

Title:

The Discourse of Advocacy Coalitions: Desired Futures and Natural Resource Issues

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Abstract:

Using discourse analysis, this paper synthesizes, characterizes, and summarizes information gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups with key representatives of civil society, state, and market-oriented entities that form existing or emergent advocacy coalitions. Other “data” include those obtained through interactions with many of the principals as a result of the involvement of the NGOs Heifer Project-Ecuador, the Institute for Ecuadorian Studies, and Terranueva in various development and research projects and training efforts in the Canton of Cotacachi. The focus is on three issues that are particularly compelling at the local level, but the six advocacy coalitions (two per issue) include institutions at various levels from the local to international. Those issues are mining in Intag, the semi-tropical part of the Cantón , and water usage and future governance of the Cotacachi-Cayapas Bio-reserve, focused in the highland portion of Cotacachi.

El discurso de las coaliciones de convencimiento: futuros deseados y temas de recursos naturales.

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Síntesis:

Utilizando el análisis de discurso, este “paper” sintetiza, caracteriza y resume la información recogida de entrevistas en profundidad y grupos focales con representantes clave de instituciones de la sociedad civil, el Estado y grupos con orientación al mercado, que conforman coaliciones de convencimiento existentes y emergentes. Otros datos incluyen los que se han obtenido de las interacciones con algunos de los principales directivos de las ONGs: Fundación Heifer Ecuador, Instituto de estudios ecuatorianos y Terranueva, involucradas en varios proyectos de desarrollo, investigación y esfuerzos de capacitación en el Cantón Cotacachi. El enfoque en los tres temas es particularmente prioritario en el nivel local, sin embargo las seis coaliciones de convencimiento (dos coaliciones por tema) incluyen también instituciones a varios niveles, desde el local hasta el internacional. Los temas son minería en Intag -zona subtropical del Cantón -, uso del agua y el futuro de la administración de la Reserva Cotacachi-Cayapas, enfocados en la zona andina de Cotacachi.

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is the process of decision making in natural resource management and the construction of alliances so that mechanisms that can make feasible certain desired futures that benefit sustainable development can prevail.

The research is centered at local level, however the analysis of the decision making process involved others levels such as the provincial, national and even international in some cases, because of the implications of the legal framework and the administrative policies of the State with the local debates about the natural resource management.

The research was carried out in Cotacachi, a Canton belonging to the Province of Imbabura, located in the Northern Sierra of Ecuador. This region has two very distinct geographical zones: the subtropical, located in the occidental part of the Cotacachi Volcano, and the Andean located in the oriental part. About 80% of the population live in the rural area, while the other 20% lives in the urban area. Approximately 45.7% of the population is indigenous.

This research focused on the following processes: a) management of the Cotacachi Cayapas reserve; b) mining extraction in the subtropical zone, and c) access and use of water in the Andean zone. These issues were selected in the context of the interaction among the institutions that supported the research (Heifer Ecuador, Terranueva, IEE) and the main actors of the zone: Municipality of Cotacachi and UNORCAC. The importance that these processes had in relation to environmental public policies and the existence of local groups that debated (debate) and requested for (request for) the execution of policies directed towards sustainable development were some of the criteria used to select them.

The study of the decision making process is connected to the new discussions about the local communities' participation and about the responsibility that local governments and social organizations could have in environmental management directed towards the achievement of sustainable development. These strategies that have been debated in world forums¹ are beginning to be legislated and applied by the States. At the same time they are being discussed by civil society organizations and institutions, though their application involve difficulties of normative, operative and consensus construction character.

The proposed perspective seeks to go beyond the partial vision of decision making, in which the process would take place with the identification of the problem, the establishment of an agenda to approach it, to finally adopt, implement and evaluate the policy, with which to face the problem. This

¹ The need for the **local** and **national** administrations to assume the responsibility to regulate and apply laws to protect the environment was recognized during the Conference about human environment (Stockholm, 1972). This goal must be accomplish with the participation of the communities and citizens. Different levels of citizen participation to address environmental issues and decision making processes were thoroughly discussed in the United Nations Conference about environment and development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992).

perspective wishes to underline the complexity of a process in which the diversity of subjects, their practices, interests and capacity in the exercise of power, obstruct the linear succession of the phases, many times giving way to discontinuous negotiations among institutions and/or individuals that come to argue the truthfulness of their proposals.

