



NUANCES OF PARTICIPATION IN THE TAQUARI-ANTAS WATER BASIN COMMITTEE, RS, BRAZIL

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to examine legislation and documents related to water resources, especially regarding the participation of society in management processes, and verify how this fundamental element of water governance emerges in the Committee of Management of the Taquari-Antas Water Basin. The study is interdisciplinary, qualitative, bibliographical, documentary and field. This is a case study, carried out between 2014 and 2016, in which the Committee meetings were followed, questionnaires were applied to the representatives of each group and interviewed the most active of each one, as well as the managers. Taking as a category the participation, the results deepen aspects related to four subcategories: a) participation of the members, b) participation of the society, c) participation of the State, and d) actions to qualify the participation.

Keywords: Water; Water basin committee; Participation; Qualitative research; Legislative Branch.

1. Introduction

The scenario of water crisis at a global level indicates that at least 80 countries have serious difficulties in maintaining water availability, which affects 40% of the world population, according to an assessment by the United Nations Environment Programme (PNUD, 2006). Thus, more than one billion people have problems accessing drinking water and 2.4 billion do not have access to basic sanitation, Tundisi and Matsumura-Tundisi (2011) state. Brazil participates in this scenario directed to the social concern with environmental issues and the management of water resources.

The 80's is marked by a degradation of water resources that resulted in various manifestations of society, in favor of the recovery of springs and the need to create a management system that would promote a broader discussion on the issue, involving the public authorities, associations of professionals involved with issues related to water resources and organized sectors of civil society, in order to provide opportunities for the participation not only of different State bodies, but also of society in the management of these resources (JACOBI *et*

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al., 2009).

The water management model, inaugurated by Law no. 9,433/1997, establishes the water basin as a territorial basis for water planning and management, through the creation of basin committees and suggests a more participatory and decentralized local process. Thus, it becomes relevant to investigate how these assumptions are being implemented, or not, in water management (BRASIL, 1988; 1997).

The objective of this article is to assess the extent to which social participation – provided for in legislation and *documents* related to water resources for carrying out management processes – emerges as a fundamental element of water governance in the Management Committee of the Taquari-Antas Watershed. For this, a qualitative study was carried out, which is presented through theoretical foundations and documental analysis on the theme of participation, reflections that support the understanding of the empirical study.

The growing concern about environmental issues around the globe has generated a concern on the part of the population in the sense of establishing global environmental governance. Castells (2005) relates the crisis of governance to the crisis of political legitimacy, resulting from the growing distance between citizens and their representatives. A series of crises intersect, he says (of efficiency, legitimacy, identity, and equity), and the instruments used by political and institutional institutions prove to be insufficient or inadequate.

In order to implement a governance system, the author proposes to include citizen participation in the political dimension for the management of relevant global issues, improving democracy with the institution of mechanisms for the participation of organizations, social movements and citizens in general in all levels of the international institutional system. Soares (2010) agrees that governance seeks greater effectiveness in democracy and public policies, which requires investments in mechanisms of participation, consensus building, dialogue, and cooperation (SOARES, 2010).

Civil society plays a key role in global environmental governance. “When we talk about Governance, we basically refer to a non-hierarchical mode of government, where non-state actors and different segments participate in the formulation and implementation of public policies” (JACOBI, 2012a, p. 12). Therefore, governance processes require partnership, networking, empowerment, perception of interdependence between actors, integration, complementarity, co-responsibility, educational practices, shared decision-making and negotiation (JACOBI; SINISGALLI, 2012). However, Castro (2007) emphasizes that when discussing water governance in the 21st century, it is necessary to overcome an idealized version of governance, which presents the State, the market, and civil society as partners in a symmetrical and depoliticized relationship.

2 Method

The study is characterized as interdisciplinary, qualitative, bibliographic, and documentary, including a case study, which covers field research. Structurally speaking, the research was developed in four stages: a) bibliographic research on the research topics; b) documentary research on legislation and documents prepared by civil society, related to water resources, water basins, their governance and the category of participation; c) Case Study, which comprised a field research based on direct observation of the meetings of the Taquari-Antas Water Basin Management Committee, application of questionnaires to its members, in addition to in-depth, semi-structured interviews, carried out later, with the most active representatives of each category; d) triangulation, seeking to build bridges between the empirical results and the documental analysis with the theoretical references assumed *a priori*.

The case study aims to gather as much information as possible through different research techniques in order to understand a situation and describe its complexity (GOLDENBERG, 2013). Between August 2014 and December 2015, direct observation was carried out in 10 Committee meetings in order to verify how members participate. The observation was direct and unsystematic, that is, spontaneous, without a pre-established script (GIL, 2012), which allowed a prolonged and detailed monitoring of the situations.

Between 2014 and 2016, questionnaires were applied to the titular and alternate representatives of each category and to the presidents of the Taquari-Antas Committee (CTA). There were 55 members sworn in for the 2015/2016 term (39 full members and 16 alternates), of which 26 responded to the questionnaire. As it was a transition period, it was decided to send the questionnaire also to the members who made up the Committee until then. Of the 46 members of the previous composition (2013/2014 administration), 11 responded to the questionnaires. Therefore, the results presented represent 37 answered questionnaires.

