



**RESOURCE**

# The unique role of municipalities in integrated watershed governance arrangements: a new research frontier

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## Description / Abstract

Local governments, or municipalities, play a key role in water governance around the world owing to the many administrative competencies they hold, ranging from water service delivery to urban planning. However, the ability of municipalities to carry out their competencies effectively depends in large part on the characteristics of the institutional arrangements in which they are embedded. In particular, the relationship between municipalities and watershed governance institutions has received little attention in the literature on polycentric and multilevel governance. Drawing on insights from diverse cases around the world, we argue that empirical research must pay closer attention to the links, or lack thereof, between municipalities and watershed governance institutions to improve the sustainability of water governance outcomes in practice. We identify a set of critical issues affecting municipalities' engagement in governance at the watershed scale that broadly apply across different contexts, and which we argue deserve more attention in future research: (1) disconnect and ambiguities of authority across hierarchical levels; (2) internal and external challenges to municipalities engaging in effective collaborations; (3) barriers to expanding the scope of traditional municipal affairs; and (4) misalignment of biophysical, institutional, and political timescales.

## Publication year

2019

## Publisher

Ecology and Society

## Keywords

Local Authorities Municipalities Administrative Competencies Watershed Governance

## Thematic Tagging

Water services

Language English

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B1.02

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**Source URL:** <https://iwrmaactionhub.org/resource/unique-role-municipalities-integrated-watershed-governance-arrangements-new-research>