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Implementing Sustainability: The New Zealand Experience

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BOOK REVIEWS

Handbook of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Barry Sader, Ralf Ashemann, Jiri Dusik, Thomas B. Fischer, Maria R. Partidario & Rob Veerheem (Eds)

Earthscan, London and Washington, DC, 2010. 640 pp., £75.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9781844073658

The Handbook of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) edited by Barry Sader, Ralf Ashemann, Jiri Dusik, Thomas B. Fischer, Maria R. Partidario and Rob Veerheem is a substantive themed document which draws upon the breadth and the depth of knowledge and experience of a wide range of authors in the field of SEA. The impetus for the work was the 2005 International Conference on SEA in Prague and the outputs are both insightful and cutting edge.

The objectives of the text are to take stock of the international experience with SEA; to highlight the key aspects and areas of the process development and application and to probe issues related to the quality and the effectiveness of SEA practice. These are successfully weaved together as each theme is unpacked and the individual authors apply their own interpretations and experiences to current thinking.

The structure and content of the book are such that it lends itself to multiple interest groups including students, researchers, academics and practitioners. Each of the 35 chapters has been crafted to yield copious amounts of rich information while maintaining reader interest. The book's introduction succinctly sets the scene by contextualizing SEA and overviewing each of the themes. Part I deals with SEA frameworks and usefully provides the international dimension, as the strengths and weaknesses of the process are analysed in selected regions across the globe. Practice in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA, Asia, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, the EU and South Africa is scrutinized and it becomes apparent that the establishment of SEA provisions is one thing but, frequently, their effective implementation is another.

Part II deals with the application of SEA in sectors where there is a relative dearth of knowledge and SEA application. These include transportation planning, water management, extractive industries and coastal zone management (CZM). The net effect is particularly useful as it not only identifies opportunities for further investigation but also the potential contribution which SEA can make to each of the sectors scrutinized. Tomlinson's work demonstrates that while transport is well placed to accommodate SEA, the challenge is to deliver a change in the culture of transport. Nootebloom, Huntjens and Sloomweg's chapter on water management is interesting in that they focus upon multi-stakeholder participative methods, integration with spatial planning and linkages between policy and implementation rather than SEA *per se*. Baker and Kisten's work on extractive

industries adds a new dimension, where the term Regional Sectoral Assessment is applied as opposed to SEA, highlighting that while this enables area wide evaluations to be conducted it does not establish if such developments are the best option of any particular sub-region. SEA is also examined by Govender and Trumbic in the context of CZM, particularly port planning, and case studies helpfully demonstrate the application of an integrated approach to the dynamics of multiple land uses.

Part III links SEA to other instruments, while specifically it explores the relationship between the concept and other methodologies designed to achieve the same objectives. The themes are usefully contextualized by Fischer who stresses the significance of such approaches in raising the profile of environmental and quality issues which are not properly represented in plans and programmes and how the application of SEA in such arenas can assist decision-making processes when as long as the *cultural context and institutional capacities* are considered. The scope of application is wide ranging and includes environmental management systems, landscape planning, biodiversity, poverty reduction and spatial planning and interesting insights are provided into the assessment and the management of development impacts in a range of international locations.

Part IV considers cross-cutting issues specifically, as Sadler explains, issues that cut across or underlie SEA. Some may feel it would have been useful to provide a thematic overview as in previous sections because the focus is wide ranging and deals with the application of environmental indicators, public participation, health, cumulative effects, transboundary issues and tiering to link to SEA. While each of these themes has been extensively considered elsewhere, this analysis brings interesting insights to the table, for example, Dixon and Therivel demonstrate the weak application of Cumulative Impact Assessment and explain how this might be addressed by reforms in governance and capacity-building initiatives. Despite the absence of the thematic overview, the editorial process successfully synergizes the themes considered in Part IV in such a way that the text flows relatively seamlessly between the sub-sections.

Part V deals with the process development and capacity building. While the themes considered permeate much of the book, this section addresses how implementation challenges faced by SEA can be addressed by capacity building. The section is particularly helpful as it focuses around four key questions. First, what are the main trends in each of the themes, second, what progress has been made in taking the areas discussed, what needs to be done and where future priority should lie and how the International Association for Impact Assessment can contribute to future programmes? While the outputs are useful, Partidario explains that there is still much to learn and, in particular, that there is a definitive need for greater transparency in terms of the relationship between SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment.

