SES and the main nature/society relationships concepts

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Abstract

The concept of social-ecological systems has nearly attained paradigmatic status: it offers a vision of nature-society relations based on adaptation cycles that operate at different scales, for different times, and in different spaces. Yet, this notion competes with other formulations of nature-society relations. Different disciplines and scientific currents have proposed alternative conceptualizations that seek to overcome the great divide between human beings and nature: e.g., some sciences such as geography privilege the concepts such as landscape or milieu in the study of human-environmental relationships; different problem oriented sciences such as Sustainability Science or Engineering have based their work on concepts like territory, which links, often in systemic terms, society and nature; and others sciences, mainly within social sciences, refuse any universal approach of nature-society relationships. In this tradition, other researchers, coming from critical studies, think that such large notions are not relevant for including nature-society relationships since they are deeply structured by political struggles. Political ecology, for instance, criticize the relevance and the effectiveness of such a concept since it hides the political dimensions of such relationships. This workshop aims to identify and characterize some of the main concepts built to study nature-society relations. Focusing on the ontological characteristics of those main concepts presented by invited speakers, a comparative approach of each of them – including SES – could help to better identify their originality and utility. Where do these different notions come from? How do they fit with scales issues? Do they overcome scales into a general model or do they develop multi-scale approaches by differentiating local, regional or global issues? What do they allow? What do they hide?

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