

Scalar politics and the region: strategies for transcending Pacific Island smallness on a global environmental governance stage

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Received 3 August 2012; in revised form 22 October 2012

Abstract. This paper examines the process through which a region was enacted and politically mobilized at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). We draw on concepts from scalar politics and new regional geography, data collected as part of a collaborative event ethnography of CoP10, and interviews with Palauan delegates to theorize the enactment of an oceanic Pacific Region as a scalar strategy directed toward transcending the practical and imagined smallness of Pacific small island developing states (SIDS) within the CoP10 meeting context and global imaginations. We conclude that the Pacific Region construct enhances Pacific SIDS' capacity to participate in CoP10, although their collective influence remains relatively limited compared with others. Most significantly, the Pacific Region imaginary of a vast ocean space and network of people committed to the CBD and biodiversity conservation positions Pacific Islanders to play a pivotal role in conserving a significant portion of the world's oceans. In the context of increasing global attention to marine conservation, the enactment of such a Pacific Region is likely to aid in attracting international recognition, attention, and support. By conveying how and why a diverse group of state and nonstate actors enacted an international and oceanic region at CoP10, we contribute understanding of strategic regionalization within the scalar politics literature and further disrupt understandings of an ontologically given, land-based region conceptualized on continental or subcontinental spatial scales.

Keywords: global environmental governance, multilateral environmental agreements, region, scalar politics, Pacific Islands

In a 1998 essay, "The ocean in us", Pacific scholar/activist Epeli Hau'ofa encouraged Pacific Islanders to act autonomously within global political-economic systems by acting together as a region (Hau'ofa, 1998). Hau'ofa attempted to counter a view of Pacific Islands as isolated, small, and dependent by outlining a new, "genuinely independent regionalism" distinct from the imposed regionalism of a recent colonial past and neocolonial present (2008, page 47). At the center of his vision was a new regional identity characterized not by the smallness of distinct island territories, but rather, by the vastness of a shared, unbounded ocean:

"In portraying this new Oceania I wanted to raise ... the kind of consciousness that would help free us from the prevailing, externally generated definitions of our past, present, and future. I wish now to take this issue further by suggesting the development of a substantial

regional identity that is anchored in our common inheritance of a very considerable portion of Earth's largest body of water: the Pacific Ocean" (page 41).

In this paper we treat regionalization as a scaling process, and contend that something resembling Hau'ofa's Pacific Region is being enacted on the global environmental governance stage.⁽¹⁾ Specifically, Pacific small island developing states (SIDS) are working with environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and a regional intergovernmental organization to enact an oceanic region ordered around a "sea of islands"⁽²⁾ tied together by an extensive ocean space and network of people and institutions committed to global biodiversity targets and a shared, Pacific, way of life. Like Hau'ofa, we are concerned with the politics set in motion by (and underlying) the scaling of the Pacific Region as a united social and geographical space.

In this paper we examine the processes through which the Pacific Region was enacted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). We bring together concepts from new regional geography and scalar politics to theorize the enactment of an oceanic region as a scalar political project directed toward contextually specific ends. In so doing, we address the questions of whom the Pacific Region was speaking on behalf of at CoP10, and for whom and what is the region being put to work?

Throughout the paper we use the term enactment and a metaphor of performance to convey our focus on the practices through which a particular version of the Pacific Region was strategically brought into existence on the global environmental governance stage set at CoP10 (cf Hajer, 2009). As such, we treat CoP10 as one context in which to understand how a region was enacted, for particular purposes and in response to particular incentives. Thus, the CBD CoP10 itself is not the focus of the analysis, but important insofar as it shapes or constrains the specific form and function that the region takes, as would other settings in likely different ways.

"Even to begin to confront the question, What is the Pacific?, it is necessary to define our terms by specifying *whose* Pacific—and when" (Dirlik 1998, page 15). In this paper, Pacific Region refers to that enacted by a network of Pacific SIDS and partners at CoP10, unless otherwise specified.

Scalar politics and the region

Despite a lingering tendency in human geography to understand the region as a fixed scale between the national and local, treatments of regions as pregiven, bounded spaces have long been challenged (Paasi, 2002; 2004). A new regional geography emerged in the 1980s in which regions are theorized as "historically contingent social processes emerging as a constellation of institutionalized practices, power relations and discourse" (Paasi, 2004, page 540; see also Pred, 1984). Critical human geographers have not only questioned the ontological status of regions, but also that of scale (Marston, 2000), theorizing scale as a social construction that must be understood in terms of the processes, political agendas, and power relationships that produce it (McCann, 2003; Silver, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2000). Like region, scale is fluid and contingent—even if it may become associated with particular processes, or fixed, over certain periods and in particular contexts (Brown and Purcell, 2005; McCann, 2003; Sievanen et al, 2013).

⁽¹⁾ We use the term *global environmental governance* rather than *international environmental governance* to refer to the governance process described herein, including that of the UN, in acknowledgment that it includes various state and nonstate actors working across multiple scales (Fisher and Green, 2004). We adopt the UN term *multilateral* to refer to international agreements.

⁽²⁾ Hau'ofa (2008, page 32) coined this phrase in an attempt to break away from the notion of Pacific Islands as small, isolated "islands in the sea".

The literature on scalar politics argues that scales may be strategically reworked in policy processes for political purposes, including regime formation and change (Bulkeley, 2005; Gruby and Basurto, in press; McCann, 2003; McCarthy, 2005; Neumann, 2009; Sneddon, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2000). McCarthy (2005), for example, demonstrates how actors can use a variety of scalar strategies to influence the outcomes of environmental governance processes. From this perspective, scale is not just an outcome of social process but also an instrument for reshaping power dynamics (Mansfield, 2001). Analytical attention to scalar politics thus focuses on the processes through which scales are constructed as part of political strategies (Swyngedouw, 2000).

