What can environmental narratives tell us about forestry conflicts? The case of REDD+

U.M. SCONFIENZA

Department of European and International Public Law, Tilburg Law School, Tilburg University, Warandelaan 2, 5037 AB, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Email: sconfumberto@gmail.com

SUMMARY

The aim of the article is to introduce three environmental narratives – ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and radical environmentalism – to analyse them from the point of view of their normative presuppositions, and then to show how this narrative/normative apparatus can be used as a heuristic device to explain a set of conflicts affecting market-based forestry policies. Using this narrative/normative apparatus as a template, the article provides a review of academic and grey literature on REDD+ projects, in order to show how conflictual situations in the implementation phase of market-based forestry policies can be explained by the competing systems of values of the different actors involved, as well as by their strategic positioning in relation to dominant ideas in environmental politics. The article is useful to REDD+ practitioners, helping them appreciate how the stories people tell about the environment and how these are used by different actors can shape policies on the ground.

Keywords: discourse, justice, FPIC, carbon monitoring, property rights

Que nous disent les récits environnementaux à propos des conflits forestiers? Le cas de REDD+

U.M. SCONFIENZA

L’objectif de l’article est de présenter trois récits environnementaux – modernisation écologique, écologisme civique et écologisme radical – et de les analyser du point de vue des leurs postulats normatifs et, ensuite, de montrer de quelle manière cet appareil narratif/normatif peut être utilisé comme instrument heuristique pour expliquer une série de conflits qui accable les politiques forestières axées sur le marché. En utilisant cet appareil narratif/normatif comme canevas, l’article offre une revue de la littérature académique et grise sur les projets REDD+, pour expliquer comment les situations conflictuelles lors de la phase d’implémentation des politiques forestières axées sur le marché, peuvent être expliquées par des systèmes de valeurs opposés des différents acteurs concernés, et par leur positionnement stratégique en relation aux idées dominantes dans les politiques environnementales. L’article est utile pour les spécialistes des projets REDD+, en les aidant à comprendre de quelles manières les histoires racontées par les gens nous disent de l’environnement et comment celles-ci, lorsqu’elles sont utilisées par les différents acteurs, peuvent changer les politiques sur le terrain.

¿Qué pueden decírnos las narrativas ambientalistas sobre los conflictos forestales? El caso de REDD+

U.M. SCONFIENZA

La finalidad del artículo es introducir tres narrativas ambientalistas – la modernización ecológica, el ambientalismo cívico y el ambientalismo radical – para analizarlas desde el punto de vista de sus presuposiciones normativas y, posteriormente, mostrar de qué manera este aparato narrativo/normativo puede ser usado como un dispositivo heurístico para explicar un conjunto de conflictos que aquejan a las políticas forestales basadas en el mercado. El artículo, usando este aparato narrativo/normativo como modelo, ofrece una reseña de la literatura académica y gris sobre los proyectos REDD+, con miras a mostrar cómo las situaciones conflictuales en la fase de implementación de las políticas forestales basadas en el mercado pueden ser explicadas por los sistemas de valores opuestos de los distintos actores involucrados, al igual que por su posicionamiento estratégico en relación con las ideas dominantes de la política ambiental. El artículo es útil para quienes practican proyectos REDD+, ayudándoles a apreciar la manera en la que las historias que las personas cuentan sobre el medio ambiente y la forma en la que las mismas son usadas por los distintos actores pueden moldear las políticas sobre el terreno.
INTRODUCTION

Since having been pioneered by Hajer in the early ’90s (Hajer 1993, 1995), the practice of looking at environmental policies through the lens of narratives has been gaining adherents (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006, Dryzek 1997, Luke 1999, Oels 2005, Richardson and Sharp 2001). By staying within this strand of research, the aim of this article is to introduce a method for analysing conflicts in environmental politics and, in particular, conflicts which arise during the implementation of market-based forestry policies. The study of narratives has been very useful in environmental politics (for a review, Hajer and Versteeg 2006) because it has contributed to understand this domain in terms of a competition for a very contested political space, i.e. the power to frame problems. Images and suggestions are what often drive the implementation of certain policies and the exclusion of others, more than solid arguments (Forsyth 2003: ch. 4). For example, when concerned with policy making, whether indigenous populations living in forested areas are portrayed as backward populations employing traditional farming methods, or as living in a naturally sustainable manner like uncorrupted bons sauvages, matters a lot. The first frame suggests a paternalistic “we-know-better” attitude which would partially justify the taking over of some forested areas in the name of scientific sustainable management; the second, rather, suggests admiration towards their lifestyle and a less intervening attitude. For example, Espinosa (2013) argued that a reframing of a few storylines surrounding oil extraction in Ecuador might have facilitated the decision of the Ecuadorian government, at the time, to back the Yasuní-ITT Initiative, a permanent moratorium on oil extraction in the Yasuni National Park, initially put forward by the environmental activists of the Ecuadorian NGO Acción Ecológica.

There has been a tendency in the literature to reify environmental narratives. Dryzek’s popular book, The Politics of the Earth, slices environmental politics into nine different discourses.1 For each discourse, he specifies the basic entities and actors recognized or constructed, the assumptions about the relationship between man and nature, and the key metaphors employed by the discourse. Given the different basic entities, actors, assumptions, and key metaphors, Dryzek is able to pit the different discourses against each other. While Dryzek’s work is impressive for the amount of topics covered and the rigour with which he conducts his analysis, he nonetheless ends up depicting discourses as sets of coherent storylines. The consequence is that well-known scholarly debates in environmental politics – e.g. whether market mechanisms advance the cause of environmental protection or rather impair it – are brought back in new clothes, reframed as clashing discourses. Dryzek is partially right, discourses are sets of more or less coherent storylines, but they are much more malleable and susceptible to external influences than he acknowledges. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) present forestry policy in terms of three narratives – green environmentalism, ecological modernization, and civic environmentalism – which, together, provide some guidance on how different actors frame and understand the negotiations in the forestry regime. While they do not present them as directly clashing, they too consider them as different and separate lenses through which forestry policy can be seen and framed.

Narratives of the sort introduced by Dryzek (1997), Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), and those developed in a following section of the present article are better understood as boxes. The labels attached on these boxes give some indication of what might be going on inside them, but what is actually inside depends on the ability of a wide array of actors to understand, at any given time, which label and box may give them a better chance of success when pushing for a specific policy, and so reframe their messages to fit that specific box. Environmental narratives not only clash – as in Dryzek – or selectively bring into focus specific aspects of certain environmental policies or regimes – as in Bäckstrand and Lövbrand – but can also be moulded in order to accommodate elements which would not initially seem to pertain to their core storylines. In this case, then, a better way to analyse how environmental narratives can be stretched – and hence analyse their capacity to shape policies on the ground – is to look for the normative presuppositions which, in principle, can be invoked under the banner of a narrative’s core storyline.

