
REVIEWS AND NOTES

A REVIEW OF THE ANZSYS BOOK

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James Sheffield (ed.), *Systemic Development: Local Solutions in a Global Environment*. ISCE Publishing, 2009. 784 pp.

The title of the book is that of the 2007 ANZSYS (Australia – New Zealand Systems Conference) held in Auckland, New Zealand. The conference was held at UNITEC and organised by Sheffield and Fielden.

The book contains 62 papers on the theme of an interconnected world. Environmental, social, organizational, and informational problems are pluralistic and messy. Systemic approaches are required to reduce conflict and confusion. A key challenge is to apply holistic systems concepts to improve the lives of those served by systems of all kinds. This challenge motivated the theme for 2007's ANZSYS conference – 'Systemic development: local solutions in a global environment'.

It is interesting to compare the papers in the book with the 18 topics listed in the Call for Papers of *Journal of Globalization Studies* and reproduced in the Editorial for this first Edition. The book has 11 papers on local solutions in a global world, 9 papers on sustainability, and 8 papers on systemic interventions in governance. A further 17 papers match other *JGS* topics. That is, more than 70 % of the papers in the book match topics identified as important to *JGS*.

The book provides a characteristic 'systems' approach to globalization and aspects of globalization seen through a lens of emergent local-global interactions. The authors approach globalization through the work of system theorists, including Ackoff, Ashby, Churchman, Habermas, Luhmann, and Pierce. They employ systems techniques, tools and processes, including boundary critique, systems dynamics, and the Viable Systems Model. Some authors describe action research interventions they have made in systemically complex domains. While these interventions must by necessity be situated *somewhere*, the underlying theoretical perspective embraces the systemic complexity that is a defining characteristic of global systems.

A feature of the book and the ANZSYS 2007 Auckland conference is the high quality of the reviewing process. In total the participants provided more than 200 double-blind reviews. Most submissions received three reviews. All of these adopted a systems perspective and met reviewer's consensus on quality requirements. These reviewing procedures have ensured that the quality of the papers presented in the book is generally very good.

As the editors of *JGS* have noted, the study of globalization requires a multidisciplinary approach characterized by commitment to scholarship from diverse, often value-laden perspectives. Systems theorists such as Churchman insist that in a marketplace of ideas a successful theory is one that can 'sweep in' rival explanations. This has implications for what constitutes 'rational' communicative action among systems researchers themselves. The tolerance and respect that is required to listen to another's point of view is captured in the book. One example is provided – a footnote from a paper applying compact mathematical models to development conceived on a global scale:

Note that one of the anonymous referees of this paper has suggested that 'faster technological growth does not result in faster growth of the Earth's carrying capacity, rather it degrades it faster'. However, our analysis of relevant long-term demographic, ecological, and technological data has shown that in long-term perspective all the important increases in the Earth's carrying capacity have been achieved just through the acceleration of technological growth (Korotayev *et al.* 2006a, 2006b; Korotayev and Khaltourina 2006).

This is a well edited hardcover book. Links to environmental concerns are presaged in a cover image of a Pohutukawa tree (*Metrosideros Excelsa*) which has crimson flowers and symbolizes New Zealander's ties with the land. The papers are formatted consistently and each page contains helpful header and footers containing paper number, title and author. At a cost of \$US 65.99 this represents a high-quality, low-cost publishing achievement.

The conference modelled a respectful forum for discussion and debate on systems perspectives and their applications. One of the highlights of the conference was seeing the way in which the principles of sustainability were translated into practice in the vegetable gardens on the campus. The other highlights were the papers and conversations about the synergies between indigenous cultures and systemic approaches. Dualisms are the heart of all development problems. To what extent can we be said to be complicit in perpetuating these dualisms in the way in which we think and practice? Stewardship, according to Laszlo (2000, cited in Romm 2002: 461) from the verb 'steward', meaning to 'bring forth', needs to underpin what is regarded as reasonable, future-oriented praxis. If we accept that systemic approaches involve our thinking and practice, then we are potentially part of the problem and the solution. Reasonable, caretaking decisions can be enhanced when we recognise our role as stewards. Thus the papers and the volume make a contribution to a different approach to development, representation and accountability.¹ '...The relationship between the people and their country is understood to have existed from time immemorial – to be part of the land itself' (Rose 1996: 35–36, cited in Atkinson 2002: 29).

The book provides a valuable resource for graduates and for professionals. It is hoped that this volume will stimulate others to produce systemic local solutions that respond to the global challenges – and *vice versa*.

NOTES

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¹ We need to develop an understanding of the consequences of our social, political, economic and environmental decisions. Expanded Pragmatism (rather than a narrow form of pragmatism is needed). Expanded pragmatism is based on considering the consequences for ourselves, others, the environment and the next generation of life.

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