

Fluid Dynamics: Politics and Social Struggle in São Paulo's Water Crisis (2014–2015)

By

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ABSTRACT

In late 2013, a severe drought hit the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil's most populous city and main economic center, and precipitated a water supply crisis. As water availability became increasingly strained during 2014, myriad collective action efforts by civil society actors sprung up in the city. My thesis explores this social mobilization around São Paulo's supply crisis as a window into water politics and governance when water supply problems and solutions are unclear but have important political and service repercussions for different stakeholders. Two interrelated questions guided the research: How and why did particular forms of social mobilization around the water supply crisis emerge and develop? How did civil society actors transform their problem definitions into action strategies? I answer these questions by tracing the mobilization process of two broad-based civil society coalitions that emerged in the context of the crisis: the Alliance for Water (*Aliança pela Água*) and the Collective for Water Struggle (*Coletivo de Luta pela Água*). This analysis helps uncover underlying value disputes shaping how different actors framed problems and opportunities during the crisis. At the same time, it sheds light on the ways in which maintaining flexible problem frames and fluid relationships with one another allowed the two coalitions to reach beyond ideological stances and traditional strategies. Through fluid mobilization dynamics, they were able to either carve or take advantage of spaces for participation while still advancing particular organizational goals. While it is not clear what the long-term outcomes of mobilization will be, I argue that the efforts of both coalitions served to amplify different civil society voices, facilitate knowledge sharing about water issues, and open up channels for greater participation in water governance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABRH	Associação Brasileira de Recursos Hídricos (Brazilian Association of Water Resources)
AESabesp	Associação dos Engenheiros da SABESP (Association of Engineers from SABESP)
ANA	Agência Nacional de Águas (National Water Agency)
APSRH	Articulação Paulista Pró-Saneamento e Recursos Hídricos (Paulista Network Pro-Sanitation and Water Resources)
APU	Associação dos Profissionais Universitários da SABESP (Association of University Professionals from SABESP)
ARSESP	Agência Reguladora de Saneamento e Energia do Estado de São Paulo (State Sanitation and Energy Regulatory Agency)
BNDES	Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (Brazilian Development Bank)
CBH	Comitê de Bacia Hidrográfica (River Basin Committee)
CBH-AT	Comitê da Bacia Hidrográfica do Alto Tietê (Alto Tietê River Basin Committee)
CBH-PCJ	Comitê das Bacias Hidrográficas dos Rios Piracicaba, Capivari e Jundiaí (Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiaí River Basins Committee)
CETESB	Companhia de Tecnologia de Saneamento Ambiental (Environmental Sanitation Technology Company)
CNRH	Conselho Nacional de Recursos Hídricos (National Council on Water Resources)
COHRI	Comitê Coordenador do Plano Estadual de Recursos Hídricos (State Water Resources Plan Coordinating Committee)
CPI	Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito (Public Inquiry Commission)
CRH	Conselho de Recursos Hídricos (State Council on Water Resources)
DAEE	Departamento de Águas e Energia Elétrica (Department of Water and Electrical Energy)
FEHIDRO	Fundo Estadual de Recursos Hídricos (State Water Resources Fund)
FIESP	Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (Federation of Industries of the of State São Paulo)
FNU	Federação Nacional dos Urbanitários (National Federation of Urban Workers)
GAEMA	Grupo de Atuação Especial de Defesa do Meio Ambiente (Special Action Group for the Protection of the Environment)
GIFE	Grupo de Institutos, Fundações e Empresas

GTAG	Grupo Técnico de Assessoramento para Gestão do Sistema Cantareira (Technical Advisory Group for Management of the Cantareira System)
IDEC	Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISA	Instituto Socioambiental
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MAB	Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (Movement of People Affected by Dams)
MPF	Ministério Público Federal (Federal Public Prosecutors' Office)
MPSP	Ministério Público do Estado de São Paulo (State Public Prosecutors' Office)
MTST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (Homeless Workers' Movement)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NYSE	New York Stock Exchange
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCJ	Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiá
PMDB	Partido do Movimento Democrático do Brasil (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party)
PNRH	Plano Nacional de Recursos Hídricos (National Water Resources Plan)
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party)
RMSP	Região Metropolitana de São Paulo (São Paulo's Metropolitan Region)
SABESP	Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Basic Sanitation Company)
SIGRH	Sistema Integrado de Gerenciamento dos Recursos Hídricos (São Paulo's Water Resources Management System)
SIM	Sistema Metropolitano Integrado (Integrated Metropolitan System)
SINGREH	Sistema Nacional de Gerenciamento dos Recursos Hídricos (National System for Water Resources Management)
SINTAEMA	Sindicato dos Trabalhadores/as em Água, Esgoto e Meio Ambiente (Labor Union in Water, Sewerage and the Environment)
SMA	Secretaria do Meio Ambiente do Estado de São Paulo (State Secretariat of the Environment)
SSRH	Secretaria de Saneamento e Recursos Hídricos do Estado de São Paulo (State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources)
TCE	Tribunal de Contas to Estado de São Paulo

UN	United Nations
USP	Universidade de São Paulo (University of São Paulo)
WHO	World Health Organization
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“WELCOME TO THE CANTAREIRA DESERT”

“If the water won’t come, the city will stop!” chanted nearly ten thousand people in the streets of São Paulo, Brazil’s most populous city and main economic center, during a protest on February 26, 2015. Protesters held banners, performed indigenous rain dances, and marched for nearly two hours to call attention to the impact of an ongoing water supply crisis on the population. Beginning in late 2013, São Paulo was hit by an unprecedented drought. Average rainfall between December 2013 and February 2014, generally the wettest time of the year, was nearly half of the normal historical average for the period, and insufficient to replenish some of the city’s main water reservoirs. As the drought extended into 2015, São Paulo sank into a deeper water crisis. Reservoir levels dropped to historical lows. Depletion of the Cantareira system, the largest set of reservoirs serving nearly 9 million people in São Paulo, became so severe that it exposed all kinds of rubble previously underwater, including a rusting, abandoned car. Local graffiti artist and activist Mundano ingeniously turned the car into a symbol of the crisis. “Welcome to the Cantareira desert”, Mundano wrote provocatively (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - "Welcome to the Cantareira desert" by graffiti artist Mundano



Source: The Guardian 2015.¹

¹ The Guardian, “Brazil’s worst drought in history prompts protests and blackouts.” Published January 23, 2015. Accessed October 23, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/23/brazil-worst-drought-history>

“WHAT MAKES THE DESERT BEAUTIFUL IS THAT SOMEWHERE IT HIDES A WELL”²

This crisis has elevated the water agenda to a new level of political discussion in Brazil. I think this is an extremely positive situation.

– Vicente Andreu, President of Brazil’s National Water Agency, reflecting on São Paulo’s water crisis, March 2015.³

When crises strike, Deborah Stone writes, “people want to ensure that ‘that kind of thing’ never happens again.” (2012 [1988], 301) However, the fact that a crisis exists does not mean that there is consensus as to what exactly “that kind of thing” means and what actions—if any—would remedy the situation and prevent it from reoccurring. Government officials, civil society groups, and analysts often understand problems and perceive critical conjunctures differently. Disputes over the nature of a problem, its causes, and potential solutions are at the root of many policy debates and collective action challenges (Stone 2012 [1988]; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Pritchett and Woolcock 2002; Rochefort and Coob 1994).

The water supply crisis that engulfed São Paulo following the drought was no different. São Paulo state’s⁴ government, responsible for managing water bodies and groundwater within state boundaries, argued the crisis resulted from an atypical hydrological cycle that state planners could not have foreseen. To remedy the situation, the government and SABESP (the state-owned water and sanitation company servicing São Paulo) resorted to different mitigation measures. They implemented a program of financial bonus and penalties to encourage lower consumption among city residents, controlled pressure in the distribution network, and invested in infrastructure projects for interbasin and inter-reservoir water transfers. Although reservoir levels showed little sign of substantial recovery as the crisis unfolded between 2014 and 2015, São Paulo state’s government and SABESP downplayed the severity of the situation. They maintained that measures taken were sufficient for securing water supply until rainfall returned

² Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*, Chapter XXII, 1943.

³ Vicente Andreu, “Perspectivas de desenvolvimento da Região de Campinas sob o ponto de vista dos recursos hídricos.” March 18, 2015. Fórum Sustentabilidade Hídrica, Unicamp, Brazil.

⁴ São Paulo city is the capital of São Paulo state. Throughout the thesis, I will use São Paulo primarily in reference to the city. Whenever I refer to the state of São Paulo, the word state will be explicitly mentioned. São Paulo’s Metropolitan Region, which encompasses 38 municipalities in close proximity to the city, will be referenced by its acronym, RMSP (*Região Metropolitana de São Paulo*).

to normal levels. More than a year-and-a-half into the crisis, SABESP's president, Jerson Kelman,⁵ affirmed in an event, "there is enough water for everyone, just don't politicize it."⁶

Yet, water-related debates, campaigns, and protests erupting everywhere in São Paulo during the crisis demonstrated that supply management was, in fact, a deeply political issue. There were disagreements about the causes of the crisis—was it simply the result of an exceptional drought or were there deeper unaddressed problems? There were questions regarding allocation in a context of scarcity—who receives water, when, and at what price? There were accusations that the state government managed the crisis based on political interests—the governor, Geraldo Alckmin, was running for re-election in 2014. There were also differences regarding what measures would help mitigate the crisis and increase water security in the future.

In particular, many civil society organizations and grassroots movements contested how the state government and SABESP managed the situation.⁷ They argued that state and company authorities had neglected prior warnings of the growing imbalance between supply and demand in the region, and had failed to invest in measures that could have helped avoid a crisis of the magnitude observed. They also criticized measures taken to alleviate the crisis. Although state and company authorities denied any rationing was taking place, reports of water shortages⁸ and lower water quality emerged,⁹ particularly in vulnerable communities at the urban periphery. Activists argued pressure reductions to reduce losses were a form of "silent rationing" and accused the government of operating with a lack of transparency and of managing supply inequitably. They also faulted supply management measures, which relied on bringing water

⁵ Jerson Kelman became president of SABESP in January 2015, thus a year into the water crisis. He replaced Dilma Pena, who was president between 2011–2014. As I discuss further in the thesis, the change accompanied a reorganization of upper-level management within the company and within the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources (SSRH) coordinated by state governor Geraldo Alckmin during the crisis.

⁶ Event 9, São Paulo, July 22, 2015 (see Appendix 2).

⁷ Because the state government is SABESP's majority shareholder, the state government holds influence over company management. During the crisis, relief measures implemented by the company were discussed and approved by the state government. This is why throughout the thesis I refer to both the state government and SABESP when discussing official crisis management.

⁸ SABESP received over 150 thousand water shortage complaints between January and July 2015—a 49% increase relative to the same period in 2014. See Rede Brasil Atual, "Reclamações por falta de água aumentam 49% em São Paulo, segundo Sabesp." Published September 08, 2015. Accessed September 13, 2015. <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/ambiente/2015/09/reclamacoes-por-falta-de-agua-aumentam-49-em-sao-paulo-segundo-sabesp-9363.html>

⁹ Residents complained primarily of turbidity and unpleasant smell or taste. See El País Brasil, "Qualidade da água em São Paulo cai durante a crise hídrica." Published September 08, 2015. Accessed September 13, 2015. http://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/08/31/politica/1441054527_550589.html

from farther locations—a strategy considered outdated and unsustainable. To many activists, government efforts failed to use the crisis as an opportunity to promote deeper changes in water resources management and governance¹⁰ in the state.

As São Paulo’s water supply grew increasingly strained towards the end of 2014, civil society activists began to organize around the crisis. Ranging from small-scale initiatives to educate people on how to build low-cost cisterns for rainfall collection to large-scale organized demonstrations on the city’s streets, a myriad of collective action¹¹ efforts sprung up.

My thesis explores this social mobilization around São Paulo’s water crisis as a window into water politics, and specifically the conflicts that arise when water supply problems and solutions are unclear but have important political and service repercussions for different stakeholders. Two interrelated questions guided my research: How and why did particular forms of social mobilization around the water supply crisis emerge and develop? How did civil society actors transform their problem definitions into action strategies? I answer these questions by tracing the relentless, sometimes collaborative, sometimes contentious, and often uncertain efforts of two broad-based civil society coalitions that emerged in the context of the crisis: the Alliance for Water (*Aliança pela Água*) and the Collective for Water Struggle (*Coletivo de Luta pela Água*).

The Alliance for Water was formed in October 2014 to raise public awareness about the crisis, pressure public officials for greater transparency and civil society participation in crisis management, and promote sustainable water resources management practices. Under the leadership of longtime water activist Marussia Whately, the coalition nearly doubled its members in a single year. By September 2015, it included almost 60 groups, foundations, and national and

¹⁰ There is little consensus in the literature regarding the definition of water governance and its scope (Araral and Wang 2013). Here, I follow Karen Bakker’s definition of governance as “a practice of coordination and decision-making between different actors, which is invariably inflected with political culture and power” (Bakker 2010, 8). As the author explains, “this definition of governance is not the norm in the literature on water management, which tends to constrain the definition of governance to a narrowly technical decision-making process” (Bakker 2010, 8). By expanding the concept to consider issues of power and coordination among multiple stakeholders, Bakker’s conceptualization asks us to consider more carefully the role of differently positioned actors in water decision-making.

¹¹ There are different definitions of collective action in the literature. For the purpose of this thesis, I offer Della Porta and Diani’s (2006) conceptualization. They define collective action broadly as “individuals sharing resources in pursuit of collective goals—i.e., goals that cannot be privatized to any of the members of the collectivity on behalf of which collective action has taken place” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, location 344).

international NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF Brazil.¹² The Collective for Water Struggle, in turn, formed in January 2015. While it shared some of the Alliance’s goals, it sought to press the state government more directly for measures to relieve the impact of the water crisis on the population, especially on low-income communities. More than 80 labor unions and federations, local and national social movements such as the Movement of People Affected by Dams (*Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragem* – MAB), and other organizations signed the manifesto titled “Water is a Human Right, Not a Commodity!” that brought the Collective to life. The activities of these two large coalitions represent the most concerted social mobilization efforts around the water crisis. In addition to serving as the primary non-profit civil society voices in the media and in interactions with the state government and SABESP, they also served to connect many of the smaller groups and water-related initiatives taking place in São Paulo.

Research on social struggles around water has contributed to a growing understanding of the role social mobilization can play in (re)shaping the terms and values upon which water governance arrangements are built (Sultana and Loftus 2012; Robinson 2013; Morgan 2011; Bakker 2010). In particular, researchers have noted that water-related movements can effectively advance claims when they frame problems clearly and present arguments to policy makers in a unified way (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012).

Yet, most studies focus on efforts in which the targets of mobilization—whether privatization or dam development—are clearly defined. In São Paulo, where issues such as private sector participation in water supply services was just one piece of a larger puzzle, activists needed to navigate a “complex tangle of causal stories” (Keck 2015). The coalitions’ struggle was as much about defining targets as it was about advancing particular movement claims. Moreover, as I discuss throughout the thesis, the state government and SABESP controlled access to information about the crisis, dismissed criticisms, and was unresponsive to civil society demands. To advance their arguments and proposals, the Alliance and the Collective had to create or take advantage of alternative spaces for participation (Gaventa 2006).

Contrasting the mobilization efforts of the Alliance and the Collective is helpful because it draws attention to the different political and organizational projects coexisting in the space of the crisis.

¹² A complete list of members of the Alliance for Water is provided in Appendix 3. A list of signatories of the Collective for Water Struggle’s manifesto is provided in Appendix 4.

The analysis of how the two coalitions were formed, therefore, serves to uncover and clarify the “underlying value disputes” (Stone 2012 [1988], 14) that shaped how actors framed opportunities and problems during São Paulo’s water crisis. At the same time, it helps pinpoint the ways in which the political and institutional environment influenced their efforts.

Further, I argue that mobilization around São Paulo’s water crisis sheds light on the ways in which civil society actors may serve as agents of change and strengthen democratic governance when water supply problems are unclear and state institutions are impermeable to civil society input. Reviewing studies of social movements, Archon Fung argues that social mobilization may deepen democratic processes to the extent that it presses “governments to reorganize their decision-making in ways that allow the direct and indirect participation of many more voices” (Fung 2003). Further, mobilization can organize communities “not only to engage effectively in traditional political arenas but also create and take part in a new, more encompassing democratic politics” (Fung 2003). However, Fung suggests that this is only possible if social movements are willing to cultivate relationships with movement outsiders and “look beyond the politics they know” (Fung 2003).

While the Alliance and the Collective emerged from different political stances and organizational projects, their mobilization strategies were marked by the kind of flexibility Fung describes. They adjusted problem frames and maintained fluid relationships with one another in order to expand the reach of their actions but still advance particular group claims. As the crisis unfolded, the coalitions served to amplify different civil society voices in water-related debates, facilitate access to information, translate perceived problems to broader audiences, and open up channels for greater participation in water supply governance.

As my research was conducted while the crisis was ongoing, it is not clear what the long-term outcomes of mobilization around São Paulo’s supply crisis will be. However, as extreme weather events associated with climate change become more frequent, it is increasingly important to learn everything we can from São Paulo’s water crisis. The political and contextual factors that shape decision-making and civil society participation are especially important in navigating the challenges that arise in drought-stricken, large-scale urban areas. Contexts like these have been under-explored in the literature on social mobilization around water. This thesis begins to fill this

gap. In the remainder of this introduction, I discuss the analytical concepts that inform my analysis, present my overall arguments, and conclude by discussing my research methods.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Social movement scholars have dedicated much attention to understanding why and how social mobilization occurs. Two concepts have been central to most such analyses: *political opportunities* and *framing* (Benford and Snow 2000; Della Porta and Diani 2006). The idea of political opportunity gained traction following Sidney Tarrow's *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, published in 1994. Focusing on the emergence of contentious forms of collective action through which movements confront the state, Tarrow used the concept of political opportunities to denote the "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – sets of clues that encourage people to engage in contentious politics" (Tarrow 2011 [1994], location 1118). In his view, mobilization emerges at political junctures that facilitate the activation of collective identities and social networks.

Critics later argued, however, that Tarrow's focus on political opportunities failed to capture the means through which actors attribute meaning to such moments (i.e., conjunctures). This criticism was part of a broader push within social movement studies—driven, among others, by Tarrow himself—to move away from analytical frameworks that characterize mobilization in static and deterministic ways (Von Bülow and Abers 2011). For example, in the 2001 book *Dynamics of Contention*, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly sought to articulate this new focus by shifting attention to interaction dynamics and political processes that influence what they call "contentious politics." Under their new proposed framework, "political opportunity", as a conceptual tool, was replaced by the notion of "attribution of political opportunities" (McAdam et al. 2001). The underlying proposition was that opportunities are not given and will not automatically result in social mobilization. Certain objective characteristics may define an opportunity but it "exists in the perceptions of participants as well" (Kingdon 2003, 171).¹³ In this sense, one could argue, situations like the water crisis in São Paulo are not

¹³ It is important to note here that Kingdon's (2003) work is on policy analysis. However, his discussion of crises as "policy windows" offers insights that speak to the criticisms of the concept of opportunities in social movement

opportunities for mobilization in themselves; rather, they need to first be interpreted as opportunities for action, and then created in practice through concerted strategies.

The issue of interpretation is also central to the concept of framing. Frames are interpretative schemes that enable individuals or collectives to situate their experiences in the world and establish courses of action (Snow et al. 1986). Within collective action efforts, framing denotes a negotiated process of meaning construction that inspires and reinforces participation (Benford and Snow 2000). Particular frames may activate mobilization to the extent that they build upon shared meanings and values, and help actors perceive issues as problems they can act upon (Della Porta and Diani 2006). As Margaret Keck writes, “both activists and policy makers ‘frame’ issues and alternatives, attempting to give them resonance in a particular political setting by describing them in relation to other desirable values or goals” (Keck 2002, 167). This process often involves emphasizing the urgency of issues considered relevant and developing causal arguments about problems (Stone, 2012 [1988]; Keck 2002). In particular, according to Deborah Stone, constructing a compelling story about a problem generally requires defining who should be blamed for it—what she calls “the assignment of responsibility” (Stone, 2012 [1988], 207).

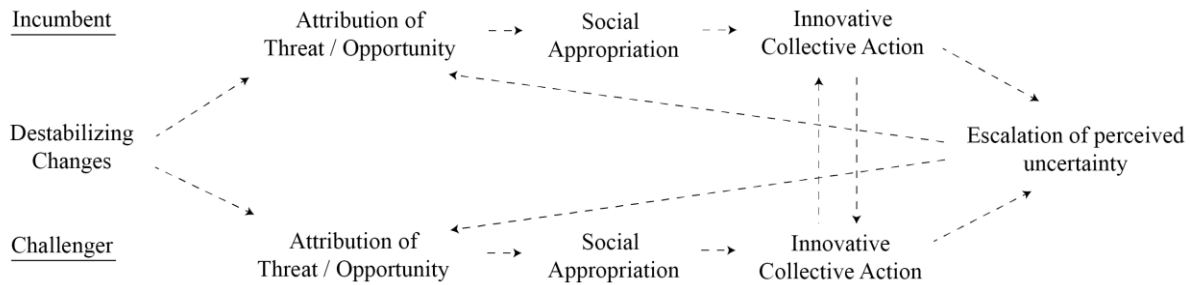
Taken together, the concepts of political opportunities (or attribution of opportunity) and framing offer helpful lenses for understanding social mobilization. In this thesis, I explore how activists from the Alliance and the Collective interpreted the opportunities for action the water crisis created. I also examine the ways in which they framed problems (their causal arguments and assignment of blame). This analysis helps to situate the values and projects shaping mobilization during the crisis.

However, I seek to move away from the “movementcentrism” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) that has characterized mobilization research more broadly and studies of water conflict in particular. “Movementcentrism” refers to a lack of attention to the broader set of actors with which movements interact and the ways in which these interactions shape mobilization. In *A Theory of Fields* (2012), Fligstein and McAdam address this gap by articulating a more complete way of

studies. Kingdon documents several instances in which changes in administration or new problems shifted governmental agenda and were perceived by “policy entrepreneurs”—or policy activists—as windows of opportunity for changes in public policies. According to him, these opportunities are rare, short-lived, and often unpredictable, thus advocates need to be ready, proposals in hand, “lest the opportunity pass them by” (Kingdon 2003, 165).

analyzing mobilization efforts, particularly those emerging from external shocks or destabilizing changes such as economic depression, war or, in São Paulo’s case, a drought (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Mobilization process (Fligstein and McAdam 2012)



Building upon social movement scholarship, the authors propose that, in the face of an exogenous change in a given field, mobilization will emerge and develop through three interrelated mechanisms. Social actors need to 1) perceive the change as a threat or opportunity “for the realization of collective interests” (“attribution of threat / opportunity”); 2) mobilize resources to transform sense of threat or opportunity into sustained action (“social appropriation”); and 3) adopt innovative action strategies for advancing their particular goals (“innovative collective action”) (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 20–21). This framework is part of a broader theoretical arc that seeks to explain stability and change within what the authors call “strategic action fields”.¹⁴ These can be understood as constructed social arenas demarcated on a “situational basis” (or according to the issues at stake). Individuals or groups within these arenas interact in ways that either maintain the dominant organization of the field—the role of “incumbents”—or transform it—the role of “challengers” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

While I will not engage with all the analytical layers in Fligstein and McAdam’s “theory of fields,” I will build on their understanding of mobilization precipitated by destabilizing changes.

¹⁴ The authors’ own formal definition of strategic actions fields is the following: “A strategic action field is a constructed mesolevel social order in which actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purpose of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 9).

First, their framework helps to account for dynamism within collective action. As the authors highlight, “actors who are both more and less powerful are constantly making adjustments to the conditions in the field given their position and the actions of others” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 12). Second, the authors consider more carefully than others the agency of those who push back against the pressure of social mobilization (the “incumbents”). Although I focus primarily on the civil society coalitions mobilizing around the crisis, I am also concerned about the views and actions of those they were challenging—in this case, São Paulo state’s government and SABESP. The interplay between state action and activism is central to understanding how civil society mobilization around the supply crisis emerged and developed.

THESIS ORGANIZATION

In addition to the introduction, the thesis is organized around four chapters. In the second chapter, I review the literature on collective action around water, with particular focus on studies of social mobilization. I discuss some of the factors the literature has considered relevant for effective mobilization around water such as movement unity, clearly articulated arguments, and linkages between local struggles and international issues. I dedicate some attention to the human right to water as a mobilization frame given its importance for water struggles broadly and to mobilization around São Paulo’s water crisis in particular.

In the third chapter, I discuss water resources management systems in Brazil and São Paulo in order to situate the historical and institutional context within which the crisis unfolded. I also review water supply in São Paulo and present how the water crisis developed following the 2013–2014 drought. I focus on relief measures implemented by SABESP and the state government, as well as on political tensions that emerged as reservoir levels continued to drop dramatically in 2014. The deterioration of supply conditions was one of the factors that contributed to mobilization emergence.

In the fourth chapter, I develop the arguments regarding how the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle were formed. My work shows that uncertainty about future supply availability and growing discontent with how the state government and SABESP managed the crisis created a sense among activists from both the Alliance and the Collective that there was a

political opportunity for action. While activists converged in some of the arguments and criticisms they articulated, they diverged in how they interpreted this opportunity—which helps explain why two coalitions emerged. I argue that different meanings of opportunity were related to different organizational and political characteristics, different views regarding the assignment of blame, and, ultimately, different projects related to the crisis.

For the Alliance, which largely evolved from a tradition of environmental advocacy, the crisis was an opportunity to unite environmental movements and other organizations around a water agenda to promote a “new culture of care around water.” For the Collective, formed by grassroots movements and unions historically aligned with class-based struggle and left-wing political thinking, the crisis was an opportunity to advance a broader agenda of social and political transformation. This agenda involved fostering critical political thinking, amplifying grassroots organizing, and undermining the state government—which the activists were politically opposed to. While the Alliance maintained that all levels of government (municipal, state, and federal) held responsibility for the supply crisis, the Collective blamed the state government and SABESP directly for it.

By tracing their mobilization process, I show that activists from both the Alliance and the Collective transformed different understandings of opportunity into actual mobilization by building on individual and organizational relationships and weaving scattered water-related initiatives around their different agendas. Experienced and well-positioned leadership was also central to coalition formation in both cases.

In the final chapter, I discuss how mobilization around the water crisis developed, dedicating attention to the challenges faced and action strategies pursued by both groups. Among the challenges they faced, I identify navigating diffuse causality (or finding ways to articulate and act on the multiple issues they associated with the crisis), dealing with organizational constraints such as limited knowledge or resources, and overcoming institutional impermeability on the part of the state government and SABESP. I argue that confronting these challenges, advancing particular organizational goals, and taking advantage of spaces for action within the crisis required the coalitions to engage in flexible mobilization dynamics.

Despite their distinct organizational characteristics and ideological projects, I find that the Alliance and the Collective deliberately sought to coordinate efforts where they felt collaboration

would strengthen their ability to influence processes related to the crisis without compromising particular group goals. This process involved adjusting problem frames and strategically choosing which issues to target in different spaces for participation. The Alliance and the Collective collaborated, for example, in the preparation of a joint report on human rights violations to the United Nations, in a partnership to support investigations on the crisis being conducted by the State Public Prosecutors' Office (*Ministério Público de São Paulo – MPSP*), and in a coordinated strategy to influence debates on SABESP's water use right to the Cantareira system, which was under discussion in participatory river basin committees. The coalitions did not pursue joint efforts, however, when it came to translating and raising awareness about the crisis, where maintaining their own narratives about the situation was more important for achieving particular coalition goals. I present each of these strategies in this final chapter and conclude by discussing what we can learn from civil society mobilization around São Paulo's water supply crisis and its implications for democratic deepening.

NOTE ON METHODS

The analysis I develop in this thesis relies primarily on semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted during three months of fieldwork in the city of São Paulo between June and August 2015, while the water crisis was still ongoing. The first month of fieldwork served as an exploratory period during which I sought to make connections with the groups I wanted to study, namely the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle. Informal discussions with them gave me a chance to refine my research questions.

