

ECOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION CONFLICTS and the EJAtlas

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The term Ecological Distribution Conflicts has been used since 1995 to describe social conflicts born from the unfair access to natural resources and the unjust burdens of pollution.

Environmental gains and losses are distributed in a way that causes conflicts. The terms socio-environmental conflict, environmental conflict or EDC are interchangeable.

- The term 'ECONOMIC distribution conflicts' in political economy describes conflicts between capital and labour (profits vs. salaries), or conflicts on prices between sellers and buyers of commodities, or conflicts on the interest rate to be paid by debtors to creditors.
- The term ECOLOGICAL Distribution Conflicts in political ecology stresses the idea that the unequal or unfair distribution of environmental goods and bads is not always coterminous with 'economic distribution'.

- **Ecological distribution conflicts** is then a term for collective claims against environmental injustices. For instance, a factory may be polluting the river (which belongs to nobody or belongs to a community that manages the river).
- The same happens with climate change, causing perhaps sea level rise in some Pacific islands or in the Kuna islands in Panama.
- Yet this damage is not valued in the market and those impacted are not compensated for. **Unfair ecological distribution is inherent to capitalism, defined by K. W. Kapp (1950) as a system of cost-shifting.**
- Notice the explicit absence of “liability” for climate change in the COP21 agreement 2015.

No “liability” at COP 21 in Paris

- Todd Stern, the US climate envoy, said the US ... had long acknowledged there was a need to support countries acutely vulnerable to climate change impacts. But he added: “There is one thing that **we do not accept and will not accept in this agreement and that is the notion that there should be liability and compensation for loss and damage. That is a line that we can’t cross.**”

Fin. Times 6 Dec. 2015

No “liability” at COP 21

- Miguel Arias Cañete, EU climate commissioner, told the Financial Times (6 Dec. 2015) there was now a “growing understanding” that loss and damage provisions would be included in the Paris agreement, **as long as they did not expose wealthy countries to new claims for compensation.**
- No recognition of an ecological debt.

Compare to *Laudato si*, para. 52

- **A true “ecological debt” exists**, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time. The export of raw materials to satisfy markets in the industrialized north has caused harm locally, as for example in mercury pollution in gold mining or sulphur dioxide pollution in copper mining.
- There is a pressing need to calculate the use of environmental space throughout the world for depositing gas residues which have been accumulating for two centuries and have created a situation which currently affects all the countries of the world. The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world...

Laudato si, para. 52

There is also the damage caused by the export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries ...

Generally, after ceasing their activity and withdrawing, they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities ...

- In environmental neoclassical economics, the preferred terms are “market failure” and “externalities”, a terminology that implies that such externalities could be valued in monetary terms and internalized into the price system.
- Then, if we would accept economic commensuration and reject incommensurability of values, ‘equivalent’ eco-compensation mechanisms could in theory be introduced. In theory, not in practice.
- **Instead, ecological economics and political ecology advocate the acceptance of a plurality of valuation languages to understand such conflicts**
- **and the need to take them into account through genuine participatory processes and by recognition of the groups holding such values (e.g. sacredness, or environmental values that cannot be translated into money terms).**

In the EJAtlas (www.ejAtlas.org)

- We have by end of June 2016 only about 1800 ecological distribution conflict cases in the EJAtlas.
- e.g. three cases

<https://ejAtlas.org/conflict/comunidades-kuna-yala-frente-al-cambio-climatico>

- <https://ejAtlas.org/conflict/sompeta-power-plant>
- <https://ejAtlas.org/conflict/fuleni-mine>

These three and many other are related to climate change. Let us look at them.

From a social metabolic perspective we classify Ecological Distribution Conflicts through the stages of a commodity chain; conflicts can take place during the extraction of energy carriers or other materials, transportation and production of goods, or in the final disposal of waste.

- Our ten main criteria (level one) of classification
 - **Nuclear energy**
 - **Mineral ores, building materials**
 - **Waste disposal or management**
 - **Biomass and land conflicts**
 - **Fossil fuels / climate justice**
 - **Infrastructures, built environment**
 - **Water management**
 - **Biodiversity conservation conflicts**
 - **Industrial and utilities conflicts**
 - **Tourism recreation conflicts**

So, in the EJAtlas...

- The ecological distribution conflicts collected are not primarily classified as being caused by “bad governance”, or by “market failures” or by “caste oppression” or “mistreatment of indigenous populations” ... but from
- **MATERIAL CAUSES**, we take a “commodity approach”. We shall not change this approach after 4 years of work !!!
- But we include in the 4 or 5 page database forms the social actors, the different impacts, and whether “success” in environmental justice has been achieved or not (or “not sure”).



EJ Atlas

- So far, good, plausible thematic distribution in the main ten fields (in my view) but VERY uneven geographical distribution.
- <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/india-leads-world-in-environmental-conflicts-10655>
- India has more conflicts (220 so far) because it has a very large population, but China has so far only about 40 conflicts in the Atlas, Bangladesh only 6...
- This makes the EJAtlas still not credible, according to interested and kind observers.

