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Questions and Response : New College of Human Ecology in Germany, Wolfgang Responds

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Recently, I posted the news that there is a new proposal in the works to create a new [College of the Atlantic of Europe](#), which is proposed to be setup somewhere in Germany.

**College of
Human
Ecology for
Europe**

Well, after I had finished, I still had a few questions for Wolfgang and Jadranka, and really wanted to gather some discussions momentum around the initiative. I decided to draw up a few questions and discussions points, asking what I think are very relevant and necessary questions to ask anyone or any group who is proposing such a project, knowing however that there are many more important questions remaining to be asked.

Below are the questions I asked, and the direct response I received from Wolfgang, one of the original proposal writers. I wished for more activity and discussion, or at least some general commentary or feedback, but it seems everyone is either to busy these days, not interested, or not paying attention. If you already read my original email to these groups, then feel free to skip to down further below to Wolfgang's responses.

My Questions and responses to them :

Based on the proposal, it looks like the main backer of the efforts will be the German Society for Human Ecology. Anyone have any more information this society? I've searched online, but I can't come across anything online. Perhaps my inability to speak German makes it a bit difficult, and the lack of information in english on the mentioned [main-site](#) and the pages it links to. The website mentioned says very little about the German Society for Human Ecology, and very little about Wolfgang and Jadranka (note, there are CV's for both on the site too, although they are sort of hidden in the contact page).



I'm curious to know more about those individuals and organizations who are behind the push for a new school. Have they all been known to work well with others? Do they really have the capability to get this school up and running? How well do they know the College of the Atlantic and the new proposed locations in Germany to be able to fundamentally duplicate it completely outside of its original context effectively and successfully? How transparent do they usually work? How transparent will they work on this project?

What do people think about the initiative? Will any of you be participating in its formation? Will you be supporting the startup financially? Would you like to (or plan to) join the faculty?

What are the benefits of copying an existing education institution, namely in this case, College of the Atlantic of Bar Harbor ME (www.coa.edu)? What are the drawbacks? Is COA really behind this effort, and if so, how much support are they willing to give and what role will the institution (including the students) play in the new school's formation?

One thing mentioned in the proposal is that a lot of the faculty will be drawn directly from the German Society for Human Ecology. To me, right off the bat, that causes a bit of an alarm. Human Ecology (in theory) is generally best learned when taught and practiced against a wide-spanning selection of disciplinary and transdisciplinary experts, researchers, clever and creative thinkers, and practitioners. To pull most of a faculty from one Society seems problematic in its potential to meet the needs of providing a quality Human Ecological education to students. Again, I do not know the make up of the German Society for Human Ecology, so perhaps it is a very large society (I would be pleasantly surprised to hear so) and is made up of exactly the wide-reaching set of disciplines and thinkers as (I think) would be necessary for a complete education faculty profile for programs in Human Ecology. Although the society is one of Human Ecology, I believe it would be a mistake to look only in the society for faculty, or to even only look mostly in the society while pulling some additional faculty from outside this group. It might be the most convenient solution, but I have a hard time imagining it would be the best. Anyone have objections or reasons why the best place to recruit faculty would in fact be directly from the German Society for Human Ecology?

Wolfgang's response :

Hi Chris and everyone else,

Here are some answers to your questions about our initiative to start a College of Human Ecology in Europe or more exactly in the German speaking areas of Europe modelled by the College of the Atlantic.

Why a College of Human Ecology (COH) now?

You have already read this in the call: we have still today no similar study program in the named European area even though we have a human ecology movement now for over 30 years. And, yes we believe with regards to the Bologna Process in Germany, it is high noon to do it now.

Why I'm convinced to do so?



