

Regimenting the Global Environment Regimes, Nonregimes and the Invisibility of Sustainable Mountain Development

Jörg Balsiger

Department of Environmental Science, Policy & Management, University of California, Berkeley

Paper prepared for the 2007 International Studies Association Annual Conference
February 28 – March 3, 2007, Chicago

DRAFT – DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION

In his address to the International Studies Association Annual Conference in 2003, President-elect Steve Smith made a powerful argument about the intrinsic link between ethics and the study of international relations. Rejecting Max Weber’s famous notion of science as a vocation, which notes that “...whenever the man of science introduces his personal value judgement, a full understanding of the facts *ceases*,” Smith contended that scholarship cannot be neutral, is unavoidably partial, unavoidably political, and therefore unavoidably has ethical consequences, whether or not the scholar is explicit about these ramifications.¹ The pretense of value-neutrality, of using ‘objective’ data, is particularly problematic; as Weber commented on several occasions, there is no more effective way of taking a political position than ‘letting the facts speak for themselves.’

One important way in which scholarship is politically, and hence ethically, potent concerns the ways in which the discipline constructs the categories of thought within which the world is described and explained. These categories, Smith claimed with respect to international relations, “help to reinforce Western, predominantly US, practices of statecraft that themselves reflect an underlying set of social forces.”² Referring in particular to the nature of violence unleashed in the attacks on September 11, 2001, Smith argued that the discipline’s very important assumptions about what constitutes violence and what kinds of deaths are relevant to explaining the world of international relations have blinded it to the fact that everyday threats to human security – consisting of economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security³ – “are absolutely critical to explaining

-
1. Weber 1948, 145-146, cited in Smith 2003.
 2. Smith 2003.
 3. UNDP, 1994: 230-234

September 11 because they help explain why much of the world's population celebrated the attacks, and why the West generally, and the United States specifically, is so unpopular, even hated.²⁴

In this paper, I want to use Smith's critique as a point of departure for considering the ethical consequences of scholarly constructs on environmental degradation. My intention is to argue that the categories created by the mainstream global environmental politics (GEP) literature have produced a conceptual straight jacket which renders invisible a multiplicity of actors, institutions, and processes that support sustainable development because they fall outside the purview of dominant concepts. Smith's criticism of IR's narrow view of violence is no less relevant to the case of GEP, for the majority of elements included in the above definition of human security critically hinges on the state of the world's environment.

To the extent that scholarly inquiries of environmental problems are linked to praxis, the consequence of 'regimenting' threats to the biosphere into a handful of easily recognized international treaties amounts to a dire neglect of governance acts and functions performed in a host of other issue areas. The impact of this neglect is very real because the architecture of GEP knowledge is powerfully connected to the allocation of financial and human resources, the development of scientific knowledge, and the population of international, national, and local political agendas. Even a cursory look at the narrow substantive range of large research initiatives, journal publications, conference presentations, academic curricula, and other venues confirms that climate change reigns supreme, with biodiversity, air and oceanic pollution, and forestry crowding a distant second place.

How did this come to be? One of the main reasons, I argue is the dominance of the international regime concept, which emerged during the 1980s as a notion for analyzing patterned behavior in international politics but has failed to take into account new governance arrangements witnessed during the last decade. The emerging interest in 'nonregimes,' rather than undermining the regime concept and joining its recyclable features with available alternative conceptualizations of governance, is reinforcing the regimentation of the global environment witnessed during the last two decades. Similarly, the study of regime effectiveness, which became a preoccupation of GEP scholars in the 1990s, has failed to question the fundamental underpinnings of the regime concepts. On the contrary, the narrow regime definition has facilitated empirical work and oriented research

4. Smith 2003.

toward the same handful of formal international treaties that most other GEP scholarship typically examines. The recent emphasis on quantitative methods for assessing regime effectiveness has further cemented the regimentation process while at the same time raising the bar for entry into the discipline.

The international regime concept has been subject to a sustained critique from different quarters and alternative views of international politics have come to the fore. In this paper, I apply these recent critiques and propose a reorientation toward the notion of global public spheres as a perspective that aims to overcome the shortcomings of the regime concept and allow for the resurfacing of issue areas that have previously been hidden from the discipline's view. Examining the case of sustainable mountain development, I intend to show that policy efforts to address the degradation of the world's mountain ranges can be viewed from this perspective, and that such a view is better able to grasp the totality of governing acts and functions underway at international, transnational, regional, national and local levels.

The article proceeds in the following steps. The first section briefly reviews how a narrow regime definition has come to prevail, even though broader views were voiced in the concept's early history, and what critiques it has prompted. A brief examination of currently emerging scholarship on nonregimes implies that the (really not so) new concept reinforces a narrow view of international governance. In the second section, I portray global public spheres as an alternative perspective scholars have proposed to examine governance acts in a way more sensitive to actor diversity, social interaction, and issue complexity and interlinkage. The third section looks at global mountain degradation and sustainable mountain development as an issue area that has received scant attention – precisely because it does not fit the regime mold. In the fourth section I revisit several elements of global environmental governance to demonstrate the contributions of a global public sphere approach to the international mountain dialog. A brief conclusion recapitulates the argument and reiterates its ethical implications.

Regimes and Nonregimes

The post-war world of international politics, in the contemporary eyes of realist and neorealist IR scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, was an atomistic, anarchic, “Hobbesian” system in which the

failure of cooperation was captured by the Prisoner's Dilemma and self-interested states primarily sought to maximize relative gains.⁵ Regime theory emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in response to widely observed and increasingly durable interstate cooperation.⁶ Initially, neoliberal institutionalist scholars who espoused the regime concept claimed only that states were interested in furthering their absolute, rather than relative gains. This distinction nevertheless opened the door to a fundamental reordering of conceptual approaches to international politics. At the same time, it provided the emerging field of global environmental politics with a theoretical anchor for interpreting the spread of environmental cooperation.

The general development of the regime concept has been the subject of numerous reviews and need not be retold here. What I want to focus on instead are two decisive moments in this evolution and the consequences they entail for future research. The first occurred early on and concerns the crystallization of a narrow regime definition and its impact on the population of phenomena that came to be studied. The second is more recent and relates to two opposing developments. On the one hand, an increasing number of regime critiques are opening up analytical possibilities for capturing a richer empirical arena. On the other hand, the emerging study of nonregimes carries the risk of reinforcing the narrow regime definition. The ethical implications of these diverging trends are considerable, as the conceptual architecture of governance that is going to prevail will dictate the terms for important political, financial, and scientific decisions during years to come.

The crystallization of a narrow regime definition

The emergence of new concepts, whether they evolve as a response to theoretical disjuncture or empirical observation, is commonly accompanied by intense definitional debates. In analogy to problem framing in public policy making, the conceptual delineation of a new phenomenon entails significant implications for disciplinary locus, ontological scope, and epistemological tractability. From an ethical perspective, these implications concern the visibility and invisibility of concomitant actors, institutions, and processes.

5. Waltz 1979.

6. Keohane 1984, 1986; and Krasner 1983.

Although proponents of the international regime concept found common ground in their dissatisfaction with prevailing (neo)realist perspectives, they disagreed over how broad or narrow the concept ought to be perceived, that is whether it was more useful to view normative convergence as a pervasive feature of international politics or to think of it as a more limited set of purposeful rule making processes.⁷ The most comprehensive view of regimes has been offered by Donald Puchala and Raymond Hopkins, who argued that “a regime exists in every substantive issue-area in international relations ... Wherever there is regularity in behavior, some kinds of principles, norms or rules must exist to account for it.”⁸ This view encompassed formal and informal arrangements, as well as states and nonstate actors, but neutral on the point whether regimes were conducive or not to interstate cooperation. Because the potential for tautology is high since influence on behavior was itself to be deduced from patterned behavior, the revealed normative fabric of the world, this perspective did not fare well and was largely abandoned.

