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# Water Governance

*The Case of the Machángara Watershed Conservation Committee*

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## **Abstract**

Water is an essential yet increasingly contested resource, particularly in regions where ecological vulnerability intersects with competing socio-economic demands. This thesis examines the governance dynamics of the Machángara Watershed Conservation Committee in Cuenca, Ecuador — a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together public institutions, local governments, academia, and sectoral actors to safeguard a critical high-Andean watershed. Drawing on a qualitative research design, the study is based on semi-structured interviews with committee members representing diverse institutional mandates and interests. The analysis is framed by stakeholder theory and political ecology, allowing for an exploration of how stakeholder motivations, sustainable development principles, and power relations interact within a decentralised governance context. Findings show that stakeholder participation stems from intertwined environmental, socio-economic, political, and institutional interests, shaped by each actor's mandate and resources. Although the committee fosters collaboration, decision-making is constrained by power imbalances, institutional hierarchies, and resource gaps, limiting the practical realisation of sustainable development principles. The study highlights the need for more research of similar committees in Latin America to better understand the real-life dynamics of water governance in the region.

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**Key Words:** Water Governance, Water Management, Watershed Ecology, Decentralization of Resource Management, Sustainable Development, SDG6, Stakeholder Theory, Political Ecology, Global South, Latin America, Ecuador.

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## 1. Introduction

Water, agua, H<sub>2</sub>O — in Swedish, there is a saying, *kärt barn har många namn*, which literally translates to ‘a dear child has many names’. It refers to the idea that something valued or familiar can be known by many different names. Water is fundamental to all forms of life and underpins ecological integrity, human wellbeing, and economic productivity (Gleick, 1993; UNESCO, 2024). Beyond its physical properties, water is also deeply political, shaped by histories of governance, competing claims, and the distribution of power and resources (Swyndedouw, 2004; Bakker, 2010; Boelens, 2015). In many regions of the Global South, pressures from population growth, urbanisation, climate change, and economic development are intensifying demands on already stressed water systems (UNESCO, 2024; Caretta et al., 2022; UN, 2021). These pressures are not only biophysical challenges but also governance challenges, raising urgent questions about who controls water, how it is allocated, and whose needs are prioritised (Zeitoun and Warner, 2006; Pahl-Wostl, 2019).

The governance of water involves a web of institutions, policies, and stakeholders operating across multiple scales (Lebel et al., 2005). In academic and policy debates, water governance has emerged as a central framework for understanding how societies manage water resources, encompassing both formal state structures and informal community arrangements (Rogers & Hall, 2003). From a political ecology perspective, water governance is not a neutral, technical process but one embedded in broader socio-political contexts where power relations, environmental justice, and historical inequalities shape access and decision-making (Nygren and Rikoon, 2008; Robbins, 2011). Such an approach draws attention to how governance structures can both reproduce and challenge existing inequities, especially in contexts marked by decentralisation reforms and shifting responsibilities between state and non-state stakeholders.

Within this governance landscape, watersheds hold a particular significance. As natural hydrological units, watersheds are critical for the provision of ecosystem services, the regulation of water flows, and the maintenance of ecological health (Poster and Thompson, 2005; Vörösmarty, 2010). They are also sites where competing land uses, livelihoods, and governance jurisdictions intersect, making them focal points for both cooperation and conflict. Effective watershed governance requires coordination among diverse stakeholders—governments, communities, civil society, and the private sector—whose interests may align or clash depending on ecological, social, and economic priorities

(Reed, 2008; Reed et al., 2017). In many regions of the Global South, where water systems face mounting pressures from population growth, agricultural expansion, extractive industries, and climate change, decentralized governance has been promoted as a strategy to bring decision-making closer to those directly reliant on watershed resources (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Larson & Soto, 2008).

Ecuador presents a particularly compelling case for examining these dynamics. Since the 1990s, the country has pursued ambitious decentralization reforms aimed at transferring responsibilities and budgets from the central government to provincial, cantonal, and parish authorities (Boelens et al, 2017). In the water sector, these reforms have been framed as pathways to enhance management efficiency, promote local participation, and ensure responsiveness to diverse ecological and social needs (Larson, 2004). Ecuador's diverse ecosystems, from Andean páramo water towers to urban river valleys, mean that watershed governance is central to both environmental sustainability and socio-economic resilience (BioFin, 2019). The Machángara Watershed, in particular, exemplifies these complexities: it supplies drinking water, irrigation, and hydroelectric power to the city of Cuenca, while also serving as a biodiversity-rich area and governance arena where multiple stakeholders with varying mandates interact (Diaz, 2018).

This thesis situates itself at the intersection of these debates, examining the governance of a watershed in the highlands of Ecuador through the case of the Machángara Watershed Conservation Committee, hereafter referred to as the *Conservation Committee*. The committee operates as a multi-stakeholder body within a decentralized governance framework, tasked with balancing conservation objectives, local livelihoods, and equitable access to water.

## **1.1 Purpose and aim**

This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on collaborative environmental governance by analysing the decision-making processes and stakeholder dynamics within the Conservation Committee in Ecuador. Situated within a context of decentralised water governance in the Global South, the research aims to understand how stakeholder motivations, power imbalances, and interpretations of sustainable development shape the functioning of the committee. More specifically the aim of this study is to generate an empirically grounded understanding of the institutional and political dynamics that underlie stakeholder engagement in watershed governance. Drawing on Stakeholder Theory and Political Ecology, the study explores how organisational agendas, access to influence,

and contested visions of sustainability interact in shaping both collaboration and conflict within a decentralised governance structure. By investigating these dimensions, the research offers insights not only into the case-specific functioning of the Conservation Committee but also into broader debates on environmental governance, decentralised resource management, stakeholder inclusion, and inclusive decision-making in the global south. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- (1) Why do stakeholders engage in the Conservation Committee?
- (2) How are decisions negotiated and implemented within the committee?
- (3) How is sustainable development understood, prioritised, and applied within the committee's governance practices?

Addressing these questions will provide insight into how stakeholder motives, governance structures, and divergent interpretations of sustainability intersect in shaping collaborative water governance in the Machángara Watershed. This study seeks to contextualise its findings within the general political and institutional framework of decentralised water governance in Ecuador, thereby contributing to broader discussions on sustainable development, stakeholder engagement, and the pragmatic challenges of executing collaborative environmental governance.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: following this introduction, the literature review outlines key debates on water governance, decentralisation, as well as the role of sustainability and sustainable development. The background and context chapter provides an overview of decentralisation in Ecuador, the governance of water resources, and the Conservation Committee. The theoretical framework presents Stakeholder Theory and Political Ecology, explaining their relevance to the study. The methodology chapter describes the research design, sampling strategy, data collection, and analysis. The findings and discussion chapters present and interpret the results in relation to the theoretical framework, and the thesis concludes with suggestions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter presents key research on water governance, with a focus on decentralised resource management and sustainability. It discusses how water is managed in the Global South and outlines concepts central to this study, such as decentralisation, sustainable development, and environmental governance. These perspectives form the basis for

analysing stakeholder collaboration and power dynamics within the Conservation Committee.

## **2.1 Water Governance**

Water management and water governance are frequently discussed in conjunction when addressing the management of water resources. Pahl-Wostl (2015) distinguishes between the concepts; water management is defined as the activities involved in analysing and monitoring, developing, and implementing measures to maintain resource states within desirable limits, while water governance establishes the rules that guide management operations. Water management includes the technical aspects of managing water resources, which include the planning, construction, and operation of water infrastructure (Bauer, 2004; Woodhouse & Muller, 2017). Water governance, conversely, does not emphasize the technical aspects. It advocates for a comprehensive approach to water resource management that incorporates social, political, and institutional dimensions. The literature on water governance highlights stakeholder networks, power dynamics, the roles of private and public entities in policymaking, institutions, regulatory frameworks, and related factors. Water governance extends beyond the confines of natural resources and ecology, requiring an interdisciplinary approach (Pahl-Wostl, 2015).

Over the past two decades, the concept of water governance has dominated international discussions. Water security and the right to water are integral components of the sustainable development agenda (Araral & Wang, 2013). The United Nations Development Program's Water Governance Facility (2019) defines water governance as "*the political, social, economic, and administrative systems that affect the utilization and management of water,*" aligning with Pahl-Wostl's (2015) distinction between the two concepts. It concerns the distribution of water; who receives it, when, how, and the rights to water and related services, along with their benefits.

### ***2.1.1 Water Governance in the Global South***

Historically, urban water governance in the Global South has been shaped by three main models: state-led systems, where water management is controlled by centralized or local public authorities; market-based systems, in which private actors—either foreign or domestic—are responsible for service delivery; and hybrid models that combine elements of both. These conventional governance approaches have often failed to ensure equitable and sufficient water access in urban areas, especially for marginalized communities (Larsen et al., 2016; Addams et al., 2022).

Public water utilities in various regions of the Global South face challenges stemming from underinvestment, outdated infrastructure, not enough institutional capacity, and ineffective management (Dos Santos et al., 2017). Efforts to reform water governance via privatization, particularly under neoliberal policies advocated by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, have predominantly not succeeded in guaranteeing safe and affordable access to water (Addams et al., 2020). Public and private utilities often overlook peri-urban and informal settlements due to high infrastructure costs and uncertain cost recovery (Budds & McGranahan, 2003). These regions are generally unplanned, spatially fragmented, and populated by low-income individuals with restricted financial capacity. Hybrid governance models that integrate public and private actors have been inadequate in addressing the increasing water demands of rapidly urbanizing areas (Bakker & Morinville, 2013; Bakker, 2007). In light of these limitations, decentralized water governance has emerged as a viable alternative, seeking to delegate decision-making authority to local governments or community institutions. This topic will be further discussed in section 2.2.

### ***2.1.2 Community water governance***

Community water governance (CWG) has emerged as a response to the limits of both centralized state-led systems and market-driven methods to environmental control in the Global South. CWG, which is based on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) principles, refers to the institutional arrangements, administrative processes, and collective actions that communities use to articulate their water-related needs, make decisions, and hold service providers accountable (Addams et al., 2020). These locally based government arrangements are frequently portrayed as participatory, inclusive, pro-poor, and socially just (Chambers, 1997; Blaikie, 2006). Furthermore, CWG is thought to strengthen local citizenship, social cohesiveness, and marginalized people's ability to negotiate for better water and sanitation services (Adams and Boateng, 2018; Mitlin and Bartlett, 2018). In the larger context of environmental governance, such techniques are viewed as a means of democratizing resource management and strengthening local stewardship in settings where formal state capability is limited. However, CWG has faced criticism, some scholars have highlighted difficulties such as elite capture, unequal power relations, vague conceptions of 'community,' and scaling challenges (Bakker, 2008; Zulu, 2008; McMillan et al., 2014). These contradictions reflect broader issues in decentralized environmental governance,

where local empowerment objectives may conflict with structural disparities and resource limits.

