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THE CONSTITUTION OF THE "GUARDIÕES DAS ÁGUAS" MOVEMENT IN SOUTHERN MINAS GERAIS

Valderí de Castro Alcântara[1]

Ana Eliza Ferreira Alvim da Silva[2]

José Roberto Pereira[3]

Eloisa Helena de Souza Cabral[4]

Alyce Cardoso Campos[5]

Abstract

This study addresses the formation and dynamics of the "Water Guardians" movement in the Circuito das Águas region of Minas Gerais. The research aims to describe the establishment of the water justice movement "Water Guardians" in southern Minas Gerais, exploring how it was formed and consolidated its struggle for the protection of mineral waters, using Habermas's concept of the lifeworld as a theoretical lens. The research was conducted over more than two years of continuous interaction between researchers and civil society organizations. Participant observations, local diagnostics, interviews, and informal conversations were employed, along with the collection, systematization, and analysis of documents. The data analysis was guided by the concept of the lifeworld, seeking to understand the symbolic and social relationships that sustain the movement. The results reveal that the "Water Guardians" movement unifies different social actors around the valuation and protection of mineral waters, understood as a common good and an element of local identity. Since the 2000s, the movement has constituted a resistance to bidding processes that aimed at the commercial exploitation of the waters. The study identified the interconnections between culture, personality, and society, highlighting how water acts as an element of socialization, identity, and knowledge transmission among the "water peoples." The research concludes that the "Water Guardians" movement played a fundamental role in constructing a collective identity around mineral waters, positioning itself as an important form of resistance to commercial exploitation and reaffirming water as a common good.

Keywords: Civil Society; Mineral Waters; Social Management; Water Conflicts.

Resumo

Este estudo aborda a constituição e as dinâmicas do movimento "Guardiões das Águas" no Circuito das Águas de Minas Gerais. O objetivo da pesquisa é descrever a constituição do movimento de justiça hídrica "Guardiões das Águas" no sul de Minas Gerais, explorando como ele se formou e consolidou sua luta pela proteção das águas minerais, utilizando o conceito de mundo-da-vida de Habermas como lente teórica. A pesquisa foi conduzida ao longo de mais de dois anos de interação contínua entre pesquisadores e organizações da sociedade civil. Foram empregadas observações participantes, realização de diagnósticos locais, condução de entrevistas e conversas informais, além da coleta, sistematização e análise de documentos. A análise dos dados foi orientada pelo conceito de mundo-da-vida, buscando compreender as relações simbólicas e sociais que sustentam o movimento. Os resultados revelam que o movimento "Guardiões das Águas" unifica diferentes atores sociais em torno da valorização e proteção das águas minerais, entendidas como um bem comum e elemento identidade local. Desde os anos 2000, o movimento se constitui como uma resistência aos processos licitatórios, que visavam à exploração comercial das águas. O estudo identificou os entrelaçamentos entre cultura, personalidade e sociedade, evidenciando como as águas atuam como elementos de socialização, identidade e transmissão de saberes entre os "povos das águas". A pesquisa conclui que o movimento "Guardiões das Águas" desempenhou um papel fundamental na construção de uma identidade coletiva em torno das águas minerais, configurando-se como uma importante forma de resistência à exploração comercial e reafirmação das águas como bem comum.

Palavras chave: Águas Minerais; Conflitos Hídricos; Gestão Social; Sociedade Civil.

[1] Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Ph. D. in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). E-mail: valderidecastroalcantara@gmail.com

[2] Scientific Dissemination Coordinator and Journalist at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). Ph. D in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). E-mail: anaeliza.alvim@gmail.com

[3] Professor at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). Ph. D. in Sociology at the University of Brasília (UnB). E-mail: jrobertopereira2013@gmail.com

[4] Professor at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). Ph. D. in Social Sciences at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). E-mail: elocabral@uol.com.br

[5] Professor at the Federal Institute of the South of Minas Gerais (IFSULDEMINAS). Ph. D. in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). E-mail: alycecardosoc@yahoo.com.br

INTRODUCTION

Water is an essential element in human life, playing diverse roles in social interactions and socio-environmental conflicts. Particularly, mineral waters, due to their physical-chemical properties and their use for both human consumption and health treatments, are often the subject of disputes. In Brazil, legislation classifies these waters as minerals, which complicates their sustainable preservation. Although the United Nations General Assembly recognized the human right to water in 2010, this right has not yet been fully implemented in various regions of Brazil, especially concerning mineral waters. The management of these waters, from the perspective of mineral resources, raises debates about their exploitation and the cultural, social, and environmental impact of the current legal-institutional framework.

Historically, conflicts over water involve issues such as human rights (the human right to water and, more recently, the debate on the right of nature to water), the coloniality of nature, the role of multinationals in the market logic, and the economic treatment of water at the expense of cultural, social, and environmental considerations. These conflicts also encompass issues of class, gender, and ethnicity. In opposition to the processes of water exploitation and commodification, various water justice movements have emerged. One notable example is the conflicts in the Circuito das Águas region of Minas Gerais, globally recognized for the São Lourenço case involving the multinational Nestlé Waters. These conflicts, characterized by their specific nature, revolve around the exploitation of mineral waters. Notably, water justice movements are primarily formed by civil society organizations, which generally act as representatives of alternative knowledge systems and value-facts in human-nature relations. In the case of mineral water, these movements particularly demand the recognition of these waters as cultural heritage, a common good, and a human right.

