

ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS AND PUBLIC DELIBERATION ARENAS AROUND THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE IN ARGENTINA

MARÍA GABRIELA MERLINSKY¹

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, both in Argentina and other Latin American countries, conflictivity has increased in relation to the access to, the availability, the appropriation and the management of natural resources. Diverse collective actions expressed in the public sphere open up questions around the alleged benefits of development. What are the territorial consequences of the different extractive activities in the medium and the long term? What social, economic or environmental impact do these activities have on local communities and their way of life?

On certain occasions, the population chooses to ignore problems because they find it extremely difficult to find either strategies or resources of institutional or political power to take action in pursuit of certain changes. It is when social actors feel threatened in their very conception of life by risks they perceive as significant that they decide to organize themselves and protest against harm (HANNIGAN, 1995; LEZAMA, 2001).

A certain environmental impact produced by an intervention on the territory translates into an environmental problem when the population can apprehend its potential risk. The social and cultural context is important for the building of this knowledge that stimulates the organized action of the local community to resist externalities and their associated impacts. Environmental conflicts originate from oppositions between different groups in relation to the differentiated forms of appropriation, use and meanings of natural assets (SABATTINI, 1997; ALONSO and COSTA, 2002; FUKS, 2001; ACSELRAD, 2004). These oppositions give rise to the opening up of controversies on different events, to the emergence of different debates on future scenarios, and to a greater availability of options to face different problems. This is when spaces for the dramatization of the public problem are opened up (GUSFIELD, 1981: 5; BARTHÉLÉMY, 1992) and questions arise in the public sphere.

A key argument of this paper is that the different stances of the actors taking part in the environmental conflict open up a scenario and a temporality where arguments are built and exchanged over the legitimacy of certain decisions taken in relation to

1. PhD in social sciences (UBA) and PhD in geography (University Paris VIII). Senior Researcher at the Gino Germani Institute. Faculty of Social Sciences. University of Buenos Aires. E-mail: merlinsk@retina.ar

the management, appropriation, use and distribution of natural assets. In searching to understand how these scenarios emerge and subsequently evolve, we have conducted, over the last years, various case studies that provide analytical tools to comprehend the medium-term consequences of environmental conflicts in Argentina.

Our main interest is to examine how these collective actions manage to move from local scenarios to broader scales of deliberation, and to establish what influence they have upon state public action and environmental policies.

Consequently, the purpose of this work is to analyze the way in which different collective actions have, during the last decade, given way to new public deliberation arenas around the environmental issue in Argentina. Our analysis focuses on the results of two case studies: the “conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River” and the “conflict over the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin.” Both cases have great analytical value in helping us account for the way in which new social meanings have been attributed to the environment. This research work has enabled us to identify the richness of results brought about by conflicts in social relations. If, after a conflict, “nothing is the same” for many of the protagonists, it is essential to record and analyze what it is that changed and what it means.

For this reason, we intend to delve into a theoretical perspective that takes into account the productivity of these events and analyzes different forms of contagion among different public arenas of the environmental conflict.

The cases exposed are outstanding conflicts that generated changes in the way state policies are made. Their dissemination in the media and the fact that they implicated actors at different levels such as governments from different jurisdictions, multilateral bodies, international courts and the Supreme Court of Justice, among others, have contributed to making these conflicts destabilizing cases for state action. They constitute *scandals* that exemplify a state of things and that, from the perspective of the social analyst, allow for the understanding of certain aspects of the problem under analysis (CLAVÉRIE, 1994; DE BLIC and LEMIEUX, 2005; BOLTANSKI ET. AL., 2007).

Our research seeks to follow the dynamics of a conflict over time, assuming they are occurrences which do not have a final settlement in terms of the social shutdown of the problem. Many times, the projects’ authorities, officials, experts or promoters suppose that the actors of the conflict could or should reach an agreement on the subject matter of the controversy which could be reduced to a single point of view equally shared by the participants. From a sociological viewpoint, presupposing a priori that everyone should agree makes it difficult to see the conflict’s production conditions. Moreover, the focus of controversy is part of a “controlled misunderstanding” in which there may be a relationship of differential interpretation between homonymous terms with different meanings for each of the parties in conflict (FLEURY et al, 2014; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2009; DE LA CADENA, 2010).