The final section, Part VI, considers movement towards integrated sustainability assessment. It examines how the next stage of SEA will involve a more *generic* approach which integrates economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development. The section considers sustainability assessment concepts under two headings: *from SEA to sustainability assessment* where Pope and Dalal-Clayton focus upon process design to foster integration using broad steps that are already embedded in assessment methodology and making more use of governance and consultative procedures; Hacking and Guthrie, under the heading *assessment for sustainable development*, apply a case study approach

to consider how the approach can be redirected towards sustainable development via the construction of a theoretical framework and explain that there is evidence to demonstrate that the use of assessments, including SEA, contribute positively to sustainable development.

Overall, the extensive body of knowledge assimilated in the book, particularly the theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, highlights both the prizes and pitfalls of SEA, making this a document of significant interest and substantive utility to a wide variety of professionals and practitioners.

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Implementing Sustainability: The New Zealand Experience

Caroline L. Miller

Routledge, London and New York, 2011. 229 pp., £95.00 (hardback), £29.99 (paperback), ISBN 0-415-49551-6

This book tells a fascinating story. In essence, it is an evaluation of the attempt in New Zealand to put into operation a limited concept of sustainability called sustainable management. Written from the perspective of a planning practitioner, it reviews the first 19 years of experience with that country's Resource Management Act (RMA) which was passed into law in 1991. The RMA represented a radical change, overturning the well-established town and country planning system and replacing in whole, or in part, 54 statutes and 20 regulations. The prime objective of the RMA was to bring biophysical environmental management with a strong technical problem-solving orientation to the centre of planning. The new regime heralded an era in which town and country planners were to become resource or environmental managers, helped by policy analysts drawn from an array of other disciplines ranging from the biological sciences to economics. The statute was promoted originally by two successive governments, both in the thrall of neo-liberalism, who suggested that the RMA could, simultaneously, protect the natural environment and make land-related business investment decisions quicker and more efficient. These were claims that have proven to be somewhat exaggerated.

After setting the scene, including a discussion of the Resource Management Law Reform process and the political environment in which the legislation was enacted, the author turns to a discussion of attempts to operationalize ideas about the integrated management of water, air and land; the RMA's approach to urban planning and the built environment; planning for energy infrastructure; the position and role of Māori in resource management; the effect of the Act on the planning profession, politicians and the public and finally, the lessons that might be drawn from experience with the RMA for planners in other jurisdictions struggling with implementing a sustainability agenda. The argument in the book is supported by the case study material from New Zealand and a variety of other countries.

The story of the RMA is one of achievement and failure. It required the establishment of new institutions, processes, administrative and technical arrangements and ways of consulting and bringing in formerly excluded groups, particularly Māori. Such was the novelty of these factors that at the outset the quest for sustainable management was marked by unpreparedness at a number of levels. The then recently restructured local and regional government was unskilled with respect to the new planning system; planners wondered what exactly they had to do to be 'resource managers' and what advice they should give in a neo-liberal environment which devalued any sort of planning except that which occurred in commercial enterprises; and central government was unwilling to spend money on information about implementing the Act. With respect to the widespread lack of understanding of the intent of the RMA and how it might usefully be put into practice the author notes: 'In retrospect it was a sign of things to come' (p. 23).

Regional councils were charged with the responsibility to implement integrated management of water, air and land. What seemed eminently sensible in theory proved difficult in practice and much effort has gone into working the principles of integrated management into regional plans, often on a region by region basis. The biggest challenge came when attempting to plan for the integration of land and water management. In a country which makes a significant part of its income from intensive farming and where irrigation is of critical importance, water quality and allocation, and nutrient discharges to water, are matters of considerable economic, ecological, recreational and therefore political importance. Despite some successes, to date water management remains an area fraught with conflict. Similar challenges surround biodiversity protection and riparian land management. Equally, planning for energy production and transmission, infrastructure and transport has been at times inadequate and a source of conflict, but this is partly because there have been multiple statutory jurisdictions involved, with the RMA being only part of the mix.

