

# Book Reviews

Gulbrandsen, Lars H. 2010. *Transnational Environmental Governance: The Emergence and Effects of the Certification of Forests and Fisheries*. Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar.

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One of the most visible recent trends in the governance of renewable resources internationally (and of much else besides) is the emergence of voluntary certification systems. Two of the best known of these systems are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which create sustainability standards for forestry products and wild-caught fish respectively. Lars Gulbrandsen's excellent book traces the evolution of and relationship between these two standards, and uses both to illustrate broader themes and draw lessons about voluntary certification more broadly.

Both the FSC and the MSC are examples of what has been called "governance without government" in international relations. (Voluntary standards can be governmental as well, such as organic standards in the United States, but these are rare at the international level, and are not discussed in this volume). Certification is a particular form of this phenomenon, in which voluntary standards are designed to identify producers who choose to meet high environmental and/or social standards, rather than providing a point of convergence for all producers. Gulbrandsen points out that such standards, while voluntary, are not in fact governance without government—they require effective regulation and enforcement of things like copyright laws in order to function, and governments can have significant impacts on standards, through a variety of mechanisms, when they so choose.

The book asks several questions about the evolution of environmental certification schemes, including how NGO-driven and industry-driven schemes relate to each other, how existing schemes affect new ones, and how effective certification is at achieving its intended goals. With respect to the first question, Gulbrandsen argues, via a comparison of the forestry industries in Sweden and Norway, that getting large producers that sell to the international market and are sensitive to consumer and NGO pressure on board early in the process is key. The market pressure gives producers an incentive to participate in certification schemes. But in the absence of efforts to include producer voices in the creation of a scheme's principles, rules, and procedures these producers may respond to market pressure by creating their own certification schemes.

That is precisely what has happened in forestry. The FSC has had

significant success in attracting forest owners. But an industry-driven scheme, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, has attracted twice as much acreage. Gulbrandsen argues that industry-driven certification systems differ in three ways from those in which NGOs have a major say in the rules. They tend to focus more on management rules and processes than on environmental outcomes, the rules themselves tend to be less stringent, and they are often sympathetic to mutual recognition agreements, by which goods that are certified by one scheme are accepted by another. NGO-driven systems are less sympathetic to mutual recognition, because it can drag standards down to the level of the least stringent system, rather than push producers up to the level of the most stringent. He also finds, however, that when NGO-driven and industry-driven standards co-exist, the latter tends to move toward the former, narrowing the difference and increasing the average stringency of certification systems.

To answer the second question, about the effect of existing certification processes on new ones, Gulbrandsen looks at the effects of the FSC on the subsequent formation of the MSC. The driving organizational force in both of the cases in this book was the WWF, which is developing a specialty in the creation of certification schemes. (It is now, for example, a driving force in the creation of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council, or ASC.) Not surprisingly, MSC certification is structured in ways clearly modeled after the FSC, with some key differences. The standards are global, rather than leaving scope for national conditions, the governance structure is less open, and less attention is given to social, as opposed to environmental, issues.

Gulbrandsen's answer to the third question, about the effectiveness of certification systems, is nuanced, but not altogether encouraging. Certification can be quite effective at improving management systems, and at maintaining minimum environmental and social standards. But these conditions often do not translate into major improvements in environmental performance at the local level, and have little overall effect on the condition of the resource at an international scale. Furthermore, take-up of voluntary standards is heavily biased toward the developed world. There are two selection biases operating here that explain these effects. The first is that the organizations that adopt certification standards are those with higher standards to begin with, meaning that they face the lowest costs in adapting to the standards. The second is that certification favors larger organizations that can amortize the costs of certification over greater sales. Certification, in other words, works better with big companies and those that sell directly to rich-world customers than with small companies or those that do not sell to processors or retailers than have a recognized brand name to protect.

*Transnational Environmental Governance* provides both an excellent overview of the issues to be taken into account in studying voluntary certification systems, and an effective in-depth study of the forestry and fishing cases. The one thing missing is more detailed description of what specific standards

certification entails. What exactly, for example, does a company need to do to create a more effective environmental management system? But this is perhaps the topic for another volume—this one is highly effective as a treatment of environmental certification, and as a starting point for the study of the phenomenon.

Park, Susan. 2010. *World Bank Group Interactions with Environmentalists: Changing International Organisation Identities*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

*Reviewed by David Downie  
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In one of many great scenes in the classic movie, *A Lion in Winter*, Katherine Hepburn, as *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, surveys her threatening sons and remarks, “Dear, dear. Whatever shall we do with Mother?” Advocates of sustainable development have often felt the same way about the World Bank.

The Bank possesses a mother lode of economic resources, formal mandates, and practical relationships that can help initiate or finance large scale projects that could facilitate sustainable development—from sustainable energy to water conservation to climate adaptation. As Susan Park writes in this fascinating and extremely well-researched volume, the World Bank has the proven ability to provide “cheap loans to developing countries where private financing will not, and can mobilize and co-finance loans and projects with the private sector, thus providing a life-line to credit poor states. Equally importantly, it provides technical experience and acts a ‘knowledge broker’ to developing countries” (p. 1). The Bank is not a resource to ignore. It is also not an institution likely to go away, even if one wants it to. Despite calls from intelligent critics on both the right and left that the Bank does more harm than good and should be eliminated (and similar calls from the sometimes not so merry bands of anti-capitalist and anarchist protesters that accompany certain meetings), the actual prospects for eliminating the World Bank were always unrealistic, and remain that way today.

At the same time, the impacts of particular World Bank projects and its often unquestioning support for the more suspect aspects of industrialization, resource extraction, and globalization have proven, to say the least, far less sensitive and nurturing than one would want from an ideal parent. “Since the early 1980s, environmental groups have documented numerous cases where the World Bank . . . contributed to the environmental devastation and community dislocation through its development projects.” Wielding “significant material and ideational power” the Bank “advocated neoliberal economic policies through its research; structural adjustment programmes and projects; investments and guarantees” that supported outmoded models of unsustainable economic development (p. 1).

Thus, the conundrum, “whatever shall we do with the World Bank?” The