

Brouwer, Floor (ed.), 2004. Sustaining Agriculture and the Rural Environment Governance. Policy and Multifunctionality. Edward Elgar. Cheltenham, U.K. Northampton, MA. USA. Hardcover Price: Unknown xi + pp. 348 + index.

The multifunctionality of a land use activity such as agriculture is beginning to resurface as environmental problems continue to increase. Brouwer's edited book caution the modern world about the significance of agriculture as not only an activity that produces food for consumption but as an activity which helps in the effort to preserve and conserve the environment.

This volume which was made possible through the generous support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality in the Netherlands and the Strategic Development of LEI is a major contribution because the book evaluates possible strategies for safeguarding the environment and identifies the key actions necessary in order to sustain the healthy environment of the rural areas.

It must be made clear that most of the book is essentially a review of the multifunctional possibilities made available by agriculture. Land and water in the rural areas, it is argued in the book, are maintained in quality through agriculture. It is somehow assumed that agricultural practices do not involve the use of chemically based substances. Experience has shown agricultural practices in which chemically based substances can actually contribute to the contamination of water and soil. The effort to feed the increasing population in the world has led to the use of chemicals in agricultural practice. This reviewer would assume that the argument presented about agriculture in the countryside of Europe does not take into consideration the use of chemicals in agricultural production.

There is no doubt that the landscapes of the rural areas are determined by the kinds of land-use activities that take place on them and arguably, agricultural activities have dominated the shaping of landscapes in rural areas. Farmers have promoted the preservation of the cultural heritage of most of Europe especially is maintaining and sustaining the functions that enable natural resources to thrive. One might mention, as it is clearly articulated in the book, that the enhancement of biodiversity as well as organic production and agro tourism are promoted by agriculture.

This book also provides the reader with description of instruments which promote multifunctionality and clearly, the exploration of the impacts of policies on multifunctionality is discussed at length. Many of the chapters assess multifunctionality of agriculture in Europe since farmers manage more than half of the European Union territory.

The strongest argument in the book which readers must take seriously and interrogate is the assertion that "multifunctionality is an informing principle behind public policy and market management to

identify approaches for rural amenities provided by agriculture.” Policy scholars in Europe and elsewhere in the world must understand that in order to sustain the integrity of the environment, the understanding of the usefulness of a land use activity such as agriculture is an imperative in all its theoretical and applied forms.

Forestry has made two significant contributions to knowledge and they are: (1) the terminologies of multifunctionality; and (2) sustainable development. The book explains these concepts very well and the students of sustainability would find the discussion of sustainable development very enlightening.

Overall, the book is divided into four parts -- The first part provides the reader with conceptual framework for multifunctionality. It is essentially a discussion of policy implications of the management practices on natural resources in the rural areas. The review of multifunctionality as an agricultural and rural policy concept is excellent and the European Model of agriculture (EMA) provides some useful lessons for the developing world. This reviewer is not suggesting that Africa should embrace all forms of European Agriculture but this reviewer is simply arguing that there are lessons from the European experience for developing policies to guide agricultural practice in Africa.

In part two, the author provides an overview of some country and regional case studies of multifunctionality and the management of natural resources in rural area. The readers are provided with discussion of the socio-economic relevance of multifunctionality in European agriculture.

In part three the authors tackle some of the emerging perspectives on multifunctionality – particularly as it pertains to the interaction between governance and policy. Emphasis is placed upon multifunctionality issues in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, the fourth part of the book focuses on methodology and action. The chapters in this section emphasize economic rationale and agro-environmental policy choices. Overall, the readers from other parts of the world, outside of Europe, are left to wonder whether multifunctionality is a part of their governments’ agricultural policy discussion. There is no question that the principles of multifunctionality should be part of agricultural policies all over the world.

This book is highly recommended for public policy-makers and the libraries.

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