

The Sixaola River Basin Story



THE SIXAOLA RIVER, SIXAOLA-GUABITO, THE BORDER OF COSTA RICA-PANAMA.

Introducing the Sixaola River Basin Story, where river basin residents' stories communicate through their voices and perspectives brings to light how this particular co-managed research approach — bringing together the Sixaola River Basin residents' stories of their culture and values held for their water resources readily enhances understandings of the requisite interwoven social fabric that lends itself to form the current comprehensive collaborative approaches for water resources management in the Sixaola River Basin in the first place - The Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin.

Each narrative is geographically site-based, spanning from where the rivers of the basin are born at the headwaters, snaking their way across

extraordinary terrains, with the final story ending in the basin's outlet at the edge of the Caribbean Sea. Each narrative encompasses a collection of poignant and moving accounts of the basin's water resources from river basin residents' lived experiences in the Sixaola River Basin. As a collection of data, themes of unity, spirituality, and stewardship of water resources in the Sixaola River Basin emerged across all of the stories and interviews, it is based on these findings that I assert how the deep values, culture and interests of Sixaola River Basin residents form the necessary conditions for the Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin to emerge and endeavor to collaborate and coordinate in the first place. From the perspective of the Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin, "there is a lot we can show and provide other international transboundary river basin communities with regards to our organizational structure, practices, knowledge and shared learnings."

On the global scale, The Sixaola River Basin is one of the only basins in Central America that has an active working agreement between two countries that could be described as "functioning," which differentiates the Sixaola River Basin. For basin residents, this is something that is incredibly important. Fundamentally, the way in which the Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin has structured and organized itself, stands out, through a strong historical relationship among neighbors of the Sixaola River Basin, two countries of Costa Rica and Panamá, and the five indigenous communities. Overall, the data extracted from river basin residents' stories in this project show that Sixaola River Basin residents think about themselves and explain themselves as a basin (an integral working and living system), not as political divisions or borders, or separate

from one another or their resources, “... human links with the river are strongest in developing countries and communities, where livelihoods respond to the annual cycle of flows; cultural, religious and recreational ties to the river have deep meaning” (King & Brown, 2010, p. 128).

For members of the Binational Commission of the Sixaola River Basin:

Our work is the vision to continue learning in support of the struggle faced when aiming to secure the health of basin residents and the environment. The Binational Commission aims to motivate and encourage basin residents to become conscientious of what each can do to support the health and well-being of the basin. Since the commission began, the Sixaola River Basin is managing resources in an enhanced way, from the time when there was not the level of coordination that there is today. Among them, the rich resource, people - the basin residents, and the water, which is essential. (Interview, 03/2016)

The heart of this entire project— “The Sixaola Basin Story”—is shared as a means to ignite discussion for current and future water resource management paradigms and managers to consider incorporating culture and values into practice and projects while aiming to produce data within co-managed research that is conceivably digestible in a culturally sound context by the research participants themselves: The river basin residents. All of the aforementioned research objectives within this co-research project in-turn serve a purpose in answering the research question of this project: How does a river basin tell its own story? Each objective is implemented in this commanding narrative, The Sixaola River Basin Story: “Thank you for the opportunity to share with you. Following your read, and in working to fulfill and meet the objectives of this co-managed research, the concluding hope is that you too, will share your water story with us...”