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Center for Global Studies (CGS), Institute of Social Anthropology
Faculty of Humanities, University of Bern

Master Thesis

Development or Justice?

The (De-)Construction of a Political Conflict around a Hydroelectric Powerplant in San Pablo de Amalí, Ecuador

Written by Hannah Plüss
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Supervised by Prof. Dr. Tobias Haller and Prof. Dr. Christian Büschges

Abstract

The hydroelectric powerplant ‘San José del Tambo’ in the Dulcepampa River was planned and built by the company Hidrotambo S.A. within a globalized discourse of green energy production and evolved within the highly progressive legal frame of Ecuador, whose constitution prohibits the privatization and exploitation of natural resources against the will of locally affected communities. Despite this situation, the company ignored the social, political, and legal characteristics of the riverbed and its dwellers, committed common pool resource grabbing with the help of the state, and violently imposed the construction of the powerplant against fierce protest of the local community.

The implementation and operation of the powerplant caused not only the loss of resources like fish due to a river diversion and the loss of land, belongings and even lives due to floods. It also led to a clash of opinions about what is at stake: there is a severe lack of basic infrastructure in the area and the joint agreement of all actors involved that ‘progress’ or ‘development’ in this sense is urgently needed; but, within the local community, there is a latent conflict over the question if the provision of basic infrastructure can justify the water grab, destruction, and violence committed by the company.

This Thesis traces this conflict building on the theoretical foundation of political ecology and its insights in the development vs. justice dilemma on the one hand; and the importance of the knowledge-power nexus to pose resistance against natural resource exploitation on the other hand. These theories are further combined with literature discussing infrastructure as local incorporation of the contrasting effects of development, justice, violence, and abandonment. The methodological approach to this case consists in ethnographic fieldwork. I use scales – understood as a constructed level of analysis and an abstract entity of social order – as a heuristic tool to analyse my findings.

The analysis shows in a first step how the dominant actors in the area, namely the company and certain state actors – backed by parts of the local community – present the rejection of the hydroelectric powerplant as a problem of backwardness and the lack of infrastructure as the consequence of the local ingratitude towards Hidrotambo that was willing to bring development. They construct a supposed dilemma between ‘development’ or ‘progress’ understood as basic infrastructure; and ‘justice’ understood as having the rights to decide over one’s own livelihood. Doing so, they completely undermined the national legislation.

In a second step, the analysis brings to light how the NGO ‘Dulcepamba River Project’ converted the physical protest into scientific and legal activism. Through data gathering and analysis, they first were able to corroborate local knowledge, impose pressure on the legal entities in charge, and legally and discursively upscale the conflict to a national level while establishing a connection to national and globalized discourses around environmental justice and water rights. Second, through legal activism on a regional level they could fill the gap left by the regional governments, empower water users to demand their rights and step by step undo the de facto privatization of water implemented by the company and regional authorities.

With these combined efforts, they managed to shift the local discourse from the seemingly inevitable choice between ‘progress’ or ‘justice’ to the immutability of the rights of the community and nature.

Prologue and Acknowledgements

It was a bold endeavour to look for a place where an environmental conflict happens, to go there and hope for acceptance. I decided to do so in any case and learned through the internet about what is happening in a remote place in Ecuador. Or, better said, I got Rachel's number after a few unsuccessful attempts to contact someone that could tell me more about this place, San José del Tambo, as I thought it was called. Only later I would learn that this is the bigger town a few kilometres downstream, that the actual place of protests and conflict is San Pablo de Amalí, a little village right in front of what is today the hydroelectric powerplant belonging to Hidrotambo S.A.

When I called Rachel with a pounding heart, she was happy to talk to me, a complete stranger, and I felt welcomed right away. Talking about scales and networks we should not forget how we can up- and down-scale, too, how we can build networks with all the other people that care about what is around us.

What I could not foresee is the intensity, the openness, the energy, the love, and care I would receive in the encounters with the people in San Pablo de Amalí, La Margarita, San Vicente de Porotopamba, and Sixsipamba and especially with Darwin, Emily, Gisela, Hannah S., Don Manuel, Rachel, Vilma, in short with the people working for the Dulcepamba River Project. They included me in their project, households, lives, and hearts for this all too short time I was in Chillanes and San Pablo de Amalí. I owe them my deepest respect, gratitude, and affection. This thesis is dedicated to them.

I want to thank Thobias Haller and Christian Büschges as well for the opportunity to engage with the subject, their important advice, their patience, and their flexibility.

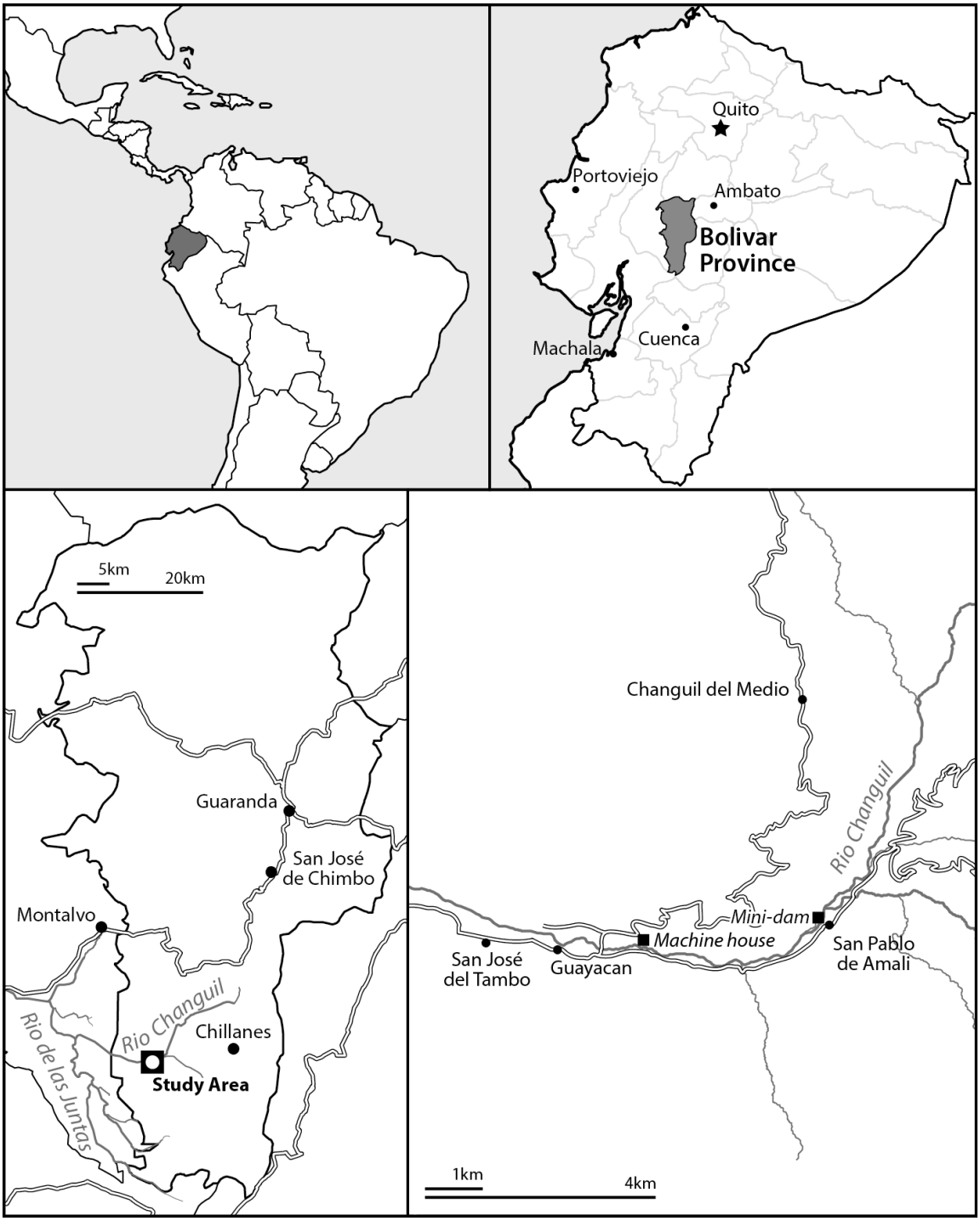
I want to thank all the people being with me and my little family so many times and in so many different ways. To Ursula and Markus for the lifetime support, to Sabina for always being there, and to all of them for their open house and open hearts. That means a lot to me. To Amelie for careful proofreading and all her knowledge. Thanks to Hedder for making Maylla happy. And, of course, thanks to Maylla for being the great little person you are. I am looking forward to the day you will be reading this.

Content

Abbreviations and Glossary

Cantón	After provinces the second level of political territorial division of the Ecuadorian administration
CONELEC	*Consejo Nacional de Electricidad*, National Ministry of Electricity
Dulcepamba River Project	*Proyecto Socio-Ambiental Dulcepamba,* Socio-Environmental Project of the Dulcepamba River
El Tambo	San José del Tambo
Hidrotambo	Company Hidrotambo S.A., owner of the 'San José del Tambo' powerplant
Parroquia	Third level of political territorial division of the Ecuadorian administration after provinces and *Cantónes*
people's defender	*Defensoría del Pueblo,* the national ombudsperson with regional offices in the whole country
San Pablo	San Pablo de Amalí
SENAGUA	*Secretaría del Agua,* National Secretariat for Water, https://www.gob.ec/senagua
SNGRE	*Servicio Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos y Emergencias,* National Service of Risk and Emergency Management, https://www.gestionderiesgos.gob.ec/

Map of the Site



Map drawn by Manuel Kasimir.

Introduction

The photo on the front cover of this thesis shows the view from the veranda of Darwin's house in San Pablo. From this spot, one can see the backyard of the house – a popular meeting point of all the chickens, turkeys, and other poultry of the neighbourhood – the forested hills, some stone fields, and the Dulcepamba River. In the time I spent there, its flow changed from a tiny trickle just before rainy season to a torrential river after the first heavy rainfalls only a week later. In the riverbed, directly in front of Darwin's house, there is a small platform, a construction whose purpose the uninitiated spectator could not discern. It is the mini dam that forms part of the hydroelectric powerplant called 'San José del Tambo'.

I stood many times on this veranda, observing the poultry in the backyard, the hills, and the river, always intrigued that such a small construction like this mini dam can bring so many problems for the people living around it, so much conflict, destruction, and violence.

The planning of the hydroelectric powerplant the mini dam forms part of started in 2003, embedded in a globalized discourse of sustainable development and forming part of the national strategy to promote renewable energy production. The first problem for people living in the area was the exorbitant amount of water that the regional secretariat for water SENAGUA granted Hidrotambo S.A., the company that built the powerplant. Despite the constitutional and legal guarantees in Ecuador that water must be prioritized for human use, small-scale irrigation and nature above "productive" or industrial uses, these concessions led to a de facto privatization of this natural resource in the Dulcepamba River valley upstream of the powerplant.

Second, Hidrotambo and the authorities in charge of regulating hydro projects did not provide any information to the local community that would have allowed them to give free, prior, and informed consent to the construction of the powerplant, even though this process is mandatory for a construction project of such magnitude.

Third, when parts of the local community offered resistance against the invasion of their lands and the grabbing of their waters, the company called the police and the armed forces and together with guards from the company itself, they violently quelled the protests.

Fourth, when the mini dam was built despite these fierce protests, the construction did not include the required minimum ecological flow to protect the aquatic flora and fauna. Therefore, the fish population – formerly an important part of the local community's diet – declined significantly.

And finally, the construction was rudimentary and dangerous, a problem that already became clear during the first heavier rainfalls after construction: the water masses accumulated behind the mini dam and in a narrow channel right next to the village that had been diverted by Hidrotambo in 2013, and, after breaking their way through, flooded the village of San Pablo, taking three lives, 15 houses, and uncountable hectares of crops and fruit plantations.

This local trail of destruction stands in a sharp contradiction with the image that Hidrotambo maintains of itself before the wider public. With their motto: "clean energy for everyone" they fully engage with the so-called gospel of eco-efficiency (Martinez-Alier, 2002), claiming to generate clean energy, progress, labour opportunities, and environmental consciousness in the area. At the beginning of the project, the powerplant even formed part of the Clean Development Mechanism managed by the United Nations, a program that promotes the financial support of sustainable development projects, mostly in the Global South, as a possibility to compensate CO_2 emissions for industries, mostly in the Global North.

This is not the only contradiction around the powerplant in the Dulcepamba River. Another one arises between the company's discourse of globalized environmental concern and subsequent reorientation towards renewable energy, and the discourse the local protesters engage with. Their claims equally involve environmental concern: for the protesters, the planning and construction of the powerplant meant the grabbing of what was formerly their common pool resource, the extinction of fish as an important buffer resource for times of crisis, and the destruction of their houses, lands and crops due to floods. In sum, it became a serious threat for their local livelihoods and nature. Therefore, they decided to fight for their rights and to defend what they considered theirs. They engaged with a discourse of environmental justice understood as "the right to remain in one's place" (Anguelovski 2015, p. 61).

The third contradiction emerges between this trail of destruction, dispossession, and crude violence against the protesting community in comparison with the legal context, especially the highly progressive Ecuadorian constitution. This constitution promotes *Buen Vivir* as an alternative thinking to material development and establishes nature as a legal person with rights on its own. Out of this legal framework, privatization of natural resources such as water is explicitly prohibited.

It was this highly contradictive setting that intrigued me. Following preliminary background research, the following questions guided my fieldwork:

> *How does a conflict evolve around the grabbing of a common pool resource based on different environmental discourses? What are the discourses and*

> *strategies of all actors in this uneven setting? And how are the resilience and coping strategies formed 'from below'?*

To answer these questions, I worked for one month in the field as a participant observer. During this short time, I engaged with the case in a way I had not expected. I felt connected to the people, to their ideas, wishes, and struggles, and I wanted to work with them. And even though I was just another person who came to talk about environmental impacts, people did not let me feel any fatigue or consternation.

During my fieldwork, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with current and former villagers of San Pablo and with people living in other villages upstream. I worked in close collaboration with the Dulcepamba River Project, an NGO consisting of local activists and volunteers from the U.S. I spoke to selected regional authorities, and I conducted three focus group discussions: one with members of the Dulcepamba River Project, and two with villagers living upstream of the powerplant that are legally affected by the water grab.

I subjected the gathered data to two stages of coding: first, an open coding stage including all the material to provide ideas, recognize themes of interest, and develop and refine my focus. Second, a stage of fine-grained, line-by-line focused coding including only selected parts of the data. I encountered a myriad of topics that deserve closer analysis within this case. The gendered patterns of environmental concern and resistance especially called my attention. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with this issue now, but attentive readers will understand why I do not abandon, but only postpone the analysis of this aspect.

So, I stuck to my initial questions and learned that the answer has two aspects: The first is what the local conflict in San Pablo consists of. Why did it emerge? What are the main claims, opinions, and clashes? And what do people think is at stake for them and the whole community? Since the meanings, measures, activities, positions, and hopes of the actors in San Pablo are clustered around this conflict, my theoretical basis engages with environmental conflict as a prime focus of political ecology (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018).

The main arguments within the conflict in San Pablo – the company claiming to bring development, and the local community offering resistance against the grabbing of their common pool resource – move within the supposed dilemma of development as the augmentation of human welfare vs. the just distribution of environmental goods and hazards, in other words, environmental justice. I engage with theoretical insights on both sides of this supposed dilemma.

Then, I turn my attention to the local manifestation of this dilemma that lies in the case of the hydroelectric powerplant in San Pablo in the local (lack of) infrastructure. The

improvement of these structures of everyday life on the one hand signifies development for the local community; on the other hand, the refusal of the local and regional authorities to provide the necessary infrastructure leads to a concrete manifestation of social injustice in the form of infrastructural violence.

The second aspect of my question can best be explored using the theoretical basis of the knowledge-power nexus, since knowledge is particularly important in environmental conflicts to maintain or change power structures. In other words: knowledge is the basis for strategies to impose, but also to offer resistance against, development projects. To understand these strategies of resistance – particularly well applied by the Dulcepamba River Project – I use scales as a heuristic tool of analysis.

There is a rich and versatile academic debate around environmental conflict, particularly within political ecology (Le Billon, 2015). The contradicting meanings of development have received attention (particularly by Escobar, 1995), as well as the connection between the development discourse, the progress of the commodity frontier, and the grabbing of common pool resources (Conde & Walter, 2015), and the importance of knowledge as a tool of resistance (Conde, 2014). Scales are equally a widely used theoretical approach in political ecology (Franco et al., 2013; Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015). In the case of Ecuador, the contradiction between the progressive legal framework and the continuance of the national economy in extractive activities has been the core of the debate (Lalander & Merimaa, 2018).

I want to contribute to these discussions by bringing them together and by using scales as an analytic entry point rather than a theoretical approach. With this aim in mind, I refine the questions that guide my thesis: How is the conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley constructed? And what difference – if any – does the national legal framework make for local resistance?

In the following, I want to first expound my theoretical basis: the discussion around the development vs. justice dilemma in political ecology; the material manifestation of this dilemma through local infrastructure; and the knowledge-power nexus as an important factor how to construct local resistance against environmental impacts. Second, I will provide the necessary national, regional, and local context to understand the case I am analysing in this thesis. In the third part of this thesis, I will briefly explain my fieldwork, data analysis and interpretation, and scales as the heuristic tool of this analysis. Fourth, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of this environmental conflict following the two main aspects of my research question, discuss my findings, and draw some final conclusions.

Theory

In the following, I want to expound the theoretical background of this thesis. I set out with analysis of environmental conflicts, a prime focus of political ecology (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018), since the meanings, measures, activities, positions, and hopes of the actors in San Pablo are clustered around a conflict and its core question: Does the local community want the arrival and operation of the hydroelectric powerplant? And, if yes, under which conditions? In other words: Should the community seek progress by letting the company in that brings with better infrastructure and labour opportunities – or at least promises to do so? Or should the people living around the river insist in their constitutional rights be protected, fight for water justice, and therefore, reject the company for not respecting these rights?

These main arguments move within the well-known, "complex and highly contested nexus between the goals and promises of development, and the frustrating rise of environmental problems and tensions" (Ioris, 2021, p. 3), a nexus discussed in literature since the first critical voices against development (Escobar, 1995) arrived on the scene.

I want to discuss both sides of the nexus: development as a concept that is enabled and promoted within the Ecuadorian and Latin American context through strategies like the anti-politics machine (Ferguson, 1990) or the enchantment of infrastructure (Harvey & Knox, 2012), entangled with commons grabbing driven by capitalist expansion in the name of sustainable development (Conde & Walter, 2015); and the alternative ideas around environmental justice and how to achieve this aim, specifically important within the Ecuadorian context of *Buen Vivir* (Escobar, 2015a).

The local manifestation of this conflictive nexus lies often in infrastructure, since the improvement of these structures of everyday life are what development signifies for the local community (De Vries, 2007). I want to discuss in a second part the meanings of infrastructure as a materiality that moves between enchantment and violence; and as a semantic and symbolic problem of structures that exist, structures that are needed, and structures that are unwanted.

In a third part, I want to discuss the importance of knowledge in environmental conflicts to gain or regain power over infrastructure works, institutions, and decision-making processes. The strategies of dominant actors within environmental conflicts around infrastructure are closely linked to the knowledge-power nexus (see, for example, Conde, 2014; Ferguson, 1990; Hecht, 2012; Ottinger, 2013). As such, they can be contested and reversed if the local community engages with the production of knowledge and achieve an upscaling of the conflict they are confronted with (Conde, 2014; Haller, Acciaioli, & Rist, 2016).

The Development vs. Justice Dilemma in Political Ecology

Political ecology is a wide field of interest between anthropology, geography, economy, and ecology that emerged first in the 1980s with the aim to lift the veil of techno-scientific objectivism (Enzensberger, 1974), deconstruct the apparently simple truths behind nature-society relationships and with this, make explicit their political side (Bridge, McCarthy, & Perreault, 2015). This political side often originates in collective decision making, with controversial and contested decisions leading to conflicts. Therefore, another classic definition of political ecology coming from Joan Martinez-Alier (2002, p. 70) is the study of "ecological distribution conflicts."

Philippe Le Billon (2015, p. 598, emphasis in the original) states that

> *political ecologists have also been keen to explore the* politicization *of the environment via conflicts, rather than* naturalizing *conflicts through environmental analysis. […] [They] seek to understand conflicts* around *or* through *the environment, and not simplistically explain conflicts as resulting* from *the environment.*

He emphasises that in this field of interest, scarcity of environmental goods is not seen as the only or not even the main argument why a conflict arises. Rather, the other aspects of collective decision making – *around* and *through* the environment – are deemed to be decisive. Within this collective decision making, the rights of different groups, their possibility of representation and similar aspects of uneven power relations become apparent. These aspects lead to tense and unfair situations that within the tradition of political ecology already are understood as conflict, even if they may not lead to a violent outbreak (Le Billon, 2015).

This is true as well for the nexus between development and environment, or better said the ideas of (material) development and the environmental damages that the realisation of these ideas often brings with. According to Pascale Combes Motel et al. (2014, p. 479 ff.), this nexus was defined as a dilemma or even a trade-off by the UN in the 1970s. They define

> *the trade-off [as] the following: on the one hand, developing countries aim at achieving higher standards of living; on the other hand, this development process is based on agricultural and industrial expansion, which is usually resource-consuming and environmentally damaging. Thus, protecting the environment and achieving development was considered irreconcilable.*

Defined like this, the nexus implies an inevitable conflict. This conflict may or may not lead to violent outbreaks – in any case, it will be there. The definition additionally implies that the nexus between development and environment is a direct link due to resources that are

intrinsically finite. Therefore, you can have either one or the other: a developed living standard or an intact environment.

This material and positivist notion of the development-environment nexus was dominated by a discourse from the Global North, intimately linked to capitalism. It represented the hegemonic perspective of governments, NGOs, and private actors during large parts of the 20th century and surely persists, in part, until today. But at least since the beginning of this century, other, more nuanced and less materialistic notions of the human-nature relation concerning development and the environment, such as post-development and degrowth, are discussed in the literature of political ecology (see, for example, Escobar, 2015a). As Antonio Ioris (2021, p. 4) rightly states,

> *environment-development dilemmas are actually much broader and more complicated than suggested by simplistic narratives of progress and conservation. All major challenges around the world are directly associated with controversial processes of environmental change and landscape degradation.*

It is difficulty to properly understand the nexus according to the author because to see it in another way implies almost automatically to fundamentally critique the capitalist way of life, so expanded and internalised in modern society, and to raise the question: is human wellbeing tied to material welfare? And if yes, up to which extend?

In this sense, the development-environment dilemma is as well a construction that takes for granted the scarcity of the (intrinsically insufficient) environment. Within the tradition of political ecology, the dilemma gets reframed and partly rejected exactly because the conflict is often not only about (the lack of) natural resources per se but starts already with the definition of the sense, use, and materiality of the parts of the environment that later are seen as the 'natural resources' at stake (Blaser, 2013, p. 34).

For the sake of analytical clarity, I will disentangle the nexus in the following and discuss both parts separately, even though they are of course intertwined and mutually dependent.

Development

Resurging after World War II as the Truman Doctrine to extend the "American dream of peace and abundance" (Escobar, 1995, p. 4) all over the planet and especially to the Global South, the term 'development' experienced a stellar career. The plan of the time was nothing less than the restructuring of two thirds of this world (the 'Second' and 'Third World') so that everyone would reach the goal of material prosperity and economic progress (Escobar, 1995). Until the 1970s, development became an omnipresent concept within governments and NGOs of all

idealistic stances, and the need for development became, according to Arturo Escobar (1995), an unquestionable certainty in the social imaginary.

What remains until today is that development denominates one particular way to organize the relation between nature and society, namely by foreseeing the mobilization and exploitation of nature to augment human well-being (Romero & Sasso, 2014). In other words: nature – in form of natural resources – serves human wellbeing. Maybe the most important change is that since the 1990s the emphasis lies on *human* development, at least for the United Nations Development Programme, "which is about expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live. It is an approach that is focused on creating fair opportunities and choices for all people" (HDRO, 2015). Despite this change, development as a social endeavour to alleviate the fate of the poor in this world is still without alternative in a modernist perspective (De Vries, 2007). In order to overcome poverty and promote wellbeing, we must develop.

It comes as no surprise that such a simplistic conception of human relations to their environment would encounter fierce critique within the literature of political ecology (Escobar, 1995; Paulson, 2015). Most prominently, the term is seen as an excuse in which's name the progress of capitalism is accelerated through the expansion of the commodity frontier and the grabbing of common pool resources. And while it was presented as an ideologically neutral conception of the society/nature organisation, James Ferguson's (1990, p. 256) analysis of development projects in rural Lesotho already 30 years ago showed that

> *a 'development' project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object. […] Alongside the institutional effect of expanding bureaucratic state power is the conceptual or ideological effect of depoliticizing both poverty and the state.*

So, behind the veil of technocratic neutrality, development is a highly political endeavour. It is, in other words, a term behind which dominant actors above all in the Global South obfuscate their political and economic interests. Ferguson (1990) baptized the various national and supranational actors and their development industry the 'anti-politics machine'.

The new focus towards sustainability within the same frame of development encounters similar critiques. What Martinez-Alier (2002, p. 5) ironically calls the 'gospel of eco-efficiency' – the kind of environmentalism equipped with unbreakable, almost religious faith in "'sustainable development', in 'ecological modernization', in the 'wise use' of resources" (Martinez-Alier, 2002, p. 5) – points exactly at the idea that within this new development

discourse ‘sustainable’ is added to development to emphasise that the environmental damages of economic growth would be compensated, at least discursively. So, even though nature as a resource is now taken into account, the system itself based on the growth paradigm does not experience any change. It is little surprise that Sara Ryser (2019), encounters in her analysis of a solar energy – and therefore sustainable development – project in Morocco the same problems as within other development projects: a commodity frontier that gets pushed forward through the discourse of wasteland, leading to a grabbing of the common pool resource land, processes that will be explained with more detail in the next section.

Through the ongoing failures of development, the need for fundamental change became apparent and some relevant alternative ideas or transition discourses (Escobar, 2015a) emerged, especially during the last 20 years. In the Latin American context, post-development is the most prominent new approach. It aims first to open up a discursive space to describe the condition of the Global South more adequately, rather than as ‘underdeveloped’; second, to identify alternatives and, third, to change the relations of power and knowledge that were instilled through the development discourse in the first place (Escobar, 2015a). This alternative thinking, even though it seems quite blurry, now has concrete social, legal, and political influence in several Latin American countries: through the implementation of the rights of nature and the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir*, it became inscribed in several constitutions of the continent, including in the Ecuadorian one. Therefore, these aspects will be discussed with more detail in the context section.

The critiques about concepts of development are so manifold and fundamental that, according to Pieter De Vries (2007, p. 26), “critiquing the development industry seems to have become an industry in itself.” He is convinced that despite these alternative ideas the desire for development of the people living in remote areas in the Global South should be taken seriously. And even though Escobar himself is one of the most prominent critics of the idea of development, he knows about the ambiguity of the term for the affected population. He states: “For many common people the world over, finally, development has become either a reflection of their aspirations to a dignified life, or an utterly destructive process with which they have to coexist, and not infrequently both at the same time” (Escobar, 2015b, p. 57). Therefore, it is no surprise that the term may see a reinterpretation, but still forms an important part of politics of the 21st century, in Ecuador and beyond.

(Environmental) Justice

The other side of this nexus, trade-off, or dilemma is called 'the environment', which is somehow misleading, since we as human beings undoubtedly form part of the environment, too. I therefore will call the side 'justice', since the problems that rise due to the development paradigm often are part of what is fought against in the environmental justice movements all over the planet. More precisely, Isabelle Anguelovski (2015, p. 61) defines environmental justice as the "right to remain in one's place and environment and be protected from uncontrolled investment and growth, pollution, land grabbing, speculation, disinvestment, and decay and abandonment." With this definition, she directly links the idea of environmental justice to the most important critique of the development discourse exposed above.

To link the development critique to claims for justice is not a coincidence but has its reason in the fact that most development projects entail disadvantages. If a development project, for example, foresees oil extraction to raise national income, the people living around the extraction side will have to live with the augmentation of risks for environmental damages that comes with such industrial activities. The same applies to the side effects of a dam to produce electricity. Flooding of land, for example, leads to relocation, or a decline of the fish population leads to food scarcity. These disadvantages often are disproportionally felt by some people, groups, or communities, while they can easily be ignored by others. Their distribution, therefore, is unjust and these injustices lead to claims for environmental justice.

Since political ecology is a stream of thought that resulted from the combination of political economy and ecologically rooted social sciences (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018), it comes as no surprise that its theoretical outlines have a strong economic impetus. Therefore, Martinez-Alier (2002) baptized the environmental justice movements especially in Latin America as a new stream of environmentalism – next to the traditional cult of wilderness and the techno-faithful gospel of eco-efficiency – called the 'environmentalism of the poor'. The term goes back to a short note from the Peruvian peasant activist Hugo Blanco (1991) entitled 'the environmentalism of the poor':

> *At first sight the environmentalists or conservationists are some slightly crazy guys that fight so that the panda bears and blue whales would not disappear. And even if they seem quite nice to the common people, the latter consider that there are more important things to worry about, for example, how to get their daily bread. […] Even so, in Peru there exist big masses of people that are active environmentalists (of course, if I tell these people: "You are an environmentalist," they would answer "environmentalist is your mother," or something similar). Let's see: Isn't the village of Bambamarca truly environmentalist, which has time and again fought valiantly against the pollution*

> *of its water from mining?[…] Isn't the village of Tambo Grande in Piura environmentalist when it rises like a closed fist and is ready to die in order to prevent strip-mining in its valley? Also, the people of the Mantaro Valley who saw their little sheep die, because of the smoke and waste from the La Oroya smelter. And the people living in the Amazonia are totally environmentalist, and they die defending their forests against depredation. Also, the poor people of Lima are environmentalists when they complain about the pollution of water on the beaches.*

So, what Blanco points to is that the resistance against environmental impacts by people deeply affected in their daily livelihood is often not considered an environmentalist movement, surely not by those people themselves, because the discourses of sustainability or biodiversity seem so far away from their daily life. They are not recognizing a connection between their worries and these ideas. Nevertheless, poor people affected by extractive or other industrial activities that entail the grabbing of common pool resources or the degradation of their livelihood defend at the end of the day exactly this environment that the environmentalists talk about. Probably, they do not defend it because it is so beautiful or because they want to prevent global climate change, but because they consider it important for their immediate wellbeing or even essential for their life. In short, they stand up to fight for what they consider theirs. And often, within these fights they in passing defend as well precisely the biodiversity and sustainability unconnected to their worries at first sight.

The environmentalism of the poor is often also the environmentalism of those who are most strongly affected by ecologically unjust distributions. With this definition, the strong connection between economic power and other kinds of power structures become apparent, structures that decisively influence the outcomes of development projects. Leah Temper (2014, p. 181) takes these thoughts a step further and states that current conflicts over the shape of capitalism are increasingly fought out through, over, and about the use and access to natural resources, be it water, land, or others. She therefore refers to an environmentalism not only of the poor, but of the dispossessed that arises all over the world and "incorporates concerns over forms of primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and accumulation by extra-economic means" (Temper, 2014, p. 182).

One of the most frequent manners of dispossession is, as already indicated, to push forward the capitalist commodity frontier through the grabbing of common pool resources. The latter are defined as resources "whose uses are competitive […], but whose intrinsic characteristics make it difficult to exclude potential new claimants" (Gerber & Haller, 2020). The most frequent example of a common pool resource is commonly used land (Islam, 2011), but, at least in the last ten years, common pool resources related to water, like irrigation water

or fishery, received growing attention from researchers, politicians, and activists alike (see, for example, Franco, Mehta, & Veldwisch, 2013; Martinez-Alier, Temper, Del Bene, & Scheidel, 2016; Romero & Sasso, 2014). Much of these resources – fish is a classic example – are important buffers in times of crisis when other incomes are low, and food is scarce. In this context, water grabbing often not only leads to a loss of a common pool resource but also reduces the resilience of local communities (Haller, 2020).

