

DECODING SHEET

WATER MANAGEMENT AS A COMMON GOOD: CONCEPTS AND IMPLICATIONS

INTRO

WORKING GROUP ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Common good, common, common heritage of humanity, public good, private good, club good and public heritage: these are all concepts that, although similar, refer to different approaches and involve very different methods of water management. The purpose of this fact sheet is to present these concepts, identify their differences and similarities, and explore the issues and implications that arise from them.

THE DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF THE COMMONS

This table details the definitions of the various concepts related to the notion of "commons". In the case of water, these definitions are particularly important, as each has concrete implications for the approach, uses and management methods, and therefore, ultimately, for the water policy implemented.

KEY CONCEPTS	EXAMPLES
COMMON Resources managed collectively according to a form of governance determined by the community itself. The concept of commons takes into account the social dimension by emphasising the chosen mode of governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community water management in Bolivia
COMMON SHARED NATURAL OR SOCIAL RESOURCES, ACCESSIBLE TO A GROUP OR COMMUNITY AND MANAGED COLLECTIVELY. IT IS AN ECONOMIC CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF A RESOURCE THAT IS NON-EXCLUSIVE* AND RIVAL*.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Res communes (common things): air, running water, the sea, shorelines
PRIVATE PROPERTY Property regulated by market laws and financial transactions. Property that is exclusive* and rival*, and whose consumption by one person prevents its consumption by another. Such property is owned exclusively by one person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A private swimming pool, shoes that you buy, a bottle of water...
CLUB GOODS (J. M. Buchanan) Exclusive but non-rival* up to a certain point of use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A private television channel
PUBLIC GOOD (SAMUELSON AND MUSGRAVE) Non-exclusive* and non-rivalrous*, accessible to all without reducing availability to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Street lighting
COMMON HERITAGE OF HUMANITY An international legal concept referring to natural or cultural resources considered to belong to all of humanity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The seabed, Antarctica, etc. UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972
PUBLIC HERITAGE Property owned and managed by the State for the benefit of the community (regulated by public law and national policies).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forest of Fontainebleau (France) National Park Service (USA)

***Rivalry:** when the use of part of a common good by one person limits the quantity or availability for others.

***Non-exclusion:** when access to resources is not restricted to one person or members of a community

COMMON: ORIGIN AND DETAILS OF THE

CONCEPT THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMON

→ The concept of the commons refers to **resources that are collectively managed** according to **specific governance rules defined by the community concerned**. As water governance rules and modes are important for ensuring **sustainable management**, the concept of the commons seems to be the most appropriate term (rather than "common good") for analysing what **sustainable water management** entails.

THE COMMONS, A MAJOR ECONOMIC CONTROVERSY

→ The commons, long associated with "res communes" (common things), have been the subject of **divergent economic analyses** regarding their objectives and associated management methods. The controversy between G. Hardin's theory, "the **tragedy of the commons**", and E. Ostrom's (Bloomington School) "**theory of the commons**" provides insights into these different visions of the commons.



The tragedy of the commons, G. Hardin

Long considered the dominant theory, Garrett Hardin's tragedy of the commons defended the idea that **any collective management of resources** would inevitably lead to their **overconsumption** due to individualistic behaviour (profit maximisation). This overconsumption would ultimately lead to the disappearance of resources.



The theory of the commons, E. Ostrom

Elinor Ostrom, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, demonstrated that, on the contrary, **sustainable collective resource management is possible** when resources are managed by a **medium-sized community** organised around **rules and a jointly decided mode of governance**. Some see this as a **third way** between state management and market management.

Elinor Ostrom's eight principles defining common pool management:

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|---|--|
| ~~~~~ Establishing clear boundaries | ~~~~~ Application of graduated sanctions |
| ~~~~~ Alignment between management rules and local conditions | ~~~~~ Monitoring of conflict resolution procedures |
| ~~~~~ Collective enactment of local management rules | ~~~~~ Recognition of organisational rights |
| ~~~~~ Monitoring | ~~~~~ Establishment of nested organisations |

For further information: [article by Remix the common](#)

Taking ecosystems into account:

The concept of the "socio-ecosystem" is now more widely taken into account in the commons approach in order to recognise **the interdependence between natural resources and ecological systems**. Taking ecosystem needs into account is an integral part of any reflection on water management as a commons, in a holistic approach that integrates all users and ecosystems.

COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

→ **Other approaches have enriched the debate on the commons.** **Commoning** emphasises the process of pooling a resource according to a triangular logic that takes into account the resource, the users and the rules, while **Jean Tirole's commons economy** focuses on economic regulation mechanisms. The preservation of the resource would thus require privatisation (payment of an access fee) and the establishment of incentive mechanisms to regulate behaviour. **In their book Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXI^e siècle (Commons: A Revolution for the 21st Century), Dardot and Laval** analyse the commons at the crossroads of different disciplines (economics, political sociology, history) and make the commons a political principle for distributing uses and creating common rules. These perspectives offer additional insights for finding guidelines for managing water as a common good.

