

# TREKKING, RAFTING AND KAYAK: ATHLETES/ACTIVISTS, NATURE, AND SPORTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT.

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Trekking, Rafting and Kayak: Athletes/Activists, Nature, and Sports in the context of Social and Environmental Conflict.

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## ABSTRACT ◀

In the field of anthropology, as well as in other disciplines, the interest in the ways in which people relate to the environment is not new, specialized anthropology in this field has been dedicated to studying this relationship for the last one hundred years or so. Within the framework of the doctoral thesis in Anthropology where this article arises, the author proposes to know these relationships, in this document she addresses the extreme sports practice in the territory where the socio-environmental conflict #NoAltoMaipo has been active since 2008. The metropolitan area of Santiago de Chile is the territory where the Alto Maipo Hydroelectric Project is under construction. The conflict is led by the Citizen Coordinator of the Ríos del Maipo who warns about the threat to the ecosystem of the River basin and the quality and availability of water for Santiago. Sports and recreational activities in that area are one of the main attractions and source of annual income for the local economy that depends largely on the more than 2,500,000 tourists who arrive every year at the Cajon del Maipo. This article aims to reflect on the link between environmental activism and extreme sports in that area. The methodological design was about classical ethnography.

*Key words: Nature, Sport, Environmental perspective, Socio environmental conflict, Chile*

## RESUMEN ◀

En el ámbito de la antropología, así como en otras disciplinas, el interés por los modos en que la gente se relaciona con el medio ambiente no es nuevo; la antropología especializada en este campo se ha dedicado a estudiar esta relación los últimos cien años, aproximadamente. En el marco de la tesis doctoral en Antropología en la que se produce este artículo, la autora propone conocer esas relaciones y en este documento aborda la práctica deportiva extrema en

el territorio donde se encuentra activo el conflicto socioambiental #NoAltoMaipo, desde el año 2008. El área metropolitana de Santiago de Chile es el territorio en el que está en construcción el Proyecto Hidroeléctrico Alto Maipo. El conflicto es liderado por la agrupación Coordinadora Ciudadana de los Ríos del Maipo, quien alerta sobre la amenaza para el ecosistema de la cuenca del río y la calidad y disponibilidad del agua para Santiago. El deporte y las actividades recreativas en esa zona son uno de los principales atractivos y fuente de ingresos anuales para la economía local, que depende en gran medida de los más de 2.500.000 turistas que llegan cada año al Cajón del Maipo. Este artículo pretende reflexionar en torno al vínculo entre activismo ambiental y deportes extremos en esta zona. El diseño metodológico utilizado es etnografía clásica.

*Palabras clave: Naturaleza, deporte, perspectiva ambiental, conflicto socioambiental, Chile.*

► **ABOUT SAN JOSÉ DE MAIPO COUNTY: WHERE NATURE, ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM, AND SPORT COEXIST**  
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The San José de Maipo county (*comuna*)-usually called *Cajón del Maipo* (Maipo Canyon)--is located in the southeast of the Metropolitan Region, in the central zone of Chile, and occupies 4989km<sup>2</sup>. Cajón del Maipo, as it is popularly known, is 50km southeast of Santiago city, in a mountainous region in the Andes Cordillera range. The valley comprises several towns along the banks of the Maipo river. The largest one is San José de Maipo. It has approximately 15083 inhabitants (INE Chile 2013). It is a semirural area that hosts many sport activities associated to "nature", mainly trekking, climbing, rafting, horse-riding, fishing and kayaking. It is one of the three counties in the Cordillera province (Pladeco 2010).

For Cajón del Maipo, tourism is the productive sector that contributes most to development and local businesses in this semirural area. This was made palpable when the National Tourism Service declared this county a tourist interest zone.

As the city of Santiago is close to the Maipo river, the upper section of the river has been vastly used to provide energy to the city. This basin has six hydroelectric plants. From the political-administrative perspective, the Maipo river basin covers practically all of the Metropolitan Region's territory, part of the Fifth Region, Valparaíso, and the Sixth Region, Bernardo O'Higgins. There are 163 populated localities in the basin, of which 22 are cities and the rest are towns and rural settlements. The Upper Maipo Hydroelectric Project (*Proyecto*

*Hidroeléctrico Alto Maipo*, henceforth PHAM) is being built in the San José de Maipo county to generate hydroelectric energy. It involves the construction of two plants: Alfalfal II and Las Lajas. These plants will be located in the micro-basin of the Colorado river. Seventy kilometers of tunnels will be built to carry the water, which will have a direct impact on the Colorado, Yeso, and Volcán rivers, and indirectly on the Maipo river. This is the fundamental difference with a run-of-the-river plant because in this case the river will be channeled and the impact will be a reduction in the river's volume of water between San Gabriel and Las Lajas localities.



