

Multiactor Governance and the Environment

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Abstract

This review critically assesses a large and growing literature on multiactor environmental governance. The first section provides an historical and conceptual background to the observed increase in such arrangements. The second section describes the diversity of governance arrangements and the related actor constellations to address environmental issues, and the third section offers some explanations for the origins, form, and effectiveness of multiactor governance arrangements. The conclusion reflects on some of the key challenges in advancing and deepening research in this area and suggests some fruitful avenues for future work.

Contents

INTRODUCTION: WHY MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE?	366
DIMENSIONS OF MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE.....	368
Public Actors	370
Hybrid Actors	372
Private Actors	372
EXPLAINING MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE.....	373
Typologies	374
Origins of Multiactor Governance ..	374
Effectiveness and Impact	375
Legitimacy and Accountability.....	377
CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD.....	378

INTRODUCTION: WHY MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE?

This review is concerned with the insights and contributions of a burgeoning literature from a range of disciplines, including political science, international relations, environmental studies, geography, and development studies, on the sources, dimensions, and effectiveness of multiactor governance in the environmental domain. This review should be read in conjunction with previous papers published by this journal, which provide more in-depth analysis of some of the dimensions of multiactor environmental governance that we touch upon here (1, 2).

Attempting to review such a wide-ranging literature is not a straightforward or easily contained task because in many ways all governance is multiactor. Indeed, if it were not multiactor, it would be referred to as something else: government, international law, private standards, or civil regulation. That said, one of the most important insights from the literature on multiactor governance is that sources of governance traditionally associated with one set of actors (private governance with private actors or international law with international institutions, for example) are increasingly

coproduced through the involvement of a range of actors in their formulation and implementation for reasons of capacity, resources, or reach (3, 4). It is increasingly the case then that no one domain of (environmental) governance is the preserve of only one actor. Indeed, this often muddies the distinction that Adger & Jordan (5) draw between the process of governing and the outcomes of that process, as it is not the case that nonstate actors (NSAs) are only involved in cogoverning. They produce, enact, and implement governance.

The very shift from government to governance in policy discourse and academic debate denotes perceived, as well as actual, shifts in political power and authority such that modes of governing have broadened and evolved to increase their ability to tackle a range of contemporary (environmental) challenges that they were set up to address (6, 7). In many instances, nonenvironmental institutions, such as the World Bank, have also had to develop new programs, procedures, and structures to cope with environmental challenges that did not exist when they were created (8). Traditional modes of state-based regulation have come to be seen as limited in their reach, effectiveness, authority, or legitimacy such that tackling complex global environmental problems (as if any global problems are straightforward to resolve) requires the engagement and participation of a range of NSAs, including, among others, business, civil society organizations, and local governments. This is often because of political or economic resources that these actors wield, and the control over technology and production they exercise is crucial to tackling environmental problems successfully. The fact that the cooperation and enrollment of these actors is considered necessary, in turn, reflects shifts in the distribution of power and resources in the global political economy: trends toward the growing power of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with transnational networks (9, 10), trends toward urbanization (1), and the power of transnational capital in conditions of globalization (11–13). It is recognition of

Civil regulation: civil society-based forms of social regulation of corporations

NSA: nonstate actor

NGO: nongovernmental organization

the heightened power of global capital, for example, that spawned global public-private initiatives such as the Global Compact, which harnesses the power of business to the goals of key UN treaties and declarations (14).

The historical backdrop to this shift in political vocabulary and strategy from government to governance is the period often identified with globalization (15), in particular, its contemporary form (16), where from the 1970s onward forms of financial deregulation, trade liberalization, and the consolidation of global production networks coincide. Here, the emphasis is often upon the strain that particular features of this process, including capital mobility and simultaneous processes of supranationalization or decentralization of political authority, are thought to have placed upon the state (17). Although it is clear that the demise of the state is overstated (18, 19) in many narratives about globalization (20, 21), there is plentiful evidence of the rise and consolidation of new modes of governance in which the state is in many cases at best first among equals, perhaps especially in the environmental domain given the range of actors that have to be engaged to produce effective responses across multiple scales.

Indeed, given that environmental problems result from such a broad spectrum of daily actions and embedded patterns of behavior and structures that span the public and private sector and cover issues as fundamental to human development as energy, water, and food (in other words, how we eat, move, keep warm and cool), it is unsurprising that their governance is necessarily multiactor. Indeed, as Arts notes, “the environmental domain has been a laboratory for new modes of governance *par excellence*” (22, p. 184). Taken together, the increasing involvement of NSAs has led to debates about the marketization and privatization of environmental governance (23–25) and the delegation of public authority to private actors (26), or at least power sharing in public-private partnerships (PPPs) and forms of hybrid authority (27–29). In relation to the role of environmental NGOs and civil society organizations, the debate has been about the extent to which they are able to

democratize existing governance arrangements (30, 31) or establish their own forms of transnational governance (32). It is clear then that the challenges of confronting environmental problems have given rise to innovative governance praxis as well as theoretical development.

The process of initiating multiactor governance is not politically neutral, nor does it exist in a vacuum. It rather reflects competing interpretations of the performance of the polity: its effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and attempts by political actors to influence the direction of political change. There is a politics to making claims about where governance deficits lie and why and who gets to frame discussions about which alternatives are appropriate, desirable, and viable. Often claims regarding the inefficiency of state institutions from global institutions pursuing neoliberal reforms lay the groundwork to involve private actors in environmental governance. The World Bank’s 2003 *World Development Report, Dynamic Development in a Sustainable World: Transformation in the Quality of Life, Growth, and Institutions* (33), for example, advances the idea that the spectacular failure to tackle poverty and environmental degradation over the past decade is caused by a failure of governance, “poor implementation and not poor vision.” The report notes, “Those [poverty and environmental problems] that can be coordinated through markets have typically done well; those that have not fared well include many for which the market could be made to work as a coordinator” (25, p. 90). The challenge for governments, according to the World Bank, is therefore to be more welcoming of private actors by facilitating a “smooth evolution of property rights from communal to private” (25, p. 90).

