Assembling global conservation governance

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ABSTRACT

As the configuration of global environmental governance has become more complex over the past fifty years, numerous scholars have underscored the importance of understanding the transnational networks of public, private and nonprofit organizations that comprise it. Most methodologies for studying governance emphasize social structural elements or institutional design principles and focus less attention on the social interactions that generate diffuse, hybrid regimes. Yet capturing the dynamics of these networks requires a relational methodology that can account for a range of elements that constantly shift and change relative to overlapping institutional boundaries. Collaborative Event Ethnography draws on insights from multi-sited, team, and institutional ethnography to assemble teams of researchers to study major international conferences, which offer important political spaces where public, private, and nonprofit actors align around sanctioned logics and techniques of governance. Drawing on insights generated from these conferences and field sites across the globe, we trace the constitutive forces behind paradigm shifts in biodiversity conservation, specifically the interconnected rise of market-based approaches, global targets, and new conservation enclosures. We show how the iterative refining of the methodology over five events generated an increasingly robust understanding of global conservation governance as processual, dynamic, and contingent, constituted through constantly shifting assemblages of state and nonstate actors, devices and narratives that collectively configure fields of governance. Finally, we reflect on how our team, as an evolving combination of researchers, research interests, and data collection tools—itself an assemblage, —has informed the continual refinement of the methodology and generated novel understandings of global conservation governance.

1. Introduction

As the configuration of global environmental governance has become more complex over the past fifty years, numerous scholars have emphasized the importance of attending to the dynamic transnational networks of public, private and nonprofit organizations that now define it (Death, 2010; Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2005). The rise of market-based conservation and associated terrestrial and marine conservation enclosures, often tied to global targets, have both reflected and reinforced these networks. Yet, the majority of methodologies for studying governance emphasize social structural elements or institutional design principles underlying effective regimes (e.g., Young, 2017). Less attention has been paid to the shifting logics and power-laden relationships that generate diffuse, often hybrid, arrangements characteristic of contemporary networked governance (Lo, 2018)—what Swyngedouw (2005) calls "governance-beyond-the-state." Capturing the intricacies of these organizational dynamics requires a relational methodology that can account for a range of elements—discourses, social networks, organizational forms, and social technologies—that constantly shift and change relative to overlapping institutional boundaries. In this paper, we focus specifically on the global governance of biodiversity conservation, or global conservation governance (GCG), and show how collaborative ethnography can illuminate the dynamic assemblages that comprise it.

Collaborative Event Ethnography (CEE) builds on insights from multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), including collaborative multi-

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sited ethnography (Choy et al., 2009a, 2009b),[1] team ethnography (Erickson and Stull, 1998), and institutional ethnography (Billo and Mountz, 2015; Smith, 1987, 2006). It examines how actors who are normally dispersed in time and space come together at international conferences to facilitate, structure, and disseminate conservation paradigm shifts. Despite being ephemeral, these conferences embody the labor of people and things. They produce narratives, agreements, decisions, alliances, counter-movements, social technologies, and devices that shape GCG. In this manner, they can be viewed as overlapping fields of governance that encompass multiple institutional domains (e.g., public, private and non-profit sectors). They construct political arenas for the performance and negotiation of particular agendas, legitimating and shaping disparate pursuits into clusters or streams of overlapping activities that configure fields of governance (Hardy and Maguire, 2010; Lampel and Meyer, 2008; MacDonald, 2010; Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2017; see also Death, 2011).

At the same time, these conferences provide a concentrated view of governance in motion where various actors align around particular ideas and approaches that incrementally construct and reshape how conservation and development are understood and practiced (Campbell et al., 2014; MacDonald and Corson, 2012; Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2017). They provide opportunities for researchers to observe and document dynamic processes of governance as they unfold in time-condensed settings and to interview actors who are otherwise difficult to access. However, they typically occur over one to two weeks with multiple parallel events, making it formidable for an individual researcher to capture the scope and scale of the conferences. To tackle these challenges, CEE assembles teams of ethnographers that mimic the large teams that countries, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) bring to these conferences (Brosius and Campbell, 2010; Campbell et al., 2014).

In this article, we draw on research across multiple CEEs to argue for an understanding of GCG as assemblage. Rather than focus on the design, rules, and formal proceedings of events and the coordinated and stated intentions of actors, we draw on the theoretical construct of assemblage to direct our attention to the constantly shifting, indeterminate relations among diverse elements (Tsing, 2015; Li, 2007a). We critically assess versions of CEE conducted at five major conferences that occurred between 2008 and 2016, analyzing how and why the methodology was adapted at each conference and how our collective understanding of GCG as an assemblage evolved as a result. The conferences discussed include those hosted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Table 1). We argue that iterative refining of the methodology over these five CEEs generated increasingly robust understandings of the dynamic social processes that animate networked governance. Finally, we assert that our evolving research methodology, comprised of specific researchers, relations among researchers and with other field sites, data collection methods, sites and scales of analysis, and theoretical framings, can also be understood as assemblage.

The evolution of our methodology has been intertwined with and critical to the theoretical advances in our understanding of GCG. We argue that, although collaborative research is logistically challenging, it produces more robust theory-building and empirical analysis. For one, large research teams assembled for a particular conference can achieve broad coverage and share insights, contacts and data. We have also

been able to combine collective insights from a number of conferences with individual knowledge of "local" field sites across the globe to document how ideas and programs at international conferences translate across time and into practice on-the-ground. Second, whereas most ethnographic work on conservation and development assesses applications of programs and policies, CEE seeks to identify and interrelate a wide array of causal elements prior to, during, and after the proceedings, bringing into view factors that shape the organization of the conference as well as its relative impacts. Third, even as we are examining what becomes institutionalized, the methodology illuminates the multiple ways that actors continuously reshape conservation politics; how seemingly dominant concepts and associated elements are constantly challenged and reworked; and how power is relational and contingent. Ultimately, CEE reveals how GCG is actively produced via dynamic assemblages.

