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Author

Mason, Fred

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Review: The Commons in the New Millennium: Challenges and Adaptations

By Nives Dolsak and Elinor Ostrom (Eds.).

Reviewed by [Fred Mason](#)
De Montfort University, England

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Nives Dolsak and Elinor Ostrom (Eds.). *The Commons in the New Millennium: Challenges and Adaptations*. Cambridge: Mass.: MIT Press, 2003. 369 pp. ISBN 0262-54142-4 (paperback). \$26.95.

The Commons in the New Millennium: Challenges and Adaptations is an edited collection that examines challenges facing common property resource (CPR) users and other stakeholders in the coming years. The nine main chapters of the book were selected from among the 300 papers presented at the 2000 conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property. These vary in scope from the primarily historical, to the theoretical, to chapters focused on practical examples of resource users' involvement in formal and informal management practices.

The book is divided into three main sections, framed by an introduction and conclusion. The first section, entitled "Managing Species, Habitats, and Landscapes at Multiple Scales," contains chapters that address the complexity, interconnectedness and conflicts characterizing CPRs with management institutions on multiple levels. The chapters in this section discuss territoriality in the Maine lobster fishery, changes in U.S. fisheries policy, and issues related to resource definition and scale in various forest commons.

The second section of the book, "Privatization," considers the success of schemes that attempted to privatize portions of certain CPRs. The authors in this section consider the use of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) in the New Zealand fishery, ITQs and other methods used in the Iceland fishing industry, and the potential use of emissions trading certificates in an international context, drawing on the example of deals between state governments in the eastern United States.

The third section of the book bears the long title of "Financial, Social and Political Capital: Managing Common-Pool Resources and Shaping the Macropolitical and Macroeconomic Environment." The chapters in this section vary greatly in scope. The first discusses how the many changes in Indonesian politics over the last 120 years have affected the management of the country's forest resources. The other two chapters are more theoretical, considering the effects of microcredit financing on social capital and the

environment, and the conversion of social capital into “political capital” to use at the macro-political level.

As in any edited collection, the chapters in this book vary from the adequate to the excellent. Two particularly good chapters include those by Acheson and Brewer on the Maine lobster fishery, and by Farrell and Morgan on emissions trading. The book’s introduction is also quite good, reviewing changes in commons theory over recent times, and relating this to the rest of the book. The conclusion, on the other hand, could be restructured to make it less a summary of the book’s findings and more focused on drawing lessons from them. They are there, but restructuring would highlight the lessons more. Meanwhile, I must ask (partly tongue-in-cheek) what each of the nine authors offered to the 28-page (including references) conclusion?

Such minor criticisms aside, this book is an impressive contribution to the literature on common property that deserves a reading much wider than the normal academic audience. Each of the essays has something to say about the human dimension in commons management, and the collection offers important insight into the complex environmental, political and social interactions that will characterize common property management in the foreseeable future.

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Fred Mason, <FMason@dmu.ac.uk>, Senior Lecturer, School of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, De Montfort University, Bedford, England, MK40 2BZ. Tel: 01234 793335.