The concept of common pool resources became widely used in a variety of disciplines. Nevertheless, it often lacks an exact, common definition beyond this basic but blurry economic categorization of a resource with competitive use but little possibility for exclusion of new users (Cangelosi, 2019). Water is a good example for the ambiguity of a purely economic definition, since it is a materiality that is involved in several industrial or agricultural activities like mining, cash crops, energy production and can be the context, the side effect, but as well the object itself of a grab (Franco et al., 2013). Therefore, the concept of common pool resources is often used not only as an economic category, but as a heuristic frame to analyse the arrangements of natural resource uses (Gerber & Haller, 2020).

Elisabetta Cangelosi (2019), in contrast, defines the commons rather as a practice than a theoretical concept. This practice of sharing resources can be found all over the world but with considerable varieties depending on the historical, cultural, social, and economic context (Cangelosi, 2019). Relying on definitions from a variety of actors of what common pool resources are, she sees the need to shift away from the economic frame of private and public property since it is too narrow to understand this global practice.

Her proposal is to reason about commons within the categories most frequently named by the actors involved in the struggles to defend common pool resources: human rights, resistance and resilience, and social change. With the first category it becomes apparent that, when it comes to commons, the important aspect is not possession but access, and this right to access is often connected with other human rights; second, commons are an important element for resistance and resilience when it comes to the maintenance of livelihoods; and third, commons are part of a reasoning about social change, away from capitalist individualism to a more reciprocal mode of life.

These reasonings link to an intuitive understanding of just distribution and representation. But when it comes to environmental justice, a purely empirical approach is not enough: there must be at least a working definition of what justice is in this very concrete context of environmental conflict. David Schlosberg (2007) provides a useful frame differing

between three spheres of justice: justice of distribution, justice as recognition and procedural justice.

The first term, justice of distribution, is the most obvious and most widely used form to conceptualize justice. Who gets what share of environmental impacts? This simple conceptualization is an important starting point, but as the only focus it is too narrow to understand the underlying reasons for these distributions. So, the question is not only how to distribute justly, but also how current maldistribution came into being.

Therefore, the second term, justice as recognition, was incorporated to understand that mostly the lack of recognition entails the unjust distribution. The underlying idea is that distribution patterns are neither static nor random outcomes, but are shaped by social structures, cultural beliefs, and institutional contexts.

There are three dominant social aspects of injustices referring to recognition: the general practice of cultural domination, e.g., if a community or individual systematically is supressed because of a certain group membership; a pattern of non-recognition as being rendered invisible within a certain spatial or political context; and open disrespect against a person or a group of people, e.g., disrespect as the violation of the body, the denial of rights, or the denigration of ways of life (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 17). Recognition is not only important within social justice because it makes just outcomes possible, but it is as well an essential need of every human being. Therefore, as Schlosberg (2007, p. 23) states, “the concept of justice as recognition moves beyond a focus on the state alone for remedies, and brings justice theory squarely into the political space beyond the state.”

The third term, procedural justice, refers to fair and inclusive institutional decision-making processes, especially within state entities and other public realms (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 25). If an individual or group of people cannot participate, they will not be recognized and the other way around. This lack of participation almost certainly will lead to an unjust outcome.

There is a conceptual overlap between justice as recognition and procedural justice. Nevertheless, the differentiation between the three spheres is useful because the question of justice of distribution and justice as recognition is played out in the procedural sphere. The focus on procedural justice therefore will produce the necessary insights on how unjust recognition and unjust distribution patterns come into being.

Just as the concept of environmental justice needs a theoretical understanding of what justice is as an abstract claim, it is only meaningful within a material, spatial, empirical context. Therefore, I discuss in the next section how these overarching aims of globalized movements for environmental justice translate and are translated from concrete, materialized contexts.

Local Infrastructure between Development and Justice

So, there is a global dilemma about development and the environment, and there are internationally pronounced goals and claims within the environmental justice movements. But these problems are not only created, debated, and combatted on the globalized scale. Indeed, only the smallest part of this debate takes place on this scale. The most important share of the struggle is local, within communities longing for environmental goods or fighting against environmental degradation. Therefore, I will now analyse what development and justice can be in local contexts, mostly in Latin America.

First, I want to put emphasis on a differentiation that will be analysed with more detail in the methods-section but should not be left out here: a concrete place and 'the local' as a scale is not the same. While the former refers to the 'here and now' of social practice, the very tangible materiality that surrounds us, the latter is a process and above all a constructed level of analysis (Escobar, 2001, p. 152). In this sense, I want to show the theoretical debates around the material and local manifestations of development and justice.

De Vries (2007, p. 25) observes:

> *It must be a strange experience for students of development, well versed in the latest discussions about 'post'- or 'alternative' development, to be confronted with the thoughts of Andean villagers in the Peruvian highlands. There, when engaging people in discussions about the meanings and costs of development, the position of Andean villagers is quite clear: what is needed is big and small infrastructure, highways and feeder roads, irrigation systems, dams, schools, town-halls, etc.*

So, what the author noticed is that the theoretical debate and the local and materialized ideas around development talk at cross-purposes. While post-development is about the disentanglement of wellbeing and material prosperity, what villagers in rural areas need and long for is just that: material infrastructure, be it small or big. It is what they denominate development (or often also 'progress').

To dig deeper in this supposed contradiction of the globalized discourse and the local ideas, it is necessary to think about infrastructure. Just as common pool resources, infrastructure is a materiality and a political and analytical category at the same time, making a concrete definition very difficult. The term itself has two parts: first *infra*, Latin prefix for beneath, below or within; and structure, e.g., a plurality of integrated single parts (Carse, 2017, p. 27). So, infrastructures are material constructions that serve some underlying purpose or higher-order project. For the moment, the definition of Penny Harvey et al. (2017, p. 5) suffices: "Infrastructures are extended material assemblages that generate effects and structure social

relations, either through engineered (i.e. planned and purposefully crafted) or non-engineered (i.e. unplanned and emergent) activities."

These materials – invisible in other contexts – constantly reach the surface of social conflict in rural areas of Latin America, just as De Vries (2007) observed. Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox (2012, p. 523) show in a similar vein how roads as the most emblematic incorporation of infrastructure have the capacity to enchant remote communities in the Peruvian Amazon with promises about speed and connectivity, political freedom, and economic prosperity. These promises make roads – and infrastructure in general – a decisive part of the Peruvian imaginary: regardless of class, ethnicity, or gender, everybody wants roads and sees them as a necessary social good. However, the promises that roads come with almost never get fulfilled since the roads, if ever built in the first place, mostly disintegrate again due to the difficult environmental conditions in the area.

While Harvey and Knox (2012) talk about infrastructure that evoke elusive, somehow irrational hopes within local populations, they also refer to the tyranny of delay that comes with the constant lack of access in remote areas. Nevertheless, these references seem to come with an ironic undercurrent, stressing the naivety of the wish for access so frequent around the local population. It is in this context that De Vries (2007) claims to take seriously the wishes of the people actually living in these areas. He states that these wishes for progress are no naïve ideas resulting from a lack of information about possible dangers and obstacles; they are the result of conscious decisions to hold politicians, state authorities, and private companies accountable for their promises. Therefore, he claims that local communities should not compromise their desire for development.

Dennis Rodgers and Bruce O'Neill (2012) also take infrastructure not as hope and illusion, but as a right for access. Therefore, they denominate the notorious lack of infrastructure in urban areas as infrastructural violence. The violence happens either active, when someone or a group of people is consciously kept out of certain places, facilities, or areas (e.g., parks or means of transport); or passive, as in exclusion because of infrastructure that is not built or built without consideration of all possible users (e.g., the lack of save crossways for pedestrians). Gertrude Saxinger et al. (submitted) transmit the notion of infrastructural violence to the rural areas of the Russian arctic. The extreme disconnectedness and subsequent vulnerability make local communities dependent on help for infrastructure works, either from the state or the companies extracting oil in the area. Since both actors do not provide what is necessary – or not even what they promise – the community gets stuck in a state of limbo between hope and despair.

Another aspect of infrastructural violence comes with the propelled grabbing of resources. These violent processes of exclusion through commodification and subsequent privatization manifest in the (changing) everyday practices of the local communities. Diana Ojeda et al. (2015) show these changes by the example of water grabbing for palm oil plantations in Colombia. The water channels for these plantations take water away from original sources used by the local community. Now, the small-scale farmers and families depend on what is left in the channels for the supply of water for their everyday life. These leftovers in the channels are often stagnant and dirty and not recommended for human use. But since there is no water supply system for private households and the water channels belong to the plantations, the people do not have much choice and must use what is there.

This infrastructural violence in rural areas brings in its wake consequences, as Annelies Zoomers et al. (2011, p. 493) state: "marginal places, of no interest to the private sector and left by NGOs, have increasingly become isolated, sometimes resulting in a landscape of dying places from where people have developed multi-local livelihoods by expanding their networks in the direction of towns or remote destinations." In other words: people will leave if access is not provided, especially if at the same time other ways of traditional livelihood are increasingly under pressure due to industrial activity. This material lack of infrastructure and simultaneous exploitation of landscapes stemming from a lack of recognition that leads to exclusion directly connects with the aspects of environmental justice discussed above. In sum: infrastructure is not only about development, but about justice as well. It materializes both sides of the supposed dilemma.

These manifold ways that infrastructure intervenes in daily life indicate that the concept has not only a material, but also a semantic and symbolic value: "Environmental infrastructures turned out to be about the making and remaking of worlds at once material and semiotic and inhabited not only by people but also by a multiplicity of nonhumans," is the conclusion of Harvey et al. (2017, p. 2). Infrastructure is the materiality that especially remote communities depend on and what their struggles, aims and hopes are about. And just as infrastructure as a materiality forms part of the place as the concrete 'here and now' of social practice, infrastructure as an imaginary around development or justice co-constructs the abstract notion of a local scale.

The Knowledge-Power Nexus in Local Decision-Making Processes

That knowledge and power are two sides of one coin is a commonplace already since the 16th century when the proverb "knowledge is power," commonly attributed to Sir Francis Bacon, was enshrined in Latin for the first time.[1]

Within the last 20 years, it has become apparent that knowledge is an important tool also to alter power structures within environmental justice struggles on several scales. To start with, already the theoretical approach of political ecology itself has the aim to alter power structures through questioning what has become academic certainties, such as "the dichotomy between nature and culture, the universality of reason (and of homo economicus), the adequacy of conventional disciplines and the neutrality of Western scientific categories and findings" (Paulson, 2015, p. 75).

On the globalized scale of environmental justice movements and in close collaboration with that theoretical aim, the capitalist system and its certainties has been called into question and enabled claims for a new, more just, less materialistic, and less destructive organization of the relation between nature and society. And, as already mentioned, these claims for fundamental changes led to considerable success on the scale of national politics, specifically in Latin America, such as the inclusion of the rights of nature and the concept of *Buen Vivir* in the national constitution of Bolivia and Ecuador. In this case, the questioning of dominant knowledge led to an alteration of the (post) colonial power structures in the region.

The claims, ideas and movements that pushed these changes were not plucked out of thin air but resulted of interaction with local struggles around changed livelihoods. Therefore, it is again the local scale where the knowledge-power nexus manifests its capacity to construct and deconstruct structures, organizational modes, supposed truths, and certainties.

The paramount importance of knowledge on a local scale occurs because firstly, knowledge leads to decisions within development projects. Mostly, the knowledge considered is so-called expert knowledge; indeed, expert judgements are a core justification to take a decision in one way or another. Experts are people with diploma and degrees and not necessarily the locals. A common opinion among such experts is that 'local people' just do not know enough to participate in the production of scientific expertise (Ferguson, 1990, p. 186). So, expert knowledge is an aspect that helps to frame changes that are locally unwanted as without alternatives (Ferguson, 1990, p. 190).

[1]"knowledge, n.". OED Online. June 2021. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/104170?rskey=CgVfYt&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid. Last visit: 23-06-202.

Second, as outlined above, one main factor that would help to obtain just outcomes within environmental projects is procedural justice, and an indispensable requirement to enable procedural justice is as much knowledge as possible about the possible consequences of a development project.

The assurance of procedural justice – at least on a discursive level – nowadays is a standard practice of national and international development projects all over the world. Some things have changed since Ferguson's analysis of rural Lesotho. This particularly important change happened because many countries as well in Latin America ratified the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989* (C169) and with this, the obligation to get free, prior, and informed consent of affected indigenous communities became established (Bustamante, 2015). But despite these good intentions, the problem remains: what will these communities be informed about? Based on whose data? What findings will be presented? Based on whose analyses and estimates?

These questions are crucial since without adequate information, it is impossible to make an informed decision. At the same time, the scientific knowledge itself about the consequences of major interferences in the environment can be uncertain and insufficient to take an informed decision in the first place. This uncertainty lies in the nature of the production of scientific knowledge whose advantage precisely lies in the possibility for constant contradiction, remaking, and revision of data and findings (Ottinger, 2013). And even if this process is important for scientific research, it diametrically opposes the possibility to make meaningful decisions in one moment that not only bring the best results in the present, but also prove to be the right ones for the future. This restriction of scientific findings becomes more sever the longer the effects of those decisions last, e.g., concerning long lasting exposure to toxic materials (Phillimore, Moffatt, Hudson, & Downey, 2000). Therefore, when it comes to major infrastructure projects, scientific uncertainty is a frequent difficulty accompanying the decision-making process.

Of course, this is just one side of the story. The other side is – just as research in political ecology exposes – that "political and institutional forces produce structured gaps in knowledge" (Ottinger, 2013, p. 253). As Gwen Ottinger (2013) points out, this conscious production of knowledge gaps to obfuscate the possible environmental impacts coming with a development project or industrial facility seriously questions the possibility for procedural justice.

Put in this light, uncertainties are not always a simple lack of scientific knowledge; when it comes to production that probably leads to negative environmental impacts, uncertainties are often intended or even manufactured by the dominant actors. To take up the example of Marta

Conde (2014): as long as scientific research cannot establish a clear causality between exposure to low doses of radiation and fatal diseases, the uranium mining industry denies any responsibility when it comes to sick workers. They not only argue based on supposed unclear cause-and-effect relationships, lack of data and research; they even blame the workers themselves for getting ill, referring to their smoking, poor dietary habits, or carelessness. Like this, they are 'merchants of doubt' (Hecht, 2012) in a macabre battle over sovereignty of interpretation.

Consequently, the burden of proof for the cause-and-effect relationships between the environmental impacts and the change in local livelihood is left to the locally affected communities. This is a problem since they often have neither the formal education that enables them to gather data and respond to such assumptions with the same scientific language; nor the considerable resources in time and money necessary to engage in such a project (Conde, 2014). Additionally, they lack national and international connections to lobby for their cause.

Uncertainty does not only help to blur cause-and-effect relationships; it is also the driver for unclear expectations. Expectations are future orientations and imaginations and contain a promise (Teräväinen, 2019). They often are contradictive, especially when it comes to sustainable development projects in the Global South, such as wind parks, solar panels or hydroelectric powerplants (see, for example, Buchanan, 2013; Ryser, 2019). These projects deemed to promote sustainable development evolve in a situation of competing discourses of environmental concern: while the investors promote their projects because they expect to fight climate change on a global level, their opponents equally frame their protests as the protection of their common pool resources necessary for their sustainable livelihood. In other words: sustainable development projects in the Global South provide the clearest example how two environmental discourses – namely the gospel of eco-efficiency and the environmentalism of the poor – can pursue opposing goals and create contradicting expectations. Here again, the scale of knowledge is crucial since globalized ideas about how to fight climate change clash with local knowledge about how to take care of the natural resources in the area.

Therefore, local resistance needs local knowledge. According to Conde (2014, p. 72), local knowledge are the oral stories of the communities, but it is by far not limited to that:

> *Certainly, local geography (rivers, polluted areas) and how to access them (evading sometimes the company and state security guards), whom to interview, the social knowledge of health impacts (how many people are sick, who are they), and socioeconomic aspects (marginalisation, water supply), are also local knowledge. This knowledge is vital to the application of scientific tools.*

As Ottinger (2013) points out, another important aspect of local knowledge is time spent in the area, time to observe and experience; in short, time that will provide more information about a specific environment than most scientists can provide. So, the importance of local knowledge lies as well in the simple fact of 'being there'.

Conde (2014, p. 68) shows how local knowledge and scientific activism gets intertwined in different ways. She states that local activists in diverse rural and urban areas all over the world use collaboration with science as an effective strategy to counter hegemonic discourses: "Knowledge, be it local or scientific or newly co-produced […], becomes a political tool that can express and exercise power." These collaborative and participatory methods are implied in different areas and contexts already since the 1980s. They are called differently, depending on the degree of participation of locals and scientists and their degree of intertwining. But what they all have in common is that they reject the notion that lay people cannot contribute to scientific research or political decision-making (Conde, 2014).

This counter-hegemonic, locally based knowledge is mostly produced with the concrete aim to empower local struggles and open the path for new strategies of resistance. Institution shopping, for example, the process wherein the laws, rules, and regulations most suitable for the own interests are selected on the one hand, and those that pose possible constrains are ignored on the other (Haller, 2020), is a strategy used normally by the dominant actor, especially by international companies. With extended knowledge and agency, institution shopping becomes possible as well for actors with less decision power, e.g., local communities and environmental activists (Haller, 2020). Through this process, local demands formerly unheard can be placed within a bigger context.

The process can even lead to what Tobias Haller, Greg Acciaioli, and Stephan Rist, (2016) call constitutionality: an institution-building process from below, wherein property regimes are enshrined in institutions formed by local actors to protect their common pool resources from overuse by all kind of actors.

Just as local knowledge is an important aspect to counter hegemonic interpretations of the advantages and disadvantages of a development project, the dominant actors will not leave the locally produced knowledge uncontested. It will be transformed, contested, pushed, denied, changed, suppressed and finally, it will be an important tool to gain sovereignty of interpretation. How these processes happen and how they intertwine with the construction of the development vs. justice dilemma will be object of the third part of the analysis section.

Context[2]

In the following, I first will provide some information about the national and local context in which the ecological conflict around the Hidrotambo powerplant evolves. Then, I will unfold the history of the planning, construction, and operation of the powerplant and the resistance against it. In the last part, I will explain the emergence and organization of the Dulcepamba River Project as the most important representative of this resistance.

Political, Economic, and Legal Context

Ecuador formed part of the Inca Empire and became, like all other countries of Spanish-speaking South America, a Spanish colony after the conquest of the continent in the 15th century, until its independence in 1822. Despite its small size compared to its neighbours Peru and Colombia, the country has a very diverse landscape including parts of the Andean Mountain chain with peaks of more than 6000 meters, parts of the Amazon basin with tropical rainforest, and the coastal plains with large-scale agriculture. In general, the climate is humid and tropical, even though there is considerable variation in different areas of the country. Especially the mountain areas experience a drier, colder climate, and parts of the coast are desertic.

Since colonial times, Ecuador has been a provider of raw material and supplies to the colonialist nations and, after independence, to the Global North in general. The development of this one-commodity export oriented national economy can be divided into three periods: the cacao-exporting period from 1860 to 1920, the banana-exporting period in the middle of the 20th century, and finally the petroleum boom that started in the 1970s. This economic pattern, – interrupted by several crises – continues until today (Falconí-Benítez, 2001, p. 258).

In political ecology, this kind of national economy – bound to the intense extraction and export of primary resources like oil and minerals with little processing and low additional value generated in the country – is called the extractivist model (see, for example, Bebbington, 2010; Burchardt & Dietz, 2014; Gudynas, 2010). This model is, as indicated above, not new in Latin America, quite the contrary, as Hans-Jürgen Burchardt and Kristina Dietz (2014, p. 481) state: "The history of the region is a history of extractivism."

The extractivist activities in the second half of the 20th century were mostly managed by international companies – who took in the biggest share of the revenues as well – with only little intervention by the state. The underlying hope was that this industry would create benefits

[2] Parts of this section, especially the 'Political, Economic, and Legal Context' and 'The Powerplant' are an extension and refinement of another text of mine, Plüss (submitted).

for the whole national economy through the mechanisms of the free market, e.g., in form of new labour opportunities (Gudynas, 2010).

This hope did not come true, at least not for the big share of the population: Latin America still is the region with the highest economic and social inequality in the world (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014). As Burchardt and Dietz (2014) state, "few disagree that the neoliberal policies of structural adjustment in Latin America have failed. The primacy of the market, the retreat of the state and the opening-up of economies in the region – none has increased growth and competitiveness, instead, they have led to greater poverty and fuelled social inequalities."

Therefore, it is no surprise that in the early 21st century in countries all over Latin America leftist governments came to power, promising a reinforcement of the state to improve social welfare and reduce inequality. Ecuador under the leadership of Rafael Correa formed part of this leftist wave, together with Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil.

Once in power, Correa put in practice most of his promises made during his election campaign, at least at the beginning of his presidency: he put an end to the neoliberal reforms, reoriented the state politically to the left, raised spending on social programs and increased agricultural subsidies.[3] Another important attempt of his was to change the direction of the national economy, away from primary resource extraction like petroleum, towards a more sustainable development (Rieckmann, Adomßent, Härdtle, & Aguirre, 2011, p. 444).

But probably the most decisive reform was the new constitution that came into being in 2008. It is seen – together with the Bolivian constitution that was written only one year later – as "the most ambitious proposal of the whole continent when it comes to the reconfiguration of state power" (Aparicio Wilhelmi, 2018, p. 117, own translation). First, because it includes some very progressive social guarantees like same-sex marriage;[4] second, because it defines Ecuador not only as a pluricultural, but as a plurinational state, with wide-reaching recognition of indigenous rights (Aparicio Wilhelmi, 2018, p. 121); third, and most importantly for this analysis, because it establishes the indigenous concept of *Sumak Kawsay* or *Buen Vivir* (in English: 'good living') and recognises nature as a juridical subject with legally enforceable rights on its own (Gudynas, 2009, p. 37).

Buen Vivir first appeared on the international stage due to its institutional anchorage in the Ecuadorian constitution, but the exact genealogy and meaning of the concept before this

[3] "Rafael Correa." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Rafael-Correa/475217. Last visit: 07-29-2019.
[4] "Ecuador." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Ecuador/106215#129494.toc. Last visit: 07-29-2019

milestone is still debated among intellectuals (Inuca Lechón, 2017). According to Carlos Viteri Gualinga (2002), the concept of material development, richness and poverty did not exist in local indigenous cosmovision. He sees *Buen Vivir,* therefore, as a construction of the 21st century, because it is so closely linked to the idea of development, even though in an alternative manner. Contrary to this opinion, José Benjamín Inuca Lechón (2017) traces the concept back to the middle of the 20th century rather as a convergence of oriental and indigenous knowledge. For him, *Buen Vivir* is "the fight against the system of exploitation, oppression, discrimination; it is a fight anti-systemic, counter-hegemonic, from the cultural to the political sphere" (Inuca Lechón, 2017, p. 174, own translation).

Within the plurality of postulates around the meaning *Buen Vivir,* C. Unai Villalba-Eguiluz and Iker Etxano (2017, p. 2) locate the following aspects as points in common:

1. *a reconceptualization of wellbeing and the quality of life, linked to concepts of harmony and equity.*
2. *a reconceptualization of human relations with nature, also guided by the concept of harmony, and not limited to the concept of sustainability.*
3. *a deep critique of lineal models of history and development and the almost exclusive goal of economic growth.*
4. *recognition of the value of original, indigenous cultures and knowledges and of national and regional sovereignties facing the Western modernising project.*

Despite little theoretical clarity, *Buen Vivir* now is mentioned in the preamble of the Ecuadorian constitution as the new form of societal coexistence that should be constructed, and Art. 14 states that:

> *The right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and the good way of living (*sumak kawsay*), is recognized. Environmental conservation, the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity and the integrity of the country's genetic assets, the prevention of environmental damage, and the recovery of degraded natural spaces are declared matters of public interest. (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008)*

The other important constitutional change is the rights granted for nature. Although the idea itself was not new at the time, it was the first time that those rights became properly established in a national constitution (Rieckmann et al., 2011). According to the Ecuadorian constitution, nature has the right to be respected and restored in case of damages. Ecuadorian citizens, communities, people, and nationalities have the right to benefit from the richness of nature, but these benefits would be regulated and supervised by the state. Additionally, every Ecuadorian

person, community or nation has the right to sue for violations against nature.

The establishment of nature as a legal subject on its own with administrative and juridical protection is such a ground-breaking change because it leaves behind the western vision of nature as mere objects subjected to humankind and establishes the idea of nature as a living entity with intrinsic value (Rieckmann et al., 2011, p. 445). So, the concept of *Buen Vivir* with its aspiration to reconceptualize the relations between human and nature and the idea of nature as a legal subject with rights on its own are intertwined. Together, they offer the possibility to change the cosmovision of the Ecuadorian political and social sphere.

An example of how those concepts apply in legal practice is the regulation of water: Article 3 of the new constitution defines as a primordial duty of the state to provide all inhabitants with water. It establishes in Article 12 water as a human right. All water resources are constitutionally declared as property of the state. The will to avoid privatization is reinforced further on in the *Ley Orgánica de Recursos Hídricos, Usos y Aprovechamiento del Agua* (Law of Water Resources, Uses and Benefits of Water) that prohibits in Article 6 all forms of water privatization. The same law establishes in Article 86 the following hierarchy of water users: first, for human consumption, second for irrigation that guarantees food sovereignty, e.g., all activity that provides food for personal consumption, third minimal environmental flows, that is to say the necessary amount of water to maintain the health of ecosystems, and fourth, productive activities like electricity production. The water ministry SENAGUA[5] must grant water rights following this order of priorities.

Despite all these formal efforts, there are several authors that doubt the effectiveness of those legal measures in real life situations and the willingness of Correa's and his successor Lenin Moreno's government to fundamentally make any changes to the (neo-)extractivist model beyond the discursive level (see, for example, Bebbington, 2010; Clark, 2018; Lalander & Merimaa, 2018; Villalba-Eguiluz & Etxano, 2017).

More precisely, the initial intensions of Correa's government to actually move away from the extractivist model quickly changed into the promotion of a neo-extractivist model, as Humphreys Bebbington (2010) impressively points out. The author takes the events around the oilfield of Yasuní-ITT as an emblematic example. This oilfield is located beneath an area of the Amazon occupied by several indigenous communities and inhabited by an astonishing biodiversity. As a decided step towards *Buen Vivir*, the government proposed to leave the oil

[5] SENAGUA changed its name and is now called *Ministerio de Ambiente, Agua y Transicion Ecologica* (MAATE, Ministry of the Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition). Since this change happened after my fieldwork, I will use in the following the denomination SENAUGA.

where it was if the international community would provide half of the revenues that Ecuador could have expected from the oil extraction as trust funds for broader development projects. In 2010, approximately half of the money was assured, but under conditions that Correa deemed as too narrow. Consequently, he rejected the initiative altogether and established several oil drilling platforms in the area.[6]

Now Ecuador fully engages with the neo-extractivist model whose most prominent difference with the extractivist model is the increased presence of the state (Gudynas, 2010). This increased presence is either achieved through major cooperation with international companies, including higher taxes and a higher share of the revenue for the state or state entities managing the whole extraction projects by themselves from the beginning. These projects are mostly justified as necessary for progress and as an opportunity especially for the disadvantaged population since the revenues will be redistributed through social spending (Gudynas, 2010, p. 8). Put in this light, it is no surprise that Correa already in 2007, even before the new constitution was approved, said in a radio transmission: "Ecologists are extortionists. It is not the communities that are protesting, just a small group of terrorists. People from the Amazon support us. Romantic environmentalists and those infantile leftists are those who want to destabilize the government."[7]

Rickard Lalander and Maija Merimaa find clear words for this mismatch between discourse and reality:

> *The reliance on extractive activities has characterized Ecuador's economic development policies also after the establishment of the progressive constitution. […] The promises of safeguarding nature and indigenous territories have consequently clashed with extractive economic policies.*

In sum, most authors are critical of two aspects: first, the economic patterns did not change under Correa's leadership. The output in mining, for example, did not decline but actually increased in the country (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014, p. 472); and the energy production sector still depends up to 88% on petroleum (Ponce-Jara, Castro, Pelaez-Samaniego, Espinoza-Abad, & Ruiz, 2018). Second, the state's answer to people opposing extractivist projects is still the same, e.g., repression, exclusion, and violence (Bebbington, 2010).

There is also a (maybe too simplistic) explanation at hand, namely the so-called natural resource curse and the subsequent dependency of the national economy. The natural resource

[6] "MAAP #114: OIL DRILLING PUSHES DEEPER INTO YASUNI NATIONAL PARK". Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project. https://maaproject.org/2019/yasuni__itt/, Last visit: 06-28-2021.
[7] Speech transcribed and available on: https://redamazon.wordpress.com/2007/12/05/ecuadorian-president-call-ecologists-terrorists/. Last visit: 06-26-2021.

curse alludes to the fact that "abundant marketable natural resources have often been associated with low levels of economic growth for the countries that possessed them" (Cori & Monni, 2015). Nevertheless, these countries blessed – or cursed – with natural resources often depend completely on the extraction of those resources to finance state expenditure since no other economic sector has developed sufficiently. Bebbington (2010, p. 6) suspects that this dependency had a major influence on Correa's change of opinion. He tells of a cabinet member who was shocked about how dependent the national economy was on oil revenues. He did not see any solution to maintain social spending while reducing extractive activities.

In any case it is no surprise, considering the list above, that any extractivist model – be it neo or not – is not compatible with the postulates of *Buen Vivir*. Therefore, Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano (2017, p. 1) conclude that the inclusion of the concept in the Ecuadorian constitution was "more rhetorical than operative."

Another aspect seldomly taken up in the pertinent literature is the difficulty of changing regional power structures. The government of Ecuador is by no means limited to the national assembly writing a highly progressive constitution in 2008 but entails all the other levels of governance. And even if the national government initiates profound changes, they may not change the regional and local power structures and attitudes of state authorities, as the analysis of the hydroelectric powerplant in the Dulcepamba River and the legal and administrative fights around it will show further on.

The Dulcepamba River Valley: Local Context[8]

Ecuador is the most densely populated country on the continent,[9] with more than 14 million inhabitants.[10] Nowadays, over 60 percent live in urban areas.[11] There are two big cities – Quito in the Andes, and Guayaquil on the coast. The two cities are in an ongoing ideological dispute since independence, the former being the political and the latter the (unofficial) economic capital of the country.[12] Currently, Quito is linked to Ecuador's Andean *campesina/o* identity, while Guayaquil is linked to the export-oriented agricultural elite.

[8] The information in this chapter stems in most parts from my fieldwork, personal conversations hold between the 01-23-2020 and the 02-15-2020 in Chillanes and San Pablo and some official documents provided by the Dulcepamba River Project.
[9] "Mapa Comparativo de Países > Densidad de población – Sudamérica". https://www.indexmundi.com/map/?v=21000&r=sa&l=es. Last visit: 07-02-2021.
[10] "Ecuador en cifras: Resultados". https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/resultados/. Last visit: 06-30-2020.
[11] "Ecuador". Encyclopædia Britannica Online. https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Ecuador/106215#129494.toc. Last visit: 06-29-2020.
[12] Ibidem.

The Dulcepamba River valley, located in the southwest of Ecuador, approximately 50 kilometres away from Guayaquil, represents a space in between the Andean highlands and the subtropical foothill region which extends to the coastal plains. The valley is steep: on the ride from Chillanes to San Pablo, one experiences a close to 2000-meter altitude drop and a fundamental change in climatic conditions in just one and a half hours. There are close to 140 villages spread throughout the whole valley (Moran, 2019) with a total of approximately 14,000 inhabitants.[13] The valley formally pertains to Ecuador's Bolivar Province and on a smaller administrative level partly to the *Cantón* of Chillanes and partly to the *Cantón* of San Miguel.

