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# THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HYDROELECTRIC POWER STATION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE IDENTITIES OF RIVERSIDE DWELLERS: THE CASE OF SALTO CAXIAS - PARANÁ

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## Introduction

According to Bermann (2003), Brazil set out, particularly from the 1970s onwards, its conception of energy policy based on the construction and implementation of large hydroelectric projects as the main source of the country's energy supply and sufficiency. Brazil is in a privileged position, given its substantial reserves of fresh water and river flow, appropriate for generating electric energy. The policy of building hydroelectric power stations meant Brazil was recognized as one of the countries which most invested in large energy projects, particularly from hydroelectric sources. Between 1960 and 1980 more than 66 hydroelectric plants were built in Brazil.

Therefore, the implementation of hydroelectric plants is constantly at the forefront of public debate, particularly in terms of the Government's project to exploit this type of energy generation using the potential of the nation's rivers. These debates also involve social questions related to the construction of large infrastructure projects, such as their ecological impacts and the displacement of populations.

In addition to the technical and structural aspects involved in the building of hydroelectric power stations, subjective, human and symbolic factors must also be considered in order to improve the management of these projects. According to Rosa (2007) the building of a hydroelectric plant initially requires a confluence of rivers and a geographical relief which allows for the existence of waterfalls to produce electricity. In order for this to occur, a dam or a reservoir must be built to contain the water.

The main environmental and social problems emerge with the building of the dam, given that large areas (often, productive land) are flooded and the whole social and

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ecological system is permanently destroyed. Bermann (2003) argues from an ecological perspective the ecosystem, which includes the fauna and flora, is flooded so as to create a water reservoir. From a social point of view, the local population is forced to relocate and consequently change their habits, routines, productive activities and social relations.

Queiroz (2000, p.15) states that “filling up reservoirs has meant the emptying of the lives of thousands of people, despite - the insufficient and often unfair - compensatory actions by public authorities”. In order to create reservoirs to be used by hydroelectric plants, the construction stage nearly always results in the displacement of families to other areas and a change in their ways of living.

According to data presented by Zhouri e Oliveira (2007), more than a million people in Brazil have been forcibly displaced as a result of their lands being flooded due to the implementation of hydroelectric plants. This does not simply imply a change of their physical space but more significantly a change in social relations, work activities, routines, symbolic representations and social ties. In other words, it implies a change in the identities of these populations. Herein lays the difficulty populations have in adapting to new situations and providing new meanings to their identities, previously linked to the physical space they were forced to leave, because of the construction of a new plant's reservoir.

In Paraná, a number of hydroelectric plants were built in the last 30 years, one of which is the Governador José Richa Power Plant, more commonly known as Salto Caxias. According to Lima *et al* (2005) its 131 km<sup>2</sup> (COPEL, 2013) of flooded land resulted in environmental impacts, mainly related to the erosion of rural and urban land and the lack of adaptation of fish and endemic species which need water rapids and falls in order to survive. From the social point of view, the forced migration of countless families took place. Around 1025 families in the region were compensated and 600 were resettled in municipalities unaffected by the power plant's reservoir. This amounted to large migration away from the affected area, worsening local social and economic problems, a result of the decrease in population.

The aim of this article is to understand the reconstruction of the identities of river-side dwellers, caused by their forced displacement due to the building of the Salto Caxias/PR hydroelectric plant. After the introduction, the paper is organized into sections which include a theoretical discussion on identity and de-territorialization as the result of the construction of power plants, followed by a description of the methodological procedures used in this research. Subsequently, research findings are presented, describing how the power plant was built and in what ways the resettlement of the research subjects re-forged their identities. Final considerations are then made.

## Theoretical conceptions on identity

The origin of the concept of identity lies in philosophy. It describes the property something has in order to be identical to itself, and therefore, different from other things. According to Habermas (2009), the philosophical concept of identity does not imply that individuals have to be different from others by possessing special qualities. Furthermore,

individuals do not have to adhere to standards of behaviour which allow them to be seen as complete units, because although people may behave differently at different periods, they can still be characterized as identical to themselves, as holders of a particular unity.

