

Introduction

Studying Global Environmental Meetings to Understand Global Environmental Governance: Collaborative Event Ethnography at the Tenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

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The papers in this issue of *Global Environmental Politics* result from a research innovation we call collaborative event ethnography (CEE),¹ applied at the 2010 Tenth Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to study the politics of global biodiversity conservation. CEE combines and modifies rapid ethnographic assessment, team ethnography, and institutional or organizational ethnography to account for the untraditional nature of meetings as field sites and the challenges they pose for ethnographic researchers.² At COP10, seventeen researchers—professors, postdoctoral scholars, and graduate students from geography, anthropology, and interdisciplinary studies—worked together towards three broad objectives: 1) to analyze the

* This research was supported by the US National Science Foundation (awards 1027194 and 1027201). We would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Collaborative event ethnography relies on collaboration in coordinating fieldwork, collecting and analyzing data, and thinking through meaning. This article reflects the efforts of the larger team working on site in Nagoya. The CBD COP10 CEE team is J. Peter Brosius, Lisa M. Campbell, Noella J. Gray, Kenneth I. MacDonald, Maggie Bourque, Catherine Corson, Juan Luis Dammert B., Eial Dujovny, Shannon M. Hagerman, Sarah Hitchner, Shannon Greenberg, Rebecca Gruby, Edward M. Maclin, Kimberly R. Marion Suiseeya, Deborah Scott, Daniel Suarez, and Rebecca Witter.

1. Brosius and Campbell 2010.

2. Erickson and Stull 1998; Gusterson 1997; Low et al. 2005; Mosse 2004.

dynamic role of individuals, groups, and objects, situated in networks, in shaping the ideological orientation of global biodiversity conservation; 2) to document the social, political, and institutional mechanisms and processes used to legitimate and contest ideas about what biodiversity conservation is; 3) to relate team members' individual research experiences in diverse locales around the world to the agendas established in venues like COP10 in order to better understand how ideas about conservation travel and with what consequences. We shared theoretical interests in the politics of knowledge (or "translation"), politics of scale, and politics of performance, and we used these to guide our study at COP10. Overall, our aim was to improve understanding of new spatial and institutional relations of conservation, drawing on theoretically informed and empirically substantiated ethnographic research. In this issue, we familiarize readers with CEE and the insights it provides into the politics of global biodiversity conservation at the CBD, and into global environmental governance more generally.

Global environmental governance (GEG) scholarship has its roots in political science, particularly the subfields of international environmental politics, comparative politics, and political economy. Much contemporary thinking about GEG—regarding regimes, science, nonstate actors, advocacy networks, global relations of production and consumption—stems from these fields.³ However, scholars in fields such as geography and anthropology, long interested in environmental policy and practice in particular places, have increasingly directed their attention "up" and "out,"⁴ recognizing that lines demarcating local places, processes, and outcomes, if they ever existed, are increasingly blurred. Scholars now seek to link the politics of conservation in localized field sites "to the politics of decision-making that shape the ideological and practical orientation of institutions for global environment governance."⁵ It was our interest in making such links that led us to experiment with CEE, and the underlying theory and methods reflect those common to our disciplines. Although we relate our work to GEG as discussed in political science, we do so to facilitate an effective dialogue across disciplines rather than to displace any particular understandings developed in disciplines other than our own. Just as our work has been enhanced by reading beyond our own disciplines, we hope the same will be true for scholars in other fields.

In this introduction, we describe our interests in global environmental meetings as sites where the politics of global biodiversity conservation can be observed and as points of entry or windows into broader GEG networks. We also specify the types of politics we attend to when observing such meetings. We then describe the CBD, its COP, challenges that meetings pose for

3. O'Neill et al. 2013.

4. Marcus 1995; Nader 1972.

5. Brosius and Campbell 2010, 247.

ethnographic researchers, how CEE responds to these challenges generally, and what we did at COP10 specifically. Following a summary of the contributed articles, we conclude by reflecting on the evolution of CEE over time.

Studying Meetings to Understand Conservation

Global environmental governance is defined by uncertainty and complexity, multi-scalar linkages across ecologies and policies, horizontal linkages across issue areas, and rapidly evolving problems and institutional initiatives.⁶ It is constituted by networks of actors and objects across time and space. Actors include governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and civil society, working at and among local, national, regional, and international levels, often defying easy categorization as one kind of actor (working at one level) or another. Governance is comprised of “formal and informal bundles of rules, roles, and relationships”⁷ that, distributed as they are within networks, can be difficult to “see.” Global environmental meetings are one node in these networks, networks constituting fields of governance that, we argue, can be studied ethnographically (Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald, this issue).

