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## **Review of *Communities, Development and Sustainability Across Canada* Edited by John T. Pierce and Ann Dale**

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**Communities, Development and Sustainability Across Canada.** Edited by John T. Pierce and Ann Dale. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999. xvi+302 pp. Figures, tables, notes, maps, index. \$85.00 cloth (ISBN 0774807229).

*Communities, Development and Sustainability Across Canada* is intended to serve as a synthesis of work on how Canadian communities can achieve sustainable development. Twelve essays by different authors discuss diverse

theoretical and analytical perspectives and promote a variety of actions related to implementing sustainable development at the community level. The editors' introduction promises that the book will "highlight the importance of community as a critical link in achieving sustainable development." To this end, contributors were instructed to provide readers with both "retrospective and prospective analyses" and to make concrete proposals for action. Individual authors responded by producing work that consistently addresses the editors' intentions but varies considerably in terms of the pragmatic quality of proposed recommendations.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this book is the remarkable consistency in the message produced by an academically diverse group of authorities. Without exception, each essay stresses the importance of community input and involvement in the process of achieving sustainable communities. Each essay also emphasizes the integral and complex relationships among environment, economy, and community that must be understood and accounted for in community policy and planning initiatives. A less explicit but equally recurrent theme is the need for changes in senior government policy and administration allowing for increased participation and decision making at the community level, particularly with regard to multi-jurisdictional resource management issues and interests.

Despite this thematic consistency, the essays do not live up to expectations in providing concrete recommendations. The quality of concluding observations and subsequent recommendations for action vary from trivial and overgeneral to focused and specific. While this variability is doubtless due in part to the topics assigned to individual authors, some essays still deliver disappointingly little in the way of applied solutions. Some authors tend to pose their recommendations for achieving sustainable development in terms of a community vision best described as utopian, rather than realistic or pragmatic. Although fine as far as it goes, it does little to enhance the book's value as a tool for the planner or civic-minded citizen looking for concrete ideas on implementing sustainable development concepts into a community's structure. Several authors' strong academic approach to their writing renders their essays virtually incomprehensible to any reader without an equally strong academic background in planning, economics, or sustainable development, thereby further limiting the volume's usefulness to the layperson.

Shortcomings notwithstanding, the book's editors have done an admirable job of trying to fill the niche between the work done on global sustainability and the body of work on resource stewardship and "green" planning. The majority of the essays are eminently readable, thought provoking, and presented in an intelligible manner. Discerning and creative readers will find

practical guidance for applying sustainable development concepts to their own unique community situations. **Neil Gilson**, *Regional Environmental Officer, Calgary Regional Office, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*.