Stephen D. Krasner offered a tighter definition of regimes as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.”⁹ This carefully crafted, yet still fairly vague definition further hinged on one’s view of norms and rules, specifically whether they were necessarily explicit, formal, and codified, and therefore more easily accessible to researchers than implicit, informal understandings. More recent definitions, such as that of Volker Rittberger who views regimes as “rules of the game agreed upon by actors in the international arena (usually nation states) and delimiting, for these actors, the range of legitimate or admissible behavior in a specified context of activity” have followed in this vein.¹⁰

A third view of international regimes emphasized the formal, codified, state-based, and functional-rational character of regimes.¹¹ In this assessment, regimes are primarily found where multilateral agreements among states aim to regulate national action within a specific issue area. Although this most restricted definition was argued to risk the charge of formalism, which had been plaguing the study of international law, it became the accepted view of international (environmental) regimes and gave birth to a highly productive phase of IR and GEP research.

7. Conca 2006; and Haggard and Simmons 1987.

8. Puchala and Hopkins 1983, 61-91, cited in Haggard and Simmons 1987, 493.

9. Krasner 1982, 2.

10. Rittberger 1993, xii.

11. Young 1982; and Aggarwal 1985.

The choice among alternative regime definitions entailed a trade off between conceptual comprehensiveness and empirical tractability. One of the reasons why the formalistic definition prevailed was that it enabled researchers to distinguish it from several cognates, including “cooperation,” “institutions,” “order,” and “stability.”¹² This was perhaps necessary at the time, especially in light of the claimed parsimony underpinning the realist perspective. As the recent critiques to which I now turn have made clear, however, the narrow regime concept may have thrown out the baby with the bath water.

Regime critiques

Many of the recent regime critiques actually have a long history. In an article that appeared in the influential 1982 *International Organizations* special edition on regimes, Susan Strange asked rhetorically “whether it may not even be actually negative in its influence, obfuscating and confusing instead of clarifying and illuminating, and distorting by concealing bias instead of revealing and removing it.”¹³ More specifically, Strange charged that the concept was a fashion, imprecise, value-biased, overemphasizing the static and underemphasizing the dynamic element of change in world politics, and rooted in a state-centric paradigm that “limits vision of a wider reality.” Furthermore, she argued that exaggerated attention to the regime concept “ignores the vast area of nonregimes that lies beyond the ken of international bureaucracies and diplomatic bargaining,” and that it “persists in looking for an all-pervasive pattern of political behavior in world politics, a ‘general theory’ that will provide a nice, neat, and above all simple explanation of the past and an easy means to predict the future.”¹⁴

More recent critiques of the international regime concept have picked up Strange’s warnings and evolved around three main points. First among these is a state-centric view that follows, on the one hand, from an outdated assessment of agency in international politics, and from the exaggerated emphasis on international treaties signed by nation states on the other. The implication is that roles are taken as relatively fixed and understood functionally rather than constitutively, and that as a result, questions of standing, authority, and legitimacy are viewed as

12. Haggard and Simmons 1987, 495.

13. Strange 1982.

14. Strange 1982, 480.

given and unchangeable. The consequence is that nonstate actors have been either left out of the picture completely or accorded only secondary importance.¹⁵ The vast literature on the increasingly influential role of nonstate actors, as well as the partnership arrangements that have emerged from the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, have provided ample evidence to the contrary.

A second point, recently made by Ken Conca, concerns the territorialization of nature by drawing a stark distinction between domestic nature as a “bounded, fixed realm that can be governed by the state as ‘natural resources,’” and “international nature that consists of those expressions of the natural world that lie outside of or link otherwise separate territories, thereby demanding shared governance.”¹⁶ Over time, but especially since the 1972 Stockholm Summit, he argues, governments have increasingly reaffirmed state authority and the territorialization of nature by developing regimes aimed at problems of pollution beyond borders. Consequently, Montreal (ozone) and Basel (long range transport of air pollution) became influential models of global environmental governance, whereas evident patterns of governance in the context of local, cumulative environmental problems have been largely neglected.¹⁷

The third main problem with the prevailing regime concept is that despite the proclaimed acknowledgment of scientific uncertainty and an attendant commitment to the precautionary principle, international regimes consistently stabilize knowledge by favoring a singular construction of an environmental problem, developing an officially sanctioned body of universal, technical knowledge, and defining the boundary between “official truths and acknowledged uncertainties.”¹⁸ Regimes, Conca argues, limit the flexibility of knowledge through the “functional-rational legitimization process ingrained in the normative structure of most, if not all, international environmental regimes.”¹⁹ According to Lucy Ford, the stabilizing function of regimes has even carried over from regime theory to the literature on global governance. Similarly, Richard Ashley has noted governance is concerned with the imposition of international “purpose,” which centers on the “production and objectification of enduring structures that . . . lend to global life an effect of continuity, of a direction, and of a unified collective end beyond political questioning.”²⁰

15. Conca 2006; and O’Neill et al. 2004.

16. Conca 2006, **PAGE NUMBER**.

17. Conca 2006, 35-37.

18. Conca 2006, 53; Jasanoff 1998; and Litfin 1994.

19. Conca 2006, 54.

20. Ashley 1993, 254.

These critiques point to the fact that international environmental regimes occupy only a small space in the universe of global/international/transnational environmental governance. In their analysis of sustainable development governance in the Baltic Sea Region, Kern and Löffelsend note that international regimes constitute only one type (“international governance *by* nation states”) alongside international policy networks (“international governance *with* nation states”) and transnational networks (“transnational governance *without* national states”).²¹ To grasp the totality of global governance more fully, the main elements of the regime concept have to be carefully revisited and placed in the context of a conceptual framework that is more attuned to the diversity of governing acts and functions above, below, and beyond the nation state. The trade off between conceptual scope and empirical tractability referred to above naturally applies to such a trajectory as well, as do the ethical implications. As I will argue, however, a more careful balance can be achieved than has been the case with the international regime concept. Before I outline the general parameters of such a framework and apply it to the case of sustainable mountain development, a closer look at the current interest in nonregimes will serve to further elaborate what is at stake in the struggle surrounding the architecture of knowledge.

The study of nonregimes

Some IR and GEP scholars have consistently noted that the study of international politics has unduly focused on existing international regimes.²² Arild Underdal, for example, has argued that “there is a real possibility that *the entire field of regime analysis is biased in favor of positive findings.*”²³ Yet a concerted effort to address this lacuna has only been made in the last few years. From a substantive standpoint, adding nonregimes to the population of environmental governance cases promises to shed light on issue areas previously neglected by the regime focus. From a methodological standpoint, since the exclusion of negative cases leads to the loss of control cases, biased inference, and hence serious questions about the validity of existing regime theories, an examination of negative cases has the potential to strengthen explanatory leverage.²⁴

21. Kern and Löffelsend 2004, 454.

22. Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1997; Keohane 1988; and Sprinz 2001.

23. Underdal 2002, emphasis in the original.

24. For example, King, Keohane and Verba 1994.

In spite of these advantages, the study of nonregimes risks falling into the same trap as the study of regimes failed to avoid. Two specific risks are worth mentioning, one conceptual and one ethical, but both relating to the definition of nonregimes that is going to prevail. Conceptually, to the extent that a nonregime is defined through the absence of a formal interstate agreement, it reinforces the narrow definition of regimes. Moreover, by focusing on the theoretical opposite of international regimes, narrowly conceived, it potentially misses as many negative cases of governance as international regimes misses positive ones. Ethically, the consideration of nonregimes erects a normative boundary between what is desirable (regimes), regardless of whether regimes are effective or not, and what is lamentable (the absence of regimes), regardless of the nature of governing functions and acts carried out in the absence of formal treaties.

