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CONTEXT, POWER AND EQUITY IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COMMISSIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO VERY DIFFERENT BRAZILIAN STATES

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Abstract

Multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) gained popularity in territorial planning as an innovative method that brings diverse actors together to advance “good governance” and “sustainable development”. However, both territorial planning and MSFs constitute a double-edged sword. Advancing certain goals, strengthening certain land-use rights and benefiting certain actors can come at the cost of others, with the potential to both challenge or reproduce power asymmetries. MSFs may present the shortcomings, and profit from the lessons, recognized by scholars and practitioners. Based on mixed methods research, we comparatively analyze equity and power dynamics in the Ecological-Economic Zoning (ZEE) commissions of Acre and Mato Grosso, two Brazilian States with different contexts. We reveal that territorial planning MSFs have better chances to promote equitable power relations and environmental benefits when they emerge - and operate in - a historical context that embraces social-environmental movements, the “common good”, trade-offs and subjectivities, rather than from technocratic top-down initiatives.

Key Words: governance, equity, territorial planning, multi-stakeholder forums, power.



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Long abstract

Throughout the last decades (since the 80s-90s), multi-stakeholder territorial planning has been widely promoted by governments and international agencies around the world (e.g. Cote et al. 2010; Stead 2014; Comerma 2010; Ardiansyah et al. 2015). The idea – or ideal(L) – behind this planning method is to discuss, formulate, approve and/or implement land-use maps or plans, creating multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs) that bring together diverse stakeholders. In doing so, proponents note that these platforms are better geared to pursue both “sustainable development” and “good governance” (Reed 2008; Kusters et al. 2018).

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that it is debatable to what extent territorial planning and MSFs constitute an equitable and effective solution to land-use problems (Kohlepp 2002; Rudel and Meyfroidt 2014). Both territorial planning and MSFs constitute a double-edged sword as advancing certain goals, strengthening certain land-use rights, and benefiting certain actors can come at the cost of other goals, rights and actors (Broegaard 2016, p.170-171), with the potential to both challenge or merely reproduce power asymmetries, depending on the context and other key factors (Kohne 2014).

As it remains unclear how, why and when the use of MSFs in land use planning can work, in this paper we examine how do context and power dynamics play out in the equity of the Ecological-Economic Zoning (ZEE) commissions of Acre and Mato Grosso, two Brazilian States with very different contexts. For this study we propose a theoretical framework that goes beyond a merely optimistic or pessimistic view (see figure 2). Under this framework, power relations and equity in the processes and outcomes of land use planning MSFs (in this case, Acre’s and MT’s zoning commissions), can be negatively and/or positively affected by diverse contextual factors and complex power relations (see Figure 1).



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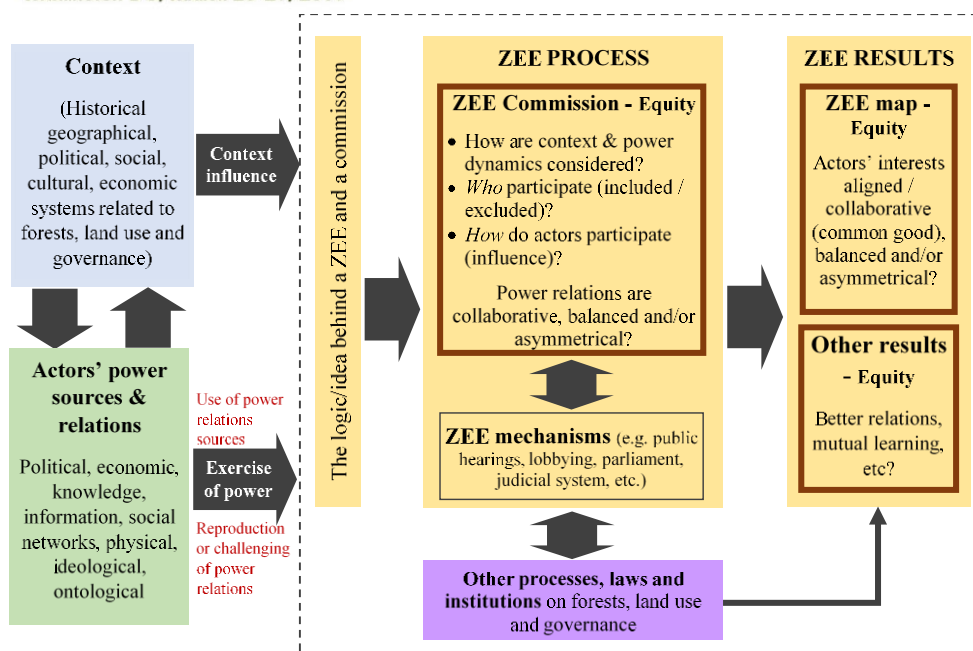


