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**DOI**

[10.1007/978-1-137-50572-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-50572-9_1)

**Publication date**

2016

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Environmental Governance in Latin America

**License**

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**Citation for published version (APA):**

de Castro, F., Hogenboom, B., & Baud, M. (2016). Introduction: Environment and Society in Contemporary Latin America. In F. de Castro, B. Hogenboom, & M. Baud (Eds.), *Environmental Governance in Latin America* (pp. 1-25). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-50572-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-50572-9_1)

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# Introduction: Environment and Society in Contemporary Latin America

*Fábio de Castro, Barbara Hogenboom and Michiel Baud*

## Introduction

Societal change in Latin America is intimately related to nature and natural resources. In this resource-rich region, nature–society relations provide both opportunities and challenges in achieving more fair, equitable and sustainable development. Nearly half of the world’s tropical forests are found in the region, next to several other natural biomes, which together carry a wealth of biodiversity. It holds one-third of the world’s freshwater reserves and one-quarter of the potential arable land. And despite five centuries of extractive activities to serve global markets, the region still holds large volumes of important mineral reserves, including oil, gas, iron, copper and gold (Bovarnick, Alpizar and Schnell, 2010). On the other hand, this “biodiversity superpower” has seen a fast rate of biodiversity loss, increasing ecosystem degradation and one-third of the world’s carbon emissions, mostly a result of the expansion of extractive activities and land-use change (UNEP, 2012). Together, these economic and ecological developments affect a large number of different social groups in all Latin American countries, primarily in rural areas but also in cities. Next to mobilizations and conflicts that attract national and international attention, there are numerous local socioenvironmental tensions that lead to longstanding economic problems and social injustice. Although these tensions have been part of the region’s history, the accelerated pace of change, the spatial scale of impact, and the widening of social and conservation demands all point to the urgency of Latin America’s current environmental challenges (Baud, Castro and Hogenboom, 2011).

Since Latin America’s insertion into the world system, the extraction of natural resources has been central to its economic, social

and political development. This has led to continuous tensions and antagonisms about access to natural resources, the distribution and use of revenues, and the distribution, compensation and prevention of environmental and social costs (Alimonda, 2011). In Latin America, issues of poverty, inequality and environmental protection are thus closely intertwined. Despite academic studies showing the risks of being a global provider of foodstuffs, energy, metals and environmental services without appropriate institutional arrangements, not much progress has been made in successfully tackling problems of underdevelopment (Bunker, 1988), impoverishment/marginalization (Martinez-Alier, 2002), inequality (Therborn, 2011), accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003), and disempowerment and dependency in rural communities (Painter and Durham, 1995).

After a long history of elite capture and foreign exploitation of Latin American mines, agrarian lands and, later, oil and gas resources, social and political forces started to push forward reforms such as the nationalization of oil and metals, and the distribution of land in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, access to resources, revenues and power remained unequally distributed at local, national and international levels. The neoliberal regimes of the late twentieth century went against previous redistributive policies (Liverman and Vilas, 2006). This period was marked by greater attention to both environmental protection and decentralized decision-making (Larson, 2003). However, restricted funding and liberalized markets limited the potential to break with historically established patterns.

This new environmental, social and institutional context also changed environmental governance in Latin America. Both in rural and urban areas, poor citizens became more vulnerable due to environmental degradation and the increased intensity and frequency of climate disasters, including droughts, flooding, hurricanes and glacier retreat (Rios and Veiga, 2010). In many countries, especially in South America, a new phase of widespread civic discontent and mobilization of groups against exclusion, poverty, inequality and technocratic policies started in the 1990s (Harris, 2003). While many groups only called for socio-economic redistribution, indigenous movements, landless farmers and environmental organizations also demanded different policies towards land and nature (Carruthers, 2008; Urkidi and Walter, 2011; Latta and Whitmann, 2012).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Latin America has experienced radical developments that have changed the dynamics of

environmental governance. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, democratic elections resulted in a number of left-ist governments that promised inclusionary development and more participatory decision-making. Their reforms included a more prominent role of the state in the extraction of non-renewable resources and the redistribution of revenues. At least symbolically, attention to the environment also increased. The new regimes and their policies have thus attempted to combine measures geared towards the reduction of poverty and social exclusion with policies that enhance national control over natural resources and improve environmental protection. Simultaneously, the global commodity boom brought extra revenues and foreign investments, thereby intensifying resource extraction and leading to problems of environmental degradation and more intense environmental conflicts (Fernández Jilberto and Hogenboom, 2010; Hogenboom, 2012).

Institutional adaptations played an important role in these transformations, as illustrated by the debate about the global sustainable development model. The narrative of social justice and the plural development model, established in the 1990s with strong participation by civil society organizations, was gradually replaced by narratives of institutional fixes and technological innovations (Mol, 2003). This led to a new model, framed as the Green Economy, which shifted the focus from social and political questions about deepened environmental citizenship and justice to a more technological and economic approach focused on the commodification of nature.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the model of participation through citizenship has gradually been reframed by participation through compensation, as installed by the post-neoliberal state in the context of an urbanized region.

