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Navigating Regional Environmental Governance

Jörg Balsiger and Stacy D. VanDeveer*

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Abstract. Global environmental governance is growing increasingly complex and recent scholarship and practice raise a number of questions about the continued feasibility of negotiating and implementing an ever-larger set of global environmental agreements. In the search for alternative conceptual models and normative orders, regional environmental governance (REG) is (re)emerging as a significant phenomenon in theory and practice. Although environmental cooperation has historically been more prevalent at the regional than at the global level, and has informed much of what we know today about international environmental cooperation, REG has been a neglected topic in the scholarly literature on international relations and international environmental politics. This introduction to the special issue situates theoretical arguments linked to REG in the broader literature, including the nature of regions, the location of regions in multilevel governance, and the normative arguments advanced for and against regional orders. It provides an overview of empirical work; offers quantitative evidence of REG's global distribution; advances a typology of REG for future research; and introduces the collection of research articles and commentaries through the lens of three themes: form and function, multilevel governance, and participation.

It is time to bring the regional back in to the study of global environmental politics. The field of international environmental politics—now oft-called global environmental politics (GEP)—advanced significantly in the 1980s and early 1990s with the emergence of popular concepts such as international regimes and epistemic communities.¹ These concepts were originally illustrated through cooperation to prevent marine pollution in the Mediterranean, safeguard the Antarctic for peaceful uses, or support the conservation of North Pacific fur seals. They have proven invaluable to a generation of scholars seeking to delimit and define

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1 Haas 1990, Young 1980.

their objects of research, and to understand their formation, evolution, and consequences.² Regime theory in particular has inspired an enormous body of research, which promptly embraced newer global agreements on the ozone layer, biological diversity, climate change, and countless others.

More recently, the regime concept's once dominant status has been challenged by historical trends, notably the transformation of the nation state and the accompanying diffusion of governing authority, as well as a theoretical reorientation to notions of multilevel governance, transnational collective action, and public spheres.³ The regional dimension so important to early theoretical work has scarcely surfaced in these discussions, however, despite the breadth and dynamism readily observed in international environmental cooperation.⁴ While the "global" and the "regional" have been lumped together under the rubric of international environmental politics, we contend that more sustained attention to regional cooperation can help shed light on contemporary developments in the realms of research and practice.

This introduction situates a number of theoretical arguments linked to regional environmental governance (REG) in the broader literature of international relations (IR) and international environmental politics (IEP). Such debates include the nature of regions, the locations of regions in multilevel governance, and the normative arguments advanced for and against regional orders. The article also endeavors to provide an overview of empirical work on REG by focusing on theoretical debates and on comparative empirical work, thereby connecting REG research to the emerging subfield of comparative environmental politics.⁵ The section below outlines a number of reasons for the scholarly community around global environmental politics to pay more attention to REG, and offers some quantitative evidence for the prevalence and global distribution of REG. We then further develop a recent typology of REG that identifies variables along three axes—coordinating agency (state to nonstate), thematic focus (single issue to cross-sectoral), and nature of territoriality (state-centered to ecoregional) to delineate an analytical space in which regional initiatives can be located.⁶ Here, we attempt to provide a model designed to better serve empirical purposes, and thereby facilitate future comparative research. The final section offers a brief overview of the research articles in the special issue by situating them in the theoretical debates and analytical typology just presented.

Why the Regional Focus?

Surveys of recent scholarship and practice raise a number of questions about the continued feasibility of negotiating and implementing an ever-larger set of global environmental

2 O'Neill, Balsiger and VanDeveer 2004; and O'Neill, 2010.

3 Conca 2006; Doyle and Doherty 2006; and Keck and Sikkink 1998.

4 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010.

5 Steinberg and VanDeveer 2012.

6 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010.

agreements.⁷ The transaction costs of servicing international regimes, weak compliance and effectiveness records, lowest common denominator approaches, equity and justice challenges, and creeping global convention fatigue have helped to intensify the search for alternative conceptual models and normative orders. At the same time, international coordination through governance arrangements that aim at regional rather than universal participation continues to proliferate, largely under the scholarly radar.

