

The slide features abstract green geometric shapes. On the left, a solid green triangle points downwards. On the right, a complex arrangement of overlapping translucent green triangles and polygons creates a dynamic, layered effect. The main title is centered in a large, bold, green sans-serif font.

Sociology, places and cultures of sustainability

Giorgio Osti

University of Padua, FiSPPA Department

Course articulation

Aim: Sociology of places for understanding environmental crisis

Course articulation: 2 parts, one on frameworks, the other on a special topic (lessons), then,

- External experts' intervention, maybe a seminar
- Students/teacher fieldwork
- Students presentation at the end of the course (optional)

Final exam: a paper in English of 2500 words, all inclusive, plus a short discussion, if necessary

Course method

- ▶ **Frameworks of Environmental Sociology**
- ▶ What is essentially sociology
- ▶ Connection among disciplines: a meta-frame for approaches
- ▶ A lesson on each approach matched with a paper
- ▶ Lecture + discussion
- ▶ The language problem: to use several ways (spoken and written language, images and even dramatization)
- ▶ Moodle
- ▶ **A Case study:** wetlands socialization
- ▶ International conference in March 2027 on 'forms of knowledge of rural fragile areas' (call for cases ready soon)
- ▶ Students alone or in group can organise a small research on wetlands socialisation with a variety of methods
- ▶ This fieldwork can sort in the exam paper and conference participation (in the last years students organised an entire session)

Course's philosophy or style

“Sociology in a Master of Psychology”

Environmental Sociology in a Master with
‘intercultural interests’

How to justify a sociological scrutiny of
environmental issue (or crisis)?

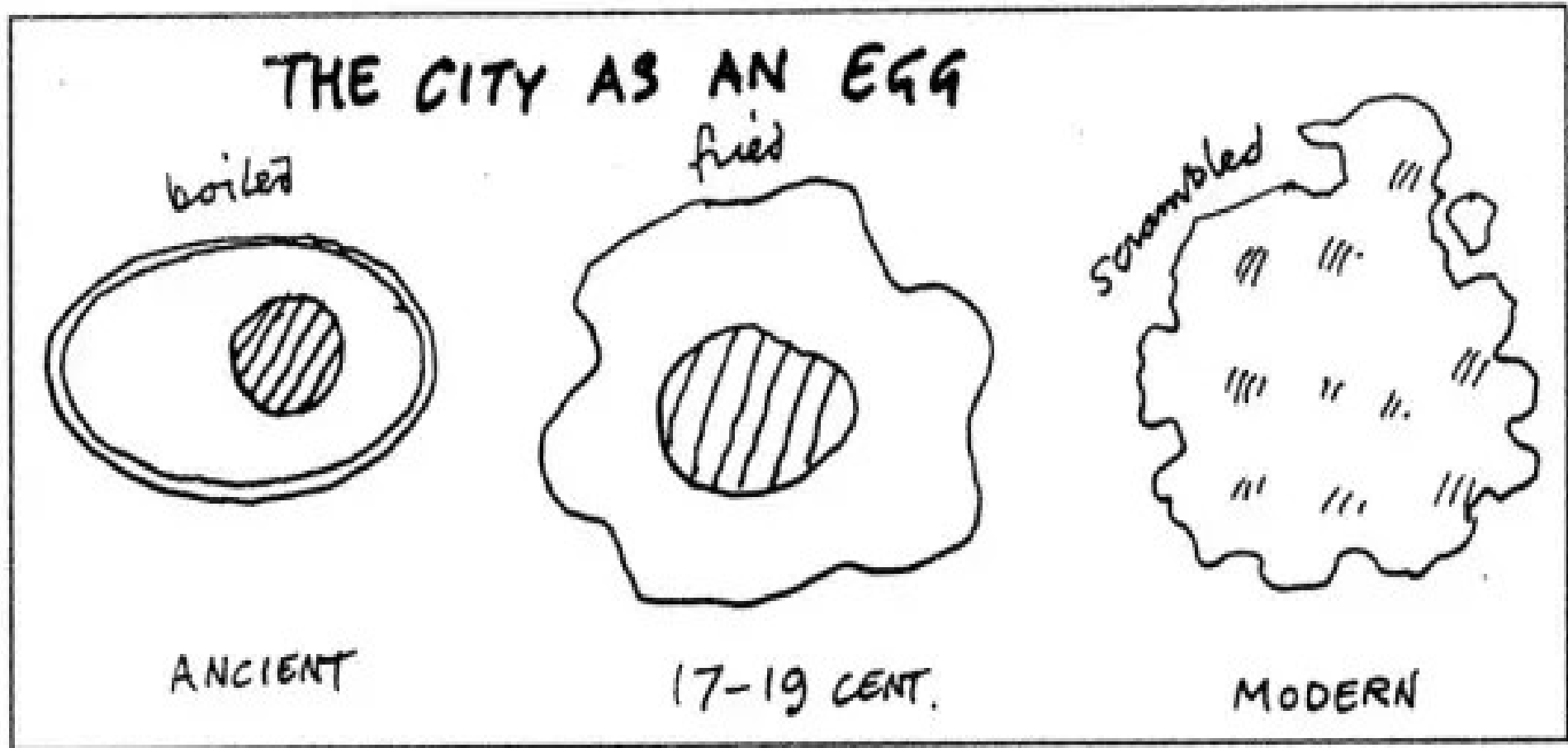
- Environmental phenomena are not self-evident
- Perception and meaningfulness filter reality
→ environmental sciences have a cultural mediation
- Organised action is fundamental; we are *zoon politikon* or social beings → rationality, power and love (or hate) in relation to others