REDD+ projects – the acronym stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the role of Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks – are just some of such “policies on the ground” which might be helpful to scrutinize through the lens of environmental narratives and their normative presuppositions. They are complex policies which rest on the promise of combining the different goals and values of different actors situated at different policy levels. Given this complexity, it is unsurprising that their implementation is often troublesome and gives rise to conflicts. In order to explain why and how such conflicts might emerge, an analytical approach which looks at the ways in which the actors involved might pursue their goals by strategically placing themselves in relation to the dominant ideas in environmental politics might be particularly helpful.

REDD+ is a forestry climate mitigation instrument which rewards the sustainable management of forests and forest resources. It has been proposed in the context of international negotiations on climate change and first put on the international negotiations table in 2005 by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica on behalf of the Coalition of Rainforest Nations (CfRN). The Kyoto Protocol included afforestation and reforestation projects into its scope, yet it failed to include the management of existing forests due to legitimate concerns over issues of additionality and leakage, which could not have

---

1 The article uses the terms “narrative” and “discourse” as largely synonymous. In the methodological section I explain the small differences between the two and why “narrative” is preferred throughout the article.
been properly settled before the treaty entered into force. In 2005, the CIRN proposal focused only on deforestation. Due to pressure from countries within the CIRN which were experiencing an array of dynamics which were harmful to their forests and yet could not be subsumed under the category of deforestation, such as those of the Congo Basin, REDD acquired its second “D” for forest degradation – thus becoming REDD – and as such was officially adopted at fourteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 14) of the UNFCCC in 2008. Due to additional pressures from other countries whose forest cover was not in decline (e.g. India and China) but which nonetheless feared that, in the absence of the right incentives to manage forests sustainably, their forests were also bound to degrade, REDD acquired its “+”, which stands for the conservation of forests, their sustainable management, and for the enhancement of their carbon stocks.

With the negotiations on REDD+ advancing, the focus progressively shifted from “what” and “why” questions, to questions of “how”. The management of forests needs to be respectful of the local communities and their ways of life. With the negotiations on REDD+ advancing, the focus progressively shifted from “what” and “why” questions, to questions of “how”. The management of forests needs to be respectful of the local communities and their ways of life, thus COP 16 in 2010 (Cancun agreement) introduced REDD+ safeguards to account for the social impacts of these mitigation instruments. Once it became clear that the management of forests might have been included in the national mitigation targets of the post-Kyoto arrangements, additional efforts were made to clarify the procedures involved in measuring, reporting, and verifying both the existing and projected amount of carbon stocks. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the scientific arm of the UNFCCC – had been tasked to study the matter and provide guidelines on how to properly account for carbon stock exchanges (IPCC, Penman et al. 2003).

Parallel to the slow but progressive institutionalization of REDD+ within the UNFCCC, a number of REDD and REDD+ projects have been proposed by private actors; these do not count towards the meeting of national emissions reduction targets but only towards meeting voluntary emissions reduction pledges. The uptake of REDD+ from the private sector is mainly due to two reasons. First, many private actors developed REDD+ projects with the hope of gaining a competitive advantage. Had the independently certificated emissions reductions produced by the projects been allowed to be used by companies in order to meet carbon regulations, the value of the carbon credits would have increased and those companies which had already gained experience in managing these projects would have been in a better position to start new highly profitable REDD+ projects (Laing et al. 2015). Second, these early REDD+ projects – especially those financed by public donors – contribute to the complex process of data and knowledge gathering which is useful for implementing Sustainable Forest Management, refining the methods of carbon measuring and reporting, as well as safeguards reporting.

What can be learned about forestry conflicts, especially those happening during the implementation of market-based policies, by looking at them through the lens of environmental narratives? This article aims to answer this question in a distinctive way: by looking at the normative presuppositions behind those narratives. The first section clarifies some theoretical and methodological issues related to the study and use of narratives in the social sciences. The second section introduces three environmental narratives by adapting Bäckstrand and Lövbrand’s analysis of environmental narratives: these are ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and radical environmentalism. Each narrative’s core storyline revolves around a broad subject – markets, participation, de-commodification – and each storyline is in turn legitimized by a handful of normative presuppositions – i.e. a theory of why markets, participation or de-commodification is good and should be promoted. By unveiling these presuppositions, the article aims to uncover some of the underlying normative forces shaping environmental politics. In the third section, the article provides a review of the academic and grey literature on REDD+ projects. The review (i) uses the narrative/normative apparatus as a template; (ii) focuses on conflicts which might be explained as having been generated by an incompatibility of views concerning the values that the governance of REDD+ projects should be most informed by; (iii) targets three phases of REDD+ implementation in particular, which are an ongoing concern for REDD+ practitioners, and the operationalisation of which often causes conflicts: (a) FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent), (b) carbon monitoring, along with whom it empowers and disempowers, and (c) property rights recognition.

THEORETICAL APPROACH, METHODOLOGY, AND SOME CAVEATS

There is a family resemblance between the various concepts mentioned above: narrative, discourse, frame, and storyline. They all refer to a shared and partial way of perceiving the world. A narrative involves some sort of temporal structure which connects two events, neither of which presupposes the other (Prince 1982). A discourse need not involve such temporal structure, it is an ensemble of concepts and ideas which distinguish what is normal from what is not; e.g. it is now normal to refer to a plot of forest in terms of its capacity for CO2 sequestration, whilst it is not normal anymore – as it was in the eighteenth century (Thorsheim 2006) – to refer to the decomposing biomass in the understory of forests as generating toxic effluvia. A frame is an unconscious structure which people use to think (Lakoff 2010). The verb “to frame” implies a purposeful agency; to frame something is to use specific words referring to roles and concepts in order to elicit some shared unconscious structure. A storyline is a simple temporal structure. Storylines and narratives are largely similar, but the latter is more abstract and general. A scholar could, for example, argue that the storyline about indigenous people being backward and dangerous is being subverted, yet the more general narrative about the need for a rational and efficient allocation of forestry resources, which the original indigenous people storyline was instrumental to, is not. This article uses the concept of narrative because its intrinsic temporal structure effectively captures the cause and effect nature of policy-making; i.e. there is a problem now,
there is a desired state of affairs in the future, and there is a story about how best to solve the problem which connects now to the future.

This clarification is necessary as, lately, the concept of narrative has been associated with a rather novel strand of research called the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) (Jones and McBeth 2010). By clearly defining structures and components of narratives – more rigidly than the definition provided above – and by testing a series of hypotheses about the alleged effects of narratives on peoples and institutions, NPF tries to bring the study of narratives into a realm in which social sciences are less “soft”. Similarly to NPF, the use of narratives throughout this article presupposes social constructivism as a starting point. This means that the furniture of the world comprises both brute and institutional facts (Searle 1995), yet these become relevant to policy-making only when they are talked about in a particular way. Global warming is politically relevant not because temperatures are rising, but because rising temperatures are considered dangerous. Unlike NPF, however, the analysis carried out in this article is decidedly interpretivist. How people talk about the environment is analysed by looking at the meanings which are attached to the object of study. In other words, if global warming is politically relevant because rising temperatures are considered dangerous, then the interpretivist scholar questions how and why such a meaning of global warming emerged and became dominant. As a consequence of this epistemic stance, this study does not aim to achieve the replicability of its results. In any case, the claim that the study of complex narratives can be judged along positivist standards is to be received with skepticism: narratives are ideal-typical constructions which abstract from reality certain key features of social types in order to explain a social phenomenon.