The research aims to describe the formation of the “Water Guardians” water justice movement in southern Minas Gerais, exploring how it was established and how it consolidated its struggle for the protection of mineral waters, using Habermas's concept of the lifeworld as a theoretical lens. The research is justified by the need to understand the dynamics of conflicts related to mineral waters in the Circuito das Águas of Minas Gerais, a region marked by intense disputes between commercial interests and the preservation of natural resources. Through a diachronic and participatory empirical investigation, which included participant observations, interviews, and document analysis over two years, this study contributes to the field of Social Management by proposing a practical application of the lifeworld concept in the analysis of environmental conflicts.

The study is part of a broader investigation within the field of Social Management studies, particularly from a Habermasian perspective. It contributes to the field of Social Management by presenting a participatory and diachronic dynamic of empirical research focused on an issue that is under-researched in the field and that involves conflicts over the exploitation and management of water resources. Additionally, it offers the possibility of operationalizing the lifeworld concept as a theoretical foundation, a guide for empirical research, and an interpretation framework based on the categories of society, culture, and personality. In the following sections, we present a discussion on the lifeworld perspective.

THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORLD-OF-LIFE

The objective of the work of Jürgen Habermas, German philosopher and sociologist, is to develop a theory of rationality that can serve as a basis for a critical theory of society (RISSE, 2000; KIM GRUNIG, 2011; MONTI *et al*., 2022; ROYKA *et al*. 2022). In this sense, "Habermasian thought can be regarded as multiculturalist, pluralist and multiphilosophical, since it promotes an open, dialogic and critical dialectic reflective process" (POLI, 2013, p. 13). In addition, the author considers that the Habermasian theory has the world-of-life as a privileged locus for understanding society. There is another perspective that composes the Habermasian dual vision: the system perspective. However, this article only uses the concept of world-of-life as a theoretical element and guide for empirical research through the categories society, culture and personality – components of the world-of-life (SILVA; PEREIRA; FELIZARDO, 2022).

Each participant in the communicative action possesses a "moving horizon", being part of a dynamic world-of-life. Habermas (2012) argues that whenever the world-of-life has been chosen as a basic concept to explain a theory of society, it has been biased by focusing solely on one of the three structural components: culture, society or personality. On the other hand, Habermas (2012) understands the world-of-live as made up by culture, society and personality in an articulated and dynamic way: culture (reserve or collection of knowledge), society (legitimate institutional orders) and personality (competencies that enable the individual to speak and act). To talk about the world-of-life, it is necessary to articulate it with the concept of communicative action (RISSE, 2000; KIM GRUNIG, 2011; MONTI *et al*., 2022; ROYKA *et al*. 2022).

In contemporary society, communicative action is present in the formation of identity, in the institutions and in the socialization process. This means that the symbolic reproduction of society can only be accomplished through communicative actions. Therefore, communicative action and world-of-

life are presented by the author as complementary concepts (HABERMAS, 2004). The world-of-life, being a repository of knowledge and experiences, can be used "as an interpretative resource, as a linguistically organized store of background assumptions that reproduces itself as cultural tradition" (HABERMAS, 2010, p. 156). As can be seen in Chart 1 and Chart 2, in addition to culture, Habermas (2012) regards society and personality as resources, not just restrictions, both for the maintenance of the components themselves and for the reproduction of action oriented towards understanding.

Chart 1 - Contributions by the reproduction processes to the maintenance of the world-of-life

Reproduction processes	Structural componentes		
	Culture	**Society**	**Personality**
Cultural reproduction	Agreeable interpretation schemes ("valid knowledge")	Legitimation	Behavior patterns effective in education; education goals
Social integration	Obligations	Legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships	Social belongings
Socialization	Interpretations	Motivation for acting under the norms	Interaction abilities ("personal identity")

Source: Habermas (2012).

The world-of-life plays roles in the process of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization. For this reason, it constitutes the background of the communicative action. Reinforcing this idea, Habermas (2015, p. 16) states: "the symbolic structures of the world-of-life are reproduced, then, through the continuity of valid knowledge, the stabilization of group solidarity and the formation of players capable of responding for their acts" – as showed in Chart 2. The intersubjectivity that marks social relations in communicative action, according to Habermas (2004), occurs immersed in and resorting to three types of knowledge existing in the world-of-life: background knowledge (proper of the world-of-life), contextual knowledge (referring to problematized themes, in the foreground) and knowledge relative to a horizon of the situation (SILVA; PEREIRA; FELIZARDO, 2022). As Habermas sees it (2012), the whole process of understanding takes place against the background of a pre-understanding, a culturally exercised pre-comprehension.

Chart 2 - Reproduction functions of understanding-oriented action

Reproduction processes	Structural components		
	Culture	**Society**	**Personality**
Cultural reproduction	Tradition, criticism, acquisition of cultural knowledge	Renewal of effective knowledge in terms of legitimation	Reproduction of formal knowledge
Social integration	Immunization of a core of value orientations	Coordination of actions through intersubjectively recognized pretensions and validity	Reproduction of social belonging patterns
Socialization	Acculturation	Internalization of values	Identity formation

Source: Habermas (2012).

The world-of-life is a horizon-forming context of understanding processes, thus playing a constitutive role in comprehension. As a resource of the interpretation movement, the world-of-life "can be represented as a linguistically organized collection of backgrounds, which are reproduced in the form of cultural tradition" (HABERMAS, 2015, p. 15). In this process, themes, restrictions and ingredients of action situations are delimited, translated into facts, norms and experiences (HABERMAS, 2015; SILVA; PEREIRA; FELIZARDO, 2022).

