



Understanding Society and Natural Resources: Forging New Strands of Integration Across the Social Sciences

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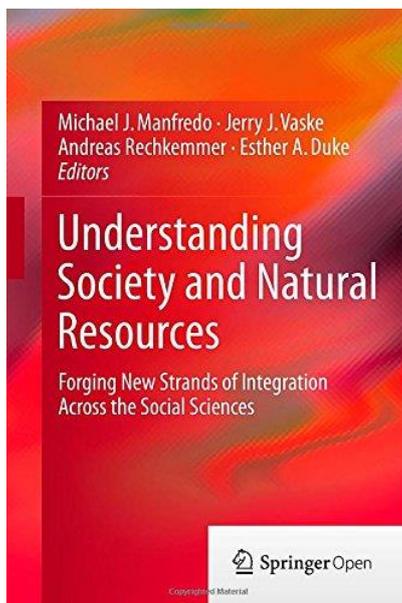
Understanding Society and Natural Resources: Forging New Strands of Integration Across the Social Sciences

Manfredo, Michael J., Vaske, Jerry J. and Rechkemmer, Andreas (eds.)
Springer-Verlag: Berlin, 2014
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Reviewed by [Mehdi Sagalli](#)

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The book edited by Manfredo and colleagues provides a general overview of the various conceptual trends regarding interactions between society and natural resources. Organised into general sections (i. The status of integration; ii. Topics in integration; iii. Methodological advances for facilitating soil science integration), this book is mainly a plea, an advocacy towards more integration and more interdisciplinary work between social sciences and "biophysical" sciences by, for instance, global frameworks such as the promising Socio-Ecological System (SES). Integration here means combined methods or methodological axes that are described as having a capacity for "jumping up" the level of quality of the understanding of the acknowledged complexity of SES through models and tools.

Although the great benefit of the book is that it covers a wide range of promising frameworks and projects/programmes that deal with this integration issue, the book lacks the very integration it promotes. The interesting preface by A.E. Luloff, J. C. Bridger and G. L. Theodori illustrates the point: they promote the capacity to deal with socio-environmental issues with an AND perspective as opposed to the usual OR perspective, meaning that policy and science issues should tend towards non-binary proposals and solutions in a rather nuanced combination. For instance, sustainable development should be preferred to the binary choice between "pure conservation" OR "economy first". Meanwhile, such a proposal has its weakness: merging implies to not look after the intersection gaps: how to gauge different concepts and frameworks, and what do we do if a framework does not work? This means both confrontation with other works on the same issue but also with other chapters of the book and clarification of the lacking points that any concept, framework and model may have.

Several articles of the book are mainly descriptions of conceptual frameworks leading to some kind of self-promotion of a concept without any further evidence of the reasoning or discussion, facing even contradictions with other chapters of the book: the self-promoting MAHB of Chapter 2, the disdainful neo-Malthus concept of Chapter 4. For example, the neo-Malthusian perspective in Chapter 4 is rejected in sociology, not because of fear but because it superimposes a point of view and by then imposes a policy without further discussion, which is rejected at least in Chapters 1 and 8 of the very same book. Chapter 7 highlights individuals and because of this cognitive psychology is assumed to be clearly useful. Then the question arises: why using genetics and evolutionary perspectives if no scientific evidence has been found that natural selection may have an impact on one group reaction towards collective action and while no sociology has been applied? Using an individual perspective does not mean that individual psychology alone can explain collective adaptation, which is stated by Chapters 3, 5, 6, 10, and 11 of the book. These articles are therefore lacking a discussion of the inherent counter-effects, the difficulties and the bias that such frameworks encounter.

However, several articles provide interesting insights, especially on methods of integration because they deal with some gaps of all integration processes: Chapter 1 illustrates, beyond the simplistic examples of proposed futures, the capacity of the envisioning method to create a collective path for stakeholders and actors. Chapters 3 and 5 are dealing with crisis analysis frameworks combining theories and offering pleas for an interdisciplinary integration of collaboration especially for those issues that need even more resilient efficiency in the response towards a crisis rather than towards non-crisis cases. Chapter 6 raises the importance of power in SES by collecting and combining different definitions of power, including [Ostrom \(1976, 1990, 2005\)](#), [Ostrom and Cox \(2010\)](#), [Ostrom, Schroeder and Wyne \(1993\)](#), [North \(1990\)](#) and the promising Lukes' perspectives ([Lukes, 2005](#)), but forgetting the Sociology of Organized Action of [Crozier and Friedberg \(1977\)](#). The third part of the book is devoted to certain methods used by social simulation scientists (e.g., Chapter 8: Land-Use & Cover Change modelling, Chapter 9: Agent-based modelling, Chapter 10: Network analysis, Chapter 11: Social learning), dealing with collective action regarding SES issues. Together with Chapter 6, this part of the book is more "practical" and goes beyond the "interdisciplinary is necessary" mantra that can be fruitful for both beginners and experienced practitioners. This part of the book describes a good overview of the usefulness and applicability of such methods, because they take gaps and difficulties explicitly into account. In particular, the last two chapters raise the question of trust among stakeholders, of institutional and epistemological constraints all scholars should face without "pink glasses". Integration for better SESs is also a social issue.

As a conclusion, given the diversity of its content, not all scholars will want to read this book from the beginning to the end, but many will profit from consulting individual contributions which were clearly written independently. From my point of view, I will stand for the most "practical" ones described above.



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