Replicability of the results would depend on different scholars “cutting” the social world in exactly the same place and defining a narrative in exactly the same way, which is unlikely given the complexity of the social world. Different meanings and concepts and ideas are constantly overlapping; the boundaries of a narrative are constantly changing (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012: ch. 6). For example, Hajer (1995), Dryzek (1997), Mol (2001), and Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) all characterize ecological modernization in terms of a narrative centred around the role of markets in bringing environmental protection; yet they also disagree on exactly what this narrative covers. Are Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) correct when suggesting that ecological modernization overlaps with the narrative of sustainable development or is Dryzek (1997) right when proposing that there is more to it, i.e. ecological modernization puts forward an idea of economic growth which not only can be reconciled with environmental protection, but it is actually good for it? Replicability might not be important, but generalizability is. Generalizability rests on the fact that the narratives capture ideal-type features which are recognizable by a wide array of people and that interpretative processes, when appropriately guided by the researcher, are similar across humans.

The three environmental narratives explored in this article are analysed by looking at their normative presuppositions. These normative presuppositions are divided along the axis of a popular normative dichotomy: efficiency vs. justice. The embedded normativity shows how the different narratives can be used strategically by various actors in order to further their interests. As actors interested in market solutions to environmental degradation are more likely to look for an efficiency rationale to justify their positions, uncovering efficiency arguments in narratives whose core storyline does not seem to directly involve markets, might give a better idea of what the actual policies which end up supporting corporate interests are. A similar argument can also be made for the interests of indigenous people: whereas there is a sector of the indigenous population who resolutely oppose any external intervention into their way of life, there are also indigenous communities who are willing to adopt a vocabulary more in line with mainstream positions in environmental politics, with the hope of being better placed to defend their positions and further their interests.

A caveat on the distinction between efficiency and justice is needed. This distinction is not sharp, as ultimately behind the rationale for efficiency stand the normative assumptions of welfare economics on increasing the wellbeing of the people, which in turn captures important aspects of utilitarian justice. However, most of the time, the distinction is unpromising: arguments on grounds of efficiency maintain that a certain policy should be carried out if it produces certain benefits while costing less than other alternative options. This type of reasoning has an obvious intuitive appeal: if something can be done with less effort, then the remaining resources can be used in order to achieve something else. On the other hand, the notion of justice captures all those normative positions which depart from the idea that the equality of something is of paramount importance: equal respect for property rights (libertarians), equal opportunities to shape one’s own life (political liberalism), equal respect for life and life-bearing entities (non-anthropocentrism).

The aim of the following section of the article is to populate table 1 below, which for the time being is empty.

| TABLE 1 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                | Ecological modernization | Civic environmentalism | Radical environmentalism |
| Efficiency arguments |                  |                   |                      |
| Justice arguments |                  |                   |                      |
In the section titled “REDD+: A Map of Conflicts” the article takes a look at the literature on already existing REDD+ projects and, by using the narrative/normative apparatus put forward in the previous part of the paper as a heuristic device, it tries to locate a series of conflicts which these projects might create or intensify. “Conflict” is another concept which needs some explanation. Following FAO (2000), the article defines conflicts as disagreements and disputes which arise when different actors have interests, needs, and priorities which are incompatible among them.

The aim of the section is to see whether a conflict identified at the theoretical level between two cells of the table mirrors a possible conflict on the ground. Both the conflicts and the evidence the article brings to prove the existence of such conflicts are theory-laden and method-driven. In other words, the conflictual relationships between different actors emerge from the superimposition of this narrative/normative grid of interpretation upon descriptive accounts of REDD+ projects. Sometimes theory-ladenness and method-drivenness receive a negative connotation in research communities, as they are perceived as ways to fit observations to a given method instead of – allegedly more honestly – doing the opposite, i.e. finding the best method to understand a given problem (Green and Shapiro 1994).

A possible pitfall of this approach is that through the interpretative grid developed here, forestry politics in general, and REDD+ in particular, might come across as “too conflictual”. The unreflective use of this approach might lead a researcher to overlook cases in which such conflicts have been successfully managed, or did not arise at all. There are also two benefits of this approach, the second of which provides a direct response to this possible pitfall. The first, mentioned above, is that this approach explores forestry conflicts from a distinctively normative point of view and, by so doing, accounts for the strategic use of narratives. The second benefit is that, instead of trying to solve a clearly established exogenous problem, this approach explores what dynamics might be overlooked by not employing a narrative understanding of politics, and forestry politics more specifically. As Gritten et al. (2009) acknowledge, one of the main problems in a conflict situation is to correctly identify the ethical issues which contributed to cause it. Researchers working on forestry politics often resort to business ethics (e.g. Hartman 2004) in order to identify ethical problems. Yet, these approaches do not reflect the full spectrum of ethical theories currently available on the “philosophical market”. Furthermore, business ethics assumes that markets should play an important role in allocating resources instead of problematising this role (Moriarty 2016), which is a particularly limiting stance in assessing debates in forestry politics, where the very role of markets is often questioned. By looking at the normative theories underpinning three popular global environmental narratives, the narrative/normative apparatus developed here could well be a first step towards bridging this gap, helping researchers uncover and explain a different set of forestry conflicts, which might get side-lined in business ethics.

ENVIRONMENTAL NARRATIVES AND THEIR NORMATIVE PRESUPPOSITIONS

Ecological modernization

The core storyline carried by the narrative which, at least since the pioneering work of Hager (1995) in environmental sociology, has been referred to as ecological modernization, is that well-functioning free-markets and environmental protection are not competing policy objectives; quite the opposite, they can even be mutually sustained. Politicians often repeat the notion that environmental problems should be left to the market and their efficiency-producing mechanisms. What does this mean specifically? Either one of two different claims: (i) environmental protection follows economic growth; (ii) markets are clean when they work properly.

Efficiency arguments. The idea behind the expression “sustainable development” is that economic growth and environmental protection are both possible by finding substitutes to polluting inputs, by finding more energy-efficient technologies, and by moving the bulk of the economy towards the service sector and away from energy and resource intensive industries.

Two different theories explain why economic growth might create a demand for a sustainable economy: Inglehart’s post-materialist theory (Inglehart 1977), which explains the rise of environmental concerns in terms of a shift in cultural values; and Hirsch’s theory of positional goods (Hirsch 1976), which explains the increased concern for the depletion of the environment as a response to the decreasing availability of environmental resources and services. Starting from the early 1990s a large body of research has sought to empirically demonstrate the truthfulness of these two theories. In economics, the relationship between economic growth and environmental protection is known as the Environmental Kuznet Curve (EKC). It is an inverted-U-shaped curve which describes the changing quality of the environment along different estimates for per capita income. As income grows there is first a period in which resources are intensively extracted and the environment degrades, then, after a turning point, more income leads to environmental improvement and increased environmental protection. The EKC hypothesis was tested and vindicated by Grossman and Krueger (1991) in a ground-breaking study which intended to study the impacts on the environment of the opening of the markets with Mexico in the context of the North America Free Trade Agreement. They argued that trade liberalization with Mexico would spur economic growth and, as a consequence, put Mexico on a greener path. More recently, the early studies on the EKC have come under attack; newer studies on the same pollutants (sulphur dioxide), as well as on different pollutants, do not replicate the same inverted-U relationship between economic growth and environmental quality (Stern 2004).