In order to further deepen the case study through different perspectives, 14 semi-structured interviews were carried out with a representative of each category of the Taquari-Antas Committee and also with the managers of the 2015/2016 period. The interview is considered a technique of great relevance in social research, enabling the collection of in-depth data (GIL, 2012). The representative chosen was the one who showed greater involvement when answering the questionnaires and who took the lead in the meetings. The transcripts generated a document of about 200 pages.

In the next step, triangulation took place. The data were interpreted following the proposal of textual analysis, which includes a rigorous and in-depth reading of the answers, highlighting the most significant passages, identifying similarities and differences, grouping them into the following subcategories: a) participation of members, b) participation of society, c) participation of the State, and d) actions to qualify participation. Categorization is a process of classifying the units of analysis produced from the corpus, which structures the

understanding of the investigated phenomena (MORAES, 2005).

3 Context of the investigation site: The Taquari-Antas Water Basin Management Committee

The watershed is a regional unit of water planning and management, based, according to Jacobi (2011) on the tripod decentralization-participation-integration, considering the quality and quantity of water through actions that promote the multiple uses of water resources. Tundisi and Matsumura-Tundisi (2011) consider that acting in a watershed context allows for multidisciplinary integration between different management, study, and environmental activity systems.

For the National Water Agency - Brazil (ANA), the river basin committees are a new instance of policy making: decentralized by river basin and with the participation of public authorities, users and civil society organizations. “Water basin committees differ from other forms of participation provided for in other public policies, as their legal attribution is to deliberate on water management, doing so in a shared way with the public power” (AGÊNCIA NACIONAL DE ÁGUAS, 2011, p. 19). Table 1 presents a summary of the competencies of a river basin management committee.

Table 1 – Powers of the Water Basin Management Committee

Deliberative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arbitrate in the first administrative instance disputes over the use of water. • Approve the Water Resources Plan of the Water Basin and consequently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use rationalization goals, increase in quantity and quality improvement; – Priorities for water use permit; – General guidelines and criteria for collection; and – Reservoir operating conditions, in order to guarantee multiple uses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the charging mechanisms for the use of water resources. • Establish criteria and promote the apportionment of the cost of works of multiple use, of common or collective interest.
Propositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the execution of the Basin's Water Resources Plan and suggest the necessary measures to achieve its goals. • Indicate the Water Agency for approval by the competent Water Resources Council. • Propose non-permitted or minor uses to the responsible Water Resources Council. • Choose the alternative for framing water bodies and forward it to the responsible water resources councils. • Suggest the values to be charged for the use of water. • Propose to the water resources councils the creation of areas of restriction of use, with a view to protecting water resources. • Propose to the water resources councils priorities for the application of resources arising from the charge for water use in the electricity sector in the basin.
Consultative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the debate on issues related to water resources and articulate the action of the intervening entities.

Source: ANA, 2011 (adapted by the authors).

The Taquari-Antas Water Basin, located in Rio Grande do Sul, is the largest in Brazil in number of municipalities, with 120 and an estimated population of 1,200,000 inhabitants. Its drainage area has 26.4 thousand km² (RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 2014). In 1997, its organization took place, with the identification of users and segments of the population for the initial formatting of the Committee. With Decree 38,558, of July 8, 1998, the Management Committee of the Taquari-Antas Water Basin was created, starting the meetings, as pointed out by Cánepa et al (2011).

The representations are distributed in the following groups: Group I – Representatives of Water Users; Group II – Representatives of the Population; Group III – Representatives of the State and Federal Government; and Group IV – Special Group.

4 Participation and environmental citizenship

In recent decades, especially in Brazil, after the re-implantation of the democratic regime, new institutional forms have been sought to encourage the direct participation of citizens in public affairs, such as in the elaboration of municipal budgets; in the creation of education, environment, health, traffic, safety, child and adolescent councils; in the debate of issues related to the environment, highlighting here the Water Basin Management Committees. Conceptually, Gohn defines participation as:

[...] a process of living that gives sense and meaning to a group or social movement, making it the protagonist of its history, developing a critical de-alienating consciousness, adding sociopolitical force to that group or collective action, and generating new values and a new political culture (GOHN, 2008, p. 30).

Theodoro (2005), in turn, presents a didactic classification of participation in society, which allows for different combinations: individual, collective, passive, active, voluntary, and instrumental participation. Individual participation is an individual action of choice, while collective participation involves an associative action. Both can be public or private. In passive participation, the repetition of desired behaviors prevails, being, generally, sporadic and of mere representation. Active participation is governed by constancy and formality, presupposes the dynamic organization of a group that assumes the commitment of struggle and conquest with a direct commitment to matters of interest, in a supportive manner, seeking changes in behavior and in individual and collective attitudes. Voluntary participation is spontaneous, governed by solidarity, but it is associated with immediate problem solving, while instrumental participation aims to achieve a position of power, being directed by external organizations, with the relative inclusion of the population, as it excludes them from the decisions.

According to this author, the more the community voluntarily integrates itself into participatory solidarity projects (characterized by the horizontal political obligation between

individuals), the more the voluntary adherence to what the government wants decreases, and efforts directed towards what the community wants are added (THEODORO, 2005).

