

The CAP and stalemates over water management in Arizona. A sociological perspective on environmental policies

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During a meeting that was held in Tucson, AZ at the Metropolitan Water District in September 2014, a local water manager anxiously asked if everything was being done to avoid the drought affecting the western states, and especially Arizona. This basic concern is our starting point: why is it that drought issues are still hotly debated among water managers in Arizona? Our guiding hypothesis is: the lack of a sufficient response to the repeated announcement of drought is related to the manner in which water policy has been formulated since the beginning of the 20th century. Instead of being considered a common good, water has been a resource used by economic, professional and bureaucratic elites to strengthen their power by promoting a model of development which corresponds to their vision of “modern capitalism”. There is a fundamental relationship among the evolution of these elites, their social spheres and characteristics, and water. Together these elements have shaped the modern conception and implementation of water policies in the American West.