*Ecology, Economy and Society–the INSEE Journal* 3 (2): 191–196, July 2020

**BOOK REVIEW**

# Building Inclusive Frameworks

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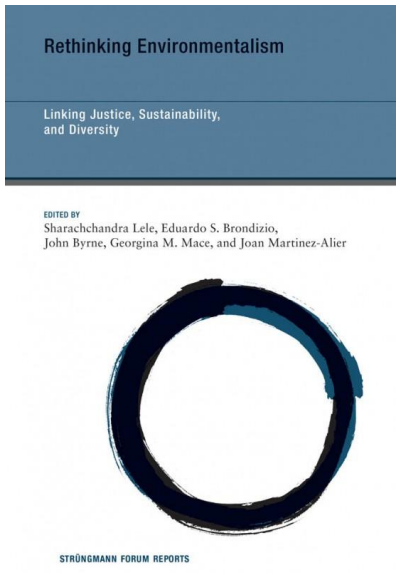
Sharachchandra Lele, Eduardo S. Brondizio, John Byrne, Georgina M. Mace, and Joan Martinez-Alier, eds. 2018. *Rethinking Environmentalism: Linking Justice, Sustainability, and Diversity*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press. ISBN: 978-0-262-03896-6, pp. 302, USD 45.00 (PB).




This book is an outcome of the discussions held at the Ernst Strüngmann Forum on "Rethinking Environmentalism: Justice, Sustainability, and Diversity" on June 19–24, 2016, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The participants of the forum, who are stalwarts in their respective fields, authored the chapters in this book. It provides a comprehensive review of the justice, sustainability, and diversity frameworks used to study environmental problems, and I am tempted to call it a reader.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant suggested that our ideas do not conform to the objects of the world

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Published by Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE), c/o Institute of Economic Growth, University Enclave, North Campus, Delhi 110007.

ISSN: 2581-6152 (print); 2581-6101 (web).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37773/ees.v3i2.215

around us; instead, objects are defined by the world of our ideas (Kant 1882). The constructivist approach builds on this idea and claims that processes, concepts, analytical frameworks, and definitions are normative and should be understood based on their socio-political context.

This book falls squarely within this field of thought and seeks to provide a self-reflective understanding of environmentalism by considering "how differences in framing environmental problems are driven by differences in normative and theoretical positions, as well as ways in which more inclusive framings might enable more societally relevant and impactful research and more concerted action/practice" (p. 154). However, the book goes beyond just reviewing these frameworks by calling into question the value-neutral claims of different theoretical and analytical frameworks applied in the study of environmental phenomena. Thereby, it brings the politics of environmentalism to the fore. The book addresses a significant gap in the literature on environmentalism by demonstrating how conceptual and analytical framings are socially constructed and are products of socio-political power structures (p. 103).

The central theme of the book is its enquiry into "frameworks". Frameworks trigger a set of emotions and ideas—including stereotypes (p. 5)—and articulate the relationship between power and knowledge that pervades the production of discourse and practice that, in turn, shapes definitions (p. 58). A footnote in Chapter 4 states,

> We understand framings as a set of concepts and perspectives based on how individuals, groups, and societies organise, perceive, and communicate about reality. It involves a social construction of phenomena. Framing selects certain aspects of an issue and makes them more prominent so as to elicit certain interpretations and evaluations of an issue.

Therefore, frameworks are understood as epistemic developments that are constructed and used to understand the world (p. 75). In evaluating these frameworks, the authors also suggest ways to make them more inclusive. At the normative level, they consider a frame to be more inclusive when it addresses more than one of the three broad values of environmentalism: sustainability, justice, and diversity. At the theoretical level, the inclusivity of a frame is determined by its ability to incorporate or reconcile different representations of social and natural reality (p. 252).

The chapters are organized into four themes: forests and other high biodiversity ecosystems, urban environments, energy and climate change, and water. Under each theme, there are descriptive chapters and one synthesis chapter that ties the whole theme together. Often, books that are a product of conferences have different papers that are put together as

chapters, and there is no connection or coherence between them. This is not the case here. In each of the descriptive chapters, the authors remain faithful to the overall aim of the book, which is to evaluate how inclusive frameworks are in socio-environmental research. The synthesis chapter that summarizes the theme reflects on not only the broader literature but also draws upon the content in the other chapters in that section. Some chapters address more normative questions whereas others focus on descriptive aspects. The strength of this book lies in the ability of its authors to provide a cohesive narrative throughout the book.

