

**Public Issues and Institutional Capacity of Urban Water  
Management in Baja California****Problemas públicos y capacidad institucional de la gestión  
del agua urbana en Baja California**Omar Miranda-Gómez<sup>1</sup> & Patricia Rivera-Castañeda<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Public issues regarding water are defined based on aspects of ownership and institutional responsibility, which have repercussions on their ability to implement effective actions for water resource management. The objective of this paper is to analyze government actions regarding urban water management and explain how they influence its institutional capacity. The methodology employed involved the use of institutional ethnography, which revealed the interactions between water resource management agencies and the priority action plans of governments. The findings recognize that the lack of institutional capacity is influenced by the particular interests of decision-makers who limit the political continuity of previous administrations. It is concluded that each administration addresses public issues according to their own interests, which may not always align with the needs and priorities of society.

*Keywords:* 1. public issues, 2. institutional capacity, 3. SEPROA, 4. Baja California, 5. Mexico.

## RESUMEN

Los problemas públicos en torno al agua son definidos a partir de aspectos de propiedad y responsabilidad de las instituciones, lo que repercute en sus competencias para efectuar funciones adecuadas para el manejo de los recursos hídricos. El objetivo de este artículo consiste en analizar las acciones gubernamentales en torno a la gestión del agua urbana, para explicar cómo influyen en su capacidad institucional. La metodología consideró una etnografía institucional que evidenció las interacciones entre dependencias gestoras de recursos hídricos, así como las líneas de acción prioritarias de los gobiernos. Entre los hallazgos se reconoce que la falta de capacidad institucional está sujeta a intereses particulares de los tomadores de decisiones, quienes limitan la continuidad política de gobiernos previos. Se concluye que cada administración atiende los asuntos públicos acorde a sus intereses de agenda, y estos no siempre son prioritarios socialmente.

*Palabras clave:* 1. problemas públicos, 2. capacidad institucional, 3. SEPROA, 4. Baja California, 5. México.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the different water management problems in Mexico, notable issues include but are not limited to overallocation, overexploitation, pollution of bodies of water, lack of water security, limited wastewater treatment (Arreguín-Cortés et al., 2020). Therefore, as these problems worsen, competition for the resource arises involving all three levels of government and their users (Arreguín-Cortés et al., 2020). In other words, poor management of the resource gives rise to the so-called *water crisis* (Monforte García & Cantú Martínez, 2015).

In this context, the state of Baja California faces water access problems due to the high pressure on its hydrological-administrative region, with a water resource pressure rate of 90.0%, ranking it second nationwide, below the Valley of Mexico, which has a very high rate of 129.7%. Additionally, out of its 48 aquifers, 35.4% exhibit critical situations of overexploitation and salinization (Conagua, 2020). Baja California is a border region with a growing population dynamic, and it is noteworthy that its most populous urban area depends on external water resources (Navarro-Chaparro et al., 2016).

To address water-related issues, aspects such as water management, competition, socio-political context, implementation of appropriate and current regulatory frameworks, availability of investment funds, political relations, institutional capacities, among others, must be considered (Biswas, 2004). In this sense, the State must promote successful policies to solve public problems, which will depend on its capabilities to achieve favorable outcomes (Rosas Huerta, 2019).

In the water issue, the role of institutions is limited by various factors: the diversity of agencies participating in the water management system (González Mejía, 2018); lack of transparency in institutional design that restricts stakeholder participation in decision-making (Villada-Canela et al., 2019); corruption (Camacho, 2021); and government turnover.

For the analysis of water management, the institutional perspective has considered various factors: public participation (Villada-Canela et al., 2019), institutional decentralization (Briseño & Sánchez, 2018), water governance (Grafton et al., 2019), and institutional capacity (Salazar Adam & Méndez Barrón, 2020), among others. Although the different approaches contribute to the theoretical and methodological construction of this article, the issue of institutional capacity will be addressed with greater interest, specifically its macro aspect, or government relations, as it allows us to visualize the definition of public water-related problems and determine the political interactions that lead to the appropriation of agendas by leaders.

In this sense, the theoretical-conceptual framework of the article is justified based on three notions: ownership, responsibility, and institutional capacity. The first two explain how institutions and actors address a public issue through concrete actions, while the latter “refers to the ability of organizations to execute responsibilities, operate more efficiently, and strengthen accountability” (Ospina, 2002, p. 4).

Among the common obstacles in water management is the lack of follow-through on development strategies proposed by administrations. In this regard, the question arises: how do institutions take ownership of and responsibility for water as a public problem? Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze the governmental actions and interactions of agencies responsible for urban water management in Baja California to explain how they influence their institutional capacity. The contribution of this article lies in the fusion of the three theoretical concepts—ownership, responsibility, and institutional capacity—to identify how public water issues are prioritized. Specifically, the analysis focuses on recent institutional and legal changes stemming from the establishment of the Office for Water Management, Protection, and Sanitation (Secretaría de Manejo, Protección y Saneamiento de Agua, SEPROA) and the attempts to municipalize its operating bodies.

The work is structured as follows: firstly, the theoretical-conceptual framework is presented, which serves as the analytical foundation for the construction of the public problem of urban water management in Baja California; the second section outlines the methodological approach; then, a historical overview is provided to analyze the political capacity in water-related issues, considering the main projects and reforms implemented by the government; following that, the administrative capacity is addressed, which accounts for the organization between institutions as well as their financial capacity; finally, a brief conclusion lists the elements that enable or hinder urban water management.

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC ISSUES: OWNERSHIP, RESPONSIBILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The definition of public issues has been debated in various intellectual contexts and developed through diverse political processes (Guerrero Bernal et al., 2018). Among the different perspectives on this matter, the viewpoint of Joseph Gusfield (2014) is particularly salient. He argues that public issues are the result of two elements: *ownership* and *responsibility*.

The first aspect indicates that in public arenas, not all groups have equal power, influence, and authority to define the reality of the problem. According to the author, ownership refers to the capacity to create a public definition of a problem and exert influence over it (Gusfield, 2014, pp. 76). Although the definition of ownership can be a subject of conflict, as stakeholders may struggle to operationalize it, there are also owners (authorities/institutions) who take actions to address the problem (Gusfield, 2014).

Responsibility, on the other hand, seeks to modify the existing structure of public problems. Furthermore, this category can be divided into causal responsibility and political responsibility (Gusfield, 2014). The former provides a causal explanation of events, while the latter seeks to identify the person or entity responsible for solving the problem (Gusfield, 2014). With that said, when studying issues of water-related political responsibility, it is linked to the individuals or entities that are obligated to take action (Gusfield, 2014).

Likewise, it is pertinent to explore the capacity of institutions to achieve real changes. Rosas Huerta (2008) examines the evolution of the concept of institutional capacity over time and indicates that some useful characteristics for its analysis are associated with responsibility, transparency, accountability, participation, and efficiency of public actions (Rosas Huerta, 2019).

Capacity is subject to institutional factors that determine it, so its analysis can be carried out in each specific area of public policies, within a proposed timeframe, and in concrete cases, such as national or local contexts (Rosas Huerta et al., 2012).

Although the notion of institutional capacity is adaptable, three theoretical-conceptual problems persist: the first relates to the arbitrary use of the concept, making it challenging to differentiate it from others (such as governmental performance or institutional development); the second corresponds to the difficulty of proposing valid indicators for its study; and the third lies in the fact that institutional capacity still faces issues in its methodological and conceptual evaluation (Rosas Huerta, 2019).

In relation to the above, Rosas Huerta (2008, 2019) proposes studying institutional capacity through two components: *political capacity* and *administrative capacity*. Likewise, the author identifies three levels: *macro* (institutional context), *meso* (organization), and *micro* (individual). The analysis of political matters involves two dimensions: the first examines the interaction among State actors and their levels of government, while the second considers the relationships between the State and various individuals and groups in civil society involved in public policy processes (Rosas Huerta, 2019).

