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Preface

This book is the result of the collaborative research project Environmental Governance in Latin America (ENGOV) funded by the European Union (EU). For four years, a team of experts from ten Latin American and European academic institutions investigated how environmental governance is currently being shaped in Latin America. In this joint effort, we were driven by our concerns about widespread ecological degradation, poverty and injustice, as well as by our curiosity about the ways in which the emergence of new political regimes and elites, and innovative steps by communities and social organizations, affects governance practices and nature–society relations. To understand the possibilities and obstacles for sustainable and equitable natural resource use, a range of case-studies were carried out in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico. Although some of the research topics and cases are not included in this volume, their findings have contributed to the discussions and theoretical reflections in the overall analysis.

The ENGOV project has been simultaneously challenging and inspiring. The theme of environmental governance is a huge academic enterprise because it addresses complex social relations, practices and views influencing how societies perceive nature and use natural resources. Combining methods and theories from different fields of the social sciences is a prerequisite which in practice is fairly demanding. Furthermore, by encompassing political, economic, cultural and environmental changes, formal as well as informal arrangements, and cross-scale connections, the study of environmental governance can easily become a ‘mission impossible’. Arguably this is even more the case for contemporary Latin America, with its variety of local and national conditions facing rapid-paced changes. Finally, collaborating in an international research consortium of ten institutional partners and more than 25 researchers from different disciplines, schools of thought and generations has also proved to be both daring and rewarding. The fact that we spoke in different academic languages and idiom accents was not only a hurdle to tackle during our group discussions, but also forced us to learn from each other’s approaches and convictions, and the foundations on which these are based. As a typical governance process, next

to misunderstandings, dissonances and unbridgeable differences, the exchange of different insights and perspectives proved to bring about refreshing debates and new understandings, nuances and agreements.

Without the ambition to provide a full overview of the environmental governance in Latin America, we have tried to identify key fields for research, with an emphasis on new trends or structural problems that deserve more academic attention. The new insights from each piece of research contributed to the development of analytical frameworks to analyse the multiple interconnected processes shaping environmental governance in the region. This volume is the result of this intricate, collaborative exercise.

For the realization of this book, several people and institutions have been indispensable. It would not have been possible without the extensive support of the EU. Financed under the Seventh Framework Programme, ENGOV enabled the consortium to develop important new research on environmental governance in Latin America and the Caribbean, resulting in a long list of publications. We are particularly thankful for the professional guidance of Philippe Keraudren and Cristina Marcuzzo of the Social Sciences and Humanities division of the Research and Innovation Directorate General.

We would also like to thank the institutions participating in ENGOV for their financial and administrative support, including their directors and the employees who directly assisted the project: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB), Institute de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo (SUM-UiO), Centro de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Universidade de Brasília (CDS-UnB), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco (UAM-Xoc), Instituto de Estudios Avanzados, Universidad de Santiago de Chile (IDEA-USACH), Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani (IIGG) and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Quito (UASB-SQ). We are grateful to our colleagues from CLACSO, and in particular to Fernanda Saforcada and Guadalupe Rudy, for their continuous support during the project. We also thank the University of Amsterdam, which hosts our own Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA) and was very supportive of ENGOV, in particular Jan Jacob Sikkema and Bea Krenn. At CEDLA, the solid project support by Leontien Cremers requires a special mention. Her accurate and cheerful involvement, including the preparation of the Index of this volume, has made a difference both for CEDLA's ENGOV coordination

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