Differing views about the performance of governance institutions and the appropriate criteria by which they should be judged (efficiency? equity? inclusiveness?) clearly constitute contested political terrain and lead to different understandings about the governance problems or gap that multiactor arrangements are meant to address. The origins and rationale for multiactor governance have then to be

Public-private partnerships (PPPs): partnerships that span both private and public sectors or their members and include both governmental and nongovernmental organizations

placed in a political context of broader struggles about the appropriate role of institutions and the state in particular. The way governance is juxtaposed with government is itself sometimes indicative of a neoliberal bias against the state (34), embodying assumptions that key services such as water, health, and education can be better (read: more efficiently) provided by the private sector and that private-sector indicators of performance, essentially focused around profit, can and should be applied to public institutions. This indeed was the basis of the growing application of “new public management” approaches to modernizing state bureaucracies (35).

In many cases, however, whatever the genealogy of the concept of governance and the politically charged nature of the terrain, multiactor initiatives often constitute genuine attempts to build and improve upon the limits of state responses to environmental threats (36). The creation of the Forestry and Marine Stewardship Councils (37, 38) can be seen in this light: Where interstate action has failed to deliver environmental protection, and yet significant consumer demand exists for sustainably produced resources, businesses want to capitalize upon such demand. Ultimately, many such initiatives are also cast in the shadow of the state such that public authority remains key to their existence and effectiveness (39). Recognizing this, business groups, for example, mobilize to participate in policy and shape agendas in ways that are designed to either stall or enhance environmental regulation, depending on whether they feel threatened by the prospect of action or see it as an opportunity to do well (11, 40, 41). From seeking to shape the responses of governments, some organizations then seek to develop their own forms of private governance to serve a variety of their members’ needs. For example, the Business Council on Sustainable Development was set up at the time of the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 to provide a business voice on environmental issues under discussion at the international level, but it has gone on to develop many of its own governance initiatives, such as the Business

Charter on Sustainable Development; the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol, a reporting tool codesigned with the World Resources Institute; and sector-specific programs, such as the Cement Sustainability Initiative.

Degrees and types of engagement also differ over the course of the policy process. Interaction among actors often intensifies as issues move from problem definition to implementation when firms again become coregulators. The phrase “street-level bureaucrats” (42) is sometimes invoked to describe the ways in which businesses, by virtue of their access to capital, technology, and control over production, translate the intentions of regulation into everyday practice. Weaker international organizations within the UN system, or departments within governments that wield less power, also tend to reach out to NSAs, such as environmental NGOs, to bolster their position and garner support on key policy matters (43). Equally, however, powerful global institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, seek to engage civil society actors in their deliberations (albeit on their own terms) to deflect criticisms about their exclusion of critical voices and lack of transparency in decision making (44). Governments themselves also employ new modes of deliberative and more inclusive governance, often in the wake of protest and public disaffection with their policies. Relevant examples in the environmental domain include the use of public input through focus groups or citizen panels and juries as a means of tackling public rejection of agricultural biotechnologies and distrust in the policy processes around their approval (45–47). Likewise, one of the drivers of business collaborations with NGOs is the need to be seen to be engaging critics of their environmental performance. This has shaped the development of codes of conduct or partnerships in the mining and other extractive sectors, for example (37, 48).

DIMENSIONS OF MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE

Scholarly assumptions about the state as a unitary actor and as a homogeneous,

monolithic unit and about state centrality as the foundation of international politics have gradually crumbled in favor of more multicentric views of the world (49). This new focus, not on governments but on governance, and not on top-down but on multilevel processes, shows that a multiplicity of actors and modes of governance are operating in diverse and overlapping spheres of authority (50–52). Although the traditional constants of world affairs have been anarchy and statehood based on territory, a stable population, and government able to exercise sovereignty, today's world is faced with challenges that permeate national boundaries, including the social and environmental consequences of globalization and transborder patterns of resource depletion (53). It is all too apparent that humankind shares a common planetary life support system and that this stands in conflict with the narrow pursuit of national interests.

As states are failing to respond to large-scale environmental challenges, NSAs are stepping forward to offer alternative experimental approaches and innovative solutions. They include public, private, and hybrid actors, acting in their own right and forming novel partnerships and networks (27, 28). It is too early to critically assess whether these emergent actors and their transnational alliances are better equipped to tackle the problems of the twenty-first century, despite much emerging scholarship on this issue. Questions regarding the role of the state and state-nonstate boundaries have been discussed extensively in recent years with the interim conclusion that these are complex and dynamic, and shift with changing contexts (54–57). The question is not whether the state is becoming obsolete—it is not—but how its functions are adjusting in the face of a changing world politics and the extent to which nonstate or transstate forms of governance enhance, embody, or mimic state-like functions.

Given the growing importance of NSAs in global politics, there has been increased interest in their agency and authority as well as their accountability and legitimacy (27, 58). Agency relates to the ways in which actors exercise in-

fluence, proscribe behavior, substantively participate in rule making, set their own rules, and as such contribute to the purposeful steering of society (59–63). Agency of course relates to structure in that agents' decisions shape and are shaped by such things as institutions, norms of participation, decision-making processes, and what is sometimes referred to as the “political opportunity structure” (64, 65). The nature of the relationship among states and NSAs as well as the multilevel context and how issues are framed (as global, national, regional, or local problems) impact upon who has agency (58).

The sources and mechanisms of legitimacy—as in the acceptance and justification of authority—are multiple as they emerge from such diverse imperatives as effectiveness, democracy, and transparency (66–70). Although the legitimacy of democratic governments was traditionally based on their accountability to their voters, NSAs may derive their legitimacy through their members or donors or from the common good they seek to protect (71). Indeed, it is often the weak chains of accountability that bind global institutions to citizens because governments are only able to represent their citizens in the most indirect and general of ways, which means many people instead vest great faith in the ability of NSAs to exercise checks and balances on the power of global institutions by holding them to account to concerned citizens (72). The checks and balances that characterize many systems of national political governance are poorly embedded or nonexistent in transnational arenas of governance where “executive multilateralism” prevails (73, 74). Scholte suggests “a notional accountability chain does connect voters via national parliaments and national governments to global governance organizations, but the links in practice have been very weak... national parliaments have exercised only occasional and mild if any oversight over most suprastate regulatory bodies” (72, p. 87). This may be considered to be as true of the politics of the environment as it is for other global issue areas.

