Ecosystem Services and Social Justice

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Introduction and 'State-of-the-art'

Understanding how changes in ecosystem services (ES) and natural capital (NC) impact on issues related to competitiveness and social justice is one of the four key challenges for OpenNESS. The links between social equality, solidarity and competitiveness have been central to Europe's policies on social cohesion, globalisation and sustainable development for the past decade, particularly in the context of labour market reform, innovation and corporate social responsibility (see for example EC, 2006; Council of Europe, 2014; LEADER, 1999 – see also synthesis paper on Competitiveness, Haines-Young et al., 2016). Social justice issues are a significant concern for the EU at the present time: a recent assessment of social justice in Europe warns that growing inequities represent "a highly explosive situation with regard to societal cohesion and social stability within the European Union" (Schraad-Tischler and Kroll, 2013; p6).

Modern concepts of social justice stem largely from the writings of Catholic philosophers Luigi Taparelli and Antonio Rosmini-Serbati in the mid-19th Century, whose theories recognised society as comprising a diverse set of social groups, with varying outlooks and requirements, and with rights and duties that required mutual support, co-operation and acceptance in order to be fulfilled (Zajda et al., 2007). These tenets further set out that competition between social groups or social classes was undesirable and undermined equality. This framing of social justice has been central to numerous international agreements and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions, and has had an important influence on international law. Notable examples include the constitution of the International Labour Organisation (1919), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Rio Declaration (1992), the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and Rio+20 outcomes (2012).

Within the broader literature on social justice we should recognise the field of environmental justice emerging in the 1970-80s, which can also be considered both as a distinct scientific field and as an activist movement (Málovics, 2012). In the global North, environmental justice concerns were raised first as an extension of wider social justice concepts in relation to the unfair distribution of environmental hazards. These were often framed within the discourse of 'environmental racism' – i.e. injustices mostly affected minority groups marginalized within a wealthy society (Boone et al., 2009). In the context of the least developed countries, however, it is clear that environmental injustices not only affect minority groups but also whole societies, which has brought forth the term 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martínez-Alier, 2003). In general, the literature on environmental justice adds two important aspects to social justice considerations: beyond targeting intra-generational justice, inter-generational and inter-species justice issues are also put onto the agenda (Lele, 2013). The first aspect refers to the idea of sustainability by claiming that equity should be expanded to larger time scales to allow future generations to access and enjoy nature and its benefits equally as we do. The second aspect reflects the principles of the deep ecology movement by asserting that non-human living beings have an equal right to live and flourish. In the last few years, ecosystem services started to be investigated from an environmental justice point of view, with clear emphasis on the distributional impacts of trade-offs between ecosystem services (Luck et al., 2012). There are possibilities to tackle both intra- and inter-generational equity issues by policy instruments related to ES management, especially by payments schemes and markets for ecosystem services (PES/MES) (Luck et al., 2012). However, Lele argues in a critical review that the ES framework addresses environmental justice issues only to a limited extent, both from normative and analytic points of view (Lele, 2013). For example, issues of intra-generational justice tend to be overlooked in favour of arguments for inter-

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generational and inter-species equity ES frameworks also, overlook social problems deriving from the extraction and use of abiotic versus biotic resources (Lele, 2013), misconceptualise ES as objective things instead of acknowledging that most ES are co-produced by humans and nature, and restrict the range of solutions to injustices to those subjectively considered the best (most acceptable) trade-off between conflicting services (Ernstson, 2013). These critical voices seek a broader and socially more inclusive perspective of justice within the ecosystem services framework.

Despite the international political drive to deal with issues of social justice, as with human well-being, of which justice is often considered a key factor, a consistent, policy-relevant definition has proved elusive. In essence, the concept of social justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of the benefits and costs arising from societal processes amongst all groups in society; this includes *inter alia* issues of equality between genders, and for ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups. However, even within this framing approaches to justice may be rather subjective, often dependent on specific social or cultural contexts. For example, Sandel (2009) identifies two general approaches to questions of justice - one based on concepts of freedom (freedom to, freedom from) and one based on notions of virtue (based on particular moral or religious ideals). The approach based on freedom is further separated into two realms which may be closely aligned with particular political ideologies: a free-market perspective which holds that "justice consists in respecting and upholding the voluntary choices made by consenting adults", and which therefore tends to reject calls for regulation for social issues (Sandel 2009, p.20), and a more egalitarian perspective which demands policies to address social and economic disadvantages in order to create a level playing field for all citizens.

