

Book Review

Rodgers, C. P., E. A. Straughton, A. J. L. Winchester and M. Pieraccini (eds.), 2011.
Contested Common Land: Environmental Governance Past and Present.
London: Earthscan.

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The book *Contested Common Land* is the result of an interdisciplinary research project (2007–2010) but contrary to many joint publications that such projects deliver, with articles written by various authors, this book is a real common publication. In many other ways, this is a unique publication, that connects the vast historical literature on commons to the present-day situation of commons in England and Wales. This book is a fine example of true interdisciplinary research, within a wide time frame, although the geographical scope is fairly limited (England and Wales). The book consists out of two main parts: an introductory part which gives a very clear overview of the situation of common land in England and Wales in both past and present and the theoretical framework – largely based upon Ostrom’s work – to understand the institutional diversity the various types of commons in England and Wales represent. A second part is composed out of four studies on geographically distinct cases (situated in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Powys and Norfolk), with differing types of resource use, legal arrangements and environmental problems, which should help to understand how environmental governance on a national level affects commons on the local level and at the same time they try to trace how governance mechanisms used at the local level since the 17th century reflect changing concepts of sustainability.

One of the remarkable sides of this book is that the authors manage to explain the long-term evolution of the complex legal structure, and connect this with both the ecological changes the commons have gone through and the changes in use of the common resources over the past 3 centuries. Parallel to this they sketch the changes in the perception of common rights, in relation to new functions – e.g. from agricultural to recreational in the late 19th century. The historical descriptions form a solid basis for the evaluation of the present-day management and future

perspectives that are given for each case study. In a last summarizing chapter they bring the case-study material and theory back together. *Contested common land* is a very solid study on commons in England and Wales, that should serve as the starting point for commons scholars and practitioners in England, Wales and the rest of Europe. The only “missed” opportunity in this book is the potential such comparison would give in terms of more systematic analysis of regulation, but that might be something for a “contested common land, vol. 2.”