In order to conceptualize the identity of the self, Habermas (2009) refers to individuals as capable of constructing new identities from fragmented or obsolete identities, but which are integrated in such a way that the web of interactions are organized so as to form a biography which can be considered their own. This always occurs when individuals embrace their own biography and are responsible for it, using the narrative to turn towards themselves and their own interactions.

From a more psychological perspective, that of the development of the individual, Erikson (1987) views identity as starting in the individuals' early childhood which, as they grow, continues to develop through the crises that individuals face, more specifically during adolescence. This is a localized process which takes place at the heart of individuals and therefore also in the central core of their collective culture. This collective culture also refers to the ever-increasing set of identifications individuals make.

In the literature, there are a number of authors who corroborate with this conception of identity, for example Castells (2008), when he discusses social actors, understanding identity as the process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute, or indeed, a set of inter-related cultural attributes which prevails over other sources of meaning. For a given individual or even a collective actor, there may be multiple identities. However, this plurality is a source of tension and contradiction, both with regard to their self-representation and in terms of social action.

For Castells (2008, p.23), identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, created by them, and constructed by means of a process of individuation. In more generic terms, it could be said that identities organize meanings while roles organize functions. He defines meaning as the symbolic identification, by a social actor, of the purpose of the action carried out by this actor. Meaning is organized around a primary identity (an identity which provides a structure to others) which is self-sustaining over time and space.

There is, therefore, some agreement between these authors in terms of the concept of the identity process which includes a primary personal core. Thus, when individuals socialize with other individuals in society, they experience different identifications which shape their identity. In this way, we highlight the self-reflexive nature of the actions of an individual and their continuity in a person's biography (space/time). To summarize, therefore, there is one identity which provides structure to other identities which are the result of an individual's interaction with others (CASTELLS, 2008; ERIKSON, 1987; HABERMAS, 2009).

Considering the influence of a number of factors in the construction of identity, Castells (2008) argues that this process is a social construction taking place within a context characterized by power relations. Thus, he discriminates between three forms and origins of identity construction:

According to Castells (2008) legitimizing identity is the basis for civil society, that is, it provides legitimacy, though at times in a conflicting way, to a set of institutions and a number of structured and organized social actors who reproduce the identity which

rationalizes the sources of structural domination. Indeed, the role of the dominant institutions over individuals is clear. Individuals internalize a set of patterns and beliefs which originate from the dominant logic, frequently without being aware of this process.

Resistance identity gives rise to communes or communities. It is the construction of a defensive identity vis-à-vis dominant institutions/ideologies, reversing value judgments and, at the same time, reinforcing the limits of resistance. This identity is shaped by resisting hegemonic ideas, forming groups of individuals who search for some type of differentiation, positioning themselves against the dominant social rationale.

Castells (2008) also argues that the third process of the construction of an identity forms subjects. Subjects are not individuals, even though they are formed by individuals. They are collective social actors, through whom individuals are able to arrive at the holistic meaning of their experience. From the definition of their role in society, individuals assume their condition of subjects as social agents who express their identities within a wider social context.

Hall (2006) proposes the development of a conception of identity through historical time. He argues there are three very different conceptions related to identity: the enlightenment subject (a unified and cohesive subject), the sociological subject (the relational subject) and the post-modern subject (de-centred subject).

According to Hall (2006, p.10) the enlightenment subject is based on a conception of human beings as individuals who are entirely centred, unified, capable of reason, consciousness and action, whose centre consists of an inner core which first emerges when the subject is born. Although this identity develops, it remains essentially the same - continuous or identical. The identity of the subject is fundamentally based on an individualist conception.

Another conception of the analysis of identity, according to Hall (2006), is the sociological subject. Alongside the emergence of Darwinian biology and other new sciences, such as psychology and sociology, the conception of the subject supported by social relations is born, internalizing the outside and externalizing the inside. According to Hall (2006, p.11), the sociological subject is seen as a social being who interacts with the outside world, thus developing his inner core. Therefore, subjects still have an inner core or essence which is the "real self". However, it is shaped and modified through continuous dialogue with the "outside" cultural worlds and the identities these worlds may offer. This vision of the sociological subject is closer to the conceptions presented by Habermas (2009) and Erikson (1987).