One element that contributes to the complexity of the decision-making, in a country like Ecuador, is the inequity in the power exercise, due to the historical exclusion in the political decisions of the indigenous groups and subordinate classes.

The decision making process is understood here as an ensemble of practices that permit the positioning of the individuals/actors in the public sphere (a place for connection of private and collective projects), to seek alliances that, when bringing together common discourses and defending them, allows them to impact in the constructions of valid dispositions for the whole community.

In order to address the decision making process from the above mentioned perspective, we have selected the methodology proposed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), who propose **the structure of advocacy coalitions**² as the organizational formula through which the subjects interact to accumulate power and have an effect on decision making.

According to these authors, such coalitions are conformed by institutional actors that establish alliances on the basis of sharing common desired futures on issues that are specific, visible and of priority. In this manner actors can support each other during negotiations with others coalitions or alliances. In the negotiation about a specific issue, the allied actors need to exercise capacities to convince the other (s) coalition (s) that is defending some position, about the advantages of their approach.

In our case, the analysis of the **advocacy coalitions** make it possible to identify the individuals/actors that intervene in the disputes, as well as their discourses around the desire futures in relation to sustainable management of natural resources, and the ways in which these futures could be constructed. In other words, the mental models present that could lead towards the organization of proposals in one way and not in another.

The analysis of the advocacy coalitions can become a tool that permits peasant organizations battling to participate in the decisions making process and influence in a critical manner the implementation and ultimately the formulation of public policies, to identify the visions that sustain specific desire futures, and interests that may be behind certain mental model.

Elevating the capacity of analysis and reflection about what other individuals/actors say and do, as well as what the organization itself says or does about natural resource management, contributes to the institutional

² Sabatier Paul y Jenkins-Smith, Hank, have called them Advocacy Coalitions, in Flora Cornelia, The Advocacy Coalitions Framework: A theoretical Frame for SANREM to Address Policy, Changes and learning, 1999.

strengthening. This capacity transforms with time into an instrument that facilitates the participation in concerting processes that will in the end derive to the improvement of the conditions and quality of life.

Simultaneously, this methodological door allows us to catch a glimpse of how external institutional actors such as NGOs, have acted in concrete processes that involved the debate about decentralization, development and the citizen participation in the local space.

The perspective of this research is not that of directly influencing decision-making, but is rather of generating information that can gradually modify perceptions and practices in the individuals making decisions.

2. METHODOLOGY, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research posed three ways of collecting information: a) secondary: official documents, newspapers, natural resource management proposals; b) interviews (22) to representatives of national, foreign, public and private institutions, using the same protocol; and c) focus groups (5) of the existing coalitions for the three issues. All this information was collected in the year 2000 over a 9 months period.

The information collected during the interviews and focus groups was transcribed and coded by nodes and sub-nodes, according to an organized guide. This was done using NUDIST Vivo (NVivo), a qualitative analysis program that permitted breaking down the documents by themes and building a data base for each of the three processes for a better analysis.

These qualitative data have been object of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be understood as the political explanation and description of discursive practices and their content. This is possible in the measure that it is through language that specific power relations among individuals are maintained and/or promoted³.

In the first stage of this research, reflection on desired futures in relation to the institutionalization that would promote sustainable development in the Canton was encouraged within focus groups. In the second stage, during which the SANREM project worked with the local peasant organization in natural resource management actions such as the diagnosis and management plan for the Pitzambitze river and lake Cuychic Cocha micro watersheds, capacity building is a concomitant activity to the process.

3. FINDINGS

The advocacy coalitions identified around the dispute over management of the RECC, the access and control of water in the Andean zone, and the mining activity in the subtropical zone, present different levels of consolidation and

³ Dijk, Teun A. E Iván R. Mendizábal, *Análisis del discurso social y político*, Abya Yala, Quito, 1999.

dynamics. These levels depend on the status of the negotiation and the interests activated in time by the most relevant individuals/actors.

