
Book Reviews

Reviewed by Luc Hens

Email: luchens51@gmail.com

- 1 Systems Thinking for Everyone: The Journey from Theory to Making an Impact in Vietnam**
by: Ockie Bosch, Nam Nguyen and Nguyen van Thanh (Eds.)
Published 2016
by Sysprac PTY
24 Rawson Penfold Drive, Rosslyn Park,
Melbourne, Australia, 138pp
ISBN: 978-099423561-9

Contemporary science evolved using a reductionist approach: complex problems were dissected towards more basic levels. Anatomy structure to histology, histology to cell biology and cells to biochemistry and genetics. This strategy no doubt resulted since Newton and Descartes in major successes of the human ratio. Nevertheless, it also entails the risk of addressing only part of reality. Features as environment and sustainable development are intrinsically complex. Studying this complexity requires proper approaches and methods.

Systems thinking are one of these approaches and this book provides an excellent introduction to this way of dealing with complexity. It provides both a systematic analysis and practical applications.

The first eight chapters are an introduction to the definitions and the origins of addressing complex phenomena in philosophy (Chapter 1), next to an analysis of how to unravel complexity (Chapter 2) and the fundamental importance of introducing relevant stakeholders (as a counterweight for external experts) (Chapter 3). Other essentials include building capacity (Chapter 4), models describing the relationships and interactions between the components of the system (Chapter 5), Bayesian networks (Chapter 6), integrated management of systems (Chapter 7) and the limitations of the approach (Chapter 8).

The second part of the book applies the theory to the most intriguing area of Hai Phong, the historical and contemporary marine gateway to Vietnam's capital Hanoi. The book shows an interesting sustainable development analysis of the Cat Ba biosphere reserve which is a most biologically valuable entrance to the North Vietnamese karst area of Halong Bay (Chapter 9). Chapter 10 applies system analysis to the strategic planning of Haiphong city, one of the green and smart cities of contemporary Vietnam.

The concluding Chapter 11 presents 'Think 2 impact' as a new paradigm to apply systems analysis and thinking to address complex challenges. Solutions emerging from this process are characterised by innovation and sustainability. Both governments and organisations will take advantage of this approach in the face of the increasing number of complex environment questions they have to handle (<http://www.tink2impact.org>).

‘Systems thinking for everyone’ is a brave and comprehensive work on systems science. It is about its basics, its applications in the policy of a fast developing and biodiversity rich country. It is brave in its search towards new, interdisciplinary, sustainability and innovation targeted solutions for real governance problems. The authors from academia (Professor Ockie), management (Dr. Nam Nguyen) and policy (Dr. Nguyen Van Thanh, who is currently a Vice-Minister for safety in Vietnam) offer a balanced and accessible text on a difficult subject. Therefore, this book is a most useful starting point for all of us interested in a journey of thinking about nonlinearity, ambiguity, uncertainty and interdisciplinary.

**2 Integral Renewal: A Relational and Renewal Perspective
by: Ronnie Lessem and Alexander Schieffer (Eds.)**

Published 2015

by Gower Publishing Limited

Wey Court East, Union Road, Farnham,

Surrey, GU9 7PT, UK, 470pp

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ISBN: 9781472454362 (ebk – ePDF)

ISBN: 9781472454379 (ebk – ePUB)

Complex problems cannot only be approached by linear reductionist thinking. The reply of science to this is inter- and trans-disciplinarity, which helps dealing with many problems in the environment-human interphase, sustainable development and mobility, to list just these examples.

The work of Lessem and Schieffer goes beyond transdisciplinarity. Their central idea is a process of integral, holistic development, of which they describe four components: an integral journey, an integral world, an integral economy and an integral university. This provides them a ‘new research paradigm’ of which the central question is “How can social research be turned into societal as opposed to merely technological innovation?” This type of innovation supposes care for self and society. These two elements provide the structure of the book.

Twelve chapters are used explaining the individual ‘self’ aspects of the discussion. They are about economics, psychology, sensuous experience, socialisation and communisation. Another 12 chapters describe societal renewal: enterprise renewal Chinese socialism, integral enterprise and integral green economy are the keywords.

These 24 chapters provide the constituents for an integral research model which the authors focus on the ‘global South’.

This is a remarkable book for a series of reasons:

- There is, no doubt, a lot of original thinking backing the chapters, and the original move connecting a wide series of individual aspects in a holistic approach is appreciated.
- On the other hand, many of the references provided at the end of each chapter are either auto-references or refer to publications of closely related colleagues. This indicates on the one hand the originality of the subject, but also the lack of a wide international science platform.

- This is not an easy book to read. Part of this is related to the specific, non-universal vocabulary the authors developed. What should one imagine when they discuss ‘individual context with collective canalisation’ as part of ‘care for self and society’ (p.19) or of the ‘domination configuration’ to affect ‘social innovation’ (p.161) and the ‘4 C-ing development’ (pp.448–450).
- I have seldom had a book with such a wide variety of terms in its index: from dance, over matricentric economics and rhythm trajectories, to (four modes of) psyche.

This is a book for the inside crowd of integral, transdisciplinary research. The wide variety themes and aspects addressed by the authors deserve an in-depth and well-motivated discussion by the scientific community. It is a valuable addition to Gowers’ series on *Transformation and Innovation* (<http://www.gowerpublishing.com/tandi>).

3 Ecotopia 2121: A Vision for Our Future Green Utopia in 100 Cities

by: Alan Marshall (Ed.)

Published 2016

by Arcade Publishing

307 West 36th Street, 11th Floor,

New York, NY 10018, USA, 320pp

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Cities and urbanised areas have struggled with a variety of problems since they first evolved some four thousand years ago. The post-modern city, in particular since it targets turning its environmentally loaded industrial heritage in new opportunities and facing the global environmental crisis, no doubt has to deal with its environmental quality. Urban environmental quality is of direct importance for some 55% of the world’s citizens but shows many facets worldwide.

This book addresses and illustrates this issue. It looks at major urban environmental threats in 100 (major) cities in five continents. For each of the selected cities, a narrative text of a few pages is provided describing:

- One of the main environmental problems the city faces: the air pollution in Athens, the urban vegetable gardens in Budapest or the innovative energy development in Dawei.
- This is used as a basis for a vision on the each of the chapters cover one city. The text of each chapter is complemented with an introductory artwork in the local style of the country in which the city is localised.

This is an impressive and a most monumental work. Few publications overview the essentials of environmental problems in 100 cities worldwide. On the other hand, this is not a scientific work. A methodological section is lacking and there is no attempt to overview the results in a concluding section, or to compare the findings with the open literature. The basis of selection of the included cities is as unclear as the selection of the main environmental problem(s) of the described city. Although Accra suffers

from inundation, it is unclear whether this is the main problem in this far-going environmentally undermanaged city. It remains equally unclear why China's impacting gold mining has main environmental effects on the (air) pollution in Beijing. The disruption of the environmental problems is insufficiently systematic and detailed to contribute to in-depth understanding. It is impossible to understand Athens air pollution without looking into its traffic and the wildfires of its surroundings. The deforested and only slowly recovering mountains around the city will significantly affect its 2021 vision.

In spite of these limitations, this is a most valuable, inspiring and interesting document for all of us – academics, practitioners and policy makers – who are interested in the logic of urban environmentalism and healthy, green and smart cities.