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MULTI-LEVEL POLICY COALITIONS
AN INTERPRETATIVE MODEL OF WATER CONFLICTS IN THE AMERICAS[1]

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This article proposes an approach to environmental conflicts related to urban watermanagement and the policy-making into which they fit, based on the concept of multi-level coalitions. The aim is to understand how water conflicts structure groups, which, in turn, influence policies, based on two hypotheses. A first hypothesis is that water-related policy arises from local conflicts structured around policy groups (coalitions), such as specific issue water prices, installation of a new water catchment system, negotiation of a new commissioning contract, the municipal plan of water, etc. A second hypothesis is that the resulting local orders are embedded at multiple levels of stakes and social practices (territorial, national, international). The main hypothesis is that the environment is subject to multi-level regulation (Hooghe, Marks, 2003), defined as interaction, reinforcing, and colliding rule-making and governance at the international, federal, [regional], and city/local community levels. It emerges from varied top-down, bottom-up, and negotiated processes within the state, among states, among [regions] and cities, and among economic and social interests (Doern & Johnson, 2006).

In the frame of the BLUEGRASS project, two types of fieldworks have been selected: initially, territorialized conflicts centring on issues associated with water (distribution, provisioning, catchment, sanitation) in some cities in the Americas (Bolivia, Brazil, France, Mexico, Peru, USA). Secondly, we focus on some international fieldwork (international organizations, European Union, multinational corporations, etc.) where water management paradigms and instruments are constructed and circulate (integrated management, catchment area, participation, delegation of services, etc.). It is therefore a matter of analysing an international water regime orbited by international organizations

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(governmental or not), scientific experts and water supply multinationals. The hypothesis is that the analysis of these two categories of fieldwork needs to be addressed in parallel, in order to grasp the multi-level logic at place in the formation of coalitions, with a view to more widely studying the international field of environmental regulation. The originality of this approach lies in the articulation of four analytical challenges.

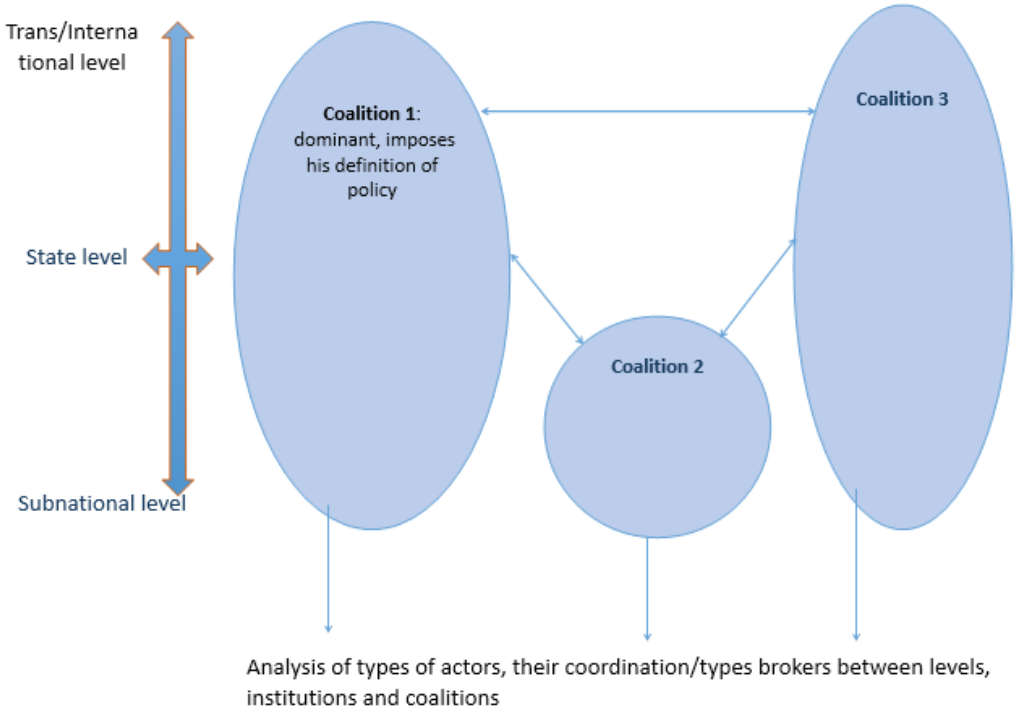
The first is to reposition social and political struggles for access to water at the heart of the research, and to highlight the importance of political stakes (see box on Environmental conflicts). This orientation is intended to set itself apart from Neo-Malthusian analyses of the tragedy of commons, which diagnose the depletion of natural resources by linking it to the lack of a rational social organization, and from institutional approaches that blame ecological crises on governance defects. The second challenge is to analyse the effects of ecological transition, including climate change, as simple socio-political issues arising from processes of water appropriation by protagonists that often give rise to conflict. The third challenge is the absolute need for a multi-level reading of action logics, which is not confined to the territorial or, conversely, international dimensions of environmental policies. And not only does the national level also play its role, but the interactions between all these levels are a variable that also has to be taken into account. These multi-level policy coalitions are not superimposed interdependency systems within networks of different levels hierarchically linked to each other through actors supposedly assignable to a specific level (Lazega, 2008): policy coalitions defined here form a single system that transcends action levels (see Diagram 1). The fourth challenge consists in enquiring into the apparent contradiction between strengthening the heterogeneity of policy actors and logics on the one hand, and creating relatively uniform spaces of power and policy making on the other hand. To that end, the concept of multi-level policy coalitions makes it possible to develop qualitative and quantitative analyses of the groups of social and institutional actors engaged in the same public policy issues.

