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Reviews

Critical political ecology: the politics of environmental science by T Forsyth; Routledge, London, 2003, 272 pages, £80.00 cloth, £21.99 paper (US $110.00, $31.95) ISBN 0 415 18563 7, 0 415 18562 9

This innovative book mobilizes critical political ecology as an analytical tool that revitalizes accounting for biophysical reality—represented through ecology. At the same time, it interrogates the separation of environmental science from politics. In chapter 1 the author argues that politics and science are coconstituted and inseparably entangled and that their perceived split has constructed, legitimized, and fortified certain environmental 'orthodoxies'. Environmental science is, all too often, represented as a decontextualized and depoliticized collection of 'facts'. Forsyth posits that uncritical applications of this depoliticized orthodoxy and problems such as desertification, soil erosion, and deforestation, which are detailed in chapter 2, have encouraged environmental and land-use policies that unjustly restrict livelihoods of marginalized people and inhibit locally determined development objectives. To combat this problem, Forsyth draws on the emancipatory goals of critical theory, the reflexive politics of critical science studies, and the contingent knowledge production and heterogeneous constructionism of poststructural critical realism. In chapters 3 and 4 Forsyth then unpacks a number of 'black-boxed' orthodoxies—from spaces of capital accumulation to forces of knowledge production—that shape philosophies of positivism, realism, universalism, rationalism, and ecologism.

In the following chapters Forsyth constructs alternatives based on greater reflexivity and the democratization of environmental science, explanation, and networks to "reflect a wider range of social framings and knowledge sources" (page 203). In the final chapters Forsyth focuses on mechanisms that bound 'legitimate' political debate and environmental policy actions as he seeks more culturally relevant and historically situated accounts of environmental issues. To conclude, Forsyth calls for "greater public participation in the *formulation* of environmental science, rather than in simply *access* to science" (page 278, author's emphasis).

Throughout the book Forsyth is sensitive that his critical positioning might be seen to undermine environmental concern. Thus, he consistently emphasizes how his insistence on seeing environmental science and politics as coproduced upon a dynamic terrain of biophysical reality and political contestations is crucial for improving both environmental and social outcomes. For Forsyth, a 'critical' political ecology provides a more inclusive approach that combats the marginalization of local environmental concerns in orthodox environmental science. He writes, "This book seeks to contribute ... by asking how far it is possible to deconstruct scientific 'laws' built on orthodox frameworks of science, yet still achieve a biophysically grounded form of explanation that is still socially relevant to the places where such science is applied" (page 13).

However—because this is such a broad and ambitious project—it could be argued that the book needed further development to meet the dual challenge of grounding in case-study analyses while reaching its explanatory and emancipatory aims. What might more informed and reflexive social movements look like? Where have we seen them (or their component parts) in action? How are certain more democratized framings constructed, maintained, and contested? How specifically do dialectic struggles to amplify voices of poor and marginalized people affect aims for more democratized science? How would further interrogation of actors that shape fields of orthodoxy and dissent (such as media and industry) assist in such aims? Forsyth intimates the importance of such questions particularly in chapters 5 and 6; however, more careful attention and elaboration could have strengthened the book. Instead, Forsyth ironically seems to fall into an Ulrich Beck-type trap. Despite aims to avoid it, the book is bounded both literally (through Beck quotes on the first and last pages) and figuratively (through the need for more specific and thoroughgoing biophysical analyses) by social scientific analyses.

In terms of the book's design, the many explanatory boxes and chapter summaries make this a potentially useful classroom resource. Although its utility is tempered at times by explanations through citations rather than in-text discussions of key research, links in the text to other sections of the book provide continuity between concepts and signal related discussions in other parts of the volume.

Overall, Forsyth offers a compellingly enhanced 'critical' political ecology. Perhaps it is more appropriate to consider this book's need for more concrete examples as an indication of how wide open this important field of inquiry remains.

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Cambridge futures 2: what transport for Cambridge? by M Echenique, T Hargreaves; Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 2003, 67 pages, £25.00 paper, ISBN 0 9535530 1 9

Following its award-winning and influential 1999 study of land-use planning options for the Cambridge subregion, this new report from the Cambridge Futures partnership explores scenarios for transport investment. Cambridge Futures is a unique, non-profit-making partnership of local business, local government, professionals, and academics, formed in 1996, with a view to creating consensus on a strategic vision through which the 'Cambridge phenomenon' of knowledge-industry-led growth could be sustained over the long term. That they should follow up their first report, which dealt principally with housing issues, with an investigation of transport is unsurprising: with increasing numbers of those working in the city unable to afford to live nearby, commuting from surrounding settlements has risen, and with it congestion and pollution. Rising housing and transport costs are seen as a threat to competitiveness. Selective urban extension, as set out in recent revisions to the Structure Plan, will increase the population within the built-up area by a third by 2016, leading to greater demand for transport within an already congested city. Transport proposals, including widening of the A14 and a new guided bus link with settlements to the northwest, have attracted criticism, as either inappropriate or inadequate.

