

Learning for a collaborative management of the commons: an example of transformative investigation from Latin America

Presentation

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Since the decree of the Protected Natural Area Archipiélago de Bosque y Selvas de Xalapa in 2015 as a green belt of this middle-size city in southwestern Mexico, a citizen network was formed with the intention of being custodians of the local cloud forest, the rivers and the linked peasant life forms. It is an experience of plural and horizontal participation among farmers, academics, CSOs, artists, professionals and some local government actors.

In this multiactoral process, many difficulties and obstacles arise for collective action that are framed within the general sociopolitical panorama of Mexico, the specific context of the protected natural area and the sociopolitical conflicts in the region. Within the challenges involved in collaborating between different actors highlight the tensions between different sectors, their visions and interests, the fragmentation between communities, the gap between the rural areas and the city, and the lack of space for political participation, considering that all of these are marked by socially constructed power relations.

At the same time, the participatory practices and learning that is sought in this network through participatory action research has been an important element to critically analyze this panorama, understand the dynamics that prevent collective action and co-construct proposals for the defense of the commons in a complex scenario without prefabricated answers. Especially, the construction of visions, the connection and exchange between different local experiences, and the connection with games and arts have been key elements for inclusive social organization, a result of participatory methodologies inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the approaches of decolonial epistemologies from the global south. In this presentation, reflections will be shared about the challenges and opportunities for this approach of transformative investigation, emphasizing the epistemological, methodological and political implications.

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