This volume seeks to analyse the features, dynamics and direction of contemporary environmental governance in Latin America. Building on various local and national cases, it presents formal and informal practices of management concerning renewable and non-renewable natural resources. It also shows how rights to nature are perceived, contested and reshaped in the context of rapid social, institutional and environmental changes on multiple scales. It combines elements of power relations, diversity, complexity and dynamics in socioenvironmental systems in order to tackle this process through a cross-scale, multiactor and dialectical perspective (Robbins, 2012). One particular strength of this political ecological approach is the explicit emphasis on the social and institutional dynamics that shape social interactions and natural

resource use patterns (Zimmerer and Bassett, 2003). Moreover, it takes into account the multiple conceptualizations of and claims over nature as part of a contested sphere, which we denominate “environmental governance”.

The three parts of this book address the changing context, social interactions and institutional adaptations in contemporary nature–society relations in Latin America. Part I introduces the socioenvironmental context through a focus on the historical legacy of Latin American environmentalist thinking, the increasing pressure on the region’s environment due to the global demand for its natural resources, and the rich ecological knowledge within local communities. These chapters set the stage to analyse the recent transformations of nature–society relations in the region. Part II addresses the politics of nature, raising issues related to the role of powerful actors – the state, elite and corporations – and their interactions in shaping discourses and practices regarding natural resource use. These processes are explored through the analysis of new policy models deployed by post-neoliberal governments, the role of new and old elites and their interactions, the narratives around the water–energy–mining nexus by contesting actors, and strategies for poverty alleviation. In Part III, new and emerging forms of environmental governance that tackle issues of participation, autonomy and environmental security are examined. The analysis of the implementation of REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation), the controversial international compensatory scheme to prevent climate change, addresses how participatory mechanisms have become invited spaces of selected legitimized groups while the bottom-up initiatives of community-based autonomous economies and local consultations to mining projects that address the struggles for effective inclusion, wellbeing and justice emerged from resistance movements.

In general, this volume aims to understand environmental governance in Latin America by looking into the ways in which historical legacies and current socioenvironmental contexts are driving new social interactions and institutional adaptations among multiple actors. The chapters cover a range of Latin American countries, mostly based on empirical data from multiple contexts, actors and production systems, and focus on transnational, national or subnational processes. Together they provide an overview of current regionwide trends, and a variety of themes and approaches to environmental governance, which feeds lively and sometimes heated debates in academia as well as in civil society and policy-making circles.

## Environmental governance as a field of inquiry

Environmental governance offers an analytical perspective that combines socioenvironmental research with development-oriented governance research (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Socioenvironmental research addresses the interplay between environmental and social change. In this context, as in this introductory chapter, the social dimension is broadly defined, also encompassing cultural, economic, political and institutional relations. Governance research addresses the way in which society organizes itself in order to solve its dilemmas and create new opportunities. Until the 1980s, social scientists working in Latin American countries focused on concepts of governability as the region faced unstable political conditions and structural challenges such as inequality, violence, corruption and limited citizenship. However, the growing emphasis on formal institutions and market-driven mechanisms of neoliberal governance quickly attracted the attention of social scientists to a perspective of governance as a social process that influences the level of governability (Kooiman, 2003). This perspective criticized the normative perspective of “good governance” introduced by the World Bank in the seminal report *Governance and Development* (1992). According to this document, the solution to overcome underdevelopment should be self-governance. The World Bank proposed a roadmap to achieve so-called good governance based on three pillars: a “small state” through deregulation; “market incentives” through privatization and liberalization; and “participation” through decentralization and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Subsequent World Bank reports further elaborated this international agenda, stressing in a rather technocratic approach, the need for effective state institutions to achieve development in a global context of liberalized markets (Demmers, Fernández Jilberto and Hogenboom, 2004). Alternatively, social science scholars use (environmental) governance to emphasize social relations and, in particular, the tension between conservation and development goals in order to understand the interplay among social, institutional and environmental change.

The environmental governance research builds on a range of theoretical schools, including new institutionalism (Ostrom, 1990; Young, 1999; Biermann and Pattberg, 2008), sociopolitical studies (Kooiman et al., 2005; Lemos and Agrawal, 2006) and sociocultural approaches (Cleaver, 2002; Alimonda and Gandásegui, 2006; Castro, 2008; Gudynas, 2011). Despite their different theoretical and methodological stands (see Castro, 2013), they all address social behaviour towards natural

resources as a complex arrangement of formal and informal interactions among state and non-state actors across different scales, driven by ecological and social factors. In this book we follow a similar approach and define environmental governance as the process of formulating and contesting images and designs, and implementing procedures and practices that shape the access, control and use of natural resources among different actors.

