

RGS-IBG CFP

31 August to 3 September 2021

Celebrity campaigners, conscientious contributors, and risk-bearing subjects in the environmental governance breach

Abstract:

This session seeks to highlight and explore the nexus of decentralization, responsabilization, and individualization of environmental governance across a range of social, spatial, political, economic, and historical contexts. While the appropriate scale for environmental governance has been an enduring question in geographical scholarship (Adger 2001, Giordano 2003, Bulkeley 2005, Reed and Bruyneel 2010, Robbins 2020), this work has not yielded any easy answers. For instance, sustained critiques of top-down, technocratic approaches to environmental concerns (e.g. Prudham 2007, Hoogesteger et al. 2018) have not necessarily led to the embrace of more decentralized and participatory alternatives. While in some cases decentralization has witnessed communities reclaiming collective control over resources and decision-making power, in others, the downscaling of responsibility was not accompanied by the requisite transfers of financial and administrative support for lower-level agencies to effectively fulfill their new duties (e.g. Norman and Bakker 2009). Thus, reduced state presence may simply effect a governance vacuum that leaves matters of resource distribution, hazards management, and other collective services unattended.

Such vacuums are consistent with a growing trend in which governance is refracted through market-oriented logics of individual responsibility and rational choice, such that individual actors are increasingly stepping into the breach in the form of celebrity advocacy (Boykoff and Goodman 2009, Abidin 2020); one-off contributors to crowdfunding campaigns for environmental disasters (e.g. <https://www.gofundme.com/c/act/california-wildfires>); and, “risk-bearing subjects” hedging against personal catastrophe through insurance policies (Johnson 2013) or gauging their “willingness to pay” for climate adaptation (Akter 2020, Al-Amin et al 2020). Under this logic, individuals have to navigate between the sense of guilt caused by the fact that they are not doing enough to address environmental degradation and climate change (Post et al., 2019; de la Fuente 2020), and insistent calls for donations to charities and international organizations that work to tackle these same issues.

We invite panelists who through their theoretical and empirical work can contribute to the above debates, by addressing questions that may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How does celebrity advocacy sanction, and perhaps even entrench, the conditions it seeks to address?
- To what extent are charities and international organizations mobilizing the notion of self-sacrifice in their donation campaigns?
- By what means and to what effects are various publics enrolled in compensatory measures to overcome the absence of environmental governance?
- Are there social limits to the responsibilities that risk-bearing subjects can be expected to absorb?
- What are examples of effective efforts to resist the responsabilization of individuals?

If interested, please submit an abstract of 150–200 words to Kimberley Thomas (kimthomas@temple.edu) and Filippo Menga (f.menga@reading.ac.uk) by 2 March 2021. We will finalize the panel and notify participants by 9 March 2021.

Keywords: decentralization, scale, empowerment, responsabilization, sacrifice, water, climate change, individualize/atomize, decision making

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