## **2.2 Understanding decentralized environmental governance**

According to Rondinelli et al. (1983), decentralisation is a broad concept with multiple forms. It generally refers to the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and resource allocation from central government authorities to lower or external entities—ranging from local government units to semi-autonomous bodies or community-based organisations. In this study, decentralisation serves as a key lens to examine how water governance is implemented at the local level, particularly through the role of the Conservation Committee, which operates within a decentralised institutional framework.

Scholars argue that decentralisation may reduce poverty, improve service delivery, increase institutional competition, and open space for experimentation in public management (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Brosio, 2014; Barletti et al., 2018). These claims are particularly relevant in the context of environmental governance, where local knowledge and community participation are seen as crucial for effective resource management. In the case of this study, decentralisation is not only a backdrop but an active mechanism shaping how decisions about water are made and who gets to participate in them. Importantly, decentralisation is also expected to enable social learning and weaken clientelist systems by strengthening accountability and representation (Matevosyan et al., 2024; Ribot et al., 2010). Matevosyan et al. (2024) highlights that meaningful decentralisation begins when local governments are empowered to address community needs, supported by mechanisms that ensure responsiveness to local constituencies. However, as Addams et al. (2020) and Kulipossa et al. (2004) note, decentralisation is no guarantee for equitable outcomes. It often encounters challenges such as uneven local capacity, limited resources, and persistent inequalities in representation and access. Thus, while decentralisation offers potential for inclusive and participatory governance, its effectiveness depends on local political dynamics, institutional design, and power relations (Addams et al. 2020).

To summarise, national decentralisation reforms since the 1990s have played a foundational role in shaping local-level institutions like the Conservation Committee studied in this thesis. Understanding how decentralisation influences the structure, decision-making, and participation within such committees is essential to assess their potential and limitations, as mechanisms of community water governance in the Global South.

### 2.3 Sustainable development as a conceptual lens

The concept of sustainable development has become central in global environmental policy and planning, particularly in relation to governance challenges around the world. The most widely cited definition originates from the Brundtland Report, where sustainable development is described as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 1987). According to the report, achieving sustainable development requires the integration of three interdependent dimensions, social, ecological, and economic, which must all be addressed simultaneously. This triad is often visualized through models that emphasize their overlapping nature (Fig. 1).

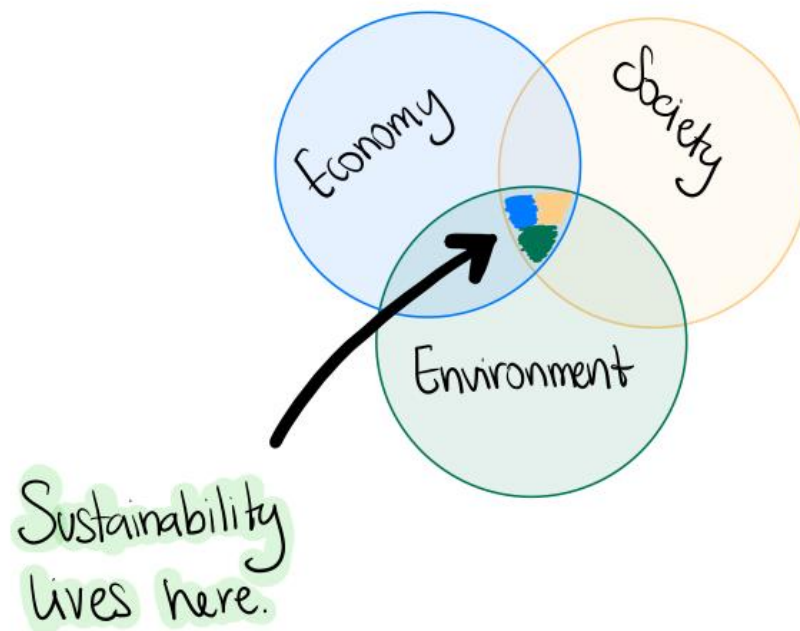


**Fig 1.** The three overlapping model of Sustainable Development (drawn by me).

While this framework provides a compelling foundation for normative discussions, scholars (Ruggerio, 2021) have raised critical questions regarding the practical application of the concept. Jovovic et al. (2017) describe sustainable development as a popular yet vague buzzword, often perceived as a *magical solution* to global problems such as overpopulation, climate change, and inequality. Similarly, Bebbington & Grey (2001) argue that the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” are used so frequently and in such diverse

contexts that they risk losing conceptual clarity. Hence, they contend that sustainability should be seen as a state, whereas sustainable development be defined as the human effort or process aimed at attaining this condition. De Roo & Porter (2012) explains that the understanding and interpretation of the concept vary among people.

This definitional ambiguity is particularly relevant when applying the concept to local governance practices, such as those explored in this study. De Roo and Porter (2012) argue that sustainable development is not a fixed goal but a flexible lens through which planning and decision-making are often approached, frequently as a secondary objective. In this thesis, sustainable development is therefore not treated as a static outcome, but as a guiding discourse that shapes how actors—particularly at the local level—frame priorities, negotiate trade-offs, and articulate legitimacy in water governance processes.

Further distinctions have been made between *sustainability* as a state and *sustainable development* as the ongoing process aimed at reaching that state (Ruggerio, 2021; Bebbington & Grey, 2001). This distinction helps clarify the tensions between long-term environmental goals and short-term development needs. Particularly in contexts where resource constraints and social inequalities are pressing. In the case studied here, this tension plays out in the competing expectations placed on local governance actors, who must navigate between environmental conservation, equitable access to water, and economic realities.

Additionally, the Brundtland report's emphasis on "needs" has been subject to critique. Brorström and Parment (2017) highlight that needs are subjective and dynamic, making it difficult to define them in universally applicable terms. In the governance of natural resources, this is particularly significant, as differing perceptions of needs between stakeholders, e.g., government institutions, communities, and private actors, can lead to contested visions of what sustainability entails. Building on this, Robert et al. (2005) argue that the flexibility of the concepts of *sustainability* and *sustainable development* can be a strength, as it allows them to be adapted to different scenarios and contexts over time. Similarly, its openness to multiple interpretations enables actors at all levels, from local to global, across diverse sectors, governance bodies, businesses, and civil society organizations to redefine its significance according to their specific contexts. As a result, no single, universally applicable definition of sustainability exists. Yet, as Robert et al. (2005) argue, the very flexibility of the concept allows it to be adapted across multiple levels of governance and sectors. This adaptability is both a strength and a limitation: while it enables broad applicability, it may also obscure power dynamics and mask conflicting interests behind a

shared but vague goal. Nevertheless, any given definition should be accompanied by a clear and concise explanation of the intended meaning (Rowan, 2002).

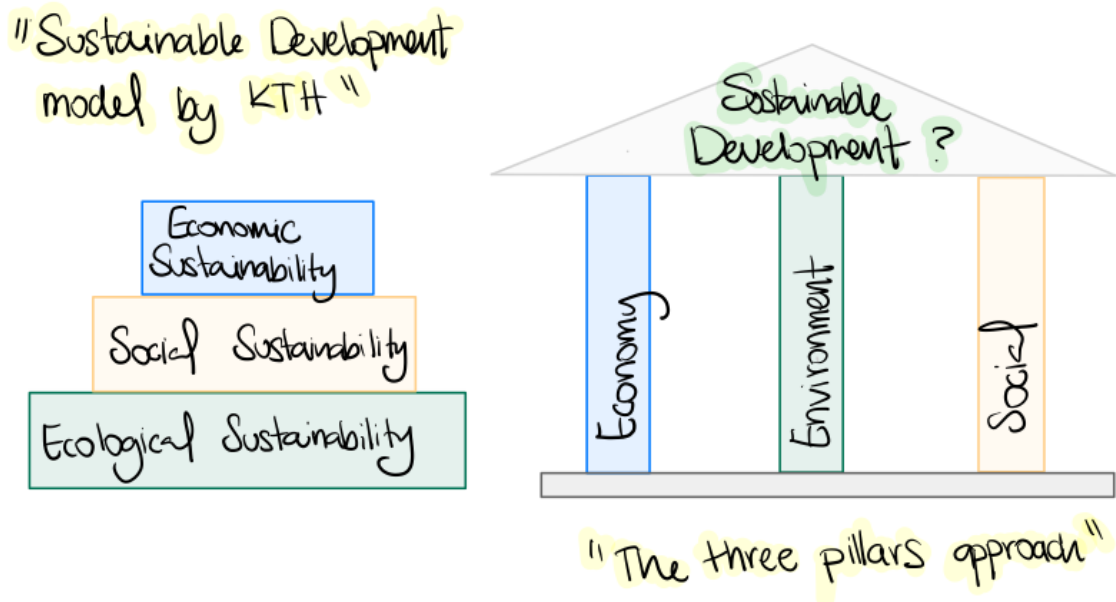


**Fig 2.** Two models of Sustainable Development – the right one designed by KTH Royal Institute of Technology (2024) and drawn by me. The left one – a model called ‘the three pillars approach’ from Willard (2014) drawn by me.

In the context of this study, sustainable development is therefore approached as a *contested and evolving idea* that informs local water governance practices. Rather than taking the term at face value, this thesis examines how sustainability is interpreted, mobilised, and negotiated by actors operating within decentralised governance frameworks in the city of Cuenca, in Ecuador.

### 3. Contextual background

This chapter presents the historical context required to understand the governance dynamics investigated in this study. It opens with an overview of Ecuador's decentralisation approach for water resource management, describing how duties have been divided across several governance levels. The chapter then discusses the Machángara Watershed and the

Conservation Committee that oversees it, outlining its institutional structure and importance to the study's emphasis on stakeholder engagement, decision-making, and sustainability.