In contrast to the debates over how broad or narrow regimes should be perceived, little argument has emerged in the context of nonregime study. So far, proponents of the nonregime concept have been careful to avoid a narrow definition by *defining* the concept broadly but *operationalizing* it narrowly. Accordingly, while a nonregime has been defined as “a specific issue area characterized by the absence of a multilateral social institution for ordering actors’ interactions,”²⁵ Radoslav Dimitrov, for instance, has operationalized nonregimes as instances of failed treaty negotiations [e.g. deforestation] and cases where such negotiations have not been initiated [e.g. coral reef degradation].²⁶ Indeed, the authors of a concept paper outlining a research agenda for nonregimes clearly echo Max Weber’s notion of science as a vocation when claiming that they remain “theoretically agnostic.”²⁷

Such agnosticism is not possible, which is precisely the point Smith made in his ISA address. To start with, it is questionable whether a narrow operationalization of a broad definition passes the methodological test of validity, which requires that the population of observed phenomena is coterminous with the definition. If nonregimes are narrowly operationalized on the basis of treaty absence, then deforestation can be interpreted as a nonregime. Yet several authors have claimed that an international forest regime emerged in the 1990s on the basis of soft law embedded in the UNCED Non-legally binding Forest Principles, Chapter 11 of Agenda 21, the 1997 Proposals for Action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, and the 2000 Proposals for

25. Dimitrov et al. 2006, 2.

26. Dimitrov 2005.

27. Dimitrov et al. 2006, 1.

Action of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests.²⁸ This example raises a second point, which is that the definitional scope of the nonregime concept reflects back on the notion of international regimes. It does not matter if the concept definition is deliberately broad. As I have argued above, the ambiguous regime definitions of Krasner and others did little to prevent the crystallization of a narrow view in subsequent empirical work, which came to dominate both research and praxis. Pursuing nonregime research with a narrow definition risks repeating the error committed by regime scholars, namely of narrowing the scholarly gaze to a restricted set of governance acts that reinforces the invisibility of important actors, institutions, and processes in other issue areas.

Moreover, by carrying over the formalistic regime view into nonregime study, all issue areas which were previously simply left out of view because they did not fit the regime definition suddenly come under the rubric of nonregimes. By no large stretch of the imagination, the connotation of a nonregime, or a 'negative case,' does an enormous disservice to the myriad of efforts carried out every day in the service of sustainable development. The ethical ramifications of such definitional bipolarization could scarcely be clearer. What is to be done? In the following section I briefly review some of the more prominent perspectives on global, international, or transnational environmental governance that have captured the imagination of a growing number of scholars. What they have in common is a much more fluid, dynamic and contingent view of nature-society relations and the governing arrangements that we are witnessing today.

An alternative view of global (environmental) governance

Whereas criticism of the regime concept has only marginally diminished its popularity, alternative views of global (environmental) governance have recently emerged. Most of these signal a move from government to governance, de-emphasizing formal, intergovernmental relations and the structural features that determine them. Instead, new views of global governance conceive of a much more informal, fluid, and diverse environment, characterized by such terms as 'multi-level governance,' 'hybrid arrangements,' 'networks,' and 'partnerships.' These views in part reflect developments in the real world, particularly since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the resulting proliferation of type-2 partnerships. In the words of Jonathan Lash,

28. Glück et al. 1997; Humphreys 2003; and Tarasofsky 1999.

president of World Resources Institute, there has been a “shift from the stiff formal waltz of traditional diplomacy to the jazzier dance” of issue-based networks and partnerships.”²⁹

Since new governance views cover the entire spectrum of ontological and epistemological orientations, a concise review is far beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I will focus on the concept of ‘global/international public spheres,’ which has gained an increasing number of followers in recent years, and selectively point out links to related but not necessarily conforming perspectives.

Global/International public spheres

The international regime concept has served a generation of scholars to identify and analyze an important domain of global environmental politics. As outlined above, however, the regime concept in its narrow definition has assumed such a dominant status in the literature that other conceptualizations of international politics have largely been crowded out. This effect has increasingly been recognized and in response, alternative tools and terms to approach patterned behavior have gained in popularity. They take issue with the regime concept's overemphasis on the nation state and propose a more diverse actor landscape in which the sources of power and influence extend beyond material bases and instead include a host of discursive and behavioral practices.

Peter Haas, for example, has noted that this shift has created the potential for replacing the traditional dichotomous concepts of global governance organized hierarchically or anarchically with a network model of decentralized global governance.³⁰ Such a model, which is also referred to as multilevel governance, Haas and Kanie argue, involves the performance of a variety of discrete functions by multiple actors, whose interactive effects in practice can yield more effective global coordination and performance of major governance functions.³¹ John Gerard Ruggie speaks of a “fundamental reconstitution of the global public domain – away from one that equated the ‘public’ in international politics with states and the interstate realm to one in which the very system of

29. Benner et al., 2003.

30. Haas 2004.

31. Haas and Kanie 2004.

states is becoming embedded in a broader, albeit still thin and partial, institutionalized arena concerned with the production of global public goods.”³²

The gradual move in emphasis from government to governance has produced significant shifts in how the regulation of actors’ behavior is achieved. This transition from government to governance, scholars have argued, “is based on the understanding that the political is not limited to the traditional concept of the state, in the sense of a delineated institution. Transformations of the state, new alliances between the state and other actors, and the state as only one (pivotal) element of global networks form new foci of theoretical attention in the governance literature.”³³ Making reference to “hybrid arrangements,” recent scholarship has also emphasized the need to reconceptualize the state and view it in more relational terms vis-à-vis markets and civil society.

The concept of ‘global public spheres,’ broadly defined after Habermas as ‘comprehensively accessible transnational sites where decisions are made on the basis of an argument’s strength rather than an actor’s leverage,’ overcomes many regime critiques and combines several elements of a new governance views. Global public spheres are sites in which state and non-state actors participate in an ever-increasing number of summits, conference of parties meetings, technical workshops, and seminars. It is also from these sites that collective action aimed at alleviating issue-specific problems emanate. Whereas interaction in international regimes is a fairly ordered activity primarily evolving around the negotiation, implementation and monitoring of international treaties, global public spheres are established, transformed, combined, eclipsed, and reconstituted much more easily. They don’t exclusively coincide with narrowly defined issue areas but may tie several of them together as new knowledge emerges and learning takes place. Global public spheres are thus a more adequate concept to describe international collaboration on highly cross-sectoral environmental issues, especially local cumulative problems such as mountain degradation.

Another difference between international regimes and global public spheres is that the regime concept lends itself to more highly aggregated units of analysis; places more emphasis on nation states, frequently as unitary, rational actors, than on non-state actors; and is less normatively oriented. By contrast, global public sphere theorists are primarily interested in the micro context of communication among deliberating social actors; largely draw on the writing of Jürgen Habermas; and often entertain a normative dimension related to the promotion of democratic rights at the

32. Ruggie 2004, 500.

33. Spaargaren, Mol, and Buttel 2006, 12.

global level. Indeed, the literature on global public spheres maintains a close affinity with writing on global civil society, understood as a sphere of voluntary societal association that is located “above the individual and below the state but also across state boundaries, where people voluntarily organize themselves to pursue various aims.”³⁴

The global public sphere concept places greater emphasis on the creative potential of individuals and groups, yet does not discard the influence of the structural environment. Actors in global public spheres make use of various resources at their disposal and through their interactions constantly recreate the structural environment. Students of global public spheres thereby take serious the criticism that international regimes often fail to examine in greater detail what really goes on inside them. In his examination of international institutions, for instance, Johnston has argued that “there are good reasons to ‘go micro’ and focus on the socialization of individuals, small groups, and, in turn, the effects of these agents on the foreign policy processes of states.”³⁵ He claims that “It is in institutions, where the interaction of activists, so-called norm entrepreneurs, is most likely, and where social conformity pressures are most concentrated. Institutions often have corporate identities, traits, missions, normative cores, and official discourses at odds with realpolitik axioms, indeed at odds with the socialization pressures that many realists argue come with being sovereign, insecure actors operating in anarchy.”³⁶

Global public spheres are the locus for shared substantive interests, institutions, organizations, procedures and channels of communication that make possible a dense web of behavioral and discursive interaction. Global public sphere theorists such as Thomas Risse, posit that in spite of arguments to the contrary, international relations does take place in ‘common lifeworlds,’ one of the preconditions of communicative action, such as in issue-areas heavily regulated by international regimes and organizations, such as trade, human rights, or the environment.”³⁷ In their view, international regimes provide a locale for the transnational exchange of reasons and opinion formation, a “practical foothold” and potential infrastructure for cosmopolitan democracy.³⁸ In his writing on transnational democracy, Dryzek goes so far as to claim that the sources of governance are discursive since because “discourses are social as well as

34. Wapner 1997, 66.

35. Johnston 2001:507

36. Johnston 2001:508

37. Risse 2000:15

38. Bohman 1999:500.

personal, they act as sources of order by coordinating the behavior of the individuals who subscribe to them.”³⁹ The point is that the more dense the webs of interaction in such social contexts, the more likely that norms are created and maintained, actors socialized, and interests and identities shaped in the process through social learning.