Global governance:

inter-, trans-, and nongovernmental formal and informal institutions, mechanisms and processes among states, markets, and organizations through which collective interests and approaches are negotiated

Below, we examine, in turn, public, hybrid, and private sites of authority—who exercises power over what and how—in the environmental realm.

Public Actors

Government actors. Although opinions diverge on whether the state is indeed losing ground or rather adapting to new circumstances and changing the way it operates, it remains a highly influential force in public affairs. Biermann & Dingwerth (75) emphasize that global environmental change is decreasing the capacity of the nation state to effectively fulfill its definitional functions without cooperation with other states and NSAs. Pierre & Peters (57, p. 5) contend that the role of the state is changing from one “based in constitutional powers toward a role of coordination and fusion of public and private resources,” where states have become “increasingly dependent on other social actors.” According to Paavola et al. (76, p. 150), “the state is not a homogeneous entity, but is instead a complex network of different actors operating at different levels who both govern and are governed,” and it has “shifted its role from provider and controller to facilitator and enabler.” This notion is embodied in work on transgovernmental networks (see below) and reflects the idea that different parts of the state are more internationalized than others, embedded in global networks (of international organizations and expert communities, for example) to differing degrees, but also affected unevenly by shifts in global politics, most obviously globalization, because the power of ministries of trade and industry or finance often increases relative to that of ministries of labor or the environment, reflecting pressures upon the “competition state” (77, 78).

The idea of full state sovereignty over all activities within a nation’s borders is increasingly at odds with the reality of an interdependent world. Examples of how sovereignty is shared are when (a) international treaties require some concession of state sovereignty for the achievement of their objectives; (b) the UN Security

Council can, through military intervention and economic sanctions, call into question the legitimacy and autonomy of a state; (c) the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund have a significant impact on the ability of many developing countries to pursue autonomous national economic and developmental objectives (79); and (d) membership of international or regional organizations by states has the effect of diminishing state sovereignty. Furthermore, weaker states are often pushed to surrender some of their sovereignty in exchange for protection by others (80).

Civil society. Civil society both as a collective and as diverse voices from around the world has emerged as a fully fledged force in global politics and an organized actor in its own right. This can be observed in civil society forums, such as at Earth summits from Rio in 1992 onward or the Indigenous Peoples Forum in Cochabamba in 2010, as well as in the emerging norms of stakeholder participation in a multitude of global to local policy-making and implementation processes (9, 10, 81, 82). An important legitimizing mechanism for civil society is its ability to mobilize a critical mass: “more people are brought to the table, more actors are being engaged, and more hands, hearts, and heads are brought to bear on a complex problem” (83, p. 9). In the climate negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, observer organizations have often outnumbered national delegations (84, 85). The Climate Action Network, active during the international negotiations, for example, counts some 340 NGOs as its members (86).

Civil society actors in the environmental realm coproduce public environmental regulations, sitting on state delegations to negotiations and actively making international law (3, 4, 87), and are heavily involved in lobbying and seeking to shape national regulation. But they also construct forms of civil regulation, civil society-based regulation of the private sector (37, 88), as well as lead environmental initiatives with cities, as we discuss below. Beyond attempts to directly influence the behavior of

states or corporations, forms of multiactor governance are also created through a multitude of civil society coalitions, alliances, and networks. In the case of social movements like *Via Campesina*, mobilizations are as often about defending the rights of resource-poor groups (to land and to food) as they are about directly shaping formal policy. Likewise, multimovement coalitions (such as the Global Forest Coalition set up to resist the commoditization of forest carbon or the Hemispheric Social Alliance set up to oppose trade integration in the Americas, which involve the labor, women's, indigenous peoples, and environmental movements) exist very much outside formal arenas but host their own (counter) summits and produce their own declarations aimed at influencing public rather than policy debate (44, 89, 90).

Cities. The urban arena has received recognition in recent years for its role in addressing environmental problems, in particular climate change, given that urban areas with mass agglomerations of human and industrial activity are particularly responsible for creating GHG emissions and particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change (91, 92). In this regard, it is both city governments as agents in their own rights and cities as spaces of multiactor governance that are of interest here.

City government action on climate change in its first incarnation from the late 1980s can be typified as “municipal voluntarism” with a focus on voluntary activities of municipal authorities to build urban capacity to address climate change (93). Many of these early actions went beyond agreements possible at national and international levels. Strong drivers and facilitators of urban climate governance were the numerous domestic and transnational networks and programs, such as the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives and its Cities for Climate Protection Program, Climate Alliance in Germany, and Energy Cities in France (94, 95).

In their second, more recent, incarnation, cities have been “building global impact” (93). Membership in the C40, an advocacy network

of the world's 40 largest global cities, has facilitated the profiling of urban best practices by hosting events and molding new norms around the significance of climate change for urban economic development and resource security.

International organizations and regional environmental governance arrangements.

International organizations are actors in their own right in that their decisions can legally bind individual member states with or even without their consent. For example, the UN Security Council adopts legally binding resolutions with a majority of 9 out of 15 votes, which all UN members must abide by. Although they may not govern entire policy fields on their own, international organizations often set and implement key rules within them. The secretariats of international organizations create, channel, and disseminate knowledge; shape dominant discourses; frame problems and solutions; influence negotiations through their ideas and expertise; and oversee the implementation of projects on the ground. This grants them an important, and often underestimated, degree of autonomy and power to shape outcomes (96). To the extent that knowledge and expertise become increasingly relevant to effectively govern across borders, international bureaucracies can be expected to gain further influence (80).

Regional governance arrangements on the environment are multiactor by virtue of the number of states that bring them into being, as well as by their close involvement with industry and environmental organizations, which they often depend on for support and credibility to successfully push through policy initiatives, as we noted above (43). Some regional bodies have produced their own regional versions of international environmental agreements aimed at reflecting their own regional priorities and preferences. The African Union, for example, produced its own Model Biosafety Law, which incorporated stronger measures with respect to the potential socioeconomic impacts of genetically modified organisms than are present in the UN Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (97).