In order to understand what it is that is put at stake in these conflicts, it is necessary to go beyond the narrative of events and analyze their *productivity*, that is to say, focus on the transformations that the events generate in the system of social relations. Analyzing a conflict’s productivity implies thinking of what it is that, in our capacity as

social analysts, we can learn from its longer-lasting results. By acquiring public status, conflicts allow for the opening up of a public debate or the generation of social learnings and, above all, they constitute instances for political and legal socialization. This does not imply that productivity is synonymous with positive result. In any case, the clarification of this point shall also be up to the public debate and we, as social analysts, will be making some contribution if we can define who are the participating actors (their positions and interests) and identify the foci of controversy.

Furthermore, being aware that there is not a direct relationship between the damage perceived and the forms of collective action, we understand there exist many cases of environmental impact in relation to which the population does not mobilize or, even if it does, it does not exert meaningful influence on the public debate. For this reason, it is important to approach case studies on environmental conflicts that are “successful” in terms of having acquired a high profile in the political system, which has been so in the case of the two conflicts we will analyze below.

We developed the narrative structure of the cases by gathering journalistic material from newspapers of national circulation and conducting interviews with the protagonists. Likewise, we have worked with judicial sources (material related to lawsuits and the verbatim records of the public hearings of the Matanza-Riachuelo case).

The journalistic material proved very valuable to organize the chronological presentation of the cases and check their consistency. We surveyed the coverage of the conflicts by Clarín and La Nación newspapers between 2002 and 2010 as they are national circulation media and constitute major spaces of expression and transformation of different public contentious arenas.

We conducted 54 open interviews with the main actors of the pulp mills conflict and 95 interviews with the protagonists of the judicial dispute on the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin. This work is organized as detailed below. Firstly, we will present a description of our approach to analyzing the relationship between environmental conflicts and public deliberation arenas. Secondly, we will offer a concise description of the two cases mentioned above, which, due to their wide relevance, have had destabilizing effects for the political system. At that point, we will attempt to reveal that there exist forms of contagion and/or translation of problems between the respective arenas of each conflict. Next, we will show how an analysis of the medium- and long-term consequences can be carried out, an aspect we call “productivity of environmental conflicts.” Finally, we will refer to a particular type of effect: territorial productivity. Reference to the two cases mentioned will be made throughout this exposition with the purpose of exemplifying the use of these categories. Our aim is to leave some questions, as well as some answers, open in relation to the medium-term balances resulting from these conflicts.

2. Environmental Conflicts and Intermediate Public Spaces. Contagion between public arenas.

Conflicts contribute to the production of an intermediate public space, that is to say, a new form of political space whose function is to build the conditions for discourses

to be heard and turned into political decisions (MELUCCI, 1999: 9). Mobilizations are, in certain cases, a collective experience for the co-production of general interest, in which there are different degrees of collaboration among social actors and state agencies; and, in other cases, they represent a clash between the actors committed to an environmental claim and the public powers who refuse to listen to their demands (MELÉ, 2003; LUSSAULT, 2007). The “public arena” is that conflictive space in which problems emerge and where the different actors check their strength against one another to impose their definitions or conduct actions regarding such space. For this reason, we consider it important to study conflicts taking into account their connection with a public, construed not merely as a grouping of actors but as a manner of facing the problem (DEWEY, 2004).

Public deliberation arenas are spaces and activities which express themselves through concrete and describable channels of expression, by means of public opinions and collective actions, generating as a result the development of common assets and public causes (CEFAÏ, 2002; CEFAÏ, 2007; GUSFIELD, 1981). They are “fields of combat” as well as “acting or dramatization scenes” built on the basis of collective experimentation work around public issues.

