

Environmental Governance in Latin America

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Edited by

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Selection, introduction and editorial matter © Fábio de Castro,
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Afterword © Eduardo Silva 2016

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2016 978-1-137-57408-4

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First published 2016 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-137-57408-4
E-PDF ISBN 978-1-137-50572-9
DOI 10.1057/9781137505729

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
Introduction: Environment and Society in Contemporary Latin America	1
<i>Fábio de Castro, Barbara Hogenboom and Michiel Baud</i>	
Part I Setting the Stage	
1 Origins and Perspectives of Latin American Environmentalism	29
<i>Joan Martinez-Alier, Michiel Baud and Héctor Sejenovich</i>	
2 Social Metabolism and Conflicts over Extractivism	58
<i>Joan Martinez-Alier and Mariana Walter</i>	
3 Indigenous Knowledge in Mexico: Between Environmentalism and Rural Development	86
<i>Mina Kleiche-Dray and Roland Waast</i>	
Part II New Politics of Natural Resources	
4 The Government of Nature: Post-Neoliberal Environmental Governance in Bolivia and Ecuador	113
<i>Pablo Andrade A.</i>	
5 Changing Elites, Institutions and Environmental Governance	137
<i>Benedicte Bull and Mariel Aguilar-Støen</i>	
6 Water-Energy-Mining and Sustainable Consumption: Views of South American Strategic Actors	164
<i>Cristián Parker, Gloria Baigorrotegui and Fernando Estenssoro</i>	
7 Overcoming Poverty Through Sustainable Development	186
<i>Héctor Sejenovich</i>	

Part III New Projects of Environmental Governance

8	Forest Governance in Latin America: Strategies for Implementing REDD <i>Mariel Aguilar-Støen, Fabiano Toni and Cecilie Hirsch</i>	205
9	Rights, Pressures and Conservation in Forest Regions of Mexico <i>Leticia Merino</i>	234
10	Local Solutions for Environmental Justice <i>David Barkin and Blanca Lemus</i>	257
11	Community Consultations: Local Responses to Large-Scale Mining in Latin America <i>Mariana Walter and Leire Urkidi</i>	287
	Afterword: From Sustainable Development to Environmental Governance <i>Eduardo Silva</i>	326
	<i>Index</i>	336

Figures and Tables

Figures

2.1	Latin America physical trade deficit in million tonnes, 1970–2008	62
2.2	Argentina’s physical and monetary external trade flows, 1970–2009	64
2.3	Physical trade balance of Colombia, 1990–2011	65
2.4	Domestic extraction in Argentina, 1970–2009	67
2.5	Domestic extraction in Latin America by major category of material, 1970–2008	71
8.1	Latin American countries in relation to their participation in REDD and the phased approach	210
9.1	National annual budget of CONAFOR according to different forest-related projects in Mexico (in million pesos), 2001–2008	241

Tables

2.1	General conversion factors of gross ore versus metal content and ore concentrate	72
4.1	Income capture in Bolivia and Ecuador	124
4.2	Environmental administration in Bolivia and Ecuador	129
6.1	Reference cases	167
6.2	Overview of signifying content in the discourse models	171
9.1	Different uses of forest by community residents in Mexico	242
9.2	Indices of forest communities’ performance	244
11.1	Mining consultations in the context of active mining conflicts, 2002–2012	293
11.2	Guatemalan wave of preventative consultations against mining activities, 2005–2012	297

Preface

This book is the result of the collaborative research project Environmental Governance in Latin America (ENGOV) funded by the European Union (EU). For four years, a team of experts from ten Latin American and European academic institutions investigated how environmental governance is currently being shaped in Latin America. In this joint effort, we were driven by our concerns about widespread ecological degradation, poverty and injustice, as well as by our curiosity about the ways in which the emergence of new political regimes and elites, and innovative steps by communities and social organizations, affects governance practices and nature–society relations. To understand the possibilities and obstacles for sustainable and equitable natural resource use, a range of case-studies were carried out in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico. Although some of the research topics and cases are not included in this volume, their findings have contributed to the discussions and theoretical reflections in the overall analysis.

