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Introduction

A Broadened Understanding of Global Environmental Negotiations

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In the past three decades, global environmental conferences have emerged as major events assembling a growing community of actors interested in the diverse aspects of environmental protection. These events establish a routine and practice for state actors to negotiate the future of the environment and the social, political and economic modes of organization that are degrading it. This has made environmental meetings critical sites for all actors invested in challenging world order to protect the environment, including researchers. While critics point to the limitations of multilateralism, and as COVID-19 postponed and disrupted the meeting cycle, the pandemic highlighted the continued importance of these events in crafting and maintaining a collective response to the environmental crisis. As this crisis deepens, however, the landscape of global environmental action grows more crowded and complex as new issues and interlinkages emerge and actors, activities and processes are created in an attempt to address these. The critical nature of global environmental degradation and the order-making in its name mean that scholarship must keep pace with, document, analyze and illuminate this expanding field of global environmental activity.

In this book, we aim to contribute to how we undertake this vital research by offering a reconceptualization of these spaces, their purposes and the stakes involved as global environmental agreement-making, and by providing a range of methodological tools for the study of negotiations in all their forms. We define global environmental agreement-making as the multiple actors, sites and processes through which environmental agreements are made, and the new sets and arrangements of actors, sites and processes that are created by any specific agreement, which have the potential to reinforce or reorient the global political order.

The global environmental conference, be it a summit, a conference of the parties (COP) or a smaller intergovernmental meeting, is the nucleus of agreement-making. Once you collect your badge and walk down the gray-carpeted, slightly bouncy floor of the temporary structure into the main artery of a negotiation venue, or have ridden up the elevator through a glassy high-rise and arrived at the floor of your intergovernmental meeting, you are greeted with more human interactions and forms of activity than it is possible to document. Beyond the formal informals and informal informals with delegates focused on particular agenda items and decisions, there are the in-between spaces of the conference: the side events, the booths, the coffee cart, the press conference, as well as the social media platforms where all of this is captured, framed and shared. The history, struggle and

order-making that animate much of this action occasionally rupture to the surface when time and pressure builds, becoming audible as huddled negotiations, verbal outbursts and ignored requests and pleas from the chairs of the meeting. But, more often or not, this is masked behind layers of diplomatic conventions that can feel as impenetrable as a wall.

This activity and its contestations radiate outwards from the meeting venue, as illustrated by protests on the streets and simultaneous events, meetings and exhibitions that overflow in the parks, surrounding hotels and other city sites. Intergovernmental meetings are shaped by complex connections across space and time, most tangibly through the negotiations and agreements reached at previous sessions. Each decision (or nondecision) made at any sized meeting has the potential to create new sets of activities and interactions that will shape future meetings. As agreements shape practice, these decisions ripple out from the meeting site into the conduct of national policies and domestic societies, and further outward to interconnected organizations and new processes, actors, partnerships and initiatives. This is the significance of global environmental agreement-making.

The aim of this book is to render these complex processes, their multiple layers and their interconnections easier to study. We offer a guide and a methodological toolkit for the study of global environmental negotiation sites, in their multiple forms, which can be assembled and put to different research questions and problems designed to increase our understanding of agreement-making and its products. We do this by offering a new framework for conceptualizing and analyzing the multiple actors, sites, processes and order-making constitutive of global environmental agreements, and by providing the building blocks for designing and conducting research into and of these events. Building on existing scholarship, we offer this reconceptualization to further shift the study of collective environmental action in five related directions:

1. To broaden the conceptualization of global environmental agreements to the actors and sites beyond formal negotiations and their outcomes.
2. To focus on the processes of agreement formation alongside the outcomes, with particular sensitivity toward the historical forces shaping the present and the future actors and activities created by agreements.
3. To pay greater attention to how global political order shapes agreement formation and how final decisions *reflect* and have the potential to *remake* this global political order of relations.
4. To call for greater reflection on the situation of research and researchers within these agreement-making processes in order to confront and counter academic and cultural dominance.
5. To encourage the use and combination of, as well as innovation with, different methods and data collection techniques on and off site.

While we offer agreement-making as a framework to deepen understanding of the opportunities and challenges that collective action offers for ensuring the health of the planet, our reader is not bound by it. This approach is offered as a way to organize, spatialize, situate and connect diverse forms of scholarship into, around and related to negotiation sites and their products. As such, it is relevant for many other nonenvironmental issue areas where

collective action is at the core, such as global health, nuclear nonproliferation, security and trade. Before we unpack *how* to study global environmental negotiations and related sites as *agreement-making*, however, it is important to explore *why* there is so much scholarly interest in these processes, and how the conceptualization and study of these has changed over time.

1.1 Why Study Global Environmental Agreement-Making?

Global environmental meeting venues have not always been popular sites with researchers, and few observed the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. During the 1990s, in the early phase of the climate change and biodiversity conventions, COPs were smaller, nongovernmental organization (NGO) participation marginal, side events almost nonexistent and communication pre-digital (see Reflection Box 1.1). Researchers were mostly interested in analyzing the outcomes of summits rather than as objects of study in themselves, with some important exceptions (e.g., Constantinou 1998). However, in recent years this has changed dramatically, with more and more universities seeking accreditation and sending delegations to UN climate change and biodiversity negotiations in particular. What explains this growth in research interest and participation?