In the subsequent months, I conducted 21 semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews with representatives of a variety of civil society organizations, grassroots groups, and government agencies at the state and federal level. Most importantly, these included members of the Alliance and the Collective, the president of the National Water Agency, and São Paulo's Adjunct Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources. I sought to interview a range of stakeholders from civil society and the government in order to capture different perspectives on the crisis. I also observed multiple meetings of the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle and attended water-related seminars, forums, workshops, and public hearings organized by

government, organizations of water professionals, academia, and activists. Most of these events were also digitally recorded. Complete lists of the interviews and the events I attended are provided in Appendix 01 and 02, respectively.

Through both participant observation and interview materials, I was able to capture activists' narratives about the crisis as well as their motivations for mobilization. These methods also helped to shed light on the interactions among the actors and the "behind-the-scenes" dynamics taking place within the Alliance and the Collective as they devised their action strategies. It is important to note that accounts of the Collective's activities are often more detailed because the group met often and I had the opportunity to attend several of their meetings while in São Paulo. In contrast, meetings in which the Alliance discussed its activities were sparser and often designed as presentations as opposed to group discussions. In order to check my biases and triangulate my findings (Bakker 2000; Wald 2014; Yin 2014), I supplemented my interviews and first-hand observations with information from governmental and civil society publications, news articles, and social media posts related to the water crisis. I also did a more complete literature review on water resources management and governance in São Paulo and Brazil.

When I arrived in São Paulo, I entered conversations and struggles that were already underway. When I left, these continued without me. What I offer in this thesis is a window on to parts of the process, framed as much by the individuals and groups with whom I engaged as by my own interpretative lenses. All translations from Portuguese are my own. Perhaps it is relevant to note that Portuguese is my native language, and I grew up in Brazil.

CHAPTER 2. SOCIOPOLITICAL STRUGGLES AROUND WATER

As the demand for water in cities increases (as a function of population growth and urbanization), ecosystems without effective management become stressed. Increasing variability in rainfall patterns due to climate change also exert greater pressure on available freshwater resources around the world (WWAP 2015). These elements combine to turn water into a fertile ground for both conflict and cooperation. Particularly in the last 30 years, a growing body of literature has emerged dedicated to investigating contentious and collaborative collective action around water at every scale. I review this literature below, dedicating particular attention to studies of social mobilization around water, which is the focus of my research.

One approach within the literature on collective action around water has been to investigate the potential for and challenges to collaborative water resources management and governance.¹⁵ Following in Elinor Ostrom's (1990) footsteps, a number of studies have focused on the conditions under which collective action—whether it be within small communities or among riparian countries—can overcome the “tragedy of the commons” and allow for cooperative management of shared water supply sources such as aquifers and freshwater bodies (Sneddon and Fox 2007; Lopez-Gunn 2003; Meizen-Dick et al. 2002; Benvenisti 1996). In particular, these studies emphasize institutional design, participation, and accountability mechanisms as key determinants of successful collective water management. Other scholars have also called attention to the role of multiple actor networks in facilitating coordination and articulating more effective forms of water resources management (Bos et al. 2015; Abers and Keck 2013; Islam and Susskind 2013). For example, exploring the implementation of new institutions for water decision-making in Brazil, Abers and Keck argue that understanding institutional change requires investigating patterns of interaction existing among actors both within and outside of the state as they seek to “produce not only new ideas but also the resources and relationships necessary to implement them” (Abers and Keck 2013, 13).

A second approach—more central to this thesis—has been to explore sociopolitical struggles around water, where debates about meaning and rights take center stage. These struggles

¹⁵ See note on definition of governance I provided in the introduction. For a helpful review of the literature on water governance, cf. Araral and Wang (2013).

encompass, for instance, indigenous movements for the right to water as a right to spiritual and cultural identity (Ruru 2012; Boelens et al. 2010; Susskind and Angelovski 2008), anti-dam movements and coalitions protesting the social and environmental impacts of large-scale development projects (Khagram 2004; La Branche 2009), and anti-water privatization groups rallying against what they consider the “commodification of water”¹⁶ (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012; Bakker 2010; Barlow 2007). Here, collective action efforts often take a form closer to social movements. Beyond sharing moral values and a collective goal, individuals and organized actors assume a collective identity and push for “targets for collective efforts, specifically articulated in social and political terms” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, location 362–367). Research on sociopolitical struggles around water has contributed to shifting debates away from technical matters towards political and cultural understandings of water (Sultana and Loftus 2012; Bakker 2010).

Furthermore, research on social mobilization around water has dedicated particular attention to how activists frame problems and to the discursive repertoires they mobilize to justify their claims (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012; Sultana and Loftus 2012; Perera 2012; Giglioli 2012). Specifically, researchers have argued that mobilization is most effective—in terms of achieving movement goals—when groups are able to unite around shared arguments and present them in a coherent manner to political authorities. For example, in the book *Contested Water: the Struggle Against Water Privatization in the United States and Canada*, Robinson (2013) compares the frames and strategies adopted by activists against water supply privatization in Stockton, California, and Vancouver, British Columbia. In Stockton, disputes regarding how to frame the issue—emphasizing lack of democratic accountability or the consequences of private control on water provision—created divisions among groups and thwarted greater mobilization. In contrast, she demonstrates that Vancouver activists shared common understandings of the problem and drew from international anti-privatization struggles to articulate local concerns in ways that not only fostered mobilization but were also compelling to local authorities.

Robinson’s account offers a persuasive analysis of the ways in which problem framing may shape mobilization around water. However, it shares with other studies on water struggles a lack

¹⁶ Water commodification, in this case, refers to the process of transforming water into a tradable economic good subject to market forces. I discuss these claims briefly further in the chapter.

of attention to how different problem framings may be dynamically mobilized and flexibly shifted to adapt to context and activists' objectives. As I argue in this thesis, problem framing was an important aspect of how social mobilization around São Paulo's water supply crisis emerged. The Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle each organized around a set of arguments regarding problems they associated with the crisis. While some of these arguments were shared, the groups diverged in their understanding of the crisis and opportunities for action in ways that led to the formation of two coalitions as opposed to a unified movement. However, unlike in Stockton, for example, where group divisions created barriers for effective mobilization, in São Paulo groups were able to work around their differences to potentiate their mobilization efforts. I argue that the particular political and institutional environment in which mobilization developed coupled with the need to overcome challenges such as limited resources and diffuse causality encouraged flexible mobilization dynamics within and between the groups. This process enabled them to take advantage and create spaces for participation in the crisis while still advancing particular coalition arguments and projects.

MEANING IN ACTION

Studies on social mobilization around water have also dedicated attention to the different meanings of water invoked by activists when constructing problem frames. For instance, according to Krista Bywater, activists may appeal to religious (water as a sacred resource), cultural (i.e., water as a common resource), moral (water as necessary for life), and legal (i.e., water is a human right) interpretations of water in order to justify their claims around particular problems they identify (Bywater 2012). Among these, the literature has dedicated great attention to the human right to water as a mobilization frame. For example, in the book *The Right to Water: Politics, governance and social struggles* (2012), Sultana and Loftus reunite a number of pieces that discuss mobilizations around water in relation to a rights framework. I discuss the human right to water briefly in this review because I found it to be relevant for civil society mobilization around the water crisis in São Paulo—both in terms of the coalitions' organizing principles and the action strategies they pursued.

The human right to water is predicated on the understanding that water is necessary for life—it

cannot be substituted—and that other fundamental rights recognized by the United Nations (UN) such as the right to life and the right to health cannot be fulfilled without access to water (Gleick 1998). The UN recognized the human right to drinking water and sanitation through the resolution 64/292 in July 2010. The resolution “calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.”¹⁷ Some countries, like South Africa and India, have also enshrined the human right to water in their constitutions. However, disputes remain regarding how the right to water can be realized in practice and what it means for water governance and service provision (Sultana and Loftus 2012; Bakker 2007, 2010).

Research on water struggles has shown, for example, that the human right to water has been particularly invoked in mobilization against private sector involvement in water provision—often grouped by the literature as anti-water privatization movements.¹⁸ Private sector participation in the provision of public services gained traction in the 1990s, following a shift in international policy away from state planning towards free-market policies and private ownership—what has become known as neoliberal policies (Budds and McGranahan 2003). In the water sector, private participation in service provision was seen as a way to increase efficiency, expand access, and price water more carefully to help recover the costs of infrastructure investments, operations, and maintenance (Budds and McGranahan 2003). The understanding that water is an increasingly scarce resource that could be allocated more efficiently through markets was an important element of this shift (Bakker 2007). This view informed, for example, the final statement from the 1992 International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin. Among other principles, the statement established that “water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.”¹⁹

¹⁷ UN Water, “The human right to water and sanitation.” Accessed April 28, 2016. http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml

¹⁸ What privatization means in different contexts is generally loosely defined. As Karen Bakker (2007) notes, privatization has served as an umbrella term covering a range of distinct reforms involving private sector participation. These include commercialization, deregulation, corporatization, and privatization itself (the transfer of assets to a private operator).

¹⁹ “The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development.” Accessed April 28, 2016. <http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/hwrp/documents/english/icwedece.html>

The jury is still out on whether private sector participation expands access to water, allows for greater utility efficiency and cost recovery, and improves water conservation.²⁰ However, some civil society groups and water activists around the world have argued against water privatization. They claim that as a public good and human right, water “must not be appropriated for personal profit or denied to anyone because of inability to pay” (Barlow 2007, xi–xii). For example, the Civil Society World Water Vision manifesto emerging from the 2003 People’s World Water Forum stated: “Water is not a commodity and must not be left to the whims of the market because no person or entity has the right to profit from it. Water must not, therefore, be commodified, privatized, traded or exported for commercial gain.”²¹

As Karen Bakker observes, opponents of water privatization often invoke the human right to water as a way to place “an onus upon states to provide water to all and [preclude] private sector involvement” (Bakker 2007, 432). However, as Bakker notes, the human right to water is not incompatible with private sector participation in water provision. Specifically, she argues that the human right to water is anchored on a legal framework for the protection of individual rights that is not fundamentally at odds with market-based approaches to water management—which are based, instead, on property rights regimes. Thus, Bakker suggests, deploying the human right to water as a mobilization tool may work against the very agendas anti-water privatization activists seek to drive forward. She notes, for instance, that international organizations such as the World Water Council,²² water industry representatives, and advocates of private sector involvement in water supply have generally embraced the human right to water in recent years—a sign of the concept’s malleability.

Alternatively, Bakker proposes that the notion of water as commons is a more effective frame for counteracting the “commodification of water.” Under the commons framework, “water is a flow resource essential for life and ecosystem health; non-substitutable and tightly bound to communities and ecosystems through the hydrological cycle” (Bakker 2007, 441). According to

²⁰ For a more detailed and nuanced review of the debates on private sector participation in water provision, cf. Budds and McGranahan (2003) and Bakker and Kooy (2008).

²¹ People’s World Water Forum, “Water is Life: A Civil Society World Water Vision for Action.” Published March 2003. Accessed April 14, 2016. <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/world-social-forum-mainmenu-34/348-a-civil-society-world-water-vision>

²² The World Water Council is an international think tank focusing on water resources management founded in 1996. Several multilateral and private sector organizations are members of the Council. Its current president is Benedito Braga, who was appointed as São Paulo’s State Secretary of Sanitation and Water Resources in December 2014. See: <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/>

Bakker, conceptualizing water as commons helps move water debates away from public-private binaries and locate communities—and thus place-based, cultural, and spiritual understandings of water—at the center of water resources management arrangements.

Bakker’s argument has the merit of asking activists and scholars to interrogate more deeply the conceptual foundations and practical implications of anti-water privatization claims. However, research on water struggles indicates that the human right to water remains a relevant mobilization frame for activists and, alongside common’s claims, composes broader political and cultural repertoires mobilized by many activists. For example, Perera (2012) demonstrates that adopting a human rights discourse allowed Colombian activists mobilizing around a water referendum to extend their claims beyond environmental projects, articulate political and territorial understandings of water, and connect their efforts to global water justice struggles. Similarly, analyzing two successful water struggles in India—the closure of a Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada following organized protests by the Adivasis and the cancellation of a World Bank sponsored hydro-project due to social mobilization against private sector participation in water supply in Delhi—Bywater argues that the human right to water discourse, while theoretically problematic, can serve as an accessible and effective language to mobilize “political cultures of opposition that rally public support” (Bywater 2012, 214). In fact, Bywater goes further by demonstrating that in both cases articulating multiple meanings of water, including human right and commons, with clear movement goals was fundamental for galvanizing public sentiment and leveraging historically strong local participation systems to advance water claims.

My analysis of social mobilization around São Paulo’s water supply crisis corroborates the relevance of the human right to water as a mobilization frame. As I discuss in chapter 4, the Collective for Water Struggle in particular invoked the right to water as a way to justify their criticisms of SABESP’s mixed ownership model, which requires the company to pay dividends to shareholders based on company profits.²³ Further, the rights framework helped situate the Collective’s mobilization efforts within a broader agenda of grassroots mobilization for other rights such as housing, health, labor, and education—which are recognized by Brazil’s 1988 Constitution. Finally, as discussed in chapter 5, the human right to water was also used for activists as a way to call the United Nations’ attention to water problems in São Paulo.

²³ I explain SABESP’s ownership structure in chapter 3.

Specifically, activists argued that measures taken by the government to mitigate the crisis compromised access to drinking water in safe and sufficient quantities, thus constituting a human rights violation.

This strategy to activate the United Nations to exert pressure on São Paulo state's government mirrors what the literature on social mobilization around water has called the creation of local-global connections. Studies have shown that water activists often attempt to establish linkages between local issues and global processes—whether it be through narratives, repertoires, or networks—to support local struggles and create a broader sense of international solidarity and legitimacy (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012; Perera 2012; La Branche 2009).

Discussing mobilization in Vancouver, for example, Robinson argues that “anti-water privatization activists drew upon symbolic anti-globalization and anti-corporate politics to foster local unity and leverage local political institutions to support their demand for a publicly controlled water system” (Robinson 2013, 84). Similarly, Bywater argues that invoking examples of negative privatization experiences elsewhere in the world helped strengthen the arguments of anti-water privatization activists in India and put greater pressure on local governments to acknowledge their claims (Bywater 2012). These efforts also call to mind Keck and Sikkink's “boomerang theory” (1998). Investigating the role of transnational advocacy networks in shaping domestic policies, Keck and Sikkink demonstrate that mobilizing international networks to create pressure on local governments can be an effective way for domestic actors to advance particular agendas when confronted with impervious states.

I will return to these points when discussing the action strategies pursued by the Alliance and the Collective. However, before delving deeper into their mobilization process, I discuss the historical, political, and institutional context within which the crisis unfolded.

CHAPTER 3. WHERE WATER PATHS AND SCARCITY MEET

Civil society groups organizing around São Paulo's water supply crisis engaged historically-rooted problems and navigated a complex institutional environment. Understanding their mobilization process requires, therefore, comprehending both the history of water resources management and supply in the region and the institutional architecture guiding decision-making in the water sector. I begin this chapter by introducing the reforms that established current water resource management systems at the state and federal levels and explaining the roles and responsibilities of different institutional actors. My objective is not to provide a comprehensive historical overview and in-depth analysis of water resources management in either São Paulo or Brazil. There is extensive literature on both (OECD 2015; Abers and Keck 2013; Wolkmer and Pimmel 2013; Campos and Fracalanza 2010; Borba and Porto 2010; Jacobi 2009; Porto and Porto 2008; Abers and Keck 2006; Keck 2002; among others). Rather, I attempt to situate the historical and institutional context within which mobilization around the water crisis took place. In the final two sections, I review water supply in São Paulo leading up to the 2013 drought and discuss how the water crisis developed. The aggravation of supply conditions during 2014 would set the stage for social mobilization to emerge.

INTEGRATION, DECENTRALIZATION, AND PARTICIPATION: WATER LAW REFORMS IN THE 1990s

The water resources management model currently in place in São Paulo and Brazil traces back to the 1980s and 1990s. In 1988, Brazil's newly enacted Constitution established that states have jurisdiction over waters lying completely within their borders while the federal government has jurisdiction over waters crossing state boundaries. Additionally, the Constitution determined that the federal government should institute a national system for water resources management and define criteria for the allocation of rights to water use. In 1997, almost ten years later, the requirement was finally enforced. Brazil's National Congress passed Federal Law n. 9.433/97, which instituted a National Water Resources Plan (PNRH) and a National System for Water Resources Management (SINGREH). The national law was the culmination of a series of debates

and reform efforts dating back to the 1970s (Abers and Keck 2013). It also built heavily on the principles and institutional framework defined by another important preceding reform: São Paulo's 1991 Water Law (State Law n. 7663/91).

Historically, water resources management in Brazil as well as in São Paulo had been deeply fragmented. National economic development goals, particularly between the 1930s and 1970s, placed hydroelectricity generation at the center of water policy agenda. Other uses were relatively marginalized. Policy areas such as agriculture, industry, and sanitation maintained independent, and sometimes competing, plans for water use with little cross-sector coordination (Abers and Keck 2013; Campos and Fracalanza 2010).

This scenario began to change in the 1970s and 1980s, when disputes regarding water allocation and quality emerged. In São Paulo state, for example, the Billings reservoir (created in 1958) was used for both energy generation and untreated wastewater disposal. Growing pollution in the reservoir generated complaints from firms and surrounding cities, leading the Ministry of Mines and Energy to create a special coordinating executive committee in 1976. Composed by different state and federal government agencies, the committee was tasked with collaboratively managing the multiple uses of the Alto Tietê and Cubatão river basins, which supplied the Billings reservoir (Abers and Keck 2013). The committee constituted the first national experiment in integrated water resources management (SMA 1995). The episode helped strengthen pressure from water professionals and experts in São Paulo and other parts of the country for reforms in water resources management.

According to Abers and Keck, water policy debates emerging in the 1970s and extending into the 1980s centered around two main concerns: the need for integrated management and the pursuit of new sources of funding for investments in infrastructure (Abers and Keck 2013, 50). One source of inspiration for reform proposals was the growing international movement for integrated water resources management (IWRM), which promoted multi-sectoral coordination as a means for sustainable, equitable, and efficient management of multiple user water systems (Abers and Keck 2013; Islam and Susskind 2013). While the IWRM approach remained loosely defined until 2000, when the Global Water Partnership proposed a formal definition,²⁴ by the 1990s

²⁴ The Global Water Partnership was created in 1996 to promote integrated water resources management. In 2000, the partnership defined IWRM as “a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable

IWRM had become an influential paradigm for water resources management (Islam and Susskind 2013). It was endorsed in international forums such as 1992 Dublin Conference and by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank. River basin planning, devolution of decision-making to local authorities (decentralization), multistakeholder participation, and market incentives to leverage the economic value of water—important ideas within the IWRM movement—became influential concepts within water reform debates in Brazil (Abers and Keck 2013). Another source of inspiration for reform advocates was the French water management system. Created in 1964, “the French model” combined decentralized management (through river basin committees and executive agencies) and water use charges to help finance infrastructure (Abers and Keck 2013; Campos and Fracalanza 2010).

These elements from the French system, along with IWRM ideas, helped shape the basic reform package that would eventually compose Sao Paulo’s 1991 State Water Law and the 1997 National Water Law.²⁵ According to Abers and Keck, the move towards decentralized decision-making served the interests of both advocates of neoliberal principles who criticized excessive bureaucracy and state inefficiency, and supporters of participatory democracy who sought changes in institutional design to increase public participation (Abers and Keck 2006, 602).

São Paulo’s 1991 Law, passed on December 30th, defined water as “a public good, with economic value, whose use must be charged” and whose management should be compatible with both regional development and environmental protection (Porto 2012). The Law also instituted a decentralized, participatory, and integrated management approach by hydrographic basin. In practice, this meant the creation of new decision-making and administrative bodies such as river basin committees for multistakeholder deliberation and water agencies.²⁶

While the final legislation was praised for promoting the participation of multiple stakeholders, initial drafts of the law were less participatory (Interview 5, July 2015; Interview 13, August 2015). According to Rosa Mancini, a state government official who was involved in reform debates at the time, “the first draft contained no civil society participation. Then there was a lot of debate and the legislation was changed to include tripartite participation from state

manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.” See: <http://www.gwp.org/en/The-Challenge/What-is-IWRM/>

²⁵ For an in-depth analysis of how different elements of the IWRM approach and the French system were incorporated into both legislations, cf. Abers and Keck (2013).

²⁶ I explain the current institutional framework in the next section.

government, municipalities, and civil society” (Interview 13, August 2015).

Mobilization from organized civil society groups was an important driver of the change. There was a sense, among many water activists at the time, that it was important to expand spaces for civil society participation in order to strengthen the country’s nascent democracy, following more than twenty years of centralized decision-making under military rule (Interview 5, July 2015). Under the leadership of the Labor Union in Water, Sewerage and the Environment (SINTAEMA), a group of water experts, environmental protection associations, and union members formed a “pro-sanitation and water resources” network (*Articulação Paulista Pró-Saneamento e Recursos Hídricos – APSRH*). Among other proposals, the coalition advocated for river basin committees dedicated to both consultation and deliberation, and composed by civil society representatives, state officials, and municipalities (SMA 1995; Interview 5, July 2015). Edson Silva, who previously worked for SABESP and was a union leader at the time, explained their mobilization as follows:

the legislation proposal had many problems from the point of view of guaranteeing civil society’s participation, so through the labor union we began mobilizing. We brought in environmental groups as well as experts from private companies. This is interesting. Why? Because the experts did not have enough room to articulate their proposals within their companies, so they used us as a way to voice their ideas. And here I am referring specifically to SABESP. (Interview 5, July 2015)

In their effort to influence the proposed legislation, activists in the APSRH sought a number of strategies. In addition to bringing different groups together to elaborate joint proposals, they pressed legislators into holding public hearings about the draft and negotiated with public officials. They also wrote a letter to a mission from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) who was meeting with São Paulo’s state governor—at the time Luiz Antônio Fleury Filho from the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). In the letter, they denounced the legislation draft for not being participatory enough.

This history of mobilization around São Paulo’s 1991 Water Law is important to relate because some of the activists and groups involved then were also involved in social mobilization around the water supply crisis. For instance, Edson Silva was one of the leaders of the Collective for Water Struggle, and SINTAEMA was a member organization in the Collective, contributing

often to its efforts. According to Silva, however, the political context against which mobilization took place in 1990s was much different from the context in 2013–2014, when the water supply crisis began. Comparing mobilization in the two periods, he said:

[in the 1990s] our experience was a tremendous success. We managed to gather 100 people in a room to discuss the law proposal. This led to a series of public hearings in São Paulo's state legislature with the participation of different groups and finally the proposal was passed in the manner that we wanted. Today, that would not have happened—even though we supposedly live in a stronger democracy. It wouldn't happen because the state governor, [Geraldo Alckmin], controls absolutely everything. Nothing would pass, it's very anti-democratic. (Interview 5, July 2015)

Silva's argument about the political context in São Paulo during the recent crisis is critically important background to the struggle and strategies employed by different civil society groups studied in this thesis.

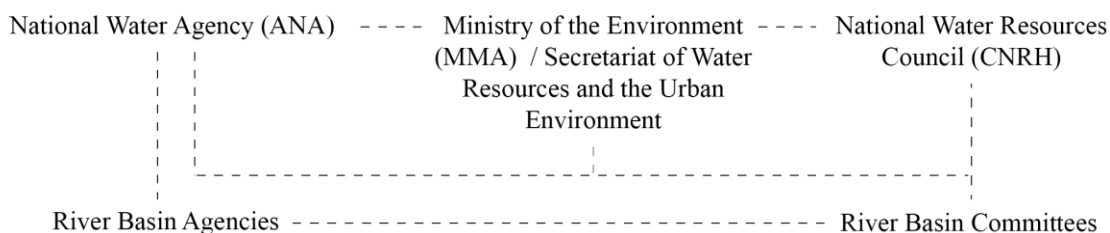
As aforementioned, São Paulo's legislation served as the foundation for the 1997 National Water Law. Federal government officials worked closely with officials from the state government in São Paulo to devise the new national water resources management system (Abers and Keck 2006, 2013). The Federal Law established that 1) water is a limited natural resource as well as a public good with economic value; 2) in situations of scarcity, drinking water for human and animal consumption should be prioritized; 3) water resources management should happen at the river basin level and support multiple uses. Similar to São Paulo's law, three basic principles supported the core reforms defined in the 1997 legislation: integrated management, decentralization of decision-making, and participation of water users and communities (Wolkmer and Pimmel 2013; Abers and Keck 2006, 2013). In the next section I explain the basic institutional architecture resulting from the 1990s' reforms. Different institutions within this system would perform important roles in São Paulo's supply crisis.

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The National System for Water Resources Management (SINGREH) provides a framework for connecting policy formulation and implementation bodies at the state and federal level. The

system is composed by the National Council on Water Resources (CNRH), State and Federal District²⁷ Councils on Water Resources (CRHs), River Basin Committees (CBHs), river basin agencies, and federal and state government agencies whose responsibilities relate to water resources management (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - National Water Resources Management System



The Ministry of the Environment (through the Secretariat of Water Resources and the Urban Environment) serves as the main liaison among different water-related institutions and projects at the federal level. It oversees the formulation of the National Water Resources Plan and supports the activities of the National Council on Water Resources.²⁸ The National Council is a participatory and deliberative body composed of representatives from all levels of government as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations and water users. Some of its main responsibilities include discussing policy proposals and water-relevant legislation, arbitrating conflicts, and coordinating water resource plans across states and regions (OECD 2015). State Councils on Water Resources are also multistakeholder, deliberative forums with similar responsibilities to those of the National Council, though their composition may vary according to state laws.

While the Ministry of the Environment and the councils support water policy formulation, the National Water Agency (ANA) is primarily responsible for operationalizing the National Plan

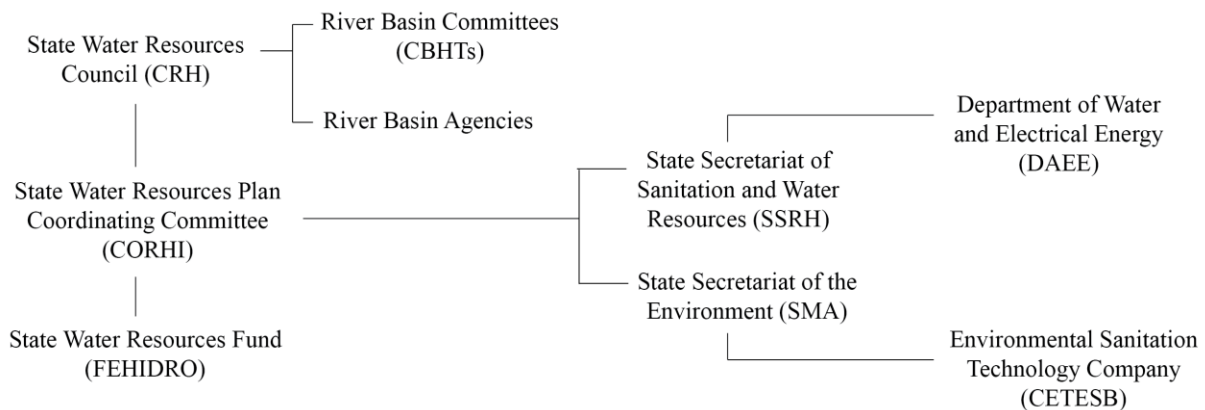
²⁷ Brazil has 26 states and one Federal District.

²⁸ It is worth noting here that, at the national level, the Ministry of Cities oversees sanitation policies. Other Ministries—for instance, the Ministry of Agriculture—play roles in water resources management but they are not formally connected to the National Water Resources Management System.

and National System of Water Resources Management. Created in 2000, the ANA is a regulatory and coordinating body connected to the Ministry of the Environment. The agency's responsibilities include granting and monitoring water use permits for waters flowing between states and thus under federal control, as well as supporting the creation of river basin committees and river basin plans (both under state and federal jurisdiction).

