framework to analyse coordination mechanisms and institutional interplay in a context of continuous erosion of the Golden Age isomorphism between welfare state and nation state.

Sergiu Delcea
Central European University, Budapest
sergiu.delcea@gmail.com

References

Alice Vadrot: The Politics of Knowledge and Global Biodiversity

This book offers an insightful analysis of the process leading up to the foundation of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which, after more than seven years of negotiations, was established in 2012 as a new international body. Although the idea of an intergovernmental organisation for biodiversity was already mentioned in the 1990s, the 2005 conference on ‘Biodiversity: Science & Governance’, held in Paris, is generally regarded as the landmark event for the origin of IPBES. This event signalled the start of a consultative process to explore options for a new expert organisation on biodiversity. Subsequently, under the guidance of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a new phase of negotiations started and a number of intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meetings were convened, leading to the establishment of IPBES. Since then, three plenary meetings have taken place during which IPBES has decided on a work programme (2014–2018), which is currently being implemented.

The main idea of IPBES is that it will generate relevant and usable knowledge for the governance of biodiversity. In that sense, it is expected to play a role comparable to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). However, the analogy of the IPCC is not uncontested, as most experts agree that biodiversity needs a specific approach which is tailored to biodiversity issues and draws lessons from other global environmental assessments including the 1995 Global Biodiversity Assessment and the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [Beck, Esguerra and Gorg 2014; Brooks, Lamoreux and Soberón 2014]. From the start of the process in 2005, the development of IPBES has been characterised by controversy and contestation over a number of key issues. These include the role of local and indigenous knowledge; its relation to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD; and who would be allowed to become a member of the platform. Also from the beginning, there were strong voices that argued against the need for a new international body, saying that the CBD-SBSTTA could take care of whatever functions would be demanded of
IPBES or that biodiversity governance needs action rather than more knowledge. In other words, some argued that biodiversity loss was due to an implementation gap, not a knowledge gap. Thus, from the early beginning of the process there was no consensus as to whether a new organisation was needed at all.

Vadrot’s book takes the reader right in the middle of these negotiations. She seeks to answer the question how, in light of the contestations, many of which have not actually been resolved yet, IPBES could have been established. Most of the fieldwork on which the book is based was conducted before the plenary sessions of IPBES commenced and the author uses an impressive corpus of documents, interviews, and participant observations to present a detailed historical account of how IPBES came into being. To analyse the materials, the author outlines what she calls a novel theoretical approach. Indeed, the first part of the book is interlaced with numerous references to theoretical and conceptual literature about biodiversity, structure-agency debates, power-knowledge, and science policy interfaces.

According to Vadrot, the book’s conceptual approach is rooted in critical realism and political economy—specifically the work of Bob Jessop—but it also includes references to Michel Foucault and poststructuralism, Francis Bacon and positivism, and Sheila Jasanoff and constructivism. The concept of epistemic selectivities forms the centre of the book’s theoretical approach. The author explains that ‘the concept of epistemic selectivities rests upon the assumption that patterns of selectivity lead to the domination of specific knowledge forms, problems perceptions, and narratives over other and that these take part in the stabilisation of how the object to be governed is understood and assessed’ (p. 77). While this is a reasonable assertion, it remains unclear for readers how exactly the concept is positioned in relation to critical realism or the other schools of thought mentioned. A more thorough treatment and succinct operationalisation of the concept would have been desirable.

Perhaps more importantly, the application of the concept remains rather implicit in the analysis presented in chapter 5. This chapter identifies six different narratives of IPBES: (1) better politics, (2) better policies, (3) scientific evidence and usable knowledge, (4) convincing policymakers to act, (5) mainstreaming biodiversity, and (6) valuing biodiversity. These six narratives give a good overview of the different meanings attributed to the platform and the different hopes and expectations of what IPBES may achieve. Narratives 1 and 2 emphasise how IPBES is expected to improve the effectiveness and quality of biodiversity governance. Better policies refers amongst others to the expectation that IPBES will increase synergies between existing international agreements and complement the work of the CBD-SBSTTA which is seen as politicised. Narratives 3 and 4 put more emphasis on the ‘science-policy interface’ as a key site of intervention to improve the connections between scientific knowledge and policy making. Finally, narratives 5 and 6 articulate the different values and meanings of biodiversity, and the forms of knowledge that are needed to assess those values and meanings. These narratives include debates about indigenous knowledge, valuation, and the concept of ecosystem services.

