

Bas Verschuuren and Steve Brown (eds.) *Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in Protected Areas: Governance, Management and Policy*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2019. 313 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-11-38091-19-1. GBP 43.00.

***Cultural and Spiritual Significance of  
Nature in Protected Areas:  
Governance, Management and Policy***

Today's protected areas have their roots in the American national parks created during the late nineteenth century. These parks were established to protect "wilderness" from inappropriate human intervention and focused on excluding people from protected areas (Nash 2001). Over the course of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, an increasing recognition that very few places on the planet are free from the influence of humans has shifted the focus of nature conservation policies from preserving wilderness to conserving nature with local stakeholders (Berkes 2007). Conservation with people requires policies that embrace aesthetic and ethical values of nature conservation as much as scientific or economic values (Bhagwat 2009). This includes a recognition of the cultural, traditional, spiritual, and religious importance of nature to local people. This volume is an attempt to bring those values to the forefront in protected area governance. It arises from the work of a Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA). This volume is one component of CSVPA's programme on cultural and spiritual significance of nature. Other components include best practice guidelines for protected area managers; case studies that highlight examples of best practices; training modules for protected area managers; and a network of professionals with expertise on cultural and spiritual values. The volume has 20 chapters written by 42 authors. Each chapter is accompanied by a 'personal statement' describing what drew the authors to look at cultural and spiritual values of nature. The volume is well illustrated with several monochrome photographs, maps, and diagrams.

The volume starts with an introduction by the editors describing the genesis of the project and the key concepts driving it (Chapter 1). The remaining chapters are somewhat artificially divided into three parts—I. Concepts (Chapters 2–9); II. Policy and Practice (Chapters 10–14); and III. Case studies (Chapters 15–20)—although there are crossovers in the content covered in these parts. For example, 'Concepts' covers a wide range of spiritualities—from personal experiences of nature to the world's mainstream religions. However, the chapters in this part go beyond these concepts and attempt to connect them with ideologies, behaviours, and practices of nature conservation. 'Policy and Practice' includes chapters based on a range of different case studies—from conservation

in wetlands to cultural practices in the Altai mountain of Mongolia. 'Case studies' introduces concepts ranging from 'non-human agency' in indigenous conservation practices in Vanuatu to 'place attachment' in Australian protected areas. As a result of these crossovers, the division of chapters into three parts becomes somewhat confusing. This volume is far from a 'handbook' for practitioners or a 'textbook' for scholars. Each chapter is written in an individual style and the content largely derives from the practical experiences of the author/s. The volume is therefore more a 'mosaic' of concepts, practices, and case studies. However, collectively, the chapters cover a wide range of themes and geographies, making it a useful resource for practitioners interested in mainstreaming cultural and spiritual values in protected area management.

A number of essay collections on sacred natural sites have been published in recent years and they have all been led by members of CSVPA, including *Sacred Natural Sites: Conserving Nature and Culture* (2010; eds. Verschuuren, B., R. Wild, J. McNeely, and G. Oviedo); *Sacred Species and Sites: Advances in Biocultural Conservation* (2012; eds. Pungetti, G., G. Oviedo, and D. Hooke); *Asian Sacred Natural Sites: Philosophy and Practice in Protected Areas and Conservation* (2016; eds. Verschuuren, B. and N. Furuta); and *Indigenous Perspectives on Sacred Natural Sites* (2018; eds. Liljeblad, J. and B. Verschuuren). The present volume adds another collection of essays to this body of literature. Collectively, this literature has a particular agenda—to promote a greater recognition of cultural, spiritual, traditional, and religious values in nature conservation. Such edited volumes allow scholars and practitioners to come together to share their fieldwork experiences, case studies, and diverse viewpoints. As opposed to articles in peer-reviewed journals, these essays allow their authors a degree of freedom in tackling concepts, themes, and topics that are close to their hearts.

The present volume is no exception. While the collection of essays is somewhat eclectic, what unites it is the common agenda of mainstreaming cultural and spiritual values in protected area management. The volume is a useful addition to the literature that has sought to promote such an agenda over the last decade. A collection of essays such as this offers limited opportunities for ground-breaking scholarship; they are very much an assortment of concepts stitched together in a single volume. Nevertheless, there are some concepts in this volume that are noteworthy.

First, the idea of 'deeply seated bond' between nature and culture expressed in Alexander von Humboldt's (1769–1859) writing. Humboldt was one of the first Western scholars to

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propose the idea of interconnectedness between people and their environments. Although the authors of this volume do not mention this, it is a serendipitous coincidence that the volume has been published in Humboldt's 250<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary year. It goes on to show that his ideas have endured the test of time and are pertinent even today, as the entanglements between nature and society are increasingly acknowledged in the academic literature. Most chapters in this volume are based on the premise that nature and culture have co-evolved and continue to be tightly knit in many protected landscapes around the world. This bond between people and their natural environments can form an important foundation for conservation of nature today and in the future. The volume showcases this bond and makes a case for highlighting it in protected area governance.

Second, the concept of 'multi-naturalism'. Just as 'multi-culturalism' embraces the co-existence of different cultures, multi-naturalism embraces the diversity of natures. The early national parks in the USA, for example, promoted a particular vision of 'nature without people'. The conservation movement during the early twentieth century, on the other hand, sought to safeguard 'nature despite people'. In the late twentieth century, the discourse on nature promoted the idea of 'nature for people' as the benefits of nature to people were valued in economic terms. With a growing discussion of the Anthropocene—the age of humans—there is now increasing recognition that nature has been influenced by people in most places on the planet and the only viable approach to conservation is to embrace 'nature with people'. This acknowledges novel forms of nature co-produced by the interaction of people with their environments (Bhagwat 2018). These diverse visions of nature are represented in the protected areas of the world and can all co-exist in the 'cultural and spiritual values' framework. The essays in this volume invoke these diverse visions of nature and embrace the pluralism required to govern such protected areas.

Third, 'spiritual pluralism' in nature conservation. The essays in this volume are open to recognising and respecting different worldviews, whether they arise from personal experiences of nature, collective nature worship in indigenous traditions, or moral codes of conduct towards nature promoted by a particular religious doctrine. Ever since Lynn White Jr, in his influential essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* in the journal *Science*, questioned some religious doctrines over their exploitative approach to the natural world (White 1967), religion and conservation are seen as antagonistic to each other. However, many religions have historically promoted ethical and moral codes of conduct, including support for conservation (Bhagwat et al. 2011). Many contributions to this volume recognise the role of mainstream faiths in conservation as much

as indigenous spiritualities. They recognise the capability of mainstream faiths to mobilise mass support for conservation.

In summary, this volume is a useful addition to the literature on sacred natural sites that has promoted a greater recognition of cultural and spiritual values of nature. The essays in this volume explore the 'deeply seated bond' between nature and culture while recognising that there are multiple versions of nature and of culture. This volume embraces the plurality of worldviews, belief systems, and ideologies of nature conservation, which is an essential element in the governance of protected areas today. It is a useful resource for concepts, case studies, and examples for practitioners interested in mainstreaming cultural and spiritual values of protected areas.

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<b>Quick Response Code:</b>	<b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.conservationandsociety.org">www.conservationandsociety.org</a>
	<b>DOI:</b> 10.4103/cs.cs_19_57