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Abstract

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A B S T R A C T

Global forest governance is generally analyzed as highly fragmented, meaning that it involves a multiplicity of actors and institutions. This fragmentation may be one explanation of the proliferation of multiple discourses around forest governance produced by some dominant actors. In this context, community forestry organizations are seeking, through their association in the form of transnational self-help networks, to promote alternative discourses around their own model of communitarian governance. These recent experiences question the traditional concepts and approaches that only consider community forestry organizations at the local scale. Based on a transnational political sociology perspective and on concrete experiences from Mesoamerica, this paper aims to present an innovative analytical framework to understand how transnational self-help networks of community forestry contribute to transform norms of forest governance through their discourses. It aims in particular to capture the mechanisms leading to the translation of norms between scales and the production of discourse coalitions within the network. The goal is finally to consider transnational self-help networks of community forestry as full-fledged actors within global forest governance, with the capacity to transform the nature of key norms of governance, particularly those directly affecting their own model.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, forests are the object of increasing attempts to address the issue of deforestation at the international scale, especially in the context of rising efforts to fight climate change. The lack of a structured international regime may be one potential explanation for the proliferation of multiple discourses around forest governance emerging from these global arenas that reflect the power of some actors involved in the issue (Howlett et al., 2010; Giessen, 2013). In this global context, community forestry actors, organized around a model of self-managed resource governance at the local scale, are facing different transformations to incorporate new global challenges such as climate change, and to maintain their model in front of increasingly centralized decision-making processes (Young et al., 2006; Armitage, 2008).

With regard to the Mesoamerican region, one of the most innovative experiences may be the recent creation of transnational self-help networks by community forestry organizations themselves, such as the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB). This network was created in 2010 to defend community forestry in front of States and other international actors. This new type of self-managed networks aims at presenting the model of community forest governance as a viable solution to key contemporary issues such as deforestation and climate change. However, beyond just promoting a governance model, transnational action also appears as a way to actively participate in the global processes of discourses and norm production around forest resources.

These recent developments go beyond the static vision of community forestry organizations, according to which they would be limited to local action. Indeed, these actors are far from standing on the fringe of the current globalization dynamics of forest governance, either through their integration into transnational protest movements or through the creation of their own networks. However, this rescaling process raises several questions: how do these actors, traditionally rooted in local contexts, manage to organize and build alternative discourses around forest governance on such a scale? To what extent are these discourses the expression of translated norms of forest governance?

This paper aims to answer these questions through the presentation of a theoretical framework based on the relatively new field of transnational political sociology. More precisely, it aims to consider transnational self-help networks as new actors of global forest governance, and to understand their role in the transformation of norms of forest governance. In a first part, the context of fragmented global forest governance and its possible impact on local community forestry organizations will be presented. In a second part, concrete experiences of community forestry networks in Mesoamerica will be presented to illustrate the new concept of transnational self-help networks developed in this paper. Finally, a theoretical framework mainly based on the sociology of translation will be set to better understand the discursive strategies.
and scale mobilization implemented by some key actors within the networks, as a new way to transform community forestry norms of governance in a context of globalization.

2. Community forestry in a context of fragmented global forest governance

At the global scale, more than one billion people depend directly or indirectly on forests to sustain their livelihood, out of which 18\% are managed by communities.\footnote{World Bank, “Sustaining Forests: A Development Strategy”, Washington, 2004, 80 p.} These activities can range from exploitation for timber production, agroforestry to processing of products. Community forestry really started to be taken into consideration in the 1970s, with the introduction by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of forestry programs in collaboration with rural populations, and the rising recognition of the importance of forests for human development. This governance model gradually increased in developing countries through decentralization programs, from 200 million hectares (ha) in 1980 to 450 million in 2000.\footnote{Idem.} In general, community forestry can be defined as: “the exercise by local people of power or influence over decisions regarding management of forests, including the rules of access and the disposition of products” (McDermott and Schreckenberg, 2009: 158).

