

The Construction of a Revitalization Program for the São Francisco River Watershed

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Introduction

WATERSHED revitalization is a technical-scientific concept still in development in Brazil. Brazilian legislation does not approach revitalization as public policy. The political and social furor surrounding the possibility of a project to reroute the waters of the São Francisco River saw the term “revitalization” coined as a counterproposal to redirection. In 2001, the federal government passed the Presidential Decree of June 5, 2001, creating the revitalization project for the São Francisco Riverbasin in response to demands from the local people for the area’s hydro-environmental recuperation (Codevasf, 2008b). Revitalization came to be seen from that time on as a series of actions to be implemented with a view to increasing the quality and quantity of water in the basin.

In 2004, the São Francisco River Watershed Committee (CBHSF) incorporated the concept of ecological flow into its Water Resources Master Plan as a criterion for defining water availability in the basin. As such, the plan to divert the river clashed with the Master Plan, which identified a shortage of water for multiple uses in the watershed area and recommended external allocation only for human and animal consumption.

Later, the Water Resources Master Plan for the Velhas Riverbasin, a tributary of the São Francisco, not only incorporated the concept of ecological flow, but proposed the use of biological aquatic ecosystem indicators to assess the results of the basin’s revitalization. This plan set the thematic and geographical priorities, timeframe and result indicators, thus outlining a methodology for watershed revitalization.

Various political and administrative factors, including the conflict surrounding the river re-routing project, have blocked the São Francisco Riverbasin Revitalization Project from becoming a genuine program. In practice, the actions underway, which are bankrolled with funds from the

Union budget, prioritize environmental sanitation, in other words, they focus on the quality of the water in the São Francisco basin while effectively neglecting the quantity.

We believe that a São Francisco Riverbasin Revitalization Program will result from the legal and political closure of the debate on redirection, as the preservation of energy production and the aquatic ecosystem in the watershed depends upon the abandonment of the plan to canalize and re-route 127m³/s of Old Chico's water.

The concept of revitalization

The concept of watershed revitalization is yet to be defined technically and scientifically in Brazil and is not covered in Brazilian legislation. Article 21 of the Federal Constitution declares that the Union shall have the power to “establish a national system for the management of hydric resources and define criteria for the concession of the right to their use” (Brazil, 2008a). That same article also asserts that the Union “shall operate, directly or through authorization, concession or permission the electric power services and facilities and the energetic exploitation of watercourses, jointly with the states wherein those hydro-energetic potentials are located” (ibidem). However, the letter of the law does not legislate for water management per se, as the term used is “hydric resources”, which could be defined as being limited to those waters used by human populations (ANA, 2005, p.3). Its mention of the “energetic exploitation of watercourses” once again underscores strictly human use. In chapter VI, which deals with the environment, Article 225 introduces “the right to an ecologically balanced environment”, claiming it to be the duty of the State “to preserve and restore the essential ecological processes and provide for the ecological treatment of species and ecosystems” (Brazil, 2008b). Federal law N° 9.433/1997, commonly known as the Water Law, and which established the National Hydric Resource Policy, likewise fails to make any reference to the term revitalization. The general directives of the Water Law speak of “the adaptation of hydric resource management to the *physical, biotic*, demographic, economic, social and cultural diversities of the different regions of the country” and “the integration of hydric resource management with environmental management” (Brazil, 2004 p. 24). Deliberation □ 05/2000, approved by the National Water Resource Council (CHRH), determines that Watershed Committees should “adapt their hydric resource management to the *physical, biotic*, demographic, economic, social and cultural diversities within their ambit” (ibidem). This deliberation merely reiterates law □ 9.433/1997, albeit tailored to scope.

The water resource management and environmental management defined in Brazilian infra-constitutional legislation envisage the preservation of watersheds and rivers only indirectly, as per the above-cited normative deliberation of the National Water Resource Council and Water Law when they

refer to “physical and biotic diversity”. Technically speaking, this preservation need only be observed in protected areas.

The Presidential decree of June 5, 2001 created the São Francisco Watershed Conservation and *Revitalization* Project, under the coordination of the Environment Ministry in conjunction with other ministries and the state and municipal governments in the basin area. The basic goal of the Project is to foster improved conditions of water supply in the basin, according to priority uses (Codevasf, 2008b). Its specific targets include de-pollution of sewage and agro-toxins, soil conservation, dealing with drought, the reforestation and recomposition of ciliary forest, management and monitoring of the basin, integrated solid waste management, environmental education, the creation and management of conservation units and biodiversity preservation areas.

