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Summaries of the papers

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Five theses of contemporary cultural ecology

Today, the character and role of cultural ecology as a scientific discipline reflecting the relationship between human society and natural environment is questioned under the light of contemporary global environmental and societal issues. The introductory article of the initiators and organizers of the conference entitled Our Common Present completes three aims.

First of all, it comments on the original focus of the discipline and the shift that it underwent after being established in the 1950s by Julian Steward. The fact that environmental circumstances influence institutions and societal order is still valid, yet by no means is the importance of the impact of human society onto natural environment less significant.

In the second part, the article summarizes historical stages and diverging concepts that marked the evolution of the discipline. The difference between cultural and social ecology, and the living heritage of Murray Bookchin, Chicago school and environmental sociology are discussed. The overview concludes with an informative section about Czech academic institutions active in the field of cultural ecology. Reflection on the responsibility of cultural ecologists, as revealed by Bohuslav Blažek, is underlined.

The link between the academic sphere and urgent issues of nowadays, or more precisely, the need to establish it, triggers the formulation of five constitutive principles of today's cultural ecology. These include: 1) focus on *present times* instead of escapes into the past or the future, 2) *transdisciplinarity*, 3) reflection on the society-environment relationship through *culture*, 4) dealing with concrete *global problems*, and 5) *dialogue* between man (society) and environment (nature).

Complex societal reality of the 21st century is calling for approaches that avoid plain reductionism. The task that cultural ecology is facing at the moment is to clarify what issues it can address in a way inaccessible to other, highly specialized scientific disciplines. The ability to prove its potential for a better understanding of environmental and societal processes that determine our times will be crucial for its future course.

Eva Cudlínová

Changes of economic thinking – chance for the sustainable development or green growth?

New style of economic thinking appeared in the 1970s. These new economic trends which were focused on environment as a part of economic theory are known as environmental and resource economics. The emergence of new style of economic thinking was reaction to the great changes – energetic crises and degradation of nature and natural resources. Economists focused on these problems were not divided into any specific fields. They tried to solve the questions of limits of economic growth and relationship between economic and biophysical cycles. Later the former ecological oriented branch of economists divided into different branches – environmental and resource economics and ecological economics. The main topics of interest for environmental and resource

economists were internalization of externalities and searching for methods of valuing natural resources. They paid attention just to social effects of environmental problems and tried to change the imperfect market functioning through internalization of environmental externalities. Ecological economics is based on biophysical and energetic conception of mutual linkages between economy and nature. The main goals of ecological economics is to find the adequate dimension of economy in relation with the planet Earth and fair distribution of resources among states and generations. At present a new economic field of thinking is appearing, it is a green economy. Its concept ought to be the same as ecological economics and the main goal is to achieve the sustainable development. This study tries to compare all these new concepts of economics in relation to the main idea of sustainable development. The main philosophy of green economy is a support of new green technologies and new green jobs seems to be closer to environmental than ecological economics. It seems to us that the main goal of a green economy is not sustainable development but a “green economic growth”.

Zdenka Sokolíčková, Gaudenz Assenza, Aliaksandr Martynau

Strong Europe? Economic crisis and environmental commitments

Europe, currently integrating within the European Union, is facing interrelated crises in the spheres of politics, culture, economics and environment. How is the development in these areas connected and how to approach the issue from a cultural perspective? Our hypothesis is that the global economic crisis unraveling simultaneously with ecological degradation is caused by a false understanding of the concept of “power”. The attempts to create a strong, globally successful region are primarily based on the idea of competitiveness and economic growth. Academics, politicians, bureaucrats and journalists follow developmental trends in, for example, China, fearing that Europe loses its leading position in the world. However, in reality the slowing of economic growth brings hope for longer and better life of citizens compared with the rapidly developing but highly polluted countries. Green, slowly expanding economy is more flexible, viable and also stable than the one which is growing at a galloping pace. The traditional Western economic competitiveness (which is a struggle of rivaling economic forces) is incompatible with principles which Europe is currently promoting under the banner of ecological sustainability. The need to mitigate the consequences of the recession is met by tweaking the system, which in its core is at the very best neutral towards the environment, if not detrimental to it. As the EU builds its new vision on the environmental-friendly foundation and positions itself as a leading actor in green politics, the basic assumptions about the world remain ecologically unsustainable. If we take a closer look at the essence of power as conceived by the majority, it becomes clear that power is a synonym of growth and that small can be beautiful, but never strong. The causes of drastic economic and environmental changes are cultural assumptions, which need to be approached comprehensively. However, our society fails to do so, partial solutions adopted are insufficient and the need to work out a comprehensive strategy lingers. The concept of power in its traditional Western rationalist spirit becomes even more dangerous when its logic is accepted by other world regions striving to achieve the European standard of life. The current model of economic development, upon which a thin layer of ecological consciousness is superimposed, links strength with trust in the existing social order, stability, growth and innovation aimed at increasing competitiveness. “Strong” Europe, mantra of the European political elite, is a Europe returning to conservative anthropocentric values and cultural domination (of the West over the rest of the world, of a human being over nature). We are arguing for a revision of the concept of “strength” and for a shift away from aiming at material goals. Despite frenetic measures adopted to save the economy and the ambitious environmental agenda of the EU, in neither of these spheres the progress is satisfactory. Thus, if the current crisis of the Western society has a cultural foundation, one cannot progress by

making isolated steps to prop the aging vision of the world, but it requires courage to open oneself to a radical cultural alternative.