For its part, administrative capacity corresponds to the technical-bureaucratic skills of the state apparatus to implement its official affairs and includes the *meso* and *micro* levels. The *meso* level refers to the organization and analyzes the overall functioning of the executing entities, evaluating their effectiveness and efficiency. The *micro* level examines the human resources or individuals that make up the governmental organization. Here, functions are determined based on their skills and aptitudes (Rosas Huerta, 2019). This article considers some micro aspects, such as the profiles of water management leaders, and complements the analysis with the aforementioned concepts of ownership and responsibility.

In this regard, the contribution of Rosas Huerta (2008) provides a guide and analytical structure. However, “it can be asserted that any evaluation carried out regarding institutional capacity must first define what is understood by this capacity, as the assessment depends on the definition” (Rosas Huerta, 2008, p. 126). Therefore, three essential aspects are considered for the analysis of institutional capacity in water management: 1) the rules, laws, and norms that enable political interaction among State actors (Vázquez Lee, 2020); 2) administrative aspects associated with the technical-bureaucratic skills of decision-makers and their organizational forms (Rosas Huerta, 2008); and 3) the financial capacity that allows for identifying the level of dependence of governments and institutions (Pineda Pablos et al., 2019). Together, these aspects help determine the accountability of public issues in urban water management in Baja California and analyze actions through the responsibilities of institutions and key actors.

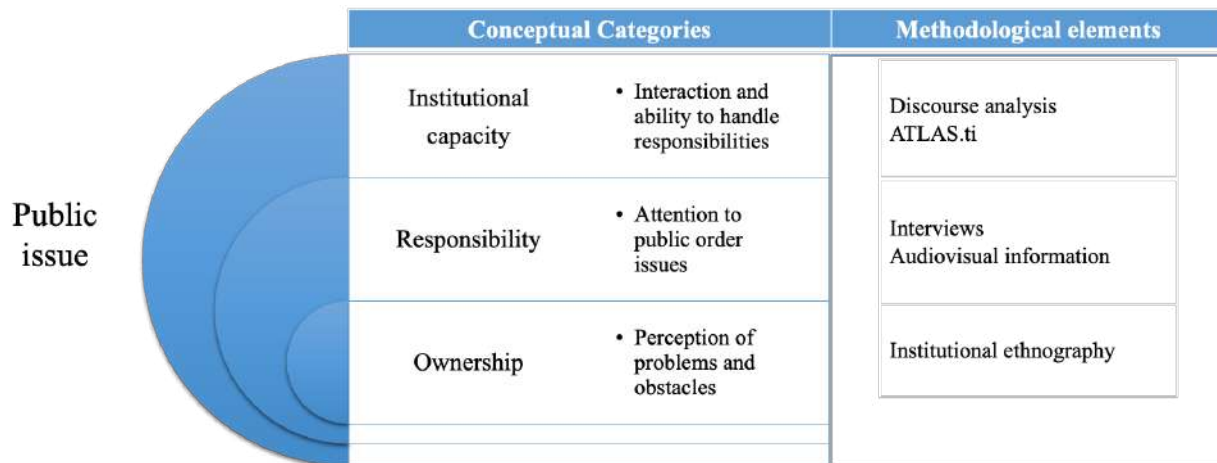
METHODOLOGY

Based on institutional ethnography, social relationships among individuals are explored through their actual practices (Smith, 1987). Interviews were conducted and official documents were analyzed to understand how work experience may influence the relationships between actors in water-related matters and selected government programs (Smith, 1987; Torres Oregón, 2013).

It is worth noting that the temporal scope of the analysis covers the last fifteen years of urban water management in Baja California (2007-2022), which can be considered an opportune period of institutional change. In this sense, the forms of organization before and after the establishment of the Secretaría de Manejo, Protección y Saneamiento de Agua (SEPROA) are evaluated in order to understand its lines of action and identify continuities and/or tensions regarding water development policies.

The study is based on a descriptive and analytical model of the conceptual categories of ownership, responsibility, and institutional capacity as elements that allow for the formulation of water as a public issue.

Figure 1. Water as a Public Issue



Source: Own elaboration.

The definition of the public issue by the actors and institutions stems from the way in which they assume responsibility for it, and consequently, from how actions are channeled to address public urban water issues. Their particular decisions influence how political responsibilities are executed (Figure 1), and the institution determines the capacity to confront the problem.

To investigate these aspects, institutional ethnography allowed for a documentary review of the official newspapers of the State of Baja California between 1990 and 2021, in order to produce a historical overview of the actions directed towards water resource management. This allowed for an understanding of how different governments have approached the issue of water as a public problem. In addition, laws, regulations, codes, government reports, and state administration development plans, and programs regarding water were reviewed to learn about

the interactions between the agencies responsible for water management and their political priorities.

Similarly, four interviews were conducted with key actors to identify the elements of ownership and responsibility as discussed. The interviewees were current or former public officials who have interfered in water management in the state (former directors of the Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Tijuana [CESPT], former legislators), academics, and members of civil society. The interviews adhered to the required ethical standards, such as obtaining written informed consent to ensure the anonymity of participants and the proper use of information. The interviews took place from June to September 2022 and were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

To complement the article, the audiovisual records of the so-called “Miércoles de Mañanera”<sup>3</sup> were reviewed, which is an initiative implemented by the current government of Baja California to engage in dialogue with society and provide information about public issues. A total of 27 sessions between November 2021 and June 2022 were examined, allowing for an understanding of the problems, actions, and interactions related to water issues carried out by the current government.

To examine the obtained information, discourse analysis was employed: both the interviews and the morning sessions were coded using the software ATLAS.ti. This coding involved grouping the main public order issues and their relationship with each level of institutional capacity. This analysis helped understand the connections between institutions and the government’s course of action regarding water resource management.

Although there are previous studies on institutional capacity in the region (Pineda Pablos & Briseño Ramírez, 2012; Loera Burnes & Salazar Adams, 2017; Muñoz-Pizza et al., 2022), the relevance of this article lies in two aspects: one methodological and the other theoretical. The first corresponds to the use of institutional ethnography, which allowed for the identification of relationships and interactions between institutions and their agenda changes over a period of 15 years. The second aspect is a theoretical contribution associated with the concepts of ownership and responsibility, which, in conjunction with the proposed institutional capacity, helps understand how public issues are perceived.

Another aspect of this study that stands out compared to previous works is the analysis of a moment of institutional change. In this regard, there was an interest in the organizational forms before and after the creation of the Secretaría para el Manejo, Protección y Saneamiento de Agua (SEPROA) in order to understand its lines of action and identify continuities and/or tensions regarding water development policies.

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<sup>3</sup> Which translates to “Wednesday Morning Press Conferences”. The sessions can be found in audiovisual format on the Facebook page of Gobierno de Baja California (n.d.).