In the 1990s, some authors tried to overcome the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968) to highlight the possibilities of creating self-organizing systems between individuals at the local scale in order to sustainably manage resources (Ostrom, 1990). They thus provided an explanation of the conditions for the emergence and perpetuation of these community systems at the local scale, as a third way between the state and the market, around key principles such as autonomy, horizontality or reciprocity (Ostrom, 1990). However, despite their number and important contribution to the improvement of basic services to the populations, these organizations often remain invisible or little recognized beyond the local scale.

In addition, they are part of a wider context of global forest governance, which could have a significant impact back at the local scale. Indeed, it is important to mention both the fragmented nature of this global forest governance, which has no formal international regime (Giessen, 2013), and its conflicting aspect regarding the definition of norms of governance by multiple actors (fight against climate change, biodiversity conservation…). Several authors then prefer talking about a “regime-complex” to describe the diversity of institutions and initiatives around global forest governance, developed to address the limitations of interstate governance and the failure as for the adoption of an international convention (Howlett et al., 2010; Keohane and Victor, 2011). Thus, “it is a patchwork of international institutions that are different in their character (organizations and implicit and explicit norms and goals), constituencies (public and private), spatial scope (from bilateral to global), and subject matter (from specific policy fields to universal concerns)” (Biernan et al., 2009: 4).

Moreover, the multidimensional nature of forest governance has encouraged its connection to other international regimes, such as biodiversity and climate change, which benefit from a more structured regulatory framework (McDermott et al., 2010). For example, under the international climate change regime was launched in 2008 the UN-REDD Programme (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation). This program aims to fight deforestation by creating a financial value for the carbon stored in forests. It is essentially built on a market-based approach around the concept of payment for ecosystem services, and a distributive conception of equity around the principle of efficiency. However, this type of global program is facing some problems of mismatch between local realities and international conceptions (Cashore et al., 2012). As an example, REDD programs are blamed for leading to a recentralization of forest governance at the national scale, and to an exacerbation of social inequalities between local actors (Agrawal et al., 2010). Disagreements about norms and paradigms induced by these global programs may be one explanation for the proliferation of transnational protests, mainly directed against the lack of local communities’ inclusion in decision-making processes.

This fragmentation of global forest governance represents both an opportunity and a constraint for local communities. On one hand, it represents an opportunity in the sense that the transition from a hierarchical system of global governance to a horizontal network system enables civic society actors to get more weight and easy access to the international arenas of decision-making (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Bulkeley, 2005). But on the other hand, it also represents an important constraint in terms of the high number of actors in potential competition for the construction of discourses and norms about resource governance. Several studies do mention the role of dominant coalitions of actors in the construction and evolution of discourses structuring global forest governance. One central element of discourse construction is the “framing”, defined as “strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (Kliham et al., 2002: 12). These framing strategies can involve different scalar dynamics, for example to define the resource as local or global in function of the goal pursued. As a consequence, the way some problem will be constructed will then influence the possible institutional change or norm transformation. It can be mentioned for example the role of environmental NGOs in the construction of a discourse on sustainable development and illegal logging, or the role of indigenous communities in the production of a discourse on biodiversity access and property rights (Arts and Buizer, 2009).

Therefore, many authors point to the need for community systems to organize at other scales than the local one, in order to adapt to these contemporary changes and acquire a role in international mechanisms of discourses and norm construction (Young et al., 2006; Armitage, 2008). Community organizations are indeed inserted into multi-level processes that involve various changes in their modes of governance. These processes particularly encourage going beyond self-management limits (low technical and financial resources) through the establishment of partnerships between organizations at national and transnational scales (Dedeuwaerdeere, 2005). Precisely in response to these changes, various local, national and regional initiatives have emerged to consolidate the efforts of community organizations to promote and strengthen their model of governance, such as the recent Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMaP). These processes justify the development of an innovative conceptual framework to link community forestry and transnational action.