The region lies within two major biodiversity hotspots, called the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena and the Tropical Andean Hotspot (see map from Quintana, Girardello, & Balslev, 2019). The region has the nickname 'granary of Ecuador', because the ideal climatic conditions allow for a large agricultural variety. Activities range from animal husbandry, mainly cows and chickens, to cultivation of banana, cacao, coffee, papaya, and mango in the lower elevations. In the higher regions, farmers grow potatoes, berries, tomatoes, tree tomatoes, beans, and corn.[14] Because of the lack of flat territory, there is no big scale, homogenous, plantation-like agricultural production as there is in coastal areas. The most important activity of the local population is therefore small-scale agriculture, for subsistence and for sale in local and regional markets. Cash-crops can be found to a smaller extent, especially cacao is grown mainly for international export.

Nevertheless, small holdings were not always the predominant land ownership pattern in the region. San Pablo provides a good example for this development: the village was one big hacienda until the middle of the 20th century when debates around land reform took place in the whole country and led to the formal end of the hacienda and plantation complexes in the 1960s (Goodwin, 2017). It was after these reforms that families from the indigenous dominated highlands migrated down to San Pablo.[15]

Even though the land tenure pattern changed, the hacienda period left the village with a legacy of ownership mentality over every piece of land. The villagers therefore do not have any commonly used ground, and all the agriculturally productive parts of the village are divided into small territories. Thus, most people in the village own several pieces of land spread across a range of 20 kilometres. Even the small part of commonly used land where the church, the

[13] According to census sectors within the Dulcepamba watershed geographic area in the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC), 2010 Housing and Population Census.
[14] Information drawn from revision of hundreds of water use authorizations for families and water boards in the Dulcepamba Watershed, provided by the Dulcepamba River Project.
[15] Personal conversation with the wife of the former Hacienda owner, 02-10-2020, Chillanes.

school and the football field are built upon had to be bought in a complicated process from the former Hacienda owner.[16]

Surprisingly, the ownership mentality of land has not been engrained around the use of water in the region. The river was used by the villagers as a common pool resource for subsistence fisheries, sanitary needs, and leisure. There were rules about how to fish, e.g., with different techniques depending on the season and without poison to maintain a healthy fish population. But, at least according to my informants' memories, there was always an abundancy of water and fish and therefore no need to formalize these unofficial rules of usage.[17]

On an official level, as indicated above, all water resources in Ecuador are owned by the state, which in turn grants use permits to individuals at their request. But until recently an overwhelming majority of the farmers in the Dulcepamba River valley did not register their water uses because they did not deem it necessary. Therefore, thousands of watershed residents did not have water use permits up to the day that Hidrotambo got their water use permit which included more water than the watershed drained during 69% of the year (Newmiller, Walker, Fleenor, & Pinter, 2017) .

Despite favourable agricultural conditions, Bolivar Province is one of the poorest areas in the country (Ministerio Coordinador de Desarrollo Social, 2017). This fact manifests itself in insufficient or even inexistent public infrastructure in the region, a problem that will be explained with more detail in the analysis section.

62,5% of all Ecuadorians self-define as *mestiza/o*, e.g., of mixed race with partly indigenous and partly European roots. The second-biggest group is the afro-Ecuadorian population which makes up 21,7% of the population, followed by the 11,4% that consider themselves indigenous. [18] This pattern of self-defined ethnic belonging is no surprise since the denomination 'mestiza/o' was used to assimilate the indigenous population and promote a national, whitened identity in several countries of Latin America after independency (Eiss, 2016). It can be seen as a legacy of these days that still most people feel as *mestiza/o*. This ethnic pattern seems to apply as well for the Dulcepamba River valley, since 90% of the population in the *Cantón* of Chillanes self-identified as *mestiza/o* in the last census.

Regardless of ethnical belonging, people living in the Dulcepamba River valley most strongly identify as *campesina/o*. A *campesina/o* is, in most simple terms, a peasant. But in the Latin American and Ecuadorian context, the denomination is more than that: in addition to its

[16] Personal conversation with the wife of the former Hacienda owner, 02-10-2020, Chillanes.
[17] Personal conversations with several villagers of San Pablo.
[18] "Ecuador." Encyclopædia Britannica Online.
https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Ecuador/106215#129494.toc. Last visit: 06-29-2020.

use in daily life, it is also a politically loaded category of belonging, a watchword for a social movement, or even an ideological stance. Maybe the most important representative of the political term is *La Via Campesina* (the peasant way), an NGO working with peasants in Latin America and the rest of the world. They define, according to Mónica Fernanda Figurelli (2016, p. 14, own translation) the ideal type of a *campesina/o* as:

> *the producer of healthy food, a guardian of biodiversity, linked to a way of life and work that develops in balance with the nature, that is associated with a respectful use of the soil, without grabbing or labour exploitation. A way able to generate sovereignty for the people, decent and autonomous work, able to create equal conditions for the women, able to cool down the planet, to contribute to the health of the population, to offer nutritious food and a good ambience to everyone.*

In contrast to this highly loaded image, Patrick Clark (2018) draws a more pragmatic concept of the peasant sector in Ecuador. He supposes that the concept of *Buen Vivir* and rights granted for nature brought into the constitution within this *campesinista* discourse are rather concepts used within social movements and NGOs, but not in the peasant daily life. He even sees a discrepancy between an essentialist *campesinista* discourse that is also anti-capitalist, and the actual struggles of the *campesina/o* community not longing for an end of capitalism, but rather fighting for better market access and prices for their products.

For the people in the Dulcepamba River, both conceptualizations seem to apply: to be a *campesina/o* means in fact to participate in, and to form part of certain daily life structures like the *campesino* insurance or other organisations alike. In this context, the *campesina/o* identity has a merely organisational aspect. Additionally, people told me they have financial troubles because they cannot sell their products for a reasonable price on the national market. At the same time, the term is a self-reference in many interviews I conducted in the moments when people feel indignation thinking about the lack of access to water they experience.

For example, during the focus group discussion in Margarita I asked why the participants went to Guayaquil to a protest march against Hidrotambo, and a peasant and day-labourer answered:

> *Because Hidrotambo wanted, to put it like this, take all the water and not led the* campesino *to have water like normal, but give him less. […] We* campesinos *live from the animals. We need the water for the animals. How can a company come and forbid us to take the water? (Focus Group Discussion, 02-13-2020, Margarita)*

This very same person asked me for help later to get a credit to extend his land and open a large-scale chicken farm. So, he feels like a *campesino* and rejects the water grab as an affront towards his community, but nevertheless wants to work within a capitalist enterprise.

Despite these blurry definitions and concepts, the villagers of San Pablo decided some years ago in the context of resistance against the hydroelectric powerplant to self-define as a community with ancestral roots. This self-definition provides better legal protection because according to the Art. 57, Paragraph 7 of the constitution, locally affected indigenous communities have a right to be asked for prior, free, and informed consent to the implementation of a development project, but *campesina/o* communities are not clearly included in this law.

The Powerplant

In this section, I want to provide an overview of the history of the powerplant. To help the reader to not get lost within this history that has been lasting for more than a decade now, I provide a list of the most important actors involved (Illustration 1) and a chronologically ordered list of the most important events around the powerplant (Illustration 2).

Claudio (pseudonym)	Darwin's father, farmer, active protester, living in a village on a hill above San Pablo.
Darwin	Cofounder and member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Tailor. From Ecuador, raised in different parts of the country, living in San Pablo for approximately 20 years. Part of the local resistance against Hidrotambo since the beginning.
Emily	Member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Environmental analysist. Rachel's sister. From the U.S., living for approximately seven years in Chillanes and San Pablo.
Gisela	Member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Student. Born and raised in San Pablo.
Hannah S.	Member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Former volunteer of the United States Peace Corps in Ecuador. From the U.S., living for approximately five years in Chillanes, El Tambo, and San Pablo.
Hidrotambo S.A.	Operator of the 'San José del Tambo' run-of-the-river hydroelectric powerplant in the Dulcepamba River, owned by the Cuesta-family.
Javier (pseudonym)	Darwin's son. Student. Living with him in San Pablo for approximately three years.
Manuel	Cofounder and member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Trader and truck driver. From Ecuador, born and raised in different parts of the country, living in San Pablo for 27 years. Nationally known environmental activist, part – or even initiator – of the local resistance against Hidrotambo.
Manuela	Villager, peasant, trader, and landowner, born and raised in San Pablo, part – or even initiator – of the local resistance against Hidrotambo.
Maria (pseudonym)	Villager, born and raised in San Pablo, owner of the biggest shop in the village. Current community president according to her husband.
Dulcepamba River Project	*Proyecto Socio-Ambiental Dulcepamba*, (Socio-Environmental Project of the Dulcepamba River), locally rooted NGO advocating for water rights and providing help for local water management.

Rachel	Cofounder and member of the Dulcepamba River Project. Environmental analysist. Emily's sister. From the U.S., living for approximately ten years in Chillanes and San Pablo.
Vilma	Lawyer representing the applicants for water use in close collaboration with the Dulcepamba River Project. Born and raised in Chillanes. Living in Guaranda.

Illustration 1: list of the most important actors involved in the construction of the powerplant and the Dulcepamba River Project.

2003	Environmental licenses granted by CONELEC (National Ministry of Electricity) to Hidortambo for the Dulcepamba River. water use permits granted by SENAGUA (National Secretariat for Water) to Corporación para la Investigación Energética (CIE) for the Dulcepamba River.
2005	Transfer of farer-reaching permits from CIE to Hidrotambo.
2006	Parts of the local community learn about the construction plans due to illicit invasion of their lands. Beginning of mobilization and resistance.
2007-2009	Escalation of conflicts between the state forces (army and police) and the local protesters backed-up by people living in the valley. Conversion of San Pablo in a 'war zone'. Accusation of protesters by the state and the company because of sabotage and violence.
2008-2015	'San José del Tambo' powerplant forms part of Clean Development Mechanism of the UN.
2008	Occupation of mayor's office for 8 months.
2008	Amnesty for the protesters granted by the Constitutional Assembly of Ecuador.
2008	Entry into force of new national constitution.
2009	Cancelation of contract by the national Army Corps of Engineers.
2012	New operation permit granted for Hidrotambo by CONELEC
2012	Documentary about the situation in San Pablo developed by Rachel
2013	Retaking of construction approaching the river from the other side through the village of *Vainillas*, resumption of protests, accusation of terrorism placed against Manuela and Manuel by Hidrotambo and the state.
2014	End of construction. Rejection of demand for protective action placed by local community members. Installation of weather and hydrological stations by Rachel and Manuel as part of Fulbright scholarship.
2015	19 March: first flood in San Pablo after construction of the powerplant, loss of 3 lives and 14 houses.
2015	Institutionalization of local resistance, foundation of Dulcepamba River Project.
2016	Acquittal for Manuela and Manuel by regional court.
2016	Initiation of 'the office' of the Dulcepamba River Project in the town hall of Chillanes.
2019	SENAGUA partly accepts the claim placed by Manuel and other villager against water concessions granted to Hidrotambo. Order for reconstruction of the powerplant. Allowance to operate only during rainy season.

Illustration 2: chronologically ordered list of the most important events around the powerplant.

The 'San José del Tambo' powerplant is a run-of-the-river dam. Rachel, member of the Dulcepamba River Project and environmental analysist, describes in her thesis the functioning of such a dam as following:

> *This type of dam involves a barrier built across the whole river that diverts water to one side, where it flows through a canal and enters a holding tank. Water then flows from the holding tank into tubing that heads downhill, and it reaches the turbines at a high velocity and in high volume. After running through the*

> *turbines, the water is returned to the river in the same quantity as it measured at the diversion point. Between the diversion and the point where water is returned to the river, a small ecological flow will be left in the riverbed. (Conrad, 2013, pp. 66-67)*

The beginnings for this run-of-the-river dam can be traced back to the years 2003 and 2004, when CONELEC (National Ministry of Electricity) granted environmental licenses and operating permits for the Dulcepamba River to Hidrotambo. At around the same time, SENAGUA (National Secretariat for Water) as another state entity provided water use permits for the same river to the dam's original promotor, a company named *Corporación para la Investigación Energética* (CIE), and soon after in 2005, the water title was transferred to Hidrotambo.

The operating permits granted by the Ministry of Electricity to Hidrotambo only allowed the production of energy for personal use, e.g., to operate factories owned by the same investors as Hidrotambo. Later Hidrotambo would change its permits to be able to produce electricity in the Dulcepamba River and sell it to the national grid as part of the national strategy to export its renewable energy production (Redacción la Fuente, 2019).

The majority investors of Hidrotambo S.A. are a group of companies that belong to the Cuesta family, for example *PlastiCaucho S.A.* and *Bienes Raices de La Sierra Puntosierra S.A.* (see Appendix I: extract of the national register of shareholders). The family from Ambato is well-known in Ecuador, since they have made a fortune from a national monopoly production of rubber boots, as well as through many other economic activities.[19] Hidrotambo had by the time also gathered some international investors from Spain and Canada.

As demanded by law, an environmental impact assessment was conducted in 2004 by Hidrotambo. While I could not access the original environmental impact assessment, I was able to access the update written eight years later by *Yawe Cía. Ltda.*, a small consultancy based in Quito, specialized in environmental impact studies.[20] The assessment and its update have some major inconsistencies and inaccuracies that will be elaborated with more detail below.

The planification process had some major incongruencies in other areas, too. Most significantly, the state entities granted the water concessions without respecting the hierarchy of water users established in the law and without the socialization, prior informed consultation or consent of the local community demanded by the national constitution (see Art. 57,

[19] "José Cuesta, un legado de trabajo y solidaridad". La Hora. https://lahora.com.ec/noticia/1102126001/jose-cuesta-un-legado-de-trabajo-y-solidaridad. Last visit: 06-27-2021.
[20] "YAWE CONSULTORES CIA LTDA (ECUADOR)". EMIS. https://www.emis.com/php/company-profile/EC/Yawe_Consultores_CIA_Ltda_es_3984764.html, last visit: 06-27-2021.

Paragraph 7; and Art. 398) and by the 2014 water law (see Art. 126). The former notary of the province in charge in Chillanes even assures that he has taken sworn statements of villagers that confirmed to never have received the necessary information about the project in advance.[21] The sworn statements upon review include 45 different affected people and affirm the lack of prior consultation.[22]

Only one villager remembers two information sessions that proceeded the implementation of the project, but they took place in El Tambo and not in San Pablo. Therefore, most of my local informants learned about the construction plans approximately one year later, when workers from Hidrotambo's subcontractor for construction, COANDES, already invaded private property belonging to community members in order to begin topographic studies.

When Manuel – who was president of the village by the time – heard about the project, he decided to call for a meeting with three other villagers. They were all upset about the rude behaviour of the workers from COANDES and decided to confront them the next day. Spreading the word, they mobilized 22 other community members. Confronted with protest, the workers called the police to counter this community mobilization.

The subsequent confrontations between the police and the protesters quickly escalated as the villagers kept on mobilizing people from the whole region. During the most intense times of protest, up to 4000 people from all the villages in the Dulcepamba River valley came to San Pablo to protest. The company did not just call the police, but the military forces as well. Within months, San Pablo was converted to a 'war zone' as several community members call it, with daily confrontations between the villagers and military forces, abundant use of tear gas and rubber bullets, and detentions of protesters. Some even remember the use of live ammunition by the military and the police.

Within this state of heated conflict, the Army Corps of Engineers of Ecuador that forms part of the national military took over the construction of the powerplant during the next three years, and a considerable part of the villagers continued to protest. When the protesters found out that the mayor of Chillanes was involved in the construction of the powerplant, they even occupied the mayor's office in Chillanes during eight months in 2008.[23]

The state and the company framed the protests as political offenses against the state and accused several protesters of sabotage and violence. Since the protesters already had a considerable network in the country that included politicians and NGOs advocating for human

[21] Personal conversation, 01-25-2020, Chillanes.
[22] Declaraciones Juramentadas, 2006. Escrituras Públicas de Declaraciones Juramentadas Conjuntas del 26 de enero 2006, 29 de enero, 2006, 31 de enero 2006, 23 de marzo, 2006. Notario Segundo del cantón Chillanes.
[23] Interview with villagers, 01-24-2020, Chillanes; 02-05-2020, San Pablo.

rights, they went to the Constitutional Assembly in 2008, where they could convince enough parliamentarians to grant them amnesty.[24]

In 2009, the course of events took an unexpected turn: the Army Corps of Engineers detected that Hidrotambo did not have all the necessary permits to continue with construction. They therefore cancelled the contract and backed out of the project. Afterwards, Hidrotambo sued the Army Corps due to their non-compliance with the construction contract and partly won the case.[25]

In any case, the villagers thought that with the retreat of the armed forces the whole project had come to an end. They rejoiced all too soon: in 2012, Hidrotambo signed a new operation permit with CONELEC.

To conceive this new operation permit, the update of the environmental impact assessment was written. Community complaints reveal that this update does not have required risk mitigation plans for flooding and bank collapse, nor does it have a contingency plan in the event of a flood/bank collapse. It neither does analyse the impacts of use of dynamite despite the fact that the company used exorbitant amounts in and around the Dulcepamba River, and its hydrometeorological data is extremely out of date and does not represent the watershed's realities.[26] Two aspects of the study that most strikingly manifest these inaccuracies deserve specific mention:

First, it is admitted that there will be changes in the river basin. But they are classified as non-problematic: "Even if the impact [of the river-channelling and diversion] is high, its effect is very localized (only intake), once the intake area construction is finished, the river will retake his original channel." (YAWE Consultores Cía. Ltda., 2012, p. 142, own translation) Additionally, the so-called environmental flow that leaves enough water in an alternative, free-flowing channel is mentioned in the study as a reason why the aquatic life would not be affected at all by the construction of the dam. Unfortunately, this channel was never built, as my informants and my own fieldwork confirm.

Second, concerning flood risks, the study states that:

> *According to the map of risks, the area where the project of the hydroelectric powerplant San José del Tambo is in construction is susceptible to flooding; […]*

[24] Personal conversation with several villagers and NGO members.
[25] Link to the summary of the case:
http://www.pge.gob.ec/images/documentos/Direcciones2015/asuntosinternacionales/adjuntos/FICHAS_RESUMEN_CASOS_ARBITRAJE_NACIONAL0.pdf.
[26] "Denuncia a la compañía Hidroeléctrica Hidrotambo S.A. por falta de cumplimiento con las normas ambientales y peligro inminente hacia la población ocasionado por su ingeniería en el rio Dulcepamba" placed by Manuel Cornelio Trujillo, president of the community of San Pablo de Amalí to the Ministry of the Environment of Ecuador, 12-15-2015.

> *therefore, there is a possibility of flooding of the structures from the project, especially in the sector of the machines. In any case, during the last years the phenomenon of floods in the area of the project have been minimum. (YAWE Consultores Cía. Ltda., 2012, p. 69, own translation)*

With this, the possibility of floods is somehow foreseen, but denied in the same paragraph since it is classified as a problem of the past.

For re-initiation of the project, the former international investors backed out, and just one new international shareholder joined: a woman registered as 'Magistra Schenk Francesco Maria' from Switzerland. According to the national register of shareholders, she invested over 2,5 million US-dollars in the company (see Appendix I).

In 2013, the workers from Hidrotambo started construction again. This time, to avoid protest, they did not approach the river crossing San Pablo but came from the other side through a village called Vainillas. The villagers of Vainillas did not protest, since they considered the project to be a benefit, and they did not fear flooding related to the dam because Vainillas is not located directly next to the river in the flatter part of the valley, but higher up in the mountains.

Hidrotambo's reactivation again spurred protests in San Pablo. In the aftermath of these protests, Manuel and Manuela were accused once again by the company and the police, this time of organized terrorism. They suffered through judicial processes for years. Here again, their network within national NGOs was of great help for defence and the case moved up to the regional court, where they were acquitted in 2016. While many villagers in San Pablo kept on protesting despite these lawsuits, some did not because they were tired and felt paralyzed due to the legal arbitrariness related to their protest.

In this period, Hidrotambo carried out a major river diversion towards San Pablo, and parts of the village began to erode into the diverted river. Additionally, the quantity of water declined so much that it affected the fish population, a fact that starkly contradicts the predictions made in the environmental impact assessment. Several villagers even remember tons of fish rotting on the river shores as a consequence of the river diversion.[27]

In October of 2014, the construction was mostly finished, but power production still did not begin. Some villagers, including Manuel, presented a demand for protective action in the local court. They feared the loss of their houses and territories because of possible floods due to the river diversion. The judge called them lunatics and rejected their claims altogether.

But all too soon, the villagers tragically were proven right: only five months after finishing construction of the powerplant, during the first rainy season on 19 March 2015, the

[27] Interview 13, 01-29-2020, San Pablo; Interview 6, 01-26-2020; personal conversations.

river eroded, undermined, and flooded San Pablo. The results were three lost lives, the destruction of 14 houses, major damages to the only road accessing the village, and loss of uncountable crop plantations (Benavides Llerena, 2019). The flood is a second demonstration of the inaccuracy of the environmental impact assessment.

Despite all the formal inconsistencies, despite the heated conflict, even despite the disastrous flood, the hydroelectric powerplant remains. However, the possibilities for operation of the powerplant are significantly limited since October of 2019 due to a claim placed by 450 villagers from the Dulcepamba watershed communities. They claimed against the state because of the exorbitant water concession granted to the company.

SENAGUA accepted the claim, and, as a consequence, the Water Secretariat ordered Hidrotambo to reconstruct parts of the powerplant because the intake work construction was rudimentary and put the left bank (where San Pablo is located) at risk of collapse. The rebuilding would need protection works at the river margins for retention of the water masses and protection of adjacent areas in case of heavy rainfalls. Additionally, the operation of the powerplant is now restricted to the months with the highest amounts of water, namely January to June, since there is not enough water during the rest of the year. Finally, the resolution orders Hidrotambo to always maintain 1,46 cubic meters per second of water in the river to allow the decimated aquatic life to recover and continue to survive.

However, Hidrotambo has ignored the water authority's binding resolution: they dried out three kilometres of the river repeatedly every dry season, they have not carried out the required redesign, and they use all of the water in the river for their project during dry season months when they have no water use permit authorized.[28]

Hidrotambo's self-presentation on the internet and within public events starkly contrasts the experiences of local people posing resistance against the powerplant. Meanwhile the representatives of the company do not cooperate or even take notice of the affected community in San Pablo, in other parts of the valley, above all in the bigger town of El Tambo, they pursue a good-neighbour policy. The activities within this policy consist in the distribution of little gifts at regional festivities (see pictures in Appendix II), workshops to plant trees or to manufacture Christmas decoration, and guided visits to the powerplant. All these activities are vividly documented on the company's Facebook page.[29]

[28] Informe Tecnico de Control de Cumplimiento de las Obligaciones Contempladas en las Autorizaciones de Uso y/o Aprovechamiento Productivo del Agua. Sujeto de Control-Hidrotambo S.A., INFORME: ARCA-2021-CN-DRH-DZ5-04-IC-AUAA-001.
[29] "Hidrotambo S.A.". Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/hidrotambo.sa. Last visit: 06-29-2021.

On a national and international level, Hidrotambo fully engages with the discourse around sustainable development and the gospel of eco-efficiency. Their motto is: "clean energy for everyone" and they claim to generate clean energy, progress, labour opportunities, and environmental consciousness in the area.[30]

But most astonishingly, the powerplant qualified as a project matching the requirements of the Clean Development Mechanism of the UN[31] between 2008 and 2015, because it "provide[s] emission reductions that are additional to what would otherwise have occurred" (United Nations, 2021). Considering the events in the Dulcepamba River valley – the flood and the grab, the violence and the repression – this qualification seems like a bad joke.

The Dulcepamba River Project

In this section, I want to introduce the Dulcepamba River Project that I accompanied during my fieldwork, e.g., its history, members, aims, and strategies. A lot of the points briefly touched upon here will be analysed with more detail below.

Way before the Dulcepamba River Project was founded, the local protesters of San Pablo already knew how to mobilize. They had a good network amongst national politicians and NGOs. Therefore, the local protest movement cannot be equalled with the Dulcepamba River Project. Despite their common roots, today they are two different organisational structures. So, how can the project be defined otherwise?

> ***Rachel:*** *This project is a more or less organic effort consisting of different previous efforts that came into being to plan water use and assure the right to water specially for* campesino *families and to contribute to the environmental justice process with information – quantitative and qualitative information alike, technical and academic information – to reach processes that are better anchored in the communities in order to achieve justices, specifically connected to industrial hazards. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

This is the definition the project members use to ask for funding from a variety of NGOs and academic institutions, above all in Ecuador and the United States.

Another approach to understand the project is by its history. Chronologically, the emerging of the Dulcepamba River Project can be placed at the arriving of Rachel in San Pablo in 2012. Part of her exchange semester at the School For International Training in Quito was

[30] "Hidrotambo S.A.". Hidrotambo website. https://hidrotambo.com.ec/. Last visit: 06-27-2021.
[31] "Project 1298 : San José del Tambo Hydroelectric Project". Clean Development Mechanism. https://cdm.unfccc.int/Projects/DB/TUEV-SUED1187627873.55/view. Last visit: 06-27-2021.

an internship, and out of a list, she chose to work with the NGO *Acción Ecológica* during this time. There, she was told to develop a documentary about the situation in San Pablo.

Later, she decided to write her master thesis (Conrad, 2013) about hydroelectric energy and extractivist development in the zone, and in 2014, she received a Fulbright Scholarship to continue her investigation of the powerplant. As part of this research project, she installed weather stations and hydrological stations in the Dulcepamba River together with Manuel to further observe the hydrologic developments in the valley. The installation of the stations did not happen out of purely scientific interest, as Rachel explains:

> *[The villagers] all said: "We are worried about the water," but there was no clarity why exactly. It was like: "Well, we are worried that [Hidrotambo] will take away all the water." But I read the water concession and it was like: "But why they would to the people upstream – I mean, is it possible that they fence all the water sources and tell them that they cannot use the water anymore? Or what will happen?" The people were worried, but there was no information how much [water] there is and how much they need and if there could be a court ruling. […] So, the idea was that information about availability and necessity, demand – in short, about river basin management – can contribute to a court ruling. Because it would have been possible that our results would have shown that there is enough water to operate with the powerplant in summer [dry season] and that [the villagers] should stop menacing the hydroelectric [powerplant] and just say: "Yes, there is enough for you, there is enough for the current population," and that's it. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

And later, she precises:

> *There were the menaces the people talked about. Manuela told me: "I go to SENAGUA and they tell me: 'Don't even bother about the water adjudication because it is all for Hidrotambo'." So, I said: "But do we know how much there is? Do we know if they actually will need to block water users upstream to get the adequate concessions, the adequate waterflow, or not?" So, this was the aim in the beginning: let's see if there is enough water or not, and if there is a real conflict or not. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

So, while Hidrotambo restarted construction and carried out the river diversion in 2014, the first scientifically collected data about amounts of water and water use in the zone came into being. Only when the first big flood happened some months after in March 2015, it became clear how crucial the parallelism of these two developments was. As Emily explained, this was a decisive moment of change:

> *I wasn't part of the project, but I was helping for the application of funding when the first flood happened. […] We always applied by end of February for the next year. And [the flood] happened the 19th of march, just three weeks after we finished the application. And we had to think: this project is an investigation abut needs and availability of water and land use; but how can we ignore what happened three weeks after? How can we help within the parameter and the*

> *capacity that the project had in this moment? Because how can we just ignore that people died, that their houses were washed away? How can we influence something about the investigation about that? Because it wasn't part of the panorama of the project. […] And well, the studies about water availability were and still are like one of the most important proofs of the cause of the damages of the flood. Why? The argument of SENAGUA is: There was a natural, extraordinary event that never could have been planned that it would happen and that there was all the damage but that it wasn't their fault. But with the hydrological model – that is basically a model of water availability – we showed that there was no extraordinary event, there was an event that happens every five or six years or that has a probability of 17% to happen every year. This is a giant probability. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

At the latest in this period, it became evident that the company as well as the local and regional authorities are basing their discourses, decisions, and actions on assertions that are provably wrong. So, the focus that Rachel explained before – to find out if there is a conflict in the first place – became obsolete.

Confronted with this novel situation, the Project expanded its focus, diversified the strategies, and formalized the protest activities. The most decisive step Darwin, Manuel, and Rachel took towards formalization was to join forces with an Ecuadorian NGO called *Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas* and to found a permanent project in 2015. This is the formal beginning of the *Proyecto Socio-Ambiental Dulcepamba* (Socio-Environmental Project of the Dulcepamba River). In the next few years, first Emily, then Hannah S. joined the Project as permanent members: Emily, Hannah S., and Rachel as volunteers, Darwin and Manuel as paid workers. Additionally, Vilma is the lawyer collaborating with the project and representing the water users when it comes to hearings with the regional authorities, and Gisela joined the team recently to work two days a week as a volunteer in the office.

Manuel has been living in San Pablo since the 1990s and, as already mentioned, started the protests against Hidrotambo after experiencing the violent invasion of his territory. During these first years of heated conflict, he always was on the front lines as one of the most exposed protesters and confronted up to 68 court proceedings simultaneously, initiated mainly by policemen and the military forces because of sabotage and aggression. He went to prison several times, the longest for three months because of occupying the mayor's office. After the amnesty in 2008, the accusation of terrorism was the most problematic and difficult experience Manuel had with the legal forces. An arrest warrant forced him to flee and leave his home for several months, and, after that, it took him many years of processes and the help of many lawyers to get acquittal. In connection with these events, he became a widely known environmental activist with a national and international network of other activists, NGOs, scholars, and lawyers.

Darwin has been living in San Pablo since 2000 and has been participating in the protests against Hidrotambo since the very beginning. In contrast to Manuel, he has not been in the front line fighting, but rather made use of his good position for providing important sensitive information to the protesters: Since he was working as a tailor in El Tambo during the first years of protest and construction of the powerplant, the policemen and members of the army always went to his shop to repair their uniforms. While he mended their clothes, he listened carefully to their conversations. He also went to the same restaurants as the local authorities for lunch. While eating, he sat closely to them and collected information about their plans for the next days and weeks. Additionally, he went with his family to visit other places where hydroelectric powerplants were built to learn from first-hand experiences about the advantages and disadvantages of such constructions.

It was through Manuel's connection to *Acción Ecológica* that Rachel joined the scenario and arrived in San Pablo in the first place. As already pointed out, she initiated the project and has been living almost permanently in the area since 2012. She was joined by her sister Emily after the flood in 2015. Hannah S., the third woman from the U.S., arrived in El Tambo in 2017 to work for the United States Peace Corps as a volunteer. She met the people from the project in San Pablo.

The decision to found and join the project is described in a very similar manner by all participants. There is a shared indignation about the situation in San Pablo, coupled with a general sensibility concerning injustice and inequality. In this sense, the project is a joint force to counter the impotence that many villagers felt, as unequal power relations did not allow them to protect their environment. And while the members from the U.S. stress their satisfaction about being useful and support an important cause, the three locals underline the will to help their people and, as Manuel expresses, "defend what was ours, what was our river" (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes). The project therefore is dear to its members' heart and their engagement is extraordinary.

They are also deeply involved in this conflict emotionally and must cope with the exposure their activism comes with. All of them already received threats from the company, statal entities and even other community members. Manuel is again particularly exposed in this sense: he survived three murder attempts, one from police officers and two from other community members acting supposably by order of Hidrotambo. He stressed several times during my visit that he probably will not survive his engagement, for example in a reunion with water association members from another village (02-09-2020, Chillanes) or in a meeting with a lawyer and activist in Quito (01-31-2020, Quito).