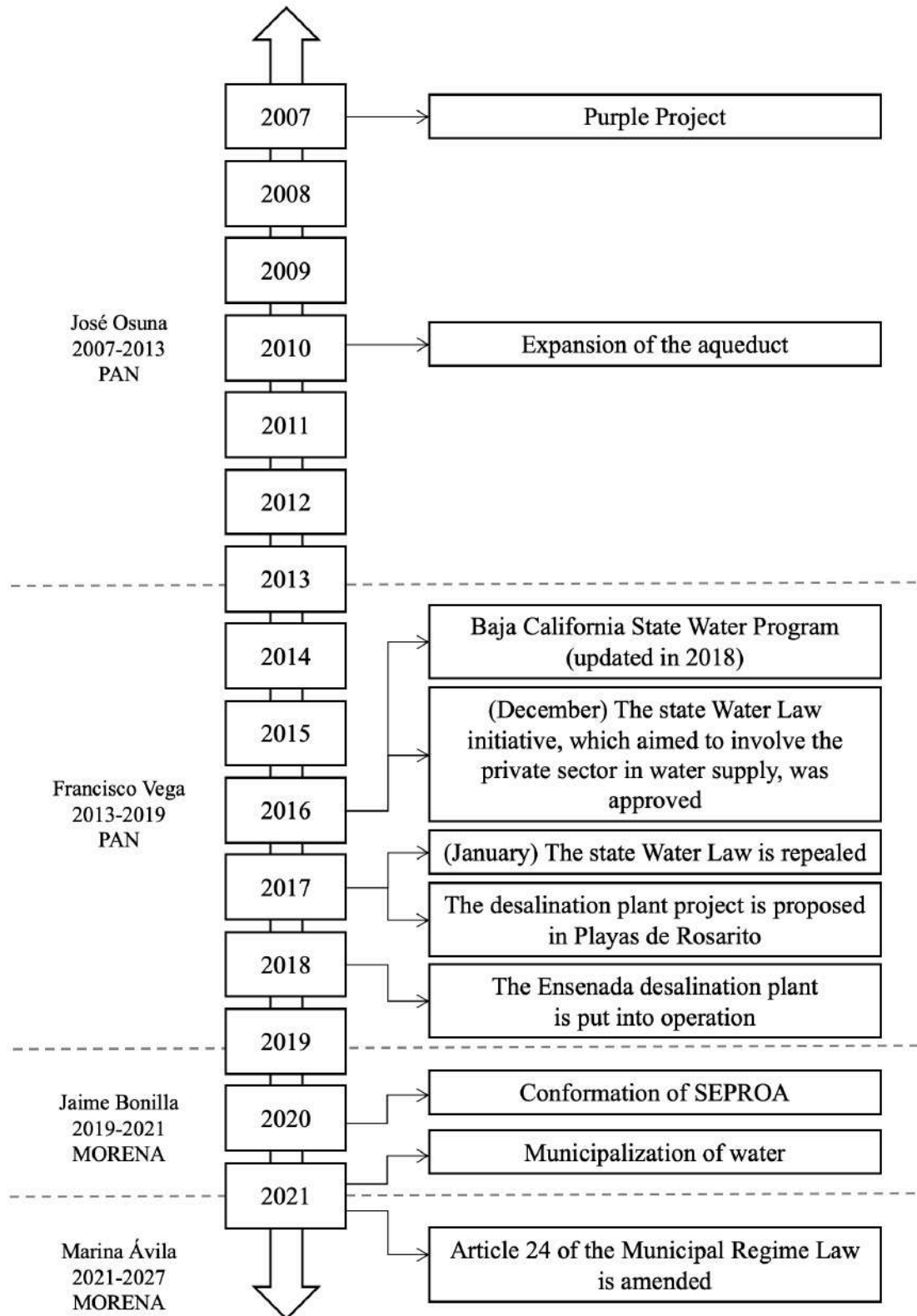
## WATER PROJECTS AND REFORMS IN BAJA CALIFORNIA: POLITICAL CAPACITY

In the debate on institutional capacity, one notes aspects such as the continuity of actions carried out by governments during their administration. Empirical evidence shows that this continuity depends on the particular interests of decision-makers, that is, their ownership and responsibility.

This section addresses the *macro* level associated with the political-institutional context of the agencies (Pineda Pablos et al., 2020), but which alludes to a personal-thematic interest of water managers that may coincide with the *micro* level, where individual aspects of ownership and responsibility are determinants. To illustrate the political-institutional context, a diachronic analysis of water projects promoted by successive governments is presented. It begins with the administration of José Osuna—as significant changes in the field were observed during his term—and concludes with the actions undertaken by the government of Marina Ávila (Figure 2). This analysis shows that each administration tends to prioritize a specific theme.

Regarding the modifications to the legislative and administrative apparatus of water management in Baja California, Table 1 shows the main reforms published in the *Periódico Oficial* that legally support actions in this field. Although the beginnings of water management projects in the state date back to the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until 1991 that the Comisión de Servicios de Agua de Baja California was created, indicating that institutional management is relatively recent (CESPT, 2022). Similarly, in 1966, the Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Tijuana (CESPT) was established as a decentralized entity of the State Government through Decree no. 44 of the Constitutional Legislature of the State (CESPT, 2022). Although this institution underwent some modifications by initially incorporating and later disincorporating the municipalities of Tecate and Ensenada, it continues to be run at a state level, which grants it greater autonomy in setting rates and engaging in binational water management negotiations, where greater power is required (Flores Ortega, 2008).

Figure 2. Main Water Projects and Reforms (2007-2021)



Source: Own elaboration.



Table 1. Modifications to the Legislative and Administrative Apparatus of Water Management in Baja California

Date	Implemented Reform
Jul 20, 1991	The State Water Services Commission (Comisión de Servicios de Agua del Estado [COSAE]) is created.
Mar 3, 1999	The State Water Commission of Baja California (Comisión Estatal de Agua de Baja California) is created, and the attributions of the Water Services Commission (Comisión de Servicios de Agua) established in 1966 are changed.
Dec 30, 2016	The Water Law for the State of Baja California of 2016 (Ley del Agua para el Estado de B. C of 2016) initiative is approved. This law proposes the establishment of metropolitan operating agencies.
Jan 17, 2017	The Water Law for the State of Baja California of 2016 (Ley del Agua para el Estado de B. C of 2016) is repealed because it involved a nearly 30% increase in rates, the concession of drinking water services, and cutting off the supply to debtors.
Jan 19, 2017	The Law Regulating the Drinking Water Service in the State of Baja California (Ley que Reglamenta el Servicio de Agua Potable en el Estado de Baja California) is created.  The Law Promoting a Culture of Water Conservation for the State of Baja California (Ley de Fomento a la Cultura del cuidado del Agua para el Estado de Baja California) is created.  The Law of State Public Service Commissions of Baja California (Ley de las Comisiones Estatales de Servicios Públicos del Estado de Baja California) is created.
May 12, 2020	The Organic Law of Public Administration of B.C. (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública de B.C.) is modified to create the Office for Water Management, Sanitation, and Protection (Secretaría para el Manejo, Saneamiento y Protección del Agua [SEPROA]) and define its responsibilities.
Jul 29, 2021	Among the various reforms, Article 122 states that municipalities will have paramunicipal organizations responsible for water management.
Aug 3, 2021	The Agreement for the Creation of the Municipal Operating Agency named Municipal Water and Sanitation of Playas de Rosarito, B.C. (Acuerdo de Creación del Organismo Operador Municipal denominado Agua y Saneamiento Municipal de Playas de Rosarito, B.C.) is signed.  The Tijuana Municipal Water Commission (Comisión Municipal de Agua de Tijuana [COMATI]) is created.
Aug 4, 2021	The Agreement for the Creation of the Municipal Operating Agency Named Agua y Saneamiento Municipal de Ensenada, B.C. (Acuerdo de Creación del Organismo Operador Municipal Denominado Agua y Saneamiento Municipal de Ensenada, B.C.) is signed.
Aug 20, 2021	The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation suspends the municipalization of water in Mexicali, Tecate, and Playas de Rosarito.
Sep 30, 2021	The municipalization of water in Tijuana is reversed.

Source: Own elaboration based on decrees and agreements published in the *Periódico Oficial* of Baja California (Decree of 1991; Decree of the Executive Power of 1999; Decree 55 of 2016; Decree 63 of 2017; Decree 64 of 2017; Decree 65 of 2017; Decree 67 of 2020; Decree 289 of 2021; City Council Agreement of 2021a; City Council Agreement of 2021b; City Council Agreement of 2021c; Agreement 3.2 of 2021), Heras (2017), and Excélsior (2021).

In order to make use of treated water in the city, the State Commission for Public Utilities of Tijuana (CESPT) initiated the Purple Project in 2007. Its purpose was to promote the reuse of industrial water for irrigation of green areas (González Solís, 2012). It is worth mentioning that political interests and their consequent lines of action are sometimes associated with experience gained in the field. In this regard, analyzing José Osuna's career path reveals that he served as the

director of CESPT from 1990 to 1995 and as the general director of the State Water Commission from 1998 to 2000 (Vázquez Lee, 2020). These positions provided him with an in-depth knowledge of the agencies involved and allowed him to influence the topic of reuse alternatives during his administration. Another significant social project carried out during Osuna's tenure was the expansion of the Colorado River aqueduct in 2010, which increased the water supply capacity by 30%. The water supply projections for this new project were set for 10 years, creating an urgency to secure other water supply options (informant 4, former public official, personal communication, October 4, 2022).