Evidence of REG initiatives can be found around the globe (albeit unevenly) in a variety of issue areas. Moreover, new knowledge about the spatially explicit distribution of global environmental change may be expected to generate further regional cooperation, or cause regional conflict.⁸ Even the climate change regime, which suffered a significant setback at the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in 2009, is in many ways regionalized, as seen in the multitude of regional emissions trading schemes.⁹ Global chemicals and hazardous waste regimes illustrate similar regionalizing dynamics. These shifts in impetus, implementation, and innovation to regional levels call for more concentrated scholarly attention.

Compared to global approaches, initiatives with a regional focus may benefit from enhanced commonalities in a particular environmental challenge, greater familiarity with key actors, and the ability to tailor mitigating action to a smaller than global constituency.¹⁰ In contrast to global approaches, many regional agreements also take seriously the implications of scalar misfits, focusing on ecologically defined regions such as river basins, aquifers, or mountain regions rather than political-administrative entities.¹¹ Lack of understanding about how these factors vary between global and regional agreements are a second important rationale for the special issue.

Mainstream work in international relations has periodically produced state-of-the-art assessments of regional politics, yet their thematic focus has been dominated by regional economic integration and security dynamics.¹² Research on international environmental politics has generated a significant body of case studies, particularly on regional seas and river basins, but overviews and comparative analyses are rare.¹³ Moreover, standard texts in international environmental politics scarcely make a mention of regional dynamics and typically lump “global,” “international,” “multilateral,” and “regional” agreements together. As a consequence, we have several different estimates and databases of international environmental agreements, but lack a reliable count of regional environmental agreements. The failure to draw this empirical-analytical boundary more clearly is a third rationale for a special issue on REG, as it may provide some of the conceptual foundations for future research.

7 JIU 2008.

8 Matthew et al. 2010.

9 VanDeveer and Selin 2005.

10 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010.

11 Balsiger 2008, 2009; and Debarbieux and Rudaz 2010.

12 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010.

13 Elliott and Breslin 2011.

Recent Activity in Regional Environmental Governance

Regional environmental cooperation has a long history and continues to be a highly active venue of international cooperation, as shown by the negotiation of new conventions and the growth in membership or extension through protocols of existing ones. April 2010, for instance, marked the entry into force of the Carpathian Convention's Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity. In March 2011, the parties to the Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (Abidjan Convention) agreed to create an Oil Spill Contingency Plan, establish a regional center for cooperation in case of oil spills and other emergencies, and develop a Marine Protected Areas Protocol.¹⁴ In June 2011, European ministers decided to launch negotiations for a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe, to be completed by mid-2013.¹⁵ In 2010–2011 alone, the United Nations' monthly *Statement of Treaties and International Agreements* included more than three dozen records for action on regional environmental agreements.¹⁶ Numerous states ratified such agreements as the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols, the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Waterbirds, and the European Landscape Convention.

The UN *Statements* reveal action on well-known treaties. One example concerns the 2003 Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Kyiv or SEA Protocol) of the 1991 Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), which entered into force in July 2010.¹⁷ According to a recent review, the Espoo Convention is regularly invoked and applied by numerous parties to the agreement, and is often seen as a model for international law development.¹⁸ The SEA Protocol, ratified by twenty-three parties, enlarges the Convention's scope beyond projects to plans and programs, thereby influencing decision-making much earlier and serving as a potential tool for sustainable development. Building on the 1998 Aarhus Convention, the Protocol requires extensive public participation in government decision-making. Another example relates to the entry into force in March 2011 of two protocols of the 1976 Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (Barcelona Convention): the 2008 Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean, and the 1994 Offshore Protocol.¹⁹ The latter signals how the Barcelona Convention has gradually broadened its scope from its initial focus on the prevention of marine pollution to integrated planning and management of coastal zones.

14 UNEP 2011.

15 Forest Europe 2011.

16 The analysis of the *Statements* covers January 2010–October 2011. The *Statements* are available at <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/MSDatabase.aspx>, accessed 24 April 2012.

17 United Nations 2010.

18 UNECE 2011.

19 United Nations 2011.

Regional Environmental Governance is Globally Common

Due to the long history of regional cooperation in North America and Europe, as well as the European Union's (EU) strong regulatory portfolio in the environmental domain, REG is sometimes seen as a predominantly Western phenomenon. Yet numerous examples exist elsewhere. In their analysis of the international environmental agreements database,²⁰ Balsiger, Prys, and Steinhoff define regional agreements as those bilateral or multilateral agreements which are signed by at least two countries that share territorial or maritime borders, or that govern a contiguous, transnational region.²¹ This definition highlights that a regional agreement's membership and spatial ambit need not perfectly coincide, nor be adjacent. Many regional agreements cover all or parts of only a limited number of signatories, especially in the case of access to marine resources; other regional agreements are signed by countries addressing a problem beyond their territorial or maritime sovereignty altogether, for instance the regulation of high seas driftnet fishing.