Darwin lives with the same awareness that his environmental activism can be life-threatening within this setting. He explains: "They threat that they would kill or beat [us] but, but I am decided to live respectfully, and if Hidrotambo achieves – or is convinced that they have to order to kill some people and I am on this list, I am not afraid in any case," and later in the same interview he says, as a final statement:

> *If I were a little... weak, I may have thought about leaving and I would have left. But one must be strong, because if not, the companies will always do whatever they like everywhere. We are not here [on earth] because of some luxury, because I am so beautiful or anything – no, we really are here to fight, to leave every impact we can on our way, without being petty with our power. We must put all our power to reach... a... a better way to get our rights. If we fail like this, the companies will keep on going and going. They must know that we are people determined in enforcing our rights and put our hands where they have to be, so that all our rights will be fulfilled as long as we live. Yes, this is it in the end. I am not afraid – I am not afraid of discrimination, of death, it would be even an honour to die fighting. I don't plan to die like a coward on my knees in front of a hydroelectric [powerplant]. (Interview 25, 02-12-2020, San Pablo)*

For Emily, Hannah S., and Rachel the threat situation is somehow more complex since they are foreign women. So, apart from threats connected to their environmental activism, they experience countless episodes of inappropriate advances or even molestations, a problem I experienced several times during my fieldwork, too. Nevertheless, especially Rachel received threats connected to her role in the project, and she even was followed for longer episodes by people paid from Hidrotambo. Within the significant change of the conflict induced by the Dulcepamba River Project, the company spreads gossip concerning the project members, reaching from fake news to personal accusations and threats.

I learned through my own personal experience how fast a foreigner in the area gets connected to the Dulcepamba River Project. Several times, people asked me about the advances of the water irrigation system or their application for water concessions without having ever seen me before. The interest I attracted was positive and friendly, I did not experience any threats personally. Nevertheless, Darwin's son talked about a friend of his that supposedly heard of some person related with Hidrotambo saying that they are searching for 'the new girl', referring to me. Even though it is not in the scope of this thesis to further investigate this gossip, it is of interest to see how fast the menacing side of this conflict becomes apparent.

Even Gisela already received menaces from other community members:

> *I remember once we went to San Pablo, and I brought [Rachel's] laptop from Darwin's house. So, [some villagers] caught me on my way. I was all alone. […] They told me that I said that there was an anti-mining reunion in my sister's house. That I have said that. And I never said that. […] But they said that I told*

> *them about, and I felt bad. Luckily, my brother just passed with the motorcycle, and he said: "Let's go because you don't have anything to do around here," I was [very relieved]. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

The episode shows again how fast volunteers associated with the Dulcepamba River Project get threatened from all kinds of actors, including within the community, even if the engagement in Gisela's case takes place mainly in the office in Chillanes and not even in the community itself.

Another important aspect of Gisela's experience is how the project is considered to be connected to the anti-mining fight. To engage with an environmental justice discourse and network that does in fact include anti-mining movements is not only part of the strategies of the project itself but influences as well where the project is placed within the imaginary and opinions of the company, the local community, and other national actors.

In the following, I will outline the most important strategies of the project. An in-depth analysis of these aspects through the hermeneutic lens of scales will be provided in the analysis section of this thesis.

As already mentioned, the initial form of activism – even the very reason for the Dulcepamba River Project's existence – is academic activism in form of data gathering and analysis. A next step is the communication of these analyses with human rights groups and other NGOs able to enforce pressure on state authorities. So, the studies developed with data provided by the Dulcepamba River Project have been included in charges against Hidrotambo and several state institutions. And even if the project members mostly are not the official plaintiffs, they provide information and incentives to nationally active human rights NGOs and the national people's defender, leading to legal activism.

Another strand of legal activism of the project is the support of the people living in the Dulcepamba River valley to secure their water rights through formalization of their water use. Prior to the conflict with Hidrotambo, almost nobody in the Dulcepamba River valley bothered to formalize water use. It just was not deemed necessary. This is understandable, since the nearest SENAGUA office is in Guaranda, and for some regions of the valley it takes a whole day to get there. Therefore, SENAGUA just 'assumed' that nobody else uses the water of the Dulcepamba River and granted most of the water resources to Hidrotambo. After these rights were granted to Hidrotambo, representatives of and other people related to the company started to impede the water use of the local farmers. When the now members of the Dulcepamba River Project heard about the situation, they not only mobilized the people living in the valley to go to SENAGUA and formalize their water rights, but also rented an office in Chillanes to attend to people from the valley who wanted to get an official permit for their water use. Since people

from the valley regularly come to Chillanes on market days, this office provides a much easier way for them to formalize their water rights.

A third strand of activities is the funding, planification, and construction of local infrastructure, the aspect most closely connected to charity. The project members in this context mostly figure as organizers or brokers between international NGOs like the Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and neighbourhoods that want to install a water supply system.

The different activities within the project seem to be dispersed. Nevertheless, they find a common ground and a logical connection in the aim of the Dulcepamba River Project. So, the most accurate definition of the project lies in its aim, as Emily precises:

> *I think that it is in the goal where all our efforts come together. We found different forms to get to the same goal. I think, according to our experience - we did not start having this aspect very clear, but specially according to our experience – we found that we must have different 'approaches' [in English] and different strategies together and like – that every part supports the other parts to get to our aim. So, we started with the studies about availability and water needs, about land use, rather to prove or demonstrate how much water exists and how much water the people need since they have the priority. And based on these scientific studies we can demand the fulfilment of the law. But we learned on the way that the studies, the data, the facts are very good, but we have to accompany these studies with political efforts, legal efforts, administrative efforts, mediatic efforts, academic efforts, efforts of national and international pressure […], and the like. So, maybe it seems like our activities are everywhere, but everything together helps us to reach the goal, the aim that we defined to assure the rights for the people in this zone. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

Put in this way, the stringency and logic behind the disperse efforts becomes clear. In another interview, Darwin explains:

> *So, we remain, the ones that are more – more convinced that we have to fight until we can. And eventually the moment will come where we will say: "Now we are tired too, we did enough to – we won sufficiently, we achieved that they repair the damages," and once they repair all the damages and guarantee our – the right to live, the right for* Buen Vivir*, for tranquillity there won't be any reason to say: "I stay in this fight." There just will be provided an example that one shouldn't intrude a community without authorisation and without previous consultation of the villagers of the area. […] There must be an example. I will be here until an example is provided... (Interview 25, 02-12-2020, San Pablo)*

The aim of the Dulcepamba River Project is in short to achieve the adherence to national law. After achieving this aim, most project members do not think of keeping on protesting. The bittersweet truth behind these statements is nevertheless that it seems a very ambitious, if not unachievable aim, or at least a lifetime task to enforce national law and human rights within the regional and local power structures the people of the Dulcepamba River valley confront.

Data and Methods

Fieldwork

Open, Construct, and Place Myself in the Field

In the context of a seminar about the analysis of mega infrastructure projects through the lens of political ecology, I decided with a friend to investigate water energy in Ecuador. As can be seen in the context section, the country – with its highly progressive constitution and simultaneous continuance in the neo-extractivist model – provides a particularly interesting case for such an endeavour.

I researched the many hydroelectric powerplants constructed in Ecuador over the last decade. Hidrotambo called my attention due to its small size contrasting with the fierce resistance it triggered and the subsequent violent developments in the area, so exaggerated that it has been called "the most violent project in Ecuador" (Conrad, 2013, p. 12, citing an environmental activist). During my research I did not find any academic work published about the case. But I found Rachel's master thesis (Conrad, 2013) and another master thesis (Sardán Muyba, 2015). So, I contacted Rachel, and she told me about her ongoing work in the area with the Dulcepamba River Project. She said that I would be welcome to stay with them for a while.

Approximately two months later I arrived, after a troublesome journey, in the province capital Guaranda. The people from the Dulcepamba River Project knew that I was on my way and Rachel called me: "Hannah, could you please bring some pipe couplings we need for our water irrigation project here?" Of course, I was happy to help.

When I arrived to Chillanes, Hannah S. was in the office. She asked me right away: "A group of people from a human rights NGO is driving right now to San Pablo. Do you want to go with them?" So, two hours later I was on my way to San Pablo. This movement from Chillanes to San Pablo and back indicates emblematically how I stretched my field, that is, if not multisided at least two-sided. In San Pablo, I joined the *minga*, the traditional communitarian work very common in the Andean area. This *minga* consisted of some villagers and Rachel and Emily. They wanted to finish the water supply system they started to construct earlier this month with the NGO 'Engineers Without Borders'. Then, I joined the human rights NGO that conducted interviews with villagers affected by the latest river diversion done by Hidrotambo. In this night, as every time when I stayed in San Pablo, I slept in Darwin's house, located right at the bus stop, equipped even with a covered entrance and a bench for the people waiting for the bus. In Chillanes, I stayed at the office since there is a spare room there.

In the next ten days of my fieldwork, I accompanied the members of the Dulcepamba River Project in San Pablo and Chillanes. I helped to conduct a survey in the village of Margarita, I attended to people in the office in Chillanes, and I joined other communitarian activities, e.g., the town fair of San Jose. In San Pablo, I spent the daily life with Darwin, Emily, Rachel, and Hannah S., had some chats with the neighbours, got familiar with some aspects of normal life in the area, and went to the river to take a bath.

After this initial familiarization, I started to work with a clearer focus and collected data for this thesis during the next twenty days I stayed in the field. The field was in San Pablo and Chillanes, including the village and the office, and the space in between, namely the dirty roads I passed, mostly as a passenger on a motorcycle. I was present at two on-site visits in San Pablo with several state authorities. I spent two days attending the hearings where water users defended their water application against the opposition of Hidrotambo. Finally, I linked my field with other areas and other people, mostly with NGOs in Quito and in Guaranda.

As part of action anthropology, I was able to contribute with my findings to the development of the charge against Hidrotambo and several state authorities placed in the constitutional court by human rights NGOs in collaboration with the Dulcepamba River Project. I handed in an *Amicus Curiae* – an expert's assessments about a certain aspect of a pending case – depicting the most important socio-environmental impacts in the area. The analysis of the impacts in the 'justice' section is in parts a summary and densification of this document.

I had to learn already in the first days of my stay: people know who to talk to and whom to avoid, who is 'on their side' or 'on the other'. After ten years of ongoing conflict, the village of San Pablo is deeply divided, and it is just impossible to stay neutral in this setting, even for a stranger like me. Therefore, being involved with the people from the Dulcepamba River Project, I quickly became interconnected, but also pigeonholed in the field.

Javier Auyero and Débora Swistun (2008) show in their impressive ethnography about a contaminated neighbourhood in Buenos Aires how difficult it is to live in a place that is constantly in the media because of its environmental hazards. How confusing it is for the local community to be confronted constantly with different people – representatives of the company, state authorities, NGO members, journalists, lawyers etc. – telling them different things about the world around them and the wider institutional context they rely on for their resistance. Frequently during my fieldtrip, I remembered this description and I felt like another troublemaker in this already confusing setting.

Of course, the people engaged with the resistance against the powerplant, above all the members of the Dulcepamba River Project, are glad about the interest around the events in the

Dulcepamba River valley that they perceive as unjust. Manuel told me at the end of the interview:

> *I would like to thank you. If you need something then you just ask me or Raquelita or anybody else of the projects, we are able to help you, at least in this aspect [concerning the powerplant], because we know that you will spread [the information]. Because sometimes we don't spread and we stay here, and this harms us, too, because if we spread [the information], the state will say: "Ah, do you see, over there they know about the situation here, too." So, the dissemination is good for us, too. But I will ask you surely, once that you wrote your thesis, that you send me a copy. (Interview 1, 01-24-2020, Chillanes)*

So, for Manuel it is important to engage with other people interested in the situation because this may help to achieve the change so urgently needed.

With the other people willing to lend me some of their time and thoughts, I tried to be as clear as possible when they posed me questions about the water law, their water adjudications, the court proceedings, the possible compensations etc. During the focus group discussion in Margarita, for example, a villager asked me: "Do you believe that with this resolution [placed at the constitutional court in Quito] there could be a decision that Hidrotambo cannot bother us anymore, the *campesinos*, and they let us live a life in peace with the water?" And I answered in the most honest way I could:

> *I believe that.... Okay, what I understand - and I don't understand very much – but the little I understand is that the Ecuadorian constitution has laws that favourite the* campesinos*, actually, on the paper. So, what should happen, if the judges in Quito are conscious and do their work how it should be, to me it seems that there should be... a solution. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-13-2020, Margarita)*

Nevertheless, I was another troublemaker, another stranger, another foreigner to them that wants to talk about what happened in San Pablo and the Dulcepamba River valley. Consequently, they assumed that I was another engineer. More than once, people called me 'ingeniera' or even 'doctora', supposing a university degree that I never claimed to have. This common assumption about my formal education and my knowledge about the case shows again how deep the post-colonial power structures are inscribed in the Ecuadorian society. And within these power structures, to be white means to be competent.

Data Gathering

I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with current and former villagers of San Pablo, but as well with people living in other villages upstream. After agreeing to give an interview for my thesis, a book chapter, and the amicus curiae, 19 interviewees allowed me to record the interview. In 6 cases I took notes while conducting the interview since recording was not wanted

(see Appendix III: guiding questionnaire; and Appendix IV: list of interviews including basic information about the interviewees). I stayed in the office and conducted short surveys with the clients. I talked with an engineer of SENAGUA, the president of the San Jose *Parroquia*, and the former mayor of Chillanes. I conducted interviews with three of the Dulcepamba River Project members, namely with Darwin, Manuel, and Vilma. I conducted three focus group discussions: one with five members of the Dulcepamba River Project, namely Emily, Gisela, Hannah S., Rachel, and Manuel. One with six members of the community of Margarita against whose water use application Hidrotambo appealed. And one with six members of the water user association of Sixsipamba, another village located upstream of the valley.

Despite several efforts (two e-mails, two phone calls to the company's headquarter, one communication via WhatsApp with the former representative of Hidrotambo responsible for socialization), no representative of the company agreed to talk to me. Therefore, it will be just partially possible to engage with the company's perspective in this thesis. Nevertheless, the company is quite present and communicative in other contexts. So, I can bring in their position and discourse through speeches, court interventions, videos, and social media.

Most people I met and talked to will not appear by name here in this thesis. People representing an authority or the company will be named by their function. The people involved that I mention by name to augment readability of this document form part of the list of actors provided in the beginning of the context-section (see Illustration 1).

In sum, the data I analyse and use as a base for interpretation consisted primarily of my 93 pages long field diary, 25 interviews, and 3 focus group discussions. I wrote my field diary in English; all the other data is in Spanish. Additionally, I used several official or unofficial documents, the recordings of speeches, newspaper articles, documentations, videos, webpages etc. to complete my analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Coding

Coding is understood here as "an euphemism for the sorting and labelling which is part of the process of analysis" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 34). Following the technique proposed by Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw (2011), I analysed my data through two stages of coding: first, I conducted an open coding step with all the material to provide ideas, recognize themes of particular interest, and develop and refine my focus. In a second step of focussed coding, I subjected my field diary and interview material to another round of close reading and hearing. Selected parts of my data then were analysed through fine-grained, line-by-line

focussed coding. Within a dialectical interplay of the data and the theoretical background outlined above, the construction of this protest movement as a singular case is conceptualized, interpreted, and put in dialog with the pertinent literature.

The tool I used for consistent and clear coding is MAXQDA, a software for qualitative data analysis. Since this software allows the exact coding of audio material, transcription of all audio data was not necessary for the first step. For the second step, all sections of audio material crucial for analysis and interpretation were transcribed. I transcribed directly from spoken Spanish to written English. Therefore, some formulations and word orders may not perfectly follow the English grammar rules, but they are a good approximation to the tone and way of speaking in the interviews.

I used the following abbreviations in the transcriptions:

–	Hesitate, repetition
…	Pause
@	Laughter
[…]	Omitting of text passage

Scales as a Heuristic Tool

Scales are, as already indicated, a process, a constructed level of analysis, and an abstract entity of social order. “Scale is produced by combining space, time, and power into different forms, functions, measures, symbols, and sensibilities, and is used to articulate relations, controls, and representations of social and biophysical landscapes” (Rangan & Kull, 2009, p. 36). Scales are often structured in daily life according to their scope, the local, the regional, the national, and finally, what is considered as global. Nevertheless, scales do not represent analytical containers with a hierarchy between macro- and microprocesses, neither concerning power nor importance, since these scales all intertwine and influence each other. Most actors are not tied to one scale but move up and down in the scope of their acts and discourses. This jumping of scales (Smith, 2008) does in change alter power structures: the more different scales an individual or movement can handle, the more powerful it becomes.

Since scales are nothing material or natural, but always constructed, the scales we consider as a given are already an outcome of previous social processes, and the socio-spatial dynamics around us again will lead to reconfigured scales. Eric Swyngedouw (2004, p. 33) describes the consequences of rescaling as following:

> *These socio-spatial processes change the importance and role of certain geographical scales, reassert the importance of others and on occasion create*

> *entirely new scales. These scale redefinitions in turn alter the geometry of social power by strengthening the power and the control of some while disempowering others.*

A social alteration of such magnitude is no decent, easy process; it is, on the contrary, where and how conflicts over control and empowerment are fought out. Swyngedouw (2004) names the contested making and remaking of the European Union as an emblematic example for the struggles over scales, pointing out that these scalar struggles include not only the control over the abstract scale, but as well the control over a concrete place and its material components.

Put in this light, it is only logical that capitalism is above all an enterprise of continuously altering scales through pushing forward the commodity frontier. In other words, if a natural resource like water was formerly used as common pool resource by the people living nearby and then gets grabbed by an international company, the local scale of water management becomes reshaped through the expansion of capitalist commodification. This common cross-scale linkage (Rangan & Kull, 2009) – profound local change happening under the influence of globalized actors, discourses, or institutions based on a national or international scale – is a particular jump of scale called 'glocalisation' (Swyngedouw, 2004).

While scales are a widely used concept in political ecology, also to explain cases of water grabbing or water justice (see, for example, Franco et al., 2013; Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015), the use of scales as a heuristic tool rather than a theoretical approach is not the main concern of this literature (Rangan & Kull, 2009, p. 28). "What the arguments about scale in political ecology do not question is *how* scale plays a role in *making* ecological change 'political'" comment Haripriya Rangan and Christian A. Kull (2009, pp. 28-29, emphasis in the original). They argue that scale is produced by three moments of action: operation, observation, and interpretation. By collapsing these three moments in the analysis, according to the authors, scales become an apolitical order or range of spatial levels. Therefore, the challenge of political ecology is to develop a framework that shows the political dimension of scale-production.

They then propose an analytical framework that consists in the separate analysis of the production of these three scales.

The production of the operational scale is the most intuitive one, namely the combination of time, space, and power to shape social activity. The observational scale then is produced through measurement and control of such activity, e.g., through the election of problems, target groups, focus, scope etc. of research made by governments, policy makers and scientists alike. The decision how to observe or analyse what kind of ecological change or conflict decisively change the outcome of the observation.

These outcomes then are the first step to produce the interpretative scale. In a second step, these supposably rational, objective outcomes become connected on a discursive level with trust, familiarity and feelings of belonging, so that they convert in widely accepted 'truths'. Rangan and Kull (2009, p. 40) conclude: "Interpretive scale is, therefore, distinct from operational and observational scale in that it is produced as a normative hierarchy or ordered range of values that serve as the context and means by which 'truth-making' occurs in scientific and policy discourse."

To provide a short, schematic example, the production of these scales within a development project could be described like this: the production of the local, operational scale is the construction of infrastructure or the drilling for natural resources; and the reconstruction of institutional settings. The observational scale comes into being when the advantages and disadvantages of the project are analysed – mostly by regional or national authorities and the internationally operating companies and organisations – from a certain angle within a certain discourse and based on a certain kind of knowledge. These supposably objective, rational findings are transformed to fit within the interpretative, globalized, already well-established scale of the development discourse. By analysing the three scales separately, a complex intertwining of prevailing discourses, new findings and the change of the immediate environment becomes apparent. This intertwining is highly political, especially since certain processes are politically debated on some scales and depoliticised on others.

In this thesis, scales serve as a heuristic tool to better understand and order the conflict that evolved in the Dulcepamba River valley, since its main aspects – the development discourse, the claims for justice, and the need for infrastructure – are phenomena that can be understood better through a notion of scale. As well to up- and downscale and to replace the gap left by authorities in the regional scale are appropriate ways to describe the main strategies of resistance invoked by the Dulcepamba River Project. Therefore, scales are a particularly useful analytical entrance to make sense as well of the resistance against this hydroelectric powerplant.

With scales as a heuristic tool and analytical background, I start my analysis on a local level, to show how the community – fuelled by the company and the regional state entities as the dominant actors – was pressed into a dilemma of 'development' vs. 'justice'. I then show in a next step how the conflict was upscaled by the protest movement; how this upscaling brought to light the institutional gaps on a regional scale and how through a newly constructed constitutionality these gaps were filled by the locally rooted NGO; and how this intervention changed local power structures.

Analysis and Interpretation

When I arrived at San Pablo in January 2020, Hidrotambo was diverting the river again: to protect their machine house located approximately three kilometres downstream of the centre of San Pablo, workers were moving stones and sand towards the machine house, sending the river closer to the road and houses of San Pablo, augmenting the risk of flooding for the zone. Therefore, the villagers that saw their houses and fields most urgently put at risk alerted the Dulcepamba River Project to interfere against this new episode of physical 'fait accomplis'. Since it was clear that the relocation happened again without state permission – most probably even without the necessary studies concerning the possible impact of this relocation – we went periodically to take pictures and videos to document the unlawful act.

Since Emily, Darwin, and Manuel form part of the regional people's defender committee, they coordinated a visit by the regional people's defender, one SENAGUA authority, one representative from SNGRE (National Service of Risk and Emergency Management) and one from the mayor's office. The aim was to document the events officially and to increase pressure on the company and the state entities in charge to adhere to national law. The people's defender announced his visit only two days before, and I personally went to the mayor's office to leave an invitation. Hidrotambo knew about the visit, too, even though it is not clear from which source.

I want to start my analysis with the thick description of the day of this visit, one of my last days in the field.

Day 28[32]

I stood up with the alarm I set to catch the bus. I packed my things, I hurried up. Rachel was talking to Manuela, they were upset. Manuela told Rachel that she was discussing the whole morning with some villagers because they wanted to hit Rachel, 'mandar a las gringas afuera' [sent the 'gringas' away] and they were saying stupid stuff, that the gringas are getting rich with the people from San Pablo, without donating a cent etc. Rachel was upset. She was sitting on the couch, saying: "I should have taken just a normal job at an office, as a secretary doing copy work." Then, she and Darwin left, and I needed to leave anyways. I went downstairs to the front of the house/bus stop.

[I went to conduct an interview with someone living in a community upstream. Therefore, I missed the first part of the on-site visit of the authorities in San Pablo. After the interview I took the next bus to go back to San Pablo, it was around 2 pm.]

We came across the school with the bus and there was a bunch of people. I understood that they are having a reunion, I saw the people's defender and other state authorities on a little, improvised stage in the entrance of the public school. So, I decided to go there. But I was very insecure about my presence as another foreigner there, I did not want to make things worse, who knows what happened earlier this day. So, I stayed in the last row. I saw a lot of people I conducted interviews with the days before…

I understood only half of what people were saying on stage.

Later, I understood the situation: After the on-site visit where the new river diversion takes place, approximately three kilometres downstream of the main square of San Pablo, the state representatives and the people mobilized by Hidrotambo and the Dulcepamba River Project had an improvised reunion to dialogue about the current situation in the village. Emily sent me some audio recordings she made of the most important parts of the speeches.

Maria made one of the first interventions. She said:

And we were united here with the people from San Pablo. I even gave the piece of land that I had [to rebuild a bridge taken by the river earlier this year]. I do not have a lot; I do not have fincas*; I do not have* haciendas*. But I gave the little piece of land to construct. It does not bring anything to me, it does not bring anything to you [unknown addressee], it does not bring anything to this lady over there alone, but to all the people that use [the bridge] because it is a public bridge.*
That is what I tell you, we do not want people here that come to divide us, people from other countries. Please, I would not like you to hurt us, please, we want to be united. We are united here in the community, Sir [to the people's defender]. What we want is peace, peace, and peace here in our community. We do not want division. Because there are some people that are only looking for something to put in their pocket.

[32] In order to facilitate the reader with references in the analysis, I provide this section of thick description with line numbers.

The misters from Hidrotambo offered us to bring obras,[33] *they offered us to fix the road, they offered us so many things, and why this could not be? Because the foreign people oppose and are in judicial proceedings and look for money for themselves. They never convene us, they never convene a reunion with us, they never convene us, they are only among themselves. We are not taken into account within the community. It is more than ten years now that [the foreigners] are living here... If you could do me the favour to ask me what* obra *we have here in the community from the foreign ladies? We do not have any* obra *from them.*
That is what we want: to live in peace and that they led us live in peace. The misters from Hidrotambo cannot give us any collaboration, no obras, *because the trials concerning this problem are still going on. You can see: the machines are working [downstream], they are protecting the houses that are the closest to the river. Here we are – there are no machines. Everything that is done is the wall, I do not know if you can see the wall that we have, the wall that is made. We are protected, nobody from San Pablo is affected, we have not been affected by the misters of Hidrotambo. That is why I am saying that you [to the people's defender] do us a favour and get aware how many people are living together with us, and what quantity the foreign misters have. San Pablo is united. We have been working, in* mingas *we have been working.*

The people's defender responded right away to this intervention:

Who among you did or does not have some relatives outside of the country that were humiliated and treated badly? Would you like that this relative, this friend would have been treated badly or discriminated because of the simple fact that he was not born in this country? The situation here must be a situation where we treat us with respect, true? This is what the human rights are for. I will ask you to listen as well to the lady [referring to Rachel]. She asked me for the permission to talk. We should listen to her. I believe that probably this kind of dialogue did not take place here. And I believe that it is maybe time now - time to find a solution, as you say, and that this - this possible division disappears. But you know what is necessary to solve problems? Confront the problems. The important thing is to not say: "There are no problems here," no. There are problems everywhere. The important thing is to confront the problems. If we confront the problem, then we have the possibility and capacity to understand the problem and solve it. We are human beings, and human beings differ from animals because we think and reason. So, with all due respect I ask you to listen to the lady [referring to Rachel].

Rachel said in her intervention:

Thank you. A very warm greeting to everyone. Thank you to take a moment of silence to listen, this is part of the basic respect towards another human being. I do not know the majority of you, I do not know where you come from, but here you are. And we – the few in this reunion that live in San Pablo de Amalí, they know that I and some other people were working as volunteers in the planning of water use during the last six years. Mostly we work with the communities upstream from here.

[33] The term *obra* roughly translates as 'infrastructure work' in this context. I leave the term here in its Spanish equivalent because it is of specific importance for the analysis.

I think that sometimes it is difficult because there are a lot of stereotypes about foreigners. There is this idea: "A foreigner comes, he has to give us a bag full of money." That is the idea. But I tell you, even maybe you do not understand until you get to know my country, that I am a volunteer, I get out of university with debts and came to give a grain of sand on request of the people that want justice in their village and in other villages upstream from here, too.
And hopefully you can start reflecting and thinking why you are here, and what – what aim you have, because our aim is always to help that there is a responsible planification of water use, to help with what we can, that is why I have been working as a volunteer for seven years now, this is not very normal. But I believe in the wellbeing of the countryside, and I believe if we are on this earth for something we are born to help. Therefore, to the people that have shared words of xenophobia, of racism today: I invite you to reflect, I invite you to think how you would feel if you went to another country and they would do the same to you. Maybe you won't think about it now because you are with so much energy from people with ugly words, but maybe you get home and think about how to treat every human being. And I think you will have a good reflection.
And for me – and for me this is nothing positive. I know that there are a lot of influences behind the xenophobia, but I invite you to have your own personality and think for yourselves. Be respectful, understand by your own what is happening, not only follow. I think that this place is a paradise, San Pablo de Amalí is beautiful and there are very good people. I wish all the best for San Pablo de Amalí.

The next person to talk was Claudio, Darwin's father:

Thank you to give me the opportunity to share some words and my reasoning and a little part of what we have been living today and how we were before. Firstly: it is true that this community is very divided. But I would like to bring to mind to señora Maria, because you said that some years before this community was very united, but that was very much before Raquelita.
[Maria in the background*: We are very united now*]
I am sorry, but could you let me talk? Did I interrupt you when you were talking?
[People's defender*: That is right.*]
This conflict was not born when Raquelita came or any other foreigner. This problem of division was born when the Hidrotambo started. Because some of us started to believe in the offers of third parties, because the misters [from Hidrotambo] did not even offer us anything. I was on the first reunion made with the parish committee and they said: "There is nothing for nobody." […] He said: "There is nothing, we are a poor cooperation." I have a good memory. "We have only the money to finance [the powerplant]" and after that they - the third parties claimed that there would be a lot of obras*. They even came to say that there would be a paved street, a health centre, and much more, and now I ask you: There was something positive? There was nothing. So, was it like this that San Pablo de Amalí, or let's say, for example, Manuel went there and said: "Do not give them the* obras*"? Negative, Señora Maria.*
[Señora Maria: *Because you don't want, you want to keep on taking money.*]
[People's defender: *Listen to him, listen to him, listen to him.*]
Nobody. And here, imagine, that I was a person that with a lot of respect and education – even if I am a campesino *– I liked to listen to our people. I liked to really feel the other person to see if he or she is righteous or false. Because with*

this mentality I came from the [Amazonian region] where there were companies that made their things, but they gave what they had to give. And here was nothing from the start, clearly there was nothing for nobody. So, who still has hopes? We invited them because we had some suggestions, there were like four or five suggestions, but these suggestions never came. Like this, we kept on fighting united against the Hidrotambo that it would not proceed, that it would not be done. But nevertheless, passing over the community, knocking us down with military forces, making us cope with the gasses – there were a lot of gasses, so much that the grandchild of [a villager] almost died.
[Maria: *They had to defend themselves Señor Claudio because what you did was...*]
What could have possibly done this child to them?

Here, the people's defender intervened:

Let's listen to him. Let's be concrete. I tell you with all due respect: The aim is not to open up wounds.
[Maria: *exactly*]
The aim is in our case as defenders of human rights always to protect life, to protect the rights in this case of nature, and that is why we are here. We never will promote the division of the people. Never. We want that we all move forward in the best way.
I will tell you something that I was telling the media, and this is true, this is my perception, and I ask you to respect me even if I am wrong in what I will tell you now. I came here three weeks ago, and I could not walk because my back hurt, and that is why I could not even get out of the car. I just made two steps and got back. But when I arrived and crossed the sector – this is the second time I come here – I tell you with all sincerity that it hurt me that there are places within my province that are completely forgotten, that are backward, and I do not know, I do not want to blame anyone, because sometimes we ourselves are the guilty ones.
[anonymous cry from the public: *the authorities*]
You know when we are guilty? When we do not empower ourselves with our rights and when we do not use the possibility to claim and when we become conformist and when they come and content us with little things. So, I said in the media: "I went to San Pablo de Amalí" – and I repeat this here – "I went to San Pablo de Amalí and the road is torn apart. I hope that some authority in the sector will arrive and improve the road." That is what I said. "In any case, there is a big company there. But I must be unaware in this part," I said, "but I do not know if they do not socialize because generally, within all the communities where the big companies are, it is said that they bring development. Maybe there are some contributions, but we are unaware of these facts." Therefore, maybe it is necessary that the communication does not break within the community and the people; and even worse if the division is promoted.

Now, a representative of Hidrotambo responsible for socialization had the word:

And this is exactly the reunion we were talking about this afternoon. We have Vainillas here, thank you. We have la Colombia as well that is joining us, San

José del Tambo, San Gabriel Bajo and San Pablo de Amalí.[34] *That is the reunion we were talking about. Maybe the people have the wrong perception that if it is about a company, there would be bags full of money, there would be a lot of money, but it is not like this. You know better than anyone else the problems that Hidrotambo had to get through in these times, but we were there with the community. Vainillas, I have the people here that were with us, any grain of sand…*

[somebody screaming from the public: *We are not in Vainillas, but in San Pablo*]

We gave to San Pablo, too, we have made this with la Colombia within our possibilities. Because this is how we work, we like to help the people this way. Maybe there is a lack of obras *that must be done, that is true, but you have to understand, please, that this only can be done in mutual work with the governments. Hidrotambo alone cannot do this. We are a producer of clean energy; we work with all the permits, and we do it in the best way. We do not have anything to hide, that is why a lot of you have been in the project. How much of you have visited us? How much of you have been there? Thank you for keeping us company.*

[Applause. Somebody screaming: *Que viva Hidrotambo.* Some replying: *Que viva*]

Thank you as well for your questions.