On the other hand, the focus of Francisco Vega's administration was to address the drought affecting the state through actions such as the reuse of treated water and the promotion of desalination plants (Agencia NTMX, 2016). The first state project related to water desalination that was implemented during this administration<sup>4</sup> was the Isla de Cedros plant in 2016 (Sánchez Munguía, 2020). In 2018, the desalination plant in Ensenada began operating (Redacción El Economista, 2018).

In 2017, another desalination project was approved in Playas de Rosarito; however, it did not succeed due to a conflict of interest (Sánchez Munguía, 2020; Vázquez Lee, 2020). It was argued that the plant was canceled because it was "too large and financially burdensome for the state, with an unpayable cost of 200 million Mexican pesos per month" (Congreso del Estado de Baja California, 2021).<sup>5</sup>

During the same six-year administration, the creation of the Water Program for the State of Baja California (Programa Hídrico del Estado de Baja California, Visión 2035) was promoted (CEABC, 2018). Although this development tool presented a comprehensive vision for water resource management, it sparked controversy regarding water management due to the approval of the initiative of the Water Law for the state of Baja California in 2016 (Ley del Agua para el Estado de Baja California of 2016), which proposed an almost 30% increase in rates, the privatization of the drinking water service, and the cutting off of supply to debtors (Heras, 2017). However, just a few days after its approval, and as a result of social pressures, the governor decided to repeal the decree (Sánchez, 2017).

Jaime Bonilla's interest in water management was notable, as he had been a member and president of the board of directors of the public agency Otay Water District (Gibbins, 2012), which provides water service to the population in the southeast of San Diego County, California (Otay Water District, 2021).

Similarly, Bonilla's administration highlighted the issue of coastal sanitation, and as governor, Bonilla pledged to improve the conditions of the area by initiating the construction of a coastal

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<sup>4</sup> Desalination initiatives in the state began in the 1970s with the Playas de Rosarito plant, which ceased operation in 1985 due to its high operating costs (CESPT, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Words of Salomón Faz Apodaca, former Secretary of SEPROA, expressed during a session of the State Congress streamed live on YouTube (minute 1:28:28).

collector. During his term, he focused on addressing an administrative problem in water management, which led to the promotion of an organizational restructuring of water administration, resulting in the creation of the Office for Water Management, Protection, and Sanitation (Secretaría de Manejo, Protección y Saneamiento de Agua [SEPROA]).

SEPROA emerged in a context of political change—as part of the governor’s campaign commitments—with the purpose of efficiently managing water resources. This agency appeared during a short government administration, as Bonilla’s government lasted only two years.

The rationale for creating such an institution was to improve the control and transparency of water management, since the water utility agencies had irregularities and deficiencies. It should be noted that the water management institutions were found to be immersed in corruption issues (Gobierno de Baja California, 2020).

This initiative was presented to the XXIII Legislature to propose the modification of the Organic Law of the Public Administration of the State of Baja California of 2020 (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública del Estado de B.C. of 2020). The proposal was voted and approved by a majority on May 11 of that year by members of the Energy and Water Resources Commission (Domínguez, 2020), and published in the *Periódico Oficial* on May 12, 2020 (Decree 67 of 2020).

The purpose of SEPROA is:

to plan, manage, regulate, validate, supervise, construct, and coordinate potable water, sewerage, sanitation, and reuse services corresponding to the State, as well as their systems, either directly or through the para-state entities under its jurisdiction (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública del Estado de Baja California of 2020).

However, the relevance of this department has generated divided opinions, as some believe that it strengthens the organizational structure of public administration:

the presence of a State Office of Water is very important because it keeps the governor fully involved with water. It holds the governor accountable for the State’s water, and at the same time, it provides support to the operating municipalities. The agency is an operator, but the Office is a governing and regulatory body (informant 1, public official, personal communication, June 28, 2022).

Meanwhile, some experts believe that “the creation of SEPROA with Bonilla is actually just to take over the functions that were already carried out by the commissions. But SEPROA, I think, still lacks its own identity, people don’t identify with it” (informant 3, academic, personal communication, June 27, 2022).

On the other hand, towards the end of his term, the municipalization of water was promoted, which created controversy regarding the consequences of management power: “The State Commission of Public Services [Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos] will become municipal. It will be managed by those municipalities that have the necessary capacity for the proper handling of water and sewer service issues” (Gobierno de Baja California, 2021, p. 82).

This process began with reforms to the law that regulates the potable water service, which incorporate the figures of municipal water organizations (Decree 289 of 2021). However, this is not the first time this issue has been addressed as “the municipalities of Tijuana, Playas de Rosarito, and Tecate requested the transfer of the water service since 2013, 2019, and 2021, respectively” (Congreso del Estado de Baja California, 2021).<sup>6</sup>

Following the reform, various municipalities attempted to promote the creation of water organizations to transfer the responsibilities previously held by state public service commissions (City Council Agreement of 2021a; City Council Agreement of 2021b; City Council Agreement of 2021c). In Tijuana, the decentralized organization responsible for water management was established (City Council Agreement of 2021b), and in Playas de Rosarito, the Municipal Water and Sanitation Operator of Playas de Rosarito (Organismo Operador de Agua y Saneamiento Municipal de Playas de Rosarito) was created (City Council Agreement of 2021a).

In response, various political actors expressed their opposition to the initiative. For Playas de Rosarito, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation determined that the action was unconstitutional, reversing the municipalization (Murillo, 2021). For Tijuana, during the extraordinary session number 60, it was agreed to reverse the transfer of CESPT to the city (Agreement 3.2 of 2021).

In line with the above, Governor Marina Ávila amended article 24 of the Municipal Regime Law for the State of Baja California of 2021 (Ley del Régimen Municipal para el Estado de Baja California of 2021) (November 2, 2021), to allow the possibility of requesting the municipalization of any public service.

In this regard, there are arguments supporting the idea of municipalization based on the premise that it would promote closer proximity between the population and local governments, as they are best suited to identify their needs (Pineda Pablos, 2002). However, it is also suggested that municipalization could harm some local governments due to the economic and administrative burden it entails (Casas Cervantes, 2015).

Therefore, institutional capacity could be affected, especially considering the binational dynamics with the United States and the fact that municipal government terms are triennial. Thus, the challenge is to ensure proper management of financial resources and to establish a coordinated approach with different stakeholders and levels.

In relation to the current government,<sup>7</sup> its political focus is to address water supply and final disposal issues in the coastal area, mainly in Tijuana and Ensenada (Figure 3). Furthermore, the discourse demonstrates an interest in addressing water treatment, operational matters, and financial issues of water agencies (Figure 4).

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<sup>6</sup> Words of Salomón Faz Apodaca, former Secretary of SEPROA, expressed during a session of the State Congress (Congreso del Estado) streamed live on YouTube (minute 1:18:00)

<sup>7</sup> The diagnosis of the current administration is partial as their term of government ends in 2027.

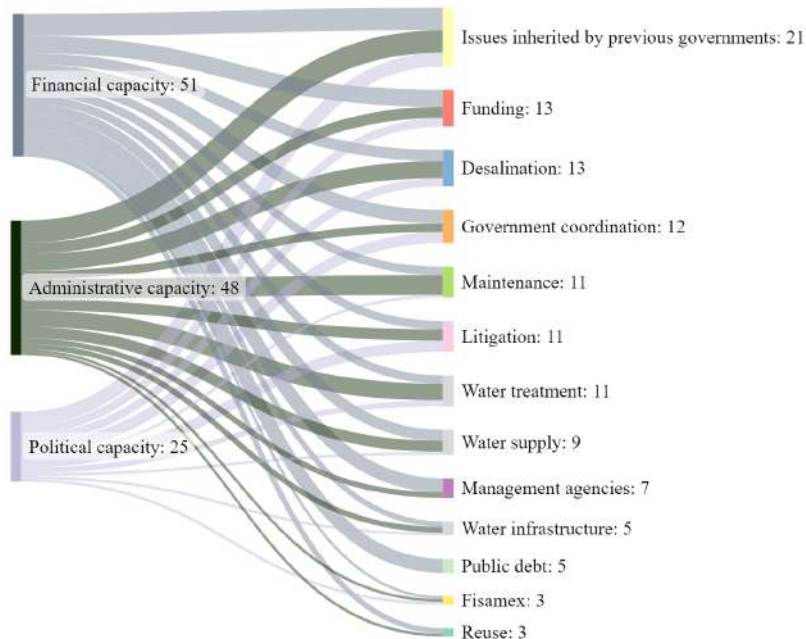
Figure 3. Water Issues Addressed in the Miércoles de Mañana



Source: Own elaboration based on the Miércoles de Mañana broadcasts from November 2021 to June 2022 (Gobierno de Baja California, n.d.).

