



# Introduction

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Taisuke Miyauchi and Mayumi Fukunaga

## Abstract

Why does environmental governance not always work well? This and related questions continue arising among stakeholders, policymakers, and academics, despite global aspirations and ongoing efforts to define and implement “good” environmental governance, cultivated through maturing literature and based on practices across diverse communities, interpretations, and implementations. Indeed, participatory institutionalizations have often led to empty formalities in process and outcomes, engendering social apathy among all parties, leading to standardized governance solutions that are supposed to work well but do not.

This book gathers case studies from Japan and links them with contextualized micro-theories that themselves have arisen from the field and seeks to share both the stories and insights as practical wisdom for better environmental governance. Japan’s archipelago of islands, communities, and resource issues has struggled with late-modern capitalistic and toxic ruins due to environmental pollution and massive development prioritized through rapid economic growth after World War II, chronic and acute stressors that include such socioeconomic structures-induced disasters as the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident. The continuing damages across generations have continued to beseech us to stay with the aspirations of environmental governance, even when it does not always work. In Japan, our aging and declining populations urgently need to change the heretofore structures of SES governance and relationships with nonhuman beings in our shared systems, including the underlying climate crisis affecting our

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T. Miyauchi (✉)  
Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan  
e-mail: [miyauchi@let.hokudai.ac.jp](mailto:miyauchi@let.hokudai.ac.jp)

M. Fukunaga  
University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan  
e-mail: [m-fukunaga@edu.k.u-tokyo.ac.jp](mailto:m-fukunaga@edu.k.u-tokyo.ac.jp)

everyday lives. Local stories about environmental governance, including those that we present, often seem too local and specific to generalize; however, the contextualized micro-theories that we offer here, and merged with our fieldwork, just might enable those involved with environmental governance in other regions to expand their imaginaries toward new, innovative activities.

We look forward to furthering these conversations—and especially, to creating robust and enduring solutions.

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**Keywords**

Contextualized reality · Complexity · Local values · Uncertainty · Adaptive governance · Legitimacy

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## **1.1 Why Does Environmental Governance Not Work Well?**

### **1.1.1 Environmental Governance and Its Institutionalization**

Why does environmental governance not work well?

With a moan and with anger, with frustration, and with helplessness, and sometimes with resignation, this question is all-too-often posed to environmental sociologists when we are in the field as fieldworkers and practitioners. We hear this and related questions from researchers and policymakers, from concerned citizens and local administrators who govern natural resources, property holders, and from those who visit and whose activities and relations with these natural resources are found in the area of concern.

And still, the number of concerned voices continues to rise, despite how well-institutionalized local and regional environmental governance has become and how well we understand this history and its successes (Berkes et al. 2002; Bodin & Prell 2011; Hogg 2012; Mori 2013; Murota & Takeshita eds. 2013; Sato, Chabay, Helgeson eds. 2018). Environmental policies and best management practices in Japan became established at the beginning of the 1970s in response to chronic and acute forms of environmental pollution, driven by industrial toxins that were a result of the prioritization of rapid economic growth after World War II. As the national government learned about local-scale issues, basic components for governance were formulated and implemented: legal systems, regulations for control and rehabilitation, agencies for management, and compensation measures. Indeed, during these times, many civil antipollution movements contributed to efforts at democratizing environmental management (Broadbent 1998; Iijima 1993; Georges 2002; Miyamoto 2014). Regardless of some efforts, policymaking and decision-making processes in Japan were occupied by bureaucratic paternalism centering on technocratic experts more than on the participatory involvement of stakeholders (Funahashi 1985; Kajita 1988).

