

Human Ecology: Basic concepts for sustainable development.

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This is a useful and timely book which attempts to present an analysis of sustainable development from the perspective of the systematic study of the interface between human systems and natural environmental systems. Though the study of 'human ecology', that is the relationships between people and their environment, is not new as a concept, it is only relatively recently that it has begun to be accepted as a discipline in its own right. This book provides a cogent argument for the consideration of the human-environment inter-relationship as a single, complex, adaptive system. In this systematic approach, the human social system and the ecosystem of the planet Earth can be seen to be a mesh of reinforcing connections, each influencing and being influenced by the others. The text proceeds in 12 chapters to outline the main features of ecosystems and human social systems, to investigate, by example, their coevolution and coadaptation, then to consider the relevance of this in the context of 'human perceptions of nature'. The final three chapters look at 'unsustainable human-ecosystem interaction', sustainable interaction, and 'examples of ecologically sustainable development'.

The text is well illustrated with relevant diagrams, and a "things to think about" section at the end of each chapter which could provide useful for interaction and tutorial group exercises. The main issues which are missing from this text, and which it would benefit by inclusion in subsequent editions are firstly, a chapter on the consideration of social capital, and the role of community participation in the management of the environment. Secondly, a section on the role and function of technology at the interface of the human-environment. A focus on alternative technologies and the relevance of the computer network based knowledge economy would have been a particularly valuable contribution. Having said this, the omissions are minor, and in no way undermine this book as a stimulating, appropriate, and very welcome contribution to the literature on sustainable development.

The unification of these social and environmental inter-relationships into a single discipline of human ecology provides a vital platform to aid the wider understanding of the complexities of the human impact on the natural environment. This in turn has a corresponding effect on the application and relevance of policies to encourage and support sustainable development in a coherent manner, rather than through a confusing jumble of academic disciplines. This book provides a very useful primer, as a core text for beginning undergraduates, for the enthusiastic politician or planner, or as a point of departure in a framework of wider reading for postgraduate study. It deserves to be widely read.

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