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Water Values and Water Governance in the Brazilian Cuiabá River Basin and in the Pantanal

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The Cuiabá River Basin is located in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso, in the geographical centre of South America. This area is experiencing not only a rapid expansion and modernization of its agricultural sector, but is also host to the Pantanal, the world's largest continental freshwater wetland and a unique ecosystem with great importance for biodiversity conservation. My PhD research aims at exploring the different values that stakeholders from different parts of society, such as farmers, government agencies, fishermen, and researchers, attach to water resources in the area. Up to now, it is based on qualitative interviews to key stakeholders, conducted between October and December 2014, as well as participant observation at water-related events. While monetary valuation techniques are continuously developed and applied in natural resource management, calls to take alternative and non-monetary dimensions of value into account have never been silenced. Prominent examples are Martinez-Alier's "languages of valuation" (2002) or O'Neill et al.'s (2008) discussion of the philosophical bases of environmental values, which demonstrate that there is a set of diverging basic values which may not be converted into each other, e.g. by using monetary figures as a measurement tool. My PhD research uses a wide conception of value as a theoretical basis, drawing on material from human geography, ecological economics, environmental philosophy, as well as social and environmental psychology. It aims at understanding how both values assigned to water resources, as well as values as guiding principles are distributed among different stakeholder groups. Moreover, it introduces concrete water governance issues in the Cuiabá River Basin and shows how these are shaped by the interplay of different types of values and political power.