Reflecting this theoretical approach, our ongoing work in developing CEE as a methodology has relied on an iterative process of gathering and analyzing qualitative data on the one hand and co-producing collective understandings of global conservation governance on the other. We embrace in our own team a relational dynamism as we are continually recalibrating the balance between collective objectives such as breadth of coverage with the individual freedom to draw on particular theoretical framings and to follow topics and processes that align with specific research interests. As different groups of researchers, data collection methods, sites and scales of analysis, and theoretical framings have been brought together in different configurations at each CEE, we have also come to think of our own research process and team as an assemblage that morphs over time. Our ultimate arrival at assemblage as a conceptual frame has emerged iteratively as we have continuously moved between grounded theory approaches such as situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2018), and a more adaptive and inductive research process in which initial questions and theories of governance evolve in response to how different events transpire.

In four main parts, this article critically explores how evolving applications of CEE differentially captured GCG processes, primarily by looking closely at how its constituent components—processes of collaboration, conferences as sites, and ethnography as medium—facilitate a more comprehensive, innovative use of theoretical elements. We begin by situating our work within scholarship in critical conservation studies, theories of assemblage and multi-sited institutional and collaborative ethnography. We then summarize how the theory of assemblage and evolution of the CEE model through sequential events generated new knowledge about the constitutive processes of distributed and differentially coordinated networks. The full scope and diversity of research interests that the larger and continually evolving research team has pursued would be impossible to cover here, so we focus our attention primarily on the topics with which we as authors have been mostly closely involved. Finally, we analyze across these events to advance our understanding of governance as processual, dynamic and contingent, constituted through assemblages of state and nonstate actors, devices and narratives that collectively configure fields of governance.

2. Conservation Governance as Shifting Assemblages

Since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, both the composition of actors involved in negotiating international environmental agreements and the array of mechanisms for pursuing environmental protection have expanded. Though international agreements are still premised on the central role of the state and related multilateral institutions, the rise of neoliberalism as a political and economic reform agenda has intersected with a populist agenda for stakeholder participation such that non-state actors increasingly participate in what was formerly state-to-state policy-making (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2003, 2005). Concurrently, as binding legal agreements have been replaced or supplemented by voluntary

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[1] The term collaboration is used in two distinct ways in the literature on ethnography: (1) to refer to collaboration between researchers and the communities of people being researched ('consultants') to support the co-production of knowledge (Lassiter, 2004, 2005) and (2) to refer to collaboration among researchers (Choy et al., 2009a, 2009b), particularly in 'team ethnography'. We adopt the latter definition in our work. See Clerke and Hopwood (2014) for a discussion of the two usages.

Table 1
Collaborative event ethnography sites.

Date/Event	Location	Number of Researchers	Group Organization
2008 IUCN 4th World Conservation Congress	Barcelona, Spain	16 core researchers, 6 affiliated researchers[a]	Researchers pursued individual interests while addressing shared question of conservation and development trade-offs.
2010 CBD 10th Conference of the Parties	Nagoya, Japan	17 core researchers	Researchers organized into subteams, via a matrix of topics and themes, within larger theoretical frames. NSF funding supported pre-event training and post-event analysis.
2012 United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development - Rio + 20	Rio de Jaineiro, Brazil	12 core researchers	Two main teams tracking the Green and Blue Economies. Two subteams within the Green Economy, tracking 'business' and 'civil society' engagement.
2014 IUCN 6th World Parks Congress	Sydney, Australia	11 core researchers, 4 affiliated researchers	Three subteams, tracking 'business and biodiversity', 'rights and justice', and 'oceans'.
2016 IUCN 6th World Conservation Congress	Honolulu, Hawaii	13 core researchers	Four subteams, tracking 'business and biodiversity', 'rights', 'oceans', and 'forests'. NSF funding supported pre-event training and post-event analysis.

[a] Affiliated researchers are those who were also attending the conference, knew of or found out about our work, and joined in parts of the collaboration on site or in later writing projects.

compliance mechanisms, global institutions have continued to maintain their importance in transnational governance through the negotiation of narratives, metrics, and nonbinding commitments, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals (Biermann and Pattberg, 2012; Norichika and Biermann, 2012). These goals have been used to justify new terrestrial and marine territorializations in the name of conservation (Campbell and Gray, 2019; Corson, 2011), and to support new knowledge regimes (Campbell et al., 2014) and to engage new actors. The recasting of nature as natural capital has precipitated, and reflected, the involvement of new private sector actors, such as investment houses and insurance companies (Swyngedouw, 2005).

A growing body of scholarship critically examines the material, symbolic, and institutional transformations encompassed in market environmentalism, neoliberal natures, neoliberal conservation, and Nature Inc.™ (Castree, 2008a, 2008b; Dempsey, 2015; Büscher et al., 2012), and associated "new appropriations of nature" or "green grabbing" (Fairhead et al., 2012; Corson et al., 2013). It explores the increasing participation of multinational corporations, the financial sector and the entertainment industry in conservation (Holmes, 2012, 2011), new ways of representing, calculating and monitoring nature (Robertson, 2012; Mitchell, 2008), the growth of speculation on conservation commodities (Sullivan, 2013), new forms of media and virtual engagement with nature (Büscher et al., 2016; Igoe, 2010), and militarization and rising violence in conservation (Lunstrum, 2014; Kelly and Ybarra, 2016; Duffy, 2014). These shifts both reflect and reinforce the rising role of conservation in the global political economy and the reorientation of conservation to this end (Büscher and Fletcher, 2018, 2015).

