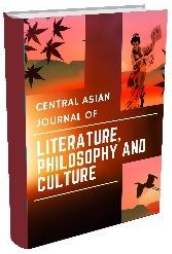

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Cultural Practices in Human Society, Cultural Ecology and its Management

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ANNOTATION

The perception of human societies of their environment is largely driven by their unique culture and cultural practices. Traditionally, modern ecosystem management has been driven via a scientific or conservation ethic. This has sometimes led to conflict between culture and conservation, but more recently there has been a strong recognition that effective ecosystem management can only be achieved through a better understanding and integration of the relationships between communities and nature. The stark reality is that most societies view and manage ecosystems through a prism dictated by long held cultural beliefs that have sustained their society, sometimes for millennia. The challenge for ecosystem management is that, in a changing global environment some of these long held practices can lead to degradation of the ecosystem and others can play a very relevant role in promoting biodiversity conservation but also in helping societies to address the impacts of climate change.

This is vitally important as humans now dominate the planet and consume or degrade a disproportionate proportion of ecosystem services from both the land and oceans. This explosion of the human population and use of the planets' natural resources have led many to describe the current period as the Anthropocene. In particular specific human actions and choices in industrial and industrializing societies have promoted a "culture of consumerism", favoring land use practices that undermine ecological resilience and are driving both global climate change and dramatic ecosystem changes.

Culture should be regarded as "a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group and that it encompasses in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, tradition and beliefs" . In addition, "Cultural systems of meaning shape the way that people interpret climate change, and provide an historical and sociocultural context within which impacts are experienced and responses are generated".

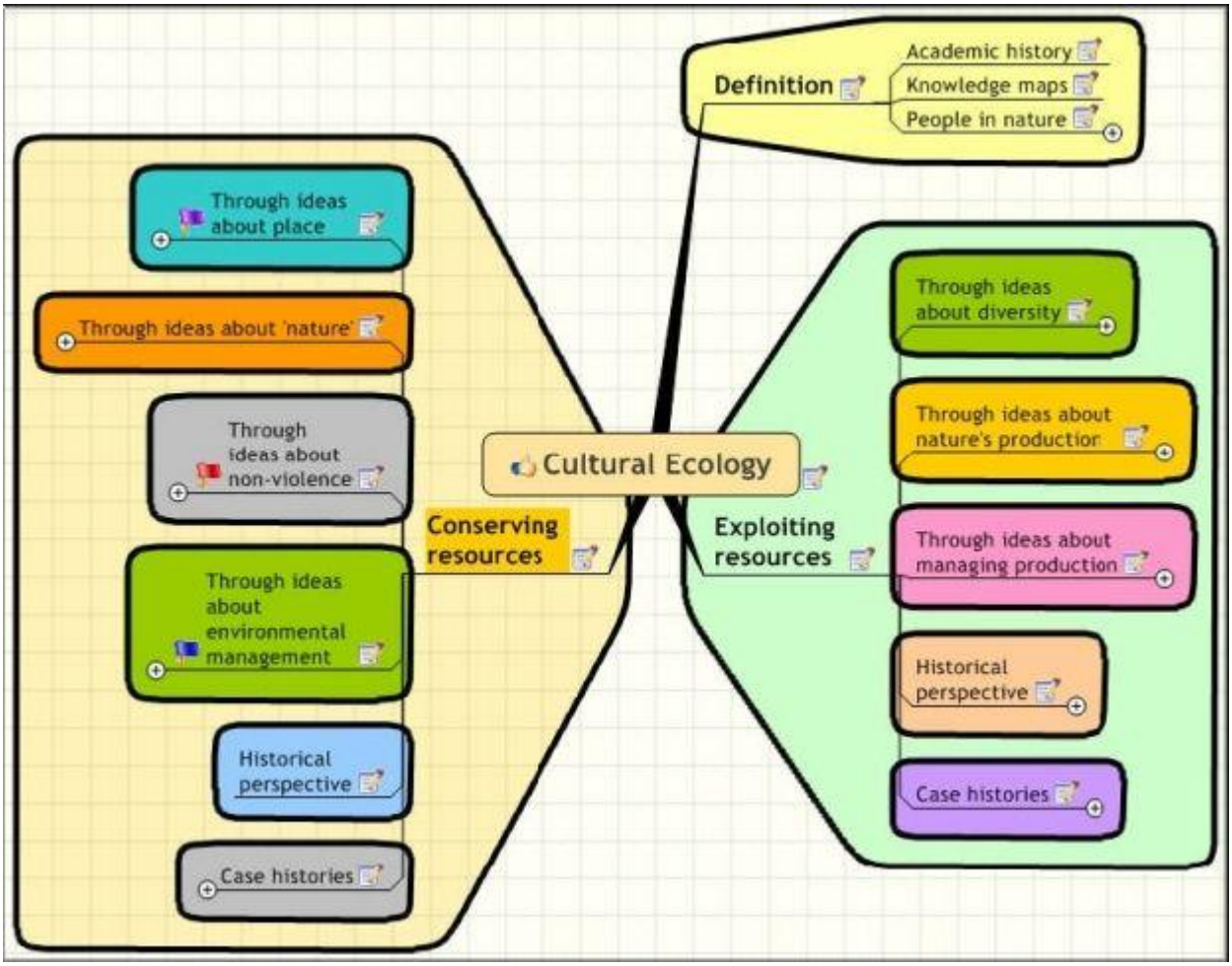
KEYWORDS: environment, culture, human, society, management, conservation, biodiversity.

