

# Sovereignty Bounded: Public Trusteeship for Common Pool Resources?

Peter H. Sand\*

All revolutions have their iconoclastic phase. When international lawyers first embraced the global environmental revolution—looking for icons to smash—they were eager to pick on the nation state as a target. Not surprisingly perhaps, much of the early literature on international environmental law and governance started from a radical *critique* of territorial sovereignty, suspected to lurk at the roots of many transnational environmental problems;<sup>1</sup> and from high hopes for the “fading away,” “erosion,” or “perforation” of operational sovereignty, as the preferred solution to those problems.<sup>2</sup>

Reality turned out to be different, or so it seems. Not only did state sovereignty prove its resilience as an organizing element for the post-Stockholm 1972 and post-Rio 1992 global ecological order.<sup>3</sup> Quite paradoxically, two of the most momentous recent developments in the worldwide codification of natural resources law resulted in a net expansion of national jurisdiction. First, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS, article 56) formally extended the sovereign rights of coastal states to the vast new area of “exclusive economic zones,”<sup>4</sup> estimated to contain 25 percent of global primary production and 90 percent of the world’s fish catch.<sup>5</sup> In 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in article 15 extended sovereign rights to the even vaster

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1. Falk 1971, 222; Sprout and Sprout 1971, 406; and Caldwell 1973, 200. But see Falk 1995, 11: “I now believe that this earlier analysis was badly mistaken in several key respects.”
2. See Karkkainen, this issue, and Falk 1975, 2; Mayer-Tasch 1985; Kiss 1992, 13; Brown Weiss 1993, 710; Caldwell 1996, 331; Hinds 1997; Odendahl 1998; van der Lugt 2000; Jänicke 2002; and generally Czempiel 1969; Camilleri and Falk 1992, 185; Schreuer 1993; Henkin 1994; and Krasner 1999.
3. Haas and Lundgren 1993; Conca 1994; Chayes and Chayes 1995; Beyerlin 1995; Haedrich 2000; Perez 2000; and generally Schrijver 2000; Kreijen 2001; and Werner and de Wilde 2001.
4. Eckert 1979; Orrego Vicuña 1989; and Hoel 2000.
5. IWCO 1998, 59.

range of plant and animal genetic resources, thereby enclosing access to another major chunk of what had once been considered “heritage of mankind.”<sup>6</sup> Another decade later, the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture bluntly put an end to that legal fiction: “In their relationship with other States, the Contracting Parties recognize the sovereign rights of States over their own plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, including that the authority to determine access to those resources rests with national governments and is subject to national legislation.”<sup>7</sup>

So is the pendulum swinging back to the other extreme—to that “formidable defensive concept”<sup>8</sup> of permanent sovereignty over natural resources,<sup>9</sup> and its notorious “obsession with territory”?<sup>10</sup> I do not really think so. True, the new treaty language seems to acknowledge that states can have their “own” genetic resources, in the way in which the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention recognized cultural and natural heritage sites as “property, to whatever people they may belong.”<sup>11</sup> Yet the reference to ownership and property rights introduces an analogy to private property law here that is potentially misleading.<sup>12</sup> Just as the sovereign rights of coastal states in their maritime exclusive economic zones are qualified by specific obligations owed to other states and to the international community (LOS, articles 61–70), the sovereign rights of “countries of origin” over access to genetic resources *in situ* are matched by an obligation to facilitate access for other parties to the Biodiversity Convention (CBD 1992, article 15:2), by the catalogue of conservation duties spelled out in the convention (articles 5–14), and by the “multilateral system” established under the FAO Plant Gene Treaty (article 10:2).

In both instances, such limitations on sovereignty have been justified by community interests designating certain areas or resources as a matter of “common concern,”<sup>13</sup> notwithstanding the fact that—unlike “common heritage” in the global commons *outside* national jurisdiction, such as deep-seabed or outer-space areas—they may be situated squarely *within* the territorial boundaries of states. Given those built-in restrictions, however, the analogy to “ownership” rights becomes so diluted as to evoke a different legal analogy altogether, that is, the role of the nation state becomes more akin to a kind of *public trusteeship*—an idea which has indeed been gaining ground in modern environmental law, and on which I will now focus.

