

Governance | Individual communication

IC - (21024) - POLITICIZING HYDROPOWER PLANTS IN PORTUGAL: ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES AND PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS OF HYDROPOWER IN RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS TIME

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Background and objectives

The recent sale of three large-scale Portuguese hydroelectric power dams to an international consortium gave rise to local protests reopening old wounds of rural communities affected by these infrastructures (Luís et al., 2015). In this paper, we retell the history of key dams in Portugal through their discursive constructions, lived experiences, and psychosocial impacts and embeddedness through a psychosocial historiography.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

For this, we rely both upon primary and secondary sources of data, i.e. archival television footage (N =19), newspaper articles (N=12) and narrative interviews with participants of a protest movement (N=2). We applied pragmatic discourse analysis focused on identifying the main discourses related with justice dimensions of hydropower in rural areas in Portugal and with the infrastructural harm, discursive construction, and psychosocial impacts of the selected dams.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Our analyses reveal that 1. Dams are rhetorically constructed by authorities at different levels and across time as promoting local development and as green, despite their main role in providing urban centers with electricity and negative local impacts for rural communities; 2. the psycho-social impacts and harms caused by dams as infrastructures to rural local communities were often caused even when the dams existed only as plans, and also during their construction and after it, across generations; 3. rural local communities were mostly made invisible as political subjects by developers and authorities across the history of hydro politics in Portugal, from the dictatorship to the democratic regime. However, there were also several instances of communities' contestations to hydropower across time that these analyses bring to the fore.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

As such, these analyses and findings highlight the relevance of going beyond mainstream dimensions of energy/environmental justice and considering more structural dimensions, based on historical and territorial power dynamics, that create psychosocial impacts across generations and that stay engraved in communities' collective memories.

Palavras-chave : Environmental Injustices, Psychosocial impacts, Resistance, Hydropower, Portugal, Psychosocial Historiography