In urban settings, maintenance works on hydraulic networks are also prominent. Figure 4 emphasizes the financial capacity as a relevant aspect, as it draws attention to the lack of resources to address water projects. Additionally, there are pending administrative issues from previous periods, such as the resolution of disputes with companies responsible for service provision and addressing financial indebtedness.

Figure 4. Institutional Capacity and Public Issues in Water Management Under the Government of Marina Ávila



Source: Own elaboration based on the Miércoles de Mañana broadcasts from November 2021 to June 2022 (Gobierno de Baja California, n.d.).

Concerning projects that had been discarded by previous governments, it is worth noting that an agreement was reached to reopen the desalination plant in Playas de Rosarito, which had been canceled earlier:

(...) where the legal arbitration process will be suspended in order to explore alternatives that do not impact the State's public finances and eventually seek replacement investors who are interested in resuming the project under reasonable and competitive conditions for the State. Therefore, there is a possibility at this moment to prevent the project from being definitively canceled and to execute it under highly competitive conditions for the State (Gobierno de Baja California, n.d.).<sup>8</sup>

However, this continuity is primarily driven by social pressure that has defined the political agenda of the current government, as opposed to a genuine interest in continuing previous political projects. In this regard, the ownership of public problems is considered based on social demands. Likewise, government actions are a product of their political responsibility, which is linked to the person or Office responsible for controlling and solving the problems (Gusfield, 1975). Finally, some interviewees agree that for institutional capacity to exist in water management, it must be considered that:

Water management should *not be political*. So, regarding water, there should be *financial autonomy*, so you don't have to ask for permission anymore, you have the power to do everything you can with what you have. And also, *administrative independence*, which means that decisions are made there and with a long-term perspective (informant 4, former public official, personal communication, October 4, 2022).

If these aspects are not addressed and the constant change of public policies continues, the institutions responsible for water management will likely exacerbate their operational and technical problems.

In summary, changes in water policy across different governments translate into the promotion of projects that demonstrate the commitment and responsibility of the governing administration and its team. The success of these projects will depend on the capacity of the involved institutions to implement them effectively.

#### *Water Management in Baja California: Organization and Resources*

Regarding administrative capacity related to the relationships and interactions between departments, the most prominent elements were cooperation and coordination, the available economic resources, the experience of decision-makers, and public recognition through evaluations.

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<sup>8</sup> Words of Marco Moreno, Secretary of Finance of Baja California, expressed during the Miércoles de Mañanera broadcast (June 15, 2022).

Particularly, considering cooperation and coordination allows us to identify attributes such as intergovernmental and intersectoral relationships, coordination based on common interests, and a comprehensive common vision (Rosas Huerta, 2019). In this regard, when comparing the institutional relationships of the agencies responsible for water management before, during, and after the government of Jaime Bonilla, we observe three moments of change in institutional coordination (Figures 5 and 6). The first is observed during the government of Francisco Vega, where the State Water Commission (Comisión Estatal del Agua, CEA) is the institution responsible for coordinating with different levels and departments of the centralized and decentralized public administration (Figure 3). Within the state public administration, its function was to coordinate the public service commissions of Tijuana (CESPT), Mexicali (CESPM), Ensenada (CESPE), and Tecate (CESPTE).

On the other hand, the second moment was manifested during the administration of Jaime Bonilla, where SEPROA positioned itself as the department responsible for coordinating and supervising drinking water services, as well as the related public policies (Figure 4). During this period, the structure of municipal public administration was streamlined (Table 2). The Offices of Economy and Tourism, Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Environmental Protection (Secretarías de Economía y Turismo, Pesca, Acuacultura y Protección del Ambiente) were merged to form the Office of Sustainable Economy and Tourism (Secretaría de Economía Sustentable y Turismo). Meanwhile, matters related to public infrastructure were consolidated under the Office of Infrastructure for Urban Development and Territorial Reorganization (Secretaría de Infraestructura de Desarrollo Urbano y Reordenación Territorial). Additionally, the Offices of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality and Culture were created (Secretarías de Inclusión Social e Igualdad de Género y la de Cultura) (Sanchez, 2019).

The reengineering of the State public administration resulted in improved coordination between SEPROA and other agencies, which allows for better organization among institutions. Another relevant aspect of this institutional arrangement is that the Secretary of SEPROA also serves as the Director General of CEA. The relevance of analyzing institutional interactions is that it permits for the identification of political connections, as it was found that one of the main promoters of the creation of SEPROA before the Baja California Congress was appointed as the director of CESPT (CESPT, 2021).

A third moment arises with the administration of Marina Ávila, who restores the merged Offices by Jaime Bonilla (Ley Orgánica del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Baja California of 2021). In this regard, nine agencies were created (Oficialía Mayor; Dirección de Comunicación Social; Secretaría de Pesca y Acuacultura; Secretaría de Turismo; Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable; Dirección del Registro Público de la Propiedad y del Comercio; Secretaría de Seguridad Ciudadana; Consejería Jurídica; y Secretaría de Inclusión Social e Igualdad de Género); six dependencies redefined their attributions (Coordinación de Gabinete; Secretaría General de Gobierno; Secretaría de Hacienda; Secretaría de Economía e Innovación; Secretaría de Bienestar; Fiscalía General del Estado de Baja California (autónoma); and three adjusted their names (Coordinación de Gabinete; Secretaría de Economía e Innovación; Secretaría de Bienestar)

(Secretaría de Hacienda, 2022b). However, in terms of the structure within government organizations, SEPROA maintains the same hierarchy as under the previous government.

At the international and national level, the relationship is maintained for the three periods. On the international level, there is an institutional relationship with the International Boundary and Water Commission between Mexico and the United States (IBWC) (Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas entre México y Estados Unidos, CILA). This link is the result of binational agreements that oversee the compliance of treaties on boundaries and water, promoting the proper management of transboundary basins (CILA, 2016). Currently, there is a greater coordination with this agency due to the fact that Alberto Bernal, who served as Secretary of SEPROA under the government of Marina Ávila, was a representative of the CILA from 1995 to 2021.

At the national level, the Office of Environment and Natural Resources (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales [SEMARNAT]) is responsible for promoting the protection, restoration, conservation, preservation, and sustainable use of natural resources. In terms of water, it is the National Water Commission (Comisión Nacional del Agua [CONAGUA]) through its Consejos de Cuenca, that will promote the coordination of planning, implementation, and management of water resource management actions among states and municipalities (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública Federal of 2021).

Regarding the interaction with international organizations, there have been collaborative relationships with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the North American Development Bank (NADB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), who have provided financing for water-related issues (Pineda Pablos et al., 2020).

Another aspect that allows analyzing administrative capacity is the allocation of economic resources (Rosas Huerta, 2019). In terms of financial capacity, in 2021, the SEPROA had a budget of 4 831 931.34 (0.01%), which increased to 85 728 041.74 (0.15%) in 2022 (Table 2). It could be argued that access to resources allows for greater autonomy since prior to its creation, the budget that allocated for water-related matters came from the Office of Infrastructure and Urban Development (Secretaría de Infraestructura y Desarrollo Urbano). In this sense, the allocated resources help identify the interests of public administrations, as an increase in funding or the emergence of new institutions demonstrates the accountability of public issues. Specifically, there is an increase in economic support for the SEPROA. However, it represents a budget transfer from the CEA to the SEPROA that does not constitute a real increase.