The message is simple: The sovereign rights of nation states over certain environmental resources are not proprietary, but *fiduciary*. I will show this by

6. FAO/IU 1983, article 1; see Bordwin 1985; Wolfrum 1996; and ten Kate and Lasén Diaz 1997.
7. FAO/IT 2001, article 10:1; see Mekouar 2002; and Cooper 2002.
8. Allott 1989, 17.
9. Schrijver 1997; and Chimni 1998.
10. Scelle 1958.
11. Preamble, fifth paragraph. On the evolution of “national” vs. “common” heritage concepts for cultural property, see Williams 1978; Merryman 1983; Monden and Wils 1986; and Genius-Devime 1996.
12. Carty 1986, 44.
13. Brunnée 1989; Attard 1991; Simma 1994; Biermann 1996; Kiss 1997; Kornicker-Uhlmann 1998; and Durner 2001, 234.

reference to comparative environmental law, to so-called “stewardship economics,” and to public international law.

### The Public Trust in Comparative Environmental Law

The concept of public trusteeship for environmental resources has undergone a spectacular revival in the United States. A rather obscure, century-old Supreme Court case (*Illinois Central Railroad vs. People of the State of Illinois* 1892), rediscovered by a perceptive law professor,<sup>14</sup> became the starting point for a whole generation of innovative environmental law-making—from Michigan’s Environmental Protection Act of 1970 to federal legislation such as the “Superfund” Act of 1980 and the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and reflected in new constitutional provisions; for example, article 1 para. 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution (as amended on 18 May 1971)<sup>15</sup> now reads:

Pennsylvania’s natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of the people.

What, then, is the idea of environmental trusteeship?<sup>16</sup> In very simplified language, it means that certain natural resources—e.g., watercourses, wildlife, or wilderness areas—regardless of their allocation to public or private uses are defined as part of an “inalienable public trust;” certain authorities—e.g., federal agencies, state governments, or indigenous tribal institutions—are designated as “public trustees” for protection of those resources; every citizen, as “beneficiary” of the trust, may invoke its terms to hold the trustees accountable and to obtain judicial protection against encroachments or deterioration.

The public trust doctrine is now well established in US environmental law, albeit not uncontested—partly because of its manifest reliance on property concepts.<sup>17</sup> Even though its origins are claimed to go back to ancient Roman law, most of its methodology and terminology is essentially derived from the Anglo-American common law of charitable trusts, under which all beneficiaries are entitled to hold a trustee accountable.<sup>18</sup> Simultaneously, and initially modeled after Britain’s “National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty” (1894, confirmed by legislation since 1907),<sup>19</sup> the “land trust movement” to preserve strategic natural areas for the community—conservancy by charitable title acquisition—has since spread throughout North America.<sup>20</sup> While courts in some common-law countries like Australia and Canada have been more reluctant to extend the environmental scope of trusteeship,<sup>21</sup> it found enthusiastic re-

14. Sax 1970; and ELQ 1998.

15. Dernbach 1999.

16. Rose 1986; Dunning 1989; and Slade 1990.

17. Lazarus 1986; Delgado 1991; and Ryan 2001.

18. Chesterman 1979.

19. Dwyer and Hodge 1996; and Waterson 1997.

20. Davis 1987; Abbott 1993; and Fairfax and Guenzler 2001.

21. Bates 1995, 70; Maguire 1997; and Tigerstrom 1997.

ception in others—witness article 2 of the Philippine Environmental Policy Decree of 1977, which proclaimed “the responsibilities of each generation as trustee and guardian of the environment for succeeding generations” (applied to the conservation of public forests in a widely quoted Supreme Court case, *Minors Oposa vs. Factoran* 1993);<sup>22</sup> Eritrea’s Environment Proclamation of 1996, which designated the state as “custodian for the harmonized and integrated management and protection of the national environment and the sustainable use of natural resources” (article 5); South Africa’s National Water Act of 1998, referring to the government as “public trustee of the nation’s water resources” (ch. 1, para. 3); and India, where the Supreme Court in a landmark decision declared the public trust doctrine “part of the law of the land” (*Mehta vs. Kamal Nath* 1996, followed in two 1999 Supreme Court cases).<sup>23</sup>

Even more striking are similar developments in the environmental legislation of continental European countries, where the common law trust is *not* part of a national legal tradition.<sup>24</sup> In Sweden, for example, the Royal Academy of Sciences—and since 1964, the Nature Conservation Board—has been designated as public trustee for protected natural areas.<sup>25</sup> In Italy, the Court of Accounts (*Corte dei Conti*)—and since 1986, the Environment Ministry—acts as trustee for claims of damage to national heritage (*danno erariale*) in the field of natural resources that would otherwise remain without procedural representation.<sup>26</sup>