In any case, the real force of the ecological modernization reading of environmental problems rests on the claim that, once people’s preferences have greened, properly working markets are clean. Environmental problems are thus portrayed...
as either a consequence of the lack of a market in environmental products or as a consequence of markets that do not work properly. By resorting to either one of the two it is always possible to both explain and allegedly solve problems of environmental degradation. When a market for environmental products does not exist, economic theory explains environmental degradation as the aggregate result of self-interested actions by rational individuals (Hardin 1968). In this case, it is usually assumed that a policy should either centrally organize the distribution of resources or open a market by privatizing and allocating natural products: the various emission-trading and payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes are examples of this kind of policies. Valuable products will be looked after in the market if their management depends solely on a well-defined individual (or group of individuals). Concerning the various markets that already exist, economic theory explains environmental degradation as a failure to properly price the social costs of environmental degradation. This is the problem of negative externality. Markets fail when the actions of one individual or a firm have a direct, unintentional, and uncompensated effect on the well-being of other individuals or the profit of other firms. In this case, responsive governments try to find a way – usually via a corrective tax on polluters – to correct the pricing of products so that the negative externalities get internalized in the final price.

Behind the narrative that sees the introduction of markets, or market corrections, in order to solve environmental problems, stand the normative presuppositions of welfare economics. The management of natural resources is then achieved by entering the market as a buyer or seller: if someone values the natural resources, or commodities linked with the enjoyment of natural resources – such as houses located in unpolluted areas –, then this person will buy and protect them. This approach to environmental governance not only links environmental protection to a willingness to pay, but also, and more critically, to the ability to pay. Even though a person might be genuinely interested in buying and protecting a given natural resource, she might not be able to do so. Hence, within this understanding of environmental governance, poorer people have less of a voice in matters of environmental protection. The environmental justice movement in the United States started as a response to the implicit market distribution of environmental amenities and hazards along rich/poor lines and racial cleavages (Bullard 1983).

Justice arguments. There is one strong line of argumentation for defending, on grounds of justice, the idea that markets and competitive relations among individuals are beneficial to the welfare of a society and to the environment: they enable individuals the maximum enjoyments of the right of property, which trumps any other kind of right that people might claim. This is the defining feature of libertarianism. Nozick – the main libertarian political philosopher – does not directly argue for this position. However, through the famous Wilt Chamberlain example, he shows how other distributive theories of justice which do not take these rights seriously would produce – according to him – unpalatable consequences (Nozick 1974). If the right to property is the most important thing, then it follows that a theory must specify principles on how individuals come to have, keep and exchange their possessions. As long as individuals respect these principles, the distribution of possessions among all the individuals will be justified, no matter how unequally the wealth of the population might come to be distributed. Nozick’s theory is historical: one can tell if a distribution of goods in a given society is just, simply by looking at its history, i.e. whether all the acts of acquisition and exchange of goods among individuals respected the principles of justice. It is also “non-patterned” precisely because, by looking at historical transfers, it also excludes that goods can be distributed along the lines of a particular “pattern”, such as maximizing utility, equal distributions, equality of opportunities, and many others. Along Nozickian lines then, markets (and markets in environmental products do not differ in this respect) could be defended on the grounds that they are the sole non-patterned mechanisms for distributing properties rights – carbon rights included – which do not violate individual rights. If anything, their reach should be extended in order to encompass all the goods that can be distributed within a society.

Civic environmentalism

The core storyline carried by the civic environmentalism narrative centres around the importance of public participation for environmental governance. According to chapter 23 of Agenda 21 – a United Nations non-binding voluntary action plan to implement sustainable development –, broad public participation is a “fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development” (UN Conference on Environment and Development 1992: 23.2). The narrative has been developed as a response to the rampant market approach to environmental governance of the 1980s and early 1990s (Sconifienza 2015). According to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), public participation is “any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make

---

2 Nagel famously called Nozick’s theory “libertarianism without foundations” (Nagel 1975) and Barry dismissed it by saying that the conclusions of the book “articulate the prejudices of the average owner of a filling station in a small town in the Midwest” (Barry 1975: 331).

3 Suppose that at a certain time the distribution of the resources in a society is just according to some principle of distributive justice. Now suppose that a famous basketball player, Wilt Chamberlain signs a contract stating that he will receive a small amount of money on every ticket sold, and as a result he comes to own a larger amount of money than anyone else. As the new distribution arose through voluntary exchanges of holdings justly distributed, then – Nozick concludes – also the new distribution in which resources are distributed unequally must be just. If some redistributive principle was placed upon this new society – e.g. a succession tax – this would interfere with the voluntary exchanges made by the people, and this in the Nozickian framework cannot be allowed (Nozick 1974: 161).
better decisions” (IAP2 2017). By being present during the decision-making process, participating people are able to choose which normative ideas they would like environmental policies to be informed by, and so, ultimately, influence politics. Participation in this sense is important because it could help draw the border of the political discourse away from solely efficiency-based arguments, and, as a consequence, away from its tendency to create or deepen distributional imbalances. The need for more diverse voices in environmental politics was made clear by two events in particular: the infamous Summers’ memo4 and the debate about the value of public participation to be effective, participating people first need to access information; this fact has also been recognized in a number of international law treaties such as the 1998 UNECE Aarhus Convention. However, besides from serving the interests of participating people, transparency and disclosure initiatives such as pollution inventories and satellite images of forest cover, can also further the interests of businesses and various actors operating in the market. In particular, transparency and disclosure initiatives display two market-facilitating elements. The first is that financial markets have informational needs. Transparency and disclosure initiatives contribute to the efficient allocation of resources, in two different ways: (i) by guaranteeing that market actors have enough accurate information about risks and opportunities in a wide array of circumstances; (ii) by managing expectation about the outcomes of various operations in the market, and stabilizing markets over long periods of times. Concerning the second market-facilitating element, transparency and disclosure initiatives are often considered in substitution of stricter top-down regulations. By voluntarily disclosing information about the environmental impacts of their own activities, and by guaranteeing that their environmental performance is more or less in line with the expectations of both regulators and citizens, firms try to escape stringent regulations that might dictate more specific (both in modality and timing) and less cost-effective ways to curb pollution. For this to work, however, both the cost of gathering information and the cost of unintended use of information need to be relatively low.