In recent decades, environmental governance in Latin America has undergone major transformations. We observe multiple layers of governance, mediated by formal and informal social interactions, which have gradually evolved over time. Nevertheless, a particular arrangement has typically dominated discourses and practices at the national level. As of the 1940s, state-centred governance mode increasingly dominated most of the region. Particularly during the period of military dictatorship, decision-making processes were based on bureaucratic authoritarian regimes and top-down procedures controlled by a technocratic elite and grounded in a strong nationalist discourse of state sovereignty.

In the 1990s, most Latin American countries underwent a societal change through democratization, political decentralization and neoliberal restructuring. Civil government and electoral democracy were (re-)established and the former exclusionary governance gave way to electoral forms of political representation. At the same time, the role of the state was limited by far-reaching structural adjustment policies imposed by international institutions, in particular the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Liverman and Villas, 2006). Self-governance mode, as conceptualized by the World Bank, calls for a small role of national states, and reliance mainly on market-based mechanisms such as privatization, self-designed corporate conduct guides (e.g. corporate social responsibility (CSR)) and voluntary mechanisms (certification and compensation schemes). While promising environmentally and socially sound initiatives, the market-based approach to self-governance primarily sought to improve the image of transnationally operating companies vis-à-vis their shareholders and to consequently ease their insertion into host countries (Lyon, 2009).

At the same time, self-governance mode, as conceptualized by political scientists (e.g. Ostrom, 1990), includes mostly local governance systems shaped through collective action to regulate access to and use of natural resources. This governance mode, long overlooked by policy-makers, became visible through a large number of community-based management studies (see McCay and Acheson, 1990; Berkes and Folke,

1998) and was brought to the attention of society at large by environmental justice movements that built on socioenvironmental discourses and political connections with transnational activism networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). While self-governance through collective action became important in more remote areas during this period (Schmink and Jouve-Martín, 2011), in areas of large-scale economic production a type of self-governance based on market-based mechanisms thrived, leading to a wave of natural resource privatization in the region. As these two governance systems collided, local social relations were disrupted (Bebbington, 2012), and local elites and transnational corporations were strengthened (Larson, 2003; Perreault, 2005). This led to an intensification of local conflicts that often had national and global repercussions (Walter and Martinez-Alier, 2012). Combined with other political and social demands, environmental conflicts contributed to major political transformations and may be considered to have been instrumental in the election of left-leaning parties in many Latin American countries.

As part of this struggle for resources, participatory governance mode emerged in the 2000s as an alternative to the previously proposed monolithic governance modes. This was part of the project to deepen democracy and citizenship by the new Latin American governments. Grounded in discourses of social justice, equity and poverty alleviation, participation of civil society organizations has become a central element of environmental governance in the region. Instead of state-, community- or market-based governance, participatory governance is based on partnerships among relevant actors to set goals and to design and implement initiatives. Participatory governance ranges from co-management models, in which state and local communities develop a sustainable plan for traditional territories (Castro, 2012), to more complex arrangements that include multistakeholders and multiscale institutions, such as that of climate governance. Here, governments, transnational social movements and transnational corporations are engaged in the shaping of an international institutional arrangement that combines semilegal agreements to tackle climate change and related environmental issues, such as emission targets, Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity (Biermann and Pattberg, 2008).

Participatory environmental governance therefore takes place in a contested political space where different actors struggle to strengthen their positions. More than a new governance mode, it represents a new layer in hybrid governance models composed by state-centred, market-based and local-based mechanisms. To what extent participation can actually be fostered, inequalities diminished and the environment



protected in this complex arrangement depends on the way different images of nature–society relations are negotiated, how problems are prioritized, and how compatible the proposed solutions are with the social, institutional and environmental context. In this respect, Latin America has recently experienced some interesting new trends.

### **Recent trends in Latin American environmental governance**

Environmental governance in Latin America is a contradictory process. The dominating discourse of participatory governance in several Latin American countries is accompanied by increasing socioenvironmental conflicts.<sup>2</sup> In the centre of this contradiction are the changes to the socioenvironmental context observed in the last decade. The impressive economic and social progress of the 2000s and the new approaches to poverty alleviation, redistribution and sovereignty were supported by large segments of the population. However, social programmes were usually based on increased public revenues from extractive activities, both through booming global commodity markets and through higher national taxes and royalties (Hogenboom, 2012). As many countries deepened their dependence on the extractive use of natural resources, this prompted a “reprimarization” of the economy. As soon as these tendencies became evident, the problems and contradictions of (neo)extractivism and the possibilities for post-extractivist development strategies became the subject of vivid debates in countries such as Ecuador (*Ecuador Debate*, 2011), Bolivia (Radhuber, 2014), Argentina (Giaracca and Teubal, 2013) and Peru (Alayza and Gudynas, 2011). Critics of extractivism point to the new partnerships between the national state and transnational corporations, which simultaneously reinforced state-centred and market-based principles of governance. Despite the increasing implementation of impact assessments and prior consultations, the involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making processes remains very limited (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2012). Grassroots organizations, human rights activists and environmentalists accordingly denounce the imposition of top-down arrangements. Next to the limited influence of civil society, and especially of marginalized groups, they call attention to the increasing criminalization of social mobilization against large-scale projects of mining, oil and gas extraction, hydroelectricity or infrastructure.