There are many historical precedents for the transnational diffusion of law, a cross-cultural process sometimes described as *mimesis*,<sup>27</sup> and similar to the spread of innovative technologies—or contagious diseases.<sup>28</sup> In the words of Roscoe Pound, former dean of Harvard Law School, “the history of a system of law is largely a history of borrowing of legal materials from other legal systems, and of assimilation of materials from outside the law.”<sup>29</sup> Environmental law proved a particularly fertile ground for this “horizontal” transfer of innovative concepts and institutions,<sup>30</sup> well illustrated by the trusteeship doctrine.

### Stewardship Economics and Common Goods

Recent economic literature, under the label of *stewardship economics*<sup>31</sup> identifies intergenerational “fiduciary responsibilities” of society with regard to certain re-

22. La Viña 1994.

23. Anderson 1998, 29; and Razzaque 2001.

24. Helmholtz and Zimmermann 1998.

25. Hillmo and Lohm 1997.

26. Bianchi 1997.

27. Toynbee 1961, 343.

28. Hågerstrand 1967; Gould 1969; and Dolowitz and Marsh 2000.

29. Watson 1993, 22.

30. Sand 1990, 23; Kern and Jänicke 2001; Jänicke and Jacob, this issue; Clark, Jäger, and van Eijndhoven 2001; and Wiener 2001, 1298.

31. Young and McCay 1995, 94; and Page 1997.

sources such as “a fishery, a forest, the Internet, the air, the oceans, the ecological health of a stream, and so on;”<sup>32</sup> that is, a broad range of common goods, “environmental commons” in particular, which—depending on criteria of public accessibility or excludability—are categorized either as global collective or “public goods,”<sup>33</sup> or as common property or “common pool resources” (CPRs).<sup>34</sup> Besides opening new intergenerational perspectives in economic and sociological analysis,<sup>35</sup> interdisciplinary research has also focused attention on the economics of “trust” as a general organizing principle in social psychology,<sup>36</sup> which mirrors Joseph Sax’s legal definition of public trusteeship as “preventing the destabilizing disappointment of expectations held in common.”<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the concept of stewardship has become the hallmark of two international pilot projects—operated by environmental NGOs in cooperation with industry—for the use of economic instruments in natural resource management, in the form of “green” eco-labels for the global marketing of commodities claimed to be sustainably harvested: viz., timber products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council<sup>38</sup> and fishery products certified by the Marine Stewardship Council.<sup>39</sup> The topic, it seems, has ceased to be academic. Transnational civil society groups—emerging as powerful actors in the environmental arena<sup>40</sup>—are beginning to develop and invoke their own tangible criteria for holding public trustees accountable.

### Environmental Trusteeship in International Law

How far, then, has the idea of public trusteeship for environmental resources progressed in the field of international law? To make things clear, I am *not* referring here to the “trust funds” frequently used as mechanisms to finance international environmental regimes and projects, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for which the World Bank serves as trustee.<sup>41</sup> What is at stake here—as object of the trust (or *corpus*, in the jargon of trust law), and as object of the rules—are *not* financial assets, but the environmental resources themselves.

The idea of treating at least part of these resources as “inclusive” or “inter-

32. Brown 2000, 110; see Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975, 725; and Scott 1999, 154.

33. Olson 1971; Russett and Sullivan 1971; Plott and Mayer 1975; Ostrom and Ostrom 1977; Sandler, Loehr, and Cauley 1978; Stone 1995; Cornes and Sandler 1996; Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern 1999; and Mitchell 1999.

34. Ostrom 1990. International lawyers tend to use the term “common property” in a spatial sense, to designate *res communes* situated in the global commons outside national jurisdiction only (e.g., Boyle 1997, 83); but see the different usage of the term (excluding “public goods”) in natural resource economics (e.g., Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975, 715).