In the introductory chapter, the book's editors set the stage by explaining that the book seeks to answer the question of who gains and who loses when different theoretical, epistemological, and socio-political perspectives are used to address socio-environmental problems. Chapters 2–4 address the theme of forests and other high biodiversity areas. In Chapter 2, Kent Redford and Georgina Mace focus on traditional biodiversity conservation and point to the malleable aspects in the definition of biodiversity. They argue that although biodiversity is thought of as a unitary concept, it has multiple meanings that differ in technical and value-based ways (p. 23). To understand conservation, they outline four conservation frameworks that have evolved since the 1960s (p. 30). This helps to shed light on a set of tensions underlying the way biodiversity conservation is defined (p. 34) and enables them to conclude that biodiversity conservation is not a term with a universally agreed-upon definition, but rather, it is a value proposition.

Ecosystem services that humans derive from nature are an important concept in sustainability and conservation. In Chapter 3, Peter Minang explores the connections between values and incentives in the context of ecosystem services in high-diversity tropical forest systems. He highlights the potential linkages between held, assigned, and relational values and multiple incentive typologies through two main decision-making framings: rational choice and bounded rationality (p. 41). The chapter explores the implicit theory of change present in every frame that is based on an incentive structure. This aspect of frameworks based on incentives is rarely articulated in terms of the context within which the incentive will take place and how it will operate differently in a different setting, which is referred to as a theory of place (p. 51).

The synthesis chapter for this theme, written by Leticia Merino-Pérez *et al.*, presents a detailed review of how varied framings of biodiversity and forests approach issues of justice and governance, which, in turn, influence conservation and sustainable management programmes (p. 59). The chapter reflects on thematic and conceptual focal points: causes and drivers of

forest and biodiversity losses and the proposed prescriptions in different framings. In doing so, it evaluates the values explicitly or implicitly held by these frames (p. 62) in the fields of conservation biology, ecological economics, political ecology and collective action, and institutional analysis theory. Further, the chapter analyses eight initiatives from these fields that represent different approaches to biodiversity conservation. It addresses the normative concerns that drive these diverse initiatives, the interaction of frameworks and values, and conceptual and ethical framings about the main challenges faced by these conservation approaches (p. 75).

The second theme of urban environments is covered in Chapters 5–7. The two background chapters in this section demonstrate how broad the theme of environmental framings can be. In Chapter 5, Amita Baviskar presents an eloquent account of how social position and political-economic power influence the framing of urban environmental problems. She demonstrates how unequal urban spaces in India operate by comparing two neighbours: an upper-middle-class family living in a comfortable high-rise apartment and their housemaid, whose family occupies a shack next door. This chapter argues that the power to define and address an issue as an environmental problem is unequally distributed and that social location and cultural capital shape interpretive frameworks and capacities to act (p. 85). This chapter stands out for its distinctive narrative style and the two environmentalisms it depicts (p. 139).

In Chapter 6, Nancy Grimm and Seth Schindler use a social-ecological-technological system framing (SETS) to discuss the nature *of* cities as well as nature *in* cities, which encompasses issues relevant to both the Global North and South (p. 99). This chapter addresses the issue that ecology is often hard to see in the city (p. 90), which is why the urban poor have not been able to wield environmentalism as a discursive resource to secure their interests (p. 91). The authors argue that bourgeois concerns drive environmentalism in cities where concerns over air and water quality are articulated in ways that penalize the poor while ignoring the culpability of other classes (p. 95). Cities continue to be ecosystems (p. 107) and the contrasting challenges associated with cities of the Global South compared with those of the North need to be seen as being interwoven into the design of various dimensions of cities, their infrastructure, and inhabitants (p. 120).