Region is seldom explicitly considered in the scale debate, and efforts to relate region and scale have resulted in calls to view the region through “the prism of scale” (Paasi, 2004, page 536; see also Neumann, 2010). Here, we answer this call in part by examining the process of regional enactment through the prism of scalar politics, which, we contend, may be achieved by foregrounding the politics driving and resulting from the scaling processes through which a region is (re)constituted over time. We take this approach in our analysis of the discursive and performative practices through which actors enacted the Pacific Region at CoP10 in an effort to enhance their ability to participate in the CBD governance process and increase their visibility among global conservation actors, particularly donors. Our focus on the enactment of the Pacific Region “means constantly trying to relate discursive work ... to situations (settings, stagings). ... It is through this discursive and dramaturgical work that political actors *perform* or *enact* a situation, either reconfirming an existing and powerful way of seeing, or breaking away from it and rendering other perspectives in crisis” (Hajer, 2009, page 7, emphasis in original).

As a result, our analysis finds regions to be not only the outcome of historically contingent social practices (Paasi, 2004) but, more specifically, tools of a scalar politics that affects developing country and civil society participation in a UN environmental governance process and the position of Pacific SIDS more broadly within global environmental governance. Although we consider some consequences of the scalar politics, both observed and potential, it is the incentives for and execution of the scalar strategies that are of central concern here. By conveying why and how a diverse group of actors enacted a vast international and oceanic region at CoP10 (one similar to and different than other versions of the Pacific Region), we contribute understanding of regionalization within the scalar politics literature and further disrupt understandings of an ontologically given, fixed, and land-based region conceptualized on continental or subcontinental scales.

Field site and methods

The CBD is a product of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and entered into force in 1993. With currently 193 parties, the CBD is one of the major multilateral conventions on the environment. Since 2002 the CBD has produced global biodiversity targets, but National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans are the principal instruments for implementing the convention. In recognition of the costs to individual nation-states tasked with protecting globally valued biodiversity, a mechanism for funding the CBD was established and is administered through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), which increases the convention’s influence. CBD decisions shape biodiversity conservation ideology and practice in Pacific Islands, as state and NGO actors align their work with CBD priorities to meet conservation targets, secure legitimacy, and access funding through the GEF and other sources.

The main governing mechanism for the CBD is the Conference of the Parties (CoP). The CBD CoP convenes every two years, to review progress on programs of work, take decisions on particular issues, and set new priorities. Although only party delegates can vote on CBD decisions, the CoP and all of its meetings are open to observers accredited as members of

‘major groups’, including businesses, NGOs, and the scientific community. Observers may participate in proceedings (eg, offer comments or opinions) unless one third of parties to the convention objects. At CoP10, proceedings included plenary sessions; two concurrent working groups; and simultaneous, smaller ‘contact groups’ and ‘friends of the chair’ meetings for negotiating the text of specific decisions on fifteen substantive issues ranging from protected areas to the Global Taxonomy Initiative, and ten additional issues related to the evaluation and implementation of the CBD, including the revised strategic plan and associated biodiversity targets.

The CoP is much more than its official proceedings, however. CoP10 activities included a high-level ministerial segment restricted to senior representatives of signatory states and invited presenters; hundreds of side events primarily organized by NGOs and other civil society actors, to highlight research, examples, or arguments of relevance to decisions before the CoP; exhibit space occupied by interest groups; public events designed to communicate the CBD mandate; and numerous informal gatherings. Thus, the CBD brings together a diversity of actors interested in biodiversity conservation, and “like all international agreements, is more than simply a document; it is an institution that calls into being an active political space” (MacDonald and Corson, 2012, page 167). The CoP10 thus presents a novel opportunity to observe scalar strategies in context, as they are performed in public venues for a specific audience and toward often clearly articulated ends. In this sense, we treat the meeting as a field site that presents a window into often less visible social processes.

This research stems from a larger project that examines global environmental governance processes at meetings like CoP10, from an ethnographic perspective. Large global meetings like the CoP constrain ethnographic approaches by their size and short duration. Our response to these constraints is collaborative event ethnography (CEE) (Brosius and Campbell, 2010), a methodological innovation that brings together a group of researchers working within a shared analytical framework who collaborate to achieve research objectives. Our team was made up of seventeen researchers, who worked together to refine research questions, to observe hundreds of events associated with CoP10 over twelve days, to analyze (shared) data, and to write up results. Ethnographic coverage of events involved recording the dialogue, making observational notes, collecting documents, photographing presentation slides and the event setting, and sometimes conducting short interviews with key participants [for more on the CEE method, see Brosius and Campbell (2010)].

Although the team approached several broad topics as large groups [eg, climate (Hagerman et al, 2012) and protected areas (Corson et al, in press)], the goals of the project included relating our collective work at CoP10 to our more specific, individual research interests, and this paper is one such example. At CoP10 the first author attended six side events specifically related to Pacific SIDS, two press briefings, and an “Island Fiesta” party organized by the Global Island Partnership. She was invited to a number of informal events and eventually to the daily strategic meeting of the Pacific SIDS. The Pacific Region was also visible during formal plenary and working group meetings, and at contact group meetings for specific decisions. These events were covered by the authors, or by other members of the CEE team. The first author complemented CEE data by conducting interviews with eight of the thirteen members of the Palauan delegation to CoP10 while in Palau in July–October 2011, to deepen our understanding of delegate experiences with the enactment of the Pacific Region at the CoP. We further complemented CEE data by reviewing documents that described the strategy of the Pacific SIDS and their partners.

We coded resulting data thematically (using QSR Nvivo software), focusing on the form and function of the Pacific Region and the activities, discourses, and stagings through which it was enacted. Although we focus on the enactment of the Pacific Region, we recognize that Pacific SIDS delegations and their partners have other strategies to achieve their

agendas at CoP10. We also acknowledge that the Pacific Region was not the only version presented at the CoP10; for example, there were related efforts to enact and draw support for smaller (Micronesia) and larger (Asia-Pacific) regions. Here, we focus on the Pacific Region as the most publicly visible enactment at CoP10.

Setting the stage for the Pacific Region

Recognizing regions as the tenuous products of historicized and contextualized processes, we begin our analysis with an account of postcolonial regionalism in the Pacific, and the structural forces that incentivized the Pacific Region as enacted at CoP10: UN institutions and the structure of the CoP10 meeting. In the sections that follow, we unpack the specific practices and discourses through which the Pacific Region was enacted at CoP10.