35. Howarth and Norgaard 1990; Fukuyama 1995; and Kramer 1996.

36. Gambetta 1988; Ripperger 1998; and Noteboom 2002.

37. Sax 1980, 187.

38. Schmidt 1998.

39. Freestone and Makuch 1996, 48.

40. Princen and Finger 1994; Mathews 1997; Florini 2000; Slaughter 2000, 96; and Breitmeier and Rittberger 2000.

41. Sand 1994, 17.

nationally shared environment<sup>42</sup> has, of course, a long tradition in international law—with regard to resources outside national jurisdiction, from *res communes omnium* to “common heritage” doctrines;<sup>43</sup> and with regard to certain “internal resources,”<sup>44</sup> from doctrines of *bon voisinage* to “shared natural resources.”<sup>45</sup> Proposals to make use of the public trust doctrine in an international context date back to the 1893 Bering Sea Fur Seal Arbitration.<sup>46</sup> They re-surfaced during preparations for the 1972 UN Stockholm Declaration<sup>47</sup> and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention,<sup>48</sup> and have since been taken up by a number of international publicists,<sup>49</sup> especially in the legal debate on inter-generational equity.<sup>50</sup>

Various forms of “trusteeship,” “guardianship,” “custodianship” or “stewardship” status have thus been suggested for the marine environment in coastal waters and exclusive economic zones;<sup>51</sup> for continental shelf areas 60 to 120 miles beyond the EEZ;<sup>52</sup> for marine resources in specific regional seas such as the Mediterranean and the South Pacific;<sup>53</sup> for living ocean resources in general;<sup>54</sup> for Antarctica;<sup>55</sup> for the global atmosphere;<sup>56</sup> for all global commons;<sup>57</sup> for rain forests in Latin America;<sup>58</sup> for freshwater resources in the Middle East;<sup>59</sup> for genetic resources or biological resources generally;<sup>60</sup> or for all elements of the environment.<sup>61</sup> In two cases dealing with marine resource conservation, the Court of Justice of the European Union declared all member states “trustees of the common interest;”<sup>62</sup> and in a judgment interpreting the 1979 EU Bird Conservation Directive,<sup>63</sup> it considered wild birds “a case where the *management of*

42. McDougal and Schneider 1974, 1092; and Schneider 1979, 22.

43. Stocker 1993; and Baslar 1998.

44. Arsanjani 1981.

45. Adede 1979; and Barberis 1979.

46. Romano 2000, 133.

47. Sohn 1973, 457; and Maggio 1997, 203.

48. Gardner 1966, 154; and Train 1972.

49. Nanda and Ris 1976; Kiss 1982; Munro and Lammers 1987, 43; Glennon 1990, 34; Zaelke and Cameron 1990, 208; Kiss and Shelton 1991, 20; Bosselmann 1992, 385; Cho 1995, 332; and Caron 2000, 257.

50. Brown Weiss 1984, 1989; Agius and Busuttil 1997; Vibhute 1998, 71; Zanghi 1999; and Redgwell 1999.

51. Beesley 1973, 6; Jarman 1986; Archer and Jarman 1992; Hildreth 1993; and Britton 1997.

52. US Draft Seabed Convention 1970, articles 26–28; and also see Schmidt 1989, 27.

53. Raftopoulos 1992; and Fong 1993.

54. Van Dyke 1993; Mann Borgese 1996; Zharen 1998; and IWCO 1998, 45.

55. Suter 1991, 170.

56. Taylor 1998, 283.

57. Iwama 1992, 415; Cleveland 1993; Stone 1993, 83; and IUCN 2000, 148 (“by analogy to trusteeship rights”).

58. Franck 1989, 541; and Tarlock 1997, 65.

59. Civic 1998.

60. De Klemm 1982, 124; Siebeck and Barton 1992; Mercure 1998, 64; Gebel 1998; and FOET 2001.

61. Kiss 1989, 19; and Bosselmann 2001, 22.

62. ECJ 1981, para. 30; and ECJ 1987, para. 15.

63. EEC 79/409.

*the common heritage is entrusted to the member states in their respective territories.*"<sup>64</sup> More recently, in his much-quoted separate opinion in the 1997 Danube Dam case, Judge Christopher G. Weeramantry of the International Court of Justice referred to a "principle of trusteeship for earth resources."<sup>65</sup>

In July 1997, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed—in his report on governance reform<sup>66</sup>—that the United Nations Trusteeship Council

be reconstituted as the forum through which Member States exercise their collective trusteeship for the integrity of the global environment and common areas such as the oceans, atmosphere and outer space. At the same time, it should serve to link the United Nations and civil society in addressing these areas of global concern, which require the active contribution of public, private and voluntary sectors.