The public arena has a political nature because, as the conflict gains public influence, a field of actors and alliances of actors is generated and they begin to form part of a common domain of cooperation, competence or conflict between institutions and social actors involved in its planning and execution. When it comes to localization conflicts, such field of power exceeds the scope of location of projects and mega-projects and highlights an intricate political, economic and cultural network, often with a transnational scope of action, linked to “development” (SVAMPA and VIALE, 2014; ARACH, 2002; RIBEIRO, 1999; ESCOBAR, 1998).

From this analysis derives a fundamental ascertainment referred to the existence of multiple deliberation arenas around the conflict. This is so much so that, when discussions are observed in different contexts (local, regional, national or international), it often turns out that the same conflict is defined in a different way at each of those levels (AZUELA and MUSSETTA, 2008).

Consequently, analyzing a single public arena is not enough. It is necessary to identify the various political spheres toward which the conflict expands. Each space may have different associations, coordinations and movements, significant changes in terms of the influence of these spheres on the media agenda, their potential transformation by public opinion into issues of interest, and their inclusion in the governmental, legislative and administrative agenda.

The latter is very frequent when it comes to conflicts in which the territorial implementation of a global-scale economic activity is at stake, and it becomes crucial to understand the relative weight of transnational actors such as international banks, multinational companies, financial bodies, consultancy agencies that carry out environmental impact studies, international NGOs, etc. It is also important when, as we shall see, one of the state powers (the judiciary) intervenes to impose actions on another of the powers (the executive).

The important thing is to think of public arenas as a “space of intervals.” The problems, repertoires of solutions, mobilization of claims that were presented in a public arena may shift to another space of public problematization beyond their local or regional foothold, even when the establishment of “bridges” between problems is not synchronic (CEFAÍ, 2002).

Therefore, it is important to consider the connections between the public arenas of conflicts. “Contagion” in public exposure is correlative to the turn of meanings and the extension of disputes. The translation and transcodification operations (CALLON, 1986; LASCOUMES, 1994) are exercises by means of which previous points of view are re-grouped, ideas recycled, and activities concentrated under new forms of social response to problems. Thus, the definition of the problematic situation is commanded by the transfer of comprehension schemes and information stocks. While the actors, their competences and their vindications circulate from one scene to the other, the activists’ resources mobilize around different meanings, procedures are subjected to successive framings, and new windows of political opportunity open up. In the next section, we aim at demonstrating how this process of translation and/or transfer of comprehension schemes between different public conflict arenas is produced, looking to identify its implications for the environmental policies of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region.

3. The Conflict over the Pulp Mills on the Uruguay River and the Conflict for the Environmental Restoration of the Riachuelo. Destabilizing Cases and the Construction of the Environmental Issue in Argentina

The first reference takes us to the conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River. The “pulp mills case,” as it has been called by the petitioners themselves, originated in 2003 at the initiative of Uruguayan activists who opposed to the building of what then was a paper pulp production plant by Spanish transnational corporation ENCE at the Uruguayan locality of Fray Bentos, on the Uruguay River, bordering with Argentina. Later on, plans for the building of another pulp mill by Finnish transnational Botnia added to the scene. Discouraged by the lack of response on the part of the authorities of their country, the Uruguayan environmentalists alerted organizations in Argentina, especially those in the nearby city of Gualeguaychú, in the province of Entre Ríos. This movement, transnational from its beginnings, developed a series of mobilization actions and, especially, requested reports from the binational water management body: the Uruguay River Administrative Commission (CARU). Still lacking a response, the movement remained limited to the collective actions in the Argentine city of Gualeguaychú. A ‘citizens’ environmental assembly’ was constituted which would eventually gain public visibility due to its unusual formats of action (road blockades, including the blocking off of San Martín international bridge, which connects both river banks) and to the deliberative nature of the process of monitoring and follow-up of the forms and time frameworks of protests.

