

## **Review: Ecosystems and Sustainable Development**

Editors: J.L. Uso, C.A. Brebbia, H. Power

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Uso, J.L., Brebbia, C.A., and Power, H.(editors). *Ecosystems and Sustainable Development*. Southhampton, UK: Computational Mechanics Publications, 1998. 680 p. US \$295 cloth ISBN: 1-85312-502-4.

Sustainable development research is a metascience in perhaps the truest sense of the word. Defining, justifying, and implementing sustainable practices transcends not just the basic, social, and applied sciences, but technology as well. *Ecosystems and Sustainable Development* is a strong volume because it captures this essential nature. The book contains the papers presented at the First International Conference on the subject held in Spain in 1997. The aim of the conference "was to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary communication amongst scientists, engineers, economists and professionals working in the different areas of ecological research." Readers have the opportunity to view a broad sampling of sustainability studies and the issues confronting the global community.

The book is organized into three sections. The first is development economics, followed by conservation, management and recovery of endangered and degraded areas, and finally modeling of natural and human ecosystems. In a book with such a broad spectrum of subject material, commenting on specific papers will most likely reflect my own expertise and bias more than it will provide a reasonable critique of the comparative value of specific contributions. With this in mind, it is hoped the more general comments herein will provide more useful guidance to potential readers.

Most noticeable is that most of the contributions make little or no mention of sustainability except, perhaps, in the title or introduction. Ideas, research, and results are presented without inter-relating them to sustainability issues or policy recommendations. The reader could just as likely be studying environmental modeling, agricultural economics, or whatever the paper discusses. It is certainly reasonable that those working in the field do not need to explain the connections to their peers, but given the intended audience, contributors could have given more attention to maximizing the potential for interdisciplinary communication. Such is the way of many scientists, however, and for

potential readers it is sufficient to emphasize that this book is not an introductory overview.

A significant editorial decision was to not subdivide the major sections. Thus, in the first section, for example, there is no apparent ordering of contributions that range from conceptual, to field studies, to empirical analyses. Similarly, readers who may be interested in particular aspects of sustainability, such as water resources or agriculture, will have to find those contributions on their own. Perhaps no structure will please everyone, all the more because sustainability is frequently crosscutting. A thorough index would be a useful tool; unfortunately there is none.

A number of the papers are excellent, but overall quality is variable. Many papers present only highlights or recent results. Much important information is left unstated, leaving conclusions and recommendations unexplained with the material presented. References are often of equivocal value for filling the information gap. A great number of interesting studies are presented, but the working scientist will find little of fundamental interest because of these weaknesses. The book is, however, prolific as a potential source of ideas and insight into a broad swath of international research. And in that context the conference appears to have achieved its objective.

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