One impact of the concern to enhance biophysical environmental management, coupled with the neo-liberal view that the government should not be involved in social planning, was that the RMA was almost completely silent on matters of urban planning and the built environment. This remarkable situation and allied questions about what might be meant by the idea of the sustainable city have been debated by a number of New Zealand academics and urban management practitioners over the intervening years. All have pointed out that New Zealand's population is over 85% urbanized and while by international standards its urban settlements are very small, and there is great variation in rates of growth, there is still an undeniable need for local government to plan for, among other things, residential and commercial land subdivision, housing, natural environmental protection, amenity areas, and the provision of a wide range of commercially and publicly provided social and community services such as those associated with recreation and culture. So, because the RMA did not adequately provide for these matters, city and district councils have had to find other means of planning for the development of their urban jurisdictions. Again, some very positive results have been achieved, but without appropriate guidance from the Ministry for the Environment, the central government agency responsible for environmental planning and management, the best possible practice has not always prevailed and there has been less than ideal levels of information sharing about innovative practice. While in more recent times, the Ministry for the

Environment has shown much greater interest in such matters as urban design and urban intensification, its performance, or at least the work it has been allowed to pursue by its political masters, still amounts to a failure to see the city in broadly social, cultural, economic *and* biophysical environmental terms.

That the RMA has been amended 17 times since its enactment is a testament to the ongoing political struggles arising from the novelty, contradictions, omissions and operational difficulties inherent in the original legislation. This book, using examples such as those discussed above, does a very good job of highlighting the varied experiences with the legislation and points to the great challenges faced by those wishing to operationalize ideas associated with sustainability in urban and rural planning. It will be of considerable interest to both planning scholars and practitioners.

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Greenhouse Governance: Addressing Climate Change in America

Barry Rabe (Ed)

Brookings Press, Washington, DC, 2010. 382 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8157-0331-0

In this edited volume, Barry Rabe brings together a rich collection of articles aimed at providing an analytical introduction to several key elements of contemporary US climate politics. Responding to the perceived tendency for social science work on climate to be dominated by rigid economic analyses, the collection counters with an array of essays grounded in the somewhat forgotten fields of political science, law, history, and public policy, among others. While the collection is not driven by a single underlying thesis, it surveys a series of crucial themes and factors largely overlooked in examinations of domestic American climate policy, and provides an extremely thorough and nuanced introduction to a range of individual topics on the issue.

The collection attempts to draw out a few primary themes informing current climate policy in the USA. First, against the common conception that recent advances on climate under the Obama administration represent novel endeavours for the country, the book draws attention to the labyrinth of policies that have emerged at the state and local levels over the past two decades. As Rabe suggests, 'One can consider virtually every conceivable strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and find one or more examples of it in operation somewhere in the US federal system' (p. 6). Second, the collection highlights the interminable influence of contemporary federalism (and the early advance of sub-national programmes) on the development of national climate policies. While this is understood to some extent as a positive factor capable of providing important models on which to construct federal policies, the volume highlights the tense intergovernmental battles that have characterized federal climate politics to date, noting that each individual policy option is likely to incite a different form

of 'federal-state tug-of-war'. Finally, the collection emphasizes the extent to which prospects for effective climate governance are hindered by the limited capacities of federal institutions in Washington, particularly the immense institutional weakness of the current Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Congress' obstinate unwillingness to move forward on crucial legislation.

The book comprises four primary sections, each of which develops a major theme in detail. In Part 1, several of the key federalist issues informing contemporary policy are teased-out, with a chapter by Martha Dethrick developing the concept of 'compensatory federalism' to help understand the division of labour between states and the federal government as being based on the relative strengths and weaknesses of each, while another by Paul Posner provides a historical point of reference for the 'vertical diffusion' of sub-national policies to the federal level. In Part 2, the authors analyse an array of various climate policy mechanisms either currently in place or pushing towards passage, and attempt to highlight the specific political challenges each entails in the American context. Chapters by Raymond and Rabe specifically seek to understand the immense obstacles to the deployment of market mechanisms like cap-and-trade and carbon taxes at the federal level, while others by Nivola and Rowlands provide strong insight into the limitations of certain command-and-control policies currently in place across the country, including fuel efficiency standards and renewable portfolio standards, respectively.

