Towards a Better Appreciation of Socio-Cultural Pre-Conceptions in Environmental Education

PA43G-3267

Simon Schneider, University of Potsdam

The Importance of Intercultural Kompetence

Individual concepts of human–environment interaction are shaped by socio-political environments (see Weiss et all 2013, Gerhardinger et al 2009 or Dowsley & Wenzel 2007 as examples).

There is also "… ample evidence that distinct cultural and religious values of individuals and whole societies influence their perception and tolerance of risk as well as their capacity to cope with environmental hazard" (Gerten, 2010:39f)

"Recognizing different perceptions can help to understand why individuals and different societies interact with the environment in such strikingly different ways." (Marten, 2010)

BUT: Education and communication research have not yet focused on how these risks and hazards are transported into the public in respect to various socio-political environments.

Traditional Knowledge vs. Western Knowledge

The term *Traditional Ecological Knowledge* (TEK) as defined by Berkes (2008) provides a starting point to understand socio-political differences in worldviews and nature perception. TEK is a knowledge – practice – belief complex.

TEK is sometimes called indigenous knowledge, but TEK does not have to be related to indigenous or tribal communities/societies.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge, that there "is a risk of over-simplification when conceptualizing the essential concepts of traditional and western scientific knowledge and developing a dichotomy between the two knowledge systems." (Gerhardinger et al., 2009:155)

From Multi- via Cross- to Inter-Cultural
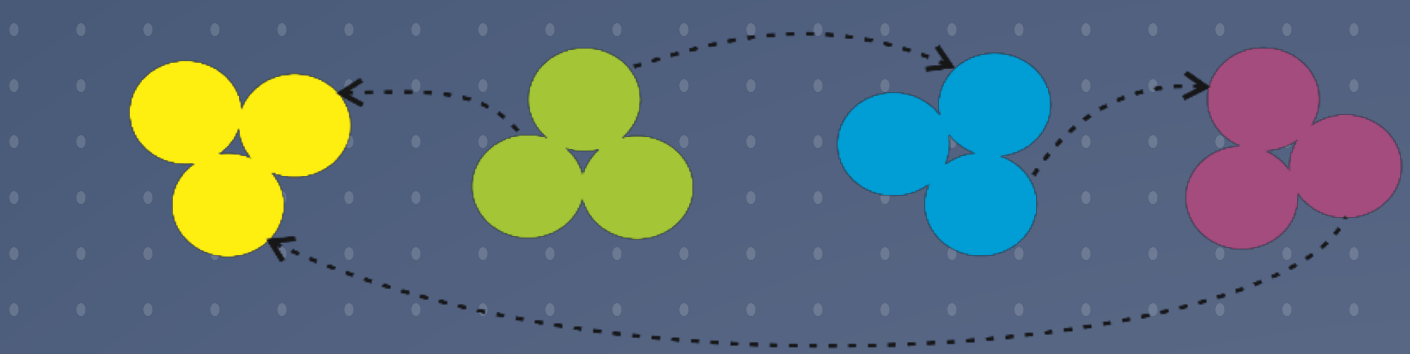
Societies that contain several cultural or ethnic groups are called *multicultural* (Goldberg, 1995; Taylor, 1994)
- people with different cultural roots live, learn, or work alongside one another (classrooms, Mega-cities, etc.)
- cultural groups do not seem self-contained, but they do not necessarily engage in interactions with individuals or groups from other cultures
- because commonalities are missing, communication in multicultural settings tends to be a singularity rather than a continuum.
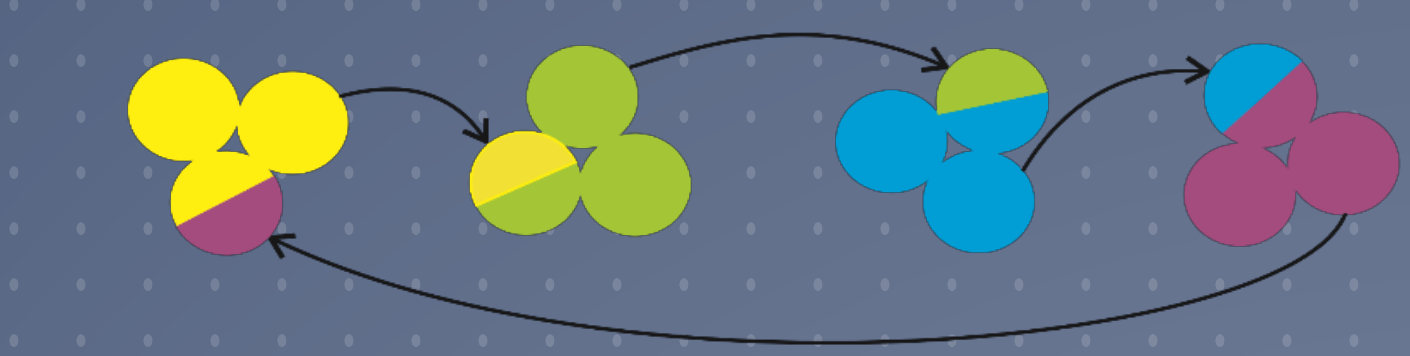
cross-cultural addresses observed differences of cultures (Schaffer & Riordan 2003).
- Cross-cultural communication respects differences striving to understand and acknowledge these.
  It can lead to or induce individual change, but will not lead to collective transformations.
- Characteristic for cc societies: "one culture is often considered "the norm" and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to the dominant culture" (Schriefer, undated).
- a more sustainable communication process can be observed, that tends to become a lasting discourse about specific thematic issues, but an expansion into additional themes seems to be difficult if not impossible.
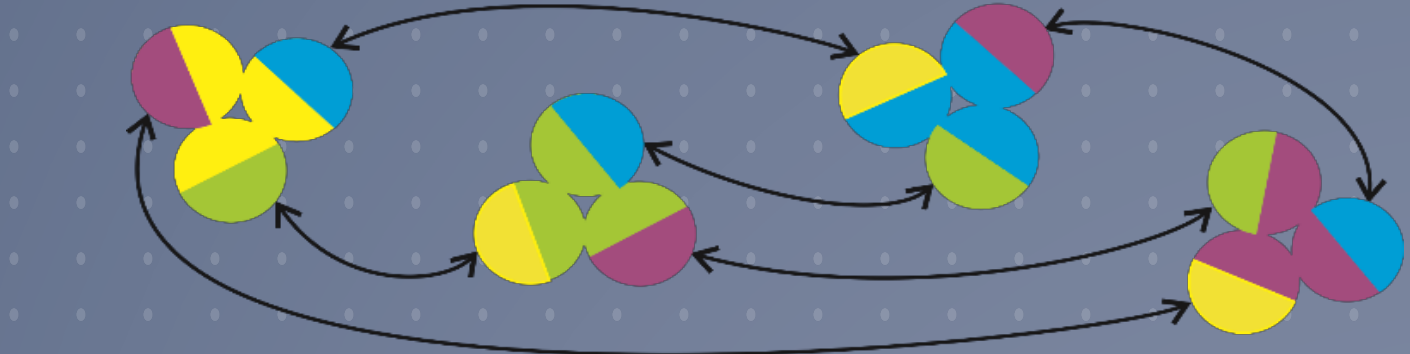
Intercultural communities are characterized by a deep understanding and respect for other cultures (UNESCO, 2013).
- Intercultural communication seeks mutual exchange of ideas and in-depth discourse about cultural norms.
- It aims towards the development of deep relationships between cultures. As a result, within intercultural societies, no one is left unchanged.
- There is a constant dynamic re-building of social norms, values, need, and demands. Intercultural communication becomes a continuous process, which is not only related to a single topic or issue. The establishment of long-term relations (as characterized e.g. by sustainable communication routines) can be seen as indicators for an intercultural character of a project.