The situations – sections of the world-of-life relevant to the case – delimit the knowledge that will be problematized, leaving the remaining repository of non-thematized knowledge only as support for reflexivity. So, there is an implicit background knowledge that cannot be questioned at will. Explicit knowledge, in turn, might be questioned and can be grounded. The fragments of the world-of-life relevant to a given case are susceptible to "free thematization", as the communicative agents promote emissions that turn them into themes (HABERMAS, 2012).

According to Habermas (2004, p. 104), the world-of-life background is capable of absorbing potential risks of disagreement and establishing a "wall against surprises", since the players move across a "horizon of common unproblematic convictions". Hence, most of what is said in everyday life is inserted in "previously consented" certainties, because they are part of the world-of-life. It is a collection that escapes the pressure of criticism and new experiences that disrupt consensus.

However, this non-thematic background knowledge can be problematized under special conditions. There only needs to be a displacement of the horizon of the situation or theme. So, attention is directed to the violation of previously shared assumptions. Background knowledge can be removed from the "inaccessible modus" through a methodical and continuous effort, thus converting itself into a theme. It is in this scenario that the pressure of moments of crisis alters the thematization conditions: "[...] it is the problematizing strength of critical experiences that distinguishes the world-of-life background from the foreground" (HABERMAS, 2004, p. 105).

Even with the advances of the Habermasian perspective of Social Management (TENÓRIO, 1998; CANÇADO; PEREIRA; TENÓRIO, 2015; CRUZ, 2017; ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA, 2017), no studies were identified that mobilized the concept of world-of life in empirical research.

HABERMASIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL MANAGEMENT

In Brazil, Social Management is a relatively new interdisciplinary field. Among the four approaches identified by Peres Júnior and Pereira (2014), namely: (Frankfurtian, interorganizational social development management, PUC-based, and societal public administration), we chose to adopt the

Frankfurtian or Habermasian approach, as discussed by Teixeira Cruz (2017). The theoretical foundation of studies in social management seeks to explore alternative and more democratic forms of management, as well as to promote knowledge that should be shaped by social logic rather than market logic, responding to the demands of social actors and valuing social participation and public deliberation (BURKHALTER; GASTIL; KELSHAW, 2002; CARPINI; COOK; JACOBS, 2004; DEGELING; CARTER; RYCHETNIK, 2015; DEGELING; CARTER; RYCHETNIK, 2015; SANDOVER; MOSELEY; DEVINE-WRIGHT, 2021; MINOZZI *et al*., 2024).

Tenório (1988; 2005) proposes a distinction between social management and strategic management. He argues that social management is based on Habermas's concept of communicative action, while strategic management is oriented by strategic action. Thus, Tenório (1988; 2005) contends that social management opposes strategic management by attempting to replace technobureaucratic and monological management with a more participatory and dialogical process, in which decision-making is shared among various social actors. In contrast, strategic management is market-driven, with a focus on competition and profit (PEREIRA; CANÇADO; TENÓRIO, 2023; CARMO *et al*., 2023).

Cançado, Tenório, and Pereira (2011) highlight some essential characteristics of social management, such as collective decision-making without coercion, based on the intelligibility of language, dialogicity, enlightened understanding as a process, transparency, and emancipation as the goal (COSTA; PINTO, 2023). In summary, these authors view social management as a "dialogical managerial action inherent to society, focused on non-state public interest and aimed at the common good" (CANÇADO; PEREIRA; TENÓRIO, 2013, p. 17). This conception shares several similarities with the notion of deliberative governance (VAN LIESHOUT *et al*., 2017; HE, 2018; BUHMANN; FIESELER, 2023).

Finally, the concept of the lifeworld (ABMA; LEYERZAPF; LANDEWEER, 2017; ELDER-VASS, 2018; FRIEDLAND; KUNELIUS, 2023; LUKE, 2024) is presented as a fundamental component of the theoretical foundation for the Social Management perspective (ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA, 2017) and can be applied to discussions on environmental justice and injustice (SILVA; RANGEL, 2022), governance (RESENDE *et al*., 202), and conflicts related to mental health and groundwater (SILVA; WANKLER, 2022; CARVALHO *et al*., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Habermas (2012) argues that it is only from the perspective of the world-of-life or the players that it is possible to understand the meaning of actions. This is consistent with the perspective of part of

the field of Social Management that seeks grounding on the theory of communicative action (TENÓRIO, 1998; CANÇADO; PEREIRA; TENÓRIO, 2015). In this way, the research that supported this work was carried out through the participation and interaction of researchers with the social players who make up the movement under analysis. Field work was conducted in partnership with four other researchers in the municipality of Cambuquira, Minas Gerais, which is part of the Water Circuit (Circuito das Águas), a tourist region that has a tradition with its mineral waters.

Therefore, the research was conducted from an interpretive perspective (GEPHART; SAYLORS, 2020; LINNEBERG; KORSGAARD, 2019), aiming to explore the meaning of the participants' actions, based on their worldview and the context in which they are situated. An interpretive perspective in research is an approach that seeks to understand the meaning of actions, interactions, and social phenomena from the perspective of the participants themselves. Unlike positivist approaches, which aim to establish causal relationships and generalizations from quantitative data, the interpretive perspective values subjectivity, context, and the meanings attributed by social actors (GEPHART; SAYLORS, 2020; LINNEBERG; KORSGAARD, 2019).

