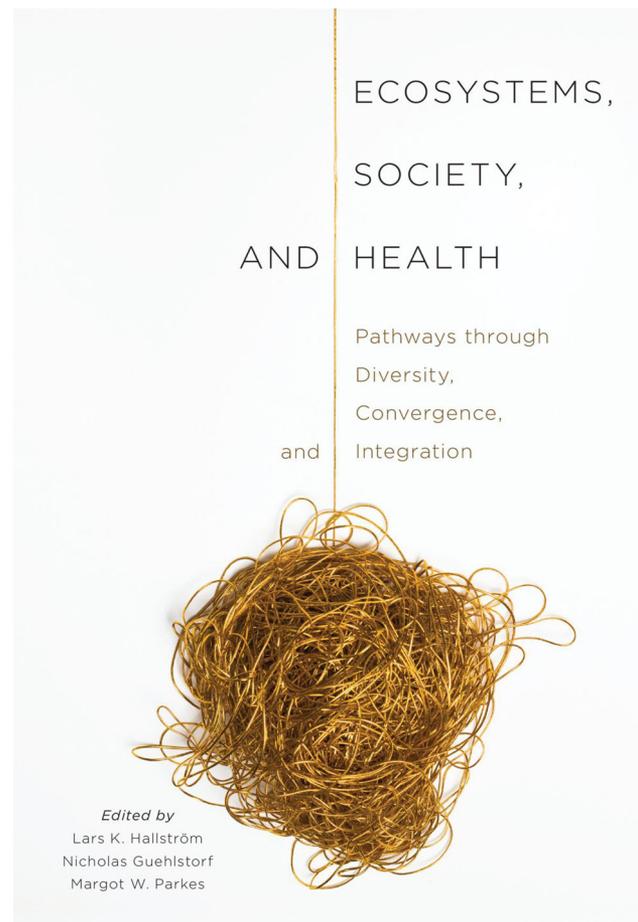


Book Reviews

Ecosystems, Society, and Health: pathways through Diversity, Convergence, and Integration, L. Hallström, N. P. Guehlstorf, & M. W. Parkes (Editors), 2015, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press

The last few decades have witnessed continued and progressive recognition of health and well-being as strongly influenced by social and environmental contexts. Associated with this recondition, in a variety of fields we are seeing the integration of health as an emergent property of ecological and social systems. Yet, it remains a struggle for many of us embedded in the Western tradition of science to maintain a holistic conception of health for more than a fleeting moment, before our training snaps our perspective back to a narrower field of view. This is where *Ecosystems, Society, and Health: Pathways through Diversity, Convergence, and Integration* edited by Lars Hallström, Nicholas Guehlstorf and Margot Parkes can help us. In this book the editors integrate contributions from a broad range of perspectives to “offer a narrative of ... inter-linked, cross-national, and interdisciplinary research” that demonstrates diverse yet convergent approaches to the integration of knowledge and action on ecosystems, society and health.

Beyond an introductory chapter that provides an overview of multiple perspectives and settings at the intersection of environmental, health and social domains, Hallström, Guehlstorf and Parkes organize the text into three sections that address social–ecological approaches, policy and governance, and learning and local knowledge. The sections are nicely balanced: each consisting of three chapters, and each preceded by a preface in which the editors introduce and integrate the contributions. Also, very usefully, each chapter includes a preamble with the authors’ explanation of their perspective, background and research interest. The result is a cohesive and masterfully integrated volume that stands in contrast to so many edited compendiums that seem to be mere collections of loosely connected papers. These editors



bring to mind the goal of the action researcher to represent all relevant perspectives in the pursuit of holism, and at the same time the expertise of the systems thinker who moves beyond analysis to synthesis to arrive at larger patterns not evident in the parts alone.

In the first section of the book, “Socio-ecological approaches to health, environment and community,” Nancy Edwards and Collen Davidson critique the application of socio-ecological models in community health. They conclude that to address complex situations and wicked problems, socio-ecological models must account for more dynamic, historically mediated and differential person–environment interactions. Patricia Marck follows this by posing the question “Is it possible for health care communities to “imagine together” better ways to treat each other and the places we share?” Integrating restoration ecology, environmental ethics and health care safety research to explore the use of restorative thinking, Marck argues for a “place ethic” in health care to foster an understanding of the critical role of ecological health and of the purpose, character and the “profound moral weight” of place in healing. Concluding the section, Patti Hansen-Ketchum presents a community- and nature-based health promotion study in Atlantic Canada. She demonstrates that “in equitable societies, citizens are not dependent upon but rather part of a community ecosystem that in its entirety generates health.”

In the section “Deliberation, Policy, and Collaboration as Pathways to Integration,” the editors chose three contributions that portray perspectives from public policy and participatory politics. Starting this section, Robert Bartlett and Walter Baber note that administrative rule-making about health and the environment will inevitably grow in response to ongoing globalization. They propose the use of juries of disinterested citizens in a process of deliberative rule-making to counter the anti-democratic tendencies of administrative discretion. Niholas Guehlstorf and Traci Lichtenberg follow with an exploration of watershed governance in the Midwest USA. They illustrate that through improved deliberative efforts, a shift to increased public participation can help to legitimize environmental decisions around agricultural pesticides and poor water quality. Closing this section, Margot Parkes uses the case of sustainability and health in the Tieri River Catchment in New Zealand to illustrate guiding concepts of integration, participation, collaboration and the place-based nature of collaborative learning to “overcome unhelpful divides between people and place, equity and ecosystems, society and nature—especially in relation to health and well-being.”

Finally, the section “Linking Ecosystems, Society and Health through Learning and Local Knowledge” explores several perspectives on values and ways of knowing related to health and well-being. In this section, Karen Morrison, John

Fitzgibbon and David Waltner-Toews apply situated learning theory to understand the social–ecological dynamics of Cuban coastal fisher communities in the context of ciguatera fish poisoning, and a dearth of information about the dynamics causing the outbreaks. The authors arrive at conclusions about the importance of social learning, local action and multi-level governance to address this problem. Next, Ann Marie Dalton demonstrates how social capital associated with religion has the power to respond to ecological crises and enhance human health. For example, religions provide institutional pathways to create networks and nodes of action, as well as to produce systems of meaning that provide hope and purpose, and thus, drive responses to ecological crises. The book ends with a chapter by Cheryl Bartlett, Murdena Marshall, Albert Marshall, and Marilyn Iwama, who present Integrative Science and Two-eyed Seeing (bringing together different world views and mobilizing different perspectives) as a way to foster “big pattern” understandings of knowledge systems to foster transcultural and transdisciplinary approaches to health and well-being. In this context they also promote the use of organic and visual models as a way to reconnect with the Earth, leading to innovative thinking and enriched understanding of human and ecological health.

The editors’ careful selection of chapters, their organization in thematic sections, section overviews and the explicit positioning of perspectives by the authors make this an interconnected and well-organized book that presents an accessible narrative of diverse yet complementary approaches. As a contribution to the field it moves us one step closer to grappling with the complexity of diverse pathways of health among people and the ecosystems within which we are embedded. For me, the test of a book is whether I learnt something in reading it, and whether it will be a useful resource in my work. The answer is a definite “yes.” *Ecosystems, Society, and Health: Pathways through Diversity, Convergence, and Integration* will stay within easy reach on my bookshelf, and should be on the “must read” list for graduate students in all areas concerned with social–ecological systems and health.

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Published online: May 5, 2016