

Ethics and „environment relationship“ - From the interpersonal ethical problem area to the „man-living space“ and „environment relationship“

Hans Peter Jeschke

Date of Submission: 16-11-2023

Date of Acceptance: 03-12-2023

The ever-increasing influence of mankind on non-human environment, the so-called Lebensraum (living-space), to which the cultural landscape, as necessary to life and guiding path to shaping lifestyle in the future is tied, leads one to pose questions of new and expanded dimensions. Research approaches such as “Environmental Ethics as Survival Ethics” or “Environmental Ethics as Ethics for the Age in Which We Live” are early indicators of the fact that the essence of our moral conduct, as for example to Nature, extends its reaches far out toward ecological issues. In the meantime, globalization has, to a great extent, left its imprint on humanistic and ethical issues.

1 Ethical problem area: “Man-Living Space-Environment Relationship”

Added to earlier approaches in dealing with the interpersonal ethical problem area, some authors introduced into the discussions on these arresting topics the principle of “Man-Living Space Relationship” from the point of view of a “Reciprocal Relationship Ethics and Spatial Planning”. With this, questions on life’s necessities, on political, on economic and on social life within a space, as well as improvements on life’s quality and security within a given and at the same time transformed space, shall be answered and/or be defined.

Above all, spatial planning, tackles problems regarding the future development of living space (cultural landscape) and, when taken within the framework of the above mentioned “Man-Living Space Relationship” as well as “Intergenerational Dimension” could induce responsibility for safeguarding the space planned and the future generation. The approach and objective of this regional planning, are therefore bound to this new (expanded) dimension of an “Ethical Accountability”. Hence, ethics in this case shall be generally perceived in the normative sense as the teaching of substantiated propositions on right actions.

2 Living-Space and Cultural Landscape as “Object of Ethical Accountability’s Expanded Area”

Lendi cites several examples of distinctive “objects” of the expanded areas of ethical accountability. Among others are the given living-space, necessities for life such as air, water, soil, as well as flora and fauna and the ecological balance. Within our context of discussion, it is, of course, necessary to include the issues of cultural heritage and/or cultural landscape. The networking of the ingredients of “Ethics-Living- Space-Cultural Landscape” shall be realised, especially through the Landscape Convention of Council in Europe over the given civil rights agreements (Article 10) in its totality and especially towards the European Charter of Local Self Government (1985). The well-being of the population (Preamble, pts. 5 and 9); their identity (“landscape as a foundation for their identity”, (Art. 6a); the evaluation of the “recorded landscapes“ considering the particular values which are accorded by their denizens and the population in question (Art. C, c and b) and the subsidiary, level-specific organisation of landscape planning (local, regional, national or international levels (Art. 9) duties and responsibilities tied to them.

3 Sketch of a “Concept of Political Ethics” as a basic Principle of Social Organisation

The treatise above points out to three basic principles of political science, a politics of social organisation which is also of great significance in shaping the living-space and the cultural landscape. The subsidiary – concept especially was “discovered” by the European Union and has since become the hottest phrase in the European political debate. The Treaty of Maastricht undertook a significant change of direction towards the federalisation of the European Union out of which the nuclear principle are the federal structures – the subsidiary principle as “universally valid principle“. Thus, a key principle of political science accepted in Europe, and with it the national and regional politics together with two other principles (personality and

solidarity principles) that are under the three key principles in a democratic and a healthy social structure wherein man's image, caught between his individuality and his social affinities, is put in order.

The above mentioned principles are mutually dependent and complimentary to each other.

That is why mere emphasis and focus only on subsidiarity does not seem to attain final results. Furthermore, fundamental features of all the principles are anchored in the constitutions of all Central European countries as well as in their national and regional laws. Individuality and social affinity are the determining factors of personality. As already mentioned, the three social principles of political science present a network system made out of components that are mutually dependent, subservient and complimentary to each other. Subsidiarity, for example, when merely reduced to a principle of authoritarian regulation with the absence of the principle of accountability in a consensus would turn to around towards the opposite direction. The allocation of a task together with accountability attached to it assists in anticipation to see that competence and reliability are established.

(1) Principle of Personality (The Persona Principle)

The basic guidelines of "subsidiary principle" are unthinkable without looking at man as the carrier, the creator and the final objective of all social institutions. Man, or so to speak the "Persona Principle" is therefore the focal point of political ethics.

