

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Newcastle University		
Unit of Assessment: 20 Social Policy		
Title of case study: Democratizing Water Politics, Policy, and Management to Tackle Social Inequality and Injustice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jose Esteban Castro	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer (2005-2008) Professor (2008-2016)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: August 2005-September 2016
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Market-centred policies, widely implemented across the world since the 1990s, have often caused or worsened extreme inequalities and injustices in the access to water sources and essential water and sanitation services (WSS). Professor Castro's research during 2005-2016 investigated these policies, their effects, and conflicts and opportunities arising from them. The findings and recommendations have helped legislators, politicians, workers' unions, and civil society organizations in Latin America to stop or amend legislation aimed at privatizing WSS, proposing the remunicipalization of privatized WSS, and to propose a national water law. It has also helped an international federation of trade unions to strengthen its political influence, transform practices, and enhance their effectiveness in campaigning.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Professor Castro's research focused on Europe and Latin America. Bringing together historical, development, political, and environmental sociology it made a major contribution by introducing a social sciences approach in a field dominated by technical disciplines. The research focused on conflicts arising from the extreme inequalities and injustices in the access to water and sanitation services (WSS) and the management of water resources. Early work showed that restricted access to water cannot be explained by natural water scarcity or lack of technology, as prevailing arguments have suggested (PUB1). It also examined the implementation of market-centred policy solutions to these problems, such as the privatization of WSS and the commodification of water resources since the 1990s (PUB2, 4). The research showed that these policy interventions have worsened the democratic deficit, increased inequality and injustice, and bear much of the responsibility for the failure of developing countries to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. It demonstrated that the "water crisis" is a crisis of democracy (PUB7). The research thoroughly examined the initiatives of community organizations, civil society groups, trade unions, and other actors that react against these inequalities and injustices, demand the reversal of market-centred policies, and propose alternative solutions. They demand the democratization of public institutions responsible for WSS and water resources, greater democratic control by citizens and users, and a radical revision of legal and policy frameworks in the water sector (PUB1-3, 7).</p> <p>Castro's work led to a set of key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratizing the water sector requires effective legal and administrative mechanisms to allow meaningful involvement of citizen-users and to make these activities subject to democratic scrutiny and control (PUB1, 2, 7). • The provision of essential WSS cannot be organized as a profit-making activity. Governments and international institutions should stop promoting market-centred solutions and enforce legal and policy mechanisms preventing them (PUB2-4). 		

- The universalization of essential WSS requires heavy state involvement and public funding. The investments must privilege long-term social “returns” (in public health, quality of life, etc.) over short-term economic gains (PUB6).
- Public, particularly local authorities, must be strengthened to deliver and regulate WSS and the sustainable management of water resources. Instead of market-centred solutions like public-private partnerships, there must be support for public-public, public-community, and community-community partnerships to tackle the crisis (PUB6).

During 2009-2011, Grant 1 allowed the consolidation of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network (www.waterlat.org). It became a hub for research, teaching and training, and a solid platform for achieving impact beyond academia, and includes in its membership an international federation of trade unions. The Network also led to the DESAFIO project (2013-2015) (Grant 2), which looked at socio-technical innovations to tackle injustice and inequality in WSS in Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia.

3. References to the research

The list includes mainly articles and books that have gone through rigorous peer-review and are well established references in the fields of water policy, public services, and urban political ecology, among others. It also includes publications in Spanish and Portuguese because these have achieved a high impact in Latin America and Spain, where publications in English are not easily accessible for the actors engaged in the research.

(PUB1) J.E. Castro, Water, Power, and Citizenship. Social Struggle in the Basin of Mexico, Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006. Available on request.

(PUB2) J. E. Castro, “Poverty and citizenship: sociological perspectives on water services and public-private participation”, Geoforum, 2007, 38(5), pp. 756-771.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.12.006>

(PUB3) J.E. Castro, “Water governance in the twentieth-first century”, Ambiente e Sociedade, 2007, 10(2), pp. 97-118. Available at: <http://ref.scielo.org/bc5p9s>

(PUB4) J.E. Castro, “Neoliberal water and sanitation policies as a failed development strategy: lessons from developing countries”, Progress in Development Studies, 2008, 8(1), pp. 63-83.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F146499340700800107>

(PUB5) J.E. Castro, “The privatization of water and sanitation services in Latin America” (in Spanish), Nueva Sociedad, 2007, 207, pp. 93-112. Available at: <https://nuso.org/articulo/la-privatizacion-de-los-servicios-de-agua-y-saneamiento-en-america-latina/>

(PUB6) J.E. Castro and L. Heller (eds.), Water and Sanitation Services: public policy and management, London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2009; Routledge, 2012. Available on request.

(PUB7) J.E. Castro, Water and Democracy in Latin America (chapters in Spanish and Portuguese). Campina Grande, Brazil, and Newcastle upon Tyne: State University of Paraiba Press (EDUEPB), and WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, 2016. Available on request.

