

Symmetries and asymmetries in collective management: The case of Galician Common Lands and the Brazilian Extractive Reserves analysis of its role in rural development processes

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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze comparatively the case of Galician common lands (MVMC) in Spain and Reservas Extrativistas (common extractive reserve) in Brazil, considering the new perspectives on rural development. The role of State in juridical transformations regarding land use and management was studied. We focused on understanding changes in access to common resources and their use, as well as, to describe how the relationship established among users groups is conformed. Results are based on the analysis of 55 semi-structured interviews among seven communities with common lands in Spain and on the application of Participative Rapid Diagnosis (PRD) techniques and interviews, for the case of the Resex of Riozinho da Liberdade in the Acre state (Brazil). The field work was developed along May 2013, April-June 2014 and February 2015. The research shows the frailties and strengths of the main management patterns in both realities. We found that, in both cases, there is a strong interference of the State, establishing normative that regulates the conditions of use and implement the management model of these areas. A common point is the perceived economic importance of natural resources as a revenue source, though the tenure of this resource becomes effective differently. It may be underlined the importance of ensuring access to land, for maintain the freedom and autonomy of the user group. This should be seen as a crucial factor for economic and social development in both cases. Finally, normative and practical arrangements found in MVMC and RESEX represent a good strategy for the rural development, considering the relationship built between user groups and the pattern of organization of land management developed with a focus on shared management.

## **Introduction**

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the new perspectives for rural development in Spain and Brazil, considering the Common Lands, or Montes Veciñais en Man Común (MVMC), in Galicia, Northern Spain and the Extractive Reserves (Resex) in the Brazilian Amazon. These areas present a model of ownership organization and land use based on the collective property. Conceptually, MVMCs can be defined as being a legal entity of a private nature, belonging to a group of residents as social groups, living in the vicinity of these areas. The Resex (s), on the other hand, are areas of public domain which use are granted by the Brazilian government to the traditional populations with specific regulation and management carried out by the local deliberative council.

Because they are distinct contexts, in which the studied regions present many differences in terms of historical, productive and spatial configurations, this work contributes to the contemporary debate on rural development, incorporating to this discussion the theme of common use of land and natural resources. The paper seeks to answer the following question: How does the rural development process, involving realities permeated by the appropriation and use of common resources and focusing on environmental sustainability, imply the construction of specific normative, conceptual and practical arrangements?

In this study, sustainable rural development as an analytical category, was approached in a systemic way, combining economic, social and environmental dimensions with a view to the exploitation of natural resources. In this perspective, sustainable rural development involves articulated processes that aim to introduce socioeconomic and environmental changes within rural areas, seeking to improve the income, quality of life and well-being of rural populations. That is, permanent extension of substantive freedoms, access to education, health, security and civil rights of individuals, and articulation with the environment, social and institutional structures, expanding their capabilities and their potentialities. (SEN, 2000; FAVARETO, 2007; SCHNEIDER, 2011).

Objectively, we sought to verify the existence of congruence and divergences between the normative, conceptual and practical dimensions in the two modalities of social use of common resources arrangements: the Montes Veciñais en Man Común (MVMC) and Extractive Reserves.

## **Methodology**

The methodological procedures for the Spanish case were bibliographic research, collection of secondary data on official websites and semi-structured interviews with users of 07 Communities of Montes Veciñais en Man Común (MVMC) located in the province of Lugo - Galicia, totalizing 55 interviews carried out between April and June 2014. Regarding the Brazilian case, the research was carried out in the Extractive Reserve (Resex) Riozinho da Liberdade, in the State of Acre, in the Amazon region. In this extractive reserve, the data were collected initially by the application of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques, carried out in May 2013. In a second moment, in February 2015, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 residents of this protected area.

## **Results and discussions**

Juergensmeyer e Wadley (1974) They argue that the academic debate on common lands is related to the consolidation of "common rights" by referring to the process of transformation of feudalism in England where individual ownership of the land almost did not exist and the rule was common property, Or at least the common law of use. According to Thompson (1998), in the English context, the concept of "common lands" was attributed to lands whose property was private and the right to use the resources given to the peasants by the landowner, on which they had the right of using the pasture forests and extraction of materials for construction and use in their dwellings, according to local custom. Two elements are highlighted in this definition: the privilege of use instituted by custom and the dependence of the resources.

Lana and Goñi (2015), on the other hand, highlight the distinction made by Schlager and Ostrom (1992) on property rights to elaborate a definition for "common lands", to analyse this regime of use in Spain. These authors analyse the level of operation (access to resources and their use) and the level of collective deliberation (of management, exclusion and alienation) to identify areas that could be defined as common. These authors consider common lands, those in which local people have management and exclusion rights as well as operational rights. They also point out that much of this land legally belongs to different scales of public administration, although some common lands are recognized as a type of collective private property. Thus, the theoretical analysis of the different forms of common land use is associated with the discussion of the guarantee of the rights of these users.