There is of course considerable debate about access to international global public spheres, particularly for non-state actors. While it is true that many diplomatic encounters continue to be carried on behind closed doors, empirical work has shown that non-governmental organizations, private sector firms, and scientific communities consistently manage to influence the direction of negotiation. This is especially true when the full range of channels of influence from face-to-face to internet-based mobilization is recognized. An examination of the international mountain dialog, where non-governmental organizations have played an absolutely crucial role, confirms this point.

In the frequent absence of legally binding instruments governing the rights and responsibilities of different actors, collaboration in global public spheres relies on social coordination mechanisms long explored in the scholarly literature. Essentially, individual and collective actors, constantly confronted with new information and called to public action on a growing list of items, rarely have the means to consider the costs and benefits of all available options as the proverbial rational utility maximizer would. Instead, they follow a norm of appropriateness by falling back on internalized norms of behavior that have previously been learned through socialization. Different social influence tools, such as backpatting, opprobrium or shaming, social liking, or status maximization, reinforce such norms. Mitzen lists three “forum effects” of publicity: drawing on Elster,⁴⁰ when in public even selfish actors will want to appear impartial and fair and so will generalize their interest claims and argue impartially; over time, a norm of publicity develops by which speakers feel they must make their reasons available to others; and public reason develops as frequently invoked arguments become shared norms. The forum effects, Mitzen argues, cause the linking of order and legitimation as gradually institutionalizing norms of argumentation and behavior stabilize expectations and as public reason begins to legitimate international outcomes.

Global public spheres emphasize social interaction in multi-stakeholder contexts that are conducive to social learning. In contrast to the international regime concept, a view of global

39. Dryzek 1999:34.

40. Elster 1995

governance through the lens of global public spheres greatly expands the scope of coordinating activity in environmental politics. Global public spheres may give rise to legally binding international treaties but these are not necessary to address pressing environmental problems. As the next section shows, a great deal of activity has developed in the context of the international mountain dialog in spite of the absence of a global mountain treaty.

Global Mountain Degradation and Sustainable Mountain Development

Although general international concern for environmental degradation in mountain areas emerged in the broader context of growing global environmental awareness, concerted international action for mountain areas origins dates back to the establishment of the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (Cipra) in 1952. Alarmed by the environmental consequences of the dramatic increase of tourism after World War II, CIPRA sought to establish a legally binding instrument for protecting Europe's largest mountain region, an effort that would eventually culminate in the 1992 Alpine Convention. Aside from Cipra's struggle for the Alps, however, international problem recognition and agenda setting was largely dominated by scientists, as in the case of other environmental issues. Because many of these scientists were involved in bilateral and multilateral development assistance, a link to the United Nations existed at an early stage. This link proved instrumental in the development of the international global sphere surrounding mountain degradation and sustainable mountain development, which evolved around the development of soft law through Earth Summit documents, the emergence of several international mountain treaties, and the more recent creation of an international Type-2 partnership. Nevertheless, these achievements have so far escaped scholarly attention as a result of the limiting international regime concept.

Origins of the global mountain agenda

In contrast to work on global commons problems such as ozone depletion, scientists involved in local cumulative environmental problems such as mountain degradation were often embedded in bilateral and multilateral development projects and programs. The origins of Italy's and

Switzerland's leading support role in today's global mountain dialog, for instance, can be traced to their development assistance activities in the mountain areas of Asia, Latin America, and Africa.⁴¹ Similarly, prominent early mountain agenda promoters were closely involved in Unesco's Man in the Biosphere Program, which launched Project 6 on 'Impact of human activities on mountain and tundra ecosystems' at international meetings in 1973.

Experiences gained in international development assistance in mountain areas and UN programs such as MAB-6 generated a global network of mountain promoters loosely united in the Mountain Agenda and with close links to critical governmental and intergovernmental resources.⁴² A relatively small group of researchers and activists, including Bruno Messerli, Jack Ives, and Jane Pratt, nurtured these links and skillfully used them during the agenda setting process leading up to the 1992 Rio Summit. According to a staff member at the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Agenda 21's Chapter 13 "Managing fragile ecosystems: sustainable mountain development," was largely a "joint project" between SDC and Bruno Messerli.⁴³ A strategic choice that aided this effort, according to Thomas Hofer, who closely collaborated with Messerli and currently works on mountain issues at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was the deliberate effort to "leave North-South issues out of the picture."⁴⁴

Chapter 13 marked a watershed in the development of the global mountain dialog. Although other chapters would soon be further developed through international treaties, the mountain chapter established international legitimacy on par with such issues as biodiversity loss and climate change, and initiated a reporting process that would guarantee continued attention. In its introduction, Chapter 13 states that "As a major ecosystem representing the complex and interrelated ecology of our planet, mountain environments are essential to the survival of the global ecosystem." Recognizing "widespread poverty among mountain inhabitants and loss of indigenous knowledge," Chapter 13 argues "that proper management of mountain resources and socio-economic development of the people deserves immediate action." The two program areas it spells out are "generating and strengthening knowledge about the ecology and sustainable development of mountain ecosystems;" and "promoting integrated watershed development and alternative livelihood opportunities."

41. Personal interview with Lukas Frey, March 18, 2004.

42. Habermann 2003.

43. Personal interview with L. Frey, March 18, 2004; personal interview with T. Hofer, January 26, 2004.

44. Personal interview with T. Hofer, January 26, 2004.

Unlike other Agenda 21 chapters, which engendered single-issue approaches, the link between mountain degradation and other environmental problem areas became evident soon after Rio. Although not thought of or talked about in these terms, the embeddedness of mountain degradation and sustainable mountain development in a larger regime complex gave rise to a variety of institutional links with what had come to be referred to as environmental regimes. Two main trends accounted for this development. First, new scientific findings underscored the importance of focusing on mountain regions in the context of biodiversity and climate change. On the one hand, their significant altitudinal diversity was found to closely correspond with high levels of biological diversity, thus suggesting a connection with the Convention on Biological Diversity. On the other hand, scientists discovered that high elevation zones were particularly susceptible to global warming and might therefore serve as important indicators of global environmental change, hence implying an important connection to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). Second, a series of high-level intergovernmental and non-governmental consultations held in 1994-95 helped place mountain dialog in a larger regime complex. These meetings were crucial awareness raising events, which brought non-academic interest groups on board and diversified mountain agenda promoters.

Regional mountain treaties

Rio attention to the earth's mountain regions did not generate a global treaty, but preparations for signing a legally binding international instrument to protect the European Alps had already been under way for some time. CIPRA initiated a campaign for an Alpine Convention in 1987. One year later, after the European Parliament unanimously adopted a proposal supporting the process, experts from the Alpine countries, the Council of Europe and the European Communities met in Liechtenstein to prepare a draft convention, which was further refined and signed by eight alpine countries and the EU in 1992. Although the convention has been seen by many as a conservationist instrument, it emphasizes the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development. The preamble to the convention recognizes the special natural and cultural diversity of the Alps and their importance as "an economic, cultural, recreational and living environment." The Alpine Convention mirrors the framework-protocol approach of the biodiversity and climate

change treaties. At present, ten protocols covering a wide range of sectoral and inter-sectoral areas such as nature and landscape protection, agriculture, forestry, tourism, energy and transport are at different stages of ratification. Several have come into force.