The environmental conflict concept

The concept of environmental conflicts corresponds to the need to take into account both the political dimension of environmental problems and the ecological conditions (territorial, spatial, economic, etc.) of their emergence (Fontaine, 2009). The sociology of environmental conflicts first developed around the issues of contamination and environmental justice: for instance, Laura Pulido (1996) characterized them as being subaltern struggles of minorities against forms of labour exploitation. David Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park (2002, 2011) showed that these conflicts could involve high-tech zones such as Silicon Valley where migrant workers who are the most exposed to environmental inequalities. Wendy Espeland (1998), for her part, showed during conflicts caused by the Orme dam in Arizona in the 1970s, how collective identities grew up against the rational choices of the bureaucracies involved. Protest movements can also be linked to the construction of the environment as an international issue, whether it be struggles leading to laws for the protection of the ozone layer (Cannan, Reichmann, 2002), struggles to impose health procedures or legal norms with regard to contamination or nuclear waste (Kamie-

necki, 1992; Vick & Axelrod, 1999), or since the turn of the 21st century, transnational struggles for the right to water (Bakker, 2011). In France, environmental engagements have been analysed as being part of wider ecologist or alterglobalist movements, struggling against neoliberal privatization (Frour, 2004; Ollitrault, 2004; Milani & Keraghel 2007).

Diagram 1: representation of multilevel policy coalitions and their competition



Background: struggles for water in the Americas

Struggles and inequalities for access to water in a context of water management privatization

We define here the term "struggles" as those for access to water from the course social movements; but also those between institutions and actors during policy processes (Wildavski, Pressman, 1972; Massardier, 2008; Hill, 2011).

In terms of water distribution and sanitation, Latin America has been a privileged fieldwork site for the international expansion of French multinationals (Weyland, 2004; Bonin, 2005). These companies have been greatly influencing world urban water policy since the 1980s, not only by conquering these markets, but also by disseminating a set of internationally acknowledged technical, economic and legal rules (Lorrain, 2003). In this context, protest movements against the privatization of natural resources (water, gas)

have revealed some major transformations in environmental regulation, bringing onto the scene various action levels (relations between States, international organizations, private companies, national authorities and representatives of civil society). These contribute to a process of international import-export and adoption of the French model for water (taken to be both a tradition of private management of urban water services and as concerted river basin and independent agency)[i].

International environmental expertise is drawing attention to the increasing pressure and stress on water resources (World Bank, 1993; Belmont Forum 2011a). With 33% of global water resources (around 28,000 m3 per inhabitant per year), thus Latin America is quantitatively well provided (FAO-AQUASTAT, 2013). However, even this region is dealing with some major difficulties. Firstly, water availability varies considerably depending on places and seasons. The situation in the Andes stands out from the recurrent droughts in Mexico and northeastern Brazil. Also, physical availability has to be distinguished from economic availability, which depends on the quality of infrastructures, conveyance and potabilization costs; from this point of view, all the Latin American countries are set to face water stress by 2025 (IWMI, 2007). Lastly, Latin America has stood out from the other regions of the world by the extraordinary rapidity of its urbanization process, which is approaching 80%, i.e. more than Europe and the United States, and almost twice that in Africa and Asia.

This situation is bound to fuel inequalities in access to water, be they economic or political: what has been called blue gold (Barlow, Clarke, 2002) is now a stake in the struggles, not only for its appropriation but also for defining its most efficient and most legitimate management methods, especially in terms of environmental justice (Baron, 2007; Durand, Jaglin, 2013). Exposure to environmental changes tends to be greater for those living in the disadvantaged suburbs of large cities or rural and urban areas, which most of the time have the least access to local decision-making processes. In Southern countries, the poorest populations pay a high price for a poor quality service. Neither do they have access to wastewater drainage systems, as in Latin America, where almost 80% of the population is apparently without access to quality sanitation (World Bank, 2009). Notwithstanding there is no guarantee that environmental policies systematically prove beneficial to the most vulnerable populations. The increasing costs associated with potabilization, treatment and preserving the quality of springs to the consumer may indeed result in a clear rise in tariffs that are prejudicial to the most deprived categories; likewise, increasing volumetric pricing, designed to reduce consumption, may hit poor and large families.

In the field of water as in others (Wildavski, Pressman, 1984; Massardier, 2008; Hill, 2011), struggles and conflicts between actors are an integral part of policymaking. It is a challenge to understand, for example, the spatial segregation in the water supply and treatment system, and how it impacts large water production facilities (the famous Guandu system had very ample policy tools for supplying the state), which characterizes the state of Rio de Janeiro for example. In this case, one has to take into account the political and institutional history of this state, characterized by the power of technical groups, political and entrepreneurial competing for power and financial resources. We consider, especially the little challenged domination of civil engineers in this uneven game; as one has also to understand that social struggles involve institutional shareholders in the public sphere:

for example, between the public company of the State of Rio de Janeiro (CEDAE) and the Environmental Institute (INEA) of the Environmental Secretariat of this same state.

