

## **Better Not Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve Your Community**

**By Eben Fodor**

New Society Publishers, 1999  
Gabriola Island B.C., Canada.

*Reviewed by Graham Brown*

*University of Utah*

*Family, Consumer, and Community Studies Department*

Portland is an area that has been dealing progressively with growth issues for many years. By living in this area, coupled with his professional experience as a planning consultant and educational experience in environmental studies and urban and regional planning, Eben Fodor is an appropriate witness to and commentator on growth issues.

The focus of the book is to refute the idea that growth is a natural extension and necessary function of our society. In the opening chapters he outlines the course of the book and sets the stage for his argument. Chapter 1 extends the introduction and generally defines growth and the problems associated with too much growth. Here he expresses his concern for the “endangered landscape” that is threatened by development.

Fodor describes growth as a machine with various parts and argues that growth is primarily a business. Fodor also points out who are the key players and major benefactors in the growth business. He follows up this idea with illustrations about the costs to taxpayers of new developments. He believes that citizens can combat growth through involvement in local organizations, writing letters to the editor, and becoming active participants in the planning process.

Fodor explores 12 common myths of growth that are used by growth proponents to encourage further growth. He debunks these myths with common sense, logic, anecdotal support, and occasional empirical research. Equally as important, he does not just criticize but offers alternatives and subsequent policy. Although growth proponents often claim that growth is good for creating jobs and making housing affordable, Fodor contends that the external competition for employment results in the same proportion of unemployment and negligible affects on housing.

He supports smart growth but ultimately his utopia is no growth. More precisely, he suggests that we strive for qualitative growth as opposed to quantitative growth. He uses the analogy of a library that does not grow in size or number of books but replaces existing books with higher quality ones. In the same sense, he advocates that we can build qualitatively better communities, despite the absence of growth.

Although Fodor clearly prefers no-growth strategies, I was pleased to see him devote part of a chapter to growth management issues (Chapter 6). As is the case in Salt Lake City and county, internal population increases will necessitate growth so it is important to recognize the need for smart growth. He describes several cities’ growth management issues and strategies with regards to housing, employment, and population increases. Interestingly, Portland has recently adopted a new approach to growth management. As reported in the *New York Times* (6/9/99) Portland has adopted a policy that will penalize companies for adding jobs. This is in line with Fodor’s account of Boulder, Colorado, another community that has a history of policy changes consistent with qualitative growth ideals.

I applaud his efforts to represent the growth issue and support his arguments through multiple sources of information. He uses both real and hypothetical examples to support and clarify points. He further draws on his experience and previous work to describe many growth scenarios. For example, he draws upon his economic background to include an informative chapter on the economic costs of growth versus non-growth. This extends his previous work in the area where he recently published a paper in *Population and Environment* (vol. 18, 1996) called *The Real Cost of Growth in Oregon*.

Despite the overall sound line of reasoning and use of multiple sources of information, I felt that the arguments could have been strengthened by addressing the psychological consequences and aspects of growth — i.e., disruption of sense of community. A concern of Fodor was the lack of research to support many claims. Although there may be a deficiency in growth development research, there is a wealth of psychological literature that could be used to strengthen Fodor’s claims (i.e., community, environmental, and social psychology included). He does mention some psychological effects (including loss of sense of community) but does not offer empirical research to develop or support these claims. Similarly, he talks about the economic costs in detail and suggests that the environment and social costs may be even higher but does not fully develop these suggestions.

This book has the potential to impact policy. However, at a minimum, Fodor needs to offer a cautionary note about many of the studies he reviews. Many results are descriptive and correlational — the same statistics that are used by the “other side” to promote growth. We need further research to confirm earlier findings and to explore new options. Unfortunately, as pointed out by Fodor, there are many barriers to this research. However, there are also great opportunities for disciplinary collaboration among sociologists, psychologists, geographers, planners, economists, etc. Either way, there needs to be more research in order to create sound policy.

On a different note, the beginning survey that precedes the first chapter sets a polemic tone at the outset and suggests that the book will be a one-sided call to action. Although Fodor clearly advocates against growth, his treatment of the issues is more scholarly than the introductory survey would suggest. Similarly, in the concluding chapter, I felt that Fodor's impassioned plea for sustainable development distracts the reader from an otherwise stimulating discussion of growth. His critique of technologies' impact on our current lifestyle seems to advocate for a reversal to earlier times. Although he raises some valid points, they are incongruent with and distract from the rest of the book. These remarks may turn a lot of people away from what is an excellent and timely argument against uncontrolled growth. In contrast, I feel that the points made further in the chapter about the distinction between quantitative growth and qualitative growth provide a more coherent focus to the book.