Sociology has 3 elementary aspects (analytics)

- Actors, agents, subjects (e.g. entrepreneur)
- Processes, dynamics, relations (e.g. group aggregation, crowd behaviour)
- Environments, institutions, organised fields (*egg town*, square, park, pub, shop, municipality, nations)

.. and a **plurality of methods**, not least those typical of physical sciences (**repeated experiments** in controlled environment-laboratory)... for small groups and simple reactions is possible... then, **statistics** when there are many context variables; finally, others less formalised more qualitative methods based on **interpretations** of interviews, observations, texts; extreme case is **research-action**

Representation of the urban environment; morphology, evolution, metaphor



Source: <https://brandondonnelly.com/the-city-as-an-egg>

Sociology is not a unitary discipline. It moves according to different logics, assumptions and ends forming a paradigm

- paradigm of order
- paradigm of conflict
- paradigm of structure
- paradigm of action-sense making
- *paradigm of relationships*

Order question (Durkheim)

What holds society together and how is social order possible in an era in which economic, social and cultural transformations have broken the belief in the sacredness of tradition and religion?

Conflict question (Marxism)

All societies until now are unequal; conflict between classes/groups is inevitable. Thus, society without conflict are either perfect or dominated. Conflict produces positive changes (dialectic logic)

Structure or emergent qualities question (Durkheim)

Society comes before individuals. 'Entities' like clubs, institutions, groups, organisations, clans are real and affect individuals; those entities are the main object of research for sociology

Action (and sense making) question (Weber)

To explain social phenomena - of whatever nature they may be - it is always necessary to trace them back to individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours and the meaning they hold for the actor must be grasped (paradigm nearer psychology).

We will see the paradigm
of relationships later



Main ideal-types of social aggregations with essential characteristics (concept intension)

Group(-Community)

(e.g. pair group)
Common ideas and lifestyle
membership++++

Institution

(e.g. State)
Rules and Sanctions
Legitimation, membership+++

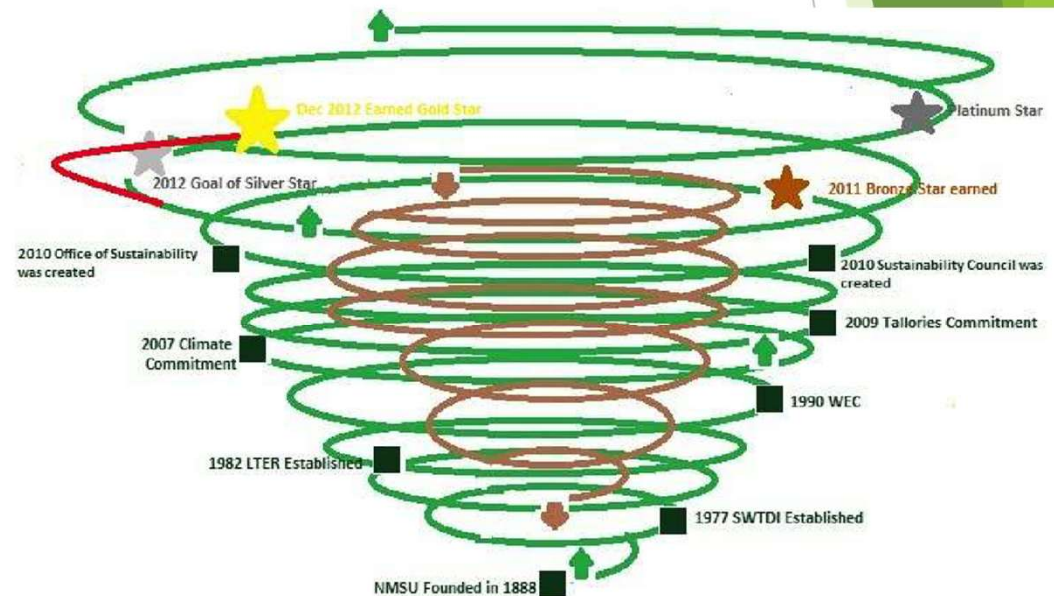
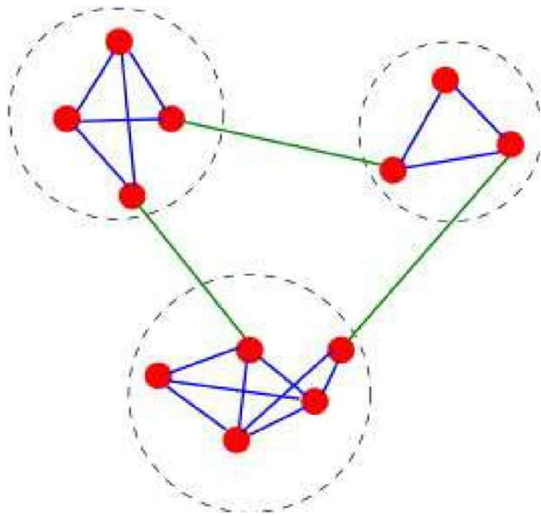
Collectivity(-Society)

