BOOK REVIEW

H. A. Becker and A. L. Porter, *IMPACT ASSESSMENT TODAY.* Utrecht: Uitgeverij Jan van Arkel, 1986.

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The editors of *Impact Assessment Today* have unquestionable expertise in both the fields of impact assessment and gaming simulation. As a reader with experience in both areas I had hoped that I would learn something about the cross-fertilization of the two subjects. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Nevertheless, the book provides a balanced international overview of current methodological developments in impact assessment. It is important to state up front that *Impact Assessment Today* will probably have more appeal for individuals with interest in impact assessment than those with an interest in gaming and simulation.

The two volumes present a selection of 50 papers that were originally presented at the 1985 meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA). The theme of the conference was "methods and experiences in impact assessment," and the conference papers focus on advances in a number of related areas, including socioeconomic impact assessment, community processes and social participation, environmental impact assessment, technology assessment and policy analysis, organizing for impact assessment, impact assessment in developing countries, the use of models, and psychological impacts. The compilation presents the "state of the art" and developments in the field of impact assessment as of 1985, and suggests a number of trends, including (1) the merging of environmental, technological, and social impact assessment practices, (2) the stabilization of methodological developments, (3) little improvement in the explication and integration of models, (4) the continued evolution in the systematic evaluation of assessments, and (5) the further institutionalization of impact assessment and evaluation.

According to the editors, the subject matter was dealt with in a comparative way, with descriptions of advancements in Europe, North

America, and other parts of the world contributing the theme of improvements of methods and their application. Although approximately half of the authors are from the Netherlands, the cross-country comparisons are one of the strong points of the book. Practitioners who desire an overview of advances outside their own countries will appreciate those articles that describe regional and national practices, such as the contribution by Leyten, Smits, and Guerts on the organization of technology assessment in five European countries and the article by Appasamy on assessments in the third world. These articles provide a glimpse at the potential for impact assessment in different institutional and political settings.

The book is not billed as more than what it is, namely a compilation of papers presented at the conference. As such, the quality of the research and writing varies from paper to paper. However, the overall quality of the papers is a step down from those normally accepted by Impact Assessment Bulletin or Technology Assessment. Nevertheless, the authors address a wide range of topics with special attention to methodology and implementation issues, and with such a large compilation, there is probably something for everyone who is interested in impact assessment. For example, I an currently conducting an assessment on the future of electronic highways, and the paper by Peter Fong on electronic road pricing provided a good summary of the experiences in Hong Kong.

Those readers who are primarily interested in gaming and simulation are probably in for a disappointment here. Although the development of the fields of impact assessment and simulation have been intertwined since their conception, relatively few of the articles address these topics in a direct manner. When the topics of gaming and simulation are addressed, the articles seem to stay at the project or method level of analysis, and few details are supplied about the simulation and gaming techniques. One notable exception is the article by van der Meer titled "Social Simulation: A Research Methodology and Learning Strategy for Social Impact Analysis." This article describes the use of gaming or "social simulation" in the context of social impact assessment.