Sikor (2013) suggests that such distinctions are important for those concerned with the distributive impacts of policies dealing with ecosystem services: "people tend to assess the justice of the management of a particular ecosystem on the basis of different notions of justice" (Sikor, 2013, p. 12). The concept of social justice has even been rejected outright in some quarters, perhaps most forcefully from neoliberal and libertarian free-market perspectives. According to some, such as Hayek (1976) and Feser (1997), it is fundamentally a fact of free-market economics that "justice" and "injustice" are nonsensical notions, and that any attempt to regulate human endeavours to overcome any perceived "unfairness" is a threat to all human freedoms. Whilst this perspective might seem rather extreme, it is nevertheless often held that efforts to regulate markets or wider society in order to ensure fairer distribution of benefits and costs – including those related to environmental externalities – are anti-competitive, bad for business and therefore ultimately bad for society. This perspective has been widely challenged, and some commentators, such as Feygina (2013) posit that this reflects a conservative interest in maintaining the status-quo and hints at a fundamental connection between environmental and social justice issues, resulting in environmentally detrimental attitudes and practices. "Ecological exploitation appears to stem from the same root socioeconomic processes as social injustice – the hierarchical arrangement of power which places some groups and the environment in a position devoid of power and rights." (Feygina, 2013, p.363)

Feygina goes on to suggest that outputs of political and cultural analyses point to "a psychological stance of domination, superiority and separation" (Feygina, 2013, p.368) as a root cause of both environmental degradation and social injustice (see also Feygina et al., 2010). Regardless of whether one fully agrees with this view, it can be recognised as a key concern with respect to the various conflicts that may arise between stakeholders or concerned groups regarding strategies and policies relating to biodiversity conservation and environmental management: the perception that decisions affecting living natural resources favour the accrual of benefits to one group of society over another is central to arguments about distributive impacts.

From another perspective, attempts on the political left to link social justice with environmental movements have also been criticised. For example, according to Dobson (1998), claims that sustainable development and social justice agendas are wholly compatible are not supported by empirical evidence; Dobson refers to the crises of legitimization which face policy makers concerned with the distributive impacts of environmental strategies or the environmental impacts of social development programmes, which would not occur, he claims, if the two agendas were entirely consonant. Recent high profile reports of social dislocation caused by environmental projects financed by the World Bank have highlighted some of the potential conflicts that can arise when economic development, however much it aims for

environmental sustainability, fails to account for the social and cultural contexts of affected communities (though in these recent cases the root causes may relate to failures of governance of and within projects of concern) (Chavkin et al., 2015). The success of efforts to avoid such conflicts rests largely on ensuring that research, policy and practice linked to biodiversity, ecosystems and their services are based on participatory approaches with stakeholders that are as inclusive as possible, considering minority perspectives and accounting for power differentials (Bagnoli et al., 2008; see also SP on Indicators, Czúcz and Arany, 2016).

The degree to which any group or individual will recognise, value, and experience any benefits from ecosystem services is largely determined by specific socio-economic and / or cultural factors. The same holds true for any impacts associated with biodiversity conservation or loss, or ecosystem change. These factors also influence the degree to which certain groups will accept ecosystem management decisions and related trade-offs (Chan et al., 2012). Defining a state of equity, recognising shifts in equity resulting from decisions on ecosystem services, and understanding how or when decisions might lead to injustice, is challenging. In considering how global values of ecosystem services change over time (e.g. influenced by global environmental agreements) and how this might disproportionately benefit or disenfranchise some groups more than others, McDermott et al. (2013) propose a framework for analysing social justice and equity. This identifies three dimensions of equity: distributive equity, relating to the distribution of benefits and costs; procedural equity, referring to decision-making; and contextual equity, relating to the conditions that limit or facilitate people's access to decision-making procedures, resources and, thereby, benefits. Though developed in the context of payments for ecosystem services, it nevertheless provides a useful tool for identifying and planning for equity impacts, and may be extrapolated to ecosystem services in general.