These processes reinforced the longstanding tension between the commodification of nature and the “safeguard of nature” (Silva, 2012).

On the one hand, governments and corporations are receiving support from the urban population to further the expansion of extractive activities in order to fulfil urgent societal needs. On the other hand, rural communities, indigenous organizations and environmentalists stress the relevance of nature for ecological sustainability, social reproduction and cultural notions of belonging rooted in local cosmologies. The implications for the safeguard of nature and local communities in the region have been complex and contested. Facilitated by national policies, large companies are attracted to resource-endowed areas to supply the increasing global demand for commodities. The expansion of extractive activities has deepened the pressure on the natural environment and its local residents. This has become particularly clear in the Amazon, where the rapid expansion of a range of large- and small-scale activities (Dijck, 2014) threatens the livelihoods of indigenous and other communities, sparking numerous conflicts and violent clashes (Alimonda, Hoetmer and Saavedra Celestino, 2009; Gavaldà i Palacin, 2013; Vásquez, 2014). However, Maristella Svampa (2011) also notes that due to a convergence between indigenous communitarian views and environmental discourses, an interesting ecoterritorial turn in socioenvironmental struggles has come about.

The frequency and intensity of socioenvironmental conflicts indicate that, in the context of democracy and post-neoliberal development models, major dilemmas between conservation and development remain. For the solution of these dilemmas, a range of proposals and actions have been brought forward that are meant to bring actors together to find new forms of more consensual environmental governance. The existing proposals can be categorized as one of two contrasting models.

On the one hand we can distinguish a tendency that we call *neodesarrollismo* (new developmentalism). This refers to mainly business-like proposals that rely on institutional engineering, technological modernization and market-based mechanisms to bring about efficient and sustainable use of natural resources. This model tends to dominate policy circles in most Latin American governments. It is closely related to the globally dominant environmental governance model known as the Green Economy. Grounded in neoinstitutionalism, the model relies on institutional fixes to fine-tune market-based incentives in order to drive collaborative behaviour and sustainable practices (UNEP, 2011). The Green Economy model assumes that shortcomings such as asymmetric relationships, injustices and unsustainable behaviour can turn into more equitable and sustainable outcomes through proper institutional

design (Biermann, 2007). By relying on institutional engineering, solutions are based on apolitical means such as innovation of technology (de Mol, 2003) and “green” consumptive behaviour (Dobson, 2003). The pragmatism of this approach finds fertile ground among elite groups because it addresses the dilemmas around equity, sustainable development and conservation from within the capitalist market-based structure. Its advocates rely on market-based incentives and compensation schemes, such as REDD and payment for ecosystem services (PES), as mechanisms to replace state regulation, minimize conflict-related costs and improve corporate image. The model also fits well into the institutional ethos of a technocratic state apparatus, which tends to rely on blueprint institutional designs. Finally, it satisfies part of the environmentalist agenda, including several international environmental NGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International and the Nature Conservancy. These transnational organizations have gradually moved towards an agenda of compensation schemes and market-based incentives in order to promote sustainable behaviour among corporations, states and local communities (Hall, 2012).

On the opposite side, we find a number of proposals that envision a radically different model of production and environmental governance, brought together under the label of *Buen Vivir* (“good living”). This tendency includes a range of alternative conceptions of nature and human–nature relations that depart from indigenous ideas about the relationship between human production and the environment and rights of nature (Gudynas, 2011). The proposals recommend a bottom-up and unorthodox environmental governance perspective, which calls for the transformation, or even the end, of the hegemonic capitalist model that is considered to be the very source of environmental degradation and injustice. Their advocates argue that *neodesarrollismo* and its connection with the Green Economy only mean a repackaging of old development models to maintain unequal power relations on multiple scales. Instead of the technocratic belief in “institutional deficiencies” that only need to be fixed, they consider these deficiencies to be the very foundation of asymmetric relationships and environmental degradation (Alimonda, 2011). They argue that institutional fixes will hardly be effective in solving socioenvironmental problems unless the unequal power relations between different social groups and the basic foundations of the market-based economy are properly addressed (Gudynas, 2009). Grounded in discourses of wellbeing, civil rights and a plural state, advocates leaning towards this narrative argue that capitalism is

limited to tackling issues of justice, equity and sustainability, and they call for alternative models of heterodox economy, such as degrowth (Russi et al., 2008) and the solidarity economy (Barkin and Lemus, 2011), or local practices such as agroforestry (Altieri and Toledo, 2011) and community-based management systems (Bray, Merino and Barry, 2005).

