



Communication Practices and Citizens' Participation in the Colombian Water Movement

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Abstract

In the last decade, social movements' struggles for water and environmental justice have noticeably increased in Colombia and Latin America. These struggles have largely been a consequence of the implementation of neoliberal policies of water privatisation and the rise of large-scale projects such as mining and dams. These emerging social movements have produced new expressions of collective democratic participation. This thesis analyses communication practices in the Colombian water movement. It argues that these practices have created new forms of participation and citizenship which have deepened democracy. Furthermore, they have contributed to increasing the socio-political visibility and relevance of the water conflicts in Colombia. The communication practices used by the Colombian water movement have permitted the re-opening and appropriation of spaces for participation and have contributed to promoting more inclusive and democratic practices and policies on governance and protection of natural common goods. Spaces for dialogue, meeting, diffusion of information, lobbying and protesting represent an exercise of active citizenship which has deepened Colombian democracy. This is particularly important in Colombia, a country with more than 50 years of internal violent conflict that has inhibited social movements and citizen engagement with issues of public concern. The thesis uses literature on new social movements (NSM), communication approaches (participatory, public, and communication for social change) and citizenship. The major theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in complementing NSM theories with communication approaches drawn from development studies. Combining these bodies of work furthers our understanding of the complex interactions of communities mobilising towards achieving social and environmental justice.

I hereby certify that the submitted work is my own work, was completed while registered as a candidate for the degree stated on the Title Page, and I have not obtained a degree elsewhere on the basis of the research presented in this submitted work

Signature: 

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Acronyms

ADACA	Asociación de Acueductos Comunitarios de Antioquia (Association of Community Aqueducts from Antioquia)
APP	Aguas Para la Prosperidad (Water for Prosperity)
ASOMITUANGO	Asociación de Pequeños Mineros Afectados por el Proyecto Hidroituango (Association of small-scale miners affected by the Hidroituango dam project)
AWWF	Alternative World Water Forum
CAPS	Comités de Agua Potable y Saneamiento (Nicaragua) (Potable Water and Sanitation Committees)
CFSC	Communication for Social Change
CINEP/PPP	Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular - Programa por la Paz (Popular Research and Education Centre – Peace Programme)
Citizenship DRC	Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability
CNDAV	Comité Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (National Committee in Defence of Water and Life)
COA	Cinturón Occidental Ambiental (Western Environmental Network)
CODEATE	Comité por la defensa ambiental del territorio (Committee for the Defence of the Territory)
EAAB	Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá
GIRAGUAS	Asociación de Acueductos Comunitarios de Girardota (Association of Community Aqueducts from Girardota)
GT	Grounded Theory
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILC	International Land Coalition
MTAs	Mesas Técnicas del Agua (Technical Water Committees)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSM	New Social Movements
ONIC	Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (Colombian National Indigenous Organisation)
PAR	Participatory Action Research

REDLAR	Red Latinoamericana contra las Represas y por los Ríos, sus Comunidades y el Agua (Interamerican Networks Against Dams and for the Rivers, their Communities and Water)
Red Vida	Red Interamericana de Vigilancia al Derecho Humano al Agua (Inter-American Vigilance for the Defense and the Right to Water)
RETACO	Red Territorial de Acueductos Comunitarios de Bogotá (Territorial Network of Community Aqueducts from Bogotá)
TAN	Transnational Advocacy Networks
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WWC	World Water Council
WWF	World Water Forum
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

Glossary

Colombian water movement: by the Colombian water movement this thesis refers to the heterogeneous range of organisations and groups involved in different roles in processes and struggles related to the defence of water as a human right and common good. These organisations include movements opposing projects, such as mining and dams, that affect the water hydrological cycle, the water provision for the population, and the quality of water; movements opposing the privatisation of water and sanitation services; and the community aqueducts. It is important to note that the term 'Colombian water movement' became more used during the campaign for the water referendum (Chapter 6) which brought together different actors and created the sense of a national movement. Most of the struggles analysed in the thesis have emerged mainly during or as a consequence of the campaign for the water referendum.

Community aqueduct: it is a water system run by a group of residents organised through an association of users to conserve and improve the quantity and quality of water, and distribute it in a given area (Peña-Cano et al., 2007). These associations normally name a board of directors that assumes and delegates the roles necessary to provide water (ibid).

Natural common goods: this thesis prioritises the use of the term 'natural common goods' instead of 'natural resources'. According to Seoane et al. (2012), the term 'natural resources' has an inherent economic connotation, considering nature as a commodity, rather than a common good as argued by environmental movements.

Planes Departamentales del Agua: Departmental Water Plans or PDA were a series of strategies (fiscal, budgetary, political, institutional, technical and financial) under the coordination of *departamentos* (Colombia's regions) for the planning and provision of public services, including water supply, sewage and sanitation.

Public-Communitarian partnerships: these are partnerships/agreements on water or water and sanitation provision services between a public institution and a community organisation.

1 Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed significant global transformations in the state and governance of natural common goods, including water. The exploitation of natural common goods has been at the centre of the neoliberal economic policies widely implemented in Latin America since the 1990s (de Echave et al., 2009, Svampa, 2009). The implementation of these policies caused the emergence of different social movements opposing the growing presence of transnational companies, ecosystem degradation, and the privatisation of public services (Castro, 2008, Svampa, 2009, Spronk and Terhorst, 2012). These movements have given rise to new forms of protest, enhancing citizen political participation and pushing for radical transformations in the governance and protection of natural common goods. This thesis is located at the intersection of different debates on environmental movements, neoliberalism in Latin America, communication for social change, citizen participation and democracy. This thesis analyses the extent to which participatory and public communication practices in the Colombian water movement have deepened democracy. It does so by looking at specific forms of citizen participation within the water movement and how these have led to new articulations of citizenship redefining the relationships between citizens, the state, and the natural common goods.

Scholarship analysing the Colombian water movement is only recently emerging. The increase and evolution of water/environmental conflicts have raised the interest of academic researchers from a range of disciplines (Perera, 2012, 2014, Mira, 2006, Gómez-Bustos, 2012, Suárez, 2010, Tarazona-Pedraza, 2013). However, studies on contemporary Latin American and Colombian social movements, specifically the water movement, do not offer a comprehensive analysis of their communication practices. By bringing together new social movement (NSM) theories, communication approaches, and debates on active citizenship and deepening democracy, this thesis explores the different ways in which citizens use communication to gain an active role in processes of water policy-making, to create spaces for participation, and to strengthen democratic practices. While emphasising the analysis of collective identity formation and how individuals become involved in

social movements (Melucci, 1989, 1995), NSM theories have not developed an explicit model of communication to explain these interactions (Huesca, 2000).

Communication is central to the development of social movements. Through communication social movements gain visibility, momentum and a space for discussing their claims in the public sphere. Communication practices are closely linked to the needs and organisational processes of social movements and are a crucial component of their democratic life (León et al., 2005). Social movements require communication to motivate collective political action and participation (Rodríguez et al., 2014). The transformations and innovations in communication and information technologies and processes have contributed to the emergence of new patterns of communication among social movements (Castells, 2012). The adoption of new communication strategies has raised questions regarding the role they play in the struggles for democracy and social justice. The Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement are two examples of contemporary social movements in which the adoption of new communication practices attracted much public attention, leading to intense academic debates. Within the context of the 'new' wave of social movements challenging neoliberal policies and demanding radical political, social and economic reforms this thesis sets out to contribute to debates on the role of communication practices in social movements and their impact on deepening democracy.

1.1 Re-awakening of civil society in Colombia and Latin America

According to Feinberg et al. (2006), the 're-awakening of civil society' is one of the central features of the revival of democracy in Latin America in the past two decades. Social movements have played a central role in promoting major political changes since the 1990s, causing the weakening of the neoliberal hegemony in many countries across the continent (Modonesi, 2008). Some examples are the emergence of the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) in 1994; the struggle of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) in Brazil; the protests in Argentina in 2001 against the economic crisis; the national strike in Peru in 1999; and the 2000 water war in Cochabamba, Bolivia (ibid). It was precisely the last one that marked a new period of collective action and a move towards the defence of the commons. Following the Bolivian events, conflicts over common goods have multiplied across Latin America and have become the focus of national socio-political articulations

challenging the neoliberal regimes (Seoane et al., 2012). Resistance to the process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’¹ (Harvey, 2005, Bebbington et al., 2008, Seoane et al., 2012, Terhorst et al., 2013) – which takes place when private capital appropriates areas previously outside the market system (i.e. water) – and environmental degradation has taken the form of new social movements claiming water, land, territory, biodiversity, minerals and hydrocarbons as common goods (Bebbington et al., 2008, Seoane et al., 2012). These new movements have introduced important debates challenging neoliberal notions of progress and economic growth, and proposing alternatives such as ‘buen vivir’ (good living) (Seoane et al., 2012, p. 63).

Recent socio-environmental conflicts in Colombia have considerably grown in number compared to previous decades. According to Escobar (2010), struggles for the defence of natural resources in Colombia have assumed also a cultural character: this is especially true for debates on biodiversity. Networking with, and receiving support from, similar movements in the Latin American region have been crucial for strengthening the impact of the movements’ actions and their incidence in policy-making. Colombian environmental movements have consolidated local networks of grassroots organisations proposing different forms of sustainable development (Archila, 2010). Colombian environmental and social movements in the last decade have introduced new forms of organisation and protest with the objective of producing changes in public policy and opposing hegemonic powers (Nieto-López, 2011).

More than fifty years of internal conflict, coupled with an undemocratic and repressive context for social movements since 2002², have prompted many citizens

¹ Accumulation by dispossession ‘occurs when private capital takes over areas that were previously shielded from the capitalist market, such as public and community water management’ (Terhorst et al., 2013, p. 58).

² Social movements in Colombia have faced stigmatisation and repression for decades. Despite the widened possibilities for claiming human rights after the promulgation of the 1991 Constitution, the criminalisation of popular protests intensified under the government of Álvaro Uribe-Vélez (2002-2010). His strategy of authoritarian control and ‘integral war’ equated social movements with subversion. This period of confrontation left no place for neutral positions. There were insufficient conditions for a democratic debate or for proposals of political solutions to the armed conflict. The overwhelming support for Uribe-Vélez in the 2006 elections demonstrated the paradox of Colombian democracy as the majority of voters preferred security over freedom and equality. Within this context, social movements have continued their efforts, particularly in urban areas. The alliances between different social sectors in relation to topics dealing with daily-life have been translated into the creation of networks and the strengthening of solidarity ties (Archila, 2004, 2006, 2010).

in Colombia to reconfigure the meaning of collective action and the scope of social movements into new social and political processes. Contemporary Colombian social movements have entered the public arena to discuss and contest issues such as national development plans, free trade agreements, the re-election of a president beyond the maximum term allowed by the Constitution, the rejection of political violence (Archila, 2010). The Colombian water movement is located within this matrix of renovated collective action in the country.

1.2 Genesis and aims of this thesis

The genesis of this thesis can be traced back to 2006 when I began my work as Information and Communication Officer for the campaign for the defence of water as a public good in Colombia (Antioquia branch). For three years I was part of this movement, which called for the development of public policies on water, and advocated for water to be declared a human right in the Colombian Constitution. During this time I witnessed not only severe water conflicts, but also the emergence of numerous initiatives aiming at defending water and raising awareness about issues such as land tenure, the environment and human rights. My MA Dissertation focused on the campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010) and its communication strategy. The MA dissertation stimulated my interest in further researching the communication practices of this movement, and in broadening my focus to include other struggles for the defence of water in Colombia, such as community aqueducts; opposition to mining, dams, and large-scale infrastructure projects; and international arenas for water advocacy. My professional and academic background in communication motivated me to research the experiences of citizen participation and communication practices in the water movement in Colombia. The study of these communication practices can help us understand their implications for the participatory governance of the commons, such as water and land, at local, national and global level. My concern is to investigate the water struggles as sites of convergence of different social actors, and as arenas, or platforms, that provide opportunities for proposing alternatives to the current development and economic model of the country. This thesis also considers the scope of communication and mobilisation actions in making the water conflicts visible and in raising the importance of discussions about water in the public sphere.

1.3 Notes on the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on: (1) new social movement (NSM) theories and Transnational advocacy networks (TAN); (2) debates on active citizenship and participation in the context of social movements and deepening democracy; (3) communication approaches (participatory, public, and communication for social change). NSM theories provide useful analytical tools to understand innovative characteristics of movements that no longer define themselves in relation to the system of production in industrial societies (Della Porta and Diani, 1999). In information societies, the demands raised by NSMs have moved from the economic-industrial system to the cultural sphere (Melucci, 1994). These demands, and the conflicts around them, focus on 'personal identity, the time and space of life, and the motivation and codes of daily behavior' (ibid, p. 109). Some of the principal, though not exclusive, contributions of the NSM paradigm are 'its emphases on identity, culture, and the role of the civic sphere' (Pichardo, 1997, p. 425). The Colombian water movement is analysed in this thesis as a new social movement. The framework on TAN is used to analyse specifically the case studies in chapter 8. Nonetheless, this thesis also argues that NSM theories are insufficient to analyse the Colombian water movement as they tend to focus on Western-European societies, and show little analytical engagement with activists' repertoires, interactions and communication practices.

To complement the analysis of the communication practices of the Colombian water movement, this thesis looks at the literature on communication approaches emerging from development studies, particularly participatory communication and communication for social change. Development scholars and practitioners have identified the key characteristics of communication practices in development processes and have theorised their relationships within wider processes of social change. However, while development studies have produced a good degree of analysis of communication practices in development projects, social movement studies have generally overlooked participatory communication and communication for social change as two useful communication approaches to deepen the analysis of interactions in social movements. Since Latin American social movements are a key driver of social change, the application of such approaches to the analysis of the communication practices of NSMs is an important and relevant undertaking.

Participatory communication approaches are characterised by horizontal processes of communication based on dialogue, consensus and equal opportunities for citizen participation (Gumucio-Dagrón, 2001, Gumucio-Dagrón, 2011b). Communication initiatives in the recent water struggles in Colombia have emerged mostly from the affected communities, with the urgency of talking, acting and defending their lives and livelihoods. The sharing of experiences and interpersonal communication has been vital to recognise the communities' strengths and envisage possibilities to solve the water problems or to put forward their demands to other actors. In participatory communication processes participants and interlocutors have the same access to information and means of expression (Díaz-Bordenave, 1994).

Communication for social change (CFSC) is the most recent approach of communication for development studies. Gumucio-Dagrón (2011c) suggests five essential conditions for CFSC: community participation and appropriation; language and cultural pertinence; generation of local content; use of appropriate technology; and convergence and networking (p. 33, 34, 35). These conditions will be used as categories of analysis in the case studies. The CFSC approach draws attention to the social issues highlighted by communities, and acknowledges that people need to have a leading role in the processes of development; it emphasises participation, local knowledge and identity. Participatory communication and communication for social change are used mainly to analyse the communication practices of the water struggles at local and internal level, while the public communication approach is used to analyse the communication practices at national level and the actions with a visible impact in the public sphere.

Public communication is another communication approach useful in analysing the communication practices of water movements in the public sphere. Public communication fosters citizen engagement in the discussion of issues of public concern and their participation in democratic practices. McQuail (1992) argues that practices of public communication encourage individuals to get involved, and inspire them to adopt an active role in collective issues and in political processes within the public sphere (in Botero-Montoya, 2006b). Public communication is particularly important when looking at the exercise of active citizenship and the interaction of different social actors around decisions and policy-making processes regarding water issues and natural common goods. Chapter 2 will explain the reasons for

choosing these theoretical approaches and how they fit the aims and research questions underlying this thesis.

Scholarly debates on citizenship, participation in social movements, and processes of deepening democracy feed the theoretical framework of this thesis and are referred to more extensively in the literature review (Chapter 2). These debates help to analyse and theorise most of the case studies analysed in this thesis and the aims and interactions of the Colombian water movement.

1.4 Note on Methodology

This doctoral thesis draws on data from fieldwork conducted in Colombia during five months, and other data derived from relevant literature, experiences and memories from previous years of personal and professional involvement in the water movement in Colombia. The findings of this thesis are generated through the analysis of a series of case studies and bear evidence to activists' creativity, resilience and resourcefulness in the implementation of communication practices and their willingness to take part and engage in the defence of water and land. The data collected in the fieldwork generated important insights regarding the interface between the global and the local in water struggles, power relationships around water, natural common goods, new social movements and communicative action, and, particularly, the role of participatory and communicative strategies. The theoretical framework underlying the methodology of my PhD study has been partly built on the Participatory Action Research Approach. As described by Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) – who draw on the ideas of Orlando Fals-Borda and Paolo Freire, among others – Participatory Action Research encourages mobilisation and reinforces the alternative forms and categories of knowledge produced by social movements (p.181). This approach is also a process of awareness building and a critical recovery of the history of different communities. By implementing PAR I was able to take active part in the planning and developing of some of the activities of the water struggles during my five-month fieldwork in Colombia. PAR is closely related to participatory communication approaches. They both call for research which is conducted with and by communities, aims at social transformations, and emphasizes the central role of communities in development processes. Other qualitative research methodologies employed have been ethnography and Grounded Theory. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-

structured interviews, field-notes and analysis of secondary sources. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework used for this research.

1.5 Water refreshing democracy

Paradigm wars over water are taking place in every society, East and West, North and South. In this sense, water wars are global wars, with diverse cultures and ecosystems, sharing the universal ethics of water as an ecological necessity, pitted against a corporate culture of privatization, greed, and enclosures of the water commons

Water Wars, Vandana Shiva (2002, p. x)

Water is the source of life. This is probably one of the easiest, yet most significant, definitions of the transparent liquid, the molecule of 2 Hydrogen plus 1 Oxygen. Taken for granted all too easily, water is essential for daily-life activities, health and wellbeing. Struggles defending water are not just struggles to claim access to this precious liquid, but also to defend what it represents: the permanence of life, land, identity, future generations, livelihoods, and culture. It is challenging to consider water as a commodity, precisely because it is so important for the life and dignity of every person. To see water as a commodity is opposed to the notion of water as a human right and common good. Unfortunately, as Swyngedouw (2005) notes, 'water does indeed remain a highly contested good' (p. 98). For activists in the water movement, defending water as a human right goes hand in hand with opposing the commodification of water, in fact 'the social struggle for water has to be turned into a struggle for fundamental human rights' (ibid).

The relationship Colombians have with water varies according to the region they live in. For instance, in Chocó, one of the wettest places on Earth, the rain and the humidity maintain the greenness of the tropical forest. The river Atrato is the backbone of the province, partly due to the absence of aqueducts and sanitation services. As well as supplying water for domestic and agricultural activities, the river is used for fishing, recreation, transportation. In Guajira, a desert region in Northeast Colombia, the indigenous women have to carry heavy buckets, walking long distances to bring water to their tribes; they have also developed a system of wells to collect water in the rainy season, during which they perform dances and pray to their gods. Water for them is scarce and precious. In the East plains, people rely on the crystalline rivers flowing down the '*altiplano*' (highlands) to cool down and relax,

taking a bath or having lunch by the riverside on weekends. Cattle, extensive palm monocultures and oil refineries also use the water from the *altiplano*. Cities in the Andes Mountains are surrounded by rivers, streams and lakes. The Aburrá Valley, where the city of Medellín is located, has more than thirty streams ending in the Medellín River. Many of these have become linear parks for sport and recreation.

Blue, the colour representing water, is part of the Colombian flag and also features conspicuously in the national coat of arms. Water is a crucial symbolic element in the myths and legends of indigenous people such as the Emberas and Koguis. Argemiro Balarín (RP 39), an Embera leader interviewed for this research, explained that for his community the rivers are the arteries through which water, the blood of Mother Earth, flows. The close relationship between water and ancestral cultures has resulted, as Roa and Urrea (2009) argue, in a more positive and respectful attitude towards nature and the environment. The way these indigenous communities have traditionally used water is communal, decentralised, and sustainable. In relation to this, Vandana Shiva (2002) remarks 'as natural rights, water rights are usufructuary rights; water can be used but not owned. People have a right to life and resources that sustain it, such as water' (p. 21).

The need for water is something all human beings have in common, regardless of their ethnic, political, social and religious background. The universal importance of water has fostered the sense of belonging among communities involved in water conflicts and facilitated citizens' participation in campaigns defending the communal management of water, and against mining, dams, and privatisation projects. The defence of water is the paramount concern shared by the struggles studied for this research. Their grievances and demands may vary. The main concern of community aqueducts is the pressure for technological and administrative modernisation without a legislation safeguarding traditional livelihoods. Citizens involved in mining struggles are preoccupied by the dispossession of their livelihoods, land and water. The struggles opposing hydroelectric dam projects see the deviation of rivers and the flooding of thousands of hectares of land, often to generate energy for export, as a mutilation of the natural courses of water.

During the recent history of Colombia, there have been few occasions where a coalition of different social actors managed to come together and agree on

defending a common good such as water. In this thesis I discuss some of the events which have led to vast mobilisations and varied confluences of actors defending water in the last decade. One is the campaign for the water referendum; another one is the citizen movement opposing the open-pit gold mining project in Santurbán (Santander). The campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010) brought together actors such as young people, adults, trade unionists, environmentalists, women's movement, peasants, communitarian aqueducts, artists and politicians. In particular, the campaign (discussed in Chapter 6) cut across political parties and social sectors, and reached remote and forgotten regions in the country. Despite the high level of political apathy in Colombia, more than three million signatures were collected in the different phases of this democratic initiative. Prior to the campaign many people had no idea that the issue of water in Colombia was that serious. Water became a topic of discussion, a matter of public interest strongly related to other debates about welfare and common goods.

1.6 Thesis outline

A shared feature of the water struggles presented in this research is a critique of the economic and development model adopted by Colombia in the last decade. These movements question a development model that wants to turn Colombia into an extractivist and mining economy, without preparing the country for all the social, technical, and environmental implications of this type of development. The recent struggles defending water in Colombia have emerged as a consequence of the advance of water privatisation policies and large-scale infrastructure projects. Each movement or struggle has its own specific socio-political context and demands. However, since the issue of water cuts across all the struggles presented in this thesis, it is possible to look at them in a broader perspective. This perspective allows to locate the analysis of local and specific demands in the context of wider, global debates on, for instance, the privatisation of common goods and the loss of democratic control over how environmental resources are used. These water struggles have joined forces with other Latin American struggles and have become part of a broader movement for water justice formed by local groups and communities that fight for a global universal objective: the protection of water as a common good and the human right to water (Barlow, 2009).

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the research. The research is situated within the literature on new social movements and the literature analysing communication practices in development studies, particularly participatory communication, public communication and communication for social change. The analysis focuses on activists' communication practices and the impact of these practices on citizens' participation in debates on issues of public concern such as the natural common goods and environmental conflicts. Other debates are also included in the theoretical framework as they are relevant to the analysis: citizenship, participation in the context of social movements, and deepening democracy. The literature on these topics helps to describe the forms of mobilisation reviewed in the case studies and to understand active citizens as political actors who engage in different practices to demand their rights and who care about their community or territory. Chapter 2 also discusses the concept of dialogue which, 'as a minimal form of cooperative, collective action' (Kincaid and Figueroa, 2009, p. 510), is essential to explain the origin of many communication practices in the water struggles.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used for the research study. It provides an account of three main approaches: Participatory Action Research (PAR), Ethnography and Grounded Theory. This chapter also includes a reflection on the role of the researcher and the relationship between activist and academic research. The chapter also describes the fieldwork, outlines the different methods employed for data collection and analysis, and discusses some of the challenges encountered during the research process and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 provides the context and background of the water movement in Colombia. The chapter opens with a discussion of social movements in Colombia followed by a analysis of water privatisation policies and the notion of a human right to water. It continues by describing the different contexts in which water conflicts have developed: mining, dams, community aqueducts and urban water struggles. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the origin of the current Colombian water movement, looking first at the campaign 'Water: a public good', and then at the campaign for the water referendum.

Chapter 5 is the first of the three core chapters of the thesis. It analyses the community aqueducts, their communication practices and forms of organisation, and members' democratic participation. This chapter draws on the literature on participatory communication approaches to explain many of the interactions within these communitarian organisations. The role of dialogue as a key component of the communication practices and citizen engagement in collective actions is also discussed. In the context of community aqueducts and rural communities affected by water conflicts, dialogue functions as the starting point from which further collective actions, aiming at proposing an alternative for the solution of the conflicts, are developed. Dialogue facilitates encounters among people, face-to-face communication and strengthens communities' sense of belonging to their territories, and their identities. This chapter discusses the communication practices of water struggles mostly at local and grassroots level, while bearing in mind the impact they have on national and transnational water movements.

Chapter 6 develops the analysis of the campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010). This national campaign laid the foundations for many of the current Colombian water and environmental struggles. The chapter argues that the campaign for the water referendum opened up local, regional, national and international debates on the situation of water resources in Colombia. It was a democratic exercise for many social sectors, who collectively discussed, conducted research, and took decisions on the issue of water.

The chapter draws on new social movements theories and literature on public communication to analyse the communication actions of the campaign. Public communication approaches were a characteristic of the different strategies implemented during the campaign. The national campaign promoted the use of a legal mechanism of citizen participation for a collective and popular decision on fundamental water issues, therefore, public communication actions encouraged participation, discussions and grassroots mobilisations. This case study represents the national level of the scale of analysis. The campaign managed to link local struggles with broader international struggles and to make the Colombian water situation visible in influential decision-making spaces on natural common goods and human rights.

Chapter 7 deals with the struggles opposing mining and dam projects. This chapter illustrates one of the most recognised struggles against large-scale mining in the region: the struggle opposing an open-pit gold mine in Santurbán, Santander. Massive mobilisations and citizens' advocacy managed to stop the mining project. Through the Santurbán case and the other two case studies the chapter shows the scope and limitations of mobilisation and collective action in opposing large-scale infrastructure projects in contexts characterised by limited citizen participation, repression and violence. The chapter draws on literature on participatory communication and communication for social change to discuss mobilisations and their communication potential in social movements. The mobilisations described in the case studies were able to transmit multiple concerns from civil society to a wider audience and did so in creative ways, using symbolic language and innovative discourses to raise awareness and catch people's attention.

Chapter 8 is the final of the core chapters and it complements the analysis of local and national struggles by assessing the international scope of the water movement. The case studies in this chapter are: the Red Vida (Interamerican Network for the Human Right to Water), the Alternative World Water Forum, and the World Water Forum. These networks represent important transnational arenas for the discussion of water issues; their relationship with the Colombian water movement constitutes the focus of the chapter. The analysis is sustained by theories of transnational social movements and advocacy networks. Chapter 8 also explores the relationship between social movements and digital media and the role of new information technologies in overcoming difficulties, such as distance and lack of resources, in transnational collective actions.

Chapter 9 brings together the different findings of the thesis and highlights the main contributions of the research project. The conclusion reflects on the interconnections between case studies and returns to address the main research questions summarising the findings and analysis presented in the thesis. This chapter ends by pointing at some methodological limitations and suggesting avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter presents the theories and approaches used to conceptualise the different elements of my thesis. In particular, it draws on the literature on new social movements as well as the literature on communication approaches. The chapter is divided into three main sections which correspond to the three bodies of work constructing the theoretical framework. These are also the building blocks of the argument of the thesis. The first section is on social movements, specifically new social movements (NSM) theories. This section presents some of the key concepts developed by NSMs scholars, namely information, symbolic actions, collective identity, and participation. The section also considers a number of criticisms directed at NSM theories and looks at their limitations in terms of their capacity to explain the processes at play in the Colombian water movement. While NSM theories recognise the importance of communication, symbolic actions and the opening of new spaces for participation, these are not sufficient to support a comprehensive analysis of communication practices in the Colombian water movement. A subsection is also dedicated to present Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN), as the main framework utilise to analyse the case studies on transnational experiences in chapter 8.

The second part of this chapter discusses the literature on three concepts central to my argument: citizenship, participation and deepening democracy. The section starts with a brief historical discussion of citizenship before focusing on debates on active citizenship, which is the concept used for the analysis of the case studies. This section continues with an analysis of the concept of participation in the context of Latin American social movements and development. Finally, the debates on deepening democracy are explored along with the evolution of the concept and meaning of democracy in recent processes of social change and citizen participation and mobilisation.

The third section brings together the literature on the three different communication approaches that are used for the analysis of the case studies: public communication, participatory communication and communication for social change. In this thesis, participatory communication, communication for social change and public communication are used to conceptualise and describe different sets of

practices employed by social actors. This is a necessary clarification because these terms have been used as different ontological categories. For example, since its emergence four decades ago, participatory communication has been referred to in relation to the following ontological categories: form of communication, alternative view of communication, helpful tool (Altafin, 1991), political activity, means (Thomas, 1994), process (Servaes, 1996, Bessette and Rajasunderam, 1996), theory (Jacobson, 1996), approach and praxis (Huesca, 2002, 2006). In the course of this thesis, participatory communication, communication for social change and public communication are conceptualised as categories or sets of practices, jointly referred to as 'communication approaches'.

Participatory communication and communication for social change are two categories of communication practices – mostly analysed in development studies literature – useful to explain the communication phenomena in the Colombian water movement and in other social movements with similar characteristics. The scope of participatory communication practices in NSMs is under-theorised. While this research attempts to fill this theoretical gap, it also aims to contribute to a better understanding of communication practices in social movements and their impact on democratic practices and environmental sovereignty. Democratic practices are understood as the series of citizens' practices, including political participation, access to justice mechanisms, partaking in decision and policy-making spaces, aiming to bring positive social change. Environmental sovereignty is the ability and right of citizens to decide over the natural common goods, their territory and the impact that any intervention affecting the environment may have on their livelihoods.

As well as focusing on communication approaches, the thesis draws on the concept of *dialogue* understood as a fundamental communication action and the foundation for other communication practices. Dialogue is a crucial element of participatory communication since it is the initial form of communication which facilitates bringing together different meanings amongst the members of a group, who are willing to transform their current situation (Melkote and Steeves, 2001). The chapter ends with a reflection on how these three theoretical strands come together to form a coherent framework to support the analysis presented in this thesis.

The Latin American body of literature analysing communication practices in development is very important to complement a theoretical framework aimed at understanding processes of change initiated by social movements. Huesca (2002, 2006) has traced the development of the conceptualisation of participatory communication amongst Latin American scholars. He argues that Latin American scholars introduced 'more fluid and elastic concepts that centered on how-meaning-comes-to-be in its definition'. He continues:

These more fluid and meaning-centered conceptualizations of communication emphasized co-presence, intersubjectivity, phenomenological "being in the world," and openness of interlocutors (Pasquali, 1963). This view introduced a sophisticated epistemology arguing that the understanding of social reality is produced between people, in material contexts, and in communication. (Huesca, 2002, p. 9)

Huesca's observation is a useful point of departure for analysing how citizen's communication practices in the Colombian water movement contribute to the production of the social world. The literature on participatory communication practices contributes to shed light on citizens' participation, power structures, and democratic practices. Huesca expresses that the concept of participatory communication has produced a rich body of scholarship that proposed 'new challenges, identified problems, documented achievements, and advanced theoretical understanding' (ibid, p. 27). One of the fields that deserve scholars' attention, Huesca suggests, is new social movements:

New social movements constitute a nexus where concerns for communication process, social justice, and broad participation converge as natural laboratories for exploring participatory communication for development. (ibid)

This thesis takes on board Huesca's call to explore the relationship between communication practices and new social movements.

2.1 Sociological approaches to social movements

[Social movements are] networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity. (Diani, 2008, p. 267)

Diani's definition is probably one of the most notorious in recent social movement studies. It provides a good starting point for this research because it focuses on interaction and networks, revealing the centrality of communication for social movements. Social movements are one of the major social practices through which collectivities express their concerns about their rights, welfare and wellbeing (Snow et al., 2004). The sociological study of social movement is important because they are key agents for bringing about social change (Crossley, 2002). According to Crossley (2002), social movements are natural experiments in power, legitimation and democracy. Research on social movements has focused on different macro issues such as the relationships among crisis, social movements and democracy, the emergence of new actors, the escalation of violence, the growth of the informal sector, the loss of confidence in the government and political parties, the breakdown of cultural mechanisms, and so forth (Escobar, 1992, p. 33). Social movements construct social action and are embedded in the everyday life of civil society (Peterson, 1989). Numerous expressions of social and political participation occur within social movements; they can be viewed as the concurrence of different collective actions and confluence of actors who instigate new forms of social organization and collective behaviour.

Social movement studies constitute an extensive field of inquiry. Escobar (1992) claims that the emergence of social movements and the academic interest they raised have provoked a substantial renovation in the social sciences, in the form of a reappraisal of civil society. Numerous perspectives have enriched the debates on social movement research in recent decades. One of these proposes the distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements. The movements concerned with the social transformations in post-industrial societies, particularly in Western Europe, were called new social movements (NSM). Important contributors in the field of New Social Movements include Alan Touraine, Alberto Melucci and Jürgen Habermas. In this research, the Colombian Water Movement is analysed through the lens of NSM theories and case studies, drawing particularly on Melucci's work on collective identity, symbolic actions, and information. Despite the criticisms and limitations of NSMs (discussed below), these theories provide useful tools to understand the aims of the Colombian water movement and explain the different interactions within the movement. However, NSM theories are insufficient for my

analysis, as discussed in the next section; therefore I also draw on the scholarly literature on communication approaches to complement the theoretical framework.

2.1.1 New Social Movements and the Colombian Water Movement

The term new social movements (NSM) gained acceptance among theorists concerned with the peace, feminist, ecological and local-autonomy movements proliferating in the West since the mid-seventies (Cohen, 1985, p. 663). These movements displayed substantive qualitative differences compared to the traditional social movements and workers' movements of the first part of the twentieth century (Urán-Arenas, 2003). The NSM approach emerged as a response to the shortfalls of classical Marxism in analysing new forms of collective action. NSMs bring 'new politics of quality life, projects of self-realization, and goals of participation and identity formation' (Buechler, 1995, p. 446). NSMs are oriented to changes in culture and daily life, and they are very critical of the productivism and consumerism of contemporary society. According to Alberto Melucci, the grievances and mobilising factors of NSMs 'tend to focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with issues of identity rather than economic grievances that characterized the working-class movements' (Melucci 1985, 1989, in Laraña et al., 1994, p. 7).

Huesca (2000) suggests that NSM research provides 'a structural framework concerning the process of social change that is compatible with participatory approaches to development communication' (p. 75). Huesca's contribution brings together the analysis of collective action, power structures and communication. According to him, '[r]esearching the communicating of and in social movements offers a promising way to document the "epistemology of action" that is central to their formation, mobilization, and operation' (p. 78). The study of communication practices in the water movement in Colombia is a way of recovering the local knowledge, practices, efforts and modes of organisation of local communities and acknowledging their role in the opening of democratic spaces and participation in a country that has experienced fifty years of internal conflict.

Among the concepts which are discussed in NSM literature, four in particular support the theoretical foundation of the analysis presented in this thesis. These are: information, symbolic actions, collective identity and participation.

Information

Melucci's ideas on semiotics and collective identity in contemporary social movements are useful for this research. For instance, he states that 'in a society increasingly shaped by information and signs, social movements play an important role as messages that express oppositional tendencies and modalities' (Melucci 1989; Gusfield 1994; Mueller 1994, in Buechler, 1995, p. 442). NSMs are interested in 'the ways in which complex societies generate information and communicate meaning to their members. Information is regarded as the central resource over which the struggle is pursued; and the movements challenge the administrative logic of complex systems on primarily symbolic grounds' (Melucci, in Peterson, 1989, p. 425). The sharing of information is a central feature of the struggles. Citizens belonging to and supporting water movements have conducted research themselves on the causes and consequences of the water conflicts affecting them. In doing so, they also disseminate their findings both inside and outside their constituencies. The modes of this dissemination will be further explained in chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. Furthermore, the forms of protest and the production of messages in different water struggles resort to symbolic language, inclusive proposals, peaceful and creative forms involving a diversity of media and social actors.

Symbolic actions

NSM theories emphasise symbolic action in civil society or in the cultural sphere as the main ground for collective action (Melucci, 1989, in Buechler, 1995, Cohen, 1985). These contemporary movements function as signs, meaning that they decode their actions into symbolic challenges to the dominant codes (Melucci, in Peterson, 1989). For Melucci (1994) 'Movements are media that speak through action... The action of movements can be seen as a symbol and as communication' (p. 126). Melucci further claims that these movements develop as a response to new areas of conflict in everyday life, and that such conflicts involve symbolic codes, identity claims, and personal or expressive claims (Buechler, 1995, p. 446)

Collective identity

Collective identity in social movements is created through the interactions around the common purposes and actions of the movements. These interactions occur between a plurality of individuals and groups or organisations (Diani, 2008). The concept of collective identity is also central to Melucci's analytical framework. He

defines it as ‘an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their actions as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their actions take place’ (Melucci, 1989, p. 34). Melucci also stresses the importance of the emotional involvement of activists in the construction of collective identity.

NSMs are focused on new collective identities and discursive struggles capable of renovating people’s self-understandings (2000). Collective action and identity are manifested through the different communication practices in the Colombian water movement. A communication action – be it a performance, or a press conference, or the making of a leaflet – is carried out by various individuals who agree on a common objective and seek to change the attitudes of other citizens towards a particular water conflict to enlist their support. The communication practices in the water movement are the processes through which the activists and people affected by water conflicts construct their identities and frame their goals. Collective identity is also perceived by Melucci as the result of negotiations, exchanges, decisions and conflicts among actors (Melucci, 1995). This sense of interaction is also present in Polletta and Jasper’s (2001) definition of collective identity as a connection (cognitive, moral, emotional) with a community, category, practice or institution. For them, collective identities are conveyed through a wide array of forms such as rituals, narratives, symbols, and verbal styles. This thesis analyses the expressive forms and communication practices employed by activists and groups involved in the water struggles.

Participation

NSMs understanding of participation and the notion of participation outlined in this chapter are related in two major aspects. The first is that they both stress the constant questioning of power structures by NSMs and the alternatives forms of interaction built from the claiming of independence. The second common aspect is the emphasis on the public sphere as an interface providing opportunities for convergence with other social actors involved in decision-making processes and the construction of public opinion. NSMs try to detach from institutional politics and bureaucratic channels of participation and political institutions (Offe, 2008), thereby creating and occupying an ‘intermediate space of social life’ (Melucci, 1994, p. 103) and reorganising civil society so that it is more independent from control, regulation

and intervention (Offe, 2008). Melucci highlights the importance of 'free spaces between the level of political power and everyday life in which actors can consolidate collective identities through both representation and participation' (in Peterson, 1989, p. 446). In his analysis of NSMs, Crossley (2002), building upon Habermas' work, affirms that NSM 'remoralize and repoliticize politics, simultaneously revitalizing the flagging public sphere. They generate a public debate about matters of public morality and social organization, contesting the norms by which we live our lives.' (p. 161).

NSMs are constantly questioning the structures of representative democracies that constrain the participation of citizens in governance, 'instead advocating direct democracy, self-help groups, and cooperative styles of social organization' (Pichardo, 1997, p. 414). The independence claimed by NSM is represented by and through alternative forms of action, communication and mobilisation, and the creation of autonomous structures of organisation and participation. NSMs create structures that 'are more responsive to the needs of the individuals — open, decentralized, non-hierarchical' (Zimmerman 1987, in Pichardo, 1997, p. 416). NSM theories have recognised the variety of participatory channels and strategies utilised by contemporary movements, and highlighted in particular how their relationship, with the state and hierarchical institutions often takes the form of detachment. However, NSM theories remain vague in relation to the specific processes citizens engage in to overcome the bureaucratic channels or bourgeois public sphere. These and other criticisms are analysed in the following section.

2.1.1.1 Criticisms of NSM theories

NSM theories have been criticised for some of the inconsistencies and ambiguities they contain. This section presents some of the critiques that have been levelled at NSMs focusing on those that are more relevant to my research topic. The 'newness' of new social movements is one of the recurrent aspects of the critiques to new social movements theories. Scott (1995) argues that new and older social movements have important continuities between them. Pichardo (1997) contends that with the exception of the issue of collective identity, the other characteristics of NSMs are not unique at all. Plotke (1990) argues that NSM discourses exaggerate the novelty of these movements and their detachment from the established political

sphere (in Buechler, 1995). Tarrow (1991) also remarks that the newness of these movements 'has less to do with the structural features of advanced capitalism and more to do with the fact that these movements were studied in their early stages of formation within a particular cycle of protest in the late 1960s and early 1970s' (ibid, p. 447).

Another inconsistency directly relevant to this thesis is highlighted by Alonso et al. (2010) in their analysis of the Brazilian environmental movement. In their view, NSM theories are not always useful to explain case studies in the global South as 'NSM theories do not take into account the national socio-political contexts and the way they condition the rise and the dynamics of social movements' (p. 154). Pichardo (1997) also notes that while the 'NSM thesis limits the phenomenon to Western nations' (p. 424), some authors have applied NSM analysis to developing countries. Numerous social movements in Latin America have been analysed through NSMs, even if the changes in post-industrial economy, and already established democratic systems were not in place there.

According to Ferrer (2014), NSM approaches 'still examine social movements from an objective and neutral perspective' (p. 31). For this author, NSM approaches observe social movements from the outside. In her view,

The complexity and multiplicity of subjectivities are compressed into general categories and variables imposed from an external and "neutral" point of view. NSM approaches ignore any form of knowledge coming from within the movements that breaks with the linearity of these patterns (ibid).

Della Porta and Diani (1999) argue that, while the NSM approach has merits such as drawing attention to structural determinants of protest and re-evaluating the importance of conflicts, it also has the problem of leaving unresolved the 'analysis of mechanisms which lead from conflict to action' (p. 13). Theorists of NSM have characterised these as detached from institutional constraints (Handler, 1992). They also have expressed that NSM seek autonomy rather than power (Barker and Dale, 1998). NSM theories consider movements to be better described as forms of collective identity engaged in discursive struggles rather than organisations of common interests (Carroll and Hackett, 2006). For Handler (1992), postmodern politics is the politics of discourse (p. 724). He considers anti-institutionalism a

fundamental condition of postmodern political theory. Nonetheless, lacking a positive theory of institutions, 'postmodernism cannot come to grips with institutionally based power' (p. 724). Offe (1990) and Boggs (1986, in Handler, 1992) sustain that the dilemmas of the NSMs are derived from the beliefs of 'antistatism, antibureaucracy, and antipower as well as their rejection of large-scale social theories' (Handler, 1992, p. 723). For these authors, these principles and beliefs are regarded as fundamental to the postmodern project.

One Handler's (1992) major critiques to NSM theories is the incapability of using the language of the liberal and socialist traditions because of the lack of a comprehensive vision for a new society. He argues that NSM theories have a dispersed set of complaints, issues and demands which do not contribute to a unifying force or vision. Handler adds that the 'enemy' of NSMs is an abstract type of dominant rationality, instead of a social class.

Alberto Melucci was a proponent of a collective identity-oriented paradigm in NSM. Melucci tried to shorten the gap between individual beliefs and meanings and collective action by 'exploring the dynamic process through which actors negotiate, understand and construct their action through shared repeated interaction' (Flesher-Fominaya, 2010, p. 394). One of his arguments was that 'collective identity must be understood as a dynamic reflexive process' (ibid, p. 396). For Snow (2001, in Flesher-Fominaya, 2010), the product is more important than the process since the product is 'generative of a sense of agency that can be a powerful impetus to collective action' (p. 397). The issue of collective identity in NSM has also been criticised by different authors. Pizzorno, one of the earliest theorists of NSM, affirmed that the process of identity formation in new social movements involves non-negotiable demands (Cohen, 1985). Authors like Cohen find this claim problematic because the logic of exchange and negotiation is inexistent in NSMs dealing with the creation of solidarity and identity. For Cohen (1985), processes of political exchange require negotiations between opponents.

NSM theories are very selective in relation to the type of movement they analyse, and tend to overlook other movements emerging in parallel, for example right wing movements or recent working class movements. While they are useful to identify some of the particular characteristics of contemporary social movements, the tools

they provide for the analysis and theorisation of interactions and communication practices are somehow lacking. In this research NSM theories are complemented with selected communication approaches to fill specific gaps and fruitfully explain the repertoires and interactions of the water struggles in Colombia.

2.1.1.2 The limitations of NSM theories for the study of communication practices in social movements

In this thesis, I argue that the Colombian Water movement has several of the features commonly attributed to New Social Movements (NSM) and can be conceptualised as such. As noted above, an important characteristic of NSMs is that they generate new collective identities and meanings through communication and public debate. However, NSM theories are insufficient in explaining both the scope of communication practices and public participation and their role in deepening democracy and overcoming political apathy. In support of this argument, I refer to Huesca (2000) who argues that:

Empirical research into NSM, therefore, has sought to understand how individuals become involved, sustained, and estranged from movements; how actors construct collective identity and action; and how the unity of various elements of action are produced (Melucci, 1989). Although all of these elements come about through communication, research into NSM has proceeded without an explicit model of communication. (p. 78)

Despite the fact that the study of communication and media practices in social movements has become the subject, in recent years, of a rapidly expanding body of literature,³ the fundamental role of interpersonal communication and participatory practices is not frequently addressed in social movement theory, especially amongst European scholars. According to Mattoni (2009), the literature on media and social movements may be split into two fields of research: (1) one looks at how the mainstream media represent social movements; (2) the other focuses on how social actors in social movements interact with different types of media. This research is situated in the second field. The focus of this research is on participatory and public communication practices, which also involve the interaction with a diversity of media

³ Gamson, 1998, 2004, 2001; Bennett, 2001, 2003; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Dahlgren, 2009; Huesca, 2006; Kavada, 2007; León, 2005; López de la Roche, 2001; Cammaerts, 2013; Rincón, 2001; Rodríguez-Urbe, 2011.

and social and political actors. My analysis of the Colombian water movement focuses on the actors, their actions and their impact on democratic actions and participation, rather than on the products of the communication processes. The analysis is informed by a theoretical framework that brings together NSM theories and communication approaches by 'Western' and 'Southern' scholars and practitioners. In the concluding section of the chapter, the different contributions offered by social movement theories and communication approaches are brought together in a unified framework.

2.2 Transnational advocacy networks and the global water movement

Transnational advocacy networks (TAN) is the theoretical framework used to analyse the case studies of transnational experiences of water justice movements and networks presented in Chapter 8. The processes of coordinating social action transnationally have been called 'globalization from below' or 'grassroots globalization' (Appadurai 2001, in Hemer and Tufte, 2005, Huesca, 2006). As part of this 'globalization from below', a definition first coined by Arjun Appadurai, *transnational advocacy networks* (TAN) have become 'potential new agents of social change in a global context' (Hemer and Tufte, 2005, p. 16). Keck and Sikkink's (1998) definition of TAN is useful to understand the case studies of global water movement presented in this chapter. These authors describe networks as 'forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange' (p. 8). They further add that what makes these transnational networks stand apart from other networks is their focus on 'advocacy';

[advocacy] captures what is unique about these transnational networks: they are organized to promote causes, principles ideas, and norms, and they often involve individuals advocating policy changes that cannot be easily linked to a rationalist understanding of their 'interests'. (p. 8-9)

Keck and Sikkink also outline the tactics that these transnational advocacy networks utilise in persuading, socialising and pressing for their causes: information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. Information politics is the capacity to produce politically usable information and disseminate it where it is likely to have an impact; symbolic politics refers to the usage of symbols, actions or stories that reinforce the meaning of a situation for an audience that is far away; leverage politics focuses on establishing alliances with powerful actors 'to affect a

situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence'; and accountability politics, is 'the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles' (p. 16).

The importance of the flow of information is a common characteristic of the different tactics adopted by transnational networks. This flow of information denotes the complex links among these groups (formal and informal). Keck and Sikkink (1998) describe information sharing as a valuable currency, and also as a crucial element shaping transnational networks' identity: 'core campaigners must ensure that individuals and organizations with access to necessary information are incorporated into the network; different ways of framing an issue may require quite different kinds of information' (p. 10). An example supporting this claim is the virtual meetings through Skype between members of the international communication committee of the Alternative World Water Forum, a committee formed to generate and deliver information before, during and after the event (section 8.4.3). Keck and Sikkink's contribution to the analysis of information and communication in this type of social movements at transnational level confirms the relevance of exploring case studies, such as the ones in this thesis and chapter, which represent different instances of information, symbolic leverage and accountability politics. Complementing Keck and Sikkink's argument, Leslie Paul Thiele argues that transnational social movements are characterised by the sharing of 'information, tactics and a culture of art, music, literature and activities with their international counterparts as well as an orientation to global citizenship and stewardship' (in Eschle and Stammers, 2004, p. 344).

2.3 Citizenship and participation

This section discusses the classic definition of citizenship before focusing on the notions of *active citizenship* and participation in the context of social movements. These two concepts cut across the whole theoretical framework because they constitute both aims and means in the repertoires of social movements and their political and social demands. The section closes linking participation and citizenship with debates on deepening democracy.