The Revitalization Project emerged from the controversy around the project to re-route waters from the São Francisco River to the so-called septentrional northeast. Social agents contesting the re-channeling project coined the term São Francisco River “Revitalization”, on the recognition that the fragility of the river and watershed warranted revitalization prior to or instead of any re-routing. The decree cited above is a direct response to those sectors against the re-channeling project, which would threaten the integrity of a river of near-national integration. However, one virtue of the project was to introduce the idea of watershed revitalization to public policy on the Federal, state and municipal levels.

The Company for the Development of the São Francisco and Parnaíba Valleys (Codevasf, 2008a), responsible for the execution of the Revitalization Project, adopted the following definition for the concept of revitalization, which it says: “consists of recuperating, conserving and preserving the environment through the implementation of actions that promote the sustainable use of natural resources, improved socio-environmental conditions throughout the Basin, and an increase in the quality and quantity of its water. Revitalization suggests a new lease of life”. As we can see, the definition is generic and can be stretched to incorporate practically any government initiative in the São Francisco watershed.

While we realize that the concept of revitalization is still in development in Brazil, a provisory formulation can already be drawn that would include a range of actions planned for the watershed with a view to adapting its hydric resource management to the physical, biotic, demographic, economic and cultural diversities of the basin through the de-pollution of sewage and agro-toxins, soil conservation, adjustments to climatic diversity, reforestation and recomposition of ciliary forest, environmental education and the creation and management of conservation units and areas of biodiversity preservation. The range of revitalization should be measured in terms of improved water quantity and quality in the basin’s mainstem.

The Revitalization Project and Hydric Resource Plan for the São Francisco River Watershed

The first watershed plan in Brazil to be cast in the molds of Law \square 9.433/97 and the Deliberations of the National Water Resource Council was that for the São Francisco Riverbasin. The Plan was drafted by the São Francisco Watershed Committee (CBHSF) with support from the National Water Agency (ANA) and each phase was preceded by a public assembly. The drafting of the plan was riven with conflict surrounding the re-routing of water from the São Francisco to the septentrional northeast. At an assembly in the town of Penedo, Alagoas, in October 2003, a deliberation was passed that stipulated the drafting of a plan within the maximum timeframe of six months, including the determination of the external allocation of waters from the São Francisco Riverbasin.

Among the goals set by the CBHSF was the revitalization and recuperation of surface and groundwater quality and quantity with a view to securing multiple-use supply to the local municipalities and the *preservation and recuperation of the biodiversity of the basin* (Committee..., 2004, p.16). The novelty in relation to the environmental and water resource legislation and the governmental definitions is the breadth of scope the recuperation perspective acquires beyond protected areas. In fact, the São Francisco Riverbasin plan was drafted using the concept of ecological flow, which introduced so-called “environmental usage” to the equation of multiple uses. Ecological flow is the quantity, quality and distribution of water needed to maintain the components, functions and processes of the aquatic ecosystems upon which populations depend (Medeiros, 2007). Hence the action directives read: “promote the substitution of the reductionist concept of water conservation, so prevalent in the Brazilian culture and basically limited to traditional uses, for a broader concept that encompasses all water functions, particularly the environmental [functions], irrespective of whether these are in tandem with some other use” (Committee..., 2004, p.18). *Total Hydric Availability* for the São Francisco Riverbasin was calculated at 1,849m³/s, the maximum flow that can be reached in the river estuary since partly regulated by large dams. Part of this must be retained to supply non-consumptive uses and environmental requirements – this is called the *residual flow*. The difference between them is the volume of water that can be extracted for consumptive uses, known as the *allocatable flow*.

Establishing this extraction limit is a way of ensuring the preservation of fluvial and coastal ecosystems associated with the environmental dynamic of the estuary and compatibility with non-consumptive uses, including the energy supply commitments to the northeast, fishing and navigation.

By this measure, the residual flow for the São Francisco River was established at an annual average of 1,500 m³/s; a value high enough to allow for the possibility of practicing a seasonal regime of flows as opposed to a regular

year-round regime. The return of inter-annual streamflow variations through artificially provoked high flows, would meet a longstanding demand from the people of the Lower São Francisco, hoping to mitigate the impact caused to the biodiversity and environmental dynamic by the large dams.