Table 1

Distribution of Regional Environmental Cooperation, 1945–2005

<i>World (Sub) Region</i>	<i>Number of Arrangements Including at Least One Signatory from That Region</i>	<i>Of Which Regional</i>
Africa	707	391 (55.3%)
Americas	1,142	727 (63.7%)
Asia	1,058	577 (54.5%)
Europe	1,671	1,012 (60.6%)
Oceania	502	238 (47.4%)

Note: The assessment is based on 2,546 multilateral and bilateral agreements and non-agreements concluded 1945–2005 (Mitchell 2001–2012). The delineation of world regions is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

The data in Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the widespread nature of the REG. Table 1 shows that the largest number of the more than 2,500 international environmental governance arrangements included in this analysis involve countries from the UN-defined world region of Europe. However, the level of participation by countries from Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania is also quite high. The data show that the majority of international arrangements fall under the domain of REG in all but one region. Table 2 shows that almost half of all international environmental governance arrangements concluded between 1945 and 2005 involve countries

20 Mitchell 2002–2012.

21 Balsiger, Prys, and Steinhoff 2012.

from one UN world region only. Among these, almost 80 percent concern cooperation in which membership and/or ambit are contiguous.

The recent examples and the empirical data showcased above point to a number of features increasingly characteristic of REG, and offering much to mainstream work on global, international, and comparative environmental politics. First, although single-issue environmental agreements continue to be the norm, a growing number of regional environmental agreements have begun to embrace a broader sustainable development agenda, thus raising theoretical and empirical questions concerning the link between vertical scale and thematic breadth. Second, regional environmental cooperation is typically situated in multilevel contexts. Extensive substantive, organizational, or operational connections link regional initiatives to each other (e.g., the UNECE Conventions), to overarching regional integration efforts (e.g., the EU), and to global treaties (e.g., mountain conventions and the Convention on Biological Diversity).

Table 2
Inter-regional Environmental Cooperation

<i>UN World Regions Included in a Cooperative Arrangement</i>	<i>Number of Arrangements</i>	<i>Of Which Regional</i>
1	1,201 (47.2% of n=2,546)	950 (79.1% of agreements in 1 UN world region)
2	826 (32.4%)	464 (56.2%)
3	156 (6.1%)	96 (61.5%)
4	56 (2.2%)	36 (64.3%)
5	307 (12.1%)	127 (41.4%)

Note: The assessment is based on 2,546 multilateral and bilateral agreements and non- agreements concluded 1945–2005 (Mitchell 2001–2012). The delineation of world regions is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

The complexity of these links provides a rich ground for refining understandings of institutional interplay.²² Third, many examples of REG have been at the forefront of enhancing participation in international environmental cooperation, both in terms of access to nonstate actors and in terms of involving subnational governments. Each of these features is highlighted in the articles of this special issue.

22 Oberthür and Stokke 2011; Oberthür and Gehring 2006; and Selin and VanDeveer 2003, 2009.

Navigating Regional Environmental Governance

Although scholars of international relations have long traced and theorized the role of regions in different parts of the world, and from different theoretical perspectives, regional economic integration and regional security have dominated their substantive agenda. Environmental concerns, while enshrined in numerous international agreements, have largely eschewed scholarly attention from those focused on the regional. In the study of international environmental politics, on the other hand, REG has recently played a small role within the field's general focus on international regimes built around global issues such as climate change and biodiversity conservation. This focus has generated much of what we know about the emergence, negotiation, institutionalization, compliance, and effectiveness of contemporary international environmental politics; however, the concomitant failure to distinguish and locate the regional vis-à-vis the international (or global) has served to conflate what IR scholars consider different phenomena, and therefore concealed a series of important analytical questions. As theoretical critiques of the regime concept multiply and the willingness and ability of statist actors to create and sustain new regimes lose steam, developing an enhanced understanding of REG emerges as an important scholarly task as a response to both analytical and empirical developments.

