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Review: Bronx Ecology: Blueprint for a New Environmentalism

By Allen Hershkowitz

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Allen Hershkowitz. *Bronx Ecology: Blueprint for a New Environmentalism*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002. 200 pp. ISBN 1-55963-864-8 (trade cloth). US\$25.00

Products manufactured by the pulp and paper industry generate air pollution, hazardous and non-hazardous wastes, water pollution, soil contamination, and tons of greenhouse gases at virtually every stage of their life cycle. This is because more than 90% of the printing and office paper manufactured in the United States and Canada, and 70% of all newsprint, is made completely from virgin content.¹

What to do? Some have tried reducing consumption. Some recycle. But no one has set out to establish a factory that would engage in environmentally sound practices while turning a profit. This is what Hershkowitz, a senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council, attempted in 1992. This book explains what happened to this dream.

Why the Bronx? Hershkowitz sought to site his project in New York City's poorest ZIP code in an attempt to "marry environmental remediation and economic development." He anticipated creating 2,200 temporary construction jobs and 400 permanent, livable-wage jobs.

Hershkowitz faced significant problems as he negotiated the shoals of a large-scale industrial development scheme. He had difficulty getting political help, even from one self-styled progressive. His group was threatened with lawsuits from competing construction companies who hoped to win the contract, a practice Hershkowitz says "occurs more frequently than one might suspect." In 1998 the IRS eliminated a rare tax break for recycling facilities.

While detailing the problems, Hershkowitz suggests solutions. He was aware that some of his problems would not be problems for others. Here we find the reason for his taking the trouble to publish this book. His final chapter outlines 14 principles that can guide anyone who wants to try again. Several of these are just good business sense: Be profitable. Partner. Others are unique, such as principle #13: "Heal ecological problems; don't just generate fewer of them." What a fascinating business principle! As Hershkowitz says, merely generating fewer problems does not change the

direction our race is heading, toward environmental decay. He wanted to change that direction and move toward healing. It may have been too much vision that destroyed the project. While seeking to solve one problem, others presented themselves. All of the problems were worthy of being addressed, and before long, the project became too big to be practical.

The book is illustrated by Maya Lin's beautiful concept designs for the physical structure. Again, while some of the ideas seem at first to be routine design concepts, they can take off in completely new directions. In and of themselves they could become an inspiration for future environmentalist-industrialists.

Reference

¹ Hershkowitz, Allen. (2003). Dear me: Five days of diary entries. *Grist Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.gristmagazine.com/dearme/hershkowitz091603.asp>.

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