3. Transnational self-help networks of community forestry: a conceptual construction from empirical evidence

This section aims to provide a conceptual perspective on transnational self-help networks from recent experiences of community forestry organizations in Mesoamerica. The distinctive features of these networks, which are composed only of community organizations, and the significant jump between scales that they are experiencing, invite to adopt a new conceptual perspective on the role that these networks are assuming in a context of globalization.

3.1. The emergence of transnational community forestry networks: a Mesoamerican perspective

The study of the Mesoamerican region is particularly interesting to highlight recent changes in the forms of governance of community forestry organizations. Indeed, this region appears emblematic of the development of self-help networks and protest movements against international programs. Whereas Mesoamerica represents only 2.2% of
the forests worldwide, with about 86.6 million hectares of forests\(^3\), forest communities and indigenous peoples own or manage over 60% of the region’s forests (Kaimowitz, 2008). For instance, the majority of forests is owned by local communities in Mexico (Kaimowitz, 2008).

In addition, the region has experienced large movements of decentralization in recent decades, encouraging a process of securing property rights, and strengthening community forestry organizations (Kaimowitz, 2008). For example, some studies on the region show that forests located on indigenous territories, or governed by community foresters, have lower rates of deforestation (Kaimowitz, 2008).

This strengthening also encouraged the formation in most countries of the region of sub-national or national networks that bring together local community organizations, in order to improve resource governance and gain more political leverage to engage dialog with governments. The interesting example of the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) in Guatemala can be mentioned here to stress this trend. ACOFOP is a sub-national network founded in 1995 during the process of delimitation of property rights in the region, which aimed to create a new protected area, the Maya Biosphere Reserve. The association conducted advocacy work in the context of conservation policies developed by the government at that time and continues its work until today (Taylor, 2010). The network consists of 23 peasant and indigenous organizations, and manages various initiatives, such as “Guatecarbon”, a pioneering program in partnership with UN-REDD. The network enabled the securitization of property rights, a fairer redistribution of REDD program funds, and a reduced dependency on external actors such as NGOs (Cronkleton et al., 2008).

In addition, this dynamic can also be found at the transnational scale, with the establishment in 1994 of the Central American Coordination of Indigenous and Peasants for Community Agroforestry (ACICAFOC), the first transnational network of this type. This network was created in order to consolidate community forestry organizations, and promote a sustainable access, use and management of resources. The network participated in the creation of the Global Alliance of Community Forestry in the context of the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. The main goal was to build a common global agenda around community forestry governance that would take into account local needs and realities.

However, the issues and roles of such networks at the transnational scale are taking another dimension in the increasing globalization of forest governance. The emblematic case of the recent Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB) can be mentioned in this regard. It is a transnational network founded in 2010 following the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The alliance consists primarily of community forestry organizations, but also indigenous and peasant organizations. Its purpose is the promotion of the community-based model of forest resource governance in Central America to face the challenges of climate change and promote sustainable development. The action strategies developed by the AMPB are strongly directed to the consolidation of property rights and the claim of local communities’ autonomy against governments and specific international programs such as UN-REDD. An AMPB’s report mentions that “these experiences contain critical lessons for large forested regions in other areas of the world — in particular for REDD + — where many large forests are in the hands of governments with little capacity to manage them effectively”.\(^4\) The alliance is supported by various organizations recognized internationally, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Ford Foundation, or the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

Some recent studies consider the establishment of this type of self-help networks, mainly at the sub-national or national scales, as a viable solution to create an intermediary between international programs and their implementation on the ground (Bolin et al., 2013). Thus, “the government engagement of large networks of community forest user groups with national forestry initiatives has been instrumental in fast-tracking improved tenure security for forest communities, and in the creation of strong additional enabling conditions for REDD+” (Bolin et al., 2013: 6). Following the same approach, a study conducted by Chhatre and Agrawal demonstrated that greater autonomy in decision-making processes at the local scale meant higher carbon storage and improved living conditions for the communities (Agrawal and Chhatre, 2009). This contributes to solve one of the central dilemmas of the REDD mechanism to match different conceptions of equity as redistributive, procedural and contextual. Indeed, “Interventions designed solely to distribute payments for ecosystem services, without attention to local decision-making inputs, access to resources, and power relations, are unlikely to have equitable consequences” (McDermott et al., 2012: 9).