Faced with the reality of Galician MVMCs and Resex Riozinho da Liberdade, this article discusses the conceptual and empirical symmetries related to the economic importance of natural resources, user flows, forms of land use and appropriation, and environmental aspects evidenced in these two common land use arrangements. Table 01 summarizes the dimensions analysed and the similarities and differences observed in relation to the two realities.

**Table 1.** Similarities and differences in social arrangements and forms of use of natural resources in the MVMC and Resex Riozinho da Liberdade

Dimensions	MVMC	Resex Riozinho da Liberdade
Objectives	Recognize the right of using a territory to a specific group.	
Appropriation of natural resources	Economic importance of Natural Resources	
	Dispute for natural resources	
	Has no primary dependence on territory resources	Has primary dependence on the territory resources
User flow	Very intense - due to legislation	Little intense - due to the regulatory role of the State
Territory use	Dwelling near the collective area; Livestock activities; Wind farms; Transmission line; Planted forest; Outsourcing of services to private companies.	Dwelling within the limits of the collective area; Self-consumption agriculture and livestock; Plant and animal extractivism and handicrafts.
Environmental aspects	Has actions regarding the environmental issue	Arises as proposal of an environmental conservation policy.

Source: Developed by the authors.

The recognition of an area such as MVMC or the implementation of Extractive Reserves consists of actions of legitimization of the right to use the territory to a specific group of users. Although the formal access process is established in a differentiated way. In the case of MVMC collective property was already historically legitimized, coming from Germanic<sup>1</sup> land tenure type. In relation to economic activities, agriculture (cereal and *Ulex Europaeus*) and livestock stood out. In the Brazilian Extractive Reserves, a specific type of protected area, created since 1989 and characterized by the guarantee of the territory for traditional populations and their sustainable livelihoods, the formal and legal regime of collective uses is instituted by the intervention of the State. In Galicia, the regulation of the process of classification of areas of common use occurs in a simpler way

<sup>1</sup> The Germanic communities were historically characterized by being nomadic with a social arrangement in which ownership of the land belonged to the entire Clan. Its members could enjoy some areas individually, but as a way of meeting the collective needs, forests and pastures were exploited in a communal way.

since it is only a question of recognizing that that area was, in a certain historical moment, a MVMC. In Brazil, the process is more complex, since it means the constitution of a new collective arrangement that involves issues such as national policy for the conservation of natural resources, land expropriation and other legal aspects.

Marey-Pérez *et al* (2010) argue that the MVMCs by their nature and extent can play an important role in the rural context to which they belong because they are virtually the only rural areas in Galicia with large dimensions that allow sustainable management especially in the case of forestry and environmental uses. In the same way, the Resex are also an innovation in the ways of using both the land and its natural resources. Thus, the demands for the creation of Protected Areas in Brazil are strongly influenced by the need to create an environmental strategy for the conservation of biodiversity. As Sawyer (2012) argues, Resex are part of a new development perspective in which the components of the notion of sustainability are not just the monetary income of products. On the contrary, this monetary component is seen as part of a range of activities that generate real benefits to the families involved, although they are invisible from the market point of view. As the author asserts, the collective use arrangement must refer to a specific group in which the proposal aims to guarantee sufficient conditions for the reproduction of families and the productive unit itself, changing the focus of environmental valuation, notably related to the opportunity cost to cover the social cost, which, in the end, also covers environmental conservation.

A common point between the two realities is the economic importance of natural resources. However, the appropriation of these resources occurs in a different way, given that in the case of Resex it is the user himself who withdraws the extractive products in a direct appropriation. In MVMC the right of using resources can be transferred to third parties, outlining an indirect appropriation, such as the plantation and removal of wood that can be carried out by private companies. In any case, the economic element is present in both realities, and precisely because it has an economic value is that in both cases we can identify a dispute over natural resources. The users of MVMC want, above all, control of the land, with a view to obtaining monetary gains, either by leasing the collective area, granting use to private companies or to make a direct use. At Resex, the important area is that where users collect and produce different resources such as fruit, fish, agricultural products and animals as a way to guarantee their livelihoods. It is in this perspective that LOPES (2011) argues that MVMC contribute to local development, as they configure

new income alternatives for users. Similarly, SAWYER (2013) points out extractive reserves as an instrument of sustainable development due to their capacity to involve communities in the management mechanisms of the use of natural resources.