### **3.1 Decentralization of water management in Ecuador**

The early 1980s marked the initiation of economic integration and neoliberal restructuring in Ecuador. This transformed the nation's social and political landscape (Hey and Klak, 1999). The institutional framework was altered, transferring responsibilities and obligations from the national government to local authorities and other intermediate-level entities due to water management policies and regulations (Cremers et al., 2005; Hoogersteger, 2011). Hoogersteger (2011) stresses how multiple countries in Latin America implemented neo-liberal policies to varying extents in the 1990s, usually under the influence of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank (Achterhuis et al., 2010). Chile represented one of the earliest and most radical implementations of these policies, which were advocated by the same international institutions as a model for other nations to emulate (Budds, 2004; Bauer, 1998). Thus, In the mid-1990s, the Ecuadorian government significantly reduced its involvement in irrigation and domestic water usage. According to Hoogersteger (2011) this was shaped by neo-institutionalism and occurred within this context.

The state's new role was to establish programs, regulations, and rights that facilitate the effectiveness of "*appropriate*" incentives. This allowed organized civil society, market forces, and the private sector to assume a more significant role in several aspects of water management that the state had before managed (Cremers et al., 2005). It was believed that funding for water management projects would derive from local budgets (provincial or municipal), private investors, or user fees. This resulted in significant reductions to funds for numerous water resource management activities. In this framework, the responsibilities of operating, managing, and administering were assigned to water user organizations, hybrid public-private partnerships, or private enterprises whenever feasible (Cremers et al., 2005; Hoogersteger, 2011).

To summarize, water management in Ecuador has been divided among three levels of government. The *central government* oversees the management, control, and regulation of the system; the *provincial government* manages water irrigation; *local governments* are responsible for the provision of drinking water and wastewater services (Ibnet, nd; Hoogersteger, 2011). Thus, the responsibility for the provision of drinking water and wastewater services in Ecuador is decentralized and managed by 221 Autonomous

Decentralized Municipal Governments (Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados Municipales, GADs). Wingfield et al. (2021) states they have the right to choose their preferred management method. The majority of municipalities employ direct municipal management, while some use independent municipal public companies or engage joint or regional public utilities. However, Wingfield et al. (2021) argues that the management system gives rise to possible conflicts about the allocation and utilization of water. Another point is that the absence of sufficient technical and infrastructural capabilities at a local level presents additional obstacles for water management in the country.

### **3.2 The Machángara Watershed Conservation Committee**

The Machángara Watershed is situated in the central highlands of Ecuador, encompassing the provinces of Azuay and Cañar. Along the watershed there's smaller *parroquias*<sup>1</sup>: Checa, Chiquintad, Sinincay, Sayausí, Octavio Cordero Palacios, and Sidcay in the Cuenca canton (part of the Azuay province); and Jerusalén, Nazón, Turupamba in the Biblián canton, as well as Gualleturo, Déleg, Cojitambo, Javier Loyola, and Solano in the Azogues canton, (part of the Cañar province). The river is essential for supplying drinkable water, facilitating agricultural production, and maintaining local ecosystems in adjacent rural and urban regions. The watershed features steep Andean slopes and high-altitude páramo ecosystems, with significant rainfall fluctuations between the wet and dry seasons. These ecological conditions make the watershed both an essential resource and a fragile system, particularly sensitive to climate change and shifting land use (Días-Granada, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of Ecuador and other Latin American countries, "Parroquias" refers to administrative divisions within a *canton*, which is similar to a district or a municipality.

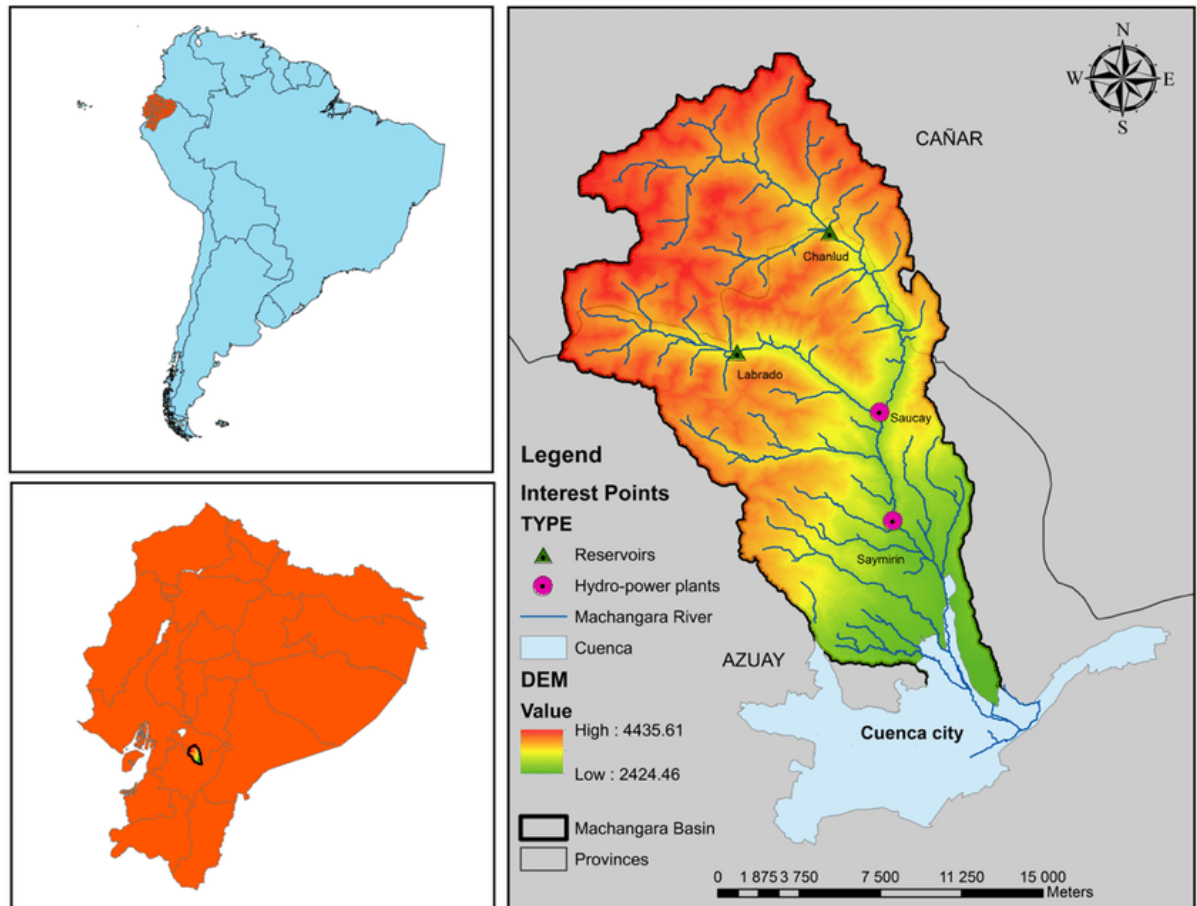


**Fig 3.** In the top right corner, South America is shown, with Ecuador marked in red. The map below shows Ecuador and the Machángara watershed stands out. On the right side, it shows the location of the Machángara Watershed between the provinces of Azuay and Cañar, and it highlights the city of Cuenca in blue (Veintimilla-Reyes et al., 2019).

The Conservation Committee (Comité de conservación de la Cuenca del Río Machángara) was founded in 1998 (Días-Granada, 2018) as an element of Ecuador's extensive decentralisation initiatives within the water sector. It serves as a multi-stakeholder governance platform designed to coordinate the sustainable management of the basin's water resources. The committee was established to resolve the fragmentation of water management responsibilities among jurisdictions and to promote collaboration among various stakeholders whose actions impact the watershed directly or indirectly.

The Conservation Committee comprises of the eleven institutions (see more in Tab. 1), of which it includes municipal administrations, parish councils (GADs), agricultural associations, national governments agencies and private sector representatives.

**Tab. 1.** The table shows the current stakeholder of the Conservation Committee in no particular order. The table also shows the institutions role in water governance.

| <b>Name of the Stakeholder</b>                                                              | <b>Their institutional role in water governance</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ETAPA (Empresa de Telecomunicaciones, Agua Potable, Alcantarillado y Saneamiento de Cuenca) | It is a municipal company owned and operated by the city of Cuenca. The company provides landline telephone services, internet, water supply, and sanitation within the canton. It also assumed responsibility for the management of Cajas National Park in order to protect Cuenca's water sources                                                                                 |
| ELOCAUSTRO                                                                                  | It is a semi-public hydroelectric company based in Cuenca, Ecuador. It plays a central role in the generation and distribution of renewable energy in the southern Andean region. With a focus on hydropower, ELECAUSTRO manages several key dams and reservoirs that not only supply electricity but also significantly influence the region's water flows and ecosystem dynamics. |
| The University of Cuenca                                                                    | It is a public higher education institution located in the city of Cuenca. As one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Ecuador, it plays a significant role in regional research and policy development.                                                                                                                                                              |
| The Ministry of the Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE)                    | Ecuador's national authority responsible for the formulation and implementation of environmental policy, water governance, and climate-related strategies. As a representative of the central government, MAATE plays a key role in ensuring that local and regional environmental initiatives align with national regulatory frameworks and international commitments.             |

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Provincial Government of Azuay                                    | It serves as the intermediate level of governance between the national government and local jurisdictions within the province. It is responsible for regional planning, infrastructure development, and the coordination of environmental and water-related initiatives across cantonal and parish levels.           |
| The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)                       | It is the national authority responsible for formulating and implementing policies related to agricultural development, food security, and rural livelihoods in Ecuador.                                                                                                                                             |
| Machángara Irrigation and Drainage Board                              | It is a local institutional body tasked with managing the distribution and maintenance of irrigation and drainage systems within the Machángara watershed. Its role is central to coordinating water use among agricultural stakeholders, ensuring equitable access, and preventing conflicts over water allocation. |
| The Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Nazón      | As one of the local governance entities within the canton of Biblián, the Rural Parochial Government of Nazón represents the interests and needs of its rural community.                                                                                                                                             |
| The Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Checa      | As one of the local governance entities within the canton of Cuenca, the Rural Parochial Government of Checa represents the interests and needs of its rural community.                                                                                                                                              |
| The Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Chiquindad | As one of the local governance entities within the canton of Cuenca, the Rural Parochial Government of Chiquindad represents the interests and needs of its rural community.                                                                                                                                         |
| The Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Gualleturo | As one of the local governance entities within the canton of Cañar, the Rural Parochial                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|  |                                                                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Government of Gualleturo represents the interests and needs of its rural community. |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Decision-making aims to be participatory, with each stakeholder contributing to the planning, monitoring, and execution of measures concerning water allocation, watershed conservation, and dispute resolution. Notwithstanding its collaborative mandate, the committee functions within a multifaceted socio-political landscape. These dynamics provide the Conservation Committee a pertinent case for analysing the practical functioning of decentralised water governance, as well as the influence of stakeholder relationships and political-ecological factors on governance results in a resource-critical Andean watershed.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this study is outlined in this chapter. Firstly, by *Stakeholder Theory*, with particular attention to stakeholder participation and the distribution of influence among actors, as these concepts are central to understanding why stakeholders engage in the Conservation Committee and how decisions are shaped. It then examines *Political Ecology*, which provides a lens for analysing how environmental governance is embedded within broader socio-political structures and power relations. The chapter concludes with a synthesis, highlighting how these theoretical perspectives intersect to address the study's aim: to explore stakeholder motivations, governance processes, and interpretations of sustainable development in a decentralised water management context.

