

Imagining water

Worldviews and critiques of the Piatúa Resiste movement in Ecuador

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In spite of the negative social and ecological impact of dams, a Swedish company aims to construct a hydroelectric dam in one of the three most biodiverse and endemic regions of Ecuador: the area surrounding the Piatúa river on the edge of the Amazon. The Kichwa communities living on the river banks are protesting against this dam, that threatens their livelihoods, amongst others using the 'water is life' discourse. In this research project, I aim to investigate social imaginaries and discourses of water in the context of the local protest against the Piatúa dam. I aim to work with Kichwa communities that collaborate in the movement Piatúa Resiste. I analyse movement members' meanings of water, its ontologies and knowledge systems, and daily life around the river, and look at the ways in which their critique and resistance are represented by the movements' members in stories, conversations, documents and practices of everyday life. Next to conventional ethnographic methods such as participant observation, informal conversations and interviews, I will use sensory and audio-visual ethnography. For that purpose, I aim to organise and record on audio and video a so-called 'Water Pilgrimage' to gain a better understanding of people's encounters and interactions with various manifestations of water. In this pilgrimage, audio-(and-)visual methods are particularly useful in gaining more insights in the ways in which they talk and express themselves about water, their interactions with it, and how they imagine water. I will use the audio and visual material to produce an ethnographic film.