3.1 Advocacy coalitions in the RECC issue

In the case of RECC, each of the coalitions involved has had to respond immediately to the proposals of the other as a mechanism to go accumulated strengthens. This is because three of the most important actors participating in the debate about ways of administration – the Ministry of the environment, the Municipality and UNORCAC- have equal interest in solving the problem. The absence of a consensus for the management of the RECC has not only paralyzed the revenue collection generated by tourism, a part of the operational system of the protected area. It also obstructs the proper functioning of the former administrative system, organized around to the offices (intendencias) that control specific reserves that should continuing running.

The advocacy coalitions have presented diverse management proposals. The proposal presented by the alliance formed by UNORCAC, the indigenous communities, specific NGOs and FENOCIN (peasant organization at the national level from which UNORCAC is a subsidiary), is an integral vision of natural resource management. It gives equal importance to resources that produce profits as well as to those that require protection even though they do not generate tangible profits: such is the case of the protection of the moorland to guarantee permanent water supply.

The specificity of the proposal could be read as technical, dealing with care and preservation of natural resources. However, taking into account on the one hand the indigenous holistic relationship between human beings and their habitat, and on the other, their generalized demand for being recognized as individuals with different ethnic tradition, natural resource management is placed under the defense of territorial use and access as a ancient right of the indigenous population. In reality, the proposal defends the “respect of the ethnic reproduction spaces”. This includes “the right to enjoy all the territory resources” –not necessarily in an exclusive way- and to present it as “symbol of the ethnic unity”.⁴

In this case, the idea of the natural resource management is incorporated to the more recent conceptual construction of **environment** as a “productive potential that emerges from the synergetic integration of ecological, cultural and technological processes”.⁵

The other coalition composed by “Tyncuicem”, the mixed tourism enterprise in which the Cotacachi Municipality, the Association of indigenous craftsman “Inkamaqui” and private actionists take part, has been constituted with the specific objective of developing a tourism activity around one of the RECC's

⁴ Iturralde A, Diego, Naciones indígenas y Estados Nacionales en América Latina hasta el año 2.000, en **Díaz-Polanco Héctor, com., Etnia y nación en América Latina**, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, México, 1995

⁵ Leff, Enrique, Saber ambiental: sustentabilidad, racionalidad, poder; Siglo XXI Editores, México, 1998.

resources: lake “Cuicocha”⁶. Being this a place that reports an important profit, the future vision that guides this proposal is to take greater advantage of the natural resource to generate revenues that then would be reverted at the local level through works by municipality that benefit the whole population –mestizo and indigenous.

The rationality that this coalition handles is that of the market: to produce maximum profitability with a little concern for the environment aspects that would be exclusively addressed through technical planning.⁷ This approach subscribes under what Leff calls the neo-classic economic proposal of “adjust the economic cycles. This is, assign market prices to nature with hopes that the commodities could continue circulating in a continuous manner around of the (perfect) sphere of economic order”.⁸ In the best of cases the ecological costs of the productive process would be internalized, without taking into account the rights and cultural practices, the value of the nature itself, the trans-generational equity, etc, externalities that are not susceptible of being given a value by the market. In this case, an attempt would be made to put a price on the way of life of populations that are seen as “exotic”

In fact, the vision sustained by the proposal presented by this advocacy coalition differs from the defense of the ethnic territory supported by the indigenous organization. Furthermore, the mixed enterprise has sought to define the zone that is of their interest (the lake) without taking into account the ecological criteria under which the state administration defined this space as **protected area** (1968). Nevertheless, this coalition has also defended a discourse that demands the allegorical role of the area as a representation of the universal identity of the cantón.

This negotiation process that still continues, began, by request of the Ministry of Environment during the first semester of 1999. The Ministry requested that the Cotacachi Municipality and the UNORCAC present a joint proposal for the management of the RECC. The Ministry of Environment has the intention of concerting the interests of the two most important local actors, recognizing in this way the peasant organization's leadership and insinuating a direct participation of the UNORCAC in the decision making towards the decentralization of the Reserve.

The procedures chosen by the most important actors of the coalitions to convince of the appropriateness of each one of their proposals sought to demonstrate institutional management capacity. The UNORCAC sought legal and technical advice to sustain its proposal. At the same time it mobilized the indigenous communities to make evident their ownership of the lake and of the RECC in general. Additionally, it promoted projects that demonstrated a sustainable management of natural resources in the RECC and the buffer

⁶ According to the Ministry of Environment, approximately 100.000 national and foreign tourists per year visit this place, making it the most visited protected area in Ecuador.