Reflection Box 1.1 How global environmental meetings have changed

By Pam Chasek

Pam Chasek is a scholar of global environmental politics and editor of *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*. She attended her first United Nations meetings in the period leading up to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Here she reflects on five major changes since this time:

1. NGO participation in the work of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other UN environmental conferences has grown exponentially. Thousands of NGOs entered the space at the Earth Summit in Rio, which opened the door to greater participation and, since then, increasing numbers of nonstate actors began participating in these meetings.
2. Side events emerged from the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to continue to engage nonstate actors in sustainable development after the Earth Summit. This practice quickly expanded to the MEAs, creating a trade fair atmosphere and dozens of events during lunch breaks and the evening hours. These side events provided a place for discussion on new and emerging issues and an opportunity to hold governments to account.
3. Technology has changed dramatically. The Earth Summit was the first meeting of the mobile phone era. The World Wide Web further opened these processes: suddenly anyone with an internet connection could read the documents, see what was being discussed and, once digital photography advanced, see photos from the meetings. More recently, the advent of Web 2.0 and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and SnapChat have given everyone a chance to comment, share photos and videos, and invite the world into the conference sites.
4. As the urgency of responding to environmental problems has increased, so too have the political and economic implications. Where once COPs and other meetings took place in

relative obscurity, increasingly governments are seeing these issues through economic, political and national security lenses, which has ramped up interest at the governmental level and increased the size of many delegations, especially from developed countries.

5. Finally, the MEA meeting calendar has exploded, especially before COVID-19. Not a week goes by without a major subsidiary body meeting, constituted body or a COP or meetings of the parties (MOP) from one MEA or another. In pre-COVID times, this led to exhaustion as some government delegates who cover multiple MEAs and other environmental bodies (UN Environment Assembly, High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, etc.) found themselves criss-crossing the globe from meeting to meeting, with limited time at home. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed the meeting schedule considerably. However, the use of online meeting platforms has led to a new kind of exhaustion: screen fatigue.

Perhaps the simplest and most important reason for studying global environmental meeting sites is because we care deeply about the state of the planet and want to understand and contribute to how environmental degradation is collectively addressed. The stakes in global environmental politics scholarship are high. The environment is degrading at an unprecedented rate (UN Environment Programme 2019). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1.5 °C report highlights the impacts and risks of warming beyond this temperature target and emphasizes that the window to achieve it is rapidly closing (IPCC 2018). The Sixth Assessment Report documents the continued rise in global greenhouse emissions, with the last decade recording the highest average increase on record (IPCC 2022). In 2019, the extent of biodiversity loss was highlighted when it was reported that “of an estimated 8 million animal and plant species (75 percent of which are insects), around 1 million are threatened with extinction” (IPBES 2019, 13). At the same time, concerns over the effects of plastic pollution are mounting, with the great Pacific garbage patch fed by approximately 1.15 to 2.41 million tons of plastic entering the ocean annually (Lebreton et al. 2017).

While global environmental assessments agree that human activities are responsible for this planetary degradation, not all societies are equally polluting, and the impacts and benefits of an exploitative global economic system are not evenly distributed. Furthermore, the global community’s response to environmental problems can exacerbate and deepen existing social injustices (Tauli-Corpuz et al. 2020). Over the past century, and as illustrated in Figure 1.1, the international community has increasingly attempted to respond to this emerging array of environmental issues through MEAs. Despite this extensive treaty-making and recognition of the need to differentiate between parties based on level of responsibility and capability, the planet continues to degrade at unprecedented rates and, as it does, inequalities become further entrenched.¹

The failure to redress some of the most pressing environmental issues that humanity faces can in part be understood through the issues themselves and the process that has

¹ Work by Farias and Roger indicates that some form of developing country differentiation relates back to the early 1960s, but that nearly 75 percent have appeared since the 1990s (Farias and Roger 2023), and even then only 6 percent of agreements contain some form of differentiation.

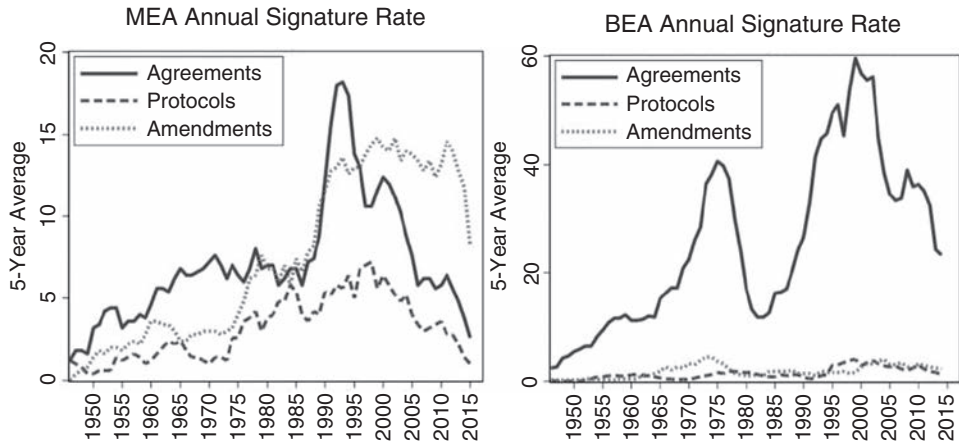


Figure 1.1 Rates of successfully completed MEA negotiations.
Source: Mitchell et al. 2020.

emerged to address them, but, more profoundly, the difficulty lies in changing the social, political and economic practices that are degrading the planet. Each discrete environmental issue has unique physical characteristics and political complexities, the full implications of which often only become apparent over time. Most environmental issues, including ozone depletion, climate change and biodiversity loss, have emerged progressively as scientific knowledge of the causes and consequences increased (see, for example, Litfin 1994; Paterson 1996; Vadrot 2014). Once an issue is scientifically accepted, there is a process of translating and presenting this knowledge to policymakers in order to build the necessary momentum and support for a multilateral response (Haas 1992a). Even in cases where scientific uncertainties remain, the precautionary principle has guided the political response (Haas 1992b; Litfin 1994).