Gualeguaychú, the hub of an area primarily devoted to agriculture and tourism, generated, in the 1990’s, a model for local development of its own around the Carnival celebrations. Thus, starting with its steadfast opposition to the establishment of the pulp

mills, it became the epicenter of controversy. Virtually all of the social sectors mobilized against both industrial undertakings (MERLINSKY, 2008; MERLINSKY 2008 b, MERLINSKY, 2014).

The case began to acquire public visibility in March 2005 after a multitudinous demonstration —between 35,000 and 40,000 people— at General San Martín international bridge, which constitutes the land connection between Argentina and Uruguay.

The activists managed to gain the support of the provincial government and mass protests gradually achieved enormous impact on public opinion at the national level. In May 2006, then President Néstor Kirchner organized a public event in the city of Gualeguaychú, with the presence of several provincial governors. On that occasion, the former president pointed out that the environment was a matter of state concern. Then, in referring to the responsibility of the Uruguayan government in the conflict, he also stated that “negotiations until then had been unsuccessful” and announced that the Argentine state would file a suit against the Uruguayan state before the International Court of Justice. The suit before the ICJ led to the internationalization of the conflict, which came to have substantial impact on the media at both national and global level (Clarín, May 5, 2006; La Nación, May 6, 2006).

By installing the environmental issue as a “matter of state,” former President Kirchner acknowledged the political nature of a process with national scope which the events at Gualeguaychú contributed to highlight. The environmental issue had ceased to be an irrelevant affair in the public sphere. Closely related to the valuation of the territory and its natural resources, and expressed in terms of the right of communities to defend their ways of life, the issue had been progressively, from the beginning of the current millennium, making its way into the symbolic repertoire and the valuation languages of collective action. Subsequently, although in terms of public policy it was still a low priority case, these events created fertile ground for its inscription as a public issue and for the formation of further environmental arenas.

The Gualeguaychú Citizens’ Environmental Assembly became the visible face of a socio-environmental movement with a territorial nature and, in view of its great impact on public opinion, it gradually turned into a “recognized source of authority,” that is to say, a social agent whose activities are considered to have a responsibility in determining what should be deemed as a matter of public concern in relation to the environment. Governmental authorities and scientific authorities are the highest sources of authority but, on certain occasions, the environmental movement may have wider recognition when it gains political and social influence on a certain conjuncture. It has been demonstrated that these agents play a relevant role in the social valuation, filtering and construction process that cuts out a situation from reality and turns it into an environmental issue (LEZAMA, 2004).

The disagreement over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River generated repercussions in terms of the discussion over the territorial, social and environmental impact of the relocation of global productive activities. The intransigence that the Gualeguaychú movement has maintained at every instance of negotiation makes it possible to understand what is at stake in a localization conflict. In these situations, positions become

non-negotiable because arguments rest with the incompatibility of projects with the local way of life. While the actors promoting the establishment of the pulp mills believe it is a positive initiative for the region whose negative consequences may be controllable; to the resisting actors, these projects are negative for the region and non-manageable, and the only solution is to rule them out. It follows, therefore, that any actor arguing in favor of the environmental monitoring of the plants, that is to say, sustaining that the case is manageable, will be regarded by the resisting actors as a supporter of the promoting actors, even if they showed support for the resisting group. (VARA, 2007: 15).

This is a key point that displays the framework alignment produced by the opposition movement. The slogan “no to the pulp mills” has been both a framework that made it possible to connect the different interests of those affected by the establishment of the plants, and a single non-negotiable maxim. The conflict poses an “unyielding” social antagonism that expresses, at the same time, a component of resistance to implementation projects and a component of “unviability” for an institutional solution of the conflict.

The conflict was deactivated —though not closed— by a decision of the Hague Court. Although it ruled that Uruguay did not respect its obligation to consult prior to the establishment of activities having impact on the Uruguay River, at the same time, it stipulated that there was no visible damage to the environment which would justify the application of the precautionary principle of paralyzing the operation of the pulp mill (ICJ, Ruling of April 20, 2010).