In its broadest sense of the term, citizenship could be defined as 'membership to a community' (Castro, 1999, p. 39). One standard way of understanding the concept is through the definition of formal citizenship as 'the formal rights and duties

governing the interactions between individuals belonging to a political community' (Castro, 2004, p. 76). Much of the practices and definitions which frame the relationship between citizens and the state have been based on the classic liberal concept of citizenship (Marshall, 1973). In this context, 'the state is responsible for the protection of rights, and is regulated and held accountable through democratic mechanisms' (Butcher and Apsan Frediani, 2014, p. 121). T.H. Marshall defines citizenship as

a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines that those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a development institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which citizenship can be directed. (Marshall, 1973, p. 84)

Marshall was particularly concerned with defining the relationship between social class and citizenship (Rees, 1996). He divided citizenship into three dimensions: civil, political, and social (Turner, 1993). Civil rights are those 'necessary for individual freedom'; political rights refer to the ability 'to participate in the exercise of political power'; whereas social rights are quite broad, covering 'the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (Marshall 1950, p. 10,11, in Hindess, 1993, p. 20). Undoubtedly, Marshall's conceptualisation of citizenship rights raised questions on the different social practices and citizens' relationship with the state in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. However, in the context of contemporary social movements, traditional definitions of citizenship have been transformed and challenged (Castro, 2004, Dagnino, 2005b), as will be explained below. The rise of neoliberalism changed the priorities of powerful decision-makers. The differences between the demands of capital accumulation and the safeguard of rights, have increasingly made the state unable or unwilling to consider the interests of vulnerable groups (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Harvey 2008, in Butcher and Apsan Frediani, 2014). Butcher and Apsan-Frediani (2014) remark that the recent criticism of classical liberal citizenship underlines that the concepts of participation and inclusion 'do not explain unequal relations of power that reproduce inequalities' (p. 121). This section considers other theorisations of citizenship, highlighting the contributions of Dagnino (2005b, 2005a, 2007), the

Citizenship DRC (2011), and Clarke and Missingham (2009), all of which are relevant for this research.

2.3.1 Active citizenship and participation

Recent work in contemporary citizenship has tried to connect the liberal version of citizenship (stressing individual rights, equality and process of law), with the communitarian focus on belonging and the civic republican focus on processes of deliberation, collective action and responsibility (Gaventa, 2002). The aim of this body of scholarship is to shorten the gap between citizen and state by reconsidering citizenship as practised rather than as given (ibid). Gaventa (2002) remarks that, in the process of extending the notion of citizenship, the idea of considering citizenship as participation emerges. He quotes Lister:

Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents (Lister 1998: 228, in Gaventa, 2002, p. 4-5)

Giving as an example the case of Latin America, Dagnino (2005a) notes that participation plays an important part in debates on citizenship. According to her, different views on participation often imply alternative conceptions of citizenship; 'participation has been seen by analysts and activists alike as a requirement, a condition, but also a guarantee of democracy and citizenship' (p. 9). The emphasis on participation considers citizenship as a form of action, as described by the expression 'active citizenship' :

to become a citizen is to participate, to struggle, to exercise the right to participate in order to achieve, materialise and guarantee other rights. In addition, such an emphasis often overlaps with a stress on citizenship as a process of the constitution of subjects: to be an 'active citizen' is to become a political subject, aware of his /her rights and power to struggle for them. (ibid)

Various authors have found evidence of this *active citizenship* in recent social uprisings, development projects and grassroots opposition to neoliberal versions of

citizenship⁴ (see Dagnino, 2007). For Clarke and Missingham (2009), *active citizenship* means ‘engaging with the political system to build an effective state, and assuming some degree of responsibility for the public domain’ (p. 955). Moreover, it also indicates the rights and duties that connect individuals to the state such as ‘paying taxes, obeying laws, and exercising the full range of political, civil, and social rights’ (ibid). Yarwood (2014) proposes a definition of *active citizenship* that draws on various authors; *active citizenship* implies that citizenship

must be actively sought or performed (Ghose 2005) rather than passively accepted. Duties are emphasized over rights and, consequently, the term has been used in policies that have encouraged people to engage in local state-led voluntary activity (Kearns 1995; Fyfe and Milligan 2003a) (p. 203)

In the Taskforce-on-active-citizenship Report (2007), being an active citizen means ‘being aware of, and caring about, the welfare of fellow citizens, recognising that we live as members of communities and therefore depend on others in our daily lives’ (p. 2). This definition of active citizenship is based on the normative assumption that the exercise of citizenship strengthens democratic processes of decision-making and the sense of belonging of individuals and communities, leading to the formation or consolidation of voluntarily and community organisations to the benefit of democracy (ibid). Instances of this type of active citizenship are identified in different communication practices of the water struggles analysed in this thesis. The case studies illustrate situations where different levels of citizenship were exercised by communities and individuals through their involvement in mobilisation actions in

⁴ Dagnino also explains that the recent appropriation of participation (together with civil society and citizenship) by neoliberal projects in Latin America ‘is seen as responsible for the increasing ambiguity around the term, and of participatory practices themselves’ (Dagnino, 2005a). The **neoliberal version of citizenship** recovers some of the traditional liberal conceptions of citizenship; there is a reformulation of citizenship stressing the individual, and the reduction of the collective meaning of social movements (Dagnino, 2005a). Dagnino argues that in this version of citizenship, social rights are understood as benefits and services to be found in the market. The state responsibility over citizens’ rights is reduced, and the market occupies a privileged place in the construction of an alternative version of citizenship (ibid). In many countries in Latin America where neoliberalism took over, the new social policies were formulated as emergency measures focused on specific social sectors at risk (ibid). Dagnino adds that ‘the idea of a collective solidarity that underlies the classical reference to rights and citizenship is now being replaced by an understanding of solidarity as a strictly private moral responsibility’ (p. 19). The economic model based on free market policies requires citizens to adopt new identities, and this excludes large sectors of the population (Castro, 1999). According to the neoliberal sociologists Peter Saunders, this new identities correspond with a new way of consumption and express the neoliberal ideals of individual freedom and consumer choice (Castro, 1999). Saunders sustains that the construction of these new identities does not imply the withdrawal of the state, but a change in its form of intervention in the daily life of citizens (ibid).

defence of water. For instance, the community aqueducts (Chapter 5) have engaged in state-led initiatives to jointly provide water services to the population and foster social development in their communities. In other cases, the exercise of citizenship has focused on the claiming of autonomy by communities defending their rights. The focus of this thesis is on the communication actions of activists engaged in the water movement; their interactions and repertoires understood as practices enabling the exercise of active citizenship.

2.3.1.1 Citizenship in the context of social movements and Latin America

The liberal version of citizenship had been the leading notion of citizenship until social movements started to appropriate it (Dagnino, 2005a). Since the 1960s, the rise of new social movements advocating for ethnic, gender and sexual rights has pushed for new understandings of citizenship; at the same time 'processes of economic federalization and mass migration have prompted radical redefinitions of citizenship rights in most developed countries' (Castro, 2004, p. 77). Some important debates and contemporary studies on citizenship come from Latin American scholars (such as Dagnino 1998, 2005a, 2005b, 2007), who have examined the evolution of citizenship in the continent in the context of social uprisings against neoliberal hegemony.

The concept of citizenship has become prominent in recent decades because it represents a 'crucial weapon not only in the struggle against social and economic exclusion and inequality, but – most importantly – in the widening of dominant conceptions of politics itself'⁵ (Dagnino, 2005a, p. 1). In Latin America, the redefinition of citizenship initiated by social movements has sought to overcome the restrictions imposed by existing political scenarios: participants, institutions, processes, agenda and scope (Alvarez et al., 1998). Direct participation of civil society in the decisions of the state is a central feature of this new articulation of citizenship since it may have 'the potential for radical transformation in the structure

⁵ The appropriation of citizenship in attaining these two objectives implied a 'redefinition of liberal versions of citizenship, paradigmatically described by Marshall (1950) in the 1940s. The liberal version of citizenship had been dominant until social movements began to appropriate it. Such a redefinition had to begin by asserting the historical character of the meanings and contents of citizenship and, therefore, the need to adjust them to concrete realities and specific political projects and intentions' (Dagnino, 2005a, p. 1).

of power relations of Latin American societies' (Dagnino, 2005a, p.8). Latin American social movements in the last two decades have found it very helpful to use this notion of citizenship to frame their own objectives and their connections with other movements. Dagnino (2007) argues that the general demand for equal rights, embedded in the classical concept of citizenship, has been expanded and given specific meanings for particular claims:

The process of redefinition placed a strong emphasis on the cultural dimension of citizenship, incorporating contemporary concerns with subjectivities, identities, and the right to difference. This new citizenship was seen as reaching far beyond the acquisition of legal rights: it depended on citizens being active social subjects, defining their rights, and struggling for these rights to be recognised. At the same time, the emphasis on culture asserted the need for a radical transformation of cultural practices that reproduce social inequality and exclusion. (p. 549)

The evolution of the concept of citizenship described by Dagnino recalls some of the social transformations analysed by new social movement scholars, discussed earlier in this chapter.

Citizenship-DRC (2011) conceives citizenship 'as attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights, but also through social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes and struggles' (p. 5). Citizenship-DRC considers citizens' abilities to be determined by vertical, horizontal, local and global relationships. A citizen 'belongs to different kinds of collective associations and defines their identity from participation in activities associated with these different kinds of membership' (p. 4). This acknowledges 'the importance of people's aspirations for justice, recognition and self-determination as a driving force for development' (p. 4). The engagement of citizens in struggles defending the right to water, the land and identity are expressions of the exercise of citizenship in Colombia. Citizens mobilise to negotiate and discuss the water conflict they are facing, they look for alternatives and solutions, strengthening networks and solidarity ties with peers in the process.

Citizenship is context dependent and, according to Citizenship-DRC (2011), can have both positive and negative outcomes (see Figure 2.1). The outcomes of citizen engagement cannot simply be measured in terms of the goals achieved in the short

term; rather, they need to be assessed also in terms of their success in establishing long lasting processes that allow for the continuous construction of political actors and the development of the communities. The outcomes of citizen engagement are closely linked to transformatory practices such as innovations, participatory methodologies and mobilisation (Cornwall, 2004).

Figure 2.1 *The outcomes of citizen engagement, both positive and negative*

Positive	Negative
Citizen capabilities	
Increased civic and political knowledge	Increased dependency on a few intermediary experts
Greater sense of empowerment and agency	Disempowerment and reduced sense of agency
Increased capacities for collective action	New capacities used for 'negative' purposes
Effective services and access to development resources	
Greater access to state services and resources	Denial of state services and resources
Deepening of networks and solidarities	Lack of accountability and representation in networks
Responsive and accountable states	
Enhanced state responsiveness and accountability	Violent or coercive state response
New forms of participation	Tokenistic or 'captured' forms of participation
Rights and deeper democracy	
Greater realisation of rights	Social, economic and political reprisals
Inclusion of new actors and issues in public spaces	Reinforcement of social hierarchies and exclusion
Greater social cohesion across groups	Increased horizontal conflict and violence

(Taken from: Citizenship-DRC. 2011. *Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action Across States and Societies. A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement*. Brighton: Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability. P. 8)

In Colombia, the engagement of citizens in collective action is affected by factors such as violence, illiteracy, lack of information, or the isolation of communities, which are analysed in the following chapters. In countries with experiences of armed struggle, such as Colombia, 'subsequent or parallel forms of participation have been hailed as a "rehabilitation of the political sphere" and taken as expressions of the formation of a citizenship movement and the expansion of the public sphere' (see Cheresky 2001 and 2002 on Argentina; and González, Segura and Bolívar 1997 on Colombia in Dagnino, 2005a, p. 11). Moreover, the defence of human rights by social movements in Colombia is an important element to understand the different challenges citizenship has encountered. For instance, referring to the Colombian case, Romero (2003) recognises a disconnection between security and democracy, where 'security is presented as a precondition or as a value for which rights and

freedom should be sacrificed, thus denying any viable concept of citizenship’⁶ This contradiction is perceived in those who claim rights and, simultaneously, reject any legitimacy of the state.

Citizens display a notable agency when they are willing to participate in democratic spaces despite inhibiting factors, such as violence, repression, and various forms of intimidation. The legal and institutional context is also fundamental for the achievement of citizenship (Citizenship-DRC, 2011). The creation of new democratic spaces becomes difficult without an enabling legal framework (ibid). Findings from the Citizenship-DRC show that political institutions or developmental interventions alone cannot foster democracy; organised citizens contribute to the strengthening of democratic practices when they ‘demand new rights, mobilise pressure for policy change and monitor government performance’ (p. 20). An active and informed civil society can demand commitment and responsiveness from the government, thus having a positive impact on the widening of new democratic spaces (IDS, 2006). The communication actions in the water struggles analysed in this thesis have helped to transform the relations between citizens and the government. Through the struggles, citizens have learnt about mechanisms of participation, their rights and duties, while engaging in debates on the commons (shared resources, natural common goods) and policies on water and land.

2.3.2 The making of social transformations: citizens’ agency and participation

This section analyses the concept of participation reviewing key authors relevant to the analysis presented in this thesis, specifically Paulo Freire, Cicilia Krohling-Peruzzo, Andrea Cornwall and Vera Coelho, and the Citizenship and Development Research Centre.

In the 1970s, Paulo Freire proposed the use of a participatory human-centred approach that acknowledged the importance of interpersonal channels of communication in decision-making processes at community level (Tufte and

⁶ Romero also refers to the situation of ‘desplazamiento forzado’ (forced displacement), ‘pointing out how the state acknowledges its duty to recognise special rights to displaced people which reveals, in practice, its previous incapacity to guarantee conditions for citizenship’ (In, Dagnino, 2005a, p. 13).

Mefalopulos, 2009). For Freire, participation was ‘the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their word’ (Waisbord, 2009). His ideas stressed the recognition of local knowledge, and the importance of using a dialogical approach when working with people (FAO, 2007, p. 4). The methods of this Brazilian educator and development practitioner became widely known as a result of his achievements in adult education and social inclusion. According to Freire, learning processes could be established with all the people with whom we work, from the grassroots to local officers and intellectuals. Freire also emphasised the importance of a continuous revision of ideas, calling for openness in the academy and social practice to build new knowledge together. Along with Freire, the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda made several contributions to the debates on participation in development from a Latin American perspective. He contributed to develop a methodology called ‘Participatory Action Research’ (PAR), whose central concern was to study *with* people rather than to conduct research *on* people in development processes. For Fals-Borda, the devolution or *proactive feedback* and sharing of research is a key aspect of the praxis of participatory research. He remarks that

the devolution of knowledge and techniques is not just a question of formal publications, but must encompass diverse forms of communication and other shared projects and activities (1987:114). Thus, it is not enough simply to integrate theory and practice, for knowledge derives from several sources. (1987:44) (in Mato, 2004, p. 675)

Regarding this approach, Mato (2004) remarks that ‘[a]n important element of PAR is the insistence on the need to break with "relationships of subordination" and connected forms of knowledge production’ (p. 675). PAR⁷ is part of and has inspired the methodological approaches used in this research (Chapter 3).

Participation in the context of social movements and environmental struggles is inevitably situated within the public sphere,⁸ where citizens take part in the decision-

⁷ Core methodological principles of PAR include: ‘iterative, group-based learning and analysis, the use of visualization methods to broaden the inclusiveness of the process and enable people to represent their knowledge using their own categories and concepts, and an explicit concern with the quality of interaction, including a stress on personal values, attitudes and behaviour’ (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 186).

⁸ Based on Habermas, and in the context of the water movement in Colombia, *public sphere* is considered ‘a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.

making processes in a democratic system. Participation – whether in social movements, communication, development or democratic processes – requires special knowledge and certain capabilities regarding how to identify what needs and objectives are to be addressed. In their work, Cornwall and Coelho (2007) underline that ‘for people to be able to exercise their political agency, they need first to recognize themselves as citizens rather than see themselves as beneficiaries or clients’ (p. 8). This recognition requires a process of participation, which involves education, political activity and recognition of their own reality. This political agency does not come out by itself, but through processes of awareness-raising and community work which, in the case of the water struggles analysed in this thesis, are enabled by communication practices implemented by citizens themselves. The development of an active citizenry demands time and experience (Citizenship-DRC, 2011). ‘Through trial and error, citizens gradually acquire crucial knowledge, a sense of their ability and a disposition to act. Such knowledge may be of one’s rights and responsibilities, more technical knowledge needed to engage more effectively with the state, or awareness of alternatives to the status quo’ (ibid, p. 9).

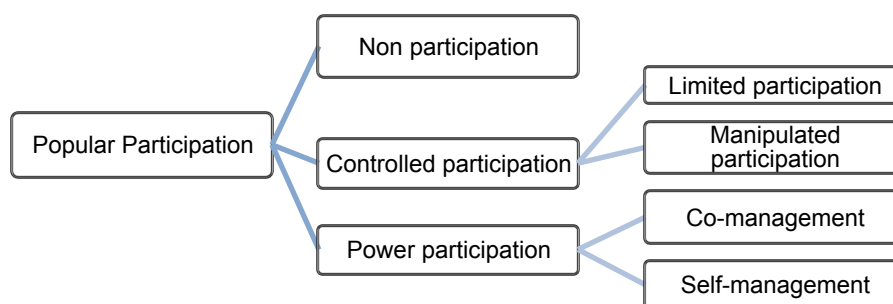
Debates on participation have always been context-dependent. The analysis of participation relies on social and political structures as well as on the practices used in order to engage in decision-making processes. Participation implies the existence of a societal structure in which individuals exercise agency – either to contribute to or to contest authority, decisions and ideas. In the case of the water movement, participation is considered the engagement of citizens in new democratic, decision and policy-making spaces through collective-communicative actions. Not only do these actions encourage citizens affected by the water conflicts to communicate messages and use different types of media, but they also encourage legal and political actions to challenge existing power structures.

The Brazilian scholar Cicilia Maria Krohling-Peruzzo provides a typology of participation in the context of communication practices which can be applied to the analysis of the social movement subject of this thesis (See Chart below) (Krohling-Peruzzo, 2004, Sparks, 2007). With regard to popular participation, she recognises three main areas: *non-participation*, *controlled participation* and *power participation*.

Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body’ (in Saeed, 2009, p. 467).

She argues that *non-participation* is evidenced in the authoritarian structure of most social institutions, where there is no place for discussion. *Controlled participation* can be divided in two: *limited participation* and *manipulated participation*. The first one is characteristic of 'social structures in which those in dominant positions determine the overall goals, but permit some discussion of proposals' (ibid, p. 70). Sparks (2007) elaborates on Krohling-Peruzzo's first category of participation arguing that in the case of *limited participation*, the elite determines the scope of participation and topics. *Manipulated participation* allows citizens certain levels of discussion and decision-making but controls, to varying extents, the means of opinion formation in order to define specific outcomes.

Figure 2.2 Krohling-Peruzzo's typology of participation



(Adapted from Sparks, 2007, p. 70)

The third main category suggested by Krohling-Peruzzo, *power participation*, represents an 'ideal' expression of participation where all participants share a degree of social control. This category comprises: *co-management* and *self-management*. In *co-management* the 'power over and organisation or process is shared between different competing forces' (Krohling-Peruzzo in Sparks, 2007, p. 70). *Self-management* is when 'participants in an organization or process collectively decide upon the aims, objectives and conduct of the matters in hand, and are in a position to reach informed decisions that they then have the power to execute' (ibid).

This typology of participation is useful for the analysis of citizens' participation in the struggles around water conflicts in Colombia. All the distinctive features described

by Krohling-Peruzzo can be detected in the water conflicts⁹ analysed in this thesis. For instance, violence and intimidation are factors that manipulate or impede popular participation (e.g. see Chapter 7, section 7.4.3.2). In other cases, there are no responsive interlocutors with whom concerned individuals can establish a dialogue regarding the water conflicts. Many associations, organisations and communities involved in the water struggles have gained organisational experience through the mobilisation processes and have become more politically active in their territories. Power participation is an objective of many of the case studies in this research, since citizens aim to have autonomy over the decisions made on the water and land, and also they aspire to be the agents of their own development. The case studies in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 exemplify the different types of participation and the forms of citizenship they engender.

2.3.3 Deepening democracy

The concept of democracy has repeatedly been contested in the theory and practice of politics (Adams, 2003). Fung and Wright (2001) argue that the nineteenth century institutional forms of liberal democracy are incapable to cope with the more complex tasks required by the state in the context of larger and more diverse polities. They explore the contribution of new citizens' practices in redesigning democratic institutions and their governance. Other authors argue that not only the institutional forms but also some of the most used conceptualisations of liberal democracy in social science fail to recognise the role of civil society. For Feinberg et al. (2006), Schumpeter's (1987) reference to democracy as 'a political regime characterized by fair elections and toleration of the opposition' is unsatisfactory because 'it does not include the extent and range of citizens' inclusion in the polity'(p. 2). Feinberg et al. are also critical of Robert Dahl's (1971) argument that 'democracy requires high levels of inclusiveness and competitiveness, and a strong institutionalization of civil and political rights' because, they argue, 'it does not take into account the intensity and functions of citizens' participation' (ibid). Both definitions of democracy do not consider the actions performed by citizens, except for voting.

More recently, the role of civil society has been acknowledged in debates on

⁹ Social processes defending the community aqueducts, struggles opposing mining and dam projects, the campaign advocating for a water referendum (2007-2010).

democracy. In particular, a body of work has concentrated on so called processes of 'deepening democracy'. This literature originally developed to analyse Latin American countries facing a progressive transition to democracy after decades of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. While the concept has been widely used in political science, this thesis focuses on debates around deepening democracy in the context of participatory citizenship. In this literature, 'deepening democracy' focuses on 'the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the democratic process than is often found in representative democracy alone' (Gaventa, 2006, p. 3). Part of the discussion on deepening democracy in the context of development focused on democratisation and decentralisation processes in southern countries such as Philippines, Brazil and India (Gaventa, 2006). In these processes questions of citizen participation also emerged. A good number of contributions to the 'deepening democracy debate' come from Latin America (Roberts, 1998, von Mettenheim and Malloy, 1998, Adams, 2003, Feinberg et al., 2006, Gordon, 2011, Isbester, 2011). However, they do not necessarily agree on the same issues. The social and political transformations in Latin America in the past two decades (military dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, transition to democracy, constitutional reforms) have prompted an important discussion on alternative ways of analysing and exercising democracy. The concept of deepening democracy, or 'profundizando la democracia', became as well the leitmotiv of the social and political Left in Latin America (Roberts, 1998, p. 3). This open-ended vision of deepening democracy 'gave political meaning to the collective endeavours of diverse new social movements' (ibid). Analysing the Latin American context, von Metterheim and Malloy (1998) consider that deepening democracy 'means not only that competitive elections select those who will govern, but that this process produces governments with initiative and capacity' (p. 3).

Gaventa (2006) considers three different views of democracy: a neoliberal market approach, a liberal representative approach, and the deepening democracy approach. This thesis is concerned with the process of deepening democracy:

It is a process through which citizens exercise ever deepening control over decisions which affect their lives, and as such it is also constantly under construction. In some formulations, especially those emerging from Latin America, this view is also about the extension of rights. Full

democratic citizenship is attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights, but also through social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes and struggles (p. 11).

The aim of deepening democracy is about extending democracy itself, going beyond representative democracy by creating and supporting more participatory mechanisms of citizen engagement, which 'in turn are built upon, and support, more robust views of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship' (ibid, p. 12). Gaventa also identifies four sub-schools or approaches on how to strengthen citizen engagement in the deepening democracy literature: (1) deepening democracy through building civil society, (2) deepening democracy through participation and participatory governance, (3) deepening democracy through deliberative democracy, and (4) empowered participatory governance. By explaining each one of these categories, Gaventa demonstrates the different uses of the term 'deepening democracy' by a range of actors such as foreign aid programmes, large multilateral institutions, grassroots activists and social movements (p. 21). Considering all these definitions and approaches, Gaventa remarks that

The issue is not replicating one version of democracy, as a standard set of institutions and practices, but to construct and deepen democracies, which may work differently in different places, and to find the most effective entry points for doing so, based on the local contexts. At the same time, while recognising the diversity of forms of democracy, such diversity does not preclude more universal commitment to its underlying values, which may compete with other values within and across cultures (p. 21).

The work of Gaventa (2006) also foregrounds some important questions and challenges for the deepening democracy debates, some of which are very relevant for my analysis. Gaventa highlights the challenge of bringing together the civil and political spheres; in other words, 'how participatory and deliberative processes for deepening democracy interact with and strengthen the traditional institutions of representative democracy' (p. 23). Another issue raised by Gaventa is the need to elaborate more inclusive forms of democracy in which power is balanced and non-elites can access spaces of decision making in order to influence more progressive and redistributive policies. However, Gaventa warns about the risks of elite capture in the processes of institutionalising participation in traditional democratic spaces.

Deepening democracy, in this perspective, is ‘work in progress’, which is nourished by multiple experiences of participatory processes in local and global arenas.

2.4 Communication approaches

This section introduces the communication approaches that complement the theoretical framework presented so far. Communication approaches emerging from the field of development studies provide the theoretical and conceptual tools to analyse collective actions that promote democratic practices, social change and environmental sovereignty. With the exception of public communication, social movement studies have largely ignored participatory communication and communication for social change as two communication approaches helpful to deepen the analysis of interactions in social movements. These communication approaches have emerged mainly from empirical and grassroots studies, and offer methods for the analysis of communication processes in contexts characterised by different types of conflicts (e.g. Manyozo’s participatory communication model, Figure 2.3). These methods are useful since they consider every step of the communication processes aiming at social change and the development of communities. This section starts with referencing literature on public communication; it then provides a definition of dialogue, both as a practice and as an approach to analyse activists’ practices in the water movement; and ends by examining participatory communication and communication as a tool for social change.

2.4.1 Public communication and participation in democracy

For McQuail (1992) public communication practices foster the mobilisation of individuals, and encourages them to intervene in collective issues and in political processes within the public sphere (in Botero-Montoya, 2006b). In this research, the focus on public communication helps highlight the importance of communicative actions in the public sphere for the opening of new democratic spaces; public communication actions aim at producing social change, political actions, and solutions to the water conflicts.

Public communication practices play an important part in the exercise of citizenship, because they strengthen processes of discussion and diffusion of information. For Sparks (2007), ‘it is through a process of discussion and exchange that citizens

come to hold opinions on public matters' (p. 35). The safeguarding of participation and citizens' engagement in democracy is possible through the existence and practice of public communication, which comprises social mechanisms that facilitate debates and discussion of public issues (Demers and Lavigne, 2007). Public communication models involve a methodology based on participation, political education, empowerment, and dialogue (Jaramillo, 2004). Public communication practices require participation and the creation of spaces, alternative institutions and a political education to promote active citizenship in civil society. According to Habermas, 'the creation of public spaces outside the domain of the state is held to be an essential pre-condition for citizen engagement that does not simply serve to legitimate the existing political system' (Cornwall, 2004, p. 79). Citizens can access more easily these spaces when public communication strategies are put in practice.

Public communication practices are evident also in the use and creation of alternative and citizens' media, which, for Pettit, Salazar and Gumucio-Dagrón (2009), 'contribute to processes of social and cultural construction, redefining norms and power relations that exclude people' (p. 443). Germán Rey (1998) remarks that the media are one of the social instruments which directly influence the consolidation of the 'public' sphere. For him, media have an important role in the building of citizenship, because one of the primary conditions for the existence of a true citizenship is to have access to adequate information, which enables individuals to make decisions and follow different topics. Citizen and community media, where public communication is performed, are spaces to promote dialogue both within and outside the communities. They have the advantage of having more credibility and being closer to the people in the localities (Jaramillo, 2004). Community and citizen media provide useful social contents, to facilitate other dynamics, to expand the access to the symbolic construction of collective identities, and to raise the self-esteem of communities generally excluded from the mainstream media (Rincón, 2002, in Jaramillo, 2004). In this sense, 'local and community media become an excellent and productive alternative for the political action of communication' (ibid, p. 31).

Mass media are also spaces representing different meanings of social reality. They are a *public sphere* where debates and diffusion of information take place. In many cases, their vision of reality and their discourses are commonly confused with public

opinion (Molina-Giraldo, 2009). But public opinion is constructed in the different representations of the public sphere including alternative and mainstream media as well as other public gatherings where debates are held. Gaining recognition and visibility in the mass media is a goal of most social movements. Despite the lack of presence of social movements in mainstream media, Marc Augé refers to both as 'formidable mechanisms of artificial production of identity both individual and collective'¹⁰ (1996, in Rincón, 2001, p. 12). By using varied and creative forms of communication and media, these social movements have demonstrated that appearing in mainstream media is an extra gain rather than the only aim.

Many communication actions in the water movement have insisted on providing citizens accurate information and elements for decision-making about the water situation. For example, press conferences have been spaces for denouncing and discussing different perspectives around a specific issue (e.g. a hydroelectric dam project, the construction of a tunnel, or the promotion of the water referendum). Experts have been invited to public seminars and conferences to present case studies, and their own views. Public audiences, rallies and fixed information points in public spaces have permitted the delivery of information about campaigns and petitions. Public communication, in this regard, facilitates citizens' recognition of their role in the public sphere. As David Meritt (1995) notes, the purposes of public and political communication are to re-connect citizens with public life and to reinforce their capacity for deliberation, to offer information while encouraging participation.

2.4.2 Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people in which participants seek to clarify what each one thinks and believes. Dialogue itself constitutes a minimal form of cooperative, collective action. The underlying assumption of dialogue is that convergence is desirable and possible, and that all participants, not just one of the parties, are willing to listen and change. (Kincaid and Figueroa, 2009, p. 510)

The above standard definition of dialogue as a communication practice constitutes the starting point for the more elaborated conceptual construction that follows. The

¹⁰ Own translation.

concept of dialogue is discussed in both theories of social movements and communication as it is intimately connected with participation and the sharing of meanings. The concept of dialogue adopted in this thesis draws mainly on the work of Paulo Freire. According to Freire, the participation and empowerment of communities are also shaped by communication models based on critical dialogue (Mefalopulos, 2005). Freire's dialogical approach moves communication beyond its relationship with media to include a more personal dimension of communication based on dialogue (in Angel-Botero and Obregón, 2011, Marques de Melo, 1979, in Gumucio-Dagrón and Tufte, 2006). In the field of communication for social change, the concept and practice of dialogue have been used not only to expand the limits of communication as a discipline but also to facilitate the cultural and social change of a particular community or society (Gray-Felder and Deane, 1998, in Angel-Botero and Obregón, 2011).

Dialogue, according to some research participants (15, 16, 18, 33), has been a significant practice in the water movement since it is the basic form of communication that brings people together and generates spaces of confidence and trust. In the struggle opposing the dam project of Hidroituango (Chapter 7), dialogue was the first step for people to know each other better and a key element in building the resources necessary to face the challenges of the conflict. As one research participant expressed, people realised the value of conversations over the issues affecting them and for thinking further collective actions (RP 15).

As explained by Melkote and Steeves (2001), dialogue constitutes an essential component of participatory communication, allowing communication to perform its true function: to bring together different meanings and build commonalities amongst the members of a group who are willing to transform their current situation. It is through this sharing and exchange of ideas that the main concerns are addressed and identified within a development project. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) affirm that this type of dialogue also makes possible the empowerment of those in vulnerable conditions. These authors remark that the exchange process generates 'new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved' (ibid, p. 17). Mato (2004) and Rerm (1989) agree about the importance of taking into account the knowledge and wisdom of people involved in the development processes, as these

'local insights' are both produced by and reflective of the social experiences and challenges in which people find themselves.

Cádiz (2005) identifies 5 characteristics in Freire's approach to dialogue: (1) communication between equals, (2) problem posing, (3) praxis, (4) *conscientizing*, and (5) five related values. The first one emphasises equality between 'the change agent and the development partner' (p. 147). Problem posing refers to the direction of the dialogic process, starting from the learner's or people's knowledge, experiences and insights (p. 148). Praxis, or, 'a cycle of action and reflection' has to do with an inductive approach to teaching that first analyses practice, then by reflection 'draws from such analysis theories and generalizations in the form of lessons learned' (p. 149). By *conscientizing* Freire meant advancing in critical consciousness, which requires having a joint dialogue with all the actors involved in development processes. This dialogue might increase participants' willingness to take risks. The five values that should exist when establishing a dialogue are: 'love, humility, hope, faith in development partners' capability, and critical thinking' (p. 149). Based on Freire's ideas, chapters 5 and 7 of this thesis analyse the significance of dialogue in activists' communication practices. Dialogue was often the first and preliminary communication action carried out by people affected by water conflicts. While dialogue can be considered a basic principle of interpersonal communication, it becomes political action when it brings together the different voices of a community trying to overcome a given challenge through collective action.

Adriana Ángel-Botero and Ricardo Obregón (2011) have reviewed and analysed different perspectives on dialogue used in communication for development and communication for social change. They describe a dialogical model of communication as a horizontal process of co-construction of knowledge (p193). It is through dialogue that a certain community can identify its own problems and decide what to do to overcome them (Jacobson and Kolluri, 2006, in Angel-Botero and Obregón, 2011, p. 197) The notion of dialogue is associated with the concept of collective action, through which members of a community carry out a series of measures to resolve a shared problem (Figueroa et al., 2002). Based on these notions of dialogue, I analyse different communication actions in the water movement, looking at how the interactions propitiated through dialogue have

created new forms of participation and spaces for the expression of cultural identities and local knowledge.

2.4.3 Participatory communication

According to Huesca (2000), participatory communication is 'the most radical and significant turn away from the Dominant Paradigm,¹¹ and it has generated a robust body of theoretical and empirical research' (p. 74). In particular, the works of Díaz-Bordenave (1994), Manyozo (2006, 2007), Sparks (2007), Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), and White (1994) provide a useful frame for this study. With their compendiums of case studies, Bessette (2006) and Gumucio-Dagrón (2001, 2006, 2011b) offer a crucial account to make sense of the experience of the movement in defence of water in Colombia and Latin America. For Bessette (2006), 'participatory development communication suggests a shift in focus from informing people with a view to changing their behaviours or attitudes to facilitating exchanges between various stakeholders' (p. 5). Moreover, 'participatory development communication uses the tools and methods of communication to provide people with the information they need and to reinforce their capacity to make their own decisions' (ibid, p. 28).

The participatory model of communication stresses the value of local communities' cultural identities and the importance of 'democratisation and participation at all levels – international, national, local and individual' (FAO, 2007, p. 4). This participatory model expands the role of the traditional 'receivers', from being just 'included' to becoming generators of strategies and knowledge (ibid). Through the encouragement of participation, collective actions, critical thinking and

¹¹ Both participatory communication and communication for social change are approaches which resulted from critiques and transformation of development communication theories. 'The concept of development communication arose within the framework of the contribution that communication and the media made to development in the countries of the Third World. In the 1950s and 1960s, many donor agencies, such as UNESCO, USAID, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), sponsored numerous projects using media for communication, information or educational purposes, with a view to facilitating development, and subsequently promoted communication within the framework of development project implementation' (Bessette, 2004, p. 13). The 'dominant paradigm' of development encountered many opponents in Latin America, where strong processes of political and social organisation were taking place. Luis Ramiro Beltrán was one of the first who revealed some fundamental problems with the dominant paradigm of development communication. In his work 'Alien Premises, Objects, and Methods in Latin American Communication Research' (1976) he pointed out that 'it was necessary to construct a new, specifically Latin American theory of social change that would begin from the analysis of the social structure and to fit the issues of communication into that framework' (Sparks, 2007, p. 41).

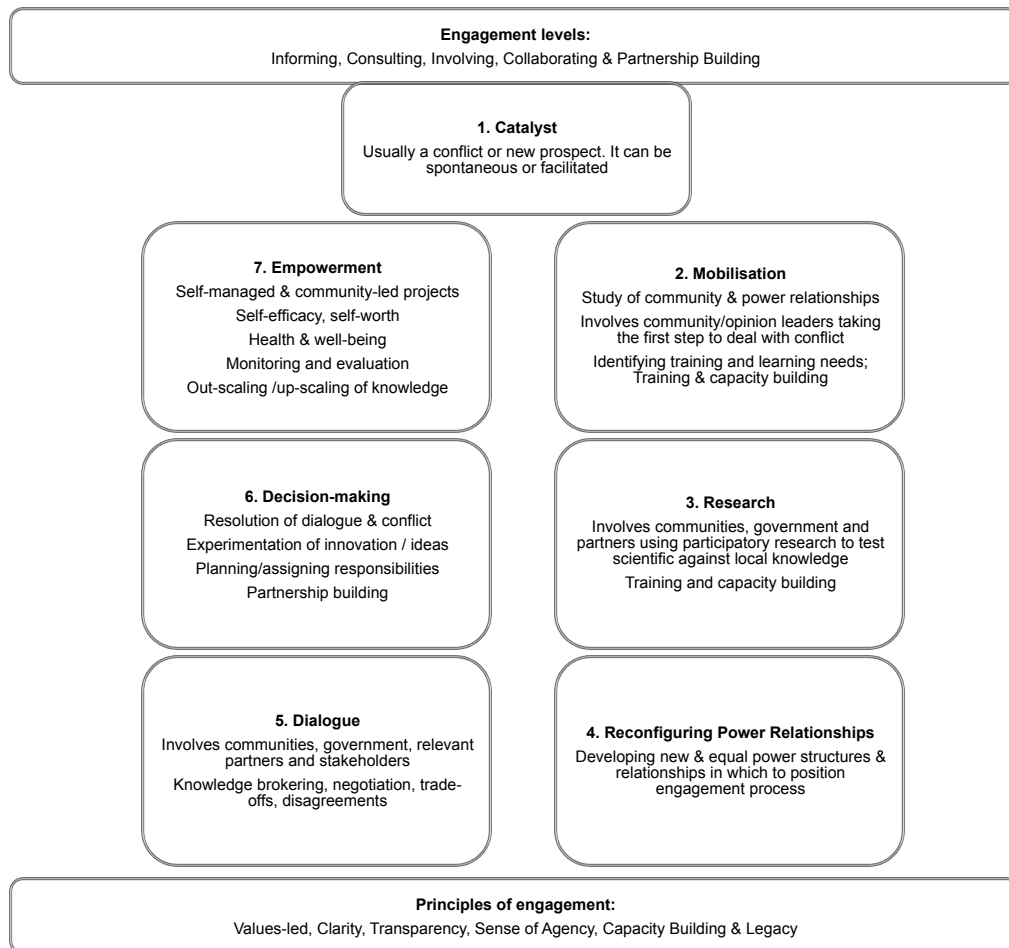
'conscientization', participatory communication aims to address people's needs and identify their constraints, rather than merely reach some of the outcomes associated with modernization and progress (Melkote and Steeves, 2001, p. 339, Waisbord, 2009, p. 20). Communication has served the interests of new development models in amplifying the voices, strategies and perspectives of different stakeholders and participants. Particularly, participatory communication has been crucial in changing the process of decision-making and in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences. UNDP (2006) recognizes the fundamental role of communication in helping people transform the societies in which they live, and address the main obstacles in achieving development goals.

Participatory communication seeks horizontal communication, in which participants and interlocutors have equal access to information and the means to express themselves (Díaz-Bordenave, 1994). Also, participatory communication advocates for a comprehensive transformation of social practices, towards the use of individual potential to reach shared goals in development processes (Bessette, 2006). Compared to the dominant paradigm of development, the methods employed by participatory approaches are more democratic and inclusive (Sparks, 2007). Development processes promoting participatory approaches are characterised by the involvement of different stakeholders and experimentation with various solutions, methods, and partnerships around a common objective (Bessette, 2006).

Manyozo (2012) proposes a participatory communication model that places particular emphasis on community engagement. He borrows from communication for social change approach and participation debates to formulate a model that could be easily adapted to the analysis of communication practices in social movements. He argues that the engagement strategies of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and partnership building have an impact on the other processes and procedures of mobilisation, research, reconfiguration of power, dialogue, decision-making and empowerment. As in a social movement, Manyozo's communication model starts with a *catalyst*, which 'is usually a conflict or new prospect' (ibid, p. 191). The different stages described in Manyozo's model could be compared to some of the stages that a social movement experiences throughout its evolution until declining or prospering in other social and political arenas. In this

research, I provide evidence of the different processes that compose Manyozo's model of participatory communication.

Figure 2.3 Proposed Model of Participatory Communication as Community Engagement



Adapted from Manyozo (2012, p. 191)

A participatory communication approach offers a significant contribution to the analysis of social processes in development and social movements. Participatory communication initiatives always start from within the communities with a self-evaluation of resources, capacities, strengths and weaknesses. As Altafin (1991) remarks 'It is a communication approach based on people's creative potential and it is this potential which creates the communication processes according to each particular situation' (p. 312). This communication approach advocates for the democratisation of the diffusion and receipt of information, and of the decision-

making processes. The use of this type of communication contributes to widening citizenship, since it reinforces the role of communities in processes of social change and development.

2.4.4 Communication for social change

Communication for social change (CFSC) is a relatively recent communication approach derived from development and participatory approaches. One of the authors who has contributed actively to the evolution of this approach is Bolivian Alfonso Gumucio-Dagrón (2002, 2006, 2009, 2011b, 2013)¹². Gumucio-Dagrón argues that CFSC has inherited from development communication the interest in culture and community traditions, the respect for local knowledge, and the horizontal dialogue between the development experts and the subjects of development (2011a, p. 32). Throughout his work, Gumucio-Dagrón provides a series of premises for the CFSC; one of the main points he highlights is the appropriation of the communication process by individuals and communities. This is a key issue in the case of the water conflicts studied for this research as they show that the exercise of participation and agency starts when affected communities create and adopt communication practices to raise their concerns. Another premise proposed by Gumucio-Dagrón is that CFSC is, at the same time, dialogue and participation with the purpose of strengthening cultural identity, trust, compromise, and the appropriation of the communication and community processes.

Gumucio-Dagrón (2011c) also proposes five indispensable conditions for CFSC to happen: community participation and appropriation; language and cultural pertinence; generation of local content; use of appropriate technology; and convergence and networking (p. 33, 34, 35). Participation and appropriation guarantee that the access to media tools is not manipulated or insufficient in the course of a development project. Language and cultural pertinence ensure that the communication process does not ignore the particularities of each culture and language. In processes of communication for social change it is very important to

¹² According to him, the conceptual formulation of Communication for social change started in 1997 from a series of meetings between communication and participation specialists, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation to discuss the role of communication in the social changes of the new upcoming century. An initial definition by the Communication for Social Change Consortium was that: CFSC is a process of dialogue and debate, based on tolerance, respect, equity, social justice and active participation of everyone.

develop people's capacity to create their own contents, taking into account the knowledge and experiences of different generations. CFSC should strengthen community knowledge and should promote equitable exchanges of knowledge. Since CFSC prioritises processes rather than instruments, the selection of a particular form of technology should take into account the needs of each communicational process. According to CFSC networking contributes to the consolidation of processes while dialogue and exchange enrich the communication processes in the different stages. All of the above conditions will serve as categories to analyse different communication actions and practices in the water struggles in Colombia. Other authors provide more categories of analysis which have also been useful for this research: leadership, degree and equity of participation, information equity, collective self-efficacy, sense of ownership, social cohesion, open access to the media, voice and visibility in the media, recognition of mutual differences, and time and space for dialogue and reflection (Figueroa et al., 2002, Alfaro, 1990, Alfaro 2001/2008, in Enghel and Tufte, 2011, 2011b)

Communication for social change is a key theoretical framework for this research. The conditions proposed by Gumucio-Dagrón are categories of analysis in my case studies and are used to explain different communication actions in the water struggles. CFSC embraces and further develops the main ideas of participatory and development communication. The use of a CFSC approach is a way to build upon the theoretical and empirical legacy of Latin American peers working in opposition to the proliferation of communication processes focused on media and communication marketing. In the context of neoliberalism and the boom of free trade agreements, media and communication marketing cater for the needs of the global economy rather than local communities. CFSC proposes looking at the social issues prioritised by local communities and putting people first in the processes of development, through an emphasis on participation, local knowledge and identity.

2.5 Communication and social movements

The analyses of communication and activists' repertoires in social movements made by Mattoni (2012, 2013) and Perera (2012, 2014) contribute to understand the importance of the nexus between social movements and communication practices. The focus of Mattoni's research is grassroots political communication in the movements of precarious workers in Italy. She explores 'grassroots political

communication by acknowledging the existence of a media environment in which different categories of media objects, media subjects and communication flows intertwine' (p. 12). Mattoni (2012) argues that informal political participation is more common than before; furthermore, she highlights that 'specific forms of legal and peaceful non-institutional political participation have gained legitimacy in western democracies, and are increasingly important channels to promote or resist social, political, economic and cultural change in "social movement societies" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998, Taylor 2000, Rucht and Neidhardt 2002)' (p. 12). Contemporary social movements make a diversified use of media, spaces and practices. Communication in contemporary social movements has broadly expanded up to the point of crossing national borders and building up supporting networks on common topics. Jong, Shaw and Stammers (2011) emphasise that political activism in recent social movements cannot be understood without considering how activists communicate politically. Likewise, contemporary media cannot be fully grasped 'without looking at how activists are both using and transforming political communication' (p. 2).

Mattoni explores and develops two concepts to analyse activists' media and communication practices: repertoires of communication and activists media practices. She constructs a definition of 'repertoires of communication' based on social movements theories, particularly Tilly's 'repertoires of contention'. Following from the works of Kriesi et al. (2009)¹³ and Teune (2011) she finds that the concept of communication repertoires is useful to comprehend the diversity of communication strategies and tactics employed by social movement actors to interact within wider political scenarios (Mattoni, 2013). She argues that communication repertoires have two dimensions. One is the communication target and the other is the stage of mobilisation. The communication target could be inside and/or outside the social movement setting; communication strategies can use media to reach potential participants and supporters, or to address a more general public. Based on these two dimensions and on the work of Tilly and Tarrow (2007) she proposes a definition of *repertoire of communication* as:

¹³ 'The politics of campaigning - dimensions of Strategic action' and 'Communicating dissent. Diversity of expression in the protest against the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm'

the entire set of activist media practices that social movement actors might conceive as possible and then develop in both the latent and visible stages of mobilization, to reach social actors positioned both within and beyond the social movement milieu (p. 47).

Inspired by Mattoni's definition, this thesis proposes an analysis which combines new social movement theories and literature on communication approaches (participatory, public, and communication for social change). Participatory communication does not come from social movement studies but from the field of development studies. However, it helps to gain a better understanding of the repertoires of communication and organisational dynamics of the communities affected by water conflicts in the complex Colombian context. In addition to participatory communication, this thesis also considers communication for social change. Many theoretical approaches in the area of participatory communication and communication for social change have emerged from scholars based in the 'global South'. Their theories have been developed through the analysis of case studies similar to those presented in this research.

Citizens' mobilisation is not only an expression of collective identity, but it is also a strategy to obtain visibility and a voice in the public sphere, gain legitimacy for a cause, and broaden participation in democratic processes. As a consequence, new social actors emerge and enter the political arena bringing alternative proposals, innovative meanings and, as Virno (2004) puts it, new 'cultural grammars'. This research also explores how activists use and interact with certain media to highlight, and gain support for, their political demands in the public sphere. Case studies in this thesis show that activists find in communication practices a way to carry the meaning of the protest. In particular, participatory communication has been used not only to strengthen the social ties at the core of the communities but also to make communities aware of the opportunities for obtaining visibility and support with regard to the water conflict.