⁷ “The market must define the things we should do”, “we have to create products for tourism, and peasant customs can be used as these type of products” are phrases pronounced by a member of the Tourism mixed enterprise. Personal interview, October 2000.

⁸ Leff, Enrique, *Saber ambiental: sustentabilidad, racionalidad, poder*; Siglo XXI Editores, México, 1998.

zone.⁹ Finally, the UNORCAC supported the criteria of expansion of the discussion space to new institutional instances of citizen participation, such as the Cantonal Management Committee.¹⁰

The Municipality sought supporting its proposal by defending the attribution that the law had granted it: to be the institution over which the responsibility of implementing decentralization directly falls. Its administration was directed towards seeing that the pertinent authority (Ministry of Environment) initiates a decentralization process from central to local government. Only as a second thought, could the incorporation of local actors to the reserve management be proposed, pinpointing in this way to the objective of "allowing social participation in public administration" which is in the decentralization law.

The search for other actors that could support the position and political will of the indigenous municipality to promote the debate in the spaces already institutionalizes of social participation, made the discussion among the actors represented in the Committee of environmental management possible.

Beyond the obvious disappointments suffered by both sides as a result of the lengthening of the negotiations, this valuable process due to the unfolded dynamics and the tools used, has put in evidence the importance of the role of the State in the process of decentralization. The Ministry of Environment's role is of supervising the observance of the law, of being flexible to recognize the specificity of the social organization within the canton, and sensible to support and facilitate processes that achieve real agreements and lay the foundations of democracy.

In this case, it has been possible to witness, through the Ministry of Environment, a wish from the State to understand decentralization not as the shifting of the central administration management to the local governments directed towards eliminating State administration. The State sought to look at new management alternatives with local participation that make possible sustainable management of the reserve that respect national policies.

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of the State and local government emerged when the decentralization process started. These weaknesses find their basis on the trouble of redefining the role of local government that has to face the challenge of managing environments/situations that have never before been under its responsibility¹¹. Likewise, the institutional weakness appears in the

⁹ The deployment of activities around peasant celebrations has emphasized the ritual use of certain natural resources. A rural tourism project has been developed with the support of NGO's, where visitors are shown "a way of life, a different holistic vision; to experience direct contact with nature, and intercultural coexistence with people from the communities..." They also are executing agroecological production and natural resource management projects.

¹⁰ The cantonal management committee is an instance constituted to concert civil society participation through debate and the construction of proposals about what orientation should policies executed by the local government have. This is experience, enriched by the mobilization of the social representation it unleashed, has been internationally recognized with the award granted by the Arab Emirates to the Cotacachi mayor's office.

¹¹ The traditional role of the municipalities has basically been that of executor of infrastructure work for the community.

pressing context of conceiving ways in which social participation in the decision making and in the control of the resources, mean a real distribution of power in the largest number of institutions and social organizations that respond to the interest of the majority.

This point relates to political culture. Although this process has demonstrated that the advocacy coalitions opted for democratic mechanisms of deliberation through the use of word and communication as an opposite form to the use of violence and force¹². At the same time, this option has been built as a sign of the importance given to a political culture that rejects vertical forms of solving problems. There is the risk that the above mentioned weaknesses if linked to an absence of democratic political will, may lead to a centralization of power in the local government, without making efforts to generate instruments of control and social participation. Participation would then be limited to recognizing or rejecting policies built outside of the community's decision.

3.2 Advocacy Coalitions in the Mining Issue

The dynamics have been very different in the case of advocacy coalitions formed around mineral extraction in the RECC buffer zone.

After a process characterized by violent clashes¹³, the coalitions -one composed by the Japanese government, the Bishimetals enterprise, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Energy and Mining and some people living in the area; the other composed by DECOIN¹⁴, resident organizations, Acción Ecológica (Ecological Action)¹⁵ and Amigos de la tierra (Friends of the Earth)¹⁶ - decreased their level of action. Nevertheless latent tension continued among the area's inhabitants, tension that becomes apparent in each zonal organization initiative.

