

Reshaping Nature: Old Limits and New Possibilities

Leipzig, November 5-7, 2009

by Matthias Groß, Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig

The *2nd German Environmental Sociology Summit* was held under the topic “Reshaping Nature: Old Limits and New Possibilities”. The original idea of a biannually English-speaking environmental sociology meeting in Leipzig was to foster exchange on current environment-related issues between a nationally oriented German environmental sociology culture and environmental sociologists from other countries. The conference was held at the “Kubus”, the conference centre of the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) in Leipzig.

All accepted abstracts were distributed to five general themes, each introduced by a well known environmental social scientist (keynote). The first subtheme of the meeting was “Adapting and Mitigating to Climate Change” opened by a lecture from the president of the *Research Committee on Environment and Society RC24* Raymond Murphy (University of Ottawa, Canada) on “The Chronic and the Acute: Mitigating Creeping Environmental Problems and Sudden Disasters”. Since the conference was held on the campus of a mainly natural science research institute, a lot of the local attendees were natural scientists by training. Murphy’s introductory talk was somewhat of an eye opener to them as to what environmental sociology is all about and it helped to clarify issues in our understanding of the nature-society interaction. Murphy’s avoidance of esoteric sociology jargon certainly helped here. The subsequent session topics included debates on the climate change regime, climate policy, environmental protection and climate change, lifestyle changes in climate change, and adaptation and mitigation governance. All papers proved how vivid environmental sociological research on climate change with a global focus has become in the last few years.

The second theme for the parallel sessions was entitled “Waste, Contamination, and the Challenges of Industrially Altered Landscapes”, introduced by the geographer Christopher De

Sousa (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA) who presented his research findings on efforts to manage the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated sites in North America over the last 30 years. His outlook on new possibilities ended with a pessimistic note, but his overview on best management practices showed that in the future a shift to sustainable restoration and revitalization processes is needed in the future. This talk as well as the subsequent paper presentations in the sessions showed that European and North American experiences in waste management and the revitalization of contaminated sites can learn a lot from each other.

The third thematic block of sessions was called “Environmentalism and Theories of Human-Nature Interactions”. It was introduced by a classic topic of the environmental social sciences, Garrett Hardin’s statement that “freedom in a commons brings ruin to all”. Andreas Diekmann (ETH Zürich, Switzerland) colourfully discussed the limits of rationality in environmental dilemmas ending with a rather pessimistic note on how the world’s leaders will make their decisions at the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 to prevent further global warming and climate changes.

The fourth and final theme of the first day was called “Knowledge and the Governance of Environmental Dynamics”, introduced by a keynote talk from Eugene Rosa (Washington State University, Pullman, USA). Rosa’s presentation gave an overview on the areas of social science research that have made remarkable progress in providing an understanding of the details and processes of the human-sustainability nexus. In great interdisciplinary fashion, Rosa drew on research from not only sociology, but also from anthropology, geography, policy analyses, and ecology. His outlook was the presentation of a refined template that brought into sharp relief key gaps where sustained research should be directed.

The second day of the conference linked the previous day’s discussion on the possibility of a sustainable future of the planet with the subtheme on “New Trends in Research on Sustainability”. Gert Spaargaren (Wageningen University, NL) opened the sessions with a keynote speech on “Climate Change Politics and Life(Style)

Politics: A Sociological Perspective". Against the background of the deepening climate crisis, Spaargaren argued that the empowerment of private consumers as co-makers of change is an issue which deserves attention both from a theoretical and policy making perspective. Using a practice-oriented perspective of the role of human agents in climate change helps to emphasize agency in environmental change without lapsing into individualistic models of change, he argued.

Following the tradition started in Lüneburg in 2007, a workshop was also launched at this year's meeting. To stimulate a lively discussion, a background paper, co-authored by Huib de Vriend and Anna Wesselink, was circulated before the conference. Huib de Vriend, an engineer from the Technical University of Delft and director of the EcoShape Programme of the Netherlands not only attended his very first sociology meeting that day but with his co-author Anna Wesselink (University of Leeds, UK) he critically presented the EcoShape Programme with a talk on "Building with Nature: Ecodynamic Design in Practice". The goal of the Dutch programme is to design and shape the Dutch coast line by using dunes and beaches together with elements such as rocks and jetties with novel technologies. The invited speakers Gert Spaargaren (Wageningen) and Wolfgang Krohn (Bielefeld University, Germany) agreed with the audience that the idea of "Building with Nature" can be seen as a good example to foster win-win solutions for society and nature. On the other hand they also pointed to the many obstacles and unintended side effects that large landscape design processes based on novel approaches in hydraulic engineering and their relationship to the ecosystem dynamics can bring.

The closing plenary speech was delivered by Hellmuth Lange (University of Bremen, Germany), who discussed "First and Third World Environmentalism: Competing Concepts or Two Sides of the Same Coin?" Lange unfolded in detail what First and Third World environmentalism can mean from different disciplinary perspectives. He also discussed on how much globalization leads to a blurring of any clear boundaries between both "environmentalisms". Based on this debate, Lange ended by discussing a list of research themes which will certainly gain im-

portance for environmental sociology in the near future, fostered by the globalization of (un-)sustainable lifestyles, consumption patterns, as well as environmental awareness and behaviour. In short, there is more work for environmental sociologists to be done than ever before.

With regard to the content of the overall conference theme, the meeting has supported the view that European environmental sociology is increasingly forging links with other disciplines, thus highlighting the inter- and even transdisciplinary potential of sociology as well as – at least on the local level – its strong focus on pragmatic solutions of environmental problems. Although the venue for the 3rd German Environmental Sociology Summit has not been finalized, there is good reason to look forward to the next meeting in November 2011.

« »

Noch große Defizite im Management von Abfällen

Tagungsbericht vom „II. Simposio Iberoamericano de Ingeniera de Residuos“

Barranquilla, Kolumbien, 24.–25. September 2009

von Klaus-Rainer Bräutigam, ITAS

Das „Nachhaltige Management von Abfällen“ war das Thema des Zweiten Iberoamerikanischen Symposiums zum Management von Abfällen, das am 24. und 25. September an der Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla (Kolumbien) stattfand. Die 250 Teilnehmer, die das hervorragend organisierte Symposium besuchten, stammten überwiegend aus Lateinamerika und Spanien. Dieser Tagungsbericht konzentriert sich auf einige Aspekte des Abfallmanagements, die den spezifischen Fall Lateinamerika charakterisieren.

Das Symposium wurde vom „Red de Ingeniera de Saneamiento Ambiental – REDISA“ (Netzwerk zur Erforschung der Verbesserung der Umweltqualität) gemeinsam mit der Universidad del Norte ausgerichtet. REDISA wurde 2003 gegründet und zunächst finanziert von der