Much of the literature critiquing these trends concentrates on what economistic processes produce and how, as opposed to how economistic governance structures and processes emerge and unfold across sites and scales (cf., Sullivan, 2013; Corson, 2018; Dempsey, 2015). Yet it is in this unfolding that we can best understand the subtle, diverse, and dynamic forms of power relations that constitute dynamic fields of governance. Similarly, there has been limited exploration in critical human geography of the role of international conferences as sites at which the negotiation of these forms transpires, even as scholars in other fields have recognized their importance (Little, 1995; Bernstein, 2013; Dimitrov, 2016). As international conferences have proliferated since the 1970s, they have become critical sites for both the orchestration of market-based approaches (Fletcher, 2014; MacDonald and Corson, 2012) and resistance to them (Meek, 2015; Doolittle, 2010; Corson et al., 2015).

Examining the continuously shifting organizational forms and social processes associated with these transformations requires both a conceptual frame and a methodology that can capture complex, dynamic interrelationships over time and across multiple spatial scales, and that can locate and analyze mechanisms and moments of influence within them (Corson et al., 2014; Riles, 2001). Key questions emerge from this line of inquiry that build upon but differ significantly from institutional studies of global environmental governance (Young, 2017). Embracing the premise that "there is nothing automatic" about hegemony––it must be "actively constructed and positively maintained" (Hall, 1986, 15)–– inquiry turns away from institutional design and focuses more upon the multiple valences of power unfolding within the "interstices of hegemony's production" (Goldman, 2005, 24-25). CEE assesses the continual work needed to build and maintain outcome agreements, resolutions, and targets that represent some of the components of these fields, revealing the constant tension between orchestration and consent, and the ever shifting alliances that negotiate them. This relational understanding draws attention to the ongoing production and reproduction of governance within the context of emergent discursive and institutional domains. It approaches policy-making as meaningful, processual, and dynamic, underscoring the importance of attending to the mundane and seemingly irrelevant as well as the obviously influential ways in which policy is negotiated. At the same time, in bringing a critical reflexivity to the project, it takes as the ethnographic object not the negotiations themselves, but the transformation in meaning and governance processes that they represent (Corson et al., 2014).

Conceptual approaches framed in terms of assemblage provide a useful lens for examining these dynamic governance processes. Assemblage captures processes of articulation and entanglement of diverse elements such as discourses, institutional forms, calculative practices, and market devices. These processes co-create complex, multiple, intricate, and not always visible interrelationships and distributed agency. While definitionally broad and open to wide interpretation and debate, assemblage approaches foreground the continuous unfolding and shifting of socio-technical arrangements as well as the multi-faceted constitutive work that animates social life (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Li, 2007a). While traditional organizational structures shape process and outcomes, they do not determine what is articulated, how, or at what moments. Assemblages "even those that appear stable—are always in the process of being maintained, altered, or resisted" (Boucquey et al., 2016, p. 3) by different actors.

Tania Li (2007a, p. 263) discusses assemblage as "the on-going

labour of bringing disparate elements together and forging connections between them". She emphasizes three characteristics of assemblage that constructively enable a dynamic, relational understanding of social processes and structures. First, assemblage focuses on processes of becoming, where elements assemble, disassemble, and reassemble, rather than on resultant formations or structures. Second, the terminology of assemblage centers upon the diverse practices that co-produce people and things, as opposed to a primary emphasis on institutional design. Third, assemblage approaches present a diffuse, often uncoordinated, view of agency that is both powerful in its cumulative work and non-totalizing. This contrasts with work that primarily emphasizes macro-level, state-to-state relations or top-down, elite-driven processes. However, attending to assemblages does not imply the abandonment of such concerns. Rather, as Tsing (2015, p. 23) observes: "Assemblages drag political economy inside them… they are sites for watching how political economy works."

Our emerging understanding of global conservation governance as dynamic and relational has been mutually constitutive with a process of continually refining the CEE methodology. Informed by different strains of ethnography, we have sought to develop a methodology that moves beyond social-structural and macro-political questions and analyses to a more critical and processual view of governance. Working in collaborative teams, researchers interact in reflexive and iterative ways as they advance the methodology and the insights it provides about GCG. Evolving with each application, CEE is not a static, pre-determined research method applied uniformly across events, but a dynamic, relational approach that is informed by the different combinations of researchers, research interests, and specific data collection tools, and developed in response to an evolving understanding of GCG generated through each successive application. In the next section, we discuss how CEE builds on other collaborative and multisited institutional ethnography approaches.

3. Collaborative Event Ethnography and Global Conservation Governance

Human geographers, cultural anthropologists, and others tied to political ecology have produced a considerable number of "traditional" ethnographic studies focused on how conservation and development programs have played out over time in particular contexts. In most cases, these studies rely on ethnographic methods in tandem with historical analysis to produce deeply contextualized understandings of how conservation and development unfold in particular places (Agrawal, 2005; Büscher, 2013; Hathaway, 2013; Li, 2007b; Tsing, 2005; West, 2006). At the same time, institutional ethnographers have sought to "study up" (Nader, 1972), moving from local communities or sites to consider national or global institutional structures (Goldman, 2005) and how they shape daily life (Campbell and Gregor, 2004; Devault, 2006; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2005). Similarly, those pursuing ethnography in the context of globalization have constructed studies across multiple, interrelated sites (Marcus, 1995). Our approach to studying multiple events builds on these scholars as well as the creative approaches used by multi-sited institutional ethnographers, who trace the movement of concepts, programs and politics across transnational networks (Bebbington and Kothari, 2006; Bebbington et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2003); those using collaborative multi-sited ethnography (Choy et al., 2009a, 2009b); and team ethnography, in which team members collaborate formally on all aspects of research, including data collection, interpretation, analysis, and writing, while focusing on a shared research objective or purpose (Erickson and Stull, 1998).