This residual flow would also mean that 80% of the water in the São Francisco River (1,500 m³/s) could be earmarked for the generation of hydroelectrical energy, as the water that arrives at the estuary every day is the same water as passes through the plant turbines. Based on the difference between residual flow and total hydric availability, the Committee fixed a maximum allocatable flow value at 360 m³/s for the Basin (Fontes, 2007).

These definitions had consequences on the São Francisco River diversion debate. Capacity to sustain the aquatic ecosystems and multiple uses is severely threatened by the prospect of allocating 127 m³/s to Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte and other states in the Northeast. The Basin Committee therefore decided to restrict external allocation to water intended for human and animal consumption in cases of proven water shortages in the receiving basin. The federal government appealed against the CBHSF decision with the National Hydric Resources Council, which authorized allocation for other uses as well. Based on the information contained in the São Francisco Riverbasin Plan, it can be inferred that revitalization is incompatible with river diversion. Fixing a maximum value for waters allocatable elsewhere requires that the federal units involved adopt self-imposed limits on use and economic development, but there is also a greater goal, namely that of fostering the revitalization, maintenance and sustainability of the river and reconciling consumptive and non-consumptive uses. The demand for wide-ranging negotiations between all players involved in each state of the Federation that has a share in the basin was a first stage in the São Francisco River Water Management Pact. The second step, establishing the delivery values for the São Francisco tributaries and the spatial distribution of allocatable flow between the Basin States, has still not come to fruition due to the conflict surrounding the licensing of the undertaking by the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama) and authorization from the National Water Agency (ANA). As things stand, maintaining the current energy production on the river, recuperating navigation, developing sustainable agriculture in the basin, sustaining the aquatic ecosystems and meeting human supply demands are incompatible with any project to divert water from the São Francisco. The river is already stretched to its limit.

The Basin Plan also incorporated the lines of action for the Revitalization Program as set down in the Union's Tri-annual Investment Plan 2004-2007, considered a continuation of the Presidential decree of June 5, 2005. These lines of action encompass management and monitoring, institutional and socio-environmental strengthening, protection and recuperation of natural resources, environmental quality and sanitation and sustainable economies. Taking its lead from these lines of action, the Basin Plan indicated the interventions it intended

to implement. Though embraced by the Union's investment plans for 2004-07 and by the Basin Plan itself, revitalization remains a project rather than a program insofar as there are no set thematic and geographic priorities, much less any definition of results indicators. The scope of these lines of action is so ample that any governmental initiative in the basin could be considered "revitalization", as the lack of priorities and indicators makes it impossible to track and assess the results.

Revitalization in the Rio das Velhas Basin Plan: a pioneering initiative in a São Francisco tributary

The Water Resource Master Plan for Rio das Velhas, a tributary in the São Francisco Riverbasin, was drafted shortly after the Plan for the São Francisco Basin. It was therefore the second plan to be drawn up under the Water Law. An innovation in relation to the São Francisco Basin Plan was that the Rio Velhas Plan not only incorporated the concept of ecological flow, but also fish fauna diagnostics capable of identifying the key environmental problems. The study showed that the number of fish species fell sharply in the stretch passing through the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte. It also attested to the viability of recovering fish stocks along that stretch, seen as there are no dams on the Rio das Velhas and there are approximately 100 fish species in the tributaries preserved in the estuarial region (Alves & Pompeu, 2001). These findings allowed for the setting of thematic and geographic priorities and the establishment of environmental indicators to track the results of the revitalization program in the Rio das Velhas basin. The environmental sanitation of the basin was taken as the thematic priority, which meant that resources were concentrated in the Metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte. Knowledge of the basin's fish and benthic fauna made it possible to use fish and bottom-dwellers as indicators of the results of revitalization interventions. Hence the Hydric resource Plan for the Rio das Velhas Watershed incorporated its Target 2010 – "Sail, fish and swim in the Metropolitan stretch of the Rio das Velhas by 2010" (Camargos, 2005).

The adoption of bio-indicators of environmental quality in rivers has occurred in various countries throughout the world. In the European Union, the Water Management Framework Directive of 2000 incorporated biomonitoring in decision-making on water uses. In Australia, biological indicators have been used to measure water quality since the 1990s, and since 1987 in the USA (Marchant et al., 2006). In Brazil, indicators have been used in academic research and in debates involving non-governmental organizations, monitoring agencies and companies in the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Goiás, Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Minas Gerais (Callisto & Moreno, 2008). In Minas Gerais, a joint deliberation by the Water Resources Council and Environmental Policy Council incorporated biomonitoring in river restoration (Minas Gerais/Copam, 2008). The use of fish species and other aquatic organisms as indicators of environmental quality has favored the involvement of the population in pursuit of the 2010 Target.

