

Book Review

Environmental Principles and Policies. An Interdisciplinary Introduction by Sharon Beder

Reviewed by Luc Hens

Vakgroep Menselijke Ecologie,
Vrije Universiteit Brussel,
Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussels, Belgium
E-mail: human.ecology@vub.ac.be

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Biographical notes: Luc Hens graduated as a Biologist and later received his PhD in Biology from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) where he is at present Professor and Head of the Human Ecology Department. He also lectures at several other universities abroad. His specific area of research concerns the elucidation of interdisciplinary instruments for sustainable development. He acts as an expert on environmental policy in several advisory councils in Belgium. He is the book review editor for the *International Journal on Environmental Pollution*, and editor of *Environment, Development and Sustainability*. He currently acts as vice-dean for educational affairs of the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy.

Any policy is founded on principles. For a policy targeted to sustainable development, the so-called Rio Declaration is of core importance. The Declaration lists some 20 principles that, used in combination, should underpin any policy targeted to sustainable development.

This book starts from some of these principles. It provides an in-depth examination of the sustainability principle, the polluter pays principle, equity principles and the precautionary principle. It shows, for example, how the sustainability principle finds its origin in the 1960s interpretation of limits to the growth, carrying capacity and the more recently established ecological footprint.

It provides a similar discussion on the 'social' principles of human rights and public participation. All of these principles, developed over the past decades, have gained acceptance to a differential extent, and have been used in international treaties and law.

In parts 3 and 4, the text focuses on the relation between these principles and environmental policy that uses economic methods and instruments. For the polluter pays principle this might sound rather obvious, for the precautionary principle, this discussion is enlightening.

The last main section of the book relates the principles to economic aspects of conservation policies. It shows how they have been used in fishing rights, water and salinity abatement.

The last chapter offers an interesting discussion on the effectiveness of economic instruments for environmental policy. It shows that "economics-based environmental policies are an indirect and ultimately ineffective method of achieving environmental goals" (p.278).

The book describes analyses and evaluates policies from the point of view of principles and environmental economics. As such, it does not reveal new facts, but contributes to refreshing perspectives and understanding.

The book is remarkable not only because it puts an almost classical discussion on (selected) principles of environmental policy, in an economic instruments contexts. It equally makes this discussion most accessible. It is written in a clear, non-technical language, and they arguments are systematically structured. The scope of the book is undoubtedly international, with a lot of attention to, for example, climate change policy and the Kyoto protocol. As the author lives and works in Australia, it is not surprising that also Australian applications (e.g., water, salinity) are discussed.

The book addresses policy makers and their advisers, but mainly students interested in the interdisciplinary aspects of environmental policy and some of its basic principles.