



Analysis

Dancing With Storks: The Role of Power Relations in Payments for Ecosystem Services

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2016

Received in revised form 14 April 2017

Accepted 17 April 2017

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Institutional bricolage

Power relations

Agency

Payments for ecosystem services

Environmental governance

Common pool resources

ABSTRACT

The institutional change induced by payments for ecosystem services (PES) schemes is a 'messy' process. The uptake and outcomes of PES schemes cannot be fully explained from a rational choice perspective. The notion of 'institutional bricolage' is needed to analyse how actors assemble or reshape their actions by combining new institutions such as a PES scheme within other locally embedded institutions. A case study from Japan is used to illustrate how a PES scheme designed to conserve the habitat of a charismatic and endangered flagship species, the Oriental White Stork, has been reshaped by social actors to fit the locally dominant 'institutional logic'. We also show how the resulting institutional change is not only able to subvert policy makers' original assumptions, for instance about how to target and distribute the payments, but can also contribute to the reproduction of unequal power relations.

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1. Introduction

The use of economic incentives, such as so-called payments for ecosystem services (PES), continues to gain increasing attention in environmental policy circles as an efficient and potentially equitable tool for environmental governance, including the conservation of biodiversity (Pascual et al., 2014). Here PES is defined broadly as a transfer of resources between actors, which aims to create incentives, subject to clear conditions, to align individual and/or collective resource use decisions with the social interest in the management of natural resources (modified from Muradian et al., 2010). The burgeoning research on PES schemes indicates that i) implementation of PES schemes is not a straightforward process as rational choice models might suggest (e.g. Osborne, 2011; Rodríguez-de-Francisco and Budds, 2015; Rodríguez de Francisco et al., 2013; Vatn, 2010), ii) there is a high degree of complexity associated with the trade-offs between cost-effectiveness and other policy goals, such as social equity (e.g. Pascual et al., 2010; Pascual et al., 2014), and iii) the introduction of PES impacts on power relations amongst stakeholders (e.g. Milne and Adams, 2012; Rodríguez-de-Francisco and Budds, 2015).

We argue that the introduction of PES schemes is often associated with a layer of complexity because ecosystem service providers are not just suppliers of such services but are also 'institutional bricoleurs' who

rearrange the standardised PES-logics in order to 'fit' their own (local) social context. The term 'bricoleurs' implies that actors creatively combine elements from different institutional contexts into a new institutional arrangement (Christiansen, Larke and Lounsbury, 2013). This concept enables us to challenge the view of actors as powerless victims of institutional change. The application of the notion of institutional bricolage is helpful in undertaking power-sensitive analysis of environmental governance and can contribute to the inclusion of power relations into the ecosystem services framework (Berbés-Blázquez et al., 2016; Pascual et al., 2014; Van Hecken et al., 2015). We borrow the term 'institutional bricolage' from cultural anthropology (Douglas, 1986; Lévi-Strauss, 1966) and organisational studies (Christiansen, Larke and Lounsbury, 2013; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Schneiberg, 2002) and adapt it to conceptualise a process in which actors assemble or reshape existing (often local) institutions, such as collective action norms in the management of common pool resources (hereafter CPR), by combining them with a recently introduced PES scheme. We also argue that due to institutional bricolage, the introduction of PES can often lead to a 'messy' institutional process with unintended consequences.¹

¹ 'Messy' institutional process does not imply that deliberate institutional design is necessarily impossible. Each actor will act deliberately to achieve their own goal and use their resources to negotiate the institutional outcome. However, we term this process as 'messy' because it is not the deliberation of one actor or one social group, such as the implementer of a PES scheme, which determines the outcome; rather it is determined by the negotiations amongst various stakeholders.

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A case study from a rural community in Japan within Toyoka City is presented to illustrate the application of the idea of ‘institutional bricolage’ and show how it helps to analyse the ways in which a PES scheme may lead to messy institutional change. This PES scheme has been introduced as an incentive to support the conservation of a flagship endangered species, the Oriental White Stork (*Ciconia boyciana*), which is on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and can only be found in Japan, South Korea, China and Russia. More generally, in Japan, PES approaches have been heralded as tackling the problem of under-use, rather than over-exploitation, of CPRs (see Section 3.1. for a description of problems caused by the under-use of CPRs). Since the 1990s, in Toyoka city, the local government has implemented eco-certification schemes for organic farming and eco-tourism to tackle this problem (Hyogo Prefectural Government, 2009). Toyoka city is considered to be one of the success stories in the use of a broadly defined PES scheme, along with Osaki City and Sado City, where similar schemes supporting flagship species have been implemented (Honda, 2008a; Wittmer and Gundimeda, 2010).²

The case study from Toyoka city reveals how community residents act as institutional bricoleurs rearranging the PES-logic to ‘fit’ their own local context and to reproduce or change the power relations within their community. It illustrates that the implementation of a PES scheme is not just about incentivising people to align their resource use decisions with broader social interests but also about power struggles among stakeholders, such as between policy makers and local residents as well as among the residents themselves.

The next section introduces the central idea of institutional bricolage from a critical institutionalist perspective. Then, Section 3 describes the background and methodology used in the case study and Section 4 analyses how the PES scheme designed for the conservation of the Oriental White Stork in Toyoka city was contested, altered and articulated by the local community. The paper concludes with the main lessons learnt for future PES-based governance of biodiversity through the lens of institutional bricolage.