Hybrid Actors

Public-private partnerships. Recent scholarship has documented a rise in partnerships that span both private and public sectors or where members include both government and NGOs (95, 98). In an immediate and formal sense, they emerged out of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit and its Type 2 partnerships (99), but over the longer term they have been driven by many of the ideologies, shifts in power, and material drivers identified above.

A prominent example of a PPP is the Global Compact, a pact between the UN and global businesses on corporate behavior launched in 2000 (14). The objective is to motivate transnational corporations (TNCs) to demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental priorities. It invites companies to pledge to abide by ten principles in human and environmental rights in their corporate operations.

Many partnerships have been limited to a single industrial sector, such as energy. An example here is EV20, a PPP initiated by the Climate Group to speed the production and global deployment of plug-in electric vehicles by bringing together companies, such as Renault, TNT, Smith Electric Vehicles, Johnson Controls, Deutsche Bank, and the governments of London, Amsterdam, North Rhine Westphalia, South Australia, New York State, and Quebec. There are also of course numerous sector-specific and project-specific partnerships that are not transnational in scale (even if driven by transnational actors), such as the World Bank-Care International's Business Partners for Development initiative that seeks to demonstrate the possibility of best practice business-community engagements across a range of settings and sectors (100).

Transgovernmental and transnational networks and partnerships. Multilevel and multistakeholder networks—made up of public and private actors and sometimes including local and regional governments—may serve to capitalize upon the strengths of each actor (such as government's ability to set targets and

enact regulation, and businesses' potential to develop least-cost technological solutions to specific challenges) while contributing to a broader transition in values. As Andonova et al. (101, p. 52) contend, "transnational governance occurs when networks operating in the transnational political sphere authoritatively steer constituents toward public goals."

The importance of transnational city networks for city-level environmental governance has been well documented (102–104). They have offered local governments a means of benchmarking their performance; learning from the experience of others; providing a sense of joint effort and of political kudos in being involved with something that reaches beyond their own boundaries; as well as concrete resources in the form of advice, support, and finance. Another example is the International Organization for Standardization, which describes itself as "a nongovernmental organization that forms a bridge between the public and private sectors. On the one hand, many of its member institutes are part of the governmental structure of their countries or are mandated by their government. On the other hand, other members have their roots uniquely in the private sector, having been set up by national partnerships of industry associations" (105).

Private Actors

The power of private actors—multinational companies, private philanthropic foundations, and individuals—is derived primarily from their financial capacity. Multinationals feature prominently alongside countries in the list of the most wealthy entities (106), and the 2006 annual budget of the Gates Foundation was comparable to that of the World Health Organization (US\$1.56 billion and US\$2 billion, respectively) (80). There has been a remarkable growth in the number of TNCs from some 7,000 TNC parent firms in 1970 to over 65,000 in 2002 plus some 850,000 associated affiliate firms. Together they make up 10% of the global gross domestic product (23). But it is not only large, multinational

corporations that are significant; the majority of private actors are small- and medium-sized businesses with fewer than 250 employees. They make up over 95% of private-sector companies in most industrialized economies and up to 99.8% in the United Kingdom. They are responsible for as much as 60% of industrial CO₂ emissions in the United Kingdom (107, 108). Although individually they operate on small profit margins and are therefore difficult to regulate in the way larger corporations can be regulated (109), collectively, they play a crucial, but understated and underresearched, role in multiactor environmental governance.

The Carbon Disclosure Project is an example of businesses collectively pledging the disclosure of information on GHG emissions for institutional investors (mutual funds, pensions funds, and insurers), which is an attempt at institutionalization of the norm of corporate disclosure of carbon emissions and reductions (110). Such initiatives are, of course, not occurring in isolation of state policy; according to some, the most influential motivating factor for TNCs to develop corporate environmental policies is to anticipate or preempt governmental laws and regulations (39, 111).

EXPLAINING MULTIACTOR GOVERNANCE

The proliferation of actors involved in environmental governance that we have noted above is at the center of much of the global governance literature. Frequently, this literature takes the dramatic rise in the number of NSAs at the global level as proof that the nature of world politics has changed. Yet it is not the sheer numbers of NSAs that make the difference. Instead, the ability of NSAs to effectively steer particular aspects of the world political system in certain directions distinguishes global governance from international politics (112). The political agency of a diversity of NSAs makes the difference. Stated differently, since various types of actors have gained the capacity to form transboundary social institutions to address transnational problems, political agency

is increasingly located in sites beyond the state. This new agency in the sustainability arena has been scrutinized with regard to a range of different actors, from environmental consultancies to social entrepreneurs (113).

There is a growing acceptance by most social scientists that the increased participation of NSAs has given rise to new forms of governance beyond the state that transcend the traditional system of legally binding agreements negotiated by governments (114). In addition to classical intergovernmental, that is state-based, regimes like the ozone regime, the climate regime, or the regime for the conservation of biodiversity, a broad range of new governance mechanisms have emerged and proliferated since the early 1990s. Hence, at the beginning of the third millennium the state-centric world is increasingly complemented by a multicentric world. Established actors in world politics, from NGOs to multinational corporations, are taking on new roles and responsibilities beyond lobbying and influencing governments, both nationally and internationally. This broadening of roles and responsibilities results in a densely populated arena of transnational governance for sustainability. In other words, an “increasingly pertinent feature of the global public order in and beyond environmental protection and sustainability is the dynamic mixing of the public and the private, with state-based public power being exercised by state institutions alongside and along with the exercise of private power by market and civil society institutions and other actors committed to the public interest and public weal” (115, p. 329).

Similar interpretations of a fundamental transformation of world politics beyond the environmental realm are expressed in the English School’s interest in the shift from an international to a world society (116); in the literature on a legalization of world politics in both its international and transnational dimensions (117, 118); in Ruggie’s account of the emergence of a “global public domain” (119); in Wapner’s identification of “politics beyond the state” (10); and in the literature on private authority in world affairs (52, 120).