**FIGURE 1**

*Territory of the Maipo river basin and metropolitan area of Santiago de Chile city.*

In October 2007 a grouping of organizations formed the Civil Convener's Group of the Maipo Rivers (*Coordinadora Ciudadana de los Ríos del Maipo*, henceforth, the Civil Convener), comprised by: Cajón del Maipo Tourism Guides and Businesses Union Association, Cajón del Maipo Hotel and Tourism Businesses Union Association, San José del Maipo Chamber of Tourism, Pirque Chamber of Tourism, Defense

of the Maipo River Group, Artisanal Sand Sellers Union, Andean Waters Federation of Workers and Professionals, and Colorado River Institute. This group is opposed to the construction of the PHAM, considering that it will negatively affect quality of life and economic activities, especially those related to the tourism sector, and will also affect the availability of drinking and irrigation water. The Civil Convener defines itself as an organization that brings together men and women closely related to Cajón del Maipo since 2007. It meets periodically in meetings that are open to the community. Most of the participants are residents of Cajón, regional entrepreneurs and producers. A diversity of professionals collaborate with the Civil Convener, such as, hydraulic engineers, natural resources engineers, geologists, lawyers, accountants, journalists, artists and, mostly, amateur athletes and professionals.

In this district and in the Civil Convener, identity and culture dialogue with the rural zone. A large percentage of the people in this area travel to Santiago for work every day. There are families dedicated to tourism or sectors such as muleteers, who maintain their traditions moving their herds according to the winter or summer seasons.

During fieldwork between 2014 and 2017, a strong link with nature was observed through the practice of extreme sports, in some cases, and amateur sports, in others, but always in direct contact with nature. In Cajón del Maipo the practice of extreme sports in this natural environment is daily. Here we intend to connect the implication, dependency and perception of nature in some of the extreme sports practiced by the environmental activists of the Civil Convener. The sports practiced in Cajón del Maipo are directly linked to nature: trekking, climbing, rafting and kayaking, but they are not the only ones. A large number of visitors practice, not in a professional manner, zipline (aerial cable runway), fishing, hunting or horse riding. To enrich this analysis, it would be interesting to study them in the future. Through them, sports become a tourist attraction in this natural space. This raises the possibility that they also might be a form of resistance of the #NoAltoMaipo environmentalist movement.

Meetings with environmental activists in their spaces of militancy, such as marches, activities to

spread awareness of the conflict, and public acts, immediately revealed that all of them practiced a sport linked to nature, from hiking to extreme sports. In the regional or national marches in Santiago's downtown, they arrive with clothing and articles linked to the sport, such as canoes, paddles, boats, and helmets. These create a scenery for the march that expresses how the ways that they inhabit Cajón del Maipo are different from the city. These performances of the environmental conflict transform daily objects in the Cajón landscape into exotic ones in the city, but which are connectors to these ecodependent realities. This is the main reason for coming to the marches with this type of sports gear.

Three categories of participants can be clearly identified in the Civil Convener:

- Environmental activists comprised of sectors linked to production, including sand sellers, muleteers, and those dedicated to tourism and hospitality
- Non-professional athlete environmental activists, who do not live in Cajón and are connected with the Civil Convener due to their concern about the project's impact on the quality of water and environment
- Professional athlete environmental activists
- These are the people who, due to their sports activities in intense contact with nature, promote the environmentalist movement and awareness about the conflict for carrying out sports, but also the negative impacts, such as, economical, water quality, drought risk, biodiversity impact, among others, in the medium and long terms.

Approaching the environmental activists' perception of nature presented an interesting challenge as an anthropologist: in order to perceive it, it was necessary to involve one's body, feel the cold, heat, smells, tastes. This requirement of involvement draws an important difference with discourses about athletes in intense contact with nature compared to those who contemplate or value nature for other environmental services, whether economical or political.

