

Benefits and Environmental Impacts of Dams

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Water availability has always been a basic need for the development of societies and dams are an essential tool to the rational management of surface water resources, mainly in zones with irregular climates, as Portugal.

The great hydraulic engineering projects always imply positive and negative environmental impacts on the areas where they are located; thus their design requires a sound study of the different impacts, in order to harmonise as most as possible the advantages and disadvantages.

However, in the last years, extreme positions against the construction of new dams have been ascertained, based on the exclusive analysis of the direct negative impacts, forgetting or minimising the important positive impacts such as those of social, economic and even environmental nature that are associated with the construction of this type of projects.

As the construction of new dams is essentially a need of the poorest zones, if they are not constructed, these zones will be definitively underdeveloped, with the consequent growth of the regional asymmetries and the migration of population in search of better living conditions - with the well known disastrous social and environmental consequences.

It is necessary and urgent to demystify the campaigns against the construction of these projects, and provide the society with adequate and deep information on this subject in a way that advantages and disadvantages of these projects are balanced in a reasonable manner.