

Conca, Ken. 2006. *Governing Water: Contentious Transnational Politics and Global Institution Building*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Reviewed by Ronald B. Mitchell
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International regimes are neither the only nor the most effective way to address many global environmental problems. Ken Conca develops an impressive critique of the view that international regimes provide an appropriate institutional form for addressing all environmental problems, focusing in particular on their shortcomings in addressing the “physically local but globally cumulative socio-ecological controversies” (p. 387) involved in damming, diverting, and draining the world’s rivers.

Central to Conca’s argument are four key claims. First, the population of global environmental problems consists not only of transboundary pollution problems and global commons problems but also problems related to the globally ubiquitous environmental abuse of local ecosystems such as “forests, soils, grasslands, wetlands, tundras, deserts, rivers, lakes, and coastlines” (p. 6). Second, forms of governance institutions other than international regimes, specifically, expert networks, transnational political struggles, and transnational marketization can be—and are being—used to address such problems. Third, these institutions vary most fundamentally in their treatment of three crucial elements: territoriality, authority, and knowledge. Fourth, the effectiveness of institutions in governing water and similar problems depends in no small part on their ability to recognize, engage, and constructively address the socioecological conflicts that are fundamental to those problems.

Conca starts by arguing convincingly that, although international regimes dominate the institutional landscape of global environmental protection as well as scholarship on that landscape, they are poorly suited to protecting the planet’s places (p. 25). Regimes take for granted that nature can be territorialized, that national governments are the most appropriate and effective means for influencing human behavior, and that knowledge about environmental problems can be stabilized. The second chapter develops the argument that global environmental governance can be improved by acknowledging the existence of and evaluating alternative institutional forms that problematize these “metanormative orientations” by deterritorializing nature, hybridizing authority, and destabilizing knowledge. A third chapter provides the background on the global water problem of damming, diverting, and draining the world’s rivers. The next four chapters analyze, in turn, the efforts and effects of international regimes (such as the 1997 Watercourses Convention as well as numerous other treaties), of international networks of water experts (and their development of integrated water resource management or IWRM), of transnational activists (particularly those working against dams and for watershed democracy), and of the struggle over the marketization of water (between those seeking to

marketize water and those resisting it). Case studies of how these alternative institutions have played out in Brazil and South Africa provide valuable analytic insight into commonalities and differences in how these global pressures play out in response to local contingencies. The conclusion reviews the book's findings and identifies lessons for practitioners of global environmental politics and scholars of international relations.

One major strength, among many, of Conca's book is the sophistication and clarity with which it critiques the dominant and too-often-unquestioned view in global environmental politics that "regimes are the answer." Although parts of that critique have been argued by many authors, Conca brings them together and develops them into an assessment that demands critical engagement by those committed to the regime research program. Conca's critique stands out for providing both a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework and empirical evidence of the analytic value of that framework in showing us where—and why—we should look for institutional alternatives to international regimes. Another major strength lies in his clear statement of the claim that conflict and contention should not be seen as problems that institutions must resolve. Rather, Conca argues, global environmental governance is likely to be improved by "the frank acknowledgement of conflict and the development of process-oriented channels for dispute resolution" (p. 385). In many areas of global environmental politics, problems are multi-faceted and poorly understood, with the very definition of the "problem" simultaneously open for political debate and central to determining the "best" way to resolve it. In such cases, resolution requires ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue among all those affected by the socioecological processes involved, not least those who presently have little voice in existing institutional arrangements.

The book is not without its weaknesses. The most troubling is simply that Conca has been too cautious. He was surely right not to thoughtlessly generalize his claims to all international affairs. Yet, Conca has made a compelling argument and it is disappointing that he does not spend at least some time moving beyond water to explore how his framework can improve our understanding of transboundary pollution and global commons problems but also of human rights, international political economy, and international security. Conca's argument also could have made better use of his important theoretical insight that institutional forms vary with respect to territoriality, authority, and knowledge. He uses these concepts to frame the conclusions of most of his empirical chapters, but that approach leaves the reader less convinced of their value than had he used them as central structuring devices for each chapter and the book as a whole.

These criticisms are small, however. The book is a pleasure to read. It combines impressive theoretical discussions, careful empirical descriptions, nuanced case studies, and thought-provoking analysis in consistently clear and engaging prose. The book's receipt of both the Sprout Award from International

Studies Association's (ISA) Environmental Studies Section and the Alger Award from ISA's International Organization section is clearly well-deserved. No recent book has more insight to offer on the wide range of institutions available for addressing the many global environmental—and other—problems the world currently faces.

Dimitrov, Radoslav S. 2006. *Science & International Environmental Policy: Regimes and Nonregimes in Global Governance*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

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The extent to which science influences policy is a vexing question. Typically, scientists lament their lack of access to politicians, decision makers claim that their policies follow scientific advice, nongovernmental organizations deplore research biases, the private sector prefers to keep a low profile, and the public likes to believe in scientific objectivity but proves skeptical about most parties involved. The consequences are acute in global environmental politics, where detailed understanding of ecological phenomena often escapes all but a small group of highly specialized scientists. Since countries nevertheless commit themselves to address many of these problems, Radoslav Dimitrov's *Science & International Environmental Policy* is a contribution to be welcomed by scholars and practitioners alike.

Dimitrov's study of intergovernmental initiatives to address ozone depletion, long range transboundary air pollution (acid rain), deforestation, and coral reef degradation follows a tradition of scholarship on the role of science in knowledge-based accounts of international environmental cooperation. He finds much of this work lacking because theoretical expectations frequently fail to match reality. He especially faults the literature for treating science as a single variable, rather than disaggregating the different types of information it can represent. As one of the two main contributions of his book, the author introduces "sectors of knowledge" as a concept to distinguish shared knowledge about a problem's extent, causes, or transboundary consequences. Dimitrov posits that reliable natural scientific knowledge about transboundary consequences is necessary because it enables utility calculations and establishes transnational interdependence, whereas knowledge about the extent of a problem is not critical and some uncertainty related to human-induced causes is tolerable.

Most existing work on the role of knowledge in global environmental politics has been limited to successful cases. Dimitrov's second key contribution consists in expanding this line of work to nonregimes, suggesting that the crucial question is not why states cooperate, but why they do so on some issues and not on others. Whereas he defines regimes narrowly as legally binding treaties that have entered into force with specific targets and timetables, nonregimes in-