[Somebody screaming: *Clean energy from Hidrotambo.* Applause]

That is what we have done, working step by step. It is true what they say that there is a budget that corresponds to the community, and we have socialized this budget with the pertinent government entities. We have done this that way because we work according to the norms. We do not do the things randomly, we are not improvising, we are doing it good, and we do it for you, for our people. And this should not be socialized with third parties or wrong people, that should be done with the governments that we should work with for your development. And this is how we have done it.

And today in this afternoon I am very thankful for your company because we did not come to confront but to show that the community is united in the cause, and this is to look for the peace of the community and the village and for the obras *and progress that they are denying us because of two or three people.* [applause] *We invite you to listen to our requests, that you listen to those people, they are* campesinos*, I am living a little more than a year here and I use the same roads, I have the same problem, I know how it is to be the whole day up, I know that the only way to get something is united, not divided, and we did not come here with xenophobic acts. A lot of us have had family in the exterior including me, but we did not go to treat badly and divide the people there, this is not the way we work, and this is not our attitude. The only thing we want is that you listen that there is a united community that is claiming peace and that is claiming that all the voices are heard, not only of three people. Hidrotambo is with you, we love you.*

There was a volatile atmosphere in the public, people applauding and screaming. The people's defender was trying to control the dialogue again:

We gave this opportunity, so - so you could as well express what you feel, right? We have as well our clear perception of the things. And this should be

[34] Vainillas is a village located in front of San Pablo, in the hills on the other side of the Dulcepamba River. San Gabriel Bajo is a village downstream from San Pablo, on the other side of the river, too. La Colombia is a village downstream of El Tambo.

understood, as I say, that we always will be alerted about violations that are tried to be done against human rights and the nature. We always will be on alert, and we will always protect these rights. The situation is that we have started this dialogue and I sincerely thank you because in one way or another we have been face to face and this is, I believe, a way to start dialoguing. Face to face, looking into each other's eyes. Because somebody who never did anything wrong will not be afraid. [affirmative expressions in the public] *I invite you following this line from today on to divest us of situations of xenophobia and racism and to have hopes in humanity and that we all learn to work together.*

The next person to speak was a villager from El Tambo:

This is such an important factor, so real, to get to an agreement. Some minutes ago, I talked to the people around here, I am from San José del Tambo, and they invited me to be here today. In disagreement, in a fight we will not reach anything, we do not achieve anything. That is overly understood. Some time ago, we used violence to get results. I think – and it hurts a lot to me to be against a humanity. We do not have to have a rivalry because we are Ecuadorians, and they are foreigners. We are all the same, we are all human beings that deserve our respect. But just like this we have to fulfil things, to do things that the law is demanding. We have to limit us to only do the things that are established in the law. We have to be coherent, reasonable and respectful to the other human beings. We all need respect, no aggressions to other people because we are all human beings, because, to say it with the bible, we are all children of God. We are all human beings and need respect. We all. Like it was said before, what would happen if we went abroad, and they would not respect us. We would not feel good. I ask you a thousand apologies, I am not in favour of anybody, but in favour of the truth, the unity, the comprehension, the loyalty, but I am not in favour of anybody. I want the people of San Pablo being able to live in unity, in unity we get positive results. Thank you very much.

Then, another villager from El Tambo spoke:

We have heard a lot of interventions that it is indeed so difficult in this community in these days. Years ago, when I worked here, I remember that San Pablo indeed was a united community. But a lot of times the pression comes from oneself. We were there, we were there because I was too one of the principal ones that was against it, how I just said to the engineer of the hydroelectric [powerplant]. But as well we cannot close us up towards an opportunity just like this.
I cannot say that I am a 100 % in favour nor a 100% against. But in any case, how they say, the dialogue is the best tool that there can be. We do not like Hidrotambo? So, we do not like it and we just leave it in peace over there. But why being in a fight within the people from here? That would be the most important thing right now, our community.
We know that maybe the people over there do not want it, but within us, I think, just as Raquel said and the man over there: Let's call for humanity and peace, we do not want to confront us within ourselves. I always conversed with Darwin, we had a lot of rivalries, we have not agreed in a lot of things, in a lot of things we have agreed. But just because of these disagreements we did not stopped to be friends. We have always talked, and I think that this is the way, right, to get to a mutual understanding. I invite you as well to understand. I do not say: "Everybody should go to Hidrotambo", no, and neither: "Go away from

Hidrotambo", but I say that you and we will reflect, and not attack us mutually. That is everything, my beloved friends from San Pablo de Amalí. Thank you for the visit here to the people from Vainillas that we know very well. We want to be a united community, it does not matter if this group is from over there or from here, but we are all the same, and here we just want to get to a union. Thank you.

The last intervention came from Darwin:

Compañeros, *mothers, grandmothers, it is a big honour to have every one of you here in San Pablo de Amalí, from the different communities. It is very beautiful and satisfying that all (gendered)*[35] *of you can feel very welcome in the community of San Pablo de Amalí. We have to... forget our prejudices, we have to start with no prejudices towards the other, we have to open our arms, we have to be way more intelligent than we think we are. We have to know that only the union... of all of us (gendered) of the girls and boys and specially of the women, of the mothers and grandmothers, is very important because like this, nobody can violate our rights, everybody made emphasis in these – in these – in our rights.*
But we have to know that if in any case there could be intentions that are not freed of - that we should bring benefit to our communities. And pay attention that I am not saying 'our community', but 'our communities', and our families. We do not have to think only about ourselves; we have to think in everybody (gendered). And this is why we are here, we as San Pablo de Amalí.
Even if we have so much xenophobia, so much racism, it is incredible that we within Ecuadorians, even within Chillaneses we are so many times saying: No - and this is embarrassing to me, and I am asking you sincerely to apologize, that I hear from my people or my family: "Oh, it's because he puts on a hat. It's because he has long hair, it's because he is homosexual, because of this, because of that", we have to leave this to forget, we have to bury this deeply underneath the cover of forgetting. We have to forget this completely.
We are all human beings, nobody is more, nobody is less. We are all of red blood, we are all - someone said somewhere: We are all from the mountains, and we are all from this earth. We are all Ecuadorians. We have to unite our power. We should not allow - and with this I will conclude – that a... person or whatever it is, comes to divide us. Let's keep up the union, let's keep up our own criteria. As a community we should not be submissive, we should claim our rights, with respect but with firmness. That does not mean that we will violate the rights of others. Just like we like that they respect us let's respect the other, like this we can have – [to the previous speaker] I respect you very much, I already told you – we had dialogues, I would not say discussions, dialogues, we had dialogues. [to the public] He has his position, I have mine, but we respect each other, and we are still friends. And if he needs a favour of us, for me it will be a big pleasure to do this. With both hands I will help him, not only with one hand.
And this is why we are here; this is why we live on this earth. We are not here for luxury, we are here to demonstrate that wherever we come from, we are looking for the wellbeing. That is why the bible says: "You won't recognize the people because of their words. You will recognize the people because of their works, and the trees because of their fruits," it says this very clearly. We have to be clear about those things, we want, as everybody of you just said, we want to be with open arms. We have to have the unity for us. And this will not be a benefit for

[35] Expressions like 'all of you', or 'everybody' have a suffix in Spanish that indicates male or female. Darwin during his speech consequently use both suffixes for these expressions (for example: 'todos y todas').

nobody else. That means that the unity and our wellbeing is guaranteed, the wellbeing of everybody (gendered), from the grandmothers to the children up to those that are not born yet, to the future generation. With this, I give a big hug to everybody (gendered) here, independently of the fact that you might think different than us, I give you a brotherly hug to all of you (gendered) and that you always will be very welcomed here. Now that Carnaval *starts soon, we should all enjoy this time peacefully and with one big hug. Thank you.*

This is the last intervention recorded.

One of the villagers came to greet me, he asked me when I would leave, we talked for a moment. I asked him: "And what did they say?" indicating the stage. He said: "For me, it enters in this ear, and it goes out through the other again," and then he left. At the end, [after the interventions transcribed above] the people's defender made another intervention. He said that this reunion is important, to go to the people and talk one by one, that this is what they want to do. To finish, he said: "And you know, every little problem you have: come to our office. When you pay too much for your phone bill: come to us. When your electricity measuring thing measures too much: come to us. You can come with all your problems," and people laughed and applause. The reunion finished.

A villager I had an interview with just the day before was standing next to me and asked if my cell phone was charged now, he would like to see the photos from Switzerland. I did not remember for a moment that I told him after the interview that I would show him some photos from Switzerland next time we meet.

I showed him some snow pictures. I was glad that I had something to do, some people checked me out with their looks, it was uncomfortable.

When the crowd left, the people from the Dulcepamba River Project still were standing around and talking to the people's defender. I approached and said: "That wasn't that bad, wasn't it?", and they did not answer quite clearly. Darwin's son Javier was there, too, and he said: "You know what I think is very interesting? When they said that they wanted to construct obras*, but you didn't want to. This is very interesting. I mean, this is like you have a dog and give him some food. When he refuses to eat, you cannot do anything." I thought about that argument already and I said that I think it is wrong. This is not about getting a gift because of behaving nice. This is about fulfilling the law, no need for begging. Everybody agreed with me, except Javier.*

We went down to Darwin's house. The people's defender and the engineer from SENAGUA I had an interview with some days before were just about to leave. I greeted everybody and asked the engineer: "Is this your first visit to San Pablo?" The people's defender laughed and said: "Tell her that you almost live here." Then, they left.

Right in front of Darwin's house, at Maria's shop were a bunch of people that attended the reunion before. There was a truck standing there, and they offered food to people. I did not understand right away, but then I saw the banner: "SPA quiere progreso." [San Pablo de Amalí wants progress] Then I understood that Hidrotambo is offering food to people. The people from the Dulcepamba River Project were standing outside of Darwin's house with some other villagers,

watching the other side. They talked, I laughed about the banner. We had the same discussion again, about not having to beg for infrastructure.

Then Rachel said that she wanted to take a photo, Hidrotambo committing hate crimes. And that was when I saw the other banner: "Fuera gringas mentirosas" [Go away, lying Gringas] was written on it. It hung on the side of Maria's shop that heads the street. Rachel showed me some photos from the third banner I missed. It was written on it: "Sacamos las gringas quitamaridos" [Let's chase away the Gringas that steal our husbands] and a machete was painted on one edge. Incredible, I had to laugh, honestly, because this is just so absurd. After a while, they took this banner away again, "it was too embarrassing" was Rachel's commentary.

Javier insisted that we should not go and take photos, that we should not even approach, because this is like approaching a dog that bites. So, we just moved to the neighbour's house. The neighbour was sitting inside with her daughter and the little son and some other villager. They watched the spectacle in front of the house with no intention to approach. From their house, we could take some good photos (see Appendix V), and they were still having some speeches. We mocked around that the manager of Hidrotambo insisted to reinforce the community committee, talking to a bunch of people from other villages, Vainillas, la Colombia, and only like three people from San Pablo. One of the last things we heard was a woman saying: "And from Vainillas, you will never get any complain." They all applauded.

The reunion finished and people left for the taxis they came with earlier in the day. One taxi left to Vainillas, one to la Colombia. There were very few people staying in the village. They all passed by the house where we were standing around. They greeted: "Bye girls" or said something else. It was weird, like intimidating each other. I also felt that there was a competition in laughter, in jokes.

Rachel told me after that apparently Hidrotambo told all those people from other villages, Vainillas and la Colombia, that the prefect would come and that they should go and ask him to build some obras*, even though this wasn't the aim of the visit. So, those people arrived with taxis paid by Hidrotambo. Rachel wanted to use one of those taxis standing around in San Pablo earlier during the visit on-site to go with some people to the machine house where the inspection took place. But nobody wanted to take her, they all said: "No, I am paid the whole day by Hidrotambo, I cannot leave," even though they were just standing around. So, only Darwin from the Dulcepamba River Project and some other people from the village went to the inspection. But the inspection wasn't that bad. The SENAGUA engineer asked the manager of Hidrotambo if they have the necessary paperwork to do the diversion of the river. He said that they handed in some paper in Guayaquil, but they didn't receive any answer, and the manager stated: "And we won't wait until we get the permission, you know, we just start." So, he basically admitted that he does not care about the authorities' permission.*

Upstairs, Hannah S. and Claudio were cooking for some people that were around. Manuela said that she is very mad. She did not go to the reunion at the school because she would have started a fight with all those people. Darwin said: "We have to be different than them, polite," and Manuela said that she cannot

be polite, she gets very mad. She said: "Even my husband, a very peaceful person, got mad. So, imagine what I would have done," and we all agreed. She claimed that Maria talks about living in peace with each other, but that she makes it impossible. Manuela remembered how she wanted to advance a project for water supply system, since there is the mayor in charge that cares about the people. And this will change, and the next mayor maybe does not help in anything. So, she sent her niece to get a form signed by Maria, but Maria would not sign. "So, how we should live in peace? What does she think? I mean, I don't get a cent for the work I did there, it was even a burden for me, but I still did that. But she doesn't want to help." She remembered a festivity for the day of the child that she wanted to organize where Maria did not want to help with anything neither, she did not even join the holy mass. Then, Manuela left to cook the food for her workers.

[Later that day I had a long interview with Darwin. Rachel had to go to Manuela's house to talk about a complaint Manuela wants to fil against the police because of the violation of her rights that happened during her prosecution because of terrorism. Before leaving, Rachel said: "I hope they don't kill me. So, you just come to look after me if I do not come back after a while, maybe they'll catch me on the way." Of course, she was kidding, but there was some seriousness about that joke. In the meantime, I shared some time with Darwin's family and the other people from the Project and then I went to bed.]

The Development vs. Justice Dilemma in the Dulcepamba River valley

Development

'San Pablo de Amalí wants progress' was written on the banner that people supporting Hidrotambo collocated on the main square of San Pablo. But what is progress about in San Pablo?

Firstly, I want to remark that 'progress' as an idea, a hope, or a faith is at least as elusive and unclear as 'development'. The term is seen also as its predecessor. And meanwhile development has the additional back-up of expert knowledge, the more politically connotated concept of progress remains underneath the development discourse as "a crude dogma, debasing the sublime and fascinating elaborations of its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers and ideologues" (Sbert, 2010, pp. 214-215). Finally, different actors I met during my fieldwork used both terms interchangeably. Therefore, I allow myself to treat them as synonyms in this analysis.

To explain the importance of progress as the wishes of what *should* be there, I must start with what is *not* there, with the analysis of what is missing and why.

A vast majority of people in San Pablo, in the Dulcepamba River valley and even in the Bolivar province would agree that what is most needed in the region is infrastructure. Indeed, the claim for infrastructure is the most common one in reunions and meetings, as can be emblematically seen in the description in lines 394-398 of the prior description: people from other villages were explicitly told to join the reunion to claim for infrastructure. While spending time in the area this priority becomes clear, since the lacking infrastructure does not concern luxury goods like warm water or washing machines, but the most basic and fundamental structures. It is important to stress this point: discussions around infrastructure in the zone are very present because the needs are very real.

In the context section, I indicated that the infrastructure in the valley was poor or even inexistent. Now, I would like to clarify what this means in more detail. Firstly: even though most homes in the watershed communities are connected to the electricity supply system, some of the newly built houses in San Pablo after the flood of 2015 still were not provided with connection even after five years, because reconstruction is very slow.[36]

Second, even until now, San Pablo did not have a publicly built drainage or stormwater management system, and only 30 percent of households were part of a water supply system (Sardán Muyba, 2015, p. 83 ff., personal conversations). Of course, there was no treatment for

[36] Interview with affected villagers, 1/26/2020.

drinking water, either. Therefore, every house must build and organize its own water system. Darwin's house, for example, has such a self-made system, but at least three times during the month I stayed in San Pablo there was no water because of blockage. Some houses do not have such a system and therefore no toilet, shower or sink at all.

Third: there is no public garbage system in the community up until today (Sardán Muyba, 2015, p. 83 ff., personal conversations). Therefore, people burn or bury their household waste or deposit in one of the few public rubbish bins in El Tambo.

And finally, to catch network for mobile phones and internet is an issue of pure luck in the valley, even though locals have some experience on which corner, stone, or otherwise marked part of the landscape connection is most probable to find. To change this, in a remote area in Ecuador the community must collectively pay the phone company to put in place an antenna and to connect to the national network. In San Pablo, there were already some efforts made to find enough people to pay part of the antenna, but this would bring a cost of approximately 20 dollars a month to every household at least for a year. The villagers I talked to are mostly farmers having irregular incomes coming from cash crops and contracts as day labourers. A day at work brings 10 dollars. It comes as no surprise that the villagers with such a small and unsteady income are not able to pay such a high fee over the time of a year until an antenna is paid.

Apart of this (lack of) public infrastructure, the valley and region have a centralized structure in the sense that markets, health centres, secondary schools, and state institutions can be found in Chillanes and El Tambo, but not in between. The public transport system consists of a bus route three times a day from Chillanes to El Tambo and back. The vehicles are old, slow, and heavy, and therefore very unsuitable for the slippery, muddy roads they must pass on their way through the valley. So, people prefer, if possible, to call one of the many taxis in the area or hitchhike.

What does exist in most villages is a primary school with one or two classrooms, a church, a small community hall or square, and a football pitch. Additionally, there are usually one or two shops that sell products for the most urgent daily needs. The primary school in San Pablo counts with approximately 20 children that are between 5 and 10 years old. Concerning the school building, I wrote down the following conversation in my field diary:

> *I talked to the teacher about her different classrooms, she has three of them, even though she is alone as a teacher. She told me that the municipality representatives came to tell her that there is some money to invest in the infrastructure of the school. They said that they would make a wall to separate the bigger classroom*

> *into two. She said that she rather has one big room, it makes more sense for her. So, they left.*
>
> *After a while, an architect from the municipality came and said again that they would separate the big classroom with a wall. She said, again, that she does not see any need for it. She rather would have a bathroom next to the school, because the kids now must go to the public bathrooms a little bit further away. But the architect said that the plans are already done, so, it must happen. Now she has another classroom that is of no use to her. (Field Diary, 05-02-2020)*

In this conversation, not only the lack of infrastructure such as a bathroom became apparent, but also the incapacity of the state to provide the school with actual needs. In an interview, the teacher told me:

> *I left [San Pablo] because there is no internet. Previously I had a friend that was professor in another village nearby, and she provided me with the school e-mail and this kind of things from the institution. But now she changed to another school and could not help me anymore. I told Raquelita: "If there was internet in San Pablo, I would stay." But there is none. So, I decided: "I have to live in El Tambo." (Interview 12, 01-29-2020, San Pablo)*

So, while the teacher could do very well without the second and third classroom, the lack of internet and telephone network was the main reason for her to move from San Pablo to El Tambo since she cannot prepare her school activities without internet.

But probably the most important issue concerning infrastructure in the community is the road crossing the Dulcepamba River valley between Chillanes and El Tambo. The first approximately ten kilometres leaving Chillanes are paved, so, this part of the ride is the most safe and comfortable. But then, the pavement stops and leads into a gravel road. This road is uncomfortable the entire year but turns into a major danger during rainy season. After heavy rainfalls, there is no gravel anymore but only mud. While good, expensive off-road cars may be able to cope with these conditions and the very common motorcycles in the area allow the one or two riders to push their vehicle across the worst parts and walk through the mud, it is impossible for the heavy, old public busses to pass the road to San Pablo. During my visit, these conditions occurred twice, so that there were two periods of three days with no public transport in the area. The neighbour told me that after almost suffering an accident with the public bus she does not go to Chillanes at all anymore during rainy season.

The dimensions of the road problem become clearer when carefully considering the manifold needs that urges the San Pablo community to go to Chillanes or El Tambo: there is a primary school in the village, but after the age of ten, the kids must go to school in El Tambo. There is no medical attention whatsoever in San Pablo itself and a health centre covering only the very basic needs in El Tambo. Any administrative issue must be dealt with in Chillanes,

there is no state authority in San Pablo and only the *Parroquia* administration in El Tambo. The supply of food or normal everyday goods is only rudimentarily covered by the two shops in San Pablo, and anything more than basic alimentation for a dinner, for example, must be bought in El Tambo or Chillanes. When the road was inaccessible due to floods in 2015, 2017 or 2019, food became scarce in the village after seven days, as the villagers told me. Not only the supply, but also the sales of cash crops like bananas must be done in Chillanes since the people in El Tambo grow tropical fruits in major amounts themselves, while the coffee and cacao for exportation is sold in El Tambo.

So, the wish for a paved road to the next bigger town is not a fantasy for speed or a promise for economic prosperity as described by Harvey and Knox (2012); it rather is an essential need to live in the area. Because people are not only confronted with what is described by the authors as "livelihoods and life itself jeopardised by the tyranny of delay" (Harvey & Knox, 2012, p. 524), but with what Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) and Saxinger et al (submitted) more adequately call the infrastructural violence of exclusion.

When it comes to infrastructure, responsibility is a decisive issue. Who would be responsible for what part of this materiality? In other words: Who is not doing her or his job in San Pablo? The construction of a toilet, for example, is not exactly the duty of any local or regional authority but a task on its own for every household. In these cases, it is difficult to know what leads to the relinquishment of such basic infrastructure. But, surely, the absence of a sewage system does not help since this lack impedes the possibility to install a proper toilet in the first place.

On a local level, the people in San Pablo are very well organized to solve infrastructure issues, as can be seen in the interventions (lines 29-35 of description) where references to the collectively rebuilt bridge are made. They are also keen to harness possibilities for obtaining proper infrastructure and get mad at each other if collaboration is not done properly, just like Manuela referring to Maria who did not want to collaborate on the issue of the sewage system and the celebration (lines 415-424). Despite high capacity and willingness, it is no easy task to organize a community to plan and build a sewage system and to maintain it after. And, considering the economic condition of most people in the region, it is almost impossible to collectively pay for it. These tasks become even more difficult in a community so divided like San Pablo.

Therefore, state entities would bring the necessary budget, technical know-how and authority to manage infrastructure. It is also their task as inscribed in the national constitution,[37] and as the anonymous cry from the public on the intervention from the people's defender shows (line 164), people do not hesitate to hold them accountable for.

However, no state entity constructs infrastructure in the area. As my informants and my own observations confirm, manifestations of the state as a service provider are almost inexistent. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that even regional state representatives themselves consider the lack of infrastructure as the most prominent problem in the area, as the people's defender's intervention on the day of the inspection shows: "It hurts me that there are places within my province that are completely forgotten, that are backward" (lines 160-161), and "I went to San Pablo de Amalí and the road is torn apart. I hope that some authority in the sector will arrive and improve the road" (lines 169-170).

The reasons why the state is unable to manage infrastructure are manifold, and an in-depth analysis of this problem would exceed the scope of this thesis. But, through the lens of scales it becomes obvious that the state, of course, is not a homogeneous actor, quite the contrary: In the rare occasions where state entities can be seen together on discussion fora, visits, or festivities, they mostly blame each other for not improving the situation in the area.

Apart from the lack of willingness, this fragmentation of state actors produces a constant mismatch between the actions and aims of the different state entities, as the example of the classrooms emblematically shows: while the intention on a national level is to improve the education in the area, the regional interpretation of how the school could be improved – with more classrooms – does not meet the actual needs on a local scale (a proper toilet for the kids and an internet connection). Some of these mismatches, like this one, seem to be mere accidents; others are conscious acts of ignorance towards unfavourable national law, for example.

It comes as no surprise that in such a situation – with no local infrastructure and no state entity capable or willing to provide it – the local community perceive a rich and powerful private company wanting to work in the area not only as a threat, but also as a possible provider of local infrastructure. Therefore, hope rose immediately when Hidrotambo arrived, and the company did not hesitate to nurture these hopes, as I learned in this interview:

> ***Villager:*** *Actually, when they started with this, in these times I was not here, I was working in the [east of the country]. So, when I came, already some reunions took place here in San Pablo[…] They said that they would give to San Pablo a*

[37] Art. 277, paragraph 4: "To conceive *Buen Vivir*, general duties of the state will be: To produce goods and create and maintain infrastructure and provide public services."

> *health centre with good doctors that they themselves would bring here. They would give a high school and the paved road from San Pablo to El Tambo.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *That's what they said?*
> ***Villager:*** *Yes, a paved road to El Tambo. So, [the community] accepted that, you see. They accepted and... Well, according to what they told me, because I was not there, I am just telling you what they told me. So, they... They got excited about that because these things would be here. So, they accepted that they would construct the project and give [the community] all these things. (Interview 23, 02-11-2020, San Pablo)*

So, it is true: the imagination of infrastructure enchanted the people in San Pablo and turned out to be, exactly as (Escobar, 2015b) says, "a reflection of their aspirations for a dignified life." But not because of what the company would do, but because of the development it would bring as a side effect.

These expectations are constantly present until today and form part of the narrative of what happened in San Pablo concerning the powerplant. For example, as Maria's ex-husband states:

> *I tell you, this issue of the – I tell you like this, honestly, with the hydroelectric [powerplant]... We are all adversely affected, not because of the environmental damage, but because we did not know how to benefit when we should have benefited with* obras *for the community. That is the only part. (Interview 21, 02-07-2020, El Tambo)*

And even the people's defender nurtures these ideas, stating on the day of the inspection (lines 172-173): "generally, within all the communities where the big companies are, it is said that they bring development." The fixation on possible development in the form of infrastructure shows the semantic and symbolic power of infrastructure as an expectation and hope. It explains also the huge and permanent deception that sprawled in the local community when it became clear that no infrastructural benefit would arrive.

In sum, when I asked people in the valley what advantages and disadvantages Hidrotambo brought, the answer was: "No advantages, only disadvantages," even from people that place themselves neutral in this conflict. There is an astonishing consensus concerning this issue. My informants illustrated their perception with the fact that the company did not build a street, a health centre, or a school. That the company did not bring *obras*.

Obras roughly translates as infrastructure work. It is a magic term used by state authorities, politicians, and private companies to subsume all the good things they could do. To outline the core issue of the environmental conflict even with more accuracy, it is an interesting exercise to take the term as the guiding line through the thick description of the day of the inspection:

First, Maria says: "The misters from Hidrotambo offered us to bring *obras*, they offered us to fix the road, they offered us so many things, and why this could not be? Because the foreign people oppose and are in judicial proceedings and look for money for themselves" (lines 42-45), and she adds: "The misters from Hidrotambo cannot give us any collaboration, no *obras*, because the trials concerning this problem are still going on" (lines 50-52). Then, Claudio intervenes by deeming these ideas as mere fantasies: "[They said] 'We have only the money to finance [the powerplant]' and after that they – the third parties claimed that there would be a lot of *obras*" (lines 123-125). He further rejects Maria's version of the missing *obras* by stating: "So, was it like this that San Pablo de Amalí, or let's say, for example, Manuel went there and said: 'Do not give them the *obras*'? Negative, Maria" (lines 127-129). The company representative directly replies to these claims, passing the buck to the government: "Maybe there is a lack of *obras* that must be done, that is true, but you have to understand, please, that this only can be done in mutual work with the governments" (lines 190-192).

People living in the valley not only expect *obras* from the state authorities or the company, but as well from the Dulcepamba River Project. This becomes apparent in the thick description (lines 47-49) when Maria criticises that the foreign members of the Dulcepamba River Project are living in the area for ten years now and did not build anything visible in the community. We further elaborated this point in the focus group discussion:

> ***Rachel:*** *And we had a bit of friction or problems in the community because when I arrived it was like: "The foreigner comes to give us charity." Not everyone thought this, but some of them did. For example, I remember one villager that always said: "And what will you give us? What project? What will you bring? I mean, another Gringa came, and she gave us something" I do not remember what now, a water project, I think, I think she gave them some money for the water project they installed in the centre [of San Pablo]. [This villager] always talks about her. […]*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Ah, the woman that would come back to bring the health centre?*
> ***Rachel:*** *Yes. So, it was like, someone came from outside with other attitude, other roots, and she will give us…*
> ***Emily:*** *Donations.*
> ***Rachel:*** *And I remember, I mean, some people understood that I came to understand this socio-environmental problematic because of Hidrotambo, and that it is something much more... not so visible, I mean, but there was always this issue: "But where are the visible things?" (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

So, the people in San Pablo classified Rachel as foreigner, therefore as powerful and able to bring help in the form of infrastructure to the zone. She was perceived as the possible provider of *obras*. This shows, on the one hand, the racialized perception – based on experience – of how a powerful actor looks like: white. On the other hand, it brings to light how vulnerable the

local livelihood is. Improvement is desperately needed, and if someone can contribute, he or she is clearly prompted to do so. This is just another example of how dominant these expectations or hopes for improvement of infrastructure are.

To sum up the analysis so far, the following part of the interview I made with Darwin exemplifies quite well the perception of what progress means for the people in San Pablo:

> ***Hannah P.: Y****ou said the Hydrotambo company said that they would bring progress and that this never happened. So, I would like to speak about the word 'progress': How do they define progress? .... How would you define it? What happens in this 'progress'?*
> ***Darwin:*** *Progress in quotation marks?*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Yes, it's like a big ball of gold in the horizon...*
> ***Darwin:*** *It's like trying to reach the sun but you will never reach.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Yes, exactly. What is progress? How do they paint progress?*
> ***Darwin:*** *Supposably, progress for them, according to what I heard, was that they would give work to 200 or 300 people approximately. Therefore, there would have been this so-called progress. But I don't know if they really had one day this amount of people working there. I believe they never reached to have so many people working there. The progress... for them was – the progress was for them because they produce and sell the electricity. Therefore, the progress did reach them because they are earning some million dollars. Therefore, economically, there was progress for them. What we [the villagers] were confused about is for whom the progress would it be. We did not understand that progress would come, but for them.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Mhm.*
> ***Darwin:*** *For us, there was no progress because they did not have... no study plan, no... nothing of progress for the community. We could call progress if they maybe would make a hospital with all specialities for free for the whole* Parroquia *of San José del Tambo and that the whole country could be attended here. That I would call progress because you could be attended with the simplest or the most complicated issue for free. I would call this progress. I would call progress that they give us, us... with the name of the community and the money made by the hydroelectric [powerplant] – the Ecuadorian state and the company should at least make that this community or these communities really progress. They should give a university that has the... the specialties that are applicable in the zone because I cannot – cannot think that they make study plans in engineering or anything, anything like accounting or law... What do I want 100 or 200 lawyers for around here? I want 1000 agronomical engineers, 1000 veterinarians and these things. So, this would be progress for the zone, progress not only for San Pablo de Amalí, but for the* Cantón *of Chillanes and the* Parroquia *of San José del Tambo. We would be – That would be a form of progress, and it should exceed us.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *of course.*
> ***Darwin:*** *But this is a dream that in some moment... One has to learn to stop dreaming and say: "They will never give us anything." The Ecuadorian state, not the government, because the state are we all, but the government that is doing the administration does not have even the most minimal intention not even to guarantee us the* Buen Vivir *or the progress.*

> ***Hannah P.:*** *Of course. The issue of the hospital – something that calls my attention is that progress is sometimes put equal like covering basic needs. And that actually, this is not, @ this is like, "that they get us a hospital, that they get us an asphalted street," I mean, I don't know if you know what I mean, but this is actually not going forward, this is just covering what actually should be here.*
> ***Darwin:*** *Yes, of course, yes. But in any case, we don't have that.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Yes, true.*
> ***Darwin:*** *Because there is nothing. Because if you go to the health centre in San José del Tambo, they'll give you a paracetamol, a diclofenac, they will make some exams to see if you have parasites, but if you have, for example, to get an operation on the gallbladder they cannot do that, they have to transfer you to... Chillanes, Guayaquil, Babahoyo, to other provinces. So, in a way this would be, we could say... it would guarantee us, at least, the* Buen Vivir.
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Exactly, yes.*
> ***Darwin:*** *The right to have health and the right of education. But this is not here, not even this is guaranteed. That is why I tell you that we would see this form as progress, but...*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And they don't even attend you on Saturday. @@@*
> ***Darwin:*** *Yes, it is forbidden to get sick around here on Saturday, Sunday, or public holidays. Don't even think about getting sick on public holidays because you will die.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Exactly.*
> ***Darwin:*** *Or you have to have the money to pay a doctor that helps you with the first aid.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Or you pay the taxi to get up to Chillanes.*
> ***Darwin:*** *Yes, to pay the taxi, the road in very bad conditions. Without drinking water. Without basic services. No – not even the minimum. Without sewage, without... treatment for drinking water, without garbage management because we do not even have garbage collection.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *True, true.*
> ***Darwin:*** *So, so, so, this is why – these desires would be part of the duty the Ecuadorian state, as I said, give a municipality, a hospital, not to San Pablo de Amalí, but to the* Parroquia *of San José del Tambo. If that would be more within the realities, Hidrotambo should give at least a part to generate work as a company, that would be part of a progress, respecting, that for sure, the rights of nature specifically. (Interview 25, 02-12-2020, San Pablo)*

So, Darwin first explains that the company made promises that it was not able to fulfil, and that the community was fooled by these promises. Then, he defines progress as improvement of education and health care in the area, an improvement that should be promoted by the company in collaboration with the state. When I confront him with my opinion that it is inadequate to label the fulfilment of basic human needs as 'progress', he agrees with me but immediately adds: "But in any case, we don't have that." He refers then to the state promise of *Buen Vivir* that is not brought to the zone, and, in the last section, implies that if the state would fulfil its promises, Hidrotambo would have had another role in the community.