### 4.1 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory has its roots in the strategy business management literature, and its where is most commonly used (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are then described as “groups or individuals who affect, or are affected by, the achievement of an organization's mission” (Freeman, 1984, 52). Stakeholders have the power to either support or harm an organization's potential to generate value. They are also relied upon for the necessary resources to create value (Rebitzer et al., 2004; Schneider, 2002). According to Muyingo (2011), the impact and motivation exerted by these stakeholders depend on their level of interest and the sort of interest they have.

Furthermore, the stakeholder theory is used to shed light on the actions and behaviors of an organization's stakeholders and emphasize the significance of integrating the interests of these stakeholders when formulating strategic decisions (Brenner & Cochran, 1991;

Donaldson & Preston, 1995). It highlights the importance of considering the interests of different stakeholders in the process of formulating development strategies. It suggests that corporations can garner support from their stakeholders by embracing their interests, which can ultimately result in a favorable overall performance (Muyingo, 2011). Literature categorizes stakeholders into primary, essential for organizational success, and secondary, either instrumental or influenced by the industry (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). The central premise of stakeholder theory is that an organization's success is contingent upon its effectiveness in managing relationships with diverse stakeholders (Freeman, 1984).

Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that this theory plays a crucial role in the strategic decision-making process of an organisation. It helps identify various stakeholder groups, their conflicting interests and demands, their level of influence, and how to effectively manage them (Ahinful et al., 2022). Extending on this argument, Deegan and Blomquist (2006) explain that the theory elucidates the existence of diverse expectations and perspectives among different stakeholder groups regarding the activities, decisions, and operations of organisations. Alongside this, Mitchell et al. (1997), explains that stakeholder qualities are not constant and can change over time, resulting in fluctuations in their power of influence. Furthermore, it should be noted that not all stakeholders hold the same level of importance or influence. Their influence is contingent upon their possession of three distinct categories of stakeholder attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Thus, defining power as the capacity and likelihood of an individual or entity in a social interaction to achieve a favourable result despite opposition from others (Weber, 1947; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy refers to the overall perception or assumption that an entity's acts are desirable, proper, or suitable within a socially formed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. According to Mitchell et al. (1997), urgency refers to the level of immediate attention required by stakeholder demands. It is determined by the time-sensitivity and criticality of these claims. These traits can exist separately or together, leading to varying levels of stakeholder influence and salience. In this case salience refers to the extent to which managers prioritise competing stakeholder claims.

#### ***4.1.1 Stakeholder influence***

As stated earlier, stakeholder theory is a conceptual framework that highlights the need of addressing the demands and interests of all entities engaged in a corporation, including shareholders, consumers, suppliers, employees, and the general public. This theory

recognises that organisations operate within a complex network of relationships that affect their operations and outcomes (Freeman, 2010).

Furthermore, Freeman (2010) emphasises that having happy stakeholders is advantageous for the organisation, as they can positively influence operations, foster motivated employees, enhance brand reputation, and cultivate loyalty among customers. Conversely, neglecting the interests of stakeholders may lead to detrimental consequences for the firm's survival, including adverse publicity, elevated employee turnover, and diminished credibility and trust (Jones & Wicks, 1999). On this basis, Frooman (1999) defined stakeholder relationships in terms of both responsibilities and influences. Thus, characterizing these factors as bidirectional: the firm towards its stakeholders and the stakeholders towards the firm. On this line, Frooman (1999) addressed the challenging task of determining which stakeholders should be included in decision-making processes as relevant. Additionally, Frooman (1999) concluded by outlining strategies for a company to more effectively engage with stakeholders, with a focus on open communication, consultation, and increased interaction. Thus, engaging in strategic management and accepting that stakeholders can be utilised as active participants in strategic decision-making.

## **4.2 Political Ecology**

Political ecology is a field of study that examines the dynamics of power and conflicts related to the management and access of natural resources (Nygren & Rikoon, 2008). It offers a method for analysing shifts in environmental preservation, with a particular focus on the social frameworks, historical figures, and power dynamics that influence environmental policy formation. Political ecology is an interdisciplinary field that merges social science-based ecology with the principles of political economics. It can be universally applied to matters concerning land management and protected areas, among others. This is because it advocates for a methodical approach that connects conservation issues with larger patterns, landscapes, and institutions, rather than examining each issue separately (Lawhon & Murphy, 2012).

Furthermore, political ecology is an academic discipline that provides a structure for analysing the connections between political, economic, and social aspects in relation to environmental challenges, such as the establishment or management of a protected area (Robbins, 2011). Thus, political ecology analyses not just the resources that will be safeguarded, but also the effects of a protected region on the human populations presently

residing on or in close proximity to this territory. Political ecology is a research topic that critically examines the idea that any action affecting the interconnectedness between humans and the environment has far-reaching consequences for the entire system (Robbins, 2011).

Over and above that, political ecology examines environmental issues as a result of political and social actions, asserting that social and environmental problems are interconnected at both local and global scales. It highlights the notion that the perception of nature is inherently influenced by political factors. Political ecology is important because it establishes a connection between the political economy and the state of the natural environment. This connection allows social and natural scientists to communicate and collaborate effectively, which is crucial for implementing environmental policies. Thus, political ecology provides a framework for environmental planning to understand the relationship between human society and nature, emphasising that humans are a part of nature rather than separate from it (Adams and Hutton, 2007; Page, 2003).

#### ***4.2.1 Power dynamics***

Power and power dynamics are crucial in the analysis of political ecology. In numerous ways, power has been defined and theorized. However, for the specific scope of this thesis, the definition of power adopted here is derived from sociologist Anthony Giddens. He defines power as the "*transformative capacity*," which refers to the ability to exert influence and bring about changes in the world (Weber, 2002). From this standpoint, whenever an individual engages in a social action, they exert influence on the surrounding world and generate outcomes that may conflict with another person's vested interests (Weber, 2002). Politics is the means by which power is exercised, and it plays a vital role in the study of political ecology.

### **4.3 Theory Synthesis**

The combination of stakeholder theory and political ecology offers a thorough analytical framework for scrutinising the decentralisation process in Ecuador. Stakeholder theory provides a structured framework for identifying, categorising, and evaluating the roles, interests, and influence of actors at local, national, and international levels, while political ecology introduces a critical perspective by contextualising these actors within wider socio-political and historical frameworks. This combination facilitates a simultaneous look at micro-level stakeholder dynamics and macro-level frameworks of power, governance, and environmental decision-making. Stakeholder theory's focus on delineating relationships and

duties is further strengthened by political ecology's ability to examine the fundamental inequities, power imbalances, and historical dependencies that influence these relationships (Freeman, 1984; Robbins, 2011). The decentralisation process, understood through this combined lens, is not merely a technical transfer of competencies and resources; rather, it is embedded in a contested terrain of political interests, environmental priorities and social negotiations.

By combining both viewpoints, the study develops an analytical framework that encompasses both the systematic, actor-centered mapping of stakeholder theory and the critical, context-aware analysis of political ecology. This dual approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the operational dynamics of decentralisation, emphasising both stakeholder agency and the structural variables that shape their interactions and results.

## **5. Methodology**

This chapter outlines the research design, sampling strategy, data collection, and analysis methods employed in this study. It also discusses ethical considerations, positionality, reflexivity, and limitations. The methodological choices were guided by the study's aim to investigate stakeholder perspectives, interests, and power dynamics within the Conservation Committee, in the context of decentralised water governance and sustainable development.

### **5.1 Research Design**

This study has employed a qualitative research design to address the research questions. A qualitative research design enables researchers to get insight into the context or environment of issues through the perspectives and interpretations of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study utilised qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive empirical data from pertinent stakeholders concerning their motives, experiences, and perspectives of collaboration within the Conservation Committee.

The research approach enabled the analysis of power dynamics and decision-making processes inside the committee, which are fundamental to the theoretical frameworks of Stakeholder Theory and Political Ecology. The methodology offered insights into the varying interpretations of sustainable development by diverse stakeholders, the negotiation of conflicting interests, and the impact of institutional frameworks on involvement and influence. This is especially relevant for comprehending decentralised governance in the Global South.

## **5.2 Sampling Strategy**

Purposive sampling is a commonly employed method in qualitative research that enables researchers to purposefully select individuals who are relevant to a certain study question (Bryman, 2012). The participants in this study were initially selected via purposive sampling, taking into account the following criteria:

1. current or previous membership on the Conservation Committee's decision-making board and or,
2. capability to offer educated insights into the committee's governance, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making procedures.

This method guaranteed that participants directly engaged with the committee's functions. The sample comprised stakeholders from various governance tiers (national, provincial, municipal, and parish) alongside representatives from academia and environmental agencies. This diversity enabled the examination of both institutional and sectoral perspectives.

The sample primarily comprised individuals in resourceful positions within the governing system, including top officials, technical specialists, and organisational leaders. This offered useful institutional insights, but it also resulted in the exclusion of opinions from less formally empowered individuals, such as small-scale farmers living around the basin or grassroots community members. This discrepancy is further examined in the reflexivity section and limitation section (see more in section 5.6 and 5.7).

## **5.3 Data Collection**

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, selected for their adaptability in allowing participants to express their perspectives while enabling the researcher to seek depth and clarification (Hammett et al., 2015). This method was suitable due to the exploratory nature of the study and its emphasis on stakeholder perspectives, interests, and experiences.

