Book Review

Raul Lejano, Mrill Ingram and Helen Ingram. 2013. *The Power of Narrative in Environmental Networks*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

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This is an intriguing and thoughtfully researched book that is a valuable addition to the extensive literature covering environmental networks. In essence, networks are one of society's key expressions of its deeply embedded association and connections with nature. Covering three fertile case studies the authors aim to explore the ways in which those connected with a particular area or way of life tell their 'story'. In order to do this the early part of the book establishes the justification for a narrative approach and promises a framework by which they can be robustly analysed. Should they deliver on this promise then this is an important contribution to the literature as it would add a valuable research tool to the qualitative side of social science, which while it is acknowledged provides richer and deeper data than quantitative approaches, is not felt to be as robust so the richness and depth does not have the influence many feel that it should.

The early section of the book makes a strong case for the significance of networks in influencing our environmental behaviour, how institutions are structured and the way in which decisions concerning the environment held and made. Not everything is positive as the section assessing participatory networks confirms and, noting the continued environmental decline, the chapter suggests that we need a new way of viewing ecology. A strong theme through all of this introductory section is the need to understand the environmental narrative in all its forms. Chapter 2 provides a strong critic of networks themselves as well as a justification of why they should be studied more closely. The discussion around Latour is helpful and overall this section is insightful and would be of use to any students studying networks. The range of literature covered is wide, even extending to EM Forster. For the researchers among the readers there is a robust justification on the need for analysis that extends across all levels and types of knowledge and reflects the system that is being studied. One area worthy of

inclusion is the role of networks in social innovation, in essence 'how networks respond to change'. This is a crucial area of enquiry and will become more so as networks across the globe respond to climate change.

The case studies provide a fascinating insight to the role and variation of networks across a range of issues, and in this case they are well chosen and thoroughly researched. I had meant to skim the Turtle Island chapter but found myself pulled in by the narrative. Whilst much closer to my intellectual home the third case study on Alternative Farming Networks was equally stimulating, although there has been a library's worth of material written in this area. This chapter also struggled in terms of scale ranging from the global literature on these techniques to a single farm. Consequently the impact of the narrative analysis is somewhat reduced. Throughout these three chapters, I would have liked to see more discussion about the non-human contribution to each of the networks. Also the indigenous aspect might have been explored more deeply and the role, significance and variety of narratives, including art, maps and traditions, across different cultures. Perhaps this is the result of the information being gathered from semi-structured interviews and has thus been 'filtered' through the researcher's matrix. You are left to wonder if ethnography or more anthropology based approaches would have highlighted an even richer variety of material.

Little niggles are that the index seems to be more about names than the major themes within the book. I am sure 'indigenous knowledge' has more than the one mention that the index suggests and 'innovation 'and 'transition' do not figure at all. It is a well written book and a comfortable read. The five elements of the framework do form the basis for the three case studies but their structure varies as other sub-heading creep in. This is not discussed so I am not sure if this suggests flexibility of a variation in emphasis. However these are minor points.

What is clear is that this book makes a contribution to the expansion and embedding of social-ecological systems within our understanding of both narratives and networks. It also challenges the notion that these networks are too complex to understand and examine. Such networks are part of the ecosystem to which they are attached and so understanding them is as important as the ecosystem themselves. Consequently a robust means of unravelling their secrets is a key tool in the researchers toolkit. What is certain is that I will return to this book in the coming months and years as I am sure I have not consumed all there is to consume in the first reading.