Despite these early problems, there was awareness of and action toward developing forms of governance imbued with democratic values such as stakeholder participation, accountability, science-based understanding, and procedural justice—all of

which began to be implemented and institutionalized in Japan soon after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the so-called Rio Earth Summit, in 1992 (Matsushita 2002; Kitoh 1999; Miyauchi 2006). This evolving transformation came in response to the rapid, globalizing spread of “resources governance” schemes and theories related not only to public policies and cooperation management, but also to the groundswell of increasing citizen participation (Maruyama et al. 2015; Miyauchi 2013). Within this community, institutional–technocratic nexus would evolve insipient notions of governance, especially with moral underpinnings and political imperatives in service to public policy (Maruyama 2014; Miyauchi 2013). These came in response to the insistent, hegemonic emergence of neoliberal globalizing, including borderless (and morals-less) economies, a re-entrenched hierarchical stratification, recurring community-scale injustices, aggravated environmental problems such as climate change, and increased dependency between ecosystems and human societies.

At the same time, such borderless problems, across regional and social–organizational scales, have helped to create participation spaces for diverse players—from multinational businesses to local residents—which also means more dynamic contestations and conflicts among devoted participants. As such, environmental governance—as concepts, theories, models, and best practices—has had to shape itself as multifaceted in order to engage with and bridge bottom-up initiatives and their resistances with conventional (and globalized) top-down governing, all while developing ties of solidarity (i.e., ties of trust) across multiple scales, fields, policies, and stakeholders (Sato et al. 2018; Olsson et al. 2004; Murota and Takeshita eds. 2013). In response to the many, many globalized movements, administrative agencies began to implement and institutionalize governance formats for public policies, particularly since around 2000. These most recent policies and institutionalizations include setting councils for consensus building through citizen participation and creating social learning programs that promote attendance and partnership across all participants to share visions for the future (Matsushita 2002).

### 1.1.2 Empty Formality?

So, why cannot such participatory institutionalizations—of processes and outcomes, of participants and relations—make for effective and enduring natural resources governance in the field? The following brief story about a local forest restoration project in Northern Japan can tell us much about this quandary.

Certain suburban community members realized that their neighboring forest was deteriorating rapidly, and they recognized the increasing risk of landslides and floods associated with intense rainfalls and the increasing number and scale of typhoons, all due to climate change. Some of the local community members started conservation activities, including planting trees and bushwalking to characterize conditions and estimate risks. Then, they founded a forest restoration council for better local forest governance according to advice from local government foresters. They next followed an institutionalized format for how to help the council and invited

stakeholders—including logging companies, renewable energy companies, local and national policymakers, local schools, and citizen organizations—to sit with each other and participate in the forest roundtable.

The council started out so active, enthusiastic, and successfully collaborative in its early meetings. However, within a year, it started malfunctioning. Residents began feeling neglected by the other stakeholder groups who gathered in the council. National agencies focused on only scientific observations performed by themselves. The local government only cared about procedural formality and publicity. People from outside the community frequently came to the forest, did their activities, and broadcast them without any positive communication with or connection to local stakeholders. Local caretakers of the forest were frustrated with the outsider-driven kinds of forest use, many of which were seen as having negative impacts according to local knowledge. Scientists in the council asked other actors to prioritize their “accurate” scientific knowledge and insight.

Still, the council persisted, participants were present, and so, the official documents stated, “the council maintained well and we collaboratively set goals for next year.” Each activity by each group was recorded on the list of collaborative works, and the local government secured the next year’s budget with the report. As long as they could secure a budget, the council could continue. In light of these experiences with environmental governance, the local people who had started the conservation activities voluntarily faded out from the activities one by one.

And soon enough, those who had attended the council began to ask themselves, “Why does environmental governance not work well?”

To answer the question, it is easy to say that we need to change entrenched bureaucratic systems that penetrate from the national to local governments and which have mired themselves in the administrative dictum not to disturb what has been arranged. Surely, even in such a typical “Japanese” context, one would hope for candor about the causes of the problem. However, committed participants in the field expect from researchers more than just a critique. They expect us to give them more pragmatic theories and concepts, tools, and best practices, all in service to enabling and supporting discursive engagement, providing feedback about their efforts, and aiding in exploring relevant paths to achieve better results.

We often hear these topics and questions: What can motivate local administrative agency staff to engage in substantive collaboration—to go beyond offering nothing more than procedural obligation? Does leadership matter? If so, which kinds have worked well? And who leads? How can outsiders start meaningful conversations with local stakeholders? What kind of role can we specifically take as researchers?