In Chapter 7, Xuemei Bai *et al.* provide a comprehensive review of five framings of urban environmentalism—SETS, urban metabolism, complex urban environments, environmental justice, and cities as solutions from different normative and theoretical positions (p. 127). The chapter also addresses four conventional dichotomies that influence conceptual and

analytical framings—the urban–rural framing, Global North versus Global South, the brown versus green agenda in cities, and private rights versus environmental commons. The authors then propose that a more inclusive definition of the urban environment will enable frameworks that take into consideration issues of justice and bring recognition to the fact that cities are complex, dynamic, and evolving systems with non-linear trajectories, influenced by a variety of urban constituencies (p. 128).

The third theme of energy and climate change has two background chapters by Patrick Bond (Chapter 8) and Manfred Fischedick *et al.* (Chapter 9), who take the Paris 2015 Climate Agreement as a starting point. Bond traces the positions taken by four individual South African environmentalists and a set of environmental organizations that have all been highly critical of the inadequate progress in international climate negotiations. Chapter 8 explores the dichotomy that is often drawn between two major civil society forces within climate activism: international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and grassroots climate justice activists (p. 156–159). He recommends that climate justice movement organizations should attempt to link up more decisively with each other, as it will enable them to confront neoliberal discourses (p. 178) directly.

On the other hand, Fischedick *et al.* in Chapter 9 recognize the top-down character of most international climate change discourses and posit that the Paris Agreement allows for more decentralized, polycentric decision-making and design in climate change policy. They point out that local and regional planning and campaigns are adopted more quickly than national and international efforts. Decentralized efforts also put a greater emphasis on inclusiveness and transparency, which allows for explicit climate justice commitments (p. 183). Through a set of three hypotheses, the authors demonstrate that climate justice—with its emphasis on unequal distribution across local communities—has an inherent bottom-up feature and provides an opportunity for a polycentric paradigm that distinguishes itself from the mainstream techno-centric strategy of control. This will instead allow for creativity, experimentation, and innovation (p. 198).

In the synthesis chapter by Sun-Jin Yun *et al.* (Chapter 10), there is a detailed typology of framing of the energy and climate debate. The authors draw specific attention to the increasingly problematic status of market-based arguments and policies. They focus on discourses of climate justice, energy sovereignty, and green economy (p. 207). In their extensive review of 12 framings on energy and climate, four frames focus on the market, three on analytical frameworks, and five on post-market aspects of the economy. The chapter captures the key ideas, values, and concerns that

emerged from framings of the energy–climate debate and speaks of ways to promote dialogue among them (p. 210).

The last theme, water, has only two chapters. Chapter 11 by Margreet Zwarteveen *et al.* addresses the issue of water accounting and how it is employed to solve water problems. The authors take on a social constructivist position and critique new science policy initiatives that involve water (p. 227) by addressing the performative aspects of knowledge (p. 231). The chapter establishes how water accounting claims objectivity by being characterized as modern, which, in turn, leads to its legitimization and all-pervasiveness. The chapter focuses on whether water accounting meets its own modernist claims and ends with a discussion on how water accounting tools can be used in less modernist ways to meet goals of equity and diversity, rather than just efficiency (p. 232).

The synthesis chapter (Chapter 12) by Amber Wutich *et al.* examines seven frames in water research and analyses them based on their normative and theoretical positions, different views on progress (p. 252), and definitions and perspectives (p. 252). The chapter demonstrates how the frames vary widely in terms of inclusiveness and justice (p. 255). For each of the frames, the chapter assesses six aspects that range from their intellectual history to their political effectiveness. These aspects are illustrated under each frame through case studies. The chapter also demonstrates how inclusive frameworks can work in practice (p. 279). By assessing the frames on water through a standard set of criteria, the authors have demonstrated points of tension, overlap, and disconnect between them (p. 283).

Overall, this book is an intense and lucid compilation of various dimensions of environmental frameworks analysed through the lens of sustainability, justice, and diversity. The authors convincingly argue that frameworks should be more inclusive. However, one drawback is the lack of a conclusion chapter. The focus of this book is so broad that there is a need to consolidate the arguments made under each of the themes. I was hoping that given the calibre of the authors involved in this project, they would have concluded the book by theorizing on the concept of "frames," which would have been a great addition to the existing literature on the constructivist approach. Nevertheless, this book is a must-read for academicians, students, practitioners, and activists who work on environmental issues.

## REFERENCES

Kant, I. 1882. *Critique of Pure Reason.* London: George Bell and Sons.