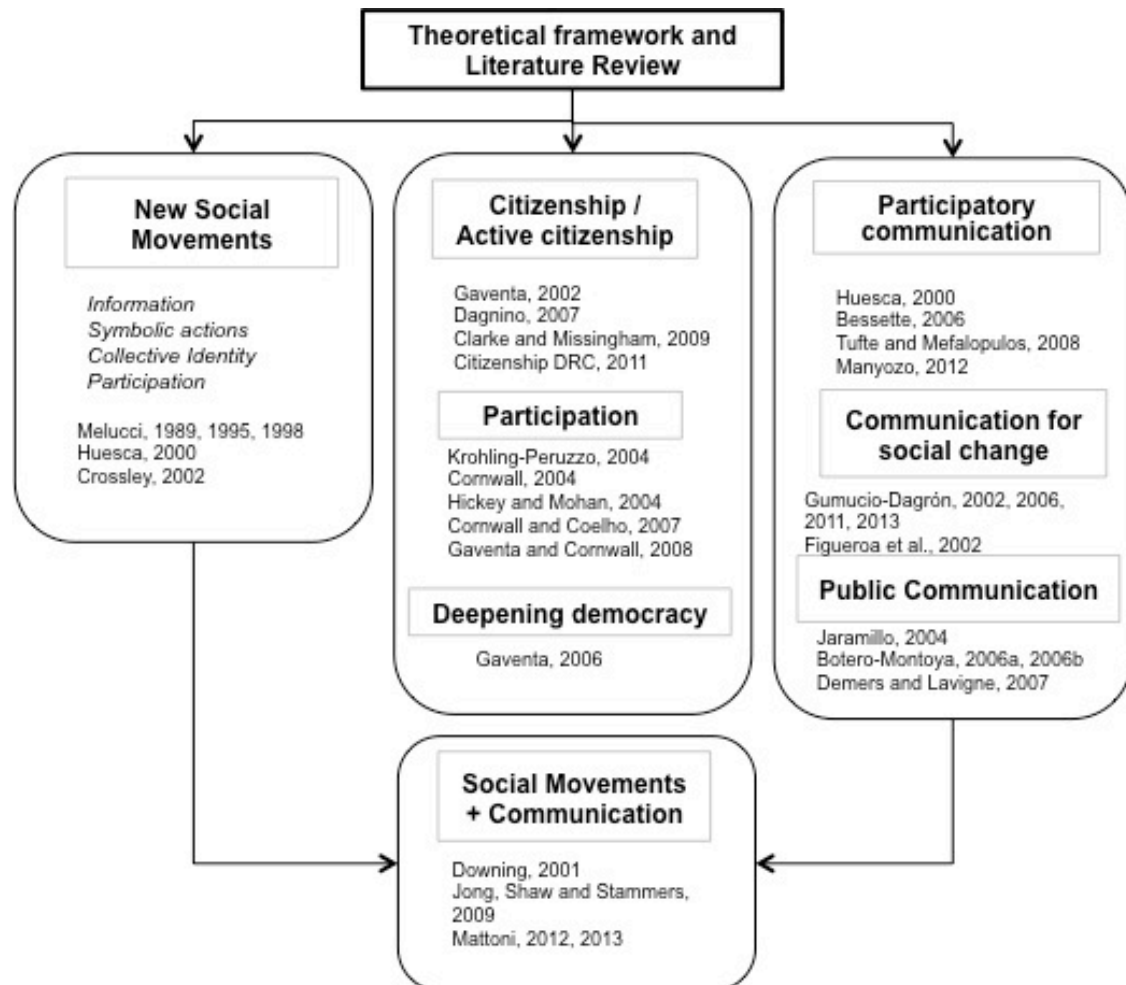
The study by Perera (2012, 2014) on the campaign for the Colombian water referendum (2007-2010) and community aqueducts shares some of the aims of this research. She claims that Colombian 'water warriors' opened up new spaces for democratic participation by expanding their emancipatory potential and networking with other similar struggles like the one in Cochabamba (Bolivia). Moreover, Perera

states that the water referendum 'became a tool for network building, and a resource to nurture a socio-environmental imagination that challenges development based on global capital, extractive industries and the terror of the armed struggle' (p. 252). As I explain more in depth in Chapter 6, the Colombian campaign for the water referendum introduced new possibilities for democratic participation in the defence of natural common goods. The organisational structure and the communication practices put in place during this referendum have been a reference point for other cases related to water conflicts.

Social movements need communication to stimulate collective political action and participation (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Activists' communication practices in social movements are ways of deepening democracy through the redefinition of forms of citizen participation and the exercise of citizenship. As already discussed, participation is considered by many analysts and activists, as a 'requirement, a condition, but also a guarantee of democracy and citizenship' (Dagnino, 2005a, p. 9). Based on the Latin American context of post-authoritarian settings, Leonardo Avritzer (2002, in Gaventa, 2006) argues that in order to democratise state-society relations it is necessary 'to bring the experiences of participation and citizenship gained through democratic action and movements in the social sphere into the political sphere'. The communication practices analysed in the thesis are a way to accomplish this transfer from the social to the political arena.

2.6 Theoretical framework chart

Figure 2.4 Theoretical Framework Chart



3 Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology employed in this research project and describes the methods for data collection and analysis. The chapter comprises three sections. In the first section, I discuss the role of academic research in the evolving context of anti-neoliberal struggles and social movements in Latin America, particularly in relation to the struggles defending water in Colombia. I reflect on the impact of academia in effecting social change and engaging actively in different social dynamics. In the second section I present the methodological approaches utilised for this study: Participatory Action Research, Ethnography, and Grounded Theory. I outline the advantages and constraints of each one of these approaches and discuss my experience in the field as a participant researcher. The third section explains my fieldwork and the methods used for data collection. In this part I also mention the issues concerning leaving the field and the process of data analysis. I make a couple of remarks regarding safety issues and maintaining rapport with research participants. Before some concluding thoughts, I describe the methodological difficulties encountered in the research process.

3.1 Activist and academic research

The search for a suitable methodology for this research project was accompanied by a reflexive questioning of my role as an academic researcher. Before starting my Master and PhD, I undertook development work in Colombia, Ireland and Kenya. My background as a development practitioner, communication officer, and activist made me realise the need for a research study on the conflicts related to water in Colombia focused on citizen participation and communication processes. Therefore, since the beginning of this research project, I reflected on the relationship between academic and activist research. I found myself agreeing with Lempert (2001) who argues that activism does not need to be an activity complementing scholarship; 'it can inhere in scholarship itself' (p. 25). Moreover, scholarship can become a mechanism 'for resisting unjust change and advancing justice' (ibid), which is also one of the purposes of this project. The importance of public sociology has recently been reinstated in this era of rapid changes and uncertainties. At the 2012 Forum of the International Sociological Association (ISA), 'Democratisation and Social Justice', ISA's President, Michael Burawoy, clearly emphasised the importance for sociology to engage with struggles for social justice.

Leonard (2001, in Drake and Heath, 2011) points out that there may be tensions, between academic and activist research, when formulating what the research is for, expanding knowledge or research conceived as emancipatory. Hermes (1998) remarks that activist research provides new possibilities for intellectual political theory and practice; she suggests that activism is evident when research breaks into the ideologies that justify power inequalities (p. 162). Jong *et al.* write that activist politics 'spawn movements, networks, organisations and websites. They influence "mainstream" politics over fundamental world issues like trade, gender relations and the environment as well as war' (2005, p. 1). Linking activism and academia is what Kemmis (2006) refers to as 'emancipatory action research'. This type of research connects the personal and the political in collaborative research and action 'aimed at transforming situations to overcome felt dissatisfactions, alienation, ideological distortion, and the injustices of oppression' (p. 96). This research project aims to encourage activists and movements to engage in the collective construction of memory and the deepening of democracy through citizen participation in democratic actions and the enhancement of communication and mobilisation practices. Moreover, this research provides a critical understanding and analysis of the water conflicts in Colombia by bringing together the evidence of the case studies with theories of social movements and communication approaches. This research is focused on the activists' experiences and grassroots communication practices which have barely been researched academically in the context of the Colombian social movements, particularly the recent struggles concerning the defence of water and natural common goods. Few have been the authors combining new social movements theories and participatory communication approaches for the analysis of social movements; one of these authors is Robert Huesca (2000, 2006). This research takes a further step in this combination and includes debates on deepening democracy and active citizenship to the analysis.

In the introduction to their work '*Global Activism, Global Media*', Jong, Shaw, and Stammers (2005) argue that tension and reciprocal suspicion between activists and academics is not uncommon. 'Activists are necessarily concerned with doing things – trying to achieve change' – while 'academics often ascribe causal power to such structural patterns, often downgrading the agency of social actors' (p. 2). However, some of the articles in their book go beyond this distinction and provide leading

reflections for those working in the field of global media and social movement studies. Jong, Shaw, and Stammers (2005) argue that 'work on activism within media studies often ignores the empirical and conceptual work on social movements, NGO (global) civil society and the (global) public sphere to be found in international relations, politics and sociology' (p. 3). The present thesis aims at bridging this gap by analysing activists' practices in water struggles in Colombia through the theoretical framework of social movements, collective action and communication practices.

3.1.1 Researcher's role

Researching familiar territory offers advantages such as openness of participants and fewer language barriers (Aguilar, 1981; Atkinson et al., 2003; Henry, 2001; in Mannay, 2010). In this regard my own personal and professional experience was fundamental to gain access to relevant sources, settings, gatekeepers and participants. However, the researcher's familiarity with the topic and past professional involvement may also be regarded as a source of potential bias (Bryman, 2008). My prior knowledge and judgements were matters that required a cautious, reflexive attitude and the adoption of a critical position. Maintaining the balance between 'insider' and 'outsider' status is a personal skill that develops, and is refined, progressively throughout the research process (Brewer, 2000). Subsequently, playing the role of 'participant as observer' implied different methodological and practical challenges.

In his discussion on 'value free' research, Weber suggests that researchers should put aside their own values when engaging in research, not simply because of power struggles and conflicting values, but also to facilitate an objective consideration of opposing arguments (Allen, 2004). Nevertheless, Weber also concedes that the decision of the selection of the topics is made by the researcher, based on his/her own values and interests – 'value relevance' (ibid). In Weber's terms, value-free research cannot be accomplished if the purpose of social research is to critically construct knowledge, to be open to dialogue, and to propose changes and actions to influence society positively (ibid). Hammersley (1995) states that 'research is part of the social world it studies', a world characterised by constant changes and contradictions. In my view it is not possible to abstract social research from the

events that, albeit happening outside the research process, have contributed to shape it. The present research has been influenced by its participants' and my own values, which are reflected in the approaches, outcomes and methods used. The role of the researcher was a role of participant, a role that allowed me to get closer to the settings, people and the context of the research topic.

Feeling responsible is inevitable when researching situations in which the people involved have suffered. While researching people exposed to difficult conditions and conflict may become exploitative, nonetheless this research project is documenting their history, thus contributing to amplifying their voices. The intention is to make sense of the complex articulations of the water struggles by relying on various theoretical approaches. On many occasions, the researcher felt powerless and unable to make a difference in the lives of, and conflicts faced by, research participants. But the role of the researcher is not supposed to be one of bringing immediate change or providing instant solutions. The researcher acts as an interpreter of the situations under study; s/he collects the information and reflects upon the connections with other case studies, theories, and personal experience.

While recognising the importance and complexity of the term participation, I was interested in employing participatory methodologies that could allow for the active involvement of participants/the researcher in different settings. Therefore, the methodological framework for this research project wove together elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR), Ethnography and Grounded Theory. These three approaches entail participatory practices during different stages of the research process.

3.2 Methodological and research approaches

3.2.1 Participatory Action research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is particularly relevant for this project because it questions the relationship between power and knowledge inherent in the research process. Participatory Action Research emerged from the attempt to bridge the gap between the exercise of power and the generation of knowledge in research, development and democratic practices. According to Gaventa and Cornwall (2008), PAR transforms power relations by challenging conventional processes of

knowledge production. This participatory model expands the role of the traditional 'receivers' from being just 'included' to becoming generators of strategies and knowledge (Mato, 2004). In this section I will explain why and how PAR was applied in my research and the advantages and constraints encountered in the process.

PAR has its origins in the work of Kurt Lewin (1946, in Balcazar, 2003) who proposed linking research and action. Later on, in the early 70s, Fals-Borda, Bonilla and Castillo (1972, in Balcazar, 2003) created a Centre for Research and Action that became the starting point of PAR. The Centre's approach was based on the insertion of the researcher in the community, the analysis of the historical conditions and the structure of the society, the development of the conscience of members of the community, and the development of political organisations and action groups (militant research) (p. 60). Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda has been widely influential in shaping what are considered to be the central tenets of PAR. His notion that PAR should enable a critical recovery of history is particularly relevant for my research project. Fals Borda (1987) describes this process of recovery as:

an effort to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which proved useful in the defence of the interests of exploited classes, and which proved useful and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase awareness. (p. 339)

The collective generation and construction of knowledge is not the only central issue in PAR. The diffusion and dissemination of findings is an intrinsic part of its participatory research praxis 'because it is another aspect of the emphasis on collective experience which leads to the goal of social change' (Fals-Borda, 1985, in Cornwall, 2011, p. 85). This research aims to return the processed reflections back to where they came from, that is, in the words of Fals-Borda, 'to disseminate in the communities concerned, through a respectful, responsible popularization of good quality, the acquired knowledge and resulting techniques' (ibid). In order to achieve this, I maintained regular contacts with activists, academics, campaigns and movements in Colombia, which allowed for feedback, updates and sharing of materials and ideas throughout the research process.

Subscribing to the notion of PAR as an alternative form of knowledge production permitted the identification of new categories of information coming from the research participants and the data collected. One of the guiding principles of PAR is

to counteract the predominance of the written word, by proposing new forms for systematising information and knowledge 'according to the level of political conscience and ability for understanding written, oral or visual messages by the base groups and public in general' (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 344). Considering PAR for my research project was a way of prioritising the voices of research participants, and the information produced by the communities themselves, rather than focusing on official and media texts. Newspapers, policy documents and government testimonies were complementary to the above. In addition, PAR allowed me to review and critically assess both western and non-western literature and approaches, and engage in a critical analysis of my previous personal and professional experiences related to the research topic.

I gathered important knowledge from the grassroots by sharing the purposes of my research with activists and engaged communities. In this research, PAR was evidenced in the participants' awareness of my project and in the feedback and response I received from them. My research was presented and introduced in the course of different activities organised by/with participants during which they expressed their suggestions and comments. The information collected with and from participants guided the constant revision of the research questions. By sharing spaces, concerns and discussions with participants, during and after the fieldwork, my research provided an input on how to achieve the common objectives of the defence of water in Colombia.

3.2.1.1 Constraints of PAR

PAR suggests an active involvement of research participants in the research process. It is a process which requires compromise, ethical posture and persistence at all levels. Pain and Francis (2003) posit that 'real participation in research must go beyond contact with researchers during data collection' (p. 51). In their view, it is ideal that participants analyse and interpret findings and also engage with other issues and problems. This aspect of PAR could not be fully applied in this research due to time and space constraints. The participatory nature of my methodology was reflected in the ongoing interactions with participants, the constant dialogue with them and the carrying out of certain activities together. My previous knowledge and involvement in some of the water campaigns analysed in this thesis allowed me to

become part of most of the groups and take part in their activities. I had a voice in many settings not just as a researcher but also as an activist and member of the public. However, the limited time available for conducting fieldwork in multiple locations, often logistically difficult to reach, hindered a complete implementation of PAR. For instance I was unable to jointly construct the research proposal and questions with research participants, however, I shared my questions with some participants and received their comments and feedback.

Environmental and water movements in Colombia dedicate little time to the systematisation of information and knowledge and the critical analysis of their practices. This is due to the rapid pace and growth of environmental and water conflicts. The movements are constantly responding to new challenges. Moreover, activists and volunteers actively involved in the water struggles have numerous tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, self-research and evaluation are not necessarily a priority for them. Nevertheless, awareness of the importance of preserving memory is increasing and this is where PAR played an interesting and challenging role in my research project as it brought together a researcher with previous knowledge and involvement in the water movement and the people directly involved in more recent water struggles.

Balcazar (2003) warns about the risk that PAR may end up generating political activism rather than scientific knowledge. The lack of resources and leadership conflicts are other elements that Balcazar mentions as impeding the full implementation of PAR in a particular project. From a similar perspective, Kothari (2001) remarks that even though the purpose of participatory research is to make the voices of people in vulnerable conditions heard, this can be a difficult task when the knowledge produced challenges knowledge conventions (p.147). She adds that according to Sibley 'when dissenting, radical ideas are produced by members of social groups, who are themselves marginalised and excluded from centres of power, the threat to the establishment may be more tangible than when it comes from within' (Sibley, 1995, in Kothari, 2001, p. 147). The analysis of participatory practices in research, social movements and development contexts is a crucial element in this research project. Participatory approaches in development may enhance the emancipation and agency of the most vulnerable, but they may also over-represent the interests of those who are most powerful and able to participate

– those able to make their voice heard and shape the goals of projects (Cornwall, 2004, Kothari, 2001). The implementation of PAR is not exempted from conflicts of power. As it will be shown in the case studies, constraints to participation and engagement arise when there are limited spaces for participation, ignorance of the conditions of participation, or external factors such as violence or displacement.

3.2.2 Ethnography

A common element shared by the methodological approaches guiding this research project is that they all are inductive: working from empirical evidence towards theory. In ethnography, the theory is built based on the experiences and data collected in the field, through methods that involve an active participation of the researcher. Blommaert and Jie (2010) express that in ethnography the object of investigation comprises ‘a complex of events which occur in a totally unique context’ (p. 17). The examination of these conditions involves the direct participation of the researcher in the setting ‘in order to collect the data in a systematic manner’ (Brewer, 2000, p. 10). Following Hammersley and Atkinson (2010), the aim of this research is to find out more about the life and practices of people and collectives being studied, including how they see the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves (p. 1).

This research project shares many features of ethnographically oriented studies: research over an extended period of time; fieldwork conducted in the participants’ settings; interest in applying findings to bring about change; and the application of qualitative methods of data collection such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis. While an ethnographic preliminary research design was important, prior to starting the fieldwork, the research design was not definitive but was constantly developed and updated in the course of data collection. Brewer’s (2000) suggestion became a guiding tool in this regard (p. 58). Before the fieldwork, the research questions and objectives were revised and refined. After this, I started the sampling of research participants based on some selected categories (community leaders, NGO staff, activists, academics, among others). I also had to consider the resources I had at hand for data collection, particularly time and financial resources. The methods of data collection were defined and proposed in advance. Subsequently, contact with

some 'gatekeepers' led to the identification of a number of events and meetings. Gatekeepers provided access to places and facilitated contact with other people.

Falzon (2009) describes ethnography as an 'eclectic methodological choice' in which the daily interactions constitute a central point of the emerging data (p. 1). By choosing ethnography I wanted to have an active role in the collection of data. I adopted the position of participant-observer, which also allowed me to analyse the paradoxes of participation within the struggles related to water in Colombia. Despite my familiarity with most of the settings, Lofland's observations (1971, in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2010) were applicable to my case: 'It is only through watching, listening, asking questions, formulating hypotheses, and making blunders that the ethnographer can acquire a good sense of social structure of the setting and begin to understand the culture(s) of participants' (p. 79). In doing ethnography, I would describe my role as a '*bricoleur*', which is how Denzin and Lincoln call ethnographers who 'collect data from all sources and in all ways as best fits the purpose' (in Brewer, 2000, p. 76).

The decision of choosing ethnography implies a reflexive process of analysis of the data and writing up. Brewer (2000) describes reflexivity as a required and critical position towards the data collected, a reflective stance that takes into account the factors 'which influence how the data are interpreted and conveyed in writing up the results' (p. 127). Some of these factors are: 'the location of setting, the sensitivity of the topic, power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between the researcher and researched' (ibid). Ethnographic work, as Clifford and Marcus (1986) put it, is entangled in changing contexts of power inequalities, 'It enacts power relations' (p. 9). However, the role of the ethnographer is often unsure and highly counter-hegemonic.

Clifford and Marcus (1986) claim that although there are no specific rules for ethnographic writing, there are rules for describing events and the place of the researcher within the text. Certain reflexive trends, for instance, favour a detailed narration of dialogues and confrontations that turns the text into a piece with which the reader can argue. Ethnographic writing means to have in mind that the process of researching is not a study *of* people but *with* people. Therefore, the different

actors and research participants are meant to have a voice in the text, to be collaborators and co-producers of the debates under study.

3.2.3 Social movement research

The study of social movements, particularly the Colombian water movement, implies bearing in mind the political context of the country, as well as the networks, exchanges, objectives and modes of operation of the different actors involved. Social movements, as Crossley (2002) puts it, are 'natural experiments in power, legitimation and democracy' (p. 9). Their complex configuration helps us to measure and understand other political structures of our society (ibid). Social movements research tends to give particular salience to some features of mobilisation -such as creativity, collective identity, discourse and protest-, and the relationship between culture and structure (Klandermans and Staggenborg, 2002). Most of the topics highlighted within social movements research are congruent with the present research project. One relevant reference for this project is Manuel Castells' (1983) *The City and the Grassroots* which provides a detailed account of a research project on urban social movements, and is considered a key text for similar research projects. In particular, the brief appendix on methodology in Castells' book describes some events, which were also common in my research project. One of them is the motivation of research participants to be part of the research project. Like in the case of the urban movements studied by Castells, many of the people within the water struggles in Colombia felt the need to talk about their own experience because it was a way of understanding their own situation. Castells remarks that himself and his research team gained activists' trust and collaboration because 'in all the situations we were considered as both researchers and political participant' (p. 342). Similarly, in my fieldwork, there were many cases in which I was considered part of the campaigns/movements and, therefore, the information I received was meaningful for both participants and researcher.

For instance, I was interested in understanding the articulation and collaboration between the different struggles, as well as the common spaces they share. These elements are relevant when looking in more detail at communication practices and citizens' participation. The integration of interests and efforts is not necessarily a common element among the different social movements in the Colombian context.

Challenging issues for social movements in Colombia are the renewing of leadership and the evolution of practices and discourses. Some elements that contribute to make these processes more difficult are political repression, violence, and apathy towards participation in decision-making processes (see Chapter 4).

Melucci and Lyyra (1998) draw attention to the emerging conflicts and social movement actors in the last thirty years, which, they argue, 'have shifted their focus from class, race, and other more traditional political issues toward the cultural ground' (p. 203). These authors further contend that one of the main aims of recent social movements has been to challenge the dominant language and the codes that systematise information and give form to political practices (Melucci and Lyyra, 1998). Social movements, apart from being political struggles looking for access to the mechanisms of power, are also cultural struggles in search for different identities (Jelin, 1990, in Escobar and Álvarez, 1992). Moreover, Touraine (2008) affirms that 'new social movements are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural' (p. 215). These remarks guide my analysis of the social movement in defence of water in Colombia and help contextualising it as part of the new trend of social movements, more concerned with the repertoires, discourses and communication strategies.

Social movements play an active role in decoding scientific ideas into social and political beliefs (Eyerman and Jamison, 2008, p. 277). Research on social movements, is a proof of this argument, since it is concerned with bringing social issues to the fore and expanding the understanding of social networks, collective action, and democratic participation. The use of alternative and participatory methods in social movement research has demonstrated that scientific enquiry and knowledge generation go hand-in-hand with the emergence of social experiences and the complex interactions among a wide array of social actors. My research on the Colombian water movement, partly grounded in New Social Movements theories, calls for a broader examination of environmental social movements and their communication and mobilisation practices, able to take into account their scope and role in the transformation and deepening of democracy.

3.2.4 Grounded Theory (GT)

Some elements of grounded theory were useful for this research project. GT stresses the generation of theory from data, which is also linked to some intentions in ethnography. Both GT and ethnography are inductive methodologies. The simultaneity of data collection and analysis, encouraged by these methodological approaches, was also a feature of my research project. Known as theoretical sampling, this process also involves comparing people, places, events, conditions and settings (Gibbs, 2010). The generation of new ideas while going through the process of data collection and analysis was a consistent practice in this case. The constant transformation of the water struggles in Colombia, in itself, called for the continuous interplay between data collection and generation of theories as I was participating in different events and meeting new people, especially during the fieldwork. Some other elements of grounded theory, however, were found not suitable for this project. Here, I will briefly discuss the common points between the present research and GT. Some drawbacks will also be mentioned: more specifically, elements that were not compatible with the interests of the researcher or were not suitable for the project.

The Grounded Theory Institute¹⁴ describes GT as:

the systematic generation of theory from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. These concepts/categories are related to each other as a theoretical explanation of the action(s) that continually resolves the main concern of the participants in a substantive area. Grounded Theory can be used with either qualitative or quantitative data.

In relation to this, Glaser and Strauss (1995) affirm that the emerging concepts are illustrated by the evidence from which the categories are derived. These concepts, they further argue, are 'theoretical abstractions' of what is occurring in the research field (ibid, p.23). Based on the work of other grounded theorists, Gibbs (2010) remarks that one key focus of the GT approach is the reflective reading of the text and the application of codes. Coding is central to grounded theory. In this research the codes came from different categories associated with the water conflicts, organisations, networks, and some of the main topics of the research (e.g.

¹⁴ <http://www.groundedtheory.com/what-is-gt.aspx>, Accessed November 2012

communication, participation, social movements). Other codes emerged from 'memos', or what Glaser and Strauss (1995) called 'theoretical coding'.

3.3 Fieldwork and methods for data collection

The study of people, their culture, and natural habitat is what is commonly known as fieldwork in anthropology (Powdermaker, 1969, in Robben and Sluka, 2007). Blommaert and Jie (2010) describe fieldwork as the moment when the researcher discovers that the norms ruling academia are different than the ones ruling everyday life (p. 1). When arriving in the field, most of the beliefs, plans and ideas previously held are re-evaluated and are most likely to be transformed. The present research was not exempted from this. As mentioned by Strauss (1969), 'the fieldworker is guided mainly by sensitivities to data derived both from his professional background and from his general notions about the nature of his research problem' (p. 25).

The process of fieldwork allowed me to revisit my previous work, and renew my interest in the water movement in Colombia. It involved going back to places I had been before and meeting people I already knew but with another purpose. The fieldwork was an emotional process through which I re-discovered my own country and realised the complexity and importance of the issues I was researching. For example, in the last couple of years, mining has become a major environmental, social and political conflict in the country. I found out that many of the water struggles were linked to mining or large-scale infrastructure processes.

The bulk of fieldwork for this research project was carried out between June and October 2012. Before heading to Colombia, I prepared and revised some materials, such as the interview guidelines and questions; I elaborated a list of potential research participants; and made initial contact with some gatekeepers and research participants. While in Colombia, I was attentive to the relevant events related to the topic of my research. I attended a number of seminars, forums, formal and informal meetings, book launches, press conferences, mobilisations and workshops. During each of these events and activities I was taking notes and photographs or video recording when possible. The fieldnotes and memo notes were a very useful tool to gather, and subsequently retrieve, observations, impressions and reflections about a particular setting or event.

The sampling for the research participants was made according to their role within a particular campaign, struggle or process. Profiles of the research participants include: leaders of community aqueducts, youth leaders, activists, environmental NGO staff, researchers, legal advisors, leaders of women networks. During the fieldwork I researched a number of processes related to the water movement; out of these processes, nine case studies were selected for inclusion in this thesis. The criteria for selecting these case studies were the growing importance and visibility of the conflicts they highlighted, the advanced level of organisation and development of the movements involved, and the quality of data collected. The case studies cover the following processes: two associations of community aqueducts, one national conference of community aqueducts, two movements opposing mining projects, one movement opposing a dam project, and three transnational networks working on water issues.

The data for the selected case studies was collected in various events and meetings in several communities and location across Colombia. For instance, I attended meetings with the committee of community aqueducts of the water campaign in Antioquia. One of these meetings was to discuss and plan the participation of Antioquia's community aqueducts in the National Conference of community aqueducts in the town of Pasto in July 2012. I also attended the preparatory regional meeting (in Medellín) for the Rio+20 UN conference and the alternative People's Summit to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. These meetings allowed participants to analyse the major issues to be discussed in Rio and to elaborate a declaration containing the concerns and proposals of Antioquia's citizens. I also participated in the follow-up meeting three months after the Rio+20 conference (September 2012). The community aqueducts from Antioquia had a special section on this event; I joined various events organised by them. I attended the National Conference of community aqueducts (Chapter 5). During this conference I spoke with and interviewed members of community aqueducts and associations from different regions (Valle, Bolívar, Huila, Santander, Caldas). I attended two meetings of the students' movement in Medellín opposing large-scale mining projects. In one of these meetings the students organised the participation on a mobilisation to be carried out simultaneously in many Latin American cities on 1 August 2012. For the case study in Southwest Antioquia (Chapter 7), I travelled to Támesis (Antioquia) to attend a two-day event to oppose the mining projects proposed in the region. In this

event, different activities were carried out, such as public seminars, press conferences, and mobilisations. While in Bogotá, I met with a leader of community aqueducts and with a member of an NGO that supports the work of the aqueducts (Chapter 5). In Manizales (Caldas), I attended an event with organic farmers; on this occasion I interviewed a member of a research centre on environmental and water conflicts. I attended a public seminar in Bucaramanga (Santander) on water, environment and public services, which was organised by the national trade union of workers of public services companies. During the seminar I had the opportunity to speak with people from the committee in defence of Santurbán (Chapter 7), and also with people campaigning for other water issues in the department of Santander. I was at a press conference with the people affected by the Hidroituango's dam project (Chapter 7), and I conducted a workshop on participatory communication with them two days after the press conference. For the case studies on transnational networks advocating water issues, I collected information at the World Water Forum (WWF) and the Alternative World Water Forum (AWWF), both of which took place in Marseille. I was part of the international communications committee of the AWWF. I also used secondary data such as documents, reports, websites and press releases. Details on the location of the case studies, the profile of participants and the events attended during fieldwork can be found in Annexes 1 and 2.

Other case studies explored during fieldwork, which informed my overall thinking but are not analysed in the thesis, included: a women's network campaigning for the human right to water and public services in the Medellín metropolitan area; a movement opposing the construction of a tunnel in Medellín and defending the water sources originated in the mountain; a movement protesting against a poultry company that polluted water sources in Santander; other independent community aqueducts (Bolívar, Huila, Valle, Antioquia); a movement against the deviation of a river to give way to a dam project in Caldas; an environmental youth network promoting a campaign against the consumption of bottled water (Medellín); and a citizen network campaigning against citizens' disconnection from public services including water (Medellín).

Prior knowledge of organisations and people was crucial to gaining access to the field and relevant information. Gatekeepers were important in this regard, since they

facilitated meetings, information and contacts. The gatekeepers were usually people I knew or people introduced by activists, friends and former colleagues. On many occasions the people already knew about the research I was conducting and they referred me to other people. This information was collected through different methods and in different settings including: twenty-nine semi-structured interviews; seven recordings of various events including conversations, press conferences, public talks and seminar presentations. The information gathered in the fieldwork involved around sixty direct participants, fifteen of them women. Women participation in different recent social and environmental movements has been substantial and significant. For instance, in the campaign for the water referendum there were various feminist organisations and women's associations supporting the campaign as well as groups of urban and rural women. Their insights and experiences marked a difference on the exercise of citizenship and politics. Nevertheless, the historical male dominance of the political and decision-making spaces in Colombia was also visible in the campaign for the water referendum (Llano-Arias, 2011). Women's discourses and interests added other points of view to the public discussion about the water issue in Colombia, but women still had to face the challenging scenarios of traditional politics (ibid). The higher proportion of men amongst research participants reflects the existing gender imbalance within the water movement.

3.3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation was the main method used during the fieldwork for this research project. It allowed me to participate in daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events, and to experience, first hand, the different aspects of life routines and cultures of research participants (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). The question 'What to observe?' always arises in the field. Before starting the fieldwork I selected relevant readings about ethnography and participant observation, which provided useful tips and recommendations (Bryman, 2008). In my role as 'participant observer' I was meant to map the social arenas of the different water conflicts studied. When conducting participant observation, every occasion was an opportunity to collect data and gather new ideas about the course of the fieldwork and the research.

I often conducted participant observation in familiar territories, but with the attitude of taking advantage of everything happening, and trying to put aside my own

preconceptions about certain people and events. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) suggest that the participant looks for opportunities 'to spend time with and carry out activities with members of communities in which he or she is working' (p. 4). With a first set of events scheduled in my agenda, I started to participate in activities during which I was referred to other activities and people. I became a familiar face for many people and that allowed me to enter into certain settings with more confidence. In the case of regular meetings, it was important for me to attend as many meetings as possible to acquire an understanding of the progress and evolution of discussions, the participation of the different actors, and the outcomes of the activities.

For example, an important event was the preparatory conference for Rio+20 in Medellín, Antioquia (5-8 June 2012). It was a three-day event that involved mobilisations, seminars, public forums and workshops. During the three days I was able to observe the development of the activities and discussions leading to the final agreements. Another important moment of my fieldwork was the National Conference of community aqueducts in Pasto, Nariño. The road trip of more than twenty hours by bus from Medellín to Pasto was itself an interesting opportunity for participant observation. The informal and relaxed setting of the bus allowed me to get closer to some research participants and to get to know some of their experiences. The conference lasted three days, the last one being a field visit to a particular community project. The group I joined visited an indigenous reserve by Lake 'Cocha'.

My memory was challenged every time I saw or heard something particularly relevant. Despite always carrying a pen, paper, recorder and camera, capturing a moment or idea was not always instantly possible. Fieldnotes were taken during every event or immediately after when possible. As I was advancing in the fieldwork, fieldnotes became more detailed and structured. I found Blommaert and Jie's (2010) suggestion of treating fieldnotes as private documents very useful: they advise not to write for an audience or feel constrained about external pressures. Thus, I wrote my fieldnotes as if I was the only one who was going to read and revise them.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather more detailed information from research participants. The research participants were contacted in advance and were told about the purpose of the research and assured about the protection of their identity and the information given. Although I prepared a list of topics to be covered, interview questions and guidelines, some questions were adapted to the profile and expertise of interviewees and followed the leads of the conversation. Britten (1995) suggests that one of the main purposes of the interviews is to 'uncover new areas or ideas that were not anticipated at the outset of the research' (p. 2).

Activists, community leaders, NGO staff, academics, projects coordinators, and trade unionists were interviewed. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Colombia. One interview was conducted in Montevideo, Uruguay, with some members of the Committee in defence of water and life from Uruguay, and two interviews were conducted through Skype. Interview guidelines were divided into three sections: introduction, core, and conclusion. The first set of questions/topics was meant to address the context of the conflict or case study. The core questions referred to the topics related to communication practices, citizen participation, constraints for participation, and actors involved. The concluding part of the interviews addressed learning and recommendations.

In this research project, the semi-structured interviews provided openness, flexibility, and an opportunity for participants to present their views and opinions in some detail (Kvale, 1996, Denscombe, 2007, Bryman, 2008). The interviews were a moment of dialogue between the researcher and the participant in which the social and cultural context played a significant role.

3.3.3 Document analysis - Secondary sources.

Another method for gathering information was the collection and analysis of different data materials such as leaflets, posters, press releases, minutes of meetings, banners, photos, and press articles. This is what Blommaert and Jie (2010) call: 'collecting rubbish', or the collection of data materials that help us to remember

details, characters and atmospheres. Some events were recorded through photographs and video.

3.3.4 Leaving the field and Data Analysis

Leaving the field and returning to work with a notebook full of fieldnotes, recordings, photos, videos, and lots of memories are two important moments in the research process. The end of the fieldwork was decided in advance for logistic reasons. It lasted five months, however, some other methods for data collection were implemented afterwards. The first encounters with the data, after coming back from the field, were emotional, reflexive and challenging. In my case, the transcription of some interviews in front of my computer in the office was the opportunity to revisit the feelings that I could not express in front of the research participants. All the transcripts were from Spanish to Spanish. The only excerpts translated into English were the quotes used in the thesis. For the transcription of the interviews I used the software F4.

The data analysis process is when the research starts to make more sense and when the research questions start to be answered by preliminary findings. The degree of participation, the membership role, and the level of emotional involvement are characteristics that DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) describe as having an impact on the type of data gathered and its further analysis (p.24). Mason (2002) affirms that it is also possible that during the process of data collection some issues and interesting insights from participants arise, which provides an alternative direction to the analysis of data.

This research project employed the Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVIVO. I created different thematic codes for the information gathered, also classified by source (e.g. person, organisation, campaign). I created 28 main nodes and 40 sub-nodes. NVIVO was found a useful tool to sift through and organise the data as it permits to retrieve data according to the specific information required.

3.3.5 Maintaining rapport

Some research participants manifested an interest in being kept up to date with the progress of the research. In particular, members of non-governmental organisations supporting and accompanying community groups and specific water struggles were concerned with the information they were sharing with me. These participants would be interested in the recognition of their work and experience in other arenas such as academia. Moreover, when speaking with me, some research participants felt that their actions and struggles acquired importance and were generating interest outside, internationally. Parkin (2004) writes that increasingly, researchers and their supporters acknowledge the need to communicate research results to participants and communities 'as part of designing a study and ensuring positive sustainable relationships' (p. 517). She argues that when performed well 'communication promotes the public good, builds trust, demonstrates respect in active and tangible ways, and creates bases for future research' (ibid).

With regard to other associations and networks, some preliminary findings were shared in the form of non-academic articles and presentations. Active participation in online forums and dissemination and sharing of information in digital social networks have been the alternative channels I employed to maintain the rapport with research participants until further actions can be carried out.

After listening to personal stories from research participants and witnessing important events in the water struggles, the researcher was faced with the complicated task of managing the information in the most accurate and responsible manner. Some stories dealt with difficult issues such as forced displacement, violence, repression and non-recognition of the communities' sovereignty over their land and water sources. The presentation of findings from the present research in academic and non-academic events has been a constructive way to spread information and receive feedback about the water conflicts in Colombia.

3.4 Methodological approaches discarded

Social network analysis came into consideration when analysing the possible methodological approaches for this research project. Social network analysis is defined by Breiger (2004) as the 'inquiry into the patterning of relations among social actors, as well as the patterning of relationships among actors at different levels of

analysis (such persons and groups)' (p.3). Social network analysis has some other important elements such as the systematic collection of data, the implementation of both qualitative and quantitative methods, the focus on processes and influence of networks. Diani (2002) uses social network analysis to understand 'how collective action is affected by the actors' embeddedness in pre-existing networks' (p.173). This research approach allowed him to track the linkages between actors, the development of protests, and network location of social movements' organisations in Milanese environmentalism in Italy.

Even if social network theory could have provided a suitable approach, my interest was more in participatory methodological approaches — not the study *of* the actors but the study *with* the actors. My involvement in multiple settings was crucial for the collection of data. While my research also looks at networks, relationship between actors and certain kind of behaviour and actions, its main focus is on participatory practices. The aims guiding data analysis in social networks studies were different from those inspiring my proposal. Network theory's purpose of generating matrices of actors' relationships and understanding patterns of behaviour were not contributing to address my research questions.

3.5 Conclusion

The methodology implemented allowed to a critical reflexivity of the events, the data collected, and the contexts in which the water conflicts were taking place. Particularly, PAR motivated me to play an active role in the research and to constantly stress the sharing and collective construction of knowledge with research participants. By implementing PAR, the aims of the research become not just an academic enquiry but also a necessary experience in trying to bring about social change. Also, the immersion in the field as a participant permits a better understanding of the communities' production of knowledge, their political beliefs and their impact in wider processes of participation. The methodology of this research project was a an exercise of emancipatory action research which, according to Kemmis (2006), aims 'to connect the personal and the political in collaborative research and action, aimed at transforming situations to overcome felt dissatisfactions, alienation, ideological distortions, and the injustices of oppression' (p. 96).

4 Background of the Colombian water movement

This chapter locates the water conflicts and social movements analysed in this thesis in the Colombian and Latin American social, political and historical context. The first section of the chapter provides a brief overview of Colombian history, emphasising the events related to the transformation of democracy. The second section deals with the issues of political apathy and weak citizen participation in Colombia. This section is very important for the analysis of the case studies because it explains some of the causes and implications of political apathy and its effects on the process of democracy building. The third section provides a brief outline of the history of Latin American social movements in the last two decades. The fourth section focuses on Colombian environmental movements and on the campaign 'Water: a Public Good' that was the main antecedent of the campaign for the water referendum. This section also reflects on the role of citizens in defending water and natural common goods. The fifth section introduces the legal and policy context around water privatisation, while the last section deals with the human right to water.

4.1 Colombian historical and socio-political context

In order to understand the contribution and findings of this research, in terms of its analysis of new forms of political participation and processes for deepening democracy, this section considers some key moments of the history of Colombia and its recent socio-political context, and analyses their impact on citizen participation and social movements. The birth of Colombia¹⁵ can be traced back to 1810 when Spanish American independence movements succeeded in gaining independence from Spain (LaRosa and Mejía, 2013). The juridical-political entity that it is now the Republic of Colombia was formally constituted in 1832, after the dissolution of 'La Gran Colombia', which was the grouping of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, under one government (ibid). The early twentieth century was marked by political party violence (between Liberals and Conservatives) and the continuity of centralism and presidentialism (ibid). This led to a period of violence

¹⁵ The political constitution of 1991 establishes that Colombia is a social rule of law, organised in the form of a unitary and decentralised republic with autonomy of its territorial entities, democratic, participative and pluralist. Its government is democratically elected directly by citizen (Taken from the virtual Library of the Colombian Central Bank <http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/economia/colombia/eco1.htm>, accessed 20 August 2014)

during the mid-century. The assassination of the Liberal leader Jorje Eliécer Gaitán on 9 April 1948, an event that became known as 'El Bogotazo', worsened the wave of violence and repression in the country. The period between 1949 and 1957 is commonly referred to as 'La Violencia'¹⁶ (The Violence) because of the bloodshed caused by political violence, and the rule of the only military dictatorship (1953-1957) in Colombian history (LaRosa and Mejía, 2013). Following this phase, the National Front was created:

The National Front was an elite-led agreement among leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties to alternate their hold on the presidency with calculated parity in each and every possible public office. This regime lasted from 1958 until 1974, and in some ways it lasted into 1986, when Liberal president, Virgilio Barco, decided to return to the government of one-party rule, which represented the apex of presidentialism for the country (ibid, p. 49)

The agreement solved the bipartisan conflict but debilitated the parties ideologically, making clientelism a recurrent mechanism to reward party loyalty (ibid). Commenting on the same period, Welna and Gallón (2007) conclude that 'Colombia's political system yielded to elitism and exclusionary institutions' (p. 10). 'The agreement between Liberals and Conservatives excluded other sectors, most relevantly the left, which did not have access to a democratic channel for participating in the political process' (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2006, p. 9). During the years of the National Front, leftist guerrilla movements inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959 were formed (Welna and Gallón, 2007).

As a measure to impede the development of this type of insurgency groups and the advance of communism, the U.S. Kennedy Administration, who viewed Colombia as 'a model of democracy and gradualist development' (LaRosa and Mejía, 2013, p. 87), implemented the programme 'Alianza para el Progreso' (Alliance for Progress) (Rojas, 2010). The Alliance for Progress was a programme of foreign aid proposed by the United States aiming at creating conditions for development and political stability in the continent during the 1960s. With this programme, the U.S. launched a long-term systematic intervention at regional scale with the objective of directly

¹⁶ 'La Violencia' was no more than a blind, leaderless conflict that undermined ancient customs of the peasant population, demolishing at the same time their yearnings for significant change and disorienting their angry reaction. [...] there was no national leader or any institution that might show them the way and redeem them from their deep tragedy.' (Fals-Borda, 1969, p. 144).

influencing social change in Latin America and impeding the advance of communism in the middle of the cold war (ibid, p. 2).

In the late 1970s, the country went through a period of severe repression, which, according to LaRosa and Mejía (2013), was characterised by 'extrajudicial killings, illegal imprisonment, and a "state-of-siege" mentality and reality' (p. 88-89). During the 1980s violence associated with drug cartels reached alarming levels, becoming part of Colombian daily life (LaRosa and Mejía, 2013, p. 91). Drug cartels from Medellín and Cali became very strong in terms of financial and political resources (Cárdenas et al., 2006). They controlled the majority of the illicit drug business, and exerted increasing political influence regionally and nationally (ibid). 'The cartel's private armies, which later evolved into paramilitary (the so-called self-defense) groups, protected them from internal fights, extradition, and kidnapping by guerrillas' (ibid, p. 9). Furthermore, between 1989 and 1990 four presidential candidates were killed, most of them by paramilitaries. Avilés (2006) describes what happened during this violent decade as the 'privatisation of repression, whereby the responsibility for persecuting individuals and communities with suspected sympathies for the guerrilla movement was in large part shifted to private groups of armed civilians' (p. 381)

Recognising the extent and implications of the crisis, a national coalition was formed in 1991 by different social actors with the aim of writing a new constitution. According to LaRosa and Mejía (2013), the constitution of 1991 intended to create a new model for the state:

this is what the moment demanded: a guerrilla movement had radicalized due to the failure of the peace talks at the end of the 1980s and especially due to the systematic assassination of all members of the Unión Patriótica'¹⁷ [...] Moreover, paramilitary groups were on the rise at this time, and their agendas went beyond controlling local processes and affairs; they became national political actors with agendas of their own. Drug cartels also gained increasing political power, having won seats in Congress and influence among businesspeople, politicians, and government officials'. (p. 50-51)

¹⁷ Unión Patriótica was 'a leftist political party founded by the insurgent group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the Colombian Communist Party that had successfully won public office in many municipalities throughout the country' (LaRosa and Mejía, 2010, p. 50)

Political analysts like John Dugas affirm that the new Colombian constitution reflected the 'co-opting strategies of political elites facing increasing domestic alienation and opposition to the existing regime' (in Avilés, 2006, p. 381). The constitution of 1991 established Colombia as a 'social state of rights' (LaRosa and Mejía, 2013, p. 51). Following a global tendency, the new constitution endorsed citizenship participation in response to the crisis of democratic legitimacy caused by the excessive centralisation of state power (Pardo-Schlesinger, 2011). Also, the constitution introduced new electoral rules which increased competition amongst politicians and 'encouraged personalistic rather than policy-based campaigns' (Welna and Gallón, 2007, p. 10).

The 1991 constitutional reform also included a clear reference to human rights (Archila, 2004) and introduced new mechanisms for enabling citizens to participate in the protection of these rights. In particular, the new charter widened the political representation of minorities, increased citizen control over government activities, and established the direct election of local authorities. Moreover, new political parties challenged the monopoly of the two parties that had dominated the history of independent Colombia (Liberals and Conservatives). This institutional evolution opened new democratic spaces for citizen-participation, which found expression in the national struggles for public goods and a new central role for popular social movements.

With more than forty-seven million people, Colombia is the third most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico (Richani, 2013). As for 2012, Colombia 'is fourth in size in gross domestic production after Brazil, Mexico and Argentina' (ibid, p. 1). The stable and growing economy since the 1940s and the fact of being one of the few Latin America countries with an uninterrupted democracy (since 1958), coexist with the country's political history of wars, high levels of violence, poverty, exclusion and narcotrafficking (Archila, 2006, Nieto-López, 2011, Richani, 2013). Parallel to the growth of the national GDP and foreign investment, social inequality has increased in Colombia since the early 1990s (UNDP, 2013). The 2013 UNDP Human Development Index Report ranked Colombia 91th among 187 countries (ibid).

Colombia's internal war, which involves different armed actors as the leftist guerrillas, the right-wing paramilitaries, and the army – with civil society in the middle – has been going on for sixty years (Richani, 2013). This internal conflict has had dramatic consequences, for instance 'eight-million hectares of land have been seized through legal or illegal means, and some 52,000 Colombians have been forcibly disappeared – nearly twice the number made to disappear in Argentina's dirty war' (Bouvier, in Richani, 2013, p. xiv). By 2012, Colombia had the highest number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the world (five million), overtaking countries such as Sudan and Iraq (Richani, 2013). The internal displacement is caused mainly by the violence of the internal war, but also by the economic crisis. The displacement of other sectors of Colombian society such as indigenous and afro-descendants people is, according to Rojas-Rodríguez (2003), the consequence of 'strategic expansionist dynamics' and territorial disputes between armed actors (p. 43).

Bearing in mind the consequences of the persistent social and political conflict, Colombian civil society faces numerous challenges when it comes to the exercise of citizenship and deepening democracy. As an organised expression of civil society claiming its rights (Archila, 2001), social movements in Colombia have played a crucial role in the construction and support of democracy (Escobar, 1992). According to Archila (2004), contemporary Colombian social movements fluidly move between the cultural and the political spheres. In the last decade, Colombian social movements have renewed their forms of organisation and protest (ibid, p.9). These changes reflect the type of conflicts they are fighting and the type of demands they are making, as evidenced by the struggles in defence of water and land. In relation to this, Nieto-López (2011) states that, despite the painful experiences of domination and injustice in Colombia, there have been collective actors who have resisted the violation of their rights, their dignity, and their autonomy.

4.2 Political apathy and citizen participation in Colombia

In the last decade, political and electoral participation in Colombia has been one of the lowest in Latin America, along with countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Venezuela (Flórez, 2011). Electoral participation does not represent all the different types of participation analysed in this thesis, but it is an indicator of the

challenges of citizen engagement in public issues. Colombia has a wide and complex infrastructure for citizen participation (Velásquez and González, 2003). Despite being one of the few countries in Latin America with an uninterrupted democracy (since 1958) (Archila, 2007), Colombia – as discussed earlier – has experienced various periods of violence. Another, more recent, period of particularly intense violence was between 1980 and 2006. According to Flórez (2011), there are three main reasons for the violence of these last three decades. The first is the precariousness of the state, which translates into the weakness of institutions, the fragmentation of political power, and an inconclusive process of national formation. The second reason is the unbalance between the processes of economic modernization and the absence of political modernization. The third is the exclusionary character of Colombian political system (p. 171). Violence is one of the major processes negatively affecting citizen participation in Colombia. For people living in violent contexts, a permanent state of frustration leads to apathy and hopelessness (Botero Gómez et al., 2011). The ongoing internal war involving guerrilla groups, paramilitary, and the state has obliged many community leaders to develop a low-profile role to avoid becoming a target of the armed groups (Velásquez and González, 2003). Violence has also weakened people's motivation to participate in public issues (ibid).

