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# Feeling, acting and connecting rivers: the experience of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective in Ecuador

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# *Feeling, acting and connecting rivers: the experience of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective in Ecuador*

**Abstract:** The San Pedro River Rescue Collective was born in 2021 as a citizen group whose goal is to restore the San Pedro River and its banks, which flow from the Illiniza volcano through Quito and its valleys towards the Pacific Ocean. One of the main dreams of its members is to bathe again in the river, as the past generation of their fathers and mothers did thirty years ago. The San Pedro River is facing multiple sources of contamination, from intensive cattle production at its watershed to wastewater and trash discharges in the city of Quito and Los Chillos valley, a densely populated area. From a political ecology perspective, this article examines the river imaginaries, knowledge co-creation and justice mobilized by the San Pedro River Rescue Collective as a river movement. The analysis is based on feminist epistemologies and ecologies of care mobilizing qualitative data gathered between January to April 2025. We explore how the San Pedro River Rescue Collective not only strives to revitalize a river, but to transform the relationship between society and nature at the very heart of the city. As a main result of this study, we conclude on the power of feelings and emotions to enact citizen action for the protection of urban rivers.

**Keywords:** River movement; San Pedro River; River justice; Ecologies of care; Ecuador.

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**Resumen:** El Colectivo de Rescate del Río San Pedro nació en 2021 como un grupo ciudadano cuyo objetivo es restaurar el río San Pedro y sus riberas, que fluyen desde el volcán Illiniza a través de Quito y sus valles hacia el Océano Pacífico. Uno de los principales sueños de sus miembros es volver a bañarse en el río, como lo hicieron sus padres y madres hace treinta años. El río San Pedro se enfrenta a múltiples fuentes de contaminación, desde la ganadería intensiva en su cuenca alta hasta los vertidos de aguas residuales y basura en la ciudad de Quito y el valle de Los Chillos, una zona densamente poblada. Desde una perspectiva de ecología política, este artículo examina los imaginarios fluviales, la cocreación de conocimientos y la justicia que moviliza el Colectivo de Rescate del Río San Pedro como movimiento fluvial. El análisis se basa en epistemologías feministas y ecologías del cuidado, movilizando datos cualitativos recopilados entre enero y abril de 2025. Exploramos cómo el Colectivo de Rescate del Río San Pedro no solo busca revitalizar un río, sino también transformar la relación entre la sociedad y la naturaleza en el corazón mismo de la ciudad. Como resultado principal de este estudio, concluimos sobre el poder de los sentimientos y emociones para generar acciones ciudadanas para la protección de los ríos urbanos.

**Palabras clave:** Movimiento fluvial; Río San Pedro; Justicia fluvial; Ecologías del cuidado; Ecuador.

## Introduction

*"The river called us, the river united us," María Elena Ordoñez (Arcandina)*

On a sunny morning of April, we went walking along the San Pedro River crossing Cumbayá, near Quito, as part of a fieldtrip of the Political Ecology course at the University San Francisco of Quito, Ecuador. Three members of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective guided us through the Algarrobos park down to the riverbank. We could experience some mixed feelings about knowing the toxicity and contamination of the river while at the same time observing the resilience of the river full of biodiversity, plants and birds all around it.

The San Pedro River Rescue Collective was born in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 as a citizen group whose goal is to restore the river and its banks, which flows through the towns of Machachi, Los Chillos and Quito, and the rural parishes of Amaguaña, Cumbayá and Tumbaco. One of the main dreams of the Collective's members is to be able to bathe again in the river, as the past generation of their fathers and mothers did thirty years ago.

The San Pedro River is facing multiple sources of contamination, from intensive cattle production at its watershed in Mejia to wastewater and trash discharges in the city of Quito and Los Chillos valley, a densely populated area. In Quito, only 3.5% of wastewater is properly treated (EPMAPS, 2024), contributing to the contamination of the whole river basin from Quito to the Guayllabamba and Esmeraldas rivers ending to the Pacific Ocean, affecting many local communities and vulnerable populations of the northern Ecuadorian coast. Therefore, the situation of the San Pedro River can be considered as a case of environmental injustice, meaning the disproportionate affection of marginalized actors facing the negative impacts of an environmental issue while not having directly contributed to the initial problem (Martinez-Alier et al. 2016).

The Ecuadorian 2008 Constitution grants Nature with rights as a living subject, including different ecosystems as rivers, forests or species. Article 71 of the Constitution reflects a paradigm shift by declaring that "Nature has the right to exist, persist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles." Following this legal framework, in August 2024, the Court of Criminal Guarantees ruling was released, recognizing that the Machángara River, another key river crossing Quito, is severely polluted, jeopardizing the river's ability to fulfill its life cycle, biodiversity, organisms, and ecological functions[5]. The ruling establishes that the Metropolitan District Municipality of Quito has failed to treat the river's wastewater and to restore its banks. This situation creates health issues for the residents of Quito and the population living along the river's course. Based on this analysis, the Court concluded that the Machángara River's natural rights and the rights to water, a healthy environment, and the city were violated, and it therefore accepted the protection action. The San Pedro River could obtain the same rights recognition in the future considering its alarming situation of contamination.

From a political ecology perspective, this article examines the river imaginaries, knowledge co-creation and justice mobilized by the San Pedro River Rescue Collective as a river movement. The analysis is based on feminist epistemologies and ecologies of care. This theoretical and methodological approach allows for grasping the invisible and emotional dimensions of river caring movements and connecting feelings with practical actions for the river defense. This study draws on qualitative data gathered between January to April 2025 through direct observations of the Collective's meetings, participatory observations during the San Pedro River clean-up actions, and non-structured interviews to key members of the Collective's Directive, as well as grey literature review of key documents, reports and presentations of the Collective.

[5] SENTENCIA A FAVOR DEL RÍO MACHÁNGARA, EL RÍO DE QUITO – Naturaleza con Derechos

First, we present the context and history of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective and its main objectives and modes of action. Second, we detail the theoretical and methodological framework guiding the analysis, which is based on a political ecology approach of river imaginaries, knowledge, justice and movements. Third, we draw an analysis of five main actions implemented by the Collective and their impacts on defending the river and its inhabitants' rights. Fourth, we discuss the role of the Collective as an enlivening river movement. Finally, we conclude on the need and power of feeling, acting and connecting with our rivers, in particular from people living in urban centers, to restore, preserve and respect rivers flows and lives.

## Context and history of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective

*Creation of the Collective and initial motivations*

The San Pedro River Rescue Collective advocates for a clean river and its surroundings by implementing community-based engagement in Quito and other municipalities and parishes where the river crosses (figure 1), with the support of schools, universities and professionals dedicated to environmental protection and engineering. These collaborative actions seek not only to remove solid waste and mitigate water pollution, but also to raise environmental awareness in the community, promote sustainable practices, and foster a sense of shared responsibility among residents. In addition, the collective promotes environmental education spaces, community workshops, and participatory water quality monitoring activities, aiming of strengthening the relationship between the river and its inhabitants.

