

Hydric crisis, water management and socio-spatial injustice: challenges to be faced from the case of the East Metropolitan Rio de Janeiro

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Environmental problems are observed throughout Brazil, and beyond technical and managerial questions, water-related issues are not simply a result of flaws in the implementation of legislation or technical inadequacy, but represent the expression of disputes between political and economic forces. Such problems are actually the motto for the explosion of conflicts whose central issue has to do with the uneven use of available resources, the idea of environmental conflict appearing associated therefore to the question of social rights and the unequal appropriation of territory and its resources. (Costa, 2010)

In the cities of the modern world, where tendentially natural resources such as water, are regulated, appropriate and distributed following the market relations, there is the transformation of goods of public use in an exchange value. In this respect, water allocation, use and conservation are core elements of 'urban problems', which became plainly globalized from the 70s, because this service that was considered a right in the state of Social Welfare has been transformed into merchandise to be acquired on the open market (Lefebvre, 1970).

The intense process of urbanization mainly experienced in the twentieth century ended up significantly affecting water bodies in cities around the world, however its consequences are not distributed equally to the population, as occurred in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. This was because, the poorer and more disorganized people, when "pushed" to areas with little or no urban infrastructure, have suffered more than those living in urban areas and away from the negative consequences of contemporary urbanization.

In this article, the purpose is to analyze the problems related to "water management" in the Eastern Region of Metropolitan Rio de Janeiro. It is intended to reflect on the "water flow" in this region and the power relations involved in this field. The relevance of this theme is because the municipalities of Niterói, São Gonçalo, Itaboraí and Marica do not have watersheds within limits able to meet their water demands, depending mainly on the water sources in the municipality of Cachoeiras de Macacu.

These municipalities are fueled by Imunana-Laranjal system, which is responsible for the supply of about 2 million people. However, the water requirement of the system is higher than its offer, currently representing approximately 400,000 people without care. For this reason, water management in these municipalities has always been one disputed field of regional character. In this context, there are strong inequalities of political and economic power between water users and between the municipalities that make part of this territory.

Besides, in this context of precariousness, social and environmental inequality and regional disgovernance it is installed in Itaboraí County in the East Fluminense a major project of "development", the Petrochemical Complex of Rio de Janeiro (Comperj), which placed the region at the center of attention since the time of its launch in 2006. This whole situation brought strong reflections on the demands, the uses and the direction of flow of water in the region.

Much of this work is based on data from qualitative research conducted between 2000-2012, "Monitoring of Socioeconomic Indicators in the Surrounding Municipalities of Comperj," in which the author of this work participated as coordinator of the thematic environmental sanitation. In the analysis of such data, it was found that the population of the municipalities that are geographically closer to water sources, do not benefit from this situation, despite its high population concentration. It can be affirmed that the privileged position that the people of São Gonçalo and Itaboraí occupy in the physical space, it was not enough to compete with those who hold a privileged position in the social space. This is because, even being geographically near the main supply system it is no guarantee that water will arrive at their home. While in the districts of Niterói (area more "noble"), called "end of line" by CEDAE,

even being more distant geographically, hardly there is water shortage. So we can conclude that "it is the relationship between the distribution of agents and distribution of goods in space that sets the value of the different regions of the social space reified" (Bourdieu 1999).

The survey results also showed that the water management problems are closely related to the lack of opportunities of the local people to influence the process of decision making and the weakness of the official mechanisms established to this date to involve the different social groups or geographic areas. In this context, the influence of more organized groups and with more political power continues to prevail in decision-making.

Since its announcement in 2006, the Comperj promoted in the East Metropolitan Area of Rio de Janeiro State, an economic and political dynamism, as well as socio-spatial transformations, social and environmental impacts and tensions between different social actors, which, according to Novais (2007) characterizes it as a Great Regional Project, because promotes disruption and impact on multiple dimensions.

These investments represented an obvious factor of conflict, expressed, among other ways, by the appreciation of land, population density increase, demand for environmental sanitation and amendments to urban planning regulations. These new standards have enabled economic agents to redefine production ways and strategies of the social space and organization of the territory, according to their interests, which shows strong signs of change in the urban policy for the "urban entrepreneurship." (Harvey, 1996)

An example of these new strategies could be seen in Niteroi in 2013, when a group of companies offered to the municipality a revitalization project of the central area of Niteroi, which resulted in the adoption of the Law of Joint Urban Operation (OUC) of Niterói Central Area. However, given the forecasts presented in population growth in the Neighborhood Impact Report (RIV) with the implementation of OUC in the central area of the municipality, the demand for water will be about 90% higher, which represents the need to nearly double the amount of water which now supplies the entire municipality of Niteroi.

In the end, recently Rio de Janeiro State Government created the Metropolitan Council of Government Integration which has among other assignments to define public policies that guarantee sustainable development of the metropolitan area. However to change this context of major socio-spatial injustices and great disconnection between the producing agents and territory managers (municipalities) it is necessary that this planning prioritize socialgroups rather than economic ones.