To quote from the Council of Europe's Recommendation on shared social responsibilities: "The views of the weaker stakeholders must be able to be heard, heeded and able to influence decisions and results. This means avoiding situations where the stronger stakeholders, in possession of more information and organisational power relinquish their specific responsibilities, impose priorities based on their interests alone and fail to acknowledge and compensate for the harm to which they may give rise" (Council of Europe, 2014). This quest for truly inclusive processes of public participation in environmental decisions reflects the procedural aspect of social justice, which aims to understand and change existing social and institutional mechanisms that create injustices (Boone et al., 2009, Sikor, 2013). One should note however that decisions are never made in a power vacuum, thus not even fundamental public engagement will result in the total absence of inequities; it can only make decisions more legitimate by being transparent and negotiable about equity consequences.

Integrating social justice into concepts of ES and NC requires that due consideration is given to these various factors. This can include moving beyond 'ready-made' communities of interest (Fish, 2011), giving weight to non-science-based forms of knowledge, and inviting perspectives and involvement from vulnerable stakeholders in developing strategies and sharing of outputs. Such approaches may also lead to opportunities to address aspects of injustice through sustainable ecosystem management. O'Brien and Morris (2014) have examined how different groups in society may gain different benefits from local woodland ecosystems, and have highlighted that targeted interventions can facilitate a more even social distribution of well-being benefits from greenspace. Mitchell et al. (2015) similarly found that access to green space had "equigenic" effects: promoting equity and breaking the link between socio-economic inequality and health inequality. These cases suggest an important opportunity to not only avoid inequities in governance and management of ecosystem services, but to promote justice through their operationalisation.

Issues to be discussed

1. Transdisciplinary approaches to research and decision making that engage with stakeholders are useful for appraising the needs and perspectives of different groups, and furthermore can be important in identifying past, present and potential future conflicts arising from distributive impacts of policies, plans or programmes. How can ES and NC concepts best assist in this process? To what extent can ES / NC concepts assist with conflict resolution?

2. Is there any evidence from the case studies that distributive impacts of biodiversity policies have a measurable impact on quality of life? How are such changes identified or addressed?
3. Should social justice metrics be incorporated into the planning and implementation of sustainable ecosystem management? From experience with the case studies, particularly those which engage closely with stakeholders, what indicators can OpenNESS suggest?
4. How can ES and NC be best utilised to practically address social justice issues, and in what contexts? For example, can operationalisation of ES and NC help to address social determinants of health inequalities in urban areas? Can it assist in reducing intergenerational risks associated with climate or demographic changes?
5. How should operationalisation of ES / NC avoid distributive impacts which have often been a challenge for biodiversity policies in Europe? Is there any evidence from the case studies that existing policies or governance structures foster or perpetuate injustice?
6. Are conflicts over ES linked to social justice issues, and if yes, how is it possible to conceptualize them? Is there empirical evidence that conflicts over ES represent distributional or procedural injustices? In a forthcoming paper ES-related conflicts in OpenNESS case studies are analysed and key aspects of such conflicts are identified. The analysis highlights that ES-related conflicts are often rooted in both distributional and procedural injustices, and calls attention to the involvement of marginalized social groups (i.e. indigenous people or traditional local resource users) in the decisions on ES management (Kelemen et al., 2016).

Significance to OpenNESS and specific Work Packages[3]

WP1 **(Key challenges and conceptual frameworks)** can help to unpack the dimensions of social justice and explore how ES benefits accrue or are distributed differentially between social groups. WP1 can also identify key indicators for social justice in Europe and opportunities for development of cross-cutting metrics that consider equity as a dimension of HWB, and justice as an indicator of sustainable ecosystem management. The links between social justice, well-being and competitiveness are key aspects of several EU social, economic and environmental policies, and are highlighted in the DoW. WP1 is exploring these connections in its work on conceptual frameworks and associated guidelines (see Deliverable 1.3).