On the one hand, I feel the need for the author to discuss growth issues in greater depth (particularly with reference to

psychological, social, and environmental issues). Yet on the other hand I would suggest a briefer version or report that would reach the policy makers. For example, he could use an executive summary at the beginning of the book that outlines the critical points of the book and links the reader to the appropriate section in the book where the issue is discussed in depth. I feel that this would be a lot more useful than the sarcastic survey (at the beginning) which immediately makes people skeptical about the contents of the volume. Nevertheless, this is a timely book that discusses a theme of vital importance. The book can be targeted to several audiences all of whom would benefit, including residents who are concerned about growth issues, policy makers who could use the information to aid their decision making, and academics who will note the many areas that need researching. More research would in turn inform the debate and help create better policy.

---

## Briefly Noted

### Edited and Compiled by Scott D. Wright

Gerontology Center  
University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112

---

### **Nature & The Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia.**

Edited by Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, Satpal Sangwan  
New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998  
ISBN 0 19 563896 4

This book serves as an introduction to issues in the environmental history of an enormous contiguous region stretching from Peshwar and the North West Frontier in the west to the Maluku islands of Indonesia in the east. Although this region is immensely variable in terms of climate, topography and culture, it does constitute a very meaningful whole in terms of the collective history of its resource management over the last two centuries. A major objective of this book is to critically examine the development of colonial discourses about nature, risk and the control of natural resources. The editors also aim to make a start in building up a picture of the indigenous response to changing patterns of environmental control, both under colonialism and in the post-colonial period. A sweeping scholarly project containing 31 chapters and over a 1,000 pages of material that covers not just the "grand themes" in environmental history, but also highlights the very local, small-scale histories of single communities and their experiences of ecological pressures and change over time.

### **Guyana: Fragile Frontier Loggers, Miners, and Forest Peoples**

By Marcus Colchester  
New York: Ian Randle Publisher (IRP), 1997  
ISBN 0 85345 971 1

Guyana's environment is now in danger of wholesale destruction. In the name of structural adjustment, this poor and indebted country is promoting a dramatic escalation of logging, mining and other forms of extraction. Half of the country has a new and potentially disastrous boom. The Omai mine disaster of 1995 was dramatic proof of the environmental threat. At the center of Guyana's ecological crisis stands the country's indigenous peoples, long marginalized and threatened by violent conflict with loggers, miners, and ranchers.

Marcus Colchester is Director of the Forest Peoples Programme of the World Rainforest Movement.

### **Ethnoecology Situated Knowledge/Located Lives**

Edited by Virginia D. Nazarea  
Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998  
ISBN 0 8165 1882 3

The re-emerging field of ethnoecology offers a promising way to document and analyze human-environment interactions. This collection brings the discipline into sharp focus, conveying local understandings of environments and proposing a way of looking at the relationship between humans and the natural world that emphasizes the importance of cognition in shaping behavior.

Case studies by international experts explore the varied views of scholars on the human dimension of conservation and the different views of local peoples regarding their own environments. Filled with peoples' voices from North and South America, Africa, and Asia, these cases cover a range of issues: natural resource conservation and sustainable development, the relationship between local knowledge and biodiversity, the role of the commons in development, and the importance of diversity and equity in environmental management. As the only volume to address the status of this increasingly multidisciplinary field — especially as it relates to the differential power of multiple stakeholders — *Ethnoecology: Situated Knowledge/Located Lives* is intended for a wide range of specialists not only in social and natural sciences but also in agricultural studies. It conveys the overriding importance of this powerful methodological approach in providing insiders' perspectives on their environment and how they manage it.

Virginia D. Nazarea is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Georgia and the author of *Cultural Memory and Biodiversity*.

