
Preface

All life is touched by water, and humans as diverse as poets and military strategists draw inspiration from it. How unfortunate, therefore, that narrow perspectives and a limited range of disciplines dominate water research. This book aims to liberate water from excessively rational and utilitarian mindsets. Water has always had an emotional and symbolic value for communities, and it increasingly provides impetus for the formation of transnational networks and discourses. We explore here the multiple meanings of water in a variety of transboundary settings in the contemporary global context.

For an edited volume to transcend the frequent failings of uneven contributions and lack of coherent focus, the book must emerge from a common research endeavor. Such efforts take a great deal of time and support. This project has a lengthy history and many contributors and supporters, a number of whom are neither editors nor authors. Although the genesis of the project extended even further back in time, the effort to develop new approaches to transboundary water problems got a firm start in a research conference at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center, June 2–6, 1997. This exceptionally fruitful meeting was orchestrated by the late Albert E. Utton, Director of the International Transboundary Resources Center, to whom this book is dedicated. The conference received funding from the Hewlett and Ford Foundations as well as the Rockefeller Foundation.

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