

Democratic and Practical Engagements with Environmental Values

Reading the papers for this issue, I was struck by several of the authors' emphases on the practical use of environments as a way of capturing the often incommensurable forms of environmental valuation. Reproducing a household, exploring a woodland with a companion species (Haraway 2008), or working in particular environments are practices that can be central to how humans forge relationships with the non-human world in which they are embedded. Such practices are also crucial to the construction of environmental knowledge and values.

This issue opens with Arler and Melquist arguing that these practical engagements become the basis for forms of environmental knowledge that might enhance democratic decision making over land-use planning. Recognising the multiple ways in which landscape is understood, interpreted and valued – as both 'space' and 'place' – the authors review some of the ways in which decisions over landscape might be made (see also Spash 2008). The fuzzy definition of the principles of democracy within the European Landscape Convention suggests an urgent need to give greater meaning to 'landscape democracy'. In the latter half of the paper, the authors review some of the practices through which decisions over landscape have sought to develop core democratic principles, looking at preference surveys, economic valuation and citizens' panels. The need for such bottom up democratisation is something of a recurrent theme in *Environmental Values* (for example, on citizen juries and their relationship to expert knowledge and decision making, see Aasen and Vatn 2013). They conclude by offering the 'connoisseur method' as an alternative. Connoisseurs are those who *know* a particular landscape through their special relationship, be it a professional relationship or one attached to 'everyday use'. The examples they provide from Sweden suggest the range of possibilities, as well as some of the pitfalls, to be found within such a method.

Similarly Centemeri explains how dwelling becomes the basis for understanding the potentially productive ways in which incommensurable valuations might be rethought (see also Trainor 2006). Centemeri, however, presents a novel reading of the pragmatic sociology of critical capacities in order to consider the languages and practices of valuation based on 'dwelling', or rather people's intimate and personal attachments to the environment, built through familiarisation. If there are echoes of Arler and Melquist's connoisseurs, who come to know their environments through 'everyday use', Centemeri remains more concerned with the manner in which innovative solutions might emerge through the inability to reconcile valuations of nature. Through the work of Fourcade (2011) Centemeri considers the surprising incommensurability of economic valuations in both France and the United States, before considering

this at a more intimate level. She concludes: 'Far from being exclusively a source of conflict and an obstacle to public decision-making, radical incommensurability can, one hopes, be an opportunity for collective explorations of new modes of organising our life in common, more respectful of our many ways of engaging with our environments' (p. 316).

The assumption that ecological citizenship and the Green State are mutually symbiotic comes under closer scrutiny in the paper by Melo-Escrihuela, who focuses most directly on Eckersley's proposition that the promotion of ecological citizenship should be approached together with the ecological transformation of the state. For Melo-Escrihuela such a proposition is a form of wishful thinking. Turning to John Dryzek's (2000) caution against the potential assimilation of deliberative democracy by liberalism Melo-Escrihuela suggests a greater need for attention not only to the relationship between the state and civil society but also to the pro-growth principles upon which economic liberalism resides. Later, the paper considers neo-Marxist formulations of state theory that recognize the crucial role adopted by the state in sustaining capitalist reproduction and also the relative autonomy of the state. For Melo-Escrihuela greater hope is to be found in a radical reorganisation of the economy and a need to focus on other spaces 'such as the community, the workplace and transnational civil society ... where the seed for the cultivation of ecological democracy and citizenship may better flourish' (p. 337).

Dan Coby Shahar similarly questions the role of the State in his critique of the new forms of eco-authoritarianism. Shahar begins by outlining an earlier iteration of eco-authoritarianism provided by Heilbroner and Ophuls in the 1970s. Whereas the centrally planned economy of the Soviet Union was an implicit reference point within earlier works and within subsequent critiques (by the authors themselves) the new eco-authoritarians look to the example of China. Turning to David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith's book *The Climate Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* Shahar is careful to take the authors' arguments on their own terms. He notes how important it is to recognise that 'the case for eco-authoritarianism is not built on the assertion that global society should collectively strive to be more like the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Singapore, or any other modern authoritarian nation' (p. 356). Instead the case 'is built on the assertion that the *system of governance* instantiated in China and Singapore has more potential to resolve the environmental crisis than market liberal democracy' (ibid.). Shahar then goes on to demolish this argument by demonstrating how an eco-elite, even if ostensibly capable and benevolent, is unlikely to be able to produce a better response to environmental crisis. Faced by the choice between independence from citizens' preferences and the effectiveness of their own administration, authoritarian regimes have instead become increasingly reliant on the inclusion of citizens in the political process. The buttresses for the eco-authoritarian argument thereby fall. Shahar in no way excuses market liberal democracies

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for their own failings in responding to environmental crises, rather he seeks to demonstrate that 'authoritarianism is still not the right response to our ecological predicament' (p. 363).