The *Buen Vivir* model has provoked two kinds of criticism. On the one hand, some observers consider the anti-market basis of these ideas to be unfeasible and unrealistic. In their view it is impossible in today's world not to participate in the market economy. Other observers focus on the governments that want to implement these ideas, such as those of Bolivia and Ecuador. They criticize the lack of clarity in the concept of *Buen Vivir* and highlight the contradictions that its supposed implementation engenders (Bretón Solo de Zaldívar, 2013). They argue that, in practice, these ideas serve as an excuse for continuing developmentalist and extractive models.

It is clear that both *neodesarrollismo* and *Buen Vivir* have their flaws and contradictions. In practice, we can see that most governments in Latin America today combine elements of both models. Indeed, we can speak of a mixed governance model, in which governments and other actors eclectically use different models to implement their practices or to formulate their demands. In this way multilayered and flexible institutional arrangements are continuously constructed and reconstructed through a process of hybridization and bricolage (Cleaver, 2002).

To understand projects of environmental governance in Latin America today, we need to start from the fact that they emanate from different actors who have particular historical experiences and use a variety of local, national and global discourses. These projects at the same time present a number of often contradictory goals and proposals. In the last instance they aim to find solutions or create new opportunities for this predicament of a balance between productive activities, societal equality and environmental policies. In the remainder of this introduction, we will try to shed light on the consequences of these complex proposals for environmental governance.

## **Environmental governance as a social process**

Environmental governance is thus embedded within a historical, environmental and social context that is continuously shaped by political struggles, environmental change and contested values of nature over time (Miller, 2007). Environmental attributes, such as availability and

distribution of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, influence access to production territories by different stakeholders (see Haarstad, 2012). Social attributes – such as consumption patterns, poverty and inequality levels, democracy and citizenship, cultural diversity, and economic growth – are some of the driving factors underlying the actions of Latin American societies to shape multiple patterns of the exploitation and protection of nature (Latta and Wittman, 2012). In particular, institutional arrangements that define the “rules of the game” – which include both formal and informal practices and mechanisms mediating social-environment relations on multiple scales – are based on different sets of principles, values and images of nature, conservation and development.

To understand how environmental governance takes place in the region, we have to look at the intricate and heterogeneous environmental, social and institutional arrangements in Latin America (see Helmke and Levitsky, 2006). Changes in the social, institutional and environmental context continuously reshape the set of opportunities and constraints for different actors, triggering new social interactions and institutional adaptations.

In these highly complex and dynamic processes, multiple actors make use of elements of different, often contrasting, discourses to legitimate their proposals or projects. To disentangle and unpack the practical and discursive contradictions of today’s environmental governance in Latin America, we identify three analytical lines that are reflected throughout this book. First, perceptions, values and discourses are important because they show the variety of images of nature, environmental problems and possible solutions among different social groups. Second, social interactions further give shape to people’s actions and relations towards decision-making processes. And third, institutional change and adaptations are the result of concrete efforts to deal with these different and often conflicting images and a multitude of social interactions.

### **Perceptions, values and discourses**

Perceptions and values are fiercely contested by different actors according to their representations of nature. The contestation over values, principles and knowledge sources guiding the way nature is conceptualized is one of the key elements of environmental governance. The way nature conservation is framed directly influences how environmental dilemmas are problematized, how solutions are designed and how priorities and trade-offs between conflicting goals are set. The more actors are engaged in environmental governance, the more complex and

heterogeneous the images become. The central question is how these complex dynamics lead to specific forms of environmental governance, and maybe even more importantly, how these forms can be directed towards social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

As argued by Martinez-Alier, Baud and Sejenovich (Chapter 1), Latin America has a long epistemological and political tradition in relation to the balance between human production, natural resources and the environment. This academic perspective goes in the same direction as indigenous cosmologies, in which nature is an integrated part of their lives. By using a range of illustrative examples, Kleiche-Dray and Waast (Chapter 3) describe in detail how cultural practices are intimately related to production and food systems. Similarly, Barker and Lemus (Chapter 10) explain how cultural perspectives of nature form the core concept of indigenous peasant communality.

While indigenous and peasant communities tend to perceive nature as important for symbolic meanings and for sustaining their livelihoods, extraction-oriented images connect nature to the interests of exploiting its resources and generating revenues. The latter images have been especially advocated by national governments and large companies. Interestingly, although Andean governments today also use the symbolic indigenous images of *Pachamama* and *Buen Vivir* in their discourses, their meaning has been reframed (see Teijlingen and Hogenboom, 2014). The governments have adapted such images to a political agenda in which nature mainly serves to support national development. This leads to the coexistence of seemingly competing images and discourses, such as *Buen Vivir* with the idea of the so-called *país minero* (mining country), as explained in detail by Andrade (Chapter 4).