The term regional environmental governance joins three essentially contested concepts, which differing varieties of social scientists have long understood and defined quite differently. Combining these concepts in one term entails a number of definitional implications. Most importantly, the regional and the environmental are principally of interest as they relate to governance, which is broadly understood here as “the processes and institutions, both formal and informal, that guide and restrain the collective activities of a group.”²³

Through governance, questions of “what is a region” and “what is the environment” are debated and constructed within social processes, institutions, and organizations (rather than primarily via the minds and interactions of scholarly researchers). Governance may concern the environment if its primary purpose is managing or preventing human impacts on natural resources, plant and animal species, the atmosphere, oceans, rivers, lakes, terrestrial habitats, and other elements of the natural world that provide ecosystem services.²⁴ Similarly, regions may be understood as all or part of at least two countries that serve as the focus of cohesive and sustained action by state and nonstate groups, yet governance participants will differ widely in how (and whether) they mobilize the biophysical, political-administrative, socio-economic, or cultural-symbolic dimensions of a region. REG is thus a concept that is open to examination from realist and constructivist perspectives.

Specific instances of REG can vary with three dimensions, with axes for agency, substance, and territoriality.²⁵ The axes are conceptualized as continuous ranges between ideal-typical

23 Keohane and Nye 2000, 12.

24 Daily 1997.

25 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010; see also Schoenfeld and Rubin 2011.

constellations along which multitudes of combinations can be located. The particular positioning of any governance arrangement may evolve over time, for instance when a state-based coordinating agency opens its membership to non-governmental organizations, or when a single-issue agreement expands its mandate to other environmental or nonenvironmental problems.

The first axis relates to the coordinating or rule-making agency of a regional initiative, which may range from formal intergovernmental cooperation such as in the case of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as explored by Elliott, to more informal arrangements such as transnational networks of state and nonstate actors. NGO-led initiatives have a long history. Ducks Unlimited started promoting a transboundary ecoregional approach to governing the Mississippi flyway for migratory waterfowl in the 1930s,²⁶ and the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps began its efforts to create an international treaty for the Alps in the 1950s, as discussed by Balsiger. Although their influence has grown in recent years, nonstate actors have not typically played a major role in the coordinating agencies of REG. The second axis refers to the scope of issues addressed under the auspices of REG, with single-issue arrangements such as for chemicals management or water quality (explored by Selin and Klinke respectively) at one end of the continuum, and broader sustainable development mandates such as those for mountain ranges or regional seas at the other end. Owing to the influential notion of crosssectoral integration, a trend toward greater substantive scope can be observed, though regional initiatives expressly oriented toward sustainable development remain in the minority. The third axis relates to territoriality, or the jurisdictional nature of an agreement's spatial ambit. While correspondence with nation-state borders remains an important approach, REG has increasingly sought to align political and ecological boundaries, as in the case of the Baltic Sea, the North American Great Lakes, or the European Alps.

The three axes constitute a three-dimensional space that serves three main purposes. First, it demonstrates that international regimes as the traditional remit of IR is too narrow a category to encompass the varied empirical domain that is REG.²⁷ Second, it provides a means to systematically differentiate REG research and experience, demonstrate its diversity, and isolate more precisely the nature and role of key dependent and independent variables. Finally, the diversity that becomes apparent in the three-dimensional space amounts to an urgent call for more comparative research. Differentiating REG by agency, substance, and territoriality reveals significant typological diversity. Examining REG arrangements, however, also reveals a number of recurring analytical themes that can render comparative research more productive: REG form and function; regional environmental cooperation in multilevel governance; and the links between environmental regionalization, democracy, and civil society.

26 Stunden Bower 2011.

27 See also Conca 2006.

Form and Function

Although international environmental politics began at the regional level, little systematic work has addressed the different forms REG takes or the functions it performs (or ought to perform).²⁸ River commissions for the Rhine and the Danube were established in the eighteenth century, US-Canadian wildlife conservation dates from the early twentieth century, numerous agreements were established in the 1970s, and new ones continue to be signed. Some forms of REG have emerged under the auspices of global agreements such as the chemicals treaties and often replicate the treaties' intergovernmental logic.²⁹ Others emanate from established regional organizations such as the EU or ASEAN, where the parent organization's institutional characteristics influence the REG operation.³⁰ Many agreements address specific issues such as fishing, while others, such as the Alpine Convention, cover sustainable development more broadly.³¹ Characterizing these empirical differentiations analytically is a prerequisite to building a theoretical framework for the study of REG. Since form and function concern all three axes in the above typology, key relationships can fruitfully be hypothesized and examined, for instance the link between agency and jurisdiction (are nonstate initiatives more likely to target ecoregional jurisdictions?) or between agency and substance (is intergovernmental cooperation more prone to a single-issue orientation?). Answering such questions in turn promises to contribute to questions of regime emergence, institutionalization, and effectiveness that are of importance in the regime literature.