Approaches to Move Towards Interculturality

The **Photovoice** method (Wang & Burris, 1994)
- seeks to "emphasize community participation for the purpose of social action" (Kuratani & Lai, 2011) and "builds on a deep, historical foundation of individuals and communities blending images and words to express needs, history, culture, problems, and desires" (Nykiforuk et al, 2011).
- first introduction of the overall research theme is given to local communities
- second phase, community members are trained in photographic techniques. This element serves two major purposes: (1) it will result in high quality feedback from the participants and (2) it is perceived as a personal knowledge gain from participating individuals, which leads to an increased identification with the research topic (Wang & Burris, 1994).
- third phase, community members are asked to produce a set of photos that are related to the research topic in question. Here, no rules or guidelines for individual interpretations are given.
- a community exhibition is conducted, during which project scientists and community members can share their thoughts and discuss the individual interpretations of the research theme. The feedback from the local community about the research theme should then be included into the project concept.

The **Mobile Oral Histories** approach (Riley & Harvey, 2007)
- a combination of traditional oral history interviews and reflections on particular places and landscapes. While Landscapes and places are crucial for local communities and bear meanings that are rarely articulated by local residents, MOH seeks to reveal these meanings.
- visiting the places during the course of the interview itself
- MOH serves to facilitate opportunities for expression of personal memories and inherited knowledge and serves as a platform for discussion and sharing of perceptions about place, values, and memories for wider community groups (Coherit & OAS, 2015).

