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American foundations in the Great Bear Rainforest: Philanthrocapitalism, governmentality, and democracy



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ABSTRACT

Environmental campaigns to save the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) in British Columbia, Canada faced complex ecological, socio-economic, and political challenges that made traditional models of protected areas unfeasible. Between 2001 and 2007, the Government of British Columbia announced commitments to a series of conservancies, to “government-to-government” negotiations with First Nations, and to ecosystem-based management and sustainable development in the remaining region, supported by a \$120 million Conservation Opportunities Fund (COF). This innovative policy solution developed out of complex negotiations between NGOs, industry, First Nations, local communities, and the province. American charitable foundations funded the campaigns of environmental nonprofit organizations (ENGOS) and contributed substantial amounts to the conservation-financing fund. While their role is frequently noted, it has not been adequately studied. Engaging the scholarly and professional conversations about the neoliberal underpinnings of philanthrocapitalism or venture philanthropy, I argue that the lens of governmentality – the techniques and rationalities of governance that produce and normalize patterns of thought and behavior – draws attention to discursive as well as financial circulations, to agonistic relations and negotiations, and to processes of inclusion and exclusion. I then trace the circulation of financial resources and discursive representations between foundations and ENGOS between 1997 and 2007. Given concerns that neoliberal philanthropy may narrow ENGO campaigns and conservation solutions to those most amenable to market relations and may institutionalize neoliberal rationalities within recipient organizations, this paper raises crucial questions about the growing adherence to philanthrocapitalism within the foundations involved and the formation, articulation, and inclusion/exclusion of ENGO voices in the process of negotiating the made-in-BC solution.

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1. Introduction

The Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) – 6.4 million hectares of temperate rainforest in the Central and North Coast of British Columbia (BC) – is the site of a decades-long, multi-stakeholder, transnational process of negotiating and implementing a framework for large-scale conservation and sustainable community development. Despite its ecological significance, by the 1990s this region was threatened by old-growth logging, mining, and other industrial uses. Named Great Bear Rainforest by environmental non-government organizations (ENGOS) to build recognition for emergent conservation campaigns (Shaw, 2004: 377, 389; Forest Ethics, 2006: 1), the region presented challenging circumstances that required new policy solutions to satisfy the provincial government, established forestry actors, ENGOS and coastal First Nations.¹

In 2001, 2006, and 2007, the Government of BC announced conservation policy decisions that were hailed by actors and observers as an important “made-in-BC” solution. These decisions marked significant changes: from clear cut forestry to Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) and from Class A parks to conservancies (Dempsey, 2011; Low and Shaw, 2011/2012); from the exclusion of Aboriginal rights, title, and interests to their prominent, if fragile, recognition through government-to-government relations (Low and Shaw, 2011/2012; Dempsey, 2011; Raitio and Saarikoski, 2012); and from hierarchical government to negotiated modes of governance (Shaw, 2004; Howlett et al., 2009; Raitio and Saarikoski, 2012; Moore and Tjornbo, 2012; Affolderbach et al., 2012), both through market-oriented campaign strategies and through the \$120 million Conservation Opportunities Fund (COF) supporting sustainable economic development and conservation management.² Explanations for these transitions have traced the relationships between the

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¹ On BC forestry politics see Wilson (1998), Cashore et al. (2001), Howlett, 2001, Magnusson and Shaw 2002, Cashore et al. (2004), and Shaw (2004).

² The COF is part of the global use of *conservation financing* as a market-based conservation technique (Roth and Dressler, 2012).

innovative campaigns developed by sophisticated and globally-oriented NGOs (Shaw, 2004; Dempsey, 2011); the legal, cultural, and political claims presented by Indigenous rights movements (Davis, 2009; Low and Shaw, 2011/2012); the spatial and functional “remapping” processes negotiated by stakeholders (Hayter, 2003; Affolderbach et al., 2012); the economic and governance transformations of neoliberalism (Howlett et al., 2009; Hayter and Barnes, 2012; Raitio and Saarikoski, 2012); and the possibilities and limitations for local democratic decision-making (Jackson and Curry, 2004; Mascarenhas and Scarce, 2004; Cashore, 2002; Shaw, 2004; see also Logan and Wekerle, 2008: 2099).

This paper focuses on a lacuna in the literature: the frequently referenced but largely unexamined role that American foundations played in supporting ENGO campaigns and the final conservation framework. A core group of American foundations provided substantial negotiated program support to ENGOs who worked on GBR conservation programs between 1997 and 2007. They also provided funds to coastal First Nations (directly and with grants passed through ENGOs) (Davis, 2009) and raised funds for the COF (Low and Shaw, 2011/2012; Raitio and Saarikoski, 2012; Saarikoski et al., 2013), two of the most significant political developments in the GBR. These foundations utilized both business models of operations (efficiency, investment models, networking, and quantifiable outcomes) and market-oriented program activities and policy solutions (markets campaigns and conservation financing). This model, known as venture philanthropy or philanthrocapitalism, is defined not solely through such practices but by a rationale “distinct from previous ideas about philanthropy” (Holmes, 2012: 195). Along with other features of a Fordist economy, such as

regulation, taxation [and] unionism. ... traditional philanthropy ... a tacit admission that giving back to the community was a compensation for the collateral injustices produced by the system. ... Rather than simply offering compensation for the systems' flaws, [venture philanthropy] also demands a conversion to that same system's philosophy. Only if we submit to their ideological authority by accepting their quantiphilia will their funds be forthcoming.

