

Taken at the flood. A look on the resilience of local norms of land uses in the Eastern Amazon

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Abstract:

Prominent discourses highlight the wisdom and strength of local institutions as basis for sound and sustainable development of rural forest regions. In contrary to this, contemporary development dynamics in the rural tropics seem not to take too much into account eventually existing potentials of such norms. Even the local land users tend to opt for non-local models of governance and development. In consequence, local institutions are in a process of steady marginalization. It is thus questionable whether, to what degree and under what conditions, local institutions are resilient against global dynamics and may allow the continuation or establishment of local land governance systems. By exploring the case of family farmers along the Transamazon highway and traditional communities in the Extractive Reserve Verde Para Sempre in the Brazilian State of Pará, this paper critically reflects on the power of local institutions to resist the dynamic of expanding agricultural frontiers dominated by urban elites and capitalized actors such cattle ranchers, timber companies, soy farmers, mineral and energy companies. The study reveals that current economic and policy frameworks leave little space for conserving more traditional local land use norms. However, local land users show capacity to adapt and reconfigure norms in response to the new contexts. It remains open whether these new local norms have the potential to maintain and to create alternative governance paths.

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