Introduction

Integrated management of ecosystems including the role of culture will meet demands of nature and people to address global changes and improve ecosystem and human well-being.

The Thematic Group pursues its mission by implementing actions that:

1. Enhance understanding of cultural practices that impact on or contribute to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management, and the cultural knowledge and value systems that underpin practices.
2. Increase knowledge of the role that cultural practices play in climate change impacts, mitigation, and adaptation and how culture can contribute to improve human responses to climate change in an integrated manner.
3. Assist the development of tools and guidance to understand the relationship between various cultures and ecosystem management and climate change response in different ecosystems of the world and therefore contribute to more effective governance.
4. Promote the development of policies that include and support the role of culture in ecosystem management for biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
5. Communicate lessons learned from case studies and promote the carrying out and sharing of case studies and lessons learned.



The following examples illustrate the potential uses and importance of cultural practices and ecosystem management in conservation and climate change adaptation:

1. Basic assessments of cultural conservation practices in different ecosystems of the world have highlighted the relevance of understanding and supporting local and traditional knowledge, when biodiversity and cultural diversity have never been more threatened than now.
2. The Commission on Ecosystem Management carried out a workshop in Doha in 2013 about "Spirituality and Ecosystem Management", and included as one of the main recommendations to establish a new thematic group that deals with those issues in a cultural context. As examples, formal and informal religions and spirituality can contribute to ecosystem management through mechanisms such as taboos, practices of care, and community motivations for conservation.
3. Real solutions to address the impacts of climate change and biodiversity conservation require a knowledge and insight from the social sciences, specifically the role that culture plays. For example, culture influences consumption decisions that may impact species or contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, and culture influences how people support or oppose responses to mitigate biodiversity loss or climate change.

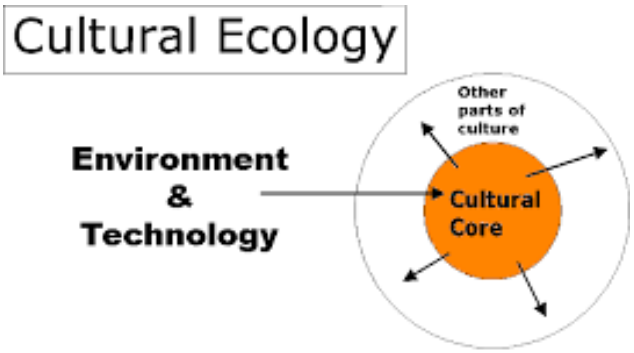
Priorities for action (deliverables):

1. Assessment of cultural practices that impact on or contribute to conservation in different ecosystems of the world.
2. Assessment of approaches to integrating cultural practices and Nature-based Solutions (NbS)

3. Assessment of cultural practices in relation to climate change, urbanization, and consumption impacting on ecosystems/ecosystem services
4. Develop and share case studies about cultural and spiritual values and practices in biodiversity conservation and climate change.
5. Develop methodological and practical guidelines for assessing and incorporating cultural practices throughout approaches to ecosystem management and governance.