An example of collaborative multi-sited ethnography is the methodology used by the Matsutake Worlds Research Group (MWRG), which emphasizes the contingencies of connections across sites and models their collaborative research design on the research subject by mimicking the rhizomatic structure of the matsutake mushroom (Choy et al., 2009a, 2009b). The matsutake, a pungent mushroom prized in

Japan, grows rhizomatically underground; its harvesting and trade also produces and reinforces global networks and connections (Choy et al., 2009a; Tsing, 2015). Taking inspiration from the 'rhizomic sociality' of the matsutake in their examination of the relationship between theories of assemblage and methods of collaborative multi-sited ethnography, the MWRG has designed a collaborative approach that embraces "productive multiplicity" and defies "the impulse of centralizing and totalizing knowledge production" (Choy et al., 2009a, p. 399). Like the MWRG, our teams mimic the assemblages we study. Throughout the ten years that we have been doing CEE, the methodological assemblage has come together in different configurations at different moments in time. Reflecting on and embracing our methodology as dynamic and relational has helped us to also understand how our research subjects continually adapt to an interplay between individual circumstances and organizational context.

Importantly, CEE relies not just on the logistical strength of more people but also on intensive, rigorous, reflexive, and synergistic collaboration throughout the research process, from research design, to data collection, to analysis and writing (Gray et al., 2019). This distinguishes CEE from just the sharing of ideas among a group of researchers. As we challenge one another's assumptions and analyses, a creative tension emerges, which forms an exciting intellectual arena and ultimately leads to a more nuanced and comprehensive methodology, analysis, and theoretical engagement. Yet a core challenge is to transform our "dispersed consciousness"—created as each of us follows different events and people—into a "collective", albeit dynamic, consciousness (Campbell et al., 2014; Corson et al., 2014; Corson et al., 2014). Ethnography is an inherently individual endeavor, in which the data collected are embedded in an individual's situated knowledge and observations, informed by the individual's theoretical training, and obtained by pursuing ideas that emerge in the process of research. In CEE, each of us comes with different theoretical training, background knowledge, and field experience that shapes how we approach fieldwork and how we analyze, theorize, and write-up results. The tension between the process of ethnographic research as an individual experience and the benefits of the collaborative venture creates our greatest challenges: how to realize the benefits of collaboration—theoretically, practically, and substantively—without sacrificing the importance of individual flexibility and interest.

While the initial emphasis in CEE was on the study of a particular, bounded event, it subsequently expanded to look across and beyond individual events—from international conferences to local research sites and across multiple international conferences. Now, as we investigate the historical context of particular issues, track intersessional activities, and relate observations at international meetings to our local field sites, our data collection extends before and after specific conferences and across sites dispersed in time and space (Campbell et al., 2014). By studying a number of meetings, both individually and as a group, we have developed a familiarity with global environmental meetings and meeting cultures, both generally and in relation to specific topics and interests. At the same time, our experience conducting more traditional field-based and institutional ethnographic research allows us to better understand and contextualize what we see and hear. In turn, participating in the CEE informs our individual understandings of our local field research. Many of our team members have previous experience working within the institutions we are studying (e.g. IUCN, the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the U.S. Agency for International Development and various national government agencies) and/or have been following these issues from local research sites in countries, which span Madagascar, Belize, Mexico, Costa Rica, Palau, Laos, Cambodia and others. We are not just studying these sites, but also the relationships among them and the ways in which international agendas are reworked in different sites within a single project (Corson et al., 2014). We are interested in how those relationships facilitate the co-production and enactment of dynamic governance assemblages (Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2015) and collectively constitute fields of

conservation governance (Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2017). Each event we study is thus an instantiation of an assemblage constituted by multiple, overlapping fields.

In CEE, as in any field site, every moment is an opportunity for data collection. Formal negotiations at conferences are typically accompanied by scheduled 'side events' (thematic presentations and panels organized by delegates and/or civil society groups in order to circulate information and ideas). Using participant observation guides and note-taking forms developed in advance, we collect data at formal negotiations, side events, and other happenings, ranging from the words actors use in advocating their positions to the ways in which procedural rules, seating arrangements, and disciplining actions used by chairs of meetings shape interactions. We study how actors frame, translate, and institutionalize their ideas in organizational position statements, listservs, blogs, press releases, and reports over time. These provide both background information and data with which to analyze narratives and representations. Across events, we observe which actors attend and how their attendance changes over time; how actors reference previous decisions or other international conferences; how boundaries between the local and global collapse through social media, texting, and phone calls; how narratives and practices evolve; and which policies become institutionalized. Finally, we use semi-structured interviews with the diverse actors who attend these conferences, such as state delegates, activists and private companies, whom we have identified through purposeful and snowball sampling, to gather information about history behind certain agendas, strategies for influencing the negotiations, and informal negotiations (Corson et al., 2014).

4. The evolution of collaborative event ethnography

This section illustrates the evolution of the CEE methodology over five events to generate increasingly robust understandings of GCG as dynamic constellations of diverse logics, social networks, organizational forms, social technologies, and devices that constantly shift relative to overlapping institutional boundaries. In line with the presentation of assemblage above, we use the following working vocabulary to describe processes and patterns of elements coming together: (1) spoken and written discourse to capture *logics*; (2) the convergence of diverse actors in *social networks*; (3) institutional agreements, policies, and program standards and procedures to delineate *institutional boundaries*; (4) programmatic structure to establish *organizational form*; (5) approaches, strategies, programs, platforms, initiatives, and related activities to indicate *social technologies;* and (6) the products, instruments, or mechanisms generated from social technologies to highlight *devices*.

4.1. WCC 2008: Trade-offs in Conservation and Development

The first CEE, at the 2008 IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC), arose out of a 2006 workshop convened to address the politics of knowledge and its influence on conservation, It was part of the MacArthur Foundation's interdisciplinary research initiative, *Advancing Conservation in a Social Context* project, which focused on 'trade-offs' between conservation and development (Hirsch et al., 2010; McShane et al., 2011). The 2008 CEE examined how large environmental meetings shape global conservation and development. The WCC is a quadrennial meeting consisting of a Members' Assembly, in which both governmental and non-governmental members vote on resolutions that guide the organization's plan of work, and a Forum, in which different actors debate, showcase, and otherwise engage with diverse conservation topics and challenges in various events. At the WCC, the team functioned as an alliance of individual researchers rather than as a collaborative team. It developed shared questions about trade-offs between environmental and social concerns: how they were made, by whom and with what logic (Brosius and Campbell, 2010). Although the individuals met several times a day to share observations and

reflections, they tracked their own interests, such as marine conservation, biofuels and business, and biodiversity, and they produced primarily single authored papers (e.g., Doolittle, 2010; Gray, 2010; Hitchner, 2010; MacDonald, 2010; Monfreda, 2010).