In his third conception of identity Hall analyzes the post-modern subject. He (2006, p. 12) argues that a single identity cannot explain the post-modern subject, where there are many, often contradictory or incomplete, identities. The subject which was previously seen as having a unified and stable identity becomes fragmented. As systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted with a disturbing and changing multiplicity of possible identities.

Finally, in order to further develop our understanding of identity in "post-modernity", we allude to Bauman (2004). He addresses this topic by analyzing the processes of liquid modernity, more commonly known as the age of globalization. According to

Bauman, in current times “liquid modernity” replaces “solid modernity”. Solid modernity emerged alongside the classic transformations and the advent of a stable set of cultural and political values and ways of living. By contrast, in liquid modernity everything is volatile, human relations are no longer tangible and shared living experiences such as the family, couples, groups of friends and political affinities lose their consistency and stability (BAUMAN, 2004).

Most of the conceptions presented here associate identity to social processes, leading to an understanding that the development of identity is related to society, from the most traditional conceptions to the most modern (or post-modern) approaches. In other words, identity is consolidated (or not) through interaction with others and personal experiences. The concept of identity is linked to the process of identification and difference, to attempts to institutionalize behaviour and resistance to these attempts. Indeed, identity can be manifested through collective projects which emerge from redefining the position of subjects in society. It is from this perspective that this article addresses the nature of identity.

Based on this theoretical description, the next section presents a discussion on how resettling individuals displaced by the construction of power plants may impact on the re-signification of territory and, consequently, on their identities.

### **Forced displacement and de-territorialization - changing identities**

With regard to identity issues, more specifically in the case of the forced displacement of riverside dwellers due to the construction of hydroelectric plants, it is important to highlight how these processes relate to de-territorialization. In other words, land and space have a fundamental role in the re-signification of the identity of this population.

Vainer (2007) shows how, from the middle of the last century, large petro-chemical, energy and road projects reconfigured the Brazilian territory. In his view, although the regional development planning agencies were immersed in projects which never came to fruition and distributed tax incentives to the dominant groups, the landscape was being altered according to the decisions taken by the large sectorial agencies. Vainer argues that regions were not contrived by regional planners, but by the planners and decision-makers of the macro-infrastructure sectors: in the electricity sector, Eletrobrás (Centrais Elétricas Brasileiras) and associated companies, as well as some large state companies; in the mining-metallurgical sector, by the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce and the large state steel companies; and in the petro-chemical sector, by Petrobrás (Petróleo Brasileiro S/A).

Vainer (2007) further argues that the major change between then and the current period is that decisions about territory reconfiguration are now made by the private sector, given that the privatization of the sectors responsible for infrastructure works led to the privatization of land use planning and control which are a fundamental part of large projects. Rampazo (2009) shows that in the electricity sector, in particular, this phenomenon began to occur from the 1990s onwards.

In other words, large projects (such as the construction of hydroelectric plants) continue to exert a considerable amount of power and are able to organize and transform

spaces, and configure and de-configure regions, although this power has “changed” hands.

Rampazo e Ichikawa (2013) show that research in many areas (REBOUÇAS, 2000a; 2000b; FADIGAS, CARVALHO, 2005; KARPINSKI, 2007; SOARES; FROEHLICH; MARQUES, 2007) discusses the negative impacts of hydroelectric plants on the territory, including geographical changes, as well as changes in social relations and the local economy which result in changes in people’s way of living and in their identities. In fact, according to Rebouças (2000a), when riverside dwellers are faced with the reality of forced relocation and consequently, with objective changes in their lives, their way of perceiving the world changes. This is because, very often, spatial disruption of riverside areas where hydroelectric plants are located entails the risk of poverty, given the social struggle for land.

According to Haesbaert (1997), reports on forced relocation allude to a multiplicity of different situations of transformation, translated into losses which encompass the physical space, a feeling of estrangement due to the experience of new situations, affecting even day-to-day and close relationships. According to this author, in these cases, de-territorialization involves much more than an increase in mobility and cultural uprooting, given that riverside populations which have been forcibly displaced experience a loss of both physical control and the symbolic references to their land (HAESBAERT, 2006).