Discussion

No special research was carried out on the value-semantic understanding of the environment as a socio-cultural phenomenon.[1]



The cultural core of subsistence related traits mediates between environment and the rest of culture.

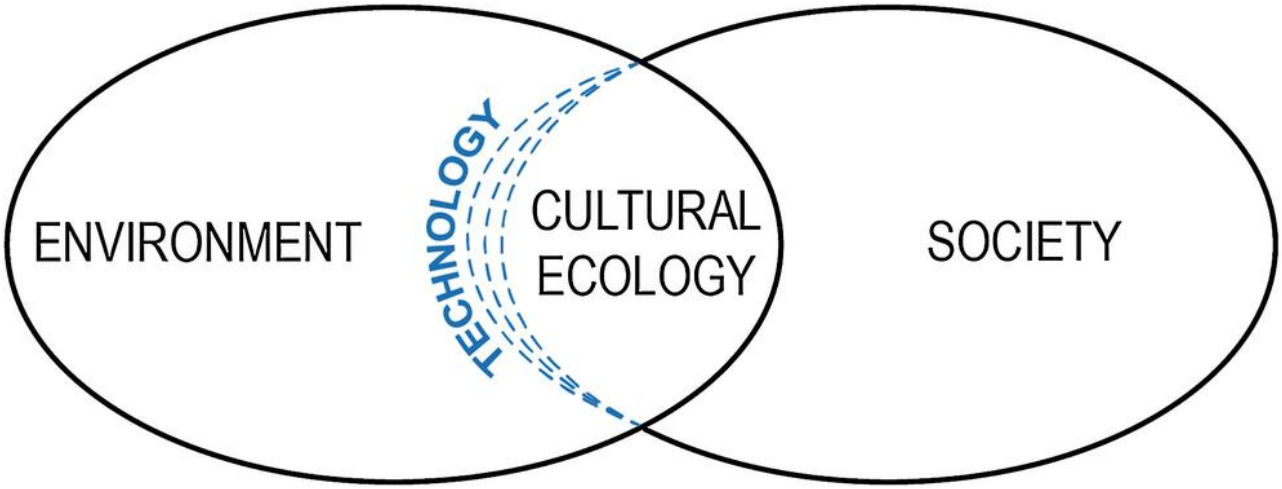
Nevertheless, within the framework of social anthropology, social ecology, and some other scientific branches, independent research areas managed to develop this link (e.g., culture and ecology (ecological culture), culture, and consumption (consumer culture), etc.). For example, the differences in understanding environmental culture between Russian and American students are as follows:

1. In American socio-ecological discourse, the concept of "ecological culture," so popular in modern Russian sociological science, is rarely used;
2. Instead of the Russian concept of "environmental consciousness," American scholars discuss "environmental attitudes" (environmental awareness), which are considered by Russian sociologists as structural components of environmental culture;
3. In the American tradition, it is customary to talk about environmental behavior, which, in terms of content, is symmetrical to the domestic concept of "environmental activity

Understanding the environment as a socio-cultural phenomenon is directly related to determining the role of man in preserving the environment. However, the question is not only about solving specific environmental problems, but also about the way a person identifies the environment as a universal or local value and what place it occupies in the value-normative system of modern society. Additionally, the ethnonational coloring of this identification process also becomes essential.

Human activities have been implicated in the vast majority of contemporary environmental problems. Thus, it might be expected that research into those activities, and the attitudes from which those activities stem, would

be of central interest to environmental scientists and land managers, and would be strongly supported by funding agencies.[2]