Some biological indicators are classified as “charismatic indicators” given the enormous identification the people have with them, and this has been a boost for environmental control programs (Boulton, 1999).

The 2010 Target was incorporated into the Rio das Velhas Water Resource Management Plan after its launch among the people of Minas Gerais. The proposal originated in the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), presented under the Manuelzão Project. It then gained adepts among civil society organs in the watershed area (Heringer, 2008). The discussions held by the Rio das Velhas Basin Committee during the drafting of the Plan made it possible to conduct a technical viability analysis of the 2010 Target and bring water users and public authorities on-board.

As such, the 2010 Target is the fruit of a wide-ranging consensus in the Rio das Velhas watershed, expressed in the development of an investment plan, the definition of indicators, a timeframe for action and the establishment of thematic and geographic priorities. The revitalization of the Rio das Velhas basin is also evidence of the importance of an institutional arrangement that can ensure the continuity of the program.

Today, the 2010 Target is defined as a priority in the Minas Gerais State Government’s environmental policy, which serves to articulate municipalities and non-governmental organizations on the 2010 Target Integration Committee, the organ responsible for running the program. Some 1.12 billion dollars has been earmarked for the construction of Sewage Water Treatment Stations, sewage catchment and interception facilities, the plantation of ciliary and top-soil forest, navigability studies on stretches of the river, environmental education, social rallying and communication, and the installation of protected areas. The funding comes from the Union Budget, from the State of Minas Gerais, the municipalities of Belo Horizonte, Contagem, Itabirito, Ouro Preto, Nova Lima, Vespasiano, Lagoa Santa, Ribeirão das Neves, the Minas Gerais Sanitation Company (Copasa) and from loans from the Caixa Econômica Federal, National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) and the World Bank. Various species of fish highly sensitive to pollution can once again be found along stretches of rivers covered by the 2010 Target, as well as a noticeable increase in benthic fauna (Alves & Pompeu, 2008b). However, physical and chemical monitoring has still not detected any significant changes (Minas Gerais, 2008).

The actions on the São Francisco Riverbasin Revitalization Project

The Federal Government-run Revitalization Project for the São Francisco Riverbasin did not succeed in consolidating the institutional arrangements. Despite the fact that the decree by which it was created defined the ministries responsible for its implementation, the Ministry of the Environment as its coordinator, the creation of a Managing Council, with the participation of ministries and the need for articulation with the States and municipalities in the



*The São Francisco
River in the
municipality
of Pirapora,
Minas Gerais.
Photo: Mariana
Garcia*



Basin, its actions remain disperse and invisible to social stakeholders interested in revitalizing the São Francisco Riverbasin. The sheer scope of the lines of action, the controversy surrounding the plan to divert water from the river, the operational difficulties experienced by the Ministry in charge of coordinating the Project, the concentration of a large part of the budget in the Ministry for National Integration and the differing perceptions as to the priorities of the basin's revitalization are all factors that hinder the project's transformation into an effective revitalization program. In addition, the lack of articulated inter-sectorial actions among the ministries and other levels of the federal, state and municipal governments has yet to be politically redressed. The territory of the watershed runs horizontally through the ambits of all these governmental instances, and this demands joint management, which runs against the grain of the essentially top-down federative tradition in the exercise of autonomy at each governmental sphere.

Among all these obstacles to the project's implantation, special mention must go to the controversy surrounding the diversion of water from the São Francisco River. The opportunity to carry through such an undertaking has transformed into a political quagmire involving technical and scientific institutions, social movements, the Public Ministry, and the basin's traditional communities, on one hand, and the federal government on the other. For the first group, re-routing would render revitalization unviable.

The Revitalization Project has been used by the federal government as a political carrot in green-lighting the Re-channelization endeavor. In 2004, 2005 and 2006, the Ministry of the Environment tried to set up project monitoring centers in the Basin States. The creation of the possibility of access to financial resources for NGOs and small municipal governments resulted in a political fiasco and serious wear and tear to the Revitalization Project. The vast majority of the institutions requesting these funds saw their applications denied in virtue of the Environment Ministry's lack of structure to evaluate the quality of the projects and possible technical lacunae in their development and drafting. Successive meetings at different locations throughout the basin were marked by attrition between representatives from these institutions and those from the government over the details of specific projects. This conflict made the discussion of the project's master framework impracticable, never mind the formation of any consensus. For its part, the National Integration Ministry held talks with the state and municipal governments, offering resources and the execution of works under a budgetary heading of "revitalization of the São Francisco Riverbasin". Codevasf was restructured and capacitated to carry out works in the area of sanitation, the recuperation of degraded areas and exhausted micro-basins.