River basin committees (CBHs) and executive agencies form the basis of the decentralized and participatory management model championed by the new legislation. The CBHs are collaborative multistakeholder forums for deliberation and consultation on management issues related to a hydrographic basin. While how each operates in practice varies significantly from committee to committee (Abers and Keck 2013), they are generally in charge of debating and approving river basin plans, monitoring implementation, establishing mechanisms and criteria for collecting charges, and arbitrating conflicts in first administrative instance. Executive agencies at the basin level provide technical and administrative support for CBHs' activities.

Figure 4 - São Paulo State Water Resources System



State water resources management systems generally follow similar organizational arcs and principles, though with some degree of institutional variation. In São Paulo state, the Integrated Water Resources Management System (SIGRH) is primarily formed by 21 river basin committees (CBHs), basin agencies, the State Council on Water Resources (CRH), and the State Water Resources Plan Coordinating Committee (COHRI) (Figure 4). The system also includes a State Water Resources Fund (FEHIDRO), created by the 1991 Law, which provides financial

support for the implementation of the system. Resources for the Fund come primarily from financial compensation from the electricity sector and charges for water use (Porto 2012).

Table 1 - State government agencies that compose the COHRI

State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources (SSRH)	The SSRH is responsible for formulating water resources and sanitation policies in São Paulo state. The agency is also charged with facilitating integration of water resources management with other policy sectors such as environment and urban development.
Department of Water and Electrical Energy (DAEE)	Originally created in 1951, the DAEE is a state agency tasked with granting water use permits, preparing infrastructure and service plans, and assessing water resource flows in São Paulo state with a focus on facilitating diverse uses.
State Secretariat of the Environment (SMA)	The SMA is responsible for formulating, coordinating, and overseeing the implementation of the State Environmental Policy as well as executing activities related to environmental monitoring and protection. ²⁹
Environmental Sanitation Technology Company (CETESB)	The CETESB is a state agency responsible for producing environmental impact assessments and controlling, monitoring, and licensing polluting activities that may affect water, air, and soil quality. Created in 1968, the agency is currently connected to the SMA.

The COHRI is composed by state agencies involved in water resources management and supply. These are the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources (SSRH), the Department of Water and Electrical Energy (DAEE), the State Secretariat of the Environment (SMA), and the Environmental Sanitation Technology Company (CETESB). Table 1 describes their different

²⁹ Between 2007 and 2011, during the government of José Serra (Social Democracy Party – PSDB), responsibility for water resources policy formulation was allocated to the State Secretariat of the Environment (SMA). Water policy coordination returned to the Secretariat of Sanitation during the government of Geraldo Alckmin (also from PSDB), though the move did not necessarily result in greater coordination between the water resources and sanitation agendas (Interview 8, August 2015; Interview 13, August 2015).

responsibilities. Together with the state council and the river basin committees, these agencies contribute to the formulation and implementation of the State Water Resources Plan, which establishes guidelines for water use, protection, and conservation with the goal of guaranteeing water availability for multiple uses.³⁰

SABESP is connected to the SSRH but is not formally part of the COHRI. Since 2007, SABESP's activities are regulated by the State Sanitation and Energy Regulatory Agency (ARSESP), which regulates, controls, and monitors water supply, sanitation, electricity, and piped gas services owned by the state government. ARSESP is connected to State Government Secretariat. In the next section, I discuss water supply in São Paulo city to situate the contextual background against which the water crisis developed.

WATER SUPPLY IN SÃO PAULO'S METROPOLITAN REGION

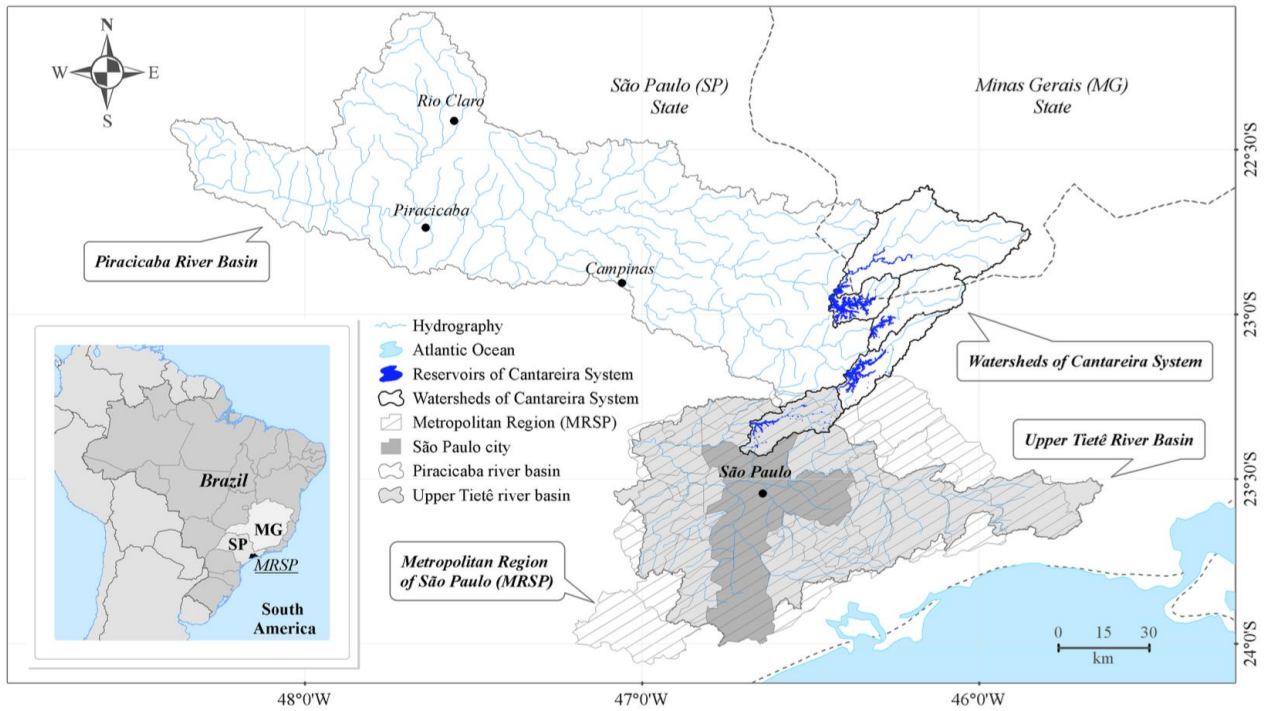
The story of water supply in São Paulo is intertwined with the story of the city's economic development and urban growth. Rapid industrialization during the 20th century, particularly between the 1930s and 1980s, propelled population growth and urban sprawl. By the end of the century, São Paulo was not only Brazil's main economic center but also the largest urban agglomeration in South America. The city's total population currently nears 12 million people while São Paulo's metropolitan region (RMSP), which includes 38 municipalities surrounding the city, has a total population of nearly 20 million. As São Paulo grew, water supply infrastructure and freshwater resource availability became progressively strained, forcing the city to continuously seek new supply sources (Whately and Diniz 2009; Keck 2002).

São Paulo's metropolitan region is mostly located within the Alto Tietê river basin (Figure 5). Urban supply in 2014 constituted the primary use of freshwater resources in the region (64%), followed by industrial use (32%) (Figure 6). In stark contrast to water demand at the national level, where irrigation for agriculture is the main use (Figure 7), irrigation corresponds to only a small fraction of water allocation in the Alto Tietê basin. In 2013, before the water supply crisis in the region began, average water demand per capita in São Paulo was equal to 188 liters per

³⁰ SIGRH, "Plano Estadual de Recursos Hídricos." Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.sigrh.sp.gov.br/planoestadualderecursoshidricos>

capita per day, compared to 166.3 liters per capita per day³¹ in Brazil.³² Both levels are above the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommended daily water consumption per capita of 110 liters.

Figure 5- River basins supplying São Paulo’s Metropolitan Region

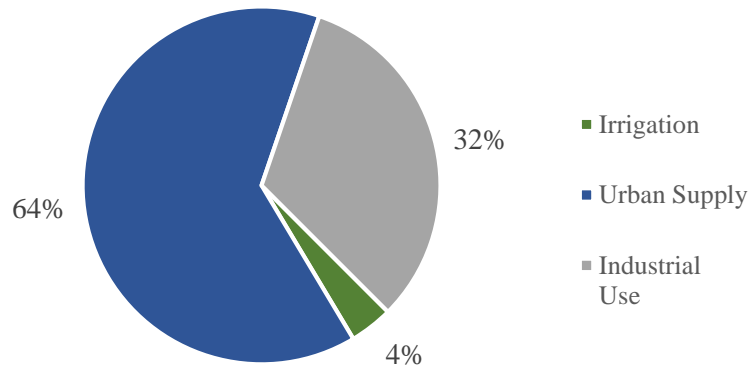


Source: Rodrigues et al. (2015).

³¹ It is important to note that there is great inequality in access to water across Brazil. According to the OECD, “coverage for urban water supply is almost universal (99.7%), while 15% of the rural population remains without access to an improved water source. A large share of the 12.8 million households that remain without access is concentrated in the North and Northeast regions, where only 45% and 69% of households were connected to piped water, respectively. In the Northeast, water supply is constrained due to the semi-arid climate conditions prevailing in the region, while access in the water-abundant North is primarily attributable to the lack of infrastructure” (OECD 2015, 34).

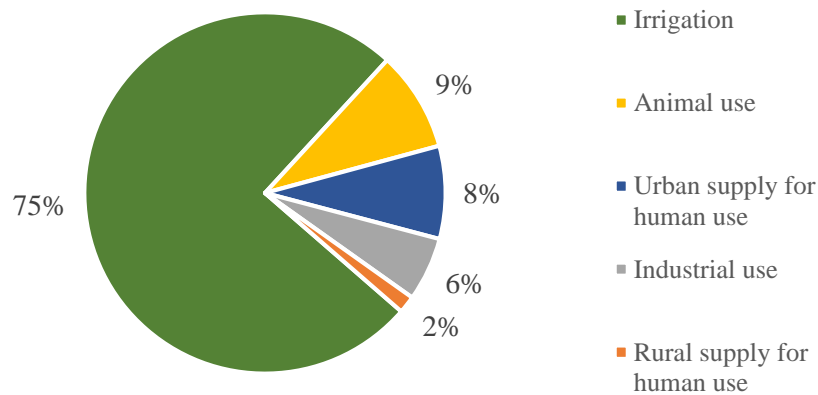
³² Folha de São Paulo, “Água no Brasil.” Accessed June 17, 2015.
<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/infograficos/2015/01/118521-agua-no-brasil.shtml>

Figure 6 - Demand for Water per Use in the Alto Tietê river basin in 2014



Source: SABESP (2014a).
 Notes: Total demand equaled 115.73 m³/s. Company only provided data for irrigation, urban supply, and industrial use.

Figure 7 - National Demand for Water per Use in 2014



Source: ANA (2015a).
 Notes: Total demand equaled 1,209.64 m³/s. Figures refer to de facto consumption in 2014.

The Alto Tietê river basin has one of the lowest water resource availability per capita in the country (Whately and Cunha 2006; Silva and Porto 2003). In a 2011 report, the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources (SSRH) evaluated that the region had less than 1,500 m³ of water availability per capita per year (SSRH 2011). The figure is considered critical. A satisfactory level, according to the report, would correspond to 2,500 m³ or greater per capita per

year. A number of factors have led to this scenario. Rapid industrialization and urban growth contributed to the progressive deterioration of already limited freshwater resources. Rivers that used to support supply, commerce, and recreation were either buried as the city developed or became unusable due to pollution. Disorganized sprawl combined with lack of adequate sanitation and wastewater treatment have further contributed to the degradation of watershed protection areas and water sources over the years (Whately and Diniz 2009; Silva and Porto 2003; Keck 2002).

To support water demand, São Paulo and its metropolitan region rely on water transferred from neighboring river basins (Silva and Porto 2003). An interconnected network, the Integrated Metropolitan System (SIM), services São Paulo as well as 34 other municipalities in the metropolitan region. The following set of reservoir systems supply the integrated network: Cantareira, Guarapiranga, Alto Tietê, Rio Grande, Rio Claro, Alto Cotia, Baixo Cotia, and Ribeirão da Estiva. Of these, the first three are the largest, accounting for more than 80% of total water availability.³³ The Cantareira System is particularly central to the region's water supply. Developed during the 1960s through transfer schemes from the adjacent Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiaí (PCJ) river basin to the Alto Tietê basin, the Cantareira supported service for nine million people in São Paulo city and some municipalities in the PCJ basin prior to the 2013 drought (ANA 2015b).

The integrated supply system is operated by SABESP. Originally created in 1973 as a public utility, SABESP began a “partial privatization” process during the 1990s. The process was meant to improve efficiency and streamline operations. According to Margaret Keck (2015), changes within the company accompanied a broader privatization and decentralization agenda pursued by the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Social Democracy Party – PSDB) at the federal level, and the governments of Mario Covas and Geraldo Alckmin (also from PSDB) at the state level.³⁴ Changes were also aligned with the previously discussed international push in the 1990s for greater private sector involvement in service provision, including in the water sector. As part

³³ United States Securities and Exchange Commission. 2014. Form 20-F. Annual Report Pursuant to Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2014. Commission file number 001-31317. Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo (SABESP). Page 44.

³⁴ Mario Covas was São Paulo's state governor between 1995 and 2001. Geraldo Alckmin replaced him, governing from 2001 to 2006. Alckmin was elected governor once again in 2011 and reelected in 2014. Their party, PSDB, has retained control over the state's government for the past 20 years. Fernando Henrique Cardoso was Brazil's president between 1995 and 2002.

of the reorganization process, SABESP decentralized services (opening business units across the state), professionalized management, and sought to increase revenue sources for infrastructure investment (Keck 2015; Interview 6, July 2015).

In 1997, SABESP began operating as a mixed capital company. Under this model, company ownership is shared between the government and private investors (through shares traded openly in the stock market). São Paulo's state government currently owns 50.3% of company shares, while the remaining ones are traded on São Paulo's stock exchange (Bovespa) and the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). As the majority shareholder, São Paulo's state government controls senior management appointments and board elections. It also holds influence over company operations and strategies.³⁵ Private investors receive dividends or interest on their capital based on the company's profits.³⁶ In 2013, SABESP's net operating revenue amounted to nearly 11.3 billion Reais (approximately US\$ 3.2 billion³⁷).³⁸

The company has operated the Cantareira System since 1974, when the Ministry of Mines and Energy granted SABESP a thirty-year long water use permit. Following its creation in 2000, the National Water Agency (ANA) took over responsibility for granting water use rights and overseeing the system's operation alongside São Paulo's State Department of Water and Electrical Energy (DAEE). This is because the Cantareira System is served by waters lying within both state and federal jurisdiction.³⁹ In 2004, ANA and DAEE renewed SABESP's right to use the Cantareira reservoirs for urban supply until August 2014. The 2004 concession allowed the company to abstract 31 thousand liters per second from the system to supply the metropolitan region of São Paulo and 5 thousand liters per second to supply the PCJ region (Whately and Cunha 2006).

The Cantareira System is vital for SABESP's operations. Although the company provides water and wastewater services to 364 of São Paulo state's 645 municipalities (nearly 60% of the state's urban population), services to the metropolitan region of São Paulo constitute its main source of revenues (SABESP 2014b). According to a company report produced for the United States Security and Exchange Commission, in 2014 the Cantareira accounted for 38.1% of the water

³⁵ United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014, op. cit., page 12.

³⁶ SABESP is required by law to pay at least 25% of its profits in dividends to shareholders.

³⁷ Based on a conversion rate of US\$ 1 to R\$ 3.55 (the rate as of May 04, 2016).

³⁸ United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014, op. cit., page 86.

³⁹ Specifically, the PCJ river basin is under federal jurisdiction.

SABESP supplied to São Paulo's metropolitan region and represented 70% of the company's gross operating revenues.⁴⁰

The 2004 concession required SABESP to invest in studies and projects that would progressively reduce dependence on the Cantareira System and help secure alternative freshwater sources. The provision meant to address the increasing imbalance between demand and available supply in the region (SSRH 2011; Keck 2015). The problem was well known. In the aforementioned report to the Securities and Exchange Commission, SABESP notes: "demand for our water services has grown steadily over the years in the São Paulo metropolitan region and has at times exceeded the capacity of our water systems."⁴¹

In an attempt to address water supply vulnerability in the region, in 2008 São Paulo state's government began developing an extensive plan for water resources management in the metropolitan region, the so-called "Macro-metropolis Plan." Completed in October 2013, the plan concluded that current supply systems were insufficient to satisfy demand in the medium and long-terms or to guarantee supply in the event of water scarcity conditions (Cobrape 2013, 2). According to the plan, an additional 60 m³/s of water would be necessary to guarantee projected demand growth in São Paulo's metropolitan region during the next 22 years. To this end, the plan identified a series of measures necessary for future water security, including infrastructure projects for interbasin water transfer, infrastructure improvements to reduce losses in the distribution network, and investment in water reuse technologies. However, as Monica Porto, the State Adjunct Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources, put it, "we had really bad luck. The plan became ready when the drought began." (Interview 10, August 2015)

SÃO PAULO, WE HAVE A CRISIS

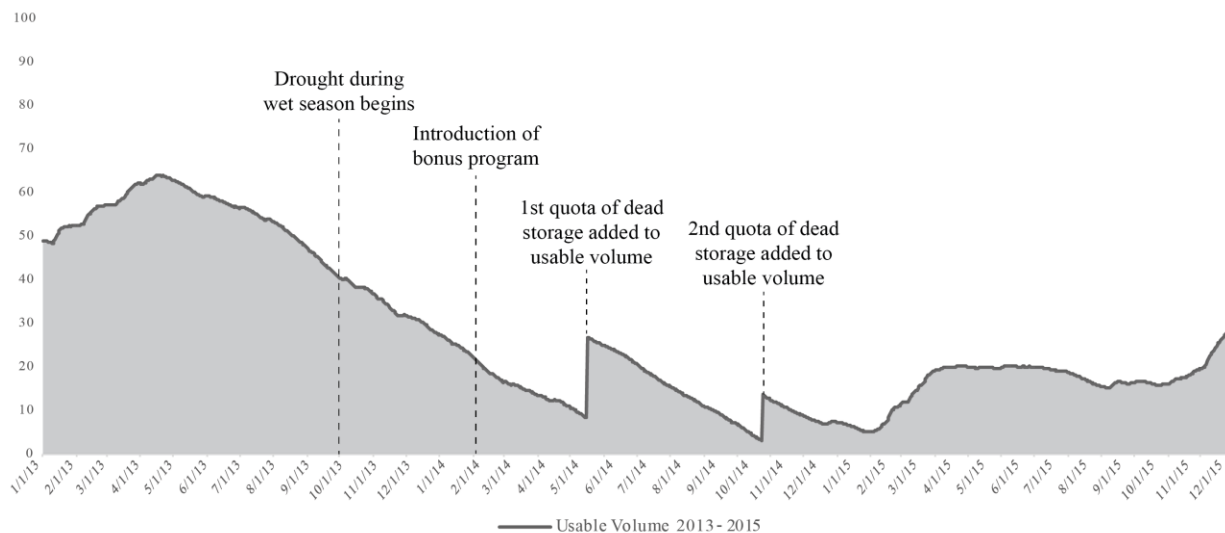
On February 1st, 2014, São Paulo city residents woke up to unusual news. Residents who were able to reduce monthly water consumption by at least 20% relative to their average consumption in the previous year would receive a 30% discount on their water bills. The program was the first in a series of measures introduced by SABESP to alleviate water supply exhaustion following a

⁴⁰ United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014, op. cit., page 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., page 32.

historical drought. Beginning in October 2013, below average precipitation levels reduced water flow to all reservoirs serving São Paulo’s metropolitan region and hindered reservoir recharge (SABESP 2015, 9). The Cantareira System was hit particularly hard. Between October 2013 and March 2014, usable storage⁴² in the system dropped from roughly 49% to 16% (Figure 8). In February 2014, when SABESP introduced its discount program to encourage lower consumption, 8.5 thousand liters per second entered the Cantareira reservoirs while 32.6 thousand liters per second were abstracted from the system.⁴³ At that pace, if no measures were taken, the reservoirs serving nearly 9 million people in São Paulo would dry up soon.⁴⁴

Figure 8 - Percentage of the usable volume of water stored in the Cantareira System (2013-2015)



Source: Mananciais.tk (2016).⁴⁵

⁴² Usable storage refers to the amount of water sitting above intake valves. Figure 8 displays the volume of water available in the Cantareira’s usable storage over time. The spikes in July 2014 and November 2014 indicate, respectively, the addition of the first and second quotas of the dead storage—the amount of water that used to sit below intake valves—to the system’s usable storage.

⁴³ Folha de São Paulo, “Governo Paulista foi alertado em 2009 sobre riscos no Canteira.” Published March 13, 2014. Accessed September 08, 2015. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2014/03/1424659-estado-foi-alertado-em-2009-sobre-riscos-no-cantareira.shtml>

⁴⁴ I center the narrative of how the crisis unfolded around the Cantareira System because, as discussed in the previous section, the Cantareira reservoirs constitute the main source of water supply to Sao Paulo’s metropolitan region. Because the system was hit the hardest by the drought, it was monitored the closest by officials, activists, and the population more broadly, and remained a focal point of debates and relief measures during the crisis.

⁴⁵ Mananciais.tk is a web app created by Código Urbano that aggregates and displays data on São Paulo’s reservoirs. The data is retrieved from SABESP. See: <http://mananciais.tk/>. Accessed May 03, 2016.

Also in February, concerns over water supply conditions in the Cantareira System prompted a meeting between the Minister of the Environment, Isabella Teixeira, the president of ANA, Vicente Andreu, and São Paulo state governor, Geraldo Alckmin (Interview 21, August 15, 2015). The meeting resulted in the creation of a technical group (*Grupo Técnico de Assessoramento para Gestão do Sistema Cantareira – GTAG*) composed of representatives from ANA, DAEE, SABESP, and the Alto Tietê and PCJ river basin committees (CBH-AT and CBH-PCJ). The group was devised to serve an advisory role and to monitor reservoir levels, water flow, and water quality in the Cantareira System as the crisis persisted.

In March, ANA and DAEE released a joint resolution reducing the amount of water SABESP was allowed to withdraw from the Cantareira from 31 m³/s to 27.9 m³/s. Concomitantly, SABESP and São Paulo state’s government announced that the company would transfer water from other reservoir systems, mainly Guarapiranga and Alto Tietê,⁴⁶ to serve areas previously supplied by the Cantareira.⁴⁷ In a statement in early March, Geraldo Alckmin argued that this measure—coupled with use of the “technical reserves” or “dead storage” of the Cantareira System—should guarantee water supply availability in São Paulo until rainfall returned (Artigo 19 2014, 11).

The “dead storage” is the water that sits below the normal intake valves of the reservoir and therefore is not used for supply. In the Cantareira System, the reserve consisted of two quotas representing 33% of the system’s storage capacity (approximately 486 billion liters of water)—enough to guarantee supply for the metropolitan region until November 2014 (ANA 2015b). In May, when usable volume in the system reached 10.2%, Alckmin inaugurated the government’s emergency project (worth R\$80 million) to pump water from the system’s dead storage. Although the reserves can be used under extreme circumstances, there were questions regarding the quality of the water, since the bottom of the reservoir generally serves as a deposit for all

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that while the Guarapiranga reservoir remained relatively stable during the drought and was able to withstand increased withdrawals, the Alto Tietê System did not. As low precipitation levels continued into 2016, the increase in abstractions from Alto Tietê to compensate for lower availability in the Cantareira would eventually put the Alto Tietê system on the verge of collapse, leading the state government to declare emergency conditions in the region in August 2015 (Interview 17, August 2015; SABESP 2015).

⁴⁷ United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014, op. cit.

sorts of sediments. CETESB would eventually dismiss these concerns, arguing that tests indicated proper quality for human consumption.⁴⁸

As reservoirs levels continued to drop, in April and May SABESP amplified its discount program to the entire metropolitan region of São Paulo as well as municipalities in the PCJ basin.⁴⁹ However, the economic incentives were slow to produce results. Between April and July, reported savings from the program averaged 3.0 m³/s (SABESP 2015, 16). Only by the end of the year would reported savings reach near 5 m³/s. For most of 2014, almost half of the company's clients either did not manage to meet reduction targets or consumed above average (SABESP 2015, 16).

It is worth noting that attributing savings to the discount program is tricky. As early as April 2014, local media reports indicated that SABESP had been decreasing pressure in the pipe network to control water distribution—a measure that would effectively impact ability to consume (Artigo 19 2014). As I will discuss in the next chapter, while activists and experts argued that pressure control was a form of rationing,⁵⁰ the company and the state government vehemently denied any rationing policies were in place and discarded the possibility of implementing one. In a 2015 document explaining measures to mitigate the crisis, SABESP argued that controlling pressure was part of its effort to reduce physical losses in the distribution network (SABESP 2015, 20). Interestingly, it was also one of the most effective measures for reducing water use. “We have found pressure reductions to be the most efficient action for coping with the water crisis, helping to decrease withdrawals from the Cantareira System by 7.3 m³/s (March 2015), equivalent to 41% of total savings in the System,” stated the document (SABESP 2015, 20).

SABESP effectively began pumping water from the first quota of the Cantareira's dead storage on July 10. By that point, ANA and DAEE had already reduced water withdrawal limits from the Cantareira four times. In July, SABESP was only allowed to abstract 19.7 m³/s from the system (SABESP 2015). Despite mitigation measures and the increase in usable volume due to water

⁴⁸ G1 – Globo, “Água do ‘volume morto’ do Cantareira começa a abastecer Grande SP.” Published May 15, 2014. Accessed May 04, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/bom-dia-brasil/noticia/2014/05/agua-do-volume-morto-do-cantareira-comeca-ser-abastecer-grande-sp.html>

⁴⁹ The program had originally been implemented only in areas serviced by the Cantareira System.

⁵⁰ According to SABESP, rationing would entail completely cutting distribution to portions of the networked system (Keck 2015).

pumped from the dead storage, the Cantareira continued to decline rapidly in the second-half of 2014.

As supply strained, political tensions around the crisis heightened. In late July, the Federal Public Prosecutors' Office (*Ministério Público Federal - MPF*) recommended that SABESP and São Paulo state's government prepare plans for water rationing in regions supplied by the Cantareira. SABESP rejected the recommendation arguing that a rationing would penalize the population and was unnecessary in light of the other measures the company had taken (Artigo 19 2014). Concomitantly, in August the Municipal Legislature of São Paulo created a Public Inquiry Commission (*Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito – CPI*) to investigate SABESP's management of the crisis. Supported by the Workers' Party (PT), who led the opposition to the state government, the commission meant to investigate whether the company had violated its service provision contract with the municipality of São Paulo. As Keck narrates, “when subpoenaed to appear before the CPI in September, the SABESP president did not show up on two occasions, making excuses. On the third occasion she did appear, but was overheard saying to a PSDB council member that the CPI amounted to ‘teatrinho,’ a little theater” (Keck 2015, 15).

Tensions with the National Water Agency (ANA) also arose. According to ANA's president, Vicente Andreu, the technical group (GTAG)'s supporting capacity increasingly diminished as the crisis aggravated (Interview 21, August 15, 2015). Any recommendations or ideas provided within the group, even those considered most technical, were taken to “the upper echelons of São Paulo state's government” for approval (Interview 21, August 15, 2015). In August, the federal agency and the State Secretary of Sanitation and Water Resources, Mauro Arce at the time, were able to agree on a criterion for operating the Cantareira System in periods of low rainfall (Interview 21, August 2015). However, the secretary later backtracked and denied the agreement, leading ANA to leave the GTAG and call for the group's extinction in September (ANA 2014). Reflecting on the decision, Andreu said, “the committee had already lost its independent technical function. After [the secretary] made a commitment and then denied it, we saw no reason for continuing to participate in the group” (Interview 21, August 2015). To Andreu, the process reflected the influence of partisan interests on crisis management. “The crisis unfolded during a period of intense electoral dispute in the country and rules for decision-making during times of supply crisis were unclear. Without these rules and in the midst of an electoral process, I guess one could say partisan interests affected decisions” (Interview 21, August 2015).