Organizationally, these issues have been addressed through the creation of institutions with shared principles and practices. This includes the establishment of a secretariat, scientific and technical advisory arrangements, and a decision-making body, such as a COP, to negotiate and agree the terms of action. This process of establishing MEAs, from the early treaty-making stage to ratification, institutionalization and implementation, takes time, political will and resource mobilization. While this has led to successes – for example, ozone depletion over Antarctica is beginning to recover (Strahan and Douglass 2018) – building an effective multilateral response to other pressing environmental problems has proven challenging.

It has become apparent that the environmental degradation that the international community is attempting to address is generated by a dominant economic system and mode of organizing life that have human and environmental extraction at its core (Brand and Wissen 2021; DiMuzio 2015; Moore 2015; Yusoff 2018). If redressing social organization were not sufficiently challenging, entrenched interest groups – which do not want to relinquish the social position, power and resources they have accumulated through this model – continue to make every effort to confuse, detract and stall collective environmental efforts

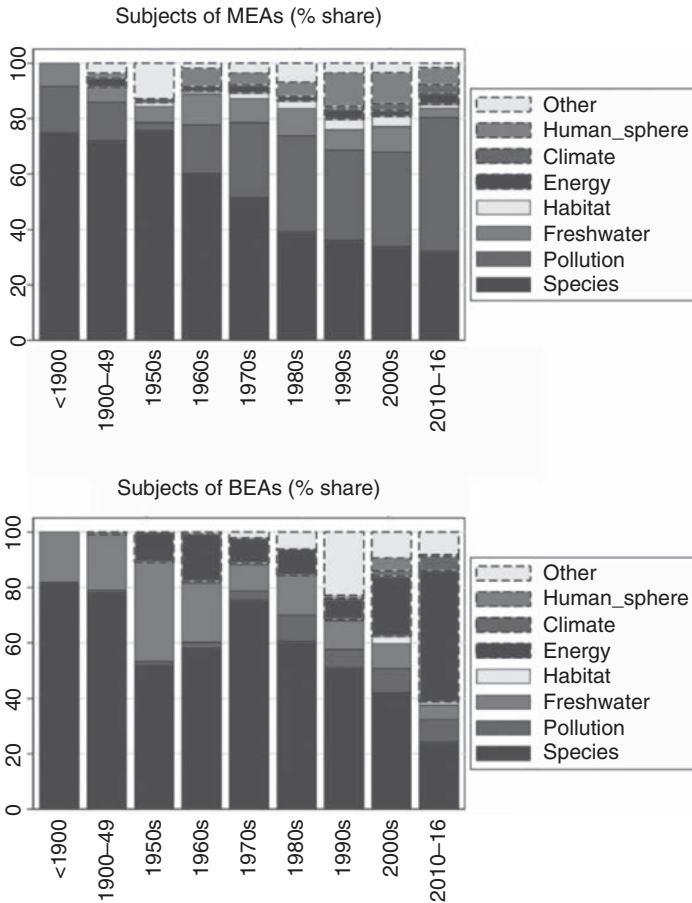


Figure 1.2 Subjects of MEAs. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show the increasing numbers of MEAs and increasingly diverse subjects they cover, where one-third of MEAs “address species, one-third address pollution and energy, and the remaining third cover an array of other issues” (Mitchell et al. 2020, 106).

Source: Mitchell et al. 2020.

and prevent change (Dunlap 2013; Newell and Paterson 2010; Oreskes and Conway 2012; Purdue 1996; Shiva 1993). The struggles this engenders play out differently depending on the issue area and the site of contestation. For climate change, the focus is on the world’s dependence on fossil fuels, common but differentiated responsibilities, the unequal impacts and capacities to adapt, and compensation for loss and damage. For biodiversity loss, the conflicts have centered around ownership of land and natural resources to be protected, demands for access to and benefit-sharing of genetic resources to prevent biopiracy, the rights of Indigenous People and local communities, and the multiple and often conflicting values associated with biodiversity, capacity building and technology transfer.

Despite the broad array of existing MEAs covering a wide range of issue areas, emerging environmental concerns continue to create new treaty negotiations. These become sites for

the emergence of new struggles between governments over the establishment of and form of the MEA, as well as, relatedly, sites for the continuation of deeply entrenched division between the South and North over the distribution of resources and the right to continued development. Recent examples include negotiations on a new, legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (Vadrot 2020). The distinct focus of this new treaty-making process on areas beyond national jurisdictions (compared with the Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD]) has become an emergent site of struggle around existing global inequalities in exploring and exploiting marine ecosystems (Vadrot et al. 2021a).