Postcolonial Pacific regionalism⁽³⁾

Regionalism has characterized the economic and social development planning of most Pacific Island governments for more than sixty years (Fischer, 2002; South and Low, 2008). Regionalism has similarly characterized their response to global initiatives: “A collective regional response to global initiatives has been the hallmark of the Pacific SIDS for the past 50 years” (Chasek, 2005, page 129). In historical accounts of Pacific regionalism, some focus on the agency of Pacific Island governments in working together to pursue collective diplomatic and development goals (Campbell, 2003). More critical analyses argue that contemporary regionalism “is a direct creation of colonialism”, beginning in 1947 when Australia, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States established and set the agenda of the South Pacific Commission [renamed the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in 1997] (Hau’ofa, 2008, page 47). Frazer and Bryant-Tokalau (2006) go further to characterize the promotion of regionalism by former colonial powers in the 1940s through the SPC as a self-interested neocolonial security strategy.

Frustrated with external domination in SPC, indigenous leaders of newly independent Pacific Island countries formed the South Pacific Forum in 1971 [renamed the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2000] as an “exclusive club” that did not include Britain, France, or the United States (Hau’ofa, 2008, page 48). Though the PIF was formed “in opposition to colonialism and neo-colonialism” (Fischer, 2002, page 284), the organization’s autonomy was arguably also compromised by the involvement of Australia and New Zealand, as they provide most of the funding and direction for the cooperation and thereby “put themselves in the best position to shape regionalism, and use it as a means for securing their strategic interests” (Frazer and Bryant-Tokalau, 2006, page 2). Crocombe (2001, page 594) has described this arrangement as a “metropolitan/islands regionalism”. These two intergovernmental organizations, the SPC and the PIF, have dominated Pacific Island regionalism for decades (Fischer, 2002), and it is within this context of a complex and fraught history of Pacific regionalism that Hau’ofa advanced his call for “a new sense of the region that is our own creation”, one that is “anchored in our common heritage of the ocean” (2008, pages 47 and 55).

UN institutions

The UN Environment Programme’s (UNEP) Regional Seas Programme, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the UN Conference on Environment and Development, and the organizations and institutions arising from these have also been described as “driving forces” of regional cooperation in the Pacific Islands (South and Low, 2008, page 576). Initiatives linked to these programs and multilateral agreements have institutionalized the broad SIDS

⁽³⁾Though a full review of Pacific regionalism is beyond the scope of this paper (cf Bryant-Tokalau and Frazer, 2006), we highlight arguments about a preexisting, neocolonial regionalism as important historical context for understanding the development and function of the Pacific Region.

grouping at global, regional, and subregional levels. Within the UN system the fifty-one islands considered to be SIDS are defined as:

“low-lying coastal countries that share similar sustainable development challenges, including small population, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, and excessive dependence on international trade” (UNDESA, 2012).

UN sustainable development institutions have long singled out SIDS as a special case in terms of their unique vulnerabilities and relationship to the oceans. Agenda 21, the plan of action on sustainable development adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, encourages SIDS to cooperate with one another and international organizations in support of sustainable development goals. The objectives in Agenda 21 have been translated into specific policy actions through SIDS-specific institutional processes, beginning in 1994 with the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which led to the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Within the CBD, the SIDS grouping was further institutionalized and singled out in 2006 through the programme of work on island biodiversity, which supports the development of national or regional targets to achieve program objectives (CBD CoP 8 VIII/1/8.). UNEP is supporting SIDS participation in negotiating and implementing multilateral environment agreements (including the CBD) in the Pacific, Africa, and Caribbean regions through a four-year multimillion Euro capacity enhancement project funded by the European Union, titled: “Capacity Building related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries”.

The CBD CoP10: setting constraints and incentives

The UNEP project mentioned above stems from understanding that Pacific SIDS’ participation in CoP processes is constrained by limited capacity (Key and Peteru, 2011). Fisher and Green (2004) suggest the disenfranchisement of developing countries in multilateral regimes for sustainable development is a function of a nation’s endogenous human resources, transnational connectivity to policy-relevant information, and geopolitical status. Here, we focus on the constraints posed by the limited endogenous resources (Fisher and Green, 2004) of individual Pacific SIDS within the CoP10 meeting setting, to convey specific structural incentives for acting together as a region.

As described above, CoP meetings are large and complex, with many events occurring simultaneously. Informal meetings started at 8 AM, formal events began at 10 AM, and negotiations sometimes ran through the night. The CBD Secretariat provided funding for one delegate from each Pacific Island party to attend CoP10; those countries that sent more than one delegate secured funding from other sources (SPREP, no date a), including NGOs and foreign countries. Of the fourteen Pacific SIDS parties to the CBD, thirteen sent delegations to CoP10. The average delegation comprised three or four people and the most common delegation size was a single person. Most of those individuals are responsible for representing their country in more than one multilateral environmental meeting (Key and Peteru, 2011). Given the simultaneous events structure of CoP10 and the wide-ranging historical, technical, and procedural knowledge necessary to act purposively within that structure, the size of a delegation and the level of knowledge, experience, and training held by individual delegates are determining factors in a nation’s capacity to participate. When asked about the challenges that individual SIDS delegations face at the CBD, one Palauan delegate explained:

“We can’t afford to bring many people. And certainly we’re limited in terms of technical capacity in all the areas that are discussed at the CoP. And thirdly, the human sustainability within those thematic areas, or maybe the turnover, is so constant here in Palau that

there is no particular person that could ... follow through, considering the history of the process” (interview, July 2011).

In addition to historic regionalism and UN institutional processes, the CoP10 meeting structure itself provides strong incentives for Pacific SIDS to work together. As we will describe, Pacific SIDS enrolled one another and NGOs into what amounted to a regional delegation. Together, the official Pacific SIDS delegations to CoP10 amounted to fifty-two people, and the UN and EU interest in both SIDS and regionalism meant that funds to support development and enactment of the Pacific Region were available.