[Bosworth, 2011: 387]

This “neoliberalization of philanthropy” concerns “the extension of market logics, discourses, techniques and motives further into philanthropy” (Holmes, 2012: 196) but also into the policy fields and NGO communities within which they work (Bartley, 2007: 230–231; Guthman, 2008: 1244–1245). Analyzing the role of American foundation philanthropy in the GBR is valuable, therefore, “not just because it is a neglected area of analysis, but because it tells us something about the processes by which conservation may be neoliberalizing” (Holmes, 2012: 186).

This paper examines the relationship between three of the five foundations³ that supplied lead gifts to the COF – the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF), The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett), and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation (Packard)⁴ – and six local and transnational ENGOs that received funding from these foundations,⁵ namely Ecotrust Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF), and the four organizations that comprise the Rainforest Solutions Project (RSP) coalition: Greenpeace Canada,

ForestEthics, the Sierra Club of Canada – BC Chapter (SCC-BC), and Rainforest Action Network (RAN). By engaging the scholarly and professional conversations about the neoliberalization of philanthropy, and by tracing the circulation of money and discourses between foundations and ENGOs, I expand the existing literature on the variable neoliberalizations of conservation. Given concerns that neoliberal philanthropy may narrow ENGO campaigns and conservation solutions to those most amenable to profits and market relations (Holmes, 2012: 200) and may institutionalize neoliberal rationalities within recipient organizations (Guthman, 2008: 1245, 1251), this paper raises crucial questions about the growing adherence to philanthrocapitalism within the foundations involved and the formation, articulation, and inclusion/exclusion of ENGO voices in the process of negotiating the made-in-BC solution.

The first section outlines how venture philanthropy and philanthrocapitalism extend neoliberal logics: neoliberal philanthropy, as with neoliberalism more broadly, demonstrates continuities and discontinuities with earlier modes of liberalism (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004); patterns and resemblances rather than monolithic and universal processes (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Hayter and Barnes, 2012); and points of friction that result in unique mutations (Hayter and Barnes, 2012). Approaching neoliberal philanthropy through the lens of governmentality – the techniques and rationalities of governance that produce and normalize patterns of thought and behavior – draws attention to discursive as well as financial circulations (Guthman, 2008; Holmes, 2012), to agonistic relations and negotiations, and to processes of inclusion and exclusion. This approach emphasizes the need to look beyond governance as policy creation and toward variable modes of constitutions of and accountability for political spaces, actors, and authorities.

The second section analyzes the foundations' circulation, in the Great Bear Rainforest, of neoliberal rationales via financial resources and discursive constructions. Using public information, I trace the flow of funding from the foundations in question to ENGO campaign activities, to the COF, and to supporting processes. Further, I trace program priorities and activities as described in annual reports, news releases, and program statements. While designed as strategic documents to communicate institutional capacity, attract high-level and/or grass-roots support, and shape policy negotiations, these documents are politically performative rather than solely strategic. I use these data not to construct a definitive historical narrative of foundations' actions and influences but to develop interpretive conclusions about the techniques and implications of these circulations of financial and discursive resources. First, the transnational relationships between philanthropic foundations and ENGOs act as a particular instance of the “frictions” (Hayter and Barnes, 2012: 202–203) that mutate neoliberal conservation strategies in particular places, though these frictions are not simply “local.” Second, negotiated program support, itself an apparent mutation, encourages ENGOs to absorb foundations' priorities into institutional commitments and program practices. Finally, despite evidence of mutual mutation, the substantial resources mobilized by foundations had the capacity to effectively prioritize some ENGO actors within the BC policy network and exclude other ENGO actors from it. While Dempsey (2011: 220) argues that “the successes achieved [in the GBR] depended on ... environmentalists departing from ideal ethical/moral positions as a part of their political strategy,” this research suggests that such decisions are not purely self-directed strategic choices, but (at best) the results of agonistic negotiations, or (at worst) decisions required to remain within the financial circulations that made campaigns possible. Therefore, financial resources and governmental techniques of the American foundations in the GBR were crucial to ENGO participation in the made-in-BC solution, but also contributed to “bracketing out and excluding broader issues in the region and (more radical) voices and visions” (Dempsey, 2011: 220).

³ The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation began granting in BC after 2001, and the Wilburforce Foundation does not publish grants information.

⁴ Other American funders in the GBR include the Pew Charitable Trusts (marine and aquaculture program), the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, and the Lannan Foundation (Indigenous communities program). Two other major contributors stopped functioning in the early 2000s: the Turner Foundation due to lost asset value (AOL stock) and the W. Alton Jones Foundation due to internal disputes.

⁵ Analyzing the role of American foundation funding of Canadian ENGO campaigns is highly sensitive due to the importance of this funding to ENGO vitality and to recent federal government criticism of the practice.

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