As Santos (2001, p. 32) argues, it is important to understand that land and territory are directly associated to the identity, *ethos*, culture, and the social and economic organization of different groups. It is not possible, therefore, to think about the biological survival and the cultural reproduction of these groups without ensuring that at least part of these lands, which have been occupied since times immemorial, are left to them, free from enterprises which are of interest to our society, including hydroelectric plants. Forced relocation directly impacts on the universe of individuals, altering their social experience, references, values and finally, their identity.

## Methodological procedure

This is a qualitative study which aims to capture the referred to subjective phenomena in order to understand them. According to Minayo (2001), qualitative research is able to transcribe the dynamism of social and collective lives and the meanings on which they are based, since there is no social action without interpretation and meaning. Qualitative research was considered to be more appropriate for the objectives of this study, given the need to understand the meanings of the social phenomena experienced by the individuals affected by the dams.

This study can be described as descriptive research. According to Selltitz *et al.* (1967) a considerable amount of social research aims to describe the characteristics of communities, that is, their social organization and main patterns of behaviour. This research is also sectional, with a longitudinal perspective, given that it mainly focuses on understanding the phenomenon elucidated by using the data collected at a particular moment, whilst also analyzing past information and data. Vieira (2006, p.21) argues that the focus of this type of research is the phenomenon and the way it is characterized during



the data-gathering period, whereas past data are used to explain the configuration of the current phenomenon.

In order to carry out part of the research, a documental search was conducted to gather historic, social and economic data related to the implementation of the Salto Caxias hydroelectric plant. According to May (2004, p.208), these documents, which are seen as the consolidation of social practices, can assist in information gathering and analyzing the day-to-day decisions taken. In the long term, they also provide us with particular interpretations of social events.

The purpose of using these documents was to collect information which could contextualize the problematic studied, in order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon of the re-signification of the identities of the displaced populations. The following documents were analyzed: The minutes of CRABI (Regional Commission of Populations Affected by Dams in the Basin of the Iguaçu River) meetings; COPEL (Paraná Energy Company) Report on Salto Caxias Resettlement Project; minutes of the meetings between COPEL and the population (public hearing), Environmental Impact Report (EIR) - Salto Caxias/PR; and newspapers dating from the construction period, exhibited in the COPEL offices in Capitão Leônidas Marques.

In addition, topical oral history interviews were conducted in order to understand, in historical terms, the implementation process of the hydroelectric plant within the context of people's lives. Alberti (2008, p.18) defines oral history as a type of "(historical, anthropological, sociological, etc.) research which focus on interviews with people who took part or witnessed events, points of conjuncture or visions of the world so as to come into closer contact with the object studied".

The riverside dwellers interviewed were resettled by COPEL (Paraná Electricity Company) in São Francisco de Assis farm (known as Flamapec). A total of twelve subjects were interviewed. The riverside dwellers were chosen via the "snowball sampling technique". In other words, most interviewees were nominated by a participant who had been previously interviewed. According to Baldin and Munhoz (2011), this is a non-probability sampling technique employed in social research where the initial participants of a study nominate new participants who, in turn, nominate further participants and so on, until the proposed object is attained ("saturation point"). Therefore, the histories of these subjects complemented each other, given that each brought a special focus to the research, in addition to the repetitions which were identified during the interview analysis. Interviews were conducted in July 2012 and involved riverside residents who were relocated in the settlement referred to above.

The names used during the analysis of this work are real. However, so as to protect identities, residents are only addressed by their first names. The São Francisco de Assis settlement was chosen because it was the main relocation settlement used by COPEL to move riverside dwellers.

The interpretation analysis sought to identify both homogeneous and atypical phenomena in the narratives. Gomes (1993) argues that the aim of the analysis and interpretation of qualitative research is not to report opinions or disclose people, but to explore the set of opinions and social representations about the topic under investigation.



That is, the object is the socio-cultural dimension of opinions and representations of a group that has similar characteristics and which tends to have points in common, whilst presenting the singularities of the interlocutor's biography. Thus, the results of the research were expressed in terms of descriptions and narratives, illustrated by people's statements and by secondary data gathered so as to provide it with the necessary foundations.