In Colombia, people's will and power to participate in public issues have also been affected by the crisis in political representation, the privatisation of state enterprises, and the vertical relationship between the political and the social sphere, among other reasons (Sánchez-Mazo, 2007). Velásquez and González (2003) identify two characteristics that describe the Colombian political system from the second half of the twentieth century: 'clientelismo' and 'autoritarismo' (exchange of political favours and authoritarianism) (p. 17). Citizens' response to these practices was diverse: on one hand, abstentionism increased in a large part of the population who thought that the elections were not advancing their interests; on the other hand, citizen protest movements increased in response to the state's incapacity to satisfy the needs of the population (ibid). The state's answer to the issue of encouraging citizen participation was to begin a decentralization process by giving more power to regional and local governments (Henao Escovar and Pinilla, 2011). It was precisely in this context that the 1991 constitutional reform emerged, adopting citizen participation as one of its main concerns in response to the crisis of democratic

legitimacy due to the centralisation of the state (Pardo-Schlesinger, 2011). The 1991 reform introduced mechanisms for citizen participation such as: popular vote, plebiscite, referendum, popular consultations, 'cabildo abierto' (open town hall meeting), popular legislative initiative and revocation of mandate (some of these mechanisms will be analysed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

More than 20 years after the introduction of the 1991 Constitution, citizens have started to recognise the importance of taking public responsibilities and contributing to the decision-making process. However, there are still major obstacles. For example, in his research on political participation of young people in Medellín, Cubides (2010) remarks that young people do not feel as subjects of rights. Young people do not believe in the effectiveness of human rights because their enjoyment still depends on the state. Political apathy is one of the outcomes of the incapacity of the state to exercise its functions in an adequate way (O'Donnell, 1992, in Tickner, 1998). The exercise of governance and democracy, and the minimum realisation of the right to participate politically, are affected also by critical situations such as forced displacement, the economic crisis, lack of opportunities, and violence. In the last decade, despite being criminalised (Modonesi and Rebón, 2011), social protest in Colombia has also promoted spaces for deliberation and reflection on public issues. Moreover, the mechanisms for citizen participation provided for by the constitution have progressively been understood, used, and criticised by civil society.

4.3 Regional context: social movements in Latin America

The study of social movements in Latin America has increased during the last decade following the central role that social protest has played in the political shift towards the left in many countries (Modonesi and Rebón, 2011). According to Escobar and Álvarez (1992), the emergence, during the 1980s, of authoritarian governments in Latin America can be linked to three processes: the crisis of development, the crisis of political parties, and the crisis of the mechanisms of representation. In this complex panorama, 'in every country of Latin America there was a desire for change' (p. 1). Social movements were enhancing the transformation of different social realities. The development of new waves of social action also reactivated the research and theorisation of social movements in Latin America (ibid). The new waves of protest that were appearing in the late 1990s were

also a response to the weakening of the economic and social benefits offered to the popular classes during the phase of state-led development (Almeida, 2007).

Through the 1990s, neoliberalism reached its highest point in many countries in Latin America, even though it was collapsing in others. Modonesi (2008) affirms that the end of the neoliberal hegemonic order in Latin America can be explained in three stages. The first stage saw the rise of conflicts and struggles that ‘from the corners of partial and local resistances were converging around the slogan of anti-neoliberalism, transiting from subordination to antagonism’¹⁸ (p. 124); the second was marked by the protest actions carried out to provoke the fall of neoliberal governments; the third was the building of autonomous spaces outside state institutions. However, some countries like Colombia and Mexico did not experience these changes with the same intensity; instead, repressive governments took control, limiting and thus criminalising social protest and political opposition. Nonetheless, even in these countries, the implementation of neoliberal policies generated strong opposition and resistance (Seoane et al., 2005), the Zapatista revolution being one of the most remarkable examples of social awakening during this cycle (ibid).

4.3.1 New cycle of collective action

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new cycle of collective action emerged, leading to a progressive accumulation of social struggles against neoliberal reforms (Modonesi, 2008). According to Almeida (2007) it was ‘the erosion of social rights [which] shaped collective action against neoliberal policies’ (p. 125). This shift in Latin America started in 2000 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, with the Water War (ibid), a civil society struggle to demand the human right to water and to oppose water privatisation. Water privatisation had been introduced in Bolivia as it was a condition set by the World Bank in order to extend the country’s debt relief (Perera, 2012). The inefficiency and inexplicable dramatic rise of water tariffs caused massive protests demanding better conditions. People from Cochabamba ‘cancelled’ the contract with the multinational company Bechtel that was in charge of water service provision. In Bolivia, neoliberal reforms had weakened unions and the historically

¹⁸ Own translation.

powerful Bolivian Workers Federation (Central Obrera Boliviana, COB) (ibid p. 244). Therefore, the Water War, which broke out at the peak of discontent, provided the opportunity for the gathering of different social actors protesting against privatisation policies.

The Bolivian and Uruguayan water struggles had a remarkable importance for the continent and for Colombia. They were not only a ground-breaking experience of mobilisation in the middle of rising neoliberalism, but they were also important for the communication practices, participatory spaces and local organisation capacity they left behind. In her research on activist repertoires in Latin American water struggles, Verónica Perera (2012) highlights the contribution of Cochabamba:

Water struggles are deeply rooted in places – or particular historical geographies, political economies and cultural contexts. Yet, since Cochabamba, there has been an *emerging activist repertoire* that travels, intertwining bodies and places, and building networks of activists and scholars, like me (p. 243).

The Water War in Bolivia marked a new cycle of collective action in Latin America where social movements managed to change the agenda on the commons and natural patrimonies. The crisis of neoliberal consensus in some countries in Latin America put at the centre issues such as: claims for basic human rights, the ownership and management of natural resources, the autonomy of indigenous communities, and the reform of political representation systems (Svampa, 2008). The crisis of neoliberalism and the re-emergence of social movements contributed to legitimising other forms of doing and thinking politics and social relationships (ibid).

The return of politics to the streets put public space at the centre, turning it into the privileged setting where popular opposition and expression were taking place (Svampa, 2008). Modonesi and Rebón (2011) contend that the Latin American social movements which arose over the last decade constitute a toolbox and source of consultation for future challenges. Many networks emerged, innovative mobilisation practices were performed, more experiences and cases were documented. The social struggles of those years became a historical opportunity for millions of people to think that another world is possible. Also, the new popular practices taking place during the new wave of social movements in Latin America

gave rise to an important research stream interested in the analysis of collective action.

4.4 Environmental movements in Colombia

In many developing countries such as Colombia, social movements have led the way towards democracy and citizen participation within repressive contexts. Their emergence may be the result of a critique of hegemonic political models or a demand for the inclusion, into the public agenda, of certain needs expressed by civil society. In both cases, social movements have raised questions and proposed alternatives about the way society is organised and how it should function. Social movements have facilitated the introduction of new topics, discussions and agendas in the public sphere, and have contributed to the transformation of public space and political decisions (Urán-Arenas, 2003).

Since the 1970s, popular environmentalism in Colombia has raised awareness about environmental conflicts and has promoted opposition to megaprojects that have had severe consequences for communities and territories (Tarazona-Pedraza, 2010). Environmental movements continue to increase in membership and multiply in number as a response to neoliberal models for the extraction of natural resources (ibid). In many cases these extractivist models are closely linked to the serious and ongoing Colombian internal conflict, not only because the areas endowed with natural common goods are disputed or guarded by legal and illegal armed groups, but also because projects entailing the privatisation of natural resources and extraction cause displacement, disruption of the social order, and abrupt change in the lives and economic conditions of local residents.

Some of the challenges that environmental social movements face in the current situation in Colombia are the integration with other social movements in order to achieve common objectives, and the strengthening of legal initiatives as alternative strategies in conflict resolution. Obando-Enríquez (2009) identifies some characteristics of environmental conflicts as opportunities to bring about change. He argues that environmental conflicts could be instruments for citizen participation, whereby organised communities are able to demand, create and contribute - together with local authorities - to new strategies dealing with future conflicts. According to Obando-Enríquez, another opportunity offered by environmental

conflicts is that they open up spaces for social dialogue between a community and local government. Through their actions, organised communities propose other models of development which reflect their own needs. Likewise, when the community is aware and informed about an environmental problem, its members can exercise more control over different discussions and decision-making on environmental issues.

Environmental conflicts have tended to be looked at in isolation from the wider public agenda. Nowadays, environmental conflicts are acquiring a different connotation, since they have increased and have affected different social, political and economic sectors in the country. Moreover, the consequences of environmental conflicts have crossed borders, which also means that environmental movements have found support in international networks and campaigns. These international linkages have helped to protect the struggles and provided a platform to give visibility to local initiatives (RP 40). In this regard, Bebbington et al. (2008) note the multilocal and transnational characteristics of contemporary movements contesting extractive industries. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998, in Bebbington et al., 2008), even if specific campaigns are focused on local transformation in a particular location, the movements supporting them often bring together local, national and international actors.

Together with the increase of large-scale development and infrastructure projects all over the country, the number and intensity of social conflicts relating to natural resource exploitation has also risen (ABColombia, 2012, CINEP and ILC, 2012). According to CINEP (Popular Research and Education Centre – Peace Programme), ‘between January 2001 and December 2011, 274 collective social actions associated with the extraction of petroleum, coal and gold took place in Colombia, with social protest against mineral extraction rising consistently’ (ibid). The defence of land, natural resources and water in Colombia is a high-risk activity because it is performed in the midst of an armed conflict. Moreover, there are the ‘powerful interests of *latifundistas*,¹⁹ national and transnational land-owning interests, drug traffickers and agri-industrial and mining projects’ (CINEP and ILC, 2012, p3).

¹⁹ Large land owners.

In their report about land and human rights defenders, CINEP and the International Land Coalition (ILC) provide six categories of threat and risk for defenders of land rights and natural resources: stigmatisation, defamation, threats, legal action, murders, and confinement. Many activists involved in the water conflicts analysed in this thesis have not been exempted from these threats. The different communities affected by the conflicts are not only worried about the damage to the environment and water, but also about the negative consequences of large scale projects in terms of health risks, forced displacement, and the destruction of ancestral traditions and land which have a special spiritual meaning for indigenous communities (ABColombia, 2012, p11).

Recent environmental movements in Colombia have promoted discussions on the consequences of large-scale infrastructure projects and the different policies for water management in the country. These movements have criticised the current development and economic model and have networked with similar initiatives in the continent to raise awareness and share experiences and information. Also, these movements have, to some extent, demonstrated that environmental and water conflicts can provide an opportunity to foster solidarity, community development and participation.

4.5 Water legislation and privatisation in Colombia

At the end of the twentieth century, the reform of the public service sector in Colombia was promoted as a strategy to improve the distribution of and access to safe drinking water and years later it became a tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goal on Water Provision (Guerrero, 2010). This was preceded by the privatisation policies introduced in the 1990s by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in the form of loans and the promotion of programmes for the provision of water supply and public services, particularly in urban centres. In an IDB report on water privatisation in Colombia, Barrera and Olivera (2006) state that, since the 1990s, privatisations have encountered 'significant political opposition' (p. 4). However, they further clarify that the effect of water privatisation on welfare has not been fully studied. In their report, they argue

In spite of the unpopularity of privatizations, our main results suggest that privatizations have positive effects on welfare, especially in urban areas. In privatized urban municipalities, we find an improvement in access to water, and an increase in the quality of water, measured as the need for water treatment or as the aspect of water. In rural areas the negative effect of privatization on prices and strong negative effects on access to water outweigh the positive impacts on the improved frequency of the service and on improved child health, even after controlling for migration to these areas. (p. 4-5)

Water privatisation is at the centre of economic and environmental debates around the world. For advocates of water privatisation, water is

an increasingly scarce resource, which must be priced at full economic and environmental cost if it is to be allocated to its highest-value uses, and managed profitably by private companies whose accountability to customers and shareholders is more direct and effective than attenuated political accountability exercised by citizens via political representatives (Rogers et al 2003; Winpenny 1994) (Bakker, 2007, p. 432).

Bakker (2007) also describes the view of those opposing market environmentalism, who believe that water is 'a non-substitutable resource essential for life' and call for the water supply 'to be recognized as a human right, which (they argue) both places an onus upon states to provide water to all, and precludes private sector involvement' (ibid, p. 432).

In Colombia the inclusion of water supply services into the logic of the market has increased water tariffs in many cities and has weakened medium-sized public water service providers and community aqueducts. Castro (2007) indicates that, even if the privatisation of water and sanitation services in the Latin American context has failed in its objectives, its implementation prompted a series of processes which will continue to exercise influence on the organisation and management of these services for a long time (p 96). For him, the privatisation reforms have let unresolved, if not actually worsened, many of the existing problems, generating many obstacles for the sustainable and democratic management of those services. Castro sustains that, in Latin America, the design and implementation of policies oriented to the universalisation of the water service will only be possible through an articulation of social forces. The positive thing, according to him, is that many processes with such potential already exist.

Debates on water privatisation and commodification are central to the analysis of the case studies in this research project. The different case studies share the fact that water is at the core of their struggle. The defence of community aqueducts and the opposition to mining projects and hydroelectric dams deal with both private and public water initiatives. In general, these struggles demand citizen participation in water governance and advocate for water protection, and accountable and sustainable management of water services. The next chapter on community aqueducts provides a more in depth analysis of the Law 142 (1994) and the Planes Departamentales del Agua (Departmental Water Plans), which regulate water service provision in Colombia.

4.6 The human right to water in Colombia

Different international norms have dealt with the topic of the human right to water. These are: the pact on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women (1993), the Children Rights Covenant (1989), the International pacts on Civil and Political rights (1966), the Pacts on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the San Salvador Protocol (1988), the International Pact on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), among others. Even though there is no specific recognition of the human right to water in Colombia, there are various pronouncements of the Constitutional Court about the right to water. Some of these legal rulings have served as a legitimising background for the movements demanding the human right to water.

According to the Constitutional Court Statement T-578 of 1992, 'Water constitutes the source of life, and the lack of it affects directly the fundamental right to life'. Statement T-270 of 2007 claims that the rights and duties declared in the National Constitution must follow the international treaties signed by Colombia, such as the International Agreement of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (1966), which mentions that states have the obligation to provide water to those who do not have the sufficient means to access it (Motta-Vargas, 2010). Moreover, Colombian judges have highlighted the importance of the issue of the right to water (T-413 of 1995, T-410 of 2003) (Salazar, 2008), in particular when people make use of 'Tutela'²⁰ to

²⁰ The 'Acción de tutela' is a constitutional guarantee to protect the fundamental rights of individuals (Article 86 National Constitution). Within the complex system of legal mechanisms provided for by the constitution, the 'Tutela' is one of the simplest and most effective ways to claim a right. It should be responded in no more than 10 working days.

claim the human right to water when they are disconnected from water provision because of non-payment.

In November 2002, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment No. 15 on the right to water (UN-CESCR, 2002). Article 1 states that 'The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights'. Comment No. 15 also defines the right to water as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. In 2010, along with another 120 countries, Colombia voted in favour of Resolution 64/292 of the United Nations General Assembly (UN-GA, 2010) which explicitly recognised 'the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights. The Resolution calls upon States and international organisations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, particularly developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all' (ibid, p. 1).

Despite having signed and agreed to different international covenants and UN Resolutions, in Colombia the human right to water is still a work in progress. The campaign for the Colombian water referendum (2007-2010), discussed in chapter 6, proposed to include the human right to water in the Colombian Constitution, along with other suggestions, for a better management and protection of hydric common goods.

Colombia followed the examples of Uruguay and Italy, where the human right to water was demanded through massive civil society mobilisations. However, in Colombia the Congress rejected the proposal despite the fact that it was backed up by more than two million signatures. Authors such as Perera (2012) question whether demanding the human right to water in Colombia through a Referendum was the best strategy to achieve provision, protection and management of the liquid. Bakker (2007, in Perera, 2012) warns that 'the human right to access to water does not automatically define the character of water as a non-commodity, and thus does not foreclose water provision by private corporations' (p.18). Since the proponents of the water referendum were clearly against privatisation, Perera (2012), following

Bakker, wonders whether Latin American and Colombian water defenders made a mistake when they framed their struggle around the human right to water.

The next chapters present case studies on community aqueducts, the campaign for the water referendum, movements opposing mining and dams projects and transnational networks working on water.

5 Community aqueducts: water governance from the grassroots



Sign inviting to a meeting of community aqueducts, 2009. Photo by: Valeria Llano Arias

This chapter analyses the communication practices of community aqueducts focusing on their role in the process of organisational strengthening and advocacy for the recognition of the aqueducts' autonomy on water governance. The chapter starts with a section explaining the legal framework for water services provision in Colombia, specifically the Law 142 of 1994 and the Planes Departamentales del Agua (PDA). After this, the chapter introduces the literature on participatory communication, Communication for Social Change (CFSC), and community media which will be used to analyse the case studies of two associations of community aqueducts and the 2012 National Conference of Community Aqueducts. Using evidence from the three case studies, the chapter argues that the community aqueducts have strengthened their organisational autonomy and community ethos in managing water by introducing communication practices centred on the sharing of experiences, dialogue, the creation of networks, and the active participation of citizens in water policy-making.

New forms of active citizenship created by the community aqueducts are expressed in the way these challenge public or private water provision models, advocating for a

third way – the community management of water with recognition and support from the state. Claiming autonomy in water governance, collectively managing water services, and advocating for an enabling legal and policy environment demonstrate the citizenship exercised by community aqueducts and how this can change the relationship between citizens and the state. The work and trajectory of community aqueducts in advocating for water governance and water justice are an important part of the Colombian water movement. Moreover, the community aqueducts have lead and supported other water struggles with similar features and concerns, for instance, rural struggles in defence of livelihoods, territories, and cultural identities.

5.1 Water provision legislation in Colombia

Solutions to the problem of access to water and sanitation came in the form of reforms such as Law 142 of 1994 that regulates water and sanitation services. This Law emphasises technological innovation and efficiency, privileging the medium and large water providers. Both the National Constitution²¹ and Law 142 of 1994 recognise different entities for the provision of water services, operating under state regulation. Law 142 of 1994 establishes the responsibility of the municipalities to provide water for citizens. According to this, the municipalities have to ensure the efficient provision of water, sewage, sanitation, electricity and telephone services through government bodies, private, or public-private companies. With Law 142, the state also initiated the sale and concession of municipal systems of water provision to private companies. This decision was aimed at regulating the sector and encouraging the privatisation of water provision services. Colombian scholar Valencia-Agudelo (2007) argues that, almost 20 years after Law 142, the private sector has greater participation and the investments have increased, turning water into a commodity. He adds that water tariffs have risen leading to the consumption of water by citizens who can pay, and the disconnection of the services for citizens who cannot pay.

²¹ In the National Constitution there are different articles referring to the provision of water and sanitation services. Article 365 states that public services are inherent to the social order of the state. It is a state's duty to ensure efficient delivery of water and sanitation to all inhabitants of the country. The services can be delivered directly or indirectly by the state or by organised communities regulated by the government. Article 311 says that the municipalities should provide the public services and should develop projects for the planning and ordering of the territory, as well as promoting community participation.

While community aqueducts in Colombia are regulated by the Law 142 of 1994, according to some of the leaders interviewed, this Law does not recognise the communitarian ethos and governance of their aqueducts. Since Law 142 was introduced, many community aqueducts have found themselves in a contradictory situation. On the one hand they are apparently 'illegal' because they are unable to comply with the technical requirements specified in the law, which are often inappropriate for their size and structure. On the other hand, they have received financial support from the government in order to upgrade their facilities and services. Perera (2014) highlights the same situation in her research on community aqueducts in Colombia. However community aqueducts have strengthened their own 'counter-network' and have been able to use the law 'in an alternative way' resisting the dispossession caused by the corporate model of water provision (p. 16). Perera adds:

“Becoming formal” is now a strategy for the poor to defend their right to water commons gained by being in place over time and through entrenched patterns of appropriation and material and emotional investment. Given their recognition in several pieces of legislation as legitimate providers of water, “becoming formal” entitles them to public monies and to the right not to be excluded. (ibid)

In the last decade, the community aqueducts have been working on strengthening their associations and networks and pushing for a legislation that reflects their aims and needs. The case studies in this chapter illustrate the different actions carried out by members of community aqueducts to achieve these purposes.

5.1.1 Departmental Water Plans

Another policy designed to accomplish the provision of water and sanitation services in Colombia was the 'Planes Departamentales del Agua' (PDA) (Departmental Water Plans). The PDA were introduced as a major issue in the National Development Plan, CONPES Document²² 3463 of 2005. The PDA were a series of strategies (fiscal, budgetary, political, institutional, technical and financial) under the coordination of departments (Colombia's administrative sub-divisions) for the

²² CONPES documents direct the application and implementation of policies, tools and strategies in the actions of municipalities, departments and the state. (Source: http://www.dosquebradas.gov.co/docs/3356_documento%20Juan.pdf, Accessed August 2014)

planning and provision of public services, including water supply, sewage and sanitation. Under the PDA, the provision of water and sanitation services required efficient business structures. Also, it was necessary to facilitate the political and social acceptance of the specialised providers in the different municipalities.

One of the purposes of the PDA was to create inter-institutional coordination between national, regional and local governments to prioritise and guarantee the provision of public services and sanitation. Many actors were involved in the decision-making process of the PDA, leaving little autonomy to local governments to decide their own needs and concerns. The PDA were implemented with a common budget from both the national and local governments. There was a small committee in every region overseeing the implementation of the PDA and prioritising resource allocation. The PDA promoted the consolidation and formation of public-private partnerships for the provision of water services, mainly in urban centres. The creation of new companies to provide water services in many municipalities resulted in the merging of small community aqueducts into larger companies following the argument that communal organisations were not able to comply with technical and modernisation requirements. According to Salazar-Restrepo (2011) the PDA brought into sharp relief the difference between the water management model of the community aqueducts and the one of private water service providers. She argues that the community aqueducts provide the services with a non-for-profit ethos. In their constitution, community aqueducts do not refer to 'capital' but to 'patrimony', and they are composed by 'associates' (not 'clients') who have both rights and duties. The decisions are made according to a *quorum* system and majorities, or are based on the communities' deliberations (ibid)

A former communication officer of the PDA in Antioquia (RP 4) shared the experience he had with the plans' management committee when, during a meeting, he proposed the inclusion of a social component and a series of communication and education activities with communities impacted by the infrastructural projects. The idea of his team was to accompany the technical and physical processes of construction of the aqueducts, installation of pipes, etc. with other actions that would make citizens become part of the project and understand its implications. In one of the meetings with the management committee to present the idea, he was told that the social component could not be included. The reason given was that 'the project

is measured according to the number of pipes installed, and that is it' (RP 4). Although, the communication officer and his team carried out other activities of diffusion of information about the PDA in Antioquia, they resigned from the project arguing that the social component was something crucial for the PDA. 'We wanted to work with the community even before the works of construction and installation of pipes. That would have been a radical change in the tradition of implementation of these projects. People should understand the interventions on their territories. Also, the idea was to emphasise the protection of water and the ecosystems' (RP 4). The refusal to incorporate a social component within the implementation of a project of water provision, contrasts with the ethos of the community aqueducts, which has, at its very core, the recognition of the collective decisions of associates and communities.

In November 2011, the PDA were discontinued. According to the then Minister of Housing, the limitations in the coverage and the accusations of excessive bureaucracy were some of the reasons for their end (Botero, 2011). In an interview, the Minister explained that the PDA were going to be replaced with the programme 'Aguas para la prosperidad' (APP) (Water for prosperity) with an emphasis on rural areas. APP was supposed to become an improved version of the PDA. After the announcement of the cancellation of the PDA, numerous questions came from community aqueducts, small public services providers, and environmental activists. Regarding the cancellation of the PDA, a member of the environmental organisation Censat Agua Viva argues that water policies should be formulated in participatory and democratic spaces with the people, listening to their contexts and needs (Urrea, 2011). For him, social initiatives like the campaign for the water referendum and the water movement have carried out a constant process of evaluation and critique of these reforms and proposed alternatives and sustainable models for water management and governance in the country.

5.2 Communicating participation – participating in communication

The chapter builds on the literature on communication for social change and participatory communication, especially Gumucio-Dagrón and Tufte (2006), Figueroa *et al.* (2002), and Alfaro (2001/2008, in Enghel and Tufte, 2011), to provide a critical theoretical framework for the analysis of the experiences of community aqueducts involved in the process of organisational development and participation

in water policy making. The chapter argues that participatory communication practices have been key in supporting the actions carried out by the community aqueducts. The community aqueducts have become more conscious of the strategic potential of communication in strengthening the social tissue and facilitating networking with similar organisations. Communication actions have enabled the aqueducts to experience processes of self-awareness, evaluation, and improvement of their community work.

Participatory models of communication stress the value of local communities, cultural identities, participation, and democratisation at different levels (FAO, 2007). Participatory communication practices aim at turning communities into their own agents of development rather than receivers (ibid). Cornish and Dunn (2009) suggest that in participatory communication practices, the creation and sharing of knowledge is expressed using different communication channels that citizens consider appropriate and important to their lives (p. 665). In their communication and mobilisation practices the community aqueducts have also created new media and taken advantage of existing alternative media. These local and community media are characterised by their potential to provide spaces for social encounters, useful contents for the people, and other forms of expression closer to the communities (Rincón 2002, in Jaramillo, 2004). Also, they improve the self-esteem of excluded communities and generate forms of citizenship by making local issues visible (ibid). Similarly to the case of the community radio broadcasting in a war region in Colombia analysed by Rodríguez (2014), community aqueducts use media to improve governance, monitor local governments, re-signify social and cultural spaces, and reconnect families and communities. In the context of her work on the Iranian revolution, Sreberny-Mohammadi (1994) argues that community media have acted as platforms for direct participation and for the 'extension of the voices of groups and ideas otherwise not heard' (p. 21). Alternative and community media use familiar forms of communication and can help to foster solidarity and awareness among citizens (ibid), in this case, the members and users of the community aqueducts.

5.3 Community aqueducts

This section analyses three case studies: two regional associations of community aqueducts and the 2012 National Conference of Community Aqueducts. As

mentioned in the introduction, these case studies are analysed drawing on the literature on participatory communication and CFSC. This literature offers analytical tools that are useful to explore communication actions at the local and grassroots level. The community aqueducts have existed for decades, creating and managing water provision services. They emerged in response to the lack of coverage in water and sanitation services, mainly in small and rural communities (Gómez-Bustos, 2012). A community aqueduct is a water system run by a group of residents organised through an association of users to conserve and improve the quantity and quality of water, and distribute it in a given region (Peña-Cano et al., 2007). These associations normally elect a board of directors that takes responsibility and, in most of the cases, designates suitable individuals to carry out the different tasks necessary to ensure water provision services in a certain population (ibid). There are more than twelve thousand community aqueducts in Colombia with different levels of organisation and consolidation.

Community aqueducts in Colombia have explored different strategies and practices of networking and learning from each other; most importantly, they have looked for alternatives to strengthen the sector and advocate for a more appropriate legislation for community aqueducts. Gómez-Bustos (2012) affirms that the community aqueducts in Colombia have been a very positive example of collective action. They have built water systems according to the needs of the communities, they have used alternative technologies, their tariffs are low, and they are characterised by their solidarity and strengthening of the social tissue. The community aqueducts also promote environmental education and the protection of water sources (ibid).

In the words of Correa-Correa (2010), community aqueducts bring together a diversity of actors who constitute a 'national patrimony' because of their socio-cultural and territorial condition and their view of water as a common good and fundamental human right. A considerable number of community aqueducts face multiple challenges such as mining and dams projects, water pollution, land grabbing or privatisation policies. In order to deal with these challenges, information and knowledge sharing are very important. While there are urban-based community aqueducts, the majority are located in rural areas. The rural location makes access to information more difficult and presents additional challenges to the political

participation and the development of actions aimed at improving the service to their associates.

Similarly to the process described by Alfaro (2012) for community organisations, the community aqueducts emerging from popular and rural sectors have turned into more formal organisations (following legal requirements, forming sub-committees) in their search for equality and efficiency. Multiple social processes of the community aqueducts indicate ways of deepening democracy. The community aqueducts have been committed to widening citizen participation when extending their physical and social networks, calling for meetings, organising projects, fundraising, and planning activities for internal development. These actions integrate: 1) reflections on the active role of the members and their contribution to the common objectives; 2) the impact of the aqueduct on the development of the locality; 3) the incidence of the aqueduct in policy making on issues related to their aims.

5.3.1 Giraguas: co-production ²³ of water services and community empowerment

Girardota is one of the nine towns forming the Medellín metropolitan area in the department of Antioquia. The population in Girardota reaches forty-three thousand people, many of whom are in rural areas and live off the land. Many citizens in the rural region of Girardota are users of community aqueducts. In the wake of the campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010), the community aqueducts from Girardota started the process of organising and building an association along with many other aqueducts from Antioquia.²⁴ The aim of forming an association comprising several aqueducts was to mutually support each other and face challenges, such as water privatisation policies, together. Since their establishment, the community aqueducts in Girardota have managed and organised water systems largely without state support and have operated as non-profit institutions. Some municipal administrations have praised their work and have helped them to overcome challenges and emergencies such as floods or landslides, and to repair

²³ For a further understanding of the debates and notion of 'co-production' in the context of water services see McMillan et al. (2014, pp. 202-203).

²⁴ The Departamental Network of Community Aqueducts of Antioquia (ADACA) was formed as a result of this campaign

important parts of the aqueducts. However, other administrations have tried to close these aqueducts by pushing for privatisation processes.

According to Citizenship DRC (2011), associations 'can contribute to the construction of political subjects and enhance political participation and the control of citizens over public policy' (p. 21). Individuals also socialise and practice civic values such as tolerance, dialogue, deliberation, trust, solidarity, and reciprocity (ibid). Nevertheless, although associations can challenge social hierarchies, they have their own challenges. The clash of power interests is a recurrent factor in these types of participatory spaces. As Cornwall (2004) states:

A newly-created space is filled with expectations, relationships, institutions and meanings that have been brought from elsewhere, and which impinge upon how those spaces come to be experienced. Unless we do more to understand these processes of impingement, and the power relations that imbue these spaces, the best-intentioned participatory endeavour can simply reproduce the status quo. (p. 85)

Giraguas, the association of Girardota's community aqueducts, has encountered various conflicts of interest during its existence, particularly when lobbying local authorities to raise the concerns of the members of the aqueducts. However, despite these circumstances, Giraguas has also pioneered the proposal and implementation of an agreement between public institutions and communities for the provision of water services (Agreement 037 of 31/08/2009 materialised two years later through the regulatory decree N° 95 of 14/12/2011): 'Whereby it is established a public policy to strengthen the work of organised communities that provide the water service in the Municipality of Girardota' (Villada-Ríos, 2012, p. 6). This agreement means that the municipality commits to provide financial, technical and social support to the community aqueducts in their work of water service provision. The initiative of the agreement has been replicated in other Colombian municipalities and presented in other Latin American countries as a successful experience of community water governance. This case study explains some of the actions that led to the municipal agreement and helped strengthening the work of the association of aqueducts.

5.3.1.1 Public-Communitarian agreements for water governance

Giraguas carried out an intense mobilisation and communication campaign for the promotion of the municipal council agreement in 2009 (RP 35). The agreement aimed at obtaining technical and financial support from the local government for the community aqueducts and, at the same time, gaining recognition of their autonomy and community management ethos (ibid). The associates and users of the community aqueducts, as well as other citizens in Girardota, implemented numerous communication actions to inform the population about the agreement. For one of the leaders in Giraguas, education was an important aspect of the association's communication and outreach strategies. In her words:

Every day we try to update ourselves with the latest information on the water issues and legal framework. We debate, discuss and study the new regulations, and the new difficulties that the aqueducts face. We also try to look for experts in different fields to explain to us the things we want to know. Many of these experts are part of community aqueducts as well. (Fieldnotes 7/06/2012)

The meeting spaces were crucial to the success of the communication strategies. One of the main spaces for communication and participation in Giraguas is their own general assembly, a space where associates make decisions, elect delegates and approve the budget. In the context of the community aqueducts, assemblies are a way of building citizenship, and engaging politically with the issues concerning the local sphere. At the same time, assemblies are public spaces in which certain actors showcase their power and influence people's decisions. For instance, in the case of Giraguas, some politicians wanted to take advantage of the political process of the community aqueducts and tried to take credit for their achievements to get voters' support. However, decision-making spaces characterised by unequal power relations, such as the meetings and assemblies, can be transformed through participatory methods, which help creating alternative views on different issues (Chambers, 1997, in Cornwall, 2004).

Another participation mechanism implemented by the community aqueducts for promoting and informing citizens on the agreement was the *cabildo abierto*. Cabildo abierto is a public meeting of the town councils and/or 'Juntas Administradoras Locales' (local assemblies) in which citizens can participate directly with the aim of discussing issues of interest to the community (Ley 134 of 1994, Article 9) (Pardo-Schlesinger, 2011, p. 71). The community aqueducts in Girardota promoted various

cabildos abiertos and assemblies to discuss the proposals for the public-communitarian agreement. The use of this mechanism for citizen participation was backed up by different participatory communication practices. Community media played a useful role for the spreading of information. Community and alternative media do not always have access to the necessary resources which can guarantee their long-term sustainability. However, many times lack of resources (material, human, organisational) provides the motivation for further creativity and solidarity. As discussed by Atton and Downing, grassroots media are characterised by the 'desire to instigate social change and activate politically passive audiences' (in Ruiz, 2008, p. 167).

Examples of the communication actions carried out to inform the population about the agreement were, for example, a series of workshops and seminars where the population could voice their concerns and proposals. Another action involving community media was the broadcasting of programmes on community radio stations. The radios provided weekly slots for the community aqueducts in which guests were invited to speak about a different range of topics. Moreover, posters were displayed in the countryside in local grocery stores, schools, and cultural centres. In some rural villages, a person with a loudspeaker spread information about meetings and mobilisations. These communication actions changed the political role of the community aqueducts in the municipality. Through the campaign to support the agreement between aqueducts and the municipality, the community aqueducts became influential political actors. Apart from taking care of the environment and providing drinking water to people, community aqueducts also emphasised local work and solidarity. The community aqueducts encouraged democratic practices for decision-making and generated a sense of belonging and sovereignty over the land and the water.

Two similar and relevant experiences of co-production of water services between communities and the state occurred in Nicaragua with the 'Alianza por la No Privatización del Agua y el Derecho al Acceso al Agua' (Alliance against Water Privatisation and for the Right to Water, or 'the Alliance'), the 'Comités de Agua Potable y Saneamiento' (CAPS; Potable Water and Sanitation Committees) (Romano, 2012b), and in Venezuela with the Mesas Técnicas del Agua (MTAs) (Technical Water Committees) (McMillan et al., 2014). In Nicaragua, by

implementing educational workshops and consultations at the municipal level, the Alliance engaged 'local governments with the issue of water privatisation, resulting in the pronouncement of at least 34 municipal resolutions against the government-sponsored water law' (Barrios and Wheelock, 2005; Gómez Martínez and Dalla Torre, 2005, in Romano, 2012b, p. 506). Findings from Romano's research on Nicaragua show a process similar to the one undertaken by community aqueducts in Girardota. Romano argues that the Nicaraguan community aqueducts (CAPS) have made water politics more inclusive by 'scaling up' participation of locally based groups (ibid). Moreover, these grassroots organisations have found in mobilisation, dialogue, and access to information a way to pursue legal recognition as organisations, to improve their technical competences, and to look for new financial opportunities for their transformation (ibid). In Venezuela, the MTAs were a government initiative to introduce and promote water committees in populous neighbourhoods in order to tackle the severe water crises in the 1990s. The initiative adopted participatory methodologies and was supported by the state-owned water company, Hidrocapital. Despite being created after a government's initiative, the MTAs are autonomous in their decisions and procedures. Through the community water councils (*consejo comunitario de agua*, or CCA) the MTAs 'influence government policy and planning' (ibid, p. 208). The idea to promote a people-centred water service became a national policy after succeeding at the local level.²⁵ For McMillan et al. (2014), the MTAs are

a co-production arrangement between the state and citizens that is part of a broader process of changing state-society relations. A key element of the model is its attempts to bridge the divide between 'development experts' and community members by mobilizing knowledge for both technical and political ends. This approach to grass-roots co-production draws on local expertise, not just as a means for collecting technical information but also as a way to raise the political capacity of the poor to make claims on the state. (p. 207)

The relationship between the community's organisations managing water and the state are context dependent as it can be noticed from the examples above. In the case of Glraguas, the aqueducts sometimes feared that their numerous demands to and pressure on the local government would exasperate it and result in their

²⁵ 'Today, there are an estimated 9000 MTAs nationwide; as of 2011, the MTAs had initiated 1500 community-managed infrastructure projects' (Mesas Técnicas de Agua, 2011, in McMillan et al. 2014, p. 206).

exclusion from important discussions and decision-making spaces on water and sanitation in the municipality (Fieldnotes 2012.06.21). In an interview for this research, one leader of Giraguas emphasised that another function of the association of community aqueducts is to exercise citizen control over the public institutions, and make them accountable on matters of public concern such as the water provision services. The agreement announced by the Girardota Council and promoted by the community aqueducts was replicated in other municipalities. For instance, in 2011, Sabaneta and Támesis (both located in Antioquia) presented a proposal to the respective local authorities to promote similar agreements in support of the work of the community aqueducts (Villada-Ríos, 2012). These proposals were also shared with the communities through participatory methodologies such as workshops and tours. The practices of sharing knowledge, experiences and materials have been key to the promotion of these agreements and the exercise of citizenship within the communities. Moreover, the agreements have been shared and diffused as successful experiences of water governance by the Red Vida Platform of Public-Communitarian Agreements of the Americas (Chapter 8). Members of the association of community aqueducts from Girardota have travelled to different places in Latin America to share their experience and promote solidarity, local knowledge and legal practices.

The processes of planning and proposing the agreement were the initial point for consolidating the municipal association of community aqueducts. Some of the aqueducts' achievements during this process were the strengthening of the networks of citizens and solidarity among aqueducts to enhance their participation in the water policy making spaces. The collective work permitted the sensitisation of the population in relation to the importance of preserving the governance of water by the community aqueducts. The changing of language was a key issue in the communication and awareness process. One of the female leaders interviewed for this research expressed that after some years, this initiative has given results. For instance, some community leaders proposed to refer to the people utilising the aqueducts not as 'users' but as associates or beneficiaries (RP-35). By considering themselves active part of the aqueducts, the associates developed a strong sense of belonging. The sense of belonging facilitated the appropriation of the information and its diffusion through different means to all citizens in the town. The agreement proposal also prompted other actions such as the legalisation of lands used by the

community aqueducts. For example, some aqueducts have initiated processes for legally acquiring/buying the land where are located the water sources and the aqueduct's machinery. The leader interviewed said that this represents not only the defence of water but also of the sovereignty over the territory. She adds that by defending the territory the community aqueducts are guaranteeing the permanence of the water in the population.

This case study is an example of deepening democratic practices through the encouragement of citizen participation in policy making. Based on Dagnino's (2005) view of citizenship in Latin America as a weapon for the 'widening of dominant conceptions of politics', Gaventa (2006) remarks that citizenship 'is not bestowed by the state, or by a set of legal norms, rather (or in addition), it is attained through practice, based on different identities and struggles around concrete issues' (p. 24). The promotion of the public-communitarian agreement was a process and practice of organisational development which implied the construction of new political identities and arenas. By implementing participatory communication practices, Giraguas challenged traditional spaces for discussion and policy-making. Giraguas managed to make these spaces more inclusive and redefined the relationship between community aqueducts and the state through a public-communitarian agreement.

5.3.2 RETACO: community aqueducts in a mega city

RETACO is the 'Red Territorial de Acueductos Comunitarios de Bogotá' (Territorial Network of Community Aqueducts of Bogotá). Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, has more than eight million inhabitants and consequently a high demand for water provision services. The main water provider is the public-owned municipal aqueduct 'Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá' (EAAB) which supplies urban neighbourhoods and some rural areas. RETACO's aqueducts manage water provision mostly in Bogotá's rural areas, which are now becoming more integrated into the urban context due to the expansion of the metropolitan area. As happened with other associations of community aqueducts, its creation was a response to the water demands of isolated communities in places the state ignored or could not reach. The campaign for the water referendum (Chapter 6) strengthened RETACO's organisational structure prompting the establishment of assemblies and sub-

committees and the use of legal mechanisms for participation, following the example of other aqueducts and environmental organisations.

5.3.2.1 Communities' participation in water policy-making

Their history and the social justice-oriented governance of water legitimise the work of the community aqueducts (RP 33). Their work is focused on solidarity and the defence of common goods. According to one of RETACO leaders and founders, one of the main forms of resistance of the community aqueducts to the market-oriented water policies has been the defence of the 'popular economy' (Fieldnotes 2012.09.05). This 'popular economy' emerges from the own resources and efforts and radically opposes conceptualising water as a commodity. Despite not being enterprises, the community aqueducts are economically sustainable and have existed for more than 30 years. This background of the community aqueducts has put them in a legitimate and strong position to make demands to the municipal authorities in protecting and better managing water in the city.

RETACO has led initiatives in water policy-making and has established a constructive dialogue with the municipality of Bogotá for the consideration of alternative proposals for water governance and protection. This section analyses the influence of RETACO on Bogotá's four-year development plan, which lays particular emphasis on water, its sustainable management and conservation. Various environmental, community and social organisations including RETACO started to lobby the local government authorities to draft and implement a municipal water policy which would take into consideration the work of community aqueducts, and highlight the importance of water for planning, urban development, health, and the economy of the city. The new municipal administration was receptive to the idea of giving water a special place in the city planning and development. Many of the community aqueducts were involved in the campaign for the water referendum and had established alliances with other organisations through their work in different areas of the capital city. This background helped them to better analyse the initiatives and proposals for new water policies.

Through assemblies, public audiences and workshops, RETACO explained to its associates the importance of the issue of water for the local development plan.

'Without the previous work of lobbying, mobilisation and awareness-raising, this would have never happened in this city' (RP 26). A member of an NGO accompanying the process described the experience in these terms:

A coordinated strategy of incidence was prepared, and it implied many levels of communication and coordination with the aqueducts to have a local impact but also to influence the city development plan. We managed to include in the plan the community's vision of management and conception of water. It was a strategy which involved a lot of communication through the telephone, meetings to share the information and strengthen the spaces for consultation that the city council have with the communities. (RP 27)

This case also exemplifies the power of local actions and local organisations to influence wider contexts. Quoting Alfaro (2012), 'participation should also mean dialogue, closeness and exchange; in this way it is possible that popular communication contributes to social transformation, making political projects a vital and organised relationship' (p. 24).

Analysing participation in contemporary debates on governance, Dagnino (2007) points at a 'perverse confluence' between two versions of this concept. One version considers participation as a prolongation of citizenship and the strengthening of democracy. The other version associates participation with shrinking responsibilities from the state and its retrieval from guaranteeing rights, or what Dagnino describes as turning the market into a surrogate for citizenship' (ibid, p. 553). Paradoxically, in both versions, an active and proactive civil society is required (ibid). RETACO displays characteristics of both versions of participation and governance. The work of RETACO has made the local government accountable, highlighting its obligations towards supporting community organisations. At the same time, the community aqueducts backed up their demands with proposals to reinforce the social tissue and the capacity of the localities to deal with water provision services.

The inclusion of water as a central element of environmental, urban and land planning in Bogotá's four-year development plan was an achievement for the community aqueducts and social organisations allied to them. Another result of the mobilisation process was to recover trust in citizen participation and its capacity to influence policy-making. For the research participant cited above, the attainment of spaces of participation was remarkable because such spaces had been traditionally

minimal due to the historical apathy and distrust in public institutions and public workers:

Grassroots organisations define their history of participation in the sentence 'I participate, You participate, We participate, They decide'. On this occasion, the input from the civil society was legitimised and included in a policy impacting the whole city. (RP 27)

In this case, a participatory policy-making experience was the consequence of citizens' engagement in debates and their own research about issues of collective concern. Another result of citizens' and community aqueducts' lobby and mobilisation was the decision of Bogotá's mayor to provide a minimum free quantity of water to cover the basic human needs of people in vulnerable neighbourhoods (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, Decree 064 of 2012) (López-Murcia, 2013, p. 120).

The role of citizens' participation in shaping Bogotá's development plan and prioritising water as a key policy issue resonates with the findings of the Citizenship DRC (2011) which show that citizens' engagement can enhance state responsiveness and accountability, create new forms of participation, and include new actors and issues in public spaces (p. 8). Free information flow is also necessary to ensure equal opportunities, build consensus, and demand government accountability (Narayan, 1999, p. 38). The different communication actions for sharing information and experiences on the development plan brought together communities and government authorities, and also urban and rural communities. What happened in Bogotá exemplifies the concept of 'mobilizing the state' referring to 'how activists within and outside the state have a crucial role to play in contributing to the state's capacity to implement policy decisions made by deliberative bodies' (Abers and Keck, 2009, in Romano, 2012a, p. 15). The results achieved in Bogotá demonstrate how communication actions from the grassroots and community media can be used to improve governance practices, monitor the functioning of local governments, and strengthen the social tissue.

5.3.2.2 Recovering memory and dialogue - collective and intergenerational work

In the context of community aqueducts, spoken word and dialogue are primary communication practices. Members of the aqueducts come mainly from rural areas

and talking is much more familiar to them than the use of digital technologies. On the importance of talking within struggles for social change, Vincent and Stackpool-Moore (2009) write:

Talking with others can prompt individuals to reflect on their own experiences and situation, and thereby gain new insights from looking at these in the light of the challenges faced by others...Talking also enables the sharing of enthusiasm, the potential emergence of shared commitment to a common cause, and is vital for sustaining networks of people. (p. 633-634)

For RETACO members, it was very important to create spaces for dialogue, to remember their history and to recover their memories through participatory communication activities. Many people served by RETACO's aqueducts came to the capital looking for better living opportunities, or because they were displaced from their land into other regions due to the armed conflict. Most of the founders of community-run water systems have a history of building neighbourhoods, settlements and communities from scratch. These experiences of collective action are part of the legacy passed from one generation to the other. In order to recover all these stories, some members of RETACO started a series of workshops on collective memory called 'Chocolatiando la memoria'²⁶ whereby people - mostly women - would tell stories and share their memories about their role within the community-run water systems. These workshops provided evidence on the principles that different aqueducts adopt in the administration and management. Also, it emerged that many people from the aqueducts still have a peasant culture; they are people living off the land and physically isolated from the urban centres. For RETACO has been a challenge to establish a fluid communication with people from these areas. One action initiated by RETACO to improve the communication was to provide some computers with internet in key points of these isolated areas. The main idea of this initiative was that aqueducts' leaders could learn how to use Skype in order to participate in RETACO's meetings without having to travel many hours to the capital. The use of Skype was also being promoted for meetings of the national network of community aqueducts.

²⁶ A translation of this expression would be something like 'telling stories with chocolate'. 'Chocolatear' is also an expression used to describe when someone is sentimental or emotional in a particular situation.

according to a female leader of RETACO (RP 33), the 'Chocolatiando la memoria' workshops also helped to recognise the contributions of other people to the community. 'Chocolatiando la memoria' was a space for bridging the gap between the elderly and the youth. The young people joined with innovative ideas and shared their knowledge of media and digital resources which were not very familiar to the elderly, who mostly came from a rural background. The young people recorded the activities through video and photos and then showed them during the meetings and seminars and uploaded them onto the Internet. These communication practices, and especially the way they affected the lives of the youth and community development, demonstrate a strengthening of democratic processes and citizens' engagement in the discussion of issues of public interest for the community. In their analysis of citizenship practices among young people, Enghel and Tufte (2011) remark that new media and information technologies have a great impact on the everyday life of young people. The use of new media and communication tools informs the process of formation of young people's identity (p. 264). In the case of the young people involved with RETACO, the exercise of citizenship was closely linked to the existence of participatory spaces and opportunities such as 'Chocolatiando la memoria'. These spaces met the necessary conditions for participation with equal opportunities for the members of the community. The outcomes of these meetings were not just a reconstruction of history, but also a way of identifying the social capital existing in the aqueducts. The communication instruments utilised by RETACO also enabled the diffusion of the messages to different publics, such as the young people and neighbouring communities.

'Chocolatiando la memoria' and other similar communication activities aimed at transforming not only the relationships between the water managers and the aqueducts' associates or beneficiaries but also the language used in water provision services. The idea of using particular expressions in the wording of the bills for water usage issued to the aqueduct's beneficiaries is part of this transformation of relationships and language. RETACO is developing a software product to facilitate the accounting, administrative and financial work of the aqueducts. The software will insert categories such as 'community work' and 'time' in the options for payment, which would never appear in a public or private company's water bill. When finished, the software could be used by community aqueducts in other regions. For RETACO,

the inclusion of new, non-monetary payment options in the water bill is a way of recognising the support provided by members. RETACO's emphasis on members' participation, beyond a traditional provider/customer relationship, and the recognition of alternative forms of payment for the water service demonstrate a process of constructing a new type of citizenship. No longer a type of 'neoliberal citizenship' (See Section 2.2.1 and Dagnino 2005a) based on monetary exchanges in a free market economy, but a citizenship built on citizen participation in defining rights and their commitment to achieve them through collective action.

The above-mentioned activities have given prominence to the role of women in the processes of water policy making and in the development of the community aqueducts. For the female RETACO leader interviewed (RP 33), when women assume a leadership role they gain more independence, engaging beyond the private life at home. In many cases women have been the ones who start building the aqueducts in order to obtain water provision. Women have had to struggle with the sexist peasant culture; a good number of the female leaders do not hold these positions for long because they have to take care of their families. However, the women who persisted in leadership positions within their communities have become role models especially for the younger generations. The female leader (RP 33) argued that in her own case, she had been involved in community work for more than 20 years. In her own experience, the economic independence made a big difference for an active involvement in social work. She just got her Sociology degree recently, along with her husband, and their thesis was on the sustainability of community aqueducts in Bogotá.