In order to better understand and analyze the complexities and challenges of creating successful multilateral action, increasing numbers of scholars have sought to access and observe interstate negotiations and their outcomes. Growing participation, however, is not just a trend among researchers, as the ensuing scholarship reveals; these events have become a focus point for a diverse range of nonstate and substate actors interested in and seeking to shape environmental action (Bulkeley and Newell 2015). As documented, NGOs (Allan 2020; Betsill and Corell 2001; Corell and Betsill 2001), business actors (Falkner 2005; Newell 2006; Maxwell and Briscoe 1997), cities (Hoffmann 2011), Indigenous and marginalized groups (Ciplet et al. 2015; Marion Suiseeya 2014; Marion Suiseeya and Zanotti 2019; Schroeder 2010; Witter et al. 2015; Vadrot et al. 2021a), scientists (Tessnow-von Wysocki and Vadrot 2022; Vadrot 2014) and youth movements (Thew 2018) congregate at global environmental conferences and, within these events, create new sites of agreement-making. Actors participate and use these sites for different strategic purposes, including as one site in historical and multilevel struggles for recognition (Brysk 2000; Picq 2018; Vecchione-Gonçalves 2009), to connect to other social issues (Allan 2020) and to promote particular governing modes, such as targets, goals and market-based instruments (Campbell et al. 2014; Kanie and Biermann 2017; MacDonald and Corson 2012).

The growth in the number, variety and motivations of actors congregating at global environmental meetings means that these venues provide the researcher with unparalleled opportunities to observe and interact with the diversity of actors and networks that assemble around the governance of an issue in a single setting (Campbell et al. 2014). These events “put on display” the varied discourses, practices and institutional dynamics constituting the politics of an issue within a clearly delimited time and space. It is hardly surprising that researchers strive to access these events to observe, question and analyze these activities and interactions as they unfold at key moments in global environmental agreement formation. Organizing study and making sense of observations and other forms of data collected at these events requires the right methodological tools. How we situate environmental negotiations and the actors that participate in them within broader patterns of global environmental governance and critically evaluate their effectiveness in the response to environmental degradation depends on existing ideas and theories that inform the research. Therefore, in the next section, we review some of the most influential concepts and methods that have informed the study of MEA processes and the events and sites of their making, and outline what distinguishes the agreement-making framework from these.

1.2 Concepts and Methods in the Study of MEAs

Historically, the most important approach for organizing study of collective environmental action has been the concept of an international regime. Pioneered within international relations (IR) by John Ruggie (1975) and popularized by Keohane and Nye's *Power and Interdependence* (Keohane and Nye 1989, 257), the regime-focused research agenda was advanced by a common working definition of a regime as the principles, norms, rules, procedures and programs around which expectations converge on a given issue (Krasner 1982). Proponents of regime theory have sought to question the conditions of formation, the regulative function and the effectiveness of given regimes in solving the collective action problems that arise through environmental degradation (Levy et al. 1995). This approach focused scholarship on the behavior of state actors and the design of institutional arrangements that bound state parties in a shared response to a particular issue, and those contributing to the regime research agenda deploy both quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore these cooperative arrangements (Underdal and Young 2004). Oran Young has provided some of the most detailed descriptions of the development of international environmental regimes and his research has contributed to the conceptualization of the emergence, evolution and effectiveness of institutions designed to protect the environment (Young 1989; 2010).

The regime research agenda led to many important insights, including improved understanding of the role of scientific knowledge and transnational communities of experts in regime formation (Haas 1989). The epistemic community model identifies the role that scientists play in helping states to identify their interests in a collective problem, particularly where there is scientific uncertainty, through framing the issue for debate, proposing specific policies and identifying salient points for negotiation (Haas 1992, 2). This approach has illuminated the role of transnational communities of scientists in informing the multilateral response to marine pollution in the Mediterranean Sea (Haas 1989), ozone depletion (Haas 1992) and climate change (Paterson 1996). However, the regime approach has been criticized for its focus on interstate and supranational arrangements (Levy and Newell 2005), which results in overlooking and "black boxing" the wide variety of environmental actors, forms of authority and institutional configurations constituting today's global environmental governance landscape (Bauer 2006; Okereke, Bulkeley and Schroeder 2009).

New scholarly accounts of global environmental negotiations and negotiation sites have emerged through ethnographic methods and scholarly embeddedness within the "black boxes" which provide deeper insight into and understanding of the actors and organizational dynamics of treaty-making processes (Campbell et al. 2014; Chasek 2001; Depledge 2004; Jinnah 2014). This research has challenged state-centric ideas in the study of IR through documenting the role and influence of previously disregarded actors on agreement formation, such as secretariats and chairs (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Depledge 2007). While revealing power asymmetries within and between actors, this scholarship illuminates the different forms of authority that operate alongside state power (Bauer 2006; Jinnah 2014; Marion Suiseeya and Zanotti 2019). It also identifies how nonstate actors have contributed to the transformation of spaces considered outside the conventional

negotiating site, including side events and exhibits (Hjerpe and Linnér 2010; Schroeder and Lovell 2012), press conferences, corridors and even virtual spaces, resourcefully creating “new” sites of negotiation to raise issues and exert pressure with measured effect (Betsill and Corell 2001; Marion Suiseeya and Zanotti 2019). Jennifer Bansard identifies and describes the myriad spaces that exist beyond the recognized and formal sites of negotiation in Chapter 7.