A total of six interviews were held, each between 40 minutes and one hour, with representatives from seven stakeholder institutions. I conducted the interviews in Spanish from February 14th to April 25th, 2024. Participants choose locations to guarantee a comfortable and secure environment, with sessions conducted in offices or at participants' homes via Zoom, or in other private settings. All interviews were audio-recorded with the

participants' informed agreement. Transcriptions were generated using *Sonix.ai* and subsequently verified for precision. I transcribed the transcripts into English, followed by a secondary check to assure semantic precision and maintain contextual nuances (Yin, 2016).

**Tab. 2** The table shows the informants names, titles and role in the committee, as well as the dates of the interviews.

| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Title &amp; Role in the committee</b>                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Date and length of the interview</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Dr. Maritza Calle    | President of the Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Nazón - Member of the Committee                                                                                                            | 15 February 2024<br>55 minutes          |
| Engr. Veronica Pollo | Chief Executive Officer of ETAPA - Member of the Committee                                                                                                                                                         | 15 February 2024<br>60 minutes          |
| Sir. Javier Velez    | Spokesperson for both the President of for the Rural Parochial Decentralized Autonomous Government of Checa and Chinquidad. - Member of the Committee<br><br>Coordinator in the government of Checa and Chinquidad | 21 March 2024<br>45 minutes             |
| Engr. Catalina Diaz  | Technical Secretary of the Committee                                                                                                                                                                               | 21 March 2024<br>40 minutes             |
| Dr. Silvio Cabrera   | Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition - Member of the Committee                                                                                                                                 | 22 March 2024<br>65 minutes             |

|                     |                                                                                   |                             |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                     |                                                                                   |                             |
| Dr. Andres Alvarado | Professor at the University of Cuenca - Ex Representative member of the Committee | 25 April 2024<br>60 minutes |

An interview guide (see to Appendix C) facilitated the exploration of fundamental issues, encompassing:

1. Stakeholder interests in engaging with the Conservation Committee.
2. Recognised advantages and obstacles of decentralised water governance.
3. Processes of decision-making and dynamics of power relations.
4. Perspectives on sustainable development and resource management.

**Tab. 3** The table shows the type of source and the selected source used in this study as a secondary data collection to gather information about the dynamics of the Conservation Committee.

| Type of source             | Selected Source                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Conservation Committee | A report of the 20 years of work the committee has done (Días-Granada, 2018).<br><br>Share management experiences report (Días-Granada, 2024)                                           |
| Websites                   | ELCAUSTRO's webside:<br><a href="https://www.elecaustro.gob.ec">https://www.elecaustro.gob.ec</a><br>ETAPA's webside: <a href="https://www.etapa.net.ec/">https://www.etapa.net.ec/</a> |

In addition to the interviews, online desktop research was used as a secondary data collection strategy, see Tab. 3 for the summary of sources used.

## 5.4 Analysis Method

The acquired data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a research method used to identify and analyse patterns or themes within data (Braun and

Clarke, 2006). It is particularly beneficial for identifying recurring patterns or meanings. Furthermore, I employed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step process, which includes becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally preparing the result.

The first coding included both inductive and deductive methodologies: inductive to facilitate the emergence of themes from the data, and deductive to connect the coding with the frameworks of Stakeholder Theory and Political Ecology. Codes were categorised into topics that encapsulated both the essential content of stakeholder perspectives and the institutional aspects of governance.

**Tab. 4** The identified main and sub-themes for the study.

| <b>Main Themes</b>                                  | <b>Sub-themes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Institutional agendas and computing priorities      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritisation of sustainability goals</li> <li>- Economic growth objectives</li> <li>- Environmental protection mandates</li> <li>- Social Welfare objectives</li> <li>- Strategic and Political Interest</li> <li>- Ethical and normative commitments</li> </ul> |
| Unequal influence and access to decision making     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Differential access to resources and decision-making arenas</li> <li>- Processes and hierarchies in decision-making</li> <li>- Financial feasibility of initiatives</li> </ul>                                                                                     |
| Framing Sustainable Development in local governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environmental Interest</li> <li>- Social Interest</li> <li>- Economic Interest</li> <li>- Political Interest</li> <li>- Ethical Interest</li> </ul>                                                                                                                |

The concluding themes—*Institutional agendas and computing priorities*, *Unequal influence and access to decision making*, and *Framing Sustainable development in local governance*—were each subdivided into sub-themes (see Tab. 4). This approach allowed the correlation of empirical results with the theoretical framework of the study, emphasizing both independent motives and the structural power dynamics inherent in the committee's governance.

## **5.5 Ethical Considerations**

This study followed the Ethical Guidelines for Fieldwork of the LUMID programme. Prior to the informant's participation in the study, all informants were provided with a concise oral explanation of the study's objectives and goals. In addition, the informants were sent an information sheet (see Appendix A) via email to prepare for our interviews. The information sheet provides a succinct summary of the study's objective and outlines the procedures for data storage and handling. Furthermore, it explicitly outlines the rights of the interviewee to decline participation, exit from the interview, or choose not to answer certain questions. All informants were notified that they might get in contact at any time for clarification or further information on the study.

After informants understood the methodology and objective of the study, a consent form (see Appendix B) was sent out prior to the real interview. The consent form provided details regarding the voluntary character of the interviews, the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the duration for which the interview data would be stored. Furthermore, all informants did express their consent for their personal information, including their organization, position, and role, to be disclosed in the study without any kind of anonymity. Following each interview, the recordings were copied to a personal laptop, and the original record file was then erased from the recorder. The transcribed material was securely encrypted and exclusively saved on a personal laptop.

Following each interview, participants were once again notified of their entitlement to withdraw from the study or delete the recordings and data at any point. Nevertheless, the participants were explicitly notified that after the study is submitted to Lund University, they would not be able to withdraw from the process.

### ***5.5.1 Positionality***

Another factor that required consideration for this study was my positionality. Hammett et al. (2015) stress the significance of acknowledging and considering one's positionality, including personal, social, and cultural factors, which may impact the collected data or the overall research procedure. I was born in Ecuador, but I've lived in Sweden since my childhood. Therefore, my positionality throughout this thesis has been shaped by both my multicultural background and my academic background formed by Western culture. The process of reflecting on my positionality has been present throughout this research. It has required me to be mindful of how my background, beliefs, and experiences shape the questions I ask, the methods I select, and the interpretations I make. By acknowledging my

positionality, I endeavour to maintain a reflexive and self-critical stance, recognising that my research is not conducted in isolation but is intricately connected to my identity and the multiple dimensions it encompasses. Ultimately, my positionality plays a crucial and dynamic role in the writing of this thesis. It influences not just the specific area of my research and the methodology I use, but also the way I analyse and draw conclusions. Through actively considering my positionality, I aim to conduct research that is both academically rigorous as well as ethically and culturally aware. Thus, by this research I'm trying to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the environmental challenges under examination.

### **5.6 Reflexivity**

All of interviewees had influential positions, including municipal officials, technical specialists, and representatives from national ministries. This provided them access to decision-making spheres and institutional resources, but also implied that their narratives could mirror institutional interests instead of minority perspectives. It was crucial to evaluate how their access to information, formal authority, and organisational affiliations could impact their narratives. These perspectives may have influenced both the narratives presented and the framing of decentralisation and water governance procedures. Although these views provide significant institutional insights, they may also represent organisational interests or exclude the experiences of less powerful stakeholders.

The lack of less formally powerful voices restricts the representativeness of the results. To address this imbalance, I employed semi-structured interviews and probing questions to push informants to transcend traditional narratives. The application of Stakeholder Theory and Political Ecology enhanced the analysis by highlighting concerns of power, agency, and structural inequality, facilitating a critical examination of both the content and context of stakeholder perspectives. This reflexive awareness guided the interpretation of individual interviews and the comprehensive thematic analysis, acknowledging the influence of positionality and power in qualitative research.

### **5.7 Limitations**

The present study acknowledges the inherent limitations of generalization associated with a case study methodology, as interviews conducted with a heterogeneous group of individuals may not yield a statistically representative sample, as outlined by Bernard (2011). Instead, the aim is analytical generalization, offering in-depth insights into how institutional agendas,

power relations, and interpretations of sustainable development are shaped within this governance context.

A key limitation is the lack of numerous crucial stakeholders in the interview sample. ELECAUSTRO, a hydroelectric firm and co-founding member of the committee, rejected many pleas for involvement. Their perspectives would probably have offered significant insights into corporate impact on decision-making within the Committee, especially concerning economic priorities and resource distribution. The lack of their contribution results in a notable gap, particularly considering ELECAUSTRO's pivotal position in the committee and its potential impact on sustainable development efforts. Likewise, three other member institutions failed to reply to the request to participate. The absence of their contribution results in a notable gap. Therefore, I acknowledge that the omission of these crucial perspectives while examining power dynamics could possibly weaken the objectives of the study, especially in terms of achieving a thorough understanding of how various stakeholders navigate their interests. The failure to comprehend the perspectives of this crucial stakeholders may result in an inadequate representation of the power dynamics involved, thus affecting the study's ability to thoroughly examine the complex relationships within the committee. Despite these limitations, the study's credibility is strengthened by the inclusion of participants from several levels of government, including national, provincial, municipal, and parish. This allowed to compare perspectives from different institutions. To remedy knowledge gaps, secondary data and an interview with the Conservation Committee's technical secretary were incorporated. These sources provided a better understanding of the committee's internal operations and context. However, the lack of direct input from several key stakeholders restricts the extent to which the outcomes accurately reflect all points of view within the committee.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews and probing questions were used to extract opinions beyond formal policy narratives, and disparities across institutional positions were examined to determine the strength of the emerging themes. For future research, a more inclusive sample that includes all committee members as well as community stakeholders living within the watershed would improve the ability to analyse the full range of institutional agendas, the complexities of power relations, and the competing framings of sustainable development in decentralised water governance.

## **6. Findings & Discussion**

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical findings of the study in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework. The analysis is organized around the main themes identified during the thematic analysis. Firstly, reflecting stakeholder motivations for participation. Secondly the governance structures and decision-making processes within the committee. Finally, the influence of power dynamics within their governance and the integration of sustainable development principles. Each section combines descriptive accounts from the data with analytical discussion, situating the results within the broader literature on environmental governance and water resource management in the Global South. By linking the findings to existing theory and prior research, the chapter aims to highlight both the specific characteristics of the Conservation Committee and the wider implications for inclusive and sustainable watershed governance.