Struggles relative to tools of urban water policies

This recognition of environmental constraints cannot be separated from the debate surrounding public or private management of the service (Megdal, 2012). Indeed, and unlike a country such as France where it came about much earlier, private management of urban water and sanitation services was widely presented, in Latin America of the 1990s, as a necessary response to the new environmental challenges encountered by the towns in the region (Bauer, 2004). For instance, a policy paper by the World Bank in 1993 highlighted that the increasing scarcity of water, urbanization and economic growth called in return for inseparably economic and environmental management of both the resource and the service (World Bank, 1993). It is in this context that the French water multinationals stirred up some major social reactions. In particular, and at a time when companies were trying to pre-empt the sustainable development issue, the reality of their ecological and social management, was largely challenged by its opponents. For example, in Brazil a National Front for Environmental Sanitation was set up in the 1990s, and has been questioning several privatization projects.

In addition, the need to rebalance available resources led to an increasing interest in freshwater security issues and unequal access to water affecting the most marginalized populations in the metropolises and cities of the South and North (Jaglin, 2002; Bakker, Kooy, Shofiani, Martijn, 2008; Prasad, 2006). In 2009, the World Bank placed the point of articulation of climate change in the ecological regulation of cities (World Bank, 2009), thereby showing itself to be loyal to Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992 and which is the driving force behind some sustainable resource management methods at the territorial government level. However, while a certain number of management principles suggest the emergence of an international regime for water (Little, 2011),, no unified international agreement on water exists to date (unlike those on the climate or biodiversity). At the moment, around thirty agencies, bodies, funds or programmes belonging to the United Nations are working to establish water governance, including the FAO, WHO, WMO, UNEP, UNDP, etc. (Sironneau, 2012). Since 2003, UN Water has been attempting to coordinate the different initiatives engaged in by the international organizations of the United Nations. It has also included, representatives from the private sector and NGOs envisaging cooperation and issuing of World Reports on the development of water resources, due to the prediction of growing water insecurity caused by the effects of climate change.

Four analytical challenges

Seeing environmental changes as social and political issues

What is commonly named as climate change or ecological transition is as much a material reality as it is a discursive and normative repertoire. An issue of struggles for

legitimately defining the principles used to classify the social world, the division between that world and its surrounding nature, along with the regulation of resource use, is finally an issue to define policy categories. For example, Bernard Barraque (2012a) showed that the scarcity of resources is often more a fiction maintained for the purpose of political mobilization rather than a physical reality, and that one must endeavour to grasp the mechanisms of the social production of that scarcity. For Barraque, water conflicts are part of the questioning of service management practices, and of their normative models.

With the increasing metropolization in Europe and Latin America, the problem of the pressure exerted on water by environmental changes is doubtless not constructed and treated socially and politically in the same way everywhere. How does it transform conflicts linked to the use of the resource, especially in an urban context? How does it renew the issue of unequal access to water? How are the environmental challenges re-appropriated, during conflicts, by social movements and the institutions they call upon, to establish new resources and new levers for action? To what degree do the effects of climate change affect, right from grassroots mobilizations, the implementation and even the design of national and international environmental policies? Is climate change, as an issue finally the answer to the question: who is governing access to water?

Over the last fifteen years, these conflicts have given rise to a great deal of literature, be it descriptive or activist, which echoes the political impact of the water wars of Latin America (Shiva, 2002; Larbi Bouguerra, 2003; Lasserre, 2003; Smets, 2004; Sousa Santos & Rodriguez-Garavito, 2005). This has contributed to the success of this topic, but has been criticised for the imprecision of the terminology and confusion it has led between resource management and unequal access to the service. For example, Karen Bakker (2011) interprets water wars as being a crisis of governance, both public and private, more than a struggle for access to resources monopolized by the distribution companies alone. In a recent report, the OECD shared this analysis, expressing that the water crisis is very largely a governance crisis (OECD, 2012).

A study on the implementation of water policies in the current context of ecological transition cannot just settle for analysing the right technical water management; it needs to examine the displacement of conflicts and the social conditions for taking on board new environmental circumstances. Recent social mobilizations around the issues of distribution and unequal access to water in South America have shown that the reception and social acceptability of new policy tools are often glaring omissions from the universal set of water governance. Yet they are actually engaged in, through the effective implementation of water policies, and particularly in the transformation of the resource into an urban service, from its potabilization to its ultimate discharge, and including access to water, its conveyance, its distribution, its drainage and any treatment. These mobilizations reflect struggles for the delivery of urban water and struggles between urban centres and the surrounding areas that possess the resource. During such mobilizations, the different water protagonists (organizations and social movements, user groups, companies, public or parapublic institutions, etc.) use the subject of environmental change and climate risk to mobilize and redefine management methods and policy tools. This has produced new representations of the world and advocacy, particularly as regards

what affects economic growth, the distribution of its benefits, and the associated lifestyles (Hulme, 2009; Liverman, 2012).

The objective is one of a political sociology of water which does not do away with the power relationships and modes of domination linked to water, unlike approaches in terms of governance which emphasize spaces of negotiation between the different stakeholders (Ostrom, 1990), or those in terms of water management, which propose a sort of one best way, socio-technically defined. Policy tools are not seen as issues of power and struggles, but as instruments that are efficiently and rationally defined, according to economic and technical rationalities blended from social acceptability processes. The selection process of actors within the policy process is through co-opting or excluding the choices of operators and participation processes in general. Yet, where water is concerned, any observer in the fieldwork knows to what degree prior scoping of the definition of policy problems and responses, and of the people who formulate them, precedes (and often determines) policy decisions.