Certification: formal approval of certain characteristics of an item, person, or organization following a procedure that may include review, education, assessment, or audit

Examples of multiactor governance arrangements in the sustainability realm range from certification initiatives for timber (121), coffee (122), fair trade (123), organic farming (124), sustainability reporting (125), marine governance (126), mining (127), sustainable tourism (128), and freshwater governance (129) to a host of PPPs for sustainable development within and beyond the context of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (130–132), along with numerous initiatives emerging from public NSAs, such as municipalities (94).

Key questions that have been addressed in the literature (beyond more traditional questions such as the influence of NGOs on governmental decisions noted above) focus on (a) typologies of multiactor governance arrangements, (b) the emergence and proliferation of multiactor governance arrangements, (c) the accountability and legitimacy of multiactor governance arrangements, and finally (d) the effectiveness and broader consequences of multiactor governance arrangements.

Typologies

Scholars have proposed various typologies of multiactor governance for sustainability. Börzel & Risse (133) have produced a typology mapping the realm of governance according to a matrix of steering modes (hierarchical/nonhierarchical) and actor constellation (public/hybrid/private). Andonova and colleagues (101) explicitly focus on transnational governance networks and propose to group them along the two axes: types of actors and functions. The typology by Pattberg & Stripple (54) takes a wider perspective and proposes to typologize governance beyond the state according to the mode of governance (hierarchical, market, or network) and the locus of authority (public, private, or hybrid). Both typologies allow us to analyze networked and market-based forms of multiactor governance that are located in spheres of authority beyond the international. A different approach is taken by Abbott & Snidal (134), proposing a governance triangle that depicts the involvement of various

actor types (public, nonprofit, for profit) in what the authors term institutions of regulatory standard setting. The governance triangle usefully shows the relative importance of each actor category for a respective multiactor governance institution. Although each typology has its own strength and weakness, we believe that they all provide useful approaches to mapping and analyzing the different dimensions of multiactor governance for sustainability.

Others, meanwhile, have introduced the notion of “regime complex” to describe the interrelated and overlapping forms of public and private authority and the hierarchical and nonhierarchical forms of organization that now characterize many environmental domains, such as plant genetic resources and climate change (135). The complex captures, for example, the role of international agreements; regional and bilateral organizations and treaties; nonenvironmental regimes in the areas of trade, intellectual property protection, and energy; as well as the PPPs and many of the other combinations of governance actors that we have discussed. It usefully highlights the interlinkages and overlaps between institutions around key issues, where conflict might need to be avoided or where fruitful synergies might usefully be explored. What it also shows very clearly is the proliferation of governance arrangements as well as the processes of delegation of authority and decision-making power that have taken place to capitalize upon the respective strengths and assets of different actor arrangements in terms of their resources, reach, mandate, and power.

Origins of Multiactor Governance

Research on multiactor governance for sustainability has paid considerable attention to the emergence of new governance mechanisms (for example, References 136–138). A major unsolved puzzle is the observation that a number of governance initiatives have been institutionalized between actors that, according to standard accounts of behavioral logic, follow different motivations for action (profit versus not-for-profit motives). A number of studies

focus on the systemic level (for example, the influence of neoliberal globalization); however, more explanatory leverage seems to lie in accounts that theorize the issue-specific process of resource exchange and additional field-level explanations (80), though we note below the need to further integrate macro- and microexplanations. In this context, scholars have observed the increasing similarities among multiactor governance arrangements in terms of decision-making procedures, organizational structure, and communication. Dingwerth & Pattberg (139) have scrutinized a standard model of multiactor governance arrangements focusing on rule making, arguing that the costly features of multistakeholder decision making along with highly institutionalized organizational structures and communications focusing on process rather than outcome can be explained by an organizational field logic, wherein the density of interactions over time predicts the similarity among organizations.

With a specific focus on PPPs, Glasbergen (140) has proposed the “ladder of partnership activity” as an analytical tool to understand the dynamics of the partnering process. With this account, partnering is understood as the process of building new social relationships among actors from different segments of society (public, market, civil society). The novel contribution of Glasbergen’s perspective lies in combining an internal view on partnerships (considering the advantages for each individual partner and the obstacles to be overcome to build trust) with an externally oriented view, one that focuses on the measurable impacts of partnerships (either as individual arrangements or in their aggregate).

Whereas Glasbergen offers a generic model of partnership development, Andonova (141) attempts to explain the hybridization of environmental governance at the global level. PPPs are understood as prime examples of “the institutionalization of hybrid authority at the international arena, beyond traditional forms of interaction between state and nonstate actors” (141, p. 26). This hybridization is explained as the result of two processes: First, the political

and functional fragmentation of environmental regimes (142) and the growth of NSAs have resulted in opportunities for cross sector collaboration; second, international organizations have responded to the “pluralisation of global environmental politics” (141, p. 26) by facilitating new collaborative arrangements with a range of NSAs. According to this account, the increase in multiactor governance arrangements is not so much the result of bottom-up initiatives but rather emerges from the conscious strategies of international public actors.

Effectiveness and Impact

The effectiveness of a multiactor governance arrangement can be understood as the degree to which the arrangement has solved the problem it was set up to address. Although this seems to be a straightforward approach, measuring the concrete sustainability impact of governance arrangements is difficult for a number of reasons. First, while many arrangements address a specific governance deficit, they are embedded in broader socioeconomic developments that they rarely control. For example, the prominent forest certification schemes Forestry Stewardship Council and the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification have broad market penetration. However, their success in halting deforestation and preserving biodiversity, particularly in the tropical forests, is hard to confirm given broader structural developments, such as economic busts and booms or competition for land-use triggered by population dynamics. Second, many multiactor governance arrangements do not target environmental or sustainability indicators directly but often focus on information disclosure and raising public awareness. While these mechanisms are acknowledged to improve environmental performance, establishing causality remains a major research challenge.

Consequently, a number of studies focus on the rate of standard uptake and rule compliance as proxies for the problem-solving effectiveness of multiactor governance arrangements and thereby potentially run the risk of concluding that the rules and norms that emerge

from multiactor governance arrangements are, by and large, epiphenomena and can be neglected in accounts of world politics (143, 144). Even though many such initiatives are created precisely because of a governance vacuum left by the absence of state action, direct comparison of effectiveness is incredibly difficult to undertake. More recent research, moreover, contends that multiactor governance has considerable effects, both intended and unintended, that reach beyond direct regulation through rules and standards.

