

Book Review

Environmental Governance through Partnerships

Reviewed by Zhongxian Wang, School of Business, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

Reviewed by James Yao, School of Business, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

Environmental Governance through Partnerships

Aysem Mert

© 2015 by Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, UK

288 pp.

\$130.00

ISBN 978 1 78254 004 5

According to McAllister and Taylor (2015), partnerships for sustainability governance loosely refer to cooperation for the purpose of designing and implementing sustainability policies. They found that partnerships incrementally nudging governance towards greater inclusion of diverse stakeholders are better than entirely transforming governance arrangements. Also, more inclusive governance is a two-edged sword: enhancing the capacity to resolve contested and complex problems at scale and obscuring accountability as well as generating conflict with other institutional objectives.

The UN endorsed transnational partnerships as the Type-II outcomes in 2002. Despite global partnerships' apparent success as mainstream across levels and issues of environmental governance, their attractiveness as a way of governing human interactions with the planet's ecosystems has not yet been appropriately examined. In this theoretical book Aysem Mert synthesizes post-structuralist discourse theory and ecocriticism to analyze three discourses that have been rooted into the logic of partnerships: privatization of governance, sustainable development and democratic participation. In her opinion, these discourses help understand both the potential and structural limitations of sustainability partnerships.

PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE

Chapters 1-4 deal with the various narratives that reveal the first conclusion, as well as the tools and assumptions through which this research was carried out.

In an introductory Chapter 1, Mert focuses on partnerships, the objects of this book. More precisely, this book scrutinizes a specific subgroup of partnerships working on sustainable development and operating at a transnational level, called *sustainability partnerships* or *Type-II outcomes*. The Preparatory Commission Meetings of the WSSD (World Summit on Sustainable Development) only reached International agreements (Type-I outcomes) in 2002. In short of legally binding agreements, Type-II outcomes are sensitive and extremely critical for global environmental governance. This book demonstrates the interactions of non-state actors across national boundaries, being mainly concerned

with transnational and global governance. The background, research questions, main assumptions, and initial problematization have been provided.

In line with the author, Chapter 2 describes the tools and methods for a circular narration that analyzes and embeds partnerships. The author notices that sustainable development has covered increasingly more issues since its initiation in the 1980s. However, the variation in the scope, organization and goals of these partnerships is extensive. The CSD (Commission for Sustainable Development) partnerships specify their composition at the global and transnational level and represent a more coherent set than other possible samples. These partnerships embrace a clear sample of choice which sets a turning point in the history of environmental governance. Therefore, powerful methods, such as discourse theory and eco-criticism, should be grounded in ontological presuppositions in order to guide their use and interpretation.

Mert establishes ontological presuppositions and the analytical concepts in Chapter 3. The author reveals the antiessentialist theoretical foundation of this book, wherein nature is no longer considered in opposition to or the exclusion of society. It serves as a theoretical platform on which issues of international relations, environment and developmental politics in the realm of transnational governance, and particularly the novel mechanisms of governance such as partnerships can be discussed. Indeed, Mert brings together the aims of political ecology and the means of discourse theory. Discourse theory is a powerful tool in the analysis of political change within continuity. Incremental changes are real and shouldn't be ignored. Furthermore, Mert suggests looking into international negotiations from a new angle: as platforms of conflict sedimentation.

Chapter 4, the last of Part I and the first empirical chapter, examines the political dimension of partnerships, by focusing on the process that will result in partnerships as official outcomes of the WSSD: from the first time they have been mentioned in an official UN document to their negotiations and official enactment. It emphasizes discourse institutionalization and sedimentation of conflict via negotiations. Titled "Partnerships as sedimented discourses: the emergence of Type-II outcomes", it details how the partnerships regime emerged, what role Type-II outcomes were given in governance, and whether actual partnerships contradict these goals. It embeds the negotiations to the three important changes that took place in environmental governance between the Rio Earth Summit and the WSSD: the implementation deficit, the increasing tendency towards private mechanisms and the prioritization of the developmental pillar. Also, Mert compares the rules set by the Bali Guidelines to the actual partnerships regime.

PART 2: ANALYZING THE MEDIATING DISCOURSES

The second part (Chapters 5-7) consists of three analyzed discourses: privatization of governance, sustainable development, and democratic participation. In Part II, each chapter explores one of the mediating discourses, from both historical and contemporary relations to sustainability partnerships perspectives.

