



# On Human Ecology

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*"The historic mission of our times is to reinvent the human— at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story, and shared dream experience." (Thomas Berry, 1999)*

With the framework of human ecology we would like to present a holistic and innovative learning model that approaches human beings as complex ecosystems in interdependence and interconnected with other ecosystems, within the great network of life on this planet<sup>1</sup>. As ecosystems we have the primordial need/responsibility for enhancing life and contributing thus to the process of thriving life on Earth. We emerged from Earth to life, for life.

How can we have a mutually beneficial —instead of destructive— relation with the worlds of nature?

How to bridge the abyss of radical disconnection between humans and the other than human modes of being?

As a holistic model, human ecology comprehends the union of four different ecologies that complement each other in the human sphere: earth ecology, social ecology, self ecology and spiritual ecology.

When we look at humans in everyday life we can recognize some dimensions of their existence:

1. Humans live on Earth, they are totally and completely interdependent with their natural environments, like any other creature on this planet. Our bodies are built up with earth elements and we need daily restoration to function properly. This dimension comprehends an *earth ecology* that shows us how to relate with Earth's environments, of which we depend to exist as *earthlings*, where we find the sources of wonder and surprise, of health, vitality, energy, biodiversity and beauty. Through earth ecology we

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<sup>1</sup> *"integral ecologies— a variety of emerging approaches to ecology that cross disciplinary boundaries in efforts to deeply understand and creatively respond to the complex matters, meanings, and mysteries of relationships that constitute the whole of the Earth community."* (Mikkey, S., Kelly S. and Robbert, A., 2017. pg. 1).





recognize that all forms of life have the same status to exist and enhance life in their own way and style.

2. Humans live in societies, communities, and groups. Social relations are a necessary condition/opportunity for survival and growth. These social relations include not only humans but other creatures and forms of life as well. This dimension comprehends a *social ecology* where we participate and actualise our collective experience as learning and evolving ecosystems in a more-than-human world.
3. Humans live in their own minds, they have the capacity to be aware of themselves as a whole made of parts: emotional, intellectual, intuitive and sensitive parts. Self-consciousness creates a subjective dimension of existence. This dimension comprehends a *self ecology* that is based on self-inquiry and openness to accept who we are with love and compassion.
4. Humans live in mystery. There is a dimension of existence that forces humans to be humble before the miracle and fragility of life. We can feel that there are forces that are more-than-human that we cannot completely understand but admire and fear sometimes. At the same time, death is a mystery that awaits every human being, and this consciousness generates a whole set of behaviors to relate with ancestors and the mysteries of nature. This dimension comprehends a *spiritual ecology* that brings awareness on our modes of relation and ways of communication with the spiritual dimension of life.

Human Ecology invites us to approach human beings as ecosystems, as multilayered networks of different forms of life and awareness in constant inter- and intra-connection with other ecosystems of different categories and scale. It encompasses multiple territories of exploration and cultivation of a more comprehensive understanding of ecological existence on this planet we call our Home Earth.

Given the complexity and imbrication of the contemporary problems that we are facing as humanity: climate change, wars, soil and forest degradation, pandemics, social isolation, addictive virtual realities, demographics of hunger and despair, and more; we are in need of proposals to imagine possible futures with inclusiveness and integrity. To integrate means to differentiate without separating, including different elements in a higher understanding of their possible relationships and cooperation.

*"The planetary destruction currently taking place is the effect of forms of human existence that dissociate humans from the world and thus fail to develop ways of being that participate in "a single integral community of the Earth". To develop new expressions of human nature is "to reinvent the human," creating new modes of consciousness and conscience that respond to the intimate interconnectedness of humans with all of the inhabitants and habitats of our planetary home. "We are here to become integral with the larger Earth Community". The Great Work of*





*our historical moment is becoming integral. Moreover, the point is not simply to become integral for oneself, but to pass on an integral Earth community to future generations. "The issue is how to give the child an integral world"" (Berry, 2009).*

This understanding of *human ecology* is a new expression of human nature, an attempt in the process of '*reinventing the human*'; and in this way it is also one innovative and original contribution to youth work: to understand human ecology as the center of gravity of a new knowledge of human existence, where the four ecologies that comprehend human ecology are equally important and complementary. We have designed a methodology with concrete practices to cultivate each one of the four ecologies, integrating them into a whole training program. Look for the manual!

Simultaneously and complementing the practices of the four ecologies, we suggest that human ecology *emerges from the embodiment* of two very important skills/competences/capacities — nature connection and wellbeing—, human capacities that are to be practiced and cultivated from early ages in order for them to become ripe when humans become adults, full of visions and willpower.

These two skills/capacities/competences are at the center of the whole project of "Belonging to Nature: the Heart of Wellbeing" from where our model of human ecology was developed. These competences can be cultivated in youth work for a more-than-human future, empowering young people towards maturity and responsible action as members of the Earth community.

***Nature-connection*** is the awareness of how to live on Earth in good relationship with all that exists, in tune with natural rhythms and dynamics, becoming able to cope and adapt, enacting wellbeing on a daily basis.

***Wellbeing*** is a process that we perform and actualise every single day. We must perform wellbeing with intelligence, knowledge and love. It is the practice of wellbeing that gives us the capacity for adaptation and regeneration in creative ways, for thriving life through changing conditions in a complex universe of existence.

Notice that *nature-connection* as an awareness supports and informs the actions of *wellbeing* generating a healthy *human ecology*, healthy in the sense of *wholesomeness, integration of different dimensions*.

Indeed, all humans are born hardwired for nature-connection and for seeking wellbeing by preserving and enhancing life within the more-than-human Earth community. Without such awareness and adaptive practices of wellbeing we could possibly have survived in wilderness for millennia. Nevertheless, it appears that our contemporary societies manifest different degrees of despair and a sense of not belonging and separation from themselves, each other and other





forms of life. This sense of separation became heavier and almost unbearable during the Pandemia of COVID-19 and we wish to acknowledge this fact and offer our project as contribution towards the process of healing this very recent collective trauma.

#### Bibliography:

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