Martin Soukup

Darwinism and ecologically noble savages

Object of the paper is the relationship between Darwinism and nature protection in the context of discussion about ecologically noble savages. Main principles of the Darwin's theory of biological evolution are intraspecific competition and interspecific competition. Author argues that protectionist attitude to the nature can not be the part of the human nature shaped by the biological evolution. In the light of the theory of biological evolution are cooperation and altruism result of the selfish behavior of the individual organisms. Special attention is devoted to the idea of ecologically noble savages. Author illustrates that indigenous peoples are not always protectionists. The dichotomy of ecologically noble savages and ecologically pathological Euro-American civilization he found as false. It is not possible to work out typology of protectionist and non-protectionist cultures consistent with the typology of subsistence or societies. Author concludes that protectionist attitude to the nature rises as a cultural phenomenon, but is necessary to build programs of the nature protection according to the human nature.

Karel Stibrál

Aesthetics and nature conservation

This paper deals with the connections between the aesthetic value of nature, and landscape and ecosystem characteristics currently determined by the natural sciences to be important for nature conservation (biodiversity, complexity and stability). The paper shows the historical roots of nature conservation in Romantic reactions to nature, which were strongly related to aesthetic values. It also points out contemporary tendencies to protect aesthetically valuable natural areas (see for example British Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Scenic Areas). It points out the current dilemma about nature conservation for the sake of aesthetic landscape values and current attempts to transfer aesthetic values to values ascertainable using the natural sciences.

The essay presents several traditional attempts (Leopold, Lorenz) at connecting the beauty of nature with characteristics ascertained using the methods of natural science, yet it also discusses current biological knowledge. The discussion about the approach of natural sciences is led primarily from the perspective of aesthetics as a discipline. However, it also takes into account the incongruity of specific examples used in the arguments of natural scientists, as well as their inability to predict what type of landscapes will appeal to people. In the conclusion the idea that there is a definitive connection between the aesthetic value of nature and landscape and the biodiversity, stability and complexity therein is brought into question. At the same time though the paper admits that biological theories and approaches have a certain validity that is, however, so general (in that they include such a broad field of phenomena), that they do not allow for decision making in specific cases dealing with nature conservation.

Jan Hendrych

The art of landscape – landscape design as aesthetic proces

The balance of ecological and productive functions of the landscape, keeping at the same time high aesthetic and cultural values was the product of a mastered human intervention (applied in a concrete context) within its physical limitations. The development of articulated landscape mosaics indicates that the aesthetic appeal is the result of a human desire for spatial order, purity and boldness of forms.

The skills able to harmonize with the nature to this ideal developed during the long centuries of practice. While some features were sought by design as local inhabitants applied their instinct for rational spatial organization, many landforms developed spontaneously as nature, in its turn, adapted to human activities. Over centuries, a stabilised systems of footpaths (often in their prehistoric trajectories, given by the natural and landform limitations), hedgerows, tree stands and natural wetlands remained stable and unchanged, supporting a variety of wildlife and sustaining landscape stability. This scenery was reflected in more carefully designed landscapes of surrounding nearby noble estates, comprising ornamented farms, gardens and parklands, divided by often majestic tree avenues that underlined the hierarchy of the communication systems.

The continuous investment made in shaping the landscape by enhancing its appeal and productivity is comparable to a work of art, in which the aesthetic character of the result was not by accident but was considered a coronation of all the effort deployed to optimise landscape productivity. In our days, when productive function of the landscape has lost its meaning, the aesthetic function has taken its place, symptomatically along with the ecological function. The goal of restoring the internal harmony of the inherited landscape is to reinforce this unique functional symbiosis between aesthetics and ecological functionality which is increasingly at risk. The maps of Stabile Cadastre graphically illustrated the mastered compromise that was achieved in the early 19th century by applying long lasting human efforts in managing the spatial organisation of nature.

Václav Cimbál

Total city

At present, more than 50% of the world population lives in towns. As a result, the town has become the predominating type of the human environment. This change raises many urban, architectonic, demographic, traffic, energetic as well as cultural-symbolic questions – the questions connected with the relationship of the man and the world as a whole. The man is an indivisible unity of body and consciousness; the contents of the consciousness are thus given also by the bodily experience of the physical world.

In the first part of the text, the author deals with the ways of the human relation to this world (space), origination of the basic spatial schemes and orientation in the space. The author presents a thesis that the nature is an account of the depths of the being and that the relationship between the cosmos and the human spirit, the relationship, which serves as a matrix for mythology, arts, philosophy and science, has been seen from the morning of the human existence. In this article, the author examines how the spatial awareness is related to the character of the artistic, religious and rational grasp of the intuitively perceived order of the cosmos.

