Extended Abstract


The political-institutional framework for water management was inaugurated in Brazil with the promulgation of Federal Law nº 9.433 of 1997. The model defined by the legislation was the result of a complex debate between political agents, specialists and service users, and generally received very positive reactions celebrating the fact that Brazil was carrying out a reorganisation of the sector attuned to contemporary global trends – more horizontal, decentralised, participatory and effective. This model would allow for the environmental, economic, political, social and territorial dimensions of water use to be coordinated all at once. Hence, a river basin is defined as a territorial unit for implementing the water resources policy and a basin committee as a managing body for this territorial unit, with important responsibilities including conflict resolution, approval and monitoring of water resources plans, and setting up of systems for charging in the water use.

The present work has as objective to study the forms of participative management aimed at dealing with water resources, carried out through the action of river basin committees, specifically the Piabanha Committee, with action on area of the river basin of the Rivers: Piabanha, Paquequer and Preto. Looking for to understand the perception and knowledge of the active members and collaborators in relation to their role, as well as their importance as a normative and deliberative instance in the context of water resources. In order to carry out the study we opted for qualitative research methodology, where through participant observation we followed the periodic meetings of said committee, and through semi-structured interviews we opened a listening channel with its members and collaborators, in this way it was possible to identify what they value most and what are the actions taken to make decisions.

Formally, the improvement of the Brazilian system of water resources management depends on our ability to exercise citizenship. But it is important not to forget that citizens' concerns about the environment have always been unstable, varied and ambiguous. They have rarely achieved the intensity required to force a radical change...
of policies, except when citizens act in an organized and better-qualified way for the The basic questions formulated to guide this study were:

How do those directly involved in participatory management of water resources - in the area of action of the Piabanna Committee - perceive their environment in relation to their conservation status?

What actions to preserve the quality of water resources are most valued?

What are the differences in the perceptions of the values and importance of the natural environments among the individuals operating in the River Basin Committee and what different functions do they play in the social context in these environments?

With the following specific objectives:

- Analyze the concept of Watershed and the legal mechanisms of management instituted.
- Characterization, identification, importance and priority of the main environmental and/or social problems of the region of action of the Piabanna Committee.
- Development of a research instrument, which can be applied to members and collaborators of the Piabanna Committee, based on the analysis of environmental perception, allowing the identification and, above all, quantification of such perception in the face of the multiple facets of environmental knowledge.
- To quantify the perception of the environmental quality of the water resources, the perceived indicators and the relation of environmental and social responsibility of the individual, in relation to the area of action of the Piabanna Committee.

In order to constitute the research universe, we sought to approach the members of the Piabanna River Basin Committee, a group of 32 (thirty-two) members with the right to voice and vote, and their respective substitutes. Each member shall indicate a titular representative and an alternate, as well as his alternate. This creates a possible universe of up to 144 people directly linked to the Piabanna Committee, as well as collaborators and support staff. With this, it was possible to carry out a participatory observation process where we could follow the committee meetings. To complement our analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with seventeen people Members and
collaborators of the committee, aiming to understand the process existing in the ordinary meetings and the unfolding of the actions developed by them in the context of standardization and deliberation of the actions directed to the water resources of the region.

We identify as a result that a significant part of the members have a close look at local environmental conditions and are sensitive to the current state of conservation of water resources. However, in the conceptual questions and of effective normatization, in most cases, there are records of great misconceptions. A factor that undermines the group's potential for influence in the formulation of public policies in the thematic area. Therefore, we believe that the result of this work will contribute to mitigation of this outstanding fragility among the members of said committee.

This research concludes that the members of the committee are engaged in the processes, as they have demonstrated that they have established relationships of responsibility and coexistence with the present water bodies. What makes possible their availability and willingness to participate in activities in favor of this common good, the water. However, most of them do not have conceptual clarity as to the extent of the meaning of what becomes to be a river basin. In this sense, the consequence is directly related to the way they normalize and deliberate policies involving water resources, which can lead to an environmental damage.

But even so, they recognize that negative impacts on water bodies caused by anthropic actions are a risk to the environment, so actions of reforestation and with population involvement appears among the suggestions to improve the quality of water resources, and environmental education is pointed as an important instrument of awareness towards the environmental conscience, in search of a better quality of life to the population.