Although some GEG scholars are skeptical about the importance of global meetings,⁸ particularly in terms of tangible outcomes, others have recognized their more indirect impacts. Bernstein, for example, traces how, beginning with the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, the subsequent decadal UN meetings solidified liberal environmentalism as the dominant global paradigm.⁹ Haas discusses more generally how conferences facilitate shifts in environmental policy and practice, by setting agendas, popularizing issues, generating new information, providing alerts, galvanizing administrative reform, adopting new norms, and including new actors.¹⁰ Whether direct or indirect, outcomes have been a focus in the literature. However, we are equally interested in the processes through which outcomes are achieved and the insights these provide into how GEG is accomplished. As discussed in Corson et al. (this issue), ethnography is well suited to studying policy-making practices and associated social relations.

Global environmental meetings are moments when diverse actors, normally dispersed in time and space, come together to produce—through decisions, interpersonal relationships, information exchange, etc.—environmental governance. Meetings become spectacles, orchestrated to enact political strategies in front of an audience,¹¹ and reaffirm the legitimacy of global

6. O'Neill et al. 2013.

7. Slaughter et al. 1998.

8. Barnett and Finemore 1999; Dimitrov 2005; Fomerand 1996.

9. Bernstein 2001.

10. Haas 2002.

11. Death 2011; Hajer 2005; Little 1995; MacDonald 2010; Suarez and Corson 2013.

environmental agreements and organizations.¹² Even though formal decisions are taken by governments, the high-profile, quasi-public nature of meetings makes them places that nonstate actors—nongovernmental and civil society organizations but also businesses—direct their efforts to influence, reinforce, or contest such decisions. Thus, meetings are an “active political space.”¹³ In this space, researchers can observe the processes that produce (or fail to produce) outcomes, as well as the particular politics (e.g., of knowledge, scale, or performance, see below) employed in such processes.

Global environmental meetings occur at discrete moments and have their own outcomes and processes that warrant attention. They are also nodes in a broader network of global conservation governance and connected via actors that move through and across space and time via references to past decisions, other conventions, or future meetings. Indeed, our choice to study CBD COP10 was informed by our first CEE of the World Conservation Union’s (IUCN) Fourth World Conservation Congress (WCC, 2008), where IUCN members negotiated resolution texts with reference to past and future CBD COP decisions. Our study of COP10, in turn, led us to attend the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20, 2012). Although the articles in this special issue focus mostly on COP10, the collection is part of an overall project to make connections among different sites of conservation governance.

Theorizing Conservation Governance

Having described global environmental meetings as active political spaces, we turn to what we mean by politics. We see contests over what conservation is, who is responsible for it, and how it should be implemented as enacted through three kinds of politics: the politics of knowledge (translation), scale, and performance. Scholars in science and technology studies (STS), geography, anthropology, and political science have used these politics to better understand environmental governance. Their combination is powerful for understanding the politics of conservation policy-making at global environmental meetings, as we highlight below using previously published research resulting from our CEEs at the WCC, COP10, and Rio+20.

The politics of knowledge is concerned with the role of scientific expertise and other ways of knowing in resolving controversy and forming public policy.¹⁴ Scientific knowledge embodies political relationships in myriad ways while contributing to their reconfiguration, a process known as coproduction.¹⁵ Complex socio-ecological phenomena like biodiversity loss can sustain a number of competing explanations, each with different implications for policy action. For example, is the “problem” of protected areas one of not enough

12. Harper 1998; Lewis 2003; MacDonald and Corson 2012.

13. MacDonald and Corson 2012, 167.

14. Jasanoff 1992, 1996; Miller 2001, 2007.

15. Jasanoff 2004.

coverage or of ineffective management? Deciding among competing explanations involves contesting both legitimacy and credibility of supporting arguments, with implications for further policy-making, management, and resource allocation.

These types of epistemic contests reflect what STS scholars name the *politics of translation*. In STS, translation is the key process in assembling actor networks—including those that constitute global conservation governance—through which scientific and other knowledge claims are translated into mechanisms of governance.¹⁶ Translation requires work by key actors interested in biodiversity to produce and circulate relevant knowledge and to mobilize support for particular understandings of issues, associated actors, and necessary actions. Bringing that knowledge to a meeting like COP10 and engaging with alternative knowledge requires that actors strategize their associations in various ways: they persuade, negotiate, contest, and defend. Tracing that engagement ethnographically allows us to document not just the “outcomes” of translation, but also the associations and assumptions that inform conservation policy.