In order to recompose the universe of struggles opened up by water policy issues, the recognition of inequalities in access to water and of shortcomings in their institutional management systems is not enough. It is a matter here of reversing the analysis, beginning with inequalities in the access to decision-making spaces (that we are calling here policy coalitions) to understand the structure of political and social struggles for water. This sociological perspective sets out to study how the definition of environmental problems and their regulation is a struggle issue rather than a conveyor of stabilized compromises. Consequently, reducing these conflicts to an opposition between the people in revolt and the government in place, rather than seeing an interweaving of institutions, organizations and social agents struggling to control natural resource regulation policies, and thereby the political power they afford, no doubt comes from the bias induced by studies of the spectacular water wars, especially in Bolivia.

Considering the overlap in levels of public action

The social and political challenges associated with climate change and water cannot be considered on a national or territorial scale alone. The analysis needs to be completed by incorporating the international dimension of environmental policies and the way they are regulated by linking all these levels with each other. The problem is that the existing literature tends to separate the analytical levels. Much of the work on the transformations of world governance of natural resources takes the form of disciplinary approaches without necessarily linking the different levels with each other: the domination of transnational corporations, legal struggles for recognition of the territories of native peoples, the challenging of State powers in the face of regional integration processes, etc. In addition, the literature on conflicts struggles to take into account the role of non-State players in international dynamics.

Firstly, the analysis of territories often seems to be isolated, policies for setting in place socio-technical systems are only dealt with via the logics of territorial development projects and the desectoralization of public policies (Ghiotti, 2007; Goxe, 2007; Lippert,

2011). Moreover, the advocacy coalitions approach of Sabatier and Jenkins falls into this category: coalitions are local (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sabatier, Weible, 2009). This work separates off territories from the logics of the higher levels to consider water management seen through the prism of territories, and as a self-sufficient whole. Whether it be a matter of urban or rural water management, conflicts, when considered, are highly localized, amounting to a deciphering of water sharing between multiple users (Bakker, Kooy, Shofiani and Martjin, 2008; Massardier, 2009; Agrawal, 2012). Yet, the water sector is intensely governed by laws, norms and standards drafted at the national level by ministries and agencies. However, insofar as the State remains endowed with the greatest capacity and legitimacy to control and steer the action of large corporations (builders, engineering specialists, operators and subcontractors) and of the other social agents in an environmentally responsible direction (e.g. the water police), becoming difficult to challenge its centrality (Steinberg, VanDeveer, 2012, p. 14-15).

Secondly, abundant literature on International Relations tends, for its part, to isolate the international drafting of environmental standards, as it pertains to the international regime to begin with (Krasner, 1983; Rittberger and Peter, 1993). There is also the literature falling into the category of world governance of the environment, which focuses on the role of NGOs, the private sector, international experts and international organizations (Levy & Newell, 2005). Indeed, over the last few decades, a set of experts and institutions has acquired a central role in determining international water policies: international or national civil servants, industrialists, scientists, NGOs, elected representatives, form a veritable water community that interpreted the Rio conference in 1992 as a challenge to its action (Meublat, 2001). Since then, organizations intended to coordinate initiatives and inform about the declared war for blue gold have mushroomed. Starting in the 1990s, the World Bank, the United Nations and some international professional organizations from the water sector linked up to try and define a world water vision which was successively embodied by the World Water Council (1994), the Global Water Partnership (1996), the 21st Century World Water Commission (1998) or in various World Water Forums.

A multitude of NGOs uses the international arenas, particularly the United Nations, to push for the recognition of a right to water, which would implicate, among other things, a minimum free monthly volume of drinking water compatible with a decent life. These institutions are in addition to the technical and scientific organizations that already existed within UNESCO, the World Meteorological Organization and the various NGOs or professional organizations.

The international summits and counter-summits on water are also ideal observatories for analysing the construction and functioning of this expertise. The meetings of official institutions, of NGOs against the privatization of the resource, of representatives of so-called original populations, doubtless have as much influence over the definition of water policies as the struggles engaged in at local level. We include within them, associations for consumer protection (Public Citizen, Attac), environmental protection (Friends of the Earth, Oxfam, Greenpeace, Peoples World Water Forum, Cry for the Water), and public management (Council of Canadians, Polaris Institute, fondation Danielle Mitterrand). Also collaborates of operators (WaterAid), development, confessional or medical

organizations, and those working in other fields of environmental protection (Cohen, 1994; Dumoulin, 2005; Finger, 1994; Vig, Axelrod, 1999; Wapner, 1996).

The idea of public goods on a world scale, as has been accepted by the activist spheres of the environment, do not designate locally threatened services of general interest. But new needs linked to the role of international solidarity and to a rejection of increasing inequalities in the global movement reinforce the multiplication of societal interactions. These articulations implied in the creation by all these organizations of the Peoples World Water Forum at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004, extended in the World Water Forum in Marseille in 2012, which engaged all the components of this water community, including firms. However, these networks should also consider the think tanks set up by the water multinationals, such as the Water Resources Advisory Committee, a committee of international experts created in 2000 by Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux. Their mandate considers the main challenges facing water resources, and forest resources. Indeed the multiple levels involved in regulating the water sector find themselves in a relationship with the economic sector of the major distribution firms, within which the French model plays a fundamental role. This complex web of new institutions enables national representatives, industries and international experts to contact each other and promote water as an international priority, be it a matter of sanitation standards, or of defining environmental risks and institutional configurations (public corporations, concessions, public/private partnerships, etc.) transferred from country to country. These epistemic communities (Haas, 1992; 1993), comprising economists, national civil servants, legal experts and NGO activists, intervene in a decisive manner in this sector to establish water as a common good eligible to be covered by international legislation or a public good worthy in this respect of a public service.