As a wider variety of public and private nonstate actors have become invested in treaty-making and the response to global environmental degradation, the sites of action and forms of activity have evolved beyond interstate treaty formation and the events and organizations that support these. New concepts have emerged to try to capture these proliferating sites and interactions and determine their role in responding to environmental degradation, including regime complex and the notion of transnational and multilevel governance (Abbott 2012; Bulkeley et al. 2012; Keohane and Victor 2011). The concept of “regime complex” still remains largely focused on interstate relations (Abbott 2012), but looks beyond conventional sites of multilateralism to denote the decentralized, diffuse and seemingly unstructured institutional landscape that has emerged to address complex environmental issues such as climate change (Keohane and Victor 2011). The concept of “transnational governance,” on the other hand, looks beyond interstate interactions in order to capture and analyze the wide variety of actors, partnerships, networks and initiatives that have emerged and operate within and across multiple levels to govern environmental change (Bulkeley et al. 2012; Bulkeley and Newell 2015; Hoffman 2011).

The Earth System Governance Project has provided an important overarching research framework and impetus to much of the scholarship exploring the governance of environmental issues and the myriad actors shaping the societal response (Biermann 2007; Biermann et al. 2010; Burch et al. 2019). The project offers a shared conception of Earth System Governance which retains key elements of the regime approach while spatially expanding the focus beyond the state and interstate interactions to capture the transnational nature of environmental governance. Earth System Governance is defined as “the sum of the formal and informal rule systems and actor-networks at all levels of human society that are set up in order to influence the co-evolution of human and natural systems in a way that secures the sustainable development of human society” (Biermann 2007, 329).

While new conceptions of governance have broadened the relevant actors, sites and activities of global environmental politics, intergovernmental meetings and conferences have remained and have grown as the locus of governance and its scholarship. As such, there has been an attempt to zoom in on these sites and to situate them within these broader patterns of governing arrangements. Methodologically, this has led scholars to think in terms of networks, complexity and assemblages (Corson et al. 2019; Orsini et al. 2020; Pickering 2019). Scholars have conceptualized meetings as single nodes within a network (Campbell et al. 2014), as sites where networks assemble (Corson et al. 2019) and as sites embedded in complex governance structures (Pickering 2019). The increased use of network analysis and the conduct of team ethnography have been important research methods for enabling new conceptualizations of the broader role that intergovernmental meetings play in global environmental governance.

As outlined earlier, scholarly observation and embeddedness within negotiating processes played a critical role in shifting understanding of the actors and forms of authority constitutive of negotiating sites and illuminated how the focus on interstate interactions is misleading. In Chapter 10, Kim Marion Suiseeya and Laura Zanotti introduce the reader to ethnography as an approach to the study of global environmental agreement-making, offering insights and practical guidance through their own experiences. However, a limitation to this approach to date has been connecting observations and analysis across vast conference sites and multiplying venues. Collaborative event ethnography (CEE) attempts to overcome this by conducting *team* ethnography and, as explored in Chapter 11 by Noella Gray et al. establishes a shared methodological practice to underpin this collaborative undertaking (Campbell et al. 2014; Corson et al. 2019; Gray et al. 2020). This makes it possible to spread a team of researchers across conference venues and follow multiple processes simultaneously, which has increased the evidence for acknowledging the myriad sites of negotiation *within* a venue and the range of strategies mobilized by nonstate actors to influence treaty-making proceedings *across* venues over time (Doolittle 2010; Marion Suiseeya et al. 2021; Scott et al. 2014; Witter et al. 2015).

Social network analysis (SNA), on the other hand, has made it possible to connect venues and organizations by following actors through their participation and interactions *between* and *beyond* the formal treaty-making event. Thus, the increased use of network perspectives and related metaphors has arisen in part because of the apparent fit of this imagery with the density of actors and interactions observable at negotiation sites, and in part because of the increased use of SNA to capture, connect and analyze these interactions across a wider range of meeting sites (Allan 2020; Hadden 2015; Paterson 2019). In Chapter 12, Matthew Paterson explores this further, reviewing the application and development of SNA within global environmental politics scholarship and indicating its potential for the study of agreement-making. Thus, both CEE and SNA have provided important evidence for expanding the study of collective environmental action beyond the actors, sites and processes formally associated with treaty-making, and thereby opened space for reconceptualizing the field and multiple processes of global environmental action as the study of agreement-making.

1.3 Global Environmental Negotiations and Meeting Sites as Agreement-Making

The term “agreement-making” emerges out of, captures and aims to advance key conceptual and methodological developments in the study of global environmental governance. The chapter offers a framework for understanding that builds on existing scholarship and expands the study of global environmental agreements to encompass the actors, sites, processes and order-making that is constitutive of collective attempts to address global environmental degradation. Expanding out from a treaty text and its negotiation in time and space opens up the framing and analysis of agreement-making in four related ways.

First, to the wide variety of governmental and nongovernmental actors invested in global environmental action and the myriad sites at which they are operating within conference venues and during, between and after these events, as identified and analyzed in the

literature reviewed. This research has evidenced how nonstate actors create and mobilize an array of sites, strategies and media within and outside the conference venue to raise issues, perspectives and concerns and have their views represented in the final text, including through handouts and flyers, side events, press conferences, protests and virtual sites (Ciplet, Roberts and Khan 2015; Corell and Betsill 2001; Hjerpe and Linnér 2010; Marion Suiseeya et al. 2021; Schroeder and Lovell 2012; Vadrot et al. 2021b). Alongside this role in agreement formation itself, nonstate actors are at the forefront in the creation of new partnerships, networks and initiatives to monitor and enhance the collective response in a given issue area (Betsill and Bulkeley 2004; Bulkeley et al. 2012; Hoffman 2011).