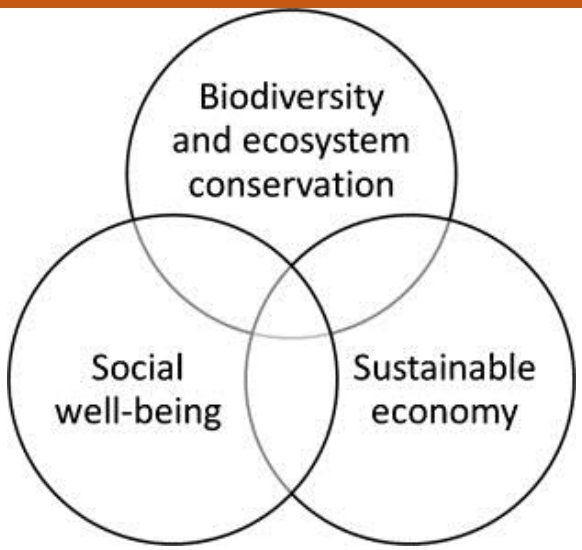
Nonetheless, the Australian experience, as reflected, for example, in the federal government's national research priorities, is that environmental research is conceptualised predominantly in scientific terms. Our reading suggests that this is the case in many other countries as well.

There has been significant engagement between the natural and social sciences in two areas of environmental research, however. First, archaeology, palaeoecology and environmental history have converged to study long term human-landscape interactions. Second, the quantitative social sciences tradition of large-scale survey sampling aims to understand environmental attitudes by correlation with quantifiable variables such as age and social class, often with a view to changing behaviour via education.

While recognising the value of these collaborative trends, we focus here on the other major paradigm that has informed the humanities and social sciences. This is the qualitative method of interpretive understanding that produces historical and ethnographic studies of culture and society.

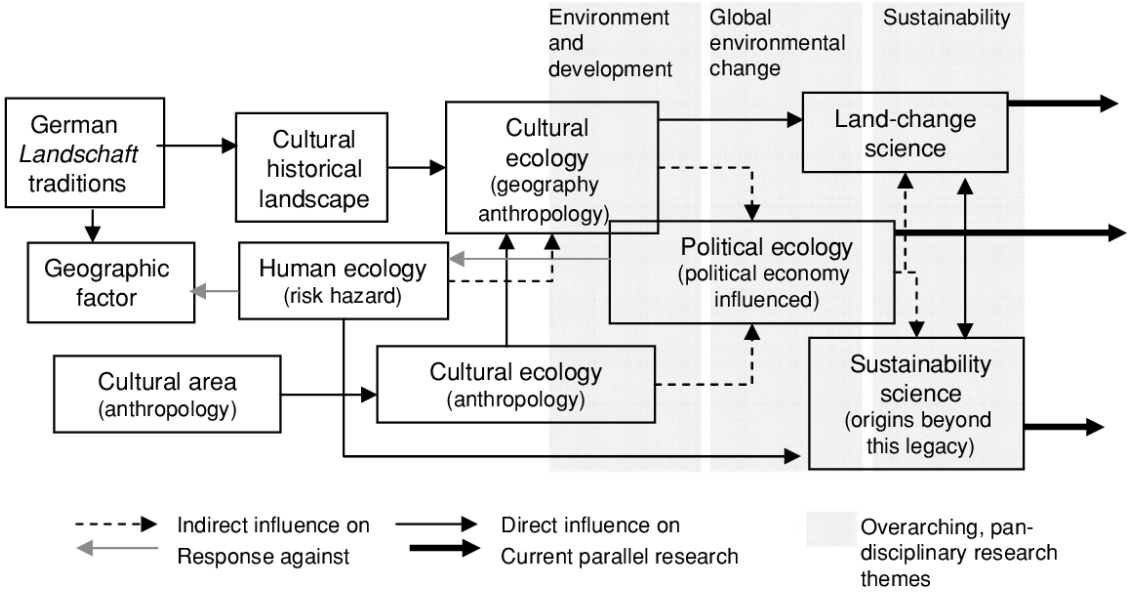
Specifically, we are interested in cultural analysis of the beliefs, practices, and often un-articulated assumptions that underlie human-environmental relations. Our aims are:

(1) To show how sociocultural processes are central to environmental attitudes and behaviours. Australia provides a fascinating diversity of examples and questions. What are the implications of Aboriginal knowledge of place, nature and landscape, developed over millennia of intimate subsistence occupation of the continent? How have British settler cultural traditions changed through interaction with diverse Australian environments? Are there identifiable influences brought from Asia through the historical arrival of migrants and visitors from such countries as China, Vietnam and Indonesia? We are not presenting a fixed view of culture transmitted as a total package through generations. Rather we approach it as a dynamic mix of practices, beliefs, and symbols that is actively made and remade in time and space.