The democratic participation of citizens in Public Administration decisions is vital for citizenship, and local power is strategic for the realization of democratic participation, Almeida and Cerqueira (2010) defends. For that, it is necessary a significant integration between the diverse social actors, for the elaboration of public politics of the population's interest. The involvement of citizens in the management of what is public grants a democratic, legitimate, equal, and inclusion character to the State's decisions. Administrative actions are legitimized with the support of society, contributing to administrative efficiency, according to Reis e Costa (2010). For the authors, opening up spaces for participation requires the creation of instruments to encourage and qualify political participation, taking into account the plurality that makes up civil society.

Despite the recognition of its importance, effective social participation is still timid and restricted in some sectors, which for Reis and Costa (2010) is related to the fact that civil society does not have the strength to emancipate itself and expand its participation; and because there is no inducing role of the State which, despite the risks of social assistance and paternalism, must create tools to access and encourage participation, that, according to the authors, requires conditions of discernment, criticism and autonomy, otherwise those involved will be conducted and/or manipulated.

It is observed that there is a crisis of legitimacy of the representative system, which is expressed by the low rates of party affiliation, electoral abstention, apathy, and political and social non-participation, Nunes and Schirmer (2010) say. Cavalheiro (2010) calls this a crisis of the deliberative democracy paradigm, emphasizing that it forces a new relationship and presupposes a new model of citizenship, which enables the effective participation of civil society in the management and conduct of the State. If the people have no motivation for conscious participation, they remain indifferent, hostile, becoming easy prey for opportunistic manipulation.

If active citizenship needs to be attractive, as Benevides (2008) reaffirms, the value of information is placed as a presupposition for participation. Gentilli (2005) argues that for people to be able to participate in decisions that interest them, under equal conditions, a communication system that offers citizens qualified and diversified information is essential, so that decisions are made consciously, since their guaranteed law does not guarantee its effectiveness.

Dufour (2016) understands that the Brazilian Constitution, although contemplating broad participation, cannot encompass its initial discursive pretensions to expand the political participation of citizens.

[...] The view of participation is still passive and bureaucratic, such as public consultation and data collection, not advancing in the sense of offering co-

authorship of decisions to the supposed “participants” and still far from being able to be called “active citizenship” (COSTA, BURSZTYN and NASCIMENTO, 2009, p. 92).

In this sense, according to Dufour (2016), a centralized, vertical and hierarchical exercise of power structure is maintained, sabotaging the egalitarian and democratic claims of the Brazilian Constitution in force. The complexity lies in enabling institutionalized spaces that allow the realization of this right, becoming a process of environmental citizenship. Specifically in the area of Environmental Law, participation is considered an important principle, even so, for Leite and Ayala (2004) the formation of a State of Environmental Law has not yet been implemented.

Oliveira (2010) names the principle of environmental law of participation as the “principle of community participation”, stating that access to environmental information becomes imperative for community participation in the formulation of public environmental policies, allowing citizens to interfere in the formulation, execution, and inspection debates of these policies, contributing to participatory democracy, instead of just submitting to ready-made decisions.

The principle of participation is included in the Declaration of Rio de Janeiro, relative to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of 1992, which in art. 10, states: “The best way to address environmental issues is to ensure the participation of all interested citizens, at the relevant level” (ONU, 1992).

In CF/1988 the principle of participation is included in art. 225, which states that it is the responsibility of the community to defend and preserve a balanced environment for present and future generations (BRASIL, 1988). Leite and Ayala (2004, p. 157) point out that it is still a problem to be faced when one understands “that the duty of protection is a community, cooperative, and based on a model of subjective distribution of responsibilities task, and not simply a task or goal of the State”.

Mayer (2016), on the subject, highlights that the lack of citizen participation also occurs due to the (dis)interest of government officials, who often purposely do not encourage and do not encourage people to participate in public decision-making. This is the case of poorly publicized popular consultations and meetings or even public hearings on working days and working hours, which limits participation.

Bobbio (1992) understands that participation is one of the intrinsic dimensions of democracy. Defending the valorization of water, air, soil, fauna, flora, and man translates into a way of contemplating interests considered diffuse, which concern an indeterminate number of people, and not only individual interests. For Hochstetler (2010) democracy arising from opportunities for participation is the only mechanism capable of dealing with environmental concerns in a minimally effective way. In the case of water, this reveals the importance of a

Water Basin Management Committee, also called the “Water Parliament”, which provides a space for discussion and deliberation on the local management of water resources, triggering the exercise of a specific form of citizenship: the environmental one.

For Ribeiro, it is a new ethic, a new lifestyle:

A new environmental ethics must reconcile different social temporalities with the times of nature, which requires increasing knowledge of natural processes and their dynamics. It must allow the free expression of citizens in a perspective of fulfillment through culture, belief, not through possession or access to consumer goods. The new ethics must free the human species for creation, leaving aside the social control of bodies and minds [...] in short: it is necessary to change the lifestyle (RIBEIRO, 2008, p. 146-147).

For the author, a new project of society requires cultural changes that return to the noblest aspects of existence, such as the idea of permanence, perenniality, dialogue, respect, and solidarity relations. This project must include the democratic management of natural resources, and of water in particular, in order to allow the reproduction of different ways of life, without one of them threatening the others, depleting the material basis of existence.

5 Participatory water management

In the case of water management, the participation of society begins to be thought from a current context of scarcity of a product that is essential to life, according to Caubet (2008). With the enactment of CF/1988 and Law no. 9,433/1997, which institutes the National Policy on Water Resources, civil society is recognized as an indispensable part of the water resources management process. For Florit and Noara (2010) it is through association and participation in the public sphere that civil society can affect the political system.