Grants

(Grant 1) 2009-2011 – J. E. Castro (PI), WATERLAT Network, Leverhulme Trust (Ref: F/00 125/AE, GBP123,896).

(Grant 2) 2013-2015 – J. E. Castro (PI), “Democratisation of water and sanitation governance by means of socio-technical innovation” (DESAFIO), 7th Framework Programme, European Commission (Grant Agreement N° 320303, EUR1,000,000).

4. Details of the impact

Castro's research has been taken up by local, national, and international trade unions, parliamentarians and government officials, and civil society organizations.

Strengthening Trade Union Political Influence and Campaigning Against Water Privatization

A principal vehicle for the impact of Castro's research has been The Public Services International (PSI), a global federation of 700 trade unions representing over 30 million workers from 154 countries. In 2014, the PSI became a member of the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Research Network (GRANT1), and in March 2015 Castro signed a Cooperation Agreement (**IMP1b**) with the PSI to develop joint activities, which include training for union members. One activity has been a Specialization Course on Water Politics and Management organized and directed by Castro, drawing extensively on his research (PUB1-7), which was taken by labour union leaders from Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru (2019-2020) (**IMP1a, IMP1d**). At a public event in 2019 where the PSI's General Secretary and Professor Castro signed an extension of the Agreement for an additional three-year period, the General Secretary stated that the contributions made by Castro's work "helped us not only to develop initiatives and campaigns but also to get theoretical support for our PSI practices in defending water services" (**IMP1c, IMP1e**).

In a video interview, PSI's Sub-Regional Secretary for Mexico, Central America, Panama, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, also stated that "for us, WATERLAT, and in particular the work of Esteban Castro, has [...] helped us to reconceptualize our role as workers unions [...] and enhanced not just our organizational capacities but also our impact and political influence" (**IMP2a**). The Sub-Regional Secretary provided a testimonial stating that Castro's "contributions not only allowed us to broaden our understanding of the problems we face, but also to achieve a better grasp of our field of intervention and extend our alliances with other progressive social actors, strengthen our arguments, and develop more effective practices in our campaigns". As one example of these achievements, he referred to "cooperation agreements established between labour unions of public and community water and sanitation utilities in Colombia, Peru, Brazil and several Central American countries". He also gave the example of the course organized by Castro, which "was taken by senior members of some of our affiliates in Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Mexico, who have praised its quality, have greatly benefited from it, and have requested that we establish it as a formal Specialization Course" (**IMP2b**). The Sub-Regional Secretary added that "the research has also contributed to reinforce our democratic struggle against the privatization of water and sanitation services" (**IMP2b**).

For instance, in 2017, the Workers Union of Santiago's Water and Sanitation Utility (SITRACORAASAN), a PSI-affiliated trade union in the Dominican Republic, campaigned to stop legislation aimed at privatizing WSS in the country (**IMP5a-b**). Although previously unaware of his contribution, Castro's research (PUB5) was extensively cited in the campaign. The union's Secretary General explained this was because of the research's "evidence based, irrefutable conclusions and direct relevance to the contents of the several water law projects being discussed in the Dominican Republic." (**IMP5a**). In a video interview offered in December 2018, the union's Secretary General also stated: "we have read [Castro's] work and took it as our point of reference [...] it was very useful to raise awareness among the population and in persuading the government about the damaging, harmful consequences of privatization" (**IMP5b**). Following the campaign, the law project was put on hold and the privatization plans were postponed.

Shaping Trade Union and Parliamentarian Mobilization in Ceará (Brazil)

An exemplar of how Castro's work has been taken up by trade unions and parliamentarians is in the State of Ceará, north-eastern Brazil, where his research underpinned successful campaigns to stop new legislation to privatize the region's public WSS utility, Companhia de Água e Esgoto do Ceará (CAGECE). Castro had involved CAGECE as a research partner in the Project DESAFIO (GRANT2). When the threat of CAGECE's privatization emerged in 2017, the Union of Workers in Water, Sewage, and Environment of the State of Ceará (SINDIAGUA-CE) jointly with provincial

legislators and politicians invited him to participate in a Public Hearing to help stop the government's privatization initiative. The President of the Labour, Administration, and Public Service Commission of Ceará's Legislative Assembly sent Castro a formal invitation to speak at the Public Hearing, which took place on 15 September 2017 (IMP3a). SINDIAGUAS' President confirmed the "significant contribution of Prof. Castro's research on the negative impacts of the privatization of WSS". He stated that the research is "elucidative and fundamental for defending WSS public companies and public policies and in the struggle for the democratization of the management and access of essential WSS, and defending the understanding of water as a right of all citizens". He continued, "the Public Hearing, which had a large attendance [...], was broadcasted by the Legislative Assembly's TV channel and diverse local media (radio, TV, websites, blogs, and journals), giving Castro's message a significant reach in the State of Ceará" (IMP3b-c). The Public Hearing was successful in persuading the governor to stop the privatization initiative. However, since 2018 the national government of President Bolsonaro started pressuring local and provincial governments to privatize public utilities, including CAGECE. SINDIAGUA continues to benefit from Castro's research in their resistance to these policies to keep Ceará's WSS in public hands, as stated by the union's President in June 2020: "SINDIAGUA uses frequently Prof. Esteban's data and observations in events, publications, and public reports during our activities to stop the persistent initiatives to privatize WSS" (IMP3b).

