

## IWRM

### Applying insights from resettlement to IWRM

A completed Water Research Commission (WRC) study sought to apply concepts from the field of displacement and resettlement studies enhance understanding of society's interaction with integrated water resource management (IWRM).

#### Background

Human settlement has a significant spatial/space-related aspect. Place, as a source of habitation and shelter, as well as a source of resources, relationships and meaning, undergirds and enables human settlement and society.

People may be seen as settled, not only in a specific place, but in place as such, as socially and culturally 'emplaced'. 'Emplacement' is here taken to refer to an association and identification that a person or group of people has with a socially constituted place/territory.

This association is recognised by other also associated with that place. Emplacement relates to being a member of the group or community associated with that place, with the concomitant rights and obligations of such membership, with regard to social relations and the institutional life of the group; this includes access to resources, livelihood, protection and meaning.

Emplacement thus involves a socio-spatially constituted local citizenship. Because the various aspects of collective human emplacement are interwoven in a dynamic, complex system, modification of any of these bases feeds back into, and works through, the ongoing systems of emplacement as a whole.

#### Water and human settlements

Water is fundamental to human settlement. In the same way that place, as a source of habitation and shelter, as well as a source of resources, relationships and meaning, undergirds and enables human settlement and society, so too does water undergird and enable human settlement and society.

If we are to ensure viable and sustainable human settlement, it is necessary to understand water's foundational and emplacing role in relation to human settlement, and to develop guidelines for sound practice in that regard.

This will make a substantive contribution to integrated water resource management (IWRM), which was a goal of this project. Water is central to human emplacement and to its viability.

Apart from the fact that water is necessary to the sustenance of biota, it flows across human settlement and society in many and interrelated ways (e.g. social, economic, political, religious, ecological etc). Water thus takes on a range of interlinked functions and is central to the possibility and sustenance of human emplacement.

## When emplacement is disturbed

Interventions or projects which impact upon people's physical and social environment, notably in the form of infrastructure, impact upon emplacement and its viability, in a range of ways. Resettlement projects often significantly modify the spatial, social, economic, political, institutional and environmental bases upon which emplacement rests.

Many interventions or projects alter access to and distribution of water, whether in terms of quantity, quality or habitat, or in terms of the spatial and socio-political dimensions of that access and distribution.

This influences what one might call 'the ways water flows across human society and settlements', and feeds back into the dynamics and sustainability of the complex system of human emplacement, in that particular context.

## Exploring the inter-relatedness of emplacement and water

This project sought to apply ideas from the field of displacement and resettlement studies, as a new perspective for helping us to understand the wider implications for settlement sustainability, of changes in water access and distribution, and of the social and policy implications of such changes.

It is argued that the emplacement perspective provides a new and multidisciplinary approach to looking at the ways in which water plays a facilitating and diverse role in human settlements.

Since water flows in many, diverse and multi-directional ways in relation to the social, institutional, political, economic and ecological needs of human settlement, it has a range of interrelated impacts. This cross-cutting and foundational role of water in relation to human settlements and their wellbeing has not always been adequately understood or incorporated in approaches to a wide range of water-focused interventions.

Looking through the list of projects which have been commissioned and completed by the WRC over the last decade or more, it is apparent that many of them have been discipline-specific, and have correspondingly focused on the investigation of very specific relationships and limited notions of systems.

It is argued that applying insights from emplacement/displacement and resettlement will enable us to bring out this multi-dimensional and integrating role of water in human settlements more clearly. This will assist us in opening out avenues of enquiry about ways in which water's eplacing and foundational role in human settlements may be impoverished/undercut or enhanced by poorly and narrowly, or by well-conceived and executed, undertakings.

The final report of this study investigates case studies of interventions or projects that have altered access to or distribution of water in settlement situations in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. The impacts of such changes upon the ways in which water underscores and enables general human emplacement in specific areas or settlements are documented and analysed.

The intention is to understand the ways in which such alterations in the water regime impact upon human emplacement, and thereby, human socio-economic and ecological well-being. Bringing out differences in the ways in which this has happened, will help us to understand more clearly the ways in which alterations in the water regime relate to and impact upon human emplacement, and so enable these understanding to feed into the development of more informed and more responsible policy and better practice in IWRM.

Both resettlement projects and planned water change are complex institutional processes, which occur and unfold in stages, and which expose people to a range of risks and opportunities. To be successful and sustainable, they both need to be integrated into their wider administrative, political and economic context.

### Further reading:

To order the report, *Water and emplacement: New perspectives from displacement and resettlement to enhance IWRM practice* (Report No. KV 336/14) contact Publications at Tel: (012) 330-0340, Email: [orders@wrc.org.za](mailto:orders@wrc.org.za) or Visit: [www.wrc.org.za](http://www.wrc.org.za) to download a free copy.