These are questions that come up again and again for researchers and practitioners worldwide and those who struggle and make everyday efforts for good environmental governance. Theoretical frameworks of environmental governance are not unified, but several moral and political imperatives are globally shared: accountability, inclusiveness, diversity, plurality, legitimacy, transparency, adaptability, and transformativity, in addition to foundational aspects of participatory democratic governance such as participation, collaboration, and fairness. There has been a diversity of interpretations of these moral and political imperatives in public policies,

civic activities, and academic action research arenas both internationally and domestically, as well as meta-analyses of those imperatives. These efforts appear in the rich environmental governance literature inherent in participatory adaptive governance (Folke et al. 2005; Chaffin et al. 2014; Chaffin and Gunderson 2016; Gupta 2008; Margerum and Robinson 2016); collaboration among transboundary stakeholders at multiple geographic and political levels (Gunderson 1999); flexibility and transformativity within and between stakeholder groups and within and between institutional and governmental structures (Ostrom 1990, 2010; Olsson et al. 2006; Armitage and Plummer 2010); participatory consensus and process building through conceptions of deliberative democracy (Koontz 2016); and the integration of scientific methods and findings with traditional ecological knowledge epistemologies, practices, and understandings (Folke et al. 2005; Armitage and Plummer 2010; Sato et al. 2018).

This maturing literature on the diversity of interpretations and implementations shows us that sharing micro-theories from different fields and contextualized for site-specific situations give researchers sparks of insight and pragmatic hints as we consider specific solutions to bring to eager stakeholders. For example, we already know that cultivating transformativity of actors is one of the key issues. As such, how can we expect to gain transformativity of actors with such a rigid bureaucracy? How can we understand what kinds of transformations are efficacious and what kinds are not efficacious? If you try unilaterally to interpret and implement some moral or political imperative in a local situation, you, too, are likely to end up asking yourself, “why does environmental governance not work well?”

For these reasons, this book gathers case studies with contextualized micro-theories from the field in order to share them as practical wisdom for better environmental governance.

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## **1.2 Toward “Good” Environmental Governance**

### **1.2.1 Highly Contextualized Realities in Complexity**

Another concern of this book is the gap between the moral and political imperatives of environmental governance and the realities in the field, and how participants can negotiate with each other. Their words, actions, values, and goals are often contested, and such contestations often bring dysfunctioning or deadlock to environmental governance in the field.

For example, wildlife management, especially regarding how to reorganize zoning among local communities, buffer zones, and wildlife territories, is now one of the critical issues in the suburbs and rural communities in Japan. Amid Japan’s continuing depopulation and reorganization of human uses of social spaces that include nature, wildlife such as bears, deer, wild boar, and monkeys have increasingly become threats and risks to small-scale agriculture, kitchen gardens, and everyday lives themselves. Experts and local government officials, who believe that participatory and collaborative approaches can make for “good” environmental

governance, make a lot of effort to bring residents together and to keep them motivated, even as residents often do not want to participate in such activities willingly. Rather, they show clear unwillingness and reluctance to join in governance. Such unwillingness and reluctance are not because they lack knowledge or have less awareness of risks (Suzuki and Muroyama 2010; Suzuki 2013). When they consider the cost–benefit trade-off of environmental governance for their everyday lives, the residents often conclude that it is a better strategy to accept damages and suffering rather than paying monetary and human labor costs to protect their garden. Because of the limited resources of time, money, and human power in aging, depopulated areas, what benefits they can gain from the limited resources, they can distribute them, and at what cost—these are the central issues that should be prioritized among residents. In other words, in such realities, the mobilization of locals for participation and collaboration in service to achieving “good governance” means depriving them of their time, money, and human power that could otherwise be used for actions that contribute to their livelihood strategies with higher priority than wildlife management. It was simply not cost-effective for residents.