The municipality of Cambuquira is historically marked by disputes and conflicts between State, market and civil society players around different management practices, use and exploitation of mineral waters (CRUZ, 2017). The following techniques were employed for data collection: (a) participant observation, (b) documentary research and (c) interviews. In participant observation, (a) attention was directed to historical practices of water management, specifically with regard to material aspects (sources, consumption and collection, physical structure, situation of hotels and vegetation around the sources, structure of collection and arrangement of water sources). The researchers also visited hiking trails in the city surroundings together with members of the NGO Nova Cambuquira and the City Hall, and also took part in meetings with the mayor of two administrations. In addition, actions, social relations, representations and attitudes of the various players involved in the management of mineral waters were followed up, particularly those from civil society, the local government and the community. It should be noted that the researchers, over more than two years, interacted with the participants of the “Guardiões das Águas” movement.

In the documentary research, the following were analyzed: (b) historical and management reports, institutional publications, legislation, as well as notices from the Economic Development Company of Minas Gerais (CODEMIG) aiming at commercial exploitation of mineral waters, reports in newspapers, magazines and internet pages , official pages and social networks about public notices and opposing movements, audiovisual materials made available by the NGO Nova Cambuquira, besides texts and images published in the WhatsApp group “Programa Ondas”, which was created to

disseminate information and establish interactions between several geographically distant people. We highlight that the WhatsApp group “Programa Ondas” is the main means of communication of the “Guardiões das Águas” movement.

Finally, we conducted (c) interviews with two “Water Guardians” in order to understand some issues that had remained unclear in our analyses – an interview with a representative of the NGO Nova Cambuquira and another with a representative of Associação Caxambu Mais. Our interviews included questions such as: “Who are the Water Guardians?”; “Where did this name come from?”; What are the reasons for using it?”; “When did this movement start?”; “How do the Water Guardians see CODEMIG's approach to what it calls water business?”; and “What is the main goal of the Water Guardians?”.

Data interpretation was based on the concept of world-of-life and, specifically, by using the categories society, culture and personality to explain how the movement was framed. In order to present the results, we described the central moments in the constitution of the “Guardiões das Águas” movement, presented the several meanings assigned to mineral waters, the themes and conflicting issues faced by them, as well as the interweaving between culture, society and identity in the scope of the movement.

Therefore, the data analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic approach (CLARKE, 1999; CARVALHO, 2003; VERONESE; GUARESCHI, 2006; DAHLAGER; FREDSLUND, 2008). The hermeneutic analysis allowed for the exploration of the various layers of meaning present in the interactions, revealing how the participants construct and share their perceptions of the preservation of mineral waters as a common and cultural good. By adopting this approach, the study went beyond merely describing the observed phenomena and delved into the interpretation of the cultural, social, and identity-related meanings that emerge from the practices and discourses of those involved, providing a richer and more contextualized understanding of the dynamics of the movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The context of constitution of the “Guardiões das Águas” movement

There is a number of conflicts and disputes around mineral waters, which result from the different ways of representing, managing and co-living with natural goods. In Brazil, particularly in the case of mineral waters, conflicts are aggravated by the fact that these waters are legally considered mineral assets. The issue of mineral waters in Brazil involves several players, such as state and business

ones, civil society organizations, as well as conflicting relations between diverse and dynamic collectivities that make up social movements. With views to summarizing the context, we present some events and controversies that have become present in the municipalities of Cambuquira, Caxambu and Lambari – remembering that there are historically close relationships between these three municipalities: the "three sisters" (GUIMARÃES, 2009; CRUZ, 2017), a relevant fact, as it was in these three municipalities that the collective identity of the "Water Guardians" (especially Cambuquira and Caxambu) was strongly mobilized.

It is worth highlighting the existence of three non-governmental organizations with a strong presence in movements favoring a more democratic and sustainable management of mineral water sources in the municipalities of Cambuquira and Caxambu: Nova Cambuquira, AMPARA and Associação Caxambu Mais. The three organizations are non-profit and act for environmental and cultural preservation, as well as the protection of mineral water sources. Nova Cambuquira was founded in 2001 and its mission is to promote the protection of social, collective and diffuse goods and rights related to the environment, water resources, cultural heritage, human and peoples' rights, mainly those related to mineral waters. Sociedade Amigos do Parque das Águas (AMPARA), founded in 2001, and Associação Caxambu Mais, founded in 2008, both based in Caxambu, have as their main objective the preservation of Parque das Águas de Caxambu and the rescue of the identity of mineral water sources located in the Water Circuit region.

There were remarkable conflicts in the early 2000s, especially in 2001, 2005-2006 and, more recently, in 2017-2018. Amidst the disputes, the NGO Nova Cambuquira was created in 2001, an organization that committed itself to making Cambuquira a "Blue Community", as a way to protect the municipality's mineral waters not only against the weaknesses of the legislation that governs the matter but also from private interests in the exploitation of mineral waters.

In 2014, for its activism around water preservation, the municipality received the Seal of "Blue Community" from the Canadian group The Council of Canadians. For the Seal to have its validity maintained, the Municipal Council approved the Decree No. 2121, of March 11, 2014, which prohibits the sale and circulation of industrialized water at local public events. The vision of the "Blue Community" is to protect water by recognizing it as a human right.