### **The implementation of the Salto Caxias plant and the displacement of the riverside population**

The Salto Caxias plant region is made up of nine municipalities. To the north, on the right bank of the Iguaçu River, are the municipalities belonging to the western region of the Paraná state, namely: Boa Vista da Aparecida, Capitão Leônidas Marques, Três Barras do Paraná and Quedas do Iguaçu. On the left bank, the municipalities belonging to the south-western region: Boa Esperança do Iguaçu, Cruzeiro do Iguaçu, Nova Prata do Iguaçu, Salto do Lontra and São Jorge do Oeste. Salto Caixas, on the banks of the Iguaçu River, is the most important plant managed by COPEL, with a capacity of 1,240 MW. Construction works began in January 1995 and the plant started operations in February 1999. It is also known as the José Richa plant and it ensures that COPEL is self-sufficient in terms of supply in the consumer market until the middle of the next decade (COPEL, 2008).

According to Parmigiani (2006), in 1998, the first rumours about the construction of a new plant mobilized the rural workers' unions in the municipalities of Nova Prata do Iguaçu, Dois Vizinhos, Realeza, Capitão Leônidas Marques, Boa Vista da Aparecida, Capanema, Planalto and Três Barras do Paraná. They organized themselves and sent an open letter to the population and the state authorities, raising the key social issues which would arise from the construction works and positioning themselves against the implementation of this venture.

The attitude of the riverside residents and the local population was influenced by the contact they had had with social movements and similar experiences of other localities with whom they had made contact. According to Parmigiani (2006, p.18):

Bearing in mind the experience of Salto Segredo, where many promises were not fulfilled, the agricultural workers demanded a written commitment, signed by the president of COPEL and the governor of the state. COPEL's representative, however, only demonstrated a willingness on the part of the company to "work in conformity with the law", where "the law", in this case, allowed for a period of up to five years to settle compensation payments. The impasse was established and therefore the meeting did not represent real progress in terms of a solution, although in practice it did mean that COPEL recognized the legitimacy of CRABI as the main interlocutor.

On 25 July 1993, CRABI organized a large demonstration, with approximately two thousand people and the presence of a number of federal and state deputies and organizations supporting the movement, as well as people affected by other dams. This

event was ignored by COPEL who attempted to resume the works, taking rock drilling machinery to the dam construction site. In a meeting, riverside residents decided, as a reprisal, to occupy the construction site, seizing the company's machinery and vehicles and preventing the works from going ahead. After thirty days of occupation the camp-site was surrounded by the Military Police Special Operations Command, giving rise to confrontations (PAGLIARINI JUNIOR, 2009).

As Parmigiani (2006) explains, on 15 December 1993, this culminated in COPEL and CRABI signing a Term of Agreement which incorporated the proposals made by the people affected by the dam and set complementary targets to the "Principles, Directives and Criteria for the Relocation of the Affected Population". Among other proposals, targets defined a period of time for expropriations and set a calendar and criteria for starting compensations; and guaranteed the resettlement of smallholders (up to 5 alqueires), tenants, sharecroppers and leaseholders. More significantly, they determined that all compensations and resettlements should be carried out before the dam was built.

However, Parmigiani (2006) states that the compensation schedule was delayed by almost a year and on 14 March 1995, CRABI organized a new mobilization when more than four thousand people occupied the dam construction site. The result of this mobilization is that, working against time, COPEL issued a public notice to purchase land for resettlement. However, this document did not comply with the agreement established which stated that the community would be involved in the drafting of criteria for including families and for land acquisition. In addition, the public notice envisioned assistance to fewer families than expected and the criteria for purchasing land did not meet the requirements of the movements involved.

According to Pagliarini Junior (2009), the results of these confrontations resulted in, from 1999 onwards, changes in the lives of the families who lost their lands in nine municipalities in the south-west of Paraná: Capitão Leônidas Marques, Boa Vista da Aparecida, Três Barras do Paraná, Quedas do Iguaçu, Nova Prata do Iguaçu, Salto do Lontra, Boa Esperança do Iguaçu, Cruzeiro do Iguaçu and São Jorge do Oeste. Of these families six hundred were relocated to ten resettlements. Of the families affected, those that had properties of over 5 alqueires received monetary compensation. Families who owned up to five alqueires were included in the resettlement project, together with tenants, sharecroppers and others. Of the families who received compensation for their lands, 76% were smallholders.