The paper by Peeters et al. also looks at how democratic freedoms can best be preserved in the light of environmental needs. The authors come to slightly different conclusions from Shahar through their focus on the capabilities approach, as developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Emphasising the importance of freedoms as a way of achieving human development and social justice, the capabilities approach rests on two related concepts: functioning and capability. The focus on the latter emphasises the importance of achieving greater freedoms in the pursuit of the good life. Although Peeters et al. acknowledge that Sen and Nussbaum, in different ways, have sought to incorporate a concern for sustainability within their conceptual frameworks, they question the authors' relative lack of interest in the question of restraining material consumption. Some form of restraint, Peeters et al. argue, will be necessary to ensuring that the conditions for human flourishing are preserved now and in the future. In resolving the apparent tension between the need for restraints on consumption and the need to protect the freedoms so central to the capabilities approach, Peeters et al. look towards both 'capabilities ceilings' and 'functioning constraints'. The latter approach is seen as offering the greatest hope for inculcating an ethos of restraint within the capabilities approach. The authors argue that in deriving functionings from a capability harmful environmental effects are found; therefore the emphasis should be placed not on placing a ceiling on capabilities but on limiting the harmful effects of functionings. In proposing such a perspective the authors see far greater potential for achieving inter-temporal justice at the same time as emphasising individual agency and intrinsic freedom.

The final paper of the issue is another in which environmental values are established in a complex set of unequal relations between the human and non-human across the global North and South. Forestry certification schemes and the representational practices through which certified forestry products are marketed to consumers in the global North are the focus of the paper by Nygren (for an earlier paper on the valuation of timber products see Veuthey and Gerber 2011). Through multi-sited research in Honduras and Denmark Nygren unpicks the ways in which the Forestry Stewardship Council Scheme, which aims to foster good forest management, has relied on practices of producing the exotic other. Certified products come to be linked to particular lifestyles and identities that are radically divorced from the actual conditions involved in the production of timber. Frustratingly forest certification has not really altered the unevenness of global trade. Instead, many Southern producers find themselves losing out through the higher costs required to produce timber in more sustainable ways. Nygren therefore critiques the forms of market governance that currently surround forestry certification, which place

emphasis on the whims of individual consumption practices as opposed to a more fundamental reordering of the social relationships that perpetuate inequality. She concludes by calling for new forms of legally binding regulation, law enforcement and fair trade activism in the face of such failings. Nygren's critique relies on understanding the differing ways of valuing nature within the forestry certification schemes and the manner in which aesthetic values come into conflict with the livelihoods of producers in the global South.

Along with Arler and Melquist's paper and Centemeri, Nygren demonstrates the environmental knowledges that emerge from practical engagements with environments – in the latter case, through the work of timber producers. In many respects, such a claim, so central to several of the papers, resonates with some of my own work, in which I have sought to develop an understanding of the ways that quotidian experiences might become the basis for a politics extending across the 'social' and the 'natural': an everyday environmentalism that suggests conditions of possibility for reworking relationships with both human and non-human (Loftus 2012).

If these relationships are to be reworked, I am convinced it must be in a way that increases democratic participation in the production and reproduction of specific ecologies. If one debate has really stood out in my first year as an editor of *Environmental Values* it is that concerning how best to achieve environmentally sustainable futures while, at the same time, ensuring a commitment to fuller and deeper democratisation. Indeed, despite the range of environmental values expressed, all authors in this issue are committed to a strong set of democratic principles. Nevertheless, the best ways of achieving these principles form the basis of significant disagreement. If Arler and Melquist's focus is on practical engagements with landscape, Melo-Escrihuela comes at the debate through a critique of the Green State. From yet another political perspective, Shahar critiques the *arguments* that lie behind what he perceives to be a new wave of eco-authoritarianism. Clearer conceptions of democracy and its relationship to environmental governance thereby emerge from each of the papers.

Translating such abstract debates into more concrete strategies for democratic participation within environmental politics and policymaking is a necessary further step. I have often argued that democratising the hydrosocial cycle is a fundamental step in achieving a more effective politics of water. Nevertheless, Erik Swyngedouw, echoing comments made by Slavoj Žižek and others, once made the point to me that he wants to go to a tap and find clean water: he doesn't want to sit on endless committees to decide how that water should flow, through what infrastructure, and at what price. It's a fair point. However, if we remain committed to *both* a deepening of democratic politics *and* to better governance of the environments of which we are a part, then the papers in this issue provide a good starting point for thinking through a form of environmental democracy that goes beyond 'yet another committee' while

opening up more joyful and embodied ways of experiencing those environments that we so value.

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