



Land grabbing within a protected area: The experience of local communities with conservation and forestry activities in Los Esteros del Iberá, Argentina



Nienke Busscher^{a,b,*}, Constanza Parra^b, Frank Vanclay^a

^a University of Groningen, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, PO Box 800, 9700 AV Groningen, The Netherlands

^b KU Leuven - University of Leuven, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Division of Geography and Tourism, P.O. Box 2409, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Green grabbing
Extractivism
Neoliberal conservation
Environmental justice
Private protected areas
Political ecology

ABSTRACT

Protected areas are increasingly being created, managed and owned by private actors, resulting in land grabs that are often at the expense of local control, livelihoods and biodiversity. Changes in land ownership and land use lead to new governance arrangements, which are full of paradoxes, alter ownership responsibilities, and create clashes of perspectives over how nature should be valued and utilised. Conversely, the presence of new actors potentially also brings about socio-environmental awareness and can open-up arenas for dialogue and multi-level collaboration. Using qualitative research methods, we considered two case studies in the protected area, *Los Esteros del Iberá*, in the north-east of Argentina: the Harvard Management Company's investments in industrial tree plantations; and the conservation project of Douglas Tompkins (i.e. the Conservation Land Trust). Their activities have increased the complexity of socio-political dynamics in the region, leading to contradictions and conflicts, as well as to a strengthened commitment to manage the *Iberá* region better. Nevertheless, local communities perceived little difference between green grabbing and land grabbing, with all land transfers increasing inequality.

1. Introduction

Land grabbing changes patterns of land ownership and land use, and fosters new modes of land regulation and governance (Brent, 2015). The exploitation of land and land-based resources by companies also generates socio-environmental conflict, inequality and environmental degradation (de Schutter, 2011). The implications of land grabbing are diverse; in many cases, conflict over land brings about the further political marginalization of the groups of people living nearby (Gerber et al., 2009; Vanclay, 2017a). However, in some cases, land grabbing may create opportunities for people to benefit from the arrival of new actors and capital (Hall et al., 2015). In contrast to the typical conception of land grabs – i.e. the large-scale commercial production of agricultural commodities (Borras et al., 2012a) – land is also being consumed by an increasing array of private conservation initiatives (Igoe and Brockington, 2007). Protected areas and other areas of high ecological value have become vulnerable to land grabbing in several ways, including: by a policy discourse that promotes neoliberal conservation; the increasing demand for ecotourism; the increasing power of big international (environmental) NGOs (BINGOs); and the opening-up of local land markets (Büscher et al., 2012; Corson et al., 2013; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Holmes, 2014a; Zoomers, 2010). These

neoliberal conservation initiatives are full of controversy (Fairhead et al., 2012; Vanclay, 2017a).

The entry of new actors in local land markets and the accompanying changes in control over land alter power relationships and can be seen as an expression of the shift from government to governance (Corson and MacDonald, 2012). Drawing on Parra (2010), governance can be defined as the system of regulation involving the interactions between and within a wide range of actors (individuals, institutions, NGOs, companies) at different territorial levels and the socio-institutional arrangements in which they participate. Governance is a multi-dimensional concept that implies the constant renegotiation, restructuring and readjustment of the various roles and responsibilities of governments, civil society and the market (Castree, 2010; Corson and MacDonald, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2005).

Changes in governance can be manifested in various ways, and the impacts of these changes have been interpreted, perceived and analysed from different perspectives. On the one hand, scholars such as Eden (2009:383) state that the passage from government to governance can entail a “more proactive, preventative and socially relevant decision-making” and can imply a change “from closed debates and state-led, reactive and technocratic decision-making to more open, stakeholder-led debates in a civil society mode”. From this perspective, the

* Corresponding author at: University of Groningen, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, PO Box 800, 9700 AV Groningen, The Netherlands.

E-mail addresses: n.a.busscher@rug.nl (N. Busscher), constanza.parra@kuleuven.be (C. Parra), frank.vanclay@rug.nl (F. Vanclay).

diversification of actors brings opportunities to open-up decision-making thus empowering citizens (Swyngedouw, 2005). On the other hand, this transformation can be interpreted as the withdrawal or erosion of the state from its environmental regulation and social responsibilities (Fairhead et al., 2012; Klooster, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2005). The growing role of markets and the private sector in biodiversity conservation now constitutes one of the key issues in the governance of the natural environment (Corson and MacDonald, 2012; Klooster, 2010; Zammit, 2013).

The empirical focus of this paper is land grabbing in and around the protected area, *Los Esteros del Iberá* (henceforth Iberá), which is located in the Province of Corrientes in the north-east of Argentina. The factors that affect governance dynamics in this region include the growing presence of private actors, increasing commodity production under green pretexts, and private conservation initiatives. We examine two cases of land grabbing in this protected area. One case focuses on commodity production, specifically the industrial tree plantations of the Harvard Management Company (HMC), the endowment management fund of Harvard University. The other case is the land acquisition activities in Argentina of the late multi-millionaire, Douglas Tompkins, who through the Conservation Land Trust (CLT) bought large tracts of land in Iberá, primarily for conservation purposes. Both cases reveal the social and environmental issues in the ongoing discussion associated with land of high ecological value being flogged-off to foreigners (Corson and MacDonald, 2012; Fairhead et al., 2012; Lunstrum et al., 2016).