(2) To illustrate the sorts of contributions research on culture can make to the practical challenges of environmental sustainability. Examples include the clarification of land use conflicts among different cultural groups, such as between rural landholders and National Parks Services over fire regimes, or between large immigrant groups of picnickers and managers over appropriate behaviour in national parks. Comparative approaches between Aboriginal and other people's (scientists, bushwalkers, fishers, parks managers) relations to land are an important component of successful joint management arrangements. Influential cultures requiring analysis include those of environmental management organisations themselves, and a number of Australian scholars are making contributions in this area.

(3) To stimulate dialogue between researchers in the humanities/social sciences and the natural sciences.



A range of approaches has been suggested, from better communication across traditional disciplinary boundaries to their total collapse. It is not our intention to advocate any one approach, nor are we unaware of

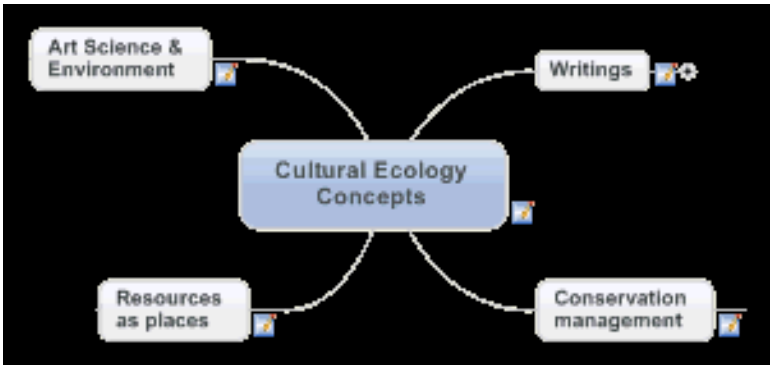
the difficulties involved. Rather, we aim to stimulate discussions between culturally-oriented researchers in the environmental humanities and related areas of the natural sciences. As these are international issues, we hope the Australian examples will be supplemented by comparisons from other parts of the world.

Cultural ecology is the study of human adaptations to social and physical environments. Human adaptation refers to both biological and cultural processes that enable a population to survive and reproduce within a given or changing environment. This may be carried out diachronically (examining entities that existed in different epochs), or synchronically (examining a present system and its components). The central argument is that the natural environment, in small scale or subsistence societies dependent in part upon it, is a major contributor to social organization and other human institutions.[3]

Anthropologist Julian Steward (1902-1972) coined the term, envisioning cultural ecology as a methodology for understanding how humans adapt to such a wide variety of environments. In his Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution (1955), cultural ecology represents the "ways in which culture change is induced by adaptation to the environment." A key point is that any particular human adaptation is in part historically inherited and involves the technologies, practices, and knowledge that allow people to live in an environment. This means that while the environment influences the character of human adaptation, it does not determine it. In this way, Steward wisely separated the vagaries of the environment from the inner workings of a culture that occupied a given environment. Viewed over the long term, this means that environment and culture are on more or less separate evolutionary tracks and that the ability of one to influence the other is dependent on how each is structured. It is this assertion - that the physical and biological environment affects culture - that has proved controversial, because it implies an element of environmental determinism over human actions, which some social scientists find problematic, particularly those writing from a Marxist perspective. Cultural ecology recognizes that ecological locale plays a significant role in shaping the cultures of a region.

