



Water Resources Management

Contesting water expert knowledge: The Politics of Citizen Science

Thesis ring on Contesting Water Expert knowledge: the Politics of Citizen Science!

Who is the expert and why does that matter? Is there only one way of knowing water? Is it possible to challenge that it is always a man in suit and tie claiming to be the expert? Is it perhaps better to leave management and governance in the hands of water users themselves?

The thematic working group on water expert knowledge at WRM is looking for thesis students who are interested in doing research on the Politics of Citizen Science. The idea is that a number of thesis students work together, each on their own thesis topic and within a location/region of their choosing, but within a common field and frame that engages with the popular notion of *Citizen Science*. Whereas many scientists believe citizen science is about water users collecting data for the experts through fancy gadgets, we seek to challenge that notion. This ring of thesis may address one of the following questions:

- ✓ Who is an expert and whose knowledge counts?
- ✓ What is the role of citizen/local/indigenous knowledges in redefining the notion of expert knowledge? – What is the role of “activism” in challenging the institutional forms of expert knowledges?
- ✓ In what way citizen science has impacted/changed/influenced the institutional expert knowledge, including the governance structures?
- ✓ How can citizens engage with the ‘paradox of expert authority’ - social political decisions are increasingly hinged on “expert knowledge” when the authority of experts and their knowledge are increasingly contested (by citizens, political activists, other experts)?

Under the rubric of these broad questions we are looking for students to work on specific topics as below.

Possible topics and contact persons:

- An ethnographic study of water activists who operate in rural South Africa in the water caucus, an independent organization mobilizing communities and scrutinizing corruption in the water and sanitation sector – contact alex.bolding@wur.nl, Lumen, room C045
- “Hydrosocial territories and the battle over the commons: expert versus local knowledges and the politics of identity in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala” – Contact: Rutgerd.boelens@wur.nl
- “Public Private Partnerships versus Rooted water democracies: Contested hydrosocial transformation and social mobilization of the commons, Valencia, Spain” – Contact: Rutgerd.boelens@wur.nl
- A study of the co-optation of farmers’ ideas and initiatives in the state’s engagement with farmer-led irrigation development in various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Contact: gertjan.veldwisch@wur.nl
- How in the recent past social and environmental activism has contested and redefined the institutionally generated knowledge on large, medium and small dams in the state of Maharashtra, India? Contact: esha.shah@wur.nl