The model of decentralized participation in water management follows a socio-technical logic in which “power relations do not disappear but are worked on and negotiated jointly between lay people and experts” (FLORIT and NOARA, 2010, p. 101). One of its characteristics is the importance given to public participation and its guarantee in all plenary sessions that make up the system as a way of legitimizing the decision and guaranteeing its implementation (council and national and state water resources bodies, river basin management committees). The Water Basin Management Committees were created with the aim of bringing the population together and allowing them to participate in decisions regarding the various uses of water.

The decentralized, participatory and democratic management of water was inserted by the World Commission on Environment and Development (CMMAD), in its Final Report (1987):

The law alone cannot impose the common interest. This mainly requires community awareness and support, which implies greater public participation

in decisions that affect the environment. The best way to achieve this is to decentralize the management of the resources on which local communities depend, giving them a voice in the use of these resources. It is also necessary to stimulate citizen initiatives, give more powers to popular organizations and strengthen local democracy (CMMAD, 1991, p. 68-69).

Participatory decentralization is an important instrument used by modern water management systems, which allows the State to maintain control over water with the participation of society and water users in decisions (OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 100). In water management, there are activities that are exclusive to the Government, such as granting the right to use water, but there are also participatory bodies to which a significant part of management is attributed, such as the Basin Committees, Water Agencies and the Water Resources National and State Council, members of the National Water Resources Management System. For Viegas (2012), the most important forum for implementing the principle of participation is the Basin Committee, as state segments, users and civil society are represented. This management method, which considers the multiplicity of uses and users of water resources, breaks the dominant paradigm until the enactment of Law no. 9,433/97, which was marked by a centralized and fragmented administration of water (VIEGAS, 2012, p. 162).

It is also possible to sustain that the decentralized process of society's participation, through the basin committees, makes it possible to find solutions to regional and local problems of water resources. However, developing a culture of participation demands time and availability from those involved (MOREIRA, 2010).

In extensive research carried out on how basin organisms are able to deal with the complexity of water resources management, Frank (2010) finds that water resources management advances very slowly, as there is a distance to be overcome, which he calls a gap between the intention and application of the water resources policy, that is, between the objective of sustainable development and the management instruments available to put it into practice, considering the concrete problems, which precisely moves people to participate in the watershed bodies or to seek solutions. The analysis carried out by the author suggests that methodological approaches are lacking to deal with the complexity of water resources management in the context of river basins. Moreira (2010) argues that effective social participation should be sought, so that the necessary actions to solve problems and define policies are accepted at the time of implementation, not running the risk of the process going backwards.

Lemos et al (2010) explain that, despite the need for legal mechanisms and institutional spaces to promote participatory water management, these are not enough to achieve effective participation. In order to increase society's participation in water management, governments must be willing to create public and plural spaces, where conflicts can be openly discussed and differences confronted, thus building a legitimate institutional engineering in the eyes of society

(JACOBI, 2012).

6 Participation in legislation and documents

In order to analyze how legislation and documents from different spheres deal with the issue of participation, we start from the global context, where it is relevant to analyze Agenda 21, which recognizes the need for broad public participation in the establishment of policies and in taking water management decisions, which requires the development of decision-making techniques. The document also points out that it is up to the State to create opportunities for public participation, provides for public consultations and user participation in the planning and execution of water projects, emphasizing the inclusion of women and young people, as well as traditional and locations, avoiding merely illustrative participation.

In the European context, the Water Framework Directive (EU, 2010) text conditions its effectiveness to cooperation and actions at the community level and to the information and participation of the public, being the obligation of the Member States to encourage the active participation of all interested parties in the elaboration, review, and updating of watershed management plans, providing adequate information for this purpose. The document relates information and participation interdependently. In Reference Document 7, a milestone for the water governance proposal at the European level (EU, 2009), it is also stated that the sectoral approach must be applied in a participatory manner, and mechanisms and instruments for decentralization and participation must be encouraged.

In the context of Latin America, the Framework Agreement on the Environment in MERCOSUR (MERCOSUL, 2001), already in the Preamble, refers to the term: “Convinced of the benefits of civil society participation in protecting the environment and in the sustainable use of natural resources”. Also, Article 3 mentions, as a basic guideline, the promotion of the effective participation of civil society in environmental issues, with the States Parties being responsible for deepening the analysis of their problems with the participation of competent national bodies and civil society organizations.

In Brazilian legislation and documents, CF/1988 (BRAZIL/1988) reports the need to create specific laws to provide citizens with satisfactory participation in public administration. For Silva (2000) this notion of popular participation is intrinsically linked to the concept of citizenship provided for in the Brazilian Constitution, which recognizes the individual as a person integrated in society, submitting the functioning of the State to the popular will.

Law No. 9,433/1997 (BRASIL, 1997), National Policy on Water Resources, guarantees that “the management of water resources must be decentralized and count on the participation of public authorities, users, and the community”. The National Water Resources Plan - PlanNRH (BRAZIL, 2006) was built through a participatory process, which reflects the search for governance. The document affirms the need to implement basin committees and other forms of

participation, decentralization, stimulation of dialogue between knowledge, democratization of discussions on water and promotion of the participation of the entire population, considering the inclusion of gender. In a similar vein, the National Pact for Water Management mentions that the desired governance model must be participatory, decentralized, and integrated, and the control goals must be defined in a consensual manner.