ADAPTATION TO CONTEXTS

➔ Sustainable water management, as a common good, requires **particular attention to linguistic and cultural specificities**, as well as **adaptation to legal and economic contexts**. Accurate, contextualised and locally adapted translation of terms is essential to ensure the consistency and effectiveness of water management policies.



Social context

Adaptation of terms used according to the **social and economic structures** of the territory.



Legal context

Adaptation according to the **legal framework** in force in the territory.

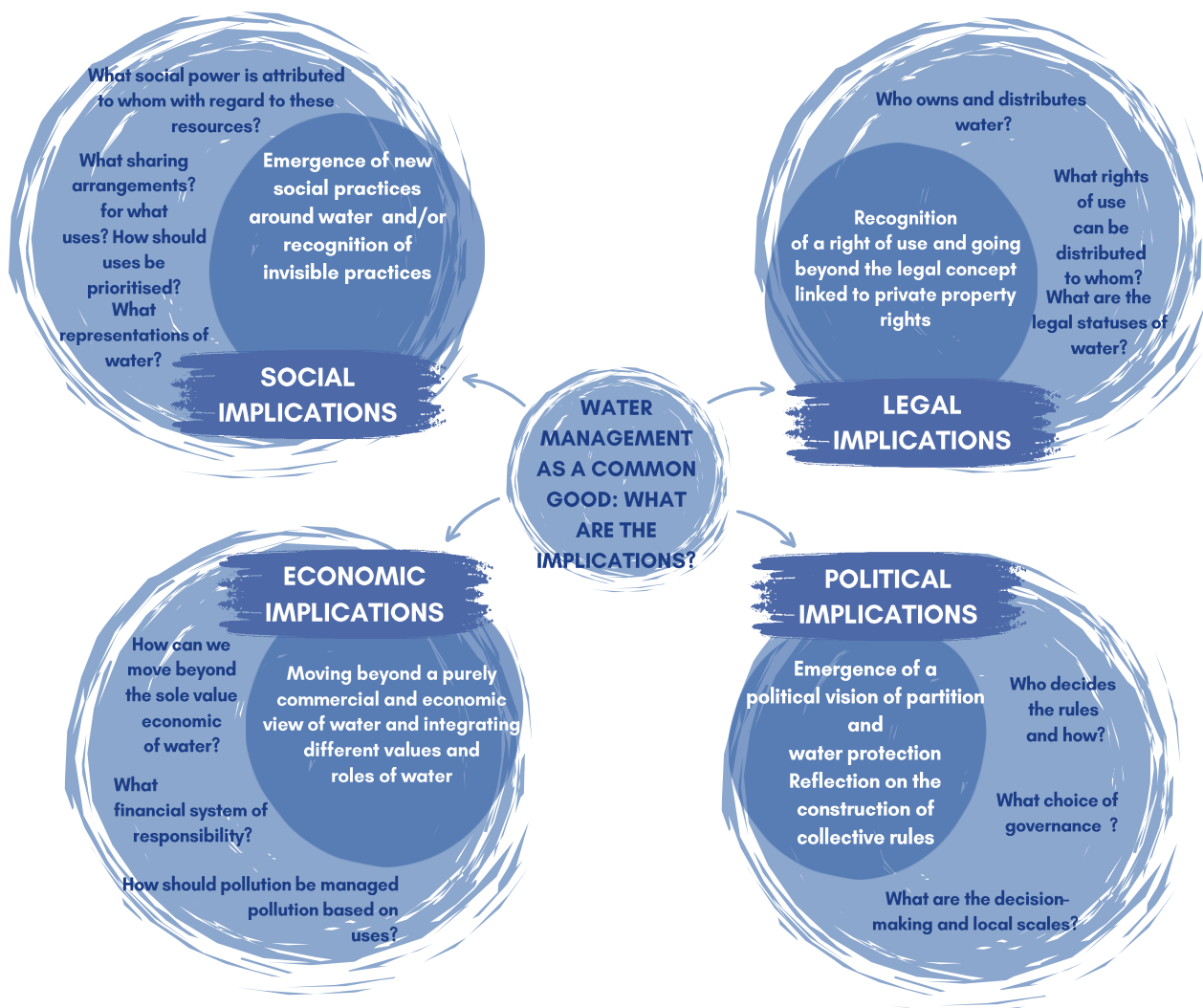


Cultural context

Adaptation according to the cultural context and **cultural connotations** that may influence the interpretation of terms.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WATER MANAGEMENT AS A COMMON GOOD

➔ Behind the concept of the commons, **many issues are emerging** to ensure collective and sustainable water management. This requires us to **rethink our current ways of managing resources** and involves **social, political, economic and legal upheavals**.



WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE ADOPTED FOR FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE WATER POLICIES?

➔ Managing water as a common good involves addressing several issues in order to provide **tools for reflection and move towards concrete and effective policies** that guarantee a **fair and sustainable model**:



What **governance** is needed for water management as a common good?



What are **the appropriate scales of decision-making** and local action?



How should water as a common good be managed in times of **conflict**?



How **should** water **be shared** from a common perspective?



What **legal status** should water managed as a common good have?



What **values** should be assigned to water as a common good?