To close this research gap, various scholars have begun to analyze the broader effects of multiactor governance arrangements, in particular those that focus on rule making instead of simply implementing existing intergovernmental agreements. Preliminary results show that nonstate market-driven governance arrangements, such as forest and marine certification schemes, have considerable unintended structural effects, including the distributive effects of changing markets and competition structures (145–147).

In terms of the problem-solving effectiveness of PPPs for sustainable development, the balance of evidence emerging from a large-*n* analysis of all World Summit on Sustainable Development partnerships (99) suggests that these new mechanisms of multiactor global governance fall short of the high expectations that were placed on them. Scholars acknowledge that some partnerships are highly effective and make important contributions to global sustainability governance (148). But a comprehensive analysis of more than 300 partnerships that have been agreed around and after the 2002 Johannesburg summit leads to a rather more critical assessment. Many partnerships are simply not active. In addition, partnerships do not seem to address core functions where their particular role and comparative advantage were believed to lie; to initiate new global governance norms in areas where governments fail to take action; to help implement existing intergovernmental regulations; and to increase the inclusiveness and participation in global governance by bringing in actors that have so

far been marginalized. Rather, research (99) shows: Partnerships are most common in those areas that are already heavily institutionalized and regulated; they are predominantly not concerned with implementation but rather with further institution building; for many of them, it is doubtful whether they had sufficient resources to make any meaningful contribution toward implementation in the first place; and finally, the vast majority of partnerships strengthen the participation of those actors that already participate (governments, major international organizations, and those civil society actors that have already had a say in global governance before the partnership phenomenon emerged). In many cases, those that were marginalized before (for example, indigenous groups, women and youth organizations) continue to be marginalized in the partnership process.

Other research has focused less on the measurable impacts of partnerships on the problem to be governed but rather on the role that partnerships can play in the interaction between existing, and often conflicting, intergovernmental attempts to mitigate global environmental problems. Speaking to the broader literature on international regime interaction and interlinkages (see, for example, Reference 141), scholars have analyzed how PPPs contribute to interaction management, with a specific focus on the biodiversity/climate nexus (149, 150).

With regard to municipalities and city networks, research has highlighted the relevance of transcity agreements, such as the Bali 2007 World Mayors and Local Governments Climate Protection Agreement to reduce GHG emissions by 60% from 1990 levels worldwide (151), the US Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, pledging to reduce GHG emissions in signatory cities by 7% below 1990 levels by 2012 (US Kyoto Protocol commitment) (151); and the 2009 European Covenant of Mayors, whose signatories pledge to go beyond the EU target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 20% by 2020 (151). Their message is that local

governments and municipalities take on global responsibility ahead of and beyond that of their national or state governments. Beyond this remarkable rhetoric, evidence for concrete measurable impacts is scarce. Research has rather emphasized the soft results of city networks in solving environmental problems, such as increased access to relevant technical information and policy learning (93, 102, 152).

In addition to the literature assessing the effectiveness and broader implications of multiactor governance arrangements, a discussion has emerged on the transformation and hybridization of the climate governance domain (32). According to this body of work, as international efforts to develop global climate change agreements became more complex and stagnant, new forms of transnational multiactor climate change governance emerge. A comparative assessment of 60 transnational climate governance initiatives (32) has shown that these initiatives are relatively recent; tend to focus on mitigation (especially the energy domain); are largely established by actors in the global North (though they usually involve actors from the global South in their operation); use limited institutional structures together with voluntary and soft forms of institutionalization; and are engaged in sharing information, capacity building, setting targets, and taking direct action to address this issue.

In sum, scholars find the extent to which multiactor arrangements are effective in environmental terms depends crucially on (a) the resources they have at their disposal; (b) the level of buy in of the most powerful and relevant actors [which has to some extent been possible with marine certification (153) but has been more difficult to achieve in timber, where illegal logging is widespread and often protected by public authorities (154, 155)]; (c) their degree of global reach; and (d) the extent to which they can mobilize sanctions in the face of noncompliance.

Legitimacy and Accountability

Biermann & Gupta (67) identify the process of globalization as a major driving force for

the search for accountable and legitimate governance, strengthening the need for new rule-making institutions at all levels of the political system. In their words, “the complexities of globalization have also given rise to a stronger political role for actors beyond the nation-state, from multinational corporations and transnational advocacy groups to science networks and global coalitions of municipalities” (67, p. 1856). This stronger role of NSAs in the search for accountable and legitimate global environmental governance has been empirically mapped in areas ranging from global forest governance to corporate sustainability reporting and networked climate governance (27, 31, 156–158). Chan & Pattberg (155) highlight the transformative shift from old accountability systems (based on public actors and formal processes) to new accountability systems that display a networked character, which is induced by a change in the number, types, and capacities of actors; the observable shortcomings in addressing global public concerns; changes in the problem framing; and broader ideological shifts. Newell (31) tracks these shifts in terms of the shifting targets of NGO activism around climate change policy from a traditional focus on intergovernmental fora to targeting the activities of multilateral and regional development banks, bilateral donors, and the private, particularly financial, sector given the importance of its investment decisions in relation to the energy sector, for example. The rationale behind this change in strategy is a reading of where power lies and how; in this case, reductions in GHG emissions can be brought about within the shortest time frame possible by targeting those whose everyday decisions exert a far greater direct impact on emissions than the weakly worded international law on climate change that takes many years to negotiate.

Within this broader context of accountability and legitimacy, the concrete mechanisms of transparency and disclosure in and through multiactor arrangements have received specific attention. Dingwerth & Eichinger (157) conclude that the hope for transformative change induced by disclosure-based governance

mechanisms is premature. Case studies on the Global Reporting Initiative, the leading global standard for sustainability reporting, confirm that it has had little impact on the balance of power in corporate governance (157). Reflecting more generally on the potential of institutional investors (mutual funds, pension funds, and insurers) to create incentives to reduce GHG emissions in the form of price performance for firms, Harmes (110) suggests such potential has been considerably overestimated because of the structural constraints faced by most institutional investors. In addition, the global reach of such initiatives is often limited with the majority of signatories to the UN Environment Program Statement of Environmental Commitment by the insurance industry, for example, being based either in Europe or Japan.