The coalition that opposed mining, maintained a surveillance to deter any action that might again open possibilities for the initiation of mining activities. The presence of the mining development and environmental control project – PRODEMİNCA- financed by the World Bank to, among other things, perform studies on minerals and metals throughout the occidental mountain range, set the coalition into action and made it search for new strategies to explicitly maintain their position.

¹² Sánchez Parga, Lo público y la ciudadanía en la construcción de la democracia, ILDIS, Quito, 1995.

¹³ In 1986 a camp belonging to the Japanese enterprise Bishimetals was taken over by those opposed to mining. The enterprise had been doing prospecting jobs in the Intag area. As a result of the negative response received by the government that supported this prospecting and the Japanese enterprise to abandon the area, inhabitants of the area burned the camp down. The mining enterprise left the area immediately following this action.

¹⁴ Defensa y conservación ecológica de Intag (Intag Ecological defense and conservation, local NGO with large presence of foreign citizens).

¹⁵ Ecuadorian NGO that operates in the national sphere.

¹⁶ International NGO.

Under this perspective, the coalition demanded of the World Bank that it send the Inspection Panel¹⁷. This demand was accepted and permitted the mobilization of more actors that were in favor of the opposing coalition's stance.

On the other hand, as a consequence of the termination of PRODEMINCA and the absence on the side of the population of an organizational platform that could sustain state development proposals, the pro-mining coalition has drastically decreased its actions. However, it is a coalition that can re-emerge encouraged by state interests that are at present promoting policies that incentive foreign investment.

The process of opposition among coalitions, which has gone through levels of violence as a way of advocating/convincing, puts in evidence the limits of the construction of democracy when the State bets towards a policy that diminishes to a maximum citizen participation in the construction of the public sphere. Under this situation, the State has risked its role as coordinator and "societal project unifier". It permitted market interests to prevail (private interests, in this case interests linked to foreign companies) under a vision that puts in doubt sustainable development as a country project, and wages for the old economic growth scheme.

In fact, the large margins under which **sustainable development** can exist as a desired future permitted the view of irreconcilable mental models upon which the practices that activated the coalitions were constructed.

The proposal to organize the survival of the population that lives in the area, looks at **development** as the metaphor of a path in which nature's processes, and inherited and constructed cultural identity converge. From this convergence material production is proposed.

There is a merging between the visions of peasant lives and the conservationist proposals of radical ecologists.

To strengthen this advocacy coalition, actors support themselves on two tools: the international ecological organizations, and on a strategy in which they combine confrontations outside of the legal sphere and the use of legal tools that belong to the Ecuadorian judicial system and/or international institutions such as the World Bank.

3.3 Advocacy coalitions around use and access of water

It was not difficult to identify the different individuals and different interests and logics that guide future visions around water and natural resource management. There are frequent conflicts among peasant communities and "haciendas", in the intercommunal space and between urban and rural populations in the Andean zone.

¹⁷ World Bank instance created in 1993 to monitor with higher levels of responsibility the fulfillment of their policies. The mandate it has is to perform inspections demanded by a third party that might feel harmed in its rights and interests by WB actions that contradict its operational and procedural policies.

In Ecuador, private property of water was abolished with the issuing of the 1972 Water Law. Water became a State property; this is why users only have right of access the resource within a legally established organization. Therefore peasants as well as the "hacendados" (landowners) have established directories, irrigation boards and drinking and domestic water-use boards to administer this resource. Commonly, former owners became users of the same amounts of water they had always possessed. The hacendados managed to have their old water rights recognized, causing an unequal relationship in use and distribution of water with the peasants.

There are at least 2 different visions with relation to the access, control and management of the resource, that warn about the different needs and interests in the use/time of natural resources.

There is the coalition constituted by the peasant and indigenous communities' water boards. The Imantag, Peribuela, Colimbuela and Morlán Boards, have joined together to execute the Imantag irrigation project with support from the NGO Central ecuatoriana de servicios agrícolas, financial resources from the international cooperation AGRO ACCION ALEMANA and the auspice of UNORCAC. The project has as main components, the construction of irrigation channels and their technical and social management within a proposal of sustainable management of natural resources. The active participation of the grassroots communities is decisive, because the purpose is to strengthen their capacities in local development management.

