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**PAYMENTS FOR ECOLOGICAL SERVICES – A SILVER BULLET OR FOOL’S
GOLD FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES IN BRAZIL**

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The increasing use of market-based schemes, or payments for ecological services (PES), to promote conservation and sustainable development is one of the most notable trends in water management around the world. While there are thousands of economics and environmental science articles examining PES, sociological analysis is limited. Brazil has widely adopted PES schemes, and this study used a meta-synthesis approach to investigate the social dimensions of one of the most prominent Brazilian PES initiatives – Programa Produtor de Água (PPA) – analyzing the content of 276 scientific articles, conference proceedings, reports, and theses focused on the PPA. Conceptual frames from organizational sociology guide this analysis, seeking to understand how social factors shaped the development and evaluation of PPA projects. Existing studies of PPA initiatives emphasize environmental and economic assessments and rarely mention the need for sociological data or consideration of the organization and administration of this program. Similarly, PPA project evaluations highlight

environmental and economic returns, with few assessments of the benefits PES provides to rural communities. Paradoxically, while numerous ecological and economic studies point to social factors such as uncertain land tenure, administrative failures, trust-in-authorities, and the socioeconomic status of landowners as impacting PPA projects, investigation of these factors is scarce. Relatedly, recommendations call for increased ecological and economic monitoring, rather than sociological studies. These findings point to patterns of bounded rationality, as managers have internalized the assumption that expanded ecological and economic inquiry will inevitably validate PES' effectiveness. Institutional isomorphism also constrains PPA actors' ability to consider alternative approaches that focus on hydro-social relations and consider key issues such as structural inequality and the nexus between rural and urban locales. PES has the potential to aid rural communities and forward sustainable development, but further sociological study of these programs will be critical for them to achieve these aspirations.

Palavras-chave: water management; institutions; hydro-social relations.