We are being watched: EJAtlas fête bientôt ses deux ans ! Billet publié le 8 mars 2016 par Bordes

- ... bien que le site soit très bien fait, notons un bémol. L'Atlas demeure encore très incomplet et rempli de manière subjective, en fonction des ONG et des universités et de ce qu'elles jugent important à indiquer ou non, ou ce qu'elles peuvent indiquer ou non... S'il n'est pas très surprenant de voir l'Inde en tête de ces conflits, il l'est beaucoup plus de constater que ni les chercheurs des universités chinoises, ni les organisations environnementales chinoises n'aient dénombré en deux ans plus de 29 conflits environnementaux. Quand on en compte déjà 59 en Espagne, cela laisse perplexe quant à la qualité des informations représentées sur cet Atlas à une échelle mondiale...
- En Mars 2014 l'Atlas dénombrait 1000 conflits, un total jugé encore trop faible au regard de la réalité du nombre de ces conflits environnementaux. Leah Temper, chercheuse à l'Institut des sciences de l'environnement et des technologies de l'université de Barcelone, appelait les chercheurs et les ONG à entrer en contact avec les coordinateurs du projet pour atteindre en Mars 2015 2000 conflits recensés sur EJAtlas. Pour l'heure, en Mars 2016, 1700 conflits sont indiqués. L'objectif n'a donc pas été atteint.

Here come Acknowl-EJ and Env Justice to the rescue !!!

- I see the two new projects at ICTA UAB, Acknowl-EJ and EnvJustice, as successful steps in a 30 year quest to establish the idea of a **Global Environmental Justice Movement** inspired by local activists (such as Acción Ecológica in Ecuador and so many others).
- My book *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2002) is part of this trajectory as also *Varieties of Environmentalism* (1997, with Ram Guha).
- Then came CEECEC 2008-11 and EJOLT 2011-15, and Leah Temper's idea of the EJAtlas.
- **EnvJustice** is a new project at ICTA UAB, given as a personal European Research Council Advanced Grant to JMA, for five years 2016-2021.
- It allows to give contracts to 3 new postdocs (including one on China) and 3 to 5 doctoral students, plus some remuneration for the Advisory Board

EnvJustice 2016-21

- ENVJUSTICE will carry out three main tasks. **First**, the team will add and analyze cases in the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas) (www.ejatlas.org), an incomplete inventory of ecological distribution conflicts compiled at the ICTA-UAB. Researchers will update and expand the EJAtlas which was launched in March 2014. It will grow thematically and geographically, becoming **a unique instrument to conduct comparative, statistical political ecology. We aim at 3000 conflict cases by 2019.**

- **The field of political ecology studies “ecological distribution conflicts” ultimately caused by the increase in social metabolism.** The links between such socio-environmental conflicts and changes in the social metabolism will be explored.
- Even a non-growing industrial economy would require new supplies of fossil fuels and other materials from the commodity extraction frontiers because energy is not recycled and materials are recycled only in part. The economy is not circular, but entropic. There are therefore many resource extraction and waste disposal conflicts, at different scales, such as greenhouse gases.

- Research based on the EJAtlas will analyze the resistance movements born from such conflicts and the networks they form across borders in a **Global Environmental Justice Movement**. In this regard, ENVJUSTICE will work with the project Acknowl-EJ 2016-19 led by Leah Temper at ICTA-UAB & Ashish Kothari (Kalpavrisksh) (www.worldsocialscience.org/activities/transformations/acknowl-ej/).

- **Second**, it shall expand the scope and deepen the analysis of the Vocabulary of the Movement for Environmental Justice, from its beginning in the USA in 1982 (with terms like environmental racism, popular epidemiology, sacrifice zones) to its deployment in many countries with new crosscutting concepts such as Climate Justice. This is only one of many terms in the vocabulary of environmental justice. The project will investigate how different claims are expressed in Europe, India, China, Africa, Latin America, related to mining and fossil fuel extraction conflicts, biomass and water, waste disposal and transport conflicts.
- **Third**, it shall analyze (following in the steps of Sicco Mansholt and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen) the elements for a possible alliance between the Global Environmental Justice movement and the smaller Degrowth (Décroissance, Post-Wachstum, “Prosperity without Growth”) movement in Europe.

Four published articles in free access

- Leah Temper, Daniela del Bene and Joan Martinez-Alier. 2015. Mapping the frontiers and front lines of global environmental justice: the EJAtlas. *Journal of Political Ecology* 22: 255-278
- J. Martinez-Alier, I. Anguelovski, P. Bond, D. Del Bene, F. Demaria, J-F Gerber, L. Greyl, W. Haas, H.Healy, V. Marín-Burgos, G. Ojo, M. Firpo Porto, L. Rijnhout, B. Rodríguez-Labajos, J. Spangenberg, L. Temper, R. Warlenius and I. Yánez. 2014. Between activism and science: grassroots concepts for sustainability coined by Environmental Justice Organizations. *Journal of Political Ecology* 21: 19-60.
- J. Martinez-Alier, L. Temper, D. Del Bene, A. Scheidel, 2016, Is there a Global Environmental Justice Movement? *J. of Peasant Studies*, https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/16-icas_cp_martinez_alier_et_al.pdf
- J.Martinez-Alier, F. Demaria, L. Temper, M. Walter, 2016, "Social Metabolism and Environmental Conflicts: a comparison between India and Latin America",
http://www.slideshare.net/Research_and_Degrowth/social-metabolism-and-environmental-conflicts-a-comparison-between-india-and-latin-america-by-joan-martinezalier-federico-demaria-leah-temper-mariana-walter-ictaub-barcelona-in-green-growth-zed-books-2016