

SUMMARY

Our approach is grounded in the concept of transition which developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and aims to observe, in two countries that share centralized public decision making, how new development paradigms (decentralization, privatization, public-private partnerships-PPPs) have impacted on urban management, in particular the governance of drinking water in major metropolises (Casablanca, Tangiers/Tetouan in Morocco; Hanoi, Haiphong and Ha Dong in Vietnam). Large-scale transformations have taken place in Morocco with the delegated management of drinking water (starting in 1997) and in Vietnam after the *Doi Moi* programme (1986). However, because of the scale of the financial investment in the infrastructure in question and issues of urban productivity in major metropolises, public decision making is still central to national strategies. While in both contexts the tendency is to set up operational and exploratory PPPs (with fundamental differences in structures and rates of implementation), the same problems regarding water pricing, access of the urban poor to water and the regulation of the new mechanisms are encountered

but receive contrasting local responses, with competitive tendering appearing where one would expect it least. Surely now is the time for a debate on water as a “market commodity” or a “shared good”. After the limitations of public authority controlled management and the heralded but unfulfilled triumph of the market, PPPs were perceived as an innovative, but still imperfect, alternative; in addition to the introduction of “French style” delegated management in Morocco, more specific types of organization are developing in Vietnam. But can these various types of PPP provide, under all circumstances, general access to water even in squatter settlements? How can customers or users benefit from at least some of the possible productivity gains? Last, what light can the very different experience of urban water governance in Morocco and Vietnam cast on the central issue of the regulation of these systems? This constantly recurring question suggests not so much a choice between the “private” and “public” sectors as mixed institutional procedures that are capable of avoiding monopolistic tendencies in water distribution.