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Books

Histoire et devenir des paysages en Himalaya: Représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh

Edited by Joëlle Smadja. Paris, France: CNRS Éditions, 2003. 646 pp. €39.00. ISBN 2-271-06000-1.

There has been a tendency to conflate the history of the Himalayan environment with the history of its study, mainly by Western researchers, starting in the 1950s. The Himalayan range, however, has been inhabited since at least 3000 years BC, and traces of wheat, barley and rice cultivation go back to the second millennium. If such an ancient history has to remain largely speculative, given the lack of archeological research in this part of the world, the aim of this book is to reconsider a certain number of received ideas in the light of case studies and fieldwork observations conducted mainly in Nepal and Ladakh, by specialists of various subjects including geography, geology, agronomy, and anthropology. Most of the contributors have been working together for numerous years, and one of the qualities of the work certainly lies in the truly pluridisciplinary approach that was adopted. Landscape ("paysage") is indeed a polysemic concept that demands such an approach. It is understood in this book as the result, at a given moment in history, of the use of space and its resources by a population that not only adapts to some physical constraints but that also understands its milieu along with some cultural values and concepts in a specific sociopolitical context (p 23).

In the 1970s, the "theory of Himalayan environmental degradation" (so called by Ives and Messerli, who were among the first to question this theory in their book published in 1989) presented a set of facts in the form of an implacable chain of events: population increase, human needs pressuring the milieu, deforestation, erosion from monsoon rains, instability of the Himalayan slopes, and flooding of the densely populated Gangetic plains. This scenario rapidly gained general acceptance, and the potential threat it involved for the population generated massive international aid—but not an incentive to question the analysis at the origin of this alarmist interpretation. The contributions collected in this book by Joëlle Smadja all provide evidence that the situation is more complex and that what has been presented as an environmental crisis needs to be reconsidered, if only in order to find more appropriate solutions.

The first part of the book begins with a careful description of the Himalayan landscape, in an effort to clarify the various notions as well as the vocabulary used so far by specialists, and relating this to the Nepalese and Ladakhi terminologies (Chapters 1 and 2). This is followed by two more synthetic studies, the first (Chapter 3) presenting the physical elements that structure the Himalayan environment—the invariables to which human beings have to adapt—and the second (Chapter 4) providing an overview of the Nepalese populations, their migrations, and their occupation of space in relation with various human activities that shape the landscape.

The second part of the book is devoted to the representations that people have of their milieu. The Nepalese landscape appears as a manifestation of supernatural or divine powers with which human beings are, in this way, in constant communication (Chapter 5). The study of the toponymies of two territories, one in Nepal (Chapter 6) and one in Ladakh (Chapter 7), informs us about the various ways in which people select elements of their environment. The study of the Nepalese case is enriched by a mapping of the toponyms, showing to what extent this differs from a map that takes into account a physical description of the space. The concluding study in this section suggests the symbolic association of a Christian community with more ancient monasteries of yogis through their common location, outside a Hindu village, close to the forest (Chapter 8).

The third part looks into the past in order to provide a historical perspective on studies of contemporary situations. A historical sketch of Himalayan agriculture focuses on two contrasted valleys, respectively on the northern and southern slopes of the Himalayan range. The Indus Valley in Ladakh does not seem to have suffered any serious famine, unlike the Kathmandu Valley, until the introduction of maize in the 17th century and potato in the 18th century, to complement rice (Chapter 9). Two studies of administrative documents show the early ecological awareness of both the authorities and the user communities. Very early, at least 4 centuries ago, the Hindu kings took measures to protect forests and to retain trees close to the springs. They also exerted tight control over the movements of the populations in their concern for a balanced occupation of space. The second study tends to show that, before the state opted for an interventionist policy concerning the management of space in the 1950s, the communities themselves regulated the use of forests and pastures. This conforms much better with the recent policy of "sustainable development" that seems to be the model currently in favor (Chapter 11). This historical section of the book ends with a survey of the successive environmental policies that prevailed over the second half of the 20th century. In its heavy dependence on international

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aid, Nepal appears as a laboratory where the most recent theories concerning the environment are tested in succession, although too often these theories are formulated far away from local realities.