(2) Principle of Common Good (The Common Good Principle)

The common good comprises, on the one hand, the totality of the social conditions of possibility for personal development and, on the other hand, the sum of those goods and facilities which the people united in the community need to fulfil their essential tasks. In the sense of the ethical problem, task and responsibility area of man - living space, this refers to the entire spatial environmental and landscape conditions of possibility. Every human community is only functional if it is supported by a certain solidarity of the people working in it, but if it also offers space for the free development of the individual people in the sense of a principle of personhood. However, the individual should also develop personal responsibility for the tasks of the community. Furthermore, the principle of the common good leads to the so-called public interest ("bonus commune"), which on the one hand is of central importance in the conception of departmental ethics (ethics of spatial planning, environmental and landscape planning, etc.). On the other hand, the principle of the common good is the starting point for all guiding principles, quality targets and objectives of spatial planning, which ultimately formally or informally a common good concretised for the respective spatial unit.

(3) Principle of Subsidiarity (Principles of Function and Jurisdiction as well as the Principle of supportive assistance)

In a comprehensive sense, the principle of subsidiarity links the coordination between the individual and the community. The jurisdiction between the two is demarcated and it is defined which functions are to be assumed by the individual and which ones are the responsibilities of the community. Self-accountability, individual freedom and personal independence are thus addressed. The community must, therefore only assist in a "subsidiary" manner, i.e. it must offer help for self-determination, to engender and support individual initiative and energy. The subsidiary principle is not only generally effective in the relationship between the individual and the community but also in any relationship between the smaller and the larger, between the membership group and the all-inclusive community. It also recognises the "rights of the smaller fellowship circles; the smaller fellowships have the rights and responsibilities to regulate themselves as they are naturally closer to immediate surroundings and are able to evaluate and judge on matters to which they are more knowledgeably-equipped.

(4) Principle of solidarity (principle of mutual responsibility)

This principle of responsibility can be best illustrated by the phrase "we are all sitting in the same boat." This means that every individual has not only the duty to develop his- or herself but also to realize intrinsic values, which is only possible within the interaction of a community. Every social group bears the co-responsibility for the community, just as the entity of the community must respect the interests and requirements of the members of the community. This responsibility/answerability for the community is anchored in the being, in the nature of the individual.

(5) Principle of Justice

The obligation of the member of a society towards this society or towards a community to which he belongs can - as already mentioned - only be based on the common good.

common good. To refrain from doing what would be detrimental to the common good and to do what is indispensable for the common good and must therefore be done, is a legal obligation arising from "social

justice", which already imposes an obligation before a legislator has recognised this necessity and clothed it in a legal provision. In this way, the common good and "social justice" are precisely corresponding concepts. interchangeable terms. This makes it clear that justice is the first virtue of social institutions. What is meant by this is that, in addition to the personal relational good, justice in particular is the fundamental criterion for state norms, institutions and systems. Justice involves various dimensions that must be systematically brought together. At one end are exchange and performance justice, at the other distributive justice and social justice (equitable distribution, solidarity). The third dimension in a "unifying concept of justice" addresses participatory justice (participation, reciprocity), which has a high similarity with the concept of justice of opportunity. Rationally as well as globally, social conditions are perceived as just that give all people opportunities for participation (through justice, education, social security, economic and environmental stability, peace, etc.) The principle of justice is the overarching "general principle" of all social principles. It is the clarifying regulator when individual principles compete with each other (Where is the limit of subsidiarity? Where is the limit of solidarity? Etc.).

(6) Principle of Sustainability

Sustainability is "a synthesis of the social-ethical diagnosis of the times and, on this basis, at the same time a yardstick for shaping the future in almost all policy areas." Sustainability therefore links and updates the core principles of social ethics mentioned so far in the problem horizon of the ecological and socio-cultural question. In this way, it gains justificatory content, ethical motivational power and organisational form from the close reference context with the aforementioned social principles:

- Sustainability needs the ethical-personal connection in the principle of personhood, i.e. the unconditional dignity of the human being and its ethically-systematically central position as a subject of action and responsibility.
- Without the solidarity principle, the sustainability principle would remain without a stringent basis for its socio-political component.
- Without the connection to the principle of subsidiarity, the concept of sustainable development would lack its organisational core. "Sustainability also reveals gaps in justice. It bundles the central issues of the future as a cross-cutting theme, reveals often surprising connections and "pattern similarities" of problems in different contexts. Sustainability clarifies the time factor as well as the nature factor in all socio-political questions. It opens up new analyses on solution strategies for the complex interplay between local and global phenomena".

(7) The "concept of political ethics" as a "networked" system

The principles mentioned are interdependent, complementary and mutually supportive, which is why merely emphasising and concentrating on subsidiarity, for example, does not seem to be effective. If, for example, subsidiarity is reduced to a principle of regulating competences, without the "principle of responsibility" it will be.