The Alpine Convention has served as a model for a second generation of international mountain treaties. The first of these covers the Carpathians mountains, a major trans-boundary mountain range shared by the seven countries of the region: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The Carpathian Convention emerged from a request by the region's countries to UNEP's European office to facilitate an intergovernmental consultative process in support of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the mountain range. With the additional help of the Alpine Convention, the convention was signed in 2003 and entered into force in 2005. Similar to the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention covers a wide range of sectors and aims at promoting general sustainable development in the region. At present, more than half of the signatories have ratified the convention but no protocols have so far been agreed.⁴⁵

A more recent convention initiative aims at the mountain ranges in the Balkan region. The idea was voiced at the 2004 meeting of the International Mountain Partnership and was followed up by a request from Macedonia to the UNEP-Vienna office for support to an intergovernmental consultation process.

The International Mountain Partnership

In the absence of a global treaty that would have established a secretariat, FAO has been the principal international actor in the mountain dialog. FAO is the task manager of Chapter 13, convenes the Interagency Taskforce for Mountains, was task manager for the International Year of Mountains, manages an extensive portfolio of mountain-specific technical cooperation projects, and is the institutional home of the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, short the International Mountain Partnership (IMP).

The IMP, a “a voluntary alliance of partners dedicated to improving the lives of mountain people and protecting mountain environments around the world,” was launched at the World

45. Mitreva 2005.

Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002 as one of the new Type-2 partnerships. By the beginning of 2005, some 115 members had joined the Mountain Partnership. The membership is comprised of countries and intergovernmental organizations but the majority of Mountain Partnership members come from ‘major groups’ – civil society, NGOs and the private sector. The Partnerships overall aim is to foster greater cooperation among all mountain stakeholders - governments, donors, implementing agencies, NGOs, private sector actors, mountain communities, academia and other field practitioners. It provides an instrument to implement the proposed WSSD Plan of Implementation as agreed in paragraph 40 on mountains with actions to: (i) develop and promote programs, policies and approaches that integrate environmental, economic and social components of sustainable mountain development and strengthen cooperation for poverty eradication; (ii) implement programs to address deforestation, erosion, land degradation, biodiversity loss, disruption of water flows and retreat of glaciers; (iii) develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and programs that help eliminate inequities facing mountain communities; (iv) promote the full participation of mountain communities in discussions that affect them and integrate indigenous knowledge, heritage and values into all interventions; and (v) mobilize resources and support for research, capacity building and poverty eradication efforts.⁴⁶

The International Year of Mountains and beyond

The creation of the International Mountain Partnership (IYM) coincided with the International Year of Mountains (at the initiative of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan), a reminder of the importance of the world’s mountain regions and a renewed call for action. In the context of IYM, close to 80 countries responded to the call by FAO’s Director General to create appropriate national multi-stakeholder structures for coordinating attention to mountain issues. In some cases, these structures were of a temporary, informal nature, responsible for serving as a conduit between the international mountain dialog and domestic state and nonstate actors. Many countries have established more permanent institutions with a view to integrating a mountain angle into domestic policy making. Some have proceeded to initiate the development of participatory and cross-sectoral mountain policies and laws. Accordingly, the Food and Agriculture Organization has been

46. United Nations 2002, 66.

approached by more developing country requests for assistance than its mountain unit and regular program can handle.

The culmination of IYM was an international Mountain Summit held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where participants signed on to the so-called Bishkek Mountain Platform, a “framework for stakeholders and others to contribute to sustainable development in the world’s mountain regions,” enabling them “to act together at all levels from local to global to improve the livelihoods of mountain people, to protect mountain ecosystems and to use mountain resources more wisely.” The guiding principle of the Platform is “to support participatory, multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary, eco-regional, decentralized and long-term approaches that respect the principles of subsidiarity, human diversity, human rights, gender equity and the environment” and to “value and build upon both indigenous and scientific information and knowledge.” Beyond this, the Platform outlines a series of actions to be taken at international, regional (supra-national), national, and local levels. Of particular relevance to the further development of the global public sphere is a call to “develop a UN resolution on sustainable development in mountain regions,” and “support to formal instruments such as charters, conventions and integrated policies to foster international cooperation between states sharing mountain areas.”

The embedding of sustainable mountain development in the larger sustainable development complex has continued in a number of ways. One has involved the institutionalization of mountain issues inside existing environmental regimes. In the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity, for instance, a mountain biodiversity group has been established and mountain biodiversity was the main theme of the 8th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2003. Activities in the mountain biodiversity working group have not progressed as far as in the agrobiodiversity and forest biodiversity working groups, but an important seed has been planted.

IYM also led to the institutionalization of mountain issues in existing organizations. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), for instance, had paid attention to mountain issues since the Rio Summit, particularly through the development of a support and exchange network of protected area managers, researchers and other professionals dealing with mountain protected areas. In 2000, however, IUCN members passed a resolution that called on the organization to establish a Mountains Initiative Taskforce, which was formed in January 2003 and consists of representatives from other IUCN Taskforces, global mountain

research initiatives and key UN organizations with mountain interests such as FAO, UNEP, and UNESCO. Since its inception, the Taskforce has coordinated contributions on mountains at the March 2003 meeting of CBD's SBSSTA and fostered partnerships within the framework of the International Mountain Partnership.

Conca argues that territorialization has been a determining characteristic of narrowly conceived international regimes. Approaches to local cumulative environmental problems, on the other hand, have a strongly deterritorializing effect, which makes them hard to fit into the regime mold. The evolution of the international dialog on mountain degradation and sustainable mountain development illustrates this tendency. Deterritorialization in mountain ecosystem degradation has been manifested in the internationalization of economic, political, and social relationships, reflected in (i) demographic changes, such as population growth, seasonal (including tourism) and permanent migration, and changing age/sex structures; (ii) the incorporation of mountain economies into extra-regional economies; (iii) the increasing influence of urban processes and perspectives, through urbanization and new communications, including transport and various electronic media; (iv) increases in consumption; and (v) changes in the location of decision-making and institutional arrangements, resulting from policy developments at all scales.⁴⁷ Paradoxically, as the growing focus on mountain ranges highlights the importance of place and locality, these transnational forces are undermining the distinction between domestic and international nature.

International Environmental Governance Revisited

What is ultimately at stake in the choice of conceptual lens for analyzing environmental governance is the degree to which it can detect effectiveness in dealing with environmental problems. In early regime effectiveness studies Underdal introduced the distinction between a problem-solving perspective that tries to assess the distance to a collective optimum, and a political-institutional perspective which examined relative improvement through carrying out counter-factual analysis.⁴⁸ Because most environmental regimes were in their infancy when

47. Programme Advisory Committee 1999.

48. Underdal 1992.

effectiveness studies were initiated, the latter generally prevailed.⁴⁹ From the mid-1990s on, however, emphasis gradually turned to specific behavioral impacts.⁵⁰ Young and Levy, for instance, have proposed six behavioral mechanisms/pathways through which international regimes could influence actors and processes in domestic contexts – as modifiers of actors’ utility functions, enhancers of cooperation, bestowers of authority, learning facilitators, role definers, or agents of domestic realignments – and several subsequent studies elaborated on them.⁵¹ Because most of them have used a narrow regime definition as their point of departure, however, assessments of effectiveness have largely ignored governing activity in issue areas devoid of an international treaty.

Revisiting environmental governance in sustainable mountain development from a broader perspective can compensate for this lack of attention. The previous section outlined some Young and Levy’s pathways through which domestic actors and processes are influenced. The section that follows highlights several dimensions which a global public sphere perspective brings to light. These include the multi-stakeholder nature of governance, the cross-sectoral institutional embeddedness of the international mountain dialog, the regionalization of rule making, and the diversification of knowledge creation.

Actors in the global public sphere of sustainable mountain development

Whereas the international mountain dialog is by far not the only global public sphere in which an increasingly diverse group of actors meets, narrow regime approaches have typically ignored the influence of nonstate actors. Numerous scholars have detailed this neglect and its consequences, giving rise to a large literature on non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, transnational social movements, epistemic communities, and even treaty secretariats. Moreover, a growing number of scholars have begun to study governing arrangements in which states only play a secondary role. In trying to understand international labeling and certification schemes, for instance, the regime concept is of limited use.

