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Book Reviews

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toration. Using examples drawn from a wide range of experiences, urban parks in Chicago, Ann Arbor and the states of Illinois and Michigan and northern New Mexico, successive chapters examine the constitution, articulation and representation of local attitudes and knowledge relating to nature and nature management. A number of common themes emerge from them all: the considerable differences that exist between different users and stakeholders in the definition and assessment of environmental or natural value; the importance of mediatory and negotiative strategies in achieving conflict resolution; and the need to integrate different values and attitudes into management solutions. None of this comes as any surprise, nor does the fact that many of the philosophical issues discussed in the first half of the book have little or no relevance to these later chapters. In an interesting exploration of restoration volunteers' motivations, Schroeder (chapter 12) reveals that no explicit discussion of restored nature's artefactuality was encountered. Indeed, by the end of the book we have moved a long way away from restoring the wilderness of the Illinois pre-European prairies to urban park management and negotiating in bits of managed nature. Chapter 11, by Mark Brunson, appears strangely misplaced. Entitled 'Managing nature as a continuum', it really belongs with the more theoretical essays of the book's first half. Contrasting humanist, protectionist and organic constructions of nature, Brunson examines how these constructions, and the rationale behind them, have evolved. Is human intervention the problem or the solution? Recalling the earlier chapter by Hull & Robertson (chapter 5), is minimal human modification a durable indicator of naturalness or is pristine nature really dead, at least on this planet?

An interesting book certainly, which addresses a number of issues and debates of clear relevance to broader social science inquiry. Any weaknesses it has are the generic weaknesses of books derived from conferences: variable essay quality; the gradual weakening of the central argument; and the regrettable distance between the theoretical essays at the beginning and the practical examples at the end. The book also suffers, particularly for an international audience, from the geographical focus.

Although not all the chapters deal with 'nature's metropolis', the Chicago area, most of them do. Ecological restoration issues associated with other wilderness areas (deserts, mountain ranges), with national parks and with marine areas are not specifically addressed. Finally, in its unconcealed advocacy, the book sometimes reads both as an extended plea for theoretical justification and as a search for the philosophical underpinnings for action. As such, the social sciences and the humanities are employed not as frameworks for critical assessment but as the basis for constructing environmental responsibilities. However, this is not a criticism. It is perhaps a limitation only in that it confines itself solely to natural environments. William Cronon's masterful book on Chicago (Cronon, 1991) ends with the statement: "The urban and the rural landscapes I have been describing are not two places but one ... they now depend on each other for their very survival ... Each is our responsibility" (pp. 384-385). It is perhaps ironic that the 1996 Chicago controversy should ultimately be about breaking apart that holism and separating out those responsibilities.

**Reference**

Cronon, W. (1991) *Nature's Metropolis* (New York, W. W. Norton).

HENRY BULLER

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**The Community Planning Handbook: how people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world**

Nick Wates, 2000

London, Earthscan

ISBN 1 85383 654 0, £14.95 (pbk)

**Community Organizing: building social capital as a development strategy**

Ros Gittell & Avis Videl, 2000

London, Sage

ISBN 8039 5792 0, £14.99 (pbk)

Community involvement has now become a crucial ingredient of the UK government's en-

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vironmental strategy, be it in Agenda 21 initiatives or neighbourhood renewal. Literature detailing the techniques and practice of community involvement, though well established, is not extensive and these two books provide welcome additions in their different ways.

Nick Wates's *The Community Planning Handbook* is written by an activist for activists. Nick has been involved in the community action movement for virtually his entire career. He cut his teeth in student days with activities in Tolmers Square and followed on in the squatting movement of the 1970s, both campaigns leading to well researched, funkily illustrated and now out of print books. In the 1980s his work took a more establishment turn and he later became an associate of the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture. More recently, his work has developed an international and urban dimension and this current book has been published with the support of the Department for International Development, the Urban Design Group, the Prince's Foundation and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The book is a comprehensive handbook setting out practical techniques for community involvement, engagement and empowerment. The situations covered range from the equivalent of an amenity society planning the improvement of a derelict site to a whole settlement plan and a shanty town upgrade.

The strengths of the book rest in the clarity of its layout, its clear and informative illustrations drawn from real-life examples and its use of colour coding as a method of organisation. The handbook is simply organised and easy to use. It has five sections: introduction; general principles; methods; scenarios; and some highly relevant appendices that include formats, checklists, a glossary and references to organisations, films and publications. The book is technically very sophisticated and would be suitable for use in a wide range of practical settings. It also provides a very useful introduction for novices to the types of procedures that community involvement draws on in a variety of contexts.

