Editorial

Water Governance And Attention: A Setting Of The Agenda.

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Abstract

The idea of agenda-setting has led to a thriving political science research field. By making references to the potential applications of this specific theoretical framework to water-related challenges, this Special Issue seeks to improve the current state of research on water governance. Agenda-setting is the process of determining when and how topics are brought up for public discussion (discussion agenda) or considered by decision-makers before they propose policies (decision agenda). Agenda-setting, to put it simply, is the process of highlighting or focusing on particular subjects. Even though this idea seems simple, agenda-setting research cannot fully fulfill its promise due to the complexity of the underlying political and sociological processes involved in water governance, which call for meticulous research methods. This Special Issue's contributions integrate research on water governance challenges with theoretically sound agenda-setting studies.

Keywords : *agenda-setting, debate, decision-making, discussion, framing, policy modification, and water governance.*

INTRODUCTION

Even though governments and lawmakers typically receive the most public attention when they discuss regulatory levels, important policy decisions are taken far earlier in the political process—that is, when the so-called agenda is being formed. Agenda-setting deals with the topics that are discussed in public (discussion agenda) or that policymakers consider when putting forward proposals for public policy (decision agenda).

The news media, both traditional and new, and how they present a topic—a process known as "framing"—are closely linked to the conversation agenda [1]. Olsen and Osmundsen, who study agenda-setting connected to aquaculture in Norway, a significant economic sector of the nation, offer an example of media framing and how it influences the conversation agenda [2]. According to the investigation, the news media create a connection between aquaculture and the harm this practice causes to the environment. In the case of aquaculture, this kind of framing can lead to unfavorable public perception and encourage citizen groups to organize against these problems in order to call for modifications to the current regulatory framework [3].

Items that are up for serious consideration by governments

[4], ministries [5], or parliaments [6] are referred to as the political agenda. According to research, the executive agenda, or the government's agenda, is generally very stable. Its scope tends to stay constant over time, but its issue composition varies, reflecting changes in the priorities of the various governments [7].

Bureaucracies are in charge of "routine" policymaking as well as "exceptional" policymaking in reaction to emergencies like natural disasters [8]. Bureaucracies like ministries play an intriguing role in agenda-setting because, while they can put matters on the political agenda directly, they can also respond to the agenda-setting initiatives of their political masters, which are primarily the government [9].

Legislative agenda-setting is more comprehensive than executive and bureaucratic agenda-setting in that it covers a greater variety of topics and does not always lead to the adoption of new policies or modifications to current ones [10]. The battle between the administration and opposition parties over specific subjects is an intriguing aspect of legislative agenda-setting [11]. Setting the legislative agenda has more to do with parliamentary discussions and letting the electorate know that lawmakers are cognizant of the concerns that their constituents believe should be addressed through policymaking.

With an emphasis on how it influences the decision agenda, several studies also incorporate the debate agenda as established by the news media [12]. Politicians overestimate the influence of the media on the agenda for decisions, which is an intriguing discovery in this context. Politicians believe that the media has more influence over agenda-setting than either events or other politicians [13]. Politicians may put topics on the agenda as a result of this view, not because they think the issues are significant to their constituents, but rather in response to media attention.

Despite the fact that agenda-setting has been the subject of much research and covers a wide range of topics, all of the contributions to this body of work concur that agenda-setting is essential to policymaking [14–18].

Explaining the reasons and trends of policy change has been the main goal of agenda-setting research in comparative public policy [19]. In this sense, one form of power has been seen as the ability to put topics on the political agenda [18]. Similarly, Bachrach and Baratz contend that influence can also be obtained by eliminating subjects from the political agenda [20].

Water governance seems to be a perfect policy area for examining agenda-setting processes because of the large number of individuals engaged and the numerous institutional settings where the associated political processes occur. In order to present fresh perspectives that can further agenda-setting and water governance research, this Special Issue integrates the study of water governance with the theoretical viewpoint of agenda-setting.

Each submission responds to one of the research questions listed below, which we will revisit in this editorial note's conclusion section:

• When are problems with water addressed? When does the focus on water-related concerns   diminish?

• What traits do the narratives about water have that are included in the discussion agenda?

• What are the effects of establishing agendas for water-related regulations?