Beyond these undeniable contributions, the effect of this corpus of literature is to separate the international level, and to consider others, as only occupying a position subordinated to the global. The models are viewed as being disseminated and imposed from above without taking into account their acceptance by local groups. Lastly, this literature focuses especially on cooperation between transnational actors over and above national contexts, which would thus seem to fade away (Conca, 2006). Policy Transfer Studies (Dolowitz, Marsh, 2000) attempt to escape this criticism by investigating the exogenous dimension of public policies and the circulation of models (Delpeuch, 2009), while likening the global dissemination of environmental standards to a convergence of institutional arrangements adopted nationally and locally (Dumoulin, Saurruger, 2010). Here, the levels of action would find their analytical place. However, it is advisable to make a clear distinction between the two phenomena (Knill, 2005). When this school of thought looks at the international level, it is first through model adoption aspects (e.g. via the pressure of conditionalities), paying scant attention to the bottom-up logics of strategic activation and instrumentalization of constraints from above. Therefore, overall, while these approaches are not without their merits in understanding the processes specific to the levels they study, attempts at junctions are rare.

Yet the study of environmental conflicts shows, on the one hand, that international management models are not adopted ready to use, but translated in each national and/or territorial context. Even though they struggle to convincingly grasp these multi-level

dynamics such as the highly descriptive article by Solanes on Chile and Peru (Solanes, 2013), some articles describe the influence of international models over Domestic Environmental Policies (Berstein and Cashore, 2012), along with the interactions between levels (Busch, Jurgens and Tews 2005; Rabe 2007; Kastens, Newig, 2007; De Deurwaerdere, 2010). The study of environmental conflicts also shows that the idea of a multi-level regulation of water conflicts helps in understanding the effects of international expertise on sector-based and national public policies. Here we strengthen the hypothesis that the establishment of international water expertise contributes to the introduction of new ways of regulating environmental problems and that these have repercussions for the political management of unequal access to water and its service, at national and local levels. During environmental conflicts, the social movements do not seem to be fully disconnected from the spheres of power. It is not merely a question of insertion in some alterglobalist networks, but also the accumulation, at the international level, of political resources that can be reused within national spaces of power (ministries, regulatory bodies, etc.). Thus, while conventional governance approaches (Young, 1994; Castro, 2004, 2007) make internationalization the simple outcome of creating horizontal networks outside the sphere of the State, national spaces of power constitute an essential dimension of these processes (Dezalay, 2007). How does analysis not consider the national technical groups (civil engineers in particular), and their social and political power?

Considering the apparent contradiction between the heterogeneity of public action and the relative uniformity of spaces of power and coalized action.

For the last few years, water management policies have been based on new legitimacies. This finding is recurrent in the literature on policy process in general and environmental policies in particular. Nevertheless, the proliferation of relevant actors should not give the impression of an all-round opening up of policy-making. A research project starts from the hypothesis that the preference, as economists would say, in public policy is a collective construction, referring here to various literatures (Advocacy Coalition Framework, policy networks, and epistemic communities). There would therefore seem to be an apparent contradiction between the heterogeneity of the relevant actors and their grouping within some coalized spaces of power that give rise to public policy preferences.

Incidentally, these coalitions are based upon porosity between sectors, political powers, interests, organizations, logics and incongruous levels of action, as shown by numerous examples drawn from environmental issues. The environmental conflict situations in the Andean, Brazilian and central Americas bring out, for example, the veritable porosity of the links between political power and social movements, a situation which seems relatively different from that in the United States (Switzer, 1997). The connections between the internationalization of environmental activism and the national spheres of power have already been studied in relation to the conflicts caused by the defence of tropical forests or of protected areas for example (Barbosa, 2003; Dumoulin, 2005). In this perspective, in the name of compensation for the elites , enabling access to positions of power for agents endowed with characteristics very similar to those of the former elites but who, by

passing through environmental movements, take on a brand new political innocence, is doubtless the paradox of the current leftist governments in Latin America. For example, in Mexico, the challenging of privatization policies and the right to water movement are championed at national level by academics mostly belonging to the two largest and most prestigious universities in the country (UAM and UNAM), and having mostly studied abroad (primarily in Europe and the United States), and by local representatives of US or Canadian international NGOs. The incorporation of the right to water in the Mexican Constitution in September 2011 and the citizens proposal for a new general water law in March 2012, drafted by a collective of over 200 academics and 90 NGOs, suggests the emergence of a national water coalition firmly integrated on the international scene. Its finality is seeking to establish the right to water as a new universal advocacy and policy network, and has thereby modified the national legal and institutional framework of water management. Another example is in the field of environmental policies, with the recognition of indigenous rights that is frequently associated with them, and it is very often that these same people who have passed from one responsibility, one organization level, to another since the 1990s (Conaghan et al., 1990, 1997; Dowie, 1995; Weyland, 2004).

