



WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Riverhood and River Commons Projects: Rivers and social mobilization

Country: Ecuador (or potentially others to be discussed)

Host institute: different ones

Online possible: potentially, though preferably involving fieldwork



Project description

For the past 25 years, indigenous peasant communities in the **Licto region, in the central Ecuadorian Andes** have been drawing irrigation and running water from the distant Guarguallá River to revitalise their territory. This river rises from the highlands of the Páramo and has literally brought life back to this deeply impoverished region. It was the result of a decades-long struggle with and against the Ecuadorian state and white mestizo elites. Today, the new challenges come from "within". The history of struggle of their elders is not known to all young people and new leaders. Relationships of mutual exchange between communities in the highlands and lowlands of the Guarguallá River have been disrupted by the logic of short-term profitability and neoliberal discourses of 'payments for environmental services'. It is these challenges that are now being mapped, discussed and acted upon through new counter-cartographic initiatives that bring together the 'high' and 'low' communities of the Licto-Guarguallá, 'older' and 'younger' leaders, and grassroots and critical academics. It is in this context that the Riverhood and River Commons projects aim to support action research on possible strategies to facilitate a renewed dialogue between the upstream and downstream communities of Licto.

Central questions are:

- Can reciprocal relations between lower communities (water users) and upper communities (water guardians) be re-established?
- Can collaborative strategies between high and low communities be established through alternative proposals such as an 'Andean Alliance and Vertical Economy' of ecotourism and fair trade?
- Can programmes be established at the local level to train young leaders in water and river management, with a focus on environmental justice, integrating and valuing the great knowledge of older leaders?

The backbone of the projects are PhD researches, where MSc students are welcome to contribute to specific cases located in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The overall research approach should be embedded in political ecology. Methodologically, the projects aim to do participatory action research. For further information visit: <https://movingrivers.org/>

Project details

Group: Water Resources Management (WRM)

Project type: MSc Thesis

Begin date: April 2024 (preparatory phase) September 2024 (Fieldwork)

End date: March 2025

Used skills: language skills of the respective country
Requirements: Political Ecology of Water (WRM31306)

Contact

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