**Efficiency argument.** Whereas the uptake of participation has been mostly received as a response to neoliberal ideas in environmental governance, an efficiency rationale can, nevertheless, be found behind the narrative of public participation, especially when it is understood from the informational side of participation (Mitchell 1998, Gupta and Mason 2014). Indeed, in order to contribute to decision-making, and for public participation to be effective, participating people first need to access information; this fact has also been recognized in a number of international law treaties such as the 1998 UNECE Aarhus Convention. However, besides from serving the interests of participating people, transparency and disclosure initiatives such as pollution inventories and satellite images of forest cover, can also further the interests of businesses and various actors operating in the market. In particular, transparency and disclosure initiatives display two market-facilitating elements. The first is that financial markets have informational needs. Transparency and disclosure initiatives contribute to the efficient allocation of resources, in two different ways: (i) by guaranteeing that market actors have enough accurate information about risks and opportunities in a wide array of circumstances; (ii) by managing expectation about the outcomes of various operations in the market, and stabilizing markets over long periods of times. Concerning the second market-facilitating element, transparency and disclosure initiatives are often considered in substitution of stricter top-down regulations. By voluntarily disclosing information about the environmental impacts of their own activities, and by guaranteeing that their environmental performance is more or less in line with the expectations of both regulators and citizens, firms try to escape stringent regulations that might dictate more specific (both in modality and timing) and less cost-effective ways to curb pollution. For this to work, however, both the cost of gathering information and the cost of unintended use of information need to be relatively low.

**Justice arguments.** Public participation has the potential to affect decision-making when it is understood in terms of a closure of an “accountability gap”. In other words, there is a distance between citizens and decision-making elites, which in environmental politics manifests itself, among other things, in the adoption of a specialized vocabulary and knowledge hinging on efficiency-based arguments. The more distant the loci of decision from the base (e.g. international), the more likely it is that the accountability gap widens. In non-democratic societies, certain redistributive demands might never arrive at the decision-making table, whereas pork-barrelling, gerrymandering, intense lobbying, campaign contributions, and influence over the media, might equally screen-out the requests of important parts of the population in democratic ones. This is not only a purely procedural problem of lack of representation, but it can also transform into a more substantive problem, as specific normative positions can side-line other others which would put forward different ideas for resource and wealth distribution. If the elected decision-maker is a citizen extension into the decision-making institutions, it follows that the normative judgements expressed by her in the deliberative process cannot represent only partially the citizens’ inputs, filter them, or reframe them.

Participation as a potential solution to the “accountability gap” operationalises a very thick understanding of the political equality of citizens in the decision-making process proper of the deliberative model of democracy: not simply having an equal right to vote and provide information when required to do so, but also equality in the deliberation process. A metaphor can be helpful to illustrate the difference between the two approaches to decision-making equality. Votes and information are the hard data of politics. They can be quite straightforward, such as in a referendum, or they can be messy, such as election votes in a multi-party system. When they are not messy, they accurately track the citizens’ opinions on a policy; this is the case for a yes or no referendum on, for example, nuclear power plants (here, of course, one needs to assume that the referendum question is not voluntarily formulated in ambiguous terms). From non-messy data it is easy to extrapolate information. When they are messy, a similarly straightforward inference cannot be easily made. In a system with a right and a left party, far-right and far-left ones, and a green party, the citizens’ opinion on nuclear power plants is dispersed. A green party voter might be favourable to nuclear power but nevertheless decide to vote green because she has animal welfare at heart. Similar mismatches are frequent in nation-wide elections. In these cases, in order to get from data to knowledge – i.e. what is the people’s opinion on a policy –, the data needs to be manipulated and information constructed. Deliberation within democratic institutions is the data manipulation of politics. Equality in “data manipulation” presupposes that a person is given the formal and substantial

---

4 It is a 1991 internal memo on trade liberalization and the practice of moving dirty industries to poorer countries written by the then Chief Economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers. In it, Summers argues that the practice makes perfect economic sense while he largely dismisses concerns over morality issues and in general he seems largely oblivious of the alarming conclusions reached by his argument. A good reconstruction of the normative underpinnings behind the Summers’ memo is offered by Hausman and McPerson (2006).
means to contribute to this process; out of metaphors, if an active role of the citizens within the decision-making institutions is sought for, then it needs to be facilitated by formally opening the doors of the decision-making institutions and through some redistribution along the lines of social welfare states.

This commitment to effective and substantial participation thus requires states to embark on a form of double redistribution of resources: on the one hand, for participation to be effective, entrance into the decision-making institutions needs to be facilitated through investments in education and capacity building (input redistribution); on the other hand, it is usually acknowledged that new entrants in decision-making institutions change the pattern and principles of wealth redistribution according to the expectations of the new median participant (output redistribution). That being said, there are also strong continuities between the proponents of market-based mechanisms to solve environmental degradation, and those who would like to see a more participatory and redistributive environmental governance: the model of political liberalism on which the ideal of participatory environmental governance is fashioned does not eschew a market-based economy; it simply seeks to offer mechanisms for social justice as redistributive measures in the face of distributive distortions wrought by market mechanisms.

Radical environmentalism

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalism tout court was radical, because the main understanding of it was that it could potentially impede losses to polluting firms; environmental concerns and firm profitability was seen as a zero-sum game. When the main environmental narrative changed in the 1980s, the idea of win-win scenarios gained ground, “sustainable development” became a catchphrase, environmentalism lost its radical edge, and the radical label began to be attached only to those positions that still cling to the idea of a zero-sum relationship between the environment and the market. “Radical” is now used in opposition to a set of fairly stable interests which want to maintain the primacy of economic growth among other policy objectives, and believe in it as a recipe that will eventually cure all social “diseases”, from environmental degradation to the gender gap. Radical environmentalism thus comprises both the earlier environmentalism that was critical of the environmental effects of unregulated or poorly regulated economic activity – the case of carcinogenic pesticides is an oft-quoted example thanks to Carson’s popular book *Silent Spring* (1962) – and the more recent group of environmental stances that are critical of win-win narratives and market-friendly environmental protection.

There are two interlinked elements behind the radical environmentalism narrative: the first one is the criticism of the market-driven commodification of nature; the second, the criticism of economic growth as a policy objective.

Radical scholars see the commodification of nature as problematic for two different reasons: (i) technical reasons, i.e. nature and its functions cannot be properly commodified, therefore they should not; and (ii) normative reasons, i.e. nature and its functions should not be commodified, therefore it does not even make sense to ask about whether it is feasible or not. Starting with the technical remarks, they claim that nature cannot be properly commodified because complex ecosystems and environmental mechanisms cannot be made to fit bounded and discrete theoretical entities such as “tons of CO₂” (Kosoy and Corbera 2010). Secondly, it has proven difficult to obtain the existential values of natural resources: some people refuse to answer to contingent valuation surveys or give protest responses that are not workable by the economists (Vatn and Bromley 1994). Thirdly, sometimes it is outright impossible to introduce property rights – essential to the procedure of commodification – where the notion of property rights is foreign: for certain indigenous populations it is nature which “owns” humans, not the other way around; furthermore, as some REDD+ experiences demonstrate, tenure rights are often contested. On the other hand, there are two possible reasons why nature should not be commodified: firstly, according to a Marxist line of thinking which goes back to the Lord of Lauderdale and his paradox, nature should be enjoyed *qua* a public good and stay as such. Appropriating nature would amount in an increase in the riches of the few at the expenses of the many (Lauderdale 1804, Foster *et al.* 2010). Secondly, the recognition that nature has intrinsic value should impede human beings from treating it and trading it as if it were an object. Something that has intrinsic value generates a *prima facie* moral duty from the parts of human beings to safeguard it and refrain from damaging it. The argument is modelled after the Kantian categorical imperative: the idea that the recognition of an end-in-itself calls for a very special treatment of the holder of the end-in-itself; this is usually applied to persons, but for radical environmentalists can also be applied to animals and natural resources.