The politics of knowledge has been particularly relevant in biodiversity conservation, a field long dominated by Western science, scientists, and organizations.¹⁷ The relevance has only increased as the scope of biodiversity conservation been “scaled up” over the last four decades. As the importance of “global” institutions like the CBD is reinforced, so are particular types of knowledge; technologies of visualization (e.g., remote sensing) make global resources (e.g., ecoregions, networks of protected areas) legible.¹⁸ They can simultaneously render the local invisible, a problem reflected in scientific framings of protected areas at COP10.¹⁹ For conservation, the politics of translation merge in tandem with the *politics of scale*.

In studying global conservation institutions, we acknowledge the politics of delineating scales. The literature on the social construction of scale rejects any claims to scale as ontologically given, focusing instead on how scales are represented and with what effects.²⁰ This leads us to ask how different actors use scale and scalar framings to pursue particular agendas. How are “global,” “local,” and “national” scales produced through these meetings? What are the implications for how conservation problems are defined and governance conceptualized? Instead of assuming scale as a given, we “empirically follow the work of localizing and globalizing.”²¹ For example, Gruby and Campbell trace the means by which Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) enacted a Pacific region at COP10, through coordinated verbal and visual messaging that elided differences among islands, appointing point persons to speak for the region, and acting as a

16. Latour 2005.

17. McCormick 1989.

18. Brosius and Russell 2003; MacDonald 2013; Scott 1998.

19. Corson et al. forthcoming.

20. Marston 2010.

21. Latour 1996, 240.

regional delegation. SIDS did so to better influence negotiations, but also to claim their place in and attract funding associated with global marine conservation.²²

We adopt a network metaphor for scale, resonant with both our understanding of GEG and of actor networks. A network approach allows a different way of thinking about scale and scaled relationships—in which particular places and actors may be seen as global and local, regional and national, rather than being only one or the other.²³ While drawing on the “flattened topography” of actor network theory,²⁴ we acknowledge its failure to attend to differences among actors in networks, particularly in terms of power. Thus, our attention to scalar politics complements the analysis of the politics of knowledge. Scalar politics illustrate “the importance of investigating power relations in scale construction through the interactions of the politics of scale with the politics of science.”²⁵ At the WCC, Gray found that an increasing tendency among ocean advocates to define conservation problems as global in scope shifted concern away from local resource users and their knowledge of particular marine systems, towards science-based assessments of global oceans.²⁶ Such processes of scaling and rescaling are ultimately struggles for control over ideas, processes, and resources. Scalar strategies are repeatedly invoked and performed across a variety of venues within meetings, leading us to the *politics of performance*.

Work in policy studies has begun to highlight the dramaturgical aspects of governance practices and the importance of empirical and analytic attention to the politics of performance in the negotiation of governance institutions.²⁷ This is guided by a growing awareness that “sustainable persuasion is often enacted”²⁸ and that performance or enactment is always contextualized. A dramaturgical perspective directs us to analyze how meeting sites are managed and roles performed, in ways that are not only constitutive of the subject identity of participants, but shape the legitimation of knowledge. What is said, how it can be said, what it is possible to say, and what can be said with effect are all influenced by setting. That setting is in part dictated by the rules and norms of a particular institution, relating, for example, to who can address formal proceedings, how nonparty delegates are recognized, and how past decisions and texts are brought to bear on a particular debate.

But meetings are also spectacles, stages on which different actors perform their policy preferences in front of an audience. Messages delivered at opening ceremonies, visual displays and their prominence, the scheduling and location of side events: much of this is orchestrated. Attention to performance highlights

22. Gruby and Campbell 2013.

23. Herod and Wright 2002.

24. Latour 2005.

25. Neumann 2009, 403.

26. Gray 2010.

27. Death 2011; Hajer 2005; Szerszynski et al. 2003.

28. Hajer 2005, 344.

how contextualized interaction produces social realities like understandings of particular problems and the power relations brought into being in addressing those problems.²⁹ It also emphasizes that the setting and staging of meetings are key to understanding their dynamics and outcomes. For example, staging was important to the “business and biodiversity” theme at the WCC, in terms of channeling like-minded actors together, promoting a shared understanding of conservation problems and solutions, and minimizing dissent. This was accomplished by, among other things, directing participants to follow the business and biodiversity “journey” and to self-identify by donning identification badges.³⁰ Recognizing the CBD COP as a political space points to the importance of understanding meetings as social devices subject to orchestration through which institutional and organizational ends can be achieved, legitimized, and contested.

With this understanding of the politics of translation, scale, and performance, and of how they interact, we turn now to focus on our work on the CBD and its Tenth COP.