### **6.1 Institutional agendas and priorities**

The willingness to secure and safeguard water resources is one of the main drivers of engagement. The representative of ETAPA, the municipal utility responsible for water and sewerage services in Cuenca, explains that their involvement is contingent upon the necessity for a dependable raw water supply. ETAPA oversees Cajas National Park and has taken on the responsibility of watershed conservation, as the páramo ecosystems are essential for sustaining the city's drinking water supply. ETAPA, as a public utility, has a mission that integrates service provision with environmental protection. Participation in the committee allows for the monitoring of land use, coordination of conservation measures, and assurance that other stakeholders do not jeopardize water quality. ETAPA illustrates a primary reason for involvement in the committee: the protection of water resources to meet the needs of Cuenca's expanding urban population. This indicates a directive aimed at public service delivery, management of environmental resources, and the guarantee of sustainable water security. Conversely, ETAPA expresses that ELECAUSTRO's involvement highlights the economic benefits of hydropower generation, perceiving water mainly as a productive resource for electricity sales and revenue generation. Thus, the founding member status of both institutions enhances their legitimacy and prominence within the committee (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). Their control over essential resources — infrastructure, technical expertise, and financial capacity — grants both power and legitimacy, attributes identified by Mitchell et al. (1997) as fundamental in shaping stakeholder influence. These capacities enable more effective agenda-setting and outcome-shaping compared to

stakeholders with limited resources. Analysing from a Political Ecology standpoint, the differing motivations of ETAPA and ELECAUSTRO demonstrate that environmental governance is integrated within larger socio-political and economic frameworks (Robbins, 2011; Nygren & Rikoon, 2008). ETAPA conceptualises water as a public good, which corresponds with discussions on social equity and public service provision. In contrast, ELECAUSTRO's illustrates the commodification of nature within market-driven energy systems. This divergence reflects institutional mandates and underscores underlying power asymmetries. In a context of decentralized water governance, entities controlling essential infrastructure and resources can exert disproportionate influence over decision-making. The equilibrium among ecological protection, social equity, and economic gain is perpetually negotiated within a framework where specific interests possess structural advantages.

The delegate from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAATE) likewise frames its engagement in the context of ecological conservation. MAATE is tasked with ensuring the sustainable utilization of natural resources and the protection of biodiversity. Engagement in the committee provides a means to implement national conservation goals at the local level, such as promoting the enlargement and management of protected areas and overseeing species that indicate ecosystem health. This position exemplifies the combination of legitimacy and power as outlined in Stakeholder Theory (Mitchell et al., 1997): legitimacy arises from its statutory authority to define environmental policy, while power is derived from its regulatory capacity and access to specialized expertise. Participation in the committee allows MAATE to meet statutory obligations and strengthen its influence. This engagement illustrates how state- stakeholders utilize collaborative spaces to sustain their influence in local decision-making, thereby embedding centralized environmental objectives within local contexts. The dual role of being both a regulator and a collaborator highlights how ecological objectives are achieved not solely through technical management, but also through the negotiation of power dynamics and institutional mandates (Weber, 1947; Freeman, 2010).

Some actors prioritise conservation, while others utilize the committee as a means to promote economic and social development. Parish governments (GADs) like Nazón, Checa, and Chiquinquirá function under constraints of limited budgets and institutional capacity (Larson, 2004; Muyingo, 2011). Their representatives characterise participation in the committee as a strategic move to secure funding and technical support for local infrastructure and livelihood projects, encompassing irrigation systems, agricultural enhancements, and small-scale tourism initiatives associated with the páramo landscape. The páramo is framed

as a vital source of ecosystem services and as foundational for supporting smallholder agriculture and creating alternative income streams (Reed et al., 2017). Due to limited municipal resources, the committee facilitates a platform for these GADs to align their development goals with wider conservation initiatives, utilizing the expertise, legitimacy, and investment capabilities of larger organizations (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). This highlights how decentralized institutions frequently engage in collaborative arrangements to address fiscal and technical limitations (Adams & Boateng, 2018).

The social aspect of sustainability supports GAD participation. Representatives raise concerns regarding the need for equitable access to water for domestic and agricultural purposes, highlighting that conservation measures must not exclude local residents from decision-making or impose undue financial burdens on their livelihoods (Mitchell et al., 1997; Adams & Hutton, 2007). Their engagement exemplifies the interplay among ecological stewardship, social equity, and economic viability, reflecting the Brundtland triad of environmental, social, and economic sustainability (WCED, 1987). This illustrates how local governments address structural inequalities and resource dependencies while striving to ensure environmental protection and community welfare within contested governance contexts (Robbins, 2011).

A third motivation stems from the desire to mediate conflicts and contribute technical expertise. The University of Cuenca's former representative frequently acted as an intermediary between powerful actors such as ETAPA and the hydropower company ELECAUSTRO, whose interests in water utilisation occasionally diverged. I argue that influence is not exclusively derived from formal authority; actors can also gain salience through credibility, legitimacy, and specialised knowledge (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). In this case, the university's reputation for impartiality and scientific competence enhanced its legitimacy and positioned it as a trusted facilitator capable of bridging institutional divides. This role reflects how academic institutions engage in collaborative governance not only to fulfil their mandate of research and knowledge exchange but also to reinforce their standing as neutral brokers within contested governance arenas (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

In addition to technical or mediating roles, various stakeholders expressed strategic and normative motivations for their participation. Participation in the conservation committee by parish governments (GADs) serves to enhance institutional legitimacy, signal environmental responsibility, and strengthen political capital, especially in the context of

gaining public trust or future electoral support (Suchman, 1995). These strategies illustrate attempts to manoeuvre and re-establish positions within larger governance structures, where visibility can ensure both influence and resource access (Robbins, 2011).

Nearly all stakeholders articulated a commitment to intergenerational equity and environmental stewardship, positioning participation as a moral duty to safeguard natural resources for future generations. This corresponds with the normative aspect of sustainable development, highlighting that participants frequently reference common ethical principles to justify collaboration. In this case the stakeholders express these values, despite the potential limitations of economic revenues (WCED, 1987; De Roo & Porter, 2012). Values-based motivations demonstrate that environmental governance is influenced by both instrumental objectives and fundamental beliefs regarding the connection between society and nature.

### ***6.1.1 Summarizing points***

Taken together, the empirical evidence shows that stakeholders engage in the Conservation Committee for interlocking reasons. Public agencies such as ETAPA and MAATE participate to fulfil statutory mandates and secure the water resources critical to their service missions. Parish governments join to obtain resources and technical support for local development and to assert their interests within a multi-level governance system. Academic actors engage to mediate conflicts and lend technical credibility, while all parties invoke sustainability and ethical stewardship to varying degrees. This multifaceted motivation underscores the complexity of collaborative environmental governance: participation is driven not by a single factor but by the convergence of institutional agendas, resource dependencies, strategic positioning and normative commitments within the broader context of decentralised water governance.

## **6.2 Influence and access to decision making**

Interviews suggest that access to decision-making spaces and the capacity to influence outcomes are significantly determined by the allocation of institutional resources. Larger entities, including ETAPA, ELECAUSTRO, and national agencies, have the financial, technical, and organisational capabilities to consistently participate in committee meetings, develop project proposals, and produce data to substantiate their positions. ETAPA's dual role as the water and sewerage provider for Cuenca and the manager of Cajas National Park equips it with the necessary infrastructure and specialised personnel to develop watershed

management strategies. In contrast, parish governments (GADs) function with constrained budgets, diminished technical capacity, and smaller administrative teams. Involvement is often limited by logistical barriers and competing local priorities, restricting participation in key negotiations and diminishing capacity to influence agenda-setting. This imbalance illustrates the claim that actors possessing greater resources—be it financial, technical, or organizational—are frequently viewed as more competent in executing projects, thereby increasing their prominence and negotiating power in collective decision-making (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). Organisations tend to align with entities that control essential resources to obtain funding, expertise, or political support. This is demonstrated by the strategic alliances formed by GADs with the Conservation Committee to obtain technical assistance and financial resources. These alignments, however, reinforce existing hierarchies, resulting in a asymmetric governance landscape, wherein formal equality, such as equal voting rights for each member, coexists with unequal capacities to influence outcomes (Robbins, 2011; Nygren & Rikoon, 2008). The outcome is a stratified participation system: although the committee's statutes provide equal formal representation for all members, actual influence over decisions is significantly linked to the control of resources, expertise, and institutional reach. This indicates that agenda-setting authority is held by those actors most capable of facilitating implementation, thereby reinforcing both structural and relational inequalities in the governance process.

The committee's charter formally emphasises consensus-based decision-making; however, the process of achieving consensus is influenced by informal hierarchies and resource asymmetries. Interviews with the representative of the University of Cuenca indicate that decisions often align with the interests of those providing the most significant financial or technical resources. He stated that significant investors are aware that a portion will be allocated for negotiations that benefit other entities. This indicates that project prioritisation is not merely a technical task but arises from a negotiation process where resource-rich stakeholders gain backing for their projects by making concessions in other areas. This dynamic exemplifies the premise of Stakeholder Theory, which posits those stakeholders with greater salience—stemming from their power, legitimacy, and urgency—are more effectively positioned to influence outcomes (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). This negotiation process illustrates the embedding of governance within wider political and economic frameworks, wherein control over material resources allows certain actors to dominate the distribution of environmental benefits (Robbins, 2011; Nygren & Rikoon, 2008). Leadership is essential in mediating these dynamics. The stakeholders highlighted the

technical secretary's proficiency in negotiation, trust-building, and conflict management among stakeholders. Her comprehensive understanding of the institutional framework, along with strong interpersonal connections, enabled her to navigate conflicting interests and promote compromise. This observation corresponds with existing literature on collaborative governance, emphasising the role of skilled facilitators and social capital in addressing power imbalances and fostering consensus (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Reliance on key individuals introduces vulnerability; the departure of trusted mediators can destabilise negotiations and exacerbate latent conflicts, highlighting that governance outcomes depend on both institutional structures and individual agency. A further expression of hierarchy is evident in the committee's leadership structure. Senior officials from major institutions often lead meetings and establish agendas. The representative from GAD Nazón indicated that the manager of ELECAUSTRO holds the position of committee president, thereby implicitly recognising the locus of decision-making authority. Smaller stakeholders may express concerns; however, their proposals are unlikely to progress unless they align with the priorities of dominant institutions. This reflects the critique that decentralised governance, although seemingly participatory, may perpetuate existing power imbalances when resource control and positional authority are concentrated among a limited number of individuals (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Larson, 2004).