Results

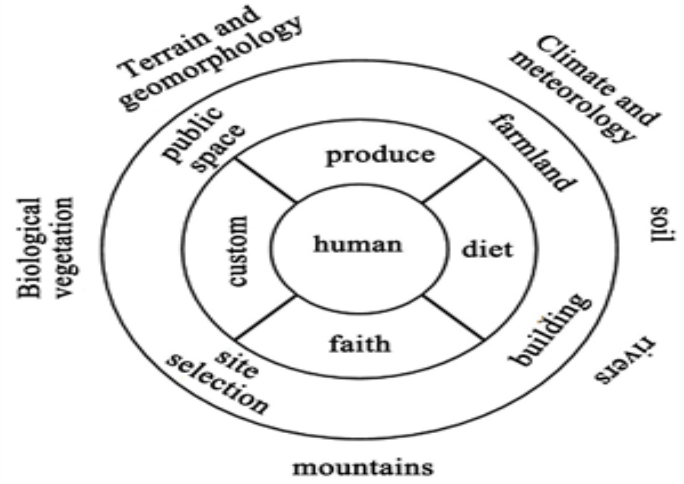
The interrelatedness between culture and nature has been a special focus of literary culture from its archaic beginnings in myth, ritual, and oral story-telling, in legends and fairy tales, in the genres of pastoral literature, nature poetry. Important texts in this tradition include the stories of mutual transformations between human and nonhuman life, most famously collected in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, which became a highly influential text throughout literary history and across different cultures. This attention to culture-nature interaction became especially prominent in the era of romanticism, but continues to be characteristic of literary stagings of human experience up to the present.[4]



The mutual opening and symbolic reconnection of culture and nature, mind and body, human and nonhuman life in a holistic and yet radically pluralistic way seems to be one significant mode in which literature functions and in which literary knowledge is produced. From this perspective, literature can itself be described as the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of "cultural ecology" . Literary texts have staged and explored, in ever new scenarios, the complex feedback relationship of prevailing cultural systems with the needs and manifestations of human and nonhuman "nature." From this paradoxical act of creative regression they have derived their specific power of innovation and cultural self-renewal.

German ecocritic Hubert Zapf argues that literature draws its cognitive and creative potential from a threefold dynamics in its relationship to the larger cultural system: as a "cultural-critical metadiscourse," an "imaginative counterdiscourse," and a "reintegrative interdiscourse" .It is a textual form which breaks up ossified social structures and ideologies, symbolically empowers the marginalized, and reconnects what is culturally separated. In that way, literature counteracts economic, political or pragmatic forms of interpreting and instrumentalizing human life, and breaks up one-dimensional views of the world and the self, opening them up towards their repressed or excluded other. Literature is thus, on the one hand, a sensorium for what goes wrong in a society, for the biophobic, life-paralyzing implications of one-sided forms of consciousness and civilizational uniformity, and it is, on the other hand, a medium of constant cultural self-renewal, in which the neglected biophilic energies can find a symbolic space of expression and of (re-)integration into the larger ecology of cultural discourses. This approach has been applied and widened in volumes of essays by scholars from over the world as well as in a recent monograph .[5]

Cultural ecology developed in response to the "landscape morphology" approach of Carl O. Sauer. Sauer's school was criticized for being unscientific and later for holding a "reified" or "superorganic" conception of culture. Cultural ecology applied ideas from ecology and systems theory to understand the adaptation of humans to their environment. These cultural ecologists focused on flows of energy and materials, examining how beliefs and institutions in a culture regulated its interchanges with the natural ecology that surrounded it. In this perspective humans were as much a part of the ecology as any other organism. Important practitioners of this form of cultural ecology include Karl Butzer and David Stoddart.



The second form of cultural ecology introduced decision theory from agricultural economics, particularly inspired by the works of Alexander Chayanov and Ester Boserup. These cultural ecologists were concerned with how human groups made decisions about how they use their natural environment. They were particularly

concerned with the question of agricultural intensification, refining the competing models of Thomas Malthus and Boserup. Notable cultural ecologists in this second tradition include Harold Brookfield and Billie Lee Turner II. Starting in the 1980s, cultural ecology came under criticism from political ecology. Political ecologists charged that cultural ecology ignored the connections between the local-scale systems they studied and the global political economy. Today few researchers self-identify as cultural ecologists, but ideas from cultural ecology have been adopted and built on by political ecology, land change science, and sustainability science.

By the 1980s the human ecological-functional view had prevailed. It had become a conventional way to present scientific concepts in the ecological perspective of human animals dominating an overpopulated world, with the practical aim of producing a greener culture. This is exemplified by I. G. Simmons' book Changing the Face of the Earth, with its telling subtitle "Culture, Environment History" which was published in 1989. Simmons was a geographer, and his book was a tribute to the influence of W.L Thomas' edited collection, Man's role in 'Changing the Face of the Earth that came out in 1956.

