

Toward recognition justice through empowerment in Natura 2000 ecotourism.

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Introduction

Justice concerns are embedded in environmental policy-making and a sense of injustice related to Natura 2000 policy-making has become powerful local narrative in a number of the EU member states. It has also become evident that more attention should be paid to recognizing local values, cultures and traditions in the process of environmental governance (e.g. Grodzińska-Jurczak & Cent, 2011).

Aim: This study is driven by questions of how Natura 2000 ecotourism can succeed in empowering local residents and to establish the parties misrecognized in the past decision-making processes as a full member of a local community.

We discuss the case of Natura 2000 implementation in Poland to offer a better understanding of Natura 2000 conflicts as the issues of environmental justice. Specifically, we focus on the recognition dimension of environmental justice in the Natura 2000 governance because we find it highly relevant the case of Poland. Our ambition is to illustrate advantages of looking at Natura 2000 conflicts through the lens of recognition justice and foster a better understanding of how Natura 2000 ecotourism can empower residents engaged in those conflicts.

Organization: After taking a closer look at the major theoretical contribution to the questions of recognition, we review issues of recognition in Natura 2000 governance process in Poland. Lastly, we discuss how Natura 2000 ecotourism can contribute to recognition justice by empowering local residents psychologically, and politically as well as empowering them as a member of the local communities and thus serve as a tool to mitigate local recognition conflicts.

Review of concepts

Environmental justice as recognition

Environmental justice frames social issues as environmental issues (Figueroa, 2006). Despite the broad evidence of multidimensionality of injustices, vast majority of environmental justice scholarship has been primarily concerned with its distributive dimension. In contrast, recognition scholars have been interested in ‘why’ inequality occurs, ‘how’ justice is conceptualized and who gets to define and design ‘just’ political processes (e.g. Fraser, 2015). Major concerns identified within the recognition discourse included the political, cultural, social, ecological misrecognition, the lack of representation of certain social actors in the processes of governance, and discriminatory participatory processes.

Building on the critical political theory of social justice it can be proposed that environmental justice as political recognition boils down to the question of how resources are used and who gets to make environmental policy decisions and who does not. Political recognition rests on

the idea that the community members are able to represent their views consistently with their values and local and historical situations in the places where they live. Thus, recognition justice requires appreciation of individual and group identity- e.g. experiences, knowledge, traditional beliefs, and environmental heritage (e.g. Schlossberg, 2007). One step closer to recognition justice would be a direct and robust participation in the decisions that affect a people. Meaningful participation can be ensured through fair procedures of who, and to what extent, is included in decision-making processes.

Empowerment through Natura 2000 ecotourism

In a tourism context, empowerment can be linked to individual changes, interpersonal changes and social structural changes. The resident empowerment literature, describes how the tourism development process can either psychologically, socially, politically empower residents depending on how tourism affects residents' self-esteem, community cohesion, and political agency. From the 'power' perspective residents who become politically empowered through tourism exhibit political efficacy and are motivated to employ social and political resources. Knowledge and information in particular raise residents' awareness of available opportunities and thus help empower individuals to be tourism decision-makers. Social empowerment occurs when tourism-related activities strengthen local relationships resulting in increased community cohesion. Social empowerment, on the other hand, involves changes in a community social structure and community agency. Tourism can promote those changes by bringing residents together for tourism development projects. Finally, psychological empowerment occurs when tourism promotes residents' self-esteem and pride. It can arise from situations when pride and self-esteem are enhanced from visitors who recognize the natural resources of a local community (e.g. Strzelecka et al, 2017).

In sum, empowerment from tourism is not mere inclusion in the participation process, but a complex process that occurs when people gain the agency to steer and control tourism processes, feel proud of their communities as well as when tourism positively shapes local community structure and its capacity to act. The notion of empowerment, therefore, enriches the notion of recognition justice as it explicitly considers interaction between individual and community processes.

Contribution

This paper makes a theoretical contribution to the fields of sustainable tourism and environmental sociology by that it: 1) relates justice to empowerment from tourism in the context of post-transition economy 2) trains the focus on justice-related issues in environmental policy making in Central and Eastern Europe. By applying recognition justice perspective this work offers a problematization of the Natura 2000 decision-making and empowerment through Natura 2000 ecotourism as political issue in post-transition state.

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