Finally, the feasibility of proposed initiatives is closely linked to funding availability. All stakeholders recognize that the committee's resources are finite, so projects must be not only environmentally sound but financially viable. This requirement means that initiatives proposed by well-resourced actors, who can commit co-financing or technical support, are more readily adopted. The ETAPA representative pointed out that the company's contributions—such as funding technical staff or paying for environmental studies—give them greater leverage in steering the committee's agenda. Conversely, parish representatives observe that while they can participate in discussions, limited financial contributions reduce their projects' chances of approval. This emphasis on financial feasibility ties back to broader discussions of decentralized water governance. Decentralization transfers service provision responsibilities to local governments but often without commensurate fiscal resources (Addams et al. 2020). As a result, smaller GADs depend on partnerships with larger public utilities or private companies to realize projects (Matevosyan et al., 2024). The Conservation Committees prioritization of fundable initiatives reflects this structural constraint. From a political-ecology perspective, it underscores how environmental governance outcomes are conditioned by economic structures and resource flows.

The feasibility of proposed initiatives is closely tied to the availability of funding. All stakeholders recognise that the committee functions with limited resources, needing that projects are both environmentally sustainable and financially feasible. This structural requirement indicates that initiatives proposed by well-resourced actors—capable of committing co-financing, supplying technical staff, or covering the expenses of environmental studies—are more likely to be adopted. The ETAPA representative noted that the company's capacity to finance technical personnel and initiate specialised studies provides it with influence over the committee's agenda. In contrast, representatives of parish governments indicate that while they can engage in discussions, their restricted financial contributions considerably diminish the probability of their proposals receiving approval. The focus on financial feasibility highlights a broader issue in decentralised water governance: decentralisation reforms frequently assign service provision responsibilities to local governments without providing adequate fiscal resources (Larson, 2004; Ribot et al., 2006). As a result, smaller GADs rely on collaborations with larger public utilities, national agencies, or private companies to implement projects. This perspective emphasises the relationship between resource control and stakeholder salience, with financial capacity directly influencing an actor's decision-making power (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). It demonstrates that environmental governance outcomes are influenced by overarching economic structures and resource distributions. Consequently, the ability to execute conservation measures involves not only technical considerations but also the challenge of addressing established fiscal and political disparities (Robbins, 2011; Nygren & Rikoon, 2008).

### ***6.2.1 Summarizing points***

In theory, the Conservation Committees is a democratic forum where all stakeholders have equal say. In practice, decision-making is negotiated through a combination of formal rules and informal power dynamics. Differential access to resources determines who can participate consistently and shape discussions; hierarchical processes mean that decision outcomes often mirror the interests of those who contribute most; and the financial viability of projects dictates which initiatives move forward. Skilled mediators and consensus procedures mitigate some imbalances, but the committee remains susceptible to resource-driven hierarchies. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing the effectiveness and fairness of decentralized water governance and for designing interventions that enhance the voice of less resourced stakeholders while ensuring that conservation goals are met.

### **6.3 The framing of Sustainable development**

Many committee members primarily associate the concept of sustainable development with environmental protection. The representative from MAATE, tasked with designing environmental policies and coordinating strategies for the sustainable use of natural resources, posits that long-term sustainability is intrinsically linked to the conservation of páramos and wetlands. The stakeholder contends that protecting these ecosystems guarantees the ongoing delivery of vital services, including water supply, climate regulation, and biodiversity, thus benefiting both present and future generations. This viewpoint aligns with the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development, which posits that environmental protection is essential for fulfilling human needs over time (WCED, 1987). ETAPA, the municipal water company, emphasises ecological integrity as the foremost criterion for sustainability. The management of Cajas National Park and its involvement in watershed conservation are motivated by the necessity to ensure clean water for Cuenca's expanding population. Thus, both MAATE and ETAPA represent stakeholders whose organisational mandates and resource dependencies are closely aligned with environmental outcomes (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). Their emphasis on ecological protection strengthens their institutional legitimacy and influence within the committee. This strong focus on environmental issues may marginalise other aspects of sustainability, specifically social equity and economic viability. This imbalance may indicate underlying power dynamics, wherein actors possessing greater resources and technical authority define sustainability in alignment with their institutional priorities, potentially marginalising community-level concerns or livelihood needs (Robbins, 2011; Adams & Hutton, 2007). Consequently, although the committee's discussion on sustainable development emphasises environmental stewardship, its implementation in governance may fail to capture the comprehensive, multidimensional approach outlined in sustainability literature (De Roo & Porter, 2012). Furthermore, when asked, none of the stakeholders were able to clarify the definition of sustainability or sustainable development that the Conservation Committee holds.

ETAPA acknowledges the importance of collaborating with local communities to minimise grazing in ecologically sensitive regions; however, there is a lack of thorough exploration regarding feasible alternative livelihoods. This highlights a tension noted in Political Ecology literature: conservation initiatives, if undertaken without a clear focus on social justice and equity, may marginalise or exclude local communities (Robbins, 2011;

Adams & Hutton, 2007). In contrast, parish governments often approach sustainable development from a social perspective, emphasizing the effects of conservation efforts on community wellbeing. The GAD of Nazón, for instance, became a member of the committee aimed at preventing agricultural expansion into páramo zones, while also showing interest in investigating livelihood alternatives for the residents impacted. The representative's focus on collaboration within the committee highlights a dedication to harmonizing ecological protection with social resilience, even though these alternatives were not explicitly outlined. In a similar vein, the GADs of Checa and Chiquindad promote “clean” livestock farming and sustainable agriculture, highlighting the importance of ensuring that production aligns with environmental respect. These viewpoints correspond with community-based governance methods, emphasising inclusion, pro-poor results, and the incorporation of local needs into environmental policy (Adams & Boateng, 2018). The social framing of sustainability is also evident in appeals for active community involvement. Both MAATE and parish representatives emphasise the significance of engaging local residents via incentive programmes, participatory projects, and knowledge exchange. This reflects the perspective that sustainable development should enable communities to engage in decision-making and to benefit from conservation initiatives—a principle that is fundamental to the Brundtland triad of environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability (WCED, 1987; De Roo & Porter, 2012).

Economic factors are however, deeply integrated into stakeholders' understanding of sustainability. ETAPA prioritises ecological protection while also acknowledging that a secure water supply is fundamental to Cuenca's economic growth. The company invests in reforestation programs and watershed monitoring to ensure the long-term availability of clean water, thus supporting the city's development and its operational sustainability. This dual framing illustrates that actors combine environmental and economic interests to uphold legitimacy and garner support from various constituencies (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Parish governments employ a similar logic, connecting ecosystem protection to agricultural viability and the potential for tourism development as alternative income sources. Nevertheless, limited institutional capacity and fiscal constraints result in a disparity between aspirations and the capacity to implement economically sustainable alternatives. This imbalance is identified as a structural challenge within decentralised governance systems, wherein local actors assume responsibilities without receiving corresponding resource allocations (Larson, 2004; Robbins, 2011). The focus on economic feasibility reflects the committee's overall decision-making processes, where projects are prioritised

based on their ability to obtain funding and show clear socio-economic advantages. This highlights the ongoing difficulty of aligning ecological objectives with economic demands in resource-limited settings, where governance results are influenced by financial resources and institutional capabilities alongside conservation aims (Adams & Boateng, 2018). When it comes to the implementation of resource management, it is essential to emphasise the significance of having a distinct definition of sustainability and sustainable development.

Stakeholders express sustainable development in manners that promote institutional and political goals. The representative from the University of Cuenca noted that, despite differing priorities, committee members generally agree on sustainability as a fundamental prerequisite for development. This discourse frames sustainability as a political language, a narrative strategically utilized to foster cooperation among actors with competing interests (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Robbins, 2011). National and municipal agencies enhance their institutional legitimacy by invoking sustainable development, which illustrates their alignment with international environmental commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and indicates adherence to national policy frameworks. Participation in sustainability initiatives enhances the profile of parish governments (GADs) within regional governance networks, indicating responsiveness to constituents' environmental concerns and bolstering their claims to future funding and political support. This illustrates the application of normative commitments to achieve wider stakeholder support, merging ethical considerations with strategic goals (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). It demonstrates how sustainability can be utilized as a political tool to forge alliances and to legitimize governance roles within contentious decision-making arenas.

Several interviewees expressed their participation in explicitly ethical terms. Representatives from MAATE and ETAPA underscore a moral obligation to protect ecosystems for future generations, while the University of Cuenca stresses the duty to provide unbiased, knowledge-based expertise in support of conservation efforts. This framing closely aligns with the Brundtland Commission's conception of sustainable development, which centers on intergenerational equity (WCED, 1987) and resonates with broader discourses on environmental stewardship that emphasize care, responsibility, and custodianship of natural resources (Adams & Hutton, 2007). Ethical commitments illustrate the normative aspect of stakeholder engagement, where actions are justified not only by material benefits but also by alignment with shared values and moral principles (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). These commitments indicate a focus on ecological and social justice, recognizing that conservation efforts must consider both environmental integrity and

equitable outcomes. Consequently, in addition to instrumental or strategic motivations, stakeholders engage in the committee to fulfil deeply rooted normative commitments that validate their role and correspond with overarching moral principles in environmental governance.

### ***6.3.1 Summarizing points***

In the Conservation Committee, sustainable development is not a single, agreed-upon goal but a flexible concept invoked to justify diverse agendas. Environmental agencies prioritize ecological integrity; local governments stress social welfare and economic viability; utilities balance ecological protection with water security; and academic and political actors use sustainability to mediate conflicts and build legitimacy. These findings support the notion that sustainable development functions as a “boundary object”, sufficiently broad to mobilize collective action yet open to divergent interpretations. This malleability enables collaboration but also masks underlying power asymmetries, as dominant actors may steer sustainability discourse to align with their interests. Recognizing how sustainability is framed across environmental, social, economic, political and ethical dimensions therefore offers critical insight into the committee’s governance practices and highlights areas where dialogue and capacity-building are needed to achieve more holistic outcomes.