This recent development questions existing approaches and concepts in both the study of common goods and the study of transnational networks from the civil society. Indeed, despite the proliferation of studies about the scaling-up of community forestry organizations and their integration into multi-level processes (Cronkleton et al., 2008; Taylor, 2010; Benjamin et al., 2011; García-Lopez, 2013), relatively little research addresses the question of a possible role for these organizations at a transnational or even an international scale. However, this new actor could have an important role to play in the building of alternative discourses (compared to discourses produced by international actors), and in the reconstruction of global norms currently poorly sufficed to local realities. Similarly, the dominant concept of “transnational advocacy networks” encountered in the field of international relations, fails to account for this new type of networks that consist only of grass-root organizations (Vielajus, 2009; Siméant, 2010; Caouette, 2010). It is therefore necessary to develop an innovative analytical framework to understand the issues related to the reorganization of community forestry actors in the form of transnational networks.


It is possible to find in the literature different conceptualizations of transnational networks. A primary concept of “transnational collective action” emerging from the field of sociology can be defined as “the coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions” (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 7). One of the related challenges is to understand how actors who are geographically and culturally distant are able to organize beyond national boundaries to pool their claims and participate in the renewal of global norms.\(^5\) In the field of international relations, the dominant concept of “transnational advocacy networks” refers to networks including “those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck and Sikkink, 1999: 89). This type of network acquired an important role in the regulation of globalization, seeking primarily to influence states and international organizations. International environmental NGOs mainly prevailed in this process of redefining global norms, which highlights their key role as an intermediary between local actors and their international claims.

In a broader sense, these approaches go beyond the one-way perspective that decisions taken at the international scale, primarily by states, would automatically apply to the national and local scales through a cascade effect. Instead, the transnational approach allows for a more dynamic vision of civil society actors, seen as both agents

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\(^4\) “Mesoamerica at the forefront of community forest rights: Lessons for making REDD work”, AMPB/Prisma, Oct. 2013, 8p.

\(^5\) Norms here are understood as “standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 851).
and subjects of change (Khagram et al., 2002). However, these concepts are failing to adequately capture the complexity of transnational networks of community forestry presented above. Indeed, they do not take into account the diversity of civil society actors, beyond the dominant category of NGOs, to assess their role in global governance processes (Vieljaus, 2009). They neither take into account the existence of more sustainable networks, beyond only protesting actions carried out at the international scale (Siméant, 2010; Cauet, 2010).

In fact, the transnational organizational form adopted by community organizations appears relatively complex as lying at the intersection of transnational social movements (local roots), transnational advocacy networks (defense of an issue) and non-governmental organizations (formal structure). It seems indeed relevant to consider an alternative concept inspired by the idea of “transnational grassroot movements” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998), to link these different approaches: the concept of “transnational self-help networks” 6. The particularity of these networks relies on their self-management and membership, as they are exclusively composed of grassroot organizations, both providers and recipients of a collective service and therefore directly affected by the issue they are defending. This concept echoes the idea of “cosmopolitanicalism” (McMicheal, 2004), referring to the active role played by local communities in the regaining of global issues that affect them directly. This can happen through their participation into transnational networks, and the rising awareness of shared interests and values with other local actors previously isolated from each other (Cauet, 2010). This new category of analysis takes into account the specificities of community forestry organizations’ transnational action, and the corresponding issues of scale dynamics.