Enacting the Pacific Region at CoP10

Preparations for CoP10 among Pacific SIDS began two months before the event, when the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) brought together eleven Pacific SIDS, four conservation NGOs, environment agencies in New Zealand and Australia, SPC, the University of the South Pacific, and UNEP for a Pacific regional preparatory meeting in Fiji on 16–18 August, 2010. SPREP is the regional CBD focal point, with the mandate to assist member countries in preparing for CoP meetings and implementing CBD objectives, and an overall mission “to serve as the conduit for concerted environmental action at the regional level”. SPREP originated in 1982 as a small program attached to SPC, but was established as an autonomous body through an intergovernmental agreement in 1993.

Organizers of the preparatory meeting provided an overview of the regional and global context of the CBD, lessons learned from past meetings, and a review of the meeting agenda, establishing a “transnational connectivity” that is considered to be a “prerequisite” overcoming disenfranchisement (Fisher and Green, 2004, page 74). Participants in this preparatory meeting laid the groundwork for a coordinated physical and discursive presence at CoP10 by negotiating regional positions on nine CBD issues, and assigning specific delegates to represent the region in negotiations on those issues at CoP10. As a Palauan delegate explained,

“we had a lead country and a back-up country, so if the lead country was not there, the back-up country was there prepared with the Pacific position on the issue” (interview, July 2011).

Participants also developed a communications campaign—dubbed “One Pacific Voice” or the “Pacific Voyage”—to elevate their visibility at CoP10. The preparatory meeting effectively rescaled the positions, actions, and discourse of Pacific SIDS and their partners from the national to the regional, structuring the Pacific Region within the imaginations of those who would enact it at CoP10 and thereby producing an interdependent regional delegation:

“The national priorities are still important for the countries, but the [preparatory] meeting helped to facilitate these to a discussion on the regional level, so they can be promoted together as a Pacific Voice at the international level” (Easter Galuvao, Biodiversity Adviser for SPREP, quoted in SPREP, 2010).

Participating Pacific SIDS and their partners solidified their regional delegation at CoP10 through continuous interactions at the event as they renegotiated their priorities in the dynamic meeting context and coordinated their distribution across simultaneous events. Pacific delegates and partners gathered each morning for strategic meetings, which a Palauan delegate described thus:

“every morning we would all meet, all the Pacific Islands, and we get to talk about issues that were discussed in the plenary the day before, kind of brief everybody, and ... coordinate issues that were coming up, who is gonna say something about it” (interview, July 2011).

Pacific delegates and partners also whispered to one another during formal proceedings and side events, gathered in a designated Pacific hub area, and met in hallways and cafeterias.

They kept in touch continuously through Skype, as a Palauan delegate described:

“People in different rooms, they were just kind of keeping people up to date on what was happening and there were a couple times that I would say, ok this is happening, should I say anything?” (interview, July 2011).

In other words, Pacific SIDS and their partners enacted a Pacific Region in part by acting as a region, depending on one another to represent the group. The first author observed this strategy play out during a marine ‘contact group’ meeting (22 October 2010) when a Palauan delegate walked into the room, late and out of breath. He scanned the room and upon noticing that the Pacific had representatives in the room, immediately departed, presumably to expend effort elsewhere. Indeed, in formal negotiations, Pacific SIDS delegates often spoke for the entire region, as in the following example:

“we in the Pacific ... are concerned about issues related to status of highly migratory species and species vulnerability on the high seas” (Palauan delegate intervention, marine contact group, 22 October, 2010).

In addition to conducting “collective diplomacy” (Fry, 1994, page 70), what did this regional delegation do and say with its ‘one Pacific voice’ at CoP10 to scale and fortify a Pacific Region within the imaginations of other CoP10 participants? We identified three pillars around which a connected, expansive, and engaged Pacific Region was brought into public existence at CoP10: a shared regional identity, a common commitment to global biodiversity conservation, and a large and boundary-less ocean territory.

Performing One Pacific Voice

As delegates, observers, and the first author walked into the side event, “Pacific SIDS: Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life” (Side Event 2215, 22 October 2010), we were greeted by a Fijian woman wearing a flowered dress, a lei, and a flower in her hair. She handed us a necklace of white seashells, and explained that we would be going on a “Pacific voyage”. Surrounded by the vibrant flowery textiles and dress, we were indeed enrolled into a celebration of (a shared) culture that felt worlds away from the suits and science that characterized so many of the events at CoP10.

The presenters in the side event were from Samoa, Kiribati, Fiji, SPREP, and the GEF, but they referred frequently to the centrality of biodiversity to the traditions, livelihoods, and institutions of the Pacific people and their shared way of life. The Director of the SPREP, for example, described the meaning of the “Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life” slogan thus:

“This theme reflects the reality of life in the Pacific—Biodiversity is indeed the lifeblood of Pacific peoples and our island nations. Pacific people have lived in harmony with the land and the sea for thousands of years and have adapted and developed approaches to safeguard the environment and to ensure sustainable use of natural resources. Biodiversity and the Pacific way of life is under threat” (David Sheppard, “Pacific SIDS: Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life”, Side Event 2215, 22 October 2010).

A Fijian delegate invoked a similar picture in his intervention to the working group discussion of the protected areas decision (19 October 2010), when he described the ocean and terrestrial ecosystems of “our islands” as the foundations of “Pacific livelihoods”. We are not evaluating the truth-value of these representations, but rather, the way they are strategically invoked in support of a particular vision of the Pacific Region. Strategy is suggested by how closely the above statements reflect the message of the “Pacific Voyage” communications campaign:

“As part of the ‘Pacific Voyage’ we ask that you clearly highlight the following message at whatever media opportunity you may have available: ... ‘The Pacific region is working hard to conserve our nature as it supports Pacific livelihoods, culture and way of life, we

can do much more if we had more support from the international community” (Pacific Voyage Passport to the CBD CoP10, briefing document, SPREP no date b).