In Part 3, the contributions consider the ability of each of the three branches of the federal government to play a constructive role in the response to climate change. Kirsten Engel provides a particularly insightful chapter on the crucial role of the judicial realm over the past several years, underscoring the growing use of the courts as a means to advance progressive climate goals and mediate intergovernmental tensions on the issue. With regard to the legislative branch, Rabe explores the range of structural impediments serving to stunt the forward progress of congressional deliberation and progressive climate policies in the House and Senate, while Rosenbaum provides a final chapter drawing-out the structural incapacity of the EPA and other executive agencies to deal with the technical complexities of climate change. Finally, in the book's closing section, a pair of chapters by VanDeveer and Selin consider various ways in which the USA can re-engage with the rest of the world after two decades of combative posturing in international climate negotiations. The authors assess a series of options ranging from global policy-making to more *ad hoc*, bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation across multiple jurisdictions and regulatory levels, and integrating a range of national and local governments, advocacy groups, and businesses.

Despite the extremely ambitious amount of territory covered in the volume, the book has only a few minor identifiable shortcomings. Given its almost exclusive focus on the institutional political challenges that have come to characterize contemporary American climate policy, the book pays very little attention to the actual drivers of climate policy at both the federal and state level (be they economic motivations, security concerns, interest group pressure, etc.), and thus may leave less-familiar readers unsure of the root factors animating many of these battles. The book might also have benefitted from a much more serious engagement with the powerful rise of environmental industrial policy in the USA over the past several years. There is a strong tendency in the volume to dismiss funds allocated to alternative energy technology development as mere pork barrel politics and wasteful subsidies for large energy conglomerates—

what Rabe refers to as 'passing the pork' (p. 18). This, however, risks overlooking the impressive rise of highly decentralized innovation policies through the National Climate Change Technology Initiative and Climate Change Technology Program which, over the past several years, have become integral elements of US climate policy through increased levels of funding and coordination within the 12 Department of Energy National Laboratories, and the development of aggressive commercialization and facilitation strategies.

These minor shortcomings aside, this volume stands as one of the strongest analyses of contemporary American climate politics to date and is a must-read for students and scholars seeking to understand the complex relationship between the institutional specificities of American governance and the shape of current US climate policy. As noted, in spite of its immense ambition, the collection is very well organized and demonstrates strong thematic continuity throughout. All the contributions have been written in a manner which is very accessible, without sacrificing the subtlety of the arguments. The collection is thus suitable to a broad array of readers ranging from upper-level undergraduates to graduate students, researchers, and policy-makers.

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Ecological Modernization and Renewable Energy

Dave Toke

Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2011, 216 pp., £ 55.00, ISBN 9780230224261

Back in 1990, Dave Toke published a visionary book with the 'says it all' title '*Green Energy—A Non-nuclear Response to the Greenhouse Effect*' (Toke, 1990), which is as relevant today as it was then. At the time Toke wrote: 'If we are to avoid use of nuclear power with all its environmental, political and economic disadvantages, the only alternative is the speedy deployment of renewable energy sources', and in his conclusions, Toke urged: 'We must do this *now*. We have no time to lose'.

Unfortunately, notwithstanding the introduction of the UK's pioneering Climate Change Act in 2008 (which came about not least due to sustained pressure from a 'coalition' of non-government organizations (NGOs), notably Friends of the Earth), the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change continues to be undermined by maverick climate sceptics with dubious agendas who are afforded disproportionate media space. Indeed, in my view, relatively little progress has been made in Britain over the last 20 years when it comes to the large-scale deployment of renewables. At the same time, despite the events in Fukushima and the subsequent acceleration of Germany's nuclear exit strategy, Britain seems determined to press ahead with a nuclear renaissance, which would undoubtedly undermine renewables and the associated huge economic, environmental and indeed social benefits they can bring. This has been undertaken with support from 'a cohort of should-know-better Greens who have been seduced by the blandishments of the nuclear industry', to quote Jonathon Porritt.¹

Nevertheless, events such as the annual 'All-Energy' exhibition and conference in Aberdeen, a city that is undergoing a transition from 'Oil Capital of Europe' into the 'Energy Capital of Europe', are going from strength to strength, which suggests that the tide is finally turning. At long last, Britain is beginning to seize the opportunities offered by a move towards a renewable energy economy, a process on which Germany embarked several years ago and which is now bearing fruit as a major economic driver that has already generated tens of thousands of jobs and is powering the country out of the economic crisis.

