



Lecture 1: Civic Ecology

Episode 1: Introducing Civic Ecology

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Overview of the lecture

- 1. Introducing Civic Ecology**
2. Civic Ecology Principles and Values
3. Interview



Learning Outcomes

- An emerging distinctive community-based systems approach to sustainability, referred to as civic ecology
- A postmodern relational (ecological) paradigm oriented towards interconnectedness, self-organization and co-evolutionary dynamics
- An ethical system rooted in a deep sense of kinship and mutuality with the larger community of life on Earth
- An adaptive learning approach combining scientific and local knowledge to maximize flexibility and responsiveness during interventions



Structure of Episode 1

1. Starting Premise
2. Defining Civic Ecology
3. Civic Ecology Principles (Part I)



Starting Premise

- Most of our pressing environmental problems have their origin in complex socio-economic and cultural practices with long histories.
 - The survival of modern economic systems depends upon insatiable consumption. A simple way of life no longer satisfies most people.
 - Detached, instrumental rationality created material progress but has brought greed, inequality, alienation and ecological degradation.
- What we have to do and how much do we have to change to create a more just, fulfilling and sustainable society?





Starting Premise

“The kind of change required by sustainability implicates each community, each household, each individual.

Successful solutions to problems at this level of society will need to be rooted in the cultural specificity of the town or region if the people are to be supportive of and involved in such change.”

Source: UNESCO (1997) Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action.



Starting Premise

If we are to prevent further destruction of the natural world, it is fundamental to raise awareness among citizens.

Identifying effective ways to foster sustainable behavior through social learning and community participation.



Source: Klimabündnis
Österreich,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/klimabuendnis/6828885659/>



Civic Ecology

- The result of this new fundamental paradigm is the emergence of a civic ecology – a community based systems approach to sustainability.
- Seeking to restore a qualitatively different relationship between humans and nature.
- Imparting new life and vigor to both human and nonhuman communities.





Civic Ecology

Why civic?

The wellbeing of individuals and their communities depends on civic engagement and the performance of civic duties.

