

Interactive comment on “Unravelling intractable water conflicts: the entanglement of science and politics in decision-making on a large hydraulic infrastructure project” by Jonatan Godinez-Madrigal et al.

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Dear authors,

Thank you for your reply to my comments. The reply gives thorough clarifications, and also explains the way in which you will clarify and improve the manuscript.

I agree with all but one point, and that is the political neutrality of the model. In my view the model is political as it influences decision making in a biased way (which has consequences for the distribution of costs, benefits and risks among different social groups

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and the environment). It does not matter if these consequences are intentional or not. One could compare with the following example: A member in an appointment selection committee that is unconsciously racist and has a negative bias against coloured candidates will make the selection procedure racist and the outcomes biased towards white candidates. Even if in an interview this member states not to be a racist and did not have racist intentions. (Similar cases are the male-biases in appointments of CEOs).

In the same vein the model is political, even if the makers did not intent it to be political. In the case of the El Zapotillo dam project, you say that the modellers took into account the interests of the Temacapulín community by including an option of 80 m dam height. However, with 80 m the communities of Acasico and Palmarejo will be flooded, and Temacapulín will have to be protected with dykes. Those communities prefer a dam height of 40 m not 80. Many choices are made in including or excluding interests, people and values. The UNOPS model also neglected the effect of climate change and future increase of water demand. This makes the model political in the sense that the numerical objectifications such as dam height, rankings and indicators influence political options and imaginaries, resulting in biased discussions and instruments of governance that influence decision makers (but also other stakeholders like academics, NGOs and the involved communities).

Ambiguity is something different. Ambiguity is the fact that you can look at the same object in different ways and thus have different conceptions of what it is. The UNOPS model is not ambiguous in that sense. The model promotes a selected number of problem definitions, numerical objectifications, indicators and solutions and selects one preferred option with a number of (biased, not neutral) indicators. In this selection process incommensurable values are made commensurable, which implies political decisions.

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