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Fulfilling promises of more substantive democracy? Natural resource governance under the 'pink tide' in South America

ABSTRACT

This article uses natural resource governance as an analytical lens to examine to what extent progressive governments have been successful in reaching their objective of improving the functioning of democracy. Building on a substantive understanding of democracy and the notion of citizenship rights, the paper focuses on two crucial elements; first the role of the state in terms of reflecting the concerns of society as a whole, taking a variety of positions into account and mediating in situations of conflicts; and second, the rights of civil society with regards to popular consent, popular participation and possibilities to have a say in decisions directly affecting citizens. These two elements are examined in three case studies; sub-soil resources in the Andean-Amazonian countries; intensive agriculture in the Southern Cone; and regional cooperation on resource governance. I argue that while there has been some progress towards making states more inclusive by using revenues from the resource sector for social programmes, significant limitations remain in terms of taking a variety of concerns into account and building structures for popular participation and public debate. This brings up the fundamental question of why progressive governments, despite their commitment to social concerns and deepening democracy, continue to ignore socio-environmental concerns arising from intensive resource exploitation and do not improve channels for public debate or participation in decision-making. In response to this the final part of the paper outlines some considerations on globalisation and the role of external actors in limiting the development of more substantive forms of democracy.

Bio

I completed my PhD on regional environmental cooperation in the Southern Cone at the University of Glasgow in June 2014. Building on three case studies of regional environmental cooperation and extensive fieldwork in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, my PhD thesis examines how environmental cooperation takes place in the Southern Cone region. This includes an analysis of the actors driving regional environmental cooperation and the opportunities provided by the return to democracy, as well as the continuing obstacles and constraints, notably the focus of governments on neo-extractivism as a development strategy. I am currently teaching on several Politics undergraduate courses at Glasgow University and developing and teaching a course on environmental politics at Edinburgh Napier University (January-May 2015).