

## BOOK REVIEW

TAYANAH O'DONNELL, DANIEL F ROBINSON AND  
JOSEPHINE GILLESPIE, *LEGAL GEOGRAPHY:  
PERSPECTIVES AND METHODS* (ROUTLEDGE, 2019)

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Increasingly, environmental legal research and scholarship extends well beyond the field of law. Complex environmental problems require multi-faceted analysis and responses. Interest continues to grow in relation to inter- and multi-disciplinary research, which is better recognised now than several decades ago. The interface between law and geography is clear, but the discreet field of legal geography is, I believe, poorly understood. Indeed, as I commenced reading this book, I was not entirely sure what legal geography encompassed. Although emerging in the 1990s as a sub-field, it is an area that until now appears to have avoided clear definition, and one that I have found hard to pin down. It is in this context that *Legal Geography: Perspectives and Methods* makes a significant and valuable contribution to the literature.

One of the most interesting threads through this book is the attention given to explanations of what legal geography is, and the contribution it makes. The various authors all address this to some extent, as well as the ways in which legal geography can be distinguished from legal anthropology, law in action and law & society. Legal geography is described, in this book, as much more than a hybrid between legal anthropology and human geography; although clearly situated at the intersection of law, society and space. It is a distinct field that engages with the commodified environment - our utilisation of nature and natural resources. Importantly, the book makes it clear that legal geography seeks to engage with how the environment shapes human societies, and in turn how we shape nature. The authors explain how a key element of legal geography centres on the ways in which spaces are altered by us, and how spaces also influence what we do.

As noted in chapter 1, legal geography fights against the disciplinary 'closure' of law and the siloing of that field. The breaking down of these disciplinary boundaries is essential if complex environmental challenges are to be overcome.

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The authors clearly grasp this point, stating that the book ‘exposes the complexity of the spatial and temporal implications of the law-society-environment matrix’. In this sense, the book seeks to engage with all aspects of the environment – resources, spaces, people, time, rules and norms. This rather suggests an all-encompassing collection of places, perspectives and issues, but the editors make the compelling case that the scope of legal geography is much more than simply the sum of its environmental parts.

The volume commences by addressing the definitional issues, followed by the theoretical perspectives and then methodological approaches. Too often edited books, whilst containing interesting and valuable case studies, do not include such a comprehensive entrée into a field. This book bucks the trend in this respect, with the introduction providing a solid foundation for the chapters that follow. Particularly instructive is the detailed discussion of Australian and Asia-Pacific legal geography scholarship, vis-à-vis that of Anglo-American researchers, in chapter one. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there has been a deliberate turn away from the urban in Australian research.

Part 2 focuses on methodologies and perspectives, including four case study chapters, each exploring an Indigenous context. Chapter two provides an overview of methodological challenges for legal geographers working in cross-cultural settings. The following chapters cover broad geographical areas and topical issues: chapters three and four provide Indonesian case studies on land rights and Islam, chapter five explores Indigenous knowledge protection in Vanuatu, and chapter six the Māori viewpoint on jurisdiction.

Part 3 returns, in part, to theory and methodology with chapters on legal perspectives of legal geography, comparative legal geography, phenomenology and the role of fieldwork. It is not entirely clear to me why Parts 1 and 3 were separated, given that both are more foundational in content and approach. The book could have been structured with these sections together, which would have also closed the gap between Parts 2 and 4 which both contain case study chapters. However, there is a clear distinction between the earlier chapters which highlight differing cultural viewpoints, and the later chapters which address specific environmental problems.

Part 4 returns to exploring case studies; here mainly Australian-focused explorations of extractive industries covering issues such as climate change, fossil fuels, coal seam gas and water security. Clearly, the authors have concentrated on some of the most critical and topical issues which, to date, have defied effective solutions and where, arguably, legal geography can provide new insights.

Chapter five sits alone, centring on a health case study by examining the legal geography of a supervised injecting facility. A greater consideration of the ways in which legal geography contributes to medical issues, and broader public health discourse, would have been interesting at this point. The volume ends with a short, future-focused, concluding chapter six. Whilst this chapter rounds off the book, a more detailed discussion could have been included focusing on how the discipline is likely to evolve in coming decades.

This book is a timely addition to the literature, and certainly leaves the reader better informed about the fascinating field of legal geography. For environmental law scholars, it provides some inspiration to engage more deeply with this aspect of scholarship with such close links to law in context. The range of authors and interesting case studies also encourages readers to seek out further work by the scholars who contributed to this book, particularly their future contributions as the field of legal geography continues to develop. The volume will thus be of value to law and non-law scholars and practitioners across broad areas of environment, geography and law.

In closing, I came away from my reading of this book much better informed about, and more aware of, another field with which my own environmental law research aligns and intersects. The stated aim of the book is to 'broaden the legal geographer-as-scholar toolkit'. I think much more was achieved: detailed explanations of the breadth and depth of legal geography scholarship, and critical investigations of various research methodologies and their application to pressing environmental problems in culturally and geographically diverse contexts. Such scholarship is no doubt needed, to ensure a brighter and more inclusive future for our environments and societies.