In the next part, the author studies the urban environment as an organism created by gradual snowballing and development of its structures. The author studies their development from the moment when towns represented the human environment for an insignificant part of the population only and when the people maintained a close link to the natural/rural environment, up to the present. Now it is typical that the town is the human environment for more than half of the world population, and the society has been thus physically and culturally separated from the natural world. As a consequence, the relationship with the natural world has been being replaced by the relationship with other cultural layers. This situation raises questions whether such closed culture may perform its typical functions, whether a system of values can be restored, or whether it is a formal, auto-reference system incapable of giving answers to the basic questions of the human existence. The author shows that the artificial technical environment serves as a background for solving both living and existential issues in many works of the mental civilisation. However, he shows that in order to solve them, it is necessary to

overcome the technology as a world-governing phenomenon and subordinate it again to the sphere of values as a source of private and social standards of action.

Markéta Braun Kohlová

Travel mode choice – an important aspect of changes of current cities

The aim of the paper is to answer questions related to the *explanation of the travel mode choice used by people for regular commuting and what role in their decision making can be attributed to location of their residence, i.e. how the travel mode choice differs in case of traditional urban residents and suburban residents*. The reason why to study everyday commuting is the fact that people currently living in western cities spend a lot of time and money commuting and the aggregate of everyday individual mobility generates a significant environmental impact.

I study the travel mode choice from two perspectives: a) *statistical* and b) *behavioural*. Using the statistical analysis I explain the travel mode choice based on situational constraints and differences between social groups. The statistical analysis, however, is unable to explain how the situational constraints lead to different behaviour in different individuals and also the part of behaviour that cannot be explained using the constraints, thus I add a qualitative study. Summarizing both types of findings, I conclude that the everyday travel mode choice depends to a large extent on constraints that cannot be influenced by individuals: i) the amount of time and money available to the individual, ii) public transport services, civic facilities in the place of residence, and iii) required mobility for job related reasons. In the qualitative study I focus on what type of residence people prefer. Looking into preferred characteristics of people's place of residence and actual travel behaviour I generate general classification of rationality related to the travel mode choice: 1) travel mode choice rationality based on constraints, 2) a consistent lifestyle including travel mode as well as nature of residence choice, and 3) the travel mode choice as an unreflected habit. According to the three types of rationality we can identify different factors of individual transport development: a) differences in the nature of individual travel modes and their attractiveness related to individual economic and professional constraints, b) real willingness of many people to live in residential locations with a lower accessibility and lower level of services, and c) a habit to drive a car automatically regardless of conditions as a natural part of habitus of economic middle and upper classes. Differentiation of these factors leads to different implications when considering possibilities of overturning the current increasing trend of car transport. Firstly, it is a question of price or other regulation changing attractiveness of the individual alternatives. Secondly, there are factors related to preference of suburban lifestyle including not only normative and cultural patterns but also significant differences in real estate prices in internal cities and suburban locations. In the last case of the habit to use a car regardless of available alternatives as a part of habitus of economic middle and upper classes the discussion about possible changes is the most demanding. However, this study shows that majority of people make their travel mode choices taking into account real possibilities and constraints and thus that it is possible to influence their behaviour through economic and other types of regulation.

Oleg Suša

Co-optation of the protest, ecological crisis and dilemma of “ecological modernization”

This study article critically applies the Weberian mechanism of the routinization of charisma onto contemporary processes in developed states and global capitalist network relationships classified by some analysts as ecological modernization.

We should ask what means the systemic integration and co-optation of environmentalist critical challenge to the modern civilization: what is the result of “ecological modernization” – is it innovation

and the systemic change, or is it rather new integration and system stabilisation? Co-optation of originally radical critique is exemplified in a framework of institutionalization of environmental discourse as formalised system of bureaucratic rules and technocratic expertise and procedures. The contemporary crisis of the interactions between human society and nature confronts the static image of the bureaucratic administration of the risks as something external and technically manageable.

Pavel Nováček

Sustainable development, sustainable retreat or collapse?

More than forty years ago Man landed on the Moon. On the other hand people in poor countries are starving to death until now. The environment is degraded or even devastated in many regions, biodiversity is decreasing. We need a daring vision of what to do next. And maybe more than that. We need to search for and find “will to meaning” (according to founder of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl).

Almost 25 years ago vision of sustainable development was first published in the UN report “Our Common Future”. Question remains, how vital and perspective is this vision in present multipolar world.

In the past we learned from our former experience and mistakes. Today, in the era of huge scientific and technological development, we need new model of learning. We need to learn from our future potential opportunities as well as threats, not just from the past.

It also includes possibility, that our effort to formulate and implement sustainable development will not succeed. Then alternative to sustainable development is sustainable retreat. And even darker scenario is possible – chaos and anarchy. We can already see this in some failed states (Somalia, Haiti). In such case key challenge would be to keep and preserve principal knowledge and skills accumulated by civilized societies during former decades and centuries for future generations.