And so, between 2004 and 2006, 64 million dollars was ploughed into environmental sanitation, the collection and treatment of solid waste, the control of erosive processes in micro-basins, the shoring up of river banks and reforestation of ciliary woodland around riverheads. Up to 2010, the

Revitalization Project will receive roughly 700 million dollars in federal budget funds. Of this figure, a little over a quarter of a billion is destined for sanitation work in 80% of the basin's municipalities. In practice, the federal government set the collection and treatment of sewage water as the thematic priority of the Project, which is not enough to constitute an effective Revitalization Program for the São Francisco Basin (Barbosa, 2008). Actions geared towards water quality alone are insufficient to render the Project viable, as we have seen that something also needs to be done to increase the quantity of water in the São Francisco watershed, especially in the stretch below the Sobradinho reservoir, on the lower mid and lower São Francisco River. This realization has hampered the establishment of a consensus among the various governmental and non-governmental agents interested in the project, as it would require the reformulation of the river re-routing project. This impasse was made clear in February 2008, when the electrical sector obtained special licenses from Ibama and the ANA to operate water reservoirs that brought ecological flow to 200m³/s below minimum levels, i.e., to 1,100 m³/s. The Re-channeling Project envisages diverting 127m³/s downstream of the Sobradinho, regardless of the fact that, during the dry season of April 2007 to January 2008, Northeastern energy demands required the consumption of 90% of the reservoir's water reserves.

The possibilities of consolidating a program for the revitalization of the São Francisco Riverbasin

A program for the revitalization of the São Francisco basin is still under construction. Seven years after the promulgation of the decree that created the Basin revitalization project, close to 1.7 billion dollars has been ploughed into its realization. The process of constructing a program has been marked by the conflict surrounding the river diversion plans and by the institutional dynamic established in the basin since the passing of the Water Law. This spurred the institution of the São Francisco Riverbasin Committee and nine tributary committees in Minas Gerais and two more in Bahia. The function of the committees has created some conditions for dialog between the various stakeholders in the basin's hydro-environmental recuperation. The revitalization of a whole watershed is not the task for a single sphere of government, as the complexity and diversity of the necessary actions demand the involvement of sundry governmental and non-governmental agents including federal, state and municipal governments, water users (sanitation companies, hydroelectric stations, fishermen, rural producers, large irrigators and others besides), traditional communities, indigenous peoples, and all relevant representatives of civil society. The water resource master plans for the São Francisco and Rio das Velhas watersheds have indicated directives and introduced new concepts for watershed management and revitalization that are slowly being implemented.

In the Upper and Mid São Francisco River, the damage caused by the discharge of domestic and industrial wastewater is being tackled with investment

in environmental sanitation through the collection, interception and treatment of wastewater. Better water quality in the Pará, Paraopeba, the environs of Três Marias, Velhas, Pacui, Jequitai and Verde Grande sub-basins and on stretches of the São Francisco mainstem near the municipalities of Pirapora, Manga, São Francisco, Juazeiro, Petrolina and others will reduce the incidence of water-related illnesses and boost the integrity, diversity and health of the aquatic ecosystem. The consensus established around the improvement of water quality in the basin has propelled its revitalization.

The controversial re-routing project has not yet properly begun, although the federal government believes that dialog with society is already over. The long drawn-out process of public tenders has already been halted on various occasions by provisional judgments coming from various courts, largely moved against the project by the Public Ministry, the Basin States,¹ organized civil society or companies with some interest in the work. Today, most of these suits are at the Federal Supreme Court, which, advocating the initiatives taken at the lower courts, has recognized the existence of a federative conflict. These suits question the environmental licenses granted, the EIA-RIMA, the authorization issued by ANA, the decision of the CNRH authorizing productive uses in the receiving basin, the lack of jurisdiction on the part of the legislative to intervene in indigenous lands, etc. Even with a Supreme Court ruling in favor of the Union, the allocation of the 127 m³/s may be blocked when it comes to the Basin Committee determining the price for the re-routed water or the spatial allocation for each Basin State. The São Francisco Watershed Committee is conducting an administrative process, based on the legal prerogative of initially arbitrating conflicts concerning water resources. However, dialog with society is continuing and may yield alternative consensual solutions as to the volume of water allocatable to other basins. The quantity and distribution of water of the São Francisco watershed are bones of contention in the process of constructing a Revitalization Program.

