

Institutions in Governance of Land Use: An Introduction

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Land management is at the center of some of the most pressing challenges in contemporary urban development, including urban expansion, infrastructure-led transformation, transition from agricultural economy, environmental governance, and climate-sensitive resource management. Land is not merely a physical asset; it is also a legal relation, a governance object, a source of livelihood, and a foundation for ecological resilience. Studies assembled in this book demonstrate that land management requires attention to land value creation, ownership structures, tenure security, institutional quality, environmental limits, and the socio-political processes through which land is allocated, used, protected, and contested.

The book contains 10 original papers (List of Contributions) covering three themes. The first set of contributions examines how land values are shaped by state action, market expectations, and development demand. In the first paper of this book, Contribution 1 shows that state action such as compulsory acquisition processes can generate both “blight” and “hope” effects in peri-urban land markets, illustrating how infrastructure projects that require land restructure price formation even before formal acquisition of land is completed. This concern with land value formation and changing use is complemented by the work on ecosystem service bundles in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area in Contribution 2, where rapid urbanization reconfigured trade-offs between grain production, carbon sequestration, runoff regulation, and water conservation. The contribution of these chapters is that the value of land cannot be reduced merely to exchange price alone, as it also reflects ecological functions, regulatory decisions, and anticipated future development trajectories.

A second theme concerns transformations in agrarian ownership, use, and continuity of agricultural activity. Contribution 3 shows how farmland ownership decisions are shaped by social, spatial, and economic drivers, with implications for agricultural sustainability and land transfer pathways. Relatedly, Contribution 4 demonstrate that in Chinese cities, state support favors capital-intensive and peri-urban agricultural models while marginalizing small-scale intra-urban cultivation, despite the latter’s social and ecological contributions. These studies also highlight that land-use change is not only a matter of economics or planning, but also of intergenerational transfer, social legitimacy, and the political privileging of particular land-use models.

Questions of governance and institutional quality form another major thread running through this book. Contribution 5 shows that weak governance, corruption, insecure land registration, and limited transparency in Ethiopian urban land management undermine tenure security, reduce public revenue, constrain investment, and intensify land disputes. In a related theme, Contribution 6 demonstrates that institutional fragmentation and land tenure conflicts have hindered forest and landscape restoration in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The contribution to China’s agricultural investment along the Belt and Road



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Initiative extends this discussion, as Contribution 7 shows that political, social, economic, and agricultural-management risks shape land-based investment environments across countries. These papers emphasize that land governance is not simply an administrative function; it is a decisive mediator of inclusion, exclusion, conflict, and legitimacy.

A further dimension of governance quality is revealed in the context of market-based environmental regulation. Contribution 8 on South Korea's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) pilot project demonstrates that the effectiveness of carbon governance is conditioned by local institutional capacity and regional economic structure. The chapter highlights that a balanced approach combining stricter regulation with market-oriented incentives is essential for the sustainable transition of local land economies. This reinforces the broader argument in this book that governance quality is decisive for both environmental and land developmental outcomes.

Chapters in this book also broaden the analytical lens by foregrounding environmental governance, sustainability transitions, and development risk. Contribution 2 presents a framework for identifying ecosystem service bundles and governing trade-offs in a rapidly urbanizing region, showing how urbanization shifts landscapes toward different ecological profiles. Contribution 4 likewise reveal that ecological policies can privilege technologically visible and state-sanctioned forms of urban agriculture while overlooking grassroots practices. The study of agricultural investment risk across Belt and Road countries by Contribution 7 similarly shows that land-linked development strategies now operate within wider transnational circuits of finance, diplomacy, and resource competition. These studies highlight that sustainability is not external to land governance; it is one of the principal terrains on which land politics now unfolds.

The nexus between environmental governance and community rights over land is further examined in the context of forest conservation. Contribution 9's analysis of the Implementation of Governance, Forest Landscapes, and Livelihoods (I-GFLL) project in Lao PDR evaluates how Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) was applied in practice. Their chapter demonstrates that even well-intentioned frameworks for land and forest governance can fall short when implementation capacity, cultural sensitivity, and community participation are insufficiently supported.

The book cautions by foregrounding limits: the limit to carrying capacity, environmentally disruptive development, and land governance models that prioritize narrow forms of efficiency over social justice. Discussing the carrying capacity of Greek islands, Contribution 10 demonstrates the importance of evaluating land development against ecological thresholds and regional resource constraints. In their study on the Greater Bay Area ecosystem-services, Contribution 2 similarly shows that unmanaged urban expansion can shift landscapes from productive and regulating functions toward low-service states, with important implications for long-term resilience. Contributions in this book show that land systems must be understood as socio-ecological systems whose sustainability depends on balancing productivity, equity, and environmental integrity.

The book makes three broader contributions. First, it demonstrates that land questions are fundamentally relational: changes in ownership, pricing, regulation, and use are embedded in wider political and ecological systems. Second, it shows that governance quality matters immensely, not only for efficiency, but also for fairness, legitimacy, and sustainability. Third, it highlights that future land research must continue to bridge disciplinary divides, particularly between property and planning studies, agrarian studies, urban governance, and environmental analysis.

The chapters in the book invite a more integrated approach to land scholarship, one attentive to value and vulnerability, productivity and protection, rights and risks, and growth and limits. An important message therein is that the future of land use governance

will depend on whether institutions can reconcile developmental ambition with ecological responsibility and social justice.

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