Through this loose form of collaboration, the team cultivated a shared understanding of the ways in which the conference and the IUCN were shaping global conservation governance. Team members noted how the meeting was scripted, orchestrated and performed in particular ways to highlight ideas, such as the international target for marine protected area (MPA) coverage and *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB) (Gray, 2010; MacDonald, 2010; Monfreda, 2010). We saw how devices like the WCC's Resolution 4.031, which called on states to identify ecologically and biologically significant areas on the high seas, co-produced actors and things over time (Gray, 2019). Concurrently, we observed the importance of inter-organizational relationships, such as between the IUCN and CBD, and the limits on the IUCN's influence: the Assembly's non-binding resolutions contrasted with the importance that many participants attributed to the biennial Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD-COP). Many WCC 2008 side events and resolutions aimed to influence CBD strategic plan and targets, which were then under negotiation in anticipation of the 2010 COP. Although multiple researchers noted this in the context of their specific topics, it was the combined observation across the group that strengthened our conclusion that WCC discussions aimed to influence the CBD-COP, which then led the team to study the CBD.

4.2. CBD-COP10 2010: The Meeting as a Political Arena

The second CEE team, which studied CBD-COP10, collaborated more deliberately prior to, during, and after the meeting in order to better capture shared insights about GCG in research, analysis, and writing.[2] We adopted a theoretical frame around the politics of knowledge translation, scale, and performance, which complemented a substantive matrix organized around themes of science, markets, participation, and other topics. Researchers were assigned at least two topical teams and one thematic team to maximize coverage of the conference and to maintain working groups of manageable size. To understand the meeting as a whole and to look for connections throughout it, we shared insights at daily full team debriefings and small team meetings, and we held a writing retreat six months later (Campbell et al. 2014).

More formalized collaboration permitted wider coverage of the event and, informed by our diverse backgrounds and field sites, allowed team members to support or challenge each other's observations in the process of developing a nuanced and comprehensive assessment of the role of the CBD in GCG. For example, the subteam following the strategic plan negotiations drew on the insights of the markets subteam to contextualize a conflict over two of the Aichi targets related to biodiversity mainstreaming (Target 2) and financial incentives (Target 3). Here, developing countries were protesting language about market-based mechanisms as part of a desire to protect traditional bilateral and multilateral funding for conservation (Campbell et al., 2014). Similarly, members of markets, targets, and protected area subteams could triangulate growing attention across multiple events to the "protected

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area financing gap," or the finances needed in the absence of sufficient state funding and capacity, to sustain growing protected area networks to meet new CBD targets (Corson et al., 2014).

Again, the conference afforded multiple platforms for orchestration, where business, conservation, and governmental actors assembled around particular logics and techniques related to market-based conservation and global targets. TEEB was unveiled at key events, and the associated TEEB reports, each color coded to a different audience, circulated narratives and images of nature as natural capital, which subsequently gained traction, such that, "side event titles changed, corridor conversations shifted, and high-level politicians struggled to reformulate their speeches in the language of ecosystems services and more specifically TEEB" (MacDonald and Corson, 2012, 171; see also Suarez and Corson, 2013). Likewise, social networks of island governments, regional organizations, and NGOs collaborated at the conference site to "perform" the Pacific Island Region, which intertwined Pacific Island cultural sensibilities with environmentalism in order to capture growing interest in and resources for marine conservation. Here, the conference served as site for nations often marginalized in GCG to assert their relevance therein, with the assistance of non-state supporters (Gruby and Campbell, 2013). Finally, we saw how the narratives, logics and mechanisms we observed at individual events translated over time and across spatial scales to other conferences and our own field sites. Corson (2011) linked efforts by NGOs at CBD-COP10 to increase the protected areas target with their subsequent lobbying of the Madagascar government to rapidly expand protected areas at the end of 2010 (see also Campbell et al., 2014). In this manner, the methodology allowed us to document how conferences serve as sites for orchestration and performance—for assembling diverse elements in ways that transcend the bounds of conferences sites. Devices such as targets, logics such as market-based conservation, and narratives such as the financing gap play important roles in justifying new conservation enclosures across the globe.

As at the WCC, institutional context shaped the ways in which elements assembled. In contrast to the marginal interest in resolutions that we observed at WCC 2008 and the disconnect between the IUCN's Members' Assembly and the Forum, many of the side events accompanying COP10 aimed to influence formal CBD decisions or capture CBD (and other bilateral and multilateral) resources. Participants drew on previous COP decisions to affect current negotiations, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (Campbell et al., 2014). While the IUCN targeted its resolutions at the CBD, the CBD measured its prominence (visibility, funding, success) relative to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Efforts to align biodiversity conservation with the climate change agenda, through co-benefits, suggested a kind of climate envy in which actors sought to claim the resources and political attention paid to climate change (Hagerman et al., 2012).[3] The proposal for the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services was frequently cited as a needed parallel to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Several of the products emerging from CBD-COP10 (e.g. the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefits Sharing, and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets) were negotiated with specific references to the need to demonstrate relevance and success. In this sense, social technologies, such as the Nagoya Protocol and the Aichi Targets, serve to reinforce the CBD's relevance within a shifting assemblage of global conservation governance. At COP10, the next study site was signposted for us via the presence of the Rio Conventions Pavilion, which hosted a range of events connecting biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable land management in preparation for the upcoming Rio + 20 conference.

