

Book Review

Studies in Human Ecology

Editors: I. M. Pires, M. Gibert, L. Hens
2010 by Publishing House for Science and
Technology Ha Noi, Vietnam
Registered Ref. No: 833-2010/CXB/026-4/
KHTNCN

Human ecology emerged for the first time in sociology. During the 1920's the term referred to a sociological approach that was most similar to the way ecologists studied natural ecosystems. Contemporary human ecology in Europe dates from the early 1970's. It was one of the interdisciplinary academic approaches that in the aftermath of the 1968 events should revive traditional thinking at universities and research centers. Today, almost 100 years after its emergence, human ecology is still a discipline looking for its authenticity. This is less related to its necessity (many scientists are convinced that interdisciplinary approaches to complex problems that link humans with their environment are most wanted), but merely to its competition with other, intrinsically disciplinary, approaches that address human ecological issues.

The search of human ecology to its own identity is the main guiding theme in this new publication on "Studies in human ecology". In 10 chapters that are structured in three sections, it highlights a variety of aspects of this discussion. The first part is about past, present and future of human ecology. It entails chapters on its history, but also on its competition with other areas of research that address the human-environment interphase, such as ecological economics and political ecology. There is ample attention for the relevance of human ecology for contemporary environmental discussions as global problems, including the global environmental crisis.

Part 2 is about new additions to the multidisciplinary character of human ecology. Here, its relation with health ecology, anthropological (molecular) genetics and landscape ecology are addressed.

Part 3 is about applications of interdisciplinary studies. The chapters show in which way human ecology is useful to evaluate policies that target sustainable development and to handle environmental management systems. This section also entails an almost controversial chapter on teaching human ecology.

Interesting is the concluding chapter of the book. It offers a 13 points program that is the core of how European universities that offer human ecology (master and Ph.D.) programs look at its specificities. Among them are the reciprocal relations between humans and their environment, the wide interpretation of "environment", that includes not only the biophysical but also the social, cultural, technical, managerial and policy dimensions, the multi/inters/trans-disciplinary nature of human ecology, and its target to contribute to solutions for complex problems in the environment – sustainable development interphase.

Nineteen Human ecologists, from Europe, South-East Asia, and Latin-America contributed to this book, that over all offers a fair and multi faceted idea of what human ecology means today. It is most interesting and warmly recommended reading for students, researchers, trainers and professionals in human ecology world wide.

Luc Hens
VITO, Boeretang 200,
2400 Mol
Belgium
E-mail: luchens51@gmail.com