The Convention on Biological Diversity

The CBD COP is a critical node in the global biodiversity governance network. A product of the 1992 UN Earth Summit, the CBD was established to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, as well as the “fair and equitable sharing” of genetic resources. With 194 parties, the CBD is one of the major international conventions on the environment and the most comprehensive on biodiversity. Its biennial meeting of the COP convenes all parties that have ratified the treaty to review progress, identify priorities, establish work plans, adopt protocols, and provide direction to the Global Environment Facility (the CBD’s funding mechanism). COP decisions shape conservation in member states via National Biodiversity Action Plans and Strategies, biodiversity targets, and various programs of work. The COP is important for what it produces (e.g., the Aichi Biodiversity Targets), the opportunity it provides to observe related processes, and as an entry point into the global biodiversity governance network.

COP10 took place from October 18–29, 2010, hosted by the prefecture of Aichi, Nagoya, Japan. Participants represented parties, NGOs, indigenous and local communities (ILCs), businesses, and other groups (Table 1). Their relative numbers reflect the CBD COP’s inclusive approach to nonstate actors:³¹ of the 7,418 registered COP10 participants, only 2,251 were party delegates (Table 1).³²

The formal COP10 proceedings comprised the plenary; two main working

29. Hillgartner 2001.

30. MacDonald 2010.

31. Bäckstrand 2006.

32. Calculated using list of registered participants dated 10/28/2010.

Table 1
Registered participants at CBD COP10

<i>Group</i>	<i>Attendees</i>
Parties	2,251
NGO	1,937
Education/University	806
Local Authority	728
Business	486
Observers	401
UN	241
IGO	235
Parliamentarian	175
ILC	132
Non-Parties	22
Other	4
TOTAL	7,418

groups in which delegations stated (and later negotiated) their positions on various decisions; thematic contact groups in which a subset of interested delegates negotiated decision text for presentation back to working groups; and “friends of the chair” (and even smaller “friends of the friends”) groups in which a subset of interested delegates negotiated decision text for presentation back to contact groups. The structure of the meetings ranged widely. Formally scheduled plenary and working group meetings were attended by hundreds of delegates in pre-designated rooms. Others were “scheduled as needed” contact group meetings that were attended by 20–150 delegates, met once or multiple times for one to twelve hours at a time, and sometimes relocated from one meeting the next. Other groups of four to five delegates convened “of the moment, back of the room” meetings, which often met during breaks in a contact group. With the exception of high-level, closed-door meetings (related to Access and Benefits Sharing (ABS) and the financial mechanism), COP sessions were open for observation by nonparty delegates, including members of our research team.

In addition to the formal COP10 proceedings, approximately 320 side events were organized by NGOs, governments, research groups, intergovernmental organizations, and others to highlight results of research and initiatives, sometimes with specific lobbying objectives. These were held during late morning, afternoon, and evening breaks in the formal proceedings, with approximately twenty events scheduled simultaneously. They attracted both party and other delegates. Although scheduled in advance, side events changed frequently, and new events were added daily. Tables filled with literature, pamphlets, and

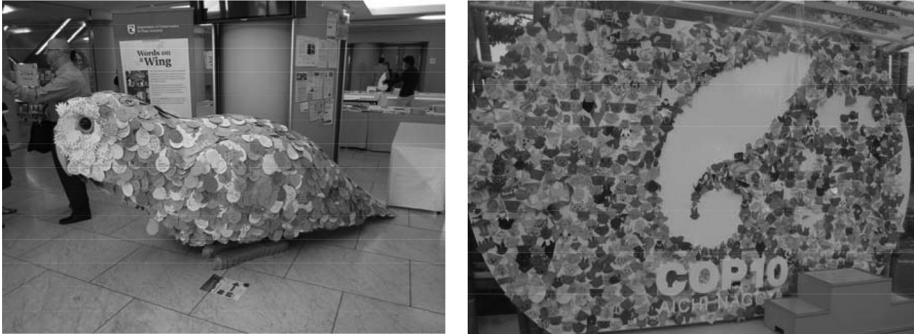


Figure 1
Promotional Displays at COP10 (photos by CEE team members).

small promotional gifts, along with poster stands and other creative displays, filled lobbies and lined corridors (Figure 1). Social gatherings also occurred in the evenings at the convention center and offsite locations.

Both inside and outside the official spaces, various actors sought to influence understandings of conservation and how it should be accomplished. For ethnographers interested in process as much as outcome, all of these activities warrant attention. However, traditional ethnography has relied on immersion in particular places with particular people, over extended periods of time, in order to gather data that allows for “thick description”³³ and theoretically informed interpretation (Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald, this issue). Meetings like COP10 thus pose challenges for the immersion of individual ethnographic researchers, given the time-constrained and multi-sited characteristics of events. CEE is our response to these challenges.

