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# INTER-REGIONAL WATER TRANSFER: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

G. GOLUBEV and A. BISWAS, Eds.  
Oxford: Pergamon Press. 1979. Pp. 217.

The prospect of making large transfers of water from one region to another is drawing increased attention from planners, decision-makers, and critics. This strategy of water management, of course, is not new; it is as old as the hydraulic civilizations. What is new is the enormous scale of some of the proposed schemes and the concern about their consequences. *Inter-Regional Water Transfers* points out that certain of the proposed schemes contemplate the diversion of as much as 150 million acre-feet per year, a volume equal to more than ten times the annual discharge of the Hudson River in New York, and even more than the Columbia River on the Pacific Coast. While many such developments might result in benefits such as major increases in agricultural or industrial output, or a large expansion of hydro-electric power, in other instances there might be adverse environmental effects and major economic and social losses. Concern about these effects and losses has led to a growing skepticism about the desirability of such transfers in North America.

Much of the commentary to date has been based upon emotion, rather than on well-reasoned and documented analysis. Lack of the latter has stemmed in large part from the absence of a suitable framework for evaluating such proposed schemes. It was a recognition of the need to overcome this deficiency that led to the preparation of this volume which presents a highly informative collection of essays of interest to the planner, politician, decision-maker, and critic alike.

The papers are grouped into three sections. The first consists of a series of case studies examining experience and proposals in North America, the Soviet Union, Mexico, and India. While the approach in each paper is slightly different, there are a number of common conclusions. One is that the larger the scale and wider the range of jurisdictions involved, the greater the prospects of opposition to proposals for transfer. Another is that there is a critical need to consider such schemes within the broad context of national economic and social planning. Each of the papers draws attention to methodologies available for this purpose.

The second section focuses upon specific issues involved in inter-regional water transfers. Examining the efficiency of investment in such schemes Howe concludes that, in North America at least, other means of providing needed goods and services, such as recycling or

more efficient water use in areas where particular types of agriculture are climatically the most feasible, usually are superior. Noting that many of the methodologies currently in use for evaluation of water projects fail to trace adequately their regional economic impact or environmental consequences, Fisher examines the possibilities of employing a dynamic econometric modeling technique for the former. He also suggests a technique for expressing environmental consequences in economic terms. Ortolano focuses more specifically upon environmental effects and draws attention to the weaknesses in relying upon expressions of such impacts in economic terms, noting the implications of the latter for projects that have been developing in the Western United States. He reviews possible alternative approaches and emphasizes the need to ensure that the results of such evaluations are fed into the planning process at each stage of that exercise. A contribution by Golubev describes in detail an approach used in the Soviet Union to evaluate the environmental consequences of large scale water transfer schemes, taking account of considerations both of efficiency and uncertainty. He suggests that as a consequence of the major uncertainties associated with very large scale projects, an incremental, iterative analytical approach should be used.

The third section consists of a bibliography, listing contributions on water transfers appearing in literature in many parts of the world. This should be especially useful for those embarking upon studies in this field. It would have been even more valuable, however, had it also included a rationale for the categories selected, and a commentary on the art in research in this field.

Like most Proceedings of symposia or Reports of task forces, the quality of the presentations varies considerably. Some, such as those by Garduno et al on water planning in Mexico, and Voropacv on water transfers in the Soviet Union, are stimulating and original contributions; many of the others appear to be based upon material that has appeared before. Despite such weaknesses, however, this volume is a valuable addition to the literature in an important and expanding field.

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