The drawbacks of the book lie in its advo-

cacy role. It is concerned with the 'front end' of environmental change with a strong emphasis on design and planning. There is little about implementation and also little comment on scale. The handbook is unashamedly proselytising, despite its explanation of some of the pitfalls of involvement and how to overcome them, and the emphasis and tone are about selling the concept to reluctant authorities and corporations.

By contrast, Gittell & Videl's book deals with implementation. It recounts and analyses the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) demonstration project in the USA. The subject of the book is community development, now known in UK regeneration parlance as building social or human capital. The book explains that community development corporations, which appear to be similar to community development trusts, were common in the USA but, as in the UK, were focused on property. Again, in common with UK regeneration policy, academics and activists saw the need to shift the emphasis to developing people, rather than buildings. The book sets out LISC's attempts to set up three demonstration projects in low-income neighbourhoods in different parts of the USA: Palm Beach, Florida; New Orleans; and Little Rock, Arkansas.

There is a good, detailed account and analysis that sets out the theoretical background to building social capital, the background of the project as a whole and the programme in each neighbourhood, explains the plethora of funding initiatives and considers the problems. Unsurprisingly, the conclusions advocate a social capital approach and recommend developing neighbourhood leaders. The book's strengths lie in its detailing of the difficulties that are familiar to anyone who has ever been involved in voluntary activity. These problems include those of representative involvement, finding the right people for the right jobs, gaining credibility, achieving results to sustain effort and achieving independence for the project. The discussions around filling appointments and overcoming potentially explosive racial divisions are particularly honest.

This is a useful book for academics and postgraduate students who wish to familiarise

themselves with the practice of community participation and its pitfalls over the lifetime of a number of projects. It also provides a theoretical background to notions of developing social capital. Although written in a different genre from Wates's book, there are similarities. Both works rest on solid empirical observation and both are written from a protagonists' viewpoint. There are no pyrotechnics, no dazzling displays of theoretical insight, no wondrous pyramids of deconstruction. Rather, each displays a dogged determination to make incremental changes, through hard work and sheer grit, and to tell the reader how to do it, without making the same mistakes over and over again. As such, each should become compulsory reading for environmental activists and practitioners.

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**Municipalities and Community Participation: a sourcebook for capacity building**

Janelle Plummer, 2000  
London, Earthscan  
ISBN 1 85383 744 X, £20.00 (pbk)

This book aims to bring about stronger and more sustainable forms of community participation which lead to a better quality of life for poor people. The author focuses on the relationships between the municipalities, which supply services and infrastructure, and lower-income communities in developing countries. However, the recommendations in this book have relevance for all community-municipality relationships, whether urban or rural or in developing or developed countries.

The author's starting point is that community participation is becoming the rhetoric of both developing countries and donor agencies. Participation is being written into government policy but the implementation of such policy is increasingly left to cash-starved municipalities that lack human and financial resources and have hierarchical internal structures which prevent them from responding quickly enough to a culture of community participation. In the pro-

vision of the local services and infrastructure that can transform the lives of people in poor communities, many municipalities can be characterised as being engineering-led, dominated by technical professionals managing capital-intensive projects who find the concept of community participation an irrelevance. One key factor Plummer identifies is the transfer of staff from front-line posts, especially field workers who develop the trust of marginalised communities and whose advocacy within municipalities may bring them into conflict with senior management.

However, the book is definitely not a critique of the role of municipalities. It recognises the financial human resource constraints they are under and the institutional inertia generated from years of custom and practice and seeks ways of overcoming this, partly through building capacity in the local communities themselves. The book is grounded in research into 10 case studies with municipalities in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Egypt, mainly dealing with the supply of basic services such as water, sewage and waste collection. One example quoted is the community financing initiative of the Ahmedabad Slum Networking Project in Gujerat, north-west India. In the pilot phase of the project a partnership was established with poor communities, which contributed one-third of the costs. Once local groups had deposited 60% of their contribution, a survey of the slum area was initiated. Once the figure rose to 70%, layout plans for the slum were released, and when 90% of the community contribution had been made, construction of agreed improvements to facilities began. Although this community had few decision-making powers in the project, their financial commitment involved them in monitoring the works closely and having a sense of ownership of the new services.

Plummer argues that true community participation must allow involvement in decision making and create a shift in power relations between poor communities and municipalities, donor bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially for women and other marginalised groups. However, the book neatly sidesteps the theoretical controversies surrounding the definition of 'community participation' by laying down four assumptions