In addition, it is also necessary to redefine the concept of norm to suit our object of study. The constructivist approach of international relations developed a theoretical model of norm “life cycle” around three phases: emergence, diffusion and internalization (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). However, it does not recognize an active role in this process to civil society, and even less to local organizations. Other authors then proposed to construct a new category of “transnational norm-building network” (Mückenberger, 2008; Hein and KohlMorgen, 2009), in order to give these actors a key role in each phase of norm life cycle. This concept implies an alternative perspective that recognizes the existence of subsidiary and informal norms. These norms have an important role to play in a context of global forest governance characterized by the absence of central authority. It also recognizes the existence of transnational norms, reflecting their circulations between the local and global scales, and their limited scope to a certain type of actor or a geographical area. Finally, it acknowledges the influence of these norms, beyond the states, on the behavior of actors directly affected by the promoted norms.

This conceptual approach allows to consider transnational self-help networks of community forestry as full-fledged actors in the global forest governance system. These actors have the capacity to transform norms of forest governance, particularly those directly affecting the model of community forestry. It is now necessary to develop a theoretical framework to understand the specific mechanisms of norms reconstruction, using a sociological and discursive approach.

4. Toward a political sociology of the transnational: discourse networks and scale dynamics

This framework is part of the recent approach of “transnational political sociology” (Siméant, 2012), aiming to explore new social configurations within spaces of circulation and interaction between global and local scales. In addition, it falls within the “argumentative turn” that appeared in the 1990s in the field of political science. This approach aims to highlight the role of ideas and discourses in political processes, beyond traditional analyses that focus only on interests and institutions (Fischer and Forester, 1993; Arts and Buizer, 2009). The purpose of this part is then to develop an analytical framework for understanding how some key actors into transnational self-help networks are using discourse coalitions and scale mobilizations, in order to transform unsuited norms and drive institutional change in community forestry governance. The framework will be completed by some concrete examples from Mesoamerican networks, as to make easier the comprehension.

The abundance of concepts and theories mobilized for the construction of this theoretical framework is justified by the transversal nature of the actor studied, considering both disciplines (commons field, international relations, sociology of social movements…) and scales (local, national and transnational). To facilitate the understanding of the concepts and theories presented, and their articulation, a graphic has been drawn (see Fig. 1).

4.1. Scale dynamics at the center of norm translation processes

The transnational form of action adopted by community forestry organizations raises new questions about the implications of changes in scales for collective action. The concept of “political rescaling”, found in the field of geography, emphasizes the importance of socio-political dynamics at work in the rescaling processes of collective action (Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997; Dufour and Goyer, 2009). In that perspective, scale is meant as an interactional process under power relations between actors. This confirms the need to deconstruct the network in order to show the internal processes of fragmentation, division and differentiation between member organizations (Swyngedouw, 2004). This perspective helps to highlight what the strategic mobilizations of scales carried out by key actors in the reconstruction of norms are. Following the same approach, the sociology of translation considers that society is primarily determined by the relationships existing between actors who shape it (Akrich et al., 2006). Beyond a purely structuralist vision of society, it recognizes the power of individuals and the weight of their interrelations in social processes. In opposition with a vision of the network as a neutral and universal social structure, it suggests to consider it as a social construct subjected to actors’ manipulations and representations (Kahler, 2009; Dumoulin and Pepin-Lehalleur, 2012).

If scale is meant as an interactional process, it is therefore necessary to identify the actors who are connecting the scales of action, and how they are themselves connected by some discourses, ideas or norm conceptions. The same field of study developed an interesting theoretical model to explain how norms and ideas are translated from one scale of action to another. Accordingly, an important distinction is made between the role of “intermediary” and the one of “mediator” in the translation process (Latour, 2005). Mediators are those actors who, benefiting from their capacity to circulate between scales of action, contribute to transform norms and ideas according to their own representations. This notion of mediator is particularly interesting to highlight the existing power asymmetries between actors within the networks, not all of them accessing this central function. As an example, the highest representatives of the AMPB, also members of the executive commission, benefit from a strategic position between local members and international actors, in order to transform both local and global norms according to their personal conceptions.