## **7. Conclusions**

This thesis set out to examine why stakeholders engage in the Conservation Committee, how decisions are negotiated and implemented within the committee, and how sustainable development is framed and applied. Through qualitative analysis of interviews with representatives from national agencies, a municipal utility, parish governments and a university representative, the study reveals a complex landscape of motivations, power dynamics and normative discourses that both enable and constrain collaborative water governance.

First, stakeholders engage in the committee for varied but overlapping reasons. National and municipal institutions prioritise conservation and water security, consistent with their formal mandates and operational needs. Parish governments, operating under devolved responsibilities but facing fiscal and technical constraint, join to secure resources, protect livelihoods and gain a voice in regional water management. Academic actors contribute technical legitimacy and mediate conflicts. These motivations span environmental, social, economic, political and ethical interests, underscoring the

multifaceted nature of stakeholder engagement.

Second, the committee's consensus-based decision-making is moderated by unequal access to resources. Larger entities can invest in projects, attend meetings regularly and thus shape agendas, while smaller GADs are less able to influence outcomes. Skilled facilitators and trusted leaders help bridge these gaps, but the process remains susceptible to power imbalances. This finding aligns with critiques of decentralisation that warn of replicating existing hierarchies unless support mechanisms accompany the transfer of authority.

Third, "sustainable development" functions both as a shared goal and a contested concept. Environmental agencies and utilities equate it with ecosystem conservation and water security, whereas local governments stress social equity and economic viability. Despite these differences, sustainability serves as a common language that enables collaboration, reflecting its flexibility but also its potential to obscure underlying power imbalances.

Taken together, the results suggest that successful collaborative water governance requires more than formal structures; it depends on addressing resource disparities, institutionalising mediation and ensuring that diverse interpretations of sustainability are openly discussed. While based on a single case, the study contributes to understanding how decentralised environmental governance operates in practice and highlights areas for future research.

### ***7.1 Future research***

This study is based on a small number of interviews and focuses on one watershed committee, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could expand the dataset to include additional stakeholders (e.g., small farmers, indigenous groups) and compare committees across regions to identify broader patterns. Quantitative analyses of project outcomes and financial flows could complement the qualitative insights offered here. Moreover, investigating how national policy reforms and international conservation programmes influence local governance in Latin America would deepen understanding of the multi-scalar dynamics at play in the region as well as within individual countries.

**Word count: 13369**

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# Appendices

## Appendix A - Information Sheet

### Hoja de información

Título del estudio de investigación:

“El comité de conservación del Río Machángara – Porque quieren conservan la cuenca?”

**Investigador:** Thea Rivas (email)

**Supervisor:** Torsten Krause (email)

Está invitado a participar en una entrevista para un estudio que estoy realizando como parte de mi programa de maestría, Gestión y Desarrollo Internacional, en la Universidad de Lund. Antes de decidir si participar o no en esta entrevista, lea la siguiente información. Si tiene alguna pregunta o información poco clara mientras lee, comuníquese conmigo.

#### **Objetivo:**

El propósito de este estudio es contribuir a la investigación sobre el manejo de recursos examinando el caso del autoestablecido comité de conversación para la cuenca del río Machángara en Cuenca, Ecuador. El estudio tiene como objetivo obtener información de las once instituciones que forman el comité, con el objetivo de resaltar los factores interconectados que dan forma e impactan los esfuerzos de conservación del río Machángara.

#### **¿Tienes que participar?**

La participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. Tiene derecho a negarse a participar o a responder cualquier pregunta. También puedes retirarte en cualquier momento sin dar ningún motivo.

#### **¿Qué significa participar?**

Si acepta participar en este estudio, se le dará la opción de hacer la entrevista en sus oficinas o se le invitará a una entrevista semiestructurada a través de una plataforma digital como Zoom o Microsoft Teams. La duración de la entrevista será de unos 60 minutos, dependiendo de tu disponibilidad y del nivel de información que quieras compartir.

#### **¿Cómo se manejará la información?**

La entrevista se grabará con su consentimiento y se transcribirá. Toda la información recopilada no será identificable si desea permanecer en el anonimato. Toda la información personal será codificada si así se solicita.

Todas las grabaciones y documentos transcritos se almacenarán de forma confidencial. Nadie más que el investigador y el supervisor tendrá acceso directo a las grabaciones o documentos. Las grabaciones se borrarán una vez que se complete la transcripción. Los datos se utilizarán para la tesis, lo que puede dar lugar a que se compartan algunas citas durante el examen de tesis.

Si tiene más preguntas o inquietudes sobre este estudio, comuníquese conmigo en cualquier momento.

Gracias por leer esta información y considere participar.

## Appendix B - Consent Form Template

### Formulario de consentimiento para la entrevista

#### Título del estudio de investigación:

“ El comité de conservación del Rio Machángara – Porque quieren conservan la cuenca?”

Este formulario es para confirmar que ha comprendido el propósito del estudio, lo que implica la entrevista y que acepta participar. Lea atentamente y marque cada casilla para indicar su acuerdo.

| Pregunta                                                                                                       | Marca si estás de acuerdo |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Confirmando que he leído y comprendido la hoja de información del proyecto anterior.                           |                           |
| Entiendo quien tendrá acceso a la entrevista y entiendo cómo y durante cuánto tiempo se almacenarán los datos. |                           |
| Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirarme en cualquier momento sin dar motivo.  |                           |
| Acepto que me graben y entiendo que la entrevista grabada se utilizará para el análisis de la investigación.   |                           |
| Entiendo que mis palabras podrán ser citadas en la publicación (en este caso en la tesis).                     |                           |
| Acepto ser identificable con mi nombre real, organización o ubicación geográfica.                              |                           |
| No acepto ser identificable con las características anteriores y prefiero ser anónima.                         |                           |
| Por la presente, acepto participar en el estudio de investigación anterior.                                    |                           |

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Nombre del participante: | Fecha: |
| Firma del participante:  |        |

## **Appendix C - Interview Guide**

### **Part 1 – Stakeholders’ interest in participating in the committee**

- ¿Cuál es tu nombre completo y a que institución representas?
- ¿Cuál es tu papel dentro de su institución?
- ¿Cuál es tu papel dentro del comité?
- ¿Qué aspectos específicos del comité de conservación se alinean con los valores y objetivos de tu institución?
- ¿Existen desafíos u oportunidades específicos relacionados con la conservación que llevaron a su institución a unirse al comité?
- ¿Existe alguna preocupación ambiental o comunitaria específica que haya motivado a su institución a participar activamente en el comité de conservación?
- ¿Puede dar más detalles sobre los factores que motivaron a su institución a involucrarse en el comité de conservación?
- ¿Qué papel cree que desempeña el comité de conservación en la promoción de los intereses y objetivos de su institución?
- En su opinión, ¿cómo contribuye la participación en el comité de conservación al logro de los objetivos de su institución?
- ¿Puede compartir alguna historia de éxito o resultados positivos resultantes de la participación de su institución en el comité de conservación?

### **Part 2 – Interconnection of stakeholders’ interests and the sustainable development framework**

- ¿Cuáles son las principales metas u objetivos que su institución busca lograr en sus actividades y compromisos?
- En las iniciativas de su organización, ¿qué factores o consideraciones contribuyen a impactos positivos a largo plazo en la comunidad y el medio ambiente?
- ¿Puede describir cómo las acciones de su institución se alinean con objetivos más amplios relacionados con el bienestar ambiental y social?
- Desde su perspectiva, ¿cómo contribuyen las actividades de su institución a la mejora general de la comunidad y el medio ambiente?
- ¿Existen valores o principios específicos que guíen los procesos de toma de decisiones de su institución, particularmente en relación con las preocupaciones comunitarias y ambientales?
- ¿Podría dar ejemplos de cómo los proyectos de su institución promueven resultados

positivos tanto para la comunidad como para el medio ambiente?

- En su función, ¿cuáles considera que son los factores clave que garantizan los efectos positivos duraderos de las iniciativas de su institución?
- ¿Cómo incorpora su institución consideraciones para el bienestar de la comunidad y el medio ambiente en su planificación estratégica?
- ¿Qué aspectos del trabajo de su institución contribuyen a los objetivos más amplios del desarrollo sostenible y responsable?
- ¿Puede comentar algún caso notable en el que los intereses de su institución hayan coincidido con objetivos más amplios relacionados con la sostenibilidad y el desarrollo comunitario?
- ¿Qué tipo de significado o efecto cree que tiene su asociación con el CC sobre el marco de desarrollo sostenible?

### **Part 3 – Power dynamics between stakeholders**

- ¿Cómo se toman las decisiones dentro del comité con respecto a la asignación de recursos?
- ¿Podría describir los factores que influyen en la determinación de qué recursos reciben prioridad dentro del comité?
- En su experiencia, ¿qué influye en las decisiones del comité a la hora de priorizar los recursos?
- ¿Existen ciertas consideraciones o aspectos que tienden a guiar al comité a la hora de decidir qué recursos priorizar?
- ¿Qué criterios o elementos se suelen tener en cuenta a la hora de decidir la priorización de recursos en el comité?
- En su función, ¿ha observado algún patrón o tendencia en cómo se eligen los recursos para priorizar dentro del comité?
- ¿Cómo suele determinar el comité la importancia de diversos recursos sin considerar explícitamente la dinámica de poder?

## **Interview Guide for the technical secretary of the committee**

- El POA - me puedes contar lo que es y cómo se constituye?
- ¿También quiero saber un poco más del proceso de evaluación hacia porque se decide llevar a cabo un proyecto, pero otro no - tienes conocimiento en el tema?
- Verónica me comentó que ETAPA es una de las instituciones fundadoras - me podrías dar más énfasis en el tema? ¿Por ejemplo, si sabes de donde surgió la idea de unirse para formar el comité - de quien fue la idea inicial?
- Al inicio eran ocho y ahora son once las instituciones que forman parte del comité - me puedes contar si hubo conflictos al inicio por las diferentes partes y cómo se resolvieron?
- ¿Cómo suele determinar el comité la importancia de diversos recursos sin considerar explícitamente la dinámica de poder?
- Hay algún tipo de discusión de tipo - quién debería ser parte del comité?
- ¿Puede quien quiera ser parte del comité?
- ¿Como se decide?