49. For example, Haas et al. 1993.

50. Wettestad 2006.

51. Young and Levy 1999, 21; Brown-Weiss and Jacobson 1998; Underdal and Hanf 2000; Victor et al. 1998; and Clark et al. 2001a, 2001b.

National governments, to be sure, have played an important role in mountain governance during the last twenty years. Countries signed and ratified the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, adopted Agenda 21, voted to make 2002 the International Year of Mountains, and play a significant role in the International Mountain Partnership. Furthermore, most international mountain events and programs are financed by national governments, including the Secretariat of the International Mountain Partnership. At the same time, nation states are characterized by highly diverse, fragmented and often conflicting internal structures. In the case of the Alpine Convention, for instance, negotiations were almost exclusively carried out by environment ministries, which were often at odds with other national ministries as well as local governments in mountain areas. As early as 1972, European mountain regions joined together in the *Arge Alp*, which provided them with a venue for carrying out what Karl Geir has called para-diplomacy.⁵² Similarly, municipalities have formed *Allianz in den Alpen* to promote the Convention, whereas Swiss mountain cantons organized in the Governing Council of Mountain Cantons prevented the national government from initiating the ratification process until years after the convention was signed. A further innovative institution that has emerged centers on publicly elected officials from mountain areas. In a global public sphere perspectives, such domestic and transnational dynamics among subsidiary bodies of nation states and public officials are highlighted because the analytical focus is on discursive and behavioral practices in social interaction.

The role of nonstate actors in the international mountain dialog is similarly pronounced. To begin with, the Alpine Convention would most likely never have emerged if it was not for the sustained efforts of the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, a IUCN spinoff. Similarly, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations have played a crucial role in the elaboration of the Carpathian Convention and are proving instrumental in the development of the Balkan Convention Initiative. Over the course of the last twenty years, an incredible diverse network of public, private and mixed transalpine networks has been at the center of discussions over the future of Europe's mountain regions and assumed principal responsibility for the architecture of the public mountain sphere.

The best example of the role of nonstate actors in the international mountain dialog is the International Mountain Partnership. Although Ottaway has warned of the neocorporatist tendencies inherent in such arrangements as the World Commission on Dams, Type-2 partnerships that

52. Geir 1999.

emerged from the World Summit on Sustainable Development have proven highly successful in fostering dialog among diverse sets of actors. Significantly, many of these hybrid arrangements have elaborated private regulatory initiatives. The Mountain Partnership has also brought on board a large number of private sector associations. The narrow definition of authority roles in the international regime concepts fails to account for the lion share of today's governing acts.

Institutional linkages

Because the concept of global public spheres is much more fluid than that of international regimes, institutional overlap is conceptually (and practically) both more likely and perhaps less undesirable. One of the questions the study of nonregimes has raised is whether nonregimes illustrate a governance deficit. Does the complex multiplicity of governance acts or functions that exist in spite of, or in response to, the centralizing force of an international, legally binding agreement really amount to the kind of duplication of efforts, overlapping of responsibilities, and waste of resources typically deplored by reform-oriented scholars and practitioners? For instance, it has been argued that “divergent policy approaches within a horizontally and vertically segmented policy arena pose significant challenges,” including the risk that a lack of uniform policies may jeopardize the success of approaches adopted by individual groups of countries or at different levels of decision-making.⁵³

On the other hand, segmented approaches have their advantages. Peter Haas believes that “some degree of redundancy is actually desirable in the international system, as it provides insurance against the decline of any individual international institution and fits better with an ecological institutional design vision of requisite diversity. Moreover, redundancy provides for more contact and linkage between institutions.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Biermann admits that distinct policy arenas allow for the testing of innovative policy instruments.⁵⁵ Haas also rejects the efficiency argument, which states that more could be done if there was less competition for resources, because less competition would result in the consolidation of political influence among a smaller number of actors.

53. Biermann 2006, 246.

54. Haas 2004, 3.

55. Biermann 2006, 247.

The international mountain dialog has been characterized by a large degree of institutional linkage for two reasons. The first concerns the cross-sectoral context in which associated local cumulative environmental problems manifest. Mountain regions occupy about one fourth of the Earth's surface, ranging from the Equator to the poles, and provide goods and services to about half of humanity.⁵⁶ Goods originating in mountain regions include water (for consumption, irrigation, and energy production), food (crops, domesticated and wild animals), wood (for energy and construction), non-timber forest products (fibers, foodstuffs, and medicinal plants), and minerals. Ecosystem services include the maintenance of soil fertility and structure, and associated limitation of soil erosion, downstream movement of soil nutrients, avoidance and mitigation of damaging impacts of disastrous events, such as floods, landslides, and avalanches, provision of landscape as amenity, biodiversity, and cycling and storage of carbon and soil nutrients. In addition to providing a large array of goods and services, mountain regions are also the homes of about a tenth of the world's population and because many of these are among the most economically, politically, socially, and environmentally marginalized, the mountain dialog is firmly embedded in general sustainable development discourse and practice and all the attendant institutional linkages this implies.

The second reason for the large degree of institutional linkage of mountain issues, as noted above, stems from links with existing treaty systems, especially the climate change, biological diversity, and trade in endangered species. Accordingly, linkages have been developed with the biodiversity regime through the establishment of a mountain diversity working group, the climate change regime through a variety of research projects, the Commission on Sustainable Development through annual and now biannual reporting activities, as well as the forest regime through the Mountain Cloud Forest Initiative a joint activity of UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN to promote action and capacity-building in partnership with UNEP, World Conservation and Monitoring Centre, IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management, and UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program. Lastly, links between mountain treaties and other environmental regimes run both ways. The Alpine Convention, for instance, is formally linked to several EU directives.

Sustainable mountain development is thus difficult to fit into a regime context because many of its constituent problems are already addressed in other regimes. Indeed, "most international and national institutions were designed historically to address discrete problems,

56. Kapos et al 2000; and Messerli and Ives 1997.

whereas the current globalized agenda consists of intertwined issues (or what organizational theorists term non-decomposable or partially non-decomposable problems). Effective management of these new intertwined issues requires procedures for responsible agencies (either nationally or internationally, or states as a whole) to think about how their actions will affect the responsibilities of other autonomous agencies and how their policy domain may be affected by decisions taken in or by other bodies.”⁵⁷

Formal instruments at the regional scale

Examining international environmental governance through the lens of global public spheres de-emphasizes formal treaties in favor of the development of social norms through iterative multi-stakeholder interaction. In the area of sustainable mountain development, preparatory activities for significant events such as the Earth Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, or the International Year of Mountains, have provided important venues for the elaboration of international norms anchored in Agenda 21’s Chapter 13 and the Bishkek Mountain Platform. As we have seen, however, international agreements centering on mountain ranges have nevertheless been in existence for fifteen years. While these have not covered the entire globe, and for this reason have largely escaped attention by regime scholars, their regional (supra-national) manifestation has contributed to a growing trend in international environmental governance.

Attention to regional agreements instead of global treaties has two main advantages. First, as Conca has noted, “more than a decade after the 1992 Earth Summit, it has become clear that the momentum for interstate environmental diplomacy has ebbed dramatically... Yet, at the same time, environmental governance is indeed growing increasingly transnational.”⁵⁸ One of the reasons why the momentum for global treaty making has declined is that international cleavages, among which the North-South divide is the most prominent though not the only one, has made it difficult to find common ground. Reluctance to establish still more international institutions is another reason, as is growing doubt over the effectiveness of such overarching regulatory attempts. The pursuit of regional treaties offers an alternative to capitalize on transnationalization of environmental governance and overcome global treaty fatigue. A second advantage of regional

57. Haas 2004.

58. Conca 2006, 383.

agreements stems from the greater stake a more immediate context can instill in actors and the greater ability of diverse stakeholders to participate in governance arrangements. This in turn increases the level of interaction and the conceptual leverage of a global public sphere approach.