Water management by multi-level coalitions

Coalitions as relational systems: associations and social spreads

The final challenge in the analysis of urban water management is therefore to effectively take into account this apparent paradox. On the one hand, the increasing heterogeneity of the multiple actors and levels of water management and, on the other hand, the porous logic of the coalized policy spaces of power, as defined in the rest of this article. In order to analyse policymaking, it is thus possible to focus on negotiations and learning between actors (governance), or to concentrate on the strategies of the actors and inclusion of their actions on the agenda (Hill, 2012). The choice of this article is to follow another school of thought which emphasizes the logic of associations between actors who guide and influence public policies, and the oppositions existing between those associations. This represents a group approach to policy making, but also to the struggles over the distribution of water resources, which become the central piece in the analysis. These struggles take several forms, those between the multiple actors and their interests and rationalities (in this sense, the conflicts are part of policymaking); those between the coalitions formed around public policy issues; those between the levels of action, and those within the coalized spaces. The conflicts and struggles can be seen in the oppositions between coalitions competing on the same issue/sub-issue, as suggested by the ACF model (Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, 1993), and in the hierarchical structures within each coalition, which here is akin to the structural approach of networks (Lazega, 2007).

Multi-level policy coalitions are groups, usually informal (Marsh, Smith, 2000; Massardier, 2006; Considine, Lewis, Alexander, 2009) and follow a pattern. They can be classified as those groups which are composed of multiple action logics, be it of elected representatives, technocratic experts and consultants, of IO and NGO funding agencies,

or representatives of agricultural or industrial economic interests, and of activists (ecologists, fishermen, sometimes producer communities, etc.). Other groups are structured by configurational regularities visible through the distribution of social capital, power and domination, and the hierarchy between actors, on the one hand,, and through the relational structures of the coalition, as revealed by centrality and density indices and on the other hand (Sandstrom, Carlsson, 2008) which guide policy making and policy implementation (a causal connection exists between the structure of the dominant coalition and the outputs and outcomes of the policy in question). Or in other words, the content of a policy is governed by the structure of the coalition that imposes its preference on the other coalitions; iv) which are multi-level (Bache, Flinders, 2004; Lazega, Jourdana, Mounier, 2007; Dumoulin 2010).

The assumption is that water management systems and their instruments (commissioning contracts, water pricing, catchment installations, etc.) are issues that crystallize conflicts and give rise to coalitions around preferences relative to the policies implemented (Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Boscarino, 2009; Marsh, Smith, 2000). These issues are recurrent (a service delegation contract mobilizes during its negotiation and signature) and evolve in line with technical, political and social temporalities, but also with variables (there is crossover with other issues such as the climate aspect, or urbanization, etc.).

The multi-level coalition concept considered in this article links several sociological approaches. Thus including the structural approach of social networks (Lazega), the cognitive approaches of coalized groups (Advocacy Coalition Framework of Sabatier; Public Policy Community and networks of Marsh and Rhodes - Massardier, 2006, the epistemic community of Haas); the multiple levels of public policies and changes of scale (Doern *et al.*; Bache, Flinders), and also the principles of a sociology of fields applied to public policies and the administrative field (Bourdieu, 2001). In the sense where a structural analysis of public policy coalitions does not only consider interactions between undefined actors alone, as network analyses usually do. But also a structured space, which goes beyond the order of interactions and where institutional players and social agents are positioned in a relational and differential manner. For example, if the actors of policy coalitions come from multiple and incongruous organizations, those organizations remain one of the explanatory variables of the selection on entry and of the internal structure of those coalitions. The same applies for the social characteristics of the individuals (training, titles, legitimacy, etc.) and their social resources accumulated over their professional and political trajectories (ability to drum up funding, support, to provide information, technical or social expertise, etc.). What brings together the coalized actors is important, but so is what differentiates them socially.

Coalitions arise from the mobilization of social players by a policy issue

The solidarity within these groups, which are usually informal, mostly finds its rationale in the policy issues that mobilize various types of actors, as we now know: price of water in a town, new catchment, new water service delegation contract, sanitation of a district, etc. Granted, this assumption is not new in public policy analysis: iron trian-

gles, public policy communities, neo-corporatist partial regimes, and other networks have already shown its relevance. These types of mobilization around policy issues have several consequences.

The first is that mobilizations in these coalitions are very piecemeal and come from very diverse social spaces, sectors or organizations (Massardier, 2006). In other words, the group approach cannot be content with explanations through public actors and their attributes alone (law and sanctions) or those where civil society alone and its actors or even pressure groups hold primacy over policymaking. Such is the case with coalitions. The second consequence is that these groups are a-organizational in the sense that the relations between the individuals making up the coalitions go beyond the framework, norms and interests of organizations to which they nonetheless belong. Moreover, today, this is a trait shared by all the literature on public policy networks (Massardier, 2006). Indeed, the first works on coalized policy spaces (initially based on the elitist theory) explained that public policies are negotiated in spaces of informal interdependence, which transcend bureaucratic organizations and interests groups (Lowi, 1969; Mc Farland 1987). The third consequence is that the policy issue in question does not however mobilize the actors full time, apart from rare exceptions, nor does it define the totality of their social, political and organizational practices. However, their degree of specialization in the public policy issue that has mobilized them builds their strength. The expertise in the issue variable is one of the unavoidable resources for being central within these groups.