THE AGENDA-SETTING VIEWPOINT AND HOW IT ALIGNS WITH THE WATER GOVERNANCE RESEARCH AGENDA

The goal of this special issue is to encourage water governance researchers to take an agenda-setting stance. Although political science is undoubtedly the foundation of agenda-setting research, it also incorporates elements from other fields. Most notably, agenda-setting is related to communication and media sciences since it deals with the function of the news media. The mechanisms that are anticipated to result in either small-scale or major changes to current policies are another facet of agenda-setting research that is related to

ideas from organizational science or psychology. For instance, Baumgartner and Jones [19] contend that the acceptance of a single policy image—that is, the way an issue is framed and understood and the language that is developed around it—within a policy sub-system leads to policy stability[21]. In order to assist policy change, efforts must modify the perception of the policy, which calls for a reinterpretation of the problem at hand and the discourse around it. This reinterpretation is best understood through the use of psychological theories. The institutional settings where decisions are made and the potential for changing policy venues are two other aspects of the theory [19]. Collaboration with legal scholars would be beneficial in determining if venue-shifting is conceivable and what venues are practical given constitutional limits. As a result, the theoretical approach itself provides a number of opportunities for connections with other fields, and when combined with an emphasis on water-related concerns, the research opportunities become even more extensive and fascinating.

Agenda-setting research is in a good position to support multidisciplinary research on water governance because of its unique features. Numerous insights into the management of water resources in various (national) contexts have previously been gained from the study of water governance. But as Tortajada [22] points out, there are still a few issues that need more focus in the future:

•   institutional arrangements
•   urban water governance
•   holistic water governance
•   tariffs and subsidies
•   water sector reforms.

To protect the amount and caliber of its water services as well as water resources generally, the water industry needs to be reformed. Similar to this, reform is required to account for trends like urbanization, globalization, and climate change [25] as well as to lessen the effects of water on other industries like agriculture or energy [23, 24]. Pharmaceutical residues in surface water and other kinds of micro-contaminants are examples of emerging pollutants that demand large investments in wastewater treatment [26, 27]. The agenda-setting perspective is appropriate for explaining whether policy change occurs and to what extent (incremental versus radical), regardless of the particular difficulty.

Urban water governance is one topic that Tortajada [22] says needs special scholarly attention. Indeed, aged water infrastructure and urban floods brought on by or exacerbated by climate change are just two of the growing water-related issues that cities are dealing with [28]. In a similar vein, several creative policy solutions to urban water problems are developed in cities [29]. Whether water concerns are handled by cities because they are a part of the agenda-setting theory [19] or because they have descended from the political agenda

of the state or region to the local level can be explained by the idea of institutional venue changes.

According to holistic water governance, coordination and cooperation with other sectors and the players based in them are necessary for the governance of water resources, which is not limited to one sector alone [22]. The necessity of cross-sectoral policymaking is covered in the literature under a number of titles, such as policy integration [30] and the nexus method [24]. The agenda-setting viewpoint is well-suited to examine holistic water governance and its results because of the idea of policy images and whether they are stable or are challenged by new actors joining the policymaking process [31].

A key component of the agenda-setting approach is institutional arrangements, as was covered in the preceding section. First, the ease with which a matter can be brought to the political agenda is determined by institutional rules [6]. But institutional arrangements are also important since they are linked to players and rely on how those actors view policy issues, which can affect whether or not policy change is practical. For instance, studies revealed that moving to a new institutional setting where producer organizations had less sway than before was beneficial for California's water management [32].

Tariffs and subsidies are the final topic on Tortajada's research agenda [22], which can be linked to the agenda-setting viewpoint through feedback procedures [19]. Negative feedback from actions that are viewed poorly by their target group can initiate a reform process, which frequently results in little improvements. On the other hand, "the opening of a window of opportunity can start a bandwagon or 'cascade' effect that provides positive feedback for new initiatives (sometimes leading to major policy punctuations)" [21]. In fact, developing a suitable water tariff design has proven to be a politically challenging undertaking in many nations (such as Spain [33]), and using the agenda-setting perspective in situations where Water rates have changed, and comparing those that haven't changed could reveal some fascinating information. Similarly, the public's opposition to the privatization of water services stems in part from their expectation that water rates will rise [34, 35].

In conclusion, the agenda-setting approach has a lot of potential for the study of water governance, and the review of the contributions to this Special Issue that follows will demonstrate that, in spite of its sparse theoretical foundation, it supports a wide range of research.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Eight papers in this special issue address one of the three topics mentioned above to explore different facets of agenda-setting in water governance.

When Are Water Concerns Taken Care Of? How Long Does The Focus On Water Issues Last?