(e.g. Italian society, urban residents)
Common identity/residence
Membership+

Network

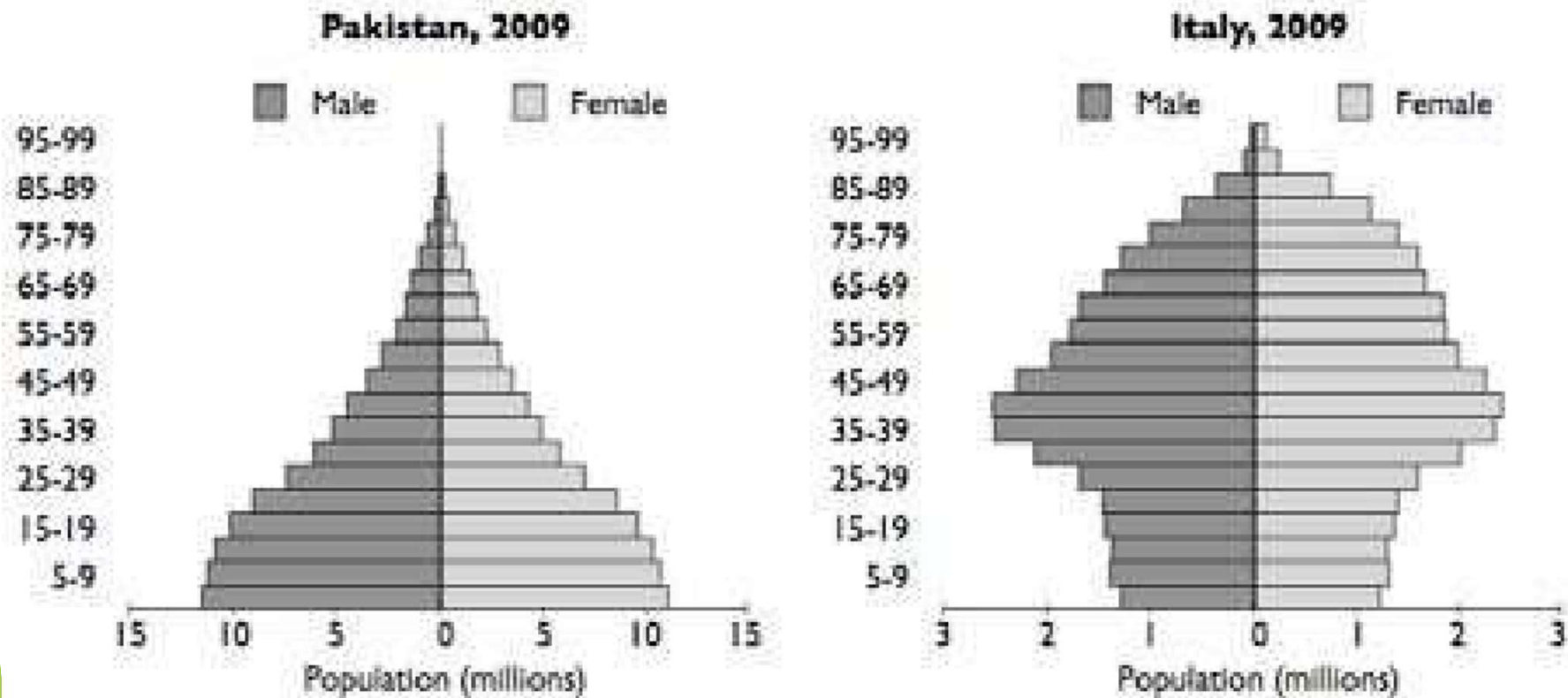
(e.g. social media, movements)
Free exchange of gift
Membership++

