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Analysis of Water Governance in the Canary Islands: Evolution and Future Challenges

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Abstract

The Canary Islands are a European outermost region and one of Spain's two archipelagos. They have a subtropical climate, however, the different orography between the eastern and western islands (which in turn make up the Province of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and the Province of Santa Cruz de Tenerife), favours the islands that are closer to the African continent to be more arid. The islands furthest from the African coast, on the other hand, are rich in groundwater resources, with the aquifer being the main source of drinking water on these islands. In general, groundwater coexists with seawater desalination, with each island being managed individually through the Island Water Council of each island. Each Island Water Council develops a Hydrological Plan for each island, and these bodies are in turn dependent on the Island Council (Cabildo) an institution inherited after the Conquest of Spain. The hydrological plans are developed to comply with the provisions of the European Water Framework Directive and also to meet the specifications set out in the European Union's Smart Specialisation Strategy for the Canary Islands. Therefore, this article analyses the evolution of the institutional regulation of water in the Canary Islands, placing special emphasis on its particularities, such as the privatisation of groundwater, and examines the challenges facing the region linked to climate change and the water-energy nexus posed by the desalination of seawater, as well as purification and reuse.

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