The ocean also occupied a particularly prominent place within the Pacific Region discourse. In contrast to Western and Indian Ocean societies’ conceptions of ocean space, some Pacific Islanders have traditionally conceptualized the ocean as territory (Steinberg, 2001). Micronesians, for example, “see the world as a web of ocean pathways, connecting places” (Steinberg, 2001, page 54). At CoP10, Pacific SIDS and their partners drew upon such an understanding of ocean space to perform a discourse that assembled island and ocean territories into one oceanic region that, as a whole, supports a large portion of the world’s biodiversity.

Presenters in the side event “Pacific SIDS: Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life” (Side Event 2215, 22 October 2010), for example, delivered their talks in front of floor-to-ceiling sized posters boasting a variety of statistics on “One Ocean” (see figure 1). These statistics situate a group of small islands, together, at the center of a vast, productive, and globally important ocean, to make the case that these islands and the ocean that unites them deserve



Figure 1. [In color online.] “One Ocean” poster displayed in side events, exhibits, and hallways at CoP10. (Reprinted with permission from SPREP.)

recognition and support. As David Sheppard summarized,

“In this region our biodiversity is of global significance” (“Pacific SIDS: Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life” Side Event 2215, 22 October 2010).

The oceans have long been a focus for Pacific SIDS in global governance processes and otherwise, but they have been eclipsed on the global conservation agenda more generally. In recent years, however, the oceans have become increasingly visible at the global level, as reflected by new conferences devoted to marine conservation (eg, the International Marine Conservation Congress, first held in 2009); investment in oceans research and conservation by major philanthropic organizations (eg, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Pew Environment Group), and big international NGOs (BINGOs); and calls for a global network of marine protected areas from the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the 2003 World Parks Congress, and in the CBD’s 2010 and 2020 protected areas targets (Gray, 2010).

As ocean conservation increases in prominence, it brings new actors, institutions, and outcomes to venues like CoP10, and increases space on the global conservation agenda for small islands with large ocean territories. This is important because, in the context of UN sustainable development processes, SIDS have historically been unable to attract international support as individual states (Fry, 2005). Given the high-profile commitment to marine conservation by Pacific SIDS,⁽⁴⁾ the concentration and diversity of marine biodiversity there, and concerns for the impacts of climate change, there is now more impetus for donors, BINGOs, and others interested in marine conservation to recognize, value, and support conservation in the Pacific Islands, particularly when these islands are construed as a region comprising a relatively large ocean space.

Recognizing opportunity, Pacific SIDS and their partners often juxtaposed the large ocean territory of the Pacific Region with the limited capacity of Pacific Islands to manage the portion under their jurisdiction:

“22% of the Pacific Ocean is under jurisdiction of 22 small Pacific Island nations. These countries are very small yet they control such a large part of the world They also have limited capacity to govern their own exclusive economic zones” (Bernard O’Callaghan, Oceania Programme Coordinator, International Union for Conservation of Nature, “Pacific Ocean 2020 Challenge—A Healthy Ocean for Future Generations” Side Event 2281, 28 October 2010).

In other cases, Pacific SIDS and their partners invoked an extensive, shared ocean territory to illustrate their commitment to the CBD, the significance of their conservation achievements, and their relevance to global biodiversity conservation efforts. For example, in the working group discussion of the protected areas decision (19 October 2010) a Palauan delegate highlighted Pacific-wide progress thus:

“In the Pacific a number of small islands have taken massive steps toward global goals for marine protected areas. . . . In order to sustain this type of effort in our Pacific ocean to meet the 2012 marine protected area target, long-term global support will be needed.”

This discursive framing signals an attempt to shift attention from the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS—as mentioned above, UNDESA defines SIDS in terms of their shared challenges—to their collective role as important constituents of the global marine biodiversity conservation effort.

The examples discussed in this section reflect the main components of the performative acts and discourses that presented a kindred Pacific people who are both defined and united *spatially* by one ocean and *socially* by their dependence on natural resources, longstanding

⁽⁴⁾For example, Pacific SIDS have been at the forefront of large-scale protected area commitments, such as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area in Kiribati, the Cook Islands Marine Park, and the New Caledonian Coral Sea Marine Protected Area.

conservation ethic, and associated traditional tenure and management institutions. Rescaling Pacific SIDS from many small island nations to one large international oceanic region at CoP10 thus meant enrolling not only people, but also territory—a vast ocean territory that unites rather than isolates the Pacific people-as-stewards. The Pacific Region therefore embodies a new scalar arrangement on two dimensions: scale as level (in terms of sociopolitical hierarchy) and scale as size (in terms of territorial extent). Rescaling Pacific SIDS on both dimensions proved relatively useful in the struggle to be seen and heard in at the CoP10, a point we return to in our conclusions.

A contingent and heterogeneous region

In this section, we further support our case that the Pacific Region is a contingent scalar construction by comparing it with other institutionalized forms of Pacific regionalism. Recognizing scale as the product of a historical political process, one that is “always deeply heterogeneous and contested” (Swyngedouw, 2000, page 70), we also highlight the diversity of interests served, but also ignored or misrepresented, through the Pacific Region.

Pacific Region as unbounded

In 2007 eleven Pacific Island countries with representation in the UN established an informal group of Pacific SIDS to advance common interests within the UN system. This group includes Fiji, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. However, according to the SPREP, there are fourteen Pacific SIDS parties to the CBD: the eleven nations listed above plus the Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Niue. It is this larger grouping (minus Niue that did not send a delegate) that, with partners, participated in the enactment of the Pacific Region at CoP10. These Pacific SIDS groupings, whether eleven, thirteen, or fourteen, exclude powerful members of preexisting regional organizations in the Pacific—Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States—and thus represent a departure from the historically institutionalized regional groupings in the Pacific Islands described earlier, groupings perceived as dominated by former colonial powers. Table 1 shows shifting participation in these different Pacific regionalisms, and illustrates the contingency of the concept.

