

PREFACE

The concept of *landesque capital* is used widely in academic literature on land degradation, soil and water conservation, natural resource management, landscape archaeology and political ecology. Until now, however, no comprehensive book-length treatment of the concept and its applications exists. Blaikie and Brookfield's book, *Land Degradation and Society*, published in 1987, remains the most-often-quoted source for a definition of landesque capital. Although a significant amount of research in political ecology has been concerned with unraveling the chains of causation behind land degradation, much less work has been conducted on the factors that contribute to the building and maintenance of highly productive landscapes. Our volume aims to fill that gap and to advance our understanding of the socioecological contexts of investments in land. Instead of focusing on marginalization and degradation, we ask how and why some farmers in some societies invested their labor in landesque capital. The volume combines theoretical discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the concept with in-depth empirical studies from different parts of the world, and from different time periods.

In September 2011, the editors convened an international workshop at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala. An interdisciplinary group of scholars gathered to develop new theoretical and conceptual developments in the study of landesque capital and enduring landscape modifications. The 17 contributors to this volume represent a spectrum of academic disciplines: anthropology, human geography, archaeology, history, and human ecology. The participants' contributions range from empirical place-based research to theoretical approaches.

The chapters range from theoretical discussions of the usefulness of the landesque capital concept as an analytical tool to empirical applications of the concept in different areas of the world: Southeast Asia, East Africa, India, South America, Europe, China, and Melanesia. This contextualized approach implies that although landesque capital includes material landscape features, it should also be a theoretical concept that explains socioecological processes that are embedded in social relations and cultural symbolism. Thus, we aim for a holistic understanding that ranges from the lived-in landscape, to farmers' cosmologies, to the integration of land use into social institutions; as well as analyses of the regional to global economic and political factors that affect these human-environmental processes.

We argue that it is imperative to understand why and how people make successful investments in land, both with respect to human land

use history and from a concern with current systems of food production in the tropical world and elsewhere. The current destructive and inefficient system of food production and energy use is unsustainable. If continued, it will end in severe shortages and misdistribution of food. Industrial food production is subsidized by fossil fuels that are likely to diminish rapidly, and the system is accompanied by deleterious climate changes. The challenge of feeding future humans can therefore not be found only in technology and chemicals but also must also be sought in regional solutions, using local knowledge and resources. Such cases of increased food production without recourse to industrial inputs abound in history and prehistory. This volume brings forth salient new information on sustainable food production systems and land use that combine numerous desirable qualities and thus can provide guidelines for an expansion of alternative agricultures in a world with accelerating, deleterious biophysical contradictions in capitalist agriculture.

A number of institutions and people have made this volume possible. We would like to extend our deep appreciation to our effective and brilliant discussants, Carole Crumley and Paul Sinclair, who provided a running commentary and analysis of the workshop presentations. They therefore also made a substantial intellectual contribution to this volume. We are grateful to William Balée, who read and commented on the volume as a whole. We would also like to thank Monica Udvardy for extensive linguistic editing of the editors' English in the introductory chapter. From her vantage point as a cultural anthropologist, she also read and provided comments and suggestions that considerably sharpened our argument. Thanks are also due to the Left Coast Press editor Jennifer Collier, who shepherded the manuscript in a helpful, highly efficient, and friendly manner.

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