THE GIVE AND TAKE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability strives to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future, but increasingly recognizes the tradeoffs among these many needs. Who benefits? Who bears the burden? How are these difficult decisions made? Are people aware of these hard choices? This timely volume brings the perspectives of ethnography and archaeology to bear on these questions by examining case studies from around the world.

Written especially for this volume, the essays by an international team of scholars offer archaeological and ethnographic examples from the southwestern United States, the Maya region of Mexico, Africa, India, and the North Atlantic, among other regions. Collectively, they explore the benefits and consequences of growth and development, the social costs of ecological sustainability, and tensions between food and military security.

MICHELLE HEGMON has dedicated her career to expanding the reach of archaeology, drawing insights from her own research in the Mimbres region of the US Southwest. She has contributed to archaeological theory, the study of style and ceramics, gender research, and social perspectives on ecology. Currently, she is developing a new paradigm, the Archaeology of the Human Experience (AHE), concerned with understanding what it was actually like to live in the past that archaeologists study. The study of tradeoffs, the hard choices people have to make, is part of that AHE perspective.
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Preface

Tradeoffs are in the news almost daily, and most people experience many tradeoffs in their daily lives. As anthropologists (archaeologists who study the past and ethnographers who study living people) my colleagues and I see many tradeoffs in the situations we study. In some cases we can see people making difficult choices between two important goals; in other cases our long-term perspective allows us to see tradeoffs that develop over time, so that the benefits and losses cross generations. The goal of this volume is to share our insights about tradeoffs with a broader audience so that they may contribute to policy and decision making that affects today’s world.

One of the joys of this work, the conference at the Amerind Foundation and the many, many conversations that followed, was the collaboration. So many of the ideas throughout this volume came out of that collaboration. This is especially the case for the introductory Chapter 1; although it was authored by me, it is truly a product of all of our collaborative work. All of the conference participants (including John Ware, then director of the Amerind Foundation, and Frances Hayashida, who attended but was unable to contribute a chapter) should share the credit. Alf Hornborg graciously contributed a post-conference concluding chapter that helped to round out this work, asking us to think about tradeoffs inherent in the very concept of tradeoffs.

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