Note: Real aggregations often have an intermediate position, like associations or markets; some ideal-types contains others (e.g. informal networks are within almost all other ones)



How to represent graphically society

Sometime is quite easy to represent and compare societies



Population Pyramids for Pakistan and Italy Data
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Database

Main forms (or ideal types) of social aggregation according to some criteria (synoptic table) -

Aggregations	Members hip	Rules	Medium/pr ocess	Ties strengt h	Length
Groups	High informal	Implicit	Identity/co nstruction	High	Variable
Institutions	High formal	Explicit	Law/Legiti mation	Middle	Long
Collectivity	Low Formal	Low profile	Similarities /assimilatio n	Low	Long
Networks	Low informal	Low profile	Gift/Excha nge	Middle	Low

Noteworthy: Society is made of Processes and Aggregations

What pushes aggregation among people

Types of factor pushing for aggregation (again plurality)

- Sexual attraction (family, sociability)
- Parents-children attachment (family, care)
- Physical, mental and communicative strength (power)
- Symbiosis, specialisation, know how, resources control (Interdependency, exchange)
- Game playing (sociability, recreation)

All these forces, often shared with animals (behaviourism), are included and transformed into meaningful systems, that we call 'cultures'

Such cultures evolve over time, differentiating; difficult for sociology establishing 'laws' or regularities, but that is the aim!

Sociology is in between unique differentiations (historicism) and search for universal trends (philosophy of history, *does humanity have an end?*).

2° Lesson: introduction to environmental sociology

- What are human-environment relationships
- Historical matrixes of environmental crisis
- Forms/sources of environmental crisis
- Environmental crisis through ideologies
- Conclusions

Premise

How to conceptualise the human-environment relationship?

They are not completely detached, but are not the same entity ('fusion' perspective), thus we have 3 **compatible** situations

- Humans are **part of the environment** they are living organisms subjected to the rules of physic and animal world
- Humans are *relatively* **detached of environment** both in terms of single distinct bodies (identity) and artificial spaces, like a house protected from rain
- Humans are **interlinked to environments** in various ways - This variability is high because eco-systemic and human aggregations are many → the combinations or structural coupling <https://www.fractalmodel.org/structural-coupling/> of various human and ecological systems is the object of environmental sociology (see farming as an old structural coupling)

An example per third type (interlinking)

An example of human-ecosystem combination is a prairie constantly monitored by an agro-environmental agency for understanding consistency and performances of grass after sheep's pasture and other perturbations, like CC, pollution, allochthone species arrivals

The constant interaction between agency use of indicators and grassland reactions can produce a structural coupling: the two systems communicate well and are *sustainable... monitoring prevents grass overuse*

Historical matrixes of environment sociology
(classification with 2 criteria: temporal order and
they have provoked social and political re-actions)

Studies on “green revolution” (?!?) (R. Carson and
pesticides in waters, *Silent Spring*, 1962)

Social movements and protest (22 April 1970, USA
Earth Day)

Great industrial and transport incidents (Exxon
Valdez vessel oil spills off Alaska sea in 1989)

Risk society (U. Beck 1986), reflexive modernisation
by education, secularisation, rationalisation

Global climate change (e.g. permanent glaciers/poles
reduction) IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on CC, 1988

Principal sources of human-environment crisis and remedies

Forms of ecological crisis	Effects	Remedies
Pollution	Emission of synthetic substances harmful to health	Monitoring, recycling, bio-imitation, ban on substances
Ecosystem biodiversity reduction / fragmentation	Continuous rationalization of terrestrial and marine spaces	Protected areas, green cities, sustainable agri-forestry-pastoralism
Climate crisis	Exorbitant production of CO2 from fossil sources and livestock	Energy transition to renewables, food transition to less meat and milk by-products

Comments: more than one **independent** source; there is a bland **chronological order** (conservationism is the oldest XIX century, even if fight against pollution represents the boom phase of ES

A link with previous lesson: how forms of ecological crisis interface with main ideal-typical social aggregations?¹

Forms of ecological crisis

Eco-systems and species biodiversity reduction
(e.g. animal extinction)

Pollution from synthetic objects (eg Per-polyfluoroalkyl Substances-PFAS leaking)

Climate change
(eg CO2 increase; Ozone hole)

Interf
aces
?