For RETACO it is important to keep developing their communication strategies: communication strategies do not only benefit their internal work, but have also permitted the inclusion of new actors and issues in external public spaces. Organising, classifying and sharing information have increased aqueduct users' civic and political knowledge, and have widened their capacity to have an influence on other decision and policy-making arenas. Along with participatory communication, the community media they have used combine traditional knowledge with new technologies of communication and information. The participatory practices of communication implemented by RETACO have been instrumental in increasing the relevance and visibility of water issues in the region and the country.

5.3.3 2012 National Conference of Community Aqueducts

This case study analyses the IV National Conference of community aqueducts held in Pasto, Nariño in July 2012, during which I conducted fieldwork for this thesis. These conferences²⁷ provide an opportunity for community aqueducts to build an agenda on the implementation of legal actions and reforms. Aqueducts from all over the country meet to discuss, plan and support their own work on community-oriented water governance. While campaigning for the water referendum, many of the community aqueducts got to know each other and started to share experiences and ideas on how to deal with some of the main challenges affecting them. In addition to the water referendum activities, seminars and forums were organised exclusively for the community aqueducts. In these spaces, the agenda was based on their priorities, needs, relationships and strengths. Moreover, one of the intentions was to constitute a national association of community aqueducts in different regions. After the national campaign promoting the water referendum the aqueducts continued to voice their concerns regarding water regulations and the presence of private operators in the water sector. The national conferences have been a continuation of that process of campaigning, networking and building organisational capacity.

The conferences of community aqueducts bring together communities' representatives from all over the country with the aim of sharing experiences and knowing more about similar processes of community water-management. Most of the people from community aqueducts have a rural background. Apart from sharing a special care for water, the sense of belonging to the land and the need to protect it are common elements amongst participants. When people from these organisations meet, they use similar terms, they share common concerns and they feel that they are in a supportive environment with peers. Despite the variety of regions participants come from, they share key cultural and social elements, such as being peasants and being community leaders²⁸.

²⁷ The first National Conference of Community Aqueducts was held in Medellín in 2006. Oscar Olivera, a renowned Bolivian water activist was at this conference and his speech and contributions were very encouraging for the people attending. Other conferences have been held in Buga, Valle del Cauca, 2010; in Cartagena, Bolívar, 2011; and in Pasto, Nariño, 2012.

²⁸ An example of the diversity of cultural identities and the sharing of experiences was a communal dinner organised by the network of aqueducts from North Bolívar, Caribbean Coast. Crossing the country from north to south, the network's members brought various packages filled with native vegetables and ingredients to make a traditional Caribbean dish. One night, after the activities of the

One of the main objectives of the IV Conference was to advance the consolidation of the National Network of Community Aqueducts²⁹ and its bylaws. The national conference was also an opportunity to showcase the recent progresses made by the associations of aqueducts in terms of their bylaws, technical improvements and strengthening of networks and alliances. The conference provided various spaces for informal dialogue and the sharing of experiences. The aqueducts showcased their work through a series of stalls with banners, photos, videos, leaflets and crafts. This was called the 'Fair of Experiences' and was accompanied by presentations explaining the main features of specific aqueducts: location, foundation, number of associates, community work, main problems, challenges and expectations from the conference. For the attendees, the conference was an opportunity to meet new people doing similar work. According to Servaes (2003), 'It is at the community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed, and interactions with other communities are elicited' (Cadiz, 2005, p. 146).

In their work on an 'Integrated Model for Measuring the Process and the Outcomes of Communication for Social Change', Figueroa et al. (2002) propose six dimensions of *sense of ownership*. These could be identified also in the conferences of the community aqueducts: 'importance of the issue or program to participants, sense of responsibility for the program, contribution to the program, benefit from the program, participants sense of ownership of either credit or blame in the program outcome and personal identification with the program' (p. 32). These dimensions reflect behaviours and procedures that facilitate dialogue and the development of communication actions directed towards the achievement of social change. In particular, members of community aqueducts feel responsible for the permanence and survival of their organisations in the face of water privatisation policies. For the representatives of community aqueducts attending the conference, it was crucial to understand water privatisation policies and their implications, and also to learn the bylaws of other associations of community aqueducts, and their different experiences and challenges in the management of water. During the conference they tried to gather all possible details to disseminate this information among their

conference, they invited everyone for a big feast. The banquet was a cultural encounter between people from all the Colombian regions.

²⁹ Facebook group: 'Red Nacional de Acueductos Comunitarios de Colombia'

own communities. Many aqueducts attending the conference brought material to share, such as booklets, leaflets, photographs, videos. Participants became replicators when they went back to their communities. They informed their colleagues about the new developments, agreements and concerns expressed in the conference. In this transmission of knowledge, participants effectively disseminated and adapted the messages using autochthonous methods and media to share the outcomes of the conferences. The conference was also an opportunity to reaffirm the priority of the aqueducts: to build on the strength of each member and put it at the service of the collective interests of the network.

The National Conference of community aqueducts represents both an 'invited' and 'popular' space for participation, based on the work of Cornwall (2004). Cornwall remarks that 'spaces in which citizens are invited to participate, as well as those they create for themselves, are never neutral. Infused with existing relations of power, interactions within them may come to reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and inequalities' (p. 81). The differences of opinions, backgrounds, political views and years of experiences sometimes may have an impact on the agreements made at the National Conferences of community aqueducts. However, these differences are put aside when it comes to contest together the common threats that the aqueducts face, particularly water privatisation policies.

The associations of community aqueducts and the National Conference are not exempted from the risk of reinforcing existing hierarchies and power relations. In fact, another national parallel process involving community aqueducts exists, promoted mainly by a left-wing political party. Many of the aqueducts attending the IV National Conference in Pasto expressed the view that they did not feel autonomous and comfortable when political parties took over their communal spaces for participation and discussion of water issues. Some people expressed the opinion that, if they wanted to join the process, they should do it as individuals or members of community aqueducts, but not as political parties or as their representatives.

The IV National Conference reproduced organisational and participatory forms already applied in other instances, for example the campaign for the water referendum, and constructed collectively by people from communities and different

regions. It was a participatory space that gave participants an opportunity to build networks and partnerships based on a sense of community collaboration and solidarity and on shared concerns, such as water privatisation policies and large-scale infrastructure projects.

5.4 Discussion

This chapter has provided an account of some practices of participatory communication and CFSC deployed by some Colombian community aqueducts in advocating for their organisational autonomy and the recognition of a communitarian ethos in managing water. The analysis of the nature, aims and composition of the community aqueducts sheds some light on the characteristics of new forms of grassroots citizenship and political participation.

Citizens' participation in local democratic practices has a longer history in community aqueducts than in other water struggles. The community aqueducts emerged from the collective work and objective of local communities, with the task of providing water and improve the living conditions of their members. Along with the water supply, other needs and objectives soon emerged, such as community development, political representation, fundraising for different projects, the preservation of identity and culture, and the defence of the territory. Perera (2014) comments on the work of community aqueducts in these terms:

Against the national modernizing forces that attempt to measure, quantify, aggregate, homogenize, and detach water from communal habits, users of community-led systems struggle for autonomous, place-based management and organization (p. 12)

The concerns raised by water privatisation policies have generated resistance in the community aqueducts. In the process of contesting these policies, community aqueducts have implemented participatory communication actions. These actions have helped to bring communities together, promote knowledge-sharing, and raise awareness about the importance of collective actions and common goals.

Krohling-Peruzzo's (2004, also in Sparks, 2007) typology of participation, in particular 'power participation', can be detected in the functioning of the community aqueducts (See Section 2.2.2). The experiences of community aqueducts show a degree of social control and organisation: these are central features of power

participation. In their cooperative-type of work, the community aqueducts are actively claiming their autonomy and expressing their communitarian ethos in water governance. They create their own structures for decision-making and representation. The goals and objectives are generally decided collectively. In achieving these goals and developing new projects for the communities, the aqueducts focus on their communication practices and interactions within members and with the external public. The reinforcing of communication strategies and the use of new communication and information technologies are a common feature of both Giraguas and RETACO.

The evidence from the case studies in this chapter also suggests that dialogue is a key communication and participation practice for the community aqueducts. Dialogue in participatory communication is developed around a common goal, with the objective of seeking solutions to common problems (Bessette, 2004). According to research participants (15, 16, 18, 33), dialogue has been a significant aspect of the water struggles and the activities of the community aqueducts because it brought people together and generated spaces of confidence and trust. By appropriating local and communal/collective spaces for participation, communities have become aware of their own capacity to overcome difficulties - working as collectives and setting common objectives. Many of the community aqueducts have become more autonomous and conscious of their own decisions and the implications of their communication and mobilisation actions. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) affirm that exchange processes based on dialogue generate new knowledge intending to address social situations that need to be improved.

The defence of the territory is another objective shared by the community aqueducts and associations presented in this chapter. In the Spanish language, 'territorio' is not limited to the physical connotation of a place, but includes a series of interactions and relationships around a space. Perera³⁰ (2012) recovers the definition of territory from the experience of the campaign for the water referendum

³⁰ Perera also retrieves the notion of the territory from Escobar's (2008, p. 146, in Perera, 2012, p. 250) analysis of the processes of organisation of black communities in the Colombian Pacific basin. She quotes 'territory came to be defined as the space of effective appropriation of ecosystems by a given community...', that is, 'it evokes spaces used to satisfy community needs and to bring about social and cultural development ... Thus defined, the territory cuts across several landscape units; more important, it embodies a community's life project' (p. 250). Arturo Escobar refers to the territory as a 'subaltern strategy of localization' (2008, p. 59, in Perera, 2012, p. 255).

in Colombia describing it as ‘an understanding of the socio-natural world, or the relation between land, resources, people, and wealth, radically different from what extractive industries re-enact’ (p. 249). One research participant expressed that, in the context of the community aqueducts, the territorial dimension helped to integrate different social actors:

it has helped to create a more complex vision of the water conflict, of its relationships with other conflicts [...] The territory is not a fixed or physical entity, but it condenses different forms of life. In the territory people construct their culture, have social, political and economic exchanges. (RP 27)

Another research participant from an association of community aqueducts in Antioquia, discussed the relationship between water and territory as follows:

water is linked to the territory; they cannot be separated. If there are conflicts over the water, that has an impact on the whole territory [...] the processes of association of the community aqueducts have promoted the sharing of knowledge and experiences [...] By unifying criteria of organisation and mobilisation, but preserving each one's identity we are constructing a national public policy on communitarian water governance, which looks closely at the territories. (RP 35)

Discussing the connection between community aqueducts and the territory, Perera (2014) highlights that users and beneficiaries of community aqueducts understand the community aqueducts ‘not as part of their place, but as their place’ (p. 12). She adds:

They relate to water as something they own collectively and know intimately because of their physical life experience in their own barrio or vereda (rural plot). Like an umbilical cord, water is a conduit to their territory and to others within it.

Community aqueducts and their associations have become mediators between the state and civil society with regard to water provision issues. The two community aqueducts associations analysed in this chapter are constantly updating themselves on the development of water policies, and continue to disseminate relevant information among their members through communication practices. Even though the state strongly controls many spaces of negotiation, the community aqueducts have autonomy at the local level, which allows them to protect and maintain some of their organisational practices. Despite not having the same level of resources of

large water service providers, community aqueducts have reached important goals through processes of mobilisation, networking and dialogue with other aqueducts and associations.

Based on Dagnino (2005a) conceptualisation of citizenship, community aqueducts could be depicted as active social subjects building forms of solidarity and collaboration that challenge neoliberal versions of citizenship according to which the meaning of solidarity is reduced to charity and private moral responsibility. Community aqueducts exercise active citizenship by assuming the responsibility of sustainable water management with a social justice ethos. Nonetheless, community aqueducts do face internal difficulties and contradictions. Perera (2014) summarises this reflection in the following terms:

Like all human communities, aqueducts' collective management is far from flaw- less. I heard complaints about the lack of participation in assemblies (the supposedly ultimate decision-making body), arbitrary decisions by the executive bodies, the need to strengthen penalizing mechanisms for uncaring users in the community who waste water or want to take more than their fair share, and users who do not pay what and when they should. But communal systems are about more than (imperfect) local self- management techniques. (p. 12)

Overall, the functioning and social aims of the community aqueducts are an example of civil society organisation and political intervention 'from below' in a country where political apathy and limits to participation are frequent. The exercise of active and participatory citizenship³¹ (Dagnino, 2007) by aqueducts' members finds expression not only in the defence and claiming of the human right to water, but also in the creation and proposal of new legislation and local resistance to large-scale infrastructure projects and displacement. The community aqueducts challenge traditional and bureaucratic routes to participation and create new 'democratic' spaces to identify their rights and to struggle for their recognition. Processes led by the community aqueducts also constitute a useful point of reference for other social and environmental movements defending water and natural common goods in Colombia.

³¹ In the context of social movements in Latin America during the 1970s, there was a redefinition of citizenship, which Dagnino describes as participatory citizenship: 'Citizenship came to prominence as a crucial weapon in the struggle against social and economic exclusion and inequality, and in broadening the prevailing conception of politics.' This definition reinforced the notion of 'a right to have rights,' 'this new definition of citizenship enabled new social subjects to identify what they considered to be their rights and to struggle for their recognition' (Dagnino, 2007, p. 550).

The case studies on the community aqueducts provide evidence of the global scale of their struggles. Water privatisation policies, promoted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Interamerican Development Bank have had a direct impact on the local and communitarian processes of water governance. In countries like Colombia, water privatisation policies combined with government programmes for water provision required high-standard technological and administrative standards and specifications from water providers, which could not be met by the community aqueducts. Through the defence of the popular economy and the collective work, community aqueducts have demonstrated their sustainability and capability to provide water to citizens. In addition, their work constitute an exercise of democracy and participation in spaces for decision making. The community aqueducts through the processes of association and sharing of experiences have contested the full implementation of these privatisation policies in their territories, reinstating the social-justice ethos in managing water.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings of the analysis of community aqueducts are significant in at least two respects. First, they reveal the conquering of spaces for participation and self-governance. Second, they show how autonomous initiatives such as the community aqueducts have redefined the relationship between citizens and the state. Demonstrating their ability to provide water services but also demanding support from the state to constantly improve, community aqueducts challenge the neoliberal view of citizenship that frames the relationship between citizen and state in terms of client/provider. Instead, community aqueducts claim their autonomy and the right to define the services they need, taking into account the diversity of their communities. They present a different type of social contract, refuting the universal standardised provision from the state and proposing themselves as co-producers of water services. The aqueducts have clear demands for the state: an enabling legal and policy environment and concrete support provided in the terms mutually agreed between communities and local authorities. The work towards constructing new state/citizens relationships represents a new form of citizenship, which managed to engage politically many citizens disengaged from other forms of politics due to the history of political violence (Chapter 4).

The chapter argues that community aqueducts have strengthened their organisational autonomy and communitarian ethos in managing water by introducing communication practices directed at the sharing of experiences with other aqueducts, the creation of associations and networks, and the active participation in water policy-making. Participatory communication practices have strengthened the social fabric at the local level and promoted democratic practices among citizens in the community aqueducts. Evidence from this chapter suggests that, through the implementation of participatory practices of communication and mobilisation, these community organisations are not only guaranteeing the sustainability of natural common goods such as water and land, but also the preservation of particular systems of social organisation and political intervention, as well as cultural heritage and traditional practices.

The case studies presented in this chapter further our understanding of communication approaches in the field of development studies and social movements theories. As regards their communication approaches community aqueducts have recognised the importance of reinforcing and finding innovative ways to organise and diffuse information. Concerns surrounding the environmental and social consequences of water privatisation policies or large-scale infrastructure projects have pushed community aqueducts to think of, and envision, alternative processes to better communicate internally and externally. They have called attention to the need of involving communities in policies on water services, land-use planning, and the development of their regions and territory.

Communication practices are at the core of the activities of community aqueducts and are oriented towards strengthening their local interactions and internal development. One of the premises of participatory communication is the ownership of, and control over, the communication process by local people (Cadiz, 2005). Also, the communication processes in these communities are characterised by a mutual learning approach between partners. Sharing experiences, a fundamental feature of communication for social change and empowerment, was central during the Conference of community aqueducts. As Cadiz mentions (2005) 'New approaches, best practices, and insights evolve out of the joint efforts of partners, thereby enriching the discipline grounded on praxis' (p. 150). The functioning of the

community aqueducts in the current Colombian socio-political context demonstrates an alternative way of doing politics from below able to open new spaces for democratic participation and deliberation on issues of public interest such as water. The participatory procedures of community aqueducts have become a way to challenge citizens' apathy and lack of engagement and to mobilise them in defending their territory and its resources.

The analysis of the case studies of community aqueducts stresses the redefinition of the relationship between community aqueducts and the state. Citizens are not passive clients of a state that provides services but they are negotiating and defining the nature of the polity by claiming their autonomous governance of water and asking the state for an enabling and supporting legal framework that responds to their specific community aspirations. The process of engaging in a dialogue with the state has transformed this relationship ultimately deepening democracy. In this context deepening democracy means that the citizens are able to contribute to set their rights, rather than passively receive them.

The achievements of the community aqueducts in terms of citizens' inclusion in policy and decision-making are the result of a long process of local organisation and learning communication strategies, legal mechanisms, administration, and mobilisation. Many of these processes were refined and learned while taking part in the campaign for the water referendum, which will be analysed in the next chapter.

6 Water in the public sphere: the campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010)



Tent for the collection of signatures in support of the water referendum, 2009.

Photo by Valeria Llano Arias

The water referendum campaign has been a fundamental milestone in the movement in defence of water in Colombia. The campaign did not only signalled the convergence of different water struggles into a massive popular mobilisation but also became a 'laboratory' for envisaging, testing, and consolidating new practices and understandings of citizen participation and democratic decision-making. Since the end of the campaign in 2010, the struggles and the organisational modes and committees formed during the referendum mobilisation have continued their work and have supported other causes for the defence of water and natural common goods such as the community aqueducts (chapter 5), and anti-mining and anti-dams campaigns (chapter 7). Through the analysis of the national campaign for the water referendum, this chapter discusses how the public communication practices of the Colombian water movement have succeeded in placing water at the centre of the

public sphere and, gradually, in obtaining the inclusion of civil society in decision and policy-making spaces. The analysis presented in this chapter is theoretically grounded in new social movement theories and public communication approaches. Before presenting and discussing the campaign for the referendum, the chapter looks at another campaign that was the antecedent of the water referendum. It then outlines some of the characteristics the Colombian water movement shares with new social movements, and discusses the relationship between public communication and social movements.

In the last two decades Colombia has experienced the implementation of water and public services privatisation policies and an increase in the number of mining and dams projects. In 2007, a civil society campaign emerged proposing a popular referendum to amend the Colombian constitution in order to legally recognise the human right to potable water and to guarantee a minimum amount of free water to cover basic human needs. The campaign also demanded that the government look after the public management of water; give recognition and support to community aqueducts; and confer special protection to ecosystems essential to the hydrological cycle. The Colombian campaign for the water referendum³² has been an important recent water struggle in Latin America. Moreover, it has been one of the few attempts to propose a referendum through a citizen initiative since the 1991 Constitution introduced this legal mechanism.

6.1 The campaign 'Water: a public good' (2005-2006)

In May 2005 Colombian Congress introduced the Law Project 365 for the planning and management of hydric resources. This law aimed to reinforce the application of Law 142 of 1994 (Public utilities and services), and the organisation of other policies and entities managing water in the country. According to the National Environmental Forum,³³ the Water Law Project did not tackle clearly the processes of globalisation

³² From nine national referendums proposed in Colombia since 1991, just three of them advanced until the second phase of the collection of signatures (5*100 of the electoral census). Coincidentally, the campaigns for these three referendums were held simultaneously. The three referendums were (1) to propose a re-election of president Álvaro Uribe Vélez for a third term, (2) the water referendum, (3) life-sentence for child rapists. As regards the amount of signature collected, the water referendum had the second highest number, after the referendum for the president's re-election. None of these referendums was approved in Congress discussions <http://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Historico-de-referendos-.html>

³³ The National Environmental Forum (Foro Nacional Ambiental) is a permanent inter-agency partnership that provides a public stage for reflection, discussion and analysis in the formulation,

and commerce that can have an influence on water management in Colombia (Foro-Nacional-Ambiental, 2005). Environmentalists such as Márquez (2012) argued that this project favoured privatisation of the aqueduct and sewage services and posed a threat to water sources since it could grant long-term private concessions for water provision.

In 2005, a civil society campaign, called 'Water: a Public Good', emerged to oppose Law Project 365 of 2005. Initiated by Ecofondo, an environmental umbrella organisation, the campaign brought together initiatives from all around the country with the intention to propose public policies on water developed by different social and environmental organisations (Mira, 2006). One of the main objectives of the campaign was to promote civil society participation in the defence of water and environmental issues. Civic participation was exercised mainly by community organisations which had experience in the topics of the campaign and represented the interests of local communities (Colmenares-Faccini, 2005). The campaign also aimed to promote a sustainable development model for the different Colombian regions based on the defence of biodiversity, the environment, and human health. Another goal was to strengthen the dissemination of information and to stimulate the mobilisation of citizens around the aims of the campaign, through awareness-raising and promoting their active role in the resolution of the water conflicts.

The campaign was carried out through three phases: research, socialisation, and mobilisation (Colmenares-Faccini, 2005). The research phase was about the construction of case studies representing the main water conflicts in the regions. Three different axes were taken into account for the case studies: the situation of the hydrological ecosystems, agriculture, and the environmental conflicts in urban centres. The socialisation phase entailed the elaboration of proposals for public policies on water. These proposals were agreed through participatory workshops in the different regions during which the consequences of the water policies responsible for the crisis were presented. The report developed by the campaign through participatory sessions and workshops selected a representative case study for each region, highlighting the main conflicts and potential solutions. The

mobilisation phase³⁴ focused on the dissemination and promotion of the agreements and proposals made in the participatory workshops among the wider public. During this phase, the social movements and initiatives in defence of water were mapped and identified as well (Colmenares-Faccini, 2005).

The campaign collected 44,475 signatures asking for the cancellation of the Law Project 365 of 2005, which resulted in its temporary withdrawal (Márquez-Valderrama, 2012). However, this did not mean that the campaign had won because the legislative project could be modified and presented again. For this reason, many organisations supporting the campaign proposed to take more radical action. On February 2007, a group of 60 organisations supporting the water campaign met at the Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman Office) to constitute a committee for the promotion of a referendum to include a series of articles in the National Constitution guaranteeing the human right to water and its protection.

6.2 Water movement: a 'New Social Movement'?

This section complements the theoretical background presented in Chapter 2 fleshing out the relationship between New Social Movement (NSM) theories and the Colombian water movement and presenting further theoretical considerations needed to analyse the national campaign for the referendum. In recent years Latin American research on social movements has used NSM theories to explain most of the social phenomena happening in the continent. As discussed in Chapter 2, the water movement in Colombia shares some of the characteristics associated with NSMs, in particular Melucci's ideas on collective identity and the use of language in contemporary social movements.

Riechmann and Fernández-Buey (1995, in Rodríguez-Urbe, 2011, p. 138-139) propose a list of eight features to define NSMs, which also serve to differentiate them from traditional social movements. Out of these eight features, this chapter focuses on the six that are most relevant to the analysis of the Colombian water movement and the campaign for the water referendum. (1) NSMs propose

³⁴ The Italian environmental NGO 'Legambiente' gave valuable advice to the campaign. Their familiarity and experience of dealing with environmental campaigns and environmental citizenship in Italy was a valuable input. The support of Legambiente was also important for the recognition of the Colombian campaign internationally. The relationship with Legambiente was further consolidated, when both Italy and Colombia were proposing Referendums - for the recognition of water as a human right in Colombia, and as a common good in Italy.

alternatives to processes of industrialisation, centralisation, institutionalisation. (2) They have a heterogeneous composition, in which professionals in social and cultural services, as well as middle class people, are predominant. (3) Their actions are described as 'Think globally, act locally'. (4) The structure of NSMs is decentralised and without hierarchy; they function as networks with a low degree of institutionalisation. (5) NSMs politicise daily life and private spaces with the intention of developing new forms of coexistence, production and consumption. (6) NSMs deploy non-conventional methods for collective action such as passive resistance, direct actions with symbolic elements, and mass protests with recreational components (p. 139). These features of NSMs can also be identified in the campaign for the water referendum. For instance, the campaign proposed new forms, more inclusive and participatory, of making politics; it was in itself a democratic exercise in learning mechanisms for citizen participation in policy and decision-making. As regards its composition, the water campaign managed to bring together numerous civil society organisations and citizens with diverse social backgrounds, status, and political orientation. The nature of the issue at stake, the right to water, was a unifying element for all these social sectors. To encourage citizen's awareness the campaign implemented communication and mobilisation strategies that harnessed local creativity to deliver local actions and initiatives. The campaign for the water referendum was inspired and backed up by other international initiatives such as the Bolivian water war (2000), the Uruguayan water plebiscite (2004) and the Italian water referendum for water as common good (2009-2011).

The defence and protection of the environment, including water, is no longer a concern shared exclusively by post-materialist societies in industrialised countries. Water has become a key issue in developing countries, where the defence and protection of the environment has been directly linked with communities' survival and the defence of livelihoods (Arrojo-Agudo, 2009, Martínez Alier, 2002). Environmental conflicts in the global 'South' deal 'with the poor trying to retain under their control the environmental resources and services they need for livelihood, and which are threatened by state takeover or by the advance of the generalized market system' (Martínez Alier, 2002, p. 40). The case studies discussed in chapter 7 vividly illustrate the challenges faced by civil society actors and communities involved in environmental conflicts (mining, dams projects) and the impact that

large-scale projects have on water sources, forests, biodiversity, as well as on people's livelihoods, identity and right to the territory. Environmentalism in Colombia has brought together a diversity of individuals, groups, organisations and collectives who, from different perspectives, fight for the defence of natural common goods and human quality of life (Tobasura, 2004). Through symbolic and political actions, environmental movements in Colombia have opposed and mobilised against large-scale infrastructure projects that put water and natural resources at risk (Tarazona-Pedraza, 2010).

6.3 Public communication and social movements

Studies on the relationship between social movements, media and communication have increased in the last two decades (Castells, 1983, 2000, 2009, Downing, 2001, Rincón, 2001, León et al., 2005, Carroll and Hackett, 2006, Cremona, 2007). This new interest has been fostered by the use of new information and communication technologies by social movements as well as the impact of social movements' actions on policy-making. Some international examples of this relationship are, for instance, the use of the Internet by the Zapatistas³⁵ since 1994, the communication strategies of the World Social Forums (Stephansen, 2011), the online forums and mobilisation planning by anti-mining movements in Latin America. According to Sádaba (2004, in León et al., 2005) 'the irruption of new technologies in social movements has set a new form of political existence for many activists and collective actions in a globalised world' (p. 26). Communication has been recognised as a strategic space for dispute (León et al., 2005); many initiatives, such as alternative media and media observatories, have multiplied, particularly in Latin America (ibid). In the past decade there has been a rapid development in communication actions by social organisations and social movements in Colombia. In the campaign for the water referendum, the communication strategy collectively constructed by the actors involved was crucial to define tactics and actions. On the

³⁵ The Indigenous people of Chiapas, Mexico, (who called themselves 'Zapatistas' in honour of Emiliano Zapata, a Mexican Independence leader) started, on 1 January 1994, their struggle for democratic rights, land and jobs against the Mexican federal government and its neoliberal policies (Servaes and Jie, 2002). The Zapatistas implemented a communication strategy using the internet, alternative and radical media to spread their cause and get international support. Manuel Castells referred to their struggle as 'the first informational guerrilla movement' (2004, p. 82, in Chadwick, 2006, p. 125)

importance of communication in social movements, Rodríguez et al. (2014) recognise that:

Communication is required for social movements to gain momentum and galvanize collective political action, but this generally implies a multiplicity of forms of communication, from the performative communication of bodies in the street to the disembodied informational act of texting a meeting time and place (p. 154).

Public communication actions are performed in the public sphere, which, according to Habermas is:

a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of the freedom of assembly and association and freedom to access and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means of transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. (Habermas, 1964 (1979), p. 198)

Another definition of public sphere which is useful to analyse the water movement and the campaign for the water referendum is the one Cox (2012) provides in his work *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*:

The public sphere is most often the arena in which popular, passionate, and democratic communication occurs, as well as reasoned or technical discourse. Such a view of the public sphere acknowledges the diverse voices and styles that characterize a robust, participatory democracy. (p. 26)

The public sphere is the arena where public communication actions performed by social movements take place. For McQuail (1992) public communication 'refers to the intricate web of informational, expressive and solidaristic transactions which take place in the public sphere of any society' (p. 2). These transactions foster collaboration, strengthen individuals' and communities' resolve, and encourage them to intervene in collective issues and in political processes within the public sphere (ibid). Public communication comprises the collective representations and

shared expressions of people characterizing their multiple interactions in society (Galvis-Ortiz, 2005). Public communication approaches are useful to understand how citizens engaged with the campaign for the referendum and to analyse the multiple representations of their concerns and ideas.

For citizens to intervene in collective issues and represent their realities they must be able to access the communicative spaces where policy and decision-making are discussed (Dahlgren, 2009). For Dahlgren, citizens' engagement in politics involves some kind of passion and motivation. In the case of the campaign for the water referendum, supporters had to deal with the political apathy characterising many sectors of Colombian society (See Chapter 2, section 2.2.1). In trying to overcome this apathy, one of the first objectives of the communication strategy of the campaign was to bring together supporters and volunteers in the planning and development of the campaign's actions. The campaign for the water referendum sent a message of trust in the power of collective action to resolve issues of public concern, such as the management of water and the future of natural common goods. The strategy of the campaign included the use of dynamic tactics to spread messages including mobilisation events rich in performative and artistic elements, and tours in isolated zones of the country.

Through its public communication practices, the campaign for the water referendum reinforced the notion of the 'public', which according to Pécault (2001) is related to the recognition of similarity among all members of society, as well as the visibility of relevant debates in a space not organised by the state (in Botero-Montoya, 2006b, p. 13). In order to recover the notion of the 'public' and the public sphere, social movements are required to reinvent, create and appropriate spaces for citizens' democratic participation. As Dahlgren (2009) mentions:

For democracy to happen, citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other. They need access to each other to develop their collective political efforts, and contexts in which they can act together. Citizens also must be able to contact those who represent them, and to enter into the communicative spaces where policy and decision-making are discussed (p. 114).

The communication strategy of the campaign for the water referendum propitiated multiple participatory and communicative spaces to encourage debates on water

issues. Different types of media and communication instruments assisted the process of diffusing information and constructing representations. The expansion of communicative spaces for civic encounters permitted the exercise of active citizenship, generating opportunities for grassroots and popular knowledge-sharing, and producing alternatives to commercial mainstream media representations of social movements and environmental issues.

6.4 The campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010)

The proposal of holding a water referendum was an ambitious initiative, considering the political apathy and disbelief of many citizens in the effectiveness of mechanisms of citizen participation. Moreover, since one of the stages in the process of obtaining a constitutional referendum is the requirement that the proposal is passed by Congress, Congress members still had the power to overturn the proposal signed by millions of citizens through a long process of campaigning. Another challenge consisted in the fact that some sectors in Colombia were not prepared to, or did not agree with, the notion of a human right to water. The main reasons behind this was that recognising water as a human right would have implications for the government and public utilities companies, in effect obliging them to provide water to all citizens, including those living in isolated places. Despite these challenges, for many activists and supporters the campaign for the water referendum was an exercise of democracy, citizen participation, and an opportunity to learn about the legal processes regulating citizen participation mechanisms. In order to reach diverse sectors of civil society, the campaign put into practice various strategies (legal, political, communication, education and mobilisation). The strategies were designed collaboratively, and through a consensus-based methodology, by different organisations and supporters of the campaign who formed a National Committee in Defence of Water and Life (Comité Nacional en Defensa del Agua y de la Vida or CNDAV). The committee took its name from the movement that ejected the Bechtel Corporation from Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000 (Conant, 2009). Simultaneously, regional committees were established, comprising environmentalist NGOs, schools, trade unions, women's associations, and community aqueducts, among others.

To obtain citizens' support and encourage participation in various actions, the campaign worked to raise the water issue to a higher status in the public sphere. It

is in the public sphere that a particular discourse – in this case ‘water as a common good’ – looks for consensus to persuade and motivate people to take collective action (Galvis-Ortiz, 2005). Making water a central issue in the public sphere raised citizens' support and response to the initiative. The association of water with other important issues – such as sanitation, health, housing, education, the economy and different forms of control over natural common goods – was another strategy adopted by the campaign to win ordinary citizens' support for the referendum proposal.

A communications officer of the campaign I interviewed in 2011 for a different project argued that it was possible to raise awareness among citizens by making them part of the water situation, and utilising simple, inclusive, and creative messages (Llano-Arias, 2011). For him, citizens' support of the referendum proposal was achieved thanks to the delivery of clear and updated information about water in Colombia. He added that there was a need to generate a new discourse and language, more positive and proactive, that could break the predominant idea that such environmental and social issues only affect a part of the population (ibid). Therefore, the participatory and public communication approaches of the campaign had an impact on citizen agency to the extent that they inspired actions that reflected each context and the specific needs of the population.

The public and participatory communication strategy of the referendum intended to articulate new and existing actions with the aim of diffusing the message and proposal of the referendum to all possible social groups and territories of Colombia. However, this communication strategy encountered different challenges in its implementation. According to the national coordinator of the campaign, one of the major challenges was the need to decentralise its organisational structure and enhance actions and participation at local level, guaranteeing the flow of information and timely feedback from different communities. To tackle this issue, the campaign mapped out the existing local communication actions and created a guiding framework to be adapted by the communities according to their own context.

The communication strategy for the water referendum was collectively designed through a participatory exercise based on contributions from different partner organisations and civil society; it provided a general framework of objectives,

actions, and procedures in terms of production of information, support of political education projects, and the campaign's widespread diffusion. An external advisor from a renowned public university was brought in to help with the design and planning phase, during which a diagnosis³⁶ was made to map the state of the communication processes in different regions of Colombia. The outcome of the diagnosis provided data on the communication and media resources available, the type of messages being sent, the main features of the target population, and the level of awareness and knowledge of the referendum and its implications.

The first diagnosis of communication activities also emphasised the importance of Colombian social and cultural diversity: it found that people were adapting the messages of the campaign to local contexts, reflecting on their own specific social and water issues. The regions had their own strategies, and were autonomous in the development of campaign actions, yet there were unifying guidelines to follow concerning the political direction of the referendum. The communication strategy was accompanied by communication training, especially in remote places where the spreading of information was difficult. The training sessions allowed capacity-building and increased awareness of the role that different groups may play in a democratic initiative such as a referendum.

6.4.1.1 The campaign for the water referendum and the media

Another central objective of the campaign was to enter the agenda of mainstream and alternative media. Media support – especially from national newspapers, television channels and radio stations – would guarantee that information about the referendum's initiative and the water situation in Colombia would reach a wider audience. Working hand-in-hand with alternative and community media was considered a priority because they offered channels to disseminate the messages through in-depth discussions, research, and other creative means. Moreover, alternative and community media allowed the involvement of communities and supporters of the referendum in the production of media content.³⁷ Gómez (2009)

³⁶ Different organisations carrying out activities in support of the referendum campaign received a questionnaire in which they were asked about the different communication and mobilisation actions they were implementing. Their feedback was the basis upon which the diagnosis of communication strategies of the water referendum was elaborated.

³⁷ The campaign of the water referendum had more coverage in alternative media than in mainstream media. The most active of these alternative media were university radio stations and newspapers,

argues that, although media have an important role and social responsibility in the building of a pacific, democratic and sovereign nation, the campaign for the water referendum needed to challenge the idea that specific demands are valid and legitimate only if commercial media³⁸ broadcast them. The campaign did not have the monetary resources to publicise in the mainstream media (Gómez-Bustos, 2012). This was one of the reasons the campaign was unable to reach a wider number of citizens whose main source of information is mass media. Limited mass media coverage had an impact on the diffusion of the campaign, especially during the last phase of Congress discussions. Gómez-Bustos (2012) remarks that these limitations forced the National Committee in Defence of Water and Life to incorporate low-cost, creative communication elements in mobilisations and virtual networks, and also to use a more inclusive and clear language.

Activists interviewed for this research expressed the difficulties they faced in accessing mainstream media for the campaign's diffusion. While the campaign for the water referendum was raising awareness on the situation and collecting signatures, there was no in-depth coverage in the media for a very long time. The campaign's communication officers in different cities, including myself, were personally calling journalists and sending them material. In this regard, the collaboration of activists' journalist friends or contacts working in the media was important. The presence of the water issue in the media was the result of these personal relationships rather than real interest on the part of mainstream media outlets. For Gómez (2009), the national communication officer of the campaign, the presence of the water referendum in mainstream media was due to the interest of individual journalists rather than editors' choice. According to various leaders of the campaign, the marginalisation of the water referendum from the agenda of certain mainstream media (private TV channels and newspapers) was due to different

indigenous media, community radio. Some examples are: Javeriana Estéreo, UD Estéreo, UN Radio, Univalle Estéreo; and websites such as: Actualidad Étnica, Ecoportal, La Silla Vacía, Uniandinas, Citará (Chocó), Radiomundo Real. (From, Gómez.Bustos, 2012, p. 64).

³⁸ The campaign had more coverage in radio and internet than in television. Some of the mainstream media that published information on the water referendum were: Radio Súper, Melodía y Todelar, news agencies such as Colprensa, Sistema de Comunicación para la Paz, SIPAZ, Indymedia, IPS, Servindi, national media such as El Espectador, Agenda CMI, Arcadia, El Tiempo, Portafolio, El Nuevo Siglo, Semana, Cromos, Catorce 6, Desde Abajo, Le Monde, Caracol TV and Radio, RCN TV and radio, City TV, Teleantioquia, Noticias Uno, Telmex, BBC; websites such as El Tiempo, El Espectador and La W (From Gómez, 2009, p. 324-330).

political and economic interests, and to the fact that two other referendum proposals were being discussed simultaneously, in the media and in Congress: one to allow a third consecutive mandate for the President, – a hot political issue due to the coming to an end of the second mandate of Álvaro Uribe-Vélez, the president in office (2002-2010) – and the other to introduce life sentences for child rapists. In most mainstream media, the water referendum was presented along with the other two, without providing in-depth coverage of the different actions and activities.

The mainstream media panorama in Colombia is not much different from that of other countries where private media exercise a powerful control over the public agenda. Mejía-Quintana (2011) remarks that mainstream media in Colombia (press, radio, television) propitiate a 'parochial culture' oriented towards authoritarianism instead of democracy. He adds that media encourage 'values' such as intolerance and exclusion rather than tolerance, inclusion and democratic pluralism.

The media in Colombia do not meet the social function of ensuring a comprehensive, impartial and balanced handling of the information in order to create in its audience sufficiently enlightened fluxes of public opinion that are not overtaken by actors and interest groups who distort citizens' self-judgments and do not allow a democratic qualification of Colombian political culture in order to overcome the tensions that tend to assume positions of power and authoritarian solutions.³⁹ (ibid, p. 82)

In 2001, one of the most influential Colombian media critics and academic, Omar Rincón (2001), published a journal article containing a harsh critique of Colombian society and media. He wrote that when a society like the Colombian one is trying to survive, there is little time to think and engage in social causes. He added that, 'if the basic needs are not satisfied, how can we pretend to attend and promote the spiritual and democratic needs?' (p. 14). He argued that people were not feeling part of the public sphere and did not exercise their citizenship. He suggested that both media and social movements should respond to the need of moving beyond being merely inhabitants to become active citizens.

³⁹ Own translation.

6.4.2 The Campaign for the water referendum as an exercise of democracy

The process through which citizens in Colombia can demand a referendum requires collecting supporting signatures in two phases. The water movement collected more than 3 million signatures during the two phases, representing almost 10% of the total electoral census of the country. The last set of signatures was for the Referendum to be included in Congress debates. During the debates there were numerous absences from Congress and many discussions were postponed. The discussions also coincided with the advent of the presidential elections and with the other two Referendums. On 18 May 2010 the Referendum was rejected by the Chamber of Representatives because it did not reach the minimum votes required to be approved. Supporters of the initiative were not surprised by the decision, considering the lack of support shown by many parliamentarians, and the prevalence of other political and economic interests in the agenda of major parties.⁴⁰ In a press release spokespersons for the campaign blamed the Colombian Congress for its anti-democratic attitudes, which ignored citizen participation.

However, according to the former spokesperson of the committee of promoters of the referendum, citizen participation and people's attitude in relation to water, land and natural common goods have been transformed since the campaign for the water referendum (RP 31). Citizens' increased interest in such issues is also due to the multiple threats to water and natural common goods all around the country. Activists interviewed for this research commented that despite the fact that the referendum proposal was not approved in Parliament, civil society awareness and mobilisation expanded their scope (RP 29, 40, 43). This is reflected in the recent implementation of campaigns supporting community aqueducts, and opposing mining and dams projects.

Different research participants agreed that the water referendum was an exercise of democracy. A research participant argued that it was not just a campaign; it was a political act with legal implications that managed to gather different social actors around the issue of water (RP 5). Speaking about his experience in the referendum, a Colombian environmentalist from Bogotá, quoted in Perera (2012), said: 'Besides

⁴⁰ According to Gómez-Bustos (2012) the support by the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA) (an opposition left-wing party) to the water referendum proposal, had an impact in the cancellation of the project in Congress. The PDA opposed the re-election referendum, which was supported by the majority of the congress represented in President Uribe's party.

the legal change, which does not exhaust our struggle, the referendum is ultimately a pedagogic exercise, an exercise of direct democracy, and an exercise of the territories' (p. 242). The referendum became a popular citizens' response to the adverse policies and conditions which threaten people's right to water (Colmenares, 2009). The central feature of the communication strategies adopted by the campaign involved having a direct encounter with citizens and including their perspectives in future actions. The campaign for the referendum managed to promote the use of a legal mechanism of citizen participation which, since its conception in 1991, had been rarely used in the context of water related issues. It was a demand to respect a legal, democratic instrument and the peoples' will.

6.4.3 Communication and mobilisation activities

The campaign for the water referendum carried out communication and mobilisation actions to inform citizens, raise awareness, and get support. The reference to these actions provides a comprehensive account of public communication in the context of a social movement.

The 'National Assembly in Defence of Water and Life'. The national assembly was the main collective decision-making body of the campaign. The assembly acted as a platform where citizens and supporters could present and discuss different opinions and views about the same topic and reach decisions by consensus. Groups from each region had to prepare in advance materials and reports to be shared with participants. The assembly stressed the importance of discussing issues in thematic committees, and the inclusion of spaces for education and updating. Photo exhibitions, theatre performances, and other artistic representations complemented the activities of the assembly. The participatory governance model of the assembly influenced the evolution of the campaign for the water referendum and the creation of internal democratic spaces. Participants replicated the model of the assembly in their own regions, linking the local agenda to the national situation.

The Collection of Signatures. The collection of signatures was the longest and one of the most important phases of the campaign for the water referendum. The

campaign needed to collect signatures in two phases.⁴¹ The collection of signatures allowed supporters and activists to establish direct contact with the general public and diffuse the message about the water referendum. The collection of signatures was an example of deepening democracy and making politics in the streets: it generated public debates and allowed the sharing of ideas and visions on water governance across different regions. In the phases of the collection of signatures, the public and participatory communication strategies focused on encouraging citizens to take an active role in deciding vital issues such as the protection and management of water and sanitation services. Collection points in public spaces of town centres became forums for group discussions among citizens interested in signing or in receiving more information about the aims of the referendum (Llano-Arias, 2011). These street sessions for the collection of signatures permitted a direct contact with citizens, which revealed many people's interest in environmental issues (Colmenares, 2009). Some activists acknowledged that there was a positive response because people had the opportunity to fully understand the issue of water through a process of direct engagement with other citizens. People from the cities and the countryside shared the same concerns, and many campaign actions brought the urban and the rural closer.

Mobilisations/rallies were communication actions combining political, cultural and educational activities in public spaces. They were mostly carnival-themed activities inviting people to join and enjoy the defence of water. The mobilisations in the campaign for the water referendum were characterised by symbolic and recreational elements that attracted the attention and interest of different social actors. A research participant in Bogotá commented that mobilisations were a powerful tool in building up new conceptions of citizenship that defy the traditional position in which the citizen takes distance from the public sphere and delegates to politicians (RP 27).

⁴¹ The first phase for the collection of signatures was to register the initiative (5*1000 of the electoral census = around 136,000 signatures in 2007); the second phase was for the initiative to be discussed in Congress (5*100 of the electoral census = 1,360,000 in 2009, to be collected in a period of six months). In the first phase, the movement collected 231,081 signatures. In the second phase the number of signatures was 2,060,922 Source: <http://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Historico-de-referendos-.html> (Accessed August 2014).

Boat trips. Besides the collection of more than two million signatures, boat trips along the most important Colombian rivers⁴² were some of the most ambitious endeavours of the campaign for the water referendum. These tours allowed for closer encounters with the territories and the needs of the inhabitants. The majority of them had world-renowned activists⁴³ on board who 'gave visibility and increased legitimacy to the Colombian campaign' (Perera, 2012, p. 247). Furthermore boat trips denounced the poor conditions of the aquatic ecosystems of the rivers and the worrying situation of millions of coastal residents. Many inhabitants of the towns visited by activists welcomed the campaign for the water referendum and participated in the activities which were proposed following focus group discussions with members of local communities (Llano-Arias, 2011). As a result, many citizens in the coastal towns created local committees, which were not only in charge of promoting the water referendum, but also of analysing the water and sanitation situation in the community/region, developing strategies and alliances, and seeking solutions.

Forums and Seminars embodied the education component of the campaign. They provided specialised information to communities and citizens. Different forums were organised throughout the four-year long campaign. Many of them were facilitated by international speakers and academics⁴⁴ who also visited affected communities and attended parliamentary debates. Most of the outcomes from these seminars were published and disseminated through different media, becoming a valuable resource for further declarations and proposals.

Publications.⁴⁵ The campaign issued numerous publications in the form of bulletins, press-releases, and booklets providing information on water issues concerning the

⁴² Magdalena, Amazonas, Atrato, Cauca, Meta, Sinú and Bogotá

⁴³ Some of these special international guests were Uruguayan unionist Adriana Marquisio, Bolivian worker Oscar Olivera, Spanish hydrologist Martínez Gil and Canadian UN consultant Maude Barlow (Perera, 2012, p. 247).

⁴⁴ For example: Maude Barlow (Canada), Oscar Olivera (Bolivia), Ann Le Strat (France), Javier Martínez-Gil (Spain), Pedro Arrojo-Agudo (Spain), Adriana Marquisio (Uruguay), Claudia Campero (Mexico).

⁴⁵ Apart from the printed publications, a music CD was also launched. It was called 'Agua: cantos para que fluya' (Water, songs for it to flow) and it was a compilation of songs donated by national and international artists. The CD cover was designed and donated by the indigenous artist Benjamin Jacanamijoy. The selling of the CDs and some T-shirts with the campaign logo helped to finance the costs of the collection of signatures.

country in general and specific regions. Two books were also published: *Colombia, ¿un futuro sin agua?* (Colombia, a future without water?) and *Dos millones de firmas por el agua* (Two million signatures for water). Experts and activists contributed to these publications with research-based material; articles tackled water issues from technical, legal, cultural, political, and international perspectives.

Congress debates. The campaign for the water referendum was a grounding phase for the discussion in Congress, but the ever changing and controversial political arena in Congress affected different procedures of the campaign, making it vulnerable. A campaign leader explained that during the discussions in Congress the diffusion of information among supporters was not as frequent and complete as before (Llano-Arias, 2011). Furthermore, there was a lack of clarity regarding the possible alternatives to Congress discussions. The discussion in Congress was relevant for understanding the scope of citizens' participation in democratic actions.

Krohling-Peruzzo's (2004, also in Sparks, 2007) *limited* and *manipulated* participation types are useful for explaining the debates on the water referendum in Congress. *Limited participation* is characteristic of 'social structures in which those in dominant positions determine the overall goals, but permit some discussion of proposals' (in Sparks, 2007, p. 70); *manipulated participation* allows for a certain level of discussion and decision-making but controls, to some extent, the means of opinion formation in order to define specific outcomes (ibid). These definitions describe the discussion of the water referendum proposal in Congress. Although some opportunities were given in Congress to explain and discuss the proposal, the influence of some political parties opposing the referendum had a decisive impact in causing its rejection (Gómez-Bustos, 2012). The position of these parties was clear even before water activists had a chance to speak in Congress. The Parliamentary debates were the final phase in the campaign for the referendum and citizens could not intervene directly. The limited access to Congress discussions, the specialised language used, and the complex relationships established between the promoters, the people and the congress representatives were distant to many activists and supporters. Despite the referendum proposal being rejected in Congress, this phase was not seen as the final one by many citizens.