Parker, Baigorrotegui and Estenssoro (Chapter 6) demonstrate how the discourses of private companies resemble those of the national Latin American governments. Through multiple – and often contrasting – discourses, large private companies strive to defend their interests, to confront contested political contexts and to legitimate their projects. However, while national governments define the control of natural resources as an element of national sovereignty, corporate actors interpret the dilemmas of environmental governance as transcending national boundaries, such as in the case of the fictitious United Republic of Soybeans, the agricultural area covering parts of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia that is controlled by the world's largest food companies (see Grain, 2013).

Environmentalists' images of nature also transcend national interests and boundaries, and often pit them against national governments

and interest groups. However, their views contrast with indigenous communities or companies by defining nature as a biophysical entity, characterized by its ecological function of biodiversity repository and carbon sink with direct implications in regulating the global climate. By using metaphors such as “Earth’s lung” or “carbon sink”, or superlatives such as megabiodiversity spots, biomes such as the Amazon are usually emphasized over other ecosystems, as shown by the REDD+ case described by Aguilar-Støen, Toni and Hirsch (Chapter 8).

In sum, whether a lifestyle, a commodity or a biological stock, nature’s multiple images and values create dissonance among stakeholders’ perceptions of nature-related problems and possible solutions. At the core of this dilemma is the struggle over meanings of nature, conservation, development and participation. The consequences of these different perceptions and the contradictions within existing discourses become apparent in concrete social interactions.

### **Social interactions**

Social interactions are the propeller of environmental governance. Through their ambitions to deepen democracy and foment popular participation, often in response to social demands and mobilization, Latin American governments have expanded the range of actors and interests involved in environmental governance. Even though these ambitions may have often been confined to discourse and rhetoric, they have opened political spaces for more varied and dynamic social interactions. As a result, decisions regarding environmental dilemmas in Latin America today involve a range of actors that may hold multiple political and identity positions. These positions may be strategically shifted according to new opportunities and constraints that emerge from changes in the socioenvironmental context. Because they concern concrete decisions that present technical, economic and political choices and ambiguities, social interactions are dynamic and constantly swing between the opposites of cooperative or accommodating to conflictive and resisting relations. In this intricate social interaction, the struggle to participate and control the decision-making process is a central element of environmental governance.

It is interesting to note that the relevance of participation for effective solutions to economic, social and conservation challenges is no longer questioned by the elite groups. As Chapter 6 shows, even the most conservative and market-oriented stakeholders acknowledge the importance of the inclusion of local or marginalized groups. In fact, participation has become a central element in official documents drafted

by government agencies, corporations, donors and multigovernmental agreements. However, the participation of local communities has been framed in terms of them being recipients of compensatory benefits decided by other legitimated actors.

In the case of mining consultations, Walter and Urkidi (Chapter 11) argue that companies try to demobilize local participation with technological solutions and false promises. Through top-down procedures, they only give local populations the opportunity to be informed in order to legitimize their activity. In the case of REDD+, Chapter 8 argues that projects are dominated by “invited” actors who decide which knowledge tools, goals and models are legitimized. What remains for the local populations is some compensation in the form of money or material facilities. Despite the different territorial and political contexts, both of these chapters demonstrate the dangers of framing participation as a distribution of compensatory measures.

The reframing of participation through compensation has emerged from coalitions between the state and other elite groups. Chapter 4 and Bull and Aguilar-Støen’s Chapter 5 focus on state-business coalitions for the expansion of extractive industries. The former focuses on the political and economic agenda of the state based on natural resources, while the latter describes how this process has driven new forms of political interactions between the state and the new and old elite. Chapter 8 focuses on the NGOs, experts and state coalition for the expansion of protected areas.

The unfulfilled promises of participatory policies combined with the increased exploitation of natural resources in many Latin American regions have fuelled socioenvironmental conflicts almost at the same pace as the implementation of participatory initiatives. According to Martínez-Alier and Walter (Chapter 2), these conflicts concentrate on the distribution of the ecological debt and basically emerge from the unequal exchange of material between different parts of the world. In addition, as Sejenovich (Chapter 7) shows, dominant production processes have high social and environmental costs. To end poverty and realize sustainable development, social rights as well as ecological limits need to be fully integrated into governance processes. In recent years, some progress has been made in this direction. To regain their protagonism in environmental governance, various local communities have developed and designed bottom-up decision-making processes to defend their local interests and to keep their autonomy in shaping their livelihood strategies (see chapters 9, 10 and 11).