Pagliarini Junior (2009) also states that from 1996 three settlements were established in the Cascavel region. The largest was São Francisco de Assis formed from land acquired, via compensation, from Piquiri farm belonging to what was then known as Flamapec Agribusiness. In addition to São Francisco, the resettlements of Baretar and Refopaz were also located in Cascavel.

## **Forced relocation and changes perceived in the identities of subjects**

Here we present some of the statements of the people interviewed during this research. The aim is to describe, in the best way possible, the issues raised by subjects

in interviews on their identity transformations. Interviews were used to support the analysis conducted.

As mentioned in the methodological section above, the subjects interviewed were relocated to the São Francisco de Assis resettlement in the municipality of Cascavel. Prior to the building of the plant, they lived on the banks of the Iguazu River until their lands were flooded by the Salto Caxias reservoir. They were originally (mainly small) landowners, tenants or sharecroppers. In the settlement, they received small lots of land (between three and fourteen alqueires), with the exception of Mr. Milton. Mr. Milton came from Três Barras do Paraná, where he farmed 60 alqueires. Thus he could have been considered a medium-size producer in comparison to other settlers. In general, they cultivate beans and corn, as well as keeping dairy cattle.

An important point highlighted from the statements of interviewees was the role of CRABI during the whole period of the implementation of the Salto Caxias plant and the struggles for better conditions for the population relocated as a result of the plant. According to interviewees, CRABI had a significant role in supporting the population to ensure better resettlement conditions and compensation, as well as better interaction with government bodies and COPEL.

The creation of CRABI brought together the subjects displaced to fight for better living conditions. Their statements show that with the creation of the movement, interaction between people led to new identities being forged within the group:

They were going to take everything from us, our houses, our land, our friends, and we were just going to stand by and watch. Then the people from the affected group appeared, MAB [Movement of People Affected by Dams], to show how it was important for us to get together and work. It was very good, we created a good group [CRABI] that defended everyone who would be resettled (Nair).

Once the period of the CRABI struggles was over, the subjects interviewed were moved to the São Francisco de Assis settlement. This is where our analysis begins. After more than ten years in the resettlement, the findings of this study surprised researchers. Indeed, most studies conducted with riverside residents who were compulsorily evicted from their lands as a result of the construction of hydroelectric plants have reached very different results (REBOUÇAS, 2000; ZHOURI; OLIVEIRA, 2007; SEVÁ, 2008). In this case, most interviewees held positive views regarding the transformations in their lives. They seemed satisfied with their course in life, despite the fact that they recalled with sadness the time before they were forced to move:

The day the truck arrived to take my things I cried a lot, I cried lots... I was thinking about all the things that had happened to me there, I saw my children being born, I saw them grow up, they were raised free amongst the cultivations, simply happy. It was very sad, I was being forced to go somewhere we did not know well, they talked a lot, but, it's only by actually living here that we could find out how it was (Francisca).

For most interviewees, apart from when they recalled the past, whenever they assessed their current situation in the resettlement, they would mention that their lives were better than before. Therefore, we sought to understand, from their statements, what would have caused this feeling of satisfaction. A common factor identified in the subjects' statements and which was extremely useful for this interpretation was that they all referred to the quality of the land chosen for the resettlement. This factor can be identified as one of the variables for the satisfaction of interviewees with life in the settlement.

In addition to the better quality of the land, for some, the resettlement meant a change in status, as well as a change of area. For example, according to Mr. Adair's statement, a change from employee to landowner: he is now proud to say that the land is his, given that previously he worked for an employer and lived from agricultural services.

Despite the fact that his property is small, Mr. Adair presents himself as a landowner and no longer as an employee. This meant the re-signification of his relations, his future and his family, as well as his willingness to work. In order for Mr. Adair to self-define himself, he needs to appeal to a set of references, the construction/re-construction of identities. In his case, the positive references - the fact that he is now a landowner - helped this reconstruction.

In general, the same undertones found in Mr. Adair's narratives were present in the statements of most interviewees. From the data gathered, it was observed that resettlement was organized in such a way so that close family ties were kept in place. This is seen as a factor that considerably helped interviewees during the process of change. In statements, they highlighted the importance of the organization of the farm's physical space, where families who previously used to live near each other continued to be physically close in the resettlement. This assisted in the process of accepting the new space.

