Preface

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This book is one of the final outputs of the Global Environmental Change (GEC) Programme, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) between 1991 and 2000. The ESRC is the main funder of social science research in UK universities and colleges, and the GEC Programme was, at that time, the largest single investment the council had ever made. As suggested by Michael Redclift, the Programme's first Director, the aim was ambitious: 'to put the environment into social science and to put social science into the environment'. The outcome was a broad programme of research marked out by a diversity of disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives. In total, some 150 projects were funded involving over 350 researchers and producing over 1000 academic publications (for more details see: www.gecko.ac.uk). Beyond this, the Programme was linked to two UK research centres also funded by the ESRC, the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE) at the University of East Anglia, and the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC) at Lancaster University. While UK-based, much of the research carried out was international and global in scope, involving partnerships with institutions in Europe, Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

In conceiving this book, we decided that a summary of the many achievements of the programme was neither feasible, nor terribly useful. The breadth of the research was too broad to do it justice in one volume, and issues and perspectives had changed over time. Instead, drawing inspiration from an earlier review of GEC research,¹ we sought to identify a number of critical themes in the GEC's work, to review major developments in scholarship during the 1990s and to suggest how perspectives had shifted and evolved over that period. As editors, we have tried to encourage authors to think critically about what has been learnt in their fields, how debates have been reframed and reoriented, and what this can tell us about future research agendas. In the first chapter we have tried to bring together some of the main currents of thinking in environmental social science, as reflected in the other chapters in the volume, and to place these in a broader historical context. We add the caveat that we make no claims for being comprehensive or definitive. Ours is not the only interpretation that could have been placed on

an historical review of recent developments in the social science of the environment.

Besides the work of the authors, this book rests on the endeavours of many others. As co-directors in the final phase of the Programme we are indebted to the work of the three Advisory Committees, chaired by Judith Petts, Jackie Burgess and Tim O’Riordan, each dealing with one of the core themes that served as an organizing framework for this book. These themes were: uncertainty and environmental decision-making (Chapters 2–4); governance of the environment (Chapters 5–7); and sustainable production and consumption (Chapters 8–10). We also pay tribute to the work of Alister Scott for being the inspiration behind our greatest adventures, to Julia Hertin, Hilary Ougham, Michelle Harris and Kath Bowden for providing diligent and cheerful support, and to Jim Skea who preceded us as Director.

Finally, some words on the title of the book. By ‘negotiating’ we want to capture three meanings: in the sense of the dialogue and deliberation now viewed as central to the framing and handling of environmental problems; in the sense of travelling through an uncertain landscape towards the objective of greater sustainability; and in the sense of formal processes of governance that lead to new norms, expectations, agreements and commitments.

NOTES

1. Redclift, M. and E. Benton (1994), *Social Theory and the Environment*, Routledge: London.