One of the most developed activities is mountaineering (*andinismo*). Although there are professional athlete activists involved, it is an easy access activity for people who do not practice it habitually, composed of different circuits associated to different levels of complexity and physical resistance. Regarding this activity, one

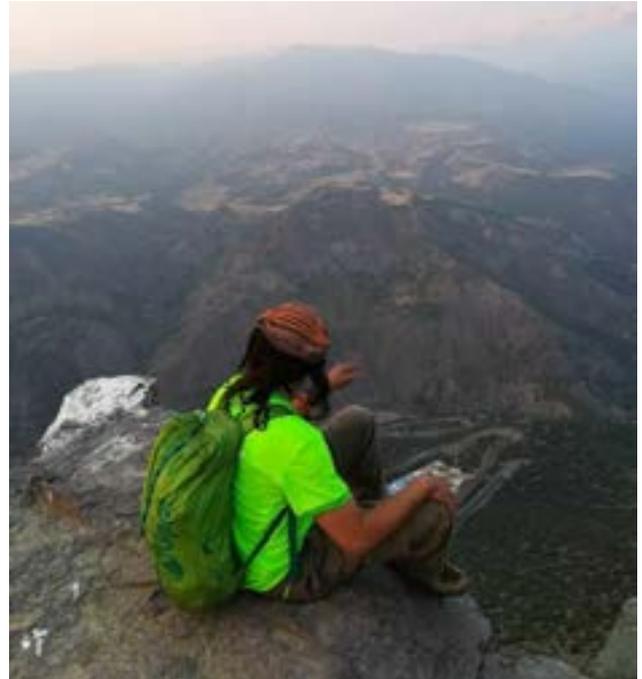
activist athlete explained his participation in a mountaineering club in the following way:

Now you are part of a system of gears. There are companions with the same goals. I am in a mountaineering club, a mountain club. Twenty years' ago we worked with children in social risk contexts and we want to start that again with children who do not have access to sports. We want to enjoy nature. That's why we also have a shelter.

Mountaineering is an inclusive practice given the way he describes it: cultivating "enjoyment" of nature is possible from a young age.

Tomás (activist and athlete) says that:

Athletes, professionals and amateurs, practice their specialty in one of the locations of Cajón del Maipo, like the rock climbers in El Manzano, El Melocotón, San Alfonso and Boyenar, ideal places for their activity. Recently other places have also emerged for this sport, such as El Hongo and La Mina, near Baños Morales and the sector of Las Melosas. Other sports that are carried out in this area are: fishing in lakes (in El Canelo sector), trekking (in El Melocotón, San Alfonso, Boyenar, Baños Morales, Lo Valdés), mountain bike (in Baños Morales, in El Yeso reservoir), rafting (in San Alfonso), kayak (on most of the rivers), and navigation windsurf and kayak during the summer (in El Yeso reservoir area). Mountaineering has found an ideal environment for its development in these peaks, walls and ice.



**FIGURE 2**

*Photo from Luis Emilio's archive, mountaineer and environmental activist, 2018. Cajón del Maipo. Creative Commons , license: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10214835977002517&set=pb.1519156518.-2207520000.&type=3&theater>*

## ► **METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY OF A NON-ATHLETE ANTHROPOLOGIST**

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In the context of the doctoral dissertation, the methodological research approach is positioned within qualitative strategies focused on the study of an ethnographic case. Observations, participant observations and in-depth interviews were carried out. Since the researcher's conversations in the field can be considered interviews, these have a strong component of everyday engagement. In this manner, it was possible to clearly explain the dynamics involved in activism, changes experienced in everyday life as a consequence of the hydroelectric project's infrastructure construction, what moved them to defend a river or mountain, how they perceived the landscape in which they lived, and how they visualized the future. In this way, these exchanges were productive to begin to understand about relations, places, events or motivations. This article draws from the interviews references to sport and the defense of Cajón's biodiversity due to the benefit of attracting local tourism for nature sports. It also contemplates the reasons

for opposing the PHAM, especially its negative impact on the possibility of continuing to carry out sports activities in this natural setting.

The Chicago School developed the in-depth interview, life history and participant observation techniques (Gutiérrez & Delgado 1994:143). With that, they promoted the qualitative method, which consists of direct observation, in social interactions with the social actors under research and in informal interviews.