Regional Environmental Cooperation in Multilevel Governance

Governance structures for resources and the environment can be found on a multiplicity of levels—global, regional, national, and local regimes, norms, and regulatory mechanisms are linked into a complex institutional architecture.³² An important debate in international environmental politics has therefore arisen with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of an increasing fragmentation of environmental governance structures.³³ This second theme contributes to ongoing research by forging a better understanding of the role of regions in vertically and horizontally linking different governance levels. Theoretically relevant in this regard is the link between regime effectiveness and the “fit” and “scale” of environmental regimes as suggested by Oran Young.³⁴ Similarly, some have argued that regionally framed multilevel governance may well be an appropriate response to globally framed challenges like climate change, given that some regional political, economic, and energy-related institutions

28 Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010, but see Thompson 1973.

29 Selin 2010.

30 Selin 2007.

31 Balsiger 2009.

32 Ansell and Balsiger 2011; Betsill 2005; Keohane and Victor 2011; and Raustiala and Victor 2004.

33 Biermann et al. 2009.

34 Young 2002.

are generally more robust than global ones.³⁵ Another perspective has been offered by game theoretic and economic analyses that assess the effectiveness of different climate coalitions working as complementary building blocks to the global climate change regime.³⁶ Analogies could further be drawn from discussions about security and economic integration at the regional level, where regions have been perceived as stumbling blocks or building blocks to global free trade and world peace,³⁷ or by recent work that looks at environmental displacement in international environmental governance.³⁸ Multilevel governance, too, has relevance for each of the three axes of the typology and relationships between them. For instance, does the degree of multilevel embeddedness influence the substantive range of regional agreements? Or, are ecoregional ambits more likely to involve a greater range of local, national, and international actors?

Environmental Regionalization, Democracy, and Civil Society

Although the emergence, institutionalization, and evolution of environmental regions draw heavily on ecological dynamics and technical knowledge, environmental regionalization is inextricably tied to cultural developments and political processes.³⁹ Environmental regions such as mountain ranges or river basins have to become part of public imagination and debate, which involves the use of symbolic, material, and organizational tools and techniques. For this reason, the degree of legitimacy attached to environmental regionalization is linked to its unfolding through participatory institutions. This presents special challenges in transboundary regions, where the sovereign reach of democratic governance usually stops at a country's border, even in relatively integrated polities such as the European Union. In places such as the Great Lakes region, civil society organizations have been successful in bridging political frontiers and promoting environmental goals, yet often at the expense of democratic accountability and legitimacy.⁴⁰ Conversely, where nation states are fragile and democratic traditions short-lived, such as in the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya region analyzed by Matthew, the challenges of democratically attuned environmental regionalization are formidable.

The links between environmental regionalization, democracy, and civil society have clear implications for the REG dimensions of agency and territoriality. The nature of coordinating agency (and of coordination itself) by its very nature says much about the democratic and participatory possibility of REG initiatives. Of greater interest, however, is the way that particular combinations of agency and territoriality affect participation and democracy. For instance, does ecoregional cooperation, which may be more likely to involve subnational governments than cooperation based on state territoriality, foster participation? Or can

35 Patt, 2010; and Selin and VanDeveer 2009, 2011.

36 Eyckmans and Finus 2007.

37 Held et al. 1999; Hurrell 1995.

38 Vezirgiannidou 2011.

39 Debarbieux and Rudaz 2010.

40 Klinke 2009.

ecoregional initiatives serve political elites in weak states as a means to maintain control over peripheral regions?

The ways in which the three themes outlined above link to agency, substance, and territoriality is meant to demonstrate the usefulness of systematic differentiation in regional environmental cooperation. A second benefit is that it highlights some areas in which REG research can contribute to important questions and debates in the broader IR and GEP literatures. These analytical themes are the common thread in this special issue. The following section provides a brief outlook of the research articles and commentaries by situating them in the above framework.