The Seal awarding event was attended by Maude Barlow (writer, researcher, activist and president of The Council of Canadians), the mayor of Cambuquira at the time, members of Nova Cambuquira, prosecutor of the Public Ministry of the Environment, among other authorities. The Seal allowed those who were engaged in the cause of mineral waters to be more integrated around Cambuquira, as the municipality became an important symbol in disputes against exploitation.

The denomination “Guardiões das Águas” was already used in Caxambu, mainly by people linked to AMPARA - Associação dos Amigos do Parque das Águas, and gained more members and visibility after facing another conflicting situation in 2017. Throughout that year, the movement articulated this identity in contesting CODEMIG's decisions, as well as in daily practices of environmental sustainability, preservation and protection of mineral waters, also raising awareness on their importance.

With the movement against the Public Consultation in February 2017 and the judicialization of the process, CODEMIG did not release the public notice as planned. Nevertheless, the public notice (in-person auction 07/2017) was launched at the end of November 2017. It was aimed at “selecting a private partner for the constitution of a Partnership in Account for the exploration of the mineral water business in the units of Caxambu-MG and Cambuquira-MG” (MINAS GERAIS, 2017). It was interpreted by the “Guardians” as a process of water privatization, colonization of local traditions and values and, thus, there was opposition to the public notice with new mobilizations. Following actions by civil society organizations, court decisions against and in favor of the bidding process, CODEMIG selected a company for the partnership. The “Water Guardians”, represented by Nova Cambuquira, Associação Caxambu Mais and AMPARA filed a Public Civil Action that demanded, among other claims, discontinuation of the bidding process.

This history becomes important from the world-of-life perspective, inasmuch as to understand the constitution of the movement it is necessary to integrate the elements of culture, historical time and identities (HABERMAS, 2015). In the formation of the “Water Guardians”, the most important civil society organizations were three, namely: Nova Cambuquira, AMPARA and Caxambu Mais. In addition to these, activists from various cities and regions took part in the process. However, the “Water Guardians” are not formed solely by civil society organizations. Other participants include university researchers, residents of the municipalities of Cambuquira, Caxambu and Lambari (mainly Cambuquira, with a higher adhesion of local people), members of the Public Ministry and the local Public Power.

In this scenario of conflicts around the possibility of commercial exploitation of mineral waters, the “Water Guardians” became a group that carries a collective identity and mobilizes it in various actions, such as raising awareness in schools, filing lawsuits, heading public protests, mobilization on social networks and other actions towards protecting and preserving water, as well as contesting initiatives aimed at exploiting mineral water as a business.

Water in the guardians' worlds-of-life

In this topic, three points concerning water in the Guardians' worlds-of-life will be discussed: first, important occasions in the movement will be covered; then, an interpretation of the actions from the world-of-life perspective; and lastly a discussion about the interweaving between culture, society and identity.

Back to the world-of-life or following the "Water Guardians"

We accompanied several civil society players, Nova Cambuquira, Caxambu Mais and AMPARA, who participated in the seminar "Agenda 2030 Cambuquira – Local transformation for sustainable development", which was held in February 2017. Concurrently with the event, on February 7, 2017, CODEMIG released a "public consultation on the bidding for the mineral water exploration project", in which it made available the draft of the future public notice for the "mineral water exploration project". Due to that fact, a number of discussions took place among members of civil society organizations about the consultation and the draft of the public notice, namely: its impacts; disclosing the issue on social networks and alternative media that deal with the environmental issue; mobilization for a petition and collection of signatures; contact with a regional TV network to cover the discussion; and conversations with activists from different movements, as well as municipal representatives, mayors, local residents and members of the Public Ministry.

We delimited the contours of this context or situation of action (HABERMAS, 2015) to highlight the moment that we found to be central for the constitution of the "Water Guardians". In our understanding, it was in the resistance to the aforementioned CODEMIG process that the identity "Guardiões das Águas" was rearticulated and gained new meanings, players and force. On the Avazz.ORG Petições da Comunidade (Community Petitions) website, on the same day (February, 7), a petition was filed by the NGO Nova Cambuquira.

The petition stated: CODEMIG has launched "[...] a public consultation process to 'sell' our waters to predatory companies! They want to destroy our greatest asset, our most precious good, which nature has given us, handing it to the predator on a silver plate!". The text referred to mineral water as "treasure", "life", "health", "human right" and "public good". These are the most common meanings shared by the "Water Guardians", complemented by the phrase "water is not a commodity" present in other contexts such as the Alternative World Water Forum (FAMA).

With views to discussing about CODEMIG bidding process, on February 15, 2017, Caxambu City Council held a Public Hearing with the community, civil society organizations, public authorities and other players, where the majority opposed the process. AMPARA, NGOs RenovaMata and Nova Cambuquira jointly promoted, on March 4, a demonstration against the Public Consultation and the public notice that would be published. Banners showed watchwords: "#Stop the public notice", "Water is life, it is not a commodity" and "Stop the public notice, it is an environmental crime". The expression "#We are Guardians of the Waters" was also sowed in this event.

A protest in Caxambu, Minas Gerais, in 2017 was representative of the movement. During the protest, speeches, social relations, actions, and individuals evidenced a movement opposing the bidding process. One of the participants wore a Nova Cambuquira T-shirt, the posters read "Stop the Public Notice" and "#We are Guardians of the Waters", and the demonstrators shouted "stop the public notice". In this demonstration and throughout the year of 2017, the collective identity of the "Guardians" was also marked by a connection with the expressions "water: an element that unites us as a people" and "the waters are us". It is noteworthy that these manifestations that use an unofficial language of the waters – since CODEMIG's official one involves business, exploitation and resources – show the importance of the debate in the public spheres.