There are two important implications emerging from the interview extract that further clarify the findings of this analysis:

First, in Darwin's opinion, the people in the Dulcepamba River valley do not have the guarantee of *Buen Vivir*, of living a decent life in the zone. He and everybody else living in the area are very aware of the fact that the Ecuadorian state will not fulfil these wishes, as has been mentioned before in this analysis. Therefore, it is only reasonable to demand infrastructure from whoever else that seems able to provide such services. In other words: to demand progress from Hidrotambo is to demand that the company fills the gap on the operational scale left empty by the local and regional authorities.

Second, Darwin defines *Buen Vivir* as the fulfilment of basic infrastructure. So, he calls *Buen Vivir* what the other villagers name *progreso* and therefore fools the academic idea that *Buen Vivir* would be an alternative to development.

This leads to a contrasting perception about what is at stake: In academic discussions, as exposed above, progress and development are deemed as ideas from the Global North to accelerate capitalist expansion and the use of nature for material welfare. *Buen Vivir*, in change, is seen as an alternative that fundamentally questions this perception of welfare. In change, if government officials or people living in the area talk about progress or development, they do not necessarily mean materialist welfare or capitalist expansion. The term in this discussion indeed does not include yet any perception about wellbeing, the relationship to nature, or the commodification of natural resources. It includes as the first and most urgent only the fulfilling of basic infrastructure needed to live a safe and decent life in the zone. The alternative labelling – call it progress, call it development, call it *Buen Vivir* – does simply not label away the problem that these basic needs are not fulfilled.

This situation does not have to be like this: if state entities in Ecuador would be able and willing to provide remote zones in the country with basic infrastructural needs, the demands, the questions, and the possibilities would be different, as I want to show in the next section.

Justice

The hydroelectric powerplant did not bring any progress or development to San Pablo or the Dulcepamba River valley, as all my informants confirm. But what did it bring, then?

Considering the small size of this powerplant, the amount and extent of its negative impacts are astonishing (Plüss, submitted). I will structure the analysis of these negative impacts along the categories of justice proposed by Schlosberg: injustice of distribution; injustice as a lack of recognition with its specification in the general practice of cultural domination, the pattern of non-recognition as being rendered invisible, and disrespect; and procedural injustice.

Not the only, but a central trigger for the local community to pose resistance against the hydroelectric powerplant was the exaggerated water concession SENAGUA granted the

company. To talk with Schlosberg's categories, people protested because of the unjust distribution of the environmental good 'water'. This redistribution led to a de facto privatization of the natural resource formerly managed by the people living in the valley through unofficial rules of usage. As indicated in the context section, water was not seen as a property, but as an important resource of shared access. Water therefore was a common pool resource, and the concession granted to the company led to its grab.

Therefore, the unjust restriction of access is a common claim among the local community. This villager's answer to the question what would bring justice back to San Pablo is a good example:

> *For me, what I think what would be crucial for us here, in the community and the communities further up, that the water concessions that Hidrotambo has would be repealed infinitely. That is the only thing that I would ask for myself from the constitutional court. That these concessions would not exist here, not in this country and even less in the Bolivar Province.[…]What priority do [the owners from the company] have as millionaires to come and bring in their possession a concession of our nature, of our – our communities and our provinces? So, this is what we as* campesinos *ask from the court. That [these concessions] would be repealed, infinitely. (Interview, 01-25-2020, San Pablo)*

So, this villager's most urgent demand is to legally get the water back that he considers belonging to his community, specially to the *campesina/os* in the area.

More severely, the lack of access was not only a legal exercise but had very physical consequences, as another villager describes:

> ***Villager:*** *They forbade me to take the water, even though I was further down their water catchment area.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *They forbade it?*
> ***Villager:*** *They forbade it. Sometimes, they damaged my pipes, they sometimes throw them aside. I started the catchment with a 6-inch pipe, then I reduced to 1 inch or even half an inch.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *They broke your pipes?*
> ***Villager:*** *Yes, they broke them, they threw them away to the shore, they disconnected them. That's the point, that's what they did, the supporters of Hidrotambo. (Interview, 01-27-2020, El Tambo)*

The villager's experience of denied access is another form of infrastructural violence that comes with resource grabbing, just as Ojeda et al. (2015) have observed in the Colombian case.

So, the formal dispossession of water opened the path for the physical construction of the powerplant and the mini dam. This construction, in turn, had major physical consequences that some people of San Pablo experience every day. In this context, the severe decline of the fish population needs special mention. According to all my informants facing the most precarious living conditions in the community – day labourers with no land – fish was an

important resource for their subsistence, especially in times of crisis. They say: "You do not know, but for the poor people, this was food. Now it became scarce" (Interview 9, 01-27-2020, San Pablo). Manuel explains:

> *I remember, in the past you went with your fishing net, and in half an hour you brought back a bag full of fish and you ate. This was for us* campesinos *– good money. This was – wellbeing. Firstly, because we ate healthy, and second because it did not cost us anything. […] We have lost this; it does not exist anymore, and it will not exist again. So, this is over. Starting from there, the damage can be felt. (Interview 1, 01-24-2020, Chillanes)*

And this villager uses the clearest words:

> ***Villager:*** *For the* campesino*, the fish was his/her food. Sometimes there was nothing to eat and we just went to the river to get some fish. The fish combined with a ripe banana, nothing else, and this was the food.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *So, we could say that a basic part of your diet, of your daily alimentation is gone?*
> ***Villager:*** *Yes. Now those who have [money] must buy in the market. Those who do not have [anything]… Well, they just must figure out what to do. (Interview 13, 01-29-2020, San Pablo)*

These statements demonstrate that the grabbing of water, the construction of the powerplant and the subsequent changes in the watershed led to a reduction of the local resilience (Haller, 2019, p. 114). It exposes people to bigger risks in times of crisis because of food scarcity. Another violent, even traumatic consequence of the water grab is the augmented risk of floods in the area.

The water grab and its very physical and violent consequences led to severe resistance from parts of the local community. People that do not belong to the community but are positively inclined towards the protesters often frame this resistance as a logical and immediate reaction against dispossession. For example, the president of the *Parroquia* states that:

> *Well, about the protests, like in every community, every village that is affected by what they do with its sector, damaging it, in a place where people have lived in peace, right? You and every person that sees the land and knows that they will affect his/her interests or the little land he/she owns will get mad. That is why people reacted and they reacted for good reasons. (Interview 11, 01-29-2020, El Tambo)*

Or a trader who regularly went to San Pablo and joined the protests from the very beginning naturalizes the protest comparing it to the behaviour of animals:

> *A person defending his/her territory, just like, you know, like a bird, a… How you say that? A worm, a little snake defends its territory, no? No matter how, but it seeks its defence. So, every reptile, every animal looks desperately for defence up to the very last moment. We as human beings must defend what's ours, too. And*

> *if others come like eagles that capture the little birds… Well, that's not okay. (Interview 2, 01-24-2020, Chillanes)*

Therefore, the resistance movement in San Pablo is classified here not as one of environmental concern, but as a reaction against dispossession. Put in this light, the environmental activism in San Pablo is not only a movement of environmental justice, but an environmentalism of the dispossessed as well.

All these aspects concerning water in San Pablo – the lack of access as the most urgent problem, the reduction of resilience, and the subsequent emergence of a new environmental concern – converts this conflict to an almost classical case of commons grabbing according to Cangelosi's (2019) definition.

The case is also a very poignant example of 'the other side of infrastructure': infrastructural violence is not only exclusion through its missing, but also through the enforced imposition of unwanted infrastructure that the local community in the end must cope with. As exposed in the theory section, infrastructure is construction, materiality, an unavoidable part of the 'here and now' of social practice, and a manifestation of power in a very physical way. Hidrotambo had the power – the machines, the people, the arms – to just build the powerplant, diverge the river, and destroy the crops that were in its way. Put in this perspective, local infrastructure expresses environmental injustice in a very physical manner.

The legal dispossession and physical disruption of the local water management was only possible due to severe injustices of recognition. These injustices are based on a general practice of cultural domination, as becomes apparent through my own place in the field: just as the postcolonial legacy implies the pattern that being white is being competent, it implies the other way around that being an indigenous *campesina/o* means being less competent, less educated, less able to participate in the decision-making process.

This pattern is entangled with the other aspects of justice as recognition, namely the invisibility and disrespect. Most strikingly, the people living in the Dulcepamba River valley were literally rendered invisible: the company could only bypass the prevalence of water for human use inscribed in the national water law with the grotesque lie that there is 'nobody living in the area,' as several villagers and the Dulcepamba River Project members confirm. This is ignorance in its most drastic way and a widely known problem within the literature on commons grabbing, where land frequently is deemed as 'wasteland', empty, and therefore of open access (see, for example, Gerber & Haller, 2020; Ryser, 2019). It is, additionally, an emblematic example of non-recognition.

An example of injustice as disrespect towards the people living in the Dulcepamba River valley is the disproportional amount of violence used by the police and the armed forces to repress the resistance against the powerplant. This violence did not only traumatize the locals as individuals, but the whole community. It left a wound that quickly tears open again, as can be seen in Claudio's intervention on the day of the on-site visit (lines 141-146).

Repassing the thick description in the beginning of this section, the normality of non-recognition becomes apparent: when the company manager does not bother to wait for the official permissions from Guayaquil to redirect the river (lines 404-409), he not only ignores national law, but also accepts the possible exposure to floods of the people on the other side of the river. Since their houses, lands, and lives are an inconvenience to him, he rendered them invisible. The injustice becomes even more grotesque since the non-recognition is at the same time denied by the responsible for socialisation when she says: "We are a producer of clean energy; we work with all the permits and we do it in the best way. We do not have anything to hide" (lines 192-194). In a similar way, the company afterwards offers food not to the affected villagers from San Pablo, but to the people they mobilized from other places. So, again, the local community is just ignored by the company.

As pointed out in the theory section, a very important step towards procedural justice was taken when the obligation to get free prior informed consent of affected communities was established in international and national law. The corresponding laws are also prominently anchored in the Ecuadorian constitution. But here again, on a legal scale it can be seen how local and regional power structures dominate the progressive national legislation. Even though there may be some confusion on the question if there was any information meeting proceeding the construction of the powerplant or not, the bottom line is that there was no socialization that deserves its name, and especially no provision of information that would have made the informed consent of the local community possible. Therefore, the company did not follow the legal framework and did not fulfil the prerequisites to achieve procedural justice. Also in this aspect, the events in San Pablo follow an emblematic line of environmental injustice.

But where the procedural injustice comes to light even more prominently is in connection with legal arbitrariness around the protests of the local community: while the state and the company framed the concession granted to Hidrotambo that led to the water grab as a mere administrative action, they repoliticised the local resistance against this process as acts of terrorism against the state. If the decision around the uses of the waters of the Dulcepamba River would have been treated as the highly political issue they in fact are, the labelling of the protest as terrorism would not have been possible.

In sum, this is a case where multiple environmental injustices took place: the deprivation of access through commons grabbing; the unjust distribution of adverse environmental impacts through the decline of fish as a buffer resource and the augmented risk for floods; the lack of recognition through a postcolonial pattern of general disdain of the local community leading not only to the complete ignorance of its existence, but also to disproportionate violence against protesters; and procedural injustice, most importantly in the form of a lack of information that makes an informed decision impossible, and legal arbitrariness.

But what have these environmental injustices to do with the need for development described in the previous section?

Development or Justice?

> ***Hannah P.:*** *What caused the division of the community?*
> ***Mother:*** *The lack of dialogue. Everything brings its advantages and disadvantages. But the people did not understand, there were rumours as well that [the company] would take away the water in big ice cubes and sell it abroad, and that the environment would be damaged. But this never happened, we must be realist, too. Okay, the river dried out a bit, but not completely. There is less fish, but that happens everywhere. There was no good information in the community, the* gentecita *did not understand. And my concern always was: this is an* obra *from the state, this is why it would be constructed in any case, right? They said it's a private* obra*, but this is not true. The* gentecita *divided because of that false information. And, on the other hand, because everybody wanted to get personal benefits, too. They did not fight for the people, but only for their own pockets.*
> ***Son:*** *The community would have benefited, San Pablo would have had a health centre, a paved road. I love San Pablo, me, my siblings, my cousins, the first thing we do on weekends is go to San Pablo. So, San Pablo would have progressed. But the people did not know how to earn it.*
> ***Mother:*** *Because one gives something to the other, and the other part gives something, too. It's an interchange. So, the company has to give something. Because it is true as well, the people suffered a lot, the poor* gentecita *were bad treaded. They were beaten, some went to jail. But the dialogue was always missing.*
> ***Son:*** *It's like if you come to my house and I shout: "Go away!" we cannot talk, right? But if you say: "Come in! Let's talk," this would be another issue. But the people completely shut themselves off. (Interview 5, 01-26-2020, El Tambo)*

I want to show in this section how several actors – namely the company, some state authorities, and a part of the local community – construct a causality between the lack of development and the subsequent infrastructural violence of exclusion in the area; and the claims for environmental justice that leads to the rejection of the powerplant.

The woman in the interview extract above firstly ascribes the main problem of the conflict to a lack of dialogue. She plays down all the negative impacts of the construction of

the powerplant by emphasising their normality in context of climate change and further explains that people acted wrong due to misinformation and personal interests. Differently than the protesters, she concluded from the beginning that there would be no possibility to impede the construction of the powerplant. Somehow ironically, she bases her position on the evidentially wrong idea that Hidrotambo is a state project.

It is interesting that this confusion is widespread among the local community, especially within the people that did not join the protests. A somehow more sophisticated version of this argument is that even though the company seems to be private, the local community would not have a chance to stop the construction, since the company relates to the state. So, there is no point to fight against it, and the major preoccupation should be to get as much benefit as possible.

The interviewee then proceeds– backed up by her son – by saying that the people did not know how to get the maximum out of this situation. This maximum would have been progress. But most importantly for this analysis, she argues that every situation, including the construction of the powerplant, brings advantages and disadvantages, that it is a give and take. She therefore concludes that the acceptance of the hydroelectric powerplant in exchange for infrastructure would have been the only rational behaviour.

It is no random choice that my interview partner refers to the people from San Pablo as *gentecita*. *Gente* means 'people', and the suffix *-cita* is a diminutive. The term therefore roughly translates as 'little people', meaning 'simple people' as those from the countryside without much education. It is in this context a pejorative term. The woman I talked to is descendent of the former hacienda-owner in San Pablo. She lived in the village for most part of her life but has now moved with her family to El Tambo. She belongs to a higher class than the *campesina/os* living in the village. By calling the people from San Pablo *gentecita*, she positions herself as superior and semantically emphasises that the people's incapacity to maximize their own interests is due to their intellectual inferiority: "The *gentecita* did not understand."

The opinions expressed in the interview extract emblematically engage with the trade-off: local infrastructure for natural resource extraction. And even though I introduce the trade-off aspect here with a person somewhat outside of the local *campesino*-community, she is by far not the only one alluding to this frame.

As already mentioned, Maria in her speech on the day of the inspection emphasises as well that there would be a lot of progress if the company would not be held back by unnecessary legal procedures asking for justice (lines 50-52); her ex-husband equally laments that there was not enough benefit in the form of progress for the community; the Hidrotambo representative

responsible for socialization states that progress should not be negated because of ‘two or three people’ (asking for justice) (line 212); and even Claudio emphasises in his intervention (lines 147-149) that he fought against Hidrotambo because compared to this company, the oil drilling companies in the Amazon compensate locally affected people. So, he fought against Hidrotambo because of deception, not because of the water grab per se. At the latest when Darwin’s son Javier indicates the same day that the reproach expressed by all these actors seems logical to him (lines 349-352), it becomes evident how strongly the trade-off between development and justice is naturalized within the community.

Equally, the claim for unity is the most frequently placed in the speeches of all actors involved on the day of the on-site visit. These claims have contradictive meanings: when Darwin says (line 311): “only [in] union […] nobody can violate our rights,” he sees the need for union in the community in order to be more effective when fighting for community rights.

But when Maria and Hidrotambo’s representative talk about peace and unity, they refer to peace and unity as abandonment of the conflict and acceptance of the current situation. Just as the visitor from El Tambo says (lines 273-274): “We do not like Hidrotambo? So, we do not like it and we just leave it in peace over there.” These actors frame the fight for justice as an unnecessary aggression against the supposably passive, peaceful company. Of course, facing the fact that the people living on the river upstream got legally dispossessed by the company and lost their land and buffer resource, these claims are a farce. Nevertheless, they contribute to the perception that the status quo concerning Hidrotambo is unchangeable and resistance therefore unreasonable.

To conclude, the very core issue of the conflict for the local community in San Pablo is the following: if you want to have the basic infrastructure to live a safe and decent life in your village, you need to connect with the company, accept the grab, and give up your rights. In other words: If you want development, you cannot ask for justice.

So, even though the dilemma of ‘development’ vs. ‘justice’ is a mere political construction in San Pablo that connects two in principle unrelated issue, it becomes a very crude reality for the local community. This dilemma is not solved with the objection that progress would have never arrived anyways. Even though this is probably true, the expectations, the hopes, and the conflict are indicating otherwise, namely that the lack of development in form of basic infrastructure is a punishment for the impudence of the local community to claim sovereignty over the resources, environment, and livelihood that they consider as theirs.

Of course, the dilemma itself is a social injustice, emerging due to the lack of recognition of the local community; a lack that materializes mainly through the absence of the state as the

provider of basic services. This absence – or infrastructural violence of exclusion – leads to an elevated vulnerability that makes the construction of this development vs. justice dilemma possible in the first place. Following Le Billon (2015), I would state, therefore, that this environmental conflict is in fact not about the environment as a scarce resource; it is not even a conflict about the collective decision-making of how to manage the environment; it is a conflict around a politically constructed trade-off of possibilities and constrains for decent livelihoods in remote areas.

This differentiation may seem like a banality, but I make the assertion that when it comes to collective decision-making around natural resources, the vulnerability of local communities converted into bargaining assets are at the very core of the strategy to push forward extractivist enterprises. So, even if local communities, NGOs, and policy makers will get in touch with alternative wordings of development: as long as development – understood as the fulfilment of basic needs – is not provided by the state, the dependency of local communities on other powerful actors as potential provider of such infrastructure will severely impede their claims for justice. There is, in other words, almost no way out of the extracitivist model under these conditions. Of course, the last ones to blame are the local communities themselves longing for some material goods – like decent roads, a sewage system, or a functioning health centre – that are mostly standard in the more urbanised zones even within their own countries.

Escobar (2015a) states that:

> *First, it is important to resist falling into the trap, from northern perspectives, of thinking that while the North needs to degrow, the South needs 'development'; conversely, from southern perspectives, it is important to avoid the idea that degrowth is 'ok for the North' but that the South needs rapid growth, whether to catch up with rich countries, satisfy the needs of the poor, or reduce inequalities; while acknowledging the need for real improvements in people's livelihoods, public services, and so forth, it is imperative for groups in the South to avoid endorsing growth as the basis for these improvements; a key criteria is that* growth and the economy should be subordinated to BV *[Buen Vivir]* and the rights of nature, not the other way around. *(Emphasis in the original)*

In theory, I agree completely with this statement. It is very important that development as an economic fantasy should not get confused with the need for real improvements claimed by local communities. But what to do in the very real, very empirical, and very frequent case where there is no possibility for real improvements without engaging with other, often destructive (neo-)extractivist practices?

As exposed in the theory section, the development-environment dilemma is not discussed as a trade-off without alternatives, but as a construction based on a capitalistic notion of material growth at least since the beginning of this century. Nevertheless, this literature still

suggests that the conflict has the environment as a materiality at its core. What has been left out for all too long is the possibility that this dilemma might be a constructed one on a discursive basis, a mere trick to maintain physical control, sovereignty of interpretation, and, finally, the political decision power.

In sum, I herewith want to answer the first of my research question: How is the conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley constructed? It is a political construction around a supposed dilemma: the local community either accepts the company and gets development from them in the form of basic infrastructure; or they insist in their water rights and reject the company due to its illicit behaviour and renounce on the development it would bring. This dilemma is constructed by the dominant actors – namely the company and the regional authorities – that take the vulnerability of the local community resulting from the infrastructural violence of exclusion as a bargaining asset to impose the reconfiguration of the local natural resources management. The construction of the conflict lacks a concrete environmental background since the possibility to progress – to get decent infrastructure – is unrelated to the question if the local community has the right to decide over the use and management of its common pool resource.

The Knowledge-Power Nexus

As already stated in the literature around neo-extractive activities and resource grabbing, regionally dominant state and private actors in the Dulcepamba River valley behaved the same way as their counterparts in other countries pursuing extractivist activities.

There should be a decisive difference in the Latin American panorama between countries like Chile and Peru with a continuous neoliberalist stance, and countries that were part of the leftist wave of governments, namely Bolivia and Ecuador: the latter anchored in their legislations very progressive laws concerning nature; laws that would enable local communities to impede the grabbing of their common pool resources and the exploitation and degradation of their livelihoods. So, what changes does such a highly progressive national constitution bring on a local level concerning the perception of the politically constructed development vs. justice dilemma?

Until this stage of my analysis, I would agree with the conclusion of most academic accounts analysing this question: almost none. The same power structures are forming the physical realities and discourses, the same problems are conditioning needs, values, agreement, and disagreement among the actors involved, forcing the people confronted with cases of commons grabbing and environmental injustices to choose between development or justice.

I want to stress that my findings are not very exciting in this sense, since this is what has been stated so many times in the pertinent literature exposed in the theory section: the neo-extractivist model is just the same as the extractivist model, and the Latin American new left is, when it comes to extractivist activities, just like the old right. Or, through the scalar lens, the national interpretative scale with its highly progressive framework is disconnected from the regional and local operational scale, e.g., the events happening in remote provinces of the country. The regional observational scale, e.g., the task of regional authorities to force the dominant actors on a local scale to adhere to national law, is empty in most cases.

It is the third part of my analysis that challenges these findings, because it shows that despite the initial circumstances that are all too known, the situation in the Dulcepamba River valley is not the same anymore. This change became possible through the formation of the Dulcepamba River Project.

Based on the brief description of the project in the context section, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of its activities in the following. The analysis is divided in three parts: I will show first how the project upscaled the conflict to a national and even international level by producing scientific data to back up local knowledge and reframe the occurrences in the valley within the pertinent national law and the international discourses around environmental concern; second, how it stepped in the gaps left by regional governments by making institutions more accessible, achieving with this a newly configurated regional scale that significantly changed local power hierarchies; and third, I will shed light on what consequences this set of activities brought for the local conflict, namely how it disentangled the locally dominant development vs. justice dilemma.

Upscaling Knowledge, Upscaling Rights

In the context section, I showed that while the aim of the Dulcepamba River Project is defined quite clearly – water justice through the assurance of water rights of local communities, especially for the people living around the Dulcepamba River – the activities to reach this aim changed considerably over time.

The first set of activities I analyse are the production of scientific data to back up local knowledge and reinforce the possibility to win legal indictments against regional authorities and Hidrotambo. I understand this set of activities as upscaling. Since scales are, according to Rangan & Kull (2009, p. 36) "the means by which ecology is made 'political'," their reconfiguration makes the politization of environmental goods and hazards possible. In other words: the locally dominant actors, namely regional authorities and the company, frame the resistance against the installation of the powerplant as terroristic acts against progress, and the

deterioration of local livelihoods following the construction of the powerplant as two unrelated events. Therefore, they deny the political dimension of the powerplant. By scientifically reaffirming the causal connections between the construction and the flood; by pointing at the national legal frame; and by opening the focus away from this local perspective up to globalized discourses around environmental justice, the Dulcepamba River Project uncovers this political dimension and thereby reinforces the spectrum of choice perceived by the local community.

It is important to be aware, as Danny MacKinnon (2011, p. 29) points out, that "political projects and initiatives are generally about exerting influence and control over particular areas of social activity and public policy rather than the command of scale per se." This is true for the Dulcepamba River Project, too: the project is not interested in the command of scale, e.g., by occupying a political office, but in the defence of the rights of the watershed communities. To achieve those rights, they need to get more influence, or access to a bigger scale than their counterparts; they need to upscale.

There are two characteristics of the Dulcepamba River Project that are of paramount importance to achieve the upscaling:

Firstly, the project is not an invention out of thin air, but the continuation of the protest that has been lasting already for almost a decade when the project was officially formed. This is important since the credibility and trust in the project is crucially driven by these roots within the aims and ideas of the community, or of the part of the community that protested. So, the project did not bring something new in but upscaled what was there.

Secondly, that deep local anchorage intertwines with the formal education of the women from the U.S. who have a background in environmental analysis and are well versed in data gathering and interpretation.

In short, the upscaling requires all the different qualities of the project members. During my fieldwork I witnessed several times in the context of organisational issues such as community work, surveys, or reunions, how the different skills of the project members intertwine. While the locals move within their environment knowing and respecting the cultural codes, the members with formal education use strategies to improve effectiveness and efficiency of their work. I want to provide an example from a reunion I attended with the other project members:

> *In the reunion with another water user association, Manuel and another activist were talking about several problems concerning mining licences, deforestation, and the use of pesticides in agriculture. Then, Emily intervened, asking if she is permitted to say something. She already organized a big sheet of paper and a pen. She then said that she would like to summarize the ideas buzzing around*

> *during the reunion. Rachel said several times: "Emily, you shouldn't be doing this. Somebody else should do that." Emily stressed that she does not want to recollect the ideas on her own, she would just write them down. Like this, they proceeded further, always discussing a lot. […] Later on, they already continued to some concrete ideas about what to do next in the watershed community. They wanted to plant some native trees next to the river, thinking about the education and the community guards, because apparently there were some thefts of animals at night in the area. (Field diary, 02-08-2020)*

In this example, Emily channels the discussion among Manuel and other water users to concrete results. Her expertise in other professional environments influences her longing for visualization of results. By holding back her sister, Rachel emphasised that the channelling of ideas should not be imposed by the outsiders.

In the focus discussion, we talked again about this moment:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *What I could, ehm, observe is an issue of efficiency that you, Rachel, talked about, too. I remember […] how you, Emily, yesterday, when you organized the pen and the big paper...*
> ***Emily:*** *That is very American.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And the other thing that happens is, for example, when you try to fill in the documents and you are always saying like: "Don Manuel, who lived next to that person 20 years ago?" "Don Fulanito." "Ah, yes," so, there is this interplay...*
> ***Emily:*** *It's very cultural.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Yes, this interplay between the local knowledge and formal education.*
> ***All:*** *Mhm*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *What do you think? Well, I said a lot already @@@*
> ***Rachel:*** *I was more stressed before, I had this phase when it was like: "We will not achieve what we intended to do, and why are we doing things so slowly," and – and – and – my solution was to work until dawn @@@*
> ***Emily:*** *That's very healthy.*
> ***Rachel:*** *And now, sincerely, I feel more calmed, because I say: "Yesterday the whole day we spent doing something very valuable, something where we learned a lot, we talked and talked and talked... But I didn't fill out any document," I mean, these things are always in my mind, and it is like: "There are so many documents to fill out, still," this is always in my mind, but for me it is like: before – before – I don't know, I let it cover me and it was like – I couldn't be attentive in the reunion, I would have been nervous all the time in this reunion, in this reunion where we spent hours listening to important discourses, but now I don't know, but I managed to restrain my culture, my perfectionism...*
> ***Emily:*** *I took this action [of bringing a pen and a sheet of paper to concretize the ideas in the reunion] because I was listening, I heard so many important things, but I didn't want to leave the reunion without resolutions, without actions, and this is very cultural.*
> ***Hannah S.:*** *And I appreciated that a lot what you did yesterday to not only finish the reunion with all the ideas loosely flying around everywhere but to concretize them.*

> ***Emily:*** *It's like this: in my ideal we finish the reunion not only with concrete actions, but as well by saying who will be in charge up to which date.[…] I know that this was not – was not feasible in this reunion, but this is my idea, to have a productive reunion, we have to end like this, and this is part of – this is one example of many examples that we can give about the cultural shocks we have. […] The topic of the cultural shock is like: we are in a race for efficiency and achievements. And we have to show to ourselves and the world that we achieved something at every pace, in this reunion now, on this day, in this week and this month... I worked in a private company before I came here […] where every 15 minutes count. So, in some way in the United States and in Europe and in other places it is like: "My time is gold, and if I don't achieve my goal within the budget – because the budget and the time is the same – and I have two hours and 15 minutes to finish my task [instead of only two hours] I already failed", and this clashes a lot with the culture of – of sharing, thinking, relating, all that. It is a culture where we have our lanes, and we have expectations every certain meter and if we don't achieve them, we fail.*
> ***Rachel:*** *And I think in the beginning when Emily arrived, she was thinking within this business model. And she said: "We will have reunions every Monday, they will last 20 minutes, we will achieve the following conclusions, we will budget perfectly, and the costs will be exact."*
> ***All:*** *@@@*
> ***Rachel:*** *And I thought like: "We will never achieve this, because there will be a series of unfortunate events" @@@*
> ***Emily:*** *And I think that both extremes don't work, and we have to find something in the middle, and we all have to leave our space of hmmm, wellbeing [looking for the exact term]*
> ***Hannah P.*** *[in English]: our comfort zone.*
> ***Emily:*** *Yes, we have to leave our comfort zone sometimes. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

Meanwhile I wanted to refer to an intertwining of knowledges and functioning within the project, in this discussion my observations were understood within cultural patterns. Especially Manuel emphasised later in the discussion that he perceives the culture of the United States as more advanced than the Ecuadorian one. After some further elaborations about cultural differences, I tried to specify my question:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *Maybe I didn't explain myself sufficiently, I didn't want to talk about the 'efficient gringas' and the 'slow Ecuadorians' that wasn't what I observed, but do you [Manuel] think that within the project you [Manuel] only learn from the 'gringa' mentality, or do you see as well this interchange of knowledges?*
> ***Emily:*** *This is an important question.*
> ***Manuel:*** *I mean, in life there are two aspects. And one aspect: never mind how advanced someone is, or how much older, the little child that is 10 years old can teach something to the grandfather that is maybe 100 years old. I mean, in life we can learn something from the maximum or the minimum. It depends on the mentality that we have. Now, there are a lot of dynamics. That the grandfather learns from the grandchild, and there are a lot of dynamics where the grandfather left us something and maybe we learn that. […] You learned something from me, and I learned something from you.*

Rachel: *Of course. […] It was mutually, we learned a lot mutually.*
Manuel: *There are a lot of issues that we can talk about this night, and we won't finish. But I tell you that I am very convinced that you come from another culture that is more advanced.*
Hannah P.: *I think that concerning this issue we won't conclude today indeed.*
Hannah S.: *What I want to say as well is that culture has several levels. And we don't only come from the United States, but as well from a semi-urban culture. And here, this is rural Ecuador. So, we must take into account that if we want to compare this culture and our culture, this is not exactly parallel because I have seen in Quito places where we go to a reunion where it is like: "Let's do that, we have to say that now"...*
Rachel: *Yes, and there are things you do here that I tried to learn, and I maybe cannot learn, but that are so beautiful and positive, for example the way of conversation. We come from a place where it is like: you have a conversation just if it is necessary – I mean, it is not always like this, sometimes we spend long times together learning from each other, but a lot of times there is too much efficiency.[…]*
Hannah P.: *And isn't exactly this local and formal knowledge that comes together here and that makes this project so good?*
Rachel: *Hm... What?*
Hannah P.: *I mean –*
Manuel: *I didn't understand.*
Hannah S.: *If our cultural mix makes us a better project.*
Hannah P.: *Exactly.*
Emily: *The question is if we bring together the good things about our cultures that sometimes clash, but as well everything has its value, and it makes us better in integration. […]*
Hannah P.: *Do you see this combination of forces in your project?*
All: *Yes.*
Emily: *I think it would be impossible to be effective or do something without the members from here. I think it wouldn't be possible.*
Manuel: *This wouldn't work. It wouldn't work. There are a lot of things that wouldn't work.*
Emily: *And I don't know about the opposite, if it would be possible to manage the project if – and I would say that we – and I believe that this is the difference, I believe that it would be possible to manage the project very similar to how we are doing it now and the difference is not that we are foreigners, but it is the preparation that we have.*
Hannah P.: *Exactly.*
Rachel: *And as well that we are willing to work as volunteers for almost a decade. @@@ […]*
Manuel: *Now... If it would not be with you, maybe, to give you an example: Darwin will be well prepared.*
Hannah P.: *Aha.*
Manuel: *Darwin will be well prepared in case that you leave.*
Hannah P.: *Aha, yes.*
Manuel: *And he would be one of those people that probably would carry on.*
Rachel: *Gisela as well.*
Manuel: *Vilma probably in part will be prepared. […] So, it wouldn't be so difficult for those left behind if we stay. Because I tell you: there are people that worked with you. Now, the big problem is the financial part. We of course would*

> *find someone that would be in charge of doing the project, initiating the project. But we don't have the same effectiveness and the same way to conceive [funding]. This would be difficult. Now, for you it is a little bit more difficult because you are from somewhere else. And if you don't have the support from the people from here for you it would be more difficult.*
> ***Emily:*** *Impossible.*
> ***Manuel:*** *Not impossible.*
> ***Emily:*** *It is impossible because the reason why we are here is to help you with something. And if you don't want the help, then... Because you cannot help anyone if he/she doesn't want to get help. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

In this part of the discussion, Manuel still insists in the cultural superiority of the United States. But meanwhile the cultural perspective prevails, it becomes clear that cultures differ as well within countries, especially comparing rural and urban environments. Here, the difference in between formal, business-like cooperation and the work within a rural community is emphasised. The positive and negative aspects of both attitudes are pointed out, the race for efficiency of the urban, formal environment versus the more integral and respectful way of communication with a lack of concrete results in rural areas. The moments where these attitudes conclude in contradicting actions can lead to major tensions, denominated violently as 'clashes'. Nevertheless, concerning the project the cultural differences in their majority are seen as a positive mutual completion.