In the Rio Grande do Sul state context, the 1989 State Constitution (RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 1989) establishes that the direct and indirect public administration of any of the State and municipal Powers shall observe the principle of participation. State Law No. 10,350/1994 (RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 1994) includes the decentralization of State action by regions and water basins and community participation through the Water Basin Management Committees. The State Water Resources Plan also provides for decentralized and shared management.

Therefore, participation is highlighted as a fundamental assumption when addressing the management of water resources, whether in the academic environment or in legal provisions and guiding documents, placing the Basin Committees as a privileged instance of water protection decisions. Points identified in the development of the article, pointing out the relevance of the study for the area and proposing developments in terms of future studies.

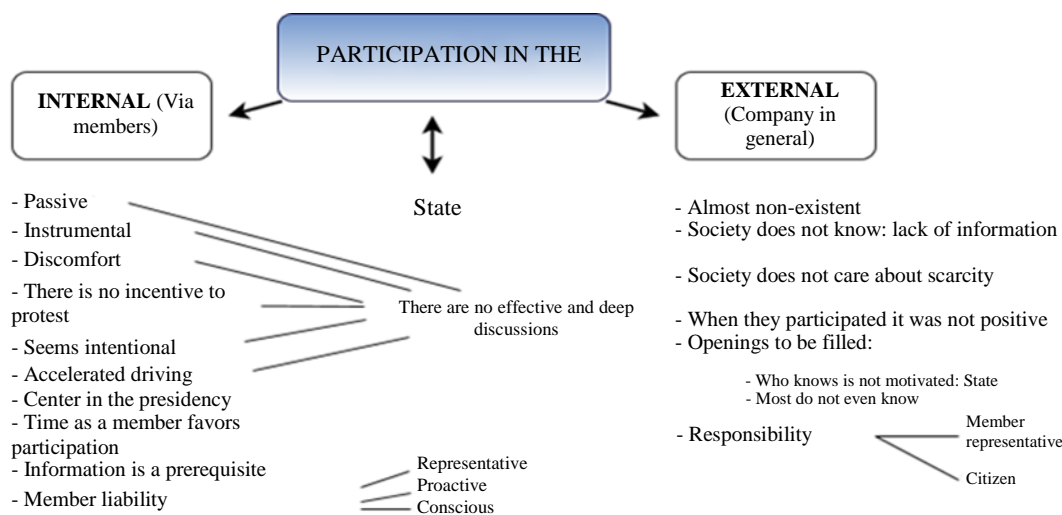
7 Participation in the Taquari-Antas Committee (CTA)

The case study included the application of questionnaires, in-depth interviews and direct observations at the meetings of the Taquari-Antas Committee (CTA), data that were crossed with document and bibliographic analysis, resulting in four subcategories: a) participation of members, b) participation of society, c) participation of the State, and d) actions to qualify participation.

It was found that there are two main axes of participation: the internal participation in the CTA, related to the members in the regular meetings through manifestations, and, sometimes, by email; and external participation, carried out by members of civil society (non-CTA members), in monitoring the meetings, with the possibility of manifestation.

These two modes of participation are influenced by several orders, but one factor stands out: the relationship between the CTA and the State (RS), that is, the support received (or not), and the recognition/adoption/implementation of policies of the state agency to which it is linked, which will determine most of the directions of participation, both internally and externally. Another point that stands out in the analysis are the actions suggested to qualify this process of participation, whether internal or external, so that a fourth subcategory was created: actions to qualify participation (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Participation in the Taquari-Antas Committee



Source: Luz (2017).

7.1 Participation of CTA members

Internal participation in the CTA, especially at the time of ordinary meetings, proved to be passive and instrumental (THEODORO, 2005), since many present do not manifest themselves in the debates. These are limited to participating in the votes, when they occur, being characterized as a predominantly quantitative participation, which can be called semi-participation or mere representation.

As an influencer of this mode of participation, the lack of motivation of the members due to the lack of recognition by the State stands out. The long period of meetings and their delay at the beginning, in addition to the difficulties of commuting, also affect participation. In addition, the debates are considered by the members as insufficient and, when they occur, they usually take place at the end of the meeting, generate discouragement and fatigue, and are accelerated, which inhibits the demonstrations.

It was also found that most members do not feel comfortable to expose the problems of their category in plenary meetings, considering that there is no freedom and space, thus leaving the agenda items centered on the presidency. This form of conduct does not bring society and the Committee together and does not promote integration between social actors (ALMEIDA E CERQUEIRA, 2010; PEREZ, 2006), when the legislation and documents analyzed realize that water management must be decentralized, which establishes Law No. 9,433/1997 (BRASIL, 1997), PlanNRH (BRASIL, 2006) and State Law No. 10,350/1994 (RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 1994). Therefore, the provisions of the documents are not met.

Some members expressed that they seek to contribute and suggest, even realizing that their opinion is not accepted, which reveals that even when attempting an active participation, it

proves to be passive, without authorship, with problems not being openly discussed in a plural space, offering co-authorship in decisions among the participants (JACOBI, 2012; MACHADO, 2011, COSTA, BURSZTYN AND NASCIMENTO, 2009).

