

CHANGING GLOBAL WATER RESOURCES – A CONFLICT POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE?

VERKNAPPUNG GLOBALER WASSERRESSOURCEN – EIN KONFLIKTPOTENTIAL DER ZUKUNFT?

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SUMMARY

The scarce freshwater resources that make life on earth possible are coming under increasing pressure from population growth and the associated anthropogenic stressors such as agriculture, industry, domestic water consumption, but above all from human-induced climate change. In many watersheds, water consumption has already escalated and excessive water withdrawals are leading to massive, sometimes irreversible environmental damage, socio-economic risks and, above all, conflicts. Their relevance is well known, but often the question of how conflicts arise in connection with the use of water is not examined from different perspectives. The natural sciences study the resource water in terms of quantity and quality and evaluate it on the basis of functions. However, this economic conception of water usually contradicts cultural conceptions of water as life, which, because of the human right to it, is seen as inalienable. Some world orders even conceptualize water itself as a living being. Because of their complexity, conflicts therefore cannot be reduced to the quantitative presence of water alone, but must also be examined in light of specific local socio-cultural and economic factors in order to generate a comprehensive understanding of them. Water must therefore be understood in its complexity and studied as more than just a calculable and measurable elemental compound. A look at the history and development of various water conflicts shows that successful cooperation, creative coping strategies and innovative governance structures have usually emerged from them. This knowledge should help us to look more calmly and optimistically into the future with regard to water conflicts.

Keywords: Water resources, water conflicts, freshwater availability, global change

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die begrenzten Süßwasserressourcen, die das Leben auf der Erde ermöglichen, geraten durch das Bevölkerungswachstum damit einhergehenden anthropogenen Stressfaktoren