In the end of the discussion, the project members agreed that the most important contribution of the project members from the United States is the preparation, the possibility to work for no money and the network to get financing for the project. In sum: their formal education. Therefore, they are in theory replaceable with other people with the same preparation and willingness. This shows how formal education moves within a mobile, globalized, observational scale of a scientific community and legal language; and how the necessary network to finance the project mainly from abroad moves within the same scale. Therefore, the global dimension not only influences the observational and interpretative scale of the construction of the powerplant but through upscaling it influences also the resistance against it.

In comparison, the local members are deemed indispensable since their anchoring within the community assures the project's legitimacy on a discursive and material level. They bring in the local knowledge, e.g., their cultural background, geographical information, their time spent in the area, assuring that the aim of the project corresponds with the aim of the local community. Emily expresses this aspect by saying that it is impossible to help someone if he or she does not want that kind of help. Despite this anchorage, the project members must cope with unmet expectations of other parts of the local community, as already mentioned in the

previous section. This shows that the 'local community' as one homogeneous structure does not exist.

To conclude, the project is perceived and lived of its members as a joint effort of different people intertwining their local knowledge with formal education. This joint effort is not always easy and even leads to anxiety, as Rachel and Emily both describe, but in the end the combination is the core force that makes change in the conflict around the Dulcepamba River possible.

So, what were the steps taken to upscale the conflict? The first step was the production of scientific evidence to support the local knowledge, as Emily explains in the context section on page 34:

> *The argument of SENAGUA is: There was a natural, extraordinary event that never could have been planned that it would happen and that there was all the damage but that it wasn't their fault. But with the hydrological model – that is basically a model of water availability – we showed that there was no extraordinary event, there was an event that happens every five or six years or that has a probability of 17% to happen every year. This is a giant probability. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

I quote this part again to reinforce its importance within this context. The locals that opposed the powerplant underlined its danger. They already knew that the river would wash away the construction and cause major damage. But since this is a situation of uneven power relation, the less powerful local community was not heard, and the company downplayed the probability of floods. The local and regional authorities equally dismissed the concerns as nonsense. This manufacturing of uncertainty (Conde, 2014) exposes the people living in the area to danger and silences their voice. The scale constructed here by the dominant actors excludes the local population and their knowledge as supposably only scientifically backed-up findings count.

This is where the Dulcepamba River Project brought the right tools to counter the dominating power. By speaking the same language of officiality, of science, of evidence and findings, it rewrote the local knowledge. Like this, the local knowledge became formalized, scientifically whitewashed even, and upscaled. It converted the concern ignored until now into claims that had to be heard. This change of perception emblematically shows why the knowledge-power nexus is so important.

An additional gamechanger and an outstanding fact in such a setting is that the collection of data was already going on in the valley before the big flood in 2015. This advantage of the project impeded the dominant actors to use a lack of data as a tool to manufacture uncertainty in this case.

Armed with this unusually good data situation, the project started the upscaling through networking. Again, I would like to quote Emily:

> *We learned on the way that the studies, the data, the facts are very good, but we must accompany these studies with political efforts, legal efforts, administrative efforts, mediatic efforts, academic efforts, efforts of national and international pressure […] and the like. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

She describes here the constant networking, after the data gathering as the most important pillar of the scientific and legal activism of the Dulcepamba River Project.

In other words, the data and analyses may be the basis for achieving anything at all, because they allow for the reframing of the local knowledge as facts that cannot be ignored anymore, and the proof of causalities considerably complicate the manufacturing of uncertainty by the dominant actors. But the project members became aware that this is not enough to change power relations. What is additionally needed is an interested, even alerted public that goes beyond the local community. Like this, real pressure becomes possible. So, the networking becomes the second step for upscaling the conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley.

This second step must be put in context of the composition of the project. Networking is a demanding issue, and the project has some decisive advantages in that matter.

First, to build networks with powerful actors is considerably easier for foreigners. Especially authorities are more respectful towards white people, as I could confirm in different circumstances during my fieldwork. As already described in the section about my place in the field, people constantly classified me as an engineer or doctor, even though I did not claim to be one. But since I was foreigner, they assumed that I had a superior education and therefore more knowledge about water use, legal circumstances, administrative issues, and the like. In sum, I gained more credibility simply due to my appearance. Similarly, I wrote down the following episode in my field diary:

> *Rachel went to the hospital in Guaranda today with [a villager], Gisela's mother. She has not been able to walk for years, and they never properly attended her at the hospital. They just told her that there is nothing that they can do for her. So, Rachel accompanied them to 'make some force', and to get the doctor to do his job properly. She succeeded; indeed, we are all quite intrigued how much a 'privileged' face changes the doctor's attitude. They didn't attend [the villager] properly until Rachel showed up. And when Rachel left, they stopped attending her properly. (Field Diary, 02-04-2020)*

Manuel comments this change of attitudes of local and regional authorities in the following words:

> ***Manuel:*** *In the government offices they treated us very badly before. If a farmer arrived, the person attending to the office was already alerted when he/she saw*

> *the* campesino *only from far away. He/she had to move back because the* campesino *stinks. Because he surely didn't take a bath. This was the way of treatment, right, Gisela?*
> ***Gisela:*** *Yes*
> ***Rachel:*** *Yes, I know.*
> ***Manuel:*** *But what happened with Correa? This changed. And supposably people from other countries now come to observe this change, and the employees are afraid, they are afraid of that. And the fear – sometimes they don't attend to clients properly, but if another [foreign] person arrives, they say: "She/he will sue us." And as they know that there is a law that protects us – and this is made by the new constitution, this is new – […] now if they see a foreigner it is just logical that the first thing they will do is attend to her/him properly. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

So, if someone from another country is present, a sort of upscaling of power occurs right away, since the person is perceived to be different, better educated, more aware of her/his rights, richer, in short: more powerful. In the Ecuadorian case, according to Manuel, the foreigner additionally changes the operational scale: the state representatives feel observed and judged harder. Therefore, it is no surprise that the regional power structures changed when the foreign members of project got involved in the conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley.

Second, networking is easier for the Dulcepamba River Project because on the one hand, the women from the United States already arrived with a network in academia. The University of California in Davis where Rachel studied environmental analysis conducted the hydro-forensic analysis, one of the most important evidences of causality between the construction of the powerplant and the floods in 2015 (Newmiller, et al., 2017). The Engineers without Borders who designed the irrigation systems form part of these connections, too. On the other hand, Manuel and the other protesters most exposed to lawsuits during the first years of protest constructed a national network with NGOs advocating for human rights.

Within the project, these two networks are brought together so that the academic activism is directly linked to experts that take the necessary legal steps to exert as much pressure as possible on regional and national authorities. Through the combination of their scientific and legal networks, the project, in cooperation with their partners, achieved some considerable legal successes, namely the lawsuit placed at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against Hidrotambo and several regional state entities; the aforementioned resolution that led to a limitation of the powerplant's operation; and another lawsuit placed by national NGOs and the regional people's defender at the regional court against the same actors. In the first instance, this last lawsuit was dismissed as irrelevant. The NGOs in charge brought the case up to the constitutional court. This court of higher instance, in stark contrast to its subordinate body,

marked it as a particularly relevant precedent case concerning the management of renewable resources under the new constitution.

Networking is, in sum, one of the crucial activities of the Dulcepamba River Project. During my fieldwork of one month, the project members constantly were connecting to other organisations and authorities: on my first day in the field, I already accompanied a human rights NGO from Quito developing a documentary about the newest incidents in the valley. On the next day, we went to a festivity in El Tambo, and Rachel introduced me to the president of the *Parroquia* and to the mayor of the *Cantón* Chillanes whom she is friends with. On 31 January, we went to Guaranda to a meeting of the regional people's defender committee. Darwin, Emily, and Manuel form constant part of this institution. On the same day, we drove to Quito and spent two days meeting the national people's defender, several human rights NGOs, a lawyer willing to write an expertise about the case, and we even spent the night at the home of one of the law clerks from the constitutional court.

It is within these networks that the struggles of the people living along the Dulcepamba River get connected to national and international discourses of environmental justice and water rights. This is another highly important step of upscaling achieved through the project. One week after our trip to Quito, we attended a reunion with the regional governor in a village near Chillanes. The village is opposing mining concessions that the regional authority wants to grant for the land in the area. They mobilized within the anti-mining movement and invited people and organisations from all over Ecuador that are fighting against environmental injustices. Therefore, the people from the Dulcepamba River Project were invited, too.

These connections definitely convert the struggle around the Dulcepamba River to a glocal one, jumping scales from the local issues up to national and global discourses around water justice. This even led to a registration in the Environmental Justice Atlas (Pérez, 2016), a website curated by the university of Barcelona. Maybe the most emblematic example how much the of the project members themselves embrace this glocality is Darwin's intervention on the day of the on-site visit that contains all the aspects of a glocal activist: the gendering (lines 282, 286, 293), the reference to a rural, national identity (we are all from the mountains, we are all Ecuadorians, lines 294-296), the citation of the bible (lines 316-318), the reference to respect homosexual people (lines 297-299), the praise to women (lines 286-287), etc. In this reunion, he incorporates a person that simultaneously has local roots and a perception of the situation that entails elements of the globalized (environmental) justice movement.

Within the fight for water rights, the connection to globalized discourses is not only a tactical move to give more weight to the claims. It is also a way to combat loneliness and fear

that inevitably come with such a longstanding, devastating conflict, as I documented in my field diary:

> *[An anti-mining activist from Cuenca] said: "I don't know what the specific problems in this village are, but there is the wear and tear, you sometimes get tired of being every day in the fight." And he suggested to bring new players in. He proposed that within a big event in Quito, instead of just hoping that the local community of San Pablo would move, the Dulcepamba River Project should invite other organizations and communities all over Ecuador in order to build connections. Rachel said that it seems a very good idea to her, to show the people of San Pablo that they are not alone in this fight, that there are other communities with the same problems. She said: "It's like giving San Pablo a hug, because San Pablo really needs one." (Field Diary, 02-09-2020)*

In this sense, the network also serves to encourage the people that they are doing something important and necessary, and that they are not alone. And other communities in the watershed are already demanding the help of the Dulcepamba River Project to fight against mining concession that the state has been granting recently.

During an interview, Darwin stated the following:

> ***Darwin:*** *[The people from Hidrotambo] always use the word that they are clean, that they take the water and give back downstream all the water exactly like they took it, but why in this case they oppose to the farmers upstream of the hydroelectric [powerplant]? […] And it doesn't matter if [the farmers] demand for one person or ten people, [the company] opposes all the water requests. They don't respect the law. Basically, the one that has more money crushes the smaller one. It's like a fight of a giant against a small one.*
> ***Hannah:*** *Like David and Goliath?*
> ***Darwin:*** *Ah, yes, of course. But... Based on that, even if we are very small economically compared to the company, but we fought against them very... almost... from 'you' to 'you', egalitarian, because we used the laws a lot to help legalize the water use for the other* campesinos*. Ehm, and SENAGUA lately is agreeing with us and Hidrotambo at the end is losing and losing. (Interview 25, 02-12-2020, San Pablo)*

Darwin explains in the interview extract how the law is a lever to alter the power relations in the conflict, how the situation can be managed as an egalitarian one, even if the financial and structural power would tell otherwise. This alteration becomes possible through upscaling of the observational scale, through mobilizing forces that are willing and able to apply national law, even if those laws alter the local and regional power structures. So, despite all pessimistic accounts about the effectiveness of the national constitution, this chapter shows that laws that protect common pool resources from commodification and privatization are indeed a gamechanger; not because they would automatically change local power struggles, but because they offer at least the legal back up indispensable to advance the local claims.

Filling the Gaps

The upscaling however had a side-effect that quickly became evident through the work of the Dulcepamba River Project: it opened a gap, an empty space on the operational scale between local realities and national laws, the gap left by regional institutions of the state, like the government of the *Cantón* or the regional SENAGUA office, that are ineffective or even inexistent.

I will show three processes how the Dulcepamba River Project fills this gap and constructs a new regional scale. First, they inform the watershed communities about the water law and encourage them to demand their water rights by providing the necessary infrastructure. This process is the most outstanding and prominent one. Second, they bring together local and regional authorities and pressure them to assume their responsibility. Third, they fulfil, at least partly, the infrastructural needs of the local community by constructing a water irrigation system. Like this, they disentangle the politically constructed trade-off between development and justice by showing that one and the same actor can insist in local water rights and provide infrastructure at the same time.

During the focus group discussion with the project members, I asked the following question:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *I will not ask if [your project] is important, because obviously it is very important to a lot of people. So, the question is: Why? Why do you think that for a lot of people this project is so important?*
> ***Manuel:*** *From my point of view this project is important first because it brought us money, it brought us time. And a lot of people – and I don't want to minimize them – a lot of us* campesinos *don't even know how to present ourselves in front of the lieutenant or the commissioner if there is a problem. We need to have other people that talk for us or tell us, because we really don't know how to get to these people. And even worse to reach the water ministry to transmit something. So, for that matter this is where the lawyers [of Hidrotambo] took advantage. So, I believe, I think that due to all these aspects concerning the lives of the community [the project] was the best that happened, the best help we received. And this help equals money for us water users, it equals time, it avoids wear of the people. Because we don't know how to arrive at an office. A lot of us don't even know the city of Guaranda. I am sorry about this, but this is the reality. The* gentecita *– why? It is not because they don't want to. But in a lot of cases, it is about the economic situation. There are people in the countryside that work from Monday to Saturday. Only on Sunday they can go to the market and buy their stuff, that's it. And every other day they dedicate to work. What do they work for? There are a lot of people saying: "Well, I worked Monday and Tuesday and I earned 10 dollars." These 10 dollars are needed to bring food at home. So, this is the reality, and this is why a lot of people have seen the good side of this project, they have seen that this was the best. […]*
> ***Rachel:*** *Okay, something that we hoped we could help in around here, and something that I saw in the beginning – when the people arrived in the office or*

> *when we went to other offices – was that in a lot of offices there is like a way to treat the* campesino *person that is very lamentable. Because it is like – it is not like: "Hello my friend, how are you? What did you do lately? How is your life? I will take my time to explain you what I am doing." But it is: "Just come quickly and sign here." @ Or: "Now I don't feel like working, come back another day."*
> ***Emily:*** *This is the most common attitude @@@*
> ***Rachel:*** *Above all at SENAGUA, but equally at the police station or at the... Well, at some mayor's offices. […] I have a lot of love for the first people whom we made the water adjudication for, because we got to know them very well and we went with them for marches, reunions, and we talked a lot about the problems with Hidrotambo. […]I believe this was something very beautiful and it is still ongoing about the project and the office we had over there. Ehm. And yes, well we became friends with a lot of people, and this is very beautiful. And we try to take the time and reflect on the water law and the topic of Hidrotambo. We talked about that a lot, we spent hours talking about this topic in the office. […] So, I believe that this was something positive. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

The project members locate their importance in their way to treat people differently compared to the regional authorities. They are explaining how these authorities do not help people with little understanding of bureaucratical issues, people from the countryside, *campesina/os*.

But the most important aspect mentioned above is the physical distance between the SENAGUA office and the people living around the Dulcepamba River. The SENAGUA subsection that includes the Bolivar province is huge, reaching from the centre of Ecuador up to the Galapagos Islands. So, even if SENAGUA wanted to, I doubt that there would be enough budget to adequately cover this space. This fact stands in sharp contradiction to the requirements that every single household should adjudicate its water use, or better said, the distances make this administrative issue an impossibility for the local population. Just as Manuel describes, people earning 10 dollars for one day of work cannot afford to miss several workdays and pay the ticket to go to the province capital to adjudicate their water use. Even worse if the authorities in charge cannot or do not want to work on a certain day.

These aspects – the national law that declares all water as national property and demands the registration of water users, and the local customs without formalized water use – led to a situation of legal blurriness. The company asking for water concessions took advantage of this situation and could grab the common pool resource water, even though according to national law such a grab is not possible. With this, the company emblematically engaged with the strategy of institution shopping (Haller, 2020). Again becomes apparent that, even if this conflict is not about scale per se, the omission of a properly operating regional scale leads to a situation that is unwanted according to the national legislation.

When the project members became aware of the grab and the threats of the company, they started to explain their rights to people. This downscaling – or institution enforcement 'from below' – led to the possibility of mobilisation and informed reaction. During the focus group discussion in the village of Margarita, the importance of this information becomes clear:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *And among you, does someone remember when you found out about the problem with Hidrotambo, with the water and the adjudications? When was that?*
> ***Woman 1:*** *This was just recently, I think. Maybe seven years ago.*
> ***Man 1:*** *It was through your friends, you know, the gringitas.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *Aha, Raquelita arrived seven years ago?*
> ***All:*** *[Agreeing on this timeframe]*
> ***Woman 1:*** *Thanks to them, they make us aware that we have this problem with the water, because if not, [the company] would have caught us sleeping, nobody knew what would happen with the water. It was like this. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-13-2020, Margarita)*

The people of Margarita stress several times that it was neither Hidrotambo nor the authorities in charge but the project members that provided the necessary information about the adjudication of water use. In other words, if the Dulcepamba River Project would not exist, the new water law that gives priority for human water users would not have any effect since people did not know about the law.

Darwin finds clear words to explain this aspect:

> *Part of our fight, our work, our rebellion, of our... daily life is to help the others in this case to legalize the use of water since Hidrotambo is a company that grabbed the water. It even had 6500 litres per second every time. SENAGUA gave it to them, the institution that is in charge to distribute equally the water, giving guarantee and priority of use... for water consume of people, how the law of the 6th of August of 2014, article 86 guarantees. […] But this law never was respected. Even if the laws are in our favour, there must be a hard fight to get these rights that they would be applied in our daily life. Otherwise, they won't arrive. Even if it is written down, it is written in the wind, you don't know about [those laws]. It is pure paper, pure bureaucracy. In the end, a lot of* campesinos *and* campesinas *don't even know about the laws because the institutions like SENAGUA never informed about them. We ourselves as agricultural workers should have talked about this water law to help the other people. Otherwise, the people think that we are a little crazy and that we are leading them to commit an error. But once the law was explained and shared in our communities we could – ehm – they concluded that they should legalize their water use. Otherwise, they would receive a fine. (Interview 25, 02-12-2020, San Pablo)*

Darwin not only calls the grab by its name, but as well describes how the laws do not have any use and solemnly exist on paper. The project's work was to bring together the local circumstances and the legal frame, to construct a new regional scale.

Within this spatiality and along with the information task, the Dulcepamba River Project developed the habit to help to fill out the forms and transmit them to the SENAGUA office in Guaranda. Based on this activity, the independent Dulcepamba River Project office gradually came into being. The project members did not really make a conscious decision to go a step further and open an office that literally replaces the regional authorities, but they did what they deemed necessary to support the water users. To open an office seemed only a logical next step, as they explain during the focus group discussion:

> ***Emily:*** *We made a very small office in the town hall of Chillanes, and we were there only Monday and Tuesday in the beginning, I think. And in the first four –*
> ***Rachel:*** *Only Monday.*
> ***Emily:*** *During the first four months [there was no work] we were sitting, talking with our friends in the U.S. because we lived all the time in San Pablo de Amalí and we didn't have internet there. But then the word spread and the line in front of the office was so long, it continued outside the office, down the stairs and even outside the town hall, like every Monday and Tuesday. […]*
> ***Rachel:*** *There were different stages of office.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *But you opened the office because of the water adjudications?*
> ***Rachel:*** *Yes.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And there were only the two of you in the beginning, nobody else?*
> ***Emily:*** *No, there was another guy from the United States. He didn't stay for a long time. We opened the office basically when I arrived, it was like three weeks after that I arrived.*
> ***Rachel:*** *Before we worked without office, I and Darwin.*
> ***Hannah S.:*** *When did you start to do the adjudications?*
> ***Rachel:*** *2015. But we made only five or six.*
> ***Emily:*** *And we opened the office in October 2016. I arrived in August.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And you remember this moment where you decided: "Well, let's take this to another level. Let's – to put it like that – do a work that should the state do"? Weren't you a little afraid to take the project to this level?*
> ***Rachel:*** *You know, I am more afraid now than I was before.*
> ***All:*** *@@@*
> ***Emily:*** *We did not know a lot yet.*
> ***Rachel:*** *Yes, maybe it was innocence. Because after that, Hidrotambo did harass us. They even presented a complaint in Guayaquil in SENAGUA saying that this office is illicit, or I don't know what word they used, and SENAGUA from Guaranda came to interview the people in the line outside. "Are they charging you something? Are they saying that they are lawyers? What do they tell you?" Like this. And – and they came to take pictures. [A state employee] took pictures. It was very weird. And well, after that, they asked to investigate our migratory status, and SENAGUA accepted and sent demands to the ministry of interior. But well, now we overcome. I mean, some people from SENAGUA still are a little weird, but the majority isn't. [The SENAGUA engineer in charge in Guaranda] now even tells people that arrive [at the SENAGUA office] that they should come here. […]*
> ***Manuel:*** *It is true that we achieved to be a bit more visible in this. Because when we just started, we met the authorities and we were the troublemakers, the*

> atrasapueblos,[38] *in this sense we transformed ourselves. Because that was what they called us, in the water office, when they saw us: "Look over there, there are the guys that will oppose themselves," like, this was the issue. […] We are within a process. This process started with some* compañeros *that are behind this. If we can go now to SENAGUA and they attend to us, it is not because we went there so much, no, but because of the pressure of the people. […] That wasn't something we got for free, because of being beautiful they suddenly respect us, no. I have seen the engineer of SENAGUA before, and he couldn't even look at us. But now he is [very friendly]. This is how it is. This is one reality. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

As can be seen in this extract, the office changed gradually, from one room inside the town hall up to the current independent office with two different rooms, bathroom, and kitchen. People gradually learned about their rights and therefore came to the office. According to the survey I conducted in the office, until now most people learn about the office and the need to formalize their water rights trough family or neighbours that told them to do so.

Another aspect is the contradictory relationship between SENAGUA and the office of the Dulcepamba River Project. Officially, SENAGUA denies its existence, as the engineer in charge told me during an interview:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *As you know I learned about the office of the socio-environmental project in Chillanes. And there are a lot of water users that arrive to this office. What do you think: Is such an additional place to help necessary?*
> ***Engineer:*** *No, we don't recognize it, we don't have another office. In fact, we recommend the water users to transmit personally, it is for free. Well, we don't mind, it is okay that they help, but we don't recognize another place than this, this office here. (Interview, Guaranda, 02-03-2020)*

Nevertheless, as Rachel pointed out, SENAGUA sends people from its office in Guaranda to the smaller and faster NGO-office in Chillanes. Vilma, the lawyer working for the Dulcepamba River Project representing the water users in the hearings finds clear words for the situation:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *I just talked to the SENAGUA engineer. He told me that every process is for free, that they recognize only one office here in Guaranda and no office in Chillanes, and these issues. But you are seeing the help that the office in Chillanes offers – what is the problem of the water adjudications so that an office like the one of the socio-environmental project is necessary?*
> ***Vilma:*** *Well, Raquel and Emily are of big help. Why? Well, I must declare before that here in SENAGUA they always say Raquel and Emily are tramitadoras,[39] but this is not true. They are not because all the documents they issue for the* campesino *people are for free. It is for free; they don't charge not even one cent. This office and the help that Raquel and Emily offer is indispensable.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *The help that you offer, too.*

[38] Literal translation: the 'delayers of the people', meaning the ones that hold back the progress of the nation.
[39] Tramitadores is a very common profession in Latin America that consist in helping people to fulfil necessary administrative issues of all kinds. Tramitadores charge a fee for their services.

> ***Vilma:*** *That the whole Dulcepamba Project offers. Because, as you know, in San Pablo de Amalí and San José del Tambo* campesino *people are living with few economic resources, so, they don't have enough resources to do the adjudications and to be behind SENAGUA [telling them to hurry up with the adjudications]. They don't have the resources to travel, because from San Pablo de Amalí it takes three hours to get here to Guaranda, minimum three hours, without taking into account that sometimes you cannot pass, there is sometimes no public transport, the roads sometimes are in bad shape, so, they cannot travel just like this. And the facility is that [with the office in Chillanes] they just arrive Saturday and Sunday to Chillanes, and we help them with the documents, and we bring these documents here to Guaranda. We don't charge even a cent to the people from the countryside. Therefore, it is very important. We help them because they don't have the economic resources. And the facility that we – if we need some document or [the applicants] have to sign something or we have to bring something to SENAGUA that is signed we localize them by phone, sometimes. Sometimes, there is no network. This is another facility that we offer, that we go to the homes [of the applicants], we make them sign and explain everything to them. This is another issue. Because there is no transport, they don't have economic resources, and there is no network to contact them. So, this is another facility we help with. And we don't only help the* campesino *people but SENAGUA as well. Because sometimes SENAGUA cannot locate the people and they call us: "You know that we are trying to reach the following person," and we locate them. So, we help them considerably, too, because actually they should call the people and contact them and tell them that they have a hearing and that they should come, and they should go and inform them in the countryside and tell them: "You have to come, you have an appointment," because this is their work and not ours. So, we are helping SENAGUA considerably. And even so, they damage us.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And why SENAGUA doesn't fulfil their task?*
> ***Vilma:*** *They don't fulfil because they say that supposably they are covering a big amount of people, the whole Bolivar Province and a part of Los Rios. And as I tell you: it is hard to find [the people], sometimes there is no telephone connection. So, apart from helping the* campesino *people we are helping SENAGUA and the state, too.*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *So, one could say that you are filling a...*
> ***Vilma:*** *... an empty space of SENAGUA, of what SENAGUA should do, we are filling this empty space that SENAGUA leaves, that is their work, and we are doing it for them. But we are not doing it to help SENAGUA, but we do it for the people from the countryside that don't have – that sometimes don't have the adequate knowledge and therefore are impeded. (Interview, 02-03-2020, Guaranda)*

In this extract, Vilma explicitly mentions that most of the work that they do to get the water adjudications would be the responsibility of the state entities.

As Emily and Rachel mention in the focus group discussion, to perform a state task that finally would improve the possibilities of the local population to exercise their rights did not go unnoticed. Quite the contrary: Hidrotambo and the regional authorities – the most powerful players in this situation – worked together to intimidate the Dulcepamba River Project. The worst personal threats started after opening the office and continue until today. The placards

and videos I saw during my fieldwork by which the company insults the project members verge on character assassination.

Apart of this social threat that I will analyse with more detail in the next section, Hidrotambo pursues a legal opposition by appealing against every water grant that SENAGUA is providing for people living in the Dulcepamba River valley. The company has the right to do so, since they are so-called co-user of the same water source. But as the hierarchy of water users recorded in the national water law clearly gives priority to human use and subsistence economy, none of the over 80 appeals by Hidrotambo have been successful. This completely useless legal action seems to have the sole aim of prolonging the already slow working bureaucratic process. Vilma explains the legal background in the interview:

> ***Hannah P.:*** *So, from a legal perspective one can say that the opposition of Hidrotambo does not make any sense at all?*
> ***Vilma:*** *It makes no sense at all in no – in no moment they mention any legal article [in the adjudication processes]. So, it lacks legal fundament and therefore SENAGUA always denies the water [to Hidrotambo]. There is no article [Hidrotambo] can base their claims on, and it is something illogical that they oppose, oppose, oppose so much. […]*
> ***Hannah P.:*** *And in your opinion, why do they do it anyways?*
> ***Vilma:*** *My opinion is that... As Raquelita told me, the river of the Dulcepamba watershed does not have enough flow for the operation of the Hidrotambo powerplant. Therefore, they oppose so much because of the fear to remain without water. If more water gets adjudicated, more* campesinos *take the water, the water of the Dulcepamba river becomes less. So, this is the fear [of the company] to remain without flow and the powerplant cannot function anymore. So, this is my opinion. They are so afraid of remaining without flow that they oppose so much, in order to reduce the flow that in reality corresponds to the* campesino.
> ***Hannah P.:*** *So, taking further this reasoning, theoretically in some moment the concessions should be taken away from the hydroelectric [powerplant]?*
> ***Vilma:*** *They should be taken away. (Interview, 02-03-2020, Guaranda)*

In other words: through pushing massive water adjudications for all the people living in the valley, the Dulcepamba River Project is reconverting the grabbed water into the common pool resource it was before. With their additional office in Chillanes, they do not fill the gap of the operational scale left by regional authorities for the sake of the work itself, but because they can slowly but steadily undo the illicit water privatization committed by Hidrotambo and the regional SENAGUA office.