Passive participation also stems from the lack of a favorable environment for the demonstrations, as there were some situations of embarrassment when some members spoke about something that did not please those who were conducting the meeting. It was noticed that such situation was a cause not only of inhibition of the member involved, but also of the others, who chose not to expose themselves to similar situations.

Furthermore, there is no incentive for members to express their opinions through tools that encourage participation. As recommended by Agenda 21 (BRASIL, 1992) and PlanNRH (BRASIL, 2006), full participation presupposes the inclusion of all segments of society, which are often excluded, such as women, blacks, youth, indigenous people, and local communities. However, within the scope of the Taquari-Antas Committee, there is no specific incentive to increase the participation of these segments.

Regarding the agendas of the meetings, it was found that these could be more objective, focusing on the Committee's attributions, since there is no effective exposition and discussion about the problems of the Basin, elements that should be brought by the members. This makes us reflect on the decentralized management model proposed by the law, which is considered adequate, but which encompasses other factors to the participatory process, of political, economic, and cultural nature, which requires the predisposition of leaders to compose open and transparent public spaces (JACOBI, 2012), which, however, was not evidenced in the CTA case study.

It was also evident that when there is any consultation at meetings, it is conducted in an accelerated manner, implying that no debate is desired. This mode of conduct that does not favor participation and manifestation means that the subject is not problematized in its complexity (MAYER, 2016).

These findings indicate that the plenary meetings of the CTA have not been constituted in an institutional space of broad expression, which allows processes of experience with sense and meaning (GOHN, 2008; DUFOUR, 2016). The participatory process demands time and availability to create, make opportunities, and encourage participation, which is the role of the State – in this case the Committee is understood as a state body – which has the capacity to intervene as indicated by Agenda 21 (BRASIL, 1992) and the Water Framework Directive (EU, 2010), WALDMAN, (2003) and MOREIRA, (2010).

The ways of participating in the CTA are also influenced by the trajectory of its members, which determines knowledge about the debated cause and facilitates demonstrations. It was found that the longer a member has been working on the Committee, the more they tend to manifest, in view of the experience gained and the accumulation of information, which

expands the possibilities of interfering in the debates of formulation, execution, and inspection (OLIVEIRA, 2010). In relation to this verification, two lines of analysis are pointed out.

The first confirms the assumption of the interdependence between information and participation. The availability of information to members motivates participation, attendance at meetings, awareness-raising and, possibly, engagement. However, it should be noted that if they do not receive information from the managers, it would be up to the members to take a proactive stance, seeking to learn about the matters discussed in the Committee, in order to ensure a more qualified participation.

The second refers to the fact that it is understood that the longer working time in the Committee can help in the participation processes, but the renewal of the members helps to break the forms of worn out or flawed representations, opening the opportunity for new dynamics.

Finally, it is emphasized that the member's way of acting is revealed as a key element for the participation process, considering that representativeness improves through permanent dialogue with the category, presenting itself, in the interventions that occur during Committee meetings, group ideas, not individual positions.

7.2 Society participation in the CTA

As for the ways in which the external public participates, it was observed that the relationship between the CTA and society (non-members) needs improvement. During the direct observations at the meetings, it was found that the participation of society was minimal, a fact corroborated by the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews.

Considered fragile, the participation of society is not effective because it was found that the citizen does not know the Committee, as there is a lack of information and dissemination of actions and meetings. Therefore, they are unaware of its importance and influence on community life. Also, the time when the meetings take place does not favor participation (working days, usually Friday mornings). Furthermore, as there is no shortage of water in the basin region, the water issue is not a matter of concern, arousing little interest.

There were reports that CTA sought, in the past, to increase community participation in meetings, but as people arrived without prior information on the agendas and procedures, they often caused embarrassing situations. In this sense, it is perceived that there is a need to provide public transparency to the acts, procedures, and subjects of the Committee, which can stimulate the participation of society in an “appropriate” way.

The fragility of society's participation within the scope of the CTA is also evidenced by the failure to fill all vacancies for members, which demonstrates a lack of interest on the part of people and entities. In addition, as society is not informed about the opening of vacancies, filling them is difficult.

The member's way of acting also interferes in the CTA's relationship with society, because if it is effectively representative, dialoguing with its category, it will enable the circulation of information about the Committee, stimulating the rotating representation of the group it represents. But for that, it is necessary that they act as information agents, which requires understanding themselves as a holder of rights and duties towards the community, getting involved and making time available for their exercise as an environmental citizen (JACOBI, 2012; TURATTI, 2010).

Although some members consider that there is no need to promote the participation of local communities, the Declaration of Rio de Janeiro, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (BRAZIL, 1992) emphasizes: "The best way of dealing with environmental issues is by ensuring the participation of all interested citizens at the relevant level". In the case of environmental citizenship, participation must occur on three fronts: individual action, society and the State, providing citizens with the ability to intervene (WALDMAN, 2003). In this way, decentralized management is promoted, provided for in both national and state legislation.

There is legal recognition of the need for civil society participation in dealing with environmental issues, which is provided for in the Mercosur Framework Agreement. Law no. 9,433/1997 also brings as a foundation the need to carry out the water management based on community participation, as well as EC/1989 brings participation as a principle and State Law no. 10,350/94 emphasizes that this community participation takes place through the Water Basin Committees (MERCOSUL, 2001; BRASIL, 1997; RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 1989; RIO GRANDE DO SUL, 1989).