It is important to mention that these transformations mainly occur through discourse construction, so mediators can be seen as true “agents of discursive change” (Arts et al., 2010). In fact, according to the culturalist approach, discourses are the result of a process of interpretation and bargaining between actors (Keller, 2013). Some authors speak about “discourse communities” (Wuthnow, 1989), or “conceptual networks” (Mische, 2011), to represent the changing patterns of meaning depending on the evolution of actors’ coalitions. This approach helps to detect power relations of exclusion and inclusion in the constitution.
of discourse coalitions. Therefore, actors seek to actively construct discourse coalitions in order to impose the norms they contributed to translate.

Finally, this process of translation implies different transformations in the scalar dimension of norms (Latour, 2005). One first transformation can be a “localization” of global norms that result inconsistent with local realities. As an example, the global norm of “payment for ecosystem services”, traducing a technician vision of forest governance, is the object of various attempts of localization. On the contrary, local norms can be the object of “globalization” processes, for example to strengthen capacities or get more weight in higher decision-making arenas. In the case of community forestry, the local norm of “autonomy”, traducing a diversity of isolated local organizations, is the object of a centralization process through the creation of inter-scale networks. As a consequence, one of the key challenges for transnational community forestry networks would be to find a balance between the defense of autonomy at the local scale and the need to be recognized as a full-fledged actor in national and international decision-making processes. The structure of their networks constitutes yet a solution in itself, as it maintains a certain holistic identity and horizontal dynamics.

It is therefore possible through this approach to break the dichotomy between actor and system, and between micro and macro. Instead of a truly global or local scale, it is more useful to talk about a continuum of interactions between the two, representing a dynamic structure. This perspective confirms the important role transnational self-help networks could play in the transformation of norms, using their strategic position between local and global scales. At this point of the theoretical development, a central question arises: who are the mediators within these networks, and what they concretely do to translate norms of governance? The next sub-part provides some concrete elements of understanding, and demonstrates in particular that the capacity of mediators to constitute dominant discourse coalitions is determinant in the process of norm translation.

4.2. The important role of mediators and discourse coalitions

The sociology of transnational social movements provides an interesting model that can help to identify on the one hand the possible mediators within these networks, and on the other hand, through what mechanisms they contribute to shape discourse coalitions around certain norms of resource governance. This field is actually the one that brought the most attention to the forms of networked organization from civil society, including grassroot organizations (Khagram et al., 2002). It developed a theoretical model defining three factors to explain the transnational social movements’ political impacts. It is then possible to apply this model to our object of study, namely the redefinition of norms of governance through the action of mediators within transnational self-help networks. These three factors are the mobilizing structures (number, strength and articulation among members; degree of centralization; human, political and financial resources), the structures of opportunity (political, institutional and cultural context, both national and international) and the movement strategies and frames (continued mobilization in time; influence on targeted actors and issues) (Chatfield et al., 1997). In addition to the identification of mediators, these factors contribute to understand the scalar dimension of the norms that will be translated, especially in terms of globalization or localization of resource governance.

The first factor, namely mobilizing structures, permits to identify which actors have a central function within the network (degree of centrality). In the case of the AMPB, the national or sub-national federations, representing the local community forestry organizations of their country, will have a determinant role of mediator, in order to translate local claims into official discourses. In addition, the degree of homogeneity of members within the network will be crucial in the construction of a unified discourse. In fact, a high degree of heterogeneity could lead to multiplication of potentially conflicting discourse coalitions, and then the impossibility to impose one vision of the norms. Using the case of the AMPB discussed above, despite the fact that the network is composed entirely of community forestry organizations, the diversity of members in terms of peasant or indigenous identity, and differences in power, presuppose the existence of a multiplicity of discourse coalitions seeking an affirmation of local specificities. This is for example the case between actors who strongly reject REDD+ programs for their communities (as the National Coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples of Panama, COONAPIP), and others that are seeking to create their own structure to manage these new funds (as ACOFOP, through the “Guatecarbon” Programme).

