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Review: The Daily Globe; Environmental Change, the Public and the Media

Joe Smith (Ed.)

Reviewed by [Ryder Miller](#)
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Joe Smith (Ed.). *The Daily Globe: Environmental Change, the Public and the Media*. London: Earthscan Publications, 2000. ISBN 1-85383-664-8 (paper); ISBN: 85383-669-9 (cloth). US\$25.00 paper; US\$69.95 cloth. Elemental chlorine-free paper

Confronted with a lack of trust from the public, sometimes questionable corporate news sources, complex scientific environmental issues, and the dynamics of the news industry; environmental journalists struggle to maintain credibility and direction while they remind the public that adjustments need to be made to sidestep potential world disasters.

In *The Daily Globe*, editor Joe Smith, a lecturer in geography in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University and co-director at the Cambridge Media and Environmental Programme, has collected more than 15 papers which examine the difficulties United Kingdom environmental journalists face while covering the environmental beat on their mission of keeping the public informed.

The chapters fall under four sections: I. Global Environmental Change, the Public and the Media; II. Reporting Global Environmental Change; III. Understanding Environment, the Public and the Media; and IV. Making the Environment News. Memorable chapters include: "'Other' Cultures, 'Other' Environments and the Mass Media" by Graham P. Chapman; "Communicating Complexity and Uncertainty: a Challenge for the Media" by David Gee; and "Politics, the Public and the Environment" by The Rt. Hon John Gummer MP (former UK Secretary of State for the Environment). There is also a two-page list of acronyms used. Some of the issues examined are those relating to the Brent Spar oil spill, the workings of individual media sources and particular environmental issues like global warming, sustainable development, and Frankenstein foods.

Understanding and working with the many concerned parties is a challenge for the environmental journalist. The degree to which journalists are distrusted in the UK is a huge hurdle. Robert M. Worcester in his chapter "Public and 'Expert' Opinion on Environmental Issues," (chapter 4) points out, "journalists have the trust of fewer than one person in five, and rank even below politicians. Half of those individuals who trust business leaders

trust journalists, while only a third of those who trust civil servants and pollsters, a quarter of those who trust the police and scientists, and a fifth of those who trust professors trust journalists" (p. 34).

Included in *The Daily Globe* are some remedies to the problems. One of the conclusions seems to be the creation of organizations like SeaWeb (www.seaweb.com), which seeks to be a link between environmentalists and the media by providing up-to-date, relevant, and accurate information. In chapter 16, Vikki Spruill, the Executive Director of SeaWeb, details the obstacles they have faced, and the successes they have had.

The involvement of concerned third parties can also help. Smith lists "recent projects and institutional developments" that may serve to support new approaches to the media":

- social and environmental reporting by major corporations;
- sustainable development indicators, and new "sustainable" measures of economic growth produced by national and local governments;
- increasingly professional editing and presentation of complex scientific and political debates;
- media training for experts, and in-depth explanations of the context of global environmental change stories for journalists;
- increasingly creative (and unpredictable) "surveillance" of government and business · performance by NGOs, and the development of new media technology;
- recognition by institutions that "expert" definitions of issues must be balanced by
- recognition of diverse public values." (p. 13)

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