The ENGOV project has been simultaneously challenging and inspiring. The theme of environmental governance is a huge academic enterprise because it addresses complex social relations, practices and views influencing how societies perceive nature and use natural resources. Combining methods and theories from different fields of the social sciences is a prerequisite which in practice is fairly demanding. Furthermore, by encompassing political, economic, cultural and environmental changes, formal as well as informal arrangements, and cross-scale connections, the study of environmental governance can easily become a ‘mission impossible’. Arguably this is even more the case for contemporary Latin America, with its variety of local and national conditions facing rapid-paced changes. Finally, collaborating in an international research consortium of ten institutional partners and more than 25 researchers from different disciplines, schools of thought and generations has also proved to be both daring and rewarding. The fact that we spoke in different academic languages and idiom accents was not only a hurdle to tackle during our group discussions, but also forced us to learn from each other’s approaches and convictions, and the foundations on which these are based. As a typical governance process, next

to misunderstandings, dissonances and unbridgeable differences, the exchange of different insights and perspectives proved to bring about refreshing debates and new understandings, nuances and agreements.

Without the ambition to provide a full overview of the environmental governance in Latin America, we have tried to identify key fields for research, with an emphasis on new trends or structural problems that deserve more academic attention. The new insights from each piece of research contributed to the development of analytical frameworks to analyse the multiple interconnected processes shaping environmental governance in the region. This volume is the result of this intricate, collaborative exercise.

For the realization of this book, several people and institutions have been indispensable. It would not have been possible without the extensive support of the EU. Financed under the Seventh Framework Programme, ENGOV enabled the consortium to develop important new research on environmental governance in Latin America and the Caribbean, resulting in a long list of publications. We are particularly thankful for the professional guidance of Philippe Keraudren and Cristina Marcuzzo of the Social Sciences and Humanities division of the Research and Innovation Directorate General.

We would also like to thank the institutions participating in ENGOV for their financial and administrative support, including their directors and the employees who directly assisted the project: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB), Institute de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo (SUM-UiO), Centro de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Universidade de Brasília (CDS-UnB), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco (UAM-Xoc), Instituto de Estudios Avanzados, Universidad de Santiago de Chile (IDEA-USACH), Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani (IIGG) and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Quito (UASB-SQ). We are grateful to our colleagues from CLACSO, and in particular to Fernanda Saforcada and Guadalupe Rudy, for their continuous support during the project. We also thank the University of Amsterdam, which hosts our own Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA) and was very supportive of ENGOV, in particular Jan Jacob Sikkema and Bea Krenn. At CEDLA, the solid project support by Leontien Cremers requires a special mention. Her accurate and cheerful involvement, including the preparation of the Index of this volume, has made a difference both for CEDLA's ENGOV coordination

team and for all the consortium members. We would also like to thank María Barrachina for kindly granting permission to use her photograph on the front cover. We are also most grateful to the members of ENGOV's international advisory board, who have offered insightful comments on the draft chapters: Anthony Bebbington (Clark University and University of Manchester), Alberto Cimadamore (University of Bergen), Edward F. Fischer (Vanderbilt University), Barbara Göbel (Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut), Leticia Merino Pérez (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Pedro Roberto Jacobi (Universidade de São Paulo) and Eduardo Silva (Tulane University). In addition, we are grateful to all the scholars and students who have contributed to the discussions at different ENGOV meetings.

Last but not least, we are very grateful to the key project researchers, not only for the chapter they have contributed but also for their critical input to other draft chapters and their commitment to the ENGOV project. With them, we hope this book will inspire both researchers engaged in the environmental governance debate in Latin America and young scholars and non-academic readers interested in understanding the complex society–nature relations in the contemporary world.

Fábio de Castro, Barbara Hogenboom and Michiel Baud



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