

Land as an Object of “Good Governance”: Beyond Rights and Property

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Abstract:

Recent years have witnessed growing interest in land as a resource to be exploited, object of discursive engagement, and problem arena within international development. "Land governance" as a concept has come to be codified in very specific ways. This paper takes an historical and ontological approach to interrogate this evolution and the visibilities and invisibilities rendered by the consolidation of a global land governance regime. To do this, we draw on original documents in the grey literature to examine how land governance has "come to be" as a concept and domain of practice; critical scholarship that interrogates these concepts to render visible the work that they do; and ontologically-rich ethnographies that articulate other ways of knowing "land" to highlight the invisibilities rendered by these framings. Dominant framings of land governance emphasize land as an entity isolated from other things or relationships; land as "resource"; a strong focus on property and rights to frame engagements with land, and in particular formal and privatized title; and land as a commodity, among others. The flip side of this construction include outcomes rendered invisible by these framings, and the possibility of governing land otherwise. The "work" owing from these framings include the freeing up of customary land (and tenure security) for investors; reduced ecological connectivity; and the disruption of ecological functions and social relationships. Ontologically-attuned ethnographies show how land might be envisioned otherwise - as an entity calling for duties as much as rights; constitutive of and continuous with social relationships; or as relationally linked to all life forms.

For the full paper, please see the paper titled "Environmental Governance: Broadening Ontological Spaces for a More Livable World" submitted by Laura German.