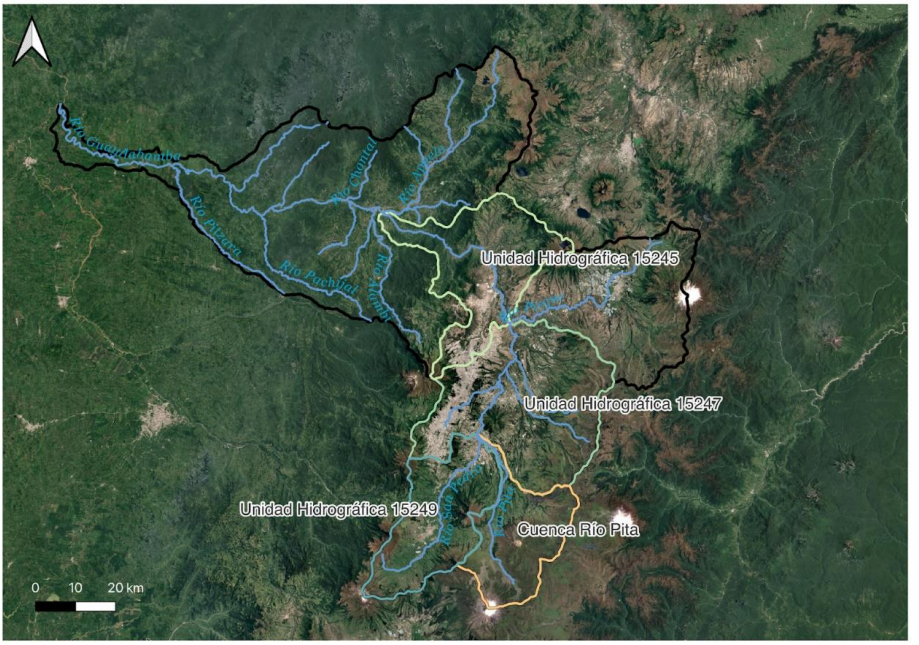


Fig. 1: Map of the San Pedro River basin (M. Intriago)

This non-profit organization was born in 2021 as a direct response to the progressive degradation of the San Pedro River, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic as a tipping point (Goodwin, 2021). As Maribel, the actual coordinator of the Collective, explains, the movement emerged while facing despair and the need to connect again with nature and rivers during the lockdown period[6]. In a context marked by institutional neglect and the advance of extractivist urban models, this collective emerged as an act of local resistance, in articulation with other socio-environmental and water movements, like Waterkeepers and Arcandina, and rooted in a deep sense of territorial belonging.

Today, the Collective is composed of about 30 members (19 women and 11 men), with ages ranging from 26 to 65[7]. They identified themselves as *mestizos* and live in Quito. The Collective also has a group of 30 volunteers who participate in the clean-up activities in the San Pedro River.

[6] Interview in YouTube: Un Río de Quito: ¿Sujeto de DERECHOS? - YouTube
[7] Data obtained from the San Pedro River Rescue Collective, 2025.

The initial motivation arose from the shared concern among residents, activists and academics about the accelerated loss of the river's ecological, symbolic and cultural value. Patricio, one of the founding members, recalls how the first meetings focused on sharing memories of a river that was once a place of play, learning, and encounter. These evocations were not simply nostalgic tales, but rather manifestations of an active memory that began to mobilize concrete actions of restoration and defense.

From a political ecology perspective, the formation of the collective can be read as a response to the historical invisibility of ecological demands by the State. The lack of environmental governance, coupled with the neoliberal logic of uncontrolled urbanization, has relegated ecosystems like the San Pedro River to a purely utilitarian function. In this context, the collective presents itself not only as an environmental initiative, but as a political entity that challenges the commodification of nature and the hegemony of exclusionary urban development (Swyngedouw, 2015).

One of the collective's most powerful experiences has been its community-based intervention in the Algarrobos Park (Figure 2), one of the most polluted areas of the river. This high level of contamination is mainly due to the location of the park in the middle of the city and just after the industrial discharges to the river of the Cerveceria Nacional private beer company. There, through various *mingas* and other environmental activities, members found all kinds of waste: bottles, textile scraps, plastics, and even visible chemical residues such as detergents bubbling on the banks. This scene is a materialization of what Jason Moore (2015) calls the "cheapness of nature," in which water and other common goods are stripped of their intrinsic value and turned into disposable resources.

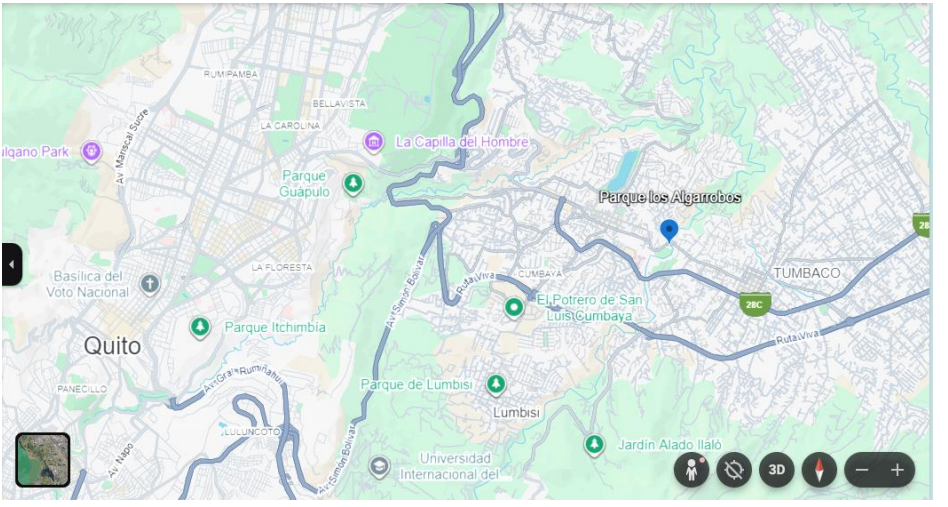


Fig 2. Location of the Algarrobos Park near the San Pedro River, Cumbaya (Google Earth).

The contrast with the stories of the oldest inhabitants is striking where there is now toxic foam and garbage, there used to be children's games, ritual baths, and family walks[8]. This intergenerational memory has become a pedagogical tool for the collective, which uses it as a mechanism for rebuilding the community fabric and as a source of inspiration to imagine different futures. Following Anna Tsing (2015), we could say that these stories are seeds that germinate amidst ecological ruin, proposing alternative ways of life in the face of environmental collapse.

The collective has adopted diverse practices ranging from traditional *mingas*—Andean forms of collective and non-wage work—to decolonial methodologies such as body-territory maps. *Mingas* are part of a wider and longer tradition of community-based water management in the Andes and fighting for rights and recognition through solidarity values (Hidalgo et al. 2017; Goodwin, 2019; Dupuits et al. 2024). These practices represent a different way of knowing and acting in the world: not from a technocratic perspective, but from the body, emotion, spirituality, and affection. Listening to the river, smelling it, touching its wounded skin are ways of generating situated, embodied, and deep political knowledge. As Arturo Escobar (2008) proposes, it is about reterritorializing knowledge to open the way to a pluriversal perspective that allows us to understand ecological defense from multiple cultural perspectives.

