
Reviewed by Rajiv Thakur
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*Unbuilt Environments* is an enthralling book which provides an innovative, informative rumination on recent resource and infrastructural developments in northwest British Columbia. The author uses the notion of “unbuilt environments” as a heuristic device to better understand and explain economic development and its social and environmental effects in northwest British Columbia. This book appreciates how the line between human/economic systems and natural systems is blurred. It also appreciates the changing ways in which ownership over nature is established.

As a geographer, Jonathan Peyton engages with questions such as: how did individual, corporate, bureaucratic, and state actors relate abstract notions of nature and environment to the practical work of mining, hydropower development, and road building? What happens when plans go awry? How might development ideas and nascent projects have affected economies, societies, regional ecologies, and the infrastructures connecting northern and southern Canada? The author is well positioned to write about the subject as a long-term resident of the region and as a geographer whose research lies at the intersection of environmental geography and political ecology, from which he develops a cultural and historical approach.

The introduction sets the basic building blocks of understanding the Stikine watershed which is also famous as North America’s largest and most intact wild salmon system. This is done through an examination of its connection with the rest of the world, of rising interest in local resources, of differing perceptions of and ambitions for the area, and of indigenous people marginalized. In the next five chapters, Peyton focuses attention on mining activities, railway building projects, gas export plans, hydroelectric development schemes, and energy transmission lines through reliance on technical and scientific data. In the process the author not only unfolds a layered history, but also examines the landscapes
and ecologies of the regions and the “geographical imaginations” of those new to it.

This reviewer agrees with Graeme Wynn in his suggestion that the strength of *Unbuilt Environments* lies in the range of cases it examines, for they are critical to understanding how and why environmental change occurs and to detailing the breadth of those changes (xix).

*Unbuilt Environments* is a great contribution to the emerging interdisciplinary narrative on resource development conflicts in northwest British Columbia, a region that is currently the site of intense mining exploration and controversy over energy projects. Drawing on fieldwork throughout northwest British Columbia and on research which is both eloquent and honest, *Unbuilt Environments* is a practical, accessible, and reliable resource from a respected emerging researcher.

I strongly recommend this book for the expert and non-expert, for *Unbuilt Environments* is not a grand narrative about the relationship of environment and economy but an approach that emphasizes the contexts and institutional bases of commodification allowing people and places to examine how both resource inputs, and the pollutants that result from them, are turned into economic processes. This book delivers what it promises its reader. It ties the past and the present challenging the reader to reflect critically on issues drawn from contemporary economic life which is increasingly constituted at a global scale – from uneven development and environmental degradation, to powerful global corporations and organized labor. This book will make good reading for anyone interested in the environment, for it offers compelling analysis of the impact of failed and successful projects on environment and people.