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Peer reviewed

Review: The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication

Edited by Anders Hansen and Robert Cox

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

Ottawa, Quebec, Canada

Hansen, Anders and Cox, Robert, Eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication*, New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2016. xix+434 pp. ISBN: 9780415704359, hardcover, US\$284.00. Also available as a Kindle eBook, US\$55.78. Note: Part of the *Routledge Handbooks* series.

This hefty reference tool is at the intersection of Environmental Studies, Sociology of the Environment, and Media Studies, resulting in the interdisciplinary field of environmental communication that has become widely recognized and institutionalized. For more than a decade, there has been an International Environmental Communication Association, a scholarly journal (*Environmental Communication*, published by the Taylor and Francis Group), a yearbook, and countless academic publications solely dedicated to this emerging domain (p. 14). As explained in the opening chapter (which summarizes some of the field's major research questions) environmental communication relies primarily on the study of culture, power dynamics, and social representations of the environment, to understand how the ideals of a balanced nature, peace, and social justice can be subtly diverted in mainstream discourses from everyday life:

“Often drawing upon critical social theories, scholars have traced the development, influence, and/or alteration of discourses sustaining dominant social, political, and ideological formations, particularly as these rationalize unsustainable practices of the natural world” (p. 15).

An insistence on the local and the concept of “self-in-place” is fundamental (p. 16).

Aptly discussing public agendas and agenda-building processes within the public sphere, Co-editor Anders Hansen gives a strong essay about “Communication, Media, and the Social Construction of the Environment,” based on his previous Routledge book *Environment, Media and Communication* (2010) and on Herbert Blumer's classic constructionist perspective (p. 26). To (imperfectly) summarize this approach, I would say that the social construction of the environment states that just like any social problem, environmental issues are socially validated, not by the whole society, but mainly and firstly through the media (i.e. the journalists, researchers, assistants). Following this framework, the media people have the power to select, validate, sometimes ignore, overestimate, underestimate, or reject any situation, in this case linked to environmental issues, health issues, risks, and related debates. Therefore, issues and debates that are not on the radar of the media are not considered as existing:

“The key achievement of the constructionist perspective on social problems lies in the recognition that problems do not become recognised or defined by society as problems

by some simple objective existence, but only when someone makes claims in public about them". (p. 27).

As we know, some essential issues escape media attention — for a variety of good and bad reasons.

While it is impossible to comment on the 33 previously unpublished chapters included here, some general observations can be made, for example, the recurrent use of core concepts related to culture, ideologies, and social identities (p. 274), linked with the ways nature and environmental issues are conceived and represented in various social groups. Anders Hansen's on advertising demonstrates how citizens can have a very different attitude towards nature depending on the place where they live (rural, urban, or suburban locations), their social class, and how they situate themselves whenever connecting with the mainstream media, which often communicate a modern, urban, technology-based point of view that inevitably positions 'economy' above 'ecology' (p. 274). Indeed, "every nation celebrates its particular nature" (p. 275), and therefore, "there are different national natures" (Anders Hansen, p. 275).

Like many other titles in the book series "Routledge Handbooks", the *Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication* investigates new fields and approaches. They are located in-between the familiar disciplines, therefore bringing new knowledge, unexpected bridges, and original perspectives. Fourth year undergraduates and students at the master's level in domains related to social sciences and humanities (from Sociology to Cultural Geography and Urban Studies) would undoubtedly benefit from this impressive and irreplaceable sum of syntheses in Environmental Studies and Media literacy.

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