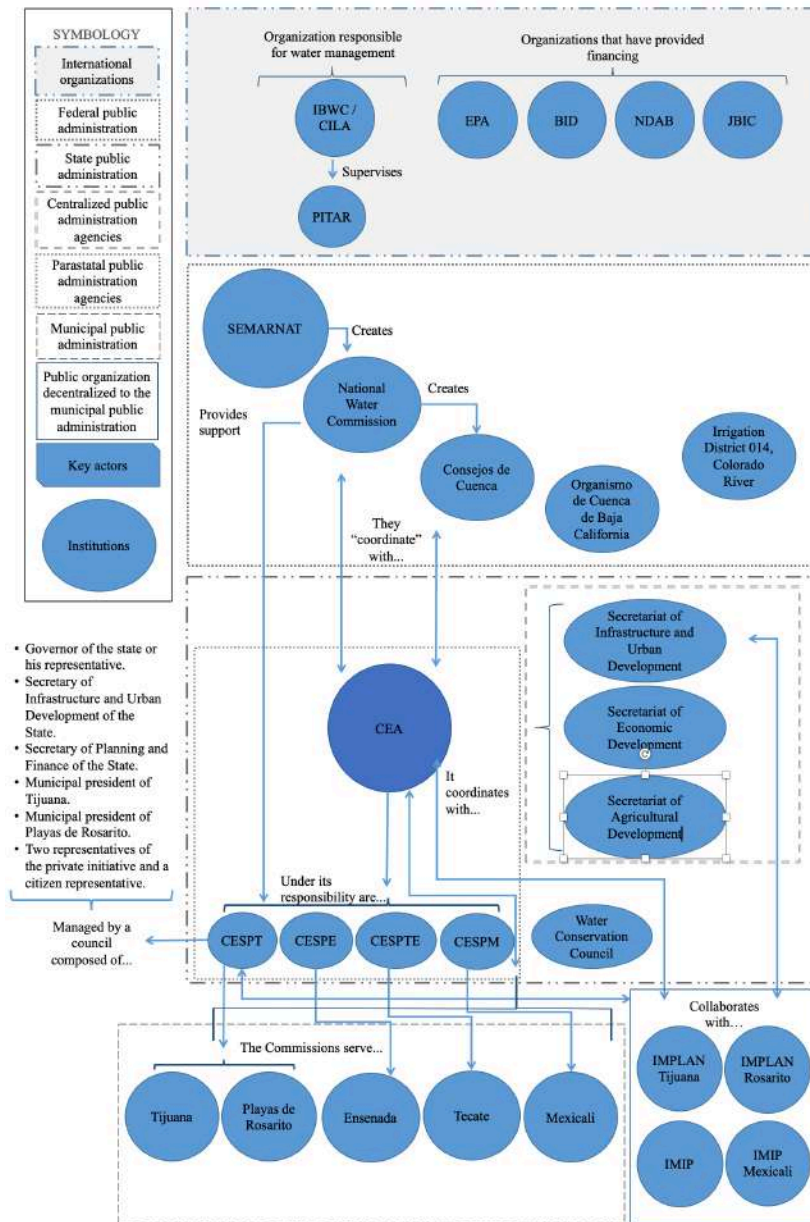
Now, when analyzing the budget allocated by the current administration, there is an evident interest in addressing public security issues, with 4.34% of the budget allocated to this area. Additionally, the gender agenda has been strongly promoted, as there is now an institution dedicated to addressing these matters. In general, the decisions made by administrations do not strictly correspond to rational criteria but often respond to political commitments (Subirats, 2001).

Finally, it should be noted that in practice, the SEPROA as an institution did not make a substantial difference compared to the CEA, as it only acquired the CEA's functions. However,



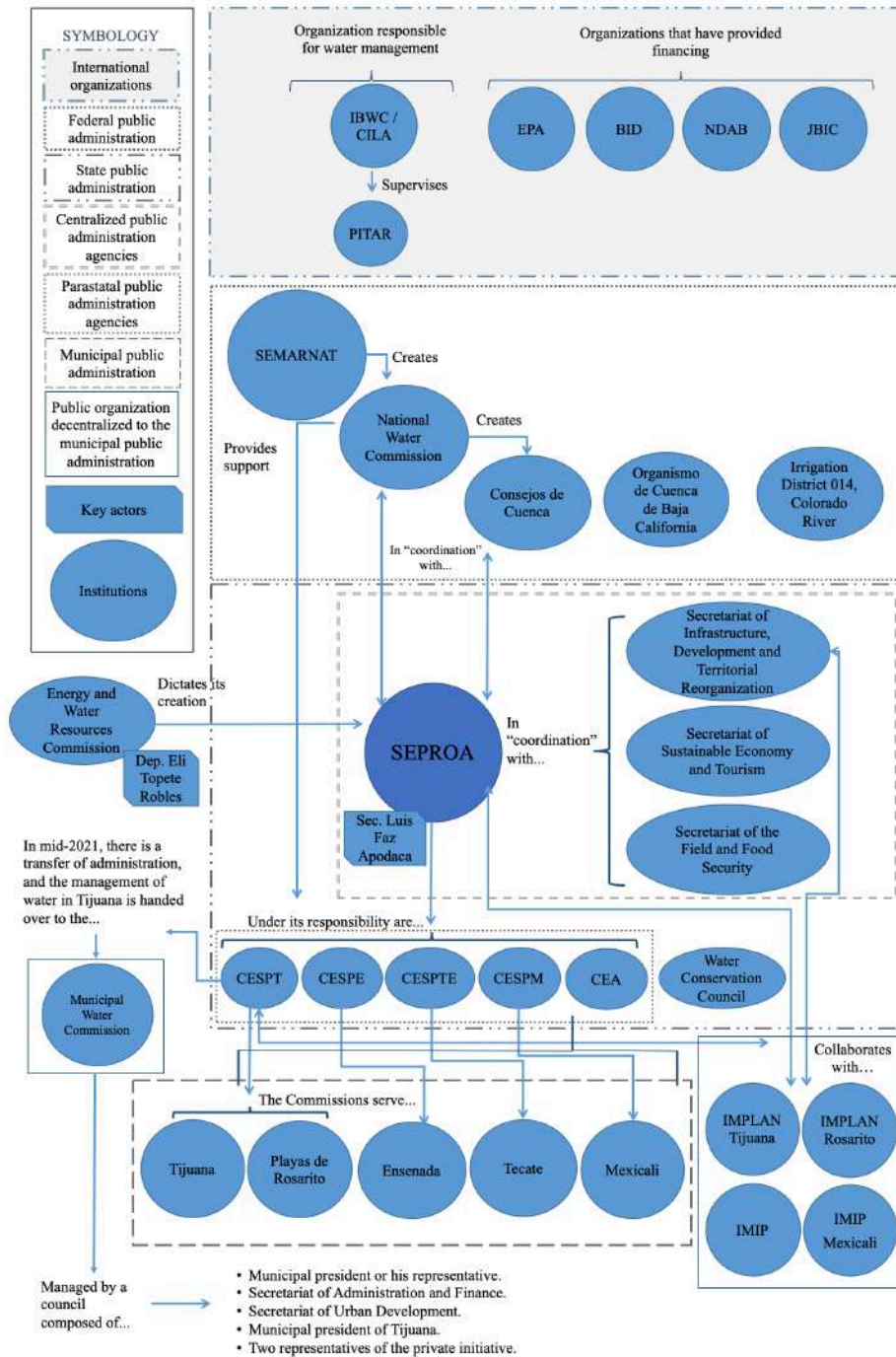
by virtue of its establishment as an Office, SEPROA exercises greater control over resources by the state apparatus. In this sense, this institution addresses the lines of action that the residing governor considers priorities, which is associated with the notion of responsibility and handling of the public issue.

Figure 5. Water Management Agencies and their Interactions Prior to the SEPROA



Source: Own elaboration based on the Organic Law of Public Administration of the State of Baja California of 2019 (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública del Estado de Baja California of 2019).