6.4.4 The post water referendum situation

In her article 'From Cochabamba to Colombia: Travelling Repertoires in Latin American Water Struggles', Verónica Perera (2012) describes her arrival in Bogotá a couple of weeks after the Congress rejected the water referendum. While she thought she would find a weakened movement, she discovered that activists were energetic and positive. Somehow the Congress' rejection was not a surprise for many activists supporting the referendum. The whole process of the initiative was a school for learning on legal issues, citizens' participation, lobbying, and mobilisation to the extent that the organisational structure of the campaign for the water referendum has been replicated in other recent water struggles (Chapter 5 Community aqueducts, Chapter 7 anti-mining and dams struggles). According to an environmental leader from Bogotá (RP 43), three components of the water movements were strengthened by the water referendum process. These were anti-mining and anti-dam struggles (Ríos Vivos) (Chapter 7), and the defence of Community aqueducts (Chapter 5). The structure developed by the water referendum campaign no longer exists but there have been occasions in which the actors who supported the referendum joined forces, e.g. during the struggle against mining in Santurbán (Chapter 7). Harris and Roa-García (2013) remark that the Colombian water referendum achieved some distinct objectives to the ones it originally proposed. For instance, it revealed the problems linked to private sector provision in the water sector, it fostered the visibility and recognition of community aqueducts and brought attention to the quality of life and challenges faced by middle income and impoverished Colombians (ibid).

Rafael Colmenares, the spokesperson of the committee of promoters of the water referendum, admitted that, despite the efforts of building a more horizontal communication structure amongst social actors in the campaign, there were still issues of diversity, internal conflicts, and fear of authoritarianism within the campaign (Colmenares, 2009). Another campaign advisor felt that in the end, the water referendum was unable to maintain the confluence of organisations and to respond to other relevant water issues occurring in Colombia. The phase following Congress' rejection witnessed a split as a result of internal conflicts and the weakening of a common objective. For Colmenares, this new phase was a 'natural' evolution for the referendum campaign. As in other social movements, splits and

conflicts of interest are consequences of internal tensions and/or adverse external conditions (RP 31).

Colmenares (2010) affirms that an important opportunity for a public debate was lost, and that the example of the water referendum demonstrated Congress' lack of independence from the executive power. However, Colmenares also remarks that the three simultaneous Referendum proposals in 2009 laid an important foundation for the future utilisation of mechanisms of citizen participation, and for the implementation of communication strategies to facilitate citizen involvement. An activist from Antioquia (RP 5), who was critical of the result after the discussion in Congress, said that one of the lessons learnt from this process was that legal mechanisms that have to be discussed in congress are more vulnerable than those that go through the court system directly. In Colombia, the possibility of implementing other types of mechanisms avoiding the discussion in Congress exists, but, according to a legal advisor of the campaign, it could be more risky; also, a higher number of signatures has to be collected and presented to the court. This situation indicates the congress' reluctance to take demands from citizens seriously. In a similar view, Harris and Roa-García (2013) (following Urrea and Cárdenas, 2009; Dugard and Drage, 2012) affirm that 'It has been suggested that referenda of this type are meant to be a vehicle for democratic participation, yet the process, and specifically the need for Congressional approval, has also been interpreted as significantly limiting their potential in this regard' (p. 25).

The campaign for the referendum can be conceptualised as a communication act in itself, carrying meaning and encouraging dialogue among different social actors. The social confluence initiated by the water referendum had no precedents in Colombia. The referendum provided the foundation for the discussion of the issue of water in policy-making spaces. After the referendum various towns in Colombia included water in policies and campaigns. For example, in Bogotá, the mayor Gustavo Petro (2012-2015) gave water a special place in the city development plan and environmental policies. In Medellín and Bogotá, the two main cities in Colombia, the municipal administrations introduced programmes to provide the free minimum vital quantity of water to the most vulnerable families. To a great extent, these events were a consequence of the advocacy and lobbying activities taking place during and after the campaign for the water referendum. The campaign was also the

starting point for other initiatives at local level, for example in the community of Tunjuelo, in Bogotá, where a group of young people created the collective *Territorio Sur*, which promotes actions and strategies to take care of water sources and the environment. Different associations of community aqueducts were created based on the water referendum principles (FECOSER, Valle del Cauca; ADACA, Antioquia; RETACO, Bogotá).

Perera summarises some of the consequences of the campaign for the water referendum in these terms:

The referendum thus allowed activists to nourish a critical consciousness within subaltern communities by posing questions to its members such as, again in the words of Diego, who worked in the Cauca region, 'Who owns biofuel enterprises?' 'Why are people being displaced here?' 'What are the interests behind displacement?' 'Who controls mining?' 'Who controls the diversion of water?' 'What types of wealth are being produced here?' The referendum thus became a security shell for activists, as well as an opportunity for strategic talk to help make oppressed communities somewhat more resistant to the coercive biophysical and cultural reconfiguration wrought by global capitalist development, increasingly connected to the use of terror and armed actors.' (Perera, 2012, p. 252)

6.5 Discussion

The campaign for the water referendum mobilised under one umbrella a variety of struggles defending water and natural common goods in Colombia. It was a large and popular national coalition for the use of a mechanism of democratic participation to defend the right to water. The campaign for the water referendum opened the path for many of the water struggles that are active today and it helped to raise the importance of the issue of water in the Colombian public sphere. Moreover, the campaign raised awareness on Colombian water issues in the public sphere at a transnational level. Water does not only concern environmentalism, but it is a fundamental issue in city planning, large-scale infrastructure projects, and conservation of nature reserve zones. As Juan Camilo Mira, the coordinator of the water referendum campaign, said:

Through water, many organizations that had never been able to come to a political agreement before, have done so now. Water is such a basic necessity; it makes it easy for people to agree on what needs to be done. (in Beeson, 2008, p. 3)

The referendum proposal was rejected by Congress, but activists and communities in many regions have continued to voice their demands and achieved some results at the local level. This represents the positive legacy and continuation of national actions: the strengthening of social tissue and local actions. One of the reasons why the campaign was able to bring together different interests and agendas is the importance water has for everyone without any distinction of class, gender, religion, political orientation, or origin. Water is fundamental to different human activities: economy, industry, culture. Therefore, decisions on water involve a variety of actors and interests. The campaign for the water referendum brought together around 1200 organisations (Suárez, 2010) spanning 'union leaders, environmentalists, public service consumer groups, educational sector, youth groups, peasant and indigenous communities' (Sgrò and Nærstad, 2009, p. 215), and also women's groups, academics, artists, and churches, among many others.

The campaign was also an exercise of citizen participation in democratic practices implementing public communication actions. Citizen participation and active citizenship were manifested in the formation of local committees, the promotion of local mechanisms of participation, mobilisations, and petitions. Some research participants (RP 6, 32, 36) agreed that, in the context of a country that has a history of low level of electoral participation,⁴⁶ citizens feel they have more chances of bringing about social change if they avail of other participatory and democratic actions, especially at the local level. This reflects the crisis of representation, volatile political parties, and weak institutions. The campaign reactivated the use of mechanisms for citizen participation such as the referendum, bringing into relief the benefits and limitations these mechanisms have.

As explained before, the campaign for the water referendum displayed characteristics typical of a new social movement, and thus was analysed through this theoretical lens. Environmental social movements are often used as the archetype in NSM theories. These movements struggle towards the re-constitution of civil society, and the renewal of politics and democratic practices by contesting traditional forms of political organisation. For these new types of politics, new communication practices are required. The campaign for the water referendum

⁴⁶ As an example, the parliamentary elections in March 2014 registered 52% of abstentionism (taken from Semana, 2014)

emphasised the communication and debates in the public sphere, promoting a collective identity and objective of defending water as a common good. According to Dahlgren (2009), for democracy to happen, citizens should be able to encounter, to talk, to meet those who represent them and to go through communicative spaces hosting discussion and policy making.

The campaign for the water referendum is an example of the cycle and life of a social movement: common goals, periods of agitation, splits, reunification, and weakening (when the Congress rejected the citizens' proposal). The current water movement in Colombia is experiencing a transition period influenced by the struggles of other sectors of society such as farmers, coffee growers, transport workers, indigenous people, and victims of the armed conflict. The demand for fairer agricultural reforms, sustainable environmental policies, and equitable land distribution are shared concerns among the recent social movements in Colombia. In a 2007 article, Archila sustains that Colombian social movements and social actors have contributed to 'democratizing democracy' by pressing for comprehensive citizenship and demanding socio-economic equality with respect for cultural differences (Archila, 2007). Although they are not the most prominent protests in the country, the recent environmental struggles (before 2010) have won the support of increasing number of local grassroots organisations and had a strong national impact (Archila, 2010). Through their silent work, Archila adds, these struggles have consolidated themselves as groups that propose new forms of sustainable development, and have built links with academic, government and international networks (ibid). From 2010, the environmental struggles have grown in number, visibility, and in terms of actions carried out. According to Jiménez-Sánchez (2005), one factor that influences the consolidation of social movements is their role as coordinators of collective action and facilitators of exchanges of resources between organisations (p. 25). The alliances and networks developed by the water movement during the referendum campaign have contributed to the consolidation of a broader movement made up by different elements, all taking part in the political arena and decision-making spaces regarding water issues. Archila (2010) also remarks that the alliances between different social sectors sharing similar daily-life issues have been translated into the creation of networks and the strengthening of solidarity.

The campaign for the water referendum is an example of a citizens' initiative for a constitutional reform in a country with high levels of political apathy and distrust. The campaign sought to overcome political apathy by promoting awareness and urgent actions on the water conflicts in the country. During the campaign, activists and supporters encountered opposition from different sectors such as government authorities, some public utilities companies, private water companies, and political parties. However, the campaign opened up spaces for dialogue and debates on the various points of the referendum proposal, which brought together all these actors. Despite contrasting views and opposition, the campaign managed to raise the status of the water issue in the public sphere and to highlight different perspectives on the water conflicts. In this regard, the campaign for the water referendum also became a reclamation of the right to communicate and to receive updated and clear information on water conflicts. Public communication practices in the water movement functioned as a bridge between supporters and the wider public, and managed to connect different visions and objectives. As Barbero (2005) expresses, the scope of democracy depends not only on people asking for information, but also on their ability to produce alternative information, debate and make their word publicly heard (in Botero-Montoya, 2006a).

The focus of the analysis in this chapter has not been on how the campaign was portrayed in the media, but on the different types of media and communication strategies used by activists to achieve their purposes. The findings have significant implications for social movements research, especially in relation to movements' communication practices and activists' repertoires. New social movements emerging in Colombia are proposing new types of politics, and these new types of politics need new forms of communication. Communication practices and strategies carried out by water activists constitute a repository for other social movements: drawing on it, they can learn how communication practices empower other citizens, and help them to identify with the aims of the mobilisation and, thus, actively support it. The communication practices in the water movement are a demonstration of resilience and creativity in a context characterised by internal conflict and repetitive violation of human rights. The communication actions of the campaign were also a reflection of the initiatives that had emerged organically from civil society and that aimed at elaborating alternatives to the conflicts affecting communities, and defending their right to participate in decision-making processes.

The campaign for the water referendum was also an example of transnational collaboration between movements and networks working on water issues. The Colombian campaign for the water referendum built alliances with some of the major initiatives of the global water justice movement such as the Italian water referendum initiative, the Bolivian commission in defence of water and life, the Red Vida, the Uruguayan water plebiscite movement, the Municipal Services Project⁴⁷, and the Council of Canadians⁴⁸, among others. Through different international platforms and events it was possible to make the state of Colombian water and natural common goods and their management visible to other similar campaigns and international actors. The global scale of the Colombian campaign for the water referendum can be understood through the different actions in which the campaign participated in order to exercise pressure on international organisations and obtain the inclusion of civil society in the processes of decision-making on water. For example, the United Nations General Assembly and the declaration on the human right to water in July 2010.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter analyses the water referendum and the water movement through the lens of new social movements theories. The analysis centres on the campaign's communication practices and their scope in promoting democratic practices and an active exercise of citizenship. The chapter also describes the post-phase situation of the water referendum and how it became a reference point for the current water and environmental struggles in Colombia. This chapter argues that through its communication practices, the campaign for the water referendum contributed to the creation of new political subjects and identities. These identities cut across the social, economic and political boundaries of a fragmented society, recomposing an active citizenry and ultimately deepening democracy.

The evidence from this case study answers some of my research questions: how do interests and agendas of different social actors play out in the water struggles? And

⁴⁷ 'The Municipal Services Project (MSP) is a research project that explores alternatives to the privatization and commercialization of service provision in electricity, health, water and sanitation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. - See more at: <http://www.municipalservicesproject.org/about-us#sthash.QO164akl.dpuf> ' (accessed December 2014)

⁴⁸ 'The Council of Canadians' campaigns advocate for clean water, fair trade, green energy, public health care, and a vibrant democracy. We educate and empower people to hold our governments and corporations accountable' <http://www.canadians.org/about> accessed December 2014.

how do these affect citizens' participation? The analysis of the water referendum campaign shows that the confluence of different social actors facilitated a joint political agreement on the need to implement a new water policy. The interests and agendas of different social actors (environmentalist groups and organisations, trade unions, public utilities companies, banking sector, teachers, students groups, universities, environmental authorities, women's groups, academics, artists, churches) were brought together under one coalition, which was also calling for the need to strengthen democracy by participating collectively in decision and policy-making processes. Different interests and agendas were taken into account in the collective formulation of the Law project proposing the referendum. This was carried out through participatory and public communication activities such as assemblies, local committees, workshops, seminars, and the use of community and alternative media. The variety of interests emerging during these activities reflected the multiple concerns of people from different regions. However, citizens were able to find a common platform for action, out of a shared acknowledgement of the importance of defending water and the future of their lands and livelihoods. This reaffirmed both the appropriation of the campaign and the sense of belonging to their territories.

The case study of the water referendum contributes to debates on democracy and active citizenship in some major aspects. The campaign was a pedagogic exercise in the use of a democratic mechanism for citizen participation. A complex communication strategy at different levels supported the campaign in the process of transforming a (rarely used) formal mechanism into a tool of national mobilisation.

Some of the limitations of the campaign identified in this chapter relate to the restrictions and lack of guarantees inherent in the constitutional mechanism, more specifically the legal requirement that for a citizens' proposal to pass, it needs to be approved by Congress. As discussed in this chapter, once a citizens' referendum proposal reaches the stage of Congress discussions there is restricted interaction between congress commissions and civil society, and the information is complex and insufficient to plan the next steps of a campaign. A broader question that arises from this chapter relates to the real possibilities for social movements to become key figures in policy and decision-making spaces. The different struggles defending water in Colombia have achieved various important goals mostly at the local level. However, in order to induce a radical change in terms of policy-making and effective

legislation on national common goods, strong confluences need to happen at the national level: these would give water struggles the strength and capacity to lobby and debate with policymakers and elites.

The next chapters will expand this argument using a number of case studies, particularly movements opposing mining and dam projects, and international networks for the defence of water.

7 Resisting extractivism and dams



Mobilisation opposing the Hidroituango dam, 2012.

Photo taken from: http://debatehidroituango.blogspot.co.uk/2012_08_01_archive.html

This chapter analyses communication practices in the struggles opposing mining and dam projects in Colombia using three case studies. In the last decade, the number of mining and hydroelectric projects and concessions in Colombia has increased as well as the number of citizens opposing them. The emerging social movements opposing these projects have appeared in the midst of a difficult sociopolitical context. Many citizens defending common and environmental goods have been persecuted and targeted by legal and illegal armed groups (See Chapter 4, section 4.4). However, through their different mobilisation and communication practices these movements have allowed citizens to open a public debate on the social, environmental, political and economic implications of mining and dam projects. Through their communication practices, the struggles opposing mining and dam projects have raised concerns over the current development and economic model of the country. Furthermore, they have established important links with similar struggles in other countries, sharing experiences, resources and information.

The chapter starts by introducing the context of mining and dam projects and some of the conflicts associated with them. The next section examines the role and meaning of mobilisations in social movements, arguing that these actions enable the

exercise of citizenship and participation. Then three case studies are presented: the first two concern movements opposing gold-mining projects, while the third case study refers to a struggle opposing a hydroelectric dam project. Through the analysis of the case studies, the chapter assesses the role of the communication practices adopted by the movements. The effectiveness of such practices in opening spaces for democratic participation is further discussed in the conclusion. Theoretically, this chapter draws on participatory and public communication approaches, the notion of active citizenship, and new social movement theories.

7.1 In search of ‘El Dorado’: mining

A mineral and energy-led economy is the path that many countries in the developing world have been following in recent decades (Hujo, 2012). In Latin America, the escalation of extractive activities has been fostered by demands from the global market and the rising prices of minerals and hydrocarbons in the last decade (Aguilar, 2012).⁴⁹ The decision to choose this development strategy has not been necessarily accompanied by the strengthening of political institutions, the review of revenue systems, or prior consultation with communities living in the areas affected by the mining projects. In her UNRISD report ‘Mineral Rents and the Financing of Social Policy: Options and Constraints’, Hujo (2012) points out that for countries to manage the challenges of a mineral-led economy positively, it is essential to ‘design and implement comprehensive, inclusive and rights-based social policies and build strong democratic institutions’ (p. 1). The mineral-led model has been seen as a unique opportunity for countries such as Colombia to transform its economy and to attract foreign investment through large-scale projects. Aguilar (2012) analyses the cases of Colombia and Peru, where governments have granted concessions to multinational companies for the exploitation of natural resources as a way to multiply national income (p. 7).

The plan to turn the energy and mining sectors into a major driving force of Colombian economy was first introduced under the government of Álvaro Uribe-Vélez (2002-2010) (ABColombia, 2012, p. 5, CINEP, 2012). During his presidential mandate, more than 9,000 mining permits were granted with little consideration of

⁴⁹ ‘As a consequence, the majority of Latin American countries have been specialising in raw material exports, as shown by the increase of these in terms of exports and the growth of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the area of natural resources, which reached 43% in 2010 according to ECLAC1, 2010’ (Aguilar, 2012, p. 5).

the impact of large infrastructural projects on natural reserves and indigenous communities (Ronderos, 2011). The Plan 'Minero Energético Visión 2019' has been continued by the current government led by Juan-Manuel Santos-Calderón, and has been included in the National Development Plan (ABColombia, 2012, p. 5). Contrary to the government's optimistic proclamations, a report by ABColombia (2012) reveals, among other things, the ineffective management of the tax system for mining corporations, which has resulted in Colombia 'giving away' the raw materials (p. 1).⁵⁰

In recent years, the increase in Colombian GDP and foreign investment has benefited only a small part of the population (Nieto-López, 2011). The outcomes of the new mining policies include the loss of natural resources and, most importantly, the communities' loss of their land and identities. The communities' attachment to their land, their practices, routines and history are an integral part of peoples' relationship to the territory and the construction of their identity. In the case of most mining projects, there were no clear and timely consultations between the main parties involved: government, mining companies, and communities. For Rodríguez (2013), prior consultations⁵¹ have enormous importance. Indigenous communities have stated that they are not opposed to development in itself, but that they want a

⁵⁰ 'With encouragement from the World Bank (WB), a series of tax reforms were initiated in order to lower Corporate Income Tax rates in Colombia from 35.5 to 33 per cent. This has reduced the total tax revenue as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP): a figure already low in comparison with other countries in the region such as Argentina and Costa Rica. In addition, the extractive sector has a complicated system of tax exemptions awarded to multinational corporations which, according to expert economist Guillermo Rudas, has resulted in Colombia gaining relatively very little in the way of income from the extractive sector. In fact, in the years 2007 and 2009 the government appears to have paid corporations to take its coal' (ABColombia, 2012). See also Arellano-Yanguas and Mejía-Acosta, (2014).

⁵¹ In Colombia the right of prior consultation with Indigenous and Afro-Colombian people does exist. This right is supposed to be adhered to when carrying out projects in the indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories. Moreover, Colombia has ratified the International Labour Organization Convention 169 which deals with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples:

The Convention requires that indigenous and tribal peoples are consulted on issues that affect them. It also requires that these peoples are able to engage in free, prior and informed participation in policy and development processes that affect them.

Both the right to prior consultation and the 169 ILO Convention are not always observed in large-scale water and mining projects. Gloria-Amparo Rodríguez, an environmental lawyer, sees the prior consultation process as an opportunity and not as a threat or obstacle to the development model of the country (Rodríguez, 2013). She argues that prior consultation serves as an exchange of experiences through which it is possible to identify common strategies and mechanisms for minimising the environmental, social and cultural impacts that a project might cause.

The ONIC -National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia - states that 'there had been 83 prior consultation processes carried out between 1994 and 2009, but none of these were considered to be examples of good practice' (ABColombia, 2012, p. 16).

collective and pluralistic process of decision-making (ibid). Before the government's adoption of a mineral, and largely private-led, economic model, Colombia had, traditionally, little experience of large-scale extraction activities (with the exception of coal), thus many communities, especially indigenous people, are still not familiar with their implications. As it has happened in Peru, requests for mining permits are concentrated in zones characterised by 'neglected agrarian economies and significant indigenous and campesino populations' (Bebbington et al., 2008). These are the more vulnerable populations in terms of security, education and livelihoods.

The communities are also affected by various forms of dispossession. Bebbington et al. (2008) refer to the dispossession caused by mining conflicts as a 'loss of a way of life, and a certain set of taken for granted assumptions about livelihood and development'. Dispossession can also be understood as 'the loss of an exchange value that occurs through the tax and royalty advantages and exemptions that companies enjoy at a time of rising commodity prices' (p. 2891). The increase in large-scale mining activities and private investments since the 1990s has generated a growing number of social mobilisations and conflicts in Latin America (Bebbington et al., 2008). Threats to local livelihoods provoked the emergence of social movements aiming to protect different forms of life and social organisation (ibid). Mining activities have a direct impact on water sources. The struggles against mining are also struggles in defence of water and the land. Mining projects have given rise to struggles demanding better and fairer living conditions for the communities living in the areas affected by the projects. These struggles have created networks and links with each other to find common strategies and share experiences. The 'multilocal' and transnational features of these struggles are factors in common with other campaigns contesting extractive industries in the world (ibid).

Focusing on three case studies, this chapter explores the social consequences of the implementation of the mining and energy policies currently in place in Colombia. The analysis of the communication actions used by the movements described in the case studies helps to shed light on the agency of civil society in resisting mining and dam projects. The activists' interactions and repertoires and the purpose of the communication practices are the main focus of this analysis.

7.2 Struggles against dams and the diversion of rivers

Worster (1985, in Atwi and Arrojo-Agudo, 2001) argues that a dam is the antithesis of a river. What is essential about a river is the dynamism of its flows, whereas in a dam it is its immobility (p. 5). The benefits of the construction of dams are widely known; they control floods, they meet urban, agricultural and industrial demands, and they produce hydroelectric energy (Atwi and Arrojo-Agudo, 2001). Nonetheless, all over the world dams have also created crises and irreversible social, environmental and cultural problems (ibid). The political decision-making power behind the construction of dams in Colombia is often exercised through coercion to contain the opposition of the people directly affected. Coercion can take the form of financial compensation or resort to the use of force (Roa and Duarte, 2012).

The World Commission on Dams (2000) estimates that tens of millions of people worldwide have been physically displaced in the last half century due to dam projects. The commission remarks that too often 'an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers, and by the natural environment' (ibid, p. xxviii). In Colombia, thousands of people have paid a high price because of the serious consequences of hydroelectric dams. Urrá (I, II and III), La Salvajina, La Miel, El Quimbo, Hidrosogamoso, Hidroituango are just a few of the recent water dam projects which have resulted in residents having to face repression, displacement, violence, and irreversible ecological damage to their areas.

At the moment there are various social movements opposing dams and the diversion of rivers in Colombia. Most of them have come together in a network for the defence of the rivers and the areas: 'Ríos Vivos' ('Rivers Alive'). Apart from defending the rights of the communities affected by the construction of the dams, one of the goals of 'Ríos Vivos' is to claim their energy and food sovereignty. This means the capacity of people and communities to be self-sufficient in terms of energy, and to decide about food production, food consumption and the economic chains of production within their regions. The communities also work together to strengthen their social tissue and generate proposals and alternatives to improve their living conditions. The struggle against dams in Colombia works in tandem with

other struggles in defence of water and land, such as struggles against mining, urban water struggles, and the defence of community aqueducts.

7.3 Politics in the street: mobilisations

Mobilisations are one of the most visible and contentious expressions and representations of social movements. They are the staging moments during which ideas, symbols, demands, and identities are publicly displayed. In the different water struggles, mobilisations have been the place of encounter between citizens affected by water conflicts, supporters, and the other broad set of social actors, including spectators, opponents, politicians and potential supporters. José Bernardo Toro (2002, in Jaramillo, 2004) define mobilisation as

the assembling of wills to a common purpose under one shared interpretation and sense, through a communicative action that, for the fact of being a convening is an act of freedom; for the fact of being a convening of wills is an act of passion; and for the fact of being a convening of wills with a shared purpose is a public act and an act of participation.⁵² (p. 27)

Mobilisations are an example of public communication practices because they diffuse information about issues of public interest. White (1994) believes that 'local mobilisations are often the first step toward the building of an alternative horizontal communication structure' (p. 108). Mobilisations can also be regarded as political strategies of social intervention that, through mediators, generate networks allowing the achievement of common objectives.

Mobilisations in the water movement, particularly those analysed in the case studies in this chapter, are characterised by being peaceful encounters of different social actors; they appeal to popular culture and use symbolic elements to communicate their purposes. In the struggles opposing dam and mining projects, attachment to and care for the territory and local identity constitute a regular feature. The representation of local customs, traditions and myths is a central element of these public events; they exemplify the communities' values and celebrate their rich heritage, which are threatened by the water conflicts. In their study about the Iranian revolution, Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (2006) observe a similar phenomenon, calling it a 'repolitization of culture'. These authors write that '[p]opular

⁵² Own translation.

culture can be highly politicized, and entertainment can be a powerful vehicle for political gathering and mobilization' (p. 474). The importance of symbolic and cultural elements in water mobilisations is evident in the words of a young woman from an environmental group from San Cristóbal, Medellín,

One of the mobilisations that I liked the most this year was the one for the International Day Against Dams, on the 14 March. Everyone from the committee in defence of water and life of Antioquia joined the movement 'Ríos Vivos'. It was a big event. There were people from different parts of the country, especially raising the issue of El Quimbo.⁵³ A group was singing songs from the Pacific coast and other artistic groups performed as well. It was packed with people. Apart from being a mobilisation, it was a cultural act. For me it was a success because everyone was satisfied with what happened. (RP 1)

Mobilisations reflect the interaction between activists and different media outlets and technologies. Mattoni's (2013) findings regarding grassroots mobilisations against precarious work in Italy are helpful when analysing mobilisations defending water in Colombia. For Mattoni 'activists developed knowledge about the media environment through being part of the active audiences that produced, circulated, reproduced and transformed diverse media texts' (p. 48). In the mobilisations in the water movement, activists with a longer experience of supporting the struggle acquired the capacity to engage in the different stages of the communication processes: the planning, production, diffusion and transformation of media texts, information, and symbolic elements.

Symbolic elements have played an important role in the water movement in Colombia: expressive forms like art, poetry, performances, graffiti, songs, etc., have facilitated the diffusion of sensitive or radical messages and demands among the population. One example of symbolic action was the 'funeral of the *Bocachico*' carried out by the communities affected by the Urrá dam project in North Colombia (Córdoba). The *Bocachico* is a typical fish of the Sinú River and the nearby *ciénagas* (small lakes/swamps), which disappeared, according to the native and indigenous communities, after the construction of the first two phases of the dam. The Zenúes indigenous people organised a symbolic funeral for the fish, to highlight the damage caused to their livelihoods and the environment (RP 16).

⁵³ Hydroelectric Project in Southwest Colombia.

The use of symbols and art by water movement activists transform mobilisations into more inclusive actions. Many of the symbols used in this type of mobilisations appeal to local traditions; they strengthen communities' sense of belonging, and help expressing their demands in less overtly political terms. In contexts characterised by armed conflict or political repression citizens need to look for alternative ways to disguise their messages and expand their audience to minimise risks of persecution and harassment. Rodríguez (2014), in her study of citizens' media among unarmed communities living in war regions in Colombia, remarks that

media are used to open communication spaces in which men, women, and children find ways to articulate the lived experiences of human rights violations and other modes of victimization at the hands of armed groups in the form of camouflaged messages that won't alert armed groups (Nordstrom, 2004; Ramírez, 2001). Frequently, community media carefully and safely move these messages from private to public spheres, allowing feelings of shared experience to grow. (p. 160)

The use of symbolic elements has a dual function: on the one hand it serves to engender a sense of shared experience, based on common cultural traits and memories; on the other, by eschewing the use of extreme and/or radical messages, violence or force, it seeks to reduce the risk of retaliation and repression. The use of symbolic elements and metaphors is an important difference between Colombian new social movements and more traditional movements focused on labour conditions, health, or agriculture whose demands and language are much more direct and stout. The significance of daily life, and the routine activities and experiences that constitute one person's life, appear frequently in the messages of these new social movements and their mobilisations. For Escobar (1992), the valorisation of daily life in Latin American movements has a special significance.

To problematize everyday life is to provide the conditions for a different social theory and interpretative framework. Everyday life involves a collective act of creation, a collective signification, a culture. Reflection on daily life has to be located at the intersection of micro-processes of meaning production, on the one hand, and macro-processes of domination, on the other. Inquiry into social movements from this perspective seeks to restore the centrality of popular practices, without reducing the movements to something else: the logic of domination or capital accumulation, the struggle of the working class of the labor parties. (p. 30)

Escobar's reflection provides an interesting starting point for the analysis of the case studies in this chapter. Through their communication practices the communities affected by the mining and dam conflicts have managed to highlight the negative effects of these conflicts on their everyday lives, in terms of the deterioration of their livelihoods, the disappearance of traditional jobs, the dispossession of their land and cultural identities. Communication practices and symbolic actions in mobilisations are placing at the centre popular practices and experiences that belong to the realm of everyday life, thus bringing into the public sphere the private spaces and concerns of individuals and communities. The symbolic actions in the mobilisations and communication actions also function as a way of mediating between the micro and the macro levels of demands in social movements.

7.4 Case studies

The case studies below illustrate different conflicts caused by the implementation of mining and hydroelectric dam projects and civil society's responses to them. The analysis of the case studies will focus on activists' communication practices, networking, use of mechanisms of citizen participation, asking how and to what extent these actions have contributed to the exercise of active and participatory citizenship and the enhancing of democratic practices defending the natural common goods.

7.4.1 The Santurbán's struggle opposing open pit gold mining

Santurbán is a highland area in the Eastern Cordillera of the Colombian Andes situated between the departments of Santander and North Santander in Northeast Colombia. It is an ecologically strategic zone, with páramo⁵⁴ ecosystems located at more than 3500 metres above sea level. The páramo ecosystems are the origin of many water sources serving cities such as Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, Girón and Lebrija in the department of Santander. The main environmental conflict in Santurbán – the 'Angostura Gold–Silver Project,' which started in 2010 – is the focus of this research. The Canadian mining company Greystar (later renamed Eco Oro) secured a concession for an open-pit gold mine. The mining project caused the immediate reaction of civil society because of concerns over the ecological impact

⁵⁴ Páramos are inter-tropical ecosystems located in mountain areas, 3000 to 5000 metres above sea level.

and social consequences of the project. The mobilisation actions carried out by different social sectors forced the project to stop. After a couple of years of struggle, a natural park was created in the zone; however there are still various parts of the *páramo* that may be approved for mining concessions. Despite the possibility that other concessions may be granted in the future, the case of the Santurbán mobilisation against the gold mine exemplifies the effectiveness of the public communication practices put in place by activists in order to defend water sources and the land.

The citizens' movement against the Santurbán mine in Santander has been an important event in the history of Colombian civil society's environmental struggles in the last decade. As an environmental activist remarked during an interview, the Santurbán struggle is an example of the consolidation of a direct democratic action accompanied by communication strategies and mechanisms of social mobilisation and citizen participation (RP 43). When the mining project became publicly known, people from the Bucaramanga metropolitan area started to come together and build a movement that ended up confronting the Canadian mining company and the Colombian government. The 'Comité por la defensa del páramo de Santurbán'⁵⁵ was formed by numerous organisations concerned with the impact of the 'Angostura project'. This committee continued the organisational process inherited by the national campaign for the water referendum (2007-2010), during which different types of organisations had united around the defence of water as a human right and public good. Even people from other cities in Santander adopted Santurbán cause as their own, because they identified with the movement's aim of defending a common good such as water.

7.4.1.1 Communication practices characterised by social cohesion, persistence and creativity

The Santurbán campaign brought together different social actors such as young people, adults, environmentalists, women's movements, peasants, community-run water systems and artists. Social cohesion, one of the features of Communication For Social Change according to Figueroa et al. (2002), was a key element of the movement for the defence of Santurbán. These authors remark that 'social cohesion

⁵⁵ <http://www.salvemoselaguaylavida.com/>

consists of the forces that act on members of a group or community to remain in, and actively contribute to, the group' (Figueroa et al., 2002, p33). Social cohesion is also an important antecedent and consequence of successful collective action. One research participant involved in the campaign of Santurbán stated that:

The academia joined the campaign, and they provided valuable insights and research. Also, the chamber of commerce, the association of engineers, the Catholic Church, the municipal aqueduct and local authorities. That was very important to get visibility and support. (RP 30)

The major aim of the movement was to stop the project and to raise awareness about the need to protect and conserve Santurbán's highlands and water. Among the main reasons for opposing the project were the threats to water sources and the use of cyanide and other toxic minerals, which remain in the water and soil.

We started to investigate by ourselves what was going on. First, we collected information. We realised that those mining concessions were given to multinationals and that the Colombian government signed them. We did not see anything benefiting the country. The concessions are made in favour of the multinationals. We then found out as well that the environmental licences were given by the environmental authority - CAR - when the exploration phase had already started. (RP 30)

In her research on community radio in Colombia, El'Gazi (2011) highlights the importance of investigations conducted by the communities. She argues that, thanks to the communities' increased awareness of issues affecting them (through the investigations they themselves have carried out), an informed 'public voice' has been created (p. 302). The investigations and research conducted by the community led to the elaboration of other types of communication materials and to the planning of mobilisation actions. The committee created for the defence of Santurbán initiated the process of going out into the streets and disseminating information about what was happening:

We printed leaflets, we participated in radio programmes; we went to Bogotá to the Ministry of the Environment, to human rights protection agencies. All of this with very little money - organisations and citizens were putting in their own human and creative resources to let the message be heard. (RP 30)

The same research participant also commented: 'People from small villages close to the mining project started to see trucks going up the hills, then helicopters; then they

started to feel that the earth was trembling' (RP 30). He further recalled that when people from Bucaramanga and other towns started to collect information about similar problems in other parts of the country, they realised that the mining project in Santurbán was one of the most ambitious of its kind in Colombia. The mining company had already secured an environmental licence and all the permits despite the fact that the communities had not been consulted.

A factor that certainly facilitated wide ownership and the spread of the campaign against the mining project was the nature of the issue at stake: water. Water directly affects human health, land, identity, future generations, livelihoods, and culture. It is also an issue that can determine the origin, planning and development of human settlements, spaces, cities and communities. 'The very nature of the issue at the centre of citizen engagement will also influence possibilities of change' (Citizenship-DRC, 2011, p. 44). The finding of the Research Centre on Citizenship and Democracy are also supported by the evidence analysed in this research. The nature of the issue and the way it was framed by activists were central to the evolution of the mobilisation in Santurbán.

The issue of water as a matter of public concern was part of the public communication approach of the defence of Santurbán. As in the campaign for the water referendum (Chapter 6), the campaign defending the páramo in Santurbán recovered the idea of the 'public', which according to Miralles (2002, in Botero-Montoya, 2006b), implies the active participation of citizens and the support of common interests. Bringing the water issue into the public sphere generated more positive responses towards the initiative; as an activist from Bucaramanga (RP 29) described it: 'this collective work of awareness raising and workshops in neighbourhoods and schools laid the foundation for the mobilisations and the rallies'.

Other remarkable communication actions were the mass protests in Bucaramanga. Following the trend of carnival-type mobilisations of other recent environmental struggles, Santurbán's rallies and parades brought together music, dance, chanting and even parallel workshops and press conferences. The movements in defence of Santurbán organised a protest that was attended by more than one hundred thousand people. It was called 'Cien mil voces por el agua' (A Hundred Thousand

Voices For Water). Held on 15 March 2013, this protest criticised the inconsistencies contained in the declaration of the Parque Natural Regional Santurbán (PNRS). According to the committee defending the *páramo* of Santurbán, the declaration did not imply the cessation of mining activities. In fact, mining companies were thinking of changing the open-pit systems for tunnels. The tunnels would still have a serious impact on groundwater sources and land stability. 'Cien mil voces por el agua' was also reproduced in other cities in Colombia, including the capital Bogotá, as an act of protest against other large-scale mining projects such as Cajamarca, La Laguna de Tota, el Páramo de Pisba, Tunjuelito in Bogotá, Río Ranchería, and against the dam projects of El Quimbo and Hidrosogamoso.

The messages and information diffused in the Santurbán protests were centred on defending water as a common good, essential for life. Many of the performances, banners, chants and messages were adapted from that main idea. Unexpected actions in the middle of the city centre were part of the wide range of communication and mobilisation actions. For example, on 8 March 2013, a group of women decided to take part in the campaign opposing the mining project by doing a body painting performance. They wanted to highlight the role of women in standing up for water and nature.⁵⁶ Art, protest, and discussion came together to represent the conflict. It was an unusual event that attracted the attention of many citizens. Another example was the production of videos featuring famous actors and personalities from Colombian TV denouncing the consequences of the Santurbán project and large-scale mining and inviting citizens to join mobilisations, sign petitions, and follow the issues closely through different media. These videos were posted in social media websites and became very popular all around the country. By involving famous personalities, this initiative broadened the audience of potential supporters of anti-mining campaigns.

The social mobilisation and active participation of citizens defending the *páramo* of Santurbán have been recognised by other similar struggles in Colombia and Latin America and also by international organisations. Praising the social mobilisation in

⁵⁶ <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2013/03/08/universitarias-en-bucaramanga-se-desnudaron-para-defender-el-agua/>

Santurbán, the Canadian NGO Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC) wrote on their website:⁵⁷

Social mobilization and a growing awareness of the environmental effects of Greystar's proposed mine in Santurbán – including the contamination of water that supplies some of the inhabitants of Santander and feeds the Lebrija, Pamplonita and Zulia rivers and the tributaries of the Arauca and Catatumbo rivers – have contributed to the temporary withdrawal of the multinational from Colombia. This clearly demonstrates the possibility of new forms of resistance and social expression in the country.

Also commenting on the agency of citizens in the Santurbán campaign, the journalist and sociologist Alfredo Molano (2013) wrote in one of his opinion columns:

The creation of the Natural Regional Park in the Páramo de Santurbán with its 11,800 hectares is an achievement of the civic and environmental movement against the pretensions of the gold-mining multinationals Aux Gold, Eco Oro Minerals Corp, Leyhat Colombia, Galway Resources, Calvista Gold Corporation, Auro Resources Corp, CB Gold, Continental Gold and CVS Explorations, who have considered the mountains as their property (Opinion column, El Espectador, 12 January 2013).⁵⁸

7.4.2 Gold mining project in Southwest Antioquia: civil society mobilising to preserve identity and livelihoods

Southwest Antioquia is part of the 'Cinturón de Oro de Colombia', an area with a high concentration of gold. The situation in this region has some points in common with Santurbán. Since 2010, numerous mining permits have been conceded, many of them without prior consultation with the locals, including the Embera indigenous communities who have special constitutional rights over their land. As in Santurbán, the population of the different towns witnessed unexpected explorations, helicopter inspection flights, and surveys carried out by the mining companies. They were also aware of some of the consequences of open-mining activities.⁵⁹ These events led to the creation of the Cinturón Occidental Ambiental (COA) a regional network⁶⁰ grouping citizens from 12 municipalities in Southwest Antioquia and West Caldas

⁵⁷ <http://www.pasc.ca/en/article/lessons-santurb%C3%A1n-canadian-mining-company-greystars-project-santander> . Accessed on August 2013

⁵⁸ Own translation.

⁵⁹ Guhl-Nannetti (2013) mentions some of them: the contamination of groundwater by the infiltration of minerals, alteration of the aquifers, perforations, excavations and explosions. Large mining projects like this one have a serious impact on air quality, biodiversity and the soil, especially in high mountain areas or high slopes.

⁶⁰ The network has elaborated environmental plans, risk prevention and planning proposals for different municipalities.

(located in the valleys of the Rivers Cauca and Cartama).⁶¹ The COA and other civil society organisations, including environmental groups, started campaigns to raise awareness about the mining projects and their impact on the population and the environment.

The analysis of the campaign in Southwest Antioquia identifies two features of Manyozo's (2012) model of participatory communication: the reconfiguration of power relations and dialogue. Manyozo suggests that the reconfiguration of power relationships is part of the process of a participatory communication model. New and equal power structures can be developed from participatory communication practices (Ibid). In Southwest Antioquia, the movement opposing the mining project built an alliance with some of the mayors and councillors in order to develop an action plan to face the mining threats. The mayors were receptive to people's petition and concerns. The communities found in the mayors' support an incentive to formulate broader objectives oriented towards the development of the region and the improvement of their quality of life.

Manyozo (2012) argues that dialogue can involve 'communities, government, relevant partners and stakeholders; knowledge brokering, negotiation, trade-offs, disagreements' (p. 191). In this case study citizens used dialogue and their interactions with local authorities to reach common objectives. This cooperation represents an evolution in terms of redefining the relationship between civil society, government authorities, and policy-makers. This collaboration also created opportunities for citizens involved in the anti-mining movement to contact people in positions of power through the support of local authorities.

Organising joint actions involving neighbours, classmates, communities and local governments is an effective way to exert public pressure on the government on environmental issues. These initiatives can result in an increased political participation that opens spaces for recognition,⁶² dialogue, community work and

⁶¹ The main economic activity of this region is agriculture (coffee, citrus fruit, sugar cane, potato). There are also numerous poorly regulated artisanal gold mining activities. In some municipalities, tourism is also an important economic activity.

⁶² Fraser (1995) analyses the concepts of *recognition* and *redistribution* as 'dilemmas' of social justice in the post-socialist age. According to her: 'The "struggle for recognition" is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Demands for "recognition of difference" fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, "race", gender and sexuality. In these "post-socialist" conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief

education. In Southwest Antioquia, many participatory workshops were conducted in order to comprehend the situation of affected communities and the implications of mining activities. The speakers chosen came from inside and outside the region. At the end of each workshop, different proposals were elaborated, and tasks were assigned to different participants; updates and emerging issues were discussed during follow up sessions. Moreover, tours and walks in different areas permitted the gathering of information, testimonies and support for the campaign. These activities allowed many people to become familiar with places they did not know before. The purpose of these activities was also to highlight characteristics such as natural patrimony, cultural heritage, geography and community work. These experiences exemplify some of the positive outcomes of citizen participation identified in the notion of active citizenship (Citizenship-DRC, 2011, p. 8), presented in Chapter 2, such as the inclusion of new actors in public spaces, the creation of a greater sense of empowerment and agency, and the deepening of networks and solidarity.

Between June and July 2012, citizens in Támesis and Jardín lobbied the councils to adopt a declaration of intent which expressed their opposition to the mining projects. The mayors of both municipalities supported the declaration of intent and joined the campaign opposing the mining project. During a press conference on 21 July 2012, the mayor of Támesis declared that mining was not a viable economic or social alternative in the region. He said that a mining project of the size of the one proposed by the multinational mining companies would radically affect the environmental and cultural legacy of the region. The mayor also highlighted the importance of the campaign and the need to maximise communication with the other municipalities in the area. The campaign opposing gold mining in Southwest Antioquia demanded responsiveness and accountability from local government authorities (mayors, city councillors, etc.), an important step towards deepening democratic practices in the region. This campaign demonstrated that civil society can work hand-in-hand with the local government to carry out joint political initiatives.

medium of political mobilization. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socio-economic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle' (p. 68).

7.4.2.1 The scope of the sense of belonging

Servaes (2003, in Cadiz, 2005) suggests that participatory communication originates in the discussion of problems at a community level. This was emphasised by research participants involved in the struggle in Southwest Antioquia who articulated the importance of the sense of belonging and identity:

The active participation of citizens at a local level is generated from a sense of belonging and mutual collaboration, which positively contributes to the improvement of living conditions and coexistence.
(RP 6)

Local residents have an interest in preserving the living conditions and identities that have always existed in the areas. (RP 16)

These discussions are often prompted by interactions with other communities. For participatory communication to be effective, a crucial aspect is networking and alliance building with other organisations, sectors, or communities working on similar issues (Cadiz, 2005), as the struggle against mining in Southwest Antioquia demonstrates. The COA and CODEATE⁶³ (Comité por la defensa ambiental del territorio/Committee for the Environmental Defence of the Territory, a wing of the COA in Támesis) linked with other similar struggles in the country, such as Santurbán and the movement opposing La Colosa mining project in Tolima, to share information, contacts, tactics and experiences. They were following other cases in Latin America such as the Peruvian project Yanacocha. Even the local committees, women associations and schools in the different municipalities of the region organised events to allow people to meet up and discuss their own perspectives and experiences of the mining and environmental conflicts.

The 'Vigil in Defence of Water and Land' (21-22 July 2012) was another communication and mobilisation action built upon the sense of belonging and the generation of local content which took place during the campaign in defence of water, land and identity in Southwest Antioquia. The 24 hour vigil was organised by CODEATE. Over 24 hours, a range of different activities took place across Támesis. These included: a communal lunch; a public seminar with presentations about mining and the archaeological patrimonies in the region; a parade showing the

⁶³ CODEATE is an environmental committee which was established in Támesis in the midst of the mining conflict. The committee brings together environmental associations, school groups, youth clubs, women's associations, indigenous communities, and universities, among other social actors.

natural common goods of the region, legends and stories from the different towns; a night-festival with music, dancing and poems; and a press conference. The task of representing the local culture and the mining conflict was a creative, intergenerational effort. Children, young people and adults shared the decoration work, the organisation of the parade, and preparation of the banners. By promoting their culture and traditions and by raising awareness on the sustainable local environmental practices, the communities in Southwest Antioquia propose alternatives to the mining project. During the vigil, a group of people also climbed the highest hill in the town and spent the night there to offer a tribute to nature and 'Mother Earth'. Among the people in this group was the renowned environmental lawyer, Juan Ceballos, who had previously carried out protest actions against mining activities and deforestation in Chocó, Colombia. Moreover, a group of young software developers, members of the collective Manada Libre, presented a video game they had created about the campaign against mining projects.

7.4.2.2 New technologies for social change

The case of Manada Libre⁶⁴ is an example of the use of digital tools in promoting citizen awareness and participation. Manada Libre is a non-profit collective which designs and adapts free software for different social campaigns. In their website, the collective explains that:

Free software is a critical tool that allows us to build a technological autonomy which does not depend on third parties who want to monopolize knowledge, information and technology, and in this way, be able to have digital freedom.

Manada Libre created a video game for people/children affected by mining in Southwest Antioquia. In the video game, the main character discovers that his/her community is going to be affected by a mining project: his/her aim is to stop it. Mining equipment and vehicles as well as the company's staff are 'expelled' by actions such as: growing vegetables on the land earmarked for handover to mining activities, calling more people from the community, or cleaning the land from mining toxins. According to one of its creators (RP 17), the software is just an expression of what the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) can do to help communicate issues creatively and promote awareness about different causes. The

⁶⁴ <http://www.manadalibre.org/contenido/?q=node/67> Accessed July 2012.

video game was an innovative initiative for many children in the different towns in Southwest Antioquia. Through the game they could better understand the mining project and its implications. Furthermore, the children were able to copy ideas about actions they could put into practice. One of the video game designers (RP 17) mentioned that when they went to the rural community to explain the purpose of free software, the peasants from the community said: 'this is like agro-ecology, this is like the growing practices we have here in our village: knowledge is to be shared, not to be kept for ourselves'.

With regard to the processes of appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICT), Clemencia Rodríguez (2011) argues that ICT could be as inoffensive and ineffective as having a blog which no one reads. However, in certain political and social contexts, the same processes of appropriation and use of ICT can have a strong impact on society (p. 52). The example of the video game illustrates the potential of local initiatives to promote more sustainable water governance and environmental conservation. These new forms of active citizenship based on claims of sovereignty over natural common goods are transforming Colombian democratic space.

According to Gumucio-Dagrón (2011b), communication for social change (CFSC), promotes communication processes based on dialogue and interpersonal communication, rather than a vertical use of communication instruments. He argues that the use of technology should respond to the need of each communication process: 'the capacity of appropriation developed by the actors involved defines the appropriate technology in each phase of the process' (p. 34). For instance, the game developed by Manada Libre cannot be used in every community because it requires a minimum of technological conditions and the capacity to install and use free-software and computers. There are other appropriate technologies and methods that different communities can use in order to diffuse their messages and get more support.

The struggle in Southwest Antioquia is on-going and the future of the mining concessions is unknown. However, the conflict has created opportunities for re-thinking the relationship between citizens and natural common goods. The committees formed to oppose mining activities are expanding their actions to tackle

other important environmental and social issues in the region, such as avoiding toxic substances and chemicals in agriculture, promoting eco-tourism, and rescuing the archaeological patrimony of the region. The people affected by the mining conflict have also questioned the current mining and energy-led development model of the country, arguing that this model does not include the visions of the local inhabitants.

