

Book Reviews

Recensions

Setting the standard: certification, governance and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Chris Tollefson, Fred Gale, and David Haley. Vancouver: UBC Press. 2008, 404 pp. Price: \$85 (paperback).

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When I picked up the book, "Setting the standard ..." looked like a very ambitious title. But the authors live up to the expectations — they deliver a coherent story about a unique phenomenon. Besides telling the readers about setting the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standard for British Columbia (BC), another major purpose of the book is to introduce the theory on the dimensions of governance — namely, politics, regulation, and institutions — and to discuss the implications of a success in establishing a non-government governance mechanism, such as FSC. The authors argue that FSC has emerged as a unique governance form, global democratic corporatism, and thus add a valuable theoretical approach to the discourse on forest governance.

There are two distinct levels in the book. The first is the history of the FSC standard in BC. The second, the advancement of the governance theory, is enveloped in the reflections on the standard development. The structure of the book facilitates the distinction.

In the first half of the book the authors reflect and report on the development and the establishment of the FSC standard in British Columbia. As with almost

any book on forest certification, the authors could not avoid comparing different certification standards. However, the authors refer to the book as “doubly comparative”. The comparisons cover the FSC standard development in different jurisdictions around the globe (e.g., Sweden, the USA, and different Canadian provinces) as well as contrasting the FSC standard and certification process to analogues in the world (such as standards within the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification — PEFC, or Marine Stewardship Council). This assessment is presented in Part 1 of the book. Part 2 relates the FSC-BC standard requirements to relevant topics in BC forest management, and this analysis helps the reader to understand the intricacy of the standard development in the province. The “hot” forest management issues discussed in Part 2 include tenure and tenure reform, indigenous people’s rights, and environmental impacts of forestry. The authors report on the complexity of the group dynamics within the BC forestry sector, a factor that created challenges during the development of the FSC-BC standards.

In addition to reviewing the issues connected with the setting of the FSC-BC standard, Part 3 provides a comprehensive analysis of the governance aspects of FSC. The authors devote the three chapters of Part 3 to their proposition of a three-dimensional structure for analysing certification governance. The dimensions — political networks of informal governance, the regulatory power of the FSC standard to influence behaviours of external social actors, and the regulation within the FSC system (FSC institutional governance) — have been not unheard of in the political science literature, but their joint application in relation to forest certification is unprecedented.

Although the majority of the comparisons of FSC to other certification standards is concentrated in the first two parts of the book, the authors also assess how their propositions will be applicable to other systems in Parts 3 and 4. The authors contrast FSC governance with other systems through detailed examples and conclude that FSC is unique in terms of governance structure. It is truly impossible to find another certification system that would have a similar structure and organization as FSC, and the examples (e.g., ISO system) cannot be perfectly matched for the contrast. This impossibility supports the idea of the uniqueness of FSC.

The authors provide compelling reasoning why the development of the FSC-BC standard has been marked by struggle and why the finalizing of the standard has been a success in governance and regulation. British Columbia, the province where the long-lasting struggle for the establishment of the FSC-BC standard took place, is also *sui generis* in Canada in terms of treaties with Aboriginal people. Most of BC is not covered by treaties, and this has brought Aboriginal issues to the forefront in forest management with recent Aboriginal claims of title to the land. The absence of a clear answer who is the owner of the resource complicated the

development of the FSC-BC standard. However, the FSC system had the flexibility to engage BC First Nations through the formation of an additional First Nations chamber for standard development, thus revealing the democratic nature of the FSC system.

The same adaptable nature manifests itself, for example, in the fact that the FSC removed a number of major environmental requirements from a draft standard in response to industrial criticism. It is not to say that other standards lack adaptability: the opposite forces demanding the standards to avoid either “raising the bar” too high or “lowering the bar” too low have driven the standards to adapt and resemble their counterparts. Although some requirements were lost in order to arrive at a consensus for the FSC-BC standard, the authors emphasize that the standard is still the most comprehensive among the comparisons, and the FSC global democratic corporatism model of governance worked well to embrace complexity and avoid rigidity of the standard.

While the authors’ proposition of global democratic corporatism as a unique governance regime is substantiated, the discussion of the implications of corporatism would perhaps augment the story. How do the authors see further development of the FSC system, given the fact that forest certification evolves at a tremendous pace? They do caution about a possibility of FSC becoming a service provider for forest industry, rather than an experiment in governance, but do not extend a discussion of the issue. Can the “democracy” part of the FSC flourish further under the corporatism roof? In consideration of the peer pressure between the governance mechanisms, what could be other examples that fit the format of global democratic corporatism and do not stem from the Rainforest Alliance and WWF? These organizations work closely with the FSC, but examples from “a step further away” would have been interesting.

The authors conclude the book with a call for the audience to “influence the course of events” in the FSC development. And the audiences that might be interested in both the influence and the book are two-fold. Those following environmental movement in British Columbia and sustainable forest management certification will find abundant material on the FSC-BC standard and its contrast to other certification systems. Scholars of governance (who might want a shorter descriptive part) will acquire insights and food for thought on how the governance regimes evolve and on the implications of the regime successes.