The idea was not a new one. It had first been raised by Maurice Strong—legendary organizer of the Stockholm and Rio UN Conferences—in a 1988 speech to the World Federation of United Nations Associations in Halifax;<sup>67</sup> and by Maltese Foreign Minister Guido De Marco in his closing address as president of the 45<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in 1991.<sup>68</sup> Initial reactions were rather skeptical, mainly because changing the mandate of the Trusteeship Council would require an amendment of the UN Charter.<sup>69</sup> But Strong has a reputation for never taking "no" for an answer, and nobody was surprised therefore to see the idea re-surface in the report of the Commission on Global Governance (of which he was a member),<sup>70</sup> and later in the UN reform proposals (for which he served as consultant)—promptly endorsed by Malta's new head of state, law professor De Marco.<sup>71</sup>

The 1997 UN report was followed by a note from the Secretary-General on *The Concept of Trusteeship*,<sup>72</sup> which regrettably entrusted the question to the proverbial UN committee, the "Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements," chaired by the Executive Director of the UN Environment Program (UNEP). The task force report to the General Assembly in October 1998 refrained from making any recommendations on the trusteeship issue.<sup>73</sup> The buck was then passed to the "Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers on International Environmental Governance" launched by the UNEP Governing Council in February 2001, which predictably referred the matter to expert consultations, held in Cambridge, England, in May 2001; the experts concluded that "it would be very difficult to undertake measures that would affect the main

64. ECJ 1990, 885.

65. ICJ 1997, 213; see also Weeramantry 1992, 151.

66. UNSG 1997, para. 85.

67. Strong 1989, 20.

68. Borg 1992; and de Marco and Bartolo 1997.

69. Szasz 1992, 362.

70. CGG 1995, 251.

71. De Marco 1999 and 2001; see also Mann Borgese 1998, 164 and 195.

72. UNSG 1998a.

73. UNSG 1998b; see Agarwal, Narain, and Sharma 1999, 365; and Desai 2001, 486.



organs established by the United Nations Charter, like the ECOSOC and the Trusteeship Council.<sup>74</sup> As a result, the topic never even reached the agenda of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit.<sup>75</sup>

So is this just another one of those non-starters that periodically emerge in international institutions, only to die a slow “death by committee”? I do not think so; and I believe it is worth taking a closer look at the trusteeship idea, for a number of reasons.

### Prolegomena of a Theory

In spite of the irritant amount of rhetoric surrounding it, the concept of public trusteeship is *not* a mere figure of speech or a utopian scenario, as some commentators and orators seem to assume. To begin with, the concept has respectable philosophical credentials: from the famous statement in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1685), asserting that governments merely exercise a “fiduciary trust” on behalf of their people,<sup>76</sup> to the suggestion by Roscoe Pound to limit the role of states in the management of common natural resources to “a sort of guardianship for social purposes.”<sup>77</sup> That comes remarkably close indeed to Karl Marx:<sup>78</sup>

Even society as a whole, a nation, or all contemporary societies taken together, are not owners of the Earth. They are merely its occupants, its users; and as diligent guardians, must hand it down improved to subsequent generations.

It seems to me that this fundamental political dimension of trusteeship is often neglected in purely juridical comparisons between Anglo-American trust law and other legal systems.<sup>79</sup> While it is true that the common law trust has historic parallels in European civil law (going back to the ancient Roman *fiducia* and *fideicommissum*), in the charitable *waqf* of Islamic law and in the *moramati* of African customary land law,<sup>80</sup> analogies from property law may not suffice to explain public trusteeship.

Another major source of misunderstandings is the frequent invocation of trust metaphors without juridical content—a usage already encountered in the literature on common *cultural* heritage, often labeled as “comparable to trusteeship in a *non-legal* sense.”<sup>81</sup> In the environmental field as well, whenever ethical terms like “resource stewardship,”<sup>82</sup> “international/global steward-

74. Estrada Oyuela 2001, 1.

75. Sand 2002, 12.

76. Gough 1973; Dunn 1984; and Brown 1994.

77. Pound 1954, 111.

78. Marx 1865, 718.

79. Waters 1995; Helmholz and Zimmermann 1998; Hayton 1999; and Grundmann 1999.

80. Fratcher 1973, 108; Kenyatta 1978, 32; and Ollennu 1962, 4.

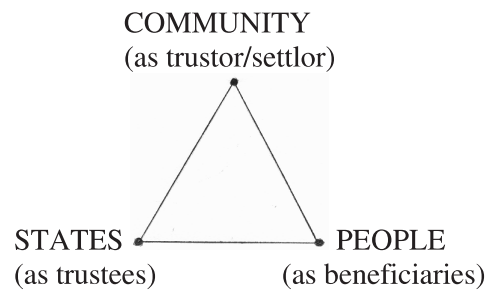
81. Stocker 1993, 123; and Genius-Devime 1996, 354.