Observation is not pure and immaculate. It implies absorbing what is observed into a reference frame or background, which gives it meaning [...] Data, ultimately, never cease to be a selection of experience according to the purposes and expectations nurtured by the observer, and cannot avoid being influenced--and, maybe determined--by the reference frame through which they are assimilated, and the assimilated theories that precede observation (Martínez 2008:22-24).

Waiting times and the calmness of the rural area characterized fieldwork in Maipo. Activities start at dawn, pause for lunch, there are moments for reflection, and when the sun sets dinner is served (Guber 2001). Waiting times in Maipo gave a chance to travel around Cajón, drink *mate*, contemplate the landscape, admire the rapids, which often kept me still to listen to the deep sounds of the water, observe the intense green vegetation and admire the constant mist that I learned to enjoy during three winters. There were afternoons spent lingering in the square in San José de Maipo, where there is a crafts market, watching workers and students walk by, waiting for the meeting with the Civil Convener members.

Kayak, zipline, boats, and vehicles with mountain gear, constitute Cajón del Maipo's landscape. For someone like me unaccustomed to sports--much less extreme ones--it all triggered curiosity. The apparatuses used to practice sports suggested a physical display of strength and skill. The knowledge required for practicing these sports is multidimensional. It implies understanding the athlete's body, knowing and dominating the tools upon which their lives often depend and, not least, knowing the natural environment in which they practice their sport: the rapids, mountain, paths, wind, storms, and more. According to Luis, activist and athlete

In the mountain everything changes in ten seconds, in ten minutes. The sun may be shining brightly and it all turns to rain, sleet and--this may sound strange--but it makes us understand we are emotional and that we don't control our emotions because there are inherited things. We strengthen our character and develop a skill, abilities that we are not entirely conscious about.

The relation with athlete activists during fieldwork was limited to observations, sharing spaces and interviewing them about their opposition to the PHAM. I was unable to accept invitations to participate in any of these sports, except walking along the river banks, which, depending on the intensity, could be considered a sport in itself.

A landscape and nature so absolutely different to Uruguay already required time needed for adaptation. Though inhabitable, it requires a certain amount of physical aptitude, which is part of the life of the people born in Cajón del Maipo.



**FIGURE 3**

*In Santiago (city center), Chile, activists and athletes carry their boats to the march for water, 2013. Image by Civil Convener's Group of the Maipo Rivers. Creative Commons , license: <https://www.facebook.com/NoAlProyectoAltoMaipo/photos/a.413929418644894/480966455274523/?type=3&theater>*

## ► NATURE AS A SPACE FOR SPORT

The activist athletes from the #NoAltoMaipo movement were born in Cajón del Maipo and they maintain an intense contact with nature in their daily lives. One activist athlete expressed:

The mountain is a witness of life. They are always present, observing your backyard. It's like a man sitting on the seaside listening to the breaking waves, the unending sound of one wave and the next wave. The mountain is always there, present. First it was like playing a game, then physical exercise, afterwards competing, and now it is about enjoying the mountain, being alone, or the silence if I do it alone. Be able to listen to nature.

But there, everything becomes an opportunity. Everything is available in one scenery. According to Carles Feixa (1995), everything is in one symbolic universe: "The scenery of recovered nature, the universe of controlled emotions; nature as a claim, as the decorated wild, exoticized nature" (p.37).

As Feixa explains, physical dangers and direct contact with nature were part of daily life in preindustrial societies, in which bodily emotions were expressed in situations such as feasts, war, religion or subsistence, without a clear distinction between each of these contexts. Modern sport regulates them and imbues them with a competitive spirit that transcends their original meaning as productive, religious or festive exploits.



**FIGURE 4**

Activist athletes in the river. Before going out with tourists they conduct talks to explain about the conflict, Cajón del Maipo, January 2017, Cajón del Maipo. Creative Commons license: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10211629509762840&set=pb.1519156518.-2207520000.&type=3&theater>

Similarly, Giddens (1993) considers that to carry out new sports, post-modern society is able to transform nature and build its own "created environments". This refers to the availability of spaces to carry out sports that involve major or minor interventions, such as ski trails, mountain climbing schools, artificial rapids, tree circuits, orientation circuits, etc. Rather than transformed spaces, in Cajón del Maipo the practice of sports in unmodified nature is predominant. Although ski trails are available, sports in the unmodified river and mountain are the most salient.