Coalitions are collective preference systems about policy issues

Some analysts of coalitions say that these can bring out the instrumental rationality of temporarily coalized actors[ii] who primarily seek to structure power to achieve the primacy thresholds defined by the nature of the issue and by the rules of the game (Lemieux, 1998). But, on the contrary, far from self-interest maximization and game theory, Advocacy Coalitions Framework (ACF), which arose from the observation of water management systems in the United States (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, 1993) explain policy chance through an alternation of the dominance of group backing advocacy (coalition). According to this cognitive approach, advocacies, shared ideas, permit actors to bring them together and act. ACF defines coalitions by the following elements: an advocacy (economists would say a preference) cements the members of the coalition together in the long term; the actors share a common vision of the public policy that is mobilizing them, a vision that only changes on the periphery (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier, Jenkin-Smith, 1993). Thus, work on advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988), on public policy communities (Marsh, Rhodes, 1995) or on epistemic communities (Haas), makes it possible to qualify coalitions as groups of actors who share a minimal vision of the policy problem arising and of the solutions to be applied to it, affinities of normative beliefs (Lemieux, 1998). Unlike rational choice and public choice approaches, these approaches have the merits of placing the emphasis on group dynamics explaining policy choices by shared interests and ideas of these groups.

However, the coalition concept developed in this article complicates that used by Sabatier. It takes up the basic postulate of ACF whereby the definition of preferences

in public policy is not a matter of the self-maximizer but of a group logic, of coalized action. Policymaking is operated by groups of actors working together and mobilized by an issue (negotiation of a public service delegation contract, decision to open a new catchment, etc.). However, a certain number of other ACF postulates are worth being, if not reconsidered, as the cause is not necessarily, what defines a coalition since a power--holding group may change its world vision while strengthening is coherence around the power it holds. The time span of a coalition mobilization is not necessarily long. These groups are therefore characterized by mobilizations of piecemeal actors around issues that are either short-lived, as highlighted by Lemieux (a public policy system) or long-term (defence of a sector or a cause for decades as found in the work by Sabatier). Lastly, a system of coalition opposition is not necessarily head-on, in that bridges may exist between coalitions. These groups and their type of solidarity are the outcome of both, the sharing of common ideas on an issue, the sharing of interests around that issue, the social division of labour, and the specialization (expertise, etc.) in the issue in question. That is why, in our conception of coalitions, we add that social criteria of members are structuring coalitions too.

Coalitions between the territorialisation and internationalization of conflicts and of policymaking

Coalitions cannot be just defined by the locality of their members as might be suggested by the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier, Jenkins and Weible). Indeed, their work remains attached to the description of territorialized dynamics. Neither is it a matter of self-governing irrigation systems as studied by Ostrom,, but rather of territorialized systems embedded in national and international processes. The analysis of a water management system confined to the territory indeed appears to be restrictive, in view of what can be learnt from the literature on the internationalization of environmental policies. It is more relevant to expand the understanding of territorial water management to the other levels, such as already indicated, according the Doern the definition of multi--level approach mentioned before (Daern and al., 2006).

Whether it be a matter of public policy transfers (Marsh, Dolowitz, 2000), international circulation of public policy frameworks (river basin management, integrated management, participation) or the issuing of transnational injunctions (Stone, 2008), each of the levels brings into play specific skills and specific strategies. A level is not defined by its institutions alone (public or private), but also by interactions specific to that level for example, lobbying European institutions at European level, policy making specific to the national level and to its political, institutional and budgetary order and norms. Each level is therefore a specific space of action, which does not of course prevent struggles between levels for the management of a policy, or even the fact of calling upon the resources of a given level to act within another (international expertise in a local struggle for example). Secondly, a level must be defined by changes of scale: there are multi-positions within these multiple levels of action, systems of relations between the levels (formal relations defined by texts in federal systems, the taking over of public policies by new levels, etc.).

Conclusion: an operationalization of multi-level policy coalitions

This approach has methodological implications. Firstly, those at the analysis level, the sub-issue is considered as a whole, and not only the coalitions it mobilizes: context, policy-making, instruments, social mobilisations and, of course, the coalitions competing to control them. Thus, the first stage of the enquiry must make it possible to contextualize coalitions within policy-making as a whole and the conflicts at work. It must be possible to gather sufficiently detailed information on the conflict being studied (issues, local context), on the political system (political parties, structure of political game, contentious) and, lastly, on policy making (institutional players, organizations and social agents involved, instruments and their objectives, agenda setting processes).

Secondly, this approach has implications for the level of data gathering on the coalitions, which is bound to be very micro. The challenge is therefore to strike a compromise between a research ideal and its feasibility, with the need to reduce the perimeter of the instruments and actors. For instance, given the focus on water management struggles, the purpose of the survey and analysis must be, in each fieldwork, that of a water management sub-issue (negotiation of a distribution contract, installation of water meters, or a new catchment, etc.), and especially to recompose the set of sub-coalitions mobilized by that sub-issue.

