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## Book reviews

*Transformational Change in Environmental and Natural Resource Management. A Guidelines for Policy Excellence*, edited by Michael D. Young and Christine Esau. Published by Routledge, Earthscan from Routledge London and New York, 2016, pp. 234, ISBN: 978-1-13-888474-8, AU\$ 74.00 (paperback).

It is widely agreed the *Anthropocene* has seen an unprecedented decline in the natural resources conditions that have underpinned the economic growth of the last few hundred years. As communities, we have not responded to Boulding's vision of 'the coming space ship earth'<sup>1</sup> although not for want of much official and private effort. As 'wicked problems',<sup>2</sup> the impacts have been often ignored or off loaded to policymakers, with mixed success.

As this book describes, a key difficulty for policymakers is articulating a compelling narrative while the changes needed to 'transform' the situation can occur. Transformational change, such as innovation, suffers from the 'shock of the new'; there are few pointers to success and the links between cause and effect are often widely separated in time. The changes needed are often 'public goods' and not easily converted into financial benefits that might motivate individual action.

Unpicking 'why, and how', to draw lessons and guidelines useful to others, is the task the authors have set for themselves.

Have they succeeded?

The book arose from a conference organised by Young while he held the Gough Whitlam and Malcom Fraser Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard. It was funded by the Harvard Centre for the Environment in the context of the need for water reform in the then drought in Western USA. Young brought his experience to bear, plus that of many Australians from other domains (including ex-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) to illustrate lessons of success and failure. Readers will find authoritative dissections of our climate change policy machinations, the 'Pink Batts' fiasco, drought policies over time and the unanticipated benefits derived from Landcare.

He also attracted a range of relevant international specialists from the private and public sectors to contribute case studies and to review a set of guidelines developed by Young. Readers will find fascinating dissections of cases as varied as the New York and Phnom Penh water supplies, the New

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<sup>1</sup>*The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth* Kenneth E. Boulding 1966 quoted in H. Jarrett (ed.) 1966. *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*, pp. 3–14. Baltimore, MD: Resources for the Future/Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>2</sup>A good discussion of the interdisciplinary and intractable nature of 'Wicked Problems' appears in *Wicked Problems worth solving: A hand book & call to action* by J. Kolko. Published by Austin Centre for Design, 2012.

Zealand fisheries sector, water pricing in China, empowering consumers as part of forest product certification, and difficulties with Payments for Ecosystems Services. The authors of each study highlight reasons for success but do not gloss over the weaknesses experienced. Among the general lessons discussed, the importance of context, reform ‘champions’, the consistent support of a wide range of stakeholders over time and action through different layers of government emerged as important.

The book also succeeds where it discusses the tools used to gain the support of stakeholders, such as the uses, abuses and cost of participation,<sup>3</sup> and the importance of evaluation with stakeholders as an iterative learning process. Game theory, a good tool for modelling social and institutional responses, is mentioned but might have been explored further, as this is one way of quantifying social responses to logically inform changes in approach.<sup>4</sup> Risk is another area in which coverage is mixed; it was very well covered in the private sector innovation case but not so well in cases dealing with the public sector. However, some other potentially useful tools are not covered. For example, ‘concept mapping’ is useful in helping people with limited shared languages or culture to follow the development of complex ideas during planning.<sup>5</sup>

This writer’s main negative criticism has to do with the cross-cultural aspects of change: the book does not discuss the importance of articulating and communicating the ‘world view’<sup>6</sup> of different stakeholders; the ‘meaning of life’ lenses through which people will see a narrative for change. Without articulating this, stakeholders can have little insight into how each will respond to the change being promoted, particularly those at the ground level, who are expected to act. A good example is the excellent case study of the conflict between the land managers in the Catskills and the New York water supply authorities. Here, even though the conflict and reactions took place over decades, the realisation of each other’s views that eventually enabled a solution of sorts to evolve, only gradually emerged causing much delay and cost. In some cultures, it is a matter of belief that no one ‘owns’ water and activities to change these are slow and sometimes negative.<sup>7</sup> Failure here is

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<sup>3</sup>The classic source for discussions about participation is *Arnstein’s ladder of participation*, see, e.g., <https://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>.

<sup>4</sup>A good discussion of this potential is contained in, *Using Game Theory to Address Modern Resource Management Problems*, Grantham Institute Briefing Note No 2, September 2015, Imperial College London.

<sup>5</sup>A good discussion of different types of concept mapping is contained in *Concept Mapping, Mind Mapping and Argument Mapping: What are the Differences and Do They Matter?* Unpublished. W. Martin Davies. The University of Melbourne, Australia. [wm-davies@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:wm-davies@unimelb.edu.au).

<sup>6</sup>In the fuller meaning of the German word *Weltanschauung*; the framework of ideas and beliefs that individuals and groups use in interactions with the world, not so much subconscious, as seldom challenged.

<sup>7</sup>A recent US example where this is discussed at least implicitly is *A good that transcends: undermining Environmental Reform* by E. Feyfogle. Published by The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

analogous to taking up the lessons in the *Wealth of Nations* without considering the value system Adam Smith expressed in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as the moral firmament upon which he considered collective and individual actions to be based.

However, the book does succeed: Young and Esau have produced a very valuable primer for policy makers and stakeholders at different levels. The book is well illustrated with diagrams and tables and benefited from the reflection possible while editing the work at the Rockefeller funded Bellagio Centre in Italy.

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*Achieving Food Security in China: The Challenges Ahead*, by Zhang-Yue Zhou. Published by Routledge, New York, NY, USA, 2017, pp. 156, ISBN: 9781138807471, AU\$ 221.00

China's ability to feed itself, with a population of 1.4 billion individuals, has long been a source of potential anxiety for global food markets and agribusinesses. Zhang-Yue Zhou examines the country's food security from China's post-war era (1950–1958), through its Great Famine of 1958–1962, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, to the present. Zhou pursues both the distal and proximal causes of China's two major famines in this era, as well as the recovery of its food supply in the 1980's and growth and expansion through the 1990's. This book is not just an intellectual exercise or research topic to inform China's food policies. It is apparent how deeply personal the subject is to Zhou as he relates his own experiences and those of his family, growing up in rural China during these famine periods. The personal nature of the narrative that Zhou explores, however, at times feels mismatched with the book's purported goal of addressing China's future food security challenges.

The first half of the book delves into the modern history of China's food supply. In the *Introduction*, Zhou shares his experiences growing up in the shadow of China's famines, describing scenes with his family and in his village. He expands the scope to give a brief overview of the country's fluctuating food supplies through the period before laying out the objectives of the book and its key terminology and concepts. In the second chapter '*Existing studies on China's food security*', Zhou surveys studies of China's famines, revealing a theme of unreliable or contradictory data, particularly over the country's death toll. Due to the harsh light these events put the government in, research into these topics has (unsurprisingly) been discouraged. Indeed, Zhou notes the political