Figure 1. Conceptual diagram

This study utilized primary and secondary data, collected over a 10 months period in Acre and Mato Grosso (MT) during the years 2017 and 2018. A total of 88 (semi-structured) interviews were carried out, applying different data collection instruments to different types of informants (see Table 1). Interviewees were selected to include a diversity of informants from different genders, levels and sectors. Interviewees represented (national, state-level and local) government agencies, NGOs, private sectors, farmers organizations, indigenous/grassroots organizations and university professors/researchers

Instrument	Type of informant
Key context questionnaire	To 11 individuals that constitute key informants about the local context with authoritative local knowledge (e.g. academia, NGO, government, grassroots organization, and private sector).
Theory of Change (ToC) questionnaires	To 6 ZEE commission organizers, to know their goals and strategies and how they considered contextual factors.
Participant questionnaire	To 43 MT ZEE commission participants.
Non-participant questionnaire	To 28 actors that participated in, or are affected by, the ZEE but do not participate in the ZEE commission.

Table 1. Types of data collection instruments applied to different types of informants



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We found that Acre's ZEE commission (and ZEE in general) emerged principally from a collective demand nourished by strong social-environmental movements and led by political authorities that had been part of such movements. As a result, the initiative responded to a legitimate, *idealistic-realistic* need: to look for the common good, while acknowledging trade-offs, and empowering the weak ones, while acknowledging structural power differences. On the other hand, in MT, a zoning process and a zoning commission were created mainly to comply with international and national stipulations that demanded participation and land use planning. Consequently, MT's ZSEE commission was created as a *technocratic* governance mechanism demanded by high-level, politically powerful actors.

Results show that in Acre equity was high, locals were empowered (gaining *power within*) and power differences were directed towards collaboration and goal achievement (*power with* and *power to*). This seems to be a reflect of a context where an important part of the population whose livelihoods depended on forests, a well consolidated social-environmental alliance, political authorities that (as part of that alliance) intensively advocating for empowerment of the "fracos", participation, "florestania" and sustainability, and a territory with well-preserved forests.

On the other hand, in the MT case, equity was limited. Structural power differences led to through distrust and the use of *power over* not only in the commission but, more importantly, in the zoning process as a whole. This is very much consequence of an historical system where agribusiness as the main economic activity for those land-owners that concentrate most of MT's land, a powerful alliance between the private sector and the state-level government (i.e. economically, politically and ideologically powerful groups dominating the process), a limitedly strong civil society, and a territory already pretty much deforested.

In Acre, not only power differences were highly minimized inside and outside the commission, but also powerful actors were social-environmental allies of the civil society. In MT, power differences were partly minimized inside the commission, but reproduced outside the commission.

In that sense, we emphasize that neither of the two commissions operated in a vacuum. Other decision-making spaces created for the zoning process and, in general, land use governance (public hearings, Legislative Assembly, etc) influenced the overall equity. In Acre, these spaces complemented and legitimized the commission, while in MT they were used by powerful actors to delegitimize the commission and take control over the zoning process.



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We conclude that zoning and MSFs can be a dual-edge ‘bomb’ for equity and ‘sustainable development’, for better or worse. Territorial planning MSFs have better chances to promote equitable power relations and environmental benefits when they emerge - and operate in - a historical context that embraces social-environmental movements, the “common good”, trade-offs and subjectivities, rather than from technocratic top-down initiatives.