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Abstracts, Brian D. Clark, Ronald Bisset, and Peter Wathern**

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: A BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH ABSTRACTS

By BRIAN D. CLARK, RONALD BISSET and PETER WATHERN
New York: R. R. Bowker Company. 1980. Pp. 516. \$59.95.

Environmental Impact Assessment, an annotated bibliography, is by its nature neither intellectually uplifting nor possessed of peculiar literary merit. Although it has numerous features which make the volume potentially useful to the uninitiated seeking a quick guide to the vast environmental assessment and NEPA literature, it will lose value rapidly with the passage of time and is not without serious flaw in any event. Why did the authors, who are clearly imaginative, thorough, and insightful, put so much time and energy into an inevitably partial rehash of others' efforts, when they should have been working on something more creative of their own? Insensitivity resulting from recent rates of inflation notwithstanding, I believe that \$60 books must meet higher standards than those costing a mere \$10, \$20, or even \$30; this book is so vastly overpriced that one must fear it will not gain the circulation for which the authors hoped.

Assembling any bibliography requires that the compilers make numerous decisions about what to include, and how to organize and annotate the selections. In this case they have done a laudable job of locating critical and generally available works. Particularly noteworthy is the extensive section on assessment in "selected" countries. To those in the United States that means "other" countries, and the introduction to foreign experience should prove to be one of the most valuable aspects of the bibliography. The authors have straddled an awkward problem by including the United States in the selected countries section. This is a bit disingenuous as most of the rest of the book is based on American experience. Moreover, one could wish that, having made the decision to treat America as one of several selected countries, less reliance had been placed upon American concepts, assumptions and jargon in the essays that accompany each chapter and subchapter. As written, the essays are useful if unextraordinary, but a bit disappointing given that the three British authors seem almost as bound as we are by American approaches to the field.¹

These quibbles as to inclusions are relatively minor. Major difficulties, if such there be, occur in the organizing and annotating of the materials. They are arranged around five reasonable headings: assessment aids and methodologies; critiques and reviews of the process;

1. See, e.g., page 1, where the authors define environmental assessment almost exclusively in terms of NEPA-like Environmental Impact Statements.

environmental assessment as one aspect of planning; assessment experience in selected countries (United States, Canada, Continental Europe, Australia, and "others"), and bibliographies, and conclude with a list of relevant periodicals which is too brief and general to add much to the references cited in the previous 491 pages. So far, so good. Authors may have erred, however, in dividing their five headings into eighteen subcategories. Such chopping seems excessive, and in order to achieve the necessary cross referencing between and among the subcategories, a confusing set of notations keyed on abbreviations of the subcategories is used. Such devices are always clearer to the designer than to the reader, and although one could learn the system, a less minute approach to categories would have been preferable.

Unfortunately the confusion is seriously compounded by a poor index. A good index conceals numerous sins, but this is not one of them. The abbreviated cross references, rather than the subject of each entry, is listed in the index. Hence, one turns, for example, to "transportation" and finds "S95, S99, FA2, FA3, FA4," and cannot divine a hint of the content of an article without locating it individually in the text. This is no mean task as the references are to subcategory entries, not pages, and the subcategories appear in no particular order in the volume.

The annotations are, however, worth the effort to find them. They are comprehensive, terse and, in general, seem designed to place each entry in its field without imparting a bibliographer's coloration to the substance.² They would not, except under duress, substitute for reading the article. The authors have almost uniformly provided sufficient information so that readers can select the references they need and minimize time spent in frantic searching for totally irrelevant articles. One might quibble over the fact that some entries are afforded lush treatment and others are simply listed without comment. However, the comprehensive annotations directed clearly toward the user's "read/no read" decision are the unique and principal virtue of the volume.

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2. This statement is based on an assessment of the annotations of the limited number of entries with which the reviewer is familiar. Perhaps worth noting is that while I am not particularly impressed by the treatment of my own works in the bibliography, readers certainly are given enough information on which to base their own assessments.