

The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice.* Sarah S. Brophy and Elizabeth Wylie. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008. 224 pp.

Reviewed by Ellen J. Censky

As we entered the 21st Century, the new buzzwords were “green” and “sustainability.” With green house gases on the rise, global temperatures increasing, and natural resources being depleted at ever increasing rates, the world finally started to take notice. However, societies have been dealing with the results of climate change and resource depletion since their beginnings, albeit not on a global scale. In Jared Diamond’s book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005), he examined several societies, from ancient to modern, and documented their use of natural resources, among other things. Those societies that overused their resources and were unable or unwilling to change their habits and behaviors were doomed to collapse. Museum staff can take a lesson from Diamond’s book by reviewing and changing their habits and behaviors, both on a practical level (looking at resource use within their facilities) and at a philosophical level (looking at how we as institutions can, through our programs and practices, safeguard and preserve heritage as a whole). Museums are in a unique position to contribute to the sustainability movement through actions and through their roles as educational institutions. In this book, *The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice*, Sarah Brophy and Elizabeth Wylie provoke us to think about sustainability and our institutions. They provide information, examples, and tools to move your institution toward a more sustainable future and in doing so, preserve the world’s heritage.

The book is divided into four general themes (chapters): “The Idea,” “The Metrics,” “The Options,” and “The Money.” “The Idea” explores why “going green” is good for all museums. Brophy and Wylie show the reader that no matter what type of museum, whether a natural history museum, a children’s museum, or an art museum, acting in an environmentally sustainable way is central to each institution’s mission, if only for the fact that it can save the institution money and provide a clean and safe environment for objects and visitors. The chapter outlines how collection care issues and sustainable practices intersect as well as provides information on the cost savings that accrue when an organization institutes green initiatives. In addition, the authors explain that “green” is here to stay and that audiences are demanding that museums make progress in this area. As educational institutions, museums can take advantage of the process of going green by using it as a great tool for enlightening audiences, encouraging their participation in finding solutions. Throughout this chapter, Brophy and Wylie provide ideas that range from simple to complex. They stress that each institution must determine the degree to which it can go green.

The second topic addressed is “The Metrics.” As the title implies, this chapter introduces the kinds of things that can be measured to track progress in becoming more sustainable. The chapter reviews several tools for benchmarking to get that baseline data on which all progress is measured. It provides information on the kinds of audits that an institution can undergo from

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energy to waste stream audits. The authors stress that an institution must be realistic in its goals—the initiation of green practices must integrate with the culture of the museum and the systems within the museum.

The third chapter, “The Options,” is the most dense in regards to information. This chapter provides numerous examples of what museums are currently doing as well as ideas for how to get started. The authors cover areas such as green teams, integrated waste management, composting, green products and materials, energy generation, lighting, HVAC, green roofs, and green education. In addition, they go into good detail on policy, providing guidelines and examples.

The final topic discussed is “The Money.” This was the shortest of the chapters. I found this to be the weakest in that there was nothing new and insightful. While, it is true that the “green” movement is just getting started and because of that, this is new territory for museum fundraisers, I believe that the old tenants of fundraising—being true to your mission and matching that with your donors/funders interests—will still rule at the end of the day.

In addition to these chapters, the authors provide case studies throughout the book. These case studies include details on specific institutions and their journeys in becoming more sustainable. The examples provide a more personal view of how an institution goes green. And finally, Brophy and Wylie provide a wonderful resource guide, organized by their four themes.

This book is a great reference for anyone who is considering going green as well as for those who have already embarked on this journey. Brophy and Wylie provide a wealth of ideas that should inspire all museums to become more sustainable.

Reference Cited

Diamond, Jared M.

2005 *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Viking.

Ellen J. Censky is the Senior Vice President at the Milwaukee Public Museum in Milwaukee, WI. A herpetologist, ecologist, and museum professional, she has previously served as Director of the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. She is the author of more than fifty scientific papers and two books.