Within this framework, the collective does not conceive the river simply as a passive object of intervention, but as a political subject, a living entity with history, agency and the right to exist. This position is framed within the constitutional recognition of the Rights of Nature in Ecuador and goes beyond the legal text. For the collective, the defense of the river implies the creation of a new ethical pact that overcomes the distance between norm and action[9]. As Eduardo Gudynas (2011) has pointed out, the challenge is not only normative, but epistemic: recognizing other forms of life and connection with nature that escape modern instrumental rationality.

Another fundamental axis of their work is the critique of environmental management logic that reduces ecological conflict to a technical problem, as authors such as Erik Swyngedouw (2010) denounce. The sporadic cleanups promoted by municipal authorities, like garbage collection campaigns, are empty actions that ignore the structural causes of the environmental crisis. Instead, the collective proposes a

[8] Testimonies gathered during the walk through the San Pedro River with the Collective's founding members.

[9] Interview with the Collective's founding members, Cumbaya, Ecuador, April 2025.

profoundly transformative approach, where local action is understood as part of a broader struggle against the development model that produces disaster[10].

## Pursuing the dream of bathing in the river again

*"I remember once I went for a walk with my taita to the San Pedro; it smelled pretty bad and there was garbage everywhere. My taita said to me, "Did you know that when I was a guambra I used to float in a buoy around here and go out in the tropic? That got to me a lot",* Jorge Ignacio Anhalzer (Graphic chronicler of the Andes).

*"We as Indigenous people have learned from dreams, from connected nature, from spirituality"* (Sacred Basins Alliance).

Rivers harmonize our life; their waters reach our homes and have been a source of nourishment throughout our existence. They are protagonists of the history of great civilizations. The world's largest cities, such as the Nile in Egypt, have been built and developed around rivers, which not only allow for the transportation of goods and people, but also provide significant recreational, cultural, health and tourism experiences. In the San Pedro River, we can appreciate and feel a whole trajectory of ancestral knowledge that the river has collected, so taking care of it and preserving its waters is fundamental.

The importance and benefits of river bathing date back to centuries; it has been a part of many cultures and identities. Immersing oneself in a river is a revitalizing experience and has even been considered very effective for one's health. This contact has improved the overall well-being of many people. Therefore, river pollution and the ban on river bathing have become highly controversial for many people, as can be seen in Jorge Anhalzer's quote. Likewise for our ancestors, who have to watch and explain with pain and disappointment this lack of empathy from human beings toward caring for water, nature and, therefore, caring for themselves.

Various water quality analysis provide evidence on the level of contamination of the river. The San Pedro River presents contamination by acid waste and wastewater (sewage), especially exceeding the maximum permissible value in the Ecological Standards of Water Quality. The main sources of contamination come from industrial and agricultural activities, as well as urban growth in Quito. From a study conducted in 2024 (Iza Arias and Zotaminga Tupiza, 2024), the average Dinius Water Quality Index (WQI) value for the San Pedro River was found to be 67.272, indicating "contaminated" water quality and "unacceptable for sensitive fish". The

[10] Idem.

dream of bathing again in the San Pedro River is a form of resistance against the forces that have alienated people from their surroundings. Activists and local residents imagine the river as a place suitable for swimming[11], and in some ways, this would become a radical act and a demand that urban development must be reoriented toward sustainability and community well-being.

As anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018: 16) points out, "imagining alternatives is, in itself, a form of political resistance". The dream of seeing a river suitable for bathing and swimming resists the normalization of polluted environments and transforms the vision of urban life, where reciprocity, respect, accessibility to clean public spaces, and the revaluation of water as a living being prevail. For communities living near the San Pedro River, especially in areas such as Cumbayá, Tumbaco and Lumbisí, this dream represents the yearning to restore a way of life that was once deeply intertwined with the rhythms of the river[12].

Community organizations have played a fundamental role in keeping this dream alive. Groups such as Guardians of the San Pedro River and Neighbors for Clean Water regularly organize *mingas*, community cleanups, river walks, and storytelling circles, creating what sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) calls "epistemologies of the South", as knowledge systems rooted in the lived experiences and resistance of marginalized communities. These groups document environmental injustices, advocate for public investment, and reactivate collective memory through oral histories and artistic expressions. In some ways, the dream of bathing in the river, and therefore of healing it, is revived in the new generation.

Imagination is also mobilized through cultural practices. Local artists, educators, and historians have created murals, poems, photo essays, and theatrical performances inspired by the river. For example, the public art project "El Río Vive", "The River is Alive", directed by local artist Carolina Cepeda, invited children from nearby schools to draw what the river meant to them and how they would like to see it in the future. Many of the drawings included scenes of people bathing, playing, and fishing in a clean, vibrant river. Images that contrast sharply with current reality, yet powerfully express hope and agency.

These acts of imagination are not naive. Rather, they represent what feminist scholar Donna Haraway (2016) calls "tackling the problem," a way of confronting the environmental crisis not with despair, but with creativity and responsibility. By imagining and articulating a future in which the river is restored, these communities lay the groundwork for real transformation. They inspire action, foster solidarity, and transform the terms of public discourse, moving from resignation to possibility.

[11] Idem.
[12] Idem.

**Mode of action, conformation and main activities**

The San Pedro River Rescue Collective is a clear example of how a social movement can incur in politics. The Collective is part of a wider history of socio-environmental movements defending nature's rights and rivers in Ecuador. In line with this history, the Collective holds various alliances with other civil society groups and non-governmental organizations including Acción Ecológica, Yasunidos, or the Foro Nacional de Recursos Hídricos.

The collective is structured in a flexible way where there are no rigid hierarchies. This allows for the collective to be adaptable, dynamic and open to civil society participation. The leadership is not centralized, it involves various members that offer different perspectives, and where each member has an important role in the future of the river. The collective also has ties with other socio-environmental movements, such as Las Guardianas del rio and Mujeres por el Agua, so they can work together, join their strengths and do a better job at restoring the river.

*Mingas* are the key activity for the collective's strategy of restoring the river. These bring together members of the community who share the same concern for the river's deteriorated health. During *mingas*, local residents and activists share their experiences, connect through what brought them together and collaborate towards their goal. This type of activity creates a sense of community responsibility, and its participants develop stronger ties with each other and their surrounding environment. So far, the collective has organized 25 *mingas*, collecting on average 14 tons of garbage with the help of around 100 volunteers[13].

After participating in the *mingas*, the volunteers share something called "pambamesa", as a space where the participants gather around to share natural foods and drinks. This is a moment that strengthens the community's sense of responsibility, here they can share more about each other, their stories and more importantly about what the river means to each of them.

Another important activity the collective uses to restore the river is through forums where they share their work and educate people on the damage that the river has been suffering over the years and how much worse it has gotten lately, the difficulties we face in the conservation of rivers, and the wildlife that the river hosts. They also talk about the work they do and how new people can join the collective to work together, they are always open to getting new people to work with. People are the key to sustaining the movement. Everyone has a place there and everyone can help to reclaim the river to how it was 30 years ago.