82. Tarlock 1997, 66.



ship,<sup>83</sup> “man’s obligations as Earth’s custodian,”<sup>84</sup> “man’s stewardship or trustee responsibilities for Earth’s natural resources and life systems”<sup>85</sup> are invoked as purely metaphorical formulations, the focus tends to be on *bilateral* duties owed by the present generation of humankind—as trustee—to future generations or “future humanity” as the beneficiaries.<sup>86</sup> Yet the legal structure of international public trusteeship is not a bilateral one, but typically *trilateral*,<sup>87</sup> as expressed in the following diagram:

**Figure 1**  
International Environmental Trusteeship



Admittedly, this oversimplified model leaves a number of questions open for debate—starting with the definitions of the community concerned as *trustor/settlor* (the global community? or the community of members of specific international regimes; e.g., contracting parties to a multilateral convention?); of the sovereign entity concerned as *trustee* (states only? or also intergovernmental institutions acting in areas outside national jurisdiction; e.g., the UN International Seabed Authority?); of the people concerned as *beneficiaries* (present and future civil society? individuals and groups?); and of the *corpus* of the trust (designated resources only? or the global commons? or the whole environment?).

There are essentially three options for the creation of an international environmental trust:

- (a) by a specific trust “deed” (*affectation*)<sup>88</sup> designating a particular resource to be conserved for a beneficial purpose; e.g., the “listing” of protected areas under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, through a process of for-

83. Brown 1998; and Lucas, Beresford, and Aitchison 1998.

84. Caldwell 1973, 210.

85. Robinson 1975, 3.

86. Busuttill et al. 1990; Kiss 1997, 247; Gillespie 1997, 107; and Bubnoff 2001.

87. Sand 2001, 50; Sand 2003, 218.

88. Kiss 1982, 229. Significantly, if by coincidence, the French term for “trust funds” in UN terminology is *fonds d’affectation*; and see UN Doc. ST/SGB/Financial Rules/1/Rev.3 (1985), paras. 106.3–106.4.

- mal nomination (by a host state) and conditioned acceptance (by a committee representing the member states), based on agreed criteria;<sup>89</sup>
- (b) by a treaty designating an entire category of trust resources to be so conserved in all member states; e.g., the genetic resources included in Annex I of the FAO Plant Gene Treaty, subject to ratification by the *in situ* states concerned;<sup>90</sup> or
- (c) arguably, by customary law or “objective” extension of a conventional trust regime to all states (*erga omnes*) regardless of their membership in the treaty, on the basis of objective natural criteria of the resource (*par nature*)<sup>91</sup>—which would presumably in turn require some kind of declaratory or customary specification of the international community’s “common concern”<sup>92</sup>—e.g., for the deep seabed under the UN Law of the Sea Convention: common heritage “as a form of international trusteeship.”<sup>93</sup>

Save for the last-mentioned hypothesis of an “objective regime” (which remains controversial),<sup>94</sup> the majority of international environmental trusts are likely to arise in one of the consensual forms described under options (a) and (b); hence, their legal effects will normally be limited to relations between parties to the multilateral regimes concerned. When defining the environmental resources of “common concern” envisaged as objects of a global trust—its *corpus*, as it were—the UN Trusteeship Council proposal seems to envisage the global commons in the first place;<sup>95</sup> however, as the examples of genetic bio-resources and cultural/natural heritage illustrate, “internal” resources situated *within* national jurisdiction could also be so designated if the community as trustor/settlor and the host state as trustee so agree. Hence the trusteeship status of a resource is not at all incompatible with the legitimate exercise of sovereign rights by a host state, just as—and here the analogy from trust law seems perfectly appropriate—a common law trustee has legitimate property rights over the *corpus*, always provided those rights are exercised in accordance with the interests of the beneficiary and with the terms of the trust.