Further evidence for the need to broaden the sites of agreement-making from recognized locales at global environmental conferences has come from study of the knowledge bodies informing the negotiating processes. As described in Reflection Box 1.2, participant observation and CEE of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the IPCC have highlighted the similarity in actors and processes between the scientific advisory arrangements and the agreements they are designed to inform in the CBD and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Hughes and Vadrot 2019). Global environmental agreement-making captures these advances in knowledge, and, while acknowledging power asymmetries (Vadrot 2014), highlights that all actors interested and invested in an issue have the potential to “exert a force” in shaping how it is constructed and acted upon (Wacquant 1989, 36; Hughes 2015).

Reflection Box 1.2 Expanding the site of negotiations

One of the most important rationales for expanding agreement-making sites beyond formal negotiation venues came from studying the IPCC and the IPBES. Two of the most popular concepts for studying and understanding how science informs international environmental action are the epistemic community model (Haas 1989) and the notion of a boundary organization. In both of these approaches, knowledge bodies such as the IPCC and the IPBES are situated outside of formal negotiation processes, even while the political importance of these sites and the entanglement in the knowledge products is accepted (Lidskog and Sundqvist 2015). However, once you undertake observation of both the knowledge body and the negotiating process, the separation conceptualized between sites becomes difficult to uphold. This is easiest to illustrate through the approval of IPCC and IPBES Summary for Policymakers (SPM) documents.

The IPCC and the IPBES produce global assessments of the science and impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and related environmental issues, as well as special and technical reports at the request of member governments and/or the negotiating bodies they inform. These assessments are authored by appointed scientists and others with relevant expertise, as guided by the elected bureau and government-approved report outline. In order for these scientific assessments to have a wider impact on policymaking, the key findings are compiled in a shorter summary document that is subject to line-by-line approval by member governments. At a dedicated intergovernmental session, usually held over four days and often through the night, this summary for policymakers is essentially negotiated word by word between its authors and member governments (De Pryck 2020; Fogel 2005; Hughes and Vadrot 2019; Kouw and Petersen 2018).

During the approval sessions, heated debate often breaks out over particular terms, figures or sentences that are perceived to have implications for or the potential to shape negotiations. This can lead to text and figures being removed from the SPM (De Pryck 2020), and new concepts and terms, if they do remain in the text, being tightly defined (Hughes and Vadrot 2019). This is what we observed with the struggle over biocultural diversity in the IPBES SPM approval process for the special report on Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production (IPBES 2016), and why we conceptualized the term as “weighted” (Hughes and Vadrot 2019). What is critically important and what we aim to illuminate through the notion of weighting is that this struggle is not generated by the concept *per se*, but by the potential that the concept has to shape multi-lateral environmental negotiations, in this case within the CBD. Furthermore, this struggle and contestation is often related to or has the potential to impact upon deep-seated tensions between the Global South and North over the distribution of resources and the related social and political orders (Vadrot 2014, 2020).

Second, by understanding agreement-making as a process rather than a single outcome, this approach aims to focus scholarship on the ongoing formation of global environmental agreements. This situates the moment under analysis within past struggles and contestation, particularly between the global South and global North, which condition the present and have the potential to re-open and shape future negotiations even once final agreement is reached (Hughes and Vadrot 2019; Miller 1995). Thinking in terms of process keeps the researcher attentive to the historical forces that are shaping the present as well as orientated toward the future, sensitizing study toward the new sets of actors, sites and processes that are created by and emerge from any decisions, non-decisions and other outcomes written into or out of an agreement (Vadrot et al. 2021a).

Third, the agreement-making framework aims to emphasize that the stakes in all global environmental agreements is global order and, for some, including Indigenous actors, life itself (see Chapter 5). As we explore in Chapter 4 through the use of concepts, the order of relations at agreement-making sites – the actors that are recognized as knowledgeable, authoritative and have the greatest power over the text – is closely coupled to the global distribution of economic resources and the investment in agreement-making processes these enable. These resources, brought in from outside the conference venue, shape who is able to gain access and to which sites, the levels of know-how and expertise available to represent views, the human resources to cover simultaneous negotiations and, ultimately, the capacity to be heard and have interests reflected in the final agreement reached. A central aim of the book is to deepen the scholarly focus on and analysis of the intertwinement between the global economic order and the order of relations within any given negotiation venue at the multiple sites and scales that agreement-making takes place. At the same time, the stakes in agreement-making are not homogenous: while some actors seek to secure an economic order, others are fighting to preserve threatened lifeways and the lands that gave rise to them. Identifying the stakes in global environmental agreement-making is critical to challenging and re-ordering politically degrading relations and to securing any chance of preserving the lifeways from land already lost (Beier 2009; Lightfoot 2016; Watts 2013).