4.3. Rio + 20, 2012: The Fate of Conservation within Sustainable Development

By focusing the next CEE on Rio + 20, we could interrogate how issues that were hegemonic at CBD-COP10 fared within a much broader agenda concerned with poverty alleviation, human health, food security, and the overarching theme of the Green Economy (Barbier, 2009). We could also track how dynamic assemblages formed and transformed before and during conferences. Working in subteams, comprised primarily of researchers who had also been at CBD, we focused on markets and marine issues. One subteam expanded the CEE method to consider how actors try to influence preparatory processes. As they followed the preparatory meetings for the 2012 UN Conference of Sustainable Development at UN Headquarters in New York City, they documented the iterative, processual nature of policy before and during the event, contrasting how informal and formal discussions intertwined to shape the negotiating document even before the main conference (Corson et al., 2015).[4]

We observed how, even as advocates did not always reach their ultimate goals, they used these events to institutionalize narratives and logics that paved the way for future progress. For example, in contrast to the lack of interest by many parties at the CBD-COP10 in extending the CBD's work to areas beyond national jurisdiction (the high seas) (Gray et al., 2014), oceans advocates at Rio + 20 pushed for the outcome document to include a commitment to negotiate an agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that would pave the way for high seas MPAs (Campbell et al., 2013). Although this language was not ultimately included, deliberations at Rio + 20 nonetheless served to build further support for the concept of high seas MPAs. The MPA component of the CBD's Aichi Target 11 was eventually adopted verbatim in the Rio + 20 outcome document, *The Future We Want,* although the CBD Aichi targets were not included more generally. This example suggests how each meeting further solidified the logic of high seas MPAs as possible objects of global conservation governance and aligned diverse actors around this logic, even as advocates failed to realize their goals at any particular meeting (Gray, 2019).

The combined research across events also illustrated how much of the work, even by governmental entities, focused on the creation of voluntary initiatives and the production of devices such as reports and toolkits in the process securing spaces for corporate actors in GCG. At Rio + 20 and beyond, UN agencies played central roles in building the Green Economy. They did this by helping to conceive of and develop initiatives like the Natural Capital Declaration; by assembling and supporting social networks tied to these voluntary initiatives; and by underwriting devices and social technologies such as the Green Industry Platform private–public partnership, which was designed to coordinate industry activities to reduce the environmental impacts of production. The Corporate Sustainability Forum (CSF), a mini conference organized by the UN Global Compact to prompt business leaders to examine their role in developing the Green Economy, provided a convenient conduit for featuring the work of UN agencies. New TEEB initiatives released at the CSF animated an expanding field of voluntary, corporate sustainability programs that included the Natural Capital Declaration by United Kingdom-based NGO, the Global Canopy Programme, and the UN Environment Programme's Finance Initiative. These elevated the role of the finance sector within discussions of natural capital

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[3] Although we elected not to study the UNFCCC in subsequent CEEs, one of our COP10 team members, Kim Marion Suiseeya has built a research program studying Indigenous peoples' efforts to influence climate politics in UNFCCC and elsewhere, using a modified version of CEE (see http://www.presence2influence.org).

[4] After the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the UN established a formal 'Major Groups' structure through which to channel non-state participation in the post-1992 process. The nine groups in this structure were Women, NGOs, Children and Youth, Business and Industry, Workers and Trade Unions, Local Authorities, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and the Scientific and Technological Community.

accounting and corporate sustainability (Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2017).

Finally, the team documented how geographic location and associated conference logistics shape the ways in which assemblages form around international events. The Corporate Sustainability Forum was held at a private hotel where protest possibilities were limited and the People's Summit, where counter hegemonic discussions took place, was held more than an hour's drive away from the main conference site.

We explicitly focused on the politics of dissent and the formation of "resistance assemblages" at conferences. We tracked how activists used the organizational form of the UN Major Groups participatory process to build alliances around a "rights-at-risk" metaphor as an alternative framing to the Green Economy. We also documented how the official participatory process for engaging civil society in Rio + 20 negotiations simultaneously enabled and disciplined their efforts (Corson et al., 2015). We saw how TEEB coordinator Pavan Sukhdev, who had prevailed at CBD-COP10, faced opposition to the Green Economy by a counter hegemonic bloc focused on the concept of Buen Vivir and led by Latin American states (Suarez, 2017). We observed how Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDs) reframed the concept of the Green Economy into the Blue Economy as part of broader ongoing attempts to discursively (re)territorialize ocean space as spaces of livelihoods, ecosystem services, or business opportunities (Campbell et al., 2013; Silver et al., 2015). Finally, we documented how NGOs and other states, aligned with SIDs interests, posed a counter narrative of Large Ocean States, or Large Ocean Territories as an alternative to the UN's Small Island Developing States label (Silver et al., 2015).

In this regard, the third CEE reinforced the role of international conferences as spaces for the performance and orchestration of multilateral agendas as well as the organization of resistance to them, where social technologies and devices engage alliances both behind and against hegemonic agendas. It illuminated the dynamic process whereby various actors, representing diverse organizations, continually reworked these agendas to suit their needs.

4.4. WPC 2014: The Centrality of Protected Areas

At the 2014 World Parks Congress (WPC), a conference organized every ten years by IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas, we studied how and why protected areas remain the core of conservation. Even though conservation is shifting in response to things like climate change and market-oriented approaches, global protected area targets continue to justify the territorialization of spaces, negotiated with states, extractive industries, indigenous communities and others (Corson et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2014). Given the smaller, more informal nature of the WPC, the team focused more on interviews with prominent actors. We sought to capture the influence of social networks and to examine the impact of conference structures, such as pavilions and thematic "streams." We realized the value of engagement in the social networks we were studying and the critical role that nonbinding international documents can play in shaping GCG, contributing to our growing appreciation of GCG as processual, dynamic and contingent, formed through shifting assemblages of social networks, devices, logics, organizational forms and institutional boundaries.