Collaborative Event Ethnography

CEE evolves as we apply lessons learned. Thus, we begin our description of our work at COP10 with a summary of our approach to the WCC.

During our first CEE at the WCC, our goal was to increase our understanding of the event by using a team of researchers to overcome the limits of working alone. Although we collaborated to consider the common theme of conservation and development tradeoffs,³⁴ we did so while pursuing individual research interests. We anticipated the primary benefits of collaboration would be event coverage, but we found other benefits more compelling. As we exchanged observations, we developed a broader appreciation for the event and how conservation was being represented within it. We began to theorize our observations in

33. Geertz 1973.

34. Brosius and Campbell 2010.

terms of the three types of politics we later adopted to frame our work at CBD COP10. However, without a mechanism to support collaboration after the WCC, and in the traditions of our sole author disciplines, our individual interests dominated analysis and writing, although some collaborative articles were produced.³⁵ We shared a general sense of having failed to fully capture the power of CEE in our outputs. Thus, looking to COP10, our focus shifted from the practical benefits of collaboration (e.g., “more eyes”), to the ways that collaboration generates new insights (e.g., “more ideas”).

The practical and intellectual benefits of collaborating are tightly coupled, and the latter can only be realized through a supporting structure. Looking to COP10 we wanted to be more purposeful in collaboration, but we also anticipated the difficulties of sustaining meaningful collaboration in a group of seventeen researchers. Our supporting structure included three key features. First, we explicitly adopted a shared understanding of politics (i.e., of translation, scale, and performance) as our theoretical framework. As noted above, these emerged from our work at the WCC, when several authors reflected on scalar and knowledge politics independently in their articles, and where our discussions of the politics of performance dominated our daily meetings. Second, we developed a matrix covering topics selected from the COP agenda (e.g., ABS, biodiversity and climate change, biofuels and biodiversity, etc.) and governance themes (science, markets, and participation) that reflected both our interests and findings at the WCC. For COP10, each researcher joined three topical and one thematic subgroup, such that each topical subgroup had members from different thematic groups and vice versa. This resulted in eleven subgroups, eight topical and three thematic, that directed our onsite work and made the practicalities of collaborating in a large group more manageable. The final feature to support collaboration was a weeklong writing retreat, held approximately seven months after COP10.

The work of the CEE team and subgroups began well in advance of COP10, when we began to track intersessional activities and events, and to research past decisions related to our topics. Although a COP is a temporal event hosted in a particular place, the meeting extends beyond such boundaries. At COP10, some agenda items had been debated for years; an ABS agreement, for instance, has been in development since 2002, with nine related working group or technical meetings held since COP9 in 2008. Marine biodiversity has been on the agenda since 1995. More generally, the CBD’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and other ad hoc committees, like the Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention (WGRI), meet to advance the interests of the CBD. Thus, for most topics, there is an institutional history that can be traced in past decision and informational texts.

Once the full team was assembled, we used Internet conferencing

35. E.g., Maclin and Dammert Bello 2010; Paulson et al. 2012.

(webinars) to 1) introduce and populate the matrix; 2) explore and refine common questions; 3) review CBD history; 4) discuss preliminary research on intersessional meetings and past decisions; 5) develop data-gathering protocols; and 6) discuss logistics at COP10. Many webinars were linked to a formal syllabus that included assigned readings. As our CEE team was comprised of members at various stages of their academic careers, we had explicit (if underdeveloped) mentoring goals, and these preparations allowed us to get to know one another prior to our work at COP10. They also allowed us to discuss and ultimately embrace our shared understanding of politics, the “scaffolding” necessary to support successful ethnographic observation and analysis. They supported our research into past decisions, which allowed us to think about COP10 in relation to the CBD and, with the insight of WCC CEE alumni, to the governance network more generally. Finally, preparations allowed more seasoned researchers—those with in-depth understanding of various topics, organizations, actors, and other meetings—to share their insights.