Besides, they are involved in monitoring the river's water quality. This is key to collect data of the river's contamination levels and then be able to advocate for the river with scientific evidence when talking to the authorities and to the media. The

[13] Website of the Collective: Rios Limpios | Rescate Del Río San Pedro

collective also advocates for the protection of the river's rights and pushes for a stronger regulation system in the water protection laws. To achieve this goal, they work alongside other collectives, they have "mesas de diálogo" with the government where they discuss and negotiate about the rights of the rivers, having them recognized as a legal person that is subject of rights, and establishing the responsibility of the government in the river damage. Lastly, the collective works alongside universities to discuss possible solutions the students might have about the restoration of the river.

## Political ecology of river justice and the ecologies of care

*"We must listen to the territory, understand it, and respond to it"* (Fany Kuiru Castro, COICA Coordinator).

The notion of 'river justice' focuses on rivers as key sites of conviviality and struggle. Rivers are facing multiple forms of domestication, enclosure, erasure, and pollution on an unprecedented planetary scale (Boelens et al. 2022). Moreover, from a political ecology of water, differential water access, asymmetries in rights, and uneven levels of protection and influence over decision-making are inevitably forged along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and human/non-human.

Increasingly, rivers are considered from an exploitative view in line with the commodification of nature. In this view, rivers are seen as dead nature and their flows are stopped by mega-hydraulic projects with the objective to bring 'clean' energy, water security and flood protection for expanding cities and agro-industries. This productive approach on rivers is often connected to hydraulic-bureaucratic administrations and capitalist imaginaries, also called 'hydrocracies' (Molle et al. 2009). These imaginaries often disregard alternative, locally grounded river knowledge and relationships (Boelens et al. 2019).

Facing those challenges, new water justice movements have emerged to engage in radical collective practices of place and community making. As river enlivening movements, they contribute to wresting rivers away from influences that enclose, commodify or pollute. Along with this perspective, the notion of 'riverhood' represents 'the state of being a river' (Oxford Dictionary), such as a temporal and/or continuous and unifying state, condition, character or period (as in livelihood, childhood, sisterhood). In the same line, Cohen et al. (2023) show how kinship with rivers figures centrally in primarily Indigenous-led struggles in various regions of the globe for the recognition and enforcement of river personhood and rights. This is

partly because people are motivated to fight passionately for their kin. Nonetheless, the authors argue that associating river kinship exclusively with Indigenous worlds undermines its potential for global impact.

Feminist political ecology is an interconnected approach that allows for grasping the invisible and emotional dimensions at play in river defense movements. Feminist political ecology finds its roots in gender and development studies in the 1990s. It pays particular attention to the gender dimensions of struggles over nature, water and the environment (De Luca, 2024). Additionally, it questions human dominance over non-human or more-than-human natures. In this sense, this approach is relevant to study the San Pedro River Rescue Collective as a movement essentially composed of women who act as caregiver of the river conceived as a more-than-human nature. Feminist epistemologies and methods represent a research practice that empowers and promotes social and ecological transformation for women and other marginalized groups (Elmhirst, 2015). From a reflexivity perspective, it questions universal and objective knowledge, making the invisible visible, rendering the trivial important, and understanding more-than-human natures as subjects rather than objects. Moreover, the notion of 'situated knowledges' aims at valuing knowledge from the place of enunciation and production (Haraway, 2013).

As a complementary epistemology, the ecologies of care require an awareness of the interdependence of relational engagement that involves "actively connecting with the more than human, rather than simply seeing connection" for instrumental purposes (Pavlovich and Roche, 2024). It echoes the field of 'multi-species justice' (Houart, 2023). An ecological engagement is about "restoring and creating liveable ecologies for all" (Ergene et al., 2021), through life-sustaining meshed webs of relations that include the health and well-being of humans, animals, mountains, rivers, the sky, carbon and indeed the larger cosmological whole (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2022).

Some authors reflected on the ethical relevance of human moods and sensibilities, merging the classical conception of enchantment as being "struck and shaken by the extraordinary" with more everyday experiences of "moments of joy" in encounters with "human and nonhuman, natural and artifactual" bodies (Bennett, 2001). This perspective aims at understanding if and how enchantment of the world translates into ecological responsibilities and modes of care (Krøijer and Rubow, 2022).

They are situated stories about modes of thinking, healing, and inhabiting contested landscapes. It entails a disposition to "care for" rather than merely to "care about." The distinction is important for our exploration of the relationship between ethics of care and enchantment because it nuances the spectrum between detached attention, acts of being attentive to others, and caring for others.

In this perspective, the objective is not only to feel and think the river, 'senti-pensar' (Escobar, 2014), but also to feel and act for and with the river, 'senti-actuar'. Feeling the negative affectation and contamination of the river should not only produce

negative emotions and a paralysis of action, but also an impulse to look for solutions and put ourselves in movement such as a natural river flow.

## Methodology

Inspired by those feminist epistemologies, we applied various qualitative and participatory research methods (Merçon, 2021) to foster immersion with the San Pedro River Rescue Collective. Participatory approaches therefore seek to increase the relevance, credibility, and legitimacy of scientific research by ensuring the active participation of non-academic actors. When successful, the co-production of knowledge can lead to policy and practice outcomes that take into account a diversity of values, perceptions, and worldviews, making them appear legitimate and credible to local populations.

We first reviewed grey literature including reports, presentations and documents provided by the Collective, to obtain key data on their main actions, impacts and evolution from its creation. Then, we participated to one *minga* in the San Pedro River co-organized in February 2025 by the Collective in Guangopolo parish in Ilalo where we contributed to clean-up the river from trash and register local biodiversity around the river ecosystem. This local immersion was key to be part of the river cleaning and defense movement, share with local activists and residents and connect with the river to feel its contamination and injustice.

We visited the San Pedro River in the Algarrobos park in Cumbaya with three members of the Collective who shared with us their stories, the meaning of their engagement with the river movement and the main actions they drive. During this visit, we could connect with the river and then express our feelings through drawing our experience with the river. Additionally, we conducted non-structured interviews with the Collective's members to know from their trajectories in acting with the river.

Finally, we conducted direct and participatory observations during three events co-organized in early 2025 by the Collective for the construction of an academic network in the defense of Quito rivers. During those events, we could observe the discourses and approaches mobilized by the Collective's members to create a sense of community among academics and build new alliances and networks in favor of the Quito rivers protection.

## A river where stories, struggles and *mingas* converge

*Practicing mingas for the river*

The San Pedro River is much more than a waterway. It is a space where childhood memories, the wounds of the land, and the hopes of those who resist institutional indifference intertwine. Its waters have witnessed profound transformations: from being a place for games and fishing in past decades to becoming a silent dumping ground for urban waste. However, amidst this apparent decline, a collective heartbeat has emerged: an organization that, through community action, environmental awareness, and the practice of *mingas*, reclaims the river as a subject of life and rights.