The concrete consequence of Hidrotambo's legal opposition is a hearing where the water users or their legal representative – Vilma in a lot of cases – must defend the water use they applied for. These hearings were a very exiting issue in the beginning, as the project members told me. Now they have converted into a routine where sometimes Vilma attends

alone as the legal representative of the water users. But since they are public, whoever wants to attend is allowed to. Therefore, I was able to attend the hearings in two occasions.

Comparing the two different days of hearings I attended, the repetitiveness became apparent. The lawyer representing Hidrotambo has two arguments he always repeats, as I wrote down in my field diary:

> *He dictated that the request for water was exaggerated, that there was no need to request so much water, that the request was organized and proceed by a so-called socio-environmental organisation lead by two foreign sisters with the last name Conrad whose migratory status should be revised by SENAGUA. The request was made with the only motivation and goal to boycott and bother the project of the hydroelectric powerplant. That boycott even has a negative influence for the Ecuadorian state since the state as well is part of the investors of Hidrotambo and therefore is interested and entangled with the project. (Field Diary, 01-23-2020)*

So, the first argument produced by the lawyer is that the water users ask on purpose for a supposably exaggerated amount of water to harm the operation of the powerplant. Nevertheless, Emily told me after that neither the user association nor the project members invented the calculations upon which they requested the amount, but these amounts are prescribed by the state based on a standardized calculation model depending on the number of people, animals, and hectares of land the water use request is made for. The second argument is that the motivation behind the water requests supposably are foreigners wanting to boycott the powerplant and the Ecuadorian state. This may be a political, but not a legal argument. It becomes obvious that from a legal point of view, the opposition of Hidrotambo does not make any sense.

The project members accompanying the hearings have contradictory roles: on the one hand, they are not allowed to say anything, and Hannah S. once had a very uncomfortable experience concerning this issue, as Vilma told me:

> *"You know, the first and only time Hannah S. came to a hearing, she said something. When the Hidrotambo lawyer said: 'The illegal foreigners', Hannah said: 'But we are not illegal!' and it was a huge problem because she is not allowed to say anything. They treated her very bad. She even cried in the end. That's why I told you not to say anything before the hearing started." (Field Diary, 02-03-2020)*

So, the dominant actors will not hesitate to manifest and protect the power hierarchy within the hearing. At the same time, as I could observe, there is a lack of paper and folders in the SENAGUA office in Guaranda, issues that the state institution should resolve. But if the Dulcepamba River Project members ask for copies and documents, they need to provide the

necessary infrastructure themselves. This again shows that the state is not fulfilling its tasks properly and within this context, the power relations and clear-cut roles are not important anymore.

In sum, the Dulcepamba River Project is assuming many different tasks that are the responsibility of the state: facilitating the water user adjudication process for the people living in the Dulcepamba River valley through an office located close enough to the water users; locating, contacting, and informing water users about administrative issues during their adjudication processes; representing and defending the rights of the water users in public hearings; and supplying the regional SENAGUA office with the necessary material infrastructure (paper, folders, etc.). The role of the project is contradictory, since the state and the company do not want to accept the change of power structures the Dulcepamba River Project achieves. At the same time, the regional state entities depend on the project since the state entity is not able (or willing) to fulfil its task properly.

Apart from this first and most prominent way to fill the gap and to rearrange power structures, the Dulcepamba River Project creates a new regional observational scale by bringing together authorities that should assume responsibility for the developments in and around the Dulcepamba river. An emblematic example of this strategy is the day I started this analysis with. As already mentioned, I personally brought the invitation for the inspection to the mayor's office, and the project members spent the whole day on the phone mobilizing other authorities. Through their connections – most importantly through their membership in the regional people's defender committee – they have the possibility to constantly put pressure on the regional authorities that should get involved. So, the Dulcepamba River Project replaces in this context the state as an entity of control and power regulation. This role entails not only mobilization, but also control during the inspection. The project fills not only the operational scale left by regional authorities, but the observational scale, too.

A third aspect how the Dulcepamba River Project steps in the gap is by replacing the regional authorities to build infrastructure. This part becomes especially urgent since people are longing for this help. I personally was asked several times by people of several districts of the valley if the Dulcepamba River Project will help to build a water irrigation system in their village, too (for example Interview 18, 02-05-2020, San Pablo; or Focus Group Discussion, 02-14-2020, Sixsipamba). It is the newest and the most ambiguous kind of help the project provides because, as already mentioned in the analysis of the perception of 'development', the providing of basic infrastructure to improve life conditions is not the central aim of this project.

The people from the Dulcepamba River Project step so determined into the gap left by regional authorities that the local community even expect them to behave like state entities in all other aspects, too. This problem became apparent in the focus group discussion:

> ***Manuel:*** *I mean, this is what we sometimes explained in San Pablo, how we work, how we are formed economically. Now, related with you, they think that the money comes from over there and you are doing a project based on the community, and based on that you are coming here. And a lot of people don't think first about [the benefit] that you bring for them but the first they are saying is: "How much [money] are they taking?"*
> ***Gisela simultaneously:*** *How much are they taking?*
> ***Manuel:*** *And: "Who is taking it?" And this is one part.*
> ***Hannah S.:*** *The myth that we are taking the money: I think this is related to the fact that they perceive us now as authorities and for authorities, to take money is the norm. […]For the people here, it is so weird: "Why would they work without earning anything?" So, they have to believe that – they cannot believe that we don't earn anything. At the same time, it is very normal that the people – the authorities are taking away the money. So, they bring those issues together and right away the gossip is spreading. (Focus Group Discussion, 02-09-2020, Chillanes)*

This impression that people do not distinguish between the project and the regional authorities was reinforced as well during my visit, where a villager even referred to Emily as "the sister from Raquelita from SENAGUA." So, the project does not only fill the gap left by regional authorities but is also perceived to form part of the government apparatus.

In sum, the Dulcepamba River Project first upscaled the local conflict around the hydroelectric powerplant through the scientific substantiation of local knowledge; through connecting the local struggles with national and international discourses of environmental justice; and through reframing of local claims within the pertinent national law. In a second step, they filled the gap on an operational and observational scale left by the regional state entitites through empowering and facilitating the water adjudication process of the people living in the valley; through forcing the state entities in charge to notice and document the illicit behaviour of the company; and through the unconditional provision of infrastructure.

By filling the gaps on different regional scales, the project engages with a process of constitutionality that in the end alerts power structures on a local scale, as the next section of my analysis will show.

<u>Reshaping the Local Conflict</u>

In this last section of the analysis, I want to come back to the day of the on-site visit to show how the scalar reconfiguration exposed above affects the local situation. What changes do the

activities of the Dulcepamba River Project bring for the local community? Can they alter the local power structures? In other words: how is the local conflict redefined through the project?

As already mentioned in the section about justice, the tricky issue about infrastructure is that it leads to physical facts. These facts are just there, changing the landscape, changing the environment, inevitably changing local livelihoods as well. When I visited Manuela, she showed me the view out of her window directly leading to the river and said: "Every day I must cope with the mini dam right in front of my house, every day I have to see this disgrace." The complaint was not about the aesthetic aspect but about the pain to be constantly remembered that the powerplant in the end was just built. So, it is for sure that the landscape, the 'here and now' of San Pablo did not change with the activities of the Dulcepamba River Project since infrastructure is sticky material difficult to change.

What changes did it bring, then? According to my analysis, the project activities brought two important changes to the local conflict: Firstly, they challenged the dominating discourse of unrelatedness by backing-up local knowledge; and, secondly, they empowered the local community to demand both, development and justice, and herewith disentangled the development vs. justice dilemma constructed by the dominant actors in the area.

Concerning the first change, the generation of scientific evidence that substantiate the local knowledge does not only influence national and international lawmakers and NGOs. It is also a tool to contest the locally dominating discourse of uncertainty and unrelatedness that emblematically becomes apparent in Maria's intervention on the day of the inspection (lines 55 and 56 of thick description): "I do not know if you can see the wall that we have, the wall that is made. We are protected, nobody from San Pablo is affected, we have not been affected with the misters from Hidrotambo." With scientific evidence, the local protesters stating the obvious – namely that cause-and-effect relationship between the construction of the powerplant, the flood, and the decline of the fish population – received a scientific confirmation.

As a manifestation of usual power structures, even in the local perception, 'local knowledge' has not the same value as 'expertise', and, therefore, the evidence expressed from a myriad of local villagers still did not have the same weight as a report written by a foreign university. The Dulcepamba River Project could take advantage of this glocal power imbalance between local knowledge and formal education to change local power structures between the dominant actors – namely the company and regional state entities – producing uncertainty and the local community stating the obvious. Now, the local knowledge gained more credibility.

The two perspectives – one connecting the damages with the construction of the powerplant, the other one denying such a causality – are causing a latent conflict in the local

community that resurfaces with full force at a turbulent event like the day of the on-site inspection.

Within this conflict, there are people with a clear-cut, contrasting opinion, emblematically represented by Maria and Claudio publicly disputing during their interventions on this day (lines 132-140). But a considerable part of the population is located in between, unsure whom to believe or what to think. They are tired and feel paralyzed. One woman that joined the protests in the beginning even told me that her relatives asked her to retire and not to get involved anymore. And another villager did not want to give an interview at all since he considers this conflict to be over. “They won, the powerplant is built, there is nothing that can be done anymore,” he told me.

Some other people, in change, just do not care too much. The villager that approached me after the speeches (line 342-344), for example, lost a small piece of inherited land in the flood in 2015 and filled out a form to demand compensation within the lawsuit placed at the constitutional court. So, he is only slightly affected by the construction of the powerplant. Nevertheless, he ironically comments that the discussions about the legitimacy of the powerplant or the Dulcepamba River Project do not stay on his mind.

It is evident, in conclusion, that the scientific back-up of local knowledge did not bring a clear-cut solution of this conflict in its wake. Maybe the confusion even augmented. But what it did strengthen is the power of the local population to doubt the official version of the events; to not just give in and live with uncertainty, but to believe in their local knowledge and insist on their rights. Additionally, even though the situation seems irreversible, the upscaling leads to some success that motivates further protest.

So, while it is highly difficult to change the material shape of infrastructure, the project could change its meaning, its legality, and its significance on an interpretational scale.

The Dulcepamba River Project achieved the second important change by filling the gap left by the regional authorities, namely the enabling of information around the water adjudications and the help to construct local infrastructure. With this engagement, they show that there are, on the one hand, water rights written down in the constitution. These rights are independent of any other idea about value or use of natural resources. On the other hand, there is an unquestioned need for basic infrastructure in the area whose fulfilling is a responsibility of the state. This responsibility is unrelated to the resistance of the local population against illicit use of the natural resources surrounding them.

The project members’ simultaneous engagement on both sides of the supposed dilemma led to a discursive disentanglement of the trade-off between development and justice

constructed by the dominating actors. This led to an increase of the local awareness, that infrastructure is not about charity, but about basic rights. So, the local community increasingly have the self-confidence to claim both, an intact environment and decent infrastructure.

So, again, while it is highly difficult to change the material shape of infrastructure, the project could deconstruct the political conflict constructed around it by the dominant actors in the area.

These dominant actors reacted with fierce opposition against these scalar reconfigurations achieved by the Dulcepamba River Project. This reaction is no surprise since the rescaling comes along with a change in power structures that significantly interfere the plans of Hidrotambo.

The reaction of the company has legal and social components. The legal components consist mainly of the opposition against the water adjudication requests, as shown in the previous section.

The social components consist of disparagement, defamation, and even threats, as the day of the on-site inspection emblematically shows. The fuelling of xenophobic ressentiments, at this specific occasion with placards, is a constant part of the opposition by the people close to Hidrotambo. Equally, Maria opens her speech by stating that that the village wants peace it cannot get because of the ‘gringas’, and she reinforces the gossip that the ‘foreign ladies’ get rich trough the legal opposition against Hidrotambo (lines 54-56).

Even though these are the most open moments of conflict, the tensions and threats do not remain solely on a discursive level. As one tangible aspect, the people working for Hidrotambo hinder the project members to arrive to the on-site inspection by telling the taxi drivers to not transport them (lines 397-401). Equally, when Javier noted that we should rather not approach the people reunited with the Hidrotambo manager, just as one should not approach a dog that bites, he expresses his concern that too much provocation could lead to physical violence (lines 389-390). And when Rachel says at the beginning of the day that she should have taken a normal job (lines 6-8), and at the end of the day that she hopefully will not get hurt leaving the house at darkness (lines 442-446), she is joking. But these jokes contain a kernel of true concern.

So, the vicious campaign of the company shows an effect, and the wear and tear of local protesters is an ongoing topic in the Dulcepamba River Project. Combining these observations with the awareness particularly of the local project members that their activism may lead to their murder, as mentioned earlier in the context section, one gets an impression of how dangerous, tense, and serious their activism became on a local level. For the Dulcepamba River

Project, the most outstanding achievement in the end is that it still exists, imposing resistance against the company and the regional authorities, constantly offering the local community a possibility to reinterpret the conflict differently than the dominant actors.

MacKinnon (2011, p. 32) writes: "[E]stablished scalar structures can, as manifestations of prevailing power relations, influence how wider processes of political, economic and social restructuring are played out in particular spatial contexts." I would add that the change of those scalar structures can significantly alter the power relations within a community, up to a point that the facts are redefined.

Herewith, I want to answer my second research question: What difference – if any – does the national legal framework make for local resistance? In the case of the hydroelectric powerplant in San Pablo, the legal frame that impedes the privatization of natural resources brings a considerable difference. But this difference did by no means occur through the mere existence of these progressive laws alone: only through strategies of upscaling the conflict and filling the scalar gaps left by regional authorities – strategies particularly well applied by the Dulcepamba River Prjoect – the political stance of the locally constructed dilemma of development vs. justice became apparent and a redefinition of the conflict became possible.

The disentanglement of these two unrelated aspects that were intertwined through the discourse of the dominant actors did not lead to an end of the conflict. Maybe the confusion even worsened. But more important than the end of the conflict is the possibility for the local community to rethink what is at stake, to keep on fighting for what they consider to be theirs, and to win back the authority over their own livelihoods.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This thesis is an in-depth analysis of the environmental conflict that evolved around the hydroelectric powerplant in the Dulcepamba River. My theoretical basis stems from the literature around political ecology, and I take scales as a heuristic tool for analysis. I aimed at answering two guiding questions, namely: How is the conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley constructed? And what difference – if any – does the national legal framework make for local resistance?

The answer to my first question is that the core of the conflict lies within the development vs. justice dilemma: if the community around the Dulcepamba River connects with the company and gives up the rights over their common pool resource water, Hidrotambo would provide them with the basic infrastructure needed to live a safe and decent life in the area. If the community insists on its rights granted by the national constitution and offers resistance against the water grab, they subsequently reject the company and will not get any development.

The dominant actors in the area find the basis to politically construct such a dilemma in (the lack of) infrastructure, the materiality that remote communities like the people in San Pablo depend on and what their struggles, aims and hopes often are about. This infrastructure is not provided by the state, even though it would be the responsibility of regional authorities to do so and to guarantee at least the possibility for *Buen Vivir*. This situation is an emblematic example of what has been called infrastructural violence of exclusion. This violence of exclusion leads to a vulnerability that the company uses as an asset to improve its bargaining power and to impose the restructuring of the property regime over water in the area. The de facto privatization then forms another infrastructural violence of exclusion.

With this summary it becomes clear that the environmental conflict in the Dulcepamba River valley is in fact not about the environment as a scarce resource; it is not even a conflict about the collective decision-making how to manage the environment; it is a conflict around a politically constructed trade-off between possibilities and constrains for decent livelihoods in remote areas, a supposed dilemma of choice between development or justice.

The answer to the second question, what difference – if any – the national legal framework makes for local resistance, is the following: despite many pessimistic observations about the effectiveness of the Ecuadorian constitution in real life situations, my analysis shows that national laws protecting common pool resources from commodification and privatization

can be a gamechanger; not because they would automatically change local power struggles, but because they offer at least the legal back-up necessary to advance local claims.

To achieve this connection between local reality and national legislation, it is indispensable to upscale the conflict, an activity the Dulcepamba River Project engaged with in this case. They did so by firstly substantiating the local knowledge about the destruction the hydroelectric powerplant brought in its wake with scientific evidence. With this, they were able to increase pressure on regional authorities to adhere to national law. Secondly, they connect the local claims to a national and international discourse around environmental justice. Thirdly, they fill the gaps on the operational and observational scale left by regional authorities: they empower and facilitate the water adjudication processes of the people living in the valley and with this, undo the de facto privatization of water step by step; they force the state entities in charge to notice and document the illicit behaviour of the company; and they provide basic infrastructure without any further conditions.

This rescaling of the local environmental conflict brought the possibility for the local population to doubt of the official version of the events, to not just give in and live with uncertainty, but to believe in their local knowledge and insist on their rights. In other words: a rescaling especially of the interpretative local scale of this conflict became possible. Additionally, even though the situation seems irreversible, the upscaling led to some successes that motivated further protest (as an overview over my analysis, Appendix VI provides a schematic representation ordered by actor, time, and scope of actions).

These answers lead to some final thoughts: first, scales matter for our understanding of environmental conflicts. Therefore, they should be seen and used rather as heuristic tools of analysis than theoretical concepts or geographical containers. Second, and connected to this, it becomes apparent that the national legislation matters to shape local realities, but that careful attention must be paid to the events between those scales, namely the operational and observational regional scale. These scales are often shaped very differently than the national legislation would demand. It is on these scales where the conflictive negotiations around definition and use of natural resources take place.

Third and finally, another problem of scale is the contrasting perception about what is at stake: in academic discussions, progress and development are deemed as ideas from the Global North to accelerate capitalist expansion and the use of nature for material welfare. In change, if government officials or people living in the Dulcepamba River valley talk about progress or development, they do not necessarily mean materialist welfare or capitalist expansion. The term does not yet include any perception about wellbeing, the relationship to

nature, or the commodification of natural resources. It includes as the first and most urgent issue only the fulfilling of basic infrastructure needed to live a safe and decent life in remote areas.

So, I want to give a first, tentative answer to this question, too: what to do in the very real, very empirical, and very frequent case where there is no possibility for real improvements without engaging with other, often destructive (neo-)extractivist practices?

Concerning the locally affected communities, I would claim, freely paraphrasing De Vries (2007): not only do not compromise your desire for development, but don't compromise your rights for infrastructure, either. And, even more importantly: don't let these two different issues become discursively intertwined. It is very possible and very reasonable to demand both: decent infrastructure and the right to decide over one's own livelihood.

Concerning academy, I would strongly advocate for reconsidering what development is about. The alternative labelling – call it progress, call it development, call it *Buen Vivir* – does simply not label away the problem that these basic needs are not fulfilled. It is often a fact that in zones of conflict between the (neo-)extractive industry and the local communities the very common desire for progress does not mean the desire for some fancy gadgets, but for the very basic needs of infrastructure the state is not able or willing to fulfil. This is the real dilemma academia must think about.

I do not want to say with my analysis that the dilemma constructed by the absence of the state and the discourse of the company is desirable – quite the contrary, it is the destructive mechanism how the extractivist model is brought forward in so many countries of the Global South and the reason why the 'ghost of development' (Quijano, 2000) is still spooking around in Latin America. I equally do not think that this dilemma is inevitable, but that another way of bringing development without losing rights must be found, ideally in cooperation with local NGOs how it happens in San Pablo de Amalí. But I do think that within the discourse around environmental conflict, the core of these conflicts easily gets out of sight and subsequently the dilemma between infrastructure and rights as a political construction has been ignored. Even though it is devastating to admit the ongoing existence of this dilemma, in my point of view it is the responsibility of scientific research to analyse the shapes of environmental conflicts as they are, and not only to think about how they should be.

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Appendix

Appendix I: extract of the national register of shareholders of Hidrotambo S.A.

SUPERINTENDENCIA DE COMPAÑÍAS, VALORES Y SEGUROS

REPÚBLICA DEL ECUADOR

SUPERINTENDENCIA DE COMPAÑÍAS, VALORES Y SEGUROS DEL ECUADOR
REGISTRO DE SOCIEDADES

SOCIOS O ACCIONISTAS DE LA COMPAÑIA

No. de Expediente: 150308

No. de RUC de la Compañía: 1791894146001

Nombre de la Compañía: HIDROTAMBO S.A

Situación Legal: ACTIVA

Disposición judicial que afecta a la compañía: NINGUNA

No.	IDENTIFICACIÓN	NOMBRE	NACIONALIDAD	TIPO DE INVERSIÓN	CAPITAL	MEDIDAS CAUTELARES
1	1891717012001	BIENES RAICES DE LA SIERRA PUNTOSIERRA S.A.	ECUADOR	NACIONAL	$ 1.676.400,0000	N
2	2434873	MAGISTRA SCHENK FRANCESCO MARIA	SUIZA	EXT. DIRECTA	$ 2.590.800,0000	N
3	1890010867001	PLASTICAUCHO INDUSTRIAL S.A.	ECUADOR	NACIONAL	$ 2.984.800,0000	N
4	1890135001001	TEXTILES INDUSTRIALES AMBATENOS S.A. TEIMSA	ECUADOR	NACIONAL	$ 368.000,0000	N

CAPITAL SUSCRITO DE LA COMPAÑIA (USD)$: 7.620.000,0000

Number 1 and 3: other companies of the Cuesta family

Number 2: Swiss investor

Appendix II: pictures of little gifts from Hidrotambo

Christmas present seen in a drug store in El Tambo, 17.01.2020, personal picture

Baloons distributed by Hidrotambo workers on Parroquia festivity in El Tambo, 17.01.2020, personal picture

Appendix III: guiding questionnaire for semi-structured interviews

1. Tell me: what is your connection to San Pablo de Amalí? Since when do you live here? What were your reasons to live here?
2. What do you like about San Pablo? What do you not like? How you evaluate the life quality here?
3. Are there aspects of the neighbourhood that could be improved or that you would like to have differently?
4. (If not mentioned until now) In the last 10 years, a hydroelectric powerplant was built near San Pablo. What changes, advantages or disadvantages brought this powerplant for San Pablo?
5. Did you work for some time for the hydroelectric powerplant company, or do you know someone that worked there?
6. Do you think that the hydroelectric powerplant was rather a positive or negative influence for the daily life in San Pablo? Why?
7. Do you think that the hydroelectric powerplant was rather a positive or negative influence for the social structure in San Pablo? Why?
8. Do you think that the hydroelectric powerplant was rather a positive or negative influence for the economic situation for the people in San Pablo? Why?
9. (If negative influences mentioned) Do you think that there is a way to compensate these negative influences or to restore the way how the village was before the construction of the hydroelectric powerplant?
10. What do in your opinion the other people in the community think about the hydroelectric powerplant?
11. In the beginning of the construction of the powerplant, some people protested against the project.
    a. Did you know about the protests?
    b. What did you think about the protest?
    c. Did you join the protests? Why (not)?
12. During the whole process of planification, construction, and resistance against the powerplant: what was the role of the state?
13. In your opinion: what should have been the role of the state?
14. During this whole process: did a violation of some of your rights happen? If yes, in which sense?
15. The Ecuadorian constitution enshrines in Art. 66: “the right of the inviolability of life.” Do you think that this right of yours was violated during this process? Why?
16. In Art. 66.3 of the Ecuadorian constitution, the right of physical and psychical integrity is enshrined. Do you think that this right of yours was violated during this process? Why?
17. In Art. 14 of the Ecuadorian constitution, the right to have a healthy environment is enshrined. Do you think that this right of yours was violated during this process? Why?
18. (If interviewee considers that some violation of rights happened) What would be in your opinion the right of the state to protect your rights?
19. Personal characteristics:
    a. Sex:
    b. Age:
    c. Profession:
    d. How many children:
    e. How many years living in the community:

Appendix IV: list of semi-structured interviews with basic information

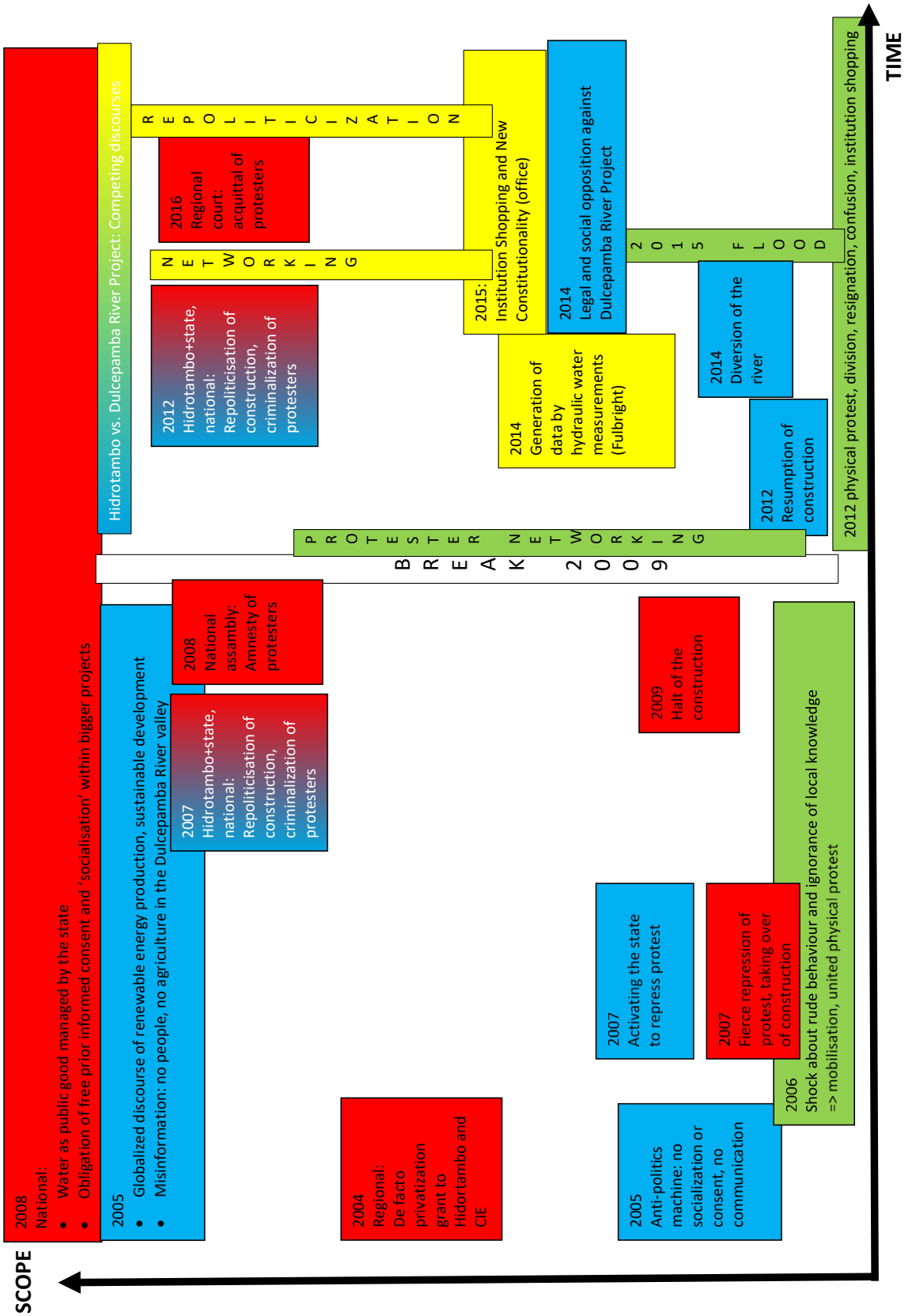
Interview Nr.	Sex	Age	Education	Profession	Number of children	Years living in San Pablo	Where, when, and in presence of whom did the interview take place	Date	Longtitude
1 (Manuel)	m	55	bachelor	trader, bus driver, farmer	2	27	Chillanes, the office, afternoon	24.01.2020	01:16:00
2	m	77	primary school	trader, farmer	7	not living in San Pablo	Chillanes, the office, afternoon	24.01.2020	01:20:00
3	m	?	uniersity	lawyer	4	not living in San Pablo	Chillanes, interviewee's house, Manuel, Emily, the interviewees wife and children were present, later two unknown people, in the morning	25.01.2020	01:13:00
4	m	55	primary school	farmer	8	?	San Pablo Alto, Interviewee's house, late afternoon, rain	25.01.2020	00:20:00
5 (mother/son)	f/m	49/20	bachelor/still attending university	teacher/student in nursing care	2/0	47/18	El Tambo, interviewee's house, morning	26.01.2020	no recording
6 (husband/wife)	f/m	49/48	secondary school/secondary school	farmer/farmer	6	49/?	El Tambo, interviewee's house, lunch, two of the children were present	26.01.2020	00:18:00
7	f	55	?	farmer	8	8	San Pablo Bajo, interviewee's house, afternoon	26.01.2020	00:21:00
8	m	52	secondary school	mechanics	2	17	El Tambo, interviewee's house, afternoon	27.01.2020	00:50:00
9	f	50	?	farmer	4	30	San Pablo Alto, interviewee's house, afternoon, television turned on	27.01.2020	no recording
10 (Manuela)	f	51	bachelor	farmer	0	51	San Pablo, interviewee's house, lunch time, eating lunch during interview	28.01.2020	00:41:00
11	m	~50	?	president of the parroquial executive comitee	?	not living in San Pablo	El Tambo, office of the parroquial executive, morning, with interruptions (phone, secretary)	29.01.2020	00:22:00
12	f	~40	bachelor	teacher	0	5 years working in the community	San Pablo, in the school, lunch time	29.01.2020	no recording
13	f	~40	primary school	farmer	2	40	San Pablo, afternoon, in presence of Darwin's mother	29.01.2020	no recording
14	m	42	primary school	taxi driver	3	15	San José, in interviewee's car, late afternoon	30.01.2020	00:16:00
15	m	62	university degree	farmer	0	not living in San Pablo, but in a community upstream	Chillanes, office, morning, in presence of interviewee 16	04.02.2020	00:24:00
16	m	38	primary school	farmer	5	38	Chillanes, office, morning	04.02.2020	00:25:00
17	f	?	primary school	farmer	3	>40	San Pablo, interviewee's house, morning, in presence of husband (commenting on the interview, too) and great-grandchild	05.02.2020	00:14:00
18	m	52	primary school	farmer	4	41	San Pablo Bajo, interviewee's house, afternoon, in presence of interviewee's wife and children, television turned on	05.02.2020	00:51:00
19	m	19	still attending high school	student	0	19	San Pablo, outside of Darwin's house, afternoon	06.02.2020	no recording
20	f	60	bachelor	farmer	5	8	San Pablo, interviewee's house, in presence of her husband (mostly sleeping)	06.02.2020	no recording
21	m	52	secondary school	farmer	4	22	El Tambo, interviewee's house, late afternoon, television turned on	07.02.2020	01:15:00
22 (mother/daughter)	f/f	78/55	primary school/bachelor	farmer/houswife	7/3	lived in San Pablo for 20/7 years, moved away 48 years ago	Sixsipampa, interviewee's (mother) house, before lunch, daughter preparing lunch, husband sitting outside	10.02.2020	01:11:00
23	m	51	primary school	day worker	10	51	San Pablo Bajo, interviewee's house, night, sitting outside	11.02.2020	01:31:00
24	m	60	primary school	farmer	3	not living in San Pablo, for 17 years living in a community upstreams	San Vicente, interviewee's house, morning, wife cooking lunch and making comments on interview	12.02.2020	00:32:00
25 (Darwin)	m	39	secondary school	NGO member, environmental activist, tailor	2	~20	San Pablo, interviewee's house, night, in presence of Darwin's grandmother (sleeping), Claudio, Gisela, Hannah S., Javier, Rachel	12.02.2020	01:38:00

Appendix V: picture of the day of the on-site visit

Placard on the left: “SPA quiere progreso” (San Pablo de Amalí (SPA) wants progress)
Placard on the right: “Fuera gringas mentirosas” (Go away, lying gringas)

Forecourt of Maria’s shop, San Pablo Centre, 12.02.2020, personal picture

Appendix VI: schematic representation of analysis ordered by actor, time, scope



Legend:
Red = state; blue = Hidrotambo; yellow = Dulcepamba River Project; green = regional/local community