Other scholars have approached the question of legitimacy and accountability from the perspective of democratic theory (129). Here, the question is whether multiactor governance arrangements for sustainability themselves adhere to standards of democratic legitimacy, including participation, inclusion, control, accountability, and deliberative quality. Empirical analyses have scrutinized these questions with regard to PPPs that have emerged out of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (159) and a range of transnational multiactor rule-making organizations in the sustainability realm (71). The overall conclusion is that multiactor arrangements do not automatically close the legitimacy gap in global governance but show a wide variation in terms of different democratic qualities. A related discussion has highlighted the potential relation between (perceived) legitimacy and increased effectiveness, without presenting final conclusive evidence (e.g., Reference 66).

CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD

On the basis of this review, we conclude that future theorizing and empirical analysis of multiactor environmental governance will encounter a number of critical challenges.

A first challenge is the ability to combine and meaningfully connect a metatheory that is able to capture the broader macrodynamics (which may or may not be global either in spatial or causal terms) and historical conditions (which give rise to particular modes and practices of governance on the one hand) with specific country, region, actor, or issue-specific governance arrangements (whose creation and form may be quite unique on the other hand). It requires us to recognize diversity among governance initiatives while not losing sight of commonalities and patterns among them or common causalities in terms of when, how, and for whom they were created. This is the challenge facing the research being undertaken as part of the Earth Systems Governance Project, which seeks to develop models and theories that are globally relevant. While recognizing distinct configurations of state, market, and civil society across the world, the aim nevertheless is to develop generic insights about cross-cutting dimensions of governance, such as agency, architecture, accountability, access, and adaptation (159). Some assumptions travel well across settings, but many do not. Determining what can be generalized is, of course, a perennial challenge for (social science) researchers.

There are clearly different levels of explanation at work here. In the introduction, we offered a series of explanations for the shift of focus from government to governance as embodying shifts in power and authority between public and private actors and the ability of key actors to frame some forms of governing as inefficient, poorly performing, and in need of change. These macroexplanations of change in the international system at particular historical junctures need to be complemented with and grounded by the sorts of microexplanations of the specific circumstances around how, when, and why multiactor governance arrangements emerge, how they evolve, what makes them effective (or not), and who they serve (reviewed in the third section).

A second challenge is how to effectively and meaningfully make comparisons across such diverse arrangements. Given the many different

objectives that the initiatives are set up to serve, and the different contexts in which they emerge, can common understandings of effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability be employed? For example, the work of Mann & Liverman (160) comparing the contribution of voluntary business efforts on climate change found it almost impossible to get a quantitative handle on what was being achieved because companies employ such different baselines, include some gases and not others, and employ different time frames. Likewise, notions of effectiveness may be relative depending on the scale of the problem the particular type of multiactor governance is seeking to address and the power of the actors whose behavior they may be attempting to change. Nevertheless, as noted in the third section, attempts to systematically compare initiatives in one issue area, such as climate change (32) or a governance type (132), demonstrate the potential to yield important insights about generic trends.

Third, we need to be able to explain the deeper dynamics of power at work in multiactor governance arrangements: Why do some succeed where other, seemingly similar, initiatives, fail? What are the forms of power at work that explain divergent degrees of success or that lie behind the creation of governance initiatives in the first place? They might include resources (political, moral, or financial), authority, credibility, and perceived legitimacy as well as embeddedness within influential networks. The world is not short of policy entrepreneurs or demands to protect public goods, but numerous efforts fall by the way side. Why and what does this tell us about who succeeds and under what conditions? These questions deserve fuller answers than we currently have at our disposal. Combinations of deep case study analysis and larger-scale comparative analysis could usefully take research forward in this area.

Fourth, much of the work on multiactor governance takes as a starting point that the initiative in question is new and novel and without historical precedent. Yet, beyond the obvious point that it did not exist in that particular form previously, which is one common-sense indica-

tor of newness, there is perhaps a need to historicize these developments to look for parallels and precedents, even if they were described and made sense of in different ways. For example, a great deal of private governance, particularly voluntary certification standards, has grown up around carbon markets (41). But the approach of such standards, many of the issues they deal with, and indeed many of the actors to whom they delegate authority, such as verification agencies, reflect established patterns of conduct and engagement and are a product, therefore, of many networks that have existed for some time. The question of what is novel about them as modes and practices of (multiactor) governance deserves further scrutiny.

This, in turn, raises a fifth issue: the issue of innovation and learning within and across multiactor governance. How far do initiatives mimic one another's governance arrangements or modes of working that appear to generate success and learn from others' apparent failings? How far does this occur within particular sites of governance and across them, and what are the means by which this learning occurs? Returning to our first point, in this instance, the challenge of generalizability from one context and issue area to another is one that practitioners of multiactor governance (and not just academics) face.

Sixth and finally, there are the challenges of researching multiactor governance arrangements. Assessing and properly understanding the depth of collaboration and degree of involvement of different actors may often mean direct engagement or participant observation and working with(in) these arrangements. Without this, researchers are left with the difficulty of accessing information beyond what is available on the Web and few means of attributing influence and explaining causality. Interviews can fill some of the gaps, but often these generate limited understandings of the daily inner workings, strategic dilemmas, and resource (and other) constraints that multiactor governance arrangements face. This, in turn, raises issues of a lack of critical distance from the organizations being researched on the part

of researchers who often then develop a stake in the success of the organization and share its normative and political commitments. These of course are not problems unique to researching