7.4.3 Hidroituango: dam, armed conflict and social movements

The Hidroituango project is the biggest dam project in Colombian history and also the most controversial. It is located in the Northwestern part of Antioquia. The area of influence covers 12 municipalities, most of them near the river Cauca⁶⁵ – the second largest and most important river in the country. The dam is scheduled to open in 2018 and expected to produce 2400 megawatts of energy (Negocios, Periódico El Espectador, 2009). The reactions and opinions towards the project have been very much divided, with the government authorities and the public utility company in charge of the project on one side, and the communities impacted by the project on the other. It has been said that one of the objectives of the Hidroituango⁶⁶ project is to produce energy for export, as well as for an aluminium plant in Urabá (ibid) and to facilitate the improvement of this port city on the Atlantic Ocean.

The communities neighbouring the dam project argue that they are not against the development of the region but they do want and need to be included in the decision-making processes which affect their lands. An activist and community leader from the region interviewed for this research affirmed that: ‘The communities should be autonomous in deciding what to do with their water and their land’ (RP 15). The imposition of these projects has caused not only a loss of autonomy but also displacement and violence. In fact, forced displacements in the country are not only related to the armed conflict but also to infrastructure projects, such as dams (RP 15). The communities have been dispossessed of their land, the level of violence is

⁶⁵ The river Cauca originates at 3125 metres above sea level in the mountains of the department of Cauca, Southwest Colombia. It has an extension of 1350 km. It flows through more than 180 municipalities in 8 departments.

⁶⁶ The reservoir will be 70 km long and will cover several municipalities in Northern and Western Antioquia. Although the dam is just being built now, the idea of this project goes back to the 1960s and 1970s. Some analysts believe that when in operation, the department will receive royalties of \$100 million Colombian pesos a year (51,800 USD) (from Arias-Jiménez, 2013).

With an investment of \$5,500 million Colombian pesos (2,849,000 USD), this hydroelectric megaproject will generate about 20 per cent of the total energy consumed in the country, and will have eight turbines (from: Dominguez, 2013).

rising, and livelihoods are affected. Fishermen, artisanal miners and peasants are at risk of disappearing from these areas.⁶⁷

The area where the Hidroituango project is located has also been affected by the armed conflict between guerrilla, right-wing paramilitary groups and the army. Citizen participation, local organisation, and democracy have been hampered due to intimidation and repression. To engage in campaigns opposing large-water projects is not an easy experience for many people. Fear, pain and anger are influential factors which impact on citizens' engagement and communication practices within environmental struggles. Suárez Orozco (1990, cited in Ruíz-Pérez, 2007) argues that the psycho-social trauma of constant political repression is another form of victimisation which affects social cohesion and citizen participation. Fears for one's safety and repression have pushed people to remain silent and submissive in the face of different social conflicts. Bessette (2004) also suggests that in communities where there have been negative experiences of free speech or a history of conflict, participation could take a long time to increase (p. 27).

Nevertheless, there are also situations in which people and groups exposed to extremely difficult situations react by increasing social cohesion and collective actions as a way to defend themselves (Beristain, 1999, in Ruíz-Pérez, 2007). This happened in the struggle of the people affected by Hidroituango. A member of Ríos Vivos expressed her concern about the loss of fear and the willingness, on the part of some community members, to take ever increasing risks in spite of the violence that historically affects the region: 'people do not want to protect their lives anymore because they are willing to risk everything in order to defend their land, family and identity'. Evidence from the case studies shows that disillusionment and, at the same time, commitment to keep on struggling for the local area are common characteristics and paradoxes of the movements against dams in Colombia (e.g. Hidrosogamoso, El Quimbo, La Miel, diversion of Guarínó River). In the case of Hidroituango, the affected communities, already experiencing the consequences of

⁶⁷ The website 'Environmental Justice Atlas' maps out environmental conflict all over the world. With regard to Hidroituango, they mention some socio-economic impacts: Visible: displacement, loss of livelihood, militarization and increased police presence, land dispossession, loss of landscape/sense of place.

Potential: Increase in corruption/co-optation of different actors, increase in violence and crime, lack of work security, labour absenteeism, firings, unemployment, loss of traditional knowledge/practices/cultures, social problems (alcoholism, prostitution, etc.), violations of human rights. <http://ejatlas.org/conflict/ituango-hidroelectrica-colombia> (Accessed 27 June 2014)

a violent armed conflict in the region, had to face the issue of the hydroelectric dam and, in addition, organise themselves to propose alternatives for their lives. Participatory communication and mobilisation actions have helped to slowly overcome political apathy and lack of participation in democratic practices. These actions have enabled ordinary people to recognise their role in their own communities and the potential of working as a collective towards the achievement of the same goal.

7.4.3.1 Recomposing communities through collective action

The communities affected by the Hidroituango project have found in the struggle an opportunity to get to know each other and their territory better. In the press conference held in Medellín on 7 September 2012, some of the people affected said that if, prior to the mobilisation, they had barely known who else was affected by the project, through the struggle they had become a group of people working together to propose alternatives to improve their lives. Buber's designation (1958, in Angel-Botero and Obregón, 2011, p. 196) of dialogue as 'a true re-encounter' is appropriate to describe the communication processes of the people affected by Hidroituango: the relationships and solidarity generated by the process of getting to know one another and recognising shared concerns and aspirations across different communities. One of the outcomes of this initial process of recognition and integration of the community was the creation of different committees such as the Asociación de Pequeños Mineros Afectados por el Proyecto Hidroituango (ASOMITUANGO) (Association of small miners affected by the Hidroituango project).

The circumstances forced the people affected by the dam project to learn how to use formal mechanisms of citizen participation to claim their rights. Some of the most widely used have been the 'derecho de petición',⁶⁸ and 'acción de tutela'.⁶⁹ Through these mechanisms people could obtain information about the dam project, from local and environmental authorities. Nonetheless, the communities affected by Hidroituango encountered difficulties with the procedures required for the

⁶⁸ Legal mechanism to demand information from public authorities.

⁶⁹ The 'Acción de tutela' is a constitutional guarantee to protect the fundamental rights of individuals (Article 86 National Constitution). Within the complex system of these legal mechanisms, the 'Tutela' is one of the simplest and most effective ways to claim a right. It should be responded in no more than 10 working days.

implementation of these mechanisms. For instance, a peasant from Briceño, who attended the press conference on 7 September 2012, expressed his discomfort with these. He said that the mechanisms are for 'rich people, for people who know how to read and write. Therefore, if we do not know that, we are excluded'. To overcome the restrictions of formal participatory channels, the communication practices used in the struggles opposing the dam project have given special importance to the spoken word. For the people in the area, this is the most suitable way to make agreements and have a proper dialogue around the issues that affect them.

Mefalopulos' analysis (2005) in relation to communication practices in development projects is also applicable to the Hidroituango case, especially his notion that the use of dialogue, when comparing diverse realities and perceptions, plays a key role in building trust, and also facilitates the problem-solving process. People affected by Hidroituango have found in dialogue, conversations and informal encounters a way to promote participation in political and social activities among the community. In an interview for this research, an activist from Ríos Vivos (RP 15) remarked that one of the most valuable lessons learnt during the struggle against the dam had been the opening of spaces for reflection:

I believe that conversation is still the space for excellence for reflection [...] The pretext of talking about having a better life, of talking about the dam, has been an excuse to reflect on what the communities want to do with their own lives, their own future [...] The dam could be the worst thing that could happen to a community, but in this case it has also been an opportunity for getting together [...] It is time to open our eyes because there is no other moment for that. When your land has been taken, when your life has been taken, when you have been dispossessed of your territory, then the possibility of reflection is a communication space that needs to be used. What we need to do is to be speakers...

For social change to occur there needs to be dialogue between the people in power and the communities (Chitnis, 2005, p241). Dialogue between the people affected and the other actors involved (dam project representatives, the government, the environmental authority) is an important demand from the communities. They want their voices to be heard and also to receive clear explanations and updated information about the dam project and its implications. Dialogue is at the basis of participatory communication, an approach which aims to facilitate the empowerment of those who are most vulnerable and marginalised (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

Public meetings are also held to 'reclaim' information from the authorities and to receive updates on the state of the project. The meetings are usually organised and arranged by the communities affected. The meetings have gradually become structured and established spaces where to discuss the conflict over the dam but also other issues affecting the inhabitants. Attendance at these meetings has increased over time, which reflects an amplification of participation and engagement. However, in many cases, the meetings are also attended by external individuals who often try to persuade or induce people to take certain actions: this happens in particular during election time or when a radical action opposing the dam projects is being planned.

Cornwall and Coelho's (2007) analysis of people's participation in development processes can explain some of the features of the Hidroituango meetings. These authors express that 'for people to be able to exercise their political agency, they need first to recognize themselves as citizens rather than see themselves as beneficiaries or clients' (p. 8). The process of participation in political and mobilisation actions should be accompanied by education, political activity and recognition of one's own reality. These actions are preconditions for the exercise of an active citizenship, which, according to the Citizenship-DRC (2011), demands time and experience. The knowledge acquired through these participatory experiences 'may be of one's rights and responsibilities, more technical knowledge needed to engage more effectively with the state, or awareness of alternatives to the status quo' (ibid, p. 9). Taking into consideration Krohling-Peruzzo's (2004, also in Sparks, 2007) typology of participation, the participation of citizens opposing Hidroituango is still limited. A 'limited' form of participation refers to 'social structures in which those in dominant positions determine the overall goals, but permit some discussion of proposals' (ibid). Despite their efforts and some achievements in promoting participatory and democratic actions, the people affected by Hidroituango still have no access to the resources, mechanisms and decision-making spaces which enable an ideal type of participation, like *power participation*.⁷⁰

The conflict with the construction of the dam has been an opportunity to recover the sense of belonging and collective identity. In one occasion, the communities

⁷⁰ *Power Participation*, represents an 'ideal' expression of participation where all participants share a degree of social control (Chapter 2, section 2.1.4).

affected by Hidroituango, with the support from Ríos Vivos, organised a photography contest. The contest was intended to both illustrate specific places and the natural beauty of the region and to recall the sense of belonging and identity. Della Porta's and Diani's (1999) definition of identity helps to understand the photography contest in the context of social movement. Collective identity is 'the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings. They give meaning to their own experiences and to their development over time' (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 85).

On 9 September 2012, I facilitated a workshop on communication strategies for the group of people affected by Hidroituango who were in Medellín for the press conference and for the meeting with the regional government. In the workshop, I stressed the importance of the recognition of their own capacities, collective work and the strengthening of existing communication and organisational resources. Participants were asked to think of the communication and mobilisation actions they had implemented and to write them down in a list. The workshop served to discuss the challenges of diffusing information on the conflict through different channels, and of dealing with different actors such as the government, other affected communities, and the dam project workers. During one of the activities proposed for the workshop, participants were asked to form three groups and compete against each other to reach a specific goal. At some point, the three groups decided to merge into one, and that was the conclusion they gave to the session: joining capacities and knowledge is the only way to face together the impact of the hydroelectric project.

With the support of Ríos Vivos, people affected by Hidroituango have used other means to get their message out. Among other things, they have created a blog in which all aspects of the conflict are described. In the blog, they not only publish comments and interviews but also press releases and official demands. The blog has served as a platform to show and monitor the evolution and deterioration of many of the zones affected by the dam through photographic documentation. Moreover, different interviews, videos, audio-reports and chronicles are regularly broadcasted on Radio Mundo Real (<http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/es>), a multilingual web radio and alternative communication project affiliated to the environmental organisation Friends of the Earth International.

7.4.3.2 Challenges for citizen participation

In order to call on the government to find solutions to the abrupt changes and transformations threatening their communities, the people affected by Hidroituango organised a long mobilisation. They marched from the zone where the main dam works are located to Medellín, the capital of Antioquia (170 kilometres northwest approximately). The mobilisation lasted several days and, in the last stages, participants walked along the main highway into the city. The group of 300 people camped in the sports centre of the University of Antioquia, a public university. They arrived in Medellín, on 17 March 2013 and waited various months to have a meeting with the regional government authorities. The group of people were living in overcrowded conditions, experiencing health problems because of lack of food and suitable facilities. On 9 September 2013, 'the Labour Chamber of the High Court in Medellín ruled in favour of those affected by Hidroituango, ordering that their demands, in relation to collective protective measures (based on threats to life and physical integrity which had been repeatedly denounced), should be resolved in six days'.⁷¹ In the middle of these events, Nelson Giraldo Posada (31 years old) – a fisherman affected by the dam project – went back to Ituango. He felt desperate because, for months, he had not been able to work while waiting for the government's response. Nelson was brutally killed and found beheaded and with shot wounds in his chest on the river Cauca's beach 'Sardinas' on 17 September 2013. This event represented another threat to the peaceful protest and demonstrated the vulnerability of the people protesting against the dam. While waiting for the decision of the Court to become effective, people also expected to get more support in order to go back to their land. Nelson's violent killing prompted mainstream media to focus their attention on the people affected by the dam project. Some articles were published and some news features about the situation and the conditions of affected people were broadcasted.

By the end of 2012, the people had already returned to their lands with uncertain guarantees from the government regarding their relocation and new opportunities for working and living. At the beginning of 2013, a first tunnel was excavated to divert the river. Despite this, the social movement still continues developing the goals they had at the beginning, although with the dam in the middle of their lives

⁷¹ http://www.cjlibertad.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=746:asesinado-lider-del-movimiento-rios-vivos-antioquia&catid=44:novedades

and their territories. The construction of the dam is a fact, still with unknown consequences for the people, the environment and the country's economy. Different actions have been put in place to monitor the construction of the dam and continue the mobilisation process of the people affected: regular meetings, workshops, assemblies. Some of the most important Colombian newspapers and magazines have written in-depth reports, outlining the implications of a mineral and energy-led economy in the current situation of the country. Also, academic research by social and natural scientists is investigating the impacts, consequences and decisions related to the construction of hydroelectric dams.

7.5 Discussion

The case studies presented in this chapter reveal how participatory communication practices initiated by the water movements have encouraged citizens to engage in democratic practices demanding environmental sovereignty and defending water, livelihoods and identity. In these environmental and social movements, citizens have confronted large transnational companies and the government voicing their demands and raising their concerns about the impact of the projects on their lives and land. Moreover citizens have learnt about communication processes, acquired new communication skills, and become knowledgeable about the implementation of legal mechanisms for participation. The historical apathy towards participation in democratic practices, in many regions affected by these large-scale infrastructure projects, has been a challenging issue, potentially affecting the outcome of the struggles. This apathy is a result of violence and armed conflict (Chapter 4), the physical and social isolation of communities, and the lack of education and information on legal mechanisms to defend their rights. The communication practices in the case studies presented in the chapter were mainly developed as a reaction to the dam or mining projects, and not as part of parallel, already established processes of development. However, through their participatory communication practices local citizens have also strengthened the internal organisation of their communities through the creation of subcommittees, the delegation of tasks, the planning of activities, and the sharing of resources.

The three case studies show that many communities did not have strong social ties or the custom of meeting collectively before the arrival of the mining/dam conflict. As expressed by a research participant, in the case of Hidroituango, the communities

did not have strong connections, prior to the dam project, partly because of the violence in the region. Dialogue among the people affected by similar issues has not only fostered the sharing of experiences and concerns but has also contributed to creating strong bonds and alliances. Dialogue has involved reflexivity on the different perspectives of those involved in the conflict and on the individual and collective interests, intentions and needs. This reflection is consistent with Chitnis' (2005) argument:

Through active participation and dialogue, communities can help identify their needs and address them with available resources, and thus using and creating their own knowledge (Arnst, 1996). Knowledge is tapped by facilitating empowerment of communities, which leads to directed social change (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). People can only achieve their full potential when they are given the freedom to think and act in ways that overcomes oppression. For this reason, participatory communication recognizes ordinary people's knowledge, capacity and potential to be involved in the development process. (p. 237)

A common issue among the case studies is the importance of mobilisations in the making of 'politics from below' and the exercise of active citizenship. Going out into the streets to claim human rights needs courage, determination, and indignation with a particular situation. A similar feeling of dispossession has inspired the struggles which originated in different places. As previously mentioned, mobilisations are one of the most visible and contentious expressions and representations of social movements. They are the staging moment in which ideas, symbols, demands, and identities are publicly displayed. As one of the research participants, an activist and academic, expressed in relation to the campaigns opposing mining projects and water privatisation policies:

A big lesson learnt from these campaigns in defence of water is that legal actions without the backing of communication and mobilisation initiatives do not have any repercussions or influence on the decision-making that goes into water policies. (RP 28)

This statement underlines the impact of communication practices and mobilisation in giving impetus to social and political transformations. Mobilisations themselves are acts of communication, and, as Jaramillo et al. (2004) remark, collective arguments are built in mobilisations: the 'meeting of wills' that aim at a common purpose, a political agreement which requires negotiation of particular and collective interests. In the case studies analysed, mobilisations were public and massive proposals

calling for alternative ways of doing politics. They constituted a political practice taking place in the streets and demanding the inclusion of civil society in the decision and policy-making processes affecting people's lives and lands. The difficult socio-political context in the regions affected by the mining and dam projects had limited, for many years, the overt expression of concerns and ideas. Therefore, mobilisations against the mining and dam projects have provided spaces for the expression of sentiments and demands. The use of symbolic actions in mobilisations in Bucaramanga, Southwest Antioquia, Medellín, and the region of the Hidroituango project have made publicly visible the difficult situations in the rural zones where these projects are carried out. Along with other communication actions, the mobilisations have criticised the mining and energy-led development model of the country, which, according to many activists, does not take into account people's realities and viewpoints in the regions of the projects.

What is also evident from the different case studies is that the decisions made on the commons such as water should involve different actors and viewpoints. The effects of public discussions on the commons might have a long-term impact on current and future generations. The case of the struggle against Santurbán demonstrates that, despite the multiple constraints to citizens' participation in decision and policy-making spaces, there are chances of achieving outcomes as a result of social mobilisation. Citizens' access to accurate and updated information is key to enabling their active participation in these discussions. For instance, in the struggle against the mining project in Santurbán, the different communication actions such as press conferences, workshops, festivals, have been useful for people to understand the implications and consequences of the project and take action. Communication actions in the case studies have advocated for the creation of participatory spaces for discussion on the consequences of the mining/dam projects on neighbouring residents and citizens in general.

The three cases – mining in Santander, Southwest Antioquia and the Hidroituango dam – are large developments with the potential of transforming the social, physical and environmental panorama of the regions. These projects are also priorities in the central government's policies to promote economic development. The conflict between the alleged national economic benefits and the environmental and social impact on local residents is at the centre of the public debate. However, since these

are projects that require meticulous planning and numerous permits, citizens demand to be included in the negotiations to define impacts and revenues for the locals, as well as respect of their livelihoods and identities.

The global demand for natural resources has pushed foreign direct investment (FDI) into countries like Colombia, who have abundant natural resources such as minerals and fuels. This 'reprimarization' of Latin America's economies began in the 1990s 'under conditions of the structural reforms imposed by the new world order of neoliberal globalization' (Veltmeyer, 2012, p. 68). In recent years, mining companies have shown a preference for investing in countries such as Colombia and Mexico 'whose overtly neoliberal regimes are less demanding and more open to foreign investment and the operations of extractive capital' (ibid, p. 66). The consequences of the escalation of the social and environmental conflicts originated from the mining projects have led to the emergence of numerous civil society movements opposing extractivism, such as the ones analysed in this chapter. These movements are not entirely opposed to the projects. What they are claiming is to be taken into account in the decisions concerning their lives, livelihoods and territories. These movements have also raised concerns on the numerous failures of the country's extractivist economic and development model. The anti-mining movement have a multilocal and transnational dimension (Bebbington et al. 2008), since they exist at a range of geographical scales. Moreover, they have created networks of support and advocacy at national, continental and global levels (e.g. 'Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería (REM); and Confederación Nacional de Comunidades del Perú Afectadas por la Minería (Conacami)' (in Veltmeyer, 2012, p. 75) and 'Movimiento 4 M'. In general, the movements opposing extractivism are not only fighting against neoliberal regimes but also 'against the underlying and operative capitalist system' (ibid, p. 79).

7.6 Conclusion

The chapter analyses three case studies related to social struggles opposing mining and dams projects in Colombia. The analysis of the case studies draws on literature of participatory communication and communication for social change. From a social movements perspective, the analysis focuses on the importance of mobilisations and the exercise of active citizenship and street politics. This chapter illustrates some crucial situations that Colombia is facing at the moment: the rapid rise of

large-scale infrastructure projects and their impacts on the environment and the lives and livelihoods of residents living close to the projects. This chapter argues that localised mobilisations and campaigns challenging mining and dams have been able to question the mineral and energy-led national development and economic model, highlighting its long-term implications. In doing so, these movements have explored different practices of citizen participation and have implemented communication actions to foster their demands and network with similar movements. By defending their rights to water and livelihoods, these movements have demonstrated alternative models and relationships between communities and nature, and have proposed models for the sustainable co-management of natural common goods by communities and the state. The process of challenging the hegemonic models of development and the proposal of alternatives for the governance of natural common goods have contributed substantially to the process of deepening democracy

Research participants, mostly activists, have criticised the exclusion of civil society from the policy-making spaces on mining and dam projects. They argue that the communities directly impacted by these projects have not been taken into account in decisions affecting their territory. In response to this, citizens have actively mobilised in the last decade to oppose these projects, demanding to be included in decision and policy-making spaces. Evidence in this chapter suggests that the visibility of the mining and dams and the public discussions they prompted have been enhanced by citizens' exercise of active citizenship through practices of participatory communication and mobilisation. These practices have contributed to overcome citizens' indifference and apathy towards political participation and have promoted the use of democratic and legal mechanisms in the water struggles in Colombia.

The campaigns and initiatives against mining in Santurbán and Southwest Antioquia, and against the Hidroituango dam project constitute a new chapter in the history of environmental movements in Colombia. Such case studies also reveal a growing opposition to, and questioning of, the development model promoted by the government. Through communication and mobilisation actions, these emerging environmental movements have put forward alternatives to the mining/dam projects and to the development model of their regions. In the process of understanding the conflicts and their implications, affected citizens have gradually learned how to

communicate their demands and how to participate in democratic actions for the defence of their rights. However the case studies of Santurbán, Southwest Antioquia and Hidroituango still represent a limited type of citizen participation (Krohling-Peruzzo, 2004). Most of the citizens in these affected zones have lived in vulnerable conditions due to the armed conflict and the absence of the state, which has made political participation difficult. Thus, the fact that citizens in these areas have succeed in calling for the intervention and urgent action of the state to halt the operation and advancement of the projects is worth considering. The mining and dam conflicts somehow have provided local communities an opportunity to initiate a crucial process of demanding their rights and exercising active citizenship and sovereignty over natural common goods. Citizens have also relied on different legal mechanisms of citizen participation to complement their communication and mobilisation strategies.

This new chapter of Colombian environmental social movements is being written by a wide array of civil society actors who are carrying out actions resisting the implications of the environmental conflicts through participation, communication practices and mobilisation. Politics and democracy exercised in the streets by the communities are proposing alternatives to the imposed extractivist development model. Due to the difficult context of violence, repression and corruption, the communication practices gained importance and became a step towards the recognition of civil society in decisions affecting the country. As expressed by Brysk (2009) in her article on communicative action and human rights in Colombia: 'Colombia has the potential to create a collective identity that will serve as a source of mobilization, a legitimate point of reference, and a bulwark against the cycle of violence' (p. 7). The water struggles have been an exercise of democracy, resistance and solidarity in Colombia. They have also raised wider questions about the ownership of natural resources and common goods and the defence of human rights, both of which are now central political issues in the country.

8 The defence of water goes global



Alternative World Water Forum, Marseille, 2012. Photo by: Valeria Llano Arias

This chapter discusses the importance and scope of transnational advocacy networks in the defence of water at international level. Based on the analysis of three case studies, the chapter argues that the networking and sharing of information and tactics among water struggles internationally have led to actions that represent forms of global citizenship through which citizens have claimed environmental sovereignty at local, national, and transnational level. The legal and political gains of the global water justice movement, such as government recognition of the human right to water, public-communitarian partnerships, referendums and campaigns, have been disseminated and replicated in different places. Local water struggles have inspired other movements in different parts of the world. Gaventa (2006) argues that '[i]n the context of globalisation, therefore, one cannot talk of deepening democracy locally, without also looking at the impact of actors and decisions beyond global borders' (p. 27). The global water justice movement is nurtured by local water struggles; at the same time, its aim is to give them support and act in solidarity with their aims and ethos, developing strategies to influence water policy-making internationally.

The main theoretical framework underpinning the analysis of the three case studies is transnational advocacy networks (TAN) (section 2.2), a concept drawn from social movements theories: TAN theory stresses the importance of the sharing and distribution of information and the diversification of political tactics. The chapter contains a section on how digital media and the Internet have helped to bridge the physical distance between social movements by facilitating the sharing of information and tactics and by providing support online. The idea that the Internet has become a space for contention and debate for social movements, especially at international level, is further explored. The discussion continues with three case studies that are used to analyse transnational water networks and the international arena for the discussion of water issues. The case studies are: the Red Vida (Inter-American Vigilance Network for the Defence and the Right to Water), the World Water Forum, and the Alternative World Water Forum.

The establishment of networks and the international support received have been very important for the Colombian water movement. The generalised context of water privatisation and large-scale infrastructure projects in the region has led to the formation of social movements opposing these issues. In the case of water, the networks linking social movements often act as transnational arenas where the issue of water is discussed from different perspectives. This confluence of actors and concerns has brought together rural and urban issues from various latitudes. These new transnational spaces have witnessed the emergence of new social actors in global contexts. In relation to this, Seoane et al. (2012) write that the struggles for natural common goods have been characterised by the construction of wider convergence spaces nationally, regionally and internationally which are oriented towards sharing information and planning common actions.

International networks defending the right to water and related issues are grouped mainly according to the region or continent in which they operate. However, they also engage in wider campaigns with other transnational movements and organisations. For instance, in Latin America, there are networks advocating for the human right to water such as Red VIDA,⁷² or the REDLAR,⁷³ a network criticising dams projects, which have a transnational approach and representative groups in

⁷² <http://laredvida.org/>

⁷³ <http://www.redlar.net/>

several countries. These networks build their action plans taking into account inputs from their different members. Latinaqua⁷⁴ is another Latin American water-focused network that looks at scientific development, innovative techniques and problem analysis from a global perspective. This network is mainly composed of universities and research centres, and is also supported by FEMSA Foundation, the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), and the Tecnológico de Monterrey (a Mexican university). In Europe, the campaign for the human right to water⁷⁵ brings together many national networks and social movements. In Africa, there is the African Water Network,⁷⁶ a collective working towards equitable access to water for all, through campaigns opposing commercialisation policies.

The next section uses the framework of transnational advocacy networks (section 2.2) to make sense of the interactions and modes of communication of the organisations analysed in the three case studies. The case studies in this chapter refer to transnational advocacy networks that are composed of a diversity of actors located in different parts of the world. In the case of the Red Vida and the AWWF there are defined channels for information sharing and the planning of tactics. These two networks exemplify the four tactics identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998), inasmuch as they produce information, use symbolic elements to explain their motives, have to connect distant publics, and also have to deal with powerful actors.

8.1 Colombian water movement: from local resistances to transnational collective actions

Since the start of the ECOFONDO's campaign in defence of water as a public good in 2005 (see Chapter 6), water activism in Colombia has created links with other water movements and networks in the world. It was important to look for wider support, and for similar experiences to learn from in order to plan actions contesting threats to water. The Bolivian and Uruguayan struggles (2000 and 2004 respectively) were the major experiences that inspired the Colombian water movement. These two events were a wake-up call alerting communities to the dangers of the different water privatisation models rapidly advancing in Latin America. The Bolivian resistance sparked similar actions across the continents,

⁷⁴ <http://www.latinaqua.org/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.right2water.eu/>

⁷⁶ <http://www.africawaternetwork.org/>

which replicated its forms of organisation and communication. For example, the model of the 'Commission in defence of water and life', which was the organising body behind the Bolivian campaign, was reproduced in countries such as Uruguay, Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico. In every country, the Commission or Committee in defence of water and life brought together different civil society organisations. This diversity of actors has been a common pattern in the constitution of the committees in various countries. ECOFONDO's campaign also received support from the Italian environmental movement and, later on, from the movement in defence of water as a common good ('Acqua bene comune'). Also, umbrella organisations based in Italy, such as Legambiente, advised on how to organise and communicate a campaign on environmental issues. The Colombian campaign 'Water as a public good' (2005-2006) evolved and later became the campaign for the water referendum (Chapter 6).

The campaign for the water referendum has been one of the biggest and most significant legal actions regarding the defence of water as a common good and human right in Latin America. Despite the fact that the Congress rejected the proposal for a referendum, the different strategies (organisation, education, mobilisation, communication) were inherited by subsequent water struggles in Colombia. During the campaign for the water referendum, the international vigilance and support of transnational actors were crucial to raise the status of the campaigns. During the campaign, a variety of dissemination activities were carried out: many of these featured international figures⁷⁷ who gave talks, attended public seminars, facilitated workshops, and participated in press conferences. Through all the activities carried out, the campaign raised public consciousness on sustainable water governance and built collective knowledge on water issues in the country.

The connection of recent Colombian movements defending water and opposing large-scale infrastructure projects (dams, mining, roads, tunnels) with other similar struggles across the globe exemplifies the evolution of these social movements from national to international arenas. This evolution has had an impact on social movements' needs and their interactions with actors such as governments, international institutions, corporations or environmental authorities. The links

⁷⁷ Adriana Marquisio (Uruguay), Oscar Olivera (Bolivia), Javier Martínez Gil (Spain), Maude Barlow (Canada), Ann Le Strat (France), Pedro Arrojo-Agudo (Spain), Claudia Campero (Mexico), Ana Ella Gómez (El Salvador).

between national and international water justice movements, mainly sustained through communication, information technologies and joint actions, have allowed them to develop a global repository of experiences and information to support initiatives defending water regionally and globally.

8.2 Internet and digital media: a useful tool for transnational advocacy networks

This section provides some theoretical and empirical evidence of the scope of new information technologies in transnational social movements, focusing on the global water movement. It reflects on the exercise of active and global citizenship at local, national and transnational levels and discusses the implications the use of these technologies and the opening of new digital democratic spaces have on the inclusion/exclusion of civil society.

Globalisation and new information and communication technologies (ICT) have allowed different political actors to enter international arenas, a privilege previously restricted to national states (Sassen, 2004). Digital media is a fundamental tool for transnational social movements and advocacy networks: it enables them to network with similar social movements and share information. Feixa et al. (2009) argue that 'new, new' social movements⁷⁸ are grounded on an 'infra-structural web of technical tools and new technologies' (p. 438). Among these digital tools, the Internet, in particular, has facilitated the overcoming of physical barriers and has brought together initiatives from all over the world. Leon et al. (2005) argue that social movements have a positive relationship with the Internet because it allows low-cost communication and it does not have a complex configuration and functioning. The Internet and new information and communication technologies, accelerate the workflow and provide alternative, faster options for diffusing information (ibid). According to Bennett (2003), protests and movements at global level would not be possible without digital communication channels such as the Internet. An example of this was the planning of the continental day of action, which took place on 1 August

⁷⁸ As Feixa et al. called them, the 'new, new' social movements 'emphasize both economic and cultural dimensions: their basic grievances are economic, but no longer exclusively revolve around self-interest; they also include solidarity with those who are marginalized by globalization. The struggle also takes place on the terrain of cultural identities, highlighting the right to difference. As with the new social movements, action repertoires involve marches and demonstrations, but calls to action are distributed through the Internet, while mass marches and actions articulate with multiple forms of virtual resistance' (Feixa et al. 2009, p. 427).

2012 to oppose large-scale mining projects and was organised by the movement '4 M' (Movimiento Mesoamericano contra el Modelo extractivo Minero – Mesoamerican Movement against the Mining extractivist Model). This day of action⁷⁹ was promoted mainly through web-blogs, social media, mailing lists. Different groups in every country used the Internet to coordinate the details of the activities together. The aim of this day of action was to demand stronger legislation for transnational mining companies, and the inclusion of communities in decision-making processes regarding their territories and the feasibility of mining projects. Big carnival-type mobilisations, rich in symbolic language and elements, were carried out in different cities in Latin America on 1 August 2012.

Noam Chomsky, in a statement made to the Mexican Newspaper La Jornada (19.09.2004), claimed that 'the use of the internet, apart from facilitating communication within and between social movements, is able to subtract control of the established media' (in León et al., 2005, p. 12). Referring to radical media (including the Internet), Downing (2001), expresses that these media do not need to censor themselves in the interest of the powerful mainstream media, dominated by state power or religious authority. One of the advantages of the Internet for social movements is that it allows them to communicate directly with their audiences, avoiding the commercial bias of mainstream media (Hill and Hughes, 1998, in Kavada, 2005). Moreover, the Internet allows people to communicate interactively, thereby overcoming the limitations of the one-way flow of information which characterises commercial media (Villareal-Ford and Gil, 2001).

The Internet has become a media of global reach, and it has opened up alternative channels to access information and facilitate political organisation (Portillo, 2004). It has become a fundamental tool for social movements seeking to build up collective proposals aiming at the defence of public and common goods (ibid). The globalisation of communication and information has brought radical changes in the way social struggles organise, make demands and exist. Chadwick's (2006) observation is useful to analyse some of the interactions emerging from the case studies presented in this chapter:

⁷⁹ <http://www.movimientom4.org/2012/07/10-de-agosto-2012-dia-de-accion-continental-contra-la-industria-extractiva-canadiense-a-gran-escala/> Accessed October 2012.

globalization has opened up new spaces for nongovernmental actors to press for change in an increasingly fluid environment. In this kind of context, collaboration among networks of groups are often able to use the Internet to simultaneously mobilize and focus their efforts on different levels of politics, seamlessly shifting from the national to the transnational. (p. 124)

The Internet constitutes a virtual public sphere for many social movements and political actors. According to Kavada (2005), for many 'optimists', the Internet increases the pluralism of voices within the public sphere; the participatory and interactive characteristics of the Internet encourage solidarity and civil society involvement with movements' causes (ibid). Activist groups dispersed all over the globe can learn what others are doing (Lipschutz, 2005). It is a powerful tool for building up a global civil society⁸⁰ and contesting transnational powers and politics. The Internet has played a key role in the global water justice movement; it has facilitated networking, the organisation of joint actions and initiatives, the formulation of legal frameworks, and has been instrumental in raising awareness about the water conflicts among the wider population.

8.3 Transnational advocacy networks on water issues and International scenarios for water discussion and decision-making

This section presents three case studies of transnational water networks: the Red Vida, the World Water Forum (WWF), and the Alternative World Water Forum (AWWF). Transnational advocacy networks and public communication approaches are the theoretical frameworks used to analyse these three experiences. The networks in the case studies are composed of a diversity of social actors such as government authorities, private corporations, alternative water networks, community aqueducts, trade unions, civil society, and academia.

The Red Vida is concerned with the water issue from a social justice perspective. The Alternative World Water Forum, which started as an international conference, has become an on-going, continuous process similar to the World Social Forum. The World Water Forum is the official meeting space for discussion on water issues and brings together governments, public institutions, private corporations, and sometimes academia. These organisations provide spaces for sharing knowledge,

⁸⁰ 'the term global civil society is a relatively recent phenomenon, associated with the emergence of debates about globalization, the increasing global interconnectedness of movements activism and the orientation of recent activism aimed at changing the policies of international institutions such as the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund' (Jong, et al., 2005, p. 9).

experiences, policies, and technological developments on water. They allow people from different countries to discuss, make decisions and set common goals on water issues. The two water forums in particular represent a public arena and crucial space for gaining an understanding of the state-of-the-art debates on water in the world. The Alternative World Water Forum has the characteristics of a transnational social movement space, whereas the World Water Forum is an international gathering of policy-makers and water corporations. The AWWF has created participatory spaces for citizens' engagement regarding water issues. Both the Red Vida and the AWWF represent advocacy networks, which have been sustained by local experiences and the coordination of global actions.

8.3.1 The Red Vida

The Red Vida Network (Red de Vigilancia Interamericana para la Defensa y Derecho al Agua / Inter-American Vigilance for the Defense and the Right to Water) was born in 2003 during an International seminar/workshop⁸¹ called 'Citizen Movements facing Water Privatization: Learned Lessons, Strategies and Challenges for the Future' held in El Salvador. This international seminar was a consequence of initial encounters in the Porto Alegre's World Social Forum held in January that year. By 2003, water movements were emerging rapidly in Latin America to oppose water privatisation policies, following the example of the Bolivian and Uruguayan struggles (Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). The Red Vida⁸² marked the beginning of a coalition of forces sharing knowledge and expertise on water issues across the continent. One of the first activities of the network was to launch a campaign against water privatisation and in favour of a public management model with social participation (ibid).

During more than a decade, the work of the Red Vida has strengthened local initiatives and has raised awareness of Latin American water issues among a broader audience. Its forms of organisation and communication have facilitated the

⁸¹ It was an event congregating organisations and social movements from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Canada, and the USA (Red Vida, 2003).

⁸² The founding principles of the network, contained in the Declaration of San Salvador, reflect the multiples concerns and initiatives around water in the continent. The declaration stresses the rejection of market-driven water policies, the unsustainable management of water and large-scale infrastructure projects, and the defence of communal, public urban and rural water systems.

circulation of information and the provision of support. For instance, since its creation, the network has emphasised strategies of information, communication, training, analysis, research, legal and political initiatives, mobilisation, and national, regional and global alliances (Red-Vida, 2003). The network relies on different communication mechanisms such as email lists, newsletters, publications (in English and Spanish), and committee meetings through Skype. The Red VIDA organises a general meeting between members from the whole continent every two years. These meetings are an opportunity to update members on each country's situation and to prepare a working plan for the coming years. Along with the meeting, the network normally organises a public event or seminar in the host city⁸³ to gather different social and political actors and advocate for the water issues in that specific locality.

The sharing of experiences is central to the work and ethos of the members of the Red Vida. The Red Vida functions as a platform where local and regional water initiatives can make their voices heard and look for help. The Red Vida brings all those initiatives into intercontinental arenas, where they meet similar cases, share experiences and know-how, and build mutually beneficial alliances. These transnational connections have enabled the development of broader campaigns and actions regarding the human right to water. For instance, the Red Vida is an active participant of the Alternative World Water Forums, which is part of the World Social Forums. As a member of this forum, the Red Vida takes part in the proposals of thematic sessions, communication strategies and advocacy. This type of networking is very important for social movements as it prompts and sustains collective action. In this regard Della Porta and Diani (1999) argue that:

by participating in the life of a movement and, in particular, in that of its various organizations, activists create channels of communication among different organizations, and increase the scope for promoting common campaigns. Links founded on multiple allegiances are therefore an important element connecting movement areas internally, as well as supporting communications between movements and their environment. (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 118)

⁸³ The host city is selected by the members of the Red Vida. Member organisations can make proposals in support of their cities hosting the continental meeting. This meeting is normally every two years.

The Red Vida could be also analysed through Keck and Sikkink's concept of 'advocacy networks'. Advocacy networks are primarily communicative in content and 'mobilize information strategically so as to gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments' (Keck and Sikkink, 1995, in Tarrow, 1998, p. 189). According to Tarrow (1998), advocacy networks lack the sustained interpersonal relations that domestic social networks have, but their strength lies in their focus on transnational communication and 'the involvement of northern governments, foundations, and public interest groups in issues of inequality, human rights, and the environment in other parts of the world' (p. 189). For instance, the Red Vida participated in the global platform for the defence of water in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2005. Member organisations from the Red Vida took active part in the preparation and delivery of workshops, discussions and press conferences. In the forum, civil society organisations blamed transnational companies and international financial institutions, such as the WTO, as the principal responsible for privatisation water policies, and denounced the complicity of national, regional and local governments (Grosse et al., 2006).

In 2005, Colombian environmental organisations were inspired by the Red Vida initiatives to start a national water campaign: 'Water as public good'. Currently, the Colombian chapter of Red Vida gathers organisations ranging from environmental organisations, trade unions of public water companies, women's organisations, and community aqueducts. In 2009, the Colombian chapter of Red Vida hosted the continental meeting where it presented the proposal of Public-Communitarian agreements on water management. One of the cases discussed was Giraguas, the aqueducts association of Girardota, which had succeeded in securing a municipal council agreement for the protection of community aqueducts (Chapter 5). Since the signing of this landmark agreement, members of Giraguas have travelled to other cities in the continent to share their experience and provide guidance to other communities and public aqueducts. In the Girardota case, the use of digital media was crucial for sharing experiences among water activists and garnering support and guidance from abroad. This example of local-transnational collaboration and collective work illustrates some of the features of TAN identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998). Establishing links with local organisations allows groups to receive and monitor information from many countries at a low cost (p. 22). Moreover, local groups (in our case the community aqueducts from Girardota), rely on international

contacts 'to get their information out and to help protect them in their work. The media is an essential partner in network information politics' (ibid). Feixa et al. (2009) remark that thanks to technological innovations and the connections they facilitate between groups, 'local initiatives diffuse transnationally, while global events manifest themselves in diverse local contexts' (p. 438). By favouring communication between organisations involved with water issues from the local to the global level, the Red Vida encourages the political agency of many social actors and fosters their participation in water policy-making.

8.3.2 The World Water Forum

During the World Water Forum (WWF) people from all over the world meet to analyse policies, market agreements, and management strategies related to water. Its main organiser is the World Water Council (WWC), an organisation based in Marseille, France, which cooperates with the Forum's host country to organise the event. The WWC was created in 1996 by the initiative of water transnational corporations and various international bodies.⁸⁴ In the preamble of its constitution document it is stated:

The effective management of the world's water resources will contribute to the strengthening of peace, security, co-operation and friendly relations among all nations in conformity with the principles of justice and equal rights. Amongst the natural resources, water is the most critical. It can and should be used to promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples of the earth, in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations as set forth in the United Nations Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights (World-Water-Council, 1997, p. 3)

The first WWF was held in Marrakesh, Morocco in 1997.⁸⁵ Part of the agenda of the WWF is to set up the preparatory processes in every continent: these involve states, water corporations, public service water providers and academia.⁸⁶ The motto of the 6th World Water Forum in Marseille 2012 was 'The time for solutions'; the objective of the 2012 WWF was to 'identify targets, bring solutions and ask for commitments

⁸⁴ World Bank –WB–, International Water Association –IWA–, International Union for Conservation of Nature –IUCN–, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council –WSSCC–, United Nations Development Program –UNDP–, UNESCO.

⁸⁵ Other editions: The Hague in 2000, Kyoto in 2003, Mexico in 2006, Istanbul in 2009, Marseille in 2012.

⁸⁶ The WWF has been heavily criticised by civil society organisations for its pro-big business bias and its weak legitimacy

involving experts and decision-makers from different sectors and regions of the world' (WWC, 2012). Among the events organised for the forum were: high-level sessions, ministerial sessions, water debates, commitments session, the 'village of solutions', and press conferences.

The 2012 WWF was also a space for showcasing the latest technologies on water provision and innovative water infrastructure projects. This was really a technological and commercial fair of water companies and organisations promoting their products and developments. The WWF was also an opportunity to reinforce and create partnerships and alliances between organisations and companies involved in the water sector. There were academic spaces as well, most of them dedicated to the dissemination of recent research results and cutting-edge ideas on water issues. Some academic meetings were proposing the integration of academic knowledge into global water education. Moreover, the challenges of passing from research to implementation and the development of local capacity in creating new alternative solutions for water issues were discussed.

The Marseille 2012 World Water Forum created a new commission called the 'Grassroots and Citizenship Commission', with the aim of 'involving and mobilising civil society representatives and raising awareness among citizens to ensure a stronghold in local, national, regional and international realities' (WWC, 2012). The commission focused on four main groups consisting of NGOs, women, youth and the cultural aspects related to water. However, the participation of civil society was reduced in comparison to the 2009 forum, held in Istanbul (ibid).⁸⁷ In Marseille 2012, Colombian government delegates attended some of the ministerial meetings and the sessions for the discussion and approval of the declaration. Government or environmental authorities have normally represented Colombia in various WWF. Environmental authorities such as Corantioquia presented their programmes and case studies on water conservation. Some workshops and seminars mentioned Colombian cases, but there was no significant participation either from social movements or government authorities.

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<https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/pressreleases/world-water-forum-attendance-reportedly-down-as-activists-ramp-up-preparations-for-alternative-forum-2/> Accessed March 2012 / In Marseille, the entry price for one person without concession was up to €500 for the four days, with a discounted option of €100 for students.

8.3.2.1 Similar language – different purposes

The WWF and the AWWF discuss similar issues such as water governance, human right to water, and water sustainability, but from completely different perspectives. Water activists argue that the WWF is co-opting activists' language to promote the privatisation agenda. This language appears to be more sensitive and appealing to governments and development institutions which are the recipients of the funding of WWF partners such as the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. The use of the same language by the WWF and the global water justice movement, despite their diametrically opposed perspectives, denotes a shift towards the use of inclusive and propositive expressions rather than radical or technical ones. From both perspectives, the aim is to persuade and to attract people's attention and invite citizens to take part in water decision and policy-making spaces.

For many water activists I spoke to during the 2012 AWWF, the WWF is an illegitimate, private body. In their view, the UN would be the only legitimate body entitled to guide global water policy. These activists criticise the partnership between the WWF and the World Bank, which is one of the main supporters of water privatisation - a policy that for these activists contradicts the human right to water and the principle of water as a common and public good. According to a Colombian water activist interviewed for this research, who had attended various editions of the WWF, these forums 'co-opt' the language used by environmentalists groups and water activists.⁸⁸ He remarked that the declaration of the 2012 WWF recognised the UN 2010 Declaration on the Human Right to Water⁸⁹ and the need to increase access to water in order to reduce poverty. The declaration also spoke about water governance and green economy, and alternative ways of providing water services and managing water territories; this language, according to the research participant, was first used by water activists and social organisations. This type of co-option and appropriation is similar to the one which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when the participatory development discourse, emerging from the global South, was adopted by international organisations such as the World Bank and the

⁸⁸ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

⁸⁹ On 28th July 2010 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recognising access to clean water and sanitation as a human right. The resolution is calling on States and international organisations 'to provide financial resources, build capacity and transfer technology, particularly to developing countries, in scaling up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all' <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/ga10967.doc.htm> Accessed March 2012

United Nations. The next section will look at the alternative forum created by water activists in response to the World Water Forum.

8.3.3 The Alternative World Water Forum

The Alternative World Water Forum (AWWF) (In French: Forum Alternatif Mondial de l'Eau –FAME) is an event held during the same days as the World Water Forum to create a space for civil society discussion on water issues. The AWWF is part of the World Social Forum; its aim is to encourage local and international initiatives to make their voices heard in international organisations (AWWF, 2012). Both forums 'support movements which inspire change, put transformative actions on the global agenda, and build a better world' (ibid). The AWWF describes itself as 'an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, and free exchange of experiences' (ibid). According to a Colombian water activist attending the forum, a lot has been gained from the previous two Alternative World Water Forums (RP 43). Positive advances include the visibility of the territories and the centrality of the issue of extractivism in environmental discussions (ibid). Also, the forum has enabled valuable debates and raised important arguments as regards the human right to water (ibid). In fact, one of the aims of the forum is to advocate for the recognition of the human right to water by its inclusion in national constitutions in accordance with the United Nations Declaration of 29 July 2010.

In this chapter, the AWWF is analysed as a transnational advocacy network or web. Alvarez et al.'s (1998) notion of 'social movement webs' is useful to understand how the AWWF functions. For these authors, movement webs

encompass more than movement organizations and their active members; they include occasional participants in movement events and actions, and sympathizers and collaborators in NGOs political parties, universities, other cultural and conventionally political institutions, the Church, and even the state who (at least partially) support a given movement's goals and help deploy its discourses and demands in and against dominant political cultures and institutions (Landim 1993a and 1993b). (p. 16).

The Alternative World Water Forum is also a global conference which displays the type of nodes and interconnections, and sharing of resources and knowledge, mentioned by Smith (2004)

Global conferences provide opportunities and more resources for activists to gather at the sites of international government meetings to consider strategies for addressing global problems. They served as 'training grounds' in global politics as networking arenas, as spaces for information exchange and dialogue, and as targets for local and national political campaigns (Archer 1983, Willetts 1996, and Clark et al. 1998). (p. 322)

Spaces such as the AWWF provide opportunities for activists to build up links with other water movements and organisations. Information sharing is key for the development of strategic and lasting alliances; it involves a number of preparatory activities, which take place before the forum, including the production of own discourses and materials to spread out. Similarly to other transnational networks, the AWWF is organised through commissions and preparatory meetings in different parts of the world. As part of its work, the forum supports and plans numerous events, in addition to the official 'forum days' every three years. Among these, it is worth mentioning the water workshops at the World Social Forum, various demonstrations for the defence of water as a common good, and regional meetings of water committees.

The participation of civil society is widely promoted by the AWWF.⁹⁰ The alternatives for water governance proclaimed by the AWWF 'stand in opposition against the capitalistic globalization of water and sanitation services which have been implemented by large multinational companies and governments and international institutions. They serve their own interests, as does the World Water Forum' (AWWF, 2012). Colombian environmental organisations took part in the 2012 AWWF; most of them presented case studies of current water conflicts and also highlighted the most recent legal developments in water policy-making promoted by civil society. Colombian activists also participated in the mobilisations organised by other water activists as well as press conferences and seminars.

