

**Paul J. Radomski and Kristof Van Assche**

***Lakeshore Living: Designing Lake Places and Communities in the  
Footprints of Environmental Writers***

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*Lakeshore Living: Designing Lake Places and Communities in the Footprints of Environmental Writers* presents a new critique of the planning, development and governance of lakeshore places – explored through the lens of environmental writing. It complements an established literature which focuses on the relationship between nature writing and the environmental movement (Philippon, 2005) and between nature writing and environmental politics (Payne, 1996). Selected for this study are the writings of Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), Sigurd Olson (1899–1982), and William Hollingsworth Whyte (1917–1999); each ‘a scientist, activist, and writer’ (p. x). The study brings to the fore the power and authority of cultural landscape values, and echoed throughout the book is a ‘belief that the environmental writing tradition, [...] can teach us something about rich lakeshore living. Their ideas and writings continue to capture people’s imagination and provide insight and guidance on the fundamentals of rich lakeshore living. They grasped the fundamental issues of living close to the water, the multiplicity of linkages between ecology and society, and the paths toward better use’ (p. x).

*Lakeshore Living* is organised across eleven chapters grouped into four parts. Part One is largely context-setting, with the opening two chapters dedicated to introducing key concepts relating to lake parts and lake ecology respectively. In Part Two, the reader is introduced, chapter by chapter, to the conservation philosophy and writings of Leopold, Olson and Whyte, and their relevance and translation to the concept of ‘rich lakeshore living’. As Radomski and Van Assche note, ‘We reinterpret their insights in the light of contemporary questions and combine them with recent scientific thought in ecology, planning and related fields into a perspective about lakeshore living that can hopefully inspire scientists, politicians, residents, and lovers of literature and the environment’ (p. xi). Part Three allies the science of lake ecology with the philosophies of Leopold, Olson and Whyte in arguing for sustainable lakeshore design, planning and development. Radomski and Van Assche review three key principles for this sustainable future: asset preservation through asset-based design (Chapter 6), asset creation (Chapter 7), and the importance of connectivity (Chapter 8). Across these chapters, Radomski and Van Assche argue that lakeshore development needs to be understood as redevelopment; and particularly ecologically-, culturally- and politically-sensitive redevelopment. In Part Four, the focus is very much on the shoreland living politic and governance – it reiterates the call for ‘rich lakeshore living’ to garner attachment, appreciation and stewardship of lake places. These final three chapters

address, in turn, the tie-up between culture, sense of place, planning/zoning traditions and governance; adopt a systems thinking approach to identify those systems that require a change (proposing corresponding potential leverage points); and finally, restate the place of ‘community’ and social responsibility in the design, planning, management and governance of lakeshore ecosystems and ecological values.

Leopold, Olson and Whyte’s personal histories and stories of lake and river experiences frame their representation and manifestation of ‘lakeshore living’ narratives in differing (yet overlapping and concordant) ways. Aldo Leopold pioneered an ecological (conservation) conscience and ‘land ethic’, and posited lakeshore living within the context of a *morality* of conservation. Sigurd Olson regarded lakeshore living against the backdrop of a need for wilderness conservation and the preservation of lake wilderness, and, in particular, of wilderness as a *spiritual tonic*. Leopold and Olson, both conservationists, desired the management of natural areas for both society *and* nature. William Whyte, a sociologist, adopted a more urban-centric approach – centred on suburbia and suburban development, urban sprawl and urban regeneration – and through study of social behaviour and interaction in urban settings, believed that quality of life could be enhanced through nature–society interaction. His rally for ‘humane environments’ is emulated in humane lakeshores. This literary canon therefore provides another voice to the practice of designing environmentally-sensitive lakeshore places and communities.

*Lakeshore Living* is a valuable study, for in placing Leopold, Olson and Whyte’s principles and stories of lakeshore living centre-stage in planning debates, it presents a new type of lakeshore community and a new way of lakeshore living: ‘Reinventing our lakeshore living requires rethinking place identity and shifting cultural identity in the places we inhabit. Leopold, Olson and Whyte were keenly aware of this, and their writings, each in a different way, shed light in the complexity of such endeavour, on the complexity of the relations between individual, community and place. They suggested, sometimes plainly, sometimes subtly, how we might resolve the issues we’ve created, issues that strongly affect the lakes we love’ (p. 143). Emphasised throughout is the contribution and implications of environmental writing to lakeshore development and governance, for the former advocates and echoes ‘the importance of site-specific, multi-functional, and sustainable design’ (p. 145). Radomski and Van Assche thus put forward a novel design approach to lakeshore living; one which draws insight from (i) lakeshore knowledges, experience and engagement, (ii) environmental ethics/morality, (iii) lake ecology, and (iv) traditional land-use planning concerns. Such a context-sensitive approach can also be pro-active, empowering lakeshore citizens in the decision-making process.

For anyone with an interest in lake ecology and shoreland development governance this book is a significant resource, and is an essential reference

not just for landscape design/architecture and urban planning audiences, but also for audiences interested in environmental philosophy and environmental writing. A key principle to take forward from Radomski and Van Assche's study rests in a belief that 'a sensitive observation of the place and a listening ear for its stories are as important' (p. 89) as ecological, cultural and political contexts when considering lakeshore development decisions. Phrased another way, 'Ecologists will continue to advance our understanding of our world, but philosophers and poets may do a better job at capturing the nature of nature for citizens' (p. 111).

### *References*

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