

up here, but perhaps the lenses elaborated in this book can be useful in considering it. Future work also needs to extend this analysis to *how* specific initiatives have worked, and to identify governance options that can garner consensus between actors with disparate perspectives.

Litfin, Karen. 2013. *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

*Reviewed by Michael Maniates*

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Karen Litfin swings for the fences in this courageous work of discovery and self-discovery. Aspiring to “write a book that would inspire people to transform their lives” (p. 68), Litfin synthesizes more than a thousand pages of notes gleaned from over 140 interviews at fourteen ecovillages to argue that a world of greater justice, deeper community, and genuine environmental sustainability lies within our collective grasp, if only we would heed the lessons and clues offered by the women and men she encountered during her travels. The result is less a rigorous comparative study of ecovillages than a first-person, sometimes deeply personal account of one observer’s attempt to draw meaning from these “evolutionary laboratories” where “applied scientists” are “running collective experiments in every realm of life” (p. 149).

The pencils and paints of Litfin’s “global portrait of the leading edge of sustainable living in the 21st century” (p. 32) are an eclectic mix of ecovillages (defined as “a gathering of individuals into a cohesive unit large enough to be self-contained and dedicated to living by ecologically sound precepts,” p. 3), each of which she describes briefly in an early chapter. The heterogeneity of her sample will trouble readers expecting a systematic comparison of ecovillage experience. Her “data” range from an inner-city intentional community in Los Angeles to a network of 350 West African villages aspiring to self-sufficiency, and from iconic settlements such as India’s Auroville to less distinctive experiments in suburban co-housing in upstate New York, and scales from a community of 35 individuals to networks of thousands of participants. At times this diversity strains even the broad characterization of ecovillages guiding Litfin’s inquiry.

In less capable hands this kaleidoscope would prove unwieldy, but Litfin is generally up to the analytic task of generating meaning from sometimes incomparable experience. She does this by building her book around four elements of sustainability: ecology, economy, community, and consciousness—or E2C2. Separate chapters on each element integrate the history, practices, and struggles of selected ecovillages to generate “clues,” in Litfin’s words, about how the rest of us might begin the hard but rewarding work of transforming our lives in the service of sustainability.

In her chapter on ecology, for instance, Litfin explores in almost travelogue fashion the virtues of permaculture, the rewards of collaborative consumption,

and the possibilities for small-scale organic farming, among other topics. The result is an accessible articulation of how the rest of us might go about reducing our ecological footprint. We can't all live in an ecovillage, Litfin notes, but even a glimpse into this alternative life can help us better see and embrace the realms of possibility, and begin to change our lives accordingly. In this way, ecovillages become the raw material for larger arguments about the politics of imagination and the intrinsic rewards of living more lightly on the planet. The genius of Litfin's approach is captured in the ecovillage "citizens" she quotes, describes, and invokes. They aren't heroic, sacrificial, or fanatical. They are instead, by and large, likeable, intelligent, humble, and earnest, finding their way and sometimes filled with doubt like the rest of us, yet seemingly happier and more secure than one might expect. Suddenly, making our way step by step toward radically lower ecological-footprint living doesn't seem impossible, or even unattractive.

The remaining core chapters follow the same strategy, though with a twist. In the economy chapter, Litfin's gaze settles on questions of ownership, work, currency, and consumerism, with attendant "lessons learned" and "next steps" for the reader. The virtues of communal governance and social connectedness, as well as Litfin's own yearnings, loom large in the chapter on community, which concludes with advice for the reader. But in her chapter on consciousness, she suggests that few if any of the ideas and actions she has thus far described will grow and spread absent a new earth-centered consciousness, one that would birth a "collective intelligence" about the limits of the planet and the intrinsic value of nature. And it is here that ecovillages, of all styles and sizes, play their most important role. For Litfin, they demonstrate, in real time and with ordinary people, how a collective ecological intelligence can emerge, and is emerging. Ecovillages are both the incubators and monasteries of processes and conditions that privilege the best angels of our individual and collective natures. "The most important work of ecovillages," Litfin writes, "is the inner work [of] social change through personal transformation in the crucible of community" (p. 179).

Many of the tools and practices documented by Litfin will be familiar to scholars and practitioners of environmental sustainability. Her primary audience would thus seem to be readers less familiar with the field, including university-level students of environmental politics to whom she frequently refers. But even the more expert will discover fresh ideas here, including notions like "an architecture of intimacy," a reference to how ecovillages structure community connectedness, and the ways in which community and commitment combine in small intentional communities to expand the capacity for generosity and compassion.

Litfin's book stands as one the best contemporary vehicles for the argument that our current difficulties—ecological, political, and even psychological—arise from a crisis of consciousness rooted in hyperindividualism, a mechanistic world view, the decline in community, and a chronic disconnect from nature.

This perspective is underrepresented in the discourse on global environmental politics; *Ecovillages* is thus a welcome addition to the conversation. The book isn't without its distractions, however. The ubiquity of "we" in the narrative sometimes feels too sweeping—who is this "we" to which Litfin refers, and to what extent does the pronoun hide more than it reveals? Litfin's a priori assumption that the crisis of sustainability is a crisis of consciousness in which we are all complicit will be a difficult leap for some readers. Finally, her recommended "next steps" for readers tilt toward changes in individual lifestyles, without a clear sense of how these changes could reasonably coalesce into the fundamental changes in thinking and doing that she so deeply desires.

And yet, any deficiencies in the narrative are easily offset by Litfin's passion, the clarity of her prose, and her unflinching focus on difficult questions too often swept under the rug. She wrote *Ecovillages*, in part, to interrogate the proper role of an academic during a time of planetary crisis. Her inquisition should prompt a similar introspection among her academic readers, with good effect. She also demonstrates, time and again, a deep mindfulness about her students—about the burden they now carry, and about their mix of hope and despair as we move deeper into the Anthropocene. In many ways this book is for them; it is a testament to the capacity for fundamental and courageous change buried within each of us, waiting to be liberated through meaningful work within supportive community. It is a testament that we all need to consider.

Ridgeway, Sharon J., and Peter J. Jacques. 2014. *The Power of the Talking Stick: Indigenous Politics and the World Ecological Crisis*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

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From its opening chapter, entitled "It Is Time for Our Hearts to Be Broken," it is clear that *The Power of the Talking Stick* is not a dispassionate review of indigenous ecological knowledge and politics. Rather, the book is a passionately written call to solidarity—or as the authors put it, a call to "join the struggle" (p. ix)—in challenging a model of global development that has pushed many of our planetary systems to the brink of collapse.

Ridgeway and Jacques' book is broadly structured around two interwoven themes. The first is a ranging critique of the neoliberal model of globalization and the ecological and cultural impoverishment that they argue has resulted from it; they move from the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions to the rise of transnational corporatism, then to a focus on how these trends have triggered a crisis in the global food system. The second theme contrasts this dominant model with a call for "a planetary consciousness [that] begins with a new awareness of the connections amongst all life forms sharing existence on this planet Earth" (p. 13). They then outline this call, first though proposing a green