True inter-cultural co-design and inter-cultural cooperation demands additional resources. Photovoice and MOH are only two examples of respective approaches, but both show that additional time, financial and personal resources are needed. Moreover, there is a demand for inter-cultural communication skills and the sensibility for cultural differences - skills, that are required from each individual scientist.

Communication Strategies Have to Address Encoding-Decoding

Stuart Hall (1973), when talking about encoding and decoding processes, already introduced the idea of transfer functions to communication theory. The aim is to predict the decoding process in more detail. While the transfer function can be seen as a complex function with a high number of unknown socio-cultural variables (belief, values, ethics and moral elements, historic and socio-political as well socio-economic parameters and others), it seems clear, that by identifying at least some socio-cultural background parameter, communication strategies (as well a management strategies) become more efficient.

the transfer function of communication processes is time-dependent. While culture is a non-static condition, the above mentioned variables can change with time (Sorokin, 1985; Hofer et al., 2010)

Pictures:
Photovoice: Childfund Vietnam –
„Welcome to our World"-Project
Mobile Oral History: Culturi Center
Uluru-Kata Tjuta1

Universität Potsdam

Potsdam Graduate School

This presentation is supported by a Travel Grant from:

References

Berkes, F., Colding, J. and Folke, C.: Rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management, Ecological Applications. 10(5):1251-1262. doi:10.1890/1051-0761(2000)010[SB1251:ROTEKA%5D2.0.CO;2. 2000.
Coherit, and OAS (Organization of American States): Elicitation of Community Heritage Values and Place Perception. http://coherit.com/projectfiles/DeliverableGuide_2_2.pdf. visited August 2018. 2015
Dowsley M, Wenzel G. W. (2008): The Time of the most Polar Bears – A co-management conflict in Nunavut. Arctic 61(2):177-189.
Gerhardinger L.C., Godoy E.S., Jones P.S. (2009): Local ecological knowledge and the management of marine protected areas in Brazil. Ocean Coastal management. 52(3-4):154-165.
Gerten D. (2010): Adapting to climate and hydrological Chance - Variegated Functions of Religion. in: Bergmann & Gerten (ed.). Religion and Dangerous Environmental Chance – Transdisciplinary Perspectives on the Ethics of Climate and Sustainability. LIT. Münster, Berlin. p 39-56
Goldberg, D. T.: Multiculturalism: a Critical Reader. Wiley-Blackwell. 1995.
Hall, S.: Encoding/decoding in Television Discourse'. In: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.): Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79 London: Hutchinson, 1973.
Hofer, M, Reinders and H, Fries, S: Wie sich Werte ändern – ein zieltheoretischer Vorschlag zur Erklärung individueller und gesellschaftlichen Wertewandels. Zeitschrift für Entwicklungspsychologie und Pädagogische Psychologie (2010), 42, pp. 26-38. doi:10.1026/0049-8637/a000003. 2010.
Kuratani, D. L. G. & Lai, E.: TEAM Lab - Photovoice Literature Review. https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.usc.edu/dist/0/198/files/2018/08/Photovoice-Literature-Review-FINAL-22lfmn.pdf, visited August 2018, 2011
Marten, G. (2010): Human Ecology - Basic Concepts for Sustainable Development, 2nd edition. Routledge.

Nykiforuk, C. I. J., Vallianatos, H., and Nieuwendyk, L. M.: Photovoice as a Method for Revealing Community Perception of the Built and Social Environment. International Journal of Qualitative Methods 10(2):103-124, doi:10.1177/160940691101000201. 2011
Schaffer, B. and Riordan C. M.: A Review of Cross-Cultural Methodologies for Organizational Research: A Best- Practices Approach Organizational Research Methods 6 (2): 69.125. 215. doi:10.1177/1094428103251542. 2003.
Schriefer, P.: What's the difference between multicultural, intercultural, and cross-cultural communication? Spring Institute. Retrieved from https://springinstitute.org/whats-difference-multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication/ , visited 01st of May 2018, undated.
UNESCO: Intercultural Competence – Conceptual and Operational Framework. Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002197/219769e.pdf, visited April 2018, 2013.
Sorokin, P.: Social and Cultural Dynamics. New York: Routledge, 1985.
Taylor, C.: Multiculturalism. Extended paperback edition. Princeton University Press, 1994.
Wang CC & Burris MA. (1994). Empowerment through Photo novella: Portraits of participation. Health Education Quarterly. 21(2), 171-186.
Weiss K., Hamann M., Marsh H. (2013): Bridging Knowledges: Understanding and Applying Indigenous and Western Scientific Knowledge for Marine Wildlife Management. Society & Natural Resources. Vol. 26(3):285-302. doi. 10.1080/08941920.2012.690065