In contrast with CBD-COP10 and Rio + 20, the WPC did not feature formal negotiations or voting, and the production of its non-binding outcome document, "The Promise of Sydney", was mostly hidden, with component parts drafted in technically open, but poorly advertised, groups of mostly IUCN staff and affiliates. This more informal deliberative process reflected the perspectives of a small subset of participants, such that when the document was revealed at the closing plenary, critics of the marine section argued that the recommendation that 30% of oceans have no extractive use permitted did not represent the views of the broader marine constituency, specifically those interested in small scale fisheries (Charles et al., 2016; Campbell and Gray, 2019). Despite this, the Promise of Sydney would perform important

political work at the WCC, 2016 as we describe below.

By linking long term CEE work to a new research project across multiple sites that examined the emergence and spread of Large Marine Protected Areas (LMPAs), the marine subteam inserted itself in the LMPA network The team conducted interviews and conversations with LMPA practitioners in order to explore international discourse and logic around LMPAs, to refine research questions, to identify possible 'local' field sites and to increase team members' visibility as actors with interests in LMPAs. Reflecting the theory that GCG emanates through the movement of ideas and actors from 'local' places to other sites of governance, including large international meetings, the team explored how narratives that circulate at international events (e.g. LMPAs as remote, pristine, and politically expedient tools for meeting Aichi Target 11) reflect or inform conservation practice in particular local sites (Gruby et al., 2017; Gruby et al., 2016).

IUCN's Business and Biodiversity Programme and the Conservation Finance Alliance (CFA) Pavilions hosted panels, presentations and social events that aligned private sector, governmental, and non-governmental actors around voluntary corporate social responsibility logics through initiatives focused on natural capital accounting and biodiversity offsets. By hosting well-attended happy hours, the CFA channeled interested participants through events organized into conservation finance "journeys" that promoted private investment in conservation. The pavilions were also prominent venues for enhancing the visibility and legitimacy of extractive industries in the context of global conservation governance. Numerous sessions showcased how transnational mining and oil and gas companies had formed strategic partnerships with international NGOs and used technologies such as biodiversity offsetting, which legitimize and depoliticize the impacts of extraction on protected areas. Furthermore, even as participants in sessions associated with the Business and Biodiversity Pavilion openly discussed challenges with measuring and valuing nature, they normalized natural capital accounting as a technique aligned with broader processes of economization of conservation governance (Wilshusen, 2019). Sessions promoted knowledge products for diverse clients interested in natural capital accounting, such as the Natural Capital Coalition and Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystems Services. The Natural Capital Coalition began to coordinate the ongoing collective labor associated with wide range of activities focused on measuring and valuing what has come to be called "nature's contributions to people" (Diaz et al., 2018).

4.5. WCC 2016: The Influence of Informal Networks

Coming two years after WPC, WCC 2016 offered an opportunity to compare observations and findings in relation to the initial CEE at WCC 2008 and to track conservation specific agendas from the smaller WPC to the larger WCC. Findings from this round of research again uncovered multiple ways in which logics, social networks, social technologies, and devices influenced the more formal, yet still nonbinding, WCC negotiations. We could also draw longitudinal comparisons across five conferences. We were more deliberate about orchestrating interaction across subteams, and we brought undergraduate and graduate students into an intensive training program and cascade mentoring system across five academic institutions.[5]

At the WCC, we saw how a non-binding document can be a powerful device and the work that it takes to constantly assemble GCG. During negotiations on a resolution related to MPAs (WCC-2016-Res-050),

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[5] Again with funding from the US National Science Foundation (award no. 1560812), we assembled a team of 13 people, including six faculty, one PhD and one masters student, and five undergraduate students. We were able to support pre- and post-event collaboration, including a six-week intensive webinar training program, cross-institutional cascade mentoring, and a post-event writing retreat.

NGO representatives invoked The Promise of Sydney's recommendation that 30% of the oceans have no extractive activities as a pre-existing commitment, in spite of the protest at the WPC 2014 that it was not representative and objections to it voiced again during WCC deliberations. Ultimately, the preambular text of Res-050 repeated the WPC 2014 recommendation verbatim, and the resolution called for 30% of oceans in highly protected MPAs and 30% with no extractive use. MPA proponents thus perpetuated the logic and social technologies of conservation enclosures, particularly 'no take' MPAs, using the 30% target as a device.

The WCC also further revealed how assemblages expand and shift over time. For example, the Natural Capital Coalition continued to grow, embracing longstanding initiatives like the Natural Capital Project and elevating the Natural Capital Protocol, which establishes a common framework to guide the measurement and valuation of natural capital across sectors. Perhaps most importantly, the WCC reinforced how third party actors—conservation NGOs in particular—perform much of the assembling of economistic conservation governance arrangements on behalf of corporate clients. We saw this in discussions regarding Motion 63 on Natural Capital, which called on IUCN's Director General to convene a working group to develop a draft working paper on natural capital for consideration prior to the 2020 WCC (WCC-2016-Res-058). On the surface, the motion offered a straightforward approach to assessing how the IUCN program of work could incorporate natural capital approaches. However, during the "contact group" deliberations on the motion's final text, non-voting IUCN staff steered the process to ensure that voting members who were in favor of the motion were present to support language that omitted reference to critical perspectives on natural capital.

Finally, a subteam focused on resource rights noted how organizational forms, such as the informal processes of the WCC, and the influence of the Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy in advocating for community participation, created opportunities for rights-based conservation advocates to build critical alliances. Advocates utilized social technologies such as the Conservation Initiative on Human Rights, devices such as the IUCN Environmental Law Center's portal on the Rights-Based Approach to Conservation and the authority of the United Nations to reassert the prominence of protecting rights to nature within conservation. While previous resolutions invoked various UN declarations, from the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, these advocates engaged new actors, including the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and on Human Rights and the Environment. Through informal processes, such as side events discussing just released UN reports that document human rights abuses in conservation, they shifted the discursive terrain at the conference and secured the authority to shape conservation politics. A key advancement in recognizing Indigenous peoples' authority to participate in WCC decisions was the passing of Motion B during the member assembly, which established a new voting category for Indigenous peoples' organizations—a move that would have been much harder in the more structured context of the CBD. Thus, the more informal nature of the WCC relative to the CBD offered opportunities for actors who are more marginalized in the formal state-to-state binding negotiations to secure legitimacy in GCG.

