



Book Reviews

Ecological Context of Development: New Zealand Perspectives

Marjorie van Roon and Stephen Knight

This book offers an interesting examination of the state of environmental and resource management in New Zealand. The basics for understanding the problems and challenges in managing the effects of extensive human activities on the environment are clearly presented. Before human settlement, New Zealand indigenous forest covered approximately 82 per cent of the total land area. This was reduced by over 50 per cent by Maori fires. Today, after further European deforestation, only 23 per cent of the country is covered by forest. New Zealand has also lost 85 to 90 per cent of its freshwater wetlands. New Zealand's natural environment has been dramatically transformed and its native flora and fauna has been replaced with exotic trout, sheep and pine forests.

The book is structured into six parts. The first five chapters provide an overview of resource management and environmental law and the concepts of natural boundaries, ecological cycles and ecosystems. Part two examines methods of minimising the ecologically damaging hydrologic cycle that results from farming and forestry activities. It also discusses the effects of urbanisation. Parts three and four introduce the concepts of rebalancing nutrient cycles and chemicals. Part 5 depicts the biodiversity issues associated with natural resource use and extraction and the effects on the various ecosystem types.

The concluding chapter ties the book together with a plea to consider and incorporate ecosystem cycles into a sustainable ecological management framework. The authors suggest that these principles are the basis of sustainable human development.

The Resource Management Act deals with the need to reintegrate or at least maintain the ecosystem. It sets the legal framework for local Councils to control further development so that it does not further degrade the natural environment. Clearly development must continue to proceed, however environmental damage must be minimised and where possible, native flora should be reintroduced. The authors offer many positive examples of planning solutions such as greenbelts; beach erosion control measures and dairy shed waste management.

The book is well written and offers numerous illustrations and case studies with local New Zealand examples. It is well documented with an extensive bibliography. On the negative side, the four and a half page glossary was totally inadequate. One would need to have several texts on environmental geology, physical geography, geomorphology and ecology to fully understand all the terms and concepts. The fields of ecology, planning and development intersect with the *Resource Management Act* and how New Zealand approaches the concept of sustainable development. Van Roon and Knight have helped bridge the knowledge gap.

Despite the poor glossary, I would recommend the book to anyone interested in understanding ecosystem management in New Zealand.

James E. Rowe

Review of Reshaping Australian Local Government (2003)

edited by Brian Dollery and Neil Marshall from the University of New England and Andrew Worthington from the Queensland University of Technology (University of New South Wales Press)

In their Introduction to *Reshaping Australian Local Government* Dollery, Marshall and Worthington lament the fact that, in terms of the attention local government has drawn from the research community; it is the poor cousin of state and federal government research. This collection from leading Australian and international academics, and local and state government managers (responsible for local government), makes a valuable contribution correcting this oversight. The Foreword by Professor Kevin Sproats, commissioned by the New South Wales Government in 2000 to inquire into the structure of local government in the inner city and eastern suburbs of metropolitan Sydney, provides an excellent context to frame the main themes of the book: finance; governance and management; and, policy reform. Sproats found significant inadequacies in the fundamental operations of the Sydney councils relating to these themes.

The book consists of twelve chapters: three chapters per each of the key themes with an opening chapter by Janice Caulfield 'Local Government: Reform in Comparative Perspective'. The editors wrote the Introduction and Conclusion as well as contributing three individual chapters reflecting their own areas of research in local government.

Caulfield's chapter demonstrates the wide variety in local government systems around the world. While some systems have been influenced more by structural and process reforms than others in recent years she suggests that 'new public management' (NPM) representing new management and governance ideas has had a wide appeal and impact on local government. This is certainly the case in Australia as in most OECD countries. Importantly Caulfield highlights the different taxing regimes in other places and how they have been devolved by central government for more effective decentralisation and subsidiarity.

The three chapters under Finance provide a complementary perspective on this important area of debate. Johnson and May are both experienced local government managers who are also doctoral students in local government, bringing a valuable practitioner theoretician perspective. Johnson does an excellent job discussing the economic dilemma confronting local government: how it can use its limited resources to meet the unlimited demands of the public it serves. May's chapter focuses on the amalgamation of councils and the question of efficiency of service delivery. This chapter is a must read for people wanting to know about the research on size and performance. In local government, he concludes 'the achievement of economies of scale and financial efficiency appears to be far more grounded in prediction rather than actuality'. The third chapter in Finance by Christine Ryan continues her extensive research in the area of local government financial reporting. Ryan picks up on the issues associated with AAS27, also a must read for people new to local government in order to gain an appreciation as to the impact of this accounting reform on the way local government does business.

Governance and management provides three papers, this time from two well versed academics and one leading state government public manager responsible for local government. Rosemary Kiss goes straight to the core of Australian local government as she argues that 'despite the considerable interventions and adjustments of the last decade ... local governments in Australia have not been effectively reformed or positioned to meet the needs of the new millennium'. This is an excellent chapter as Kiss cogently argues that in spite of all the reforms and change local governments legitimacy has weakened in the 1990s.

Geoff Baker is a Queensland Government official who has held senior appointments relating to local government in that State. His chapter on management reform in local government provides an excellent overview of the nature and impact of intergovernmental reforms. Clearly they are significant, and notwithstanding Kiss' view, these changes have affected the way local government works, and the nature and quality of service delivery. Neil Marshall rounds out this section with a corporate governance perspective on the roles and responsibilities of CEOs and councillors. He

notes that one of the common issues dealt with in the reform of all state local government legislation in the 1990s was to clarify the role of the CEO and councillors. The 'corporate governance' perspective has prevailed; 'the fundamental principles, operational structures, and desirable codes of conduct that should underpin and drive responsible company management'. Marshall concludes that amalgamations have weakened the ability of elected people to represent the needs of residents and that greater clarity in definition of roles has not been realised. In short, he believes, councils do not function as effectively as they could.

In the penultimate part on policy reforms three academics tackle the challenges topics of policy networks, efficiency measurement and local government failure. Joe Wallis takes Kenis and Schneider's (1991) proposition that the network concept has become the new paradigm for the architecture of complexity. Public policy is understood by analysing the networks through which issues are played out. Wallis focuses on the relationship between governance and networks from a range of perspectives which, for many readers, will provide a framework for analysing the decision making strategies in local government.

Andrew Worthington provides the largest chapter in the book, and the most challenging, addressing efficiency measurement in local government. This is the chapter for anyone who ever asked the economies of scale question relating to local government amalgamation, and much more. It is a credit to Andrew's scholarship that he has provided such an extensive coverage. In the final chapter in this part Dollery addresses the rarely spoken-about issue of local government failure: the inability of a government to intervene optimally in a market economy. He argues that cogent reasons exist for such failure at the local government level, than at higher tiers of governance. For state and federal government policy makers responsible for local government, and with a genuine interest in equalisation and subsidiarity principles this chapter brings some balance back into the debate, especially in the light of contemporary concerns about intergovernmental revenue sharing and cost shifting.

In the final concluding part, two of the editors, Dollery and Marshall, summarise the keys themes covered in the preceding parts and recommend that greater discourse and inquiry occur with local, state and federal governments, key associations – including professional bodies and university researchers working in this area of public policy and management. While the collection they have brought together is often at times critical of local government they are great supporters of this level of government through this compendium, part of a tradition of excellent local government research out of the University of New England.

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