Since its inception, the collective has had a unique way of working: without rigid hierarchies, with a strong commitment to intergenerational dialogue and the inclusion of diverse knowledge. School students and entire families learn from grandmothers who tell how they bathed in the river forty years ago. In this intersection of experiences and languages, the San Pedro River becomes a living school, a place of mutual learning.

The *mingas*, ancestral practices of collective work, are the lifeblood of this organization. They are not just cleanup days: they are acts of resistance. Each *minga* is a gesture of recovering the connection with the territory. It is not just about collecting plastics or extracting waste; it is about rebuilding the community fabric, remembering that shared work is also a form of healing. As Lisa Maria, one of the most active members of the collective, says: "The *minga* is an antidote to forgetting. When you work with other people for something that isn't yours but feels like yours, you begin to change the way you inhabit the world".

The stories that emerge during the *mingas* are numerous. A mother who takes her daughter to teach her that the river also has the right to be clean. A young man who decided to change his major to study ecology after attending a workshop. A neighbor who, after years without participating in her community, once again felt she had something valuable to contribute. The river, in these stories, is neither a landscape nor a resource: it is a protagonist, an interlocutor, a mirror.

The collective has promoted practices that go beyond the traditional environmental dimension. Instead of focusing exclusively on technical data or institutional strategies, they focus on embodied, affective and sensitive forms of knowledge. They have held body-territory mapping workshops, where people drew rivers on their bodies to identify where the territory hurts, where pollution is felt, and what memories are associated with water. They have organized sensory walks along the riverbank, where people walk in silence, listen, smell, and remember. These exercises decolonize the way politics are conducted (Cusicanqui, 2010): it's not about demanding solutions from above, but rather about constructing meaning from below, from the body, from the community.

One of the most critical points of intervention has been the Algarrobos Park, one of the most polluted areas of the river. What was once a biodiversity corridor now

accumulates bags, bottles, old clothing, and even chemical waste. Nonetheless, the collective doesn't see this place solely as a problem, but as a possibility: a symbolic node from which to construct another narrative. Open *mingas*, artistic gatherings, performances, forums, and collective plantings have been held there. Everything contributes to a larger narrative: that the river is not alone, that there are people who listen to it, walk it, and defend it.

At the heart of this defense is a radical ethical and political commitment: recognizing the river as a subject of rights. Although the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 already recognizes the rights of nature, the collective has shown how, in practice, this declaration remains on paper. The *mingas*, body maps, life stories, and advocacy actions are all attempts to embody this constitutional promise. It's not just about protecting an ecosystem, but about reconfiguring our relationship with nonhuman life.

The collective's work also engages with contemporary perspectives such as political ecology, environmental justice, and territorial feminisms. By understanding the river's deterioration as the result of power structures that privilege profit over life, they position themselves not only as environmentalists, but as activists fighting against the privatization of the commons, against a loveless technocracy, against imposed oblivion.

This work is not just about protest but about creation. In the midst of the climate crisis, the collective sows hope. Concrete hope, woven into action. A hope that neither idealizes the past nor ignores the present, but that dares to imagine a different future. In this future, the San Pedro River flows clean again. Not because a large company or a ministry saved it, but because many hands, many stories, and many struggles decided not to give up.

The San Pedro is, then, a river where stories, struggles and *mingas* converge. Where memory becomes a political tool, where the community organizes from the bottom up, and where the water continues to speak, although sometimes it whispers from deep within the mud. Those who hear that whisper know that outrage isn't enough. We must act. And acting, in this case, is a *minga*.

*Influencing politics*

The San Pedro River Rescue Collective is a critical force of change in politics when discussing topics of environmental injustice in Ecuador. Its main goal is to restore the river but also to challenge the political structure of the government that has neglected the environmental needs for a long time.

One of the main ways the collective has influenced politics has been through grassroot mobilization. Grassroots mobilization is one of the most effective ways to get political attention and political change (Kauffman, 2016). The objective is to gather the residents of the sector of Cumbayá, Tumbaco and Valle de los Chillos, which are areas directly affected by the contamination of the river. They are the ones who clean the river during the *mingas* and, by doing so, they have created a network of ecological activists who are committed to the restoration of their river and who are politically aware of the negligence of the government to this area.

Their efforts already had a concrete impact. For example, the recognition of the Machangara's river rights was successfully achieved by the joint work of various collectives[14]. By being active within the community, advocating legally for the river and politically lobbying for it, the collective has influenced public policies and their decision-making. For example, as part of the River Decontamination Strategy[15] which was released in 2024, the Municipality aims to build 22 Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTPs), which will be added to the 12 existing WWTPs. With the implementation of the new plants, the objectives are the recovery of the San Pedro, Machángara, and Monjas rivers, the decontamination of the upper Esmeraldas River basin, with direct impact on the Quito Metropolitan District (DMQ), neighboring cantons, and provinces, and the recovery of the stream and river environments in the affected basins.

In 2017, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador ruled in favor of the Vilcabamba River, recognizing that its rights had been violated by road construction that disrupted its natural flow and increased sedimentation[16]. This landmark decision set a precedent for the protection of other rivers, including the San Pedro. Efforts to have the Vilcabamba River recognized as a living entity under the Rights of Nature framework have drawn increased attention to the ethical and philosophical dimensions of environmental protection. As stated by Bin Abdullah (2025: 61), "the legal implications of river rights extend beyond the mere recognition of rights. They necessitate a holistic approach to river management that balances human needs with ecological preservation".

[14] Quito Criminal Court issued a written ruling officially recognizing the Machángara River as a subject of rights, ordering its comprehensive reparation through a phased process. The ruling, published on August 21, 2024, states that the court, after a detailed analysis of the evidence and testimony presented, recognized the severity of the pollution affecting the river and its negative impact on biodiversity and the health of the residents of Quito and surrounding communities.

[15] Plan de descontaminación de ríos: Municipio y BID proyectan planta para el plan ambiental – Quito Informa

[16] Caso judicial en Ecuador sobre los derechos del río Vilcabamba - Eco Jurisprudence Monitor

Despite having the Constitution on their side—and strong community support advocating for the river—achieving political change remains a significant challenge. Ecuador, while being one of the most megadiverse countries in the world, does not prioritize environmental protection. Instead, national concerns are largely focused on security and economic growth. As a result, the collective faces a persistent lack of political will as its greatest obstacle. Nonetheless, there have been important steps forward. For instance, the collective succeeded in getting the mayor of Quito to visit the San Pedro River and acknowledge the pollution it has endured. However, achieving full restoration of the river remains a distant goal unless the government begins to shift its priorities and take concrete action.

*Dialogue between science and activism*

The dialogue between science and activism provides a powerful insight into how these two areas can merge and complement each other. Science is an objective field, where data is basically everything, while activism is a field where people fight for a cause they believe in and demand for social justice. For a long time, those two fields have been seen as separate because of how different they are, one is data driven and the other is passion driven (Haraway, 2013). Lately, they go hand in hand because of how well they can complement each other, and the San Pedro River Rescue Collective is an example of the combination of these.