5. Global conservation governance as assemblage

Each of these specific examples informs an overarching understanding of GCG as processual, dynamic, and contingent, constituted through constantly shifting assemblages of state and nonstate actors, devices and narratives that collectively configure fields of governance. Over the past ten years, we have collectively observed how ideas and programs translate to multiple field sites, and we have tracked issues across conferences over time. We have continually and iteratively refined the CEE methodology and GCG theory together in an endeavor to

understand and document the constitutive forces behind the rise of market-based approaches, global targets, and new conservation enclosures. Eventually, we settled on a form of CEE that could capture the everyday practices that actively produce global conservation governance, and we endorsed assemblage as a theoretical framing that advanced a relational and processual understanding of "governance-beyond-the-state".

In modifying the methodology from WCC 2008 to CBD-COP 2010, we aimed to capture the benefits of sharing ideas and increasing event coverage, recognizing that a coalition of individual researchers could generate broad understanding. At the CBD-COP10, a coherent theoretical grounding and approach to the conference as a political arena—a site for performance and orchestration—helped to capture the assemblages of technologies, logics, and informal alliances behind market-based conservation and conservation enclosures. However, tensions between maximizing coverage versus in-depth investigation emerged, as researchers faced ontological and epistemological questions about what constitutes ethnographic data and how to share individually embodied experiences. For subsequent CEEs, we settled on a methodology that balanced depth and breadth of coverage, giving individuals leeway to follow topics and processes, while also contributing to collective research objectives.

At Rio + 20, we expanded the CEE methodology to study not just the event itself, but also preparations for it in order to track the processual, dynamic, and often informal nature of policy-making across time and space. We began to develop personal relationships that underpinned an ability to interview participants to access information about causality and historical context. Similarly, moving back and forth from larger and more formal to smaller and more informal conferences, and from events focused on conservation to one predominantly about sustainable development, we were able to document how organizational structure shapes the ways in which traditional conservation actors invoke, resist, and reshape social technologies within the broader world of sustainable development and global finance. The explicit attention we gave at Rio + 20 to contestation and reworking, as well as orchestration, helped us to develop a more nuanced and balanced perspective on the multiple ways in which diverse actors use conferences to advance and contest hegemonic paradigms.

Likewise, at WPC and WCC2016, we captured the impact of structuring factors such as pavilions and thematic "streams" on normalizing conservation finance. Our combined observations revealed how actors organized around social technologies like the biodiversity targets and the Natural Capital Declaration, social networks like the CFA and the SIDS, and devices such as the TEEB reports and toolkits. We saw how the economization of conservation became embedded through initiatives and alliances that sought to influence the corporate sector, and how the discussions about targets, promises, and values from larger events like Rio + 20 and CBD-COP10 both extended beyond single events and translated into struggles over rights and access to resource protected areas. As we drew on relationships we had developed over multiple events, and became more embedded in assemblages ourselves, we cultivated a stronger understanding of their inner workings. At the same time, we saw how informal processes, such as the behind the scenes production of The Promise of Sydney, influenced more formal negotiations at the WCC, and how, in contrast to the more formalized Major Groups structure, the IUCN's decentralized structure underpinned a fluidity and openness in which rights-based actors could shift the negotiating terrain and Indigenous peoples could gain voting rights. Ultimately, we witnessed social networks form across events and assemblages around business and biodiversity morph over time.

By tracking the progressive reframing of conservation around market-based approaches, global targets and voluntary initiatives across multiple events and scales, we could document the ways in which conferences shape the assemblage of key elements in the rise of market-based conservation, global targets, and conservation enclosures. Across these events, we could compare the dynamics from meeting to

meeting and combine interviews and participant observation, building knowledge of the actors, issues, relationships, and bureaucratic cultures and constraints. Doing ethnography collaboratively enabled us to focus on the often unpredicted opportunities that actors have to intervene, the messiness of negotiations, the ways in which public, private, and nonprofit actors may align at particular moments and break at others, and how institutional norms condition, but do not determine, individual agency. By holding interviews before, during, and after the conferences, we could document individuals' motivations and perspectives, as well as historical and "hidden" political contexts. Through continual adjustment, we developed a balanced approach that allowed us to realize the benefits of collaboration—theoretically, practically, and substantively—without sacrificing the importance of individual flexibility and interest.

Ultimately, by conducting multiple CEEs, we were increasingly able to capture how diverse elements come together at particular moments, to identify the dynamic fields of governance they constitute, and to illustrate governance as actively produced through dynamic power relations. By following actors and ideas across and between multiple events, we could see how assemblages evolve over time, extending beyond the moment and site of a conference. We saw how certain devices, logics, and narratives serve to reinforce particular institutions' relevance within a shifting assemblage of global conservation governance. We found that maintaining locally-grounded research was important to understanding the implications of global meetings—the ways in which the global and local are co-produced in relation to each other, and how ideas from international meetings are translated to the ground and back. This grounding was also critical to recognizing the relationship between global targets and conservation enclosures, and to understanding the livelihoods at stake in global negotiations. Through the iterative process of refining methodology and theory, we found that assemblage provided a way to analyze conservation governance as a dynamic assemblage of state and nonstate actors, devices, and narratives that constantly shift and change relative to overlapping institutional boundaries, and in doing so, configure fields of global conservation governance. In this manner, the methodology also allowed us to see how political economy works inside assemblages. It revealed the contextual specificity of the multiple formations that assemblages can take at particular moments in time and space, and their dynamism, which provides continual openings for realignments that can contest the increasing prominence of market logics and global targets.

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