Moving to the criticism of economic growth, radical environmentalists resort to a well-established tradition of ecological economists that dates back to Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and can be traced all the way up to Jackson (2009). According to these scholars, the scenario in which the economy grows and the environment is protected at the same time is no yet feasible. This does not necessarily mean that, considering technological advancements, this scenario will still not be possible in a century or two from now – a fact which remains questionable in any case – only that this is certainly not the present scenario. Georgescu-Roegen argues for the impossibility of combining economic growth with environmental protection by drawing on the physics of economic systems and by showing that the demands for low entropic energy of current economies are far greater than both the rate of low entropy provided by the renewable sources of energy and the rate of sink absorption. Jackson argues for it by adapting Ehrlich’s famous I=PT throughput (Ehrlich and Holdren 1971) – the Impact of human activities on the environment equals the product of Population, Affluence, and Technology – to both the current state of the world population (and its projected growth) and the technology available, showing how absolute decoupling cannot be realized at present. All the more problematic for radical environmentalists is that...
economic growth is part and parcel of both economic theory, throughout its various stages (classic, marginalism, and Keynesianism), and liberal theories of distributive justice, as well as the liberal institutions modelled after them. For example, Rawls’ difference principle makes the economic motivation of talented people the central feature of its redistributive edifice, and it even encourages it (Grey 1973, Barry 1989). A similar argument could be made for Sen’s capability approach (Robeyns and van der Veen 2007). Radical environmentalists question this human economic motivation on the ground that the utilitarian assumptions underpinning competition are more cultural than biological. The radical environmentalists associated with the degrowth movements argue in support of this stance by resorting to the literature developed by the MAUSS-group – the acronym stands for stands for Antiuutilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences. In particular, the work of Caillé (2000, 2004), who takes his cue from Mauss’ triadic structure of the gift (giving, receiving, reciprocation); he argues that the utilitarian paradigm which colonized the social sciences cannot really explain one of the most fundamental traits of human sociality: reciprocity. Reciprocity as displayed in the exchanging of gifts is both selfish and unselfish, and geared towards strengthening relational bonds instead of dispersing them into increasingly atomized societies (Caillé 2004, 2007, Muraca 2013).

REDD+: A MAP OF CONFLICTS

Having laid out the normative substratum of the three main discursive formations in environmental politics, and having done so in terms of two competing normative goals – efficiency and justice – it is now possible to test the heuristic potential of this narrative/normative apparatus in the domain of forestry politics.

The normative conflicts explored in the following sections can be both extra-narrative, i.e. between the normative presuppositions of two or more different narratives, and intra-narrative, i.e. between the normative presuppositions within the same narrative. In the latter case, the nature of the conflict is necessarily one of efficiency vs. justice. The merit of the paper is to put to good use the narrative/normative apparatus to clearly show how some unintuitive dynamics can shape the governance of REDD+ projects: sometimes efficiency is promoted through participation – or at least through paying lip-service to it – and redistributive justice through the protection of property rights which, as it has been shown above (ecological modernization, efficiency and justice arguments), is usually associated with the proper workings of markets and their anti-redistributive dynamics. The last subsection explores the conflict which has its origin in the questioning of the very desirability of the Western development model upon which REDD+, as a strategy to mitigate climate change, is based on.

The conflict between (1) and (4), i.e. between efficiency-driven environmental governance and the redistribution of resources required by effective participatory governance

As it had been seen above (civic environmentalism, justice arguments), implementing participation along the ideal of the deliberative model of democracy is doubly costly. In the context of REDD+ projects, it requires input redistribution on the part of the project promoters – usually a corporate actor together with a local firm which takes care of project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecological modernization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core storyline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency arguments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy outputs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political model</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
management – directed towards the local populations. This flow of resources is aimed at capacity building, promoting conferences, translating materials from English into the local language, and the hiring of cultural mediators. Furthermore, implementing effective participation indirectly impacts heavily on the balance sheets of REDD+ projects: accessing difficult locations – sometimes by renting helicopters – allowances to the staffs working off-site, and various technical equipment. As a consequence of effective participation, REDD+ projects can also be impacted by output redistribution: this happens when forest communities might want a bigger share of the benefits produced by the projects and additional guarantees on how the project is run. To achieve this, they might threaten to withhold consent – which is in their full right to do – until their demands are met. Project promoters thus face a difficult choice: the more they pursue input redistribution by financing capacity building, the more likely it is that they will also face output redistribution, as well-informed forest communities will probably be in a better position to bargain a deal which is more favourable to them and respectful of their rights and way of life. It is therefore clear that providing scant, one-sided information is an extremely tempting course of action for project promoters and can save them an enormous amount of money.

It comes as no surprise that this normative conflict between an efficiency-driven understanding of REDD+ by the project promoters and the redistribution required to bring local and indigenous populations into the decision-making process, bursts into actual conflicts on the ground. The forestry literature is full of examples in which the requirement of effective participation enshrined in the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is either partially or totally disregarded in order to save the project promoters’ money. For example, the Purus REDD project in Acre (Brazil) came under attack when the project promoters from the firm Moura & Rosa presented the forest communities a document to sign as “an insurance that the communities were going to benefit from the project”, which was later found to serve a different purpose (Centro de Memòria 2013: 7). Instead, the document was to guarantee the promoters legal rights to the land and could be used as evidence in court in case the forest communities were to seek legal recognition of their ownership over the land in the future. Similarly, the REDD project in Bribri territory (Costa Rica), often presented as a project involving the participation of the indigenous population, has been implemented without FPIC (Aguilar and Cabrera 2012). As there is a section of the indigenous population that has been continuously involved in the REDD national strategy of Costa Rica since 2008 – indigenous officers involved in state institutions which sometimes have no relation with the forest communities directly impacted by a specific project – project promoters can sometimes claim that their project involves indigenous people, which is technically true, albeit not in line with the spirit of effective participation (Kill 2015).

REDD+ projects have to deal with a value of carbon which is significantly lower to that which was originally expected, and on top of that, they require costly management; while these facts do not make these cases of efficiency-driven governance, they do, however, pose constraints on project promoters, with promoters needing to make trade-offs that can be more or less in line with an efficiency-driven rationale. If more in line, then this will have significant repercussions on more redistributive measures favouring participation.