This story is emblematic of the highly contextualized and sensitive situation in which governance is often embedded. We also find in the story how the complexity of value systems and the many mechanisms for determining what should be prioritized underlie governance. There is always a layered politics of values that are plural, contested, and structured differently at an individual level and a collective level. How can we prioritize one set of values over other sets of [contested] values?

Besides the moral and political imperatives in the pursuit of “good” governance, there is also a gap between the local values and the globally standardized normative values that conceptualize what environmental governance aims to achieve, including such notions as sustainability, biodiversity, circular economies, and low-carbon living. From local everyday perspectives, those globally standardized values are, unless translated or embedded into very familiar contexts, quite ambiguous and are not recognized as options to choose for their livelihood strategies. Furthermore, what values can be prioritized depends on contextual, historical, political, and cultural pathways. Thus, the value dynamics of residents are intimately shaped by the dynamics of everyday politics and path dependencies, not to mention cost–benefit assessments and power structures. Without negotiating with such local value dynamics, “good” environmental governance will not occur and any efforts to make it occur will almost certainly malfunction.

### 1.2.2 To Benefit From Uncertainty

In the literature that deals with complexity in environmental governance, an adaptive governance scheme occupies large theoretical and practical concerns (Lemos and Agrawal 2006; Chaffin et al. 2014). Adaptive governance emerged as an outgrowth of social—ecological system (SES) theory, which visualizes, historicizes, and theorizes linkages between and among the social and the ecological for analyzing and describing the world as materialized relationships and accumulations of historical interactions. Since the term “adaptive governance” formerly appeared in *Science*

(Didiezet et al. 2003), adaptive governance had developed to respond to and manage near- and long-term uncertainty and complexity in highly contextualized situations.

One of the early advocates of adaptive governance, C. S. Holling, states that adaptive governance is a scheme for making certainty out of uncertainty.

Man has always lived in a sea of the unknown and yet has prospered. His customary method of dealing with the unknown has been trial-and-error. (...) The search for a solution should not replace trial-and-error with some attempt to eliminate the uncertain and the unknown. (...) Rather, the proper direction lies in the design of policies and economic developments that can allow trial-and-error to work again. (...) This view is the heart of adaptive environment management - an interactive process using techniques that not only reduce uncertainty but also benefit from it. The goal is to develop more resilient policies (Holling 1978: 8–9).

Of course, all uncertainties vary, be they sociocultural, ecological, and/or socio-economic. And, they occur over long periods of time. Moreover, because they are so entangled with each other, they often accelerate across scales and by degree. The early contributors to theoretical framings of adaptive governance recognized the inadequacy of scientific management due to facing the inherent uncertainty of ecological systems (Walker et al. 2004; Folke et al. 2005; Brunner et al. 2005; Folke 2006). As Holling states, adaptiveness is an essential imperative in environmental governance and benefits from uncertainty, as well as from complexity and interconnection (and entanglement) of contexts. As such, adaptive governance is expected to mediate social factors for structuring well loops and recursive processes of monitoring, experimentation, and feedback to ensure a healthy system.

### 1.2.3 Legitimacy Matters

Another significant aspect of adaptive governance is the rise of community-based initiatives in scientific ecological management (Dietz et al. 2003; Walker et al. 2004; Folke et al. 2005; Folke 2006; Chaffin et al. 2014). To cultivate community-based initiatives, the literature on adaptive governance and co-management gives weight to legitimacy and social learning (Holling 1978; Gunderson et al. 1995; Olsson et al. 2004; Brosius et al. 2005; Berkes 2009; Cosens 2013). Due to the highly contextualized situations in field settings, legitimacy and social learning are two essential dimensions for structuring “good” community-based initiatives. Legitimacy here is a social, mutual recognition for those who govern and subordinate about ownership, usufruct rights, and rules, but also regarding the prioritization of values, properness of stakeholder-ness, and leadership. Social learning can cultivate participatory motivations, collaboration, and stakeholder-ness among those who might have concerns, as well as bridge into multiple and different knowledge systems such as local knowledge and scientific knowledge (Reed et al. 2010).