At COP10, we met daily to discuss emerging findings, review data-gathering protocols, and plan our schedule. We dispersed throughout the meeting to cover events of interest, a logistical challenge heightened by the fact that each researcher belonged to multiple groups and by constant changes to the schedule. At events, researchers audio-recorded sessions (or took detailed notes when recording was prohibited) and took photographs of presenters, setting, and presentation slides. Written field notes were also taken at formal and informal events, recording general observations and emphasizing those relevant to our thematic and theoretical interests. For example, we noted the ways that science (and scientists) and are invoked in debates (science theme); how particular actor groups navigate access to decision makers (participation theme); and where private sector actors are promoted or challenged as critical to conservation (markets theme). Similarly, we recorded (1) the ways “expertise” is bounded and contested (politics of translation); (2) the scales at which people, organizations, knowledge, environmental problems and solutions, are constructed, by whom, and with what effects (politics of scale); and (3) the work of creating a set, delimiting access, and communicating the normative behavior appropriate to that set (politics of performance). These observations were informed by participant observation guides that identified the types of people, metaphors, information, images, conflicts, and actions we might look for in relation to our thematic and theoretical interests. Ethnography relies on the openness of researchers to what they see, and in developing observation guides we ran the danger of narrowing our vision. Nevertheless, we found guidelines useful to researchers, particularly less experienced ones, faced with the complexity of COP10; some guides were developed during the first days of the COP in response to researcher requests. Daily meetings allowed us to reconsider our guides, and ensure that important, unexpected observations could be incorporated.

During our work at the WCC, we invested heavily in arranging and

conducting interviews with over one hundred participants. Although these were valuable, interview coordination consumed much time; once in progress, interviews were often curtailed or rushed due to the continual activities of interviewees. In contrast, participant observation proved the critical research method for us as a group. Key insights such as the institutional orchestration of session discussions, the appearance of coalitions of actors, and the performative aspects of decision processes were all revealed most strikingly through our participation in side events, workshops, and negotiations over proposed motions.³⁶

Given this experience, and because official proceedings filled much of the time available, at COP10 we prioritized participant observation. Although we did conduct interviews at COP10, we focused on a small number of key individuals who had long and broad-ranging experience with the CBD.

After COP10, we shared our notes, audio files, and photos to facilitate collaborative data analysis and writing. These are perhaps the most challenging stages of collaboration, as we continue to bring together our insights and transform what we refer to as our “dispersed consciousness” into a more collective one.³⁷ This transformation arises through our continual interaction. As we challenge each other’s observations and interpretations, we renegotiate our own understandings. Perhaps the clearest example of this occurred while nine authors wrote a protected areas article. During initial discussions, group members who were also following the markets theme presented an analysis that highlighted the influence of market logic and private sector interests on emerging understandings of protected areas. However, others following the participation theme provided an alternative view in which some indigenous groups sought to assert their rights through protected areas and where market logic was absent. Thus, a story that began as one of neoliberal governance (and dominance) became one that highlighted multiple interpretations of protected areas and explored the potential consequences of protected areas as “everyone’s solution.”³⁸ Practically, our weeklong writing retreat was critical to supporting collaboration; the debate about the protected areas article took place in person, over the course of several days. Not only did subgroups have the time and space to work together, but the powerful group dynamic and personal relationships among the team were revived and strengthened. Collaboration is, in the end, voluntary, and many of the incentives for sustaining it are personal as much as professional.

The Contributed Articles

With the exception of the companion to this introduction by Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald, the articles in this issue of GEP focus on CBD COP10, analyzing its products, processes that produced them, and what such processes tell

36. Brosius and Campbell 2010.

37. Corson et al. forthcoming.

38. Corson et al. forthcoming.

us about the politics of biodiversity conservation. Some of the articles link the CBD work to other CEE projects and to the larger governance network. Here, we offer brief summaries of the contributed articles and situate them within the overall project.

In this introduction, our treatment of ethnography has been limited, asserting the relevance of ethnography to, and reviewing the practical challenges of, studying global environmental meetings. Corson et al. further detail what ethnography can reveal about global environmental meetings, and place our methodological adaptation in a broader context of ethnography generally and as it has been used to study policy-making processes. In doing so, the authors trace how our continual reflection on our use of ethnography, and what ethnography directed us to pay attention to at global environmental meetings, ultimately led to our thinking about meetings as “field configuring events” in global environmental governance. More so than the other authors in the issue, Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald incorporate our CEE work at all three events—WCC, CBD COP10, and Rio +20—to make their argument.

The article by Campbell, Hagerman, and Gray draws on STS to reveal the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020—a major outcome and one of the most high-profile agenda items of COP10—as coproduced, hybrid objects. Based on long hours spent in a crowded room where the related contact group met, Campbell, Hagerman, and Gray use delegate arguments, chair interventions, observer reactions, and the mood and setting of the room to reveal the ways in which the targets are embedded in and reflective of the processes that produced them. Supplementing their observations of the contact group with those made elsewhere at COP10, the authors illustrate how the targets reflect and reinforce politics internal and external to the CBD. As part of the overall CEE project, the article draws most directly on the politics of translation and illustrates links between formal and informal policy-making processes. It also explicitly connects our work at the COP to the larger project on networks of GEG.