Lastly, methodological implications in terms of gathering and processing information on coalitions: the second stage of the survey consists in both gathering data using an interview grid and processing them quantitatively and qualitatively. There are three types of criteria for determining the questions. The first concerns representations and preferences in terms of conflicts and public policies (good and bad policies, solutions, instruments, etc.). It is a matter here of recomposing the systems of oppositions between the social and political representations of the members of coalitions through a qualitative analysis of their discourses. The second concerns representations of the coalitions to which the actors belong (What are the coalitions opposed on? Who backs which policy in which coalition?). The third concerns the system of links (interactions, interrelations) and solidarity between the actors of the coalition to which the interviewed stakeholder belongs (What relations with which actors in the coalition? What oppositions with whom? What are the configurational regularities within the coalition?). Coalitions are formed thanks to quantified data: centrality indices, calculation of the coefficient of agglomeration and of the degree of density (Who exchanges what information or expertise with each other?), and measurement of interactions between actors (Sanstrom, Carlsson, 2008; Considine, Lewis, Alexander, 2009). The fourth concerns the attributes of the interviewed actors from the most classic (age, gender, training) to the least classic (political, professional trajectories, resources, notably that of the ability to pass from one level to another).

Finally, the methodology consists in recomposing the social dynamics at work (grouping, exchanges of resources, oppositions, position taking), based on individual actors or social agents, their interactions, trajectories, resources, representations and their strategies, in order to reconstitute the formation of the effective coalitions around urban water and the conflicts it generates. It is therefore a matter of understanding, which agents

hold the power, i.e. the ability to integrate the decision-making spaces of the coalitions, to deal with the policy challenges brought about by the effects of climate change.

Note

i What has been known as the French model is the outcome of a specific historical construction, within which the internationalization of the final decades of the 20th century appeared as a factor of adjustments and recompositions. French water management was exported in two ways: private management of urban water services under the impetus of the French water majors which capture the global markets, and the laws of 1964 and 1992 (catchment areas, agencies, committees) which have inspired many foreign laws, including those in Brazil and Mexico (Brun, 2006).

ii This does not mean that strategist approaches (notably agenda setting) are not operational but only that explanatory primacy is accorded here to the group approach to policy making.

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MULTI-LEVEL POLICY COALITIONS
AN INTERPRETATIVE MODEL OF WATER CONFLICTS IN THE AMERICAS

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This article proposes an analytical approach to conflicts and policy-making related to urban water management based on multi-level policy coalitions. This is necessary to articulate four main issues. First, the repositioning of social and political struggles for access to water, along with policy variables. Second, the analysis of the effects of ecological transition, including climate change. Third, the reincorporation of these struggles and challenges in a multi-level approach. Finally, the enquiry into the apparent contradiction, in contemporary policymaking. The article proposes a definition of multi-level coalitions as collective preference systems that influence the content of policies (ideas/advocacy, decisions, policy tools) and their implementation, groups of actors that arise from engagement in policy issues. In the first section, the article presents the objectives of research on urban water management in the Americas, within the framework of which this analytical approach by multi-level coalitions is fashioned. In the second section, the article details four analytical issues. In the third section, it gives a definition of multi-level coalitions.

Keywords: water, conflicts, policy, coalition

Este artigo propõe uma abordagem analítica para conflitos e elaboração de políticas relacionadas com a gestão das águas urbanas com base em coligações políticas multi-nível. Isso é necessário para articular quatro questões principais: em primeiro lugar, o reposicionamento das lutas sociais e políticas para o acesso à água, juntamente com variáveis de políticas; em segundo lugar, a análise dos efeitos de transição ecológica, incluindo as alterações climáticas; em terceiro lugar, a reincorporação dessas lutas e os desafios no contexto de uma abordagem multi-nível, e por último, a pesquisa sobre a aparente contradição, na formulação de contemporânea de políticas. O artigo propõe uma definição de coalizões multi-níveis como sistemas de preferências coletivos que influenciam o conteúdo das políticas (ideias / defesa, decisões, instrumentos de políticas) e a respectiva implementação, grupos de atores que surgem de envolvimento em questões relacionadas com as políticas. Na primeira seção, o

artigo apresenta os objetivos da pesquisa sobre a gestão das águas urbanas nas Américas, no marco conceitual no qual esta abordagem analítica por coalizões multi-nível é desenvolvida. Na segunda seção, o artigo detalha quatro questões analíticas. Na terceira seção, se apresenta uma definição de coalizões multi-nível.

Palavras chave: água, conflitos, coalizões

Este artículo propone un abordaje analítico, basado en coaliciones de política multinivel, sobre conflictos y *policy-making* relacionados con el manejo urbano del agua. Esto es necesario en pos de articular cuatro asuntos principales. En primer lugar, el reposicionamiento de las luchas sociales y políticas por el acceso al agua, junto a variables políticas. Luego, el análisis de los efectos de la transición ecológica, incluyendo al cambio climático. Terceramente, la reincorporación de dichas luchas y desafíos al abordaje multinivel. Y por último, la evidente contradicción en la formulación contemporánea de políticas. El trabajo sugiere una definición de coaliciones multinivel: sistemas colectivos de preferencias que influencian el contenido de políticas (ideas/defensa, decisiones, herramientas políticas) y su implementación; grupos de actores que surgen al involucrarse con los asuntos políticos. En la primera sección, el artículo presenta los objetivos de la investigación en manejo urbano del agua en las Américas, dentro del marco de trabajo del abordaje de coaliciones multinivel. En la segunda parte, se detallan los cuatro temas analíticos previamente mencionados. Y en la sección final, el trabajo brinda una definición de las coaliciones multinivel.

***Palabras clave*:** agua, conflicto, coaliciones