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Making the Commons Work: Theory, Practice, and Policy by Daniel W. Bromley

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*Human Ecology*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1993), pp. 106-109

Published by: [Springer](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4603077>

Accessed: 31/10/2011 11:22

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easy-to-follow description and sound methods, the book might profitably be used for teaching advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

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**Making the Commons Work: Theory, Practice, and Policy.** By *Daniel W. Bromley*. ICS Press, San Francisco, 1992, 339 pp., \$44.95 (cloth).

This volume is the latest in a series of recent publications concerning the management of common property resources, among them excellent collections edited by McKay and Acheson and Berkes and a comprehensive theoretical consideration by Elinor Ostrom. The papers here were prepared for a 1985 conference on the subject, and updated for this publication. They add no new theoretical or policy-oriented perspective to the excellent and comprehensive coverage of the previous volumes, but they do offer a number of additional (and well-presented, interesting, and useful) case studies.

All these publications, including the one under review, draw their inspiration from a single, short article published in *Science* in 1968 by Garrett Hardin, called "The Tragedy of the Commons." In this provocative essay, Hardin challenged what he perceived as the then-popular call for communal ownership of various resources by pointing out the high risk of destruction of these resources as a consequence of the logical, selfish pursuit of profit by individual members at the expense of the group as a whole (known as the "free rider" problem). Less than 10 years later, Hardin provided an amplification and refinement of his views, in the first collection of essays on the topic. In this work he considers, as do the subsequent volumes, instances in which common property management seems to work well, and instances when it does not, and what factors seem to play a role in success and failure.

Consequently, it is a little surprising to read attacks by Bromley and Runge in this volume on positions which claim that common property *inevitably* leads to resource mismanagement and ecological disaster—that is, it is surprising that anyone today would hold such a position, and that anyone would find it worth the time to refute it. There are already sufficient documented case histories of common property management successes and failures to render this an academic exercise. On the other hand, the occasional insistence on the intrinsic value of common property to people and their communities in this collection sounds somewhat romantic and often unnecessarily defensive.

However, the recent demise of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and other areas of the world, and the spread of the effort to privatize what were either state-managed or locally-managed enterprises, does add a new cogency to the consideration of how to select an appropriate resource-management instrument. While the essays in this volume do not refer to either this situation or to instances of community-based management of resources in socialist regimes in the recent past, it is worthwhile reflecting on the implications of their conclusions in this wider context. I shall return to this point below.

The case studies presented here concentrate on “traditional” management practices, mostly in relatively small-scale communities, in rural locations isolated, at least until recently, from modern urbanized centers. The essays adhere, for the most part, to the useful analytic framework devised by Ronald Oakerson (presented in Chapter 3) which defines the concepts each author uses and sets out the attributes to be considered within four different categories: physical and technical, decision-making arrangements, patterns of interaction, and outcomes. In addition to sharing a common framework, the case studies also share a common concern with historical context and change through time. This latter feature greatly enhances their interest and usefulness both for theoretical and policy considerations. Finally, the case studies pay attention not only to variation through time, but also to regional variability with respect to the different attributes described, and often attempt to account for this variability. Overall, the case studies are of excellent quality, each with something different to add to the whole.

Margaret McKean’s description of several centuries of management of uncultivated common lands in Japan provides an instance of highly formalized, codified organization of common property management, one extreme of sophistication in a continuum. She attributes the emergence of this management to perceptions of deforestation both on the part of communities and on the part of national rulers; the arrangements made to regulate use of resources had to meet their different interests. This case study is one of the most complex and fascinating in the book. Also outstanding is Robert Wade’s discussion of community management of two different type of resources, grazing land and irrigation water, and their effects on one another, in South Indian villages. Wade points out that the villages in his sample vary considerably in the degree to which they are organized to manage common property; the most organized are those at highest risk with regard to crop production because they are located farthest downstream from irrigation sources, and at the same time have the best grazing (hence the most to gain from regulation of its use). With his usual clarity of exposition, he describes precisely how the resources are managed, by whom, what are the costs, what are the benefits, and so forth.

