



Tropentag, September 18-20, 2019, Kassel

“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

From Forest to Residential Housing? A Potential Victory over the “Private Profits, Public Impacts” Way of Proceeding

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Abstract

Mexico City Metropolitan Area (MCMA), one of the biggest worldwide, consumes significant environmental services, mainly provided by remaining forested areas at surrounding mountains, whose low lands have been taken by urban sprawling. In 2017 the local government allowed deforestation of 238 ha of well-preserved oak forest to favour the construction of “Diamond Forest”, an urbanisation of 19985 new residences that will increase population density. The urban polygon is set on common land, partially overlapping with a natural protected area and local people have felt their traditional ways of life will be threatened, arguing forest destruction will negatively impact local nature and “its goods” (ecosystem services: 143 species, crop land, nutrient cycling, air quality, clean water provision), reducing life quality, and that local government will be obliged to provide services public-paid to the newcomers, with less natural resources. On top of it, governance is not clear and relevant stakeholders have been neglected: neither the environmental impact assessment, nor the public consultation have been taken in consideration for the approval of the project, and high public governmental figures along with a private real estate developer close to the former government appear to be involved in a non-transparent procedure. Interestingly, many different sectors of local society are overcoming the situation, from local urban neighbours next to the location, to assemblies of common-lands rural owners, have strongly requested scientific-based evidence and support from our academia to organise informed-public demonstrations and serious press investigations to raise awareness of the problem, bring a legal dispute, and to promote an actual sustainable practice for nature management. This is, therefore, a non-usual way to overcome a common situation of natural resources loss, self-organised and empowered by the civil society itself, who has built political capabilities based on legal rights and, very important, scientific-quality information about the potential environmental harms and ecosystem services loss, in order to defend their lands for the common good and sustainability. As a result of such actions, on January this year, a district judge ordered a temporary suspension of any building activities, which represents a precedent-setting victory, although partial, in an ongoing environmental conflict.

Keywords: Forest loss, natural resources governance, pro-environment actions, urbanisation