Gray, Gruby, and Campbell use the concepts of boundary object and scalar narrative to contextualize the widespread enthusiasm at COP10 for increasing coverage of marine protected areas (MPAs). Boundary objects are “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.”³⁹ As such, they allow for consensus and cooperation among actors with varying interests. Using their observations during the marine contract group and at side events devoted to the high seas and to Pacific SIDS, the authors propose that MPAs are a boundary object by illustrating how different scalar narratives of global and local conservation lead to the promotion of MPAs, but that understandings of MPAs vary widely. They conclude by reflecting on the implications of this for the MPA “consensus,” and how the CBD accommodates this. As part of the overall CEE project, Gray et al. illustrate the interaction of the politics of

39. Star and Griesemer 1989, 387.

translation and scale in policy-making, and highlight the diversity of actors engaging in similar policy-making debates. The article is one of several products of the “marine team,” one of two topical groups that have been active at all three CEEs.⁴⁰

Scott, Hitchner, Maclin, and Dammert B. track debates about biofuels at COP10, and argue that the complex and context specific nature of biofuels stalled efforts to translate biofuels into a governable object. Using negotiations from the biofuels contact group and related side events, the authors trace attempts by actors to fix the identity of biofuels, by rendering political issues “technical,” relying on formal text to stabilize contested identities, and restricting the sources of knowledge. Rather than a boundary object, Scott et al. see biofuels as a “fire object,”⁴¹ enacted differently in different sets of relations and contexts, with ramifications for biofuel governance via the CBD. As part of the overall project, Scott et al.’s attention to the role of past texts in disciplining and directing debate illustrates the way “the meeting” overflows its boundaries. The article also draws on Scott’s later research at the CBD Secretariat, and illustrates how graduate student CEE team members linked their work at the CBD COP10 to their dissertation projects.

In the only sole-authored article, Kimberly R. Marion Suisseea presents an analysis of negotiations over the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefits Sharing (ABS) in relation to how, where, and by whom ideas of justice for Indigenous and Local Communities (ILCs) were articulated. Using a content analysis of data collected during ABS negotiations, she unveils a justice discourse that was limited in nature, scope, and participant engagement, despite the relatively inclusive nature of the CBD and the centrality of justice concerns to its mandate. She attributes her findings in part to the existence of a justice meta-norm, as evidenced through the emergence of shared meanings and prescriptive status of justice instruments. Within the broader project, the article serves to highlight the linkages between formal and informal negotiations and the role of past texts in disciplining and directing debate. The article also demonstrates that coverage is sometimes critical. To make an argument about the limited nature of the justice debate, i.e., to argue convincingly about absence, Marion Suisseea analyzed notes, photos, and handouts associated with 57 events (of varying lengths, and a minimum of 2 hours each), many of which were attended by other team members. Although in the next section we discuss the pitfalls of emphasizing coverage in CEE, in this case CEE did provide “more eyes” that proved crucial.

Finally, two brief commentaries by Rosaleen Duffy and Bram Büscher reflect on the contributed articles and the overall project. The pieces are complementary, with Büscher focusing on CEE as a method, both its strengths and limitations, and Duffy situating CEE within studies of global environmental governance more generally.

40. Campbell et al. 2013; Gray 2010; Gruby and Campbell 2013.

41. Law and Singleton 2005.

Global Environmental Meetings and Global Environmental Governance: CEE Moving Forward

CEE continues to evolve, in theory and practice. For example, practically, although the matrix we employed at COP10 supported collaboration, we were too ambitious. With researchers belonging to three or four subgroups, our work at COP10 was frenetic, with little time to process notes or reflect while on site. The multiple commitments of team members meant that not all subgroups established momentum and some ultimately dissolved. Several of our team members had strong instincts to maximize coverage, without enough reflection on why we would do so. This approach has two risks: First, we succumb to an illusion that we can cover everything, but even with a team of seventeen people covering select topics this is impossible. There were high-level negotiations that nonstate delegates could not access, but also the sheer quantity of events and the changing schedule meant that we missed some open-access events. Second, once we prioritize and emphasize coverage, we are open to questions about “what we missed,” questions that assume complete coverage enhances the objectivity and “truth” of our analysis. Ethnography accepts that observers are not neutral, that observation is always contextualized. Theoretical rather than random or comprehensive sampling is the norm. Thus, in prioritizing coverage for coverage’s sake, we undermine our own arguments about what ethnography can contribute to the study of these meetings. If mere coverage is the concern, then the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, readily accessible for post-conference textual analysis, might suffice as a source of data.