Evidence suggests that research subjects felt "closer" to their earlier situation and felt less uncomfortable because their neighbours were reasonably well known to them. According to the literature review, over time the family, as the institution responsible for primary socialization, has the most lasting effect on the identity of subjects. Whenever there was a possibility to be close to their relatives, changes were less traumatic.

Another point highlighted by the subjects was that since resettlement, life had become more "modernized". Many stated that being closer to a "large city" (Cascavel) let to improvements in their everyday lives. Many residents stressed the "progress" in their lives, new possibilities for their children, highlighting access to education, in addition to better productivity in agricultural terms, given that land in Cascavel is more fertile than where they used to live.

However, there were also times of crisis. All statements mentioned difficulties as a result of leaving their flooded lands behind, feelings of loneliness, fear and injustice caused by their displacement. Today, however, new expectations seem to occupy a space in the lives of the interviewed subjects. Erikson (1987, p.181) calls this process expectations about what we *could become*, that is, the development of the identity of individuals is shaped by contributions such as a primitive trust in mutual recognition, a willingness to be ourselves and the expectation that we can also change.

In the statements of the interviewees, the concern in finding out what they had become after resettlement was a recurring issue. Because of changes there were many doubts as to who they really were, especially because of their losses. They used to be riverside dwellers, because they lived on the banks of rivers. They used to be riverside dwellers and farmers, because their livelihood came from the land. Today, because they live in a settlement, it is common to hear others referring to them as landless, the resettled, terms which sometimes seem pejorative to the interviewees themselves. Their statements illustrate this point:

We were called “landless”, “affected by the dams” and poor, but gradually our neighbours, the townspeople, started to see that we worked. In fact, we are rural workers, we get our sustenance from the land. But this is because people here don’t know what happened to us (Francisca).

They thought it had to do with the MST [Landless Peasants’ Movement], that there would be an encampment, a lot of people without work would arrive. We had to show them that we were farmers, that we knew how to work the land (Valter).

Work or being recognized as rural workers brought them authority and, to a certain extent, helps them to define their identity today. Bauman (2004) argues that individuals construct their identities with the resources available, steered by rationality and by their objectives. We perceived this in the statements of our interviewees. Their resources were the new land, but most importantly, knowing how to work the land. This allowed them to rationalize and meet their objective: to reconstruct their identities as farmers, an identity which seemed lost by the fact that they had lost their original land.

Today, so many years after the changes, the subjects have managed to build a new relationship with the land and society, forging their identities from a personal and collective project which enabled them to redefine their new position in society. Therefore, by recovering their roles, interviewees assumed their condition of subjects as social agents and were able to forge their identities within a wider social context.

## Final considerations

In this context, the role of CRABI deserves to be highlighted with regard to the data analyzed and it is cited by interviewees as having a fundamental role in the success of the relocated population in gaining compensation. CRABI was, to a certain extent, the major factor influencing the resistance identity which permeated the process undergone by this population.

In addition to CRABI, shown to be responsible for reconstructing the identity project of the resettled population, the analysis conducted in this study also enabled other factors to be identified. One of these factors was the quality of the new land which enabled resettlers to invest in their main economic activity, family agriculture. Another

factor was the proximity of social relations in the resettlement, given that many families and neighbours were allocated homes close to one another, enabling subjects to maintain the same social networks in the new territory. The fact that the resettlement area was close to a city considered to be prosperous, in this case, Cascavel, is also mentioned by most subjects as positive, providing new opportunities for services, education and employment.

All these factors meant that the process of de-territorialization could be overcome. With regard to the transformations in the identities of riverside dwellers who underwent forced resettlement, it was observed that the sum of these factors resulted in their re-signification. Through this process they went from riverside dwellers-smallholders to landless peasants to resettled people. Currently, they have recovered their identity as farmers, given that this is their livelihood and that they are able to make their dreams come true, by working on the land that they acquired.

Thus, we observe the importance of land and work as defining elements of the identities of individuals. The symbolic value of the new territory enables subjects to seek the re-signification of their identities: new technological attributes, new social relations, as well as the close proximity (or not) to their values and culture. Similarly, work defines the value of an individual in modern society. Work and territory can help to construct or de-construct people's identity. In the case analyzed here, if the riverside residents had not managed to recover their condition as subjects of their own history, the loss of references such as work and de-territorialization could have led to much worse consequences for their identities.