Between 2005 and 2006, while the “pulp mills case” gained space in the media, the Argentine Office of the People’s Advocate submitted two reports informing on the serious condition of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin, a vast territory of the Buenos Aires metropolis: water contaminated at inadmissible levels, industrial effluents without control, open-air dumping sites, population sectors without drinking water or sewage piping (La Nación, May 3, 2006; Clarín, May 3, 2006). The issue gradually took hold in public opinion in the light of the progressive politicization of the Uruguay River conflict (MERLINSKY, 2014: 27).

In 2004, in Buenos Aires, a group of citizens either living or working in the vicinity of the petrochemical center called Dock Sud, at the very mouth of the Riachuelo, filed a suit for collective environmental damage before the National Supreme Court of Justice. The neighbors, the majority of them contaminated with plumbism or lead poisoning, claimed under the terms of the National General Environmental Act, which provides for the obligation on the part of the state and private contaminating actors to repair the damage caused for the sake of the collective right to a healthy environment. This law sets forth the obligation to restore the damaged ecosystems to their original state and, in the cases where this is not possible, it demands reparation to the environment and to those affected. Said reparation is to be awarded on a collective basis, that is, not by paying individual compensations but by generating mechanisms aimed at halting the damage to the environment —considered as damage to the community as a whole—.

In 2006, the Supreme Court of Justice upheld the claim and declared to have original competence in the case (case entitled Mendoza Beatriz Silva and others vs. the National State and others on damages (damages derived from the environmental contamination

of the Matanza River–Riachuelo)). It was done at that time because public opinion was favorable and conditions were in place to make this a “structural case” in the Argentine political scenario, more precisely in the metropolitan area and, this time, placing center stage the environmental policy of the Argentine state (La Nación, June 20, 2006).

Structural cases form part of a new type of judicial activism in Latin American Supreme Courts. They are judicial cases in which justice intervenes when claims extend beyond the individual case and collective rights are at stake (RODRÍGUEZ GARAVITO and RODRÍGUEZ FRANCO, 2010; MAURINO, NINO and SIGAL, 2005).

In general, long-standing conflicts are revealed in which the breach of rights is due to a historical deficit in public policies. The purpose of the Court is to introduce novel arguments and bring about changes in the long term. As the problem cannot be solved by imparting simple orders, it must promote the conditions for deliberation and summon different state actors in order to generate coordinated action. A worth-mentioning aspect of this process is the fact that the Court, in its attempt to guarantee institutional conditions in the resolution of the conflict, ends up favoring the exposure of the case in different political arenas, which results in the case becoming “a public case.” Somehow, and this is extremely interesting in relation to the focus of this paper, the conflict does not come to an end but it emerges re-signified in the judicial arena.

The first measure taken by the SCJ was to demand of the three governments with jurisdiction over the basin (the national government, the government of the province of Buenos Aires and the government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) an integrated plan with progressive goals for cleaning the basin. This forced the national government to raise the profile of the Ministry of Environment and, thus, create a new institutional device for the basin’s management: the Matanza-Riachuelo Basin Authority (ACUMAR).

The debate on the cleaning of the Riachuelo is presently being held in the judicial arena. The court made a first ruling in 2008 which set forth very specific measures in regard with the cleaning operations, including execution deadlines and fines applicable to public officers in the event of non-fulfillment. The case remains open and constitutes a showcase that exposes the actions and omissions of metropolitan environmental policy.