Chapter 5 contextualizes partnerships to their economic background, to observe how the term evolved from a form of business ownership to an institution of transnational governance. It focuses on the discussions around *privatization of governance* in terms of the shifts in the perception of corporations and rights of ownership. More generally it establishes the framework of globalization and the increasing influence of capital markets on governance. Mert opens up certain obscured debates related to partnerships in the context of globalization. Mert notices that the application of the term partnerships to hybrid mechanisms of environmental governance points to a change towards the limitation of legal liabilities due to its voluntary nature: how to monitor and detect failures? Is this whose responsibility? Who could be held accountable? Many questions could arise and remain.

Mert analyzes the colonization of reality by the sustainable development paradigm in Chapter 6. She traces its ideological roots (developmentalism and environmentalism) in Western myths and

examines the discourse of sustainable development and places CSD partnerships in their political context. Bringing together the unlikely ideas of environmental protection and economic development, sustainable development has been an exceptionally successful UN discourse, since 1987. To look into this dual origin of the term, a history of environmentalism and one of developmentalism are constructed and linked. Sustainable development is their merger. Through this nexus, global environmental governance and its various contemporary institutions can be understood in their historical settings. Sustainable development is appropriated by partnerships and sustainability partnerships have become radical monopolies.

Chapter 7 investigates the discourse of participation historically and links the discourse of participation as an important context to sustainability partnerships. First of all, Mert discusses the problem of scale in democratic theory. Following that she investigates the participation deficit in governance and the proposition that partnerships may address this problem. Then, she focuses on the level of global environmental governance, specifically on the way wherein the participation of civil society has changed since the Rio Conference. This was a transformation of civil society into major groups, up to stakeholder and community participation, an indispensable aspect of the 'good governance' paradigm. Participation is an ideal that is often employed to justify and legitimize partnerships. Studying participatory discourses historically reveals what kind of democratic inclusion partnerships can deliver.

Mert presents the empirical, theoretical and methodological results of the study, demonstrates the challenges and potentials of the partnerships regime, and suggests a continuation of this research agenda in Chapter 8. She summarizes the transformations that the practice and discourse of partnerships have gone through so far. In her opinion, partnerships are a promise to address the dilemmas between the political center and left as well as between the logics of cooperation and competition among public and private sectors. The implication of this observation for global and transnational governance is the extension of democracy to the global level and the promise of inclusion. Thus, it reflects on the potential of partnerships for democracy and environmental governance.

Other researches support Mert's theory. For instance, Drazkiewicz, Challies, and Newig (2015) agree that public and stakeholder participation in environmental planning is often assumed to enhance effectiveness through improving the environmental quality of decisions and enhancing implementation. Having outlined four cases of decision-making processes in local environmental planning in Germany and representing a variety of forms of public participation, they found four different pathways to 'success' in participatory planning. Therefore, given the significance of context and surprises, planners and process organizers must be open to different pathways to the successful conclusion of participatory planning processes. Cashmore et al. (2015) examine the environment as a site for the contestation of power and authority by employing governmentality, a particular perspective on power.

This book belongs to the New Horizons in Environmental Politics series, which provides a platform for in-depth critical assessments of how we understand the many changes in the politics of nature, the environment and natural resources that have occurred over the last 50 years. The series is designed to promote innovative cross-disciplinary analysis of the contemporary issues and debates influencing the various dimensions of environmental politics.

This innovative book uses the results of both quantitative and qualitative research to analyze sustainability partnerships and their role in environmental governance. This book is an indispensable treasure for researchers, practitioners, and decision makers of environmental governance.

REFERENCES

- Cashmore, M., Richardson, T., Rozema, J., & Lyhne, I. (2015). Environmental governance through guidance: The 'making up' of expert practitioners. *Geoforum*, 62(June), 84–95. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.03.011
- Drazkiewicz, A., Challies, E., & Newig, J. (2015). Public participation and local environmental planning: Testing factors influencing decision quality and implementation in four case studies from Germany. *Land Use Policy*, 46(July), 211–222.
- McAllister, R., & Taylor, B. M. (2015). Partnerships for sustainability governance: A synthesis of key themes. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 2(February), 86–90. doi:10.1016/j.cosust.2015.01.001