⁹⁰ The AWWF places particular emphasis on who is and who is not allowed to participate: Governments, military organizations, international financial institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization), diplomat representatives and political parties are among the latter. Nevertheless, government leaders, members of legislature or members of political parties can participate in a personal capacity if they respect the charter of principles (AWWF, 2012).

An international communication committee was set up months before the forum with representatives of partner organisations. Volunteers from different organisations and networks, actively involved in the planning and organisation of the AWWF, formed the committee. In the case of the 2012 AWWF, this committee⁹¹ met up frequently through Skype and shared all the materials and information through email. One of the actions of the committee was to produce a series of documents and information on the context and background of both forums (official and alternative), and coordinate preparation and on-site actions for the AWWF. One of the documents prepared in advance included a list of talking points about the WWF and the AWWF. This document was based on previous versions of the forums and summarised the aims and agendas of both organisations. The talking points document was a useful instrument for communicators because it provided key facts and figures which could be used for press releases. The work of the international communications committee also included writing media briefs and press-releases; presenting country-cases and local strategies; lobbying and networking, compiling lists of speakers and responses to WWF declarations. The main language used is English, but volunteer members of the committee translate communications into other languages.

The interactions and communication actions in the AWWF share some similarities with the communication practices in Belém's 2009 World Social Forum analysed by Stephansen (2011). Stephansen argues that media activists 'advocate alternative strategies based on strengthening movements' own communication capacities, envisaging the eventual shrinking and displacement of corporate media systems' (p. 183). This also helps explain the relationship of these movements with mainstream media. In the case of the AWWF, mainstream media was not the first priority on the agenda of the international communications committee. While it produced material for mainstream media; the main targets of the committee's communication strategy were, in fact, social organisations, alternative media and social networks. Even though, sometimes, direct contact with specific journalists was useful to get the information through mainstream media, as Stephansen (2011) notes, efforts in trying to gain access to mainstream media divert attention and resources from creating and exploring local and grassroots new media.

⁹¹ I was part of this committee

The AWWF has become a transnational coalition where actors from different countries exchange information, coordinate strategies, mobilise, promote citizens' involvement in decision making and advocate for water justice policies. For Yarwood (2014) transnational coalitions 'involve formal agreements and coordinated actions that extend across countries to influence social change' (p. 105). Transnational advocacy networks on water issues such as the AWWF have influenced, for instance, important transnational scenarios for water decision-making, including the UN. The continuous work of the AWWF, and the numerous meetings and encounters of water social movement organisations around the world before and after the official forum days, had an effect on the UN Declaration of the human right to water in July 2010. To some extent, the Declaration was the product of the mobilisation, advocacy and lobbying of many water activists, governments and social organisations agreeing with the principle that water ought to be considered a human right rather than a commodity. What these actions represent is the different forms through which citizenship is exercised across national borders and networks.

8.4 Discussion

The three case studies provide examples of water advocacy processes with different levels of organisation and networking. The global water movement is an intricate network of organisations and civil society actors which has become a key player in global decisions and actions on water. Through its many communication and mobilisation actions, this transnational movement has contributed to the consolidation of 'global civil society' (Section 8.3) widening spaces for participation on water issues for a diversity of social actors. The emergence of transnational water movements, coalitions and advocacy networks has had an important impact on decision and policy-making spaces and has put pressure on governments to listen and be responsive to civil society's demands. Transnational movements and advocacy networks, such as the Red Vida and the AWWF contest local and global power structures; Jong et al (2005) affirm that transnational movements offer alternatives to the politics of force, at the same time influencing mainstream politics.

New understandings and conceptions of citizenship, visible in the global water movement, emphasize what Painter (2002, 2012) posits as the implication of political spaces 'above and below nation-states at simultaneous and multiple scales'

(in Yarwood, 2014, p. 124). Dagnino's (2007) concept of *participatory citizenship*, whereby social subjects are able to identify their rights and struggle for their recognition (ibid), is also reflected at this transnational level, as shown in the Red Vida and AWWF cases.

On the one hand the establishment of transnational coalitions has helped local struggles to find support, share their concerns and elaborate solutions to their conflicts. On the other hand, transnational social movements including the global water movement, are constantly appealing to and reinforcing national identities and local issues, which then become a central feature of 'reflexive global modernity' (Hemer and Tufte, 2005). This is what post-colonial theorists like Appadurai and Homi K Bhabha call 'creolization' or 'cultural hybridity' (ibid, p. 16). Local water struggles have become a driving force of global struggles; they have inspired many of the political aims and strategic actions of transnational water movements. In return, transnational movements have promoted local struggles' visibility and provided local communities with alternative solutions to specific water conflicts.

Transnational movements and advocacy networks such as those analysed in this chapter have sustained their interactions through new information and communication technologies, shortening the distance separating activists from across the globe and promoting participatory and active citizenship on water issues. Digital tools, such as the Internet, have been instrumental in promoting the transnationalisation of these recent movements. It has been mainly through the Internet that partnerships, alliances and agreements have been consolidated. Also, as Bennett (2003) argues, 'the scale of protest on a global level seems impossible without the global communication and coordination capabilities of the internet' (p. 24). Social movements such as the global water movement constitute an instance of digital democracy at work. According to Hacker and van Dijk (2000) the concept of *digital democracy* refers to:

a collection of attempts to practise democracy without the limits of time, space, and other physical conditions, using information and communications technology or computer-mediated communication instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional ... political practices. (in Chadwick, 2006, p. 85)

Despite the fragility of virtual and digital spaces of citizens' participation and the power relationships inherent to them, the achievements of a transnational movement such as the global water movement have been partly premised on an increasing awareness of the scope of activists' digital actions, petitions, and demonstrations. The speed and simultaneity of actions made possible by digital technologies help social movements to agree on topics, make decisions, and propose action-plans in a timely and effective fashion.

The outcomes of the relationship between the Colombian water movement and the global water movement have been mainly reflected in the latter's support for national campaigns – such as the water referendum campaign; legal and organisational advice; and participation in joint events like mobilisations and rallies. The Colombian water movement has contributed to the global water movement experiences providing case studies of legal developments and grassroots water governance. For instance, Colombian member organisations of the Red Vida actively participate in continental debates and actions on water issues. They also share information, tactics and experiences. This mutual collaboration constitutes an exercise of active global citizenship which helps highlight the importance of water issues in the international public sphere.

The setting up of transnational links and the formation of transnational social movements dealing with water issues, such as the Red Vida and the AWWF, reflect the significance that issues around water have acquired in recent decades. The case studies reflect the wide array of approaches to water policies, management and conservation. The conflicts over water have mobilised actors all around the world and have raised concerns about the future of this precious liquid among millions of people. An important result of water advocacy and mobilisation worldwide has been the UN Declaration of the Human Right to Water approved in July 2010. Water movements around the world exercised pressure on governments and institutions to demand the recognition of water as a human right. After this event, legal developments have taken place in many countries and a lot of debates on water management have emerged as a consequence. In Colombia, the Declaration helped local initiatives fighting and claiming the human right to water to put extra pressure on local governments: in Medellín and Bogotá, for instance, local authorities have committed to provide a free minimal vital quantity of water to people

living in vulnerable social conditions. Also, some community aqueducts managed to get support from local administrations towards the improvement of water provision and sanitation services.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores three case studies: two of them exemplify the emergence of transnational social movements and advocacy networks dealing with water issues; the other one (WWF) illustrates the development of a transnational arena for policy and decision-making on water issues. The concept of transnational advocacy networks and the importance of digital media for new social movements provides a framework for the analysis of the interactions within the three case studies: the Red Vida, the Alternative World Water Forum and the World Water Forum. The three case studies bear evidence to the exercise of global and active citizenship within transnational water movements as well as the influence of power structures in decision and policy making on water issues globally. From the analysis of the case studies, particularly the Red Vida and the AWWF, it can be inferred that the establishment of networks and the opening of international arenas for the discussion of water issues have led to the implementation of water policies with a social justice perspective in different parts of the world. Moreover, the global water movement has also raised awareness of the implications of infrastructure projects affecting water and livelihoods, and, in some cases, also directly supported actions to halt these projects.

In their article on 'new new social movements', Feixa et al. (2009) recognise in this type of mobilisation the formation of a global citizenship and a global scale of action. The work of these authors inform the analysis of the case studies in this chapter. Especially relevant is their notion that these movements are based on an infra-structural web of technical tools and new technologies which allow them to become multi-scalar and active on different levels: local, regional and global (p. 438). The evidence presented in this chapter shows that transnational advocacy networks and social movements defending water have promoted and created spaces for citizen participation and inclusion in decision and policy-making arenas through the use of new information and communication technologies. The different organisations that make up the global water movement such as the Red Vida and the AWWF have been able to contest other transnational platforms such as the World Water Forum.

These movements have created thematic arenas, transnational events, permanent communication links in order to exchange information and experiences on water conflicts, policies and best practices.

The analysis of the modes of interaction and communication practices within the case studies shows how new forms of water governance are expanding political opportunities for local groups and international campaigns. This chapter also argues that threatened local communities have found support in transnational networks, and, in turn, have influenced the aims and direction of transnational movements actions. Both in the local and global contexts, a common factor is activists' exercise of active and democratic citizenship, particularly visible in the way activists have taken responsibility and have been willing to compromise in order to take part in decision-making spaces regarding the future of water resources, their countries, land and identities. The barriers to citizens' political and democratic participation at transnational level are overcome through networking and the sharing of tactics, knowledge and resources. The case studies also show that transnational advocacy networks are platforms to launch and diffuse local initiatives and to spread awareness and promote direct action at the global level.

The global water movement and the transnational advocacy networks described in this chapter can achieve what many national and local movements and networks are unable to do due to constraints to citizen participation, lack of spaces or will for collective discussion, and repression of social movements. Decisions on global water issues and policies are increasingly taken in global arenas outside 'official' democratic spaces. Therefore, effective responses to such policies can only come from global water justice movements and global actions. The Colombian water movement, through its participation in transnational water networks, has contributed to the elaboration of alternative discourses on water governance and water rights. Furthermore it has taken part in the process of, making global policy-making on water more inclusive and democratic, promoting forms of active citizenship that, while rooted in local and grassroots experiences, are able to 'think globally' and act in solidarity with a variety of stakeholders across the world.

9 Conclusion

The recent water struggles in Colombia have just started being researched academically. With few notable exceptions (Perera, 2012, 2014, Gómez-Bustos, 2012) there is a dearth of research focusing on activists' communication practices and interactions in these types of social movements. The aim of this thesis is to address this gap in the literature by critically analysing the role and scope of communication practices in the Colombian water movement. The thesis investigates how, and to what extent, participatory and public communication practices of water activists have impacted on citizen engagement in political actions, the exercise of active and participatory citizenship, and the opening of new democratic spaces for discussion in relation to the use and management of natural common goods. The analysis presented in this thesis draws upon the theoretical concepts and insights derived from three areas of scholarly research, namely: (1) new social movements theories; (2) participation, citizenship and deepening democracy; and (3) participatory communication, public communication and communication for social change. The case studies comprise social movements defending community aqueducts; the campaign for the Colombian water referendum; struggles opposing dam and mining projects; and international experiences and arenas for policy-making on water. The analysis of these case studies shows how the different communication practices used by water activists have contributed to gradually challenging political apathy and expanding democratic participation around natural common goods in Colombia. The role played by different types of media – community and alternative media, mainstream media, and digital media – in facilitating mobilisation, information sharing and networking among activists and supporters of the water struggles has also been investigated.

The findings of this research demonstrate how communication practices around the defence of water have brought a diversity of citizens together, progressively overcoming the fragmentation of Colombian civil society. These practices have also generated new forms of political participation and citizenship able to challenge the widespread political apathy caused by decades of civil conflict and violence. Moreover, through communication practices citizens affected by water conflicts have been able to connect their local struggles with others taking place beyond regional and national borders and to establish alliances with international environmental

social movements. These new forms of local and global citizenship, based on ordinary citizens mobilising to claim sovereignty over natural common goods, are deepening Colombian democracy.

The evidence presented in the thesis has sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What role have activists' participatory and public communication practices played in the struggles defending water in Colombia? (2) How do social, political and economic conditions influence the choices and implementation of participatory and public communication strategies in the Colombian water movement? (3) How do interests and agendas of different social actors play out in the struggles related to water in Colombia, and how do these affect the participation of citizens? (4) How do communication practices in the water movement influence citizen democratic participation and engagement in the discussion of public issues such as water? This concluding chapter reviews the thesis' main arguments by bringing together the main findings emerging from the case studies presented in the core chapters. The chapter is structured as follows. The first section summarizes the main argument of each chapter, highlighting the key findings of the case studies. The second section reviews the overall argument and contribution of this thesis, mapping out the linkages between social movements, communication practices and the deepening of democracy. The final section considers the implications the analysis presented in this thesis has for future research and makes some concluding remarks.

9.1 Main findings from each case study

This section presents the key findings of each of the core chapters. Pulling these findings together in one section prepares the ground for the following section which synthesises the overall contribution of this thesis.

Chapter 5 argues that, in the last decade, communication practices within the community aqueducts have contributed to strengthening the social tissue, and the organisational and political capacity of communities advocating for grassroots water governance. Aqueducts' communication practices have also facilitated the exercise of active citizenship by transforming the relationship between the community aqueducts and the state, and proposing alternative models for the co-production of a people-oriented water service. The communication practices of the community

aqueducts are characterised by consensus-based methodologies for decision-making; the re/opening of spaces for dialogue, encounters and sharing of experiences; and the use and creation of community media. These communication practices emphasise communities' sense of belonging and social cohesion, as well as the preservation and promotion of local knowledge and dialogue, which are all features of communication for social change (Gumucio-Dagrón, 2011a, Figueroa et al., 2002).

The community aqueducts are networks of individuals concerned with and working for the improvement of citizens' living conditions; this fundamental concern shapes how water services are provided and how decisions regarding the management of water are reached. The community aqueducts constitute an example of a social movement resisting water privatisation policies and challenging the neoliberal version of citizenship. They represent alternative forms of water governance, by co-producing water services with a communitarian ethos in cooperation with the state. The work of the community aqueducts is not about shrinking state's responsibilities but focuses on defending their autonomy in water management processes while demanding support from the state on their own terms.

The particular relationship community aqueducts have with water and the territory, their focus on solidarity and on the use of alternative technologies, are fundamental features of their collective identity. This collective identity is constantly fostered by participatory communication practices which facilitate dialogue and the collective construction of grassroots knowledge. The community aqueducts have become more aware of the importance of communication strategies since experiencing the positive impact of these strategies on their participation in water policy-making. For instance, by reinforcing their communication strategies, some aqueducts associations such as Giraguas have promoted successful campaigns for public-communitarian agreements on water management and service provision. The case studies of community aqueducts demonstrate the effectiveness of organised local actions compared to broad national initiatives, which require more efforts and resources. Arguably it is easier for grassroots organisations to gain access to information and speak with local government authorities. Knowledge of the local territory also facilitates mobilisation.

The evolution of the work and scope of community aqueducts in the last decade has created new forms of citizenship. These new forms of citizenship have emerged thanks to the engagement and popular agency of citizens in matters of public concern for the community. The increased participation of members of community aqueducts in political debates on water management has led to the transformation of decision-making spaces, political representation, and power relationships. The findings of the community aqueducts' case studies can be explained through Hickey and Mohan's (2005) reference to participation as citizenship:

Relocating 'participation' within citizenship situates it in a broader range of sociopolitical practices, or expressions of agency, through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities, thereby increasing their control over socioeconomic resources. (p. 253)

Community aqueducts members are not passive clients of a service provided by the state but they are negotiating and defining the nature of the polity by claiming their autonomous governance of water and asking the state for an enabling and supporting legal framework sensitive to their specific community aspirations. The process of engaging in 'sociopolitical practices' as political actors, both confronting the state and collaborating with it, has redefined the relationship between citizens and state, ultimately deepening democracy.

Chapter 6 shows how the public communication practices of the campaign for the water referendum fostered multiple expressions of collective action while becoming a pedagogic exercise in the use of a legal mechanism for citizen democratic participation such as the referendum. The campaign's public communication actions contributed to increasing the socio-political visibility of water conflicts in Colombia. Moreover, the campaign's actions enhanced the role of civil society in democratic spaces for discussion on the management and protection of natural common goods.

Drawing on NSM theories, chapter 6 argues that the campaign for the water referendum represented an opportunity for a renewal of politics, and a contestation of political hierarchies and bureaucracies in the water management sector. The campaign encouraged the creation of new civil society water committees, community aqueducts associations, research groups, and student societies working on water issues, while strengthening those that already existed. The communication

actions of the campaign also supported other spaces for discussion such as conferences, workshops, mobilisations, assemblies, and research clusters. Based on Melucci (1994), these actions are theorised as a demonstration of the movements detaching themselves from traditional models of political organisation, and occupying spaces of social life where individual needs and political innovation come together. The social and organisational structure left by the campaign has provided a solid foundation for other movements to continue the work of addressing environmental issues in different regions. For example, in Santander and Antioquia, the 'Comités en defensa del agua y de la vida' (Committee in defence of water and life) have remained active after the referendum campaign; they have continued to promote issues such as the defence of the *páramo* in Santurbán, and the defence of the community aqueducts in Antioquia. Moreover, most of the recent organised environmental movements opposing large-scale infrastructure projects or defending the community aqueducts originated from the campaign for the water referendum.

Information generation and dissemination was another central NSM feature in the campaign for the water referendum. The campaign mapped out the water situation in Colombia and denounced the critical state of water resources in many regions; at the same time, it also highlighted initiatives tackling the water conflicts. The sharing of experiences and dialogue, along with the research conducted by local communities, facilitated the process of identifying conflicts and formulating solutions. By placing emphasis on the 'fundamental' nature of the issue at stake – water as a human right and common good – the communication practices in the water referendum were able to congregate and mobilise a wide array of social actors, an occurrence rarely seen before in the country, especially in recent decades.

The campaign for the water referendum was an exercise of deepening democracy through participation, which, based on Gaventa (2006) 'may involve other strategies such as constructing and supporting political cultures of rights and citizenship' (p. 22). It was a pedagogic process of transforming a (rarely used) formal mechanism of citizen participation into a tool of national mobilisation to promote the human right to water and to push the issue of water at the centre of the public sphere. The campaign brought citizens into politics thus contributing to the creation of new political subjects and identities. These identities cut across the social, economic and

political boundaries of a historically fragmented society recomposing an active citizenry.

Chapter 7 analyses the case studies of social movements opposing mining and hydroelectric dams. These case studies demonstrate that, through communication and mobilisation actions, the localised mobilisations and campaigns challenging mining and dam projects have been able to question the national development and economic model oriented towards mineral and energy production. Citizens engaged in these movements have initiated debates on the long-term implications of such models, and opposed decisions and policies on natural common goods made 'from above', highlighting their impact on current and future generations. By defending their rights to livelihoods, territory and identity, citizens have reclaimed the significance of alternative models and relationships between communities and nature. Challenging hegemonic models of development and proposing alternatives for the sustainable governance of natural common goods are empirical responses to the need of deepening democracy; such responses are 'from below' in the sense that rely on the commitment and capacities of ordinary people.

The case studies provide evidence of the evolution of citizen participation in the communities affected by the mining and dam projects. The political agency of citizens increased as they were becoming aware of their collective power, as they learned how to use legal mechanisms to claim their rights, and as they reactivated spaces for encounter and dialogue. The communication practices that accompanied and fostered these strategies display some of the characteristics of communication for social change identified by Gumucio-Dagrón (2011c): community participation and appropriation; language and cultural pertinence; generation of local content; use of appropriate technology; and convergence and networking.

Mining and dam conflicts can be an opportunity for bringing together communities characterised by political apathy and/or physical isolation. Communication and dialogue among citizens help to overcome this apathy, mainly caused by the violence and the armed conflict, by strengthening collective identity, solidarity and communal power. The enhancement of participation and dialogue fosters the emergence of new political actors. In this context, public communication practices

are central to demanding government responses and actions to address water conflicts.

The analysis of the case studies in Chapter 7 shows the multi-locational and transnational features of the social movements opposing mining and dam projects. Through mobilisation and communication actions, citizens have managed to establish important links with similar struggles in other regions and countries, thus promoting the sharing of experiences, resources and information, and contributing to the building of a global movement on the defence of natural common goods.

Drawing on theories of transnational social movements and advocacy networks, **Chapter 8** argues that networking and sharing of information and tactics among water movements have promoted actions of global citizenship by influencing water policy-making at local, national and international level. The three case studies (Red Vida, Alternative World Water Forum, World Water Forum) are examples of coalitions which have had an impact on mainstream politics and decision-making spaces, with results such as the UN Declaration for the human right to water approved in July 2010 (See Chapter 5 and 8). These case studies also show that decisions on natural common goods are highly influenced by global policy arenas. These arenas are increasingly being shaped by institutions, which do not necessarily reflect democratic practices or the inclusion of civil society in their decisions. The transnational communication actions of the Red Vida and the AWWF, sustained by dynamic flows of information and alliances with powerful actors, have facilitated the participation of the global water justice movement in global policy arenas on water issues, opening and shaping these spaces to reflect grassroots demands. The analysis of the case studies also shows how local experiences of defending water and grassroots co-management of water services are discussed in global arenas and how global policies on water are discussed and adapted to local discourses and needs.

9.2 Communication practices, social movements and the deepening of democracy

In the last decade, communication practices in the Colombian water movement have played a crucial role in encouraging citizens' participation and the exercise of active citizenship. These practices have facilitated the setting up of spaces for

discussion and decision-making regarding water issues and natural common goods. In most of the case studies analysed in this thesis, the communication practices have fostered the use of mechanisms of citizen participation, and renovated ways of doing politics, gradually overcoming citizens' discontent and apathy towards traditional politics. These communication practices have emphasised dialogue, the sharing of experiences, communities' sense of belonging, and the strengthening of social tissue.

Evidence from the case studies shows that, often, citizens do not trust the traditional legal ways available to them for claiming their rights and participating in decision-making processes on issues of public interest. For this reason they resort to alternative channels, mobilising, protesting in the streets, implementing communication actions and using social networks. Citizens involved in the water movements acknowledge the need of combining legal mechanisms of citizen participation with mobilisation and communication practices. A research participant from Caldas made precisely this point saying that one of the lessons learnt from the recent water struggles in the country was that legal mechanisms for citizen participation do not have any impact if they are not accompanied by mobilisation and communication strategies (RP 28). The campaign for the water referendum is an example of the effectiveness of combining the use of legal mechanisms of citizen participation with the implementation of communication and mobilisation strategies to obtain support from citizens.

The case studies were analysed drawing on new social movement (NSM) theories and transnational advocacy networks (TAN) (Chapter 8). NSM theories focus on the importance of information sharing, collective identity, and symbolic actions, which are all central to the main argument of this thesis. Huesca (2000) suggests that NSM research provides 'a structural framework concerning the process of social change that is compatible with participatory approaches to development communication' (p. 75). NSM theories aim to understand how societies generate information and communicate meaning to their members (Melucci, in Peterson, 1989, p. 425) in the process of achieving social change and contesting power structures. NSM theories help explain several features of the Colombian water movement. For instance, the Colombian water movement is critical of the current development and economic model of the country and has elaborated and called for

alternatives to processes of industrialisation, centralisation and institutionalisation; these demands are, according to Riechmann and Fernández-Buey (1995), a key feature of NSM (in Rodríguez-Urbe, 2011, p. 138-139).

The activation of networks 'with a low degree of institutionalisation' (ibid) and the implementation of non-conventional methods for collective action (passive resistance, direct actions with symbolic elements, mass protests with recreational components) (Riechmann and Fernández-Buey 1995, in Rodríguez-Urbe, 2011, p. 138-139) are NSM characteristics visible in the Colombian water movement. The NSM slogan of 'Think globally, act locally' (ibid) is also reflected in the mobilisation practices of the Colombian water movement. Struggles such as the ones opposing mining and dams, the campaign for the water referendum, the networks of community aqueducts have shared their experiences of organisation and mobilisation with other similar movements in different regions and countries. Their local actions have also had an impact on global arenas.

Nonetheless, NSM theories were found insufficient to explain the communication repertoires and interactions within the water movement (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.2). NSM theories tend to overlook participatory communication as useful approaches to examine communication processes in social movements, despite the fact that, as Servaes observes, a 'participatory communication model has to take place in relation with overall societal emancipation processes at local, national as well as international levels' (in Hemer and Tufte, 2005, p. 98). To overcome these theoretical shortcomings, this research has applied participatory communication and communication for social change approaches to the analysis of the water movement's communication strategies. These two approaches are mostly used by researchers studying development processes occurring in the global South (Manyozo, 2006, Sparks, 2007). Therefore, they are attuned to the socio political context of these processes and their dynamics. The complexity of the different water struggles can be best examined by drawing on this kind of communication approaches. These approaches have also been developed into analytical models, for instance Manyozo's (2012) *Proposed Model of Participatory Communication as Community Engagement*, that have been very useful in classifying different types of participatory communication in the water struggles.

The findings of this research contribute to debates on citizenship and participation in social movements and development studies in various ways. According to Cornwall and Coelho (2007), in order to exercise political agency it is necessary that people recognise themselves as citizens rather than beneficiaries or clients. Some of the case studies discussed in this thesis, in particular the community aqueducts, the movement opposing the Hidroituango dam and the campaign for the water referendum, demonstrate that the communication practices did not only enable citizens to give and receive information on the water conflicts but also fostered processes for the use of mechanisms of citizen participation. The community aqueducts, for instance, have recognised their role as agents in the development of their communitarian organisations. In particular, practices based on participatory communication stress citizens' sense of ownership of the aim of the struggles, and their empowerment in defending water and natural common goods.

Various conceptions of citizenship arise from the analysis of the case studies. The exercise of *active citizenship* is significant in the activists' practices. In the last two decades, the redefinition of the concept of citizenship in Latin America has enabled the emergence of new political subjects who actively express what they think their rights are and fight for their recognition (Dagnino, 2005a). This redefinition of citizenship as 'the right to have rights' (ibid) contrasts with other dominant definitions such as the formal state-centred conception of citizenship or the one championed by neoliberal projects.

In the last two decades the armed conflict in Colombia has, paradoxically, provided an opportunity to re-think the meaning of citizenship and the ways human rights are reclaimed and defended. However, in the context of the Colombian conflict, security, rather than democracy, remains the priority for many citizens (Romero, 2003, in Dagnino, 2005a; Archila, 2010). This situation denies any viable exercise of citizenship (Dagnino, 2005a). As one research participant from Medellín puts it: 'citizen participation in Colombia is significant, but invisible in the middle of the many conflicts occurring at the same time' (RP 40). The case studies in this thesis show both the paradoxes of citizen participation and the resilience of many communities facing water conflicts. For example, the area of influence of the Hidroituango dam project has been strongly affected by the armed conflict (involving guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitaries and the Colombian army). The fear, apathy and distrust of

citizens in this zone could be enough reasons for not mobilising. However, the dam conflict pushed citizens to act together, and to defend their rights. Citizens affected by the dam project demanded accountability from the state, and respect for their identity and livelihoods. In the process they also learnt the use of legal mechanisms of citizen participation.

Citizenship-DRC (2011) suggests that citizenship is learned through action (p. 9). According to their findings, based on a ten-year research project, citizens gain knowledge and experience of participation through trial and error; they strengthen democratic practice when 'they demand new rights, mobilise pressure for policy change and monitor government performance' (p. 15). The water struggles cannot be analysed as isolated actions but are best regarded as processes that constitute a field for experiencing participation and exercising citizenship. As the mobilisation opposing mining in Santurbán shows, organised and mobilised citizens gradually acquired the skills and experience to discuss their concerns about the mining project with different actors (mining company, environmental authority, government ministries). The communications actions and the campaigns had such an impact that the mining project was cancelled. Another example was the collection of signatures in support of the campaign for the water referendum during which volunteers prompted other citizens to support the campaign and understand the importance of civil society participation in water issues. The campaign for the water referendum represented an expansion of the limits of a state-centred version of citizenship (see section 2.1.1) and a challenge to the neoliberal conception of citizenship (see section 2.1.2.1). The state-centred version of citizenship, or formal citizenship, centres on an individualistic conception of citizenship as a status, which tends to institutionalise hierarchy and dependency (Stewart, 1995). The campaign for the referendum brought to the fore the agency of citizens formulating and demanding their own rights, along with plans of action and alternative solutions on how to face the water conflicts. The campaign for the water referendum challenged the neoliberal conception of citizenship because it stressed the idea of citizens as subjects of rights, rather than consumers, and the notion of water as a common good, essential for human life.

9.3 Violence and the shaping of the water movement practices

Violence and forced displacement have had an impact on the way in which activists shape their choices, discourses and practices, but mostly how these activists exercise citizenship and transform their own realities. The context in which social movement operate in Colombia is vulnerable to stigmatisation, repression and impunity. Among the effects of the armed conflict, Sacipa-Rodríguez and Montero (2014) and Vidales Alzate et al. identify

The institutionalization of indirect sources of violence, trying to erase memories, eradicating knowledge about the past and about the crimes committed by the four armed groups (guerrilla, self-defences, drug traffickers and national armed forces). The use of “institutional lies” based on the selective manipulation of the information. Official polarizing of the conflict with the social legitimacy of powerful social groups, and the justification of their crimes and lies; plus the stigmatization of victims and other groups (Vidales, Alzate et al., Wilson et al.) (p. x-xi).

These effects of the armed conflict have become for some people a reason to struggle and re-activate citizen participation in building of democracy. The work of Muñoz et al. (2012) on the resistances of people affected by forced displacement resonates with the analysis of the the water movement. In many cases, victims who have faced numerous human rights violations, generate expressions of resistance with the intention to make their problems visible and reclaim their rights. For Muñoz et al., the spirit of community can survive despite the violence and fragmentation processes. People still respond to a principle of community, solidarity, sense of belonging to collectives and communities and this is in itself a political act (p. 80). Hundreds of people who have been involved in the different case studies presented in thesis have been affected by the armed conflict and forced displacement. The case study of Hidroituango illustrates this situation. In this case, after the violence caused by different armed actors, the displacement linked to the dam project was the straw that broke the camel. As one of the people affected shared in her interview for this research, people were ready to risk their lives to defend their territories because they had had enough. The violence suffered in the past together with the dam project became a strong reason to reunite the community and discover other possibilities to recover their lands, livelihood and to claim for justice.

The case studies analysed in this thesis are, in general, nonviolent processes for the claiming of environmental and social rights. The case studies demonstrate that violent past and political apathy have been transformed into increased political engagement through communication and mobilisation. Most of the struggles of the case studies propose alternatives to sustainable water governance and sustainable lifestyle. Moreover, violence and historical apathy have influenced the way social movements build up their relationships with other similar struggles. For instance, Muñoz et al. (2012) argue that a key issue in citizens' resistance in contexts of prolonged violence is the raising of their claims in international contexts in order to protect people's lives and rights.

9.4 Local, national and transnational connections

An important action at the national level was the campaign for the water referendum. As mentioned, the campaign's organisation and mobilisation structure provided the template and laid the foundations for subsequent environmental and water struggles in the country. The campaign for the water referendum reinforced the ties between regional struggles and struggles in other countries and put the Colombian water conflicts and water movement on the international agenda. The Colombian Congress' rejection of the proposal for the referendum was a blow to the national movement. Nonetheless, after a period of reflection, the water movement reconfigured itself by engaging in local struggles facing new conflicts such as large-scale mining and dam projects. These new struggles have focused their actions on strengthening the social tissue at the local level, communities' sense of belonging, and the sharing of experiences for standing up against large infrastructure projects. A similar process has occurred in the case of the community aqueducts defending their autonomy in water governance and opposing water privatisation policies. The local level of the water struggles has become an important arena where political and democratic changes can take place. These local and regional struggles have managed to connect with struggles taking place in other parts of the country and eventually, to cross borders and receive feedback from movements internationally. There is a local-local/local-transnational collaboration within the Colombian water movement. The water movement has created relationships between local and transnational arenas, bypassing the national dimension. What this situation shows is the lack of citizens' trust in the national level mechanisms, particularly if some of

these, such as a popular referendum, need to be sanctioned or revised by government authorities or Congress.

The local-global connections have resulted in the formation of partnerships working on water justice and governance issues. These partnerships have been established through participation in forums, transnational conferences, the use of the internet, virtual meetings, personal relationships. The Red Vida, public-communitarian partnerships on water management and governance, intercontinental networks opposing mining and dam projects are some examples of these local-global partnerships analysed in this thesis. These local-global connections have raised the importance of discussions on natural common goods in the global agenda. The strengthening of local actions coupled with the creation of alliances with similar transnational experiences is what Appadurai (2001) calls 'globalization from below'.

The research findings presented in this thesis show the complexity and range of actions in the water movement and how the communication practices facilitate the flow of interactions from one level to the other. The social movements analysed here operate at a number of levels, from the local, to the national and global (local: community aqueducts, anti mining and dams struggles; national: campaign for the water referendum; transnational: Red Vida, WWF, AWWF). The organised and spontaneous communication and mobilisation practices put in place at local, national and global level have intertwined with political processes promoted by the citizens themselves. Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) account of public communication processes, in the context of political communication systems in the US and UK, can help explain the extent to which some public communication actions in the Colombian water movement have influenced ways of doing politics and participating in democratic spaces: 'communication processes are involved in the legitimation of authority and serve functions of political articulation, mobilization and conflict-management. They set much of the agenda of political debate' (p. 19).

9.5 The evolution of participation and communication practices in the water movement

The different case studies highlight a profound change in the ways citizens participate in the defence of water and natural common goods in the country. This change is evidenced by the new forms of communication that have emerged to

facilitate the diffusion of messages and the raising of awareness over issues of public concern. The case studies share similar socio-political contexts characterised by features, such as violence, physically isolated communities, repression, illiteracy and ignorance of the use of legal mechanisms of citizen participation, which tend to hinder the exercise of active citizenship. Despite this, through participatory and public communication practices citizens involved in the water movement have reinforced spaces for debate and decision-making on water. The case studies represent struggles defending water and natural common goods at local, national and transnational level. Many of them are connected with each other thanks to communication practices and new information and communication technologies. The communication practices have acted as mechanisms through which communities affected by water conflicts have established alternative development goals and projects for their territories.

The case studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that communication practices play a crucial role in fostering movements' impact on the public sphere, knowledge production and social transformations. Furthermore, the dialogic character of the communication practices has (re)constructed the social tissue among many actors involved in the defence of water and natural common goods. The communication practices have stressed the sharing of experiences and the opening of spaces for dialogue and democratic participation. What is also evident is that for the communication and mobilisation actions to be successful, efforts and resources among internal and external actors of the movement need to be coordinated. The creation of strong connections between internal and external actors has contributed to building solidarity and support, and expanded the scope of movements' actions.

The public communication practices in the Colombian water referendum, such as press conferences, workshops, mobilisations, and public meetings with government authorities, shaped 'invited' spaces and created new spaces for citizen participation. Cornwall (2002) refers to *invited spaces* as those spaces created by institutions or governmental authorities, normally produced to legitimise their interests; however, these spaces can also become a site of resistance and expression for those who are invited to participate (ibid). An example of this is the case of the public meetings between the community aqueducts and members of the city council in Girardota in which future agreements in support of the aqueducts were debated. Other types of

spaces have been claimed by citizens through the communication and mobilisation actions in the water movement. These spaces have reconfigured the public sphere with regard to the discussion of water issues and natural common goods. The mobilisation in Santurbán is an example of that reconfiguration. In Santurbán's case the production and demand of clear and updated information on the implications of the mining project was a key feature of the mobilisation process. The communities' own research and the various activities put in place to facilitate the diffusion of information provide an example of effective participation. For Sparks (2007), processes of discussion and exchange encourage citizens to care about public issues. Effective participation is achieved, as Cornwall states, by 'giving people access to information on which to base deliberation or to mobilise to assert their rights and demand accountability' (p. 28).

The analysis of the case studies shows the importance of water in the planning, development and future of the communities and the country. The struggles for water are, quintessentially, struggles for life. Water privatisation policies, large-scale infrastructure projects, dispossession, directly affect the life of citizens, their livelihoods, territories and identities. Through their communication actions, water activists emphasise the importance of discussing issues related to water collectively and inclusively.

The overall argument of this thesis is that communication practices in the Colombian water movement have contributed to the creation of new forms of participation and citizenship. These forms of participation and citizenship have deepened Colombian democracy, transforming the relationship between citizens and the state, and have enabled citizens to contribute to the making of democracy by defining the rights and boundaries of the polity through their demands and collective actions.

9.6 Implications for future research and concluding remarks

This research was carried out in a particular historical moment for Colombia. In the past decade, the conflicts over water and natural common goods have increased, as well as civil society's movements opposing them. Moreover, during the same period of time, other important protests have taken place. These have involved coffee growers, peasants, teachers, transport sector workers, and indigenous people. These protests have put pressure on the government and forced them to start a

dialogue with citizens and carefully analyse policies or projects affecting them. The Colombian peace process negotiations, which started in Havana in October 2012 with the aim of putting an end to one of the longest conflicts in the world, are also part of the crucial transformations the country is facing. Despite the persistent social inequalities and the reluctance of some social sectors to embrace social movements as proponents of social and political alternatives, an increasing number of citizens is gaining consciousness of their potential role and responsibility in transforming the country. The different struggles in the water movement do not just criticise the current development and economic model of the country, but actively develop alternatives and proposals to construct collective processes of decision and policy-making on water and environmental issues.

The findings of this research could be expanded upon by widening the focus of analysis to include the communication and mobilisation practices in other recent social movements in Colombia and their impact on the process of deepening democracy. Although the analysis of the mass media coverage of the water movement was beyond the scope of this thesis, it constitutes an important topic – due to the crucial and paradoxical role Colombian mass media play in the construction of realities and symbolisms in the public sphere – that could be further developed in future research. Research on the global water movement, its different connections, outcomes and activists repertoires, would bear further evidence to some of the arguments put forward in this thesis. A more comprehensive and wide-ranging examination of transnational advocacy networks working on water issues and their communication and mobilisation strategies would improve the understanding of emerging perspectives on water governance, policies and conflicts, and new forms of global citizenship concerned with defending water and natural common goods.

As a final methodological note, I wish to reflect on the importance of the adoption of participatory research methodologies as well as a reflexive approach for this research and academic researchers in general. This research agrees with Lempert (2001) who says that activism does not need to complement scholarship; ‘it can inhere in scholarship itself’ (p. 25). Activist research expands the possibilities for the transformation of empirical evidence and theoretical debates into tools that could foster further applied research and enlighten social change and development. It was

not possible to avoid the connection between the personal and the political through the research process, especially after having witnessed, first-hand, some of the water conflicts and their evolution. The implementation of Participatory Action Research was therefore the only coherent methodological approach for the study of this topic: without it, this research would have not been feasible.

This thesis presents an analysis of the Colombian water movement which weaves together new social movement theories and participatory and public communication approaches. This composite theoretical framework foregrounds possibilities for extending participatory communication approaches beyond development studies and adapting them to other fields such as social movement studies. As already mentioned, these communication approaches provide models and elements that can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of activists' interactions and the outcomes of social movements.

10 Annexes

10.1 Location of the Colombian case studies



1. Giraguas
2. RETACO
3. National Conference of Community Aqueducts
4. Social movement in defence of Santurbán
5. Social movement opposing mining in Southwest Antioquia
6. Hidroitango

⁹² Source: www.ladonada-caldas.gov.co, Accessed November 2013

10.2 Events attended during fieldwork

Fieldwork conducted between June and October 2012

	Event	Location	Description	Participants
1	Meeting at Environmental NGO	Medellín, Antioquia	Meeting with staff of environmental NGO who work with the regional water campaign and community aqueducts. They talked to me about the purpose of the upcoming events and their current work with communitarian aqueducts.	Coordinator of the water programme in the organisation, and legal advisor.
2	Mobilisation World Environment day	Medellín, Antioquia	Mobilisation through some of the main streets of the city centre. Arrival at the Botanic Gardens. The mobilisation had as a central theme the denounce of the construction of the 'East Tunnel' which will be reducing the trip to the Medellín International Airport in 15 minutes. Activists argued the damage to water sources.	Environmental and social organisations, students, community groups, women associations, academic researchers, citizens.
3	Preparatory regional meeting prior to Rio+20 and the People's Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20-22 June.	Medellín, Botanic National Gardens, University.	The purpose of this event was to know and to reflect upon the main issues to be debated at Rio+20. Also, the event was meant to produce a declaration with the main concerns and demands from the people of Colombia regarding the UN Environmental Policies.	Environmental and social organisations, students, community groups, women associations, academic researchers, citizens.
4	Conference 'Communication for social change' with Alonso Gumucio-Dagrón	Medellín, University of Antioquia	Conference with Alfonso Gumucio-Dagrón, one of the main academics and practitioners studying and working on the topics of participatory communication and communication for social change.	Students, activists, academics.
5	Meeting with Lecturer at the University of Antioquia	Medellín, University of Antioquia	Meeting with a Lecturer who gave me some important information, advises and contacts for my research.	Researcher and Lecturer
6	Meeting with communitarian aqueducts	Medellín, Local environmental NGO	Meeting with the Association of the communitarian aqueducts from Antioquia to plan the participation in the National Congress of communitarian aqueducts.	NGO staff, representatives from communitarian aqueducts.
7	Public Forum about the state of the art of the project of the "East Tunnel" (Túnel de oriente).	Medellín, Province hall of assemblies.	Public Forum to discuss and explain the situation of the construction of the East Tunnel, a controversial project with important environmental and social consequences.	Province representatives, citizens, activists, environmental organizations.

	Event	Location	Description	Participants
8	National Conference of Community aqueducts	Pasto, Autonomous University of Nariño	The fourth version of the national congress was aiming to discuss issues such as the proposal of an autonomous law to support the communitarian aqueducts.	Community aqueducts, environmental and social organizations, activists, students, peasants.
9	Trip to “Cocha” lake and a natural indigenous reserve	Pasto, Nariño	Visit to the natural lake “Cocha” and to a natural reserve of an indigenous community.	Communitarian aqueducts, environmental and social organizations, activists, students, peasants.
10	Student’s group against big mining projects	Medellín, San Buenaventura University	Meeting to prepare a series of upcoming events such as a national mobilization on the 1 st August, a public forum, a cycling event, etc.	Students, activists, representatives from small miners, peasants.
11	Water carnival opposing the East Tunnel	Santa Elena, Medellín	Mobilisation from the rural community of Santa Elena throughout the road towards Medellín . The purpose of the carnival was to protest against the construction of the East Tunnel, which will affect many water sources.	Santa Elena inhabitants, activists, peasants, students.
12	Vigil in defence of the water and the territories	Támesis, Antioquia	A series of events to raise awareness about the multiple menaces and problems of mining in this territory, and the affectation to agriculture, water sources and food sovereignty (photo exhibition, free-software presentation, concerts, organic products fair, etc.)	Environmental committees, citizens from other towns, students, municipal authorities.
13	International Sociological Association Forum	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Presentation at the Roundtable of the Research Committee N° 24(Environment and society): “Environmental governance: from local to global”.	Social researchers
14	International Sociological Association Forum	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Conversation with Argentinian academic based in New York who does research on water conflicts and community aqueducts in Colombia.	
15	International Sociological Association Forum	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Conversation with José Esteban Castro, Researcher Newcastle University. Founder of Waterlat (Network of researchers about water in Latin America), and other colleagues from the network.	
16	Meeting with people from the committee in	Montevideo, Uruguay	Conversation (recorded) with members of the committee in	members of the committee

	Event	Location	Description	Participants
	defence of water of Uruguay		defence of water and life of Uruguay	
17	Meeting with environmental youth leader	Bogotá, Cundinamarca	Environmental youth leader who works on water and environmental campaigns in the South side of the city. The organisation he is part of was founded during the water referendum campaign.	Youth leader, researcher
18	Meeting with Leader of Community Aqueducts	Bogotá, Cundinamarca	Senior leader of community aqueducts from Bogotá	Community leader, NGO staff, researcher
19	Meeting with NGO staff working with community aqueducts	Bogotá, Cundinamarca	Staff from NGO which accompanies and supports the work of local community aqueducts	NGO staff, researcher
20	“ECO-VIDA” encounter for organic producers and farmers	Manizales, Caldas	Event to discuss advances and challenges of the rural sector	Organic farmers, members of rural community aqueducts, activists, students.
21	Public seminar: “Water, environment and public services”	Bucaramanga, Santander	Seminar organised by the national trade union association of public services companies.	Activists, trade union leaders from public services companies, academics.
22	Press conference people affected by Hidroituango	Medellín, Antioquia	Press conference organised by a group of peasants, miners and fishermen affected by the Hydroelectric Project Hidroituango	People affected, NGOs staff, journalists, activists.
23	Communication workshop Hidroituango	Medellín, Antioquia	Workshop about communication actions in processes of resistance and protest	People affected, activists.
24	Information meeting about decisions made in Rio+20	Medellín, Antioquia	Information meeting about the main decisions made in Rio+20 and about local and global struggles.	Environmental and social organizations, students, community groups, women associations, academic researchers, citizens.
25	Public talk	Medellín, Antioquia	Presentation of some reflections of my research in a non-academic context.	Public in general
26	Presentation environmental NGO	Medellín, Antioquia	Presentation of my research to staff of local environmental NGO	Staff, activists, NGO workers.

10.3 Interviews and recordings

	Organisation/Role	Interviewee(s)	Main topic	Origin
1	Environmental and Youth Network	Youth leader (female) Youth leader (male)	Water campaigns and activities of the network	Antioquia
2	Environmental and Youth Network	Youth leader (male)	Water campaigns and activities of the network	Antioquia
3	Former staff of regional water programme	Communication officer (male)	Strategies of the water programme	Antioquia
4	Independent Researcher, Sociologist	Independent Researcher	Water and environmental movements in Antioquia	Antioquia
5	Community aqueducts association in Valle	2 Community aqueducts leaders (male)	Strategies and work of the association	Valle del Cauca
6	Community aqueducts in Huila	Community aqueducts leaders (male)	Strategies, work and challenges of the association	Huila
7	Environmental oversight group in Santander	Environmental leader (male)	Campaign opposing the water pollution by a poultry business	Santander
8	Community aqueducts association in the Caribbean coast	Four community aqueducts leaders (male)	Strategies, work and challenges of the association	Bolívar
9	Environmental organisation in Antioquia	Communication officer (female)	Water programmes of the organisation	Antioquia
10	Movement in defence of the rivers	One activist (female) One activist (male)	Strategies and challenges of the movement	Antioquia
11	NGO working on alternative communication	One staff (male)	Projects on environmental and water awareness	Antioquia
12	Environmental NGO	Two staff (male)	Community aqueducts support programme	Antioquia
13	Committee in defence of water and life of Uruguay	Five members (females) One staff (male)	Strategies and work of the committee	Uruguay
14	Environmental NGO	One staff (male)	Environmental and water campaigns	Cundinamarca
15	NGO	One staff (male)	Community aqueducts programme	Cundinamarca
16	Environmental research centre	One researcher and activist (female)	Water conflicts research	Caldas
17	Environmental and cultural NGO	One staff (male)	Water campaign	Santander
18	Committee in defence of water and life	One activist (male)	Water campaign	Santander
19	Former campaigner for the water referendum	One advisor (male)	Consequences and implications of the campaign for the water referendum	Cundinamarca
20	Civic environmental committee	One activist (male)	Campaign in opposition to a mining project	Santander
21	Community aqueducts	One activist (female)	Strategies and work of the association	Cundinamarca
22	Women network working on public services	One activist (female)	Strategies and work of the network	Antioquia
23	Community	One member (female)	Strategies and work of the	Antioquia

	aqueducts association		association	
24	Network in defence of public services	One activist (female) One staff (male)	Strategies and work on water campaigns	Antioquia
25	Environmental and cultural NGO	One staff (female)	Work with the community aqueducts	Colombia
26	Indigenous Community	One member (male)	Meaning of water in the community	Chocó
27	Committee in defence of water and life	One activist (male)	Strategies and work on water campaigns and community aqueducts	Antioquia
28	Agency for the protection of human rights	One former staff (male)	Working on the study of the human right to water in Colombia	Colombia
29	Environmental NGO	One staff (male)	Strategies and work on water campaigns and community aqueducts	Cundinamarca
30	Press conference campaign opposing mining project	Nine speakers (male)	Campaign opposing mining project	Various Colombian origins
31	Network of community aqueducts	One member (female)	Presentation on the work of the aqueducts	Cundinamarca
32	Environmental NGO	One staff (female)	Launch of a book about a dam project and its implications	Santander
33	Public Seminar on water and public services	One speaker (male)	Presentation on the campaign for the water referendum	Cundinamarca
34	Public Seminar on water and public services	One activist (male)	Presentation on international policy and decision-making on water issues	Cundinamarca
35	Press conference on dam project	Members of communities by a dam project	Declaration and discussion on future actions and strategies on the campaign opposing the dam project	Antioquia
36	Workshop	Members of communities affected by a dam project	Workshop	Antioquia

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