Main social aggregations

Institutions

Networks

Groups

Collectivities

what happens in this box?

Interfaces (a dialogue between different worlds) can be many: policies, protests, citizen science, ascetic lifestyles, standardisation, donations to NGOs **we need a framework for all these interfaces !!!**

1

attention that the two interfaced sides have different level of abstraction; interfaces work also in this way, connecting processes coming at different level or scale; typical air pollution is transboundary, while policies for its reduction are regional

Anonymous; 05/10/2022

One framework can be the ***Ideologies of Environmentalism***; they facilitate the classification of socio-environmental studies with a (inter-) cultural perspective, for example through this scheme

		Attitude toward environmental goods (mainly)	
Perspective of Analysis		Instrumental	Symbolic
	Actor- oriented (control of environment)	Eco- modernity	Environment Stewardship
	System- oriented (integration with environ)	Political Ecology	Deep Ecology Degrowth

Always the idea of metanalysis.....

We choose to organise our framework using environmentalist *ideologies*

But what are Ideologies? They are more than one

- a) Cultural ways for cheating poor people (religion is the opium of the peoples)
- b) A coherent block of ideas covering all reality
- c) A charismatic vision of reality able to motivate a generous and wide political mobilisation
- d) A rigid and sectarian way of thinking not considering reality

We choose mainly meaning 'c'

Therefore, ideologies are both

- *Analytical instruments* for interpreting systematically the reality ... in our case socio-environmental crisis and remedies
- A systemic knowledge becoming a guide for motivating people to action (performative)

A clear and convincing interpretation of reality moves people to action (vice versa, too). We could call it ideology—that is, a systematic vision of the world innervated by a charismatic perspective of social change: Gramsci's concept, according to Knud Erik Jørgensen (1992, 37), that can be found in poor people mobilisation (Borras 2016).

Ecomodernity features

- Humans cannot stop changing environment (modernity means no stop change)
- Humans have to change it in order to keep it sustainable or able to last
- More governance (eg Third sector inclusion) and technology are useful
- Requisite: a stronger and independent State willing to dialogue more with other States

 **Conference of the Parties** - COPnn is the UN **climate** change conference. COP stands for Conference of the Parties, and the summit will be attended by the countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - a treaty that came into force in 1994.

Nature Stewardship main features

It belongs to the sphere of attitudes, meanings and cultures (previous one to the sphere of politics)

A more efficient and moral attitude to nature is **care**

According to Welchman (2012, 299), there are four attributes that make the term stewardship fitting for a *moderate* commitment to the environment: guardianship, landholding, enduring relationship and the exercise of moral virtues.

Attention to daily lifestyle of ordinary people

Convergence with religions thinking and with social responsibility practices of private companies (CSR)

Main features of deep ecology → degrowth

- It starts from a radical equality and assimilation between humans and other species/ecosystems
- It is immoral that humans pretend to change biodiversity and ecosystems balances
- There is a anarchist root in deep ecology; a vision of rules of states as oppressive anyway
- Degrowth contexts endless economic growth and its indicators like GDP change, North-South inequalities; promotes sober lifestyle, small scale commerce,
- Example: Citizens take part in **community-supported agriculture** (CSA), where they pay farmers directly in exchange for a weekly basket of food.

Note: Political ecology will be developed in 4^o lesson

Logical interconnections of eco-ideologies

		Attitude toward environmental goods (mainly)	
Perspective of Analysis		<i>Instrumental</i>	<i>Symbolic</i>
	<i>Actor-oriented (overcoming nature)</i>	Eco-modernity	Environmental stewardship
	<i>System-oriented (integration with nature)</i>	Political ecology	Deep ecology

Dotted line represents a common reference to
asymmetrical relationships

Continuous line represents a common reference to
individual behaviours (reflexive human being or survivalist)

Conclusions

- Environmental issue is not unitary; that creates many trade-offs when trying to solve the single problems (see mini-hydro-power plants or wind farms)
- Environmentalism is plural as well, in cultural terms → several ideologies or ‘cultures of sustainability’.
- Such ideologies motivate people in different even in opposite ways (eg. survivalism versus paternalism), this is a source of weakness for environmental movement
- Ideologies are in any case necessary both for understanding environmental issue as for mobilisation
- Thus, we must move toward a more sophisticated construction of knowledge, seeking for integrating technical and physical savoir and social sciences