2. Setting the Scene: Institutional Bricolage, Agency, and Power

In recent years the institutionalist school of thought on the study of the commons, often termed critical institutionalism, has emerged to fill the gaps left by mainstream institutionalism led by the work of Elinor Ostrom (e.g. Cleaver, 2012; De Koning and Cleaver, 2012; Hall et al., 2014). The mainstream approach generally understands institutions as ‘the rules of the game’ which define what actors may (permitted), must (obliged) or may not (forbidden) do (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995; North, 1990). It argues that rational actors design appropriate institutions to fulfill certain functions, for instance to solve collective action problems or information asymmetries (Hotimsky et al., 2006). When carefully crafted, the assumption goes, CPR institutions can in principle curb individuals’ selfish incentives to free-ride and enhance collective action to avoid the over-exploitation of the commons (McKean, 1992; Ostrom, 1990; Wade, 1989).

Critical institutionalists emphasize that new institutions cannot be separated from the pre-existing social and cultural embeddedness of resource users and thus the messiness that arises from the multiplicity of their interests and the complexity through social interactions (Cleaver, 2002; Fabinyi et al., 2014; McCay, 2002; Mosse, 1997). For this school of thought, resource users do not hold narrowly defined utilitarian and purely instrumental preferences (Mosse, 1997). Instead they are viewed as holding multiple social identities and rationalities

(Schneegg and Linke, 2015). This implies that CPR use cannot be understood solely in terms of a narrow desire to optimise a given objective (e.g. income maximization or risk minimization). It can also be strongly influenced by other concerns and interests stemming from various social identities and roles, as well as being associated with norms relating to authority/respect, in-group loyalty and fairness/reciprocity (Chan et al., 2016). It follows that institutional change relating to CPR use can be motivated, for example, by an elite’s desire to reproduce power relations (Hall et al., 2014; Hotimsky et al., 2006). It should also be pointed out that collective action for the conservation of CPR does not necessarily guarantee outcomes that are either socially or ecologically desirable (Ishihara and Pascual, 2009).

Critical institutionalism draws strongly on sociology and anthropology and institutions are understood as “social arrangements that shape and regulate human behaviour and have some degree of permanency and purpose transcending individual human lives and intentions” (Cleaver, 2012, p. 8). The process of institutional change is understood through the idea of ‘institutional bricolage’ (Cleaver, 2002; Galvan, 2004), not as an issue of ‘crafting’ rules (Ostrom, 1992) or of searching for ‘institutional fit’ (Young, 2002) but by explicitly acknowledging the ‘messy’ process or the ‘unintended’ outcomes that it may produce. The term ‘bricolage’ was originally used by the French anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1966) to describe how the ‘savage’ mind understands different cultures, and later developed by Douglas (1986) in the context of institutions, who argued that to economise on cognitive effort, actors borrow existing familiar institutions as a ‘frame of reference’ to understand new and ‘unfamiliar’ social phenomena. In the study of the commons, the use of the term institutional bricolage refers to “a process through which people, consciously and non-consciously, assemble or reshape institutional arrangements, drawing on whatever materials and resources are available, regardless of their original purpose” (De Koning and Cleaver, 2012, p. 4).

This notion of institutional bricolage enables us to better understand human agency and the dynamic power relations involved in the institutional processes that arise in the governance of the commons. At this point, we make two remarks: first, the actors involved in institutional change are not powerless victims of this process, rather they are active ‘improvisers’. Drawing on Sewell (1992), we use the term human agency³ to refer to actors’ capacity to transpose and extend an ‘institutional logic’ to a new institutional context, where ‘institutional logic’ is the shared taken-for-granted social prescriptions that guide individual behaviour in an institutional context (Battilana, 2006). The institutional logic thus embodies belief systems and material practices that represent particular worldviews, valued ends, and the appropriate means to achieve such ends (Christiansen, Larke and Lounsbury, 2013). When actors are faced with new situations, they exercise their agency by extending their existing institutional logic and make do with whatever is at hand to fit the new institutional context (Baker and Nelson, 2005).

The notion of ‘institutional logic’ in this paper is used in a similar sense to that of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990) or ‘common knowledge’⁴ (Ishihara and Pascual, 2009). According to Bourdieu, habitus is similar to a ‘sense of the game’. A player in a game, in our terms an institutional bricoleur, is guided by a ‘sense of the game’; but at the same time, the player is not ruled by it. The player still has room to create new

³ Agency is temporally embedded in the past and is oriented towards the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). On the one hand, because actors are born into a specific social structure, they internalise an institutional logic and follow routines forming habits or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). On the other hand, actors face unexpected outcomes even when they follow habitus. Then they start to question what they have ‘taken for granted’. In such a circumstance, actors distance themselves from so-called common knowledge (Ishihara and Pascual, 2009), creating a space for them to reflect on their actions in relation to their circumstances.

⁴ Other authors refer to this aspect of institutions as ‘institutional context’ (Clegg, 2010). We acknowledge that we are not using the term logic in a strict philosophical sense. However, we chose not to use the term ‘context’ in order to avoid confusion with the social and cultural context in which the actors are embedded which includes wider connotations beyond institutional logic.

² Both cities use flagship species similar to that of Toyoka. In Osaki city, the protected species is a goose and in Sado city, it is the crested ibis. For details see: <http://www.biodic.go.jp/biodiversity/shiraberu/policy/pes/satotisatoyama/satotisatoyama01.html> for Osaki city and <http://www.biodic.go.jp/biodiversity/shiraberu/policy/pes/satotisatoyama/satotisatoyama03.html> for Sado city.

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