The fourth and final section of the book is concerned with the various ways in which populations deal with these local realities, and provides 5 case studies. Conservation policies that exclude people lead to their impoverishment and to degradation of the environment (Chapter 13), whereas more positive results are observed when the local populations are given the opportunity to manage resources and innovate (Chapter 14). Paradoxical situations arise when educated young people take over local power from the elders whose knowledge of the milieu they judge obsolete, precisely when the international programs are trying to rehabilitate this precious knowledge (Chapter 15). If traditional activities such as woodcutting disappear as well as, in the process, the specialist group in question—such as the Balami in the Kathmandu Valley (Chapter 16)—important innovations show people's capacity for adaptation. This is true with regard to the remarkable development of one feature of the Nepalese landscape—the *bocage*—with hedges and trees that crisscross the farmlands (Chapter 17). This study supports the opposition by recent analysis to the catastrophist scenario of the 1960s and 1970s: population increase went along with innovations—such as private tree-planting—that decrease the pressure on forests, and the Himalayan slopes seem to be more stable than in the past. If there is a crisis, it may be less an environmental one than a social one, since not everyone has equal access to development opportunities in what remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

It is clearly impossible to do justice here to the wealth of information contained on the 646 pages of this book. We have here the state-of-knowledge on the subject, clear concepts that are useful for future research, and an innovative historical perspective as well as precious case studies, reminding the reader of the dangers inherent in simplifying reality. Last but not least, the book contains a wealth of visual material: 60 photographs, 66 figures and maps, and 13 tables. A few repetitions are a small price to pay for the benefit of the individual chapters, each throwing its own particular light on the Himalayan landscape. This book constitutes an indispensable tool for Himalayan research.

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Plan-making for Sustainability: The New Zealand Experience

Edited by Neil J. Erickson, Philip R. Berke, Janet L. Crawford, and Jennifer E. Dixon. Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2004. xxiv + 350 pp, US$109.95, £57.50. ISBN 0-7546-4066-3.

This book examines the quality of government plan-making in New Zealand following the introduction of the innovative Resource Management Act (RMA) in 1991. The book looks at a number of plans in different fields, published from 1991 to 2000. The research methods used to highlight the successes and failures of relevant plans were critiqued by peer review groups and approved by government bodies. Jointly, the 4 authors contribute a wide range and considerable level of experience in the field of planning, which they have gained both in practice in the public and private sectors and as research academics and teachers. Neil Erickson and Philip Berke have previously co-written several other books in the field of planning and sustainable development.

The book under review offers insight into specific aspects of resource management plan-making in New Zealand. It is well set out into 4 parts and a comprehensive appendix. There are numerous diagrams, charts and tables, along with the occasional map and photograph. All images and illustrations are, however, only in black and white.

Part 1 is preceded by a useful 14-page introduction that explains the birth, establishment and objectives of the RMA, gives a summary of the political structure and agenda in New Zealand, and outlines the content of the rest of the book. Following this, Part 1 itself is split into 2 chapters. Chapter 1 explains that planning mandates, such as the RMA, are one of a number of means of implementing policy goals. It briefly compares the influence of different mandates on plan development in Europe and the USA and, in more detail, in New Zealand. Chapter 2 presents a useful—though short—summary of plan-making approaches, categorized as the extremes of being based either on scientific and research evidence or on evidence gained through participatory consultation, and demonstrates that plan-making should ideally be based on a mixture of the two (rational and adaptive approach). I would expect this aspect of the book to be the most interesting for a wide international audience. Although the statements made are neither new nor radical, theories of good practice plan-making are presented in a clear and concise manner and illustrated with useful diagrams. The chapter goes on to explain the development of a methodology for assessing plan quality that is applied to plans in subsequent chapters.

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Part 2 contains 3 chapters. Each concentrates on the impact of the RMA in 3 political spheres: the central government, the regional government, and Maori interests. These chapters are detailed and specific and, whilst providing comprehensive background information, are perhaps of limited interest to a wider international audience.

Part 3 is likewise divided into 3 chapters. The first 2 present an analysis of the quality of policy statements at the regional level (Chapter 1), as well as the quality of district plans (Chapter 2). Using fixed criteria and a scoring mechanism (provided in the appendix), 8 separate aspects of each policy statement are evaluated and then compared with the extent of organizational resources (staff, peer and legal input, public and stakeholder consultation) allocated to its development. Most policies and plans score medium to poor, and unsurprisingly, scores closely correspond with the level of resources invested. The final chapter in this part compares regional policies with district plans. It emphasizes a lack of integration and coordination between these policy levels and suggests a number of reasons for this shortcoming.

Part 4 looks at 4 case studies of how different local governments developed plans for specific geographical areas. These include the Far North District Plan of 1996, the Queenstown Lakes District Plan of 1995, the Tauranga District Development Plan of 1997, and the Tasman District Council Resource Management Plan. Each case study is very (perhaps overly) detailed, providing a full description of the background, the issues, the reactions, and an analysis of the final plan and any lessons learnt.

The final section of the book concludes with a summary of the status of the RMA 10 years after its adoption. This, in brief, concludes that the purpose and principles of the RMA are flawed, and that this has contributed to a widespread reduction in the quality of plan-making for sustainable resource management.

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