WP2 **(Regulatory frameworks and drivers of change)** Noting that social justice issues sit within the framework of growth and innovation in Europe, WP2 can consider how moves towards social competitiveness at EU level can be supported by the ES / NC concepts. WP2's work to identify the policy drivers of ecosystem change (positive or negative) may help to identify underlying causes of social justice and related conflicts, e.g. related to changes in access to ES or through impacts on the status of public goods.

WP3 **(Biophysical control of ecosystem services):** Maps and other modelling tools that can help to distinguish between the source, demand, supply and end use of ES, and particularly those which can help to visualise the use of various ES across various groups within a population, will have most relevance from a social justice perspective. Inclusiveness should be a major design feature when building toolkits or indicators for policy use.

WP4 **(Valuation of the demand for ecosystem services):** From a perspective of human well-being, distributive impacts of biodiversity policies amongst particular groups can create social injustices where the needs or perspectives of minority or marginalised stakeholders are not effectively considered. WP4 can help to identify how these trade-offs and conflicting interests amongst social groups may be identified and accounted for by valuation methodologies. Can ES valuation methods assist in development of future social justice indices in Europe?

[3] For a brief description of the OpenNESS Work Packages see: http://openness-project.eu/about/work-packages

WP5 (Place-based exploration of ES and NC concepts): Case studies should be aware that the degree to which any group within a population benefits from ES is determined largely by socio-economic and cultural factors. Justice issues may arise if the access to or benefits from ES are preferentially available (or denied) to some groups more than others. It is important to note also that strategies and decisions in policy development and implementation, as well as research approaches, can also have a justice component if stakeholder engagement is not sufficiently meaningful or inclusive, or if some groups are omitted.

WP6 (Integration: Synthesis and Menu of Multiscale Solutions): Policy recommendations should account for distributive impacts of BD / ES / NC / SEM policies and their implementation, and aim to avoid or at least sufficiently mitigate against injustices. Dataset development and communication / access should also ensure that data requirements of specific groups, especially those already marginalised or otherwise underserved in social, economic or environmental policies, are identified and, where possible, addressed.

Relationship to four challenges[4]

Human well-being: Social justice relates to the ability of all groups to integrate into society, enjoy freedom of choice and action, gain fair and equitable access to goods, services, right and protections, and the degree to which various groups are impacted by environmental change and management decisions. Social justice can therefore be considered as an essential component for long term sustainable social well-being. Equity can be a common denominator: equity is both a component / dimension of well-being, and a criterion for social justice	**Sustainable Ecosystem Management (SEM):** Where the management of ecosystems can affect the distribution of, or access to, ES for particular groups social justice issues may arise. This should be factored into management processes, including monitoring of effectiveness and impacts.
Governance: Social justice is often framed as an issue of governance, with responsibility for ensuring equity and access resting with policy makers. Considering the potential for distributive impacts from biodiversity policies, it is important to factor these issues into relevant policy development and implementation processes. Procedural aspects of social justice also relate directly to governance structures and processes.	**Competiveness:** The concept of social competitiveness is largely rooted in social justice – a society is socially competitive when the benefits and privileges of residing in an area are equitably distributed and accessible to all. Economic competitiveness can also have a social justice component, in terms of how economic policy impacts on livelihood security and poverty.

Recommendations for the OpenNESS consortium

The OpenNESS consortium should be mindful of the various perspectives of social justice within the social and political landscape that can affect both the policy approaches to justice issues and the degree to which efforts to regulate for those issues are legitimized. It is equally important to recognise that the way in which the ecosystem service concept itself is framed has justice implications, and to consider options for enhancing participation in related policy processes and applications.

Three 'Must Read' Papers

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[4] There are certainly more societal challenges; the reduced number presented here is due to the four major challenges mentioned in the work programme of FP7 to which OpenNESS responded.

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