

## Architecture and Deep Ecology

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1992 Unpublished

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Two areas of problems today require unusually long time perspectives: architecture and population. A slow but steady decrease of human population may perhaps start already in the twenty-second century, but an ethically and socially acceptable decrease to a significantly lower level must take many centuries. There must be action today, but desirable results may be in a distant future.

Architecture is today conceived as a sort of modification of Earth ecosystems and the good of both human and non-human living beings is taken seriously. Landscape architecture is already an old discipline, but has not often been studied within an ecological framework: seeing towns and cities as parts of landscapes, and landscapes as parts of ecosystems. Architecture, adapted to a population of 10 thousand million, or more, requires a lot of new ideas and procedures.

Supporters of the deep ecology movement insist that ecological sustainability is only realized globally or regionally when full richness and diversity of life forms (in a wide sense) is protected. Humans and human cultures are life forms, and their protection includes what is vital for them. But the present human domination is intolerable. Areas of tree-plantations, tree farms, gardens, parks (in cities), are areas of greatly diminished biodiversity. Tree plantations now occupy areas that are too vast.

Cities cannot, of course, contain areas of wilderness, but future cities, like many cities centuries ago, can contain areas of "free nature." Such an area is one without domination by humans but with scattered human population. They do not interfere with its flora and fauna and other life forms. One important difference from areas of wilderness is the size: an area of free nature may be very much smaller. In the Norwegian capital, Oslo, there were in the last century many areas of free nature, some less than 50 by 50 metres (2500m<sup>2</sup>). A difference from parks is of great

educational importance: children were free to do what they liked in those areas (lökker) and access was not dangerous. If the ground was hilly, children made ski jumps. Small children could make use of any natural object in their play. Real estate prices in this century gradually made the free areas "much too valuable" (in dollars) to avoid "development."

From the point of view of ecological education, the spots of free nature are crucial because small children in cities and towns get intimately acquainted with the chaotic and infinitely diverse character of nature without being transported out of town or city. Growing up, children are gradually better equipped to reach larger areas of free nature, and many eventually are able to spend part of their time in wilderness.

Many of the most devoted supporters of the deep ecology movement have grown up either in cities or towns with small areas of free nature, or have, as children, enjoyed a home close to larger free areas. It is a long range problem of city planning to provide children with easy access to small areas of free nature.

The ecologically and technically cheap accessibility of the city population to large areas of free nature has steadily diminished in most places in Europe.

Before talking more about cities, I shall once more mention wilderness. For obvious reasons, it is common to see an antagonism between wilderness and human habitation. But Alaska was through many centuries a vast wilderness, but practically everywhere people, the Indians, were present. The places have names that attest to their presence. It is likely that the land could have retained the status of wilderness for more centuries. The white man made that impossible. Sami people (Laplanders) inhabited Finnmarken, the northern-most part of Norway, for centuries and did not interfere seriously with the full richness and diversity of life forms. Now the excessive number of tame reindeer, and also other factors, has terminated the wilderness status of Finnmarken.

In short, the planet may be divided into three types of areas: wilderness, patches of free nature, and human dominated areas. Just as an idea to be mentioned in connection with a number of competing ones, consider the tripartition of the total habitable area of the planet, one-third wilderness, one-third free nature, and one-third human-dominated. The term *habitable* is inserted because the Antarctic and the extreme Arctic areas are kept out of the present discussion. (If part of the vast Soviet

radioactive material stored in the extreme Arctic is not kept isolated from the ecosystems, the areas may have to be classified as man-dominated.)

But back to the cities!

Homes are increasingly built with close attention to minimize energy consumption and to other ecologically essential aspects. I shall not talk about building but rather about city planning.

It is a fairly common hypothesis that people brought up in cities without access to free nature will either be indifferent towards further elimination of wilderness and decrease of free nature or will have a low priority need and only spend a short vacation now and then in such areas. This means that, in the present intense conflicts of interest that are determining the rate and persistence of destruction, the indifference of inveterate city people will be on the “wrong side,” that is, among the passive or the “developers.”

It is difficult to assess the tenability of the above mentioned hypothesis. In any case, I think it of great importance that in the next century small children in the cities have *easy, safe* access to patches of free nature. Most of the very active supporters of protection of wilderness and free nature have enjoyed early experience in such areas. But there is still a too small minority of dedicated people to change present policies radically. At elections in Western democracies too few people support politicians who show courage in ecologically relevant conflicts. How can they propose responsible policies when it does not pay in elections, but presumably causes staggering losses?

In short, one of the important reasons for establishing access to free nature in cities, and not just parks, is that of maintaining and increasing the number of people who very early in life acquire respect and love for nature.

