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Jason K. Hawes, Anna Erwin, Brooke McWherter, Rebecca Nixon, Ruxandra Popovici, Meagan Rathjen & Zhao Ma

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BOOK REVIEW

A Review of Grassroots Global Governance

Grassroots Global Governance: Local Watershed Management Experiments and the Evolution of Sustainable Development, by Craig M. Kauffman, Oxford University Press, 2016. 252 pp., \$82.00, ISBN: 9780190625757.

Introduction

In his book *Grassroots global governance: Local watershed management experiments and the evolution of sustainable development*, Craig Kauffman asks a straightforward question: how did Ecuador's "Buen Vivir," a policy framework inspired by the local indigenous value of "living in harmony and equilibrium with nature and other people," become globally accepted as a companion to integrated watershed management (IWM)? To answer this question and to improve our understanding of the international environmental policy cycle, Kauffman explores the implementation of IWM across multiple cases studies in Ecuador. Drawing inspiration from Network Activation Theory and a variety of literature, Kauffman ultimately develops Grassroots Global Governance theory, his explanation for the mechanism by which a global-to-local-to-global policy cycle emerges and evolves. In doing so, Kauffman demonstrates the importance of: understanding local management programs within the context of global governance; the endogenous and exogenous stakeholders at play; their intersections with politics, norms, and local histories; and the drivers that motivate the development of these programs at local to global scales.

Grassroots Global Governance (GGG) captures the messiness and iterative processes that shape policies. Employing case studies from six Ecuadorian cantons where IWM was attempted, Kauffman analyzes each case's successes and failures across the proposed three phases of GGG and demonstrates how different local contexts lead to different local, national, and international outcomes. In the first phase of GGG, Kauffman explains, local actors adopt and diffuse global ideas, translating and adapting them to fit local realities. These instances are what Kauffman refers to as "local experiments." In the second phase, local institutions are created to implement and sustain these practices locally. In the third phase, Kauffman argues that local experiments that endure have the potential to be scaled up and adopted at the national and international scales, thus completing the global-to-local-to-global loop.

By focusing on the conditions under which local initiatives can become global, and thereby influence national and international environmental policies, the author challenges what has become a common narrative in environmental governance. To date, much of the existing literature focuses on top-down environmental policies and practices that are conceived and imposed by powerful national and international organizations. Given this focus, many studies take one of two forms. The first form critiques top-down initiatives imposed at the regional or local scales, explains their failures, and emphasizes the importance of participatory policy approaches (e.g. Conca 2005; Larson and Soto 2008; Ostrom 1990). The other form focuses on local resistance to top-down initiatives and explains how local actors translate, modify, and adapt them (e.g. Cleaver 2012; Geoghegan 2009; Grillo and Stirrat 1997). Fewer studies analyze the phenomenon through which concepts and practices developed by local actors are able to have power and influence at the national and international scales (see Marion Suiseeya 2014). Kauffman's book tackles this phenomenon.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Through his integration of several in-depth case studies, Kauffman makes GGG theory tangible, allowing individuals and examples to take the place of the theory's nodes and edges. This, in turn, highlights the important intricacies of the GGG process. The author's intimate familiarity with both local and national policy histories paints a detailed picture of the multiple roles of various actors (e.g. water users, non-governmental organizations) and of the path-dependency inherent to the multi-scalar governance of watersheds. However, this detailed knowledge may have come at the cost of external validity. Studies of other countries and other policy contexts may enable the sort of cross-comparison and extensive validation that a novel theory with such wide-sweeping implications requires. As new case studies emerge, it will be important to investigate the extent to which this early GGG theorization is able to capture reality and the ways in which it misses the mark. This is particularly true in light of the increasingly common critiques of IWM that highlight its intense context-dependence (e.g. Biswas 2008; Blomquist and Schlager 2005; Giordano and Shah 2014). It seems possible that the development of GGG theory may have been uniquely influenced by the sole focus on IWM and would require further adaptation and extension to be applicable to other systems of water governance.

Another strength of the book lies in its effective integration of multidisciplinary theoretical foundations (e.g. international development, water governance, environmental anthropology) that make the text particularly relevant to an increasingly diverse audience of sustainability scholars and practitioners interested in holistic policy and intervention design. For example, Kauffman notes that the agency of local actors is frequently referenced in international development literature (to the point of being “cliché”), but understudied in international policy research (Kauffman 2016, 207). Subsequently, he makes it clear that continued theorization at the intersection of environment, economy, and policy will require transdisciplinary lens. To integrate a diverse body of theory, Kauffman weaves a dense web of literature. While key to the transdisciplinary nature of his arguments, this can leave readers to make their own connections between the on-the-ground reality and the complex bodies of academic knowledge. Kauffman addresses this in part through his conclusion, which highlights the relevance of the transdisciplinary text to practitioners outside the academic community. In particular, he notes the importance of the long-term influence of local actors that allows for an iterative governance process. Lessons like this can inform strategies of resource governance that promote the enhancement of international development's “cliché” agency in resource policy design and conservation.

Conclusion

Kauffman offers a theoretically and empirically strong case for Grassroots Global Governance theory. The book is engaging, insightful, and offers a refreshingly diverse perspective on a challenging and increasingly complex topic. It is not without limitations, some of which we have attempted to highlight, but Kauffman is often quite reflective on these limitations and skillfully invites continued scholarship on these important issues of multi-scalar water governance. Overall, we consider this a strong and important contribution to the dialog on global environmental governance, and we expect that it will serve as inspiration for productive scholarship moving forward.

ORCID

Jason K. Hawes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8215-5046>

Brooke McWherter  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6193-4961>

Zhao Ma  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9103-3996>

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Jason K. Hawes , Anna Erwin, Brooke McWherter , Rebecca Nixon, Ruxandra Popovici, Meagan Rathjen, and Zhao Ma 
 Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
 jasonkhawes@gmail.com

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