



Confrontative Dialogue

Is the distinction between Water Services Authority and Water Services Provider useful?

One position:

The distinction between Water Authority and Water Provider derives from the neo-liberal framework, and hence it is dangerous to consider such a distinction as 'best practice internationally'. There is a danger in the WSA-WPA division that a new logic emerges: 'delivery is best left to business', which, by ideological definition, is supposed to be the most efficient. Yet the deregulatory market logic has failed society, as witnessed in the current global economic crisis, as 2008-09 witnessed crashes of trade, finance and investment at the worst levels ever recorded.

Another position:

This approach does lend itself to assigning provision to an external provider – whether another municipality, a water board, or a private sector provider - but that's not the only reason for doing it, and it doesn't mean that the only reason you separate WSA and WSP roles is as a prelude to privatisation. The main driver is the simple principle that a municipality shouldn't be player and referee, particularly where performance objectives aren't clearly specified and where there aren't good performance monitoring and management systems in place. There needs to be a clearer separation of roles. Yes, certainly it can work if you have a technical department delivering services, and then have a separate body in the same municipality monitoring performance. But the problem right now is that we have councillors as the primary regulators at local level, and that has the potential to permit all kinds of abuses that don't necessary achieve good service delivery on the ground.

Another position:

This separation is the exception rather than the norm in South Africa. By focusing on this issue, our debate becomes polarised around public-private arguments. Instead we need to look at the failure to deliver and acknowledge that motivating for a split in functions is optimistic bearing in mind the actual capacity of WSAs to function let alone function as regulators.