The 1990s seemed to be a time for environmental ethics to be taken seriously in schools and universities here in the West. In Norway, considerable sums have been earmarked for ethical research and teaching. This should be greeted with joy and appreciation, but I think that a major change of attitude towards nature and ecological systems as wholes largely depends on deep experience in nature, not so much on teaching that tells us to behave better. Presumably, our government agrees. But it costs so much more to prepare conditions such that everybody, or a substantial minority, can fairly easily change habits in

the direction of a ecologically sustainable lifestyle. It still takes considerable personal initiative to do so. It costs so much less for governments to hand out money to science and ethics.

As it is, most cities grow concentrically and increase the average distance to big areas of free nature. Oslo is a tragic example. When I was a child, broad areas of free nature made it enjoyable to ski all the way to the front door, or at least within easy walking distance from home. Then, gradually, the distance increased. Public transportation helped, but eventually people tended to go by car. So, after cross-country skiing one has to sit in a car driving through traffic instead of taking a shower and relaxing. A lot of problems arise every time people feel they need free nature.

As to transportation, Sweden may be the leader in making it possible to use bicycles, both in cities and outside, without risk of being hit by cars. In Canberra, Australia, and perhaps other cities, there was recently (1992) a stagnation in the development of bicycle paths. The argument used is the increasing rate of accidents. These are due mostly to bad construction: It was until recently assumed that people bicycled very slowly and that sharp 90 degrees turns were safe. But people often bicycle at 20kph or more and such turns are intolerable.

On a global scale, a major problem in the twenty-first century will be how to make cities liveable: how to make it possible to live a healthy and decent life in Mexico City and dozens of other great cities in the less industrialized world. There is no space outside cities for the additional thousand million people. Somehow they must be contained in cities. Reforestation is necessary and the continual deforestation for the sake of subsistence agriculture must be stopped. The area of good soil for agriculture is decreasing. Even if it should be practical to change direction and get more square kilometres, there will not be soil for a thousand million more farmers. Clearly, the architects of the rich nations should co-operate with those of the less rich to work out plans as to how to solve the significant city problems ahead.

Helena Norberg-Hodge has won international fame for influencing architecture in Ladakh, but the power of irresponsible developers is staggering. It is an astonishing thought that she got to be world famous for doing something that so obviously must be done, and should already have been done in thousands of areas, not only in Ladakh and practically nowhere else. She has introduced solar energy in small homes and has otherwise been able to help the people of Ladakh proceed from premodern to postmodern, ecologically sane conditions.

Or, to be more honest, she has gone a long way on that road, but is increasingly hampered by Indian “developers” of the conventional kind. It is lamentable how few architects are available in the less industrial societies. Not to improve the style anywhere, but to co-operate with the tiny minorities who are fully aware of the catastrophic developments in cities and even in the villages. The upper classes, including the politicians, are on the whole imitating the West, and the few who are in opposition for ecological or other reasons are not properly supported.

I shall end with a few words about what is called the deep ecology movement. It is distinguished from the reform or shallow movement, headed by people who trust that better technology, better scientific understanding of particular phenomena, such as ozone layer and climatic changes, and stricter rules for combating pollution will do the job. The supporters of the deep ecology movement think that changes of value priorities are necessary. They consider life on this planet to have a value in itself. The deep ecology economists are studying how to have ecologically sustainable economic progress during ages of slow population decrease, that is, progress in the satisfaction of vital needs of the populations. But there are two most essential points. The first is the grounding of ecological policies on philosophical or religious attitudes. In the last five years, the Christians, for instance, have with increasing strength announced that we have sinned against God's creation, and that everything directly created by God has inherent value, therefore all living beings and the untrampled landscapes have such value. But most supporters have such a life philosophy, including value priorities, independent of any religious foundation. The second is that the supporters stress the need to be active politically in order to change society, especially the consumerism of industrial societies. Below is a useful condensed characterization of tenets fairly generally accepted by supporters of the deep ecology movement. Of course, they co-operate with the activists of the reform movement, and also with people active in the peace movement and the movements to fight desperate poverty and brutal tyranny.

The eight points of the deep ecology movement

1. The welfare and flourishing of human and non-human living beings has value in itself. The value of the non-humans is independent of their usefulness to humans.
2. Richness and diversity of living beings has value in itself.

3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The appreciation of a high quality of life will supersede that of a high standard of living.
8. Those who accept the foregoing points have an obligation to try to contribute directly or indirectly to the implementation of necessary changes.

Since the start of the international ecology movement in the 1960s, architects have been in the forefront, explaining hundreds of small and great ideas about how to make architecture ecologically responsible and progressive. But we need their voice increasingly clear and strong in the realm of local and global planning, solving the vast problems of responsible use and non-use of planetary space, never forgetting that we are small parts of the Earth. If we ever get in contact with living beings in comparable paradisiac planets, they may be so far away that it will take a hundred thousand years for a Christmas or New year telegram to reach them.