

SPECIAL PANEL:

Environmental Governance in Latin America. Contributions from the ENGOV project (FP7 2011-2014).

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Panel Abstract:

This panel is organized by the ENGOV Project (FP7-EC 2011-2014). The central objective of the ENGOV project is to understand how environmental governance is shaped in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The project focuses on both formal and informal practices of management around renewable and non-renewable natural resources, how they are perceived, contested and reshaped in the context of rapid and complex social, political, economic and environmental changes at local, national, and global levels.

We study the obstacles and possibilities for sustainable production systems that can generate both economic development and a more equitable distribution of benefits in order to decrease poverty, exclusion, and environmental degradation in LAC. We depart from the region's experience with environmental governance, analyse recent initiatives, and explore options for institutional innovation and inclusive approaches towards natural resource use and management. The project uses multi-disciplinary and multi-scalar methods to discuss and compare contexts and outcomes in different LAC regions, and to develop innovative tools for learning processes and communicating its results.

The current session aims to present some of the preliminary results of the project. Contributions from Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Guatemala will be presented.

“Chinese actors in Latin American mineral extraction conflicts”

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Abstract:

Mineral extraction has become a socially and politically contested activity in Latin America, involving a range of local, national and foreign actors from civil society, the private sector and the public sector. In this conflictive area, recently a new actor has entered scene: China. Within only a few years, China has become a major export destiny of all resource rich Latin American countries. Especially since the global crisis that started in 2008, China is becoming a prominent investor in the region's oil and mining, including 'mixed deals' such as large energy-backed loans in which the Chinese government, state-owned banks and (state-owned) TNCs. In the light of the rapid entry of Chinese investments in the region's extractive industries, this paper aims to compare various Latin American experiences. What kind of resource extraction conflicts occur with Chinese companies, how do they react to local and national (social and political) environmental demands and requirements, and is there any difference with other TNC operations and attitudes? This explorative study will be based on information from Latin American media, civil society organizations, and national and international institutions.

“Governance from Below as a Challenge to Environmental Governance”

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Abstract:

Environmental governance is a concept that generally encompasses the organization and cooperation among national institutions for promoting political activities that contribute to promoting the sustainability of national development programs. As such they are designed to promote the goals of economic development, social inclusion, and environmental balance (with varying emphasis on weighting among these dimensions.) For marginal communities in developing countries without effective voice in national policy making, the alternative of “governance from below” as an approach to assuring their contributions to promoting local welfare and environmental balance is an approach being favored by those searching to design alternative development strategies.

Using the framework of local development, transdisciplinarity and “dialogue of knowledge systems” incorporating non-western cosmovisions, this contribution critically examines the alternative development strategies proposed by communities proposing their own approaches to what is being called “good living” in Andean countries. The examples are drawn from first hand accounts by community leaders collaborating in a project being directed by the author.

“Natural equity accounts and environmental perspectives of the economy”

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This article presents an articulated vision of the economy with ecology and other social sciences, which are articulated to explain the different environmental conflicts. It analyzes how social and economic structures transform the nature depending on the needs of the population, and quality of life. The essential rationality of the process tends to profit maximization in the short term, without considering the effects on nature and society, which creates a natural and social degradation, and a waste of natural resources, energy and infrastructure. This creates an environment perception by the population that can “naturalize” the effects or become aware of the possibility of change and act for it. Based on this situation social and environmental movements, advanced theoretical movements that promote integrative analysis, alternative techniques and a whole range of actions and ideas are being generated, that drive some policy changes and impact on the systemic process of production, distribution, the exchange and consumption.

The article emphasizes the impact that the process has undervaluation of resources during the crisis of the current situation and the important role that can play the elaboration of the Natural Equity Accounts in a sustainable development. With these accounts, qualitative-quantitative knowledge of natural resource structures, their dynamics, the possibility of comprehensive and sustainable use, and their full costs (including management of ecozones that allows the conservation and production) and income (including those resulting from the integrated use of biodiverse ecosystem supply) are achieved. Just so

we know which is the patrimony, the offers without destruction, as what we have and what new initiatives we can undertake coevolving in harmony with nature and people. Finally, the initiative has been approved by the Natural Resources Commission of the Chamber of Deputies for the development in Argentina taking into account the cost of natural resource sustainability.

“What can we know about ecological distribution conflicts from a national material flow accounting? The case of Argentina (1970-2009)”

Julien Brun, Pedro L. Perez Manrique, Ana Citlalic Gonzalez-Martinez, Mariana Walter and Joan Martinez-Alier (Institut de Ciència y Tecnologia Ambientals, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB))

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Abstract:

Some ecological economists have put forward the hypothesis that the growth of social metabolism – i.e. the interchanges between human societies and their environments in the form of resource extraction, pollution and waste disposal – is the cause of increasing ecological distribution conflicts. Ecological Economists point that social metabolism indicators such as the Human Appropriation of Primary Production or the Material Flow Analysis (MFA) could be used to explain the frequency and intensity of the formation of environmental conflicts. This proposition is our paper starting point.

This paper conducts a critical analysis on the relation between MFA and environmental conflicts in a national case study. With this aim we have a) conducted a MFA study on Argentina (1970-2009), focusing on domestic extraction trends, b) conduct a review of local extraction conflicts during the same period, and c) compared the results identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the hypothesis.

We adopt a critical position towards the possibility of establishing a direct relation between social metabolism and ecological distribution conflicts. We point that the shift in scale and volume of domestic extraction are relevant, and also the way these are distributed in the territory and the technologies being used. We also highlight that the shift from a state of “latent” conflict (i.e. objective situation of tension) to a state of “visible” conflict rests also on socio-political contexts.