
Book Review

Reviewed by Oscar Vanderborght

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Down to the Wire. Confronting Climate Collapse
by David W. Orr
Published 2009
by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
ISBN: 978-0-19-539353-8

This book is written with a deep concern about the environmental deterioration that induces climate change and that is brought about by the evolution of 'civilisation' based on energy consumption. The undertone of this very carefully written and thoughtful work is best summarised by the title's description 'climate *collapse*': it reflects the sentiment of the end of the world (or of mankind) that will occur unless urgent and stringent measures are realised.

The measures proposed by the author cover a broad range of disciplines, going from philosophy through science to politics, sociology and economics. They are mostly related to the US situations.

Primarily, the book will attract the attention of politicians and social scientists. The natural sciences' side of climate change is less well explained, but it is already well documented in other handbooks.

The doomsday thinking is sometimes becoming unnecessarily heavy and even exasperating, but this feeling could be one of the aims of the author. One can, however, doubt its efficiency in this field of human behaviour. The author offers an exceptionally carefully documented and well-ordered bibliography of about 400 publications and a rather short alphabetical index.

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Climate Change. Second edition. The Science, Impacts and Solutions
by Barrie A. Pittock
Published 2009
by Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, UK
ISBN: 978-1-84407-648-2

B.A. Pittock describes in a clear and objective way the classical scientific bases of climate change. He thus handles, inter alia, the greenhouse gases and their anthropogenic climate impacts, the causes of past climate changes of our planet and its lessons for the future, the scientific aspects and the value of the predictions and mathematical models, the reaction of extreme ecosystems to a supplementary stress induced by climate change, the consequences of possible tipping-over (non-linear responses) of geophysical, geochemical and ecological systems, and health issues.

The author also discusses the politics of credibility, of inequity in impacts and possibilities for mitigation between countries and generations. He finally adds a most interesting overview of some national (and continental) approaches to handle – or not handle – the problems relevant for climate change. Each of the 12 main chapters ends with a somewhat confusing mix of bibliography and notes.

The author takes great care to illustrate the very intricate relations of the disciplines involved, but by doing so the book loses somewhat in terms of structure, as is the case in most handbooks about this subject. A glossary with acronyms and a rather complete index adds to the practical use of this remarkable 350 pp volume, which synthesises knowledge, hope and difficulties around climate change. It seems a very valuable tool for teachers, scientists, students and policy-makers to obtain a more than superficial insight into the very complex aspects of climate change, based on objectivity and up-to-date political, social, medical and natural sciences.

Book Review

Reviewed by Luc Hens

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**Planning Sustainable Cities. Global Report on Human Settlements 2009
by United Nations Human Settlements Programme
Published 2009
by Earthscan, Oxford, UK
ISBN: 978-1-84407-899-8**

Many cities worldwide face major challenges: some grow very fast, others decline, the expansion of the informal sector, their role in causing and mitigating climate change, and their intensifying mobility and traffic are just a few of these challenges. Dealing with these problems, which are at the core of sustainable development, should be subject to planning.

This book shows how this can be realised. It contains six main parts:

- 1 An introduction on urban challenges and the need to revisit urban planning. It deals with a wide scope of urban issues ranging from demographic trends to natural and human-made disasters.
- 2 A description of global trends in the (procedural) urban planning process. Most interesting are the sections on innovative approaches to urban planning and the participation of the stakeholders.
- 3 This core part deals with the content of urban plans. It deals with green and brown (environmental) agendas and with the special structure and infrastructure of cities.
- 4 Monitoring, evaluation and education: it advocates better and renewed training on planning for sustainable cities. It points to the finding that most urban planning systems do not have monitoring and rarely have evaluation.
- 5 A description of future policy directions. It is the concluding part of the report.
- 6 The statistical annexes.

This report identifies interesting trends. Examples include:

- the development of sustainable energy in cities
- the improvement of eco-efficiency, for example in the (re-)use of waste
- the development of sustainable transport and the reduction of fossil-fuel driven cars
- the development of 'cities without slums'

The report recommends a way to respond to urban informality and provides keys to address the planning challenges that cities face today.

The publication is extremely well presented. There is a wealth of figures, boxes and tables that catch the urban situation worldwide. Most handy is the section on 'key findings and messages'. It has an up-to-date list of references and a most useful index.

The UN-Habitat core team that was completed by support teams and advisors has written the book. The result is the most authoritative, up-to-date global assessment of human settlement conditions and trends. It is a must for researchers, academics, policy-makers and decision-makers and NGOs on environment and urban development worldwide. It will undoubtedly have most inspiring effects on actors in society and teachers in urban planning schools in the years to come.

Books like this one are a blessing for their readers and the reviewers.

Book Review

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Environment, Development, and Sustainability. Perspectives and cases from around the world
by Gordon Wilson, Pamela Furniss and Richard Kimbowa (Editors)
Published 2010
by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
ISBN: 978-0-19-956064-6

There are few doubts that environment, development and sustainability are interlinked in complex ways. This can be illustrated by addressing the theory that underpins these concepts, the main themes and issues (climate change, biodiversity, management of environmental quality) that are relevant for the discussion and multiple case studies. In five parts, this book captures these different aspects.

Part A is an introduction that explores the linkages between environment, development and sustainability. Part B provides eight case studies on a wide range of sustainability issues around the world. Examples came from China, Uganda, Niger, Ethiopia, Central Europe, Cuba, Australia, the USA and India. The cases show what both the problems and the tensions are, and point to aspects of possible solutions. In Part C, major themes including climate change, conservation, water management, solid waste management, globalisation and ethics, are developed. Part D is about action. It comprises chapters on actors both public and private. It is about resources of collective knowledge, innovation and policy. Most interesting from an academic point of view are the two concluding chapters. They succeed at integrating the quite diverse information of the 25 preceding chapters.

Although published by Oxford University Press, this is not an academic publication in the narrow sense of the word. The chapters merely represent narrative stories. None of them attempts the systematic approach that characterises a scientific paper. The chapter on mobility in Cuba, for example, points to characteristics of the Cuban traffic that make it different from almost any other country. However, it does not deal with the foregoing deficiencies in covering the mobility needs of the modal Cubans, of which dozens are waving with their pesos along the central highway hoping that someone will give them a ride.

Nevertheless, the book is a most valuable introduction to the relationships between the physical environment, development and the need for a more sustainable organisation of poor societies. The 34 authors who contributed to this book have provided views from people in academia, NGOs, development practice, technology and others. They stem from different parts of the world including Africa, Australia, Europe and the USA.

They really represent the 'panache' of those who are involved in and committed to environment, development and sustainability.

The book is excellently edited. Each chapter highlights interesting cases in text boxes, a useful summary and references. The book as a whole entails a glossary and an index. It is, however, remarkable that none of the chapters makes reference to the Springer journal with the same title as the book.