By my own experience as a Sociologist and Human Ecologist working now for nearly 30 years at several universities but also outside in a lot of projects – educational, social, public health, urban and rural planning, environmental – in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and nowadays transdisciplinary context. In the last 15 years as a lecturer and assistant professor at Universities e.g. in Berlin and Cottbus I was directly involved or responsible for the development and reorganisation of several study programs: in Sociology, World Heritage Studies, Environmental Resource Management, Culture and Technology and last but not least in the preparation of a master program Human Ecology and Biosphere Management and a transnational Erasmus Mundus Program European Master in Human Ecology. In consequence my experience taught me, if you want to realize a really good program in Human Ecology you have to do this outside the system of our public universities. You have to establish a private college to get the necessary freedom and independence for this kind of self-directed study program. I have supervised a lot of self-directed study projects in the past years before Germany has established Bologna Process – so I know what we are talking about.

A private college in Germany is extraordinary!

So it's needs some time to convince colleagues. Of course in the last 5 to 10 years around a 100 private universities and Hochschulen were established, mainly in business administrations but none in an interdisciplinary field like Human Ecology, even none in any relation to environmental science or ecological issues. But nevertheless the recent development shows private colleges in Germany are possible.

How well do I know the College of the Atlantic?

Well, I don't know. But I had the opportunity to stay there in October 2005 to join several seminars, to test the dining hall, discuss about human ecology in general and in Europe and Germany with students and staff, to learn about region and location and to bear the idea to found a college in Germany modelled by the College of the Atlantic. So back in Germany, Jadranka and I started the initiative.

One of the first challenges was and is, to find the right location. COA is, one can state, location, location, location. The locations named in the call are the first three ones we have investigated in. They are always biospheres because UNESCO biospheres are by definition model regions of sustainable development. This is an advantage compared to national parks or natural reserves. And we choose these three because we have already made experiences in former projects and have still good contacts.

How can we copy or duplicate the College of the Atlantic outside of its original context effectively and successfully?

You can't copy or duplicate the College of the Atlantic. And we never intend to do that. But the COA could be a kind of parent to give the College of Human Ecology for Europe birth attendance. A child is – thank evolution and socialisation – never a copy or duplicate.

Is the College of Atlantic supporting the initiative?

Visiting the COA again in October 2006 I have presented the concept of the College in a round table discussion of the SHE conference. Furthermore the concept was the main topic of a meeting with David Hales and Ken Hill. Even though a lot of questions were not solved in detail this time they agreed to encourage the initiative. So I hope they do.

What could be the role of the German Society for Human Ecology?

As you have already seen, I'm a member of the executive board of the DGH. The DGH starts 30 years ago as a little interdisciplinary network of German, Austrian and Suisse scientists. Today the society has around 100 members in a wide range of disciplines and professions mostly with academic background. The Society is co-founder and editor of the journal GAIA – ecological perspective for science and society. Annual conferences to depicted topics and issues in the field of human ecology are documented in a series of books called Edition Humanökologie published by Oekom in Munich (you'll find in amazon).

The faculty can't be drawn directly or only from the German Society for Human Ecology (DGH)!

DGH

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But in the beginning it is necessary to have a network in the back which supports the initiative and where the faculty partly could come from, a network of teachers from different backgrounds who can help if necessary and a network of expertise which can assure the quality of the program. This indeed could be the important role of DGH as the other parent of COH. Of course the faculty of COH must grow independent.

One has to look back to the beginning of COA (like Ann Peach does in COA Magazine from winter 2007) to imagine how it could work to start a College with a very small group of students and a even smaller group of teachers. But today we know it can work if you have a lot of helping hands. By the way COH is different to COA any way. Looking back you will find COA first in 1969 and the Society for Human Ecology SHE like an offspring than in 1985. In Germany it will be the other way round.

What role will the students play?

It's up to you Chris and all the other. It seems to me a good start to read your article in the Human Ecology Forum. Keep on line.

Thanks and best greetings from Berlin

Wolfgang

Thanks Wolfgang! And truly, best of luck to you and all who support the initiative. So far it's looking good to me! I'll be trying to figure out how I can more personally get involved in the future. Just make sure to keep us up-to-date on the goings-ons!

** Note : images are from www.coh-europe.eu/

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