The community participation advocated here is the one carried out by the local community and Committee members. As it is considered the water parliament, the possibilities of manifestation in the CTA are regimental, but if the citizen follows the debates held in the CTA and has access to information, the participation of members and non-members is qualified. The active participation of the population can influence members with voting power or jeopardize their deliberations, posing a true social control.

The interested party has the right to be informed about how their entity or category is being represented and, thus, may address any demand or request to their representative. Unfortunately, throughout the research, it was noticed a veiled intention of some members that people do not know about the meetings. Although most members understand that the participation of local communities is healthy, some people seek to inhibit it, so that their interests in relation to the use of water are contemplated, while those of the inhibited categories are neglected.

In general, the case study shows that there is a distance in the Committee's relationship with society, with the possibility of creating strategies so that participation can be expanded in a

qualified way, which requires that citizens better know their role in this context, by motivating, engaging themselves. In this way, the need for information also shows its relevance in relation to representation, for the effective empowerment of all members and of society.

The participation of society also demonstrates an interdependence with the possibilities of infrastructure that the State makes available to CTA, since many measures that stimulate social participation depend on state action. There is a need for citizens to demand from the State their attributions through a proactive posture, moving away from the mere condition of beneficiary, exercising a vigilant citizenship (WALDMAN, 2003; TURATTI, 2010; LAPIERRE, 2003).

7.3 Status in the CTA

It was evidenced that the relationship of the CTA with the State has a strong influence on the modes of participation in the Committee, whether through the members (internal participation) or external society. The Committee, as a branch of the state Executive Branch, linked to the DRH/RS, and the latter to the State Secretariat for the Environment, is influenced by state choices. Therefore, the financial crisis of the State of Rio Grande do Sul during the research period was reflected in the management of water resources, which faced budgetary limitations. These two elements – political choices and budget constraint – exert a great influence on the CTA's modes of participation, which was strongly manifested in the case study.

The non-implementation of Stage C of the Basin Plan caused interruption in the sequence of the CTA's work, revealing itself as a demotivating factor for the participation of the members. The difficulty of implementing Stage C resulted in the lack of subjects to deliberate, weakening the Committee's mission.

Due to the delay in renewing the Agreement between the Universidade de Caxias do Sul and the State, CTA spent a long period without an Executive Secretariat, without managing its website (which went offline between 2014 and 2016), that, added to the lack of motivation for not progressing in Stage C, caused disbelief in the group's work.

The participatory process was harmed, since full participation occurs when covered with deliberative powers, resulting from the dialogue between knowledge and access to basic information that provides conditions for discernment in decisions and avoids manipulation (MAYER, 2016; BRASIL, 2006; UE, 2010; REIS and COSTA, 2010; GENTILLI, 2005).

Bureaucratic obstacles and the length of the processes discouraged the participation of both society and its members. It was evident that there is no recognition of the importance of the Committees by the State and the Water Resources System. The State does not recognize the relevance of the Committees, which goes beyond budgetary issues, as the absence of participation of State representatives in the Committee's meetings was noticed. The State has not yet recognized the Basin Committees as a legitimate forum for society. This is a relevant

issue to be taken into account and which affects the circulation of information (lack of structure) and the character of the participatory process (discourages).

This scenario has been holding back participation in the Committee and has been aggravated due to the fact that society depends, to some extent, on the access and stimulus tools that must be created by the State (REIS and COSTA, 2010). In the case study, what had already been verified by Frank (2010), in similar research, was validated: slow advances and the existence of a vacuum between the intention and the application of the water resources policy. The legal system is complete, coherent, logical, fair, but lacks effectiveness.

The egalitarian claims contained in the CF/1988 do not materialize. There is a lack of institutionalized spaces where there is broad expression of pluralism and dissent. The constitutional provisions of the right to participation do not make participation effective. In the case study it was evident that a centralized, vertical, and hierarchical structure of exercise of power prevails (DUFOUR, 2016). It was found that governmental actions, since the creation of the Committees, have been problematic and absent, pointed out as a strong factor of discouraging participation. This is because the effectiveness of actions and their continuity are not guaranteed, regardless of the political moments (MOREIRA, 2010), as in the French model, which inspired the Brazilian one.

The lack of recognition of the Committees is due to – in addition to the lack of financial resources – political choices such as the non-recognition of this forum by organized civil society, and the maintenance of a relationship of distance and neglect between the State and the CTA. This fact weakens social participation, as the Committee does not even have to deliberate. The State is the biggest agent that makes the CTA unfeasible. There is no reason to request a greater participation since the actions depend on state measures. Especially at the time of the research, it was necessary to bid for the choice of the company that would prepare Stage C and the creation of Basin Agencies, which would allow the system to be self-managed, without depending on wills or political moments. There is an urgent need for a new management model for the Committees, so that it is less at the mercy of the State, which must respect the deliberations of these regional forums, enabling actions to take place.

Perhaps it was the strategic moment – in this institutional and regimental vacuum, since there is no formal decision on which to deliberate – to deliberate on what the State does not consider relevant: The improvement of information and participation processes, both internally and externally.