Scientific research has been vital for many environmental advocacies and the San Pedro Collective has used it to support their activism. The contamination the river has sustained over the years has been a critical issue for local communities, its contamination has reached levels that no longer allows the community to use it for anything, something that was a vital part of the community just 30 years ago. This is why the collective's work is not only cleaning the river and advocating for it but also understanding where this damage is coming from and how much damage it has. The collective has collaborated alongside various universities, researchers and students in citizen science activities, information dissemination and collaborative research. This includes river water and sediment monitoring (Biosfera Institute – University of San Francisco of Quito USFQ - Anavanlab), proposals for fostering living landscapes along the river (Architecture - Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador PUCE), and Capstone projects for wastewater treatment (Environmental Engineering - University of the Americas UDLA). These solutions came from the students visiting the river several times, to study the land and its problems, and doing the appropriate research, so that the solutions would be viable and applicable. Their proposal was based on the river and not the collective and its people, something really important since the primary "customer" is the river and then the local community.

The Collective works alongside other entities and environmental experts, to gather accurate data on the pollution of the river, and the level of damage. This has facilitated the identification of the source of pollution, like specific points where there are untreated wastewater disposal and contaminated water, which are two of the major problems for the river's health. Understanding where the problems are coming from is big step for the collective political lobbying, because with specific data they can make an argument with a solid base to fight the governments' arguments.

As Swyngedouw (2010) argues: "The presentation of climate change as a global humanitarian cause produces a thoroughly depoliticized imaginary, one that does not revolve around choosing one trajectory rather than another, one that is not articulated with specific political programs or socio-ecological project or revolutions." In contrast, the San Pedro River Rescue Collective is a representation of a political activist movement, that their work is not only the addressing of the river's contamination, but the political advocacy of the river's rights and the challenging of the systems in place, which are one of the primary causes of why the river got to where it is.

Science provides the collective with the tools to understand the aspects of the river's contamination, and activism is the tool to fight for a change and the restoration of the river. And while science has fed the activism of the collective, the collective activism has also given back to science by pushing for more data to be collected and for the river to be taken more into account. This data collection can be later used by the collective as scientific knowledge to be able to advocate for political change. For example, the collective has called out the government for a better regulation on the wastewater treatment that the city of Quito has, because the regulations are not strict enough regarding industrial pollution. By having scientific data, community testimonies and legal arguments about the river's contamination, these can be used to demand the local government to act and address the causes of the pollution.

*Defending the river as a living being*

In recent years, a growing global movement has emerged to recognize rivers not only as dead resources, but as living beings with rights, dignity, and a place in the moral and legal community. From the Ganges in India to the Whanganui River in New Zealand, legal frameworks and Indigenous worldviews have converged to defend rivers as entities with intrinsic value. In Ecuador, whose Constitution was the first in the world to grant rights to nature, this perspective is becoming powerful. Since the first ruling in favor of the Vilcabamba River's rights, Ecuador has more than 70 Rights of Nature cases, most of them ruled in favor of Nature, 35 of which have been selected by the Constitutional Court to continue developing jurisprudence

in favor of the Rights of Nature and Animal Rights[17]. Prominent cases worth highlighting are the Los Cedros Case, where the Constitutional Court decided that no activity that threatens the Rights of Nature can be carried out within the ecosystem of the Los Cedros Protected Forest, including mining and any other extractive activity. The Intag case is also making headlines, as two recently discovered frogs, thought to be extinct, battled it out in court, and the Provincial Court revoked the environmental license of Codelco, a copper mining company planning to mine in Intag's unique cloud forest.

The dominant modern view of rivers as channels for drainage, irrigation, or hydroelectric power has led to the massive degradation of freshwater ecosystems worldwide. In Quito, the San Pedro River has transformed from a vibrant waterway into a polluted stream, flooded by urban wastewater and industrial runoff. Once viewed as fundamental to life, the river is now considered an externality of urban growth. It is often assumed that the city's garbage must go into the river, that the river cleans the city, but this is not the case.

However, an alternative worldview is gaining ground. Rooted in Andean cosmology, this perspective views the river not as a passive object, but as a being with spirit, memory, and capacity for action. As Ecuadorian jurist and coordinator of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) Natalia Greene (2011: 66) writes: "Within the framework of the Rights of Nature, rivers are no longer legal objects, but subjects with the right to exist, flourish, and evolve". This reorientation is not just symbolic, it challenges the legal and political systems to transform how rivers are governed. It demands accountability not for what rivers can give us, but for what we owe to them. Recognizing a river as a legal person implies that it can be represented in court, defended from harm, and considered in decision-making processes.

Yet, recognition on paper does not always translate into real protection. Legal anthropologist Carmen Martínez (2020: 104) warns that "the Rights of Nature often clash with extractive policies and development priorities, creating a tension between constitutional ideals and economic imperatives". In Quito, despite legal advances, the San Pedro River continues suffering from chronic contamination due to weak enforcement and a lack of political will. Defending the river as a living being, then, is not just a legal task but it is an ethical and cultural project that must be taken up by civil society, indigenous movements, and environmental educators.

Many oral ancestral stories tell about the spiritual and emotional connection that exists between humans and rivers:

[17] 15 años de los Derechos de la Naturaleza en Ecuador · 15 years of the Rights of Nature in Ecuador - Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN)

Long ago, in a valley not far from Chimborazo, there was a small river called *Yakuñawi*, the "eye of water." It was said that the river remembered every face that drank from it and every foot that crossed it. The Kichwa community that lived nearby believed the river had a soul and that its song carried the voices of the ancestors.

One year, the valley was visited by engineers who promised electricity and progress. They built a dam upstream and diverted part of the river to feed turbines. The water levels dropped, fish disappeared, and the river's song became faint. The elders warned that the river would cry, but few listened.

One night, a young girl named Ima heard weeping in her dreams. She followed the sound to the river's edge, where she saw a silver fish with human eyes. The fish told her, "They have forgotten me, but I remember them. Tell your people I am not a machine. I am alive."

Ima went to the town next day and told the story. At first, people laughed. But as the dry season worsened and the crops failed, the community remembered Yakuñawi. They gathered, cleaned its banks, and asked forgiveness. Slowly, the river began to sing again.

This story shows us how, through anecdotes and legends, people are becoming aware of their rivers, their water, and all the beings in their environment, including themselves. It makes us ask the following question: To guarantee our Human Rights, must we first guarantee the Rights of Nature?

For those who live near the San Pedro, the river carries not only water but also stories, emotions and identity. It flows through the lives of elders who remember washing clothes in its currents, through the drawings of children who imagine it blue and full of life, and through the protests of activists who walk its banks holding signs that read *"El río tiene derechos."*

Environmental philosopher Eduardo Gudynas (2016: 22) explains that "seeing nature as a subject of rights requires us to feel, imagine, and think differently. It is a decolonial move that puts life at the center". In this sense, defending the San Pedro as a living being also involves recovering the affective and symbolic connections that people have with the river. It means telling stories, creating rituals, and designing policies that honor its rhythms and needs.