Having outlined the challenges, the report presents the results of modelling a number of scenarios, and discusses their technical and economic feasibility (in accordance with the latest Treasury guidance on cost–benefit analysis for infrastructure projects), and wider social, economic, and environmental effects (following criteria set out in the Department for Transport's guidance on multimodal transport studies). In addition to the base case, consisting of the 2003 Structure Plan and existing transport commitments, the scenarios include additional investments in cycling and walking, public transport, an orbital road (partially tunnelled), congestion charging, and a combined scenario including all measures. It is unfortunate, but perhaps understandable given the uncertainties, that the effects of new technology such as teleworking and soft measures such as employer travel plans, were not modelled as part of any scenario.

The report, well presented throughout with a series of charts, maps, and montages, graphically illustrates the likely spatial and sectoral impacts of the scenarios, in terms of changing costs of living and of production. The effect on the cost of living following implementation of the combined option, such that, on average, living costs in 2016 would be no higher than 2001 levels, is particularly striking. Likewise, changes in average production costs are kept to a minimum in the combined option.

In developing a public transport strategy, the report's authors take the proposed Huntingdon to Cambridge guided bus (to be the subject of a public inquiry in late 2004) as a given. However, they acknowledge the Achilles heal of the proposal—that it will not be possible to 'guide' the bus through the city to key destinations, significantly reducing the possible time savings—and propose that it be routed through a £270 million tunnel. The very low rate of return calculated for this scheme, however, may well serve as useful fodder to the vociferous local campaign against the guided bus. To its opponents, the guided bus is a highly parochial investment, which owing to its utilisation of a disused railway corridor is in danger of preempting heavy rail investments of more regional, national or even international significance.

Given that the foreword notes how the Cambridge region "has a role that stretches far beyond its administrative boundaries", the report's neglect of the question of regional rail links is unfortunate. The additional trips that will be generated by the expansion of Stansted airport and the need to take freight trips from the A14 are among the reasons why an upgrading of rail links ought, arguably, to be given further consideration before valuable trackbed is given over to a guided bus.

This criticism is not to suggest that the report's assessment of the implications of a range of possible futures is not extremely informative and worthwhile, but to point to the need to consider additional scenarios incorporating a more strategic, regional view.

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Community-driven regulation: balancing development and the environment in Vietnam by D O'Rourke; MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, 300 pages, $62.00 cloth, $25.00 paper (£39.95, £16.95)
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Can local communities play a part in reducing industrial pollution in one of the fastest industrializing countries of the world? According to Dara O'Rourke in *Community-driven Regulation: Balancing Development and the Environment in Vietnam* the answer is yes. O'Rourke paints a vivid picture, through various case studies, of how a few communities in Vietnam have effectively thwarted the state's sometimes corrupt and inefficient environmental enforcement and its increasing protection and promotion of industrial production through 'bottom-up' pressures, or public participation.

O'Rourke builds on existing theories of public participation and informal regulation to build a model he calls community-driven regulation (CDR). The basic tenet of O'Rourke's model is that "command-and-control regulation and market dynamics are critical, but not sufficient to explain variations in environmental regulation in Vietnam. CDR stresses the interactions between state actions, firm dynamics, and community demands" (page 20). Arguing that community pressure can be, in certain situations, a catalyst for action and mobilization among agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and firms, O'Rourke highlights six case studies from across Vietnam in which communities have mobilized to force change from polluting firms. Each case study delves into the sociopolitical intricacies of pollution management in Vietnam and gives the reader first-hand experience of the trials of moving from environmental awareness to political action. Exploration of these case studies reveals that CDR is currently still rather limited and that it is "only successful under specific circumstances" (page 22). Although O'Rourke is quick to point out this limitation as well as the fact that often only immediate environmental problems that can be seen, smelt, or felt are addressed and thus that CDR cannot and should not replace traditional command-and-control regulations, he states that CDR is a promising addition to the environmental management 'toolkit' and one that has been generally overlooked in the literature to date.

Although these case studies were interesting and informative, I found O'Rourke's analysis of Vietnamese environmental management, and its interconnectedness with political, social, and economic realities in the country to be invaluable and the most intriguing aspect of the book. Taking a detailed and critical look at the context in which Vietnamese firms operate, O'Rourke probes into some of the unique challenges of balancing environment and development in Vietnam. He stresses the inherent problems associated with erroneously assuming that the Vietnamese economy operates according to neoclassical economic theories, and thus highlights the pitfalls of designing pollution controls in Vietnam based on Western theories. He details the 'vertical hierarchies' present in Vietnamese government, which prevent effective communication and coordination between related agencies, and the "rivalries, competition for resources and power, and direct conflicts over goals and objectives" (page 169), which stifle concurrent environmental and economic growth. He emphasizes the role extralocal actors play in community-based environmental management and specifically how the press can play a vital role in pollution debates.

This thorough critique of the Vietnamese political economy is essential, not only for understanding why firms behave the way they do, but also for developing more effective environmental policies in Vietnam. Often environmental management policies and practices are imported from abroad, through international assistance programs, with little understanding of the unique socioeconomic and political systems that exist in the country where they will be implemented. As O'Rourke highlights, without a comprehensive understanding of "the politics underneath market processes ... these forms of international assistance are doomed to frustration and failure" (page 26).

I recommend this book as a 'must read' for any scholar researching politics and the environment in Vietnam or for anyone interested in the dynamics of environmental management in Southeast Asia. O'Rourke has done an excellent job of detailing and analyzing a very complex topic in a succinct and clear format.

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