7.4 Actions to qualify participation

In the course of the case study, the Committee members presented some interesting strategies that aim to improve participation in the CTA. Among them, they pointed out the need for the Committee itself to think about actions to increase and qualify participation, both

external and internal. Briefly, it was suggested the creation of a commission to plan and publicize the regular meetings; the online transmission of the meetings and the availability of videos for later consultation; that Universities include the theme “Basin Committee” in the syllabus of undergraduate courses related to the environment; the creation of forms of dissemination on the importance of the CTA, verifying materials that already exist on the ANA website; the creation of Subcommittees with regionalized discussions in which local actors would be more sensitive; exposing the attendance lists at each meeting for members' self-criticism; the discussion of ways of sensitizing municipal managers and legislatures, in addition to the categories that make up the CTA.

These suggestions represent an appreciation of the CTA space as a privileged *locus* for participation, as they can generate a sense of belonging among citizens (ALMEIDA and CERQUEIRA, 2010; MAYER, 2016). By increasing participation and engagement, a meaningful experience is fostered, making the participants protagonists of their own history (GOHN, 2008).

Conclusively, it was found that there is recognition of the importance of local participation by the majority, but it is necessary to exercise the active voice of the members as a way of strengthening democracy, as recommended in the Final Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (CMMAD, 1991). Some of the members' suggestions depend on the movements and actions of different actors: Committee members, managers, executive secretariat, and state government since some depend on financial and political resources. However, more than these resources essentially depend on the desire to do.

8 Final Thoughts

This study showed that the participation issue is an overly complex and multifactorial category, and that information is a presupposition for participation, as the time of work in the CTA determines a more active participation of the members. The participation that takes place within the CTA has proved to be passive and instrumental, influenced by the State, which does not recognize the CBHs, and by the lack of comfort and incentive for members to speak out at meetings, in addition to the accelerated conduct in moments of debates about relevant topics, which inhibits the deepening, revealing an intentional *modus operandi*, to avoid manifestations.

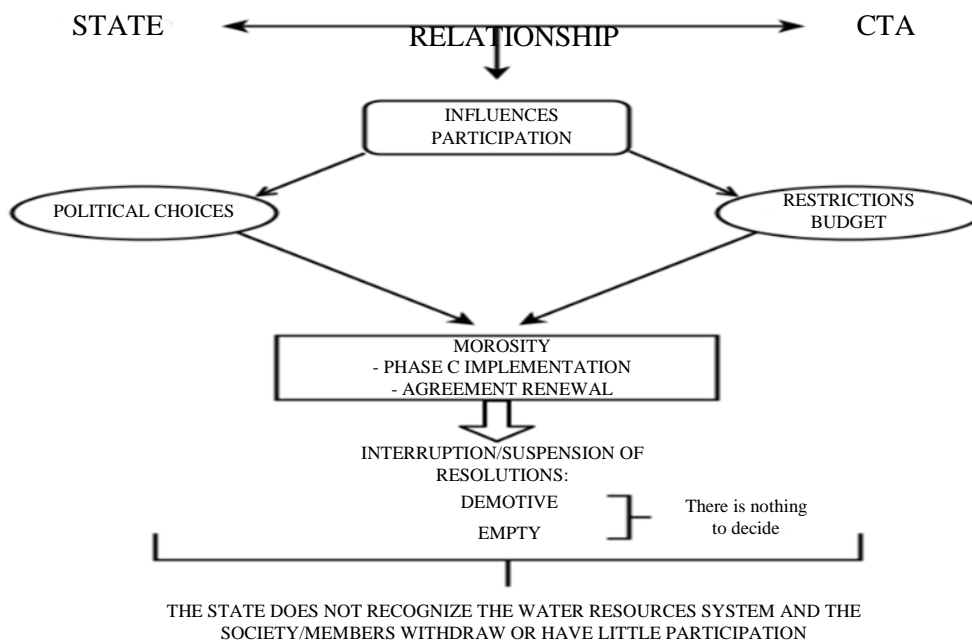
The participation of society in the CTA is practically non-existent, and the role of the State in this relationship is also decisive. Society does not participate because it does not know; and it does not know due to the lack of information regarding the actions and meetings of the CTA. Furthermore, there is no concern in the social conversations with the topic of local water since there is no shortage in the Basin.

The low participation of society is also reflected in the lack of filling the vacancies in the CTA. A veiled intention was observed in the CTA, so that society does not come closer,

perhaps to avoid discussions and positions that it does not want to give attention to. It should be noted that there is a key element in participation: The individual responsibility, whether of the CTA member, to be representative and proactive, or of the citizen, who needs to understand their role and responsibility in this context.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the State and the CTA and the nature of the participation that occurs, influenced by political choices and budgetary constraints in the RS State. The non-implementation of actions that were the responsibility of the State caused the interruption of the CTA work, which had been holding meetings without having to decide on. As a result, there was demotivation, emptying, and withdrawal of members, with repercussions on society.

Figure 2 – Influence of the actions or omissions of the State of Rio Grande do Sul on the CTA participation.



Source: Luz (2017).

Finally, it is understood that the actions indicated to qualify participation within the scope of the Committee can contribute to improving internal and external participation. It is relevant to verify that most of them can occur independently of state actions. These are simple proposals that depend on their managers and the desire of the members, demanding an active stance from them so that the idea of a Water Parliament can be implemented. An interesting and complete legal framework is in place. The challenge is to ensure that these rights are effective, not just to comply with formalities or to dress authoritarian acts in a democratic and participatory guise. In order to implement mechanisms that provide informed, citizen participation, one can begin by exploring simple methodologies that encourage everyone to speak out at meetings.

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