We can conclude that, over this period of time, there were processes shaped by national political circumstances which favored the escalation of these conflicts. In Argentina, the echoes of the conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River gradually created the conditions for the regrouping of a public in formation in regard to environmental issues. President Kirchner’s speech on May 5, 2006 at the Gualeguaychú “corsodrome” announcing the presentation of the case before the Hague International Court, and pointing out that the issue constituted a matter of first order to the national government, was, due to its implication, a turning point in the process of social and political construction of environmental issues in Argentina. And this does not intend to be a literal interpretation of the political speech. However, in order for problems to migrate from one arena to another, there need to exist social and organizational ties (HILGARTNER and BOSK, 1988). The principal organizational tie between the conflict’s arenas was originated by the fact that one of the main consultants of the citizens’ environmental movement of Gualeguaychú was named Secretary of Environment and Sustainable De-

velopment of the Argentine Republic, at exactly the same time the SCJ, faced with the unexpected social mobilization generated by the conflict on the Uruguay River, decided to carry forward this unprecedented judicial process. This is where we can observe how two conflicts occurring at different scales (transnational scale in the Uruguay River case and national scale in the Riachuelo case) and apparently not related to each other, end up having implications on the way in which environmental issues are processed in different governmental jurisdictions in Argentina.

The conflict of the pulp mills on the Uruguay River generated a context of political opportunity for the Argentine Office of the People's Advocate, in the first place, and, subsequently, the National Supreme Court of Justice to bring the case of the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin into the political arena as an issue of major relevance. The echoes of the conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River made the conditions ripe for the constitution of a public around environmental issues. This caused an inflection point in the way the problem was construed as the conditions were created for the Riachuelo conflict to be publicly re-signified as a judicial case.

4. Productivity in Environmental Conflicts and their Territorial Inscription

It is important to consider that environmental conflicts usually have a location and, in this sense, they may produce an ensemble of meanings in terms of the appropriation and vindication of space in its political sense (DI MÉO, 2004). Territoriality, according to RAFFESTIN (1982), is a system of relations maintained by both the individual and the collectivity with exteriority and/or otherness. It expresses a complex relationship between the human group and its spatial-temporal environment which is founded on experience: the starting point of territoriality is not space but the instruments and codes of the actors, which leave traces in the territory. When we analyze the change in the scale of deliberation in relation to a conflict, we are making reference to the fact that the exchange of arguments extends to other social spaces beyond the local sphere and where new actors with intervention in different geographical spheres (regional, national, transnational) participate. The key point is that this change of scale also modifies the way in which local actors experience territoriality.

The territorial inscription of the conflict refers to the set of social arrangements which the conflict puts at stake around the territory in question (MELÉ, 2003). It implies analyzing both the forms of representation of the territory which are constructed and deconstructed along with the conflict, and the changes in the concrete forms of territorial control which the conflict brings into play, including the differences in the demarcation of the territory as carried out by different jurisdictions of government.

The construction of environmental valuation languages (MARTÍNEZ ALIER, 2004) or the development of "models of ecological justification" (LAFAYE and THEVENOTH, 1993) are crucial aspects that explain the inscription of the specific claim as a demand of public interest. This is where different forms of symbolic appropriation of space are reinforced or modified as a result of a conflict over the "terroir" of a collectivity, and disagreements on the adequate uses of the space are socially exposed.

Many times, territorial valuation languages emerge as a response to state actors and project promoters who maintain that the claims of collective actors are selfish and have a NIMBY nature. It is then that the replica leads to a refinement of the arguments to show that the place is not interchangeable and it has traits that make it immeasurable. Those who are involved in confrontational struggles that entail the defense of the place (the locality, the river, the basin, the wetlands, a circumscribed landscape, etc.) recur to a re-signification of space in esthetic and identitary terms (TROM, 1999:36). In response to the question “Why in this place and not in another?” the collective would say: “because this place is different and has a history linked to our way of life, there is a close relationship between our identity and the characteristics of the environment they intend to modify.”

In the conflict over the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo River Basin, a process of territorial inscription has gradually taken place in which different actors rate the basin's degradation. This space is no longer considered only as a contaminated river but rather as a territory inhabited by social actors who suffer the consequences of that degradation. This transition indicates that there exists a new spatial cutout: the basin, which has been constituted as a region of enunciation, a social space of great value.