The conflict between (3) and (4), i.e. between the efficiency-driven uptake of transparency mechanisms and the redistribution of resources required by participatory governance

Although the narrative of public participation emphasizes the empowering potential that information can have for both the local populations affected by a forestry project and for stakeholders in general, it is often overlooked that not all types of information necessarily empowers local communities and indigenous people. First of all, gathering information concerning the health of forests is technically difficult and costly. Project promoters are thus generally interested in acquiring the type of information most instrumental to the success of the project in the market, such as better reporting on forest carbon stock changes, and not the type of information which could potentially halt the project if fed to the stakeholders, such as reporting on safeguards and livelihood issues. Furthermore, the type of information which is most sought after by project promoters, in line with internationally agreed standards, requires a high level of scientific and technological expertise; even a developed country like Germany does not yet have the capacity to fully report on tier-3-level, i.e. the most stringent method to account on forest emissions according to the IPCC guidelines (Herold et al. 2012). Thus, for the time being, a limited role is available for indigenous and local communities in the process of gathering, reporting, and interpreting information which is so central to all REDD+ projects. As preference is given to ensuring that an acceptable quality in the reporting and measuring of carbon is achieved, it is only once this whole technical machine is already in place that some funds are also directed towards capacity building for the local population. In other words, redistribution in order to guarantee the effective participation of the locals is, for the project promoters, only an afterthought. The problem with this choice is that the local population cannot be consulted on some of the most political issues affecting them directly, as well as those affecting REDD+ projects, before it is too late and the stakes too high to pull out, i.e. what should be measured, by whom, and how (Gupta et al. 2014). One important piece of information in determining forest carbon stock changes is the extension of forest cover, measured through satellite and aerial images by highly trained professional personnel. This information needs to be supplemented with ground-truthing in order to complement and calibrate remote-sensing data. There are cases in which remote sensing has been complemented by successful community carbon monitoring on the ground (for a review, Larrazábal et al. 2012), yet these participatory activities beg the question of how participatory they are. For the time being, these activities engage the local population in data collection, but the bulk of data interpretation, and the political decisions that go with it,
happen elsewhere and over the heads of the local populations (Evans and Guariquita 2008).

Community carbon monitoring might place project promoters in a trade-off situation – similar to the one explored in the previous section – and might raise a conflict between them and the local population. Community carbon monitoring might represent a cost-effective way to gather data relevant to carbon reporting. On top of this, through carbon reporting, the local population can achieve a greater understanding of the economic and political value of their work. In other words, the more project promoters involve the local population in the processing and interpretation of data, the more they risk seeing the terms of the benefit-sharing mechanism renegotiated; community carbon monitoring could become a space of counter-expertise (Gupta et al. 2012). This is certainly to be welcomed. But there is the risk that, as community carbon monitoring becomes more expensive, project promoters will have the incentive to strategically and selectively involve the local population in some participatory activities but not others.

The conflict between (1) and (2), i.e. between efficiency-driven environmental governance and the fight for recognition of statutory property rights, i.e. the unlikely alliance between forest communities and libertarianism against efficiency-driven environmental governance

Although most of the time libertarianism and fetishism for market-efficiency go hand in hand (both justify markets but from different points of view, see the section on ecological modernization above), they do sometimes clash. In an article on what it means to take property rights seriously when it comes to climate change, and environmental degradation in general, Adler (2009) juxtaposes the positions of the free market environmentalist – those that would uphold efficiency arguments – to the positions of the libertarians; the author shows that taking property rights seriously i.e. Nozick’s libertarianism – would lead to policies in favour of tackling environmental degradation, even though they might not always be cost-effective. Within the libertarian theoretical edifice, the protection of property rights trumps calculations of utility.

This line of reasoning is what is implicitly behind the choice being made by forest communities of having statutory property rights formally recognized in the process of setting up REDD+ projects, even though, by doing this, and by appropriating part of the language of the ecological modernization narrative, they might end up legitimizing it in the long-term. Without property rights lands, trees, tons of carbon, genetic materials, and many other entities cannot be exchanged on the market. Whereas, on the one hand, indigenous populations are well aware that in the short-term the protection of their lands might have to be realized through the fight for property rights recognition, on the other, they are – if not themselves directly, then through the organizations that represent them – still vividly mindful of the over-exploitation of forestry resources introduced by property rights and the logic of privatization which came attached to the structural adjustments programs of the IMF throughout the 1990s (Tockman 2001, Vreeland et al. 2001).

Furthermore, the introduction of property rights also takes its toll on community cohesion, as they create haves and have nots within the forest communities, which are used to sharing resources since time immemorial (Rojas et al. 2013). By maintaining their customary land titles, forest communities could, in theory, hold back the process of the commodification of nature and resource-grabbing. In practice, this has seldom been an effective strategy. First, customary land titles are often considered second-tier titles compared to statutory ones, hence when conflicts arise, holding customary titles does not guarantee the respect of one’s property. Second, ever since Hardin (1968) implicitly suggested that environmental degradation was the consequence of inefficient managing of open-access areas, mischaracterised open-access areas as commons (which is the system that more closely approximates to customary tenure), and framed the introduction of statutory property rights as a possible solution to degradation, a narrative took shape that placed the blame for environmental degradation onto local communities and their tenure systems. However, by resorting to the language of property rights, and by fiercely fighting for the recognition of land titles, forest communities might more effectively defend their ways of life in the short term. Yet, by doing so, they also run the risk of implicitly legitimizing, and helping advance, the narrative that sees the introduction of well-defined property rights and markets as possible solutions to environmental problems. This would, once again, place the blame for environmental degradation on the local communities, this time for legitimizing the commodification of nature. However, this accusation would now come from the radical fringes of the environmental policy spectrum and not from those pushing for a neoliberal environmental agenda.

That being said, in the short-term, securing statutory property rights over a land targeted by a REDD+ project might well be a good guarantee against unwanted intrusions into a population’s way of life and might thus trump the calculations of those who want the governance of REDD+ projects to be informed solely, or mainly, by considerations of efficiency. In many instances, this is the strategy pursued by local and indigenous populations. The conflict here arises out of two different understandings of property rights: on the one hand, project promoters implicitly subscribe to a notion of property rights as instrumentally valuable, i.e. valuable as long as they enable markets and market mechanisms to work more smoothly; on the other hand, local communities and indigenous people – or the organizations which represent them – explicitly subscribe to a notion of property rights as valuable per se, an extension into the legal world of a natural relationship between men and their lands.