The execution of the irrigation project originated various conflicts within and among communities, due to the lack of knowledge by external support organisms about local irrigation management practices. However, these conflicts were managed, at first through legal routes and later on through dialogue and negotiations among peasants themselves.

The needs and interests that guide a coalition's desired futures, are related with the improvement of live conditions and of the economy of small peasant farmers to insure family subsistence, through the increase of profits coming from intensive agricultural activity.

In the most immediate discourse, the desired futures of this alliance, present themselves closely linked with satisfaction of productive needs for family subsistence, therefore the existence of an evident concern about scarcity of water and interest in engaging in sustainable resource management actions to reverse its damage¹⁸. However in the deeper analysis, these material needs are intimately related with reproductive needs, and the permanence as ethnic communities in their ancestral land as well as the right to use their natural resources. Furthermore, the use of resources is traditionally linked with strengthening of their culture. The preservation of rivers, waterfalls, moorlands,

¹⁸ UNORCAC, CESA and other NGOs, are encouraging and performing activities to improve production systems, identifying and implementing agroecological alternatives, productive credit, together with the management of watersheds, the moorland and forests among others.

slopes, that is, ritual places in which they reproduce their ethnic identity, is vital for indigenous communities¹⁹.

There is an integral and sustainable vision that embeds itself in proposals such as "care of the sources and what little water there is" and that "it be peasants themselves who take measures to protect their water, because prohibitions have never worked". Similarly the importance of environmental education is present in this alliance²⁰.

The second coalition is formed by the owners of the haciendas: La María, Colimbuela, La Rosita, La Graciela, Ocampos, Perafán, and the agroempresa de avicultura-AVECOTA, that have been grouped, for a long time now, in the water directory for the Acequia la Marqueza²¹. The haciendas, located in the interandean valley, devote their lands to extensive cattle production and to agriculture production for the internal market. Nevertheless, in recent years they have also engaged in production of non-traditional crops such as fruits, vegetables and flowers for exportation. Within this coalition, the logic that guides the interests and desired futures is the increase of the market; that is why it is permanently imperative to produce with a maximum profitability.

There is concern about resource deterioration, mainly because of the decrease of the water levels and water contamination, which is attributed to "the increase of the population in peasant communities" and "the lack of environmental conscience in the use and management of water", among other reasons²². This way of looking at deterioration of resources, from the variables population increase and lack of education, fails to analyze the real causes of the problem, "...a central problem is the unequal appropriation, distribution and consumption of these territories and resources, adding up to an absolute contempt for the preservation of nature, common for the existing development model, to which strong processes of land division towards smallholding, fragmentation of society, new processes of subsistence, etc can be associated".²³

The hacendados do not recognize any responsibility in the deterioration of resources and suggest that water scarcity problems in the area, could be solved looking for new sources in other geographic spaces. They identify the State, as the main actor in the execution of actions, despite its weakness with regards to "clear regulations and policies", and they do not trust the State's administrative and technical capacities.

The use and distribution of irrigation water have mainly resulted in various conflicts between these two coalitions. One of these conflicts occurred between

¹⁹ As an example: a group of indigenous youth from the communities in the Pitzambitze river watersheds have proposed to recover a waterfall, in order to perform wedding ceremonies.

²⁰ Focus group water boards

²¹ Four peasant communities are part of the Water Directory and are included here because they are located in the area of influence, but they do not possess neither the same socio-economic status, being small farmers on plots that average less than a hectare, nor do they share with the hacendados the same interests and/or future visions.

²² Focus group with the Acequia La Marqueza Water Directory.

²³ Fabre Platas, Danú, *¿Gestión ambiental y construcción de nuevos sujetos sociales en América Latina?*, en Ecuador DEBATE N° 49, Ecuador 2000, p.276

the owner of La María, a member of the hacendado coalition, that has claim over water from the same irrigation system the peasant coalition have claims to. The hacendado and the communities, signed an agreement in 1995 in which the hacienda lent its floodgate so the peasants could access water, in exchange for their work in dressing the walls of the channel. Likewise they agreed that the water concession that they had since 1972 -31,5 lit/sec for the hacendados and 12.5 for the communities- be respected.

