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Payments for ecosystem services and social justice: Using recognition theories to assess the Bolivian *Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua*

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ABSTRACT

Payments for ecosystem services (PES) have been the subject of a great amount of literature among which questions of social justice are an important topic. However, we show that most of these studies tend to depoliticize the debate by considering mostly liberal and redistributive notions of justice. We argue that injecting the notion of recognition allows a better depiction of complex local power dynamics and situations of (in)justice. We, therefore, briefly review the social and political philosophical theories of recognition before using the notion of recognition as an analytical tool to assess a Bolivian PES (*Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua*, ARA). We show how PES transform recognition relationships between upstream service providers and the formerly rather disinterested service consumers, including municipal authorities, by creating new narratives and channels of recognition. We also highlight the fragility of this process as well as the persisting misrecognition of the poorest of the poor (immigrants, small landowners) that is strengthened by this PES at the intra-community level. Finally, we highlight the potential instrumental use of recognition that could be made by PES promoters as well as counter-hegemonic use potentially made by marginalized actors.

1. Introduction

Payments for ecosystem services (PES) are a contemporary instrument of environmental governance inspired by the Coasian assumption that decentralized agreements reached through direct negotiation and private transactions between actors involved in provisioning and consumption of ecosystem services (such as carbon sequestration, water quality, reduction of drought and flood risks or cultural and recreation activities) are more effective and efficient in inducing mutually desired behavioral changes than top-down centralized regulations and Pigouvian taxes and subsidies defined and enforced by the state (Van Hecken and Bastiaensen, 2010). In a vivid debate it has either been positively recommended or critically rejected as a "market-based" (neoliberal) instrument even when in practice it almost never involves any broad-based aggregation of preferences (demand) and provisioning costs (supply) typical of the market mechanism (Engel et al., 2008; Gómez-Baggethun and Ruiz-Pérez, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the inevitable hybrid, mixed institutional nature of PES is now widely recognized in the literature (Muradian et al., 2010; Muradian and Gómez-Baggethun, 2013; Van Hecken et al., 2015; Vatn, 2010; Boisvert et al., 2013).

Recent research has presented detailed analyses of these hybrid institutionalization processes in a series of case studies (Aznar et al., 2008; McAfee and Shapiro, 2010; Rodríguez-de-Francisco and Boelens, 2016; Shapiro-Garza, 2013b; Van Hecken et al., 2012), with some studies particularly focusing on the distributional consequences of the socioeconomic outcomes of the emerging "new" institutional arrangements (Greiner and Stanley, 2013; Hoang et al., 2013; Mahanty et al., 2013; Rios and Pagiola, 2010; Van Hecken et al., 2012; Zammit, 2013). Much of that literature underlines that the geographical areas considered most suitable for ecosystem services delivery are often marginalized and poor areas in the Global South, and that, therefore, PES can also be seen as a way to integrate poor, marginalized populations within market economies, making them co-beneficiaries of the broader ecosystem services that they generate. PES initiatives thus become portrayed as a possible social and ecological *win-win solution* (Pokorny et al., 2012; Muradian et al., 2013) with the potential to improve social justice (Adams et al., 2004) through the addition of pro-poor objectives to the goal of effective and efficient environmental governance (Pascual et al., 2010).

Most of PES analysis, however, states that the mere facilitation of poor people's access to new ecosystem service markets is not enough to durably combat their poverty. Structures that underlie poverty and generate domination and injustice have to be considered and fought

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against to avoid their reproduction. This is based on an institutional understanding of poverty (Bastiaensen et al., 2005), which cannot be considered as a residual individual situation of unadapted people, but is rather the outcome of biased identity-based relational processes (Mosse, 2010). Free and improved access to markets is considered as one means of exercising freedom but is certainly not enough to allow marginalized groups to "get out of their 'oppressed people' status and to concretize their aspirations to freedom and emancipation" (Guérin, 2015: 195, pers. trans.). Freedom requires the transformation of power relationships and social norms underlying domination and injustice so that they become the source of recognition, solidarity and emancipation.

Debates around justice and equity appear as central themes in PES research, in particular among studies evaluating social consequences of PES in developing countries (Calvet-Mir et al., 2015). Yet, most of this research is inspired by a relatively confined array of conceptualizations of justice, thus limiting the scope of the analysis. In this paper, we, therefore, explore and illustrate the enhanced analytical potential of a notion of justice based upon the concept of recognition as a social category. We will show how injecting the notion of recognition avoids depoliticizing the debate induced by liberal and redistributive notions of justice by allowing a better depiction of complex local power dynamics and situations of (in)justice among PES schemes.

The term "recognition" refers to both a cognitive action (the awareness that something we perceive had been perceived before) and to the act of someone's affirming the existence of someone else. Significantly, in French, the term "recognition" ("reconnaissance") is synonymous with the term for "gratitude" or "gratefulness," which is defined according to the French Larousse dictionary as an "affectionate feeling toward a benefactor." Recognition would then mean both what we feel in relation to ourselves (thanks to the Other) and what we feel toward this same Other that recognized us. Therefore, recognition is now commonly accepted as having "a social relevance" (Guibet Lafaye, 2007: 1, pers. trans.), as it "implies otherness and intersubjectivity" (Guibet Lafaye, 2007: 7, pers. trans.)—we need the Other in order to be recognized, and the recognition relationship established with the Other is not independent from the social and political context in which it takes place, thus establishing its connection to the debate about social justice.

