

Rethinking Environmental Management: Revisiting Bryant and Wilson ten years later

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In 1998, a milestone was reached in the field of environmental management with the release of Raymond Bryant and Geoff Wilson's article "Rethinking Environmental Management" in the journal *Progress in Human Geography*. In it, the authors were critical of the field of environmental management, which they thought had become an expert-driven, top-down exercise in 'environmental managerialism'. This theme issue of *Environments* seeks to revisit the critiques raised by Bryant and Wilson and to assess the extent to which the authors' argument holds true today. It builds on a series of papers presented in a special session of the 2008 annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) which was designed to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of Bryant and Wilson's provocative article.

The CAG conference session sought to explore a number of compelling questions: What had changed in the past decade about the way(s) that environmental management was studied and practised? Did perceived changes support or refute Bryant and Wilson's critique? Did Bryant and Wilson's argument ring true ten years later? These core questions were ambitious and kept purposefully broad as a re-entry point for exploring and reflecting on practice and research in the field of environmental management. After a lively session and follow-up discussion, we invited papers from session participants that addressed one or more subthemes in Bryant and Wilson's original work. These subthemes included the failure of environmental management, as a field of study, to account for: a) political, economic and cultural contexts influencing environmental management practice and research; b) the significant practical

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contributions of diverse non-state actors; and, c) the notion that environmental management had become a self-serving research agenda that was indifferent to formative human-environment interactions. We asked contributors to revisit these subthemes in the context of their own research programs, with an eye to observing potential shifts in environmental management research and practice since about 1998.

Reflecting diversity in approach and subject matter, the result is a collection of papers that address, in different ways, the arguments advanced by Bryant and Wilson (1998). Geoff Wilson graciously accepted our invitation to provide a rejoinder based on the collection of papers and his current views, which opens this theme issue. The subsequent papers present a history of biosphere reserves that shows a gradual move towards increased civic engagement (Maureen Reed); empirical studies highlighting non-state actor engagement in resource management in developing countries (Laura Sims and Apurba Krishna Deb) and in Canada (Shannon Bruyneel), and an “Ideas” piece that scrutinizes current pedagogical foundations and rudimentary concepts in the discipline of environmental management (Heather Castleden).

Collectively, the five papers bring out an evolving debate among scholars (and increasingly among practitioners and citizens) concerning the utility of environmental management in an era of increasing awareness of environmental challenges. This themed issue endeavours to foster this debate via the presentation of new and emerging perspectives and by celebrating Bryant and Wilson’s important contribution to this discussion.

Acknowledgements

The Guest Editors thank Beth Dempster, Scott Slocombe and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, which have greatly improved this issue. We also appreciate the hard work of the contributors and thank those who participated in the original special session at the 2008 CAG annual meeting. Special thanks to Geoff Wilson for his thoughtful contribution and to Ben Bradshaw for his inspiration.

References

Bryant, Raymond and Geoff Wilson. 1998. Rethinking Environmental Management. *Progress in Human Geography* 22(3): 321-43.