This is where Dave Toke's latest book, entitled *Ecological Modernization and Renewable Energy* and published as part of a wider *Energy, Climate and the Environment* series, comes in. For the benefit of the uninitiated, according to Wikipedia² ecological modernization (EM) 'emerged in the early 1980s within a group of scholars at Free University and the Social Science Research Centre in Berlin' and is an 'optimistic, reform-oriented school of environmental social science that has gained increasing attention among scholars and policy-makers in the last several decades in Europe, North America, Japan, and elsewhere'.

Essentially, the idea of EM is that it combines economic development and environmental protection as a way of conducting good business, and as such is clearly distinguished from 'dark green' approaches.

The two central questions in Toke's quest to develop political analysis of environmental policy issues using the case of renewable energy are: (a) How have new renewable energy sources, led by wind power, developed and expanded in recent decades? (b) How can we deploy, and also modify, EM theory to help answer this previous question?

For Toke, energy stands as perhaps the most important environmental challenge of our time, witnessed in terms of the policy primacy given to the resource depletion and pollution issues surrounding energy use. He therefore regards the question of how renewable energy has been developed through different policy frameworks and contexts, and what and how different outcomes have occurred in different states and countries, as a crucial area for understanding sustainability. He argues that it is public support for renewable energy as a new set of technologies that is the key political driver for its development.

Reflecting on the opportunities and limitations of two forms of EM, which he calls 'mainstream' and 'radical', Toke challenges and develops the theory of EM. He introduces an 'identity' approach and suggests that the comprehensive industrialization of renewable technologies involves the development of a separate 'eco identity'. Toke says that this identity, with which the public and environmental NGOs sympathize, means that in reality EM proceeds in a different way from conventional EM theory, which suggests that mainstream industry makes the key technological choices. In Toke's notion of 'identity EM', technological choices are prompted by 'bottom-up' pressures for specific technologies with a sustainable energy identity. He points out that mainstream EM gives little attention to the involvement of environmental NGOs in the positive promotion of technological solutions and fails to sufficiently emphasize the importance of a positive engagement of civil society in making technological choices.

This distinct technological identity persists even now that renewables are becoming major actors in the world energy industries. Toke sees the identity EM process as central to the future continued success of renewable energy technologies and lists five key characteristics as follows:

- Significant contribution of idealism in support of particular renewable energy technologies, based on 'non-material' motives.
- Existence of dedicated financial support mechanisms for renewable energy technologies, e.g. feed-in tariffs.
- Independent, publicly active, trade associations representing the main renewable energy technologies.
- Trade associations form coalitions with environmental groups to campaign for improved and maintained financial support systems for renewable energy technologies.
- Much of the deployment of renewable energy is done by companies that are independent of the major electricity companies.

Based on an assessment and comparison of the historic development and current situation in California, the USA as a whole, Germany, Spain, the UK, Australia, and China, Toke concludes that Germany displays all of the five characteristics of identity EM.

Arguments about renewable energy at a local level can be conceptualized as being about conflicts between different identities, for example, between public identification with wind farms as clean energy sources (many observers go as far as regarding wind turbines as elegant symbols of a new age of enlightenment) and, alternatively, as being in conflict with idealized notions of local place identity. Interestingly, and perhaps controversially, Toke says that deliberation is found to have limits in acting as a solution to such identity conflicts.

At the other end of the technological spectrum is the concept of a renewables supergrid covering Europe and beyond. Indeed Gregor Czigis has demonstrated that such a supergrid is not only perfectly feasible but also more economic than options involving nuclear (Czigis, 2011). The concept is enthusiastically supported by NGOs such as Greenpeace, based on an eco-technical identity that transcends the conventional notion of decentralization and the 'small is beautiful' ideal.

In view of the fact that the UK is about to make key energy policy decisions that will set the energy scene for years to come, Toke's new book could hardly be more timely.

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Notes

- 1 See <http://www.jonathonporritt.com/blog/chris-huhnes-nuclear-test> (last accessed 18 September 2011).
- 2 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_modernization (last accessed 18 September 2011).

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