See the forest and the trees: An integrated approach to community-based landscape management

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To achieve sustainable landscape management, it is imperative to motivate all stakeholders to collectively engage in pro-environmental behavior and transform land-use practices. Decades of research in psychology and other social sciences have variously offered insights into intervention designs. In psychology, most studies aim to understand human behaviors within the capacity of individual agents. Researchers in this discipline are predominantly concerned with what internal (e.g., values, attitudes, emotion, and cognition) and contextual (e.g., social norms) factors drive pro-environmental behaviors and seek to change behaviors by modifying one or more of these behavioral determinants. On the contrary, other social sciences such as sociology direct attention away from individual agents and instead focus on more system-wide thinking of an entire practice in which individual behaviors are embedded. They attempt to understand how, when, and why people do or do not engage in pro-environmental behavior. To change behaviors within a system, they seek leverage points at different social-structural levels. Psychological and social-structural theories are often considered as rival concepts on human behavior. As a result, they are rarely integrated when studying pro-environmental behaviors and designing behavior change interventions. However, to fully understand human behaviors in a complex social-ecological system, both approaches are needed. In this paper, I explain the interconnected relationships between the two approaches and show how they can be integrated into a more complete study of human action in community-based landscape management. Moreover, I discuss when and how psychological and social-structural insights can promote collective action and enhance the effectiveness of conservation initiatives at the landscape level. This combined approach helps practitioners and policymakers understand how values, attitudes, motivation, and structural factors bidirectionally influence one another and shape individual and collective decision-making that either reinforces status-quo or promote transitions to sustainable pathways. The present paper demonstrates the practical application of interdisciplinary research on collaborative landscape management and guides future direction of conservation programs and intervention studies.