Another issue that we can observe in the comparison between MVMC and extractive reserves refers to the flow of users. User flow conditions are directly impacted by the type of regulation existing in each territory, these regulations can be formal and informal. In the case of formal regulations, norms and rules are implemented by the state or institutions already consolidated in the territories, which may interfere with traditional practices and customs in relation to the appropriation of these spaces. Informal rules, however, are born at the heart of the users' lives and daily life, and they also have their level of influence in the local reality. It means that according to the rigor of these norms, whether formal or informal, if there is a greater or lower flow of users. Thus, in the Galician case, this flow is driven by the legislation itself, since the user status of the MVMC is due to the fact that the individual actually resides in the vicinity of the communal area. This situation intensifies the flow since there may be large swings in the arrival and departure of residents. In Resex, the entrance of new users has restrictions, because the Brazilian policy of Protected Areas of Sustainable Use aims to ensure that the beneficiary is the population that already used and lived in this territory, understood as extractivist or traditional populations, which have ties of ancestry with these areas. Thus, we can say that in the case of Resex the input flow is less intense. As far as the flow of output in both realities is concerned, there are regulations that foresee temporary departures as long as it is justified; the absence for more than one year without justification determines the loss of the right of use. However, in both realities the exit or exclusion of users is less common than the entry of new users.

It is important to emphasize that the multifunctionality of rural areas is another approach that is present in rural development approaches. Not infrequently, MVMCs have been partially occupied for wind energy production, hiking routes, recreational areas, that offer a monetary return to the groups of users through concession of use to the companies or, in some cases, are exploited by users themselves. That is, they are configured in new ways of interpreting the rurality. The very perspective of wind energy production activity, as stated by Abramovay (2014), is already considered within the framework of sustainable rural development, which among other functions inserts a set of changes in the classical energy matrix, replacing them with cleaner energy matrices.

In addition, it is important to remember that the MVMC resources are reverted to collective benefits, such as the organization of typical village festivals or some infrastructure, such as road maintenance. However, the demands of individuals in Galician reality are different from those found in the Brazilian extractive reserve. In Galicia, the financial benefit reverts to the community, even if it is due to certain requirements in the legislation. While in the reserves, due to the primary demands, it is possible to perceive the appropriations of natural resources in a more individualized way. Despite some similarities, the challenges faced by Resex are somewhat different from the MVMC, as it faces the fight against social imbalances directly related to the absence of State institutions.

Regarding environmental aspects, there are conservation measures in both areas. The MVMC areas present themselves with great territorial extension, which makes possible the accomplishment of environmental services, such as conservation of springs, indigenous forest remnants, wildlife refuge, etc. -it is important to note the high level of division of land property, in the Galician case, for non common lands-. In addition, we can note that environmental uses related to leisure issues begin to emerge in these realities. In the Brazilian case, the creation of extractive reserves arises within the scope of an Environmental Conservation Policy, and therefore, the restrictions regarding the use of the territory have larger amplitudes. Although it is an advance in the Brazilian environmental legislation, this policy must recognize that it is part of this development to guarantee economic, political and social opportunities in a way that is combined to reach its primary objective. In the Brazilian case, as Fearnside (2002) argues, converting services such as biodiversity maintenance, carbon storage and water cycling into cash flows that can support a population of "forest keepers" requires to cross a number of obstacles, among them, how to convert forest environmental services into a stream of income, centred on a basis for sustainable development in the Amazon.

### **Final Considerations**

Considering both the Galician MVMC and the Brazilian Resex, we sought to demonstrate in this work the importance of guaranteeing access to land for the freedom and autonomy of the user group, highlighting what CHESHIRE, ESPARCIA and SHUCKSMITH (2015) call Community Resilience, referring to the process of resistance of rural communities by the strengthening their social capital and their own forms of

community organization and use of the territory and appropriation of natural resources. Thus, the work showed that the arrangements of the MVMC and Resex represent different alternatives of income, possibility of maintenance of the population in the rural environment, as well as a multifunctionality related to the uses coupled with the valuation of the environmental question, we can conclude that these realities are inserted in the new perspectives for sustainable rural development.

We also observed that the social and economic importance of natural resources directly influences the management of these territories. In this sense, where users have a primary dependence, that is, where the factors of production, land, labor and capital, are the collective areas themselves, there is a differentiated appropriation and sociability. Thus, in the case of Galician, users have historically never resided within the limits of the MVMC, but in the surroundings, forming a secondary dependence in relation to these territories. In the Brazilian case, the families reside in the Resex Riozinho da Liberdade, "live in and of the forest" and for this reason they relate in a different way to the environment and to the appropriation of natural resources, evidencing a primary dependence on these.

From the accomplishment of this work, we propose a research agenda. In relation to MVMC it is necessary to extend the work carried out to other regions of Galicia, due to the fact that there are Comunidades de Montes inserted in other territorial dynamics. This issue should also be addressed in the Brazilian case, that is, extend this approach to other categories of Sustainable Use Protected Areas, Marine Extractive Reserves, National Forests and Sustainable Development Reserve. Another possibility for research would be a detailed analysis of the economic potential of forest products in Sustainable Use Protected Areas in Brazil. There is also a need for a more in-depth analysis on the typologies of conflicts involving MVMCs and in relation to new uses, such as environmental ones, or those related to leisure that begin to emerge in the most populated areas of Galicia. Considering the Brazilian Sustainable Use Protected Areas, there is a lack of studies related to the understanding of productive chains and payments for environmental services.

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