

Contentious Forests: From Global Climate Change Policies to Bolivian Forest Communities

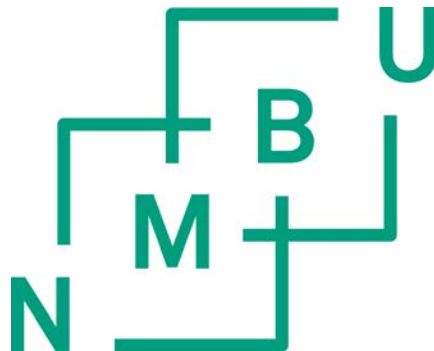
Omstridte skoger: Fra global klimapolitikk til lokale skogsamfunn i Bolivia

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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Abstract

This dissertation sets out to critically examine contestations over the governance of forest areas across scales, ranging from global climate change policies and national strategic projects to local forest communities in Bolivia. The dissertation includes several interrelated cases of contestations over the governance of forest area including: responses to the climate change mitigation initiative Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) in Latin America and in Bolivia specifically; the emergence of an alternative to REDD in Bolivia; the struggles to make and shape new forest legislation in Bolivia and the contested road construction plan in the protected forest area and indigenous territory Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS). The cases are closely interrelated, as they cross in time (2010-2013), across scales, and across the struggles and interests of the actors involved. The dissertation consists of this introduction and five interrelated papers, and contributes to an improved understanding of the complex interplay between different actors, values, scales and interests in the governance of forest areas, the connection between politics, power and space, as well as an improved understanding of power-laden knowledge struggles and the dialectics between politics “from above” and struggles “from below”. The dissertation contributes to 1) understand and analyse different responses to the international climate change mitigation initiative Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in Latin America (REDD), and the interplay between different actors who engage to reshape and contest REDD; 2) analyse possibilities and barriers for local and subaltern groups to shape forest policies and interventions in forest areas across local, national and global scales, and 3) examine how discursive framings, narratives and knowledge are used in struggles over forests.

The associated research questions reflect the contributions from the five papers:

1. How do different countries engage with REDD in Latin America, and how do different actors within these countries get involved in activities seen as necessary for the future implementation of REDD on the ground? (Paper I)
2. How has science-policy networks emerged as new elites in the development of REDD preparations in the Amazon countries? (Paper II)
3. How has REDD been contested and reshaped in domestic policy-making in Bolivia, and how do different interests, values and non-forest-sectoral negotiations influence and shape forest policy outcomes across scales? (Paper III)

4. What are the possibilities and barriers for local and subaltern groups to advance their demands in forestry policy-making processes in Bolivia? (Paper IV)
5. How has micro-political relations and strategic state projects affected the conflict over a road-building project crossing the national park and indigenous territory Isiboro Sécore (TIPNIS) in the Bolivian Amazon, and how have discursive framings been used to legitimize, advance or marginalise certain solutions, ideas and interests? (Paper V)

The data has been collected using a multi-method qualitative approach, with four fieldwork periods at multiple sites in Bolivia, with a total stay of 23 weeks in the time period July 2011-January 2013. Data collection has included direct and participant observation of relevant events and meetings, in-depth interviews and informal conversations, workshops and group discussions, collaborations with local actors and document analysis.

The cases provide insight into different aspects of forest policies and governance of forest areas at interacting scales, as well as the social, material and discursive struggles involved. I aim to understand how socio-environmental interactions, discursive power and geopolitical power relations impact on the governance of forest areas across scales. I use political ecology as an overarching analytical framework together with critical environmental governance. The study engages concepts such as power, scale, agency, participation and state-society relations, science-policy and alternative networks, discourses and narratives in environmental governance and knowledge production.

The findings contribute to insights about how REDD has been contested and reshaped in Latin America, through different country responses as “assertive”, “accommodating” and “resisting” strategies, and how different actors have engaged to shape the processes. On one hand, science-policy networks have largely controlled framings, arenas and knowledge about REDD, on the other hand, alternative networks have emerged to challenge and reshape REDD, including indigenous organisations and state-society alliances in Bolivia. REDD has become a “new layer” in the contestations over forests and interacts with already existing conflicts, though also leads to new proposals, alliances and solutions as frictions occur. The Joint Mechanism for Mitigation and Adaptation and Sustainable Management of Forests and Mother Earth in Bolivia, as well as the parallel writing of a new forest law, constitute important potential changes of forest governance in Bolivia, however, the implementation and advancements of these have been hampered by the prioritisation of agricultural interests,

strategic geo-political projects as well as tensions in state-society relations illustrated with the conflict over the road construction project in TIPNIS.

The findings contribute to insights about possibilities and barriers for local and subaltern groups to shape forest policies and interventions in forest areas, including coalition-building, strategic framings, state responsiveness, participatory spaces and cross-scalar tactics. I analyse 1) the role of subaltern groups in the making of new forests policies in Bolivia; 2) indigenous organisations' relations to the state in the struggle connected to the road construction project in TIPNIS; and 3) subaltern demands concerning REDD and the Joint Mechanism.

Finally, the findings contribute to insights about how discursive framings, narratives and knowledge are used in struggles over forests policies and interventions in forest areas. I demonstrate how narrative strategies work as a means to legitimise and position subaltern actors and how discourse-coalitions have enabled subaltern actors to advance their demands. On the other hand, oversimplified discourses and stereotypical narratives obscure internal differences and communities' real-life challenges. Furthermore, I demonstrate how power relations are embedded in specific framings of socio-environmental relations, the institutionalisation of certain concepts which are used to advance specific interests and positions and in how science-policy networks produce, order and spread REDD framings.

The dissertation's main contributions can be summarised as follows:

- A cross-sector and multi-actor perspective, as well as a dual focus on both discursive and material practices, is crucial to understand the governance of forest areas.
- Environmental governance is shaped in dialectical relationships between programmes and initiatives “from above” and responses and initiatives “from below”, where actors involved operate across scales.
- Important insights can be obtained by empirically examining the micro-politics of environmental conflicts, and by employing a relational perspective to analyse the dynamics between small-scale interactions and geo-political decision-making.
- Employing a dual analysis of elite and subaltern actors' roles in environmental governance and networks, as well as the combination of different power perspectives, contributes to improved understanding of the dynamics of environmental policy-making and contested processes.