The second factor, namely structures of opportunity, is particularly crucial in the context of the fragmented global forest governance. Indeed, the actors who will have access to international decision-making arenas, and therefore flow in key areas of discourse production, would benefit from an important position in the process of translating

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7 Several position papers produced by AMPB’s members, during their participation in global forums such as Rio + 20 in 2012 or the Community Forestry Pre-Congress in Honduras in 2013, emphasize notions of “territorial governance”, “local organizational diversity”, “resource access” and “decision-making autonomy”.

8 In the case of the AMPB, ten national or sub-national federations are assuming this intermediary role, such as the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), the Honduran Federation of Agro-forestry Producers (FEPROAH), or the Mexican Network of Peasant Forestry Organizations (Red MOCAF).
norms. These actors are primarily the highest representatives of the network. As mentioned earlier, global forest governance is increasingly centralized around international actors and discourses, mainly states and international organizations. Therefore, it can be assumed that community forestry workers’ discourses will be oriented to the contestation of the growing centralization of decision-making processes. These discourses are the expression of two different orientations: a demand for local autonomy and an institutionalization of this type of transnational self-help networks to play an entire role within international arenas.

Finally, the third factor, namely movement strategies and frames, permits to measure the degree of cooperation and the type of relationship established with other actors outside the network, such as international NGOs or UN agencies. Depending on the strategies employed, these external actors may acquire a role of mediator in the process of discourse coalitions building and norm translation. This implies a necessary loss of autonomy for the network’s members in these processes. Indeed, the establishment of partnerships with actors who often have an international influence may influence network members to strengthen a transnational action and assert an international identity, contributing to centralize their action. Conversely, the adoption of protecting strategies against external actors may contribute to localize norms of governance, for example through the claim of an indigenous identity. In the case of the AMPB, the network already engaged in many partnerships with important external actors, such as the Ford Foundation or the Climate Works Foundation. Regarding the strategies, the AMPB adopts a relatively strong contesting stance against international programs such as UN-REDD and against Mesoamerican states. In each of the three factors presented above, scale appears to be a cornerstone in the mediators’ strategies of discourse coalition building and norm translation. This presentation demonstrates that mediators can use different elements to build these discourses: their intermediate position between local and transnational scales within the network structure, their ability to circulate into international arenas, their mimicy of international actors or their claim of a local identity.

5. Conclusion

The analytical framework developed throughout this paper confirms the initial problematic, and emphasizes that community forestry organizations and their transnational self-help networks are not just seeking to contest global norms or produce alternative discourses. Indeed, through these discourses, they are especially seeking to institutionalize renewed norms of governance in order to adapt the model of community forestry governance in a context of globalization. The establishment of these networks reflects both the willingness of community organizations to institutionalize themselves through the recognition of global issues, while claiming their ability to respond to these global issues through their own designed norms. They contribute to break with the international oriented paradigm of centralization and technicization, bringing a more holistic vision of forest governance. Thus, by their transnational action, community forestry organizations highlight another way to be “international”.

However, such networks are also facing several limitations, particularly in terms of technical and financial independences regarding external actors, strongly questioning one of the key principles of the community-based model, autonomy. In addition, the question of their purpose in the long-term and their possible institutionalization arises, which would require an adaptation of some key community-based principles such as reciprocity and horizontality. The complexity of scales and discourse dynamics in the transformation of norms of forest governance justifies further study of the transnational action of community forestry organizations in a context of increasing globalization. Moreover, further research is needed, especially with empirical data, to analyze how discourses are concretely or not a key driver of institutional change for these actors.

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