The value of time in conservation: the importance of time-sharing activities on local empowerment

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Abstract

The presentation proposed here uses an innovative approach to deal with social preferences towards conservation, through a time use perspective. In this sense, we have studied the connections between ecological processes and social needs analyzing social support for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem service delivery based on the willingness to give up time approach. Within this non-monetary technique, we prevent our study from the limitations from monetary perspectives and equity problems, related with the inability to contribute to the conventional willingness to pay technique.

The study is located in rural areas in the semi-arid mountains in southern Spain, which suffer isolation, rural abandonment and low profitability of the agrarian systems, and where there is a need to empower the local communities for the maintaining of multifunctional ecosystems. In order to proceed, we conducted more than four hundred questionnaires with local respondents, in which we took into consideration different types of biodiversity conservation activities (to promote environmental awareness, to collaborate with conservation plans associated with protected area programs, to collaborate in activities of invasive alien species management, and to collaborate in threatened species conservation strategies) and different activities related with the maintain of ecosystem service categories (such as, to recover autochthonous seeds related with maintaining the genetic materials, to recover handicrafts with the aim of preserving cultural heritage services, or to recover in restoring terraces which are related with the mass stabilization and control of erosion services). In addition, we explored the effect of the respondent’s place of residence (rural or urban municipality) and gender.

We found, the satisfaction of conserving species continues to be the prominent driving force in engaging public support for conservation programs over ecosystem services. However, we found significant differences by place of residence and gender, with implications for the promotion of social engagement. Urban respondents were particularly interested in allocating
time to activities associated with protected-area programs, and were particularly distant to the ecosystem service supplied by rural areas. This disconnection highlights the necessity of reconnecting urbanities with rural areas and its environmental potential to contribute to human wellbeing. Regarding gender differences, women, in spite of having less available time, contributed significantly with more time to support activities to enhance the management of rural areas.

Overall, the results show that the willingness to give up time reflects properly socio-cultural factors behind consumer preferences. In addition, its application could promote collaborative work and strengthen community values and beliefs. Time-sharing initiatives and environmental participatory activities could reconnect nature and society, giving people enough time to understand human well-being dependence on nature, respecting the nature rhythms with an effect on social transformation, and as Vandana Shiva stated, creating an open space to strength human capacity for conservation.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity, Conservation, Ecosystem Service, Participation, Stakeholder Engagement