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The Urban Organism: The City's Natural Resources from an Environmental Perspective, by Spenser W. Havlick

Shelby J. Smith-Sanclare

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***The Urban Organism:
The City's Natural Resources
from an Environmental Perspective***

By SPENSER W. HAVLICK
New York: Macmillan, 1974, Pp. 515, \$12.95

This book sets forth a conceptual framework which relies heavily on ecological principles usually reserved for biology texts. This is a definite plus. These principles are applicable to the human being in the urban environment as well as the urban center considered collectively. The concepts are illustrated in a clear and interesting comparative manner—so much so it almost becomes an “obvious” to the reader. The holistic approach integrates main subject areas into viable units. Most urbanites wishing to be more closely acquainted with their present living conditions and surroundings, or anyone who wishes to understand what impact urbanization has had on the natural resource base, can use this book as a primary source of information.

The book is divided into three major sections. The first, which places the environment in the urban perspective, contains the basic ecologic concepts—the urbanite as an active participant of the larger community—and shows trends and impacts which are unique considerations of urban communities. The balance in this section is quite good and provides the reader a selection of alternative actions.

“Survey of Natural Resources” is the topic of the second section. All the major natural resources are explained first in terms of natural cycles, then in terms of the impact of urban interaction with these cycles, and finally in terms of the activities or changes which are occurring or might occur to bring a more favorable balance between urban and natural resources. In this respect it is far more than a survey. It is a comprehensive integration of natural resources with the urban environment.

“The Mechanisms of Future Urban Resources,” section three, explores some alternatives in urban resources and re-emphasizes the interdependence of the urban community with the world resource balance. The usage of words such as commonality, world network, and ecumenopolis exhibits a strong desire by the author to create some sense of exciting total involvement with the world system. This section is not as comprehensive as the other two, lacking their depth.

Unfortunately, both the physical and mental health of the urbanite is overlooked in this book. Yet, pollution and health

hazards of urban living result in depletion of a most vital natural resource, the human creator of the urban center. The area of ENERGY in part two is not covered in sufficient detail, and, in light of present emphasis in this area, will need more attention in future updates of the book.

The author refers to the Urban Form as an ecological community which is interdependent and whose contributing interaction with other natural resources is one of synthesis. This Urban Form is, then, the "Urban Organism." Certainly the Urban Organism is unique as a catalyst to an extent never seen before in the world ecosystem. However, those persons reading the book will question whether this synthesis function is a positive action in the natural system. While the implication of the title and introduction seems to be that the Urban Organism acts in a dynamic balance with other portions of the natural resource environment, one gets the feeling that it is instead a predator at best and parasite at worst. The most hopeful thought is that this book might become a dynamic synthesizer to encourage readers to act in a more responsible manner and correct the disfunction of the Urban Organism.

Most environmental books have been either in the form of a once-over-lightly review of problems or an exhaustive coverage of one specific environmental problem. This book represents a laudatory achievement in the difficult task of integrating a multidisciplinary approach to environmental studies, providing a sound background for the development of environmental problems, particularly the urban contributions. As such, the book deserves careful attention by all who are attempting to bridge the gap between natural and human resources whether they are in academia, in public service or involved urban dwellers. All who read this book will appreciate the glossary of terms, bibliography, and fine job of indexing which further enhance the utility of the text.

SHELBY J. SMITH-SANCLARE
Center for Environmental Research
and Development
Technology Application Center
University of New Mexico