multiactor governance arrangements but affect all attempts by social science researchers to gain a better understanding of the subjects of their work.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Sources of environmental governance that are traditionally associated with one set of actors are increasingly coproduced through the involvement of a range of actors in their formulation and implementation for reasons of capacity, resources, or reach. It is increasingly the case that no one domain of (environmental) governance is the preserve of only one actor.
2. Traditional modes of state-based regulation have come to be seen as limited in their reach, effectiveness, authority, or legitimacy. Tackling complex global problems increasingly, therefore, requires the engagement and participation of a range of NSAs, including, among others, business, civil society organizations, and cities.
3. Scholarly assumptions about the state as a unitary actor and homogeneous, monolithic unit and state centrality as the foundation of international politics have gradually crumbled in favor of a more multicentric view of the world. As states are failing to respond to large-scale environmental challenges, NSAs are stepping forward to offer alternative, experimental, and innovative approaches and solutions, which sometimes enhance, embody, or mimic state-like functions.
4. Given the growing importance of NSAs in global politics, there has been increased interest in the agency, authority, accountability, and legitimacy of NSAs. Some scholars have approached the question of legitimacy and accountability from the perspective of democratic theory.
5. Key issues that have been addressed in the literature focus on (a) typologies of multiactor governance arrangements, (b) the emergence and proliferation of multiactor governance arrangements, (c) the effectiveness and broader consequences of multiactor governance arrangements, and (d) the accountability and legitimacy of multiactor governance arrangements.
6. Studies in this area focus on the systemic level as well as the issue-specific process of resource exchange and additional field-level explanations. In this context, scholars have observed the increasing similarities among multiactor governance arrangements in terms of decision-making procedures, organizational structure, and communication.
7. In terms of the key question of whether they matter, analyses focusing on the rate of standard uptake and rule compliance run the risk of concluding that transnational rules and norms that emerge from multiactor governance arrangements are, by and large, epiphenomena. More recent research, however, contends that multiactor governance has considerable effects that reach beyond direct regulation through rules and standards.
8. Scholars who have begun to analyze the broader effects of multiactor governance arrangements, in particular those that focus on rule making, have found that nonstate market-driven governance arrangements have considerable unintended structural effects, including distributive effects, such as changing markets and competition structures.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. What are useful and comparable indicators of the effectiveness of multiactor governance arrangements?
2. Given the many different objectives that initiatives are set up to serve, and the different contexts in which they emerge, can common understandings of effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability be employed?
3. Which are the novel, innovative, and distinctive features of multiactor governance arrangements for the environment (as opposed to other issue areas)?
4. How far do initiatives mimic one another's governance arrangements or modes of working? To what extent do they learn from the success and failure of other initiatives? How far does this occur within particular sites of governance and across them, and what are the means by which this learning occurs?
5. Why do some multiactor initiatives succeed when other, seemingly similar, initiatives fail? What forms of power are at work that explain divergent degrees of success or which lie behind the creation of governance initiatives in the first place?
6. How can we usefully integrate macroexplanations of the historical, material, and global drivers of multiactor governance with microexplanations of the origins and formation of specific governance arrangements?

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Contents

Preface	v
Who Should Read This Series?	vii
I. Earth's Life Support Systems	
Global Climate Forcing by Criteria Air Pollutants <i>Nadine Unger</i>	1
Global Biodiversity Change: The Bad, the Good, and the Unknown <i>Henrique Miguel Pereira, Laetitia Marie Navarro, and Inês Santos Martins</i>	25
Wicked Challenges at Land's End: Managing Coastal Vulnerability Under Climate Change <i>Susanne C. Moser, S. Jeffress Williams, and Donald F. Boesch</i>	51
II. Human Use of Environment and Resources	
Geologic Disposal of High-Level Radioactive Waste: Status, Key Issues, and Trends <i>Jens Birkholzer, James Houseworth, and Chin-Fu Tsang</i>	79
Power for Development: A Review of Distributed Generation Projects in the Developing World <i>Jennifer N. Brass, Sanya Carley, Lauren M. MacLean, and Elizabeth Baldwin</i>	107
The Energy Technology Innovation System <i>Kelly Sims Gallagher, Arnulf Grübler, Laura Kubl, Gregory Nemet, and Charlie Wilson</i>	137
Climate and Water: Knowledge of Impacts to Action on Adaptation <i>Michael Kiparsky, Anita Milman, and Sebastian Vicuña</i>	163
Climate Change and Food Systems <i>Sonja J. Vermeulen, Bruce M. Campbell, and John S.I. Ingram</i>	195
Pest Management in Food Systems: An Economic Perspective <i>Gina Waterfield and David Zilberman</i>	223

Searching for Solutions in Aquaculture: Charting a Sustainable Course <i>Dane Klinger and Rosamond Naylor</i>	247
Municipal Solid Waste and the Environment: A Global Perspective <i>Sintana E. Vergara and George Tchobanoglous</i>	277
Social Influence, Consumer Behavior, and Low-Carbon Energy Transitions <i>Jonn Axsen and Kenneth S. Kurani</i>	311

III. Management, Guidance, and Governance of Resources and Environment

Disaster Governance: Social, Political, and Economic Dimensions <i>Kathleen Tierney</i>	341
Multiactor Governance and the Environment <i>Peter Newell, Philipp Pattberg, and Heike Schroeder</i>	365
Payments for Environmental Services: Evolution Toward Efficient and Fair Incentives for Multifunctional Landscapes <i>Meine van Noordwijk, Beria Leimona, Robit Findal, Grace B. Villamor, Mamta Vardhan, Sara Namirembe, Delia Catacutan, John Kerr, Peter A. Minang, and Thomas P. Tomich</i>	389
Toward Principles for Enhancing the Resilience of Ecosystem Services <i>Reinette Biggs, Maja Schliüter, Duan Biggs, Erin L. Bobensky, Shauna BurnSilver, Georgina Cundill, Vasilis Dakos, Tim M. Daw, Louisa S. Evans, Karen Kotschy, Anne M. Leitch, Chanda MEEK, Allyson Quinlan, Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne, Martin D. Robards, Michael L. Schoon, Lisen Schultz, and Paul C. West</i>	421
Environmental Informatics <i>James E. Frew and Jeff Dozier</i>	449

IV. Integrative Themes

The Public Trust Doctrine: Where Ecology Meets Natural Resources Management <i>Raphael D. Sagarin and Mary Turnipseed</i>	473
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Indexes

Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 28–37	497
Cumulative Index of Chapter Titles, Volumes 28–37	501

Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* articles may be found at <http://environ.annualreviews.org>