

Between modernization and conflict: The business role, municipal management and the demand for a state drinking water service for Iquique (1830-1924)

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Abstract

Supplying drinking water to Iquique since its authorization as a port at the beginning of the 19th century was a real odyssey because it was located in a coastal area of the Atacama Desert that had no natural water sources nearby. Thus, the role of water entrepreneurs was essential to provide the Iquique inhabitants with this vital resource, especially as there were no state initiatives to that effect. However, business hegemony ended up causing a series of inconveniences as commercial interests prevailed over social ones. Therefore, at the end of the 19th century, a public opinion demanding a state drinking water service was established. The objective of this article is to analyze the different private initiatives, the characteristics of the water business, the conflict between the municipality and some businessmen around the demand for a service of higher quality and, finally, to demonstrate - based on the analysis of judicial and legislative sources, as well as of the local press - that the commercialization of the service was a greater obstacle than geography itself to achieve an equitable and efficient water supply system.

Author keywords

Businessmen
Conflict
Drinking water
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