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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Power-Relations through Institutional Bricolage in the Rural Farmers’ Decision to Transit towards Agroecology in Peru

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Abstract

Empirical evidence increasingly suggests that while the uptake of agroecology brings significant benefits to ecosystems, health, and communities, yet achieving a transition towards agroecology can still be complicated. In this article we contribute to this literature by offering a power-sensitive analysis of the transition towards agroecology. We build on insights from critical institutionalism and introduce a complementary analytical view for examining the institutional arena in which actors’ interactions influence individual decisions to adopt agroecological practices. We label this bundle of interactions as ‘chaotic relational patterns’. Our empirical data is drawn from a study of a program in rural villages in Peru, designed to encourage farmers’ to take up agroecology. Our case study demonstrates that the local dynamics influenced agricultural transition and that their evolution exposed more complex mechanisms of power-play in farmers’ interactions. We identify two power-play mechanisms that influenced farmers’ decisions to adopt agroecological practices: copying and learning - which entails learning from peer farmers with more resources before adopting an agroecological production model, and the manageability of the risks - which was adopted as a strategy for managing the multiple risks of adopting agroecology, and aligning their economic and social interests with those of the agroecology programs.

Keywords: Agriculture transition, agroecology, critical institutionalism, power relations