

Green Transformation Must Involve Everyone

**Reviewed by
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I. Scoones, M. Leach, and P. Newell (Eds.), *The Politics of Green Transformations*, Routledge, 2015, 220 pages. ISBN: 9781138792906

The Politics of Green Transformations examines the multi-dimensional nature of politics and power through an interdisciplinary and multi-sited approach to see the crucial role that it can play in shaping green transformations for a sustainable future. The book embraces the notion that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners globally must be transparent to the fact that sustainability transformations are inherently political in nature, not only in terms of the discourse but also in terms of actions (in the descriptive and prescriptive sense). This would drive policymakers and other stakeholders toward more relevant and impactful actions in the direction of a green transformative change.

The book is organized in two sections, where the first five chapters examine the limited success that has been achieved by conventional environmental policy pathways that are primarily top-down, highly institutionalized, and rigid. The second half of the book investigates several alternative pathways for transformation with its associated complexities and dynamics. The authors in the second half draw from critical social theory and politico-economic perspective while offering insights on the path forward, which involves challenging the status quo for a sustainable future.

In their introduction, Scoones, Leach, and Newell discuss the urgent requirement for considering the importance of power dynamics and politics in academia, industry, and the government because it forms the very basis of green transformations. The editors share their frustration on the lack of consideration of politics in environmental policymaking that ultimately leads to weaker policies. Leach, Millstone and Stirling emphasize the domination of natural science theories and top-down approaches in the environmental policy discourse that leads to a very shallow understanding of green transformations. The authors adequately support their arguments through the 2° C, and planetary boundaries

examples, which are typical top-down natural science approaches to transformations. Newell questions the status-quo by raising important questions on the success of transformations in the capitalist regime, which are highly institutionalized and rigid in terms of fossil fuel investments.

Using a political economy lens, Matthew Lockwood examines policymaking in an institutional context by performing a comparative analysis of developed (UK and Germany) and developing (India and China) countries. He suggests that for policies to be successful, “they must be self-reinforcing, creating constituencies for their own implementation and expansion” (p.99) and must focus on feedback effects of policies and politics for potential “lock-ins.” Adrian Smith and Adrian Ely push the envelope in the realm of bottom-up and grassroots green transformations that challenge the current socio-economic paradigm and focus on an alternative pathway to politico-economic transformations. Melissa Leach and Ian Scoones use a critical social theory lens to analyze three case studies to prove how transformational change can be inspired by forming strategic partnerships and coalitions.

Meanwhile, Mazzucato and Spratt employ a political economy and critical social theory lens to investigate the potential of an entrepreneurial state and modern financial models to pave the way forward toward a transformative change. Drawing in examples from governments (Germany, China) and private sector players (First Solar and General Electric for solar and wind technologies respectively), the authors debunk several falsified notions on transformation and suggest potential green transformative strategies involving future incentives and institutional structures. In the final chapter, Hubert Schmitz summarizes the urgent need of an accelerated environmental transformation through the formation of alliances and coalitions between multiple stakeholders (government, businesses, municipalities, financial

institutions, and citizens) while embracing the plurality in the pathways to achieving sustainability.

The authors dominantly use a political economy and critical social theory lens to analyze and support their discussions on green transformations and sustainability. Another case of a political economy perspective is Andy Stirling's exhortation for accepting more radical forms of environmental policies that are not necessarily reliant on certainty and current norms. Stirling argues for embracing the messy and ambiguous nature of environmental politics and transformations and being very open and transparent in accepting challenges to the current status quo. Newell makes another strong argument that by not endorsing that innovation in the technological or market-based domain solely would lead to a sustainable transformation. Rather, he is skeptical about any significant progress that would be feasible in the current nexus of capitalism, which is obsessed with consumerism and growth.

The book makes a considerable contribution to advancing the always evolving transformations in literature by emphasizing different socio-political perspectives to achieve green transformation. However, instead of endorsing one viewpoint over the other, the authors want the reader to embrace the social and political underpinnings of these multiple perspectives. In summary, *The Politics of Green Transformations* strongly endorses a pluralist approach to green transformations.

The authors mention how the production of knowledge and its subsequent application by various stakeholders is a highly political process, and therefore, a significant change is required in the realm of knowledge production and mobilization for sustainability. Policymakers need to question the very process of knowledge production and its associated bias that is promoting a politics and transformation of "privilege." Such questioning relates to the importance of knowledge mobilization for community engagement. The authors underscore the challenges that may arise

in the transformation process when actors want to challenge the status quo and radicalize their transformation agenda by addressing issues of social justice and the politics of inequality and injustice in the green transformations process.

Despite being so relevant for today's transformation agenda, the authors take some conflicting and controversial standpoints that may weaken some of their arguments. The authors do not account for the disparity in the income, education, or Human Development Index of countries when they advance their arguments for green transformations. This makes their stance glib, immature, and controversial on a couple of occasions, especially when they suggest radical restructuring of institutions. The book's neglect of global justice issues, especially around total consumption vs. per capita consumption of nations, and the associated barriers that rapid urbanization and industrialization present to the transformative process makes some of their arguments weak and controversial. While the book's underlying theme endorses a plurality of perspectives, it does not provide a coherent explanation of the plurality of top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

The book can appeal to a broad spectrum of audience exploring answers to the underlying complexities of transformative growth and sustainable transitions. It is suited for upper-year undergraduate and graduate students in a broad array of disciplines like sustainability science, international relations, development studies, political science, public policy, public administration, anthropology, and business administration. It can also be of great interest to researchers, policymakers, and environmental activists who want to delve into the depths of sustainable transformations and the ripple effect of politics, especially when dealing with communities. Non-academic audiences including citizens and nongovernmental organizations can find ideas to foster and drive transformative solutions from the bottom-up and the political implications of doing so.