Figure 6. Entities that Manage Water and Their Interactions with SEPROA<sup>9</sup>



Source: Own elaboration based on the Organic Law of Public Administration of the State of Baja California of 2020 (Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública del Estado de Baja California of 2020).

<sup>9</sup> The Commission of Energy and Hydraulic Resources (Comisión de Energía y Recursos Hidráulicos) proposes the creation of SEPPOA. The CEA levels down in the hierarchy but continues to be led by the Secretary of SEPPOA.

Table 2. Budget for the Executive Power in Baja California (2019-2022)

Francisco Vega			Jaime Bonilla						Marina Ávila		
2019	Budget	%	2020	Budget	%	2021	Budget	%	2022	Budget	%
Executive Office	119 M	0.23	Office of the Governor	115 M	0.23	Office of the Governor	124 M	0.24	Cabinet Coordination	149 M	0.26
General Secretariat	268 M	0.52	General Secretariat	1387 M	2.76	General Secretariat of Government	1474 M	2.85	General Secretariat of Government	241 M	0.43
Secretariat of Planning and Finance	797 M	1.56	Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit	770 M	1.53	Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit	1946 M	3.76	Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit	1335 M	2.36
Senior Government Office	717 M	1.4	Senior Government Office	719 M	1.43				Senior Government Office	1354 M	2.4
Secretariat of the Comptroller and Government Transparency	70 M	0.14	Secretariat of the Comptroller and Government Transparency	66 M	0.13	Secretariat of Honesty and Public Function	75991134.46	0.15	Secretariat of Honesty and Public Function	77 M	0.14
Attorney General's Office	1483 M	2.9	General Prosecutor's Office of Baja California	2539 M	5.05						
Secretariat of Infrastructure and Urban Development	581 M	1.14	Secretariat of Infrastructure and Urban Development	513 M	1.02	Secretariat of Infrastructure, Urban Development and Territorial Reorganization	827 M	1.6	Secretariat of Infrastructure, Urban Development and Territorial Reorganization	234 M	0.41
Secretariat of Economic Development	256 M	0.5	Secretariat of Economic Development	510 M	1.01	Secretariat of Sustainable Economy and Tourism	591 M	1.14	Secretariat of Economy and Innovation	394 M	0.7
Secretariat of Tourism	190 M	0.37							Secretariat of Tourism	353 M	0.62
Secretariat of Environmental Protection	53 M	0.1							Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable	50 M	0.09
Secretariat of Fisheries and Aquaculture	63 M	0.12							Secretariat of Fisheries and Aquaculture	43 M	0.08
Secretariat of Agricultural Development	145 M	0.28	Secretariat of Agricultural Development	155 M	0.31	Secretariat of Agriculture and Food Security	182 M	0.35	Secretariat of Agriculture and Food Security	180 M	0.32
Secretariat of Education and Social Welfare	26532 M	51.86	Secretariat of Education and Social Welfare	25666 M	51.08	Secretariat of Education	27253 M	52.6	Secretariat of Education	26441 M	46.8
Secretariat of Social Development	1731 M	3.38	Secretariat of Social Development	1750 M	3.48	Secretariat of Inclusion and Social Welfare	2027 M	3.91	Secretariat of Social Welfare	2580 M	4.57
Secretariat of Labor and Social Security	162 M	0.32	Secretariat of Labor and Social Security	163 M	0.32	Secretariat of Labor and Social Security	172 M	0.33	Secretariat of Labor and Social Security	258 M	0.46
Secretariat of Health	3931 M	7.68									
			Secretariat of Culture	185 M	0.37	Secretariat of Culture	189 M	0.37	Secretariat of Culture	234 M	0.41
			Secretariat for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality	36 M	0.07				Secretariat for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality	36 M	0.06
						Secretariat of Water Management, Protection and Sanitation	5 M	0.01	Secretariat of Water Management, Protection and Sanitation	86 M	0.15
									Legal Counsel	191 M	0.34
									Social Communication Department	40 M	0.07
Additional expenditures	1029 M	2.01		835 M	1.66		1318 M	2.54		1708 M	3.02
Financing and public debt	1535 M	3		1218 M	2.42		1526 M	2.95		1794 M	3.18
Municipal development	9311 M	18.2		9637 M	19.18		9934 M	19.18		11344 M	20.08
			Non-sectoral entities	14 M	0.03		14 M	0.03		14 M	0.03
Directorate of the Public Registry of Property and Commerce	84 M	0.16								99 M	0.17
Secretariat of Public Security	2103 M	4.11							Secretariat of Public Safety	2449 M	4.34
Total	51159 M	100		50242 M	100		51807 M	100		56494 M	100

Note: Data presented in millions (M) of Mexican pesos. The green color shows a value scale that represents institutions with higher budgets (percentage), in contrast to the support provided to SEPROA (shaded in gray).<sup>10</sup>

Source: Own elaboration based on expenditure budget (Secretaría de Hacienda, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022a).

When analyzing administrative capacity, its expressions must be identified. At the *micro* level, these are associated with specific characteristics of human resources: hiring practices, suitability of the profile, time dedication, training, and recruitment methods, among others (Rosas Huerta, 2008).

Hence, this article valued the experience of government representatives and water utility managers. Table 3 summarizes the periods and professional profiles of the managerial staff, highlighting a preference for engineering and administrative fields.

<sup>10</sup> Secretariat and Office are used interchangeably in this article (T.N.).

Table 3. Profile of Government Officials and Water Agencies' Heads

Governor	Francisco Vega (B.B.A.)	Jaime Bonilla (B.B.A.; M.P.A.)	Marina Ávila (L.L.B.; L.L.M.; M.P.A.)
SEPROA Secretary	(Did not exist)	2020-2021: Salomón Faz Apodaca (B.B.A.; M.Fin.)	Nov. 2021-jun. 2022: Francisco Alberto Bernal Rodríguez (Agric. Eng. specializing in Irrigation and Drainage; M.S. in Irrigation Water Use and Management in Arid Zones)
CEA Director	2018: Ricardo Cisneros Rodríguez (B.Arch.)	2019: Enrique Ruelas López (Civ. Eng.) 2019-2020: Luis Granados Pacheco (Civ. Eng.) 2020-2021: Salomón Faz Apodaca	Jun. 2022: José Armando Fernández Samaniego (B.Eng.; M.D.A. with a concentration in Finance)
CESPT Director	2013-2016: Alfonso Álvarez Juan (B.F.T.) 2016-2018: Miguel Lemus Zendejas (B.Arch.) 2018-2019: Germán Jesús Lizola Márquez (B.Eng.)	2019: Enrique Ruelas López (Civ. Eng.) 2019: Rigoberto Laborín Valdez (Chem. Eng.) 2020: Sergio Antonio Rosete Weben (B.Econ.) 2020- 2021: Eliel Vargas Pulido (Civ. Eng.) 2021: Eli Topete Robles (B.B.A.)	2021-2022: Gonzálo López López (Civ. Eng.; M.P.P.)
CESPE Director	2018-2019: Carlos Gonzalo Loyola Peterson (B.Eng.)	2019-2021: Marcelino Márquez Wong (B.Eng.) 2021-2021: Javier Vera Delgado (B.Eng.)	2021-2022: Jaime Alcocer Tello (B.Eng.)
CESPM Director	2018-2019: Francisco Javier Orduño Valdez (B.Acc.)	2019-2020: Héctor Soto Ibarra (B.Eng.) 2020-2021: José Armando Fernández Samaniego (B.Eng.; M.B.A. with a concentration in Finance)	2021-2022: José Armando Fernández Samaniego (B.Eng.; M.B.A. with a concentration in Finance) Jun. 2022-actual: Armando Carrasco López (B.P.A.)
CESPTE Director	2018-2020: Patricia Ramírez Pineda (B.Eng.)	2021: Darío Benítez Ruiz (B.Eng.)	2021-2022: Jesús Alfonso Arámburo Zatarain (B.Eng.)

Source: Own elaboration based on the Transparency portal (Sistema Estatal de Transparencia de Baja California, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e).