### **Toward Sustainable Communities, Resources For Citizens and Their Governments**

By Mark Roseland with foreword by Hazel Henderson  
Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada: New Society Publishers, 1998  
ISBN 0 86571 374 X

Sustainable Development-Yes! But how do we actually do it? This completely updated and revised edition of Mark Roseland's classic text is the best resource available for citizens and their governments on how to apply the concept of sustainable development in their communities. *Toward Sustainable Communities* offers practical suggestions and innovative solutions to a wide range of municipal and community problems in clear, accessible language. Topics include:

- making community policy
- greening the city
- water and sewage
- waste reduction and recycling
- energy efficiency and renewables
- atmosphere change and air quality
- transportation planning and traffic management
- land use and urban form
- housing and community development
- community economic development
- governance, and tools for community sustainability

Chapters include **Tools** and **Initiatives** sections, plus essential contacts and references including e-mail and web addresses.

Mark Roseland is the editor of the *Eco-City Dimensions: Health Communities, Healthy Planet* and is past editor of *RAIN* magazine. He directs the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, and teaches in the Department of Geography.

### **Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin**

Edited by Devon G. Pena

Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999

ISBN 0 8165 1873 4

Until recently, mainstream American environmentalism has been a predominantly white, middle class movement, essentially ignoring the class, race, and gender dimensions of environmental politics. In this provocative collection of original essays, the environmental dimensions of the Chicana/o experience are explicitly expressed and debated. Employing a variety of genres ranging from poetry to autobiography to theoretical and empirical essays, the voices in this collection speak to the most significant issues on environmentalism and social justice, recognizing throughout the need for a pluralism of Chicana/o philosophies. Grounded in actual political struggles waged by Chicana/o communities over issues of environmental destruction, cultural genocide, and socio-economic domination, this volume provides an important series of snapshots of Chicana/o history. *Chicano Culture Ecology, Politics* illuminates the connections that must be understood among race, ethnicity, class, gender, politics, and ecology.

Devon G. Pena is a Sociologist at Colorado College and past director of La Sierra Foundation of San Luis. He has written several books on Chicano issues.

### **The Human Relationship with Nature: Development and Culture**

Peter H. Kahn, Jr.

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999

ISBN 0 262 11240 X

Urgent environmental problems call for vigorous research and theory on how humans develop a relationship with nature. In a series of original research projects, Peter Kahn answers this call. For the past eight years, Kahn has studied children, young adults, and parents in diverse geographical locations, ranging from an economically impoverished black community in Houston to a remote village in the Brazilian Amazon. In these studies Kahn seeks answers to the following questions: How do people value nature, and how do they reason normally about environmental degradation? Do children have a deep connection to the natural world that gets severed by modern society? Or do such connections emerge, if at all, later in life, with increased cognitive and moral maturity? How does culture affect environmental commitments and sensibilities? Are these universal features in the human relationship with nature? Kahn's empirical and theoretical findings draw on current work in psychology, biology, environmental behavior, education, policy, and moral development. This scholarly yet accessible book will be of value to practitioners in the social science and environmental fields, as well as to informed generalists interested in environmental issues and children.

Peter H. Kahn, Jr. is Research Associate in the Program in Education and Human Development at Colby College, Maine, and Co-Director of the Mina Institute at Covelo, California.

### **Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America**

Edited by Jennifer Price

Basic Books, 325 pages, 1999

ISBN 0465024858

American Nature writing is a robust genre embraced by everyone from Thoreau and John Muir to John McPhee, Annie Dillard and David Quammen. Drawing on this rich tradition, Jennifer Price breaks out of the mold in surprising new ways.

Rather than lighting out for the wild places "out there," Price explores the ways in which we bring the wilds into our homes and front yards, our retail outlets, our restaurants, our television sets. She wanders towards a new frontier, the intersection of nature and mass culture, in search of answers to the question of what place nature occupies in our hearts and minds. Price sifts through landscapes and artifacts as diverse

as eighteenth-century cookbooks, mall architecture manuals and the Mall of America, dinner menus, lawn ornaments, and John Waters movies.

In five sharply drawn chapters, Price uses her gifts as a story teller and cultural critic to chart the evolution of the ways in which Americans have made- and missed-connections with nature in our everyday lives. After brilliant chapters on the extinction of the passenger pigeon and the women's bird hat craze of the late 1800s, Price turns her eye to today's generation of affluent baby boomers, with their urban and suburban civilization and its discontents. She ruminates on everything from the extreme popularity of The Nature Company, television shows like "Northern Exposure," and "Twin Peaks," to Volvo advertisements and the plastic pink flamingo-simultaneously the totem of the artifice and kitsch and a potent symbol of our powerful and problematic vision of nature.