For that, an intense connection and knowledge of the natural landscape is required. Here, the activists' perception of nature (most of whom were born in Cajón) dialogues with interventions in nature to produce "created environments". In Giddens' terms, it is an unfamiliar nature for which the safety of practicing the sports must also be generated, as it cannot be drawn from the knowledge of a local guide who moves with confidence in an environment that is both familiar and his own.



**FIGURE 5**

Luis Emilio and Josefa Macarena's archive (father and daughter, activists and mountaineers). Creative Commons license: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10213434885936116&set=pb.1519156518.-2207520000.&type=3&theater>

As Luis, activist and athlete, expresses:

Climbing a mountain is reaching the highest level of the Earth but also the deepest, when you climb a volcano and connect with the deepest elements of the universe, which are the mountains. To do it with companions, friends, to take care of each other and that they will watch out for you. Leaders are generous in that situation. You will not be well all of the days, you will be tired, have aches, feel cold, sleepy, hungry, and you have to keep up a good spirit. Sometimes, your body will overpower you. The mind will win over body, and when the body is tired, a great spirit.

Sports activities in the mountain are carried out in different ways, such as a single experience during a tourist visit, recreation, or as a routine sports practice, and even in competitions at different levels (local, national, and international). High altitude mountaineering has a rich history of characters that includes 14th century poets to members of Hernán Cortés' expedition (Jiménez 2010).

There are three nature reserves in the Cajón region. As Feixa (1995) said, physical adventure activities in nature have been adorned with a complex ceremonial scenery. These nature reserves are surrounded by tourist infrastructure, relics storages, meeting and praying points, the presence of specialists (technicians, monitors, group leaders) and an esthetic scenery (posters, clothing, colors, emblems). Adventure spaces are framed; that is, the physical and symbolic surrounding contributes to supply ceremonial contents to the activities. There is an atmosphere of connection to the here and now of nature, involving the senses and the body, and everything predisposes the individual to live an adventure. Emotions accompany the itinerary:

At first, when you reach the mountain, you feel like a small child, euphoric, as if you had just won a soccer match with your team. But as you grow, all the effort of walking for days with physical weight, carrying a load, you arrive more calm, you contemplate better, trying to register in minutes what you have done, you thank God, and the mountain for caring for us. The goal is to return safe and sound, to return with your group, and if you go alone, to return is the most important thing.

The Maipo river gives the whole landscape its meaning. The landscape includes it and it is mutually shaped into the mountains, reservoirs and waterfalls. Rafting and kayaking are widely practiced with vastly experienced local guides.

Experienced athletes are generally the ones with all the resources available for those who practice sports during leisure moments and are related to local enterprises:

Guides, porters and cooks, travel agencies, natural parks, professional athletes, sports gear manufacturers... new providers of emotions and adventures for rent, who see these locations as a source of income with growing productivity, with a value that increases with human ingenuity. It can make the effort more accessible in terms of physical economy and suffering, more intense and varied in its leisure and enjoyment possibilities.

The mountain is a space of revelation, beholding a nature that is perceived as uncontrollable, changing from one moment to the next, just like emotions, as one activist athlete shared when recalling a mountaineering experience:

Not long ago we climbed some hills and a friend began to cry, but he wasn't the first. Many times they have told me that it is not just because of what they are seeing but also feeling. We are so tiny under the sky, under the stars, under the moon; we traverse a sojourn so small that regardless of all the power you may have obtained in life, at that moment you feel that vulnerability.

Based on the environmental activist perspective, in that relationship mediated by the senses and the intense contact with nature in Cajón del Maipo through sports, reflection on the incidence of the nature-sport link and environmental activism sometimes emerges from a young age. The following section shares environmental perceptions and how these athletes build a platform of reasons to oppose the PHAM, directly associated to the impacts on biodiversity and the economy (income from tourism).

## ► PERCEPTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

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Using the theoretical framework of environmental and ecological anthropology, an analysis emerging from fieldwork is presented, basing myself on the concept of *perception* to refer to an individual's state of awareness of self and environment. It is a way of situating ourselves in the world, in which people and nature are understood as inseparable in their definition and relationship (Descola & Pálsson 1996). The environment becomes an active component. Nature is a source of meaning, allowing the study of natural impacts on human groups (Milton 2002).