Safeguarding the rights of beneficiaries is indeed a core function of environmental trusteeship. While the balance between a trustee’s current use and long-term conservation of the resource is the key *economic* issue (converging in the “sustainable development” paradigm), public participation becomes the key *legal* issue.<sup>96</sup> In order to “enforce the terms of the trust against the trustee,” as it were in common law parlance, this may require *procedural* safeguards—including actionable rights to know, rights to be heard, and rights to challenge

89. UNESCO 1972; and Lyster 1985, 211.

90. FAO/IT 2001.

91. Kiss 1982, 225.

92. Durner 2001, 291.

93. Boyle 1997, 84.

94. Simma 1994, 358.

95. UNSG 1997, 85; see also WBGU 2002.

96. Raustiala 1997; and Ebbesson 1997.

decisions, along the lines of the 1998 UNECE Aarhus Convention<sup>97</sup>—as well as *institutional* arrangements such as the empowerment of “guardians” with rights of standing and legal representation on behalf of civil society.<sup>98</sup> In the case of trusts operating in the context of conventional regimes—such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, or the Biodiversity Convention and the FAO Plant Gene Treaty—existing treaty institutions may have to be adapted accordingly. In the case of freestanding “objective” trusts operating outside treaty regimes, the proposed environmental mandate for a reconstituted UN Trusteeship Council might serve a useful residual purpose, also in the hypothesis of jurisdictional disputes between overlapping trusts. The “international community”<sup>99</sup> may even be said to have a responsibility towards the beneficiaries—that is, transnational civil society—to ensure that they can actually enforce the terms of the trust against trustee-states, through appropriate remedies and institutions; e.g., by the designation of representative civil bodies so as to overcome the “democratic deficit” of global governance.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusions

The broader question whether lessons learned from property rights and “fiduciary” institutions in a national environmental context can be extrapolated to the global environment has long intrigued not only international lawyers, but also Nobel laureates in economics.<sup>101</sup> Public trusteeship for environmental resources raises a problem of “scale”: viz., the transferability of empirical generalizations and causal inferences from one level to another in the dimensions of space and time.<sup>102</sup> What I have tried to show is that a transfer of the public trust concept from the national to the global level is conceivable, feasible, and tolerable. It does *not* pose the “threats to sovereignty” imagined by ultra-conservative US political scientists, who have conjured up images of “the black helicopters of the United Nations” invading Yellowstone National Park to carry out field inspections under the World Heritage Convention.<sup>103</sup> Ironically, that treaty—which now has 176 member states—goes back to an initiative by the United States.<sup>104</sup> The essence of transnational environmental trusteeship, as embodied

97. UNECE 1998; see Petkova and Veit 2000; and Bruch and Czebiniak 2002.

98. Bruce and Holt 1977; Gassner 1984; Sands 1989, 417; Bruce 1990, 128; Stone 1993, 84; Sands 1997, 83; and IWCO 1998, 136.

99. Simma and Paulus 1998.

100. CGG 1995, 257; Crawford and Marks 1998; and Falk 2001, 165.

101. North 1999.

102. Young 2002.

103. Rabkin 1998, 46. The occasion was a 1995 visit to the Park (at the invitation of the US Government) by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to hold hearings on potential threats to a “listed” protected area from a mining development project in an adjacent area. The incident prompted—unsuccessful—legislative proposals for an “American Land Sovereignty Protection Act” (H.R. 3752, 104th Cong. 2nd Sess. 1996), providing for congressional approval of all public land designations under international agreements (Gebert 1998).

104. Train 1972; and Meyer 1976.

in the convention, is the democratic *accountability* of states<sup>105</sup> for their management of trust resources in the interest of the beneficiaries—the world’s “peoples,” in Rawlsian terms.<sup>106</sup> The public trust concept thus reinforces, rather than weakens, the legitimacy of environmental governance by nation states. As Robert Keohane puts it,<sup>107</sup>

in the long run global governance will only be legitimate if there is a substantial measure of external accountability. Global governance can impose limits on powerful states and other powerful organizations, but it also helps the powerful, because they shape the terms of governance.

National sovereignty, far from fading away through trusteeship,<sup>108</sup> may at least be “palishly” greening<sup>109</sup>—and that is nothing to apologize for.

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105. Jonas 1984, 36; Allott 1990, 336; Brown 1994, 142; and Redgwell 1999, 68.

106. Rawls 1999, 23.

107. Keohane 2002, 29.

108. Gebel 1998, 150.

109. Litfin 1998; Brenton 1994; Sands 1994; Agarwal, Narain, and Sharma 1999; and Cusimano 2000, 328.

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