

there is no single approach that works across a wide range of cultures and ecologies.

This little book covers a lot of ground, provides a broad overview of the topic, and is a well organized access point to a range of literature dealing with legislative and scientific approaches to assessing freshwater conservation. It is a valuable, up-to-date summary of some of the complex scientific and legislative issues in freshwater conservation currently being played out in many countries around the world.

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Places: Linking Nature, Culture, and

Planning by J. Gordon Nelson and Patrick L. Lawrence (2009), 520 pp., University of Calgary Press, Calgary, Canada. ISBN 9781552382547 (pbk), CAD 44.95.

This book arrived on my desk towards the end of last year like an early Christmas present: encased in a colourful cover and pleasingly weighty. Scanning the flyleaf, I learnt that this is the first of a new series promising to 'explore how we live and work with each other on the planet, how we use its resources, and the issues and events that shape our thinking on energy, ecology and the environment'. In particular, the aim of the series is to showcase the experience of researchers from Alberta, Canada.

This first publication in the series is essentially a collection of papers covering 4 decades of research that contributed to the

development of something referred to as the 'ABC method'. Its fundamental premise is that a holistic approach, integrating geology and earth sciences (Abiotic), plant and animal communities (Biotic) and land use, institutions and other social (Cultural) information, is necessary to understand any particular location or 'sense of place'. As a committed multi-disciplinarian myself, I was intrigued enough to delve further into what is a dense and hefty academic tome.

To help guide the reader there are several pointers early on, with chapters giving an overview and history of the ABC approach and a summary of how the book is structured—essentially a series of previously published case studies, loosely categorized as detailed analytical studies, focused summaries of detailed studies, comprehensive overviews and assessments, and rapid reconnaissance studies. The inclusion of a section entitled Questions for the Reader and some suggested approaches to designing a research project give the impression that the key audience is largely an academic one although the authors express the hope that it will also be useful for planners and other decision-makers.

The case studies are predominately from Canada and the USA but also include some applications of the ABC method to wetland and coastal management issues in Hong Kong and Java, and to the historical landscape of the UK's New Forest. I was particularly interested in the latter, having grown-up in the New Forest and completed my undergraduate thesis on the governance aspects of land use planning in the area. For me, this area has an extremely strong sense of place. Somewhat disappointingly,

this particular case study was one of the rapid reconnaissance studies, based largely on a review of existing literature and a few informal interviews, not really adding much to the body of knowledge on the complex governance issues of this fascinating region.

Overall, the current utility of the research presented here suffers from the age of the studies; even the introductory first chapter is a paper published 20 years ago. In addition, the rather poor reproduction of the numerous, detailed monochrome maps makes the book somewhat dated in this era of sophisticated satellite mapping and geographical information systems.

This volume serves a purpose as a compilation of research papers tracing the development and implementation of a multi-disciplinary method for improving the understanding and management of a range of different places. Given the dense nature of both structure and content, whether it is accessible enough to act as either a practical guide or as a much needed call-to-arms for a more holistic approach to how we see and interact with our world, is still, for me at least, open to question.

To return to the analogy of a Christmas present, this book is like a patchwork quilt lovingly put together by a respected aunt—a mosaic of intricately patterned but slightly faded pieces of material. As such, it may be valued by different people for different reasons: for its historical interest, for the stories it tells, or for its practical utility.

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