Renegotiating the Environment Jenny Stewart & Grant Jones. Annandale, New South Wales: The Federation Press, 2003, 157 pp., plus references and index. ISBN: 1 86287 473 5

The basic theme of this book is that politics are at the heart of environmental issues, and their solutions. Specifically "rather than seeing the politics of self-interest as an impediment, managers should use politics to generate better outcomes". (p. 2) Further, and setting the theme for their exploration of the resolution of environmental issues, the authors argue for "an understanding of politics that allows for the energy and interests of groups and individuals to be harnessed rather than stifled, in order to achieve more consensual ... solutions" (p. 2).

So far there is nothing new. Almost any book that discusses solving environmental problems will look into public participation, the engagement of stakeholders, involvement of multi-perspectives, or similar notions for engaging a range of perspectives and ideas to look for resolution. However, the emphasis of the authors is to expand the possibilities of engagement. To do this they draw on institutional theory, to look at what makes institutions, i.e. groups of people, change. Four issues are discussed: concern (to solve the problem at hand); contractual context (incentives for people to make and keep agreements); capacity (to implement decisions); and conflict (recognition that there will be differences of opinion and constructively using this difference). The bulk of the book is then given to the role of conflict. In particular, the emergence of conflict is seen as a "healthy sign, because ... problems that were subsumed within the institutional structure have escaped its confines". (p. 10) With this perspective "conflict means not just fighting, but figuring out how to control a strategic situation ..." (p. 10).

The authors also identify governance as a key part of controlling the situation. Their view of governance is fairly specific - "what happens when public sector managers find themselves making decisions in collaboration or partnership with managers in other agencies, and sometimes with partners in the private or not-for-profit sectors who are contracted to provide particular services". (p. 11) This view excludes the many other situations where governance occurs, such as within private firms and with the local community. This is a minor, but annoying, point as their main interest is to develop the concept of "environmental governance", which:

- occurs between national and local institutions (potentially a limiting criterion given that environmental management is undertaken by many groups);
- is based on dialogue, negotiation and agreement-making;
- acknowledges the importance of values in structuring debate;
- is implemented through a range of interconnected forms of management;
- involves leadership and management skills; and
- promotes consensus as a criterion of success.

In essence the central role of politics is recognised and given prominence in their investigation of several Australian case studies. One set of case studies focuses on water management (in the Macquarie Marshes, the Hunter River, and the Hawkesbury-Nepean River) to identify the major stakeholders associated with water control and use. The interactions of the players and the points of conflict are identified and discussed. The authors take a similar approach for their second set of studies, which focuses on the Regional Forest Agreements (in New South Wales, Tasmania, and Western Australia), and the third set that examine three urban planning exercises featuring

prominent environmental issues (M2 Toll Road (Sydney), Sydney Airport Expansion, and land-use planning in Byron Bay).

Collectively the nine case studies provide the authors with a data base to shed light on the question "what worked?" Their emphasis here is examination of the effectiveness of conflict resolution that was practiced in their case studies. The factors identified as important were: a range of stakeholders with some knowledge and understanding of the issues; incentives to reach agreement (which included the characteristics of the problem perceived by the stakeholders, the pay-offs for reaching agreement, and characteristics of the stakeholders); political support for a process to resolve the issue; leadership (to move the process forward); "productive pluralism" (willingness to engage constructively with a range of players); and policy learning (where reconfigured, or new, information was accepted and helped to shape the discussion). For the authors, these conditions are the elements needed for environmental governance.

Then, how is environmental governance to be developed? Drawing on their analysis of the case studies, and introducing several concepts from others' experiences, three skills are identified. Firstly political management will be essential; this incorporates the ability to analyse the problem, the relevant institutions, stakeholders and their strategies; and the potential for consensus. Second is having the power to influence the decision-making process; this includes working with local interests to equalise power bases, making incremental moves, and improving co-operation by promoting non-threatening agendas. Finally, they identify the importance of promoting accountability, through responsiveness to groups in the community, and reporting performance.

Conflict will inevitably develop in relation to any form of governance. Yet the authors rightly point out that conflict provides a creative potential, and is not purely an indication of some dysfunction. Management of conflict is the key. Specifically the authors see that conflict resolution can come from "civilising conflict", or reducing the risks to those involved, and building networks for co-operative engagement. An aspect of this co-operative approach is the need to enhance flexibility in how responsibilities are seen, and the mechanisms that can be used to resolve issues. The other component for managing conflict is leadership. "Transformational" leadership is the concept used by the authors to emphasise leadership that creates dialogue and communication. This may not be the role for a single manager, but can come from several people co-operating to achieve agreed outcomes.

Importantly, the authors recognise that their suggestions for environmental governance are likely to meet constraints when put into practice. In terms of environmental improvement, the successes of environmental governance may be modest (at best), as this process is unlikely to be useful for all environmental issues. Also, the analysis of the case studies indicated that several conditions were needed for environmental governance to be useful, so the scope for practising it is limited. In this context, existing practices of governments and their bureaucracies, with an emphasis on specific responsibilities and performance, do not fit well with the process approach of environmental governance. Nonetheless, the authors consider that environmental governance has much to offer for social equity, and management of environmental change. With these pros and cons in mind the authors conclude that "... a governance perspective requires stakeholders to think differently about the system they inhabit, and their role within it. Governance is about networking ... a practical appreciation of how each situation came into being, what biases are inherent in the existing decision-making structure, and the motivations and limitations of each stakeholder". (p. 157)

For those who have been part of the "environment scene", especially those involved in direct action and negotiation of environmental issues, there is probably little that is new in these conclusions, or the general model for environmental governance.

However, for new-comers there is much to be gained from the insight and experiences that the authors' analysis presents. Similarly, even "old-timers" will benefit from the detail of the case studies, and the clear identification of the key issues associated with governance. To assist all readers, the materials associated with both the theory of governance and that presented for the case studies, are clearly written and easy to understand.

For environmental educators, I see this book being a valuable reference document for students in middle and senior secondary, and in all levels of tertiary study. The case studies are particularly accessible, while the discussion of governance could be drawn into a range of educational situations. Those of us with an interest in the processes of developing and implementing environmental policy, or interested in the negotiation of management plans (or agreements), will find the book to be a valuable addition to the book case.

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