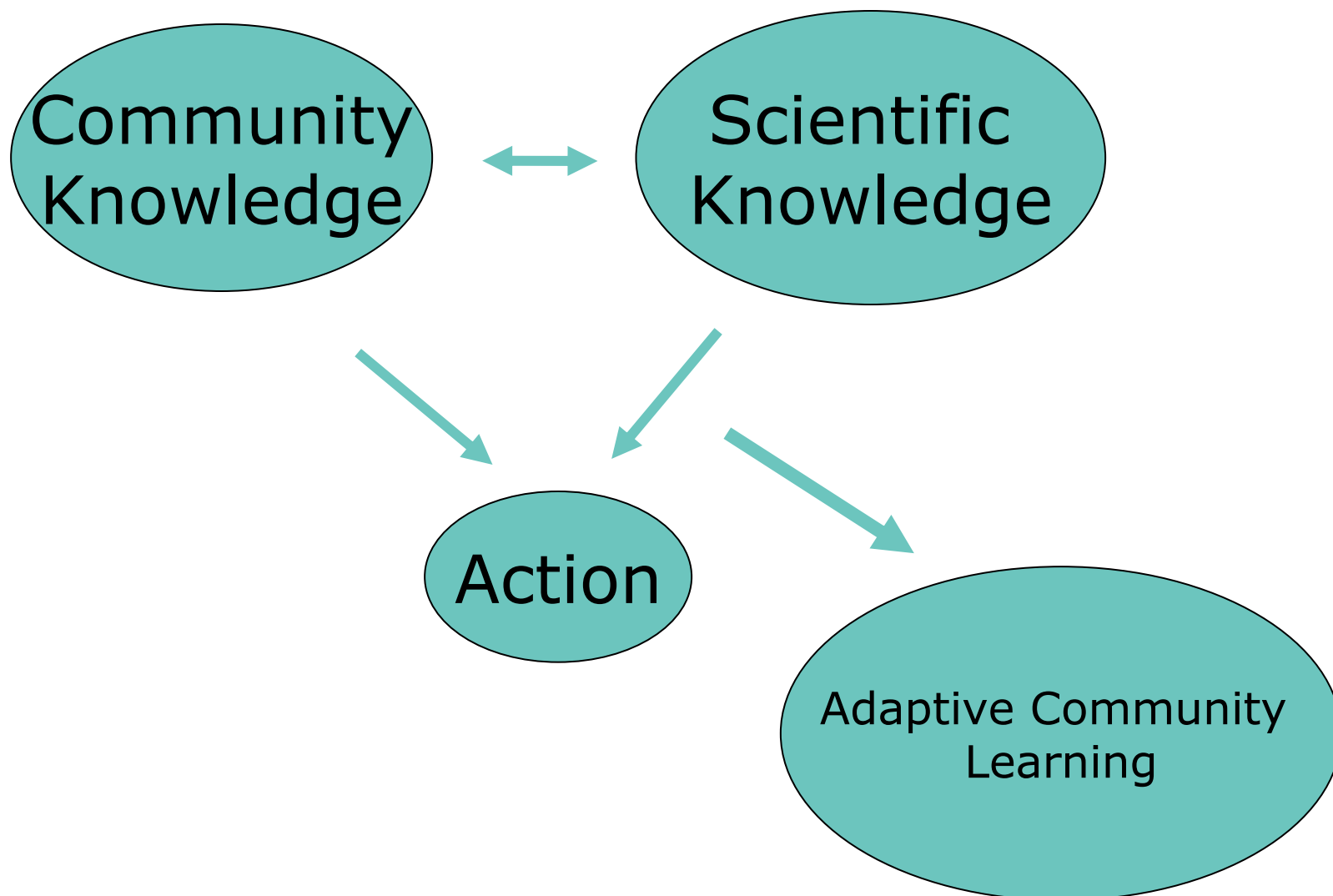


Why ecology?

The web-like pattern of relations between humans and their environment, in a particular place, constitutes a complex interwoven social-ecological system.



Civic Ecology





Civic Ecology Principles

Five Principles of Civic Ecology





Principle 1

Everything is connected
to everything else.



Source: hikingartist.com



We are all connected

Over the past 40 years, a new systemic conception of life has been emerging at the forefront of science.

A way of understanding reality based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation.





We are all connected

- Shifting away from the modern industrial interpretation of nature oriented towards:
 - Mechanism
 - Prediction and control
 - Competitive dynamics
- To a relational (ecological) conception oriented towards:
 - Interconnectedness
 - Self-organization
 - Co-evolutionary dynamics



We are all connected

- The world is organized in networks (“nested” hierarchies) of dynamic and reciprocal relationships expressing increasing holistic embrace and complexity.
- Everything is intertwined, interrelated and in flux.
- Events affect each other in a back-and-forth manner, creating circuits and networks where cause and effect interact reciprocally.
- One cannot understand the property of any part without understanding how this part is related to the others and how the others influence it.



We are all connected

Relational thinking entails making three fundamental shifts of mind relative to our traditional way of thinking:

- From a focus on the properties of separate parts of a system to relationship among parts.
- From an interpretation of change as facilitated by competitive dynamics of parts to change as facilitated by co-evolutionary dynamics of the whole.
- From an emphasis on prediction and control for the purpose of maintaining stability to developing adaptive capacity to change.



Principle 2

We construct our reality
in relation with others.





We Construct our Reality

- The mind creatively participates in our interaction with the world which we can only know in terms of our constructs (Heron & Reason 1997).
- As observers, we humans are personally involved with the creation of our own reality.
- Our beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about the world determine our relationship with the world.
- If we imagine the world inadequately, founded upon an insufficient metaphor and through a narrow epistemology, then dysfunctions arise in the world.



Principle 3

There are multiple interpretations



By HikingArtist.com



Multiple Interpretations

Recognition of “multiple” realities suggests that all theories (ways of seeing) are partial (address different aspects of reality).