Defending the river as a living being is not about rejecting development but about redefining it. True progress must include ecological restoration, equitable access to clean water, and respect for natural cycles. In practice, this implies creating river guardianships. As in the Whanganui River case, where Māori representatives serve as legal guardians, Quito could establish a plural governance model for the San Pedro, involving local communities, indigenous leaders, scientists, and legal experts. It also implies decentralizing water management by empowering community-based water

monitoring and co-management initiatives so that citizens can actively defend the rights of rivers. By promoting river education, schools should teach children not only the biology of rivers but also their cultural meanings, spiritual value, and legal status as beings with rights. Finally, by centering restoration in urban planning, any expansion of Quito's infrastructure must include ecological criteria to protect and restore urban rivers like the San Pedro.

So, defending the San Pedro River as a living being is to listen its silenced voice to hear, beneath the foam and trash, a plea for recognition, care, and reciprocity. It is to reimagine the relationship between human cities and natural waters not as one of exploitation, but as kinship. The story of *Yakuñawi* reminds us that rivers remember. They remember how we treat them, whether we celebrate their flow or poison their currents. And perhaps, if we listen closely, they will remind us of who we are and who we could become a society that does not dominate nature, but lives in harmony with it.

During our visit to the San Pedro River with three members of the collective, we experienced the connection with the river by listening to the river and its surroundings for a few minutes (Figure 3). Then, we sat and drew what we felt. This exercise of river drawing was surprising as we all drew something different and highly intimate around our personal connection to the river. While one participant drew the river as a goddess, other drew the river as a little girl in need of protection. The other participants drew the river as death and another one as a grey area without much emotion.

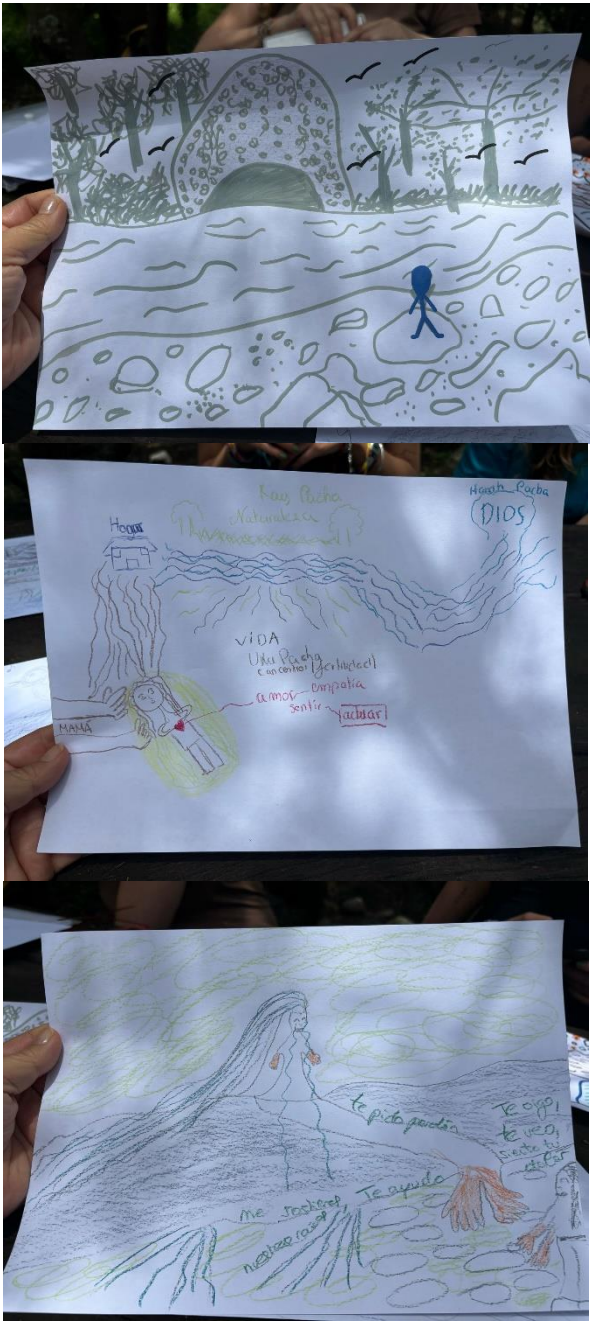


Fig 3. Drawing the San Pedro River feelings (M. Pasquel).

*Uniting international rivers*

Among the planet's most iconic rivers are the Amazon, the Nile, the Yangtze, and the Danube, whose basins have given rise to great civilizations and continue to be vital to the lives and cultures of millions of people. The Amazon, considered the world's largest river, is essential for global climate regulation and the balance of the Amazonian ecosystem; however, it faces threats from deforestation, illegal mining and agricultural expansion (Boelens, 2015). The Nile, a historical lifeline for Egypt and Sudan, remains essential for irrigation and water supply, although its management generates geopolitical tensions between the countries in its basin.

Meanwhile, the Yangtze, the longest river in Asia, has been an engine of economic development in China, but also suffers from industrial pollution and the pressure of mega-infrastructure projects such as the Three Gorges Dam. Finally, the Danube, which flows through ten European countries, is a symbol of regional and cultural integration and an example of transnational water governance through the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube. These rivers not only have incalculable ecological value but also a profound spiritual and cultural dimension, and their protection requires coordinated action that recognizes their sacred, social, and environmental character.

Rivers know no political boundaries. They flow through regions, countries and cultures, connecting territories and communities. However, this natural interconnectedness contrasts with the institutional fragmentation that affects their management, conservation and protection. In recent decades, faced with the increasing deterioration of aquatic ecosystems due to climate change, urban expansion, and industrialization, multiple citizen, environmental and institutional initiatives have emerged that seek to protect and restore rivers from a global perspective. The role of various international organizations and movements such as Waterkeepers International, International Rivers, River Cities Network, and the Minga Mundial and Latin American Water campaigns are fundamental in building collective action networks that promote water stewardship as a human right, a common good and a cornerstone of environmental justice.

Waterkeepers International is a global network of water guardians that promotes citizen oversight and fair access to clean water. According to its institutional declaration, its mission is "to protect the right of every community to clean, safe, and potable water" (Waterkeeper Alliance, 2023). Founded in 1999, this network operates in more than 40 countries and combines legal advocacy with community science to curb the pollution of water bodies.

International Rivers, for its part, specializes in the protection of rivers threatened by hydroelectric megaprojects. According to their official website, they defend "the

rights of communities that depend on rivers, as well as the ecological integrity of the rivers themselves" (International Rivers, 2023). The organization has worked with communities affected by dams in Brazil, Laos, India, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, documenting human rights violations and proposing sustainable development alternatives (McCully, 2001).

Mingas for water is a collective strategy that connects territories and mobilizes people. The Minga Mundial por el Agua (World Water Minga), promoted by the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group (ESRAG) and supported by Latin American civil society, seeks to "bring together local voices, actions, and solutions for a global cause" (ESRAG, 2022). The Minga Latinoamericana por el Rescate de los Ríos (Latin American Minga for the Rescue of Rivers), held every March 22nd on World Water Day, includes community cleanups, symbolic marches, forums for dialogue, and artistic actions to defend rivers from a community and territorial perspective. The San Pedro River Rescue Collective joined several times the World Water Minga to unify their efforts for awareness-raising and clean-up actions of the river.