Through the lens of the distinction of efficiency vs. justice, one could appreciate how the FPIC procedure, which had been introduced as a method to guarantee the participation of local people into the management of forests, had in fact been designed as a trojan horse in order to exploit this conflict between the two different understandings of property rights. Indeed, the practice of obtaining FPIC in the forestry sector
was promoted by a coalition of non-governmental actors led by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), which was dissatisfied with the impact of the extractive timber industry on local populations and with the slow response of intergovernmental negotiations on this issue. This coalition of environmental NGOs thus launched the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to address the problem. The FSC is an international certification scheme in the form of market-driven governance: it sets environmental standards and ensures that the forestry industry employs socially responsible practices. These standards, through a system of green-labelling, then incentivise socially and environmentally sustainable forest practices. A number of organizations which comprise the coalition were, however, more interested in indigenous issues and recognition than in forest loss, and, as a consequence, fought because FSC also placed significant emphasis on the issue of participation by indigenous and local people. This internal trend was also welcomed due to the perceived convergence between indigenous and conservation interests (Mahanty and McDermott 2013). Even before the formal launch of FSC in 1993, indigenous organizations were consulted on the content of FSC standards and became full members of the certification system. The standards that came out of these early consultations are known as the Ten Principles and Criteria (P&C); principle number 3 deals specifically with indigenous rights and required “free and informed consent” on all matters involving indigenous legal and customary rights. FPIC is grounded on the Western notion of property rights. FPIC specifies that people who have a legal title to a certain property cannot be alienated from it without their consent. The fact that the main mechanisms for indigenous people’s participation is grounded on the notion of property rights is not a fortuitous accident, rather a well-thought out political move. Behind it stands the desire of indigenous groups to affirm the rights to their lands while at the same time strengthening them in front of public opinion and international organizations. If property rights need to be introduced, it is going to be on their terms, and these terms sometimes work against the understanding – privileged by REDD+ project promoters – of property rights as market-facilitating legal instruments.

The conflict between (5) and the rest, i.e. the criticism of economic growth, and the commodification of nature it entails, is deeply antithetical to both efficiency-based environmental governance and a more redistributive-minded model of environmental governance, which, however, does not alter the status quo

This whole map of normative conflicts in forestry politics would not be complete if this article did not mention the stance of those who resolutely reject the notion that forest protection has anything to do with economic efficiency and market mechanisms. These are the positions of the radical environmentalists who do not accept any compromise with those who are believed to be the true perpetrators of environmental degradation. As the commodification of nature and economic growth remain of paramount importance not only for the more efficiency-driven promoters of environmental protection, but also for those more wary of the intrinsic problems of equity in protecting the environment through markets – politicians and bureaucrats working in the national and supranational environmental institutions –, radical environmental activists resolutely refuse to enter any type of institutional dialogue with either of them. In particular, radical activists are critical of the promise of participation as an instrument to redress market-generated inequities: this would ideally be achieved by entering into the decision-making institutions and by asking for environmental politics to be informed by different principles of justice – e.g. polluter pays, benefited pays, different balance of benefit-sharing in environmental projects, and others. However, for something to be redistributed more fairly, it first needs to be made available; this means that, according to the radical positions, the status quo, which still centres around market-based mechanisms, will not, and cannot, be fundamentally altered by engaging with it.

These are the armies of people who remain, and want to remain, outside the establishment; often they organize conferences and events which run parallel to relevant institutional events. These are the protesters partaking in climate marches in the streets of the world capitals during UNFCCC COPs. These are the activists from local, grassroots NGOs. In the forestry domain, this position of fierce activism and protest is taken by organizations such as No REDD in Africa Network, whose main representative is Nnimmo Bassey, or the Global Alliance against REDD. In early 2015, these networks of organizations met in Durban during the World Forestry Congress to, once again, resolutely oppose “the commodification, privatization and plunder of Nature”. The output of this parallel event is the Durban Declaration on REDD; the text of the declaration rejects REDD in all its forms and states that no amount of corrective intervention in the design of market-based forestry policies could ever redress the exploitative nature intrinsic in this “market-driven neoliberalism of forests”.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has been an exercise in showing how the normative presuppositions behind three common environmental narratives can help uncover conflicts arising from the trenches of environmental politics. In order to do so the article focused specifically on REDD+ projects as a source of potentially conflict-ridden evidence.

---

The tendency shown by more than a few REDD+ project promoters not to implement FPIC fully, i.e. in line with the spirit of the FPIC principle, can be understood in terms of a conflict between the drive for more cost-efficient forestry policies and the demand for more participation. The marginalization of the local populations in both gathering information for REDD+ projects and deciding what information should be relevant for the projects can be understood in terms of a conflict between the efficiency-driven demand for information relevant to carbon markets and the redistributive-driven demand for information relevant to safeguard reporting. The fight for statutory property rights recognition by local and indigenous populations has highlighted the very difficult place indigenous populations sometimes find themselves in: on the one hand, they are aware that in certain circumstances the protection of a territory must be obtained through the recognition of land titles; on the other, they are aware in many cases it is the very introduction of property rights, where there were none before, which permits the logic of over-exploitation of forest resources and de facto legitimises the commodification of nature. At the same time, the fight for statutory property rights recognition by local and indigenous populations – when they decide to pursue such a fight – can also be understood in terms of a libertarian approach to property rights against an economic approach to property rights, i.e. instrumentally valuable only in so far as they contribute to efficient market exchanges and economic growth. In other words, whilst the introduction of statutory property rights might, in the long-run, legitimise the commodification of natural resources and the exploitation of forests, by securing statutory property rights and espousing a libertarian understanding of them in the public sphere, local and indigenous populations attempt, in the short-term, to push back the appropriation of forests by those outsiders who see property rights only as instruments for the efficient allocation of resources. Finally, the position of environmental activists’ firm intransigence towards both market-based mechanisms for environmental protection and policies to increase the participation of, and redistribution towards, local and indigenous populations has been characterized by resorting to the normative presuppositions behind the narrative of radical environmentalism. These activists are particularly driven by the recognition that every form of participation implies, at least initially, consenting to the very institutional procedures that made the exploitation of the natural resources possible in the first place.

The aim of the article has been to show how the narrative/normative apparatus introduced in the first part can be employed and, by means of its employment in the second part of the article, to illuminate some of the conflicts to which competing understandings of environmental politics give rise. The list of conflicts and the evidence selected to support it, explored in the second part, are in no way exhaustive, and the informed reader might well be able to use the narrative/normative apparatus to find and explain additional conflictual situations. Future research could develop by analysing what other types of conflicts – other than those originating from the contrasting interpretations on how to operationalise FPIC, carbon monitoring, and property rights recognition – could be read through the lenses of the narrative/normative apparatus.

People involved in forestry politics, and REDD+ practitioners in particular, can profit from the research developed here. It could help them develop a broader understanding of how (i) values are embedded in environmental narratives, (ii) how these can be used strategically by the actors on the ground to further their goals, and (iii) how values which inform the governance of market-based forestry projects might cause or intensify conflictual situations. The stories people tell about the environment are not just stories. They are vehicles of values, blueprints for action, and, sometimes, stalking horses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Prof. Hans Lindahl and Dr. Daniel Augenstein for having helped him with the construction of what has, throughout the paper, been referred to as the narrative/normative apparatus. He would also like to thank the editors of the special issue for their suggestions on how to better bring into focus the content of the paper. Finally, the author is grateful to two anonymous referees who provided invaluable suggestions to an earlier draft of the manuscript.

REFERENCES