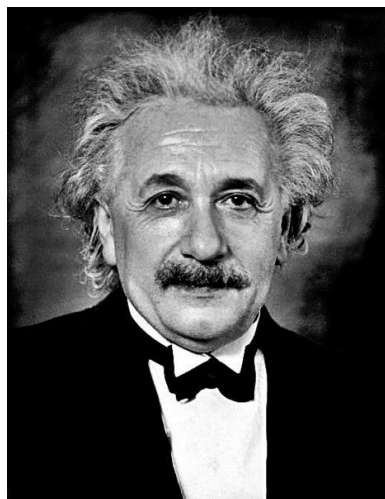
- No one understanding is complete.
- No one solution can be optimal.

More inclusive and collaborative approaches to knowledge and decision making are necessary to address human-environment relations.



Principle 4

Relationships are the location for ethical action.



„Our task must be to free ourselves... by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.“
Albert Einstein



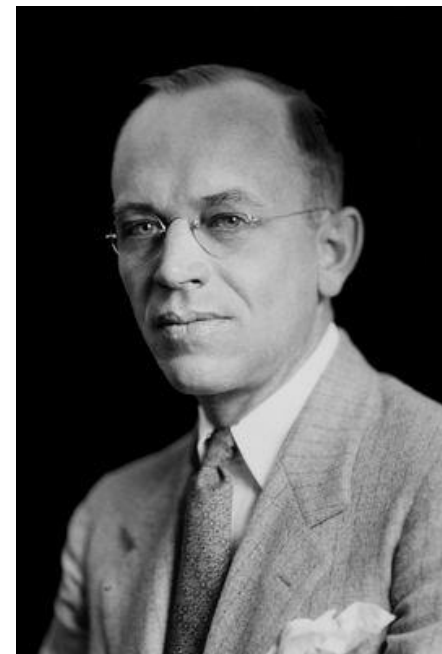
Relational Ethics

- Relational thinking offers a new perspective on how we experience and relate to the world.
- Realizing that we humans are part of the whole, rather than separated as mind over and against nature (Cartesian paradigm).
- Placing us back in *relation* (living as *relatives*) with the living world (with all the rights and obligations that implies).
- Encouraging us to expand our moral concerns, expressed as ethical actions, to nonhuman entities.



Relational Ethics

- Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) took an important step in directing us on how to live relationally with the Earth.
- His relational ethics of nature and wildlife preservation had a profound impact on the Environmental Movement.
- He emphasized biodiversity and ecology and urged us to think of the land as a community to which we belong rather than as a commodity that belongs to us.





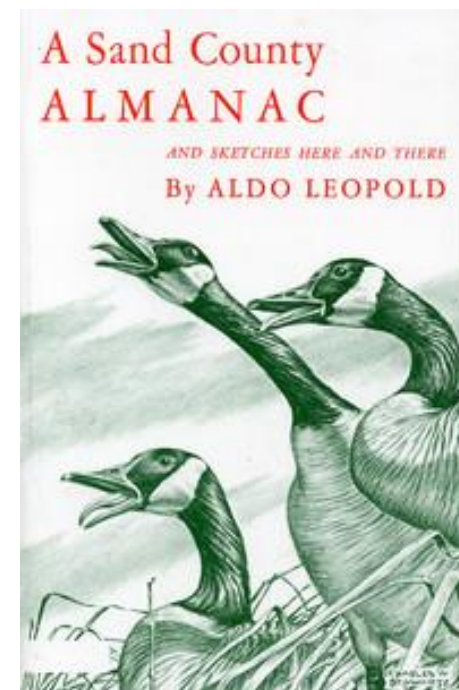
Relational Ethics

Land Ethic (1949): "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Integrity denotes the wholeness and diversity (*degree of variety*) of biotic Communities.

Stability incorporates Leopold's concept of land health, which he defined as the "capacity of the land for self-renewal".

Beauty demands that we approach the land with reverence and awe for the wonder of life.



Source:
http://www.aldoleopold.org/book_s/Default.asp



Exercises for Self Study

1. Why does the detached instrumental rationality promote inequality, alienation and ecological degradation?
2. What does civic ecology mean and what does it seek to achieve?
3. How can civic engagement and the performance of civic duties promote individual and social wellbeing?
4. Discuss the principles of civic ecology and their relevance to a more just and sustainable society.