The enactment of the Pacific Region at CoP10 did not make the distinctions discussed above and shown in table 1. Rather, the boundaries of the Pacific Region were blurred; Pacific SIDS and their partners spoke for and about the Pacific people and territory, and rarely outlined exactly who or what was included or excluded therein. In keeping the boundaries of the Pacific Region blurred, Pacific SIDS and their partners enrolled and simultaneously obscured Pacific Island territories that are not represented at the CBD as independent Pacific SIDS. The effect was invoking more extensive geopolitical support than was directly represented by the thirteen Pacific SIDS that attended CoP10. Figure 2 illustrates this discrepancy by highlighting the exclusive economic zones (ocean territories) of the thirteen Pacific SIDS that participated in CoP10. Homogenizing interests runs counter to the (perhaps idealistic) vision promulgated by Hau’ofa (2008) of a unifying oceanic identity that is something additional to diverse loyalties that should be not only recognized, but embraced.

We observed only one instance of pushback against this (mis)representation, during the “Pacific SIDS: Value Island Biodiversity: It’s our life” side event (2215, 22 October 2010). When delegates from Samoa and Kiribati highlighted invasive species problems in their presentations, an audience member from Bougainville Island⁽⁵⁾ countered that:

⁽⁵⁾ Bougainville Island is part of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and is not a CBD party (though PNG is). This individual is not listed as part of the PNG delegation; he introduced himself as a representative of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion in groupings of Pacific Islands and nonisland countries. Check marks denote inclusion.

SPC ^a	SPREP	Pacific Islands Forum	Pacific SIDS Parties to the CBD ^b	Informal Group of Pacific SIDS
American Samoa	✓			
Australia	✓	✓		
Cook Islands	✓	✓	✓	
Federated States of Micronesia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fiji	✓	✓	✓	✓
France	✓			
French Polynesia	✓			
Guam	✓			
Kiribati	✓	✓	✓	
Marshall Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nauru	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Caledonia	✓			
New Zealand	✓	✓		
Niue	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Mariana Islands	✓			
Palau	✓	✓	✓	✓
Papua New Guinea	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pitcairn Islands				
Samoa	✓	✓	✓	✓
Solomon Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tokelau	✓			
Tonga	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tuvalu	✓	✓	✓	✓
United States of America	✓			
Vanuatu	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wallis and Futuna	✓			

Note. CBD—Convention of Biological Diversity; SIDS—small island developing states; SPC—Secretariat of the Pacific Community; SPREP—Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

^aMembership in these groupings is dynamic; table 1 reflects membership as of August 2012.

^bAccording to SPREP.

“In other corners of Pacific, like where I come from, apart from rats and snails [invasive species], people’s islands are about to sink. ... While we talk about assistance from international agencies, we need to have these agencies to hear the rest of the Pacific and not just some corners of the Pacific ocean.”

Such sentiments may be felt more widely, although we did not observe other acts of contestation at the meeting. Nonparticipating Pacific Islands could neither contribute to the regional representation nor contest it.

We can also envision challenges to the unity of the Pacific Region from within, stemming from potential incongruities between national and regional priorities and unequal representation and power among participating states [see also Chasek (2005) on challenges to maintaining group solidarity within the Pacific SIDS and the Alliance of Small Island States coalitions]. The thirteen-member and nine-member delegations of Palau and Papua New Guinea, respectively, for example, dwarfed the one-person delegations of the Marshall

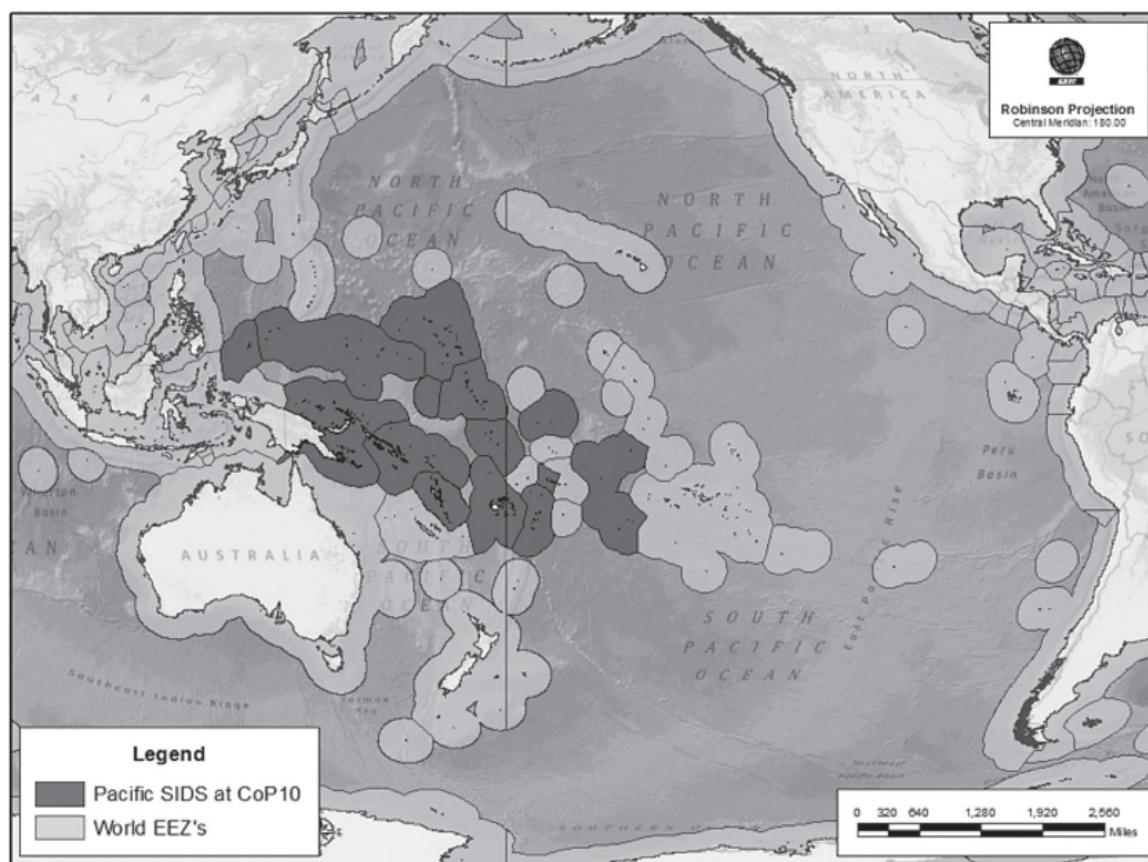


Figure 2. State-exclusive economic zones in the Pacific Ocean. Map credit: Matthew Bowers. Data sources: US National Park Service; VLIZ (2012). Maritime Boundaries Geodatabase, version 6. Available online at <http://www.vliz.be/vmcdcd/marbound>. This map was created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license.

Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Nauru. Which Pacific SIDS voices were reflected in that of the Pacific Region, and which were subsumed? As a Palauan delegate summarized, Pacific SIDS comprising the Pacific Region had “different levels of concern for different issues [at CoP10], but ... were able to come up with something that we all agree on” (interview, July 2011). The compromise we observed as political unity may not always be desirable for all participants. The Pacific Region is also contingent upon the dynamics among fourteen countries with diverse histories, cultures, priorities, and postcolonial ties to major world powers (Campbell, 2003).

Role of nonstate actors

Recognizing that there has been little attention to the scalar politics of environmental NGOs (McCarthy, 2005), we also draw attention to the key role that Pacific SIDS’ partners played in enacting the Pacific Region. In addition to SPREP’s role in orchestrating the groups’ activities and discourses as described previously, its work to support the Pacific Region was supported by larger funders, including Fonds Pacifique, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the CBD Secretariat, and the EU (SPREP, 2011a). Representatives from national environmental NGOs, BINGOs, and foundations also worked closely with Pacific SIDS before and during CoP10. In a postmeeting report, SPREP noted that

“In addition to the [Pacific Island] Parties, the following agencies and organizations were also present as part of the Pacific delegation to CoP10: SPREP, SPC, Wildlife Conservation Society, WWF, IUCN, Greenpeace and TNC” (SPREP, no date a).

These groups organized and attended regional preparatory meetings and side events during the meeting, participated in the Pacific SIDS strategic planning meetings in Nagoya, drafted interventions, briefed delegations, joined party delegates at lunch tables, and were active participants in the Skype discussions that kept Pacific SIDS in contact throughout the meeting. In some cases, NGO representatives were official members of Pacific Region party delegations. The Palauan delegation numbering thirteen, for example, included at least six representatives who either work for an NGO or whose attendance was funded by an NGO. For example, Pew Environment Group, Birdlife International, and SPREP contributed funding for Palauan delegates to CoP10. As one Palauan delegate summarized:

“We were huge, but you know what, it wasn’t the Palauan government. It was all different organizations” (interview, July 2011).

Many of the BINGOs that participated in enacting the Pacific Region are already active in individual island states and in other regional conservation initiatives (eg, the Micronesia Challenge, the Coral Triangle Initiative). Thus, NGO interests in promoting a regional vision are not surprising, but here we consider how that support plays out in the context of the CBD [see Betsill and Correll (2008) for a broader analysis of NGO diplomacy]. As already explained, most power in the CBD CoP process remains with parties. Thus, NGOs that participated in enacting the Pacific Region as advisors or as delegates on individual state delegations gained a more influential position in the CBD process than they have as observers. Moreover, the influence of NGOs increases as a function of Pacific SIDS influence. While this arrangement may increase the capacity of Pacific SIDS to participate more broadly in the meeting, one Palauan government official described the tensions that accompany mutual gains:

“for small island countries, when we go [to CoP10], we don’t have the resources, we don’t have lawyers, we don’t have scientists And SPREP’s role there was actually to help us because when a country would introduce a whole new text and we didn’t have time to review it, I would give it to SPREP and SPREP organized ... the NGOs to help ... like IUCN, WWF, SPC. ... So while I’m at the meeting, SPREP has taken that document, circulated it to our colleagues, the NGOs who are based in the Pacific, they get a chance to review it and they come back and tell us these are the pros and cons, and this is their position. And at the same time I have to determine if their recommendation is it good for my country or is it going to harm my country? ... So we have to find that balance because number one we want to make sure that we do justice to our partners, our NGOs, that they get something out of it. But number two, the second and foremost, is that whatever we do is not going to harm what’s happening at the national level, find that balance” (interview, July 2011).

The official summarized,

“half of the time we would say ... your recommendation actually contradicts with our national interest” (interview, July 2011).

Although Pacific SIDS are participants in the enactment of the Pacific Region, there is still substantial involvement from external actors and institutions, including a network of nonstate actors with their own priorities that include but are not limited to increasing the capacity of Pacific SIDS to participate in the CoP10.

Conclusions

Muni (2005) has conceptualized an ocean region as a regional identity among countries along an ocean rim. In contrast, this paper develops understanding of an encompassing oceanic region as a tool of a political scaling project. In this paper, taking the region seriously (Neumann, 2010) has meant focusing our analysis on the practices through which Pacific Islands, as small and isolated, were rescaled into a Pacific Region at CoP10, and toward what ends.

For Pacific SIDS, the Pacific Region served as a scalar fix [in the sense of problem solving (see McCann, 2003)] for two forms of smallness. The first is a practical smallness, referring to the size of Pacific SIDS delegations within the CoP10 meeting setting, and their associated limited capacity to participate as individual delegations. As summarized in SPREP (no date a, page 4), “a specific success was the strong Pacific delegation to COP10 that was actively engaged in the negotiation processes.” Participating as a Pacific Region does empower Pacific SIDS and their partners relative to what they could achieve as independent delegations or observers in the context of the CoP10 meeting setting; as one Palauan delegate noted,

“this is actually the first time that I can recall in a CoP that Pacific Island countries are actually making interventions; the last CoP, hardly” (interview, October 2010).

According to SPREP, Pacific SIDS made thirty-three interventions on seventeen issues; and CoP10 was the first time that designated delegates made opening and closing statements on behalf of the Pacific Islands (SPREP, 2011b).