These bottom-up solutions are built on environmental justice networks and peasant and indigenous movements, an instrumental strategy in the struggle for access and control over natural resources in Latin America (Carruthers, 2008). They struggle to empower themselves through a discourse of human–nature interdependency and territorial autonomy. In this process, local actors try to scale down the decision-making process. Chapter 10 argues that locally developed economic models are the only way to liberate subalterns from their marginalized position in the capitalist structure. Chapter 2 shows how local communities organize themselves around glocal (global–local) networks in order to reclaim their political position within the capitalist structure. At the implementation level, a myriad of initiatives have been observed on the ground. Local communities draw on their local knowledge and institutions in order to develop new strategies to tackle new challenges. In some cases they have actively designed their own decision-making systems to counter the manipulative consultations carried out by private companies, as described in detail in Chapter 11. In other cases, communities have engaged in commercial activities by building on their social capital to develop their technical and entrepreneurial capacity (see Merino’s Chapter 9).

In sum, the increasing tension between environmental justice and post-neoliberal policies is characterized by a dynamic reshaping of strategies among contesting actors. This central element of environmental governance drives new institutional adaptations based on discourse, relationships and practices on the ground.

### **Institutional change and adaptation**

Institutional adaptations involve strategies developed by different actors to increase their ability to be included or to define the “rules of the game” in environmental governance. These adaptations comprise formal and informal mechanisms, and range from discourse reshaping and new communication strategies to innovative initiatives, technologies and knowledge integration. Latin America has been the stage for two key forms of institutional adaptation among different contesting actors: the reshaping of environmental discourse and the rescaling of environmental governance.

Generally, dominant actors have reframed their discourses in order to fit their interests and objectives into a “green growth” agenda. Corporations favour models based on technological innovation while leftist governments argue for the expansion of extractive activities in order to reach social objectives. The ideologies and discourses of the new

so-called post-neoliberal governments in Latin America have greatly influenced the adaptations of environmental governance. By framing natural resources as a national wealth to solve inequality problems, they have strengthened the state's political position vis-à-vis the transnational corporate sector. This has allowed them to acquire a more central position in the governance of natural resources and to impose stronger conditions for the exploitation of natural resources. The increased income from taxes and royalties on natural resource use have allowed for a redistribution of benefits among different stakeholder groups, resulting in decreasing poverty and income inequality in the region, even though the problem of structural poverty still needs to be resolved (see Chapter 7).

Among several actors, gradual shifts may be observed in environmental attitudes, mechanisms and practices. The state has been instrumental in reformulating procedures for the socioenvironmental assessment of extractive industries and infrastructure expansion, decision-making processes and control over environmental conflicts. To prevent further legislative restrictions, and in response to social pressures, corporations have become proactive in the development of a discourse in which they hold a key role in solving societal problems. This discourse has materialized through the CSR framework, which promises to reconcile their productive activities with social and environmental demands. Many researchers and environmentalists, on the other hand, have adapted to the new context by claiming their "expert" role as knowledge-holder of the technical information that is necessary to design better policies.

These different discursive strategies mediate the institutional changes promoted by contesting actors. At the national level, Chapter 4's analysis of the state in Andean countries reveals the strong role of the recentralization of environmental governance as a key strategy of post-neoliberal states in order to subsidize the accomplishment of their social policies. Chapter 5 offers several examples in which elite groups try to ensure their access to land and natural resources through different means (see also Otero, 2010; Borras et al., 2012; Harstaad, 2012). In some other cases, however, different governmental levels may compete for control of the decision-making process. The REDD+ implementation process provides an illustrative example of tensions between different governmental levels in the attempt to recentralize or decentralize the funding scheme to compensate forest-protection initiatives. In the current "race" for the implementation of REDD+ in Brazil, state governments have built state-level coalitions in order to bypass national

governments and reach out to different international funding schemes (Chapter 8).

Politically less powerful actors also strive to rescale decision-making processes in order to overcome undesirable policies and developments, structural constraints or environmental degradation. Chapter 11 describes the efforts of local communities to build up both glocal connections and coalitions with local governments in order to have control over consultations and decide about the implementation of mining projects in Latin America. According to Chapter 10, the scaling down of environmental governance to the local level is fundamental in safeguarding the self-determination of local communities. Chapter 9 argues that social capital and institutional strength in communities are key factors for the protection of forest commons and for local capacities to face traditional and emergent pressures on forest ecosystems.

The extent to which local communities and social movements succeed in bringing about institutional change partly depends on their interactions with other actors. In this respect it is also important to point out that social actors (the state, corporations, communities, etc.) are not homogeneous entities. They may consist of various groups with different power, interests and positions, which may shift over time. Local governments, for example, occasionally confront central governments by developing alliances with local communities or other state agencies. Also, experts from corporations, governments and environmental organizations may take very different stances on energy efficiency, production technologies and social responsibilities, despite the fact that they work in the same sector or country (see the analysis of views and discourses of strategic actors in Chapter 6). In some cases, environmentalists support local communities against development policies that promote the expansion of infrastructure and extractive industries in fragile ecosystems (Chapter 11). In other cases, they may favour compensatory schemes in conservation policies, regardless of the criticism raised by environmental justice movements (Chapter 8).