The clashes between peasants and the private interests of the hacendado, began when the peasants asked the Ibarra Water Agency to modify the assignment of water for the hacienda, due to the decrease in water quantity caused precisely by the deterioration of natural resources.

The peasant coalition put into action a discursive practice to convince this state agency in charge of administrative decisions of their arguments, anticipating any possible claims by the hacendado as well as to the mistrust that the hacienda might appropriate itself of a larger amount of water²⁴.

At the same time, the hacienda's owner, who has political influences at governmental level, put pressure on the Water Agency to maintain the amount of water conceded in 1972, making use of a common practice within groups with economic and political power, to influence authorities that have to solve conflicts. The hacendados and their administrators have knowledge of the precise technical information on water levels and they use it correctly when needed to solve specific claims. Additionally, the hacendado used coercion with the peasant coalition to delay the construction jobs on the channel walls and at the same time claiming the fulfillment of the signed agreements.

After several negotiations between the communities and the hacendado, a provisional verbal agreement of cooperation that would put an end to the obstacles for the construction and the distribution of water to take place as stipulated by the hacendado, was achieved. With this, the obstacles that prevented the advance of the project were solved. However the pressing conflicts with regards to water distribution have remained intact.

Peasant activated discourses to produce a decision that benefits them, have been constructed around the mobilizing capacity of communities, technical and legal support by the NGO and the search of organizational support by the UNORCAC.

Inasmuch as the use and management of natural resources is interwoven by conflict with other actors, in which the exercise of power and influence come into play, the construction of broad and stable alliances seems to be the mechanism needed for peasant communities to achieve the futures that respond to their material needs of reproduction y sustainable resource management.

²⁴The communities asked the Water agency for a new water level measurement of the river in 1997 and it was proved that the level had drastically decreased and that there were no real possibilities for a distribution of water as that detailed in the agreement.

The learning of skills for an understanding of the legal regulations, which improve the information and the knowledge, would be necessary. It is clear that that the ignorance of the laws and procedures by the peasant alliance, positions it in great disadvantage with respect to the other and provokes, in a certain manner, a demobilization towards the achievement of their goals, because of lack of knowledge on how to benefit from them.

3.4 Impacts

The study of the decision-making processes in natural resource management, through discourse analysis has sought to have an effect, though not in a direct manner, on the improvement of the levels of discussion. This improvement offers organized discursive elements -desired futures and perceptions on how to achieve them-that in the daily exercise of the word can be submerged in a rhetoric prone to confusion and lacking of significance.

An attempt to precise the **what is said** and **how it is said** contributes to the strengthening of the public space, where citizen participation through their institutions, make of word and action tools for democratic deliberation, concerting and negotiation.

It is in this sense that the peasants that participated in discussion and reflection workshops about desired futures found a tool for organizational strengthening in the **re-reading** of what they **had written** themselves and what others **wrote**, with text, words and acts, to help redesign or reaffirm their policies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The cases described show that the decision making process goes through the conformation of alliances between individuals/actors that share common desired futures and most of all, strategies to reach these desired futures. It is evident as well that the processes are articulated through the exercise of power. Power that is understood as the accumulation of strengths of different origins, that make it possible to bend a decision in a certain direction.

These alliances are constructed on the basis of the articulation of discourses that permit the individuals/actors to sustain their proposals, in a framework of the combination of diverse interests increasing their capacity to convince. This process is possible when the public-will, in all actors, to accept the rules of the democratic game prevails. Otherwise, the advocacy coalitions will form alliances that seek to legitimize persuasive acts outside of the dialogue and the communication, giving way to clashes without any mediation. The State's role is determinant in the configuration of a participatory space.

Under this perspective, it is important to strengthen the capacity of individuals/actors to debate and concert to facilitate the decision making process. Actors that participate in decision-making do this through a reflection that permits the "reading/interpretation" of discourses. This interpretation is necessary to construct advocacy coalitions that are more efficient and that have a greater capacity to exercise power.

Given the subordinate condition of peasants in a country such as Ecuador, strengthening their organizations in the way described above, will help their insertion in public spaces of interaction with the State, local government and other civil society and market actors, as well as help them to have better results in their exercise of power.

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