The human intervention that causes the heaviest impact upon the São Francisco watershed has been the construction of dams along the river mainstem in order to generate electricity. The priority of a revitalization drive should therefore focus on mitigating the impact caused by this activity. The dams homogenize the amount of water in the river at a given time of the year, and even on a daily basis, when necessary. This regulation has basically only taken electrical needs into account, shunting other human uses into the background. The inclusion of environmental needs in energy sector equations and models, in other words, the “return of the fish” to the regions downstream of the Sobradinho, is a plausible hypothesis. The recommendations of the São Francisco Riverbasin Water Resources Plan for studies on ecological flow are still in development and are under the coordination of universities located within the basin carrying out studies in the estuary. Today, there is a term of reference that was developed on the basis of experience in other countries that defines a participative method for

meeting with the ecological flow of the São Francisco estuary. It is important to note that ANA has agreed to incorporate the concept in its plans for the basin (ANA, 2005, p. 30-3; CT-Hidro, 2006; Sarmiento, 2007). The episode of critical flow in the river mouth on 2008 occasioned the creation of a working group within the CBHSF to accompany the streamflow regimes of the basin's dams. The group consists of representatives from the committee, ANA and the electrical sector (Committee..., 2008).

The impact of irrigation can be seen in the quality and quantity of water in the mid stretch of the São Francisco River. Investment in water management, the recuperation of vegetation on the plateau, the introduction of water-saving technologies and the integrated management of micro-basins have all proved very relevant in the Verde Grande, Jequitai, Pacui, Paracatu, Grande and Carinhanha basins and in the environs of the Sobradinho dam. The real impact of the use of fertilizers and agro-toxins on water quality and the health of aquatic ecosystems needs to be measured and redressed. The implantation of water charges and an Umbrella Agency for the São Francisco Riverbasin has been a positive step. The Agency will be structured as a User's Association or Civil Society organization and the CBHSF has already deliberated on the minutiae of the edict to put the Agency under contract and set the criteria for the charges (Deliberation 36, 2008; Deliberation 37, 2008). We believe that the Agency will speed up the implantation of water use charges and afford the committees more autonomy to carry out the master plans for the basin and sub-basins, including revitalization programs. The price of untreated water established according to the authorized volumes will surely rouse the users to request a reduction in price, which will help in sealing the *São Francisco River water management pact* between the Union, States, municipalities and basin committees. Penalties for discharging effluents and waste will lead to an increase in investment in more efficient and better managed water and sewage treatment systems on the part of industry, sanitation companies and municipal wastewater services.

Final considerations

For a Revitalization Program for the São Francisco Riverbasin to truly come into effect, it is essential that geographic and thematic priorities, a timeframe and results indicators first be established. The experience in the Rio das Velhas basin saw the construction of a revitalization program that included all those elements, fruit of progressive consensus reached among all of the social and institutional stakeholders in the basin's revitalization. The greater complexity of the São Francisco basin makes these definitions all the more difficult. The river diversion project remains an expressive obstacle to any consensus being reached on the definition of these priorities. A resolution to the impasse depends on the Supreme Court ruling. The heavyweight significance of the electricity sector in the basin is another hindrance to determining the limits and criteria for the internal and external allocation of hydric resources. Lastly, the diversity of

problems in the sub-basins and the sheer scale of the São Francisco Riverbasin present real difficulties to the setting of geographic and thematic priorities. As a result, revitalization remains as yet only a project and aspiration for the society of the São Francisco Riverbasin.

Note

- 1 Examples are the States of Minas Gerais and Sergipe, both authors of suits brought against the project.

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ABSTRACT – The construction of a Program for Rehabilitation of river basin San Francisco is underway. A presidential decree of 2001 and the Plans of Water Resources of the river basins of the San Francisco and Velhas, introduced innovative concepts and criteria in the definition of proposals for the hidroambiental recovery of basins. The controversy surrounding the translation of waters of river of San Francisco and the implementation of the law of water in the basin determines the process of the programme. Activities and works focusing on the collection, interception and treatment of sewage are in progress and achieve great extension of the basin.

KEYWORDS: Rehabilitation, Hhydrographic basin, São Francisco river.

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