In the Uruguay River conflict, the construction of common problem repertoires through which the settlement of the pulp mills was defined as a threatening element, was reinforced by a pre-existing identity by which the Gualeguaychú citizens see themselves as agents of local development. The space does not only constitute a relation of proximity but also a previously constructed territory which has a history and a project. The identitary argument opposes the local project to the global strategy (the pulp mills as a decision made at a supranational scale). Therefore, in this case, it is the locality rather than the basin which plays a key role in the construction of territorial valuation languages.

Regarding the effect of these conflicts in relation to changes in the concrete forms of territorial control, this may involve either changes in the specific ways to use the land, such as modifications in the rules defining the property rights of different social actors and their effective forms of protection, or changes in the distribution of power of the different units and levels of government to make decisions affecting the territory.

The contamination issue, as well as many other issues included under the environmental domain, refers necessarily to a territorial sphere that exceeds jurisdictional boundaries and compels to a re-definition of the subject of the claim at a scale that blurs those boundaries and constitutes a new spatial framework which does not strictly coincide with the political division of the territory. For this reason, environmental conflicts are destabilizing in political terms when there are several governmental jurisdictions involved. Both in the Uruguay River conflict and the Riachuelo conflict, there was a re-update of long-standing social and political conflicts closely linked to the accumulation of political power in the different territorial spaces at stake.

It is important to have in mind that the municipal governments of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area have a relationship of subordination and contradiction, in political terms, with the provincial and national governments, especially due to the fact that the former are governments without autonomy and whose financial resources are subject to the type of relationship they establish with the latter two governmental jurisdictions. On

the Argentine bank of the Uruguay River, the case has encountered major disagreements at the subnational political level, as it is in the Argentine provinces where the territorial distribution of political power is at stake. At a national level, the conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River had, as political framework, a particular form of alignment of the local, provincial and national government positions. The former two played an essential role in dismantling pre-existing informal agreements between the national governments of Argentina and Uruguay and, also, in encouraging the national government to assume a central position in the conflict as plaintiff before the Uruguayan state. However, the displacement of the conflict and its international judicialization did not contribute to a territorial inscription in terms of the construction of devices for territorial protection at the scale of the Uruguay River basin.

In the conflict for the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin, the productive element in terms of the modification of the territorial arrangements is the creation of a new inter-jurisdictional body for environmental policy, the ACUMAR, which enables a new spatial device defining a new intervention area: the basin. The concrete effect in territorial terms is that this new inter-jurisdictional government “binds” the parties to establish new governability agreements in relation to the metropolitan territory, generating additional requirements for coordination with metropolitan municipalities. As the metropolitan environmental issue begins to be treated as a public problem, questionings are made to the regime of metropolitan territoriality. What is more, as the SCJ created an institutional system for enforcement of the judgment, the conflict produces a new institutionality for environmental policy.

5. Final Considerations

Conflicts are an inescapable constituent of social relations and a manifestation that engenders the sociability in which we are inserted. Consequently, by exploring the constitution of conflicts that pose a new order of problems and turn them into public issues, we can understand the way in which social actors think their everyday life settings.

We have observed that the emergence of new actors affected by an environmental problem causes a reshaping of the social landscape. Thus, controversies contribute to the creation of a domain where the inventories of actors, problems and solutions can be enriched.

The conflicts we have analyzed have decisively influenced the construction of the social and political environment in Argentina. They have done so in a complex and intense way, as they have had an impact on the social selection of the issues which are the subject of public concern. Having established a social space where different positions and dispositions are confronted in regard to something which the participants recognize as the environmental issue, these conflicts constitute a tangible indicator of the environmentalization of the social conflict in Argentina. It is necessary to say, however, —so as to be consistent with our methodological premises— that we do not believe these conflicts are “representative” of environmental conflicts in Argentina. There is a very long list of environmental conflicts which do not reach such a high profile and which are related, for

example, to access to land ownership, deforestation, the resistance to open-pit mining, the development of intensive agriculture, the use of agrochemicals, the location of final waste management facilities, etc. In the majority of these cases, the population has great difficulty in making themselves heard, and the actors remain publicly invisibilized, with no control over territories on which economic groups have great margins to dispose of the natural resources, the infrastructure and the use of the land. In many of these cases, the population resists situations in which they are forced to move, as it is considered that these groups are “non-viable” in the framework of an “efficient” representation of the territory.

