

EDITORIAL

In Brazil in 2013 the month of June was dominated by the demonstrations that took place in most capital cities and other large towns of the country. What began as protests against a rise in public transport fares in São Paulo, led by the *Passe Livre* [Free Pass] movement, transformed into an intense debate on expectations of the standard of living in Brazil. A combination of its media character, the use of social networks to disseminate mobilization and the use of alternative media, together with the lack of a single or centralized leadership gave the protests a distinct character when compared to previous demonstrations.

In addition to recognizing its specificities, for a number of analysts interpreting June's protests meant identifying the motives behind them, one of which was the reduction in spaces for dialogue between the Government, in its different jurisdictions, and civil society.

From an environmental perspective this is reflected by the weakening of environmental and water resources committees, particularly during the last two years. To cite two significant examples: first, in 2012 the powers of the São Paulo State Council on the Environment (CONSEMA) were reduced by a decree issued by Governor Geraldo Alckmin which limited the decision-making powers of this institution. The decree changed the make-up of the Council and it also took away its powers to assess environmental impact reports; second, in the federal sphere, the National Council for Water Resources only met on one occasion in 2013 at the bequest of the Minister for the Environment, Isabela Teixeira. It is worth recalling that these meetings were occurring on average five times per year over the last five years. These councils were created as part of a system of participative institutions, established in law. Though they were often considered to be inefficient and expensive, they consolidated democratic practices and the participation of different sectors of society in discussing environmental issues.

However, was the reduction in spaces for dialogue and negotiation one of the factors which motivated the majority of protesters? Perhaps this was not the central issue. The protests brought to the fore a critique of traditional forms of politics, above all political parties. Perhaps within this there is also a criticism - and indeed even a lack of recognition - of institutional instruments of participation in public management? In effect, the demands of the protestors were not aimed at achieving more participation within the existing model in order to present and negotiate their agendas. Rather, their objective was to show the direction the State should take in focusing its actions; regardless of whether advances or the possibility of bringing about changes in the system were recognized.

In a way, it is interesting to note that the environmental agenda was not evident in the protests. Specific social movements and NGOs with a history of action in the social and environmental fields joined the protests. However, the environmental question was

hardly touched on in the protests; they were clearly aimed at issues of standards of living, and in this case, the quality of urban life, secondary issues to the environmental movement.

In this context, it is worth reflecting both on the existing environmental management system and on the importance and relevance of environmental questions in face of the diffuse themes and new actors evident in June's protests.

The motives behind the protests indicate that without strengthening dialogue and negotiation between different sectors of civil society and the State, there will be increased discontent which, in the worst scenario, may compromise the participative institutions which have been created since the start of the democratic process in Brazil. The demonstrations also point to the need to review the management practices of government, across its different jurisdictions.

Another challenge was put on the table: the protests did not deny the role of the State, but demanded a more efficient State and therefore more efficient public management. At the same time, it was clear that the protestors believed that their contribution was to air publicly their ideas and demands, and in this way, acquire legitimacy. This strategy to influence the actions of the State reflects, on the one hand, a frustration with the current political system which does not modify itself, maintaining the same political practices of exchanging favors, reinforcing privilege structurally and encouraging disrespect for the law. On the other hand, the protests encompass a general distrust together with a lack of recognition for institutions and the way they are run as spaces for resulting negotiations. The risk apparent in this situation is a loss of confidence in participative systems which may lead to confrontations without institutional mediation.

From the protests we can perceive a change in relation to social actors and how they are mobilized. New network mechanisms and tools for collective action which bring people together in a virtual arena and subsequently in public spaces are evident. However, channels of dialogue and negotiation remain obscure. With this in mind we ask what the outcome will be of these protests and what impact they will have on practices of environmental governance. These are questions to be addressed in future studies in the hope that they will continue to contribute to an understanding of the multiple interfaces which make up the socio-environmental area.

Similar to June's protests, studies on the relations between the environment and society bring into focus criticisms and demands concerning consolidated institutional arrangements and the accentuation of expectations in relation to the outcomes of public policies which should be efficiently implemented. In this issue of E&S, which consists of seven articles and two reviews, topics such as climate change, management of conservation areas and agricultural practices, lead us to reflect on the relations between mechanisms established in law and public policies, and how these are applied. The consequences of new environmental dynamics and their impacts on society are analyzed.

Volume 16-3 of this E&S journal starts with two articles which address themes linked to agriculture, exposing different understandings of the experiences and perceptions of those who work in this area in terms of agricultural technology and its impact on the environment. In the article *What do smallholder farmers in Argentina think about genetically modified crops?* by Luisa Massarani, Carmelo Polino, Carina Cortassa, Maria Eugenia Fazio

and Ana María Vara, the analysis focuses on Argentinean smallholders and their position in relation to genetically modified (GM) crops. This study demonstrates how the decisions of these smallholders are profit-driven and how easy it is to adopt transgenic crops practices. However, the authors emphasize the fact that these smallholders are not aware of the possible implications of GM crops on their health and the environment, indicating that these issues are not part of their rationale. Along similar lines the article entitled *Rural work, health and the environment: narratives of flower growers in face of social and environmental risks*, by Marina Favrim Gasparini and Carlos Machado de Freitas, discusses the perception of the risk of agricultural activities through the lens of flower producers. The authors argue that the economic benefits of this crop justify choosing this activity and they relate a discourse which minimizes, or denies, the negative impact the use of agrochemicals in agricultural practices has on the environment and human health. This discussion contributes to an understanding of how risk is perceived. It is deconstructed and frequently denied by the actors in their productive practices.

A further two articles in this issue address the topic of risk from the perspective of natural disasters and resilience, and also the adoption of the Precautionary Principle in analyses of impacts on human health. In the article *Impacts of natural disasters on environmental and socio-economic systems: what makes the difference?* the authors Herlander Mata-Lima, Andreilcy Alvino-Borba, Adilson Pinheiro, Abel Mata-Lima and José Antônio Almeida argue that social capital is the key factor in reducing the vulnerability of communities affected by natural disasters. The authors emphasize that improvements in teaching, poverty reduction policies and work opportunities play an important role in increasing the resilience of communities faced with natural disasters.

The article *The Precautionary Principle in Brazil after Rio-92: environmental impact and human health* by Guilherme Farias Cunha, Catia Regina Carvalho Pinto, Sergio Roberto Martins and Armando Borges de Castilhos Jr, discusses the importance of applying the Principle of Precaution in studies on health impacts in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). The authors argue that this practice allows decision makers to make considered and qualified evaluations of the risk of the occurrence of new diseases in an environment changed by the implementation of projects which cause environmental impacts.

The three articles which close this issue of E&S also seek to evaluate existing institutional mechanisms which aim to achieve greater efficiency in the application of environmental policies. The article *The Inclusion of Aviation in the European Union Carbon Emissions Trading Scheme* by Veronica Korber Gonçalves analyzes the disputes resulting from the imposition of legal obligations on airline companies from countries which are not members of European Union. The author argues that on the one hand this decision reflects a greater commitment to climate change issues on the part of the European Union while revealing resistance by countries which are less proactive. On the other hand, she shows how commitments taken on by a particular region have an impact which supersedes its political borders, and are capable of leading to a scenario of legal disputes caused by the lack of a specific agreement on this issue.

The article *Conservation policies and control of habitat fragmentation in the Brazilian Cerrado biome* by Roseli Ganem, José Augusto Drummond and José Luiz de Andrade

Franco discusses conservation strategies concerning the biodiversity of the Cerrado and analyzes the process of the fragmentation of its *habitats*. By analyzing the reality of the existing conservation units in this biome, the authors argue that the lack of collaboration between projects being developed in the same territory results in a waste of resources and ineffective public policies. The authors suggest that the Cerrado becomes the object of a specific conservation policy which integrates different sectors of society and public authorities, thus encouraging the connectivity of the remaining native vegetation of this biome.

Finally, the article *Developing an Environmental Arena for the Conservation of Marine Biodiversity in Chile*, written by Francisco Araos and Lucia da Costa Ferreira, addresses the importance of the local sphere in establishing institutional arrangements aimed at the conservation of marine biodiversity, with repercussions on a national scale. The authors make a historical analysis of the institutions from the perspective of the concept of the environmental arena, in order to identify how new forms of de-centralized political action have led to the development of a policy which makes the co-existence of marine conservation and alternatives of economic development possible.

This issue also includes two reviews. The first, by Manuela Kirschner do Amaral, analyzes the contributions of the book *Sistema internacional de hegemonia conservadora: governança global e democracia na era da crise climática* [International System of conservative hegemony and paralysis of global climate change governance] by Eduardo Viola, Matías Franchini and Thaís Lemos. The book discusses the tension between the interdependence of national states in dealing with climate change issues and their lack of cooperation, as they prioritize sovereignty over global environmental issues. The review by Alan Ainer Boccato-Franco looks at the book *Decrescimento em dez perguntas: perspectivas para o debate social, econômico e ambiental* [Ten Questions on Degrowth: conceptual basis for a social, economic and environmental discussion]. The concept of degrowth is presented as an alternative to the discussion on sustainability, providing the debate with a new understanding of how to transform relations between society and the environment.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

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