This manifestation with the symbols of the "Guardians" marked the re-articulation of the movement. Such re-articulation with new participants, including younger ones, was significant, given that "[...] the content of traditions culturally transmitted across generations is always knowledge acquired by people. Without hermeneutic appropriation and the further development of cultural knowledge through people, no traditions can progress or be sustained" (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 144).

The collection of knowledge of civil society organizations and the experience acquired in the past were (re)signified for actions in the present, which can be seen, for instance, in activities carried out by participants in municipal schools: students wore ribbons with sayings such as "we are the water guardians"; and such identity was mobilized in the demonstration Abraço ao Parque das Águas de Caxambu, held on March 23, 2018, with the participation of municipal schools, activists and local public authorities.

This description also reveals, from the world-of-life of those concerned, the transforming power of communication (HABERMAS, 2012) that constitutes the "Water Guardians" movement as a collective identity. In view of the Public Consultation and Notice, the movement gained strength and unified around the contestation of the bidding process. Its actions were built daily on protection, conservation and awareness practices involving the issue of mineral waters, through social networks, information sharing, dialogues and mobilization of the local community, participation in public

hearings, among other engagement activities, showing that they were not restricted only to the impediment of the public notice via Public Civil Action. In addition, the "Guardians" present management models for mineral waters that dialogue with the Social Management discussions (TENÓRIO, 1998; CANÇADO; PEREIRA; TENÓRIO, 2015; CRUZ, 2017; ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA, 2017):

> [...] the movement "Os Guardiões das Águas" proposes that a model of Social Management be adopted, not only in the case of Caxambu and Cambuquira, but also for Waters and Parks throughout the circuit in the south of Minas Gerais [...] in order to implement this Social Management model, an inter-municipal Management Council for Waters and Parks shall be set up. [...]The composition of this Management Council shall include: CODEMIG, City Halls, City Councils and organized civil society entities, thus ensuring the participation of a wide and representative range of social sectors (NASSIF, 2018).

It must be said that many other mobilizations and actions were important for the re-articulation of the movement. However, the objective here is not to list them all, but instead to describe those that most contributed or fostered the visibility and construction of solidarity among the members of the movement "Guardiões das Águas". There are several views that are quite diffuse around mineral waters. Yet, the "Water Guardians" managed to articulate the understandings with a focus on the preservation and protection of the mineral waters, thus reaching common definitions for the situations (HABERMAS, 2012).

Interpreting actions from the Water Guardians' world-of-life

The initial question in this section is: which mineral waters do the "Water Guardians" shield? This question makes sense when we observe the plurality of views and representations of mineral waters present in municipalities of Minas Gerais Water Circuit - plurality not only when it comes to the various sources and chemical compositions, but also to social practices and understandings about the mineral waters. Based on documentary research and participant observation, Chart 3 shows different conceptions of mineral waters. From a legal and economic standpoint, water is regarded as mineral good, ore, business, commodity or other means to achieve financial results. This notion is shared by CODEMIG (and is kept at CODEMGE), the National Mining Agency (ANM) and the Brazilian Mineral Water Industry Association (ABINAM). On the other hand, from the Water Guardians' world-of-life emerge understandings of these waters as health, local identity and tradition, human right and common good, natural and cultural heritage, and even as something noble and sacred. The "Guardians" seek recognition of their vision of mineral waters not as ore, commodity, business or economic good. They also share a

number of other values. What we have here are other expressions of the right to water advocated by these players.

Chart 3 - Different understandings about mineral waters

Understanding	Externalizations
Health	"Water is therapeutic", "waters that heal", "mineral water with medicinal properties", "crenotherapy", "mineral water is health", "mineral water is therapy", "water is life, it is health" and "precious therapy aids"
Local identity and tradition	"Water built the city", "we were raised around the fountains", "an element that unites us as a people", "identity" and "as if mineral water were running through our veins".
Human right and common good	"Water is a human right", "water is not a commodity", "do not privatize our mineral waters", "save our waters", "water consumption must be open to all", "water supply is a priority" and "water is a common good".
Water resource	"Mineral waters should be considered water resources", "water resources" and "they are water resources and not ore".
Merchandise	"Mineral water business", "endless riches for those who exploit water", "source of income" and "bottled water market".
Ore or mineral good	"Water is ore", "ore", "mineral good", "it belongs to the State" and "exploitation right".
Business and commodity	"Mineral water business", "mineral water royalties" and "partnership for water exploitation".
Tourist attraction	"We rely on tourism attracted by mineral waters", "water as a tourist product" and "we want the tourist at the source".
Natural and cultural heritage	"Here we find a historical, social, environmental heritage", "water culture", "natural heritage", "city heritage", "cultural asset", "our greatest asset", "invaluable asset" and "we need to value this wealthy heritage".
Noble and sacred	"Nobility", "true divine gifts", "unique wealth in the world", "rich mineral waters", "so precious and rare in nature", "unique on the planet", "our most precious asset" and "miraculous waters".

Source: Self elaboration.