We start our analysis with a brief summary of the social justice topic in PES literature, indicating that it predominantly follows a liberal justice perspective focused upon distributional outcomes, but also acknowledging that a few studies have referred to recognition, yet considered it from a mostly instrumental perspective while limiting its scope to intercultural recognition. The next section walks us through the essence of the debate about recognition and social justice, taking the extreme opposite views of Honneth (positive) and Butler (negative) as our point of departure in order to result in siding with a more integrated approach (recognition with interactive positive and negative moments) in line with Allen's synthesis. This integrated framework then serves as our conceptual lens to interpret the empirical experiences of the ARA in Bolivia, so illustrating the potential of our integrated recognition–social justice perspective for the analysis of the hybrid institutional dynamics of PES arrangements.

2. Social justice in PES literature

Notions of justice and equity are quite present in recent literature on PES, yet they legitimate different political discourses and stances. One current study claims that PES have helped poor or marginalized people by contributing to formalizing and securing their hitherto unprotected property rights (Leimona and Lee, 2008). In this liberal justice perspective, formal property rights are a crucial sign of recognition as a citizen as well as a conditio sine qua non for the economic "takeoff".

Other scholars have focused more in detail on whether poor people gained access to PES or were excluded due to their lack of capital, knowledge or technical capacities (see Mahanty et al., 2013; Zammit, 2013). This often leads to suggesting corrective measures of pro-poor positive discrimination (Turpie et al., 2008). Most studies, however, confine themselves to considering de jure access of poor people to the PES scheme and do not usually contemplate effective participation of "the poor" within the scheme's governance or within negotiations about the price of ecosystem services. There is a positive bias in favor of PES, assuming that those schemes are automatically benefiting the disadvantaged if they can access those schemes.

Finally, still others have investigated whether poor people have effectively increased their net income through their participation in PES (see Cole, 2010; Hoang et al., 2013). These studies analyze the models of benefit redistribution (may they be monetary or in kind) as well as the criteria underlying those models (equality, need or merit). They also take account of poor people's access to "co-benefits" like capacity building in technology or access to the job market (Courtney et al., 2013). Again, a better redistribution is to be ensured through pro-poor corrective measures.

Common to all these studies is an underlying understanding of justice as a "fair" distribution of either rights or burdens and benefits, which is a central criterion of distributive notions of justice (Walker, 2009). The idea of justice as fair distribution can be traced to the writing of John (Rawls, 1971). Rawls distinguished between fair inequalities (those that favor the most unprivileged) and unfair inequalities (those that favor the already privileged). He argued that social justice can be reached by reducing unfair inequalities and promoting fair inequalities. Fair inequalities can be identified by applying the "veil of ignorance", i.e., a thought experiment about the just society in which one does not a priori know what one's position in society will be, which leads to an option for a society in which the worst-off can achieve a maximum level of welfare. The resulting "maximin" principle implies a preference for tools of positive discrimination and pro-poor mechanisms favoring the most destitute by eliminating unproductive inequity. More in general, redistributive justice is referred to when speaking of equity as "the distribution of socio-economic factors and goods in a society according to an agreed set of principles or criteria" (Corbera et al., 2007: 589). Approaches to redistributive justice are also influenced by neo-Marxist theories, like the one of Harvey (1996), which considers unfair inequalities as expressions of structural oppression or, in the case of environmental injustice, as "ecological imperialism" (Martin, 2013: 101), linked to "processes of ethnic classification and differentiated citizenship" (Anthias and Radcliffe, 2015: 257). In all these views, justice is understood through the prism of equity and distribution of goods, rights, benefits or burdens. The "fairness" of this distribution is then evaluated based on different criteria (merit, need, etc.).

However, distributive visions of social justice have been criticized by more recent social justice theorists, mostly because of their consequentialist character (Policar, 2006). This means that they focus on the fairness of the result of an action and not on the fairness of the processes leading to a specific outcome, i.e., they prioritize fairness of the end over fairness of the means. Moreover, critics of distributive social justice affirm that it is "disconnected" from field realities and claims of justice as expressed by social actors and movements, always containing claims concerning not only distribution but also participation and recognition (Schlosberg, 2007; Walker, 2009). Recent theories of social and environmental justice, therefore, favor more empirical and practical definitions of justice (Martin et al., 2014), involving a pluralist view of justice that distinguishes three complementary dimensions: redistribution, participation and recognition (Schlosberg, 2007).

This alternative view has led several authors to start exploring the links between recognition, social justice and power in another way (Dubet, 2008; Fraser, 2005; Garapon, 2006; Honneth, 2004; McNay, 2008; Rosa, 2012; Young, 2007). Some initial and timid traces can also be found in PES literature. Martin et al. (2014) and He and Sikor (2015) also use the notion of recognition as one criterion of evaluation of PES. They mostly draw on Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice that considers social recognition as an instrumental condition of social justice as