

Abstract

This PhD dissertation has the Republic of Armenia in the South Caucasus as its main point of departure, and asks two key questions: Why do Armenian activists claim adherence to an idea of Europe?; and why is it important for the Norwegian government to get involved in Armenia through development projects, a country with which Norway has limited bilateral relations? Skedsmo analyzes how environmentalism and development in Armenia are embedded practices that crisscross local, regional and global arenas. The dissertation makes use of post-colonial scholarship's development critique as well as post-socialist analyses of 'transition', thereby contributing to a unified post-Cold War ethnography. Armenia is especially well-suited for this undertaking being a major development aid recipient per capita, as well as a post-Soviet state.

The ethnographic data comprise two tightly interwoven threads. The first concerns the environmental activism in Armenia which seeks to tie itself to processes related to an international environmental agreement, the Aarhus Convention. For Armenia, the Aarhus Convention is part and parcel of the republic's effort at becoming a truly European democracy, at becoming 'Europeanized.' The second concerns a Norwegian-funded development project on environmental management that targeted Armenian authorities and organizations.

Skedsmo uses a conceptual framework based on the notion of anthropological problems. Anthropological problems are taken to constitute a historical place that is contingent on a more general situation comprising scientific knowledge and political actors. He applies theories of scale and assemblages insofar as both facilitate an analysis of how connections are made, claimed, and conjured across time and place. Skedsmo analyses how participants adapt to mechanisms designed in distant places, creating formal and informal networks in the process. Both with regards the Aarhus Convention and the development project, what started out as hope end up in technicalities of administration and politics, highlighting the interconnectedness of places, policies, ideas, flow charts, laws, and people. Skedsmo argues that we should resist the temptation or inclination to understand this interconnectedness as an issue of hierarchy, global determinism, and fixed relationships. Rather, both strains of ethnography constitute networks that are considerably self-referential, by invoking standards and universals such as 'environmental rights' and 'Europe.'