For example, how we define contextually sensitive stakeholder-ness is critical for community-based initiatives, and it leads to how we can continue to create public-sphere and public-access spaces that engender consensus building. And yet, who can be a stakeholder, and what is the proper set of criteria to decide who are

stakeholders? Here is an example of a certain successful consensus meeting. After consensus was successfully achieved in the voluntary stakeholder meeting, residents who had never attended the meeting started activities that went against the consensus. Furthermore, a powerful leader of the neighborhood community opposed the consensus and refused any activity that was decided at the meeting. However, due to its voluntariness, the consensus meeting did not have any effect and restriction on those who were outside of consensus processes and their activities against consensus. These events demotivated the consensus attendants and made the consensus meeting only for show as an alibi for agencies (Hirakawa 2005). This story leads us to another essential question. What is consensus? How can we recognize that consensus is rightly or successfully achieved? These questions go back to the question of stakeholder-ness. That is, who should appropriately be involved in the consensus-building processes? After all, under what set of conditions and situation can we truly say that an enduring consensus was achieved? Moreover, without any legally binding framework to structure consensus building, how can it have influence and constraints on its implementation? For those questions, legitimacy building and social learning can be essential pathways to explore answers collaboratively, as both interact with each other, within and across stakeholder groups.

The papers in this book frame the many dimensions of legitimacy and social learning and focus on narrative case studies as analytical and pragmatic tools. Narratives constitute discourses, including performance interactivity, and they tell stories that situate meaningful events and experiences amid the complexities of environmental-governance settings. Narratives contain spoken words, written texts, everyday conversations, and behaviors that convey stories, sometimes nonverbalized and unspoken, fictional and nonfictional, and contingently told or chronologically told. Narratives function as a boundary object (Star and Griesemer 1989), bridging stakeholders with different values and translating values between each other. As such, in these highly contextualized field situations that have complex values systems and uncertainties, narratives are useful as both analytic and pragmatic tools.

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### 1.3 What This Book Tells You

Each story in this book arises out of Japan's postwar high economic growth and its myriad consequences: rapid urbanization, pollution of the commons, abandoned peoples and communities, socioecological damages incurred by artifact-nature hybrid disasters, and postwar population shifts within and into cities and the more recent trend of rural depopulation. Whether sudden, extreme events like the Fukushima nuclear accident or slower-acting sets of transformative forces, each case study begins as a story, contextualized in a local environment, and tied deeply into the everyday lives of residents. Each story has relevant micro-theories that arise from the field setting. We believe that such micro-theories, including the specific contextual dynamics, relations, and tensions amid these case studies, will help



readers who also face, in different contexts, such realities in the field, and find themselves asking, “why does environmental governance not work well?”

For these, micro-theories extracted from the field have a shared theme: How to facilitate the regeneration and reorganization of local communities and their environments, which have experienced recurrent disruptions and degradations, in order to assure that these social–ecological systems can maintain their historical identity? Due to globally shared realities such as a rapid development growth and urbanization worldwide, reorganization of globalized and globalizing supply chains, and an increase in socioecological disasters due to climate change, we Japanese environmental sociologists present our experiences and our accumulated academic and practical insights as contributions to local communities and their situations, which continue to face acute, dynamic transformations. In the process, we expect that our stories and insights will further contribute to the development of SES theories and to adaptive governance, giving insights for the pursuit of socioecological regenerative-ness, particularly about how imperatives in environmental governance can be translated into effective pathways for “good” environmental governance, whatever the historic, contingent, and ongoing situation.

Specifically, case studies in Part One articulate essential criteria in environmental governance and situate these structural dimensions in Japan’s historical and socioecological contexts. In particular, their micro-theories contribute to arguments about plurality, legitimacy, and social adaptability in environmental governance contexts. Often, residents may not show their values, not least because they cannot name well what values systems they live with as their own, nor how they negotiate with other value systems from family members to national or global standardized values that surround them, nor even what prioritizations they enact, implicitly or explicitly, in their everyday lives. Soon enough, collaboration conflicts often reveal the heretofore unseen, and thus, local community members must confront a range of contested values within their own community and across stakeholder groups. And so, these sudden contestations of values often point to the reason why the conflicts are so confused and entangled with each other.