The volume offers two interesting, and in some ways surprising, cross-cultural comparisons. One is an essay by Bruce Campbell and Ricardo Godoy on commonfield agriculture in the Andes and Medieval England, surprising because of the detailed similarities in management practices in such widely separated, ecologically different and historically distinct locations. Campbell and Godoy point out that this form of management, commonfield agriculture, is fairly rare, but is also found in Europe, Mesoamerica, India, the Middle East, and Africa, in specifically-defined instances. They do point out, in the two cases they compare, important differences resulting from differences in technology and in sociopolitical context. A second comparison looks at historical change in management of common property forest resources in Niger and Thailand over the past century. James Thomson, David Feeny, and Ronald Oakerson compare the two with respect to the rise, and then the dissolution, of common property management regimes. They attribute collapse and failure of the Niger management system largely to incompetence and inappropriateness on the part of first colonial and later independent state management interference. Though an oversimplification on my part, in Thailand decline is attributed to the effects of economic development.

Fikret Berkes provides a different sort of comparison; an examination of five different coastal fisheries in Turkey reveals differences in effectiveness of common property management. Two of the five were unable to resist encroachments by outside commercial competitors, with the consequence that catch per unit of fishing effort declined. Negative consequences from outside incursions are also reported by John Cordell and Margaret McKean for their case study of coastal fisheries in Bahia, Brazil. This latter instance represents another extreme in the continuum mentioned above, in its informality of organization. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this is a case of resource management at all, though Cordell and McKean take care to explore the cultural bases for regulated interactions among fisherman.

More formal are the arrangements described by Jere Gilles, Abdellah Hammoudi, and Mohamed Mahdi for regulation of access to pasture among the Berber in Morocco, and by Piers Blaikie, John Harriss, and Adam Pain for "wasteland" or "forest" resources in Tamil Nadu, India. The latter case study examines a wide variety of different resources, and pays attention to interaction between community and state regulation.

Together, these studies broaden our knowledge about the range of variability in methods and contexts of common property resource management. As I indicated above, it is probably no longer necessary to prove that common management can work any more than it is necessary to point out that sometimes it does not. David Feeny speculates on the research agenda in one of the final chapters, with a consideration of the strengths

and weaknesses of various approaches. Elinor Ostrom's concluding essay raises the provocative question of whether survival of "appropriator organizations" is itself enough, or whether we should be asking more of them. This is, indeed, a central issue, the critical one where policy is concerned. Ostrom's advice in this matter is modest in the extreme.

To return to the issue raised earlier in this review, what are the implications of theory and research on common property management as exemplified in this volume for regions of the world which are shifting away from moribund socialist regimes to new forms of management? The writers in this volume appear to suggest that common property management works best in situations that are stable. Though common properties may contribute to stability, their defenses against exogenous destabilizing agents are weak. There seems to be consensus that individual selfishness cannot take the blame for the failure of common property management where it occurs, not because individuals are not selfish and motivated to cheat their neighbors, but rather because successful common property management systems have effective disincentives for such actions. These disincentives, while protecting the pool of common property resources, also curb individual entrepreneurship, investment, experimentation, and innovation. Perhaps future investigations of the common property management issue for either theoretical or policy recommendation purposes should take the negative implications of these disincentives more seriously into account. Mistakenly or not, the formerly socialist regimes are less concerned with the conservation of their resources, than they are with developing new means to use what they have to help them to thrive. Many of their own members, as well as outside critics, feel that curbing individual initiative was the most serious mismanagement practice of all.

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**Plants and Harappan Subsistence.** *By Steven A. Weber.* Westview Press, Boulder and Oxford; IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1991, 200 pp., \$34.50 (cloth).

This volume presents a detailed description and analysis of the seed remains discovered during archeological excavations (1982–1986) at the prehistoric site of Rojdi (ca. 2500–1800 B.C.) in Gujarat, India. Studies of paleobotanical remains from third and second millennium B.C. sites in South Asia are too few and oftentimes inadequate, so this contribution is very welcome to specialists in the field. Although there is a discussion of