Fourth, to the situatedness of the researcher and knowledge production within global patterns of order and the ordering force of global environmental agreements. The expanded field of action encompassed by the term “agreement-making” situates the researcher and knowledge production within the remit of study and demands greater reflexivity on individual and collective research practices (Corson et al. 2019; Gray et al. 2020; Hughes et al. 2021). Researchers have the potential to shape the field of agreement-making in at least two ways: first, through the knowledge produced on the issue and, second, through the relations cultivated in generating that knowledge. The chapters in this book are sensitive to the potential stakes of knowledge production processes and offer reflections on the ethics of how a researcher engages and cultivates relations both with participants and other scholars in collaborative research.

In Chapter 5, Marcela Vecchione-Gonçalves explores how working with Indigenous groups in the negotiations has shaped what constitutes her research practice, as she supports participants with translation and other tasks through the negotiations, and her participants interests and concerns, in turn, shape her research questions and methods. In Chapters 11 and 13, Harriet Thew describes how she generated trust with the UK climate youth movement, by continually re-visiting the power relations between herself and her participants as she engaged in the process alongside them. And in Chapter 11, Noella Gray et al. identify ways to challenge neo-liberal academic practices of ownership and output through collaboration. Even the interview creates relations of reciprocity, as explored in Chapter 9, and, as Yulia Yamineva highlights, offers the opportunity to cultivate the interview participant’s interest in the research and a recipient for its outputs. Each of these accounts highlight that there is not one way to relate to and conduct ethical research on negotiations, but rather an individual process that the researcher embarks on in relation to the questions and issue areas that they study.

This new approach for studying the myriad actors, sites, processes and ordering forces of agreement-making is not theoretically or methodologically prescriptive. The chapters of the book are authored by a diverse group of scholars from multiple disciplines, informed but not confined by the disciplines of anthropology, geography, IR, political ecology, political science, law, science and technology studies and sociology. Rather than providing a single theory or approach, the authors offer their reflections on what they have done and why. In Chapter 3, for example, Michele Betsill and Naghmeh Nasiritousi recount their experiences with developing and adapting theoretical frameworks to enable readers to take from this what is most relevant to their own research journey. One of the central aims of the book is to make it possible to better connect existing quantitative and qualitative studies that provide empirical insight on any aspect of agreement-making, however theoretically informed, to further knowledge and spur the next generation of scholarship. It is, however, an ethically laden approach to the study of environmental negotiation processes, the agreements that are in the making and the worlds these have the potential to build. This is an approach for scholars that have a deep concern for the state of the planet and the state of global relations, and who want in some small way to contribute to building fairer, more inclusive environmental treaties that better steward the Earth.

1.4 Do We Need to “Be There” to Study Agreement-Making?

A theme that reoccurs throughout the book is whether studying agreement-making requires us to “be there” (O’Neill and Haas 2019) – on site – to observe and cultivate relations with the actors and processes that we are studying, or whether this kind of research can be done virtually and from a distance? As noted earlier, many of the advances in scholarship that have facilitated a reconceptualization of global environmental agreements have come from scholars that have “been there” – become close to, worked alongside and gained an insider perspective on the actors and organizations constitutive of these processes. However, this does not mean that all future knowledge of agreement-making needs to be built in the same way; as is clear from Pam Chasek’s reflections (see Reflection Box 1.1), the practices of agreement-making are ever evolving. COVID-19 made the shift online a necessity, thus it is in the virtual realm that some of the greatest shifts in practicing collective action are currently taking place, and so, therefore, must the study.

Alongside the shifts wrought by a pandemic, the environmental impact of traveling to global environmental conferences has become an increasingly important concern for scholars to address (Hughes et al. 2021). The question of whether the research can be conducted virtually is considered from the start. In Chapter 2, we put this question at the top of the list when puzzling and planning research into and on agreement-making processes. The virtual resources available on treaty websites, combined with *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB) and photographs of the sessions, means that you can trace the evolution of a text and get a feel for the process even if you are not there to observe its negotiation because you want to save on air travel. Jennifer Allan and Pamela Chasek provide important insights into the possibilities and limits of using the different textual resources available, and how to compile and analyze these, in Chapter 8. Documents are not the only important research resources to be found on the treaty secretariat’s website, however; many opening and closing sessions are live-streamed and archived, which makes it possible to gain a sense of the proceedings and the layout of the room even if you are unable to be on site. As Tracy Bach and Beth Martin indicate in Chapter 6, some UNFCCC-constituted bodies had developed this capacity for virtual participation even before COVID-19, and these captured meeting resources continue to expand.

The authors of the book identify many strategies and avenues for getting to know the processes and to follow the actors central to agreement-making virtually. As Yulia Yamineva describes in Chapter 9, researchers can gain valuable insight through virtual interviews and forge relations that better connect the researcher and the knowledge produced to those that are informing it. Social network analysis is another key method and research tool in this regard; as demonstrated in Chapter 12, the scholar can draw connections and infer relationships between actors across multiple sites and venues through readily available participant lists that do not require data collection in person. And while ethnography has traditionally been a physical immersion in the space of negotiation and treaty-making, in Chapter 10 Kim Marion Suseeya and Laura Zanotti explore how the researcher can also follow and connect with actors through virtual platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook. This highlights the importance of adapting research methods to the study of an evolving field of

practice, which, as described by Alice Vadrot in Chapter 14, includes adapting our collaborative practice to span these physical and virtual spaces. What these chapters aim to make clear, is that it is not necessarily the types of research methods or in-person versus virtual presence that gives us better knowledge and understanding of agreement-making. What is critical is how the researcher mobilizes, combines and innovates with these methodological tools in order to address the challenging questions, problems and puzzles that redressing global environmental degradation collectively pose.