The perception established with respect to Piabanha river is sharply negative due to its environmental situation: pollution, mischaracterization of its banks, absence of riparian vegetation, siltation, etc. Since they clearly have the definition of Riparian Forest and demonstrate to have relations of responsibility and belonging with this component of the environment, which favors the participation of members in the defense of the construction of preservation guarantees, although the slowness of the process to carry out effective actions appears as a barrier to recognize great advances in the standardization of actions to change the current situation.
The lack of knowledge about the organisms and mechanisms existing in the management process shows the fragility of the decision-making processes that involve Water Resources.

Selective garbage collection and composting appear prominently among the interviewees' practices, a factor that we consider positive, although it is not done in the collective, but rather as an individual practice.

With respect to water bodies specifically, it can be stated that there is a concern to recover and conserve rivers and streams, which includes the depollution of water bodies, the recovery of their riparian forests and the preservation of their sources.

There is a clear indication that participation in events promoting environmental action has been limited and ineffective due to lack of disponibility of time in the first place. Thus, activities that aim at participation should be focused on environmental awareness/mobilization and education, using courses and lectures. In this way, with access to more information and more training, incorporated into their way of understanding reality, it becomes possible to acquire degrees of greater commitment that allows them to transform it.

In this way we believe that we understand that a contribution given by our study turns to the need for collective construction of knowledge, always with the participation of experienced mediators and technical expertise in the subject that is being addressed, to promote a more everyday relationship of popular leaderships with advisors, NGOs, universities and professional entities; appropriating technical knowledge related to public policies and their administrative procedures.

The monitoring and control of public policies and the practice of proposition consolidates the ability of those who effectively exercise their negotiating, consultation and consensus powers. And as an achievement of citizenship rights, social participation incorporates new meanings, such as the very idea of democracy as a product of the expression of the meaning of social actions in the public sphere.

It is necessary to learn the practice of negotiation, as another way of dealing with conflict, and to exercise the confrontational proposition, Different from the confrontations characteristic of the most demanding phase of the movements. With the strengthening of participatory individuals, who are already active (each in their own way) in participatory management mechanisms, by understanding their perception of the environmental issues
surrounding them, and the survey of the main themes to be worked on environmental education actions makes it possible to see ways to create systemic knowledge of environmental and legal processes in the scope of water resources management.

Encouraging the creation and strengthening of affective relationships and the creation of identity and belonging between the community and the water bodies of the region, with the participation of schools and universities, which should promote activities with students in order to increase their knowledge on river basin, stimulating awareness of the current environmental situation and its future prospects, through proposals for action, and NGOs doing similar activities with the population not reached by schools and universities.

The dissemination of the meaning of a River Basin Committee, its importance, its functions and the forms of social participation in its activities, stimulating popular participation in order to ensure the democratic process of participative management of Water Resources, as an exercise of citizenship.

Another aspect is the participation of the media in the dissemination of actions and events related to River Basin Committees and activities that are promoted by the established partnership, which in our view, broadens the level of knowledge of the population on the subject, such as, promotes the clarification on the problems that deserve greater analysis and reflection on the part of analysts, technicians and social actors, because this mobilization of the represented sectors, increasing the organicity of the representation exercised, the capture of the participatory spaces by private or corporate interests and the predominance of the executive power in the decision-making processes.

Another important issue to consider is the need and importance of expanding research that can promote and deepen aspects of the urban basins, enriching the studies related to this area of water resources, so important at the present time. Also relevant are the studies of environmental perception for an effective environmental education, in the certainty of the intrinsic connection between man and environment.

Therefore, it is recommended the continuity and expansion of data collection surveys focused on environmental perception. In addition to increasing the number of interviews promoting a random sampling with deepening by urban basin, increasing the representativity of the sample and enriching the analysis of the results obtained. To carry out an in-depth evaluation of the multidimensional relationships between the variables
used in this research for the social characterization of the interviewees (for example: time of residence, time of residence in that household) and others that may provide subsidies for new studies (e.g., distance from housing to the water body most representative of the basin, income, occupation, value of the housing rate), seeking to analyze them in relation to the answers given to the general and specific questions. In addition to including other aspects such as "leisure" and "landscaping" in the topics covered through the interview script, thus seeking to deepen the investigation of the environmental perception of the interviewees in relation to the places with which they have established affective relationships, identifying and evaluating the landscape situation of areas of public interest for leisure and subsidizing studies that evaluate areas for environmental recovery.

Keywords

Water resources; participative management; environmental perception; hydrographic basin committee.