The Way Forward

This special issue brings together scholars in international and comparative environmental politics who have worked on REG for many years. The contributions illustrate the developing scholarly research agendas around REG and the dynamic nature of the empirical object under examination around the globe. Collectively, they seek to map the breadth of contexts in which REG matters, broadening the debate of earth system governance by raising and examining important questions about form and function, multilevel governance, and democratic accountability at the regional level.

Global environmental governance is growing increasingly complex, and the diversity of forms and functions invoked through regional cooperation testifies to this trend. Indeed the diversity of institutional forms found in REG is perhaps the most prominent feature emerging from the collection of articles and other recent work.⁴¹ Selin's analysis of international chemicals management, politics, and institutionalization focuses on regional centers established under the auspices of global environmental treaties. Elliott's examination of ASEAN and Matthew's of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) concern a regional intergovernmental organization without a historical mandate or agenda for the environment. Balsiger's focus on European sustainable mountain development involves the Alpine Convention as a regional treaty with protocols for environmental and non-environmental issues. Finally Klinke takes into account experiences from transboundary governance in the North American Great Lakes region, yet altogether eschews existing forms in favor of proposing a new model. The REG characteristics vary not only in terms of organizational architecture but also political-administrative scope. Whereas nation state perimeters are the predominant institutional ambit for the Basel and Stockholm chemicals conventions, ASEAN, and SAARC, REG in the European Alps and the Great Lakes region more closely evolves around the territorialization of transjurisdictional ecoregions, which continues to be an empirically and conceptually neglected governance level.

41 Balsiger and Debarbieux 2011.

From the perspective of form *and* function, the contributions offer important insights into the relationship between the two. Conventionally, form is said to follow function. Selin views the emergence of regional centers as a response to implementation gaps plaguing many multilateral environmental agreements. Parties to the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and to the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants established these centers working on awareness raising, strengthening administrative ability, and diffusing scientific and technical assistance and information. Selin argues that they serve three functions: expanding regional cooperation (both developing and industrialized countries); attracting more resources for treaty implementation (mainly developing countries); and supporting implementation projects across smaller groups of countries (mainly industrialized countries).

In Elliott's article, the increasingly networked form of environmental cooperation under ASEAN can be seen as a result of the organization's state-centric, informal, and non-interventionist understanding of its governance function. In a similar vein, Klinke's normative-analytical proposal for transboundary deliberative governance closely follows the form-follows-function dictum, with institutions for public deliberation and participation strictly modeled on the function they are to perform in overall interest aggregation.

By contrast, the argument of Balsiger (and less explicitly Matthew) suggests that function sometimes follows form. Situating environmental regionalism in the broader realm of sustainable development, he proposes two regional perspectives on how the environment can be embedded in sustainable development. One focuses on the intersection of multiple and overlapping transboundary functional spaces, and the other on regionalization as the domestic manifestation of regional themes. Because the two perspectives highlight dissimilar aspects of regional governance (form), they give rise to different insights into, and recommendations for, regional governance (function). One perspective implies the integration of environmental concerns in sustainable development policy at the transboundary regional level. The other suggests a concentration of efforts at the domestic level. From his examination of challenges facing the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region, and indeed the entire region of South Asia, in terms of both human and national security, Matthew concludes that regional environmental governance holds great promise; however, effective governance institutions and processes would be extremely difficult to create. It may be more feasible to craft functioning regional governance on the basis of already operational forms of local and transboundary initiatives. In particular, he argues that the focus should be on effective approaches to managing environmental stressors, coordinating climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies required at various scales of social organization, and establishing better early warning, response, and recovery systems.

Several of the articles in this collection directly speak to different aspects of the second theme of multilevel governance. Our call to bring the regional back in to the study of global environmental politics assumes special significance because not all regions easily fit into the

nested local-national-global scheme. Selin points out that the ability of the regional centers to function effectively depends on access to greater resources and stronger political support, which can be found at more local or more global levels. He argues that expanding regional centers' mandates to include monitoring and compliance might improve multilevel governance. Yet, the reality of national actors seeking support from regional centers outside their own regions, or from multiple centers simultaneously, implies much more complex regional dynamics than the usual hierarchically nested scheme can explain. This justifies Selin's conclusion that the regional aspects of global environmental politics deserve more analytical attention. Klinke's explicit focus on ecoregional deliberative governance similarly undermines the nested scheme, since ecological boundaries famously cross the boundaries of jurisdictions and therefore raise questions about multiple, sometimes competing systems of vertical multilevel linkages. Indeed, Klinke concludes that multilevel governance necessitates deliberative modes of governance that complement and supplement established modes of planning and decision-making.