Regional institutions have been suggested as a critical element in multi-level arrangements on sustainable development.⁵⁹ During the Johannesburg Summit, reference was made to regional arrangements such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) or the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); regional institutionalization of sustainable development has progressed nowhere as far as in the European Union. Several key proposals for post-2012 policy and governance architecture for climate change mitigation and adaptation also include provisions for regional decentralization.⁶⁰ While these proposed regional approaches define regions as groups of nation states, a new generation of regional agreements that are based on ecoregions may emerge as a result of transboundary spatiality of climate change impacts. The Barents region and the Baltic Sea region are two examples of this emerging trend.⁶¹ Of importance in these cases are the "transboundary regional dialogue that takes place and also the fact that actors (stakeholders) are motivated by a sort of connection to a common regional cause and understanding. It is an appeal to the concept of 'belonging' to a certain place that is often present in the discourse."

Knowledge development

While it is almost universally accepted that knowledge plays a crucial role in international environmental politics, there has been an ongoing debate about the relative legitimacy of different types of knowledge. One of Conca's critiques of international regime is that they are characterized by an inherent tendency to stabilize knowledge by favoring a singular construction of an environmental problem, developing an officially sanctioned body of universal, technical knowledge, and defining the boundary between "official truths and acknowledged uncertainties."⁶² The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the ultimate example of

59. Bruyninckx 2006.

60. Bodansky 2004.

61. Kern and Löffelsend 2004.

62. Conca 2006, 53

sanctioned knowledge. By contrast, traditional knowledge of local populations tends to be “spotty, inconsistent, discontinuous, and noncomparable,” and as local knowledge is often diverse, contingent, and culturally bound, it is not usually considered part of the sanctioned body of knowledge. This tendency is both an expression of the institutionalization of knowledge creation in the context of international treaties and a reflection of treaty-making bias towards global commons problems.

Local cumulative problems such as mountain degradation, which are not governed by a global treaty, are more likely to foster knowledge diversity. Two important reasons account for this. First, local cumulative problems are mostly addressed at a local level, both in developing and developed countries. In these contexts, whether it be the establishment of a Unesco biosphere reserve or Unesco world heritage site in Switzerland’s mountain regions or watershed management projects in the Himalaya foothills, the involvement of local inhabitants and the incorporation of their expertise has been recognized as a critical element of project success. Through various transnational and global channels, often at the initiative of non-governmental organizations in collaboration with development assistance agencies, such experiences percolate up to the international mountain dialog, where the importance of local knowledge becomes established as an influential norm. A second reason why knowledge diversity is promoted through approaches to local cumulative environmental problems, especially in mountain areas, is that since they typically involve the world’s most marginalized populations, natural resources management issues are often tied to human rights issues. Characteristically, peace was the main theme of a recent International Mountain Day. Through local expertise and links to human rights, the global public sphere of sustainable mountain development is constantly exposed to what Conca refers to knowledge stabilization.

Knowledge stabilization nevertheless plays an important role in the international mountain dialog. As mentioned earlier, growing scientific knowledge about the significance of mountain regions as indicators for global environmental change and as sites of biological diversity was crucial to the development of the global public sphere following the Rio Summit. This in turn has generated additional interest on the part of scientists and policy makers. Correspondingly, a large number of research projects that address mountain-relevant issues have been initiated over the past decade. Their institutional embeddedness has reflected the relevance of mountain areas to a variety of research fields. The Global Change and Mountain Regions Research Initiative (MRI), for

instance, emerged in the second half of the 1990s and has been endorsed by the three main global change organizations – the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP), and the Global Terrestrial Observation System (GTOS). Projects such as MRI also demonstrate the long-term network of scientists. The MRI project scoping document notes that the IGBP Mountain Research Initiative did not actually start to form in 1996, “but it is rather the product of an awareness building process that lasted several decades and was carried through by a fairly small number of visionary scientists.”⁶³

Although much international mountain research is linked to climate change and aims at establishing baseline data and monitoring systems, such as the Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA), many projects are link back to local natural resource management issues and hence involve a knowledge destabilizing element. During the preparation of MRI, for instance, participants continuously emphasized the need for an interdisciplinary approach and suggested that IHDP’s science projects International Dimensions of Global environmental change (IDGEC) and Global Environmental Change and Human Security (GECHS). Accordingly MRI’s objectives included the elaboration of proposals towards sustainable land, water and resource management for mountain regions at local to regional scales. MRI finally serves as an example of the link to biodiversity conservation, as it has recently joined IUCN’s Mountain Initiative Taskforce, and its institutional connections to the international dialog, where it is a member of International Mountain Partnership. The link to biodiversity is further underscored through the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA) and Unesco Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura announcement at the Bishkek Mountain Summit of a global study to assess the impact of global change on the biophysical environment as well as on the socio-economic conditions of mountain inhabitants, using mountain biospheres as monitoring sites (of the 440 biosphere reserves, over 40 percent are situated in mountainous regions).

63. Becker and Bugman 1999, 8.

Conclusion

This article has made an ethical argument linking dominant conceptual approaches to global environmental governance with the invisibility of global sustainable mountain development. The world global environmental politics scholars have sung into existence, to return to Smith's claim outlined at the beginning of the article, has largely failed to generate any discussion about a region that covers a quarter of the world's terrestrial surface, provides fresh water to half of humanity, and is home to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Building on the growing critique of the international regime concept, the article has suggested the notion of global public spheres as a conceptual lens that is better suited to capture the wealth of governing acts unfolding in support of mountain regions. With its greater emphasis on norm-generating social interaction in cross-scale multi-stakeholder settings, this view is able to go beyond the narrow focus on interstate diplomacy, formal treaties, and global commons problems. With time, Kofi Annan's statement at the inauguration of the International Year of Mountains may yet become recognized, namely that "we are all mountain people."

References

- Aggarwal, Vinod. 1985. *Liberal Protectionism: The International Politics of Organized Textile Trade*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ashley, Richard. 1993. Imposing International Purpose: Notes on the Problematic of Governance. In *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges*, edited by Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James N. Rosenau, 251–290. Lexington MA: D. C. Heath.
- Becker, Alfred, and Harald Bugman. 1999. *Global Change and Mountain Regions: The Mountain Research Initiative*. IGBP Report 49/GTOS Report 28/IHDP Report 13. Stockholm: IGBP Secretariat, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.
- Benner, Thorsten, Wolfgang H. Reinicke, and Jan Martin Witte. 2003. Global Public Policy Networks. *The Brookings Review* 21(2):18-21.
- Biermann, Frank. 2006. Global Governance and the Environment. In *Palgrave Advances in International Environmental Politics*, edited by Michele M. Betsill, Kathryn Hochstetler and Dimitris Stevis, 237-261. Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bodansky, Paul, with Sophie Chou and Christie Jorge-Tresolini. 2004. *International Climate Efforts Beyond 2012: A Survey of Approaches*. Arlington, Virginia: Pew Center on Global Climate Change.
- Bohman, James. 1999. “International regimes and democratic governance: political equality and influence in global institutions.” *International Affairs* 75(3):499-513.
- Brown-Weiss, Edith, and Harold K. Jacobson, eds. 1998. *Engaging Countries: Strengthening Compliance with International Accords*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bruyninckx, Hans. 2006. Sustainable Development: The Institutionalization of a Contested Policy Concept. In *Palgrave Advances in International Environmental Politics*, edited by Michele M. Betsill, Kathryn Hochstetler and Dimitris Stevis, 265-298. Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clark, William C., Nancy Dickson, Jill Jäger, and Josee van Eijndhoven, eds. 2001a. *Learning to Manage Global Environmental Risks, Vol. 1: A Comparative History of Social Responses to Climate Change, Ozone Depletion, and Acid Rain*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- _____. 2001b. *Learning to Manage Global Environmental Risks, Vol. 2: A Functional Analysis of Social Responses to Climate Change, Ozone Depletion, and Acid Rain*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cochran, Molly. 2002. “A Democratic Critique of Cosmopolitan Democracy: Pragmatism from the Bottom-Up.” *European Journal of International Relations* 8(4):517-48.
- Conca, Ken. 2006. *Governing Water: Contentious Transnational Politics and Global Institution Building*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Davenport, Deborah S. 2004. The Global Forest Non-regime and the Role of the US: A Case of Failure or of Lack of Interest? Paper prepared for Presentation at the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, Montreal Quebec, March 18, 2004. [ask for permission to cite].
- Dimitrov, Radoslav S. 2002. Confronting Nonregimes: Science and International Coral Reef Policy. *Journal of Environment and Development* 11 (1):53-78.
- _____. 2003. Knowledge, Power and Interests in Environmental Regime Formation. *International Studies Quarterly* 47 (1):123-150.
- _____. 2005. *Science and International Environmental Policy: Regimes and Nonregimes in Global Governance*. Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Dryzek, John S. 1999. “Transnational Democracy.” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 7(1):30-51.