A first important conclusion is that natural assets have begun to hold a central place in the valuation languages of the social actors who have taken part in our investigations. On the basis of the implementation of justification models that do not accept the subordination of those assets to the commercial logic, the meanings constructed in the fervor of conflicts indicate that companies, especially industrial companies, have lost the legitimacy they used to have in the practice of different forms of subordinated extortion by exchanging employment for contamination. Nowadays, those economic actors are being put to question, in the same way as certain conceptions on development which regard territories as spaces to be emptied.

Then—and as our second conclusion—, as we are dealing with conflicts over water availability, accessibility and management, these cases reveal key dimensions that expose the existing systemic institutional deficiency of public policies for basin management and, in general, in environmental policies at the national and regional level in Argentina.

While provincial governments have control over water courses, as the Argentine National Constitution grants to them original authority over the natural resources in their territory, in conflicts where the governability of a basin is at stake, usually several governments of different jurisdictions are involved: the national government, who has jurisdiction over waterways; the provincial government, who has the original authority over natural resources; and the municipal government, who has powers over the territorial planning of the space in question. This framework of responsibilities shared by different jurisdictions generates fertile ground, which—from the viewpoint of collective action—makes it possible for a network of actors to establish cross links with the different levels of government. The balance resulting from these conflicts showed that, for the first time, environmental governability began to be considered as a political issue with a concrete existence for the management of the territory and its natural resources.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS AND PUBLIC DELIBERATION ARENAS AROUND THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE IN ARGENTINA

MARÍA GABRIELA MERLINSKY

The purpose of this work is to analyze the way in which various collective actions have given way to new public deliberation arenas around the environmental issue in Argentina. On the basis of the results of a study on the “conflict over the pulp mills on the Uruguay River” and the “conflict over the environmental restoration of the Matanza-Riachuelo River basin,” our intention is to delve into a theoretical perspective that takes into account the productivity of these events and to analyze different forms of contagion among public arenas. By presenting the results of the case studies, we will refer to the territorial productivity of environmental conflicts.

Key-words: activism and environmentalism; socio-environmental conflict; environmental policy

El propósito de este artículo es analizar de qué manera diferentes acciones colectivas han inaugurado arenas públicas de deliberación en torno a la cuestión ambiental en Argentina. A partir del análisis de los resultados de un estudio en torno al “conflicto por las plantas de celulosa en el río Uruguay” y el “conflicto por la recomposición ambiental de la cuenca Matanza-Riachuelo”, queremos ahondar en una perspectiva teórica que toma en cuenta la productividad de estos eventos y analizar diferentes formas de contagio entre arenas públicas. A partir de exponer resultados de los estudios de caso, nos vamos a referir a la productividad territorial de los conflictos ambientales.

Palabras clave: activismo y ambientalismo; Conflicto socio-ambientales; política ambiental

O propósito desse artigo é analisar de que maneira diferentes ações coletivas inauguraram arenas públicas de deliberação em torno da questão ambiental na Argentina. A partir da análise dos resultados de um estudo sobre o “conflito pelas plantas industriais de celulose no rio Uruguai” e o “conflito pela recomposição da bacia Matanza-Riachuelo” queremos aprofundar uma perspectiva teórica que considera a produtividade desses eventos e analisar diferentes formas de comunicação entre arenas públicas. A partir da exposição dos resultados dos estudos de caso, debateremos a produtividade territorial dos conflitos ambientais.

Palavras-chave: ativismo, ambientalismo, conflitos socioambientais, política ambiental.

