

Decreasing diversity through LSLA! A multifunctional view on land as antidote

Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) are often conducted with an economic or an ecological focus. Investors disregard the multi-functionality of land that is at the base of natural but also cultural diversity. Consequences are mono-cultures with products to be sold only on the global market or conservation areas that, while protecting biodiversity are inhibiting cultural diversity. A wider scope that is sensitive to the diversity of functions is proposed using a model of land and landscape perception.



Sustainable livelihoods through a fenced-off palm oil plantation that produces bio-fuel for the world market or small-holder farms with crops for the local market – a decision between economic gain and the conservation of diversity? (Photo by the author)

Tunnel vision

Mono-functionality

To be profitable on a global market, investors in LSLA resort to mono-cultures¹, resulting in decreasing natural and cultural diversity. Both consequences can be detrimental to the sustainability of affected people's livelihoods.² Even LSLA with the aim to protect nature and to enhance biodiversity run the risk of contributing to the loss of cultural diversity by barring people who have previously used the area's resources³.

Taking off the blinders

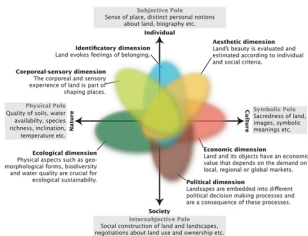
Land and landscape perception

Land is more than an economic resource or a container of biodiversity. Its multi-functions (e.g. ecosystem services⁴) are valued on different scales – from the individual to the global – and not always on a monetary basis. The four-pole model⁵ makes this transparent.

Putting things into perspective

Render visible what's hidden

Not all dimensions that play a role in people's appreciation of land are relevant for specific LSLA. However, land deals that take land's multi-functionality and its different perceptions into account have better chances to result in a win-win-situation, from which all affected people can profit.



The four-pole model of land and landscape perception (Backhaus et al. 2008)

Taking a closer look

Land and its multi-functionality

Several dimensions are relevant beside land's suitability for economic gain or ecosystem protection. Often they loom in the background of *political negotiations* about LSLA but are rarely made transparent:

- People *identify* with land that they grew up with or that belonged to their ancestors.
- Tilling the ground, ambling around one's land, touching and smelling the harvest are *sensory practices* through which people connect to land.
- The beauty of landscapes is not always deemed as relevant for land deals. Yet *aesthetics* are not only important for tourism but they are also part of people's livelihoods.

Bibliography

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