

Workshop Outline

Entering the Ecological Domain: Social and Sacred Perspectives.

Place: Moora Moora Co-operative

Facilitators: Dr Peter H Cock and Sandra Cock (Psychologist).

Introduction

This unit enters into the challenge of reconsidering us as part of nature. Its focus is on us as part of the earth's ecology with all dimensions of our being. As Roszak said we are the earth's risky experiment in self-consciousness. We are dependent on her for food, air and water-the physical breath of life but also for our being well, for learning and healing and self-transcendence. This unit challenges our separation as a false consciousness and as death dealing.

We explore ecology as us, from social and sacred perspectives. We share in the hope for humanity as a constructive partner with the rest of the earth's ecology. We consider mainstream religions' view on nature and ecology, indigenous worldviews, rekindling earth-connected spirituality, a re-animation of environmental and social action, and a reconnection to the spirit and function of place. It addresses the quality of life and interconnections between person, community, senses of place and local ecosystems.

Ecology is defined as the community of living and non-living things and all the intricacies of their coherence and change. We will explore its meaning as we enter into the ecology of a particular place shaped as it is by its wildness, its human built and its human perceived.

Social Ecology is the study of processes of regenerating close connection between persons, our species and the rest of nature. It recognizes that human existence and well being is dependent on being in relationship with human and non-human species. The Sacred acknowledges a spiritual understanding of the natural world

however this is manifested. It is not derived from any one particular religious or spiritual tradition, but is found in encounters with ‘otherness’ that reach beyond oneself and within oneself. The fusion of Social and Sacred Ecology joins the human-centredness of the social, the transcendence of the sacred, with the interconnectedness of the web of life. By working to bring these fields together within a critical framework, the dualisms of Western thought are addressed and transcended.

Participants are encouraged to actively participate in critical analysis and personal reflection of the material. They are also encouraged to be involved in community-based activities that reflect the material being discussed in the course. It will probably be personally and interpersonally challenging. Come with an openness to look within with without; in place and with a community of fellow explorers. Come ready to enter a particular complex web of life.

This long weekend intensive is facilitated in a transition place of forest, farm and local ‘intentional community’. This provides opportunities for participants to review the social and the sacred in an interface environment between the urban, rural and the wild.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will have

1. Developed an understanding of the physical and social ecology of a particular place and its interconnections.
2. Enhanced their nature connections; emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.
3. Acquired an understanding of the evolution of theory and practice related to social and sacred ecology from selected aspects of indigenous cultural approaches to postmodern perspectives.
4. Developed a critical understanding of the historical, religious, philosophical and institutional structures underlying the separation of humans from nature.
5. Gained an understanding of the role of social ecology, in working towards the goal of sustainability.
6. Developed an understanding of sacred ecology in the framework of religious and spiritual traditions.

7. Gained knowledge of some approaches to re-creating a sustainable human-nature relationship from a religious, cultural, social and philosophical perspective.
8. Enhanced their skills of presenting both orally and in writing reasoned arguments about the dialectic of the social and sacred as part of ecological thought and practice.

LEARNING/TEACHING METHODS

The workshop will be delivered through a 3 day/night intensive weekend session at Moora Moora Coop Community. The location will enable participants to begin to address the issue of social ecology through their connection with the Moora Moora 'intentional community'. This will be combined with simulation exercises and the monitoring of their own participant 'community' through the experience of living and studying together. Participant engagement with their own social group will be drawn upon to explore their own challenges and learnings.

The terrain of forest and mountain, together with Moora Moora's own sacred sites, will provide a place to begin exploring contemporary meanings of the sacred on the edge of urban-rural-wild places. This chosen location overlooking Melbourne on top of Mt Toole-be-wong facilitates exploration of the issues of social and sacred ecology in the context of seeing the structures and pressures of urban life, yet without the participants being enmeshed in it. The resident community called Moora Moora is a small community of 70 people working to live in ecologically sustainable ways, where humans live alongside wild species in relative harmony. Their infrastructure includes solar and wind generation, earth-built houses and over 200 hectares of forest terrain. This place on the urban-rural fringe encompassing intentional human settlement with wild species habitat offers a particularly supportive educational environment for intensive exploration of social and sacred ecology. While highlighting edges it also offers an introduction to possibilities for building connections between social and sacred ecologies. Because for some participants it is a familiar place, it provides an opportunity to explore more deeply as the surface of the place and community has been already seen.

We will be centred in the Lodge, a community building with a kitchen, toilets, showers and a large meeting and eating space. Participants will have the option of either Bunk room sleeping or bringing their own tent to camp around this building. We will also spend one night directly immersed in the forest wilderness in a self chosen place.

Workshops

Presentations and workshops will be intermixed with practical exercises that explore aspects of social and sacred ecology. We will address the challenge of creating effective dialogue between theory and practice that mix literature review, prac exercises and participant's own relevant experiences in an exploration of possibilities for synergy between philosophy and practice of the social and the sacred. Explorations can vary in their style of presentation, combining varying degrees of theory and practice, and varying dimensions of the social, sacred and the ecological.

Preparation Exercise

Each participant is asked to identify and map a species and its habitat they are personally connected with and describe their relationship with that species and its meaning to them.

This is part of preparation for the intensive and needs to be done before the workshop.