The recognition that the "Water Guardians" have fought for permeates the existence of mineral waters as common good, cultural good, health, tradition, identity, medicine, nourishment and human right. They are players who have their theories and practices defined around mineral waters. Therefore, this article is not aimed at theorizing about their practices as if their actions were devoid of theories. In fact, they have a theoretical basis and promote values, arguments, emotions, feelings, interests and worldviews: "What we are doing, even more than protecting water sources, is preserving a collective construction that is history, culture, water as an identity element, alongside the experiences of the people of the waters, all this inheritance that we received here" (Interviewee, NGO Nova Cambuquira). As stated by another interviewee from the NGO Nova Cambuquira and one of the main mobilizers of the "Water Guardians":

> The values shared by the water guardians represent awareness, awareness of this history, this heritage that we carry. [...]Our mission is to keep this flame lit so that other people can identify themselves as guardians of the waters in the future, placing themselves as active agents in these locations, in this case, Cambuquira, Caxambu, in short, all mineral water resorts. So, the role that we play as guardians of the waters is that of defenders, of people who are heirs to a certain history, a certain culture and a certain time (Interviewee, NGO Nova Cambuquira).

It is worth highlighting that, for the movement, as an interviewee points out, “mineral water is the element that identifies us and makes us what we are”. The relationship between these players and the waters is unique: “those peoples of the waters who cannot differentiate themselves from the water” (Interviewee, NGO Nova Cambuquira). This shows a strong link between mineral waters, personality and culture (HABERMAS, 2012) of local dwellers. So, we can affirm that these players contributed to the disclosure (ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA, 2017) of the issues related to the exploitation of mineral waters.

Interweaving between culture, society and identity

From the elements captured in the players’ world-of-life, we found that the search for an agreement in the debate between the parties seems to be hampered by the way in which CODEMIG reacts to the movement through technical and legal impositions: the influence of CODEMIG occurs not via agreement, but via coercion. CODEMIG's actions are assessed under the economic-financial code, which reveals relationships regulated by exchange (mercantile) and by power (instrumental order). Therefore, it seeks in Habermasian terms the success of its actions based on the profitability of the mineral water business. In this way, the institutional systemic mechanisms employed – money and power (to grant the water concession) – disregard local values. This leads to disagreement between CODEMIG and the “Water Guardians”, given the lack of intersubjective recognition of the validity claims raised by the social movement. CODEMIG's actions are instrumental, since their success is measured by the bureaucratic power. Concerning this player, “profitability constitutes the criterion according to which the chances of success of the action are calculated” (HABERMAS, 2015, p. 7).

In terms of Habermas’s worlds (2012), one of the focuses of conflicts around mineral waters occurs in the social world where, on the one hand, institutional orders and rules allow the exploitation of waters and, on the other hand, local traditions recognize water as public heritage and source of cultural identification. We also found that the “Water Guardians” in Minas Gerais Water Circuit express a different pre-understanding, with regard to mineral water, from that pre-understanding held by members of the political and administrative world (system). It is based on the pre-understanding acquired by the different players that they take on their positions. For the dialogue to take place, one side needs to be open to the pre-understanding of the other and both be willing to establish agreement through knowledge.

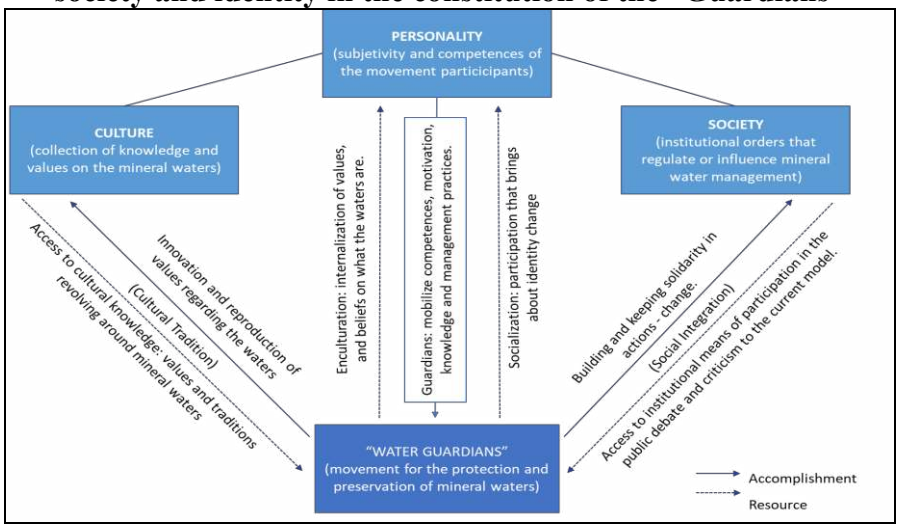
Cabral (2015) identified, across the different stages of constitution of civil society organizations, the presence of elements that express the vision of social players about the world-of-life. They explicitly

arise in the interpretation of the organizational mission as the foundation for the social action of those players. For instance, the phrase "I participate in ..." refers to various conceptions of institutionality that the author designated as representations that contextualize the player's perception and indicate adequate modes of action that lead to the mutual absorption of the organization and the individual and which have as a generating fact the empirical element experienced and valued by the individual.

From the conducted interviews, we found that although the Water Guardians' mission has not been formalized in a document yet, it is shared and recognized by several players. Their mission is to protect, keep and share the perspective of mineral waters focused on the notions of identity, local tradition, common good and human right. Thus, by examining this process in detail, we found evidence of overlapping world-of-life interpretations. Cabral (2015) argues that in the constitution process of civil society organizations and movements, values overlap, showing that they carry the representations of individuals, which we observed to be present in the constitution of the "Water Guardians". The notion of overlapping leads us to discuss the interweaving between culture, society and personality.