1.5 A Practical and Methodological Guide to the Study of Agreement-Making

Through the chapters in this volume, we aim to translate the agreement-making framework into a practical approach for the empirical study of global environmental collective action. The chapters provide methodological tools to guide the design and conduct of study at the multiple physical and virtual sites constitutive of global mega-events, conferences and intergovernmental meetings. The book does this by breaking down the research process into four stages: Part I: Developing a Methodology; Part II: Navigating Sites; Part III: Collecting and Analysing Data; and Part IV: Implementing and Adapting. Within each chapter there are also reflection boxes, wherein guest writers reflect on how they have applied and tested the content of the chapter through their own research. These boxes are written by authors that have recently finished or are in the middle of postgraduate research projects on varied aspects of agreement-making, which makes their reflections particularly valuable to the reader just beginning a research journey or grappling with methodological issues.

Part I of the book begins by preparing the researcher for study at and on these sites (Chapter 2) and by unpacking how analytical frameworks (Chapter 3) and concepts (Chapters 4 and 5) can inform, organize and help construct the research problem. By recounting their own experiences, the authors of these chapters highlight that identifying the right theoretical approach and assembling the necessary conceptual tools is not always a linear and straightforward process, but one where the researcher keeps moving back and forth between the problem and the approach. The experiences of the authors indicate the importance of allowing the empirics to inform the theory as much as the theory informs the methods and types of data collection. The accounts given in Chapters 4 and 5 also highlight how particular starting points condition the knowledge produced and aim to sensitize the reader to reflect on what order of relations is transmitted into the research project, including the types of questions asked and the sites and actors chosen through the theories and concepts adopted.

In Part II of the book, the researcher is “made ready” for conducting research at the multiple sites of global environmental agreement-making. Chapter 6 equips the reader with the basic governance arrangements and structures of MEAs as well as the different spaces and formats of intergovernmental negotiations. While this chapter is useful for the researcher to be able to quickly orient themselves on site, it also provides essential guidance on how to locate the research at an event and identifies preparations that can be

undertaken beforehand to manage the often frenzied nature of conducting research at these venues. Chapter 7 is also essential reading for familiarizing the reader with the multitude of different spaces that exist between and beyond the formal negotiation spaces. The chapter identifies the opportunities these different spaces offer for conducting research and connecting to different sets of actors at conference sites, as well raising important research questions that remain to be addressed about the roles and functions that these sites have in agreement formation.

Part III of the book turns to methods of research, exploring different approaches to collecting and analyzing data and questions that can be addressed through texts (Chapter 8), interviews (Chapter 9), ethnography (Chapter 10), collaboration (Chapter 11) and SNA (Chapter 12). The chapters do not prescribe a single approach for collecting data at or on negotiations, but rather offer a range of insights on how to conduct research and collect, analyze and evaluate the data and experiences gained from observing and participating in negotiating processes. Critically, the chapters highlight what is to be gained from using particular forms of data and methods, and equip the reader with this knowledge to apply to their own research questions.

In Part IV of the book, the authors take a closer look at their own experiences at applying the methods in the preceding section and identify how they adapted these to their own research projects. The authors of Chapter 13 are perhaps best placed to evaluate and provide relevant advice on the application of these approaches as they are most closely immersed in the research of either undertaking or recently completing a PhD. While Chapter 13 lays out some of the ideal conditions for conducting research at and on negotiation sites, Chapter 14 helps the reader navigate the research process when things do not go as planned. By describing the challenges that the author encountered in her own research, the chapter is able to identify how all research projects can be adapted to the often uncertain and rapidly changing environment of agreement-making sites and processes.

Finally, the Conclusion looks back and identifies the key themes that have emerged across the chapters relevant to the study of global environmental agreement-making, and emphasizes the role that reflexivity plays in advancing methodologies and knowledge of this critical field of study. The chapter also looks forward, identifying future directions for expanding knowledge and the practical utility of global environmental politics scholarship to help redress international relations that degrade the planet.

Further Reading

1. Hughes, H. and Vadrot, A. B. M. (2019). Weighting the World: IPBES and the Struggle over Biocultural Diversity. *Global Environmental Politics* 19, 14–37.

Evidence for expanding sites of negotiation to the intergovernmental science bodies that inform these processes came from collaborative research that brought together observations from across sites, as presented in the cited article.

2. Hughes, H., Vadrot, A., Allan, J. I. et al. (2021). Global Environmental Agreement-Making: Upping the Methodological and Ethical Stakes of Studying Negotiations. *Earth System Governance* 10, 100121.

This collective piece authored by the contributors to this book introduces the term “agreement-making” and calls for methodological innovation and greater reflection on the ethical stakes of research on global environmental negotiations. The piece resulted from a workshop funded and organized by MARIPOLDATA in Vienna in September 2019.

3. Vadrot, A. B. M. (2020). Multilateralism as a “Site” of Struggle over Environmental Knowledge: The North-South Divide. *Critical Policy Studies* 14(2), 233–245.

This article discusses agreement-making sites as “sites of struggle over environmental knowledge.” It argues that CEE is crucial for studying the multiple and contested roles of science in global environmental negotiations, but needs to be combined with the social study of the scientific field, as exemplified by the European Research Council MARIPOLDATA project (www.maripoldata.eu).

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