

## Dispelling myths about water services – A book review

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**Abstract:** Water services are fundamental to community development, yet public perception is often clouded by long-standing myths regarding their management and cost. In *Dispelling Myths about Water Services*, a multidisciplinary team of authors systematically dismantles twenty-one prevalent misconceptions. Key insights challenge the perceived superiority of bottled water and emphasise that utility efficiency depends on transparency rather than ownership models. Ultimately, the book serves as an essential, evidence-based manual for achieving sustainable water access and informed policymaking in the modern era.

**Key words:** Water services; water sector myths; SDG 6; water governance; bottled vs. tap water.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The need for fresh water has been evident since ancient times. Fresh water supply and sanitation systems have influenced individual lives as well as whole societies. From early history and in any society, water and wastewater systems were considered fundamental for the development of communities. Around the early twentieth century, the modernisation of water supply and wastewater systems gradually improved living conditions, health, security, and the overall standard of living. Nowadays and in the well-functioning societies, water services are often taken for granted and people do not necessarily think about what kind of issues and challenges are related to water services and systems, which sometimes leads to a misguided public perception.

In the book “Dispelling Myths about Water Services” a multidisciplinary team of experts led by Tapio S. Katko addresses the possibly misled “common wisdom”, by undertaking a comprehensive explanation of the “myths” surrounding the subject of water services. The authors face a rather challenging task, because water is used in diverse social contexts, with water management involving aspects such as business and natural environment. Their extensive experience and high qualifications guide them through a wealth of available information and disinformation. The Sustainable Development Goal six (SDG 6), which is “to ensure access to water and sanitation for all”, always remains their main focus.

### 2. CORE AND CONTENT

The prevailing misconceptions are categorised in this book into four primary domains: (i) General and Historical Myths, (ii) Institutional and Governance Myths, (iii) Economic and Management Myths, and (iv) Technological and Environmental Myths. The authors discuss 21 “myths” in total, offering a useful and comprehensive view of current issues in the water services sector. Each chapter is illustrated with figures and drawings, and supported by a significant number of references.

The narrative begins by discussing the nature of myths in a wide context, followed by the specific myths related to water services. The authors define the concept of myth as “a long-lasting belief that is at least questionable from the point of research-based evidence” (Katko et al., 2025). They state, though, that many myths are complicated and cannot be answered unambiguously.

The first subject, or group of myths, discussed by the authors concerns the sources of water. The most intriguing myth in this group lies in the perception that people who cannot understand the complexity of a water conveyance system, disregard the fact that such a system requires planning, construction, operation and maintenance, as well as technology, economic resources and various types of governance, and in many cases they tend to believe that “water comes from the tap”.

The second group deals with water services and infrastructure. Ageing infrastructure can become a major challenge in many countries, as substantial investment may be required for additional water and wastewater infrastructure. Water metering and dual systems are also discussed. An interesting myth of this group is that “bottled water is better than tap water”. Though this perception may be justified in order to avoid health risks in low-income countries, in most of the developed countries the quality of tap water is better than that of bottled water. Microplastics detected in bottled water is one of the arguments suggesting that water quality tends to deteriorate once bottled.

The third group of myths discusses the rules of water services and the need of teamwork, mainly in problem solving. Two myths are prevailing: “water is a basic human right and therefore it should be free” and “water services should be privatised to make them more efficient and to promote competition”. The authors stress that although water as a natural resource is free, regulatory governance, infrastructure and protection of water quality inevitably cost money. Regarding the privatisation of water services, the authors argue that the private sector has not been proven to be more efficient than the public sector.

Finally, the fourth group of myths looks to the future. Although we cannot predict the future, we have to consider it. An important myth of this group is that “future problems can be solved without considering history”. This perception usually leads societies to repeat the mistakes of our historical past. The last myth argues that “other countries’ water problems don’t concern us”, however, international phenomena, such as climate refugees, inevitably affect any country.

### **3. CRITICAL VIEW AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

What sets this book apart is its brevity and accessibility, without sacrificing academic rigor. It serves as a “myth-buster” manual for practitioners and policymakers, but also for any individual.

The authors dismantle dominant “myths”, such as the idea that “private is always more efficient than public”, providing evidence that the efficiency of a water utility depends more on institutional transparency, regulatory frameworks, and management quality, than on the ownership model itself. Furthermore, they argue against the myth of “Free Water”, clarifying the distinction between water as a human right and water service as an economic activity. They also highlight how water quality often deteriorates once bottled. The significance of this book is corroborated by other academic reviews, including Little (2025) and Petri (2025).

Dispelling Myths about Water Services is an essential read for anyone involved in the water sector. It is an excellent publication in terms of content, illustration and structure. By shedding light on several critical aspects, it provides grounds for a more honest discussion on how to achieve sustainable water services for all. Conveying a refreshing dose of realism, it strips away 21 myths often dominate public perception. The book is highly recommended for university students, engineers, stakeholders, policy makers and utility managers, or just individuals seeking to understand the complex socio-technical landscape of water services in the 21st century.

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