

SUMMARY

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The Half-hearted & the Hesitant (Chapters on Ecological Luxury)

The book loosely picks up the thread of the previous publication - *The Colourful and the Green: Some Chapters on Voluntary Modesty* (Librová 1994). Some readers have written to me having recognised themselves as the colourful, and they wished to get to know more. Reviewers drew my attention to some unfinished thoughts. Both interviews with students and with friends, and discussions with strangers at public lectures and meetings were inspiring. Both in foreign literature and in my surroundings, I have discovered ecologically favourable life-styles that reach not only beyond my previous ideas of voluntary modesty but also beyond the generally shared radical ideas about voluntary simplicity.

My attention was drawn primarily to those life-styles that are often labelled in a negative tone as post-modern and as a non-binding play of profligates, moreover motivated by fashion, prestige and snobbism. Such a classification might be relevant. Is that, however, the reason for us to become reserved towards these attempts at changing life-style? I would also find it gratifying if those were results of idealism. Nevertheless, if I strive for honest knowledge, I cannot claim a priori that the basis of the ecologically favourable behaviour must always be a pure heart. Are we not submitting ourselves to the cultural stereotypes that cannot hold out against a deeper reflection? I would like to rehabilitate luxury in the eyes of people concerned about the environment and to attempt to prove that it is not at variance with voluntary modesty or natural principles.

I focus on the micro-scale: I am interested in the individual and their households. My interest is not totally in accordance with the ideas of individualisation of Ulrich Beck (2002), whereby the process of individualisation is a chance for general favourable development.¹ I do not have, after all, the ambition to find the solutions to the ecological crisis. However worried I am about the fate for the mankind and nature on this planet, this book has not originated in my fears.

The scale of my expectations corresponds to the micro-scale point of view. I look out for any bud of an ecologically favourable change and I am content with little. However adequate the radical attitudes are to the destruction of nature and even though I do not doubt the importance of radical approaches, this time I suggest to reflect upon the vague, half-hearted lives of individuals and households.

These are ways of life that can be beneficial for nature on the local scale, are acceptable for the hesitant wider social neighbourhood and therefore have a chance to spread. I do not share the impatient demands of the radicals and their suspicion, through which they understand any compromise in way of life as a betrayal and who despise any inconsequential attempt at an ecologically favourable step as a fashion and mere "cosmetic modification".

Why do the radicals fuss about compromises so much? They must know, after all, that even the struggle for a consequent ecological regime of a household is not the solution because it is impaired by the economic and political circumstances, anyway. After September 11th, 2001 the whole world could realise what a mighty role these circumstances play. The Mayor of New York, Rudolph W. Giuliani conveyed to the inhabitants what they could do for their city and for the United States in the tragic situation: they would help by shopping. There are no doubts about the rationality of his words. They realistically express the base on which the modern western civilisation functions. They demonstrate the macro-social determinants of our way of life.

In spite of this, I do not think that the individual does not have space for their decision making. Without sharing Beck's universal hopes in individualisation, I agree with him that individuals are better adapted and prepared for the future than social institutions and their representatives. I believe that the environmental virtues of the individual have real meaning. They can reduce the monstrous ecological footprint that is left by the rich modern society in nature.

It has become evident how inefficient the information is about the destruction of the natural environment. This has come in the form of warnings against future calamities that should have made us change our life-style. People have lived in danger for centuries and got used to this danger. For the species *Homo sapiens*, this risky attitude has even paid off so far (!). More than by warnings might we be touched by the feeling that the present way of life is becoming less attractive to us, that there are greater joys than the attractions of the travel-agencies and of shopping. I am convinced that in the 21st century, this laid back consideration for the fate of nature is the part of a dignified and happy, de facto luxurious human life.

I. Way of Life & Ecological Problem

I do not use terms such as 'quality of life' and above all 'sustainable way of life': terms that are surely expected by the reader. I avoid them because they have become rhetorical slogans. Another reason why I do not write about 'sustainability' lies in its impropriety from

the ontological and evolutionary points of view. After all, what is 'sustainable' in this world?

The slogan 'sustainable way of life' is inappropriate from the practical point of view, too: if we think it through, we will find out that it includes expectations, which are too large. Provided that human society should live on the planet in a 'sustainable' manner, we would have to live in a radically different way from the one that we are used to and that is longed for by the populations of poor countries. Such a change has no chance of being generally accepted. We would put heavy demands on a human being if we wanted them to master their everyday life according to the benefit of the far future. In addition, not only the complexity of the modern world but apparently also the make-up of the human psyche prevents a human being from doing so.

Therefore, I prefer using the term ecologically favourable way of life. Its essence is a small ecological footprint of the household or an effort to reduce its (no matter how big) size. Ecologically favourable way of life allows a wide scale of radicalness and of consequentiality. It is content with a limited influence of private life on the fate of nature. As ecologically favourable way of life does not aspire to general sustainability, it can be kinder towards human weaknesses and less discouraging with its demands.