A second aspect of multilevel governance that comes to the fore in the contributions to this special issue concerns the difference between horizontal embeddedness and vertical interlinkages. Although both of these entail multiple levels, the latter prevails in most multilevel governance research. Defining sustainable development as a procedural norm for reconciling the tradeoffs between environmental, economic, and social dimensions of wellbeing, Balsiger examines how horizontal topical embeddedness interacts with vertical jurisdictional interlinkages. His analysis of sustainable mountain governance in the European Alps reveals that analytically anchoring topical embeddedness at the transboundary level has different regional governance implications than merely constraining it to domestic levels.

Finally, this collection addresses the theme of democratic participation in the context of regional environmental governance. Over the last two decades, transboundary REG witnessed institutional changes through an increasing shift from intergovernmentally constituted political institutions to new, more complex structures of decision-making among a greater diversity of actors and roles. These changes in REG parallel and augment those of interest to scholars participating in the recent turn toward transnational governance, offering another area of potential conceptual, empirical, and theoretical interaction between REG and GEP.⁴² Some policy-making seems to be adapting to a new, more active role of societal actors at multiple levels of political authority. Elliott draws attention to efforts at opening environmental governance under a very state-centric ASEAN to engage civil society and enhance outcomes. She proposes a framework that brings together analyses of the public space of formal regional governance arrangements, the inter-subjective space of regional identity building, and the private space of regional social practices. In particular, she poses the question if moves toward "flatter" forms of regional governance have been accompanied by more democratic or participatory forms of regionalism. She suggests that regional environmental structures under

42 Bulkeley et.al. forthcoming; and Hoffmann 2011.

ASEAN can be described as “invited spaces,” which largely fail to offer effective channels of communication for, or democratic representation of, a wide range of stakeholders.

Participation and deliberation are at the center of the Klinke contribution. Although he reviews existing arrangements in different governance contexts, his approach evolves around the development of a deliberative model for REG with three institutional levels, which he sees as a guide to identify and appraise the potential of deliberative democratization in transboundary environmental governance. Aware of the opportunities *and* risks inherent in normative theorizing, Klinke pays special attention to the conditions under which public deliberation and participation conveying discourse, argument, and persuasion can help to democratize collective decision-making.

This special issue on regional environmental governance concludes with two commentary pieces by Bernard Debarbieux, a geographer, and Ken Conca, a political scientist. The commentaries aim to achieve two purposes: to bring a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary perspective to the collection of research articles, and to reflect on the REG phenomenon in broader political and historical terms. Debarbieux argues that the work of REG analysts is notable for the diversity of their notions of region. Critically reviewing the articles in the collection, he finds that “regionality” often refers to different orders of reality (ontology) and that regions have a heterogeneous status in the production of knowledge (epistemology). Although such a diversity of uses and meanings illustrates the rich potential of a regional scope in environmental governance analysis, Debarbieux urges that scholars’ ontological and epistemological positions be made more explicit so that they become subject to more interrogation.

Conca returns to questions of how REG and global environmental politics are related. He examines some of the reasons for the upsurge in interest in regional approaches to global environmental challenges, including a growing sense of obstruction and drift at the global level. With the rate of formation of new global environmental agreements lagging, with many existing agreements seemingly stalled, and with the momentum of global summitry having faded, regions may seem a more pragmatic scale at which to promote the diffusion of ideas, the development of institutions, and social mobilization for change. Beyond political pragmatism, there are also conceptually interesting if still debatable—arguments that regions hold promise for strengthening global environmental governance. The regional scale may offer superior conditions to the global for common-property resource management, although the historical track record seems mixed at best, and formidable barriers to collective action remain. Regions may be more conducive to promoting norm diffusion—although the causal direction appears to be more strongly global- to-regional than vice versa. However the conceptual promise of the regional scale plays out in practice, there is also a compelling ethical argument for a regional focus, as mitigation failures at the global level condemn particular locales to formidable challenges of adaptation.

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