A major flash flood in the German State of Baden-Württemberg's municipality of Braunsbach in May 2016 garnered media attention and was on the political agenda due to the disaster's substantial damage. Witting et al. [36] examine the flow of knowledge through the reported interactions between academic, private, and governmental players in the time after the event using a network analysis and a focus group discussion. According to the authors, the catastrophic event prompted scientists to evaluate the risk, and they subsequently pointed out that several elements of flood risk—like sediment transport—were disregarded in previous assessments carried out by the municipality. Although sediment transport has become a crucial component of flood risk management in Baden-Württemberg as a result of this scientific examination, and its influence on the policies put in place is already apparent, the impact of morphological changes has not yet been taken into account in the risk assessment. Decision biases, which can arise when decision makers are under pressure to address vulnerabilities and hence lack the time to deliberate in a manner that takes into account all the available facts, can account for these differences in how scientific scrutiny has affected the judgment.

An ambitious vision for human growth in the face of global environmental change is presented by the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable growth Goals [28, 37]. Breuer and Oswald Spring [38], using Mexico as an example, examine how the 2030 Agenda might serve as a focal point or agenda-setting event for the reform of water governance. Based on information from 33 expert interviews and a Social Network Analysis of communications between water stakeholders from various sectors in the Cuautla River Basin, the authors found a number of obstacles to the proper application of the 2030 Agenda's tenets. They come to the conclusion that significant paradigm changes in Mexico's water governance are currently due more to domesticly focused events and opportunities than to the the effects of internationally specified objectives. The story of Mexico also shows how crucial political will at the highest level is to the 2030 Agenda's implementation.

Therefore, the Sustainable Development Goals must be mainstreamed and embedded into the sectorial plans that define actions at the lower working level of government in order for its implementation to continue between administrations.

In the early 2000s, Southern Germany used the climate change factor (CCF), a preventative tool for technical flood protection. Pelaez Jara [39], using the tool of choice framework [40] to look into the CCF's agenda-setting and policy-change procedures. Using data from 26 semi-structured interviews, Pelaez Jara demonstrates how rapidly the public, legislators,

and policymakers embraced the CCF as a new technical tool. In the face of significant uncertainty, it was (and still is) discursively associated with the precautionary principle, a well-known and accepted tenet of German environmental policymaking.

Interviewees assert that the CCF hasn't been subjected to a systematic evaluation or had its outreach or impact quantified. The author comes to the conclusion that after the sectoral paradigm changed from technical flood protection to more complete flood risk management, the perceived innovativeness of this tool diminished.

What Qualities Do The Narratives About Water In The Discussion Agenda Have?

The Franconian Lake District is a sizable reservoir system in Germany constructed to move water from the Danube basin to the much drier Rhine-Main basin. Daus et al. [41] examine the various stakeholder-based discourses around this system. The historically agrarian region underwent significant structural change as a result of the tourism industry's rapid growth when artificial lakes were built. The authors reviewed articles in the local newspaper and spoke with experts to gain a better understanding of how stakeholder involvement affects the conversation agenda by emphasizing particular themes. They were able to demonstrate, based on this research, that economic issues primarily influence discourses about the Franconian Lake District. The subject of cyanobacteria, which can be harmful to human health and prevent recreational use of the lakes, dominates discussions on management issues. This can result in financial losses and issues with the region's reputation.

Severe droughts, like the one that struck several European nations in 2018 [42], are referred to as concentrating events because they have the potential to affect agenda-setting procedures and lead to changes in policy.

Because agriculture is seen as one of the industries most susceptible to droughts, farmers play a significant role in politicizing the issue and advocating for appropriate governmental responses [3]. In order to better understand how politicization has evolved over time, Müller's contribution [43] compares journal coverage of four eras of severe drought in order to assess how droughts are presented. Previously, droughts were characterized as dangers to the security of food and water, but after 2003, the focus changed to yield security. Furthermore, starting in 2003, farmers began to define droughts in terms of climate change, which ultimately led to the conclusion that adaptation to climate change is required. The author comes to the conclusion that farmers present droughts as an issue of justice and claim their entitlement to state market controls, compensation, subsidies, and tax laws that favor farmers. As a result, drought politicization in the agriculture sector guarantees farmer revenues rather than giving water issues priority.