According to this study, it was in the flows of relationships between the three structural components of the world-of-life that are co-originary – culture (related to the collection of knowledge and to values), society (made up by legitimate orders that regulate social groups) and personality (competences) – that the movement was constituted seeking to reproduce and transform a certain state of affairs, identities, values and norms related to mineral waters. In Figure 1, we present this process having the "Water Guardians" as a central element. This perspective was recently utilized by Silva, Pereira, and Felizardo (2022) to study the importance of science communication and popularization through the lens of communicative action.

Figure 1 - Interweaving between culture, society and identity in the constitution of the "Guardians"



Source: Self elaboration.

Habermas's (2012) concept of world-of-life includes the idea that communication and interactions take place immersed in a background, in a stock of knowledge. Segments of this background can be highlighted and come to the foreground, being problematized and thematized through the speeches. The debates we observed represent those parts that are problematized and thematized by the players involved. This notion also allows us to discuss the construction of practices of social management of waters having the world-of-life as a basis, with such practices being formed in "deliberative processes of a public character" (ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA, 2017, p. 426). This was made possible from the moment the "Water Guardians" movement started to build "a set of dialogical managerial actions engendered by civil society through forms of daily conversations that influence political decisions" (ALCÂNTARA; PEREIRA; VIEIRA, 2018, p. 06). Management suggestions made by movement players highlight:

> The president of Associação dos Amigos do Parque das Águas (Ampara) [...] reiterated the entity's position in the sense that the park management turns out to be public and shared [...] a shared management agreement shall be signed between Codemig, the city hall and the civil society of Caxambu. [...] She proposed setting a deadline for the selection of an institutional model, along the lines of a public foundation, and that social participation in the management process be implemented through a management board. [...] Finally, she recommended the development of a management plan for the park [...] (LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF MINAS GERAIS, 2017).

Last but not least, we can say that, through the knowledge about water built and reproduced by the "Guardians", it is possible to achieve a change in behavior and a social and cultural transformation. This movement emerged by taking on a position in the debate on the theme "mineral waters", challenging the way in which private companies and the State manage and exploit mineral waters.

FINAL REMARKS

The question that was posed as a guiding principle was how this movement has been built mainly towards the preservation and protection of mineral waters, based on both the concept of world-of-life and the interpretation of the different conceptions in dispute. This approach ensures recognition of the different conceptions of water as a public good, as a scarce resource, and even as an immaterial value and, based on the interpretations of these players' worlds-of-life, it makes possible to understand how they incorporate the plurality of mineral waters. Also, we sought to highlight evidence of the various empirical manifestations about the world-of-life and its representations on the theme of mineral water, while understanding that, despite the diffuse and imprecise conceptions, even in the legislation

the "Water Guardians" added conceptions in common, thus opening room for different degrees of belonging to the movement.

In conclusion, within the context of the Circuito das Águas in Minas Gerais, we observe a tension between different criteria of justification. On one side are the principles upheld by CODEMIG, which are oriented towards the business interests in mineral waters and the "legality" of the current institutional arrangement in Brazil. On the other side, we have the proposals of the "Water Guardians," a group formed by various local actors and organizations who call themselves "Guardians" and base their actions on environmental preservation, cultural traditions, and the conception of water as a cultural and common good. This dispute reveals the complexity of local dynamics, where different values and interests come into conflict, reflecting the various ways of understanding and valuing natural resources.

The "Water Guardians" is a collective identity that unifies the fight for the valorization, preservation and protection of mineral waters as a common good, a human right, heritage, health and local identity. They oppose the processes of commercial exploitation of the waters. The movement is made up mainly by civil society organizations, but also by public authorities, researchers and residents. It was constituted by articulating knowledge about waters in resistance, since the 2000s, to CODEMIG bidding processes, interpreted by the "Guardians" as privatization of waters and colonization of traditions and local values.

From the interpretations of the Guardians' worlds-of-life, we found that nature and culture, medical and popular knowledge, facts and values, reasons and emotions, modern and traditional, rationality and belief are articulated in diverse ways. We conclude by showing how culture-personality-society interweave in the understanding of water as an element that unites, socializes, identifies, transmits knowledge and is the greatest "wealth" in the symbolic construction of the "people of the waters". We evidenced the dialogical process that was established in the worlds-of-life of those who fight for the waters, in the sense of seeking an understanding with other local, regional and international institutions on the theme in question.

The research also concludes that social management, by promoting dialogical and participatory processes, is more effective in responding to social and environmental demands, in contrast to traditional strategic management approaches that prioritize market interests. In this sense, it is suggested that public policies be reoriented to incorporate the principles of social management, thereby strengthening the participation of civil society in decision-making processes.

The research makes a contribution to the field of Social Management studies by presenting a participatory and diachronic dynamics of empirical research focused on a poorly investigated issue that involves conflicts over the exploitation and management of water. It also provides evidence on the need

for future works to address the tensions between the world-of-life and the system, given that civil society players are in conflict with state and market players – it is worth noting that at local level there are community members who are against and others in favor of the exploitation of mineral waters by businesses. In addition, this study indicates possible theoretical and methodological paths for research that seeks to grasp the worlds-of-life of players concerned by a conflicting topic.

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