

Water Discourse in a South African Newspaper

Mary Lawhon, Department of Geography, mlawhon@fsu.edu

Problem Framing

Academic studies of water have tended to start with a predefined notion of a problem. We take the opposite approach, **examining how water is talked about and understood** through an analysis of a South African newspaper known for its local voice, *The Sowetan*.

Key Findings

In contrast to international reporting, *The Sowetan* regularly includes the voices of ordinary people and presents these as valid perspectives.

Water is presented as a political, not an environmental issue, suggesting continued alienation from global environmental frames.

Articles focused on long-standing problems, and framed water in terms of human rights, basic needs, and as a symbol of modernity.



Communal tap (standpost) for drinking water in Soweto, Johannesburg.
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Ongoing Contributions

This work informs two ongoing, internationally funded research projects: Heterogeneous Infrastructure Configurations (Uganda) and Turning Livelihoods to Rubbish (South Africa). A manuscript co-authored with Anesu Makina is currently in review.

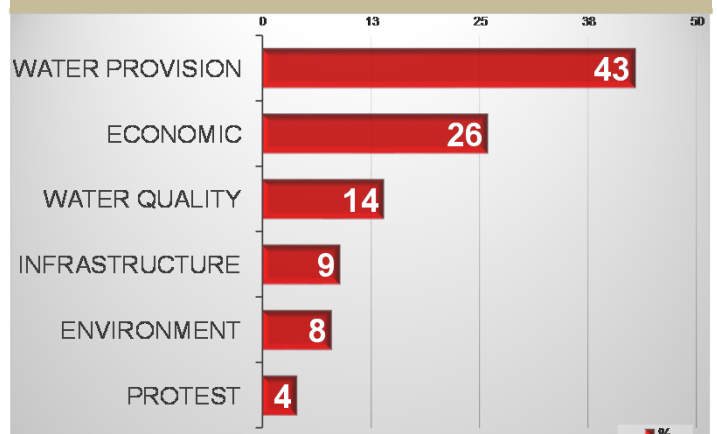


Figure 1: The graph depicts the prevalence of themes. These are calculated by their occurrence as a percentage of the total number of articles.