- Elster, Jon. 1995. "Strategic Uses of Argument." In Kenneth Arrow et al. eds., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Geir, Karl. 1999. *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenländer: Ideologische Ausrichtung und Paradiplomatie der Arge Alp*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Salzburg.
- Glück, Peter, Richard Tarasofsky, Neil Byron, and Ilpo Tikkanen. 1997. *Options for Strengthening the International Legal Regime for Forests*. Joensuu, Finland: European Forest Institute.
- Haas, Peter M. 2004. Addressing the Global Governance Deficit. *Global Environmental Politics* 4(4):1-15.
- Haas, Peter M., and Norichika Kanie, eds. 2004. *Dynamics of Multilateral Environmental Governance*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Haas, Peter M., Robert O. Keohane, and Marc A. Levy, eds. 1993. *Institutions for the Earth – Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermann, Birgit. 2003. Sustainable Development of Mountain Forests: Whose Claims, Whose Issues, and Whose Benefits? *European Tropical Forest Research Network News* 38:5-11.
- Haggard, Stephan, and Beth A. Simmons. 1987. "Theories of International Regimes." *International Organization* 41(3):491-517.
- Hasenclever, Andreas, Peter Mayer, and Volker Rittberger. 1997. Conceptual issues: defining international regimes." In *Theories of International Regimes*, edited by Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, 8-22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Humphreys, David. 2003. Life Protective or Carcinogenic Challenge? Global Forests Governance under Advanced Capitalism. *Global Environmental Politics* 3(2):40-55.
- Jasanoff, Sheila. 1998. Contingent Knowledge: Implications for Implementation and Compliance. In *Engaging Countries: Strengthening Compliance with International Environmental Accords*, edited by Edith Brown Weiss and Harold K. Jacobson, **page numbers**. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Johnston, Alastair I. 2001. "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments." *International Studies Quarterly* 45:487-515.
- Kapos, V., J. Rhind, M. Edwards, C. Ravilious, and Martin F. Price. 2000. Developing a map of the world's mountain forests. In *Forests in sustainable mountain development: A state-of-knowledge report for 2000*, edited by Martin F. Price and N. Butt. Wallingford, UK: CAB International.
- Keohane, Robert O. 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- _____. 1986. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- _____. 1988. International Institutions: Two Approaches. *International Studies Quarterly* 32(4):379-396.
- Kern, Kristine, and Tina Löffelsend. 2004. Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region. Governance Beyond the Nation State. *Local Environment* 9(5):451-67.
- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Krasner, Stephen D., ed. 1983. Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables. In *International Regimes*, edited by Stephen D. Krasner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Litfin, Karen. 1994. *Ozone Discourses*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Messerli, Bruno, and Jack D. Ives. 1997. *Mountains of the world: a global priority*. **Place:** The Parthenon Publishing Group.
- Mitreva, Biljana. 2005. *Report on the Convention on the Protection of the Alps, Convention on the*

- Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians & Balkan Convention Initiative.* Makmontana/Euromontana.
- Mitzen, Jennifer. 2005. "Reading Habermas in Anarchy: Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Public Spheres." *American Political Science Review* 99(3):401-17.
- Programme Advisory Committee. 1999. Conclusions and recommendations of the European Conference on Environmental and Societal Change in Mountain Regions. In *Global change in the mountains*, edited by Martin F. Price, T.H. Mather, and E.C. Robertson, xvii-xxxii. London and New York: Parthenon.
- Puchala, Donald, and Raymond Hopkins. 1983 [check year]. International Regimes: Lessons from Inductive Analysis. In *International Regimes*, edited by Stephen D. Krasner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Reasoner, Mel, Harald Bugmann, and Thomas Schaaf. 2003. Introduction. Background and concepts for Collaborative Work: Global Change Research in Mountain Biosphere Reserves. In *Global Change Research in Mountain Biosphere Reserves. Proceedings of the International Launching Workshop held in Entlebuch Biosphere Reserve, Switzerland, 10-13 November, 2003*, edited by Paul Simmonds. Paris: Unesco.
- Risse, Thomas. 2000. "Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics." *International Organization* 54(1):1-39.
- Rittberger, Volker, ed. 1993. Editor's introduction. In *Regime Theory and International Relations*, edited by Volker Rittberger, [insert page numbers]. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ruggie, John Gerard. 2004. Reconstituting the Global Public Domain – Issues, Actors, and Practices. *European Journal of International Relations* 10(4):499-531.
- Smith, Steve. 2003. Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11. Keynote address given at the International Studies Association Annual Conference, Portland, Maine. [insert exact citation].
- Spaargaren, Gert, Arthur P. J. Mol, and Frederick H. Buttel, eds. 2006. *Governing Environmental Flows: Global Challenges to Social Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sprinz, Detlef F. 2001. Global Warming/Climate Change Convention. In *Encyclopedia of International Political Economy*, edited by R. J. B. Jones. London: Routledge.
- Strange, Susan. 1982. Cave! Hic Dragones: A Critique of Regime Analysis. *International Organization* 36(2):479-496.
- Tarasofsky, Richard, ed. 1999. *Assessing the International Forests Regime*. IUCN Environmental Law and Policy Paper No.37. Cambridge UK: IUCN Publication Services.
- Underdal, Arild. 1992. The Concept of Regime "effectiveness." *Cooperation and Conflict* 27(3):227-240.
- _____. 2002. Conclusions: Patterns of Regime Effectiveness. In *Environmental Regime Effectiveness: Confronting Theory with Evidence*, edited by Edward L. Miles, Arild Underdal, Steinar Andresen, Jørgen Wettstad, Jon Birger Skjærseth and Elaine M. Carlin. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Underdal, Arild, and Kenneth Hanf, eds. 2000. *International Environmental Agreements and Domestic Politics: The Case of Acid Rain*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- United Nations. 2002. Type 2 Partnership Initiatives. World Summit on Sustainable Development Summit Document A/CONF.199/CRP.5. Available online at [insert web address].
- Victor, David G., Kal Raustiala, and Eugene B. Skolnikoff, eds. 1998. *The Implementation and Effectiveness of International Environmental Commitments*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Vogler, John. 2003. Taking Institutions Seriously: How Regime Analysis can be Relevant to

- Multilevel Environmental Governance. *Global Environmental Politics* 3(2):25-39.
- Wapner, Paul. 1997. Governance in Global Civil Society. In *Global Governance: Drawing Insight from the Environmental Experience*, edited by Oran Young, 65–84. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Weber, Max. 1948. Science as a Vocation. In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 129-156. London: Routledge.
- Wettestad, Jørgen. 2006. The Effectiveness of Environmental Policies. In *Palgrave Advances in International Environmental Politics*, edited by Michele M. Betsill, Kathryn Hochsetler and Dimitris Stevis, 299-328. Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Young, Oran R. 2002. *The Institutional Dimensions of Environmental Change: Fit, Interplay, and Scale*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- _____. 1982. *Resource Regimes: Natural Resources and Social Institutions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Young, Oran R., and Marc A. Levy, eds. 1999. *The Effectiveness of International Environmental Regimes: Causal Connections and Behavioral Mechanisms*. Cambridge: MIT Press.