Simmons' book was one of many interdisciplinary culture/environment publications of the 1970s and 1980s, which triggered a crisis in geography with regards its subject matter, academic sub-divisions, and boundaries. This was resolved by officially adopting conceptual frameworks as an approach to facilitate the organisation of research and teaching that cuts cross old subject divisions. Cultural ecology is in fact a conceptual arena that has, over the past six decades allowed sociologists, physicists, zoologists and geographers to enter common intellectual ground from the sidelines of their specialist subjects.[6]

Environmental history is the study of human interaction with the natural world over time, emphasising the active role nature plays in influencing human affairs and vice versa.

Environmental history first emerged in the United States out of the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and much of its impetus still stems from present-day global environmental concerns. The field was founded on conservation issues but has broadened in scope to include more general social and scientific history and may deal with cities, population or sustainable development. As all history occurs in the natural world, environmental history tends to focus on particular time-scales, geographic regions, or key themes. It is also a strongly multidisciplinary subject that draws widely on both the humanities and natural science.The subject matter of environmental history can be divided into three main components. The first, nature itself and its change over time, includes the physical impact of humans on the Earth's land, water, atmosphere and biosphere. The second category, how humans use nature, includes the environmental consequences of increasing population, more effective technology and changing patterns of production and consumption. Other key themes are the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer communities to settled agriculture in the neolithic revolution, the effects of colonial expansion and settlements, and the environmental and human consequences of the industrial and technological revolutions.Finally, environmental historians study how people think about nature - the way attitudes, beliefs and values influence interaction with nature, especially in the form of myths, religion and science.[5,6]

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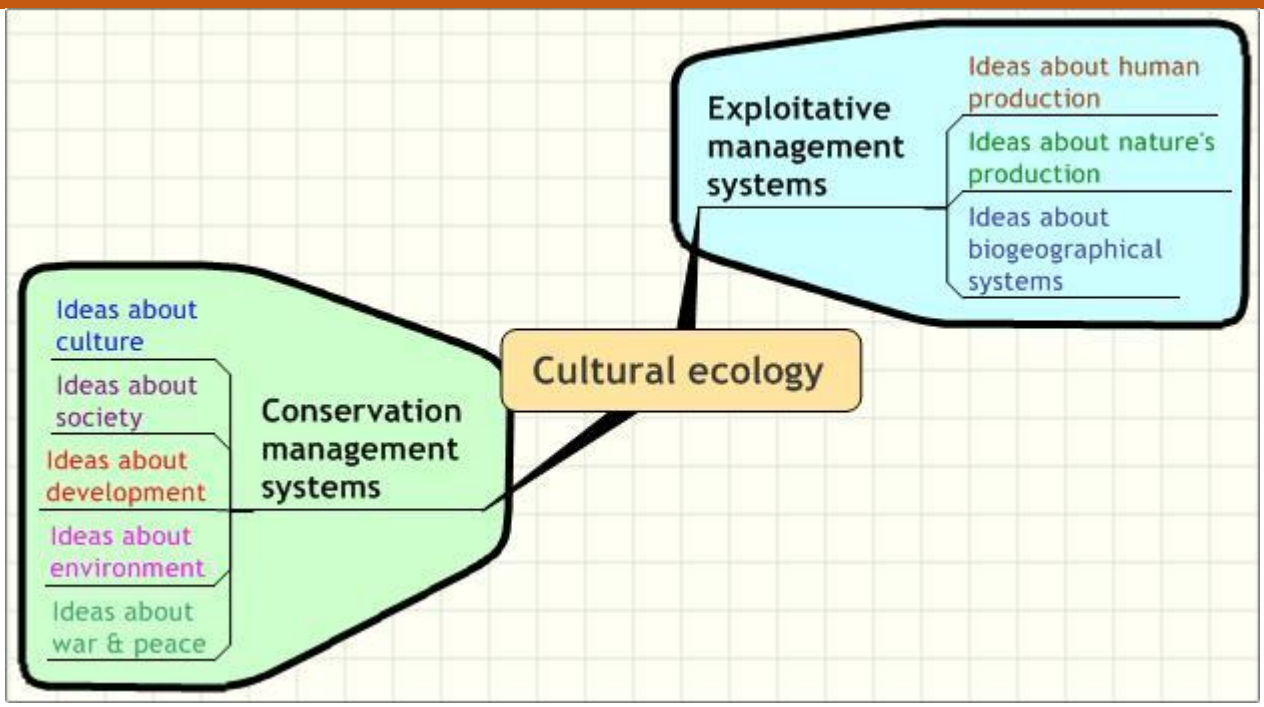