The topic of 'way of life' is woven into the complicated and complex issue of mankind and nature. Being aware of the immense simplification, I define its place with the help of the equation formulated by P. R. Ehrlich and J. P. Holdren (1994: 310):

the burden imposed on nature = the size of the population x the burden imposed by the industrial technologies x the burden imposed by consumption

Way of life influences all the three above-mentioned agents. The size of population and the number of children are very closely connected with the way of family life. By our way of life, e. g. the way of shopping and of spending our free time, we indirectly influence production, services and their technologies. In this book however, we will be primarily occupied with the connection of way of life with the last agent, i. e. with the character of ecologically favourable consumption, especially from the point of view of the home technologies, and of the structure of consumption and its volume. We shall see that ecologically favourable modesty does not so much mean possessions, but mainly low dynamics of consumption. Ecologically favourable way of life minimises a household's metabolism.

II. Modesty & Luxury

In this section, I deal with some terms connected to way of life. Their connotation influences our attitudes to it. For example, one of the sources of aversion to a modest life is the association of modesty with poverty and even further with want. Sociologists are mistaken when they leave the fact unnoticed that in the past, poverty had a value and that those traces of the past respect for poverty still live in us. Furthermore, because of this error, sociologists and journalists influence the attitudes of people in an unwanted way.

The text makes an attempt to define the often-confused words welfare, luxury, consumerism and wastage. It deals with the historical development of these phenomena and recalls their avid critics and defenders, as well as their main arguments.

I pay special attention to luxury. Understanding it in the broad sense of the word, we can say that it somehow addresses everyone and it resists all attempts of critics who try to destroy it. Also the course of life of those who were advocating for modesty and made attempts to live accordingly bears witness to the power of luxury. Historical and social omnipresence of the human longing for luxury and its ability to transform itself and its form according to the social situation bring me to the following idea: If we look for an agent that changes way of life in our serious ecological situation, we could put our hope in luxury. Such a thought may be repulsive for some readers - devotees of the natural way of life. On the basis of Adolf Portmann's biological aesthetics, I try to show that luxury is present in nature too.

One of the pronounced features of luxury is its exclusiveness that should indicate the high social status of its bearer. It is at the same time, however, the source of social imitation. Therefore, the elite have nothing left but to continually modify its form. Due to industrial and democratic development, luxury has been exposed to extraordinary danger. The volume of consumption can pass as an indicator of luxury just for a limited time. Since plenty in the rich countries was devoted to consumption, it has soon stopped representing social position. Nowadays, luxury is looking for its next metamorphosis, which has become very difficult.

It has since emerged from an unexpected area. Due to the dramatic negative changes in the environment, that which was left unnoticed or considered as self-evident has become rare and valuable. Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1997) states that the very physical conditions of our existence are becoming luxurious. Nature, space,

time, attention, silence, and safety have all been until recently considered self-evident.

I am a bit suspicious towards Enzensberger's opinion that everyone who wants to possess this rare fortune has to tighten their belt. Those who are rich enough can acquire most rare things without having to restrain themselves. I label such a way of life as predatory luxury. Nevertheless, these rarities are available to their fullest only to those who are willing to restrain themselves. Here I introduce the term luxurious self-restraint.

The second section leads to the definition of ecological luxury, the key term of this book. It is the ecologically favourable behaviour that consciously reduces the ecological footprint and is capable of self-restraint in various measures; it refers to non-material values appreciated by culture. In reality, ecological luxury specifies segments of behaviour rather than the general way of life. Gardening, the refusal of a car or the discovery of the local together with the lack of interest in long-distance travelling can serve here as examples. The condition of ecological luxury is not a small ecological footprint but its relative minimisation. There is no guidance to ecological luxury. Everyone creates it under their unique life conditions. They need basic environmental information and knowledge about the connections, a feeling for nature and a trained sense for the things of human culture and for human relations. They need a portion of imagination that is capable of creating 'clever joys'.

Thanks to its cultural competence, ecological luxury can balance self-restraint and the high claim to life in a clever way. It goes well together with the usage of modern, environmentally friendly technologies. Due to it being rooted in cultural values and traditions (in Europe these are, above all, tolerance, self-denial, the willingness to discuss and the ability to doubt), ecological luxury turns out to be rather opportunistic and inconsequent from the point of view of environmental solutions.

The strong side of ecological luxury lies elsewhere: it brings joys to the individual that are in line with the German word: schöpfungsgemäß, i. e. that correspond to the place of humankind in the world and to its coexistence with other creatures. In a more general perspective: due to ecological luxury being socially kind and willing to share the rituals of the majority, it is well able to address the majority. Thanks to its elite and prestigious character, it can provoke others to follow (the so-called trickle-down effect). In addition, ecological luxury could influence some political and legislative decisions through the social position of its bearers. In

such a manner, ecological luxury can contribute to the spread of ecologically favourