

Governance and Socio-Environmental Conflicts in Santa Elena: The Lack of Coordination amongst the different Stakeholders

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Abstract

This article contributes to the elucidation of the roots of conflicts through two perspectives of territorial configuration: the management of public institutions and the management of public institutions and community organizations in Zapotal, Manantial de Guangala and Cerezal community organizations in Zapotal, Manantial de Guangala and Cerezal Bellavista. The objective is to examine the socio-environmental conflicts derived from the implementation of the Integral Project for Sustainable Agricultural, Environmental and Social Development of Ecuador (PIDASSE). In addition, it is evaluated whether the presence of heterogeneity and inequalities in this territory could influence the differentiated formulation and implementation of public policy, adapted to its territorial context. The text concludes that the fragmentation of the community organizational structure and the absence of participatory mechanisms had an impact on the formulation and implementation of public policy, adapted to its territorial context.

Keywords: *Santa Elena, governance, public policy, territorialization, territorial development, conflicts, inter-institutional territorial development, conflicts, inter-institutional coordination.*

1 Introduction

In early 2012, the Comprehensive Project for Agricultural, Environmental and Social Development in a Sustainable Way of Ecuador, known as PIDAASSE, was designed with the objective of implementing comprehensive agricultural production systems with modern irrigation technologies in 19 communes of Santa Elena (PIDAASSE, 2017). This implementation has lasted for more than 10 years through organizational processes called "communal banks" for the administration of resources generated by the corn harvest.

In the Ecuadorian context, the National Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), promotes rural territorial development through a territorialization strategy in the nine planning zones for the formulation and implementation of the "Ecuadorian Agricultural Policy towards Sustainable Rural Territorial Development: 2015-2025". In the context of the case study, the Santa Elena Peninsula was provincialized on November 7, 2007, dividing into 3 cantons: La Libertad, Salinas and Santa Elena. Currently, it has 384,102 inhabitants, and 70.7% of this population resides in rural areas. The canton of Santa Elena has a total area of 3,640 km², with six rural parishes (Atahualpa, Colonche, Manglaralto, Simón Bolívar, San José de Ancón and

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Chanduy) and two urban parishes (Santa Elena and Ballenita), with a population of 144,076 inhabitants (INEC 2010).

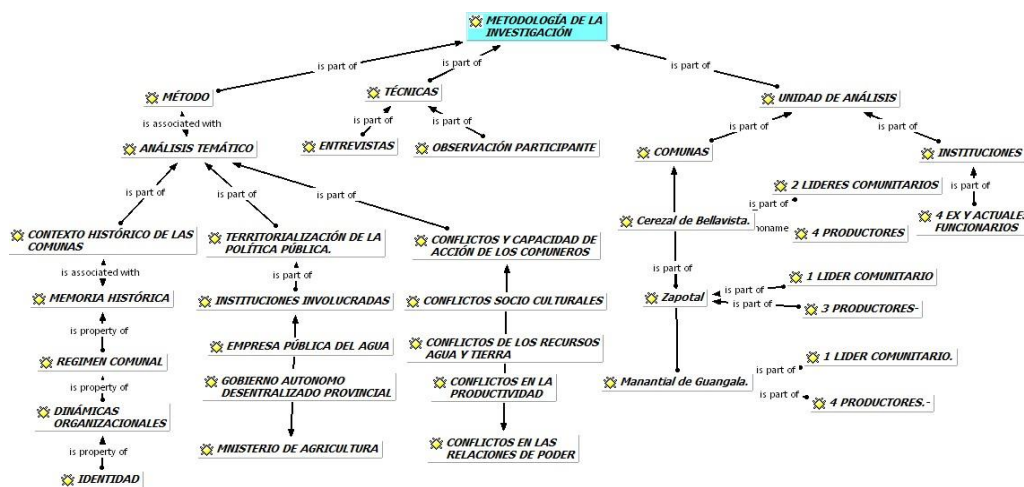
The communes of Santa Elena were created more than 90 years ago and became official with the approval of the Law of Regime and Communal Organization of Ecuador in 1937. The inhabitants identify themselves as cholos comuneros, the majority have kinship relations and their way of life is collective, with principles of exchange and mutual collaboration, administered by Cabildos as the official representative body. Leaders are elected in community assemblies by members officially registered with MAG. These communes are located in an area of dry forest with clay soils, prone to wind erosion due to the lack of vegetation cover. Most of the land is flat, with slopes of less than 5%. The community members use the slash-and-burn technique to develop agriculture, along with indiscriminate logging in the dry forest of the Chongón and Colonche Cordillera for charcoal production and intensive hunting of fauna, which has resulted in habitat loss. Considering this background, the purpose of this article is to answer: What is the capacity for action of the various actors involved in the implementation of PIDAASSE in the face of the conflicts generated by productive and economic policies in the territories, from a perspective of territorialization of public policy?

2 Methodology

To carry out this research, we began with an exploratory bibliographic investigation that addressed key issues such as governance, public policy, public policy implementation failures, actor approach, social and solidarity economy, as well as concepts related to territory, territoriality, territorialization and rural territorial development. In addition, secondary information sources were used, including documents provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), such as the agricultural development policy and the PIDASSE project.

The collection of information in the field, for which three semi-structured interview guides were prepared, with an average of 32 open-ended questions for each unit of analysis. These units of analysis included community leaders between 45 and 65 years old, producers between 33 and 65 years old, and former and current officials of the PIDASSE project institutions, between 31 and 48 years old. The questions focused on various aspects, from the history of the communities to the institutional vision and the perception of conflicts, with the objective of understanding the dynamics of articulation for the implementation of PIDASSE (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research methodology



Source: Own elaboration

In the third phase, once the interviews had been transcribed, the analysis was carried out using categories, subcategories and coding using the *Atlas.ti* program. This approach allowed for a detailed qualitative analysis of the information collected from the Zapotal, Manantial de Guangala and Cereza de Bellavista communities. A thematic analysis approach was adopted, which is a method to examine in detail the transcribed information and determine patterns, keywords or themes that facilitate a better interpretation of the case study, following the six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke in 2006.

Finally, with all the information analyzed and collected, the main obstacles in territorial governance around the implementation of the PIDASSE project were identified, from the perspectives of the different stakeholders involved. These findings were used to draw up the conclusions of this research work.

3 The different discussions of territory and governance

3.1 Construction of the territory through territoriality

Historically, territory has been linked to relations of power and domination in various spheres involving the State, the population and civil society organizations. Massey characterizes space as complex, defining it as "relations, flows and borders; territories and links, node, open of relations, articulation of influences, practices and exchanges" (Massey 2007, 9). These aspects not only contribute to the construction of an identity, but are also manifested in practices that dignify the space. This polysemic concept is relevant both in analytical terms and in institutional aspects, as addressed in this study.

Territory is conceived as a process in constant construction, of appropriation and generator of new territorialities and territorialization strategies (Díaz and Guzmán 2014, 17). In this context, the notion of territoriality is incorporated as a strategic result of the actors present in the territory (González, García, Ramírez and Castañeda 2013, 246). Territoriality is understood as the appropriation of actors within a complex process of social relations that seek to assume control and power in a given territory (Márquez 2011 cited by Lefebvre, 1976).

3.2 Multilevel governance, territorialization of public policy and definition of conflicts

In this context, according to Andres Matta, there are two governance mechanisms: one that develops in public policy from the bottom up, and another that expands in the same territory within the framework of a project (Matta, 1970). Governance implies understanding that territorial public policies must be formulated in conjunction with local stakeholders in order to achieve appropriation, participation and construction based on the expression of these stakeholders. Jolly calls this approach territorialization (Jolly 2012, 8). Territorialization requires a creative process between government and social actors to align socio-cultural priorities, organizational and institutional dynamics, as well as territorial resources (González, García, Ramírez and Castañeda.2013, 246).

Therefore, if public policies result from the territorial articulation between the State, society and the market, they should be analyzed as modes of governance. If governance problems manifest themselves as institutional problems due to the lack of State capacity in the relationship and efficiency of public action, a double problem arises due to the lack of interest in the relationship between the State, non-state and external actors for decision making in a territorial manner (Fontaine 2015, 88). In this context, multilevel policies emerge that seek to obtain and mobilize resources to adjust policies to the needs of the local population and encourage participation in local governments (Fontaine 2015, 72).

In this context, if stakeholders' expectations are not met in the territory, conflicts arise, an integral part of social life that originates in the interactions between communities, peoples, companies and States. Pruitt, Rubin and Kim (1994) define conflict as a

divergence of interests where the objectives of the parties are not achieved simultaneously. In other words, conflict arises when society assigns a value or meaning to what happens, based on history and accumulated knowledge (Carvallo and Calvo 2020, 18).

3.3 Institutionalality and governance of PIDAASSE

PIDASSE is under the supervision of the Vice-Ministry of Rural Development, with its Undersecretariat of Agriculture and Livestock, a management and a deconcentrated unit, the Provincial Directorate of Santa Elena, to carry out its execution. It has coordinated with the National Seed Project for Strategic Agrochains, the project to Promote Agricultural

Production through the Implementation of Systems for the Use and Development of Water Resources for Rural Development and Food Sovereignty, as well as with AgroSeguro and the National Coffee and Cocoa Reactivation Project, the latter aimed at diversifying crops.

The inter-institutional articulation involved the participation of academia in the elaboration of soil studies and the measurement of corn genetic types, as well as the collaboration with the Prefecture of Santa Elena and the Public Water Company to regularize and guarantee the use of the water service for irrigation. In addition, there was collaboration with the Decentralized Autonomous Government - GAD of Santa Elena, in charge of cadastral competence and property registration (according to a former MAG official, December 17, 2019). However, inter-institutional disarticulation was evident in the territory.

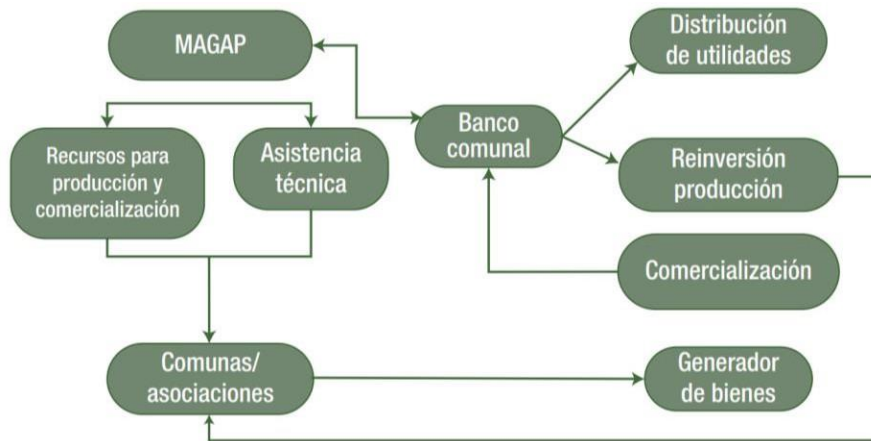
4 Governance, disarticulation and conflicts in the implementation of PIDASSE

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) deploys a centralized and deconcentrated management model, which implies the transfer of resources and decision-making power over the stewardship of agriculture and livestock. This model has been in place since the creation of the Ministry by Executive Decree No. 07, issued on January 15, 2007. The deconcentration is formalized in the Ministerial Agreement dated January 16, 2013, assigning responsibility for PIDASSE resources to the Provincial Agricultural Directorate of Santa Elena (according to a former MAG official, December 17, 2019).

The National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES) determined the priority for intervention in the Communes of Santa Elena on May 30, 2012. In order for a Comuna to be admitted to the project, the Cabildo was required to submit an application and then sign a co-execution agreement.

PIDASSE was designed as an intervention model in the Communes, covering the period from 2008 to 2020 (see image 1), with the objective of boosting food sovereignty in the rural population, i.e., strengthening the domestic food market. However, in practice, this project directly supplies agroindustry and agroexport, thus consolidating intensive monoculture (León 2017, 13).

Figure 2 PIDASSE management model



Source: PIDASSE 2016

The intervention strategy in the communities was initiated by the community organizations, specifically the Cabildos, which were responsible for allocating the land. According to a community leader, the choice of these locations for production was based on the proximity to the San Vicente dam, which would allow easy access and the possibility of attracting water through pipes (statement from a community leader of the Cerezal Bellavista Commune, December 28, 2019). In the case of Zapotal, the lower part was selected due to the presence of a siphon or pipeline system, which, according to the community leader, was related to the altitude and the availability of a lower location (information provided by the community leader of Zapotal).

The current beneficiaries are as follows:

Table 1 Beneficiaries and hectares intervened in PIDASSE

Community	Hectares intervened	Beneficiaries according to MAG	Beneficiaries according to co-proprietors	Current beneficiaries according to MAG
Zapotal	105	106	80 (2 banks)	87
Cerezal Bellavista	108	489	350	52
Guangala Spring	96	278	56	50

Source: Ministry of Agriculture March 14, 2020 and interviews with community members, January 17, 2020.

In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) coordinated a corn silage project and established a drying and storage center. The intention was for the community to manage this center in order to sell the production in more significant volumes. Management was transferred by PIDASSE, through two co-execution agreements, to the Nuevo Futuro Huelva (ASOANUF) and PIDASSE Agricultural Production (ASOPROPID) Associations in 2015:

"We managed to make an association of all the communal banks and they always met independently of the communal banks, with the objective that they take charge of the silo, right or wrong, maybe it was a mistake, for me the most important thing is that it remains with the producers of the Communes" (former MAG official, December 17, 2019).

The Zapotal Commune indicates that the silo project was a failure, because during a season of heavy rains, the dry corn grain delivered to the MAG suffered cracks and water

leaked in, as explained by a Cabildo leader of the Zapotal Commune in January 2020: "We delivered to MAG, the dry corn grain, we had a strong winter season, so it started to rain, then there started to be fissures and water was entering" (Cabildo leader, Zapotal Commune, January 17, 2020). A producer also corroborated that few delivered corn to the silo, mentioning that the rainy season is conducive to the appearance of fungi when the corn does not dry properly: "Few were those who delivered to the silo the one by Vilingota, there, because of the rainy season, especially when the corn does not dry, fungi can fall, so they take advantage of it to remove the grain" (producer from Zapotal, January 17, 2020).

Lack of coordination is also observed between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Public Water Company (EPA) in the formation of irrigation boards. The EPA, according to the MAG, lacks sufficient personnel, which affects the operability in the territory. "SENAGUA did not have enough staff, the operational part was slower" (former MAG official, December 17, 2019). The lack of coordination is perceived as an obstacle to territorial rural development processes, according to the EPA.

"Nothing was articulated, PIDASSE initially did it alone, isolated, even without counting on the ministry itself, which was attached and later, given the need to solve problems, had marketing problem, went to the natural rector which was the Prefecture, given the water problems, they have started to go to SENAGUA i.e. when they began to find problems they saw that they did not have the capacity to act alone, they began to seek help; instead of having articulated the principle" (EPA official, January 16, 2020).

This study shows that there is little predisposition to develop articulation mechanisms with the institutions involved in territorial development. The lack of institutional and inter-institutional articulation is manifested in the weak dialogue and generation of relationships, the jealousy for spaces of action that counteract the political spheres of those who exercise public policy in the territory are seen as the main reasons for the low levels of existing coordination, and attempt against the construction of governance.

"PIDASSE was not consensual with the other institutions, there were the intentions, on the one hand, it is political and at the end of the day sometimes it affects the project positively and negatively [...] the political actors of the government told me, you cannot give the revenues of the government budget to the prefecture, when they want to make an agreement and have their picture taken. With the prefecture only the roads were articulated" (former MAG official, December 17, 2019).

This context poses an important challenge related to the diversity of individuals and the recognition of the heterogeneity of the territory. In the three communities, common failures in the irrigation infrastructure were observed, such as low water pressure, constant pipe breakage and limited life span of the irrigation system. In addition, the increased demand for water as the corn plant grows significantly affected production. A producer from Zapotal shared her experience: "I have two hectares inactive because I have a problem with a pump that does not reach me the water" (producer from Zapotal, December 28, 2019).

These limitations in the irrigation infrastructure, together with the lack of consideration of the diversity of the territory, contributed to dissatisfaction and conflicts between community stakeholders and the PIDASSE project. The lack of adaptability of the production and irrigation model to the specific conditions of each community generated tensions and affected the expected productivity: "I have two hectares inactive because I have a problem with a pump that does not reach me the water" (producer from Zapotal, December 28, 2019).

These social organizations (Cabildos) have a weakness of citizen participation in their assemblies, they generally have a very poor petty cash without financial procedures, some Communes have not generated parliamentary procedures and participation mechanisms,

and there is no generation of networks between different Communes. These communities need to strengthen community management, improve technical assistance, and adopt good irrigation practices.

Another aspect is the lack of institutionality, which is manifested by a historical absence of the State and its institutions in the investment in infrastructure, generation of social and economic services. The vision of the local authorities does not generate local development but rather forges a level of popularity with fairs, festivals and fun events. Therefore, it is discussed about the weak territoriality in Santa Elena, which led to a lack of sense of belonging that the actors of the society manifest in their territory (Monnet 2010, 92). These dimensions of political territoriality should be worked on in the coordination of state implementation of public policy, with participatory processes that generate community empowerment, as well as the elimination of political clientelism.

The communal regime is very particular in this territory: the Commune is the owner of the land and the communal owner is a possessor; the Councils have the legal capacity to redistribute the land. This long-standing land conflict in Santa Elena, caused by natural or legal persons, whether national or foreign, who claim deeds in favor of communal lands, has generated difficulties to intervene in lands with multiple owners. This is considered one of the main limitations for the development of the project according to a former MAG official (December 17, 2019).

However, it is also a conflict of governance of the internal structures of the Communes. The community members, lacking resources, cultural identity and knowledge to make the land produce, hand it over to third parties, which requires a process of sensitization so that they do not part with the communal patrimony. The community states that in order to develop productively they need an improvement in the leadership of the Councils: "The Commune has no possibilities to develop productively, it has not done so because at this moment there may be a leadership that does things well, but not afterwards [...]" (Cabildo leader, Zapotal Commune, January 17, 2020).

In addition to the weak collaborative work in the studied communes and the lack of capacity and inefficiency of the State to solve land conflicts, and the failures in the implementation of the productive investment project in communal lands, there is also corruption that aggravates the territorial situation in Santa Elena. In other words, the mismanagement of power relations between the MAG institution and the communities.

From the producers' perceptions, corrupt actions by PIDAASSE project technicians were identified:

"They came to steal in other words, some technicians have good cars, good houses. I am not vicious, what I have is for work, but I am angry that the technicians themselves began to steal the product from the farmer, in the chemicals, in the fertilizers, they did not deliver the whole product; the technicians leased land, being a technician, I do not believe that the State would allow them to go (to work) [...], the technicians were earning money two years ago, as you could not imagine, they preferred to go to their shop [...], the technicians earned their money 2 years ago, as you could not imagine, they preferred to go to their store (agricultural inputs) than to help the community farmer" (community leader, Cerezal Bellavista Commune, December 28, 2019).

The perception of corrupt actions by PIDAASSE project technicians coincides with that expressed by a former project official who ended up obtaining community land. This aspect underscores the presence of corruption in project implementation, which contributes to conflicts and lack of trust between the community and government institutions.

Conclusions

The project intervention revealed an unequal distribution of the capacity for action among the actors, with a preference for the institutional actor (MAG) and intermediaries. The community members, by not actively participating in the decisions, experienced limitations in their capacity for action, generating significant conflicts in the territory.

Political and ideological differences among institutional actors and, in some cases, in the Cabildos fragment the territory, hindering information, strategy formulation and articulation.

A rigorous ethnography is suggested to understand the real dynamics of social interaction and internal and external relations.

The research highlights the need for inter-institutional articulation for public policy planning, discussion generation and innovative proposals. It proposes the configuration of a new articulating actor to promote development strategies and the creation of spaces for interaction among actors. The discussion focuses on whether local governments should be the rectors and articulators of the needs and initiatives of the territory with the central government, or whether provincial governments could be the interinstitutional articulating links with all levels of government.

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