Our two cases of land grabbing can also be considered as ‘green grabbing’ (Fairhead et al., 2012; Messerli et al., 2013). Our preferred definition of land grabbing is: “the capturing of control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms involving large-scale capital that often shifts resource use to that of extraction, whether for international or domestic purposes” (Borras et al., 2012a:405). The focus on control in this definition means that local people do not necessarily have to be expelled from the land, but rather that their resource access is lost or diminished (Hall et al., 2015). Green grabbing, a term first used by Vidal (2008), primarily concerns land acquisition for environmental purposes, such as biodiversity conservation, national parks, carbon sequestration, biofuel production, ecosystem services, ecotourism, or offsets (Fairhead et al., 2012; Vanclay, 2017a). Green grabbing adds a new dimension to the debate over land grabbing in that environmental reasons are used to justify the acquisition of land and associated resources (Corson et al., 2013; Fairhead et al., 2012). A sense of environmental crisis in various forms, e.g. resource scarcity, biodiversity loss, climate change, is also promoted to legitimate green grabbing (Castree, 2010; Corson, 2011; Fairhead et al., 2012; Igoe and Brockington, 2007). Green grabbing causes the displacement of people creating inequality, social impacts and human rights impacts (Brockington and Igoe, 2006; Fairhead et al., 2012; Lunstrum et al., 2016; Vanclay, 2017a, 2017b).

Drawing on the two case studies in Iberá, our aim is to discuss the characteristics of the governance of land grabbing in and around protected areas. Protected areas are defined as designated spaces that are managed to achieve the objectives of preserving natural qualities, biodiversity, and/or cultural heritage (Parra and Moulart, 2016). In their creation and ongoing operation, protected areas can have detrimental impacts on local people (Brockington et al., 2008; Büscher and Fletcher, 2015; Holmes, 2014b; Vanclay, 2017a,b). By zooming in on the most important governance dynamics, we explore how land grabs and subsequent governance changes provoke socio-political development as well as conflict. Our focus on land governance also helps to understand the mechanisms, practices and processes that lead to inequality.

With a growing diversity of forms of conservation, the governance of protected areas has become increasingly complex. Therefore, examining the roles, responsibilities, activities and interests of the different key actors is even more important (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen,

2014; Hanna et al., 2008; Oliveira and Hecht, 2016). An analysis of governance is useful to gain a better understanding of land grabbing from the positions and perspectives of the full range of actors. We suggest that the multi-level governance character of land grabbing potentially can lead to positive as well as negative outcomes. Nevertheless, the negative issues arising from land grabbing are frequently difficult to address because of local contextual factors. Moreover, we show that the negative implications of land grabbing are experienced far beyond the boundaries of the land investment itself.

2. Land grabbing and its characteristics

Contemporary research suggests that understanding of the drivers and impacts of land grabbing is still developing (Hall et al., 2015; Temper, 2018). Initially, the literature on land grabbing focussed on local resistance, displacement and the privatisation of land (the new enclosures) (Borras et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Holmén, 2015), whereas now land grabbing research goes further, for example, new insights have revealed that local people are not always against land grabbing (Hall et al., 2015; Holmén, 2015). In certain cases, local people, and women in particular, may actively seek to benefit from the jobs that might flow from land grabbing (Hall et al., 2015). In other situations, local people engage in negotiation or struggle to improve the terms and conditions under which land grabbing occurs and the outcomes that follow (Hanna et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2015). Their actions are directed to various actors, including the state, investors, the wider public and to others in the local community. In this struggle, tensions can occur between different groups of local people (Borras et al., 2013, 2016). Sometimes, people decide not to resist but to adapt to the negative situation brought about by land grabbing. Recent insights show that land grabbing creates unintended as well as intended, unexpected and expected social impacts and political dynamics (Hall et al., 2015; Holmes, 2014a), which was also evident in our research as we discuss below.

Based on research in Sub-Saharan Africa, Holmén (2015) identified four reasons explaining why land grabbing occurs: (1) there is a prejudice favouring large-scale development over local farming; (2) governments have been keen to attract land investments and foreign money, for example to develop much-needed infrastructure; (3) corruption and a lack of capacity with government exists in many forms, including in weak land policies; and (4) there has been misguided foreign advice. We consider that these reasons play a significant role universally, including in Latin America. With many different contexts in the world, the specificities of how land grabbing plays out varies from place to place (Borras et al., 2012b), but there are also generalities (Edelman et al., 2013). For example, in the Latin American context, Grajales (2011) emphasised the use of violence in Colombia. Costantino (2015) suggested that there were relatively high returns on land investments in Argentina and the myth of the relative abundance of land.

While land grabbing might be a necessary evil for countries to produce commodities, keep economies running, gain foreign currency to pay off debts, or to develop economically (Baird, 2011; Cotula et al., 2009; Fairhead et al., 2012), the negative effects of land grabbing on local people are extensive (Fairhead et al., 2012; Messerli et al., 2013). From a social perspective, the established impacts of land grabbing include violation of human rights, ignoring customary land rights, livelihood changes, forced evictions, and the criminalization of local people as they take action to protect their interests (Brent, 2015; Hanna et al., 2016a; Holmes, 2014a; Messerli et al., 2013; Vanclay, 2017b). The main negative consequences from an environmental perspective are biodiversity loss, ecosystem changes, water shortages, and pollution (Svampa and Viale, 2014). Land grabbing can lead to loss of income and job opportunities, reduced possibilities to own land in the future, increased land prices, and increased inequality with land ownership shifting into the hands of elites (Costantino, 2016; Davis et al., 2014).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6546072>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6546072>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)