Accusations of partisanship and “politically-driven” crisis management were shared among critics of the government and persisted throughout the supply crisis. To relieve some of the tensions, Geraldo Alckmin, who was re-elected state governor in October, restructured upper-level management within SABESP and the SSRH. For instance, in December 2014, Benedito Braga replaced Mauro Arce as State Secretary of Sanitation and Water Resources. Braga is the president of the World Water Council and a professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of São Paulo (USP). In January 2015, Alckmin also appointed Jerson Kelman as SABESP’s president, replacing Dilma Pena. A hydrologist and engineer, Kelman had previously served as president of ANA and president of private company Light. He also helped create the Brazilian Association of Water Resources (ABRH). Discussing the management changes, state government official Américo Sampaio stated: “the state secretaries and others like me are now technicians. They called technicians, people with technical experience. The political issue was set aside, perhaps too much aside. (...) But the technical expertise was missing” (Interview 8, July 2015). Sampaio himself was a new appointee. Having worked at SABESP for nearly 20 years, he was appointed to serve as Coordinator for Sanitation at the SSRH.

By November, SABESP began abstracting water from the second quota of the Cantareira’s dead storage—the “reservoir’s drain, the sludge,” said Vicente Andreu, ANA’s president.⁵¹ SABESP hoped that abstractions from the technical reserves coupled with savings from the discount program and from pressure control would secure supply until March 2015. This would buy the company and the state government time to increase water availability through small and large-scale infrastructure projects for interbasin and inter-reservoir water transfers. Projected to cost at least five billion Reais (equivalent to approximately US\$ 1.5 billion⁵²), the projects constituted the final piece in the package of official measures to mitigate the crisis and increase water security.

It is worth noting that some of the infrastructure projects implemented as part of the “emergency package” had originally been proposed in prior water resource management plans and visioning processes such as the elaboration of the aforementioned Macro-metropolis Plan. As discussed in the previous section, the need to amplify water supply availability to balance demand had long

⁵¹ UOL Notícias, “Sabesp já utiliza 2ª cota do volume morto do Cantareira; entenda.” Published November 11, 2014. Accessed April 03, 2016. <http://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2014/11/17/sabesp-ja-utiliza-2-cota-do-volume-morto-do-cantareira-entenda.htm>

⁵² Based on a conversion rate of US\$ 1 to R\$ 3.55 (the rate as of May 04, 2016).

been on São Paulo's water resources agenda. However, SABESP had previously postponed the implementation of the plans, not considering them priority investments. According to Jerson Kelman, the probability that the region would face a drought of the magnitude observed in 2013–2014 was “extremely low” and could hardly have served as a justification for spending on water transfer plans. “The policy-maker would have needed a Crystal ball or would have been questioned for deviating resources away from education and health to prepare for something that had a low probability of happening,” the president stated.⁵³ Indeed, this argument that supply scarcity was the unforeseeable result of an atypical drought would be the centerpiece of government defense against criticisms throughout the crisis.

SABESP's estimate that supply could be secured until March 2015 relied on the expectation that rainfall during the summer season would help replenish reservoirs. However, the prediction did not hold. As the company explained in its report to the United States Securities and Exchange Commission: “We expected the water levels in the Cantareira System to recover, but given the already low levels due to the shortage during the summers of 2013 and 2014, the amount of rainfall in the region during the rainy season from October 2014 to March 2015 was not enough to restore the reservoir to sufficient levels.”⁵⁴ Below average rainfall during the summer 2014–2015 increased the sense of uncertainty around water supply availability going into 2015. According to activist Marussia Whately, “the months of November through January were very unconventional, we had practically no rainfall. We began 2015 in a situation of a maximum alert, because if the same rainfall pattern remained until February, we would likely have rationing by March” (Interview 2, June 2015). It was against this backdrop of worsening supply conditions that social mobilization around the crisis emerged.

⁵³ Folha de São Paulo, “‘Tarifa de água é baixa em SP e cliente poderia pagar mais’, diz presidente da Sabesp.” Published July 20, 2015. Accessed April 14, 2016. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2015/07/1657889-tarifa-de-agua-e-baixa-em-sp-e-cliente-poderia-pagar-mais-diz-presidente-da-sabesp.shtml>

⁵⁴ United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014, op. cit., page 14.

CHAPTER 4. MOBILIZING FOR ACTION

Focusing on the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle, in this chapter I examine how and why social mobilization around São Paulo’s water crisis began. I argue that discontent⁵⁵ with state and company authorities and a sense of urgency played a significant role in catalyzing mobilization for both coalitions. As water availability became increasingly strained during 2014, activists grew uncertain about future supply, concerned about how to cope with the crisis, and dissatisfied with how the state government and SABESP managed scarcity. In their view, state and company efforts not only lacked transparency, they also failed to address deeper causes of São Paulo’s water crisis. Criticisms of crisis response signaled to eventual members of the Alliance and the Collective that civil society organizations and grassroots movements could play greater roles in the governance of the crisis. There was, in other words, an opportunity for action (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Tarrow 2011 [1994]).

What the opportunity meant, however—in terms of “the realization of collective interests” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 20–21)—differed for members of both groups. For the Alliance for Water, the crisis was an opportunity to unite civil society organizations around a water agenda oriented towards a “new culture of care around water.” For the Collective for Water Struggle, the crisis provided an opportunity to advance a broader agenda of social and political transformation that included increasing political consciousness and strengthening grassroots organizing. These different interpretations of opportunity reflected distinct organizational and political characteristics as well as underlying disputes regarding who should be held responsible for the crisis—what Deborah Stone has described as “the assignment of blame” (Stone 2012 [1988]).

Activists from both coalitions translated interpretations of opportunity into concrete mobilization by capitalizing on previous individual and organizational networks⁵⁶ and articulating their own

⁵⁵ Social movement scholars have pointed to the role of discontent in fomenting mobilization (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010; Della Porta and Diani 2006). According to Della Porta and Diani, “a social movement develops when a feeling of dissatisfaction spreads, and insufficiently flexible institutions are unable to respond” (2006, location 250).

⁵⁶ A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of pre-existing informal and formal social relationships for individual recruitment to different forms of mobilization as well as for alliance building among diverse organizations. For specific analyses on the role of social networks in collective action process, cf. McAdam (1986); Gould (1993); Siegel (2009); Knoke (1990); Diani (2003); Mische (2003); Von Bülow (2010).

stories (or framings) about the water supply problem. Experienced leadership was central in both cases. Leaders such as Marussia Whately in the Alliance and Edson Silva in the Collective had previously organized around water issues and were knowledgeable about water resources management and supply in São Paulo state. Taken together, pre-existing social networks, problem framings, and strong leadership help explain how activists transformed uncertainty about future supply, discontent with the government, and distinct interpretations of opportunity into mobilization around the crisis.

In presenting this process below, I take a somewhat contorted route. I begin by narrating activists' initial steps around the crisis in order to trace how these eventually contributed to movement formation. For the Alliance, this meant the activation of previous individual and organizational relationships. For the Collective, it meant beginning to articulate a story about the supply crisis. I then present activists' dissatisfaction with government response as the crisis unfolded and avenues for civil society action emerging from criticisms. In order to highlight the interplay between activists and state authorities, I intersperse the discussion with the perspectives and actions of the state government and SABESP. This section helps to demonstrate that activists from the Alliance and the Collective converged in many of their criticisms and self-ascribed roles. Yet, they formed separate coalitions. I explore why by resuming the narrative of how the two groups were formed, their arguments, and their interpretations of the crisis as an opportunity for action. This analysis sheds light on the ways in which convergence and divergence shaped coalition formation.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORCES AWAKEN

São Paulo's water supply crisis developed like a shock wave of increasing intensity, generating uncertainty about water availability and magnifying political tensions amid the 2014 federal and state elections. The growing ripples also progressively reverberated among civil society activists. Already in February 2014, Marussia Whately began contacting fellow environmental activists in São Paulo. She was concerned about rapid decrease in reservoir levels and wondered whether some of the organizations in her network, such as Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), Greenpeace,

and SOS Mata Atlântica,⁵⁷ would be interested in organizing initiatives around the issue (Interview 2, June 2015).

An urban planner and long-time water activist, Whately was deeply familiar with water resources management in São Paulo. Between 1999 and 2009, while working for ISA, she had coordinated a research and environmental monitoring program (“*De Olho nos Mananciais*”) on the Cantareira, Guarapiranga, and Billings reservoir systems. The program produced a series of evaluative reports on watershed conditions in the reservoirs as well as on water supply issues in São Paulo. Following the end of the program in 2009 due to lack of funding sources, the network of individuals and organizations who had contributed to it disbanded, each pursuing other projects (Interview 2, June 2015). Whately herself moved to the North of the Brazil to work with deforestation in the Amazon region. However, when the water supply crisis began to unfold, the moment appeared fit for reconnecting the networks in São Paulo to discuss the supply situation. As she explained, “what I presented was the following: not only did we have a serious problem developing in a short period of time, we also had a fragmented network and a dearth of proposals” (Interview 2, June 2015).

This initial mobilization resulted in a collaborative initiative (“Água@SP”) to develop a diagnostic and propose short, medium, and long-term solutions to the supply crisis. During 2014, Whately and a team from Cidade Democrática—a collaborative online forum for information sharing and public discussion—organized a survey with environmental activists and water experts to capture their perspectives on the causes of the crisis and potential courses of action. Supported by a number of organizations⁵⁸ and funded by ISA, the survey served two main purposes. First, it reorganized a network of individuals and organizations around a water agenda. Second, it created a shared set of causal arguments and proposals to act on the crisis (Interview 2, June 2015). As I discuss further in the chapter, the collaborative diagnostic paved the way for the formation of the Alliance for Water.

⁵⁷ SOS Mata Atlântica is a NGO created in 1986 with the goal of protecting the remains of the Mata Atlântica (a coastal forest that was vastly destroyed as urbanization along the coastline of Brazil increased). Instituto Socioambiental is a NGO dedicated to protecting and defending socio and biodiversity. It was founded in 1994.

⁵⁸ The organizations that originally supported “Água@SP” were: Associação Águas Claras do Rio Pinheiros; Coletivo Curupira; Espaço – Formação, Assessoria e Documentação; Festival Serrinha; Greenpeace Brasil; Grupo dos Permacultores”; IDEC - Instituto de Defesa do Consumidor; Instituto Akatu; IPÊ; Instituto Auá de Empreendedorismo Socioambiental; Minha Sampa; Rede Nossa São Paulo; Rede de Olho nos Mananciais; Sala Crisantempo; SOS Mata Atlântica; TNC - The Nature Conservancy; Virada Sustentável; Volume Vivo (documentário); WWF- Brasil. These organizations would eventually come together in the Alliance for Water.

Activists who would later help form the Collective for Water Struggle were also engaged in discussions around the crisis since its early stages.⁵⁹ In March 2014, for instance, non-mainstream media outlets circulated an opinion piece by Edson Silva and Ricardo Guterman—core members of the Collective—on worsening supply conditions. The article was titled “*Há males que vem para o bem*”, or the idea that some evils can be blessings in disguise (Silva and Guterman 2014). Like Whately, Silva and Guterman were experienced activists. One of the leaders of civil society mobilization around São Paulo’s 1991 Water Law, Edson Silva was now the coordinator of the National Front for Environmental Sanitation and an advisor to the National Federation of Urban Workers (FNU). Ricardo Guterman worked as a technical advisor on environmental issues to the Workers’ Party (PT) leadership in São Paulo State’s Legislative Assembly. Although their piece was not an explicit call to action, it articulated many of the ideas that would later integrate the Collective’s initial manifesto.

In the article, Silva and Guterman argued that São Paulo’s water crisis was not simply the result of excessive consumption and low rainfall; rather, it reflected “larger structural problems” within water resources management in the state (Silva and Guterman 2014). These included, according to them, lack of integrated metropolitan planning, illegal settlements in watershed protection areas due to inadequate housing policies, insufficient sanitation coverage and wastewater treatment, lack of investment in alternative supply sources, and absence of contingency plans for adverse situations impacting water supply. In particular, they criticized the state government and SABESP for failing to address these issues and to take action sooner to alleviate the impacts of the drought. While they supported awareness raising campaigns and discount programs to reduce water consumption, Silva and Guterman argued these measures were introduced when reservoirs had already reached calamitous levels. Moreover, they believed the measures unduly blamed and penalized the population for the crisis. They wrote, “there is a large difference between raising citizens’ awareness and blaming them, even if subliminally, for the possibility of rationing—especially coming from a company that operates with high water losses” (Silva and Guterman 2014).⁶⁰ Despite their criticisms, Silva and Guterman looked to the situation optimistically. In the

⁵⁹ Rede Nossa São Paulo, “Movimentos sociais irão as ruas contra a falta de água em São Paulo.” Published February 11, 2015. Accessed April 28, 2016. <http://www.nossasaopaulo.org.br/noticias/movimentos-sociais-irao-ruas-contrafalta-de-agua-em-sao-paulo>

⁶⁰ According to SABESP, physical and non-physical water losses amounted to 31.2% of distributed water as of 2013. However, the numbers are disputed. Some critics suggested that losses were actually closer to 40% (Keck

article's conclusion, they stated: "We hope the water supply crisis affecting the metropolitan region of São Paulo, the most important in the country (...), will serve to make State and society give greater importance to water issues" (Silva and Guterman 2014).

DISCONTENT WITH CRISIS MANAGEMENT GROWS

As reservoir levels dropped in 2014, the level to which the supply crisis penetrated the public agenda offered activists some reason for optimism. The crisis marked debates between governor Geraldo Alckmin and his opponents in the state government elections, it was the focus of seminars and workshops organized by universities and civil society organizations, and it became the topic of everyday conversations among residents in different parts of São Paulo. Reflecting on the extent to which the crisis had affected the daily lives of city residents, Américo Sampaio from the Collective for Water Struggle observed, "every morning when you turn on the radio, they will say: 'today the minimum temperature is 18 degrees Celsius, the maximum is 25 degrees, traffic amounts to this many kilometers, and water reservoir levels are at 20%.' One or two years ago it was unimaginable to have reservoir levels presented as routine information" (Interview 12, August 2015). In interviews as well as meetings and events I attended, activists highlighted awareness raising and public education as positive effects of the crisis. As Glauco Kimura from WWF Brazil explained, "honestly, if you were to ask São Paulo residents before the crisis where their tap water came from, the large majority would not know. They would probably say it came from the water tank in their backyard or from SABESP. Today, because of the crisis, people know which reservoir supplies their neighborhood. That's a huge advancement" (Interview 19, August 2015).

2015, 12). I provide the 2013 figures because, as discussed in the previous chapter, the use of pressure control as a mitigating measure during the crisis affected distributional losses. It is worth noting that in 2009 the company introduced the Corporate Program for Reduction of Water Loss, which devised strategies for network repair and asset renewal (*i.e.*, replacement of water meters and fractured pipes). With funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Caixa Econômica Federal, and Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), the twelve-year program was designed to reduce water losses at a rate of 1% per year. According to SABESP, the program helped reduce water loss per connection per day from 436 liters in 2008 to 372 liters in 2013. See: United States Securities and Exchange Commission. 2013. Form 20-F. Annual Report Pursuant to Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2013. Commission file number 001-31317. Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo (SABESP). Page 06.

However, the extent to which the crisis had become “a blessing in disguise”—as Silva and Guterman hoped—was disputable. Activists from both the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle were critical of official measures taken in response to the crisis and skeptical that they could increase water security in the long-term.⁶¹ Government action (or inaction) signaled to eventual members from both groups that if public officials and SABESP managers were left to their own devices, little would fundamentally change in São Paulo’s water resources management.

A primary source of discontent to activists I interviewed and interacted with in São Paulo was lack of transparency in crisis management. The issue manifested itself in at least two ways. First, activists considered official information about the crisis inaccessible—either for being hard to locate or overly technical. Several activists from both the Collective and the Alliance argued it was difficult to make sense of data provided by government sources, especially if they had limited prior knowledge about water resources management and supply.

A September 2014 report by international freedom of information NGO Artigo 19 (Article 19), who later joined the Alliance for Water, supported the claims (Artigo 19 2014). The NGO assessed the accessibility, organization, and intelligibility of information about the crisis available on state and federal government websites. It evaluated transparency as non-existent for the SSRH, SABESP, and ARSESP, whose websites provided few or no information and documents about the crisis. Regarding SABESP’s website, the report stated that while the company provided monthly data on reservoir storage levels and rainfall, substantial operational knowledge was required to fully comprehend it (Artigo 19 2014, 23). Érika Martins, a former SABESP engineer⁶² and a member of the Collective for Water Struggle, echoed the report’s conclusions during a training course organized by the group (Event 6, July 2015). While presenting information on the crisis, she argued that official data was unnecessarily complicated and that “the government made sure information would be hard to access.”

⁶¹ In condensing the sources of dissatisfaction from activists I do not mean to suggest that groups were homogenous. Due to diverse positionalities, personal trajectories and stances, activists would often differ in the degree to which they considered specific issues problematic. However, there was substantial overlap in the types of criticism evoked.

⁶² Érika Martins was among the more than 500 employees SABESP laid off between 2014 and 2015. See: G1 – Globo, “Sindicato diz que Sabesp já demitiu 500 este ano e ameaça paralisação.” Published March 06, 2015. Accessed May 02, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/03/sindicato-diz-que-sabesp-ja-demitiu-500-este-ano-e-ameaca-paralisacao-em-sao-paulo.html>

Second, activists argued that official communication regarding the severity of the crisis and the impact of mitigating measures on the population was ambiguous. SABESP and the state government continuously stated in the media that supply was under control and that the region was not at risk of water shortages (Keck 2015). However, rapidly decreasing reservoir levels, uncertain rainfall forecasts, and increasing reports of water shortages painted a different picture to activists. Edson Silva summarized the conflicting signals as follows:

The population has continuously received mixed messages about the crisis. At the same time that the state government asked people to consume less water, it stated that there wasn't really a problem, that there would be no rationing, that infrastructure projects were being done, and that the volume of the Cantareira was at 20% when in truth the reservoir levels were negative. We were using the dead storage, so the volume was effectively negative. (Interview 5, July 2015)

Misinformation and ambiguity were considered particularly salient with regard to the occurrence of water shortages. In May 2014, 35% of residents interviewed in a survey conducted by the Datafolha polling institute indicated that water supply had been interrupted at least once in their households during the previous month (Artigo 19 2014). Twenty-eight percent reported frequent shortages. In June, consumer rights non-profit IDEC (*Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor*), also an eventual member of the Alliance for Water, organized an online campaign to collect water shortage complaints. According to IDEC staff Carlos Thadeu, the organization collected more than 700 complaints in a couple of weeks (Interview 10, July 2015). IDEC shared the complaints with ARSESP, and while the regulatory agency said it would investigate the issue, it never followed up (Interview 10, July 2015). Another Datafolha poll conducted in October 2014 showed an increase in water shortage occurrences.⁶³ Sixty percent of residents interviewed reported facing shortages at least once in the previous month and for longer periods of time. Survey results also indicated shortages were substantially more frequent among lower income households.⁶⁴

⁶³ Folha de São Paulo. "Corte no abastecimento de água atinge 60% dos paulistanos, diz Datafolha." Published October 10, 2014. Accessed April 12, 2016. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2014/10/1535091-corte-no-abastecimento-de-agua-atinge-60-dos-paulistanos-diz-datafolha.shtml>

⁶⁴ SABESP claimed shortages resulted from pressure control in the distribution network rather than from rationing. Lower income households could be disproportionately affected by pressure control for two main reasons. First, many poor households are located in elevated or peripheral areas in the city and lower pressure could thus prevent

To activists from both the Collective and the Alliance, water shortage complaints indicated that SABESP was engaging in a form of “silent rationing.” The company and state government, however, continuously denied accusations and dismissed water shortage reports (Keck 2015; Artigo 19 2014). In a widely circulated—and satirized—moment during an electoral debate in September 2014, governor Geraldo Alckmin affirmed, “there is no water shortage in São Paulo; there will be no water shortage in São Paulo.”⁶⁵ Dilma Pena, still SABESP’s president by that point, also argued in a statement in October that the company did not ration water; rather, “it administered availability” through pressure reduction—a statement many considered an euphemism.⁶⁶

When IDEC staff met with SABESP’s managers to discuss water shortage complaints and pressure reduction, they asked the company to publicize information about where pressure reductions were happening and when. As Carlos Thadeu explained, “we told them, ‘if you are reducing pressure and this can result in water not reaching households, you owe this information to the population’” (Interview 10, July 2015). At the end of the meeting, company representatives agreed to share a map of pressure reduction that IDEC could make available to the public. However, like ARSESP, they did not deliver on the promise. When IDEC filed a formal request for the map based on Brazil’s Access to Information Law, the company shared thirteen PDF files. According to Thadeu, the files were irrelevant. They had no street grids or demarcated information. “I told them, ‘We are not kids. We can’t share these maps, it would be irresponsible,’” Thadeu said (Interview 10, July 2015).

The episode with IDEC speaks to what Margaret Keck, in the article “Drought and denial”, characterized as a remarkable effort by the state government and SABESP to control information flow (Keck 2015). Analyzing how São Paulo’s supply crisis evolved in 2014, Keck wrote: “not only the interpretation of facts, but facts themselves, have been contested throughout the year, and neither regulatory agencies, nor the press, nor the NGO sector, nor the judicial branch have

water from reaching those households. Second, unlike upper income households and apartment buildings, poorer households often do not have water storage tanks.

⁶⁵ G1 – Globo, “Veja o que Alckmin disse sobre racionamento durante crise hídrica.” Published January 15, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/01/veja-o-que-alckmin-disse-sobre-acionamento-durante-crise-hidrica.html>

⁶⁶ G1 – Globo, “Presidente da Sabesp admite falta d’água, mas nega racionamento.” Published October 10, 2014. Accessed April 12, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2014/10/presidente-da-sabesp-depoe-cpi-e-nega-acionamento-de-agua-em-sp.html>

been able to unblock the flow of information” (Keck 2015, 14). Along the same vein, Hamilton Rocha from the Collective for Water Struggle stated, “if there is a crisis in São Paulo, it’s a transparency crisis, not a water crisis. The government is not transparent about the most basic issues, such as where and at what time there will be water shortages” (Interview 7, July 2015).

Similar to the accusations of partisanship discussed previously, many activists attributed lack of transparency in crisis management to the electoral context in which the supply crisis unfolded. Control over information flow was interpreted as a political tactic to contain any publicity that could hurt Geraldo Alckmin’s popularity as he campaigned for re-election in 2014.⁶⁷ For example, reflecting on measures taken by the government, André Villas-Bôas from ISA observed, “all actions appeared tied to the electoral calendar” (Interview 18, August 2015). In a newspaper produced shortly after the group’s creation, the Collective for Water Struggle stated, “the governor lied to the population during his electoral campaign. He affirmed there was no rationing” (Collective 2015a, 2). Partisanship claims gained strength when the audio of a conversation between Dilma Pena and senior managers within SABESP was leaked in October 2014. In the audio, Pena stated that, if it were up to her, SABESP would have greater media presence and communicate more openly with the population about the need to conserve water. However, the company needed to “follow higher orders even if they were erroneous,” Pena stated in the conversation. The leaked audio also served to support the impression that the crisis was more severe than the government portrayed it to be.

While the electoral context was important, some activists also argued that opaque crisis management had deeper roots. Marussia Whately, for instance, observed that lack of transparency had historically been an issue in São Paulo state’s water resources management. “It’s not something new, it has always been a black box” (Interview 2, 2015). To activists in the Collective for Water Struggle, in particular, lack of transparency reflected a broader tendency

⁶⁷ Secondarily, some also viewed the effort as an attempt to leverage the governor’s political capital at the national level, given his presidential aspirations. Alckmin had run for president in 2006 but lost to sitting president Lula, from the PT, who was running for re-election at the time. Support for the PT was particularly strong in the Northeast of Brazil, a region that has historically suffered with droughts and water supply scarcity. Following his re-election as São Paulo’s governor in 2014, Alckmin announced his intention to run for president in 2018. If Alckmin were able to position himself as a candidate who had successfully managed scarcity following a historical drought in Brazil’s biggest city and was prepared to do the same in the Northeast, his presidential chances would be stronger (Interview 9, July 28, 2015). In view of the political crisis that engulfed the government of Lula’s successor and protégée, president Dilma Rousseff, following a corruption scandal in state-owned oil company Petrobrás, displaying the image of a competent administrator could also help to set the governor up as a political alternative—even if his own party, PSDB, also faced accusations of corruption.

within the state government to insulate decision-making and obstruct public participation. The characteristic was not considered specific to Alckmin's government. "The group of politicians that has governed São Paulo state over the years is a group that is terrified of public participation. They do not like participation; they listen to no one," affirmed Américo Sampaio from the Collective (Interview 12, August 2015). It was to this perception of a closed government that Edson Silva referred to when he argued that successful mobilization around São Paulo's 1991 Water Law happened in a much different political context than the one against which São Paulo's water crisis took place (see chapter 3).

In addition to lack of transparency, activists in São Paulo criticized official measures to mitigate the crisis and increase future water security. They questioned the soundness and sustainability of multibillion investments in infrastructure plans for water transfer, the fairness of economic incentive strategies, and the lack of democratically agreed upon guidelines for decision-making in the event of emergency conditions. As Maurício Pereira from NGO Rede Nossa São Paulo (an organization that participated in both the Collective and the Alliance) summarized, the criticisms reflected a broader dissatisfaction among civil society organizations with the lack of innovation in management.

"There has been no change in terms of planning and policy-making. We have been criticizing all the measures the government has announced. They see the crisis as a big enterprise. They want to transfer water from the São Lourenço river, which is 70 kilometers away, you see? These are billionaire projects. But they won't implement basic ideas that they could have started doing a long time ago." (Interview 4, July 2015)

As Pereira's statement indicates, large-scale infrastructure investments were one of the activists' main targets. In multiple interviews and meetings, activists argued the plans reproduced an outdated, supply-side management model considered inadequate for addressing supply scarcity in the short-term and insufficient for reducing dependence on rainfall in the long-term. Edson Silva from the Collective explained the model as follows:

It's a perpetual vision focused on large scale infrastructure, on bringing water from farther and farther away. You won't see the state government or SABESP invest in a cistern program to collect rainfall water for non-potable uses or invest in water reuse. It's striking that in a crisis such as this, which could serve to change models of water supply and conservation, nothing has changed. (Interview 5, July 2015)

Members from the Alliance for Water, in particular, criticized government measures for failing to use the crisis as an opportunity to invest in what they considered more environmentally sound approaches to help sustain water production systems in the long-term. “There is so much infrastructure been built, so many resources been invested in infrastructure. I find that a really poor response to the problem. São Paulo state’s government should invest more in recovering water springs, river basins,” argued Glauco Kimura from WWF Brazil (Interview 19, August 2015). Maurício Pereira complemented: “Not even discursively, not even rhetorically will they say, ‘Look, folks, we need to save water, we need to take care of watersheds’” (Interview 4, July 2015).

Emphasis on large-scale infrastructure investments has long characterized water resources management and policy-making more broadly in Brazil. As noted in chapter 3, water supply in São Paulo’s metropolitan region historically relied on infrastructure projects to divert and transfer water from adjacent river basins. While so-called “soft-path”⁶⁸ or demand-side solutions have increasingly been adopted in recent years, seeking new sources of supply through water transfer projects has remained a popular solution among policy-makers for mitigating water scarcity conditions (Rodrigues et al. 2015). According to Monica Porto, Adjunct State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources, demand-side water resource management measures are not simple to implement. She rebutted activists’ criticisms of infrastructure investments by saying, “we see now during the water crisis that people will say, ‘aahhh, the government only thinks about new infrastructure projects and doesn’t think about demand management,’ as if demand management was something easy to do but it also requires investment, resources, and time” (Interview 16, August 2015). During a panel organized by the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), SABESP’s president, Jerson Kelman, responded to criticisms that the company did not invest enough in reducing distribution losses in a similar way. He argued that reducing losses was important but not easily done. In addition to requiring resources, the president suggested the measure would inconveniently disrupt São Paulo’s already complicated traffic (Event 9, July 2015).

⁶⁸ Soft path solutions focus on improving water use productivity as opposed to seeking new sources of water supply. For further information, cf. Gleick (2002).

Some of the activists I interviewed attributed the preference for infrastructure investments to a history of short-term planning guided by political interests and perverse economic incentives. As André Villas-Bôas from ISA explained,

There is a tendency in Brazil to refrain from long-term planning. It's easier to let crises emerge, to let panic emerge, and then resort to an easy way out than to think about long-term sustainable solutions (...), which would require radical changes, especially with regard to relationships with contractors and businesses. It's much easier to build large dams, to mobilize big contractors, to feed the corrupt system that exists between developers and politicians. This path has worked since the 1950s. It's not just this government, it goes back to the construction of Brasília, the capital, in the 1950s. (Interview 18, August 2015)

Conflation of political and economic interests in Brazilian politics, including in the water sector, is a well-established issue in the country. For example, in an analysis of decision-making and institution-building in river basin committees in Brazil, Abers and Keck argue that “given the influence of construction interests in Brazilian politics, it is not surprising that proposals including big infrastructure components had an easier time winning government support” (Abers and Keck 2013, 186).

In addition to considering infrastructure projects a shortsighted solution for increasing water security in the long-term, activists also questioned their short-term impact. On the one hand, it was uncertain whether water transfer projects would be completed in time to relieve reservoir depletion. (In fact, construction delays were reported often in the news as the crisis continued throughout 2015.) On the other hand, there were questions regarding the durability of the plans and their environmental consequences. Activists suggested that projects were being implemented without proper technical evaluations and environmental impact assessments. As Marussia Whately argued, “emergency plans are being approved without adequate licensing. There are several technical controversies and the plans will not be concluded in a timely manner” (Interview 2, June 2015). The state government dismissed the criticisms. Benedito Braga, State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources, argued in an interview in April 2015 that if standard environmental licensing processes were followed, water supply would be exhausted by

July 2015. “It’s a choice. What do you prefer: to follow environmental rituals or to bring water to the population?”, the Secretary stated.⁶⁹

Another important source of criticism from activists from both groups centered around SABESP’s financial strategies. They argued that company measures prioritized profits and investor relationships over equitable and responsible service delivery to the population in a time of crisis. A thorny issue was the maintenance of special contracts for large consumers. In addition to defining a minimum level of water use, the contracts offered discounts at higher levels of consumption and prevented clients from using alternative water sources such as private wells. To the activists, this meant that while the population was asked to conserve water, large consumers had little incentive to reduce consumption.

Due to growing water scarcity, in June 2014 ARSESP required that SABESP stop signing new special contracts with large consumers. However, the company ignored the order and signed 11 new contracts worth 30 million Reais (equivalent to nearly US\$ 8.5 million⁷⁰) between June 2014 and April 2015.⁷¹ Who exactly were the large consumers, no one knew. The company refused to release information about the contracts even though they were considered public information, since SABESP is state-owned. Following growing pressure from the State Public Prosecutors’ Office (MPSP) as well as organizations such as Greenpeace Brazil (through the campaign “Water for whom?”) and Artigo 19, the company eventually released the names of 537 clients with special contracts, including churches, shopping malls, and manufacturing and service industries.⁷²

While SABESP maintained special contracts, it sought to increase water tariffs⁷³ to compensate for lower profits resulting from the financial bonus program and reduced consumption from

⁶⁹ Folha de São Paulo, “Escolha foi respeitar rito ambiental ou fornecer água', diz secretário de SP.” Published March 30, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2015/03/1610079-escolha-foi-respeitar-rito-ambiental-ou-fornecer-agua-diz-secretario.shtml>

⁷⁰ Based on a conversion rate of US\$ 1 to R\$ 3.55 (the rate as of May 04, 2016).

⁷¹ El País Brasil, “Sabesp ignorou ordem e assinou contratos com grandes consumidores.” Published May 23, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016. http://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/05/22/politica/1432320386_840574.html

⁷² Estadão, “Pressionada, Sabesp divulga lista de grandes consumidores de água.” Published March 10, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://sao-paulo.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,pressionada-sabesp-divulga-lista-de-grandes-consumidores-de-agua,1648021>.

⁷³ SABESP charges different tariffs depending on whether clients fall under residential or non-residential categories. Lower-income households, especially those located in favelas (shantytowns) are charged lower tariffs.

clients. In November 2014, ARSESP allowed the company to increase tariffs by 6.49%.⁷⁴ The move fostered disapproval from activists. Members from the Collective for Water Struggle, specifically, condemned SABESP for what they considered differentiated and unfair treatment of lower-income consumers—already disproportionately affected by measures such as pressure reduction. According Hamilton Rocha, “The company privileges some clients over others. It can’t offer a large discount to Globo News or the Jockey Club or a shopping center and double the tariff to someone that lives in a favela [shantytown]. It’s revolting” (Interview 7, July 2015). In the editorial of its newspaper, the Collective stated: “It’s important to denounce that this crisis is characterized by class-based divisions: those who are poor suffer while companies with special contracts consume water at will and with lower tariffs” (Collective 2015a, 2).

One additional source of criticism concerned the lack of a contingency plan to guide action and decision-making in emergency conditions. For example, activists suggested there should be measures in place to guarantee human supply in extreme situations, such as providing water trucks and distributing water tanks. They also argued it was necessary to define which institutions or locations—for instance, public schools, hospitals, and prisons—should have guaranteed supply in any circumstance. Finally, they asked for multistakeholder spaces to facilitate democratic discussion on allocation decisions and coordinated action around the crisis. Along with calls for greater transparency, these proposals constituted the core claims activists’ from both the Alliance and the Collective articulated upon their formation.

Where government response was considered inadequate and ambiguous, avenues for collective action around the crisis appeared. Providing accessible information, challenging government arguments viewed as misleading, questioning measures considered unfair or insufficient, proposing alternative ways forwards, and pressuring authorities to take greater action became important rationales for the emergence of both the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle. Concomitantly, decreasing reservoir levels and uncertainty about future supply availability added a sense of urgency. As Marussia Whately from the Alliance explained, “the aggravation of the crisis led us to enter 2015 no longer with the possibility of just forming groups to discuss the issue, but needing to serve as a counterpoint to what the government was saying, to

⁷⁴ G1 – Globo, “Justiça rejeita liminar da Fiesp para suspender aumento na conta d'água.” Published June 26, 2015. Accessed April 16, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/06/justica-rejeita-liminar-da-fiesp-para-suspender-aumento-na-conta-dagua.html>

provide more information, to produce materials that would guide people through scarcity” (Interview 2, June 2015). Similarly, Edson Silva from the Collective observed, “we felt the need to create the Collective because we realized the water crisis tended to intensify. So we thought it was time to bring together the largest possible number of entities to organize and develop reflections on how to confront the crisis” (Interview 5, July 2015). In the next two sections, I resume the narrative of how the two coalitions were formed—and, most importantly, why two different coalitions emerged.

COALITIONS EMERGE

By October 2014, when the Cantareira was nearing the end of the first quota of the dead storage, the collaborative diagnostic (Água@SP) spearheaded by Marussia Whately had been finalized. The results of the survey conducted with nearly 280 water experts and activists from 60 municipalities in São Paulo state echoed many of the criticisms that had emerged during the course of the crisis, particularly those from environmental activists and NGOs. Respondents indicated that São Paulo’s supply crisis was the result of inadequate water resources management and deterioration of watersheds and freshwater sources due to deforestation and pollution (Alliance for Water 2014a). The drought compounded these problems. Survey participants also identified lack of transparency in crisis management as a complicating factor as the crisis unfolded.

Based on this diagnostic, respondents proposed a minimal agenda of short-term and long-term solutions to the supply crisis. Short-term proposals included awareness raising campaigns to alert the population about the severity of the crisis, multistakeholder coordination for crisis management, measures to guarantee supply in emergency situations, and immediate enactment of policies to guarantee watershed recovery and protection. For the long-term, respondents suggested maintaining awareness campaigns to encourage lower consumption and investing on demand-side management policies, river cleanups, and continuous safeguarding of watersheds (Alliance for Water 2014a).

With the results of the survey in hand, Whately sat with staff from ISA, who funded the process, to discuss the diagnostic and next steps. As Whately narrates, “our assessment was that it was a favorable context for launching a coalition. And because we had the diagnostic, the idea was to

form a coalition around the minimal agenda. That’s how the idea to create the Alliance for Water surfaced” (Interview 2, June 2015). André Villas-Bôas from ISA complemented, “as we began to see with clarity the severity of the crisis, we became concerned. (...) It became clear to us that it was necessary to mobilize, to connect institutions and organizations, to create a large coalition to call attention to essential measures for confronting the crisis” (Interview 18, August 2015). Following the meeting, Whately sent emails to organizations that had supported the collaborative diagnostic to gauge interest in creating a coalition. The idea was to launch it on the same day in which the survey results would be presented to the public. The responses, according to her, were overwhelmingly positive. “Everyone replied saying: ‘Let’s do it.’ Everyone felt it just made sense to do it” (Interview 2, June 2015).

Strengthening civil society voices and adding greater legitimacy to the mobilization process were two important motivations for creating the Alliance. As Glauco Kimura from WWF Brazil observed, organizations such as Greenpeace, WWF, and ISA—who had resources and a history of organizing—could have pursued efforts autonomously. However, their actions would carry more weight, “generate more noise” if they worked together (Interview 19, August 2015). The decision to form the coalition was also driven by a shared sentiment that mobilization around the crisis should not be led by any one organization in particular but run independently. According to Villas-Bôas, this would allow members and potential allies to “feel comfortable with the alliance, feel like the mobilization did not belong to anyone” (Interview 18, August 2015).

On October 29, 2014, the Alliance for Water was officially launched. In a large event that featured 200 guests, Whately presented the results of the collaborative diagnostic and announced the creation of the coalition with the goal of contributing to greater water security in São Paulo.⁷⁵ Initially, the Alliance was composed of 30 organizations, many of which environmental NGOs. The composition reflected the concatenation of prior individual and organizational relationships⁷⁶ as well as an effort to create new ties. Through the implementation of the diagnostic, Whately and her team sought not only to bring together activists and organizations already in their circles, but also to include new groups that were organizing around the crisis

⁷⁵ EXAME, “Movimentos formam Aliança pela Água e listam ações urgentes.” Published October 29, 2014. Accessed September 13, 2015. <http://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/noticias/movimentos-formam-alianca-pela-agua-e-listam-acoes-urgentes>

⁷⁶ NGOs in São Paulo generally know one another well. Some, such as IDS and Rede Nossa São Paulo, were spin-offs of older organizations (in this case, ISA) and maintained ties over the years. Additionally, activists circulate professionally among them, helping to forge or sustain relationships among organizations.

such as Minha Sampa⁷⁷ (Interview 2, June 2015). Once the Alliance was formed, coalition activities were placed under Whately's coordination, given her experience with water resources and previous leadership in the mobilization process (Interview 2, June 2015; Interview 18, August 2015). An administrative secretariat and a strategic council were created to support her. Composed of five organizations—WWF Brazil, ISA, IDEC, WRI Brazil, and Associação Bem-Te-Vi—the council's role was to guide planning and help with fund-raising for the coalition. To support its activities, the Alliance was able to secure funding from the Ford Foundation, the Instituto Betty and Jacob Lafer, ISA, and Associação Bem-Te-Vi.

The results of the collaborative survey helped construct the basic problem framing and proposals the Alliance articulated in its inception. Poor water resources management, watershed degradation, and lack of transparency and dialogue with civil society were identified as the main causes of the supply crisis following the drought. The coalition's initial agenda sought to target these problems. In the short-term, the Alliance's objective was to promote dialogue and collaboration among civil society and governmental actors to help guarantee that São Paulo would reach April 2015 (the beginning of the dry season) in a better situation (Alliance 2014b). To this end, the group called for a set of crisis management measures. They demanded the creation of a crisis committee with participation from civil society organizations, greater investments in public awareness campaigns to reduce consumption, and greater transparency from government authorities and SABESP's managers. In particular, they requested that SABESP openly publicize when and where water shortages might happen due to pressure reduction. The coalition also recommended adopting financial penalties for overconsumption and incentives for large consumers to save water, as well as preparing guidelines for emergency situations in the form of a contingency plan—for example, providing a list of licensed water trucks and locations of wells and springs the population could access.

With regard to its own activities, the Alliance promised to facilitate access to information about the crisis and help raise public awareness about sustainable ways the population could cope with it. Some of the activists from the Alliance saw this as the most important role the coalition could perform. As Villas-Bôas observed, “the coalition's main objective is to inform. In this crisis, we have had information crossfire; it's hard to make sense of it all. The Alliance tries to provide a

⁷⁷ Minha Sampa is a mobilization network created in 2014 to organize initiatives around different issues of public interest to São Paulo citizens.

qualified and accessible analysis of the crisis” (Interview 18, August 2015). In the long-term, however, the Alliance hoped to help construct a new model of water resources management anchored on social, environmental, and economic sustainability. In practical terms, this meant pressuring for demand-side water resources management, protection and recovery of watersheds, climate change adaptation, and strengthening of participatory institutions for multistakeholder deliberation such as river basin committees.⁷⁸ As Whately explained, “our goal is to serve as a civil society coalition that works to make issues related to the crisis visible but, at the same time, helps to advance alternatives that will lead to a better water resources management model” (Interview 2, June 2015).

Nearly three months after the event that launched the Alliance for Water, the Collective for Water Struggle was formed. On January 20, 2015, a number of representatives from grassroots movements, labor unions, and associations met at the office of the National Federation of Urban Workers (FNU) in São Paulo, where Edson Silva served as an advisor on sanitation. The meeting was meant to discuss the water crisis and its impact on the population. As Hamilton Rocha from the Collective explained, “at that point many regions in São Paulo had been suffering with deprivation of water supply for over a year and several activists and social movements were concerned with the situation, especially because water is a human right” (Interview 7, July 2015). Edson Silva and other activists in the meeting knew about the existence of the Alliance—in fact, Silva and Whately knew each other personally—but, for reasons discussed below, did not feel represented by the Alliance’s agenda.⁷⁹ During the meeting, activists decided to write a collective manifesto about the crisis with the goal of forming a separate coalition of grassroots movements, unions, and other civil society groups to act on the crisis.

Similar to the Alliance, well-positioned and experienced leadership was important for coalition building in the Collective. Edson Silva, for instance, played a key role in bringing together activists to discuss the crisis and elaborate the manifesto. “Edson has years of experience fighting for better water services in the entire country, he is well educated on the topic,” Hamilton Rocha said of Silva’s leadership (Interview 7, July 2015). Edson’s participation in the FNU and the National Front for Environmental Sanitation— umbrella organizations connecting

⁷⁸ I discuss this last aspect in more detail in the next chapter.

⁷⁹ Following the formation of the Collective for Water Struggle, the Alliance invited the group to join the Collective but the Collective decided against it (Interview 11, July 2015).

several movements and associations—helped speed up the coalition building process. According to Rocha, “the entities understood quickly the importance of supporting the Collective. São Paulo is a national reference and everyone knew about the city’s [water] problem, so the need to have a collective fighting around the water issue from a social movement perspective was something that everyone quickly accepted” (Interview 7, July 2015).

The role of pre-existing networks in coalition formation was somewhat different in the Collective relative to the Alliance. For the Alliance, activation of individual and organizational networks served as a starting point for defining a minimal agenda around which organizations would eventually coalesce. For the Collective, although prior relationships were important for bringing activists to the January 20 gathering, networks played a more significant role in mobilizing broader support and legitimizing the manifesto outlined in the meeting. As Edson Silva explained, “following the meeting we shared the manifesto in our mailing lists, and then from these lists the manifesto reached other lists, and yet other lists. This led to several important national and international movements signing the manifesto” (Interview 5, July 2015). Within a matter of days nearly 90 movements and civil society groups had signed the document (Interview 7, July 2015). Despite these different pathways, the ways in which activists from both the Alliance and the Collective activated relationships for coalition building reflects what Von Bülow (2010) has described as the dynamic and contextual nature of network ties in social mobilization processes. Pre-existing social ties served as an underlying connective fabric that actors re-wove into new alliances in response to a new opportunity for action.

Although the Collective’s manifesto was supported by a large base of movements and organizations—from labor federations to LGBT and women’s movements to neighborhood associations—the coalition’s activities were generally led by a group of five to ten activists who were more directly committed to and engaged with the group. Following the Collective’s creation, the group met almost weekly to discuss the crisis and action strategies. The meetings were generally advertised on the Collective’s mailing list and social media accounts, and were open to anyone interested in participating. Representatives from different entities joined on occasion.

This model of organization contrasted with the more structured and centralized decision-making process in the Alliance for Water. Open meetings in the Alliance were generally large events

organized every three months to provide updates on the coalition's activities. Also in contrast to the Alliance, the Collective subsisted with fewer resources. Regarding the disparity, Américo Sampaio from the Collective remarked, "unlike us, the Alliance has a lot of money. We need to pass the hat around to collect money if we want to buy just ten lunch bags for an event" (Interview 12, August 2015). As I discuss in the remainder of this thesis, these different organizational traits influenced dynamics between the two coalitions as mobilization developed.

There was some convergence in the arguments and demands articulated by the Collective and the Alliance. Regarding the causes of the crisis, the Collective also attributed it to inadequate water resources management and environmental degradation driven by disorganized sprawl. In particular, they argued the state government had neglected the need for greater investments in expansion of supply systems, in wastewater treatment, and in improvements to the distribution network to reduce losses. They also criticized the government for lack of transparency and openness to dialogue, suggesting that state authorities had "emptied participatory and deliberative spaces" such as river basin committees (Collective 2015b). Like the Alliance, they called for the preparation of a contingency plan with guidelines for emergency situations, the creation of open data information systems and monitoring websites to facilitate daily access to information about the crisis, publicly accessible information on pressure reduction and potential shortages, and public awareness campaigns. To mitigate the impact of the crisis on lower-income households at the city's periphery, the Collective demanded the distribution of water tanks and requested that SABESP administer water distribution with greater equity. For the long-term, the manifesto recommended investments in water reuse and more efficient hydraulic equipment, as well as environmental education programs.

Despite some overlap, the manifesto also articulated arguments that set the Collective apart—at least in its inception—from the Alliance. To start, the manifesto was titled "Water is a Human Right, not a commodity!" The slogan reflected the Collective's fundamental criticism of SABESP's ownership model and operational strategy, which they argued prioritized profits and dividends to shareholders over the equitable provision of water services and rational management of supply sources.⁸⁰ In different portions of the manifesto, the Collective claimed SABESP's "private management model" was one of the causes of the crisis:

⁸⁰ While these claims—and other arguments mobilized by both coalitions—could be the object of further analytical scrutiny, my goal here is simply to situate the arguments and mobilization frames evoked by the groups.

The search for profit at any cost—as opposed to prioritizing quality provision of a public service—led the company to ignore forecasts that indicated a decrease in rainfall and the growth of demand, and to neglect several warnings—above all the provision in the Cantareira concession that mandated progressive reduction of dependence on the system. (...) The company also delayed campaigns to reduce consumption because its commercial interest in maximizing revenue from water sales overrides the need to raise public awareness. And when the company finally implemented the campaign, they blamed the population for the problem alleging exaggerated consumption (...) [SABESP] also maintains its position to continue to overexploit water supply sources and encourage overconsumption by the industrial sector (...). (Collective 2015b)

Like many anti-water privatization movements around the world, activists from the Collective evoked the notion of water as a human right to counterpose what they considered a process of “commodification of water.” According to Edson Silva, the idea built on the relationship established with former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina Albuquerque, during her visit to São Paulo in August 2014 (Interview 5, July 2015). Silva met with Albuquerque and walked her through neighborhoods in the periphery where the population was suffering with water shortages. Albuquerque also participated in debates about the crisis and met with other water activists and experts. In an interview with newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, Albuquerque held the state government responsible for the crisis and criticized SABESP. “The human rights normative framework determines that all resources should be invested in the realization of the right. In the case of a public company that delivers a service that is equivalent to a human right, there should be limitations on the distribution of dividends to shareholders,” Albuquerque stated.⁸¹

According to Edson Silva, the encounter with Albuquerque solidified in the Collective the sentiment that “the United Nations framework, the perspective that water is a fundamental human right, could be very helpful in the debates we were trying to generate” (Interview 5, July 2015). While theoretically the human right to water does not preclude private sector involvement in service provision, the example from the Collective provides support for studies on social struggles around water that have found that the human right to water remains a compelling

⁸¹ Folha de São Paulo, “Falta de água é culpa do governo de SP, afirma relatora da ONU.” Published August 31, 2014. Accessed August 19, 2016. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2014/08/1508504-falta-de-agua-e-culpa-do-governo-de-sp-afirma-relatora-da-onu.shtml>

mobilization frame for water movements (as noted in chapter 2). Further, it supports the idea that establishing connections between local problems and global issues is a useful mobilization strategy for water activists (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012; Perera 2012). The relationship with the United Nations remained important as activists devised strategies around the crisis, as discussed in the next chapter.

While the Alliance for Water would later include “water is a human right, not a commodity” among its guiding principles, the frame was a more central mobilization tool for the Collective. First, it helped to articulate the group’s stance that the state and SABESP’s priority should be to provide water access for all as opposed to privileging profits and private interests.⁸² Second, it meant to denounce “silent rationing” and opaque water resources management by the state government as a form of rights violation. As Hamilton Rocha explained,

the way the crisis in São Paulo has evolved turns the water issue, now more than ever, into a human rights issue. It’s a social justice issue that has been threatened by the way water resources have been managed in São Paulo, in the metropolitan region, in the entire state, where thousands and thousands have been excluded from basic access to water and sanitation. (Interview 7, July 2015)

Finally, the rights framework helped situate mobilization around the water crisis within a broader rights-based agenda of political transformation. As Américo Sampaio argued, while the group was focused on the water issue, its overarching goal was “to expand the struggle for rights and to fight against social injustice” (Interview 12, August 2015). This overarching project aligned the Collective more closely with other grassroots groups, such as the housing movement, which advanced rights-based claims. According to Edson Silva, “part of our goal is to tell the population that at the same time that they have the right to health, to education, to decent housing, they also have a right to water 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, in adequate quantity and quality” (Interview 5, July 2015). As I argue in the next section, these mobilization goals also reflected a particular collective understanding of what the crisis meant as an opportunity for action—an interpretation that was distinct from the Alliance’s.

⁸² While some activists in the Alliance were critical of SABESP’s operations and also opposed profit-oriented service delivery, the coalition did not articulate this criticism as a collective. One possible explanation for this is that some of the organizations within the coalition, such as SOS Mata Atlântica, received funding from SABESP and partnered with the company on a number of policy initiatives (Interview 13, August 2015). I return to some of these institutional constraints in the next chapter.

BUT WHAT DO YOU MEAN ‘AN OPPORTUNITY’?

Thus far in this chapter I have argued 1) that aggravation of supply conditions and growing dissatisfaction with crisis management created an opportunity for social mobilization, and 2) that leadership, network ties, and a collective initial story about the problem facilitated coalition formation. In this final section, I return to the notion of attribution of opportunity as a way to explain why two coalitions were formed. As social movement scholars have argued, understanding mobilization requires exploring “the lenses through which [activists] view potential opportunities for their movements” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, location 323).

For the Alliance, the crisis was an opportunity to unite different organizations in the promotion of a cultural shift around water. In the words of Marussia Whately, the coalition’s coordinator, “the Alliance has the chance to become an ample civil society movement orientated toward not only confronting the crisis but using the opportunity of the crisis to initiate a debate and work towards the achievement of new actions, towards what we are calling a ‘new culture of care’” (Interview 2, June 2015). The ‘new culture’ essentially embodied the aforementioned proposals the group put forth as long-term paths toward increased water security (Alliance 2015). According to Whately, the sooner society is able to understand the need for a cultural shift, the quicker it would be able to adjust to increasingly more common extreme events such as droughts and floods caused by changing environmental and climate conditions (Interview 2, June 2015). The coalition believed, however, that it was up to civil society as opposed to the state to provoke the shift. “Society’s commitment [to a new culture] will nudge governments, not the contrary”, argued Whately (Interview 2, June 2015).

For the Collective, the crisis was an opportunity to advance a political agenda of transformation that included undermining São Paulo’s state government and strengthening grassroots organizing. Américo Sampaio summarized the Collective’s broader objective—and greatest challenge—as “politicizing the debate”:

The issue for us is how to transform the water problem into a political and emancipatory debate, that’s the biggest issue. ‘How can we turn water shortages into a catalyzing element that will lead people to take political action?’ Because people know there is inequality, they know they don’t have water because they live in the periphery. But our

role is to expand and translate the debate in a way that people will realize that to change the situation they need to engage in politics. We need to remove these conservative politicians from power, we need to expand participatory spaces. The way out is political. (Interview 12, August 2015)

To activists in the Collective, this political stance and project is what distinguished them from the Alliance for Water. Comparing the two coalitions, Edson Silva stated,

The Alliance is a group with a completely different profile. (...) They see the crisis much more from an environmental perspective than a political perspective. Our collective, in contrast, considers that while there is an environmental problem, there is a political problem. There is lack of transparency, lack of democracy, there is a management model that has transformed water and sanitation into commodities. (Interview 5, July 2015)

Different organizational projects help to explain an important point of divergence in the way activists in both coalitions framed problems: the assignment of blame (Stone 2012 [1988]). In the case of the Collective, “blaming” was an extension of the group’s political project. Holding the state government and SABESP directly responsible for the crisis was a way to demarcate the group’s own political and ideological opposition to Alckmin’s government and SABEP’s ownership model. Reflecting on what the crisis meant for the coalition, for example, Hamilton Rocha argued that it opened a space for them to decry Alckmin as a bad politician. “He was recently re-elected, one of the governors that received the most votes. The water issue is an opportunity for us to show that he is not a good manager, that he is a bad one” (Interview 7, July 2015). The message was very clear, for instance, in the newspaper the Collective prepared for distribution to the population. The title of the main article read: “Whose fault is it? Mr. Geraldo Alckmin’s.” Activists from the group would continue to stress this point in meetings and events organized by the Collective.

While the Alliance for Water also criticized the state government, it argued that all levels of government [federal, state, and municipal levels] were responsible for the crisis. This was, in fact, one of the coalition’s principles (Alliance 2015). The Alliance’s perspective was that overcoming the crisis and advancing towards a more sustainable water resources model required collaboration from different governmental actors (Interview 11, July 2015). Calling attention to the responsibilities of all levels of government was a necessary step in this process. As Marussia Whately stated in an open meeting of the Alliance organized in June 18, 2015, “there is no single

actor that will solve the problem.” Members of the Collective disagreed with this position. As Rocha explained, “the Alliance for Water thinks that all governments are responsible for the crisis and that we have to collaborate with all of them. We think that’s not the case. We think the state government is responsible” (Interview 7, July 2015).

The different lenses activists from both groups used to interpret opportunities and assign blame reflected distinct political and organizational characteristics. The Collective’s social base of support encompassed grassroots movements and labor unions who, in Brazil, have historically aligned themselves with working class struggle and left-wing political thinking. For example, as Hamilton Rocha observed with regard to the Collective’s claims, opposition to private sector involvement in the provision of public services had long been an agenda item for the labor movement (Interview 7, July 2015). The group was also connected to left-wing political parties such as the PT, who in São Paulo served as opposition to PSDB (the state government’s party). The PT is also the party of Dilma Rousseff, Brazil’s current president. The partisan ties influenced the group’s mobilization efforts. In multiple interactions with activists from the Collective, it was suggested that organizing around the crisis could help undermine the state government’s popularity and influence political preferences—especially among lower income groups—in advance of the 2016 local elections.