As such, these case studies seek to unfold these inchoate and contextualized values from the narratives, to explore what can be shared, and to be a node for linking, negotiating, and communicating across differences. Their findings as nodes include historical and communal relationships inherently associated with collective actions and memories in watershed governance (Chap. 2); visualizations of contributions to local communities and forest restoration by mountain bikers as outsiders (Chap. 3); redundant spaces in the rice paddies with ecological capacity for intergenerational creativity (Chap. 4); a local organization that creates giving–gift relationships among urban citizens and countryside residents for mitigating wildlife conflicts (Chap. 5); and nonhuman species, seaweed, as a signifier that can translate and re-contextualize socioecological regenerative-ness for human and nonhuman stakeholders (Chap. 6).

How to manage, distribute, and mitigate risk, and how to restore abundance and resilience for individuals, for communities, and for their social–ecological systems is another essential aspiration of “good” environmental governance. For environmental

sociologists in Japan, this has meant facing the fact that both social and ecological damages interact with each other and that they spread, link, and exacerbate sufferings and damages to humans and nonhumans, near and long term. Of course, even as damages and risks are bureaucratically evaluated, converted into numeric rating scales, and prioritized to be managed, compensated, and insured, amid these objectifying scrutinies, all that is within these life stories and narratives, especially such pain and suffering, would be left un verbalized.

In this light, Part Two has three papers that describe layered damages, including un verbalized damages and risks for both today's and future generations. Among the three, two papers chose the issue of the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011. Chapter 8 depicts the realities and politics of nuclear evacuation, narrativizing the sufferings of evacuees and characterizing the difficulties of governance intended to support rebuilding the lives of evacuees. Such difficulties arose from the limited capacities of well-meaning actors, those local municipalities who were expected to be facilitators and mediators in adaptive support of the evacuees. In turn, the difficulty of renewing and maintaining adaptiveness in the aftermath of the nuclear accident is also revealed in the politics and management of compensation for rebuilding small-scale industries that use local natural resources. Chapter 9 illustrates the undocumented and unvisualized damages to the local small-scale businesses and their efforts to gain compensation and reorganize their business. Relatedly, even after the nuclear accident, the renewable energy transition in Japan has still been slow. Chapter 10 clarifies and unfolds the path dependency problems behind such slowness and then explores to create positive chains of benefits and mitigation of risks both in the intra- and inter-generations or the achievement of expanded distributive justice.

Finally, Part Three presents case studies that engage practical tools, processes, and designs with narratives, especially designs of processes for collaborativeness in knowledge, legitimacy, and stakeholder-ness production. These in turn break down, translate, and negotiate with the aforementioned meta-values of conservation, resilience, and sustainability, as stakeholders seek to establish their conceptions with what these mean in their local socioecological governance contexts. Furthermore, these ways of creating social capacities reach across to ideas and practices that aid in cultivating the capabilities of SESs, and of future visions for our more-than-human world. The tools and methods that these chapters provide us include evaluation methods of adaptability in the highly contextualized fields (Chap. 11); collaborative creation of narratives for actualizing local knowledge in order to motivate participation in adaptive governance (Chap. 12); narratives that help to drive transformativity and to bridge jurisdictional borders among stakeholders (Chap. 13); scientific narratives that can be boundary objects for co-design of urban sustainable transition (Chap. 14); co-designing workshops in action research in order to cope with the hegemonic power and social structures that are common in the field (Chap. 15); and leadership that can create the empathy-based assistance to achieve transformativity in adaptive governance (Chap. 16).

We hope that the readers will explore and understand how these Japanese researchers, as scholar practitioners in the field, were able to derive relevant micro-theories, tools, and methods through their dialogical interactions with

stakeholders in the field. We further hope that discussion with the readers of the issues, concepts, and findings that this book presents will contribute to the theoretical and practical development of adaptive, “good”—and effective—environmental governance for the near- and long-term future of all.

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