Though this level of participation may have been unprecedented, it is still relatively limited in the context of a twelve-day meeting and in contrast to actions by other parties. Pacific SIDS and their partners claim to have successfully participated in the negotiations, but they did not claim influence; still, together, they are a relatively small delegation of fifty-two representatives from NGOs and thirteen states. While a delegation of fifty-two is a significant increase from the average individual Pacific SIDS delegation of three or four, it is far smaller than other political groupings. The EU, for example, sent 458 delegates—more than eight times the Pacific SIDS regional delegation. Organizations with observer status also dwarfed the Pacific SIDS; Birdlife International sent 109 people in addition to staff serving on party delegations. Recognizing that influence is not solely a function of delegation size, we note that even as a regional delegation, Pacific SIDS remain at a significant disadvantage when it comes to influencing negotiations at CoP10.

But clearly, one of the ears that Pacific SIDS and their partners hoped would hear the “One Pacific Voice” was that of donors. Thus, the second smallness that the Pacific Region fixed is a conceptual one linked to the global imagination of Pacific Island territories and populations as small, isolated, and somewhat irrelevant to achieving global conservation goals. The ocean conservation agenda is not the sole or even main driver of the Pacific Region. However, this context marks contingency in the political life of a region or, put another way, the specific form(s) into which it is brought into being. By collaborating to speak about one ocean as a region with one voice to highlight their collective contributions to marine biodiversity conservation, the Pacific Region sought to be seen, heard, and valued by potential partners and donors, as well as negotiation chairs at CoP10—an audience increasingly interested in the oceans.

By some accounts, these goals were achieved. SPREP’s evaluation of the performance at CoP10 was positive, and a metric used for this success was publicity, visibility, and recognition by development partners (SPREP, 2011c.) The Pacific Region imaginary of a vast ocean space and network of people committed to the CBD and biodiversity conservation suggests that Pacific Islanders are willing and able to play a pivotal role in the conservation of a significant portion of the world’s oceans. In the context of increasing global attention to marine conservation, the enactment of such a Pacific Region is indeed likely to attract attention and support from donors.

Viewing the region through the prism of scalar politics has enabled us to understand the region not only as a product of social processes, but also as a very deliberately constructed tool for reshaping them. Moreover, our findings are suggestive of an important role for global environmental meetings not only as venues for negotiating policy, but also as stages upon which subaltern groups may have an opportunity to reframe—indeed rescale—their positions

within global imaginations and the global environmental governance agenda. The Pacific Region implicitly recognizes this when it assesses its success in terms of being seen and heard by donors, and the sense of empowerment associated with this, rather than in documenting specific influence on CoP decisions.

However, not all view the Pacific Region as serving their interests. Scales like regions are “institutionalized in complex ways in de/reterritorializing practices and discourses that may be partly concrete, powerful and bounded, but also partly unbounded, vague or invisible” (Paasi, 2004, page 542). It is unbounded, vague, or invisible components of the Pacific Region as enacted at CoP that both give it rhetorical power—to speak with “One Pacific Voice”—and are potentially problematic. In keeping the boundaries of the Pacific Region large and blurred within the global imagination, participating Pacific SIDS and partners invoke a sense of unity that is useful for some but contested by others, like the representative from Bougainville Island whose interests were spoken for but not fully represented under the Pacific Region banner. Contestation reflects a recognition that “the alliances social groups ... forge over a certain spatial scale will shape the conditions of appropriation and control over place and have a decisive influence over relative sociospatial power positions” (Swyngedouw, 2000, page 70). In the case examined here, contestation reflects recognition that the Pacific Region, once enacted, will likely do work at the CBD and beyond, by scaling and rescaling the objects and agents of environmental governance in the Pacific Islands, and by potentially reshaping the nature of the funding, actors, institutions, and ideology already in place (or absent).

We must ultimately ask: Is the Pacific Region a manifestation of Hau’ofa’s (2008) vision of ocean-centered regionalism that will empower Pacific Islanders to act with autonomy in international processes? Or is the Pacific Region an instrument of that same system, of nations, BINGOS, and funding agencies currently driving the global marine conservation agenda, one that has largely been focused on the creation of large networks of marine protected areas (Gray, 2010)? Our analysis indicates that the answer lies somewhere between these extremes. Though the full impact of the Pacific Region is yet to be seen, its enactment by a network of Pacific SIDS, environmental NGOs, and SPREP does represent a departure from some historic and current experiences with Pacific regionalism as institutionalized through long-dominant regional organizations like the Pacific Island Forum and the SPC. However, the main organizers of the enactment, SPREP and its funders, are tied to former regionalizations that were seen as undermining autonomy. This autonomy is further undermined by the role of NGOs in not only supporting the enactment, but in participating as delegates for Pacific SIDS.

Thus, although certain Pacific Islanders participate in and perceive benefits from the enactment of the Pacific Region, this version of the region, like the others in Pacific Island history, is not simply their own creation. The alliance we observed at CBD is predicated on the support of partners and the willingness of the Pacific Region to promote itself and be promoted as in line with global concerns for marine biodiversity conservation. What happens to partner support if Pacific SIDS diverge from the marine conservation agenda? In on-going and future work, we will continue to follow the scalar politics associated with the enactment of the Pacific Region to better understand the broader consequences of this particular version of Pacific regionalism. At this juncture, we contend that, even if the Pacific Region may help break away from a preexisting and powerful way of imagining Pacific Islands and Pacific regionalism (cf Hajer, 2009), it will likely fall short of Hau’ofa’s vision of self-determination.

Acknowledgements. This research was supported by the US National Science Foundation (award nos. 1027194 and 1027201). CEE relies on collaboration, in coordinating field work, collecting and analyzing data, and thinking through meaning, and this paper reflects the efforts of the larger team working on site in Nagoya. The CBD-CoP10 CEE team is: project leaders J Peter Brosius, Lisa M Campbell, Noella J Gray, and Kenneth I MacDonald, and researchers Maggie Bourque, Catherine Corson, Juan Luis Dammert, Eial Dujovny, Shannon Hagerman, Sarah Hitchner, Shannon Greenberg, Rebecca L Gruby, Edward M Maclin, Kimberly R Marion Suiseeya, Deborah Scott, Daniel Suarez, and Rebecca Witter. We thank Matthew T Bowers for map-making assistance, and Luke W Fairbanks and three anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments.

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