A strong oppositional political ideology was less structural for organizations participating in the Alliance for Water, which built on a tradition of environmental advocacy. The environmental movement in Brazil gained strength during the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, environmental groups professionalized themselves, sought greater sources of funding, and began organizing in networks and coalitions (Jacobi 2000). Concomitantly, the movement evolved from a narrow awareness-raising focus to a more pro-active policy advocacy role (Jacobi 2000). Throughout this process, relationships between environmental organizations and governments have been marked by a mix of conflict and collaboration, where the boundaries between movement and state become blurred (Abers and Von Bülow 2011). Some of the NGOs in the Alliance, for example, maintained partnerships or received funding from government agencies, including SABESP. Nonetheless, to a lesser or greater extent, political motivations also influenced the Alliance’s activities. As Marussia Whately observed in her interview,

I was talking to some people this morning about one potential avenue for change. Next year Brazil will hold municipal elections. These will be difficult elections, like the presidential elections in 2014. This opens room for us to raise awareness among local constituents about what are the responsibilities of the mayor, or of a municipality [in the crisis]. So that is one perspective. (Interview 2, June 2015)

Distinct organizational profiles, political projects, and underlying disputes regarding the allocation of blame help to explain why two different coalitions around São Paulo's water crisis emerged. It would not be unreasonable to expect, as mobilization developed, that these differences would prevent cooperation between the two coalitions. As I discuss in next chapter, however, strategic action around the crisis fostered more fluid relationships between the groups as mobilization developed. The convergence (in their dissatisfaction with official response to the crisis) and divergence (in their organizational projects and characteristics) dynamic that marked coalition formation also played an important role in shaping when both coalitions cooperated and when they did not as they sought to act on the crisis, sustain mobilization, and advance their own projects.

CHAPTER 5. FACING THE DESERT'S HEAT

Once activists in São Paulo interpreted the water supply crisis as an opportunity for action and mobilized arguments, resources, and networks to form the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle, it was time to act. In this chapter, I trace how social mobilization around the crisis developed during 2015.⁸³ I dedicate particular attention to the action strategies pursued by the two coalitions to sustain mobilization, influence processes related to the crisis, and advance particular political and organizational projects.

When the Alliance and the Collective were formed, activists organized around a set of collective arguments that both grounded their claims and justified their formation. However, the coalitions' ability to sustain mobilization and act on the crisis relied little on their capacity to present a unified and well-articulated story about the problem to state authorities—which remained unyielding to civil society pressure. As I discuss in this chapter, the ability to adjust group narratives and strategies in order to explore spaces for action while still advancing specific organizational goals was much more central. *Flexibility*, therefore, was a key aspect of how mobilization developed.

The need for coalitions to be flexible reflected a number of mobilization challenges. As I discuss in the first section of this chapter, one challenge activists faced was to define clear targets for action in the face of multiple causal stories about São Paulo's water crisis (Keck 2015)—what here I call navigating diffuse causality. Another challenge concerned organizational constraints faced by both coalitions. These included limited knowledge about water issues, restricted resources, and political ties that made acting on different fronts difficult. Institutional impermeability (at the upper levels of decision-making within the state government and SABESP) also constituted a challenge to mobilization efforts. Not only did government and company authorities remain relatively closed to civil society input, they continued to maintain a demobilizing narrative that attributed the crisis to an atypical climatic event that government officials could not have foreseen.

⁸³ The bulk of the analysis focuses on the activities of the two coalitions until September 2015, which is when my fieldwork ended. At that point the crisis was still ongoing but forecasts indicated a return of rainfall during the wet season, beginning in October 2015.

Activists from the Alliance and the Collective deployed several strategies to overcome these challenges and take action. I do not attempt to cover the range of their efforts. Rather, I focus the analysis on four main broad strategies both groups pursued as the crisis extended into 2015: 1) translating and raising public awareness; 2) creating global connections; 3) tapping into institutional pockets of resistance; and 4) re-claiming participatory spaces. I discuss each of these strategies in the second section of the chapter. These four avenues for action help expose the ways in which flexible collective frames and projects mattered for mobilization around the crisis.

In particular, these strategies shed light on the role of flexibility in interaction dynamics between the two coalitions. Literature on coalition and movement building has suggested, for instance, that ideological and organizational differences can prevent collaboration among groups, even when they have similar goals (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). Mobilization around São Paulo's water crisis provides an interesting example of when ideologically and organizationally distinct groups may intentionally coordinate action. The Alliance and the Collective converged (or collaborated) in all but the first strategy listed above, translating and denouncing—where articulating particular group frames was important for advancing the coalitions respective projects and narratives on the crisis.

'WHERE DO WE GO NOW?' CHALLENGES TO MOBILIZATION AROUND SÃO PAULO'S SUPPLY CRISIS

When activists launched the Alliance for Water and the Collective for Water Struggle, they put forward causal explanations, allocated responsibility, defined a set of proposals for overcoming the supply crisis, and articulated collective projects around it. While original mobilization agendas were clear, the paths ahead were not.

To start, activists were confronted with the challenge of defining how to engage with the multiple problems they associated with the crisis. In other words, they needed to navigate diffuse causality. Taking action on each of the issues identified would require engaging a complex—and at times inhospitable—institutional and political environment. As Stela Goldenstein, the

executive-director of environmental NGO Águas Claras do Rio Pinheiros⁸⁴ and former State Adjunct Secretary for the Environment, explained, when the causes of a problem are not clear, mobilizing different institutional actors to implement solutions is not easy. “The logic is the following: if no one is clearly responsible for the problem, then no one will take responsibility for solving it,” she argued (Interview 3, July 2015). The challenge was compounded by the state government’s active effort to counter arguments attributing the crisis to factors other than an exceptional drought. Finding spaces to advance their different arguments and proposals constituted, therefore, an important challenge for activists.

Diffuse causality introduced an additional challenge to both coalitions: how to present a multifaceted problem in ways that would galvanize mobilization. As Américo Sampaio, from the Collective, argued, “a peculiar thing about the water crisis, and a central challenge to mobilization, is that understanding the water issue is difficult” (Interview 12, August 2015). Gabriel Gonçalves, an activist from the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) and also a member of the Collective, explained the predicament as follows:

We know that the crisis is a result of a number of processes—illegal settlements in watershed protection areas, a water resources management model that privileges financial capital etc. It’s a systemic process. Now, imagine having to explain this on national TV? One would need three hours to explain it to someone. (Interview 20, August 2015)

In order to raise public awareness about the crisis and mobilize support for coalition efforts, activists needed to express intricate arguments and proposals in accessible ways. Frequently, this process involved strategically choosing which problems to engage depending on their audience and collective goals. Activists from the Collective, for example, often discussed in their meetings the need to target specific issues when trying to mobilize communities. As Américo Sampaio explained, “we need to have very clear objectives (...) because when we talk to people and they ask: ‘So, why are you organizing?’ And we say, ‘Oh, because the management model... etc.’, we will lose the person. So we need to be pragmatic” (Interview 12, August 2015). Indeed, as will become clearer, pragmatism was a key characteristic of strategic action around the crisis.

Part of the challenge of articulating and presenting problems to others also stemmed from the fact that many activists had little to no experience organizing around water and had limited

⁸⁴ Águas Claras do Rio Pinheiros was a member of the Alliance for Water.

knowledge about water resources management and supply. As Carlos Thadeu, from IDEC and the Alliance for Water, observed, “to speak the truth, we were a little caught by surprise as well, we still feel very lost. (...) We don’t have the technical knowledge; we don’t have information about the entire [water resources management] system to be able to act on it” (Interview 10, July 2015). Similarly, some activists from the Collective did not shy away from acknowledging their lack of familiarity with water issues. As Américo Sampaio observed, “we are still learning. If you ask me what are the main problems associated with water resources, I will have some difficulty explaining them from a technical perspective” (Interview 12, August 2015).

Grassroots groups and movements in the Collective’s network shared the challenge. Despite having accumulated knowledge in areas such as housing, education, and health, most movements in São Paulo had never engaged with water issues before (Interview 12, August 2015). According to Hamilton Rocha, “when the Collective was formed, several grassroots movements warned us of the following: ‘look, we don’t understand anything, we need to know more. We need some sort of guide so we can understand the issues better,’ they said” (Interview 7, July 2015).

In view of these difficulties, continuous knowledge sharing and learning was a key aspect of how mobilization developed. Experienced leaders such as Marussia Whately in the Alliance and Edson Silva in the Collective, who had helped structure the groups’ original agendas, continued to play key roles in this regard by providing information and guidance. Discussing Silva’s role, Hamilton Rocha said, “just the other day he was showing to me a series of laws that they helped pass in the 1990s. (...) He has a lot of information about the history of struggle around water” (Interview 7, July 2015). Whately addressed her own role within the Alliance by stating, “many people in the coalition say, ‘Marussia is leading the Alliance, she is a reference, she will know where we need to go’” (Interview 2, June 2015).

Knowledge and information about São Paulo’s water resources management and supply also circulated through what Abers and Keck have called “engagement”, or the process through which actors use connections in their networks to propagate resources and ideas (Abers and Keck 2013). “Engagement” happened not only in meetings organized by the coalitions, where different activists and organizations came together to discuss the crisis, but also through social media and email. For example, the Alliance and the Collective maintained active accounts on Facebook,

where they shared news articles, statements, and information about events related to the crisis. Concomitantly, activists from both coalitions participated in Facebook groups dedicated to discussing the crisis and used their personal accounts to share information and voice opinions.

Former (and, at times, current) SABESP workers played a relevant role in knowledge sharing. Between February and March 2015, the company laid off 335 workers and planned to dismiss another 300.⁸⁵ SABESP argued lay-offs were part of a procedural decision to honor a previous commitment established with the State Public Prosecutors' Office (MPSP) to dismiss retired employees that had remained working for the company. However, labor unions argued that the move was unjustified and intended to reduce company costs given lower revenues⁸⁶ during the crisis.⁸⁷ Some of the workers who were laid off, particularly those who were also political and labor activists, joined groups organizing around the crisis. They provided technical information about water resources management and supply, and used connections with workers still in the company to remain informed about SABESP's operations.

For example, Érika Martins—a SABESP engineer laid off during the crisis—was one of the most active members of the Collective for Water Struggle and often occupied the role of translating and explaining aspects of the crisis to other activists. Former company employees who formed the small collective “Água, Sim! Lucro, Não!” (“Water, Yes! Profit, No!”) also contributed in this role. Members of the group were often present in meetings of the Alliance and the Collective to keep up with their activities and share technical information on reservoir conditions and supply operations. As Marzeni Pereira, one of the leaders of the group, explained: “We maintain a good relationship with the other collectives, with all of them, from the anarchists to the ones affiliated with political parties. There is no issue. Our goal is to support these collectives with information because many of the groups do not have access to the sanitation companies and ours does” (Interview 6, July 2015).

⁸⁵ Rede Brasil Atual, “Sindicato promete paralisação se Sabesp não rever demissões em SP.” Published March 06, 2015. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/ambiente/2015/03/sindicato-promete-paralisacao-se-sabesp-nao-rever-demissao-de-trabalhadores-em-sao-paulo-2493.html>

⁸⁶ On February 06, 2015, the State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources, Benedito Braga, said in a speech at the Federation of Commerce (*Federação do Comércio*) that the company was facing financial constraints due to the financial bonus program and reduced consumption during the crisis. He stated the company would need to review expenses to compensate for the decrease in revenues.

⁸⁷ G1 – Globo, “Sindicato diz que Sabesp já demitiu 500 este ano e ameaça paralisação.” Published March 06, 2015. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/03/sindicato-diz-que-sabesp-ja-demitiu-500-este-ano-e-ameaca-paralisacao-em-sao-paulo.html>

Engaging with different groups as well as with one another was also a way for the Alliance and the Collective to cope with organizational constraints to action. As noted in the previous chapter, the two coalitions differed in their level of access to resources. While the Alliance received funding from different institutions and maintained a group of staff to support coalition activities, the Collective was mostly self-sustained and relied on voluntary participation from activists who contributed time to the group outside of their professional work.

Given limited human and material resources, members from the Collective emphasized in their meetings the need to prioritize activities and mobilize other organizations to contribute where they could. According to Edson Silva, one of the Collective's greatest challenges was to expand the number of groups that, beyond signing the manifesto, contributed in practice to coalition activities (Interview 5, July 2015). Concomitantly, the Collective recognized the importance of efforts from the Alliance for Water, which they argued was in a better position to engage the media and institutional actors. As Américo Sampaio observed, "I think we need to leave the institutional field for the Alliance, because they have more experience and more legitimacy to act there. (...) They fulfill an important role as well because they have more access to the media, more money, which grassroots movements lack" (Interview 12, August 2015).

The Alliance for Water also faced constraints. Some of the core organizations in the Alliance, such as SOS Mata Atlântica, maintained partnerships or received funding from state government agencies and from SABESP. As an activist from the Alliance observed following a meeting with the Collective, these institutional linkages limited the coalition's ability to openly criticize the state government. Rosa Mancini, a state government official at the Secretariat of the Environment, also noted these political constraints when reflecting on civil society mobilization around the crisis. Mancini was familiar with the work of environmental NGOs in the Alliance and knew some of the activists in the coalition. "I think the Alliance is a great thing. (...) There are several organizations within it that have actual proposals and are reflecting more about the crisis than the state government. However, there also organizations who have sort of sold themselves (...) They receive money, so they are less critical," Mancini stated (Interview 13, August 2015). In view of the Alliance's internal dynamic, the Collective occupied a more central confrontational role in relation to the state government. As Américo Sampaio observed, "the Alliance has a lot of penetration, they discuss the problems well, but they are forced to have a

more moderate discourse, while the Collective is more capable of rubbing salt in the wound” (Interview 12, August 2015).

A further challenge for the Alliance was what Pedro Jacobi, a Professor at the University of São Paulo (USP) and a collaborator of the coalition, called “the erosion of NGOs’ capacity to promote broad mobilization” (Interview 1, June 2015). While the shift towards professionalization and policy advocacy during the 1980s and 1990s increased the capacity of environmental NGOs for institutional action, it distanced them from grassroots organizing. According to Jacobi, one of the Alliance’s greatest challenges was to extend its circle beyond organizations and groups that were “already converted to their cause” (Interview 1, June 2015). Marussia Whately recognized this issue. One of the Alliance’s main efforts as mobilization developed was to expand allies through coalition building. According to Whately, they sought to create ties with groups as diverse as GIFE—an association of institutes, foundations, and business companies focused on social investment—and the Homeless Workers’ Movement (MTST)—one of the largest and strongest grassroots movements in the country. As discussed further in the chapter, they also sought to engage communities in São Paulo’s periphery—independently from the Collective—in an attempt to translate the “culture of care around water” to a broader audience (Interview 2, June 2015; Interview 11, July 2015).

In addition to navigating diffuse causality and dealing with organizational constraints, mobilization around the crisis involved confronting impermeable state institutions. Following their formation, both the Alliance and the Collective attempted to establish communication channels with the state government to discuss their claims and proposals. However, state authorities remained dismissive and impassable to civil society input. According to Marussia Whately, for example, the Alliance met with Benedito Braga, the State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources, but felt there was little room for dialogue (Interview 2, June 2015). They also considered scheduling a meeting with governor Geraldo Alckmin but decided against it. “We thought it would be a waste of time. We would get there, he would say that water scarcity was an isolated, anomalous problem, that they knew everything,” Whately explained (Interview 2, June 2015). Similarly, the Collective for Water Struggle had a hearing with state government officials following a protest they organized on March 20, the World Water Day, at the Paulista Avenue (*Avenida Paulista*)—one of the most important business and cultural centers in the city. According to Edson Silva,

It was a terrific protest. We had thousands of people on the street. Ironically, it rained a lot that day. We had stickers that read ‘Alckmin, where is the water?’ and it was raining so much, it was a bit embarrassing. Anyway, we ended the protest in front of the Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources because we had managed to schedule a hearing with them. (Interview 5, July 2015)

The group met with the secretary’s Chief of Staff and two other staff members. They discussed some of the Collective’s core claims and emergency proposals, such as the need for more transparent information about water shortages and the recommendation that the government partner with community groups and grassroots movements to distribute water tanks to the population (Interview 5, July 2015; Interview 7, July 2015). According to activists from the group, state officials did not follow up with them after the meeting. “All the demands we presented were systematically ignored by the government. They never responded,” affirmed Hamilton Rocha (Interview 7, July 2015).

Spaces created by the state government for information sharing and dialogue about the water crisis reinforced the perception of impermeability. For example, in February 2015 the state government instituted a multistakeholder crisis committee (*Comitê de Crise*). Its purpose was to provide information about supply conditions, coordinate measures to guarantee drinking water provision for human and animal consumption, and discuss the elaboration of contingency and communication plans for emergency situations (Governo do Estado de São Paulo 2015). The decision followed growing pressure from municipalities in the metropolitan region, especially from São Paulo’s mayor, Fernando Haddad (Workers’ Party), who personally requested its creation (Interview 8, July 2015).

Haddad had, in fact, been influenced by civil society activists. In December 2014, the mayor received a letter from the *Conselho da Cidade de São Paulo*—a participatory council focusing on municipal urban planning—expressing the need for the municipality to take greater action and listing a number of emergency proposals to confront the crisis, including the creation of participatory spaces for joint monitoring and dialogue (Conselho da Cidade de São Paulo 2014). Activists from the Alliance for Water, which had advocated for the creation of a crisis committee since its inception, held seats in the council and helped facilitate the elaboration of a letter (Interview 2, June 2015; Interview 9, July 2015). According to Whately, the coalition also met with Haddad and his staff to discuss the crisis (Interview 2, June 2015). Although activists could

have considered the creation of the crisis committee a victory for mobilization, their sentiment was quite the opposite. The way state authorities conducted the committee increased skepticism toward the state government and strengthened the perception that the coalitions needed to seek alternative spaces to advance their claims (Interview 2, June 2015; Interview 7, July 2015)

The committee met for the first—and only—time on February 13. It was officially composed of state agencies in areas such as environment and health, and coordinated by the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources. The following members were also invited⁸⁸ to participate in the committee: São Paulo’s Mayor, Fernando Haddad; a group of municipal consortia; and representatives from professional associations, public universities, and civil society organizations. Three organizations connected to the Alliance for Water were invited: SOS Mata Atlântica, Instituto Akatu, and IDEC. By that point, however, members of the coalition were unsure whether the state government truly intended the committee to serve as a *de facto* decision-making space. As Glauco Kimura, from WWF, recounted,

The issue almost divided the Alliance in half. Because part of the group said, ‘This crisis committee is an absurd manipulation. They have only created it ‘for the English to see,’⁸⁹ to be able to say that they are consulting society, but they will continue to repeat the same mistakes.’ And another group within the Alliance said, ‘no, we fought for this space to present our ideas and solutions, so we need to take advantage of the space that was created.’ So the Alliance was a bit divided, because it congregates a number of institutions, some more radical, more skeptical, and others that... Well... So some decided to repudiate it and others like SOS Mata Atlântica and ISA said, ‘no, we will go there and we will seat in the committee.’ That’s fine. Each institution has autonomy to do whatever they want. (Interview 19, August 2015)

Following the committee’s first meeting, however, the organizations who had defended participating in it found reasons to believe that no effective action would result from it. According to Carlos Thadeu, who attended the meeting, “it became very clear that the committee was not meant to debate the crisis, to debate water resources management. The committee was going to listen, but basically it would serve a procedural function” (Interview 10, July 2015). In

⁸⁸ The state decree listed municipal consortiums and civil society organizations that would join the committee “by invitation” (Governo do Estado de São Paulo 2015).

⁸⁹ “For the English to see” (“*Para Inglês ver*”) is a Brazilian expression that dates back to the 19th century, when Brazil signed a treaty with Britain in 1826 to end slavery. However, slavery continued for another 60 years (McMahon 2014). The expression currently means to do something just for the sake of appearances.

the meeting, it was decided that a smaller group of members would oversee the preparation of a contingency plan to be presented back to the committee (Interview 8, July 2015). The organizations from the Alliance were not part of the group. Six months after the meeting, the plan had still not been elaborated. In July, when asked by the press when the plan would be ready, Geraldo Alckmin stated, “It will be ready. It’s another useless paperwork. What is the purpose? It only serves to waste public money since we won’t need to implement any contingency measures.”⁹⁰

The example from the crisis committee evokes John Gaventa’s (2006) discussion of spaces for participation. Gaventa defines spaces as “opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions, and relationships that affect their lives and interests” (Gaventa 2006, 26). He argues that one way social actors attempt to promote change is by pressuring authorities to open ‘closed spaces’—such as decision-making processes that preclude any public participation—and to create ‘invited spaces’ for stakeholder engagement. The creation of the crisis committee mirrors this process. São Paulo’s state government was under pressure from civil society organizations and municipalities to increase transparency and participation in crisis management. However, the committee was an ‘invited space’ for participation only in its make-up. In reality, as activists learned, it worked to maintain the closed nature of decision-making around the crisis.

Initial attempts to engage the state government and occupy ‘invited spaces’ demonstrated to activists from the Alliance and the Collective that the way forward was to ‘claim’ or ‘create’ their own spaces for change (Gaventa 2006, 26–7). Marussia Whately, for example, argued,

We can’t insist only on formal political mechanisms. They created the crisis committee, for example, and it has only met once. So what have we been trying to do? We are working to make water shortages visible, to heat up the topic again. We will continue to inform, to monitor, and seek to engage other sectors. I won’t try to seat and talk with Alckmin. He will just say, ‘we are already doing everything.’ (Interview 11, July 2015)

Activists from the Collective shared Whately’s sentiment. In a training course organized by the group in July, Érika Martins said to other participants, “nothing will come out of the state

⁹⁰ Rede Brasil Atual, “Após seis meses, Comitê de Crise Hídrica de Alckmin não apresentou nenhum resultado.” Published August 04, 2015. Accessed April 24, 2016. <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/cidadania/2015/08/apos-seis-meses-comite-de-crise-hidrica-de-alcmin-nao-apresentou-nenhum-resultado-1247.html>

government; we need to carve alternative spaces” (Event 6, July 2015). Similarly, Hamilton Rocha remarked in his interview, “there are very few institutional channels in São Paulo that would allow us to change the situation we are experiencing... But there are cracks we can explore” (Interview 7, July 2015). I discuss some of the ways in which the coalitions created or took advantage of alternative avenues for action in the next section.

FLUID DYNAMICS: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN ACTION STRATEGIES

Our struggles are often inglorious. If we don't have strength, if we don't mobilize, if we don't bring several voices together to generate pressure, the moments will pass by and nothing will happen.

– Maurício Bronizi, Rede Nossa São Paulo (Alliance and Collective), Interview 4, July 2015.

We have proposed joint actions and we will continue to propose them. The actions with the Public Ministry and with the UN include all groups. We think joint efforts are more effective than an organic union of the groups, more effective than meeting, arguing, chewing one another out. That will lead us nowhere. So, 'Let's do a joint action?' 'Yes, let's do it.'

– Hamilton Rocha, Collective for Water Struggle, Interview 7, July 2015.

To overcome mobilization challenges and promote coalition agendas, activists from the Alliance and the Collective pursued fluid action strategies. On the one hand, each coalition created independent spaces and mechanisms to advance particular narratives and projects. This was apparent, for example, in efforts to *translate* problems and *raise awareness* about the crisis to communities and groups they hoped to mobilize. There was little to no collaboration in these strategies. On the other hand, activists from both coalitions deliberately sought to coordinate action where they felt collaboration would strengthen mobilization without compromising specific organizational and political projects. This was evident, for instance, in “joint actions”—

to borrow from Hamilton Rocha’s statement above—to take advantage of available spaces for denouncing and exerting pressure on the state government.

The Alliance and the Collective worked together on the elaboration of a joint report to the United Nations (*creating global connections*) and partnered with a group of prosecutors within the State Public Prosecutors’ Office (MPSP) to support investigations about the crisis (*tapping into institutional pockets of resistance*). The coalitions also collaborated to influence decisions regarding the Cantareira’s water rights, which were being discussed by the Alto Tietê and PCJ river basin committees (*reclaiming participatory spaces*). I discuss each of these strategies below. I argue that divergent (non-collaborative) and convergent (collaborative) strategies reflected flexible mobilization dynamics within and between the Alliance and the Collective. Flexibility enabled the coalitions to deal with mobilization constraints and expand the reach of their actions. At the same time, it allowed both groups to promote the distinct political stances and organizational projects that separated them at origin.

Translating and raising awareness

Providing information on the water crisis, challenging government arguments, and voicing their own stories about water supply problems were important rationales for the emergence of the Alliance and the Collective. Both groups engaged in strategies related to these goals. I group them under *translating*—explaining the water crisis to others—and *raising awareness*—making problems visible to the population. While the two coalitions pursued very similar actions related to these strategies, such as the organization of educational spaces about the crisis and the creation of web applications (apps) to map and denounce water shortages, they did not seek to collaborate in their implementation. Divergence in these cases reflected the importance of translation and awareness raising for advancing particular group arguments and collective projects around the supply crisis—in other words, for realizing in practice their different meanings of opportunity.

On July 18, the Collective for Water Struggle organized a day-long training course (*curso de formação*) to facilitate information exchange about the crisis and to “train trainers”—that is, to enable other activists to function as educators on the crisis. According to members of the

Collective, the idea to organize the course emerged from two observations. First, that it was necessary to create spaces for knowledge sharing, particularly in view of grassroots movements limited experience engaging water issues (as previously discussed). A training course would enable members of these groups to reproduce knowledge and galvanize mobilization in their own movements and communities. Second, that participation from different groups in the Collective had begun to wane and it was necessary to reconnect movements to sustain mobilization. As Edson Silva explained, “in the beginning, we had multiple people participate in the meetings of the Collective, but then there was an emptying, participation became less intense. We thought the course would help “rescue” participation from different entities” (Interview 5, July 2015). These two processes were also linked to the group’s broader goal of politicizing the debate around the water crisis. In a report about the training course, the group stated that one of the course’s objectives was to “facilitate political action around two axes: the strengthening and systematization of violations of the right to water, and core training for critical thinking on water resources management” (Collective 2015c).

The course was structured so as to allow the Collective to share their arguments and claims about the supply crisis and subsequently discuss pathways for action with participants. The first part of the course consisted of three presentations from members of the Collective. Gabriel Gonçalves from the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) presented on the history of grassroots mobilization around water in Brazil and São Paulo; Érika Martins discussed the causes of the water crisis and provided technical information on water resources management and supply in the region; and Hamilton Rocha presented on media coverage of the crisis, which he argued was biased towards the state government. Throughout the presentations, members emphasized that the crisis was a “crisis of management,” criticized SABESP’s profits, and highlighted “the need to blame the state government for its negligence and lack of transparency,” as Gabriel Gonçalves put it. The same arguments appeared in the course material and newspaper distributed to participants.

During the second part of the course, the nearly 60 participants⁹¹ divided themselves in three groups to discuss strategies for communication (media and social media primarily), for direct action, and for grassroots mobilizing. More than 50 proposals came out of the three groups

⁹¹ Participants were from a variety of labor unions, social movements, and other organizations. They also spanned different neighborhoods and municipalities in the metropolitan region of São Paulo (Collective 2015c).

(Collective 2015c). They reflected the richness of possible repertoires for action but also the diffuse nature of water problems and their multiple facets. Participants proposed the group acted on issues as varied as protesting increases in water tariff, organizing environmental education campaigns and river clean-ups, and discussing health issues related to supply scarcity.

Although organizing the course had been a challenge, given limited financial and human resources,⁹² the group considered the effort a success. As Hamilton Rocha explained,

We had some support but it was very hard to put it together—to find a place, to produce materials. However, for us, it was a success due to the number of participants and its repercussion. It also became a reference for us. We noticed that providing information went hand-in-hand with the political actions we are trying to put in practice. (Interview 7, July 2015)

As activists from the Collective met to reflect on the course and next steps, however, they were confronted with the need to deal with the multiple pathways for action that resulted from the activity. Continuing the narrative about the course, Rocha observed, “we saw that there was too much (...) and if we continued to have only a few people come to regular meetings, there was no way we could do any of it” (Interview 7, July 2015). Further, as some of the members argued in the Collective’s meetings, not all of the actions proposed were aligned with the strategic objectives of the group. The consensus was that it was necessary to focus resources on issues and actions that would help advance the coalition’s political mobilization agenda and strengthen relationships with grassroots groups and communities. Reflective of the pragmatism discussed earlier, rather than targeting multiple issues, activists suggested focusing on those considered most likely to resonate with these groups, such as increases in water tariffs. Like Américo Sampaio explained, “the tariff is not a technical issue, it ‘hurts in your pocket.’ So we think that’s a good way to mobilize people” (Interview 12, August 2015).