On the basis of Milton's concept of *cultural perspectives*, Durand (2000) proposes the concept of "environmental perspectives such as the norms, assumptions and values that come from living in the natural environment that allow it to be understood and explained" (p.86).

In this way, the concept of *environmental perspective* presents itself as a junction between culture, perception and interpretation.

According to Durand (2000), this concept has several advantages:

Not everything in culture is constructed socially. That is, there is direct perception that generates knowledge and experience. Phenomena that occur inside an individual's sphere become important and makes it easier to understand the different visions or experiences of the environment within a same cultural group (p.86).

On the other hand, conceptualizations of the environment respond to different disciplinary gazes, to the economic or political interests that determine them. The different conceptualizations converge in the complexity of giving meaning to the concept of *environment*, from the integrated totality that operates according to the sum of relationships of the elements as a whole, in which each element or subsystem contributes to affect the functioning of the whole. This totality is comprised of two dimensions: a *natural* and a *social* one; related through productive activities and framed by a development style that defines their mutual relationship. One of the definitions that has a popular worldwide consensus stems from the United Nations Conference

on Environment and Development, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, known as the Earth Summit or Rio 92. The following consensus emerged from this meeting: "The environment is the sum of physical, chemical, biological and social components capable of causing direct or indirect effects, in a short or long term, on living beings and human activities".

The relationship between environmental perspectives and cultural identities is much more complex. In some cases cultural identity implies a particular understanding of the world, but in others a plurality of perspectives (Milton 1996 in Durand 2000).

With this viewpoint, individuals can be considered:

Carriers of environmental perspectives with the possibility of moving within a geographical range, in which the social, cultural and economic context are transformed. Environmental perspectives are maintained as cultural elements but not anchored or belonging exclusively to an identity or cultural group (Durand 2000:87).

The study of environmental perspectives can help us to explain how some people or social groups perceive and act in their environment, what exactly do they appreciate or reject, and how do these experiences determine what they consider environmentally adequate or permissible. In the activist athletes' discourses the connection between what they perceive and what they would accept is reproduced, transformed into an incentive for militancy.

Daily life for the Civil Convener's environmental activists, especially the athletes born in Cajón and whose lives transpired in intense contact with nature, is threatened by the installation of the PHAM because they understand that the construction of the hydroelectric plant will radically change the natural surroundings in which their identities were forged. They are opposed, together with the muleteers, irrigators, sand sellers, the tourism and hotel sector, and thus generate a movement that reaches regional and national scales. Consequently, the perception of nature that emerges from a conservationist value linked to the practice of extreme sports contributes to other dimensions of the movement's platform of claims, dialogues with the productive sector and generates, finally, a shared vision.

## ► SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT

The manifestation of the environmental problem as a social conflict implies a crossing of logics, tensions, in which the relations between public and private compete and are transformed. Environmental problems are presented as external, when society communicates and constitutes them as such (Díaz & Morales 2010 in Aliste & Urquiza 2012). Environmental problems are configured by multiple gazes. One way to approach them is to contemplate the different logics in which the problems develop.

[Environmental] conflict is a particular type of social conflict in which the disputed issue refers to environmental matters. [...] The conflict emerges from different values, perceptions or meanings which actors bestow to actions or circumstances that affect, or may affect, the environment (Santandreu & Gudynas in Taks 2013:22).

According to this approach, conflict emerges after an activity has modified a given state of nature or will do so in a predictable way. The conflict, then, is due to a hegemonization of the meaning of a real or potential change. "Environmental conflicts are distinguishable from other social conflicts because their contents are interpreted as , due to the historical, social and cultural context they belong to" (Sepúlveda 1997:158).

Despite the capitalist system's attempts to reaccommodate to maintain accumulation, the experience of the past two decades has shown that "we are facing a constant accumulation crisis, in which the system requires geographical expansion and spatial reorganization to maintain and increment capital accumulation" (Harvey 2005:100).