In 1962, anthropologist Charles O. Frake defined cultural ecology as "the study of the role of culture as a dynamic component of any ecosystem" and that's still a fairly accurate definition. Between one-third and one-half of the land surface of the earth has been transformed by human development. Cultural ecology argues that we humans were inextricably embedded in earth surface processes long before the invention of bulldozers and dynamite. "Human impacts" and "cultural landscape" are two contradictory concepts that may help to explain the past and modern flavors of cultural ecology. In the 1970s, concern over human impacts on the environment arose: the roots of the environmental movement. But, that isn't cultural ecology, because it situates humans outside of the environment. Humans are part of the environment, not an outside force making impacts on it. Discussing cultural landscapes—people within their environment—attempts to address the world as a bio-culturally collaborative product.

Implications

Cultural ecology is part of a suite of environmental social science theories that provide anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers, historians, and other scholars a way to think about why it is people do what they do, to structure research and ask good questions of the data.

In addition, cultural ecology is part of a theoretical division of the whole study of human ecology, broken into two parts: human biological ecology (how people adapt through biological means) and human cultural ecology (how people adapt through cultural means). Looked at as the study of the interaction between living things and their environment, cultural ecology involves human perceptions of the environment as well as the sometimes unperceived impacts of us on the environment and the environment on us. Cultural ecology is all about humans—what we are and what we do, in the context of being another animal on the planet.

One part of cultural ecology with immediate impact is the study of adaptation, how people deal with, affect and are affected by their changing environment. That is vital to our survival on the planet because it offers understanding and possible solutions to important contemporary problems, like deforestation, loss of species,

food scarcity, and soil loss. Learning about how adaptation worked in the past can teach us today as we grapple with the effects of global warming.[4]

Human ecologists study how and why cultures do what they do to solve their subsistence problems, how people understand their environment and how they share that knowledge. A side benefit is that cultural ecologists pay attention to and learn from traditional and local knowledge about how we really are part of the environment, whether we pay attention or not.

The development of cultural ecology as a theory has its start with a scholarly grappling with understanding cultural evolution (now called unilinear cultural evolution and abbreviated as UCE). Western scholars had discovered there were societies on the planet who were "less advanced" than elite white male scientific societies: how did that come about? UCE, developed in the late 19th century, argued that all cultures, given enough time, went through a linear progression: savagery (loosely defined as hunters and gatherers), barbarism (pastoralists/early farmers), and civilization (identified as a set of "characteristics of civilizations" such as writing and calendars and metallurgy).

As more archaeological research was accomplished, and better dating techniques were developed, it became clear that developing ancient civilizations did not follow neat or regular rules. Some cultures moved back and forth between agricultural and hunting and gathering or, quite commonly, did both at once. Preliterate societies did build calendars of sorts—Stonehenge is the best known but not the oldest by a long way—and some societies such as the Inca developed state-level complexity without writing as we know it. Scholars came to realize that cultural evolution was, in fact, multi-linear, that societies develop and change in many different ways.

Conclusions

Modern forms of cultural ecology pull in elements of tested and accepted theories (and some rejected) in the decades between the 1950s and today, including:

- historical ecology (which discusses the impact of individual interactions of small-scale societies);
- political ecology (which includes the effects of power relations and conflicts on the household to global scale);
- rational choice theory (which says that people make decisions about how to achieve their goals);
- post-modernism (all theories are equally valid and the "truth" is not readily discernible to subjective western scholars); and
- cultural materialism (humans respond to practical problems by developing adaptive technologies).

All of those things have found their way into modern cultural ecology. In the end, cultural ecology is a way to look at things; a way to form hypotheses about understanding the broad range of human behaviors; a research strategy; and even a way to make sense of our lives.[5,6]

Think about this: much of the political debate about climate change of the early 2000s centered around whether or not it was human-created. That is an observation of how people still attempt to put humans outside our environment, something cultural ecology teaches us cannot be done.

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