Another strategy the Collective chose to pursue was the implementation of a survey in lower income areas at the periphery of São Paulo to map water shortages. The survey was seen as an instrument to reach out to community leaders and local organizations while raising awareness about the crisis. The plan was to integrate the results of the survey into a webmap displaying

⁹² To organize the course, the Collective received support from a group of unions and social movements. They helped either by providing funding or materials (such as chairs and flipcharts). However, some of members still paid for resources for the course with their own money (Collective 2015c).

supply shortages. The group agreed that other strategies would be pursued if there were organizations or individuals willing to collaborate in their implementation. This process within the Collective helps shed light on how mobilization constraints and organizational projects contributed to greater flexibility in the group's mobilization efforts.

While Rafael Poço, an activist from the Alliance for Water, spoke at the beginning of the Collective's training course in support of the initiative—leaving shortly afterwards—the Alliance did not contribute to it in anyway. The course was designed as the Collective's own space to promote and build support for its mobilization agenda around the crisis. The Alliance created its own independent spaces for translation and awareness raising.

Following its formation, the Alliance began organizing “public lessons” (*aulas públicas*) on the crisis, often conducted by Marussia Whately. The events invited the participation of anyone interested in learning more and were advertised primarily online (through website, email, and social media). The first lessons were organized near the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) at the Paulista Avenue, the center of the city. Eventually, the coalition decided to expand and organize lessons at the periphery. While the Alliance could have collaborated with the Collective to organize them, since both were attempting to reach a similar public, it did not. Divergence here was also motivated by the desire to separately present and gather support for the coalition's own projects.

One of the Alliance's first public lessons outside of the city center occurred on August 14 (Event 18, August 2015). It was held at Vila Paranaguá, which is on the east side of São Paulo, nearly 25 miles (about two hours away) from the Paulista Avenue. The lesson was organized in partnership with Escola da Cidadania da Zona Leste (roughly, East Zone Citizenship School), which organized weekly discussions about public issues at a local church. Marussia Whately talked for about an hour. She began by presenting the Alliance for Water, its principles, and its goal to promote a culture of care around water. She then discussed a range of issues related to water resources in the region, including the history of urban development, the different reservoirs, the water cycle, São Paulo's water resources management system, and SABESP's supply model. Among the causes of the crisis, she cited overexploitation of resources and mismanagement, environmental degradation, and lack of public oversight and participation in decision-making. She emphasized that all levels of government shared responsibility for these

problems. Finally, she called attention to the coalition's latest initiative: an app to collect and display water shortages in São Paulo under the campaign “#tafaltandoagua” (or #welackwater). Discussing both the public lessons and the app, Marussia Whately said,

The partnerships with other groups, the public lessons in different parts of the city serve for us to say: “look, we have this app, we have this website, go there and add there is no water.” (...) When people look at the map, they will begin to share, interact. I think this will strengthen our process not only because it will call attention to the Alliance but also because it's a way of positioning the Alliance as a counter narrative that makes more sense to society in general than the narrative that is out there, which is not solving the crisis. (Interview 11, July 2015)

The coalition planned to use the data collected through the app to produce regular bulletins raising awareness about the crisis and its impact on the population. Developed with support from ISA, the final version of the Alliance's app was launched in September 2015. In a day, the app received more than 1,200 reports of water shortage.

As aforementioned, the Collective developed its own webapp separately to map water shortages.⁹³ In a meeting of the Collective I attended on August 05, one participant mentioned that the Alliance was putting together a similar app and wondered if a partnership—or combining datasets—would not be possible (Event 14, August 2015). The idea was set aside in the discussion that ensued. Members of the Collective argued that the survey was part of the group's mobilizing and organizing effort, and that it made sense to pursue it independently. Different participants in the meeting observed that the possibility of interacting face-to-face with residents and discussing the crisis with them was more important than the data collected. As Hamilton Rocha, who coordinated the survey effort, explained in his interview, part of the purpose of the survey was to facilitate the creation of local ties and bring more people into the Collective (Interview 7, July 2015).

⁹³ After the Collective's survey was completed and once the Alliance's app was launched in September, the Collective supported the Alliance's #tafaltandoagua campaign and its app by helping to promote it. Unfortunately, I could not capture this process since it followed my fieldwork in São Paulo. However, this mutual support does not invalidate the point that there was divergence in the coalitions' initiatives while the Collective was implementing its own survey. Members of the Collective did not want to join efforts at that stage. Moreover, the coalition's subsequent collaboration reinforces my argument about the fluidity and flexibility that marked mobilization efforts around the crisis.

The Collective's survey was implemented during the month of August with the help of grassroots movements, unions, and other partners in different areas of São Paulo's periphery. I cannot say how successful the survey was as a strategy to galvanize engagement from the communities in these areas. However, in the meetings I attended in which the group discussed the strategy, activists from the Collective were satisfied with the support from their networks in the implementation of the survey and with the hundreds of responses they received.

It is possible that if the Alliance and the Collective had collaborated in their strategies to translate and raise awareness, the groups would have been more effective in reaching different communities and increasing knowledge about the crisis. Nonetheless, by bringing different organizations, movements, communities, and voices to the conversation, they helped expand and democratize access to information about the crisis and water resources management in São Paulo. They also helped bring attention to issues (such as water shortages) that the government either denied or downplayed. Information collected through the Collective's survey and the Alliance's campaign also supported two other action strategies: the partnership with MPSP and the joint report to the United Nations.

Creating global connections

One avenue for action where the Alliance and the Collective explicitly chose to collaborate was in the elaboration of a report to the United Nations on human rights violations associated with crisis management. The strategy mirrored what literature on social mobilization around water has described as the creation of *local-global connections* (Robinson 2013; Bywater 2012). In São Paulo, activists hoped that connecting problems related to the crisis with an international framework on the human right to water and sanitation would strengthen their claims regarding how state authorities had managed scarcity. Moreover, they hoped to leverage international alliances to exert pressure on the state government—a strategy that evokes Keck and Sikkink's (1998) "boomerang theory". As Hamilton Rocha explained,

A denunciation from the UN has an important political weight. First, because it reverberates internationally. Second, because it's an external voice that has received a complaint from the population with regard to human rights—which is not a secondary

issue—and that may point to the government’s responsibility for the current state of affairs. We have had reports of outbreaks of diarrhea, dengue, of degrading situations associated with water shortages. All of this is directly connected to the human rights issue. (...) We think the report will help strengthen voices against the situation we are currently facing in São Paulo. (Interview 7, July 2015)

As previously noted, the process of connecting local struggles with the UN framework on the human right to drinking water and sanitation developed following the visit of Special Rapporteur Catarina Albuquerque to São Paulo in August 2014. On that occasion, Albuquerque met with several activists and water experts about the water crisis, and criticized the state government and SABESP for how they had responded to the situation. Governor Geraldo Alckmin, at that point still running for re-election, quickly rebuked Albuquerque’s statements. He wrote a letter to UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon requesting that the organization rectify the criticisms, which he argued were based on “unacceptable factual errors.”⁹⁴ He further accused Albuquerque of having political motivations. He suggested the Rapporteur had made the statements a few weeks prior to the state elections in order to “inflame the campaign process.” The UN responded that Albuquerque had autonomy to voice her positions.

Despite the hostile response from Alckmin to Albuquerque’s declarations, activists continued to consider the connection with the UN strategic for exerting pressure on the government. On March 20, 2015, human rights NGO Conectas⁹⁵ made a speech about São Paulo’s water crisis at the 28th session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Speaking in support of the Alliance for Water, the organization denounced the state government for managing the crisis with little transparency and for adopting relief measures that disproportionately affected vulnerable communities (Conectas 2015). The organization also voiced concerns regarding water quality, arguing the government had been resorting to polluted water sources to overcome the supply deficit. It concluded the speech by requesting that UN officials monitor the water crisis closely, because “the human right to water [in São Paulo] was under serious threat” (Conectas 2015).

⁹⁴ Estadão, “Alckmin pede que ONU retifique críticas sobre falta de água em SP.” Published October 21, 2014. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://sao-paulo.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,alckmin-pede-que-onu-retifique-criticas-sobre-falta-de-agua-em-sp,1580442>

⁹⁵ Conectas was a member of the Alliance for Water.

In April 2015, a month after the speech by Conectas, the Alliance and the Collective met together with the new UN Special Rapporteur, Leo Heller, who replaced Catarina Albuquerque in November 2014. Activists like Edson Silva and Marussia Whately knew Heller well. A Brazilian researcher and professor, he had extensive experience in the field of water and sanitation in the country. As Silva observed, “Heller has been a long-time ally in the struggle for better water services” (Interview 5, July 2015). Whately arranged the meeting and invited activists from the Collective to join.

The conversation signaled to activists that in order to leverage the connection with the UN, they would need to adjust problem frames. As Américo Sampaio recounts, “the meeting was very strategic. (...) We had a fantastic debate about human rights violations, about how to translate the water issue into a discourse that was not a discourse against Alckmin, but a discourse about rights” (Interview 12, August 2015). This perspective would shape collaboration between the two coalitions as they decided to prepare a joint report to Leo Heller on human rights violations during the crisis. With the report in hand, Heller planned to prepare a formal letter to the state government soliciting explanations (Keck 2015, 23).

The Alliance and the Collective worked on the report together for nearly six months. Collaboration allowed activists to build on one another’s knowledge, experience, and resources. For example, Érika Martins from the Collective covered technical aspects related to pressure reduction and water quality. Organizations such as IDEC and Greenpeace within the Alliance contributed information from their campaigns on water shortages and contracts for large consumers, respectively. At the same time, the report evolved from the coalitions’ willingness to set aside particular group framings. For example, the Collective discussed the report’s preparation in several of the meetings I accompanied. Despite the group’s stance that Alckmin should be directly held responsible for the crisis and their criticism of SABESP’s “profit-oriented operations,” activists from the group would often emphasize the need to ground the report on issues that were most relevant for the United Nations framework. During a meeting on August 05, for instance, Érika Martins argued that the report should focus “on water quality issues, on water shortages, on the UN’s agenda.” Other problems related to SABESP and even environmental issues, she said, could be discussed in other spaces—for instance, in the hearing organized by the MPSP.

The final report was presented to Leo Heller on October 13, 2015.⁹⁶ Based on the UN framework on the human right to drinking water, the document situated evidence of human rights violations during the water crisis in relation to issues of physical accessibility, availability in sufficient quantities, safety for consumption, and affordability. In particular, activists called attention to “arbitrary, undisclosed, and sudden” interruptions in water supply, increases in tariff, and the risk of water contamination from pressure reductions⁹⁷ in the network and water transfers from polluted sources (Alliance et al. 2015). The report also articulated shared arguments about the causes of the crisis, such as inadequate water resources management practices, overexploitation of resources, and lack of public participation and transparency in decision-making.

To strengthen these claims, the coalitions took advantage of independent events and contextual developments. For example, they grounded some of the arguments presented to the UN on a report released on August 11 by the *Tribunal de Contas do Estado de São Paulo* (TCE), a state court responsible for reviewing government spending. The TCE’s report articulated many of the criticisms activists had voiced since the beginning of the crisis in 2014, and also faulted the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources for the water crisis. The court argued that state authorities had neglected warnings of critical supply scenarios expressed in different reports and plans prepared by the government and river basin committees in the last 11 years. It also affirmed that measures such as more effective control of water losses, watershed protection, and investment in reuse could have been implemented previously in order to avoid the aggravation of supply conditions, especially in the event of extreme weather events (TCE 2015). Following its release, activists from both groups evoked the TCE report often to substantiate their arguments about the crisis.

By reuniting evidence collected throughout the crisis in a report to the United Nations, the Alliance and the Collective hoped to bring greater attention to the severity of the crisis in São Paulo. As Rafael Poço from the Alliance stated during the press conference in which the coalitions jointly presented the report to Heller, “despite our collective efforts, we have not yet managed to convey the size of the crisis we are living. Activating the UN is one way we can do

⁹⁶ Ironically, on the same day, the State Secretary for Sanitation and Water Resources received, on behalf of Geraldo Alekmin, an award from Brazil’s National Congress honoring governor’s management of the crisis. Alekmin was nominated for the award by a congressman from his party, PSDB.

⁹⁷ According to the report, pressure reduction may facilitate the entry of contaminants into the pipe network (Alliance et al. 2015).

that.”⁹⁸ Collaboration between the two coalitions in this process helps demonstrate how flexible mobilization dynamics mattered for strategic action around the crisis. Unlike in ‘translating and raising awareness,’ where articulating particular narratives was more central, taking advantage of alternative spaces for action required adjusting problem frames, building on convergent arguments, and leveraging opportune contextual developments.

Tapping into pockets of resistance

Another pathway for action activists from the Alliance and the Collective pursued jointly was a partnership with the MPSP to support ongoing investigations on the water supply crisis. Between February 2014 and August 2015, a group of prosecutors from the institution opened 48 public inquiries and nine civil cases related to the crisis (MPSP 2015). They concerned lack of transparency and access to information, interruptions in water supply, deterioration of water quality, and lack of due process in infrastructure projects.⁹⁹ A majority of the inquiries and cases were led by the GAEMA, a special group within the MPSP dedicated to environmental protection.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the group of prosecutors had served as a voice of dissent within the state government. They openly questioned state actions and pressed for greater transparency in crisis management.¹⁰⁰ As prosecutor Alexandra Martins, from GAEMA, stated in an interview, “we have yet to achieve several improvements in access to information so that the population may have greater knowledge about what is happening and how this impacts their

⁹⁸ G1 – Globo, “ONGs apontam violações de direitos humanos durante crise hídrica em SP.” Published October 13, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/10/ongs-apontam-violacoes-de-direitos-humanos-durante-crise-hidrica-em-sp.html>

⁹⁹ For a discussion on the role of the MPSP and legal interventions in water related conflicts in São Paulo, particularly during the supply crisis, cf. Haglund (2014).

¹⁰⁰ To offer an example, in March 2014, José Lutti, who at the time was the lead state prosecutor for the environment, received public attention for a lecture in which he heavily criticized the state government and SABESP for their management of water resources. He also criticized the state’s justice system for failing to take action in response to civil cases filed against public agencies and water and sanitation utilities. Lutti stated in the lecture, “I have filed several cases against municipalities, against the state government, against the utilities, but everything stops at the Judiciary. The courts turn a blind eye and the problems continue.” He further argued that “only by arresting a lot of people would we be able to solve the horrible management of water resources in our state.” See: Rede Brasil Atual, “‘Só prendendo muita gente’ para resolver a gestão da água em SP, diz promotor.” Published March 18, 2014. Accessed August 18, 2015. <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/politica/2014/03/so-prendendo-muita-gente-para-resolver-a-gestao-da-agua-em-sp-diz-promotor-1924.html>

lives.”¹⁰¹ I call this group of prosecutors a ‘pocket of institutional resistance.’ They represented one of the few institutional paths available for activists to advance claims about the crisis and exert pressure on state authorities. As Hamilton Rocha explained, “a few of the prosecutors have an interest in gathering denunciations related to the water crisis. They aren’t the majority within the MPSP but they have an interest. We think that this is a rift we can explore to denounce the state government” (Interview 7, July 2015).

To support investigations, the prosecutors decided to organize a two-day long public hearing to collect evidence. According to prosecutor Ricardo Castro, also from GAEMA, “we have noticed that São Paulo state’s government was ineffective in avoiding the crisis and has remained ineffective in how they have managed it. Now we need evidence of how this has affected the population.”¹⁰² The hearing was scheduled for August 20–21. The prosecutors welcomed the participation of any individuals or organizations wishing to provide information related to the topics under investigation. Each would have between three and five minutes to speak, provided that they had registered for the hearing.¹⁰³ The prosecutors also invited experts—mainly academics and water professionals—to speak at the beginning of each day with the purpose of providing general information on water resources management and supply in São Paulo as well as discussing the causes of the supply crisis.

The Alliance and the Collective coordinated efforts to support the MPSP in organizing the hearing. The prosecutors had reached out to a number of civil society organizations and movements who were organizing around the crisis to collaborate in its preparation and help mobilize participants (Interview 5, July 2015; Interview 12, August 2015). The Alliance performed a more central role in this process. Rafael Poço, who worked with Whately in the Alliance, had previously worked for the MPSP and served as an important liaison with the prosecutors (Interview 2, June 2015). Whately was also invited to present at the hearing as an expert.

Despite the Alliance’s lead role, the coalitions considered the collaboration with the MPSP a “joint action” and discussed with one another—through messages and in person meetings—ways

¹⁰¹ Rede Brasil Atual, “MP quer ouvir a população para instruir investigações sobre a falta de água em SP.” Published August 03, 2015. Accessed August 03, 2015. <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/cidadania/2015/08/mp-quer-ouvir-populacao-para-instruir-investigacoes-sobre-a-falta-de-agua-em-sp-3498.html>

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Participants could only register to speak once.

civil society could best contribute to the hearing (Interview 7, July 2015). Leaving the “institutional field” for the Alliance (Interview 12, August 2015), activists in the Collective took on the role of helping increase participation in the hearing by encouraging grassroots movements and groups in their large network to register to speak. The group worked actively towards this end by frequently advertising the hearing and contacting partners to participate.

It is worth noting that there was some hesitance among members of the Collective regarding whether the space provided by the MPSP would be truly participatory. In some of the group’s meetings I attended prior to the hearing, activists voiced concerns about the hearing being held on work days—which they argued could prevent broader participation—and in a somewhat small auditorium within the MPSP headquarters. Further, they worried that expert presentations would take away time and space from participation from the population. Nonetheless, the prevailing sentiment was optimistic. Américo Sampaio, who was at one of the meetings with the prosecutors, observed in our interview before the hearing, “I don’t trust the process a lot. Too many suits and ties, too much legal jargon. I’m not sure if it will result in anything but I felt there was a lot of openness on their part. To start, they invited us to the meeting, which I felt was already very different” (Interview 12, August 2015).

In multiple meetings, activists from the Collective discussed the importance of making sure that the process would guarantee enough space for popular participation. As Edson Silva noted, “we have to take advantage of the rift the MPSP has provided and help construct a hearing that will be truly democratic, where people can voice their complaints and opinions” (Interview 5, July 2015). This meant, as Silva suggested in one of the Collective’s meetings, mobilizing people to protest procedures if they felt the prosecutors were not listening enough to participants (Event 14, August 2015).

Activists from the Collective also strategized about the content of interventions. In particular, the group was concerned about covering a broad range of problems associated with the crisis—or navigating diffuse causality. The group agreed that different activists should address different issues. In a meeting on August 17, three days before the hearing, the Collective went through each of the topics the prosecutors were seeking to collect evidence on and discussed who might be the best person or organization to address each. For instance, Edson Silva volunteered to talk about whether measures taken by the state government were sufficient to mitigate the crisis.

They also suggested that Artigo 19 could cover lack of transparency and Greenpeace could address special contracts for large consumers. This proposed “division of labor” mirrored collaboration in the production of the UN report, where activists tried to leverage particular strength or knowledge in different areas.

Also on August 17, the Alliance for Water met with Vicente Andreu, the president of the National Water Agency (ANA) to discuss São Paulo’s supply crisis.¹⁰⁴ According to Andreu, he asked to meet with the coalition to encourage it to strengthen and amplify mobilization around the crisis (Interview 21, August 2015). He was concerned that the issue appeared to be waning from the public agenda despite a still critical situation. “In terms of the amount of water available, the situation is worse now in 2015 than it was in 2014. However, in terms of media coverage and public debate, it seems like the crisis is either inexistent now or not as bad as it was last year,” he stated (Interview 21, August 2015).¹⁰⁵ In the meeting with the Alliance, Andreu spoke about the tensions that had surfaced between ANA and São Paulo state’s government and SABESP. He added that the MPSP had become an important ally in questioning state and company’s actions during the crisis. While he did not seek any collaboration with the Alliance, he hoped that civil society organizations would help “make noise” during the hearing. “We need greater visibility; without visibility you won’t be able to do anything and we won’t be able to do anything,” he told members of the Alliance (Event 19, August 2015).

Civil society organizations, movements, and other individuals participated *en masse* in the MPSP’s hearing. During the two days, more than 100 people used the space to voice criticisms about crisis management and provide information for the investigations. In total, the prosecutors collected 80 depositions considered worthy of further inquiry. They were particularly interested in collecting more information about SABESP’s operations and decision-making.¹⁰⁶ Former company and government employees played an important role here as well. Those who spoke

¹⁰⁴ No members of the Collective for Water Struggle were present in the meeting between Vicente Andreu and the Alliance.

¹⁰⁵ Marussia Whately had, in fact, published an opinion article on newspaper Folha de São Paulo just ten days before the meeting with Andreu in which she made the same argument (Whately 2015). Titled “Let’s talk about the water crisis?”, the piece suggested that while the crisis had disappeared from public debate, reservoir conditions remained worrisome.¹⁰⁵ By August 2015, the Cantareira was operating slightly above the second quota of the dead storage. Whately warned in the article that the reservoir could reach 7% of its storage by November.

¹⁰⁶ SABESP and other state agencies were invited to the hearing but did not attend.

often received further questions and were asked whether they were willing to collaborate with investigations.

One deposition from the second day, for example, received special attention from the prosecutors. A former employee of DAEE shared that his responsibilities while working for the agency included responding to the requests for information about the crisis sent by MPSP prosecutors. He prepared detailed reports with the requested data, all of which were sent back to him for revisions. The guidelines from department heads were: ‘say that we cannot provide the information at this time due to lack of staff; ask for a deadline extension.’ Following the deposition, a prosecutor from the MPSP asked to speak. “I commend you for your courageous exercise of citizenship. We were aware of everything you just told us. We just didn’t have the proof,” he stated (Event 21, August 2015).

During several moments in the process, prosecutors emphasized the importance of the hearing not only for their investigations but for “deepening democratic participation and decision-making,” as federal prosecutor Sandra Kishi (MPF) observed (Event 21, August 2015). At the end of the hearing, GAEMA prosecutor Alexandra Martins stated that the MPSP would “catalyze all the different voices heard to support ongoing investigations” and suggested that the public hearing represented an “important step towards reversing the serious situation of crisis.”¹⁰⁷ While it remained unclear how far the prosecutors could take the investigations—and with what results—activists from both the Alliance and the Collective with whom I interacted during the hearing thought it had served as a meaningful and inclusive space for participation, and that it was important that civil society groups took advantage of it.

Re-claiming participatory spaces

The fourth main strategy through which the Collective and the Alliance sought to exert influence on processes related to the water crisis was by *re-claiming participatory spaces*. Earlier I recounted how activists from the Alliance used the space of a participatory council on municipal

¹⁰⁷ MPSP, “Especialistas debatem a segurança do sistema hídrico e saúde pública.” Published August 21, 2015. Accessed May 01, 2016. http://www.mpsp.mp.br/portal/page/portal/noticias/noticia?id_noticia=13869827&id_grupo=118

urban policies to mobilize São Paulo’s mayor to take greater action in relation to the supply crisis.¹⁰⁸ Here I focus on how activists—primarily from the Collective but in coordination with the Alliance—used the space of the Alto Tietê river basin committee (CBH-AT) to affect discussions on the renewal of SABESP’s right to use water from the Cantareira system.

SABESP’s concession for the Cantareira was due to expire in August 2014. Towards the end of 2013, before the effects of the drought began to be felt, the company requested a 30-year-long renewal.¹⁰⁹ However, the supply crisis led the National Water Agency (ANA) and the State Department of Water and Electrical Energy (DAEE) to postpone discussions around the proposal and extend the deadline for renewing the concession to October 31, 2015.¹¹⁰ During a forum on the supply crisis organized by state university Unicamp in March 2015, ANA’s president, Vicente Andreu, reflected on the terms of the new concession.¹¹¹ He argued it was necessary to add review mechanisms to guide decision-making in adverse conditions—unaccounted for in previous rules. Further, he suggested that it was important to reflect on the duration of the permit. “What we cannot do is to issue a concession for a long period of time, especially during this process of climate change that we are currently facing,” Andreu stated in the forum.

Debates on the renewal of SABESP’s concession for the Cantareira picked up again halfway through 2015, when representatives from the CBH-AT and CBH-PCJ¹¹² resumed meetings to discuss each committees’ opinions on the matter. Although ANA and DAEE retain responsibility for granting water rights permits, the CBHs are usually consulted on the terms of the concessions. Érika Martins, from the Collective, represented the municipality of São Bernardo do Campo in the CBH-AT and sat in the working group that was tasked with discussing the Cantareira’s concession. In meetings of the Collective, she often highlighted the importance of

¹⁰⁸ The Collective for Water Struggle had not been created yet at that point, though activists who later formed the Collective, such as Edson Silva, supported the letter to Mayor Haddad.

¹⁰⁹ The time frame is not unusual for water use rights. Longer concessions are designed to facilitate recovery of capital and financial costs incurred by operators.

¹¹⁰ O Globo, “ANA prorroga para 2015 o prazo de outorga do Sistema Cantareira.” Published July 11, 2014. Accessed May 03, 2016. <http://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/ana-prorroga-para-2015-prazo-de-outorga-do-sistema-cantareira-13217424>

¹¹¹ G1 – Globo, “Presidente da ANA defende abertura para revisão da outorga do Cantareira.” Published March 18, 2014. Accessed May 03, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sp/campinas-regiao/noticia/2015/03/presidente-da-ana-defende-abertura-para-revisao-da-outorga-do-cantareira.html>

¹¹² As noted previously, the PCJ river basin is under federal jurisdiction and contributes water to the Cantareira System, reason why ANA and the PCJ river basin committee (CBH-PCJ) have stakes in discussions about the Cantareira’s concession. I focus on discussions within the Alto Tietê committee (CBH-AT) because it was the one targeted by activists.

the negotiation for the future of water resources management in São Paulo and noted the absence of critical civil society voices from the process. She argued that there was room for the group to engage more directly with the space and shape discussions within it.

Indeed, several interviewees spoke of the need for strengthening civil society engagement in river basin committees and other water-related participatory institutions. Despite efforts in the 1990s to incorporate greater civil society participation in the state's nascent integrated water resources management system, many activists and professionals argued that participatory spaces such as the CBHs had either lost or never fully developed its capacity to serve as democratic decision-making spaces. Edson Silva summarized some of the perceived problems as follows:

Nowadays we have a weakened system for a few reasons. Because there is a fund [FEHIDRO] that hands over money to water-related projects, there are many organizations that have entered the system to obtain resources for their projects rather than to contribute to effective policies for water resources protection, which is the law's fundamental task. (...) Further, the meetings of the river basin committees have been undermined by the state government. I don't have anything against them but normally the public officials that attend the meetings are low-level bureaucrats with no real decision-making power. (Interview 5, July 2015)

An additional issue raised by Silva and other activists, especially from the Collective, concerned civil society representation in the committee.¹¹³ They argued that some civil society seats had been “coopted” by organizations connected with the state government and SABESP, and were used to defend the interests of state and company authorities (Interview 5, July 2015; Interview 7, July 2015). These organizations included, for example, the Association of Engineers from SABESP (AESabesp) and the Association of University Professionals from SABESP (APU).

Issues regarding the inclusiveness, representativeness, and effectiveness of river basin committees and other participatory institutions in Brazil are not novel (Abers and Keck 2013, 2009; Jacobi 2009; Pires 2011; among others). Specifically regarding the CBH-AT, for example, Abers and Keck (2009) discuss the trajectory of the committee and some of the legal, political, and bureaucratic challenges faced by state and non-state actors in building the institution. The authors relate that while state agencies in São Paulo had high technical capacity to support

¹¹³ In total, civil society holds 18 seats in the CBH-AT. These are distributed among universities, professional associations, industry, commerce, and non-profit organizations.

deliberation, they were also reluctant to devolve decision-making to stakeholders in the committee—often deciding not to bring issues to discussion. According to Abers and Keck, the progressive emptying of the CBH-AT’s agenda led many civil society groups to “focus energy elsewhere,” seeking alternative routes to influence water policies (Abers and Keck 2009, 301). The authors concluded that “to date, the Alto Tietê Basin Committee (...) has played a decidedly marginal role in water management” (Abers and Keck 2009, 300).