Implementing the Integrated Water Resources Management framework at all levels by 2030 is one of the Sustainable Development Goals [28, 37]. By closely examining the National Water Policy 2018 and the changes brought about by Participatory Irrigation Management, Arfan et al. [44] examine Pakistan's water policy story within the framework of global agenda-setting. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with important institutional players in Pakistan's water sector in addition to critically analyzing newspaper articles, civil society participants' social media communications, and the National Water Policy policy documents. According to the overall research, the engineering narrative predominates in policy circles, and building extensive infrastructure is viewed as an extraordinary solution to the present sedimentation-induced loss of storage capability in reservoirs. In contrast, state institutions' aim to give water policy reforms international legitimacy in order to win over donors and international finance organizations is reflected in the adoption of the Integrated Water Resources Management framework. The authors come to the conclusion that Integrated Water Resources Management, the global agenda-setting process for water, is a repackaging of current initiatives and inhibits creative thinking when it comes to allocating water priorities in accordance with developmental demands.

What Effects Does Agenda-Setting Have On Water Issue Regulation

Tosun and Triebskorn [34] investigated the responses of German political parties to the growing public interest in the liberalization and privatization of water services. The European Citizens' Initiative Right2Water, which called for assured water quality and quantity throughout Europe and insisted that water services continue to be provided by public institutions, received remarkably high support from German citizens, which served as the impetus for this study. Consequently, Right2Water positioned the water services issue on both the European Union's and its member states' political agendas in this specific instance. The writers provide a thorough examination of the major political parties' election manifestos, which were released for the European Parliament elections in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019, as well as for the federal elections in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017.

Given that public service trade unions founded Right2Water and that it advocated against liberalization agenda, the writers anticipated that left-wing parties would have given this matter more attention than right-wing parties. The results demonstrate that there is a left-right divide among the parties regarding the attention they gave to this subject and how they positioned themselves, and that parties do react to civil society efforts like Right2Water.

One of the main sustainability concerns in the cotton industry is water. Fair-trade and organic initiatives have raised awareness of this issue in recent years. For instance, the German business Armedangels claims that only 10% of the water needed for conventional production is needed to produce its cotton fabrics. By concentrating on the social and environmental aspects of water sustainability, Kemper and Partzsch [45] examined the goals of these corporate agenda-setters and evaluated six international certification standards: Naturland, the European Union Organic Regulation, the Fairtrade Labeling Organization, the Fair for Life standard, the Better Cotton Initiative, and the Cotton Made in Africa standard. The findings show that the schemes' agendas cover a variety of water governance topics. While standards connected to organic movements or involving non-governmental organizations concentrate on environmental sustainability, standards that arose from early fair-trade movements highlight social issues. The authors come to the conclusion that fair-trade and organic businesses appropriately position themselves as water policy entrepreneurs and take on a function often performed by non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, only a portion of water sustainability is advanced by recognized businesses; important elements are still obscured. Specifically, there is a disconnect between the pressing socioeconomic water issues in the Global South and the agendas that emphasize environmental issues.

CONCLUSION

The way that problems are put on debate or decision agendas is demonstrated by the works of Witting et al. [36], Breuer and Oswald Spring [38], and, to a lesser extent, Arfan et al. [44]. A natural calamity, like the one that occurred in Braunsbach with the flood, is one potential [36]. Nonetheless, international organizations and their policy agendas—most notably the Sustainable Development Goals—have a significant impact on national decision-making when it comes to water governance [38, 44]. This collection of studies is enhanced by the paper by Peleaz Jara [39], who demonstrates how focus on certain policy tools can likewise wane, particularly when the overall policy paradigm shifts.

The investigations by Daus et al. [41], Müller [43], and Arfan et al. [44] all show the dominance of one particular policy image in the narratives employed for agenda-setting, although having rather distinct research subjects. The economic component of the reservoir system was continuously highlighted in the news reports about the Franconian Lake District [41]. Farmers' concerns regarding how to handle such occurrences in order to ensure their income were paramount during the droughts [43]. Similarly, the framework for Pakistani Integrated Water Resources Management presented a picture of this problem

that was exclusive to an engineering viewpoint [44]. The subject of why these policy images predominate in the agenda-setting process and how they influence the associated policy decisions is brought up by these three studies.

Tosun and Triebskorn [34] analyze the stances of the German political parties on the privatization of water and sanitation services in order to partially answer this question. It's interesting to note that this analysis reveals that political parties have responded to the Right2Water initiative's advocates' efforts to set agendas. Kemper and Partzsch [45] offer complementary perspectives as they concentrate on how businesses respond to the inclusion of sustainability issues on the agenda. By focusing more on how public and private actors engage in response to agenda-setting procedures, this research path can be expanded in the future.

In conclusion, the agenda-setting perspective is a promising theoretical framework for the study of numerous difficulties in water governance, as demonstrated by the contributions. It is a concise framework that makes interdisciplinary research easier and is adaptable enough to be used for both comparative analysis and the investigation of individual cases.

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