Theoretically, our understanding of what we are studying—meetings versus networks versus field-configuring events (Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald, this issue)—is also shifting. If our first CEE was focused on the meeting itself, each successive CEE helps us to better situate meetings in wider processes reflective and constitutive of the new spatial and institutional relations of global conservation governance. Given these shifting interests, collaborative event ethnography is in some ways a misleading title for our efforts. Or, rather, it refers to the methodology and methods that direct our work at individual meetings, while the overall research project extends beyond any one event, in several ways.

First, as described above, we recognize that any one meeting is embedded in an institutional history of past meetings, decisions, working groups, etc. We work to contextualize what we see at a meeting like COP10 within that history. Second, we are following “people, things, metaphors, and conflicts”⁴² from one meeting site to another. In moving from the WCC, to CBD COP10, to Rio+20, we analyzed how key actors, both traditional and new to conservation, aligned around market-based logic, and how others resisted it.⁴³ Similarly, we traced the

42. Marcus 1995.

43. Corson et al. forthcoming; Corson and MacDonald 2012; Corson et al. 2013; Hagerman et al. 2012; MacDonald and Corson 2012; Suarez and Corson 2013.

evolution of the marine agenda.⁴⁴ Corson, Campbell, and MacDonald explore both of these examples further. Third, our work as a team extends beyond CEEs, to other international meetings relevant to researchers' individual interests. In addition to participating in all three CEEs, collaborator Noella Gray has attended four international meetings focused on marine conservation. Collaborator Deborah Scott attended CBD SBSTTA 18 and worked with the CBD Secretariat to develop their position on synthetic biology. Team members share relevant information gained through these individual projects. Thus, the life of the team extends beyond any single iteration of CEE, and we have a growing network of CEE-trained researchers who continue to collaborate, even as the group working on successive meeting changes. Fourth, our understanding of what happens at meetings is informed by our more traditional fieldwork. Our research team comprises social scientists who have been studying conservation in specific places (e.g., Belize, Costa Rica, Madagascar, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Caribbean, France, the Arctic, Micronesia, Laos), as debated in specific organizations (IUCN, WWF, TNC, CI, USAID, various national government agencies), and as tied to specific mechanisms (protected areas, hunting, ecotourism, endangered species listing, forest management). These research experiences allow us to better understand and contextualize what we see and hear at meetings like COP10, and participating in the CEE informs our individual research. Although CEE is a means to "study up,"⁴⁵ CEE is not ultimately about studying meetings (up) instead of the local (down), but studying both.⁴⁶

Overall, studying meetings involves more than attending sessions and analyzing the discursive content and intent of those sessions. It requires contextualizing that content within an analytic frame that better explains the constitution of the meeting as a political phenomenon designed in relation to the ideological and material intent of its conveners. We argue that by adopting a shared theoretical framework, attending multiple global environmental meetings, paying attention to institutional history as reflected in previous decision texts, and drawing on our understanding of conservation in practice in more traditional field sites, we are developing an ethnographic understanding of and familiarity with meetings and meeting culture. This kind of understanding not only helps us contextualize what happens at meetings, but practically assists with things like access to "invitation only" events and interviews with key informants. These, in turn, enrich our ethnographic experiences of and insights into the meeting. We suggest that our familiarity with the policy negotiations at stake (their histories, the various interests groups involved, etc.) rivals that of more traditional ethnographers who understand land tenure or household division of labor in particular places. Furthermore, because our work occurs before and after any particular event and remains connected to conservation practices in

44. Campbell et al. 2013; Gray 2010; Gruby and Campbell 2013.

45. Gusterson 1997; Nader 1972.

46. Robbins 2002.

particular places, we are able to appropriately contextualize any conclusions we make about the significance of a particular meeting. And this ability increases with each successive CEE, or return to our traditional fields sites, both of which extend our vision of the conservation governance network.

CEE is not without its challenges. Some of these are profound. Our team struggles at times to reconcile different epistemological commitments that influence our understandings of theory and data and the relations between the two. Some challenges are systemic: although we are deeply committed to and convinced of the utility of our collaborative endeavor, many of us feel constrained by our disciplines' and departmental expectations about sole authorship and ownership of ideas. Some are discouraging: we have acknowledged a troubling gender imbalance in our work and, in addition, participants fulfill their obligations to the team with varying levels of completeness. Some challenges are mundane: data storage and sharing across a large group of researchers at different institutions is challenging, and coordinating logistics can be tedious. All these challenges are interconnected. We acknowledge the challenges both to avoid promoting a naïve understanding of what collaboration entails and to contextualize the work presented here. All of the contributed articles reflect the results of a new endeavor that, although at times fraught, has proven deeply rewarding to most participants.

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