

The challenge of liberal environmentalism

Karen Bakker

Director, Program on Water Governance

Associate Professor, Department of Geography

University of British Columbia

Liberal environmentalism

The belief in the
“compatibility of environmental concern,
economic growth, the basic tenets of a
market economy, and a liberal
international order” (Bernstein 2001).

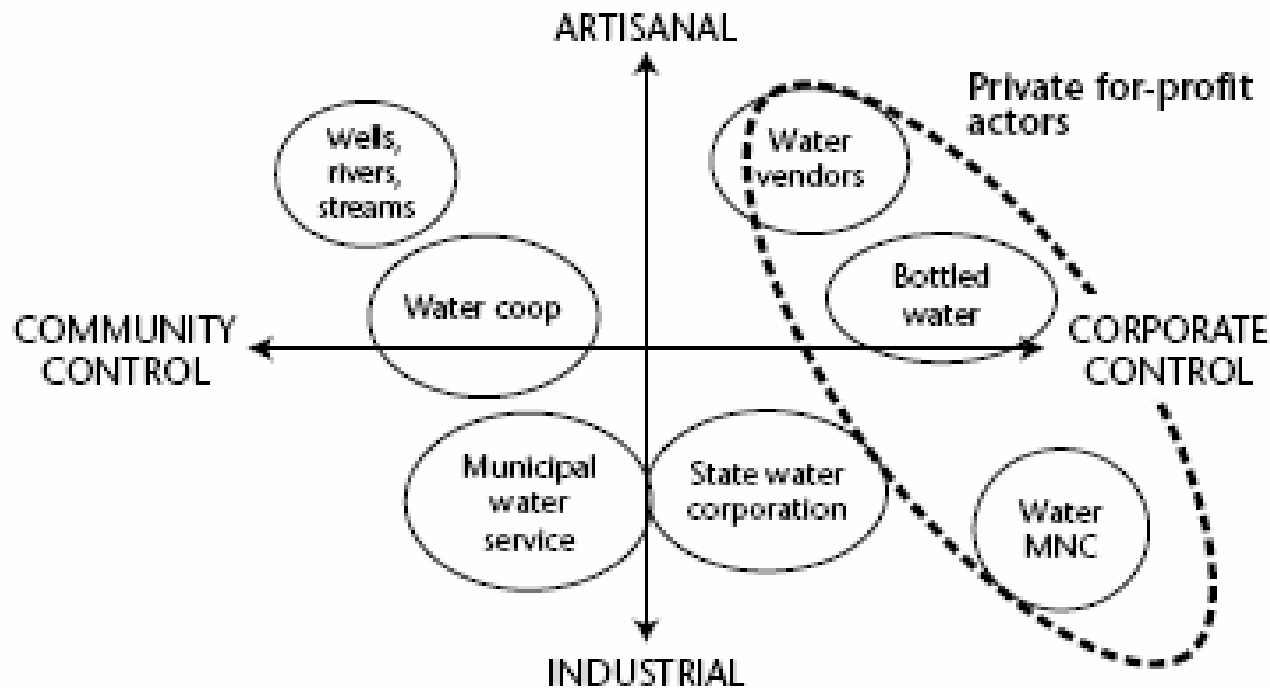
The rise of liberal environmentalism

State hydraulic

Market environmentalist

Infrastructure owner	State	PRIVATIZATION →	Private sector
Infrastructure manager	State		Private sector
Economic regulation	Command-and-control	COMMERCIALIZATION →	Market-based instruments
Resource management	Growth-oriented		Scarcity-responsive
Supply-system management	Supply-led		Demand-led
Primary goals	Equity of access Growth Quantity		Efficiency Sustainability Quality
Provision ethos	Service		Business
Primary decision-makers	Public officials, experts, citizens		Company managers, experts, public officials, customers
Consumer participation	Collective, top-down	Individualistic, bottom-up	
Consumer identity	Citizen	Customer	
Method of charging	Un-metered, proxy bills	COMMODIFICATION →	Metered
Raw water pricing	Subsidised or free		Priced at full (environmental) cost
Water supply pricing	Social equity (ability to pay)		Economic equity (benefit principle)
Allocation mechanism	Public policy		Competition
Water identity	Resource		Environment

Multiple modes of water supply provision



For discussion...

1. The need for a broader conceptual framework?
2. The limits of liberal environmentalism
3. Querying the human right to water