Regarding the periods of Francisco Vega and Jaime Bonilla, a professional profile oriented towards business administration is observed among their appointed personnel, which may explain the tendency towards the privatization of public services. One of the reasons for promoting such management schemes is that they allow for the improvement of the economic and administrative burden of the federal government (Rolland & Vega Cárdenas, 2010), through advantages related to reduced political participation, the promotion of long-term administrations, and cost reduction (Castro, 2007). However, there are those who argue that privatization promotes conditions of vulnerability by opposing the interests of service providers and users, as water would transition from being a common good to being a commodity, where its provision is not considered a public service but a business (Peña García, 2007).

On the other hand, the constant turnover of executives in state public service commissions has fostered discontinuity in water management actions. In this respect, during Bonilla's period, the CESPT was the agency with the highest number of alternations, accounting for six out of the 12 changes in officials that occurred in these state commissions (Table 3).

Considering external and internal evaluations is also a point of reference for organizations. In this sense, the CESPT stands out for being one of the best evaluated in terms of its organization, autonomy, and coordination with other agencies (Salazar Adams & Méndez Barrón, 2020).

Similarly, national evaluations place the state of Baja California among the top 10 water service providers (Figure 7). However, for the last period, there was a decline in ranking from the fourth (8.02) to the eighth position (7.40), which highlighted some shortcomings in the provision of this public service.

Figure 7. Rating Given to the Drinking Water Service in Mexico (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019)

	2013	2015	2017	2019
Nuevo León	8.60	8.46	8.54	8.59
Guanajuato	8.16	7.71	7.71	7.62
Querétaro	7.94	7.82	7.71	7.80
Yucatán	7.67	7.55	7.81	7.76
Colima	8.41	7.37	7.62	7.75
<b>Baja California</b>	<b>8.02</b>	<b>7.55</b>	<b>7.79</b>	<b>7.40</b>
Chihuahua	7.76	6.90	7.25	7.21
Sinaloa	7.95	7.77	7.74	7.93
Nayarit	6.08	6.46	6.81	6.47
Durango	7.59	6.27	6.79	7.18
Coahuila	7.47	6.71	7.09	6.92
Hidalgo	7.26	6.56	6.78	7.14
Jalisco	7.32	7.46	7.56	7.51
Sonora	7.13	6.86	7.05	6.91
Tlaxcala	6.93	7.00	7.02	7.23
Morelos	7.23	6.54	6.73	6.87
Michoacán	6.79	6.64	6.83	6.80
Campeche	6.64	6.61	7.10	6.99
Baja California Sur	6.88	6.37	6.93	7.19
Ciudad de México	6.53	6.15	6.26	6.56
Puebla	6.03	6.09	6.28	6.36
Quintana Roo	7.32	6.76	6.54	6.16
Tamaulipas	7.38	6.99	6.84	6.50
Chiapas	6.30	5.41	5.12	5.70
Agascalientes	7.09	6.69	7.05	6.19
Veracruz	6.74	6.09	6.37	6.65
México	6.63	6.01	5.92	6.50
Zacatecas	6.61	6.08	5.53	5.98
San Luis Potosí	6.65	5.91	6.35	5.99
Oaxaca	5.63	5.27	6.06	5.70
Tabasco	4.97	3.96	4.99	4.28
Guerrero	3.88	4.50	4.74	4.56

Source: Own elaboration based on the National Survey of Government Quality and Impact (Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental [ENCIG]) (INEGI, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019).

Another indicator that allows for the analysis of the institutional capacity of water management internally is the overall efficiency of the State's water operators (Table 4). This index of governmental performance recognizes the operational and financial efficiency of water operators; the higher the value, the more efficient the State water operators are (Sistema Estatal de Evaluación del Desempeño [SEDED], 2022b). When comparing Table 4 with the annual targets set by the government (71%), it was found that the efficiency of water operators did not meet their objectives, as their averages show 65%.

Table 4. Overall Efficiency of Water Operators in the State of Baja California (Per Quarter)

	2020 (CEA)				2021 (SEPROA)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Overall Efficiency of Water Operators in the State	65.6	65.41	65.7	60.31	62.26	68.82	65.52	65.84
Annual average	64.26				65.61			

Source: Own elaboration based on SEDED (2022a).

Despite the evaluations not being unfavorable, there is a perceived downward trend both in the rating of water services and in the efficiency of water operators in the state. Therefore, it is necessary to promote management mechanisms that can improve the status of the agencies responsible for water management.

To address these issues, it will be necessary to improve the operational and technical conditions of some organizations, as indicated in the following interviews:

(...) there is no other choice but to carry out a reengineering process. I start looking at their inventories and 50% of it was already scrap. I look at the staff, and there were 1 736 employees; 1 250 of them were unionized, so we were dependent on 80% of the union. But then I see the national average, and it was five employees per thousand inhabitants, while we were at 2.4 employees per 1 000. We are 50% below the national average (informant 1, public official, personal communication, June 28, 2022).

(...) something very important is the master plan, if you have a master plan of 20 or 30 years, but you do it well, complete, (...) [with] all the priorities (...) from A to Z (...), it will be successful because otherwise, everyone will be arriving and everyone will be doing a different project, right now the one who left didn't finish it in time (...). What I can say is that you struggle a lot with the union members, it's very complicated to operate within the system. These are problems that (...) I would handle in three parts: the union, the financial aspect, and corruption. Until you deal with all of that, and if you increase the workers' salaries, it should be consistent and fair for everyone, not just a few, because they [the union members] are like a gang, and they come in a group, here we have only 200 [non-union workers] (informant 2, former public official, personal communication, September 20, 2022).

In short, beyond administrative reengineering, financial resources, the experiences of public servants, and evaluations of institutions, it is necessary to reach a consensus on a long-term water plan that serves as a reference point for each new governor. This will allow for gradual progress and put an end to the appropriation of flagship projects without continuity.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article demonstrated a particular interest in investigating the ownership and responsibilities of water management administrations in order to understand the factors that enable or hinder institutional capacity. In this regard, analyzing the interactions among water management agencies made it possible to trace a fifteen-year path regarding changes and continuities in public administration in Baja California.

It was found that water management in urban areas is influenced by the technical-bureaucratic skills of those who, based on their experience in public administration, make decisions and propose lines of action for water management. The analysis revealed a lack of continuity in water management strategies, which is one of the main obstacles that reduces institutional capacity. This is reflected in the bureaucratic procedures within the organization itself, as well as in the constant changes of leaders that limit autonomous and long-term planning. In this regard, directors become mere administrators who do not make decisions, negatively impacting the institutional capacity of the organizations, limiting the achievement of objectives, and impeding real changes that address social needs.

As observed, the lack of continuity in water projects is the element that most significantly influences institutional capacity. When added to the subjective prioritization of public issues, this further hinders their consolidation because, as administrations change, public matters are addressed in diverse ways, more as political flags of committed projects rather than as long-term projections.

Water, being a limited resource in the area, is a matter of public interest for various government administrations. In this sense, the issue of water is a complex and political matter where economic power influences the institutions that manage the resource.

From the perspective of policy analysis, it is recognized that the problems that make up the political agenda are not necessarily the most urgent. Instead, each actor (institution/decision-maker) chooses to promote their viewpoints in order to draw public attention to their area of interest (Subirats, 2001).

With the constant change in the organizational structure of Baja California's public administration, there is a need to promote an autonomous structure that carries out water resources management in the entity, that has a long-term vision, and its own resources for its operation. This would avoid dependence on the "political priorities" of the active government.

Although SEPROA demonstrates autonomy in budgetary terms, it still retains the attributions of the State Water Commission, which raises doubts about the relevance of its creation. SEPROA

is theoretically envisioned as a link between municipalities and the State, capable of determining and guiding water strategies in the region. However, this department has not been able to establish itself as an institution with authority, and the general public does not recognize it as a significant entity in water management.

In this same administrative change, the issue of municipalization of the water operators is presented in an ambivalent manner: on one hand, it is argued that it will promote greater coordination with municipal agencies by aligning the institutional management and being governed by the same authority. However, it is also noted that it may lose political and financial power to negotiate projects due to increased decentralization.

Translation: Erika Morales.

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