In the specific case of this study, the struggles for and the conquest of a place which could provide them with the objective opportunities for work gave them elements to re-define their identities in a constructive way. This is why the findings show that resettlement in this case did not appear to be as negative as in other cases of construction of hydroelectric plants.

Finally, it is important to stress that even having reached the object of this research, it has some limitations. For example, there were no subjects found who had originally been settled, but who, for whatever reason, ended up selling their land to third parties. This population can no longer be physically traced, as families followed different paths. Contacting these families would have been important to identify their difficulties or the reasons why they abandoned the resettlement process. Another issue relates to the fact that data was collected at the São Francisco de Assis settlement which has a number of positive and unique attributes already described in this research, in comparison with other settlements for people affected by dams. To a certain extent, the history of the struggles of Salto Caxias and its consequences are unique. Researching the reconstruction of the identities of the population displaced by the building of hydroelectric plants is essential to assess whether the situation of other populations affected by dams has improved or worsened with time in Brazil.



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# THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HYDROELECTRIC POWER STATION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE IDENTITIES OF RIVERSIDE DWELLERS: THE CASE OF SALTO CAXIAS - PARANÁ

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste trabalho é o de compreender a reconstrução das identidades dos ribeirinhos deslocados pela construção da Usina Hidrelétrica de Salto Caxias, no Paraná, a partir do deslocamento compulsório sofrido por eles. Foram utilizadas entrevistas de história oral para de recompor as vivências dos ribeirinhos e analisar os impactos nas suas identidades. Os resultados da são apresentados, mostrando como ocorreu a construção da Usina e como o reassentamento dos sujeitos acabou reconfigurando suas identidades. Os indivíduos passaram de ribeirinhos-agricultores para sem-terras e reassentados ao longo do processo. Atualmente, há o resgate, novamente, da identidade de agricultores, pelo fato de estarem sobrevivendo e conseguindo realizar seus sonhos, a partir do trabalho com a terra conseguida. No caso deste estudo, verificou-se que os ribeirinhos conseguiram ser deslocados para um local que lhes possibilitasse elementos positivos de terra e trabalho, o que fez com que acabassem definindo construtivamente suas identidades no reassentamento.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade; Usinas hidrelétricas; Reassentamento; Deslocamento compulsório.

**Abstract:** The objective of this work is to understand the reconstruction of identities of riparian displaced by the construction of the Salto Caxias Hydroelectric Plant , in Paraná , from compulsory displacement suffered by them . Oral history interviews to reconstruct the experiences of the riparian and analyze the impact on their identities were used . The results are presented , showing as it did the construction of the plant and how the resettlement of the subjects finished reconfiguring their identities . Individuals moved from riparian - to landless farmers and resettled throughout the process . Currently , there is the rescue again, the identity of farmers , because they are surviving and accomplishing your dreams , from the work achieved with the earth . In this study , it was found that the riparian managed to be moved to a location that would enable them positive elements of land and labor , which meant they ended up defining their identities constructively in the resettlement .

**Key words:** Identity; Hydropower; Resettlement; Compulsory displacement.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este trabajo es entender la reconstrucción de las identidades de los ribereños desplazados por la construcción de la Central Hidroeléctrica de Salto Caxias, Paraná, el desplazamiento obligatorio sufrido por ellos. Se utilizaron entrevistas de historia oral para reconstruir las experiencias de los ribereños y para analizar el impacto sobre sus identidades. Se presentan los resultados, que muestran como lo hizo la construcción de la planta y la forma en que el reasentamiento de los sujetos terminado de reconfigurar sus identidades. Las personas mudaron de ribereñas a agricultores sin tierras y reubicados a lo largo del proceso. Actualmente, no es el rescate de nuevo, la identidad de los agricultores, ya que están sobreviviendo y el logro de sus sueños, del trabajo realizado con la tierra. En este estudio, se encontró que la ribera logró ser trasladado a un lugar que les permita los elementos positivos de la tierra y el trabajo, lo que significaba que terminó de definir su identidad de manera constructiva en el reasentamiento.

**Palabras clave:** Identidad; Presas hidroeléctricas; Reasentamiento; Desplazamiento obligatorio.

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