



BOOK REVIEW PERSPECTIVES

Peter Rogers, Kazi Jalal, & John Boyd, *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*

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Sustainable development has evolved as a concept partly in response to the inherent tensions between economic development and environmental protection. The long-held view has been that economic growth would inevitably lead to environmental degradation through the consumption of nonrenewable resources, the overuse of renewable resources, and the production of waste and pollution (Dryzek, 1997). Sustainable development offers the possibility that this is not inevitable; economic development can occur while still protecting the environment. Understandably, this prospect has had great appeal and not only governments, but many nongovernmental organizations and businesses, have taken up the principles of sustainable development. Sustainable development makes possible strategic and holistic policy making that recognizes the important relationship between society and the environment. However, there is very little consensus on what makes for desirable outcomes, or how they might be achieved, under sustainable development. The resulting responses potentially encompass both the radical transformation of social structures and markets and the reform of existing political and institutional structures to better account for the environmental impact of human activities.

In *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, Peter Rogers, Kazi Jalal, & John Boyd extensively discuss a number of the concepts and issues relevant to sustainable development. The book's premise is to provide a "comprehensive textbook" for those who need a "thorough grounding in the subject," including both students and practitioners. It is difficult to produce an introductory text that can appeal to such a broad target audience and the authors have not always succeeded. The title does not do the book jus-

tice; given the background of the authors, the main strength of the book lies in its consideration of the economics of sustainable development. The text, in the main, is accessible, but in places the informal writing style may be off putting to some readers.

In Chapter 1, "From Malthus to Sustainable Development," the authors move from a basic account of sustainable development to a rather technical discussion. This might alienate readers without an economics background (or indeed those who are seeking a broader approach than an economics-based one), especially coming so early. Chapter 2 considers some of the challenges of sustainable development, but with limited reference to the literature or supporting examples. Chapter 3 goes on to consider, somewhat superficially, some of the key global environmental issues such as population trends, food, and energy demands. Some important global dimensions, such as deforestation and water scarcity, are only given a couple of sentences and as a result readers uninformed on the subject may deem them unimportant. Chapters 4 to 8 cover sustainable development indicators, environmental assessment and management, and environmental law and policy. However, the structure both within and between these chapters is not always logical, with sometimes vague headings and subheadings, making it difficult to follow the argument. What is consistent throughout this material is a technocentric approach. The authors do not challenge the predominant liberal economic paradigm where a free market and economic growth are essential to human welfare, although the necessity of economic growth is highly contested in sustainability literature. Once again, an exploration of these issues in the earlier chapters and some initial guidance or introduction about the specific approach taken in the textbook would have been of benefit.

Where this book excels is in its consideration of the economics of sustainable development in Chapters 9, 10, 11, and, to some extent, Chapter 12. In particular, Chapters 9 and 10 are excellent, concise, and provide a good grounding in the economics of sustainability. Chapter 13 introduces the actors involved in international cooperation on sustainable develop-

ment, but perhaps misses the opportunity to consider their evolution, worldviews, and influence.

This book takes a very broad approach, but in places it feels spread too thinly—concepts are introduced briefly, but not fully explained, and do not always flow in a logical way. This is perhaps most problematic in the discussion of the concept of sustainable development. The authors use the Brundtland Report’s definition of “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987), but numerous other definitions of sustainability and sustainable development have been formulated. As discussed above, the concept of sustainable development is highly contentious and is subject to numerous interpretations, ranging from the technocentric—where environmental problems are viewed as a threat to human quality of life and technology and science are viewed as the solution—to the ecocentric—where emphasis is placed on the need for radical change in political structures and human organization. More discussion of this debate and an introduction to the literature in this area could, and should, have been presented. The authors do concede that covering these issues in any detail would have lengthened the book substantially; however, the complex and contested nature of some of these issues is lost in their treatment. In the conclusion the authors suggest that they have focused on “methodologies, institutions, and policy frameworks” rather than substantive issues. While laudable, this approach and structure is not always obvious and could be outlined more clearly in the introduction.

Overall, this book may be of more use to students and practitioners with an interest in environmental economics than those focusing on sustainable development’s social or philosophical dimensions.

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References

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About the Authors

Claire Quinn is an environmental social scientist with experience working on interdisciplinary projects both in Africa and the UK. Her research interests lie in the relationship between ecology, livelihoods, and institutions in natural resource management. She is currently a research fellow in the Sustainability Research Institute (SRI) at the University of Leeds.