La gota que colma la caguama: How a Brewery Development Sparked Public Participation in Water Decisions

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How a Brewery Development Sparked Public Participation in Water Decisions

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Geography and Environmental Studies

Abstract: Broad and diverse participation of actors is well recognized as a prerequisite for effective and equitable water management. However, scholarship in development and social movement literature in Latin America demonstrates that patterns of participation are shifting to more diverse strategies with non-traditional alliances. This project explores how an internationally owned brewery development sparked renewed participation from various urban and rural groups in the Mexicali Valley. I argue that widespread resistance from different groups was underpinned by neoliberal development tensions that have diminished local agency, but the strong symbolic nature of water, beer and politics provided the catalyst for a social movement to reestablish local decision making power. Using an abstract, shifting and symbolic understanding of water, protests can include civil and uncivil protests, while still maintaining a sense of unity, a break from NGO lead movements of the 90s and 00s or class based movements of the 60s and 70s. This project contributes to the literature on contemporary social movement strategies against neoliberal change in Latin America, as well as the literature on water use and governance.