

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

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this book makes important contributions to our understanding of private governance and uncovers the complex relationships at work therein.

Duit, Andreas, ed. 2014. *State and Environment: The Comparative Study of Environmental Governance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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The role of the state in public life has been a highly contested issue. During the 20th century, states took on many responsibilities, from assuring access to education to policing workers' fair compensation. Starting in the 1970s, however, the idea that the state should play a large role in public life was challenged, and small government, market mechanisms, and deregulation became guiding principles across many states. Against this history, environmental policies and politics seem to be an exception: since the 1970s the role of the state in regulating the environment has exploded. The state has not always been effective, nor has it acted alone on environmental problems, but it has been central to regulating environmental life. *State and Environment*, edited by Andreas Duit and with work from nineteen contributors, explores these dynamics. The book "bring[s] the state back into environmental governance" (p. 3), after years of scholarly neglect. The ten essays in the book achieve this goal by comparing across countries, while the introduction and conclusion develop a comparison between the emergence of the welfare state and the (hopefully) emerging ecostate.

The strengths of *State and Environment* lie in its methodological and conceptual variety as well as its accessibility. Unlike other edited volumes that test one framework through multiple single-country case studies, Duit's book explores a number of issues in cross-cutting ways to identify patterns in how societies are responding to global environmental change. Together, the essays demonstrate that environmental governance has improved overall but remains in flux. New environmental policy leaders are emerging and falling behind all the time, norms around sustainability and citizenship are evolving, and the state is constantly experimenting with new policies in new ways. State capacity is important to how environmental policies perform in forestry, fisheries, and conservation. How to measure environmental performance is an open debate, full of interesting, challenging questions regarding what makes a good indicator, as the volume demonstrates. Methodologically, the book provides students with examples of how game theory, survey data, case studies, or satellite images can be used in studies of comparative environmental politics.

Perhaps the most interesting conceptual contribution of the volume is the comparison between the welfare state and the possible emergence of an ecostate. Building on the research collected in the book, Duit argues that, although the ecostate remains a hypothetical possibility, the concept might be useful for integrating

the results of research in comparative environmental governance and for guiding future research. According to Duit, a strong ecostate “uses its regulatory and redistributive powers to maximize environmental values over economic values” (p. 323). By contrast, in weak ecostates, economic gain almost always trumps environmental concerns. This characterization gets to the heart of environmental governance, as projected both in scholarship (as in ecological modernization theory, discussed in the introduction) and in the political arena. Conceptually developing the idea of an ecostate, therefore, requires methodological and theoretical innovations that can shed new light on how states reconcile competing demands for economic growth and environmental protection.

The essays in this volume point to some directions such innovations might take. By showing that environmental leaders sometimes fall behind, and are not leaders in all areas, *State and Environment* points to the need to refocus research away from state rankings, toward understanding why states’ environmental commitments vary over time and across issues. This book presents evidence that again puts to rest the specter of a “race to the bottom,” affirms the importance of policy diffusion, and shows that environmental policies are increasing in number and stringency across OECD countries. These essays show that states’ environmental performance is improving, although environmental gains remain highly contingent and fragile. In contrast to the common assumption that improving environmental performance requires that states adopt policies that have been successful elsewhere, these findings suggest that scholarship also needs to examine the particular circumstances that make some policies work, at some times, in some places.

The global context in which states operate, however, is underspecified. Except for three chapters, the book is focused on the experiences of OECD countries. This focus does not appear to result from the historical OECD responsibility for climate change, but because of the availability of data on these countries. Existing indicators are often designed to rank-order states rather than to interrogate the relationship between economic growth and environmental protection that is central to the concept of the ecostate. On existing indicators, chapter author James Meadowcroft writes, “is it really surprising that a small, densely populated country like the Netherlands requires biological resources from beyond its borders?” (p. 37). Given global capitalism, all countries live beyond their borders for energy, mineral, and manufactured goods. One way to better integrate global trade into comparative political analysis could be to develop indicators that reflect global interdependencies, which are fundamentally about the relationship between environment and growth. For example, one indicator that might fit this description is energy intensity, which measures energy consumption per dollar of economic output. The discussions on indicators, performance, and the role of the state in environmental governance featured in *State and Environment* are excellent starting points; the further development of broader scholarship on how states might reconcile growth and environmental protections is an important next step.