In sum, while the central state has repositioned itself in processes of environmental governance of Latin America, institutional adaptation to the new contexts, discourses and demands has come from a range of (contesting) actors, and the interactions among them, across multiple scales. Overall, elite groups have tried to adjust some of their discourses and practices in order to partly comply with new demands and regulations, without having to give up their prominent position. Simultaneously, various marginalized groups have attempted to strike back by (re-)establishing and (re)appropriating local decision-making processes

in order to regain their autonomy. To what extent these institutional adaptations may lead to structural transformations in environmental governance remains to be seen.

## **Environmental governance in the making**

Environmental governance is a social arena of multiple demands, goals and images of nature, in which priorities and trade-offs are negotiated according to the interests of those who are able to influence decision-making. In Latin America, several social and institutional arrangements through which environmental governance takes place are currently changing. Trends such as the repositioning of the national state (Chapter 4), the emergence of new elite groups (Chapter 5) and the development of new mining technologies (Chapter 6) are largely supportive of the increasing resource extraction for global markets, which is a cause for numerous environmental conflicts in the region (Chapter 2). At the same time, however, new communication means (Chapter 11), knowledge exchanges (chapters 3 and 9), increased attention for social rights (Chapter 7) and strengthened bottom-up organizations (chapters 9, 10 and 11) create opportunities for marginalized groups to counter top-down political and economic processes that greatly affect the lives of people who have limited voice.

Whether new trends in Latin America's environmental governance will prove to have transformative implications depends on how relevant actors are involved in the process. In this respect, the contributions to this book reveal profound tensions between the compensatory approaches favoured by governments and corporations (chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8), and the participatory proposals and practices of socioenvironmental analysis, political decision-making and economic production that are championed by local communities and activists (chapters 2, 3, 9, 10 and 11). Although compensation can be a means for dealing with social and environmental debts and injustices, an overly strong emphasis on local "damage control", financial reparation and social projects not only legitimizes practices that threaten the integrity of fragile ecosystems but also jeopardizes a protagonist role of local communities in environmental governance. While a second generation of environmental justice movements is taking a lead in struggles over resource-related meanings and rights (Chapter 2), compensatory policies gain space in Latin America in the context of resource-based economic growth and poverty reduction (chapters 4 and 7).

The tension between participatory and compensatory approaches is in practice often not so evident or clear-cut. Take, for instance, the political visibility of injustices and the institutionalization of rights granted to marginalized groups, especially indigenous peoples, since the 1990s. While meaningful progress has undoubtedly been made, this is partly overshadowed by neoliberal and post-neoliberal institutional adaptations that give greater power to corporations and the state, and more room to expansionary large-scale production and infrastructure projects that tend to threaten the livelihoods of some of the same marginalized groups. By the same token, participation, formerly defined as full involvement of local groups in decision-making over socioenvironmental change, has been reframed to include marginalized groups mainly as co-beneficiaries through compensation schemes. Paradoxically, as state agencies more actively promote participatory initiatives, local populations may in fact be less actively involved in decision-making. And especially when coalitions between the state and corporations foster the expansion of natural resource exploitation (chapters 2, 4 and 5), the genuine participation and empowerment of local communities has been limited, and in some cases protests have even been criminalized in the name of progress and national security (Chapter 11; see also Taylor, 2011; Saguier, 2012; Zibechi, 2012).

In addition to economic and social compensation, the fast transformation of rural areas reveals a trend towards territorial compensation, in which some protected areas are supposed to make up for the vast areas where large-scale productive or extractive activities are basically given a free hand (Castro, 2014; see also Zimmerer, 2011). The expansion of protected areas (e.g. parks, reserves and ethnic communities) by national governments is primarily aimed at protecting forests, coinciding with national and international climate change and biodiversity policies (Chapter 8; see also Castro, 2013). In many cases, the expansion of these activities and infrastructure takes place in environmentally and socially sensitive areas, and forces peasants and traditional communities to fight for their autonomy, food and land security. Meanwhile, from this ongoing territorial reconfiguration, new inequalities, injustices and vulnerabilities emerge. While productive territories become gradually more concentrated in the hands of elite groups, secluded protected areas where land-use activities are limited by market constraints and restrictive rules are allocated to the rural poor.

Finally, this book's collection of studies shows that in order to tackle the current and emerging socioenvironmental problems in Latin America, three main challenges must be urgently addressed: first, the

political challenge of promoting democracy and citizenship in a public space that is safeguarded for effective participation in the agenda-setting and negotiation of conflicting interests; second, the social challenge of ensuring the improvement of wellbeing through food and land security, social reproduction and self-determination of marginalized groups; and third, the environmental challenge of protecting ecological integrity, carbon emission mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

## Notes

1. See, for example, The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEBB) – [www.teebweb.org/](http://www.teebweb.org/).
2. See [http://www.engov.eu/bd\\_justicia\\_ambiental\\_es.php](http://www.engov.eu/bd_justicia_ambiental_es.php).

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