By turns witty and whimsical, urgent and ironic, Flight Maps is a sophisticated meditative archaeology of American's desire to make nature meaningful in their lives.

### **The Condor's Shadow: The Loss and Recovery of Wildlife in America**

By David S. Wilcove

New York: W.H. Freeman & Co. 1999

ISBN 0 7167 3115 0

The vast majority of American forests, prairies, and rivers have been logged, plowed, dammed, or developed. Hundreds of species have vanished completely and many others are now in danger. And yet, in some areas there are more acres of forests now than at the turn of the century, and many of our lakes and rivers are cleaner today than they were twenty years ago. What exactly is the state of wildlife in America today? *The Condor's Shadow* attempts to make sense of the complex, and often contradictory, patterns of change. Synthesizing the many diverse elements that make up our ecological landscape, David Wilcove, senior ecologist at the Environmental Defense Fund, provides a unique and comprehensive overview of where we stand today and how we got there.

Central to this story are people whose arrival marked the beginning of a transformation of the North American landscape that is second only to the Ice Age in its impact on Wildlife. *The Condor's Shadow* describes how nature has responded to the forces human beings have unleashed upon it: habitat destruction, air and water pollution, overkill, and the introduction of exotic animals and plants and the diseases they carry. Exploring the cycles of loss and recovery that have characterized many North American ecosystems over the past two centuries and especially during the last fifty

years, *The Condor's Shadow* examines the factors that determine a species' vulnerability to extinction and reveals the unanticipated, even improbable, consequences or removing even a small part of any ecosystem. A compelling ecological history of American wildlife, *The Condor's Shadow* is essential reading to anyone interested in saving our imperiled natural heritage.

### **Design for Human Ecosystems: Landscape, Land Use, & Natural Resources**

By John Tillman Lyle

Washington, DC: Island Press

ISBN 1-55963-720-X

For more than 30 years, John Tillman Lyle (1934-1998) was one of the leading thinkers in the field of ecological design. *Design for Human Ecosystems*, originally published in 1985, is his classic text that explored methods of designing landscapes that function on the sustainable ways of natural ecosystems.

The book provides a framework for thinking about and understanding ecological design, along with a wealth of real world examples that bring to life Lyle's key ideas. Lyle traces the historical growth of design approaches involving natural processes, and presents an introduction to the principles, methods, and techniques that can be used to shape landscape, land use, and natural resources in an ecologically sensitive and sustainable manner.

Lyle argues that careful design of human ecosystems recognizes three fundamental concerns: scale (the relative size of the landscape and its connections with larger and smaller systems), the design process itself, and the underlying order that binds ecosystems together and makes them work. He discusses the importance of each of these concerns, and presents a workable approach to designing systems that effectively accounts for all of them. The theory presented is supported throughout by numerous case studies that illustrate its practical applications.

This new edition features a foreword by Joan Woodward, noted landscape architecture professor and colleague of Lyle, that places the book in the context of current ecological design thinking and discusses Lyle's contributions to the field. It will be a valuable resource for landscape architects, planners, students of ecological design, and anyone interested in creating landscapes that meet the needs of all an area's inhabitants — human and nonhuman alike.

John Tillman Lyle was, until his death in the summer of 1998, professor of landscape architecture at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, California.

Better NOT Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve your Community ISBN-13: 978-1897408032, ISBN-10: 189740803X (2) Read docs on this site: Strong T...  
In general, the more you have ppl out of their cars, the better. (1) Read this book. Better NOT Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve your Community. ISBN-13: 978-1897408032, ISBN-10: 189740803X. (2) Read docs on this site: Strong Towns (www.strongtowns.org) a non-profit group dedicated to making our communities about the people, rather than the cars, that live here. Thanks for the A2A. 97 views View 1 Upvoter. Related QuestionsMore Answers Below. What would your perfect city look like? His 1999 book, Better, Not Bigger: How to Take Control of Urban Growth and Improve Your Community, was an early prescription for how to slow growth through specific policies, such as eliminating subsidies to developers. Instead of giving away tax breaks for new development, Fodor still believes local elected officials ought to invest in existing parks, roads, schools and community centers. In other words, improve the quality of life for current residents, so that they want to stay in the city, rather than scrambling to find new ones. Even advocates of slower growth don't argue that big population losses are a good thing. Outright decline is a different matter, says Gottlieb. With decline, you strand infrastructure.