Enabling Mobilization of Civil Society in El Salvador for a General Water Law

Castro's work (PUB1-5) has been used by civil society organizations and political parties in their activities to promote the democratization of water policy and management in El Salvador, which lacks a national water law, including the development of "a citizens' proposal for a General Water Law". In a letter signed by several leaders of these organizations, including former Economy Minister (2012-2014), and former Presidential Commissioner for Human Rights (2018-2019), they state that "we have taken Castro's work on the democratization of water politics and management as reference in our activities as civil society organizations and social movements that include the Water Forum, Caritas El Salvador, the Centre for Consumers' Defence (CDC), the Foundation for the Application of Law (FESPAD), El Salvador's section of the VIDA Network, among others" (IMP4a).

To set the context, these organizations formed part of the alliance that won the 2009 national elections, and, as they put it, "our water campaign entered a new stage, as some of our members were elected as legislators and others took government positions in the economy, environment, human rights and consumer protection areas" (IMP4a). As part of their campaign to get the citizens' project for a national water law passed in the Legislative Assembly, they organized an international event titled "The Role of Parliament and the challenges of inclusive water governance", that took place on 12 November 2013. They invited Castro to deliver a keynote speech at the event "to support us in the process, strengthening our arguments, raising the level of debate in the Legislative Assembly and, especially, persuading the opposition legislators of the need to pass a General Water Law for the country" (IMP4a). Castro's contribution was thoroughly cited in the national media (IMP4b). The contribution of the research to the long-term campaign, including this event, is recognized as having "contributed to strengthen the arguments and capacity for incidence of important social sectors in El Salvador, whose efforts, despite strong opposition, achieved that the Assembly's Legislative Commission of Environment and Climate Change obtained consensual approval of 92 articles of the Water Law project by June 2014" (IMP4a). Regrettably, despite this success, the opposition in the National Assembly, representing the interests of large-scale water users (particularly landowners and businesses), has so far managed to block the passing of the water law. The Campaign continues and has included the submission in 2018 of a proposal for constitutional reform to include the human right to water and sanitation and an updated project of the General Water Law in 2020. Castro continues to be closely involved with the actors (IMP4a).

Summary

Examples of the take-up of Castro's research by civil society organizations, government officials, labour unions, and other actors in Latin America, are too numerous to be included in full here.

Overall, Castro's research is used by a range of social actors, including local, regional, national, and global civil society organizations, social movements, labour unions, legislators, and politicians from across Central and South America, in several languages. The work has contributed to the training of senior labour union members, strengthening capacities, providing scientific evidence-grounded arguments for successful campaigns for the human right to water and the democratization of water policy and management. This impact of the research is plainly recognized by the beneficiaries, who remain in close interaction with Castro's work to date.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

IMP1 a) Programme of the Course "Specialization in the Politics and Management of Water and Basic Water and Sanitation Services" (short version, in Spanish). Also publicly available at: <http://waterlat.org/teaching/waterlat-gobacit-psi-course/>. b) Cooperation Agreement between the Public Services International (PSI) and the WATERLAT-GOBACIT Network, 20 April 2015: <http://waterlat.org/projects/cooperation-agreement-with-the-psi/>. c) Agreement extension, 24 June 2019. d) Letter by PSI General Secretary, 30 November 2019. e) Public statement during the signature of the extension of the Agreement during the Opening Session of the PSI's 12nd Inter American Regional Conference (IAMRECON), Buenos Aires, 24 June 2019 <https://youtu.be/RT9nBOdvwY8>.

IMP2 Testimonial evidence from Sub-Regional Secretary for Mexico, Central America, Panama, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, Public Services International (PSI): a) Video interview 20 December 2018 <https://youtu.be/0SAXNMeowTw>. b) Letter, 10 June 2020.

IMP3 a) Invitation from Legislative Assembly; and link to recording of the Public Hearing, also available at: https://youtu.be/UrXV_jWR8H0. b) Letter from President, SINDIAGUA, 11 June 2020. c) Media coverage.

IMP4 a) Letter from leaders of civil society organizations and former government officers and parliamentarians, 11 June 2020. b) Details of Legislative Assembly event and media clips, El Salvador.

IMP5 a) "SITRACORAASAN stands up against the pretension to privatize water", press report: <http://claudioconcepcion.com/sitracoraasan-en-pie-de-lucha-contra-pretensiones-de-privatizar-el-agua/>. b) Video interview with Secretary General, Workers Union of Santiago's Water and Sanitation Utility (SITRACORAASAN), Dominican Republic (in Spanish), 14-15 December 2018: <https://youtu.be/d-vYGCQuS-0>.