Despite these issues, activists from the Collective saw the discussion on the Cantareira’s concession as an entry point to ‘reclaim’ participation in the CBH-AT and influence water decision-making during the crisis. As Edson Silva argued, “I think our challenge is the following. Civil society cannot ask for greater participation if, when spaces for participation are created, we don’t use it as we should. So I think we have to re-evaluate our participation and re-engage in these participatory institutions” (Interview 5, July 2015). The opportunity to do so lay on a meeting of the CBH-AT to be held on August 13, where representatives were going to vote on an opinion concerning the terms of the new concession to SABESP. ANA awaited a manifestation from the committees by the next day. The meeting was open to participation from non-committee members—though they were not allowed to vote.

The day prior to the CBH-AT meeting, activists from the Collective met to discuss the concession as well as their participation. Rafael Poço, from the Alliance, also joined the preparatory meeting. This time the Collective had invited the Alliance to collaborate in the effort. Érika Martins facilitated the discussion. She explained how debates around the concession had evolved until that point and briefed the others on what was expected to happen in the meeting. According to her, the CBH-AT was actually supposed to have deliberated on the opinion in July, following a presentation by SABESP with information on crisis management and company plans. However, the committee considered SABESP’s presentation lacking—with disparate data and missing information—and requested a new presentation on August 13. The plan was for the committee to vote on the opinion immediately after the updated presentation from the company. SABESP had maintained its request for a 30-year concession.

Following Érika Martins’s explanation, the activists present in the Collective’s meeting discussed possible strategies for intervention. Initially, they considered the possibility of trying to stall the process and postpone the decision. When Rafael Poço wondered if that was a good

strategy considering that SABESP might also have interest in a postponement, Érika Martins replied: “No, they don’t for financial reasons. They want to get this settled as soon as possible because they are afraid it won’t rain” (Event 16, August 2015). However, the group eventually agreed that it was better to let the process continue. Érika Martins shared that members of the CBH-AT and CBH-PCJ had talked informally with ANA’s president, Vicente Andreu, who suggested that letting the process run was the best course. The idea was that after the committee’s presented their opinions, ANA and DAEE would prepare a proposal for the concession that could then serve to support further participation and debate. Rafael Poço added that prosecutors from the MPSP, whom he had met with recently, also considered the proposal ANA and DAEE were going to formulate important for their investigations.

Dropping the idea to stall negotiations, activists chose to focus on pressing the committee to support a 10-year as opposed to a 30-year concession to the company. The rationale invoked in the meeting was similar to the one Vicente Andreu articulated in his aforementioned statement during the Unicamp forum. Different activists argued that unstable supply conditions and uncertainty about future rainfall patterns should preclude a longer concession. In contrast to the strategy devised for the MPSP hearing, where activists hoped to target as many problems associated with the crisis as possible, the strategy outlined for the CBH-AT meeting was to emphasize these points during interventions. As Ricardo Guterman summarized in the preparatory meeting, “let’s take 3 or 4 things that everyone in the committee understands, hit on these issues, and then let it move forward to ANA and DAEE” (Event 16, August 2015).

On the day of the meeting, activists from the Collective took advantage of every opportunity to speak about the crisis and voice their opinion on the concession. Caio Ferraz, a film-maker ahead of *Volume Vivo* (a documentary about the crisis supported¹¹⁴ by the Alliance for Water) was at the meeting to film and participate in the discussion. Érika Martins was actively engaged in backstage negotiations, talking informally with different people in the room. The concession was considered a technical matter by several members in the committee, who were primarily concerned with water availability, rainfall and demand forecasts, and risk calculations (Event 10, July 2015). In the moments where activists chose to address problems considered peripheral to the issues at hand or attempted to blame the state government for the supply crisis, other

¹¹⁴ The Alliance collaborated in the production of the documentary and also provided financial support for its elaboration. Caio Ferraz worked closely with Marussia Whately in the process.

participants in the committee responded that the meeting was not the space to discuss those problems and that the committee sought to maintain a non-partisan tone. The responses served as a reminder of the need to tailor interventions and focus on the terms of the concession.

At the end of the meeting, the committee approved an opinion recommending a 10-year concession to SABESP. The result was considered a victory—albeit small—for mobilization. The sentiment, especially among activists from the Collective, was that their interventions had generated strong pressure and strengthened the voices of representatives from the CBH-AT who supported a shorter-term concession. In a note published on the coalition’s account on Facebook on August 15, the Collective framed the process as follows: “SABESP and the state government have been defeated by municipalities and by civil society who worked together to limit the new concession for the Cantareira system to 10 years as opposed to the 30 years proposed by Alckmin’s government.”

In a subsequent meeting of the Collective, members of the group reflected on their participation in the CBH-AT meeting. Érika Martins celebrated the activists’ success in helping stop the 30-year proposal but alerted the Collective that, in the future, it was important for the group to be less ideological and more pragmatic in those spaces in order to build broader support (Event 20, August 2015). She was referring to the moments in which activists had attempted to use their interventions to voice criticisms of the government and SABESP. The process also served to reinforce activists’ view that it was important to re-claim participatory institutions as spaces for action. As Edson Silva noted in the meeting, “those who doubted the importance of participating in the committee now know how important it is” (Event 20, August 2015).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey writes that “any spontaneous alternative visionary moment is fleeting; if it is not seized at the flood, it will surely pass” (Harvey 2012, xvii). Applied to São Paulo’s case, Harvey’s words might as well have read: if not seized at the drought, the moment will surely pass. Activists from both the Alliance and the Collective were well aware of the uncertainty surrounding the impact of their initiatives. While they continued to look for

opportunities to advance their claims, they also joked about the effect rain might have on their mobilization efforts.

At the end of the 2015, rainfall did return. Between October 2015 and March 2016, rain patterns in São Paulo's metropolitan region resumed previously normal averages, helping with reservoir recovery. In fact, it rained so much the city had problems with flooding. In early March 2016, State governor Geraldo Alckmin officially announced the end of the water supply crisis. "The water issue has been resolved," he stated in an interview.¹¹⁵ At that point, reservoir levels in the Cantareira System had reached 58% (including the dead storage). According to the governor, even if the city were to face another drought, there would be no supply availability problems in the future. "Starting next year we will have a great infrastructure in São Paulo. The state and the metropolitan region will be well prepared for changes in climate," Alckmin affirmed.¹¹⁶

During my fieldwork in São Paulo, I had asked activists from both the Alliance and the Collective what would happen to mobilization if rainfall returned. Most thought it would lose strength. For example, Glauco Kimura from WWF said, "I think the topic will tend to be forgotten again. That's why I have been putting pressure on the Alliance for us to take action quickly, this year. If rainfall returns and the Cantareira begins to fill up again, forget about it" (Interview 19, August 2015). Marussia Whately was uncertain. She suggested that if the crisis ended, the Alliance would likely eventually dismantle (Interview 11, July 2015). Members of the Collective suggested it would be harder to galvanize support for their efforts but said they would continue struggling. The group's strategy was to turn their attention to sanitation access and water quality issues—persisting problems (Interview 5, July 2015; Interview 7, July 2015).

However, as of this writing, the coalitions' struggle to advance their claims and counter official government narratives has continued. Following Alckmin's announcement of the end of the crisis, both the Alliance and the Collective released public statements in which they considered the declaration premature and argued that São Paulo's water issues were far from over. The Alliance's statement, for example, read:

¹¹⁵ G1 – Globo, "A questão da água está resolvida', diz Alckmin sobre crise hídrica em SP." Published March 07, 2016. Accessed May 10, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/03/questao-da-agua-esta-resolvida-diz-alckmin-sobre-crise-hidrica-em-sp.html>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

It is true that rainfall over the summer has contributed to reservoir recovery but we remain far from ‘safe levels.’ In the same period in 2013, the Cantareira was at 57%, today it is at 30% of its usable volume, without considering the dead storage. (...) The recent drought has evidenced serious problems with water resources management and the measures taken thus far advance little in terms of confronting them. (...) The Alliance for Water defends that successfully overcoming the crisis depends on greater debate and greater engagement from civil society and from governments around a ‘new culture of care around water.’¹¹⁷

In its statement, the Collective also denied that the crisis had ended and suggested that Alckmin’s declaration was “alienated from reality.”¹¹⁸ The group mentioned that many households in the periphery of São Paulo still suffered with water shortages¹¹⁹ and argued that the deeper causes of the crisis had yet to be addressed by the government. “No measures taken have changed [water resources management] practices that existed prior to the drought,” the group stated.

The Alliance and the Collective have since engaged in campaigns and initiatives to promote the message that São Paulo’s supply issues persist. For example, the Alliance for Water has launched a campaign and petition decrying the end of the bonus and penalty programs designed to encourage lower consumption among city residents. SABESP ended the programs in April arguing stronger measures to incentivize conservation were no longer necessary. However, activists from the Alliance and the Collective criticized the decision claiming that it was motivated purely by financial reasons (to increase SABESP’s revenues) and that it discouraged sustained changes in consumption patterns among the population.

There are no clear-cut answers regarding how effective social mobilization around water issues in São Paulo has been thus far. In fact, the mobilization process around the supply crisis in the region raises broader questions about what constitutes successful collective action—particularly in the face of impermeable political and institutional environments. Are movements only

¹¹⁷ Alliance for Water, “Nota sobre a ‘superação da crise hídrica em São Paulo’ anunciada por Geraldo Alckmin.” Published March 08, 2016. Accessed May 03, 2016. <http://saladecrise.com.br/2016/03/08/nota-sobre-a-superacao-da-crise-hidrica-em-sao-paulo-anunciada-por-geraldo-alckmin/>

¹¹⁸ Collective for Water Struggle, “Nota do Coletivo de Luta pela Água – A crise acabou?” Published on March 08 on the group’s Facebook page. Accessed May 03, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Following Alckmin’s statement about the end of the crisis, different media outlets published articles noting that São Paulo residents still suffered with water shortages due to pressure reductions in the distribution network. See, for example, G1 – Globo, “Após Alckmin anunciar fim da crise, moradores relatam falta de água.” Published March 08, 2016. Accessed May 10, 2016. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/03/apos-alckmin-anunciar-fim-da-crise-moradores-relatam-falta-de-agua.html>

effective when they are able to influence public opinion, policy-making, and institutional change in measurable ways? Or, at a more fundamental level, is there value in social mobilization efforts that produce counter-narratives, expand the scope of public debates about pressing issues, and point to new pathways for action—regardless of whether policies or public opinion are substantially changed in the process?

It is hard to evaluate the extent to which the Alliance and the Collective have been able to broadly affect public opinion about the crisis and water issues in São Paulo. The more likely answer is that they have influenced it little. This may reflect faults on the coalitions' part but also the inherent challenges involved in attempting to engage a diverse population of millions of residents. As aforementioned, it is possible that both groups could have reached broader publics if they had collaborated in their strategies to raise awareness and translate the crisis to others. Throughout the crisis the Alliance and the Collective both struggled to galvanize broader popular mobilization and sustain engagement from groups and organizations in their networks. To my knowledge, for example, the Collective was not able to organize the smaller, decentralized water collectives that it had intended to create at origin. Limited organizational resources were an important barrier in this case.

However, the courses and webapps designed by the groups appeared to achieve their intended immediate goals. They helped to call attention to issues the state government and SABESP either denied or dismissed, as well as bring different movements, community groups, and organizations into conversations about the supply crisis and water resources management in São Paulo. The webapps exposing water shortages also received broad coverage in mainstream and alternative media outlets. Whether these efforts helped propagate a “new culture of care around water” or promote critical political thinking, I cannot say. However, they helped counter official narratives about the crisis that would have otherwise remained largely unchallenged.

It is also unclear whether the “structural” reforms the groups sought in water resources management policies will be implemented any time soon. In my interview with the state's Coordinator for Sanitation, Américo Sampaio, he argued that the State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources was reviewing its policies and shifting focus to demand-side management measures to increase water resilience (Interview 8, July 2015). These included investments in more efficient toilets and hydraulic equipment, infrastructure repairs to reduce losses in the

distribution network, and watershed conservation programs. However, Sampaio argued that carrying these plans forward would require time and more resources (Interview 8, July 2015). Thus far, the state government has yet to announce any of the investments and policies Sampaio mentioned.

Moreover, despite Alckmin's aforementioned statement that the region would be prepared for adverse weather events in the future, there is reason to be skeptical. In its 2015 report to the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, SABESP noted the financial risks associated with climate change and extreme weather conditions but suggested that if it were to dedicate capital expenditures to address them, other strategic investments could be compromised. The company also stated it had "not provisioned any funds for climate change events as current technology and scientific understandings of climate change make it difficult to predict potential expenses and liabilities."¹²⁰

Despite the uncertain impacts of their collective action, I argue mobilization by the Alliance and the Collective has not been in vain. The water supply crisis has served to awaken dormant civil society forces that had been relatively removed from water decision-making in the state. The Alliance reconnected environmental NGOs and other organizations around a water agenda. The Collective brought water issues into the broader social transformation agendas of grassroots groups and social movements in São Paulo. As Edson Silva highlighted, "an important characteristic of the Collective is that it is the first space that was able to reunite grassroots movements, which generally only discuss their own topics, to discuss the water issue. We have managed to show that without water, you don't have decent housing, decent sanitation" (Interview 5, July 2015).

Further, taken together, the efforts of the Alliance and the Collective contributed to deepening democratic participation in water-related processes during the supply crisis. Both coalitions served to amplify the voices of diverse civil society groups, translate water issues to different publics, and increase access to information about the crisis. Their action strategies also signaled avenues for greater civil society engagement in water governance in São Paulo. The groups collaborated effectively to produce the report to the United Nations, to support ongoing

¹²⁰ United States Securities and Exchange Commission. 2015. Form 20-F. Annual Report Pursuant to Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2015. Commission file number 001-31317. Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo (SABESP). Page 21.

investigations about the crisis, and to influence decision-making on the Cantareira's concession within the Alto-Tietê river basin committee. Coordinated action in these instances was important for leveraging specific organizational strengths and networks. It also helped enhance the legitimacy and representativeness of civil society participation, since the coalitions encompassed diverse bases of support. Granted, the tangible outcomes of these processes are also uncertain. However, neither coalition could control where they might lead. The investigations from the MPSP are still ongoing. Regarding the Cantareira's water rights, ANA and DAEE agreed in October 2015 to postpone once more a decision on the new terms of the concession, extending the current one until May 2017. The agencies argued that the opinions from the river basin committees were taken into consideration, but also cited the need to reach a consensus between their own proposals (ANA's and DAEE's) before the process could move forward.

Most importantly, mobilization around São Paulo's water crisis serves to show that collaboration among organizationally and ideologically distinct groups may strengthen, as opposed to weaken, collective action. Through their willingness to adjust particular problem frames and maintain fluid relationships with one another, the Alliance and the Collective were able to look and reach beyond their own politics to overcome mobilization challenges and either carve or take advantage of spaces for participation during the crisis. However, flexibility in action strategies and interactions does not mean that groups have to necessarily sacrifice particular values or organizational goals that justify their existence as independent collectives. As the analysis of convergence and divergence in mobilization dynamics around São Paulo's supply crisis suggests, groups can cooperate and still create autonomous spaces for advancing specific causes and organizational projects.

Reflecting on what this means for the future of civil society engagement with water issues in São Paulo, it may be the case that the coalitions will eventually dissolve or face constraints that prevent continued flexibility and collaboration. However, it may also be the case that this process has laid the foundations for the coalitions (or their member organizations) to reinvent their participation in water politics and governance, as well as their relationships with one another. These reinvented engagements can potentially facilitate the (re-)construction of more collaborative, inclusive, and participatory forms of decision-making in water resources management in the future. As civil society activists in Brazil often say: a luta continua (the struggle continues).

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

1. Pedro Jacobi, Professor, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, June 23, 2015.
2. Marussia Whately, Coordinator, Alliance for Water, São Paulo, June 24, 2015.
3. Stela Goldenstein, NGO leader, Associação Águas Claras do Rio Pinheiros (Alliance for Water), São Paulo, July 13, 2015.
4. Maurício Broinizi Pereira, NGO leader, Rede Nossa São Paulo (Alliance for Water / Collective for Water Struggle), São Paulo, July 15, 2015.
5. Edson Aparecido da Silva, Technical advisor / Activist, Federação Nacional dos Urbanitários – FNU (Collective for Water Struggle), São Paulo, July 21, 2015.
6. Marzeni Pereira, Former SABESP employee / Activist, "Water, Yes! Profit, No", São Paulo, July 21, 2015.
7. Hamilton Rocha, Activist, Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, July 23, 2015.
8. Américo de Oliveira Sampaio, State government official, State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources, São Paulo, July 28, 2015.
9. Anonymous interview, Environmental activist, São Paulo, July 28, 2015.
10. Carlos Thadeu, NGO staffer, Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor – IDEC (Alliance for Water), São Paulo, July 29, 2015.
11. Marussia Whately, Coordinator, Alliance for Water, São Paulo, July 31, 2015.
12. Américo Sampaio, NGO staffer / Activist, Rede Nossa São Paulo (Collective for Water Struggle), São Paulo, August 03, 2015.
13. Rosa Maria Mancini, State government official, State Secretariat of the Environment, São Paulo, August 04, 2015.
14. Devanir Garcia dos Santos, Federal government official, National Water Agency, Brasília, August 07, 2015.
15. Anonymous interview, Federal government official, Brasília, August 07, 2015.
16. Monica Porto, State government official, State Secretariat of Sanitation and Water Resources, São Paulo, August 10, 2015.

17. José Roberto Kachel dos Santos, Former SABESP employee / Professor, Mogi das Cruzes, August 15, 2015.
18. André Villas-Bôas, NGO leader, Instituto Socioambiental – ISA (Alliance for Water), São Paulo, August 13, 2015.
19. Glauco Kimura, NGO staffer, WWF Brazil (Alliance for Water), Skype interview, São Paulo, August 14, 2015.
20. Gabriel Gonçalves, Activist, Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragem – MAB (Collective for Water Struggle), São Paulo, August 17, 2015.
21. Vicente Andreu, Federal government official, National Water Agency, phone interview, São Paulo, August 15, 2015.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF EVENTS AND MEETINGS ATTENDED

1. Seminar "The challenges of rainwater harvesting in large urban centers" (*Os desafios da captação de água de chuva nos grandes centros urbanos*), organized by São Paulo City Councillor Gilberto Natalini and Acqualimp, São Paulo, June 11, 2015.
2. Rainwater Cistern Workshop (*Oficina de cisterna*), organized by Movimento Cisterna Já and Permacultores Urbanos, São Paulo, June 13, 2015.
3. Open meeting of the Alliance for Water, São Paulo, June 18, 2015.
4. Workshop "Contributions to water supply in the RMSP" (*Subsídios para o suprimento de água na RMSP*), organized by Politécnica-USP (University of São Paulo), São Paulo, June 24, 2015.
5. Plenary, "The water supply crisis" (*Plenária – A crise do abastecimento*) organized by the collective "Fight for the Water" ("Lute pela Água"), São Paulo, July 03, 2015.
6. Leadership training course about the water crisis (Curso de Formação do Coletivo de Luta pela Água), organized by the Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, July 18, 2015.
7. Meeting to Build a United Front for Water Struggle – "Towards Unit" (*Reunião de Construção da Frente Única de Luta pela Água – "Rumo à Unidade"*), organized by the collective "Fight for the Water" ("Lute pela Água"), São Paulo, July 18, 2015.
8. Round table discussion, "Designing for the Water Crisis" (*Projetando para a crise hídrica*), N SP 2015 Conference, São Paulo, July 21, 2015.
9. Workshop "Basic sanitation – Solutions for the Water Crisis in São Paulo state" (*Saneamento básico – Soluções para a Crise Hídrica no Estado de São Paulo*), organized by Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (FIESP), São Paulo, July 22, 2015.
10. 4th Meeting of the Working Group on the Cantareira Concession (*4ª Reunião do GT de Outorga do Cantareira*), CBH-AT, São Paulo, July 23, 2015.
11. Meeting of the Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, July 29, 2015.
12. Meeting of the collective "Water, Yes! Profit, No!" ("Água, Sim! Lucro, Não!"), São Paulo, August 03, 2015.

13. Panel, "The Water Crisis: California's experience and lessons for other regions of the planet" (*A Crise da Água: Experiência da Califórnia e Possíveis Lições para outras regiões do planeta*), organized by GO Associados, Fenasan 2015, São Paulo, August 04, 2015.
14. Meeting of the Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, August 05, 2015.
15. Thematic Public Hearing - II Zoning Law (*Audiência Temática – II Lei de Zoneamento*), Câmara de Vereadores de SP, São Paulo, August 10, 2015.
16. Meeting of the Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, August 12, 2015.
17. 6th Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of CBH-AT of 2015 (*6ª Reunião Plenária Extraordinária do CBH-AT de 2015*), CBH-AT, São Paulo, August 13, 2015.
18. Public lesson (*Aula pública*), organized by Alliance for Water, São Paulo, August 14, 2015.
19. Meeting between Alliance for Water and President of the National Water Agency, São Paulo, August 17, 2015.
20. Meeting of the Collective for Water Struggle, São Paulo, August 17, 2015.
21. Public Hearing on São Paulo's Water Crisis (*Audiência Pública sobre a Crise Hídrica em São Paulo*), organized by the MPSP (State Public Prosecutors' Office), São Paulo, August 20 and 21, 2015.

APPENDIX 3

ALLIANCE FOR WATER

LIST OF MEMBERS

(August 2015)

Instituto Socioambiental	Akatu
350.org	Sibite
Advogados Ativistas + AA Central de Mídia Ativista	ABES - Associação Brasileira de Engenharia Sanitária e Ambiental
Instituto Alana	Matilha Cultural
Associação Águas Claras do Rio Pinheiros	Rede Minha Sampa
Fundación Avina	Núcleo Digital
Associação Bem-Te-Vi Diversidade	Proteste – Associação de Consumidores
Movimento Cisterna Já	De Olho Nos Mananciais
Cidade Democrática	Rede Nossa São Paulo
Coletivo Curupira	EarthCode (Rede Novos Parques)
A Conta d'Água	Sala Crisantepo
Sociedade Ecológica Amigos de Embu – SEAE	Movimento Urbano De Agroecologia – MUDA
Fazenda Serrinha	SOS Mata Atlântica
Fluxo	The Nature Conservancy
Greenpeace Brasil	Virada Sustentável
Grupo Permacultores	Volume Vivo
InfoAmazonia	World Resources Institute
Iniciativa Verde	WWF Brasil
Instituto Democracia e Sustentabilidade	ZNnaLinha
Instituto Jatobás	Mapas Coletivos
Instituto 5 Elementos	Artigo 19
Espaço Formação Assessoria e Documentação	CENPEC - Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas em Educação e Ação Comunitária
Instituto Até	Conselho Regional de Psicologia
Rios e Ruas	CONNECTAS
Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor	Existe Água em SP
IPÊ - Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas	Fundação Tide Setubal
Itu Vai Parar	Instituto Ethos
Juntos! Por Outro Futuro	Nascentes SP
Instituto Kairós - Ética e Atuação Responsável	Ocupe e Abrace
Grupo de Institutos, Fundações e Empresas (GIFE)	Instituto Auá de Empreendedorismo Ambiental

APPENDIX 4

COLLECTIVE FOR WATER STRUGGLE LAUNCHING MANIFEST
SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS
(January 2015)

AMAPAR Associação dos Moradores Amigos do Parque Previdência
APEOESP Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo
APROPUCC Associação dos Professores da PUCCampinas
APSMNSP Articulação Popular e Sindical de Mulheres Negras de São Paulo
Articulação Antinuclear Brasileira
ASSEMAE Associação Nacional dos Serviços Municipais de Saneamento
Associação Civil Sociedade Alternativa
Associação da Casa da Cidade
Associação Grêmio Vila Sonia
Associação Movimento Paulo Jackson Ética, Justiça, Cidadania (Bahia)
ASTAE Associação de Saúde, Trabalho, Meio Ambiente e Trabalho
Centro Acadêmico XI de Agosto
Centro Cultural Social Y Del Medio Ambiente Ceibo Chile
Centro de Estudos da Mídia Alternativa Barão de Itararé
Centro Gaspar Garcia de Direitos Humanos
CMP – Central de Movimentos Populares
CNDAV Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y la Vida Uruguay
Coletivo Canto Geral
Comissão Paroquial de Meio Ambiente (CaetéBa)
Comitê Nacional em Defesa dos Territórios Frente à Mineração (Brasil)
COMULHER Comunicação Mulher
CONAM Confederação Nacional das Associações de Moradores
CONEN Coordenação Nacional de Entidades Negras/ Consulta Popular
CONTAGUAS: Confederacion de Trabajadores del Agua, Saneamiento y Ambiente de las Americas.
CUT – Central Única dos Trabalhadores – SP
FACESP Federação das Associações Comunitárias do Estado de São Paulo
FASE – Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional
FENTAP: Federacion Nacional de Trabajadores del agua Potable y Alcantarillado del Peru.
FFOSE Federacion de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado Uruguay
FISENGE Federação Interestadual de Sindicatos de Engenheiros

FLM – Frente de Luta pela Moradia
FNSA – Frente Nacional pelo Saneamento Ambiental
FNU – Federação Nacional dos Urbanitários
Fórum Mudanças Climáticas e Justiça Social
Fórum Paulista de Participação Popular
Frente por Uma Nova Política Energética (Brasil)
FTIUESP – Fed. dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Urbanas do Estado de São Paulo
Instituto André Voisin, Porto Alegre/RS
Instituto Biguá Eco Estudantil
Instituto Macuco
ISP – Internacional de Serviços Públicos
Levante Popular da Juventude
Liga Brasileira de Lesbicas LBLSP
MAB – Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens
Marcha Mundial das Mulheres
MNDH/SP Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos São Paulo
MOGAVE Associação Movimento Garça Vermelha
Movimento Resgate Cambui
MST movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem terra
Observatório da Mulher
Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental (Brasil)
Rede Butantã de Entidades e Forças Sociais
Rede Mulher e Mídia
Rede Paulista de Agendas 21
Rede WATERLATGOBACIT
RedVida
REF Rede economia e feminismo
SINDAE Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) em Água e Esgoto de Campinas
SINDAE Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Água, Esgoto e Meio Ambiente no Estado da Bahia
SINDAEL Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) em Água e Esgoto de Londrina e Região
SINDAEMA Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Água, Esgoto e Meio Ambiente do Estado do Espírito Santo
SINDAEN Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) nas empresas de Água, Esgoto e Saneamento de Maringá e Região Noroeste do Paraná
SINDIÁGUA/RS Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) em Água e Esgoto do Estado do RGS
SINDIÁGUAPB – Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) em Água e Esgoto do Estado da Paraíba
Sindicato dos Advogados de São Paulo
Sindicato dos Bancários de São Paulo, Osasco e Região
SINDSERV Sindicato dos Servidores Públicos Municipais de Santos
SINERGIA CUT Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Energéticos do Estado de São Paulo

SINTAEMA Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) em Água, Esgoto e Meio Ambiente do Estado de São Paulo
SINTRAPP – Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) no Serviço Público Municipal de Presidente Prudente e Região
SOF Sempreviva organização feminista
STIU PA Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários do Pará
STIUAC Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários do Acre
STIUAL Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários de Alagoas
STIUAM Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários do Amazonas
STIUAP Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários do Amapá
STIUEG GO Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários do Estado de Goiás
STIUPB Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários da Paraíba
STIURO Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários de Rondônia
STIURR Sindicato dos Trabalhadores (as) Urbanitários de Roraima
Tecele Mulher Assessoria e Pesquisa no Âmbito dos Direitos da Mulher
UMM União dos Movimentos de Moradia
UNEGRO União de Negros pela Igualdade
UNMP União Nacional por Moradia Popular