Cities have forgotten that they owe their existence to rivers. The River Cities Network promotes a reconfiguration of urban space that revalues the ecological, social, and cultural role of urban rivers. This network encourages "the integration of watershed health into urban planning as a basis for resilient cities" (RCN, 2023). Urban river restoration initiatives, such as those in Medellín, Seoul, and Melbourne, show that it is possible to reconcile urban growth with the health of aquatic ecosystems (UN-Habitat, 2020). Cities that restore their rivers also strengthen their identity, resilience, and environmental justice.

In the face of the global water crisis, marked by scarcity, pollution, and environmental injustice, international initiatives not only raise awareness of water issues but also build innovative and collaborative solutions. Uniting efforts from the local to the global, these platforms promote water governance based on rights, participation, and ecological justice. Defending rivers is not only an environmental cause: it is a struggle for the present and future of humanity.

## Discussion: River movement and river in movement

The San Pedro River, which meanders through the northeastern slopes of Quito, is not just a stream flowing from the páramo to the valley. It is also a living memory, a web of relationships, conflicts and resistance. Its course intertwines the history of overflowing urban developments, technocratic canalization, neighborhood *mingas* and the struggles to inhabit the water with dignity. In this space, water not only flows: it also summons, organizes, and communicates. It is a "river in motion"

that refuses to be contained by the fixed categories of urban administration or by univocal visions of hydraulic progress. But it is also a "movement of the river": a network of bodies, knowledge, and emotions that are activated in defense of a different way of relating to river territories.

Over the past few decades, the San Pedro River has been subject to various forms of domestication: channeling projects, land use plans, privatization processes for riparian land, and cleanup policies that view the river as a problem. These interventions, in the name of development, have sought to discipline its flow, hide its presence, and turn it into a mere drainage system. But these forms of hydraulic control not only modify its course, but also the ways of life that depend on it. They have entailed an ontological closure: an attempt to erase the diversity of meanings, uses, and care that have historically been woven around the river. The San Pedro River has been materially and imaginarily dispossessed.

However, this process has not been linear or total. In the face of these forms of exclusion, practices of reconnection and resistance have emerged that reject the idea of the river as a dead and passive object. The San Pedro River Rescue Collective has been one of these living expressions of "riverhood", re-articulating the relationship between bodies, territories, and hydroknowledge. It is not simply an environmental group, but a movement that remakes the river through lived experience, through the collective body, and through listening to urban nature. Their action is not only vindictive, but also creative, pedagogical, and territorial. Through *mingas*, mapping, workshops, and performances, the Collective has been constructing an alternative ontology of the river: not as a resource, but as a subject; not as waste, but as a space of encounter; not as a border, but as a connection.

From the perspective of "river-as-territory" (Boelens et al., 2022), the collective has fought to reconfigure the banks of the San Pedro River as a habitable space. They have resisted the logic of enclosure, which transforms rivers into technical infrastructure and risk zones. For its members, walking the river is not just a recreational or investigative activity: it is a way of "reconquering the banks," of inhabiting the riverbed as part of the neighborhood, of the body, and of everyday life. In their practices, the river does not appear as an isolated natural entity, but as a socio-natural assemblage where technical, popular, spiritual, and sensorial knowledge converge.

This approach also engages with the ontology of the "river-as-ecosociety," recognizing the San Pedro as a space of co-production between humans and non-humans. The river does not flow solely due to the force of gravity or the logic of rainfall: it flows because people clean its channels, plant along its banks, name it, sing to it, and care for it. The *minga* as an ancestral Andean practice is here a key social technology for sustaining this riverside ecosociety. In each community gathering, not only trash is removed: relationships are forged, knowledge is exchanged, and life is

celebrated. The *minga*, in this sense, is not a ritual of the past, but a contemporary political practice that challenges individualistic and extractive logic.

These forms of organization clearly fit into what has been called New Water Justice Movements (NWJMs) (Boelens et al. 2022), as they demand the right to co-inhabit and co-govern the river from below, from the margins. The collective does not wait for the State to recognize it as a legitimate interlocutor before acting: it already does so, it already cares for it, it already defends it. This is a form of "power-within," where political strength does not come from numbers or capital, but from shared experience, roots, sensitivity, and territorial commitment. It is also a form of "power-with," as it articulates networks with other collectives, universities, artists, and water activists from different geographies. From this place, the San Pedro becomes a node within a larger network of struggles for urban water, connecting the local with the transnational.

In this process, the Collective also participates in the production of "river knowledge" (Boelens et al., 2019) that transcends the hegemonic discourses of hydraulic science. Their sensory journeys, affective cartographies, performances, and photographic records constitute an ecology of knowledge that allows for the interpretation of the river through embodied experience. Knowledge here is not the property of experts, but rather a collaborative, situated, and multispecies construction. In this way, the collective proposes epistemic pacts that recognize the plurality of ways of knowing and relating to water. The San Pedro is not only an object of study, but also a subject of speech, memory, and desire.

Thus, the San Pedro River Rescue Collective embodies the ontology of the "river-as-subject," asserting the agency of the river not only as a body of water, but as a living being with the right to exist, flow, and be cared for. This affirmation is not limited to a legal or philosophical demand but manifests itself in concrete gestures: walking alongside the river, speaking to it, writing letters to it, drawing it, planting alongside it. This subjectivization of the river is not a symbolic act, but a practice of ecological justice that directly challenges the modern forms of governmentality that have silenced it. Giving voice to the river also means recovering our own voices as riverside inhabitants, as guardians of the water, as bodies intertwined with its course.

Finally, the Collective activates a form of "river-as-movement," connecting the defense of the San Pedro with other struggles for water in the city and the country. It participates in forums, meetings, networks, and articulations that seek to break the isolation of local resistance. From this perspective, the river in motion also becomes a movement that travels, that transforms, that spreads. It is not just a physical channel, but a political current that contests imaginaries, meanings, and possible futures for river territories.

## Conclusion

In this study, we explored the modes of action and experiences of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective in Ecuador. Through various months of participatory research and local immersion with the Collective's activities in the field, we were able to grasp the power of feelings and emotions in activating a citizen response to the river contamination and injustice. Beyond feeling and thinking the river from an abstract perspective, the Collective promotes actions that intimately connect the people with the river. Those actions involve *mingas*, clean-up activities, forums, body-mapping, artistic creation, academic knowledge co-production, among others.

The San Pedro River Rescue Collective not only strives to revitalize a river, but to transform the relationship between society and nature at the very heart of the city. In doing so, it questions hydrocratic orders (Molle et al. 2009), proposes alternative ways of inhabiting water, and actively contributes to a more just, grounded, and affective river policy. Many other currents resonate within the San Pedro movement: those of history, those of community, those of life that insists, despite everything, on continuing to flow.

The experience of the San Pedro River Rescue Collective teaches us the power of citizen and grassroots action to take back our rivers, especially in urban contexts where they have been abandoned and made invisible. Beyond the context of Ecuador, many other movements act from the ecologies of care to give back to rivers their place and belonging in our modern societies and urban spaces.

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