Hence, Panez, Faúndez & Mansilla (2017) affirm that for the water in Chile, regarding these socio-spatial adjustments of capital

The commodification of their sources and their management have advanced more than any other country in the region. Their privatization and seizing from peasant and Indigenous communities has been a key piece in the expansion of mining, energy, agroexport activity and the insertion of transnational capital to service the cities'

drinking water after neoliberal transformations (p. 144)

Violence has had a central role in the accumulation process:

In this sense, the increasingly naturalized reality that thousands of families have two hours of water per day, while a few kilometers away there are hundreds of avocado trees covering the hills with green in the Petorca province signals a profound violence (ibid., p. 144)

According to different authors, like Padilla & San Martín (1997), Claude (1997), the emergence of environmental conflicts, or other types but which use environmental rhetoric, is framed by the background of implantation of a neoliberal economy in diverse Latin American countries, which in the case of Chile occurs in the context of a dictatorship and post-dictatorship. The situation is the result of the implantation of this economical model that places heavy pressure on natural resources and has caused important pollution processes and environmental damage. It is met by responses and movements within civil society to defend the environment. Regarding that, there are some theoretical differences. Some authors consider that citizens seek to defend the environment with their movements and visibilization of conflicts. While other authors think that environmental or socio-environmental conflicts play out more than only ecological conservation (Sabatini & Sepúlveda 1997).



**FIGURE 6**

*Excursion with the Club Andinismo Universitario. She holds a t-shirt with the movement's logo #NoAltoMaipo, 2016, Arenas Valley. Josefa Macarena's archive (activist and mountaineer).*

In this context, the athletes that often accompany visitors who come for trekking or kayaking tell them about their ongoing conflict with the PHAM, and turn up for the activities with flags, posters and t-shirts with the movement's logo. They become important spreaders who raise awareness of the reasons for opposition. Whether hiking along the hard-to-reach paths to the mountain, navigating the river or observing the landscape in the areas close to the project's construction sites, the activist athletes share with the visitors their values, their experiences with nature and the area. During those moments in which the visitors are having an intense perceptual contact and involving their bodies, the activist athletes bring to the surface the negative impact of a megaproject of these characteristics to a natural environment, while it is stimulating an intense and unforgettable moment. The activists become, in that way, representatives of that most intense, pristine, conservationist part of nature.

► **FINAL THOUGHTS**  
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**T**emporality in relation to the practice of extreme sports and environmental activism in a natural setting guided this article's reflections. Also, whether the link with nature incentivizes them to become involved in an environmental movement to defend it, as it allows the practice and has inscribed their life histories.

Feixa (1995) says: "Every society has, indeed, its characteristic forms of organized adventure into nature; what changes is the perception about them" (p. 39).

The activists' identities are strongly rooted in the river and mountain landscape. Memories of Cajón in their childhood and adolescence reaffirm the idea of Cajón as the lung of Santiago. "Everything exploited, everything dry" flows from the militants' voice; the perception of a mistreated helpless nature. The "occupied waters" modify the landscape stemming from the control of the Maipo river waters, which historically were manipulated, but this project will occupy them, making them unavailable, affecting landscape, links and, consequently, identity.

As one activist athlete from the Civil Convener expresses:

The mountain experience is about sharing, not just the loads but also sharing what you have inside, your best. One releases things during the transit along the path. You organize them. One might reach the top very tired, but light. The goal isn't always to reach the summit. It's not always a physical goal. It might be about conquering oneself.

So, the athletes have a perception of nature and of their connection with it that is expressed in a discourse in which market logic is not primary. That is what they communicate. What they seek is for the population to become aware of that way of feeling and perceiving nature. They remind the population to "awaken" an experience of exchange and respect for nature, more linked to a conservationist logic, but also to care for nature and water by aspiring for minimal intervention and change. The activists' environmental perspectives (Durand 2000), that which they appreciate or reject, determines what is considered environmentally adequate or permissible within the conservationist or care scopes.

The perception of nature and the history of the landscape they inhabit since children supplies them with elements to be critical, to understand and oppose the effects of decisions about their territory taken by other people. Understanding these perceptions allows for the understanding of the social impact that the communities are willing to tolerate in their territory. They take a stand to spread awareness of the conflict and communicate the threats of a megaproject in a natural setting.

With their different views about the waters, the mountains, the beings that live in Cajón, and the representations of nature, the communities, the businesses generating the megaprojects, and the State enter into conflict.

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Long life to them.*

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