With these narratives, we are a step closer to addressing the objective of the book and answering the question of how IPBES could happen. But here, unfortunately, the book does not deliver. Instead of an integrative analysis, the reader is basically left with these six narratives. Such an analysis could have included discussions about for example how, despite their differences, these narratives are apparently able to go together in practice, how they hide rather than resolve conflict, or how they blur dividing lines between the narratives.
To make sense of this, we suggest that some further reflection on the concept of epistemic selectivities is helpful. A concept like biodiversity that does not have a clear, operational and accepted scientific definition and basically refers to ‘all life on earth’ cannot be fully understood. Knowledge related to biodiversity will therefore always be incomplete and any attempt to measure, assess, or represent it will be selective. In that light, it becomes important to conceptualise how these processes of selection can be analysed and understood. Does selection imply a process of choosing from available alternatives? Such a conceptualisation appeals to a—critical—realist perspective as it leaves the idea of a singular and real biodiversity intact. Or, alternatively, reasoned from a constructivist or post-structuralist perspective, is epistemic selectivity entwined with ontology and does it refer not just to knowledge but also to the material production of biodiversity, and possibly multiple biodiversities? The latter, we suggest, may be a productive avenue for further research and theorising about IPBES that is able to go beyond the observation of the—unavoidable—epistemological selectivities and address the question how these selectivities materialise in practice and with what consequences [Turnhout, Neves and E. De Lijster 2014]. This question is now all the more pertinent as IPBES has recently adopted a conceptual framework that promises to be comprehensive and inclusive of different ways of knowing and living with biodiversity [Diaz et al. 2015; Borie and Hulme 2015].

To conclude, by offering a comprehensive and rich historical account of IPBES and the different meanings attributed to it, this book will prove to be an invaluable point of reference for future theorising about IPBES, about biodiversity, and about global environmental knowledge more generally. With IPBES now in operation, this book is also an invitation to develop new and complementary research paths to analyse: how global biodiversity is being constituted in practice; the role of the concept of Ecosystem Services in this process; the implementation of the IPBES conceptual framework and the inclusion of indigenous and local knowledge; and, importantly, as global experts’ organisations are constantly contested, how IPBES will prove to be reflexive and adaptive in the governance of biodiversity knowledge [Beck et al. 2014].

Esther Turnhout
Wageningen University
Esther.turnhout@wur.nl

Maud Borie
University of East Anglia, Norwich
m.borie@uea.ac.uk

Alejandro Esguerra
Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig
alejandro.esguerra@ufz.de

References


Peter Lozoviuk (ed.): Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Discourse of the 20th Century: The Contribution of Intellectuals from the Czech Lands to the Study of Collective Identities

This is a collection of ten essays from the 20th century written by authors with a Czech background living in Germany and writing in German. The common denominator of these texts is their ethnological perspective and reflection on the issue of nationalism. The texts focus on the theoretical reflections on ethnic and national minorities and tackle the social phenomena stemming from the existence of these minorities. Although the authors come from different intellectual paradigms, they all argue that the coexistence of different ethnic groups within one area leads to the emergence of specific social processes with pragmatic characteristics worthy of research and reflection.

The book is divided into three main sections. An introductory chapter presents all the authors and gives a good overview of the whole context and circumstances under which their texts were produced. The first three chapters cover the development of thought in research, evolving from an interest in national enclaves towards the comparative study of ethnic and national groups. Walter Kuhn frames the object of interest; he defines what a language island is, how it relates to ethnic groups, and how not to confuse it with the concept of a nation. Emerich K. Francis reflects upon the concept of a multi-national state, defining its characteristics and its constitutive elements. He also analyses four different examples of multi-national states have existed in history.

The second section of the book is the broadest and provides translations of work by scholars who have attracted significant interest on the international level. The three chapters start with a discussion of the broader concept of nationalism and its analysis and reflection then analyse the criteria behind the formation of national groups are formed, and they end by narrowing down the concept and focusing on nationalism in Eastern Europe and in communist regimes. Hans Kohn argues that nationalisms in different countries are tightly interconnected and have developed under mutual influence. He stresses the importance of national sovereignty as a key condition for nationalism. Kohn comes up with an idea very much like Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’, having discussed the emotional connection between people from different backgrounds and parts of the country long before Anderson elaborated this concept [Anderson 2006]. Kohn talks about nationalism in terms of unifying the lives of millions of people who do not know each other in person and connecting them emotionally to a territory that cannot be travelled through. He stresses the emotional and mental character of nationalism. Eugen continues with a discussion of the myths about nationalism. He questions the necessity of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic characteristics in order for nationalism to emerge: ‘It is not the ethnic groups in common sense that are carriers and objects of nationalism. It seems to depend more on whether a certain group is self-sustaining in the consequence of a division of labour; and primarily whether there is a division of labour which presupposes the differences between members of the group.’ (p. 140) His analysis goes beyond the generally dis-