

Insurgent participation in Environmental Impact Assessment in Brazil



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Content

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Why study informal participation in EIA?

- The literature recognizes informal participation as an important element of analysis and seeks to understand how it influences decision-making (DEVLIN, YAP, 2008; GLUCKER *et al.*, 2013).
- In Latin America, inequality and socio-environmental conflicts reinforce the prominence of social movements (IRARRAZAVAL *et al.*, 2023; BIGOLLIN NETO, MALLET, 2023).
- In this context, studying these dynamics can help reveal limitations of formal participation and the lack of meaningful participation in EIA processes (DUARTE, DIBO, SÁNCHEZ, 2017; IRARRAZAVAL *et al.*, 2023).

Which projects are analyzed?

São Paulo MMP Region
180 municipalities
30 million people



Legend

- Drainage
- Municipalities
- São Paulo Macrometropolitan Region Perimeter
- Duas Pontes Dam
- Pedreira Dam
- Biritiba Mirim Dam
- Itapanhaú River

Studied Water Projects in São Paulo Macrometropolitan Region

Data sources: Dams (SP Águas, 2026), Drainage (São Paulo State Secretariat for the Environment, 2013), Administrative Limits (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010), ESRI Shaded Relief, Google Satellite.
Datum / Projection: SIRGAS 2000 / UTM zone 23S
Map author: Mariana Urrestarazu de Freitas (2026)

Which projects are analyzed?

ITAPANHAÚ RIVER TRANSPOSITION

- inter-basin transfer – diverts water from the coastal region to the metropolitan area.

PEDREIRA AND DUAS PONTES DAMS

- Dams and reservoirs — regional water storage and supply to the Campinas region.

Projects

Licensing
procedure

Project	Project developer	EIS	Preliminary Licence
Itapanhaú River	SABESP mixed-capital water company	19 Nov 2015	2 Aug 2016
Pedreira e Duas Pontes Dams	EMAE state-owned energy company	3 June 2015	25 Aug 2016

Who are the affected people?

- Salve o Rio Itapanhaú
(*Save Itapanhaú River*)

Caiçaras: members of traditional coastal communities



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBtjF8XxbTA/>



Source: Save the Itapanhaú River



Who are the affected people?

- Barragem não! (*“Down with’ or ‘Not to the dams”*)

Urban and rural residents from the Campinas region



Source: EPTV



Source: EPTV

How did we capture their perspectives?

STEP 1 – DOCUMENTAL ANALYSIS

Formal participation

- minutes from meetings of the State Environmental Council (n=4);
- transcriptions of public hearings (n=4).

STEP 2 - INTERVIEWS

Insurgencies - Informal participation

- movement leaders and affected people (n=6).

The material was subjected to content analysis (BARDIN, 2011).

Why did they mobilize?

Formal participation channels perceived as insufficient and ineffective

Findings from meeting minutes and public hearings:

- Affected people felt unheard, misinformed and excluded from the EIA process;
- They didn't trust the licensing process.

Why did they mobilize?

Affected people feel unheard

“Despite the fact that the population is against the construction of the dams, why are they being built anyway?”

Source: Minute meeting of council

Why did they mobilize?

Affected people feel misinformed

“We were never informed (...), we were never consulted, no one ever came to the area at risk, no one ever knocked on our doors to inform us about anything, you know?”

Source: Interview

Why did they mobilize?

Affected people feel excluded from the EIA process

“Will the population still be able to participate in the final decision of this water transfer project? It is an important issue for São Paulo, but also very important for the other cities involved.”

Source: Minute of council meeting

Why did they mobilize?

Affected people don't trust the EIA process

“Have you ever seen a SABESP (*water company*) presentation? It's theatre. They throw a bunch of technical arguments that no one understands. That's why I can't stand this whole licensing bureaucracy — coming here and telling people, ‘look, we're going to take your water away.’”

Source: Interview



Down with the Dams

We need you at the meeting

Governor of São Paulo, don't build the dams



Sabesp (water company) kills rivers. CETESB and IBAMA (environmental agencies) are accomplices.





Save the Itapanhaú Movement

Governor, respect Bertioga

JOÃO DÓRIA
RESPEITE
BERTIOGA
GREENPEACE

MANGUEZAIS
SÃO NOSSOS
BERÇÁRIOS
GREENPEACE

ROUBO
DE
FUTURO
GREENPEACE

Stealing our future

Mangroves are our nurseries





Save the Itapanhaú river



Water is not a commodity

I am against the diversion of the Itapanhaú River



PUBLIC HEARING with members of the Legislative Assembly

AUDIÊNCIA PÚBLICA

COM REPRESENTANTES DA ASSEMBLÉIA LEGISLATIVA DO ESTADO DE SP



sobre a **TRANSPOSIÇÃO DO RIO ITAPANHAÚ**

COMPAREÇA!

26/03/2018 (SEGUNDA) **19H**

no Espaço Cidadão Avenida Anchieta, 392, Centro, Bertioga/SP



WATER FESTIVAL: art and culture for ecosystem protection

FESTIVAL DAS ÁGUAS

#SALVEORIOITAPANHAÚ

SÁBADO **28** DAS 10H AS 22H

OFICINAS
SHOWS
GRAFFITE
PALESTRAS
RODAS DE CONVERSA
EXPOSIÇÕES
SKATE

ARTE E CULTURA PELA PROTEÇÃO DOS ECOSISTEMAS

Vila do Bem, R. São Gonçalo, S/Nº - Bairro Chácaras- Bertioga-SP

REALIZAÇÃO: MOVIMENTO SALVE O RIO ITAPANHAÚ

PARTECIPANDO: Bertioga Sesc



Facebook page header for '#SOU CONTRA A TRANSPOSIÇÃO DO RIO ITAPANHAÚ'.

Não à Transposição Do Rio Itapanhaú

4,7 mil seguidores • Seguindo 70

Está é a página do movimento popular de luta contra a transposição e em defesa do Rio Itapanhaú, contra a tragédia anunciada pelas obras do Governo Aécio e Sabesp.

Comunidade

How did they influence the decision-making?

Impacts on EIA process

- Popular mobilization led to legal actions and temporary suspension in both cases;
- Despite this, the effects were temporary: the procedures were resumed and the projects were approved;
- In the Itapanhaú case, social mobilization led to the inclusion of a specific monitoring requirement for the mangrove ecosystem in the environmental license.

What is the current status?

Nowadays, the projects are under construction. The movements have demobilized and no longer identify as groups under the names used during the early stages of the licensing processes.

Current status

Pedreira and Amparo dams advance, with completion expected in 2026

18 Nov 2025



The image is a screenshot of a news article from SBT. At the top, there is a blue header with the SBT logo and a hamburger menu icon. Below the header, the article title is "Barragens Pedreira e Amparo avançam com previsão de conclusão em 2026". Underneath the title, a sub-headline reads "Obras somam R\$ 1,6 bilhão em investimentos e vão dobrar vazão hídrica para abastecimento em 28 cidades da RMC e RMSP". The author is "Iago Yoshimi Seo" and the date is "18/11/2025 | 13:30". To the right of the text are social media sharing icons for WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and Telegram. The main image shows a large concrete dam under construction. A concrete pump truck is positioned on top of the dam structure, pouring concrete. Several construction workers in orange safety gear are visible on the dam's surface. The background shows a hilly landscape under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

<https://vtvnews.com.br/braganca-e-circuito-das-aguas/barragens-pedreira-e-amparo-avancam-com-previsao-de-conclusao-em-2026-is/>

Current status

Sabesp project seeks water 60 km from São Paulo to prevent a water crisis

13 Apr 2026

Estadão / São Paulo

Como é a principal obra da Sabesp que busca água a 60 km de SP para evitar crise hídrica

Transferência do Rio Itapanhaú reforça sistema Alto Tietê; medida barra queda acelerada do nível dos reservatórios, mas ainda é cedo para dizer se será suficiente para evitar desabastecimento



Vista aérea da obra de transferência do Itapanhaú, incluindo sistema de captação, bombas e geradores. Investimento total foi de R\$ 300 milhões, segundo a companhia.

FÁBIO VIEIRA/ESTADÃO

What did we learn from these cases?

Insurgent movements highlighted power asymmetries and reinforced criticisms of environmental decision-making processes in Brazil:

- The EIA process prioritizes technocratic decisions that usually favor developers' interests;
- Public consultation is often seen as a formality to legitimize pre-made decisions;
- Informal participation arises circumstantially; it cannot confront entrenched structural processes, and maintaining mobilization is usually difficult.

What did we learn from these cases?

The debate on participation in EIA must go beyond conventional mechanisms and build alternatives that effectively incorporate the perspectives of affected communities — especially in contexts marked by inequality and power asymmetry, such as in Brazil.

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Acknowledgements and Ethics Statement

I would like to acknowledge the support of FAPESP (grant number 21/14093-7) and Federal University of ABC during this research. Special thanks to Prof. Pedro Jacobi, Prof. San Momm, the caiçara communities and interviewees involved.

This study was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committee of Federal University of ABC. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, with appropriate measures taken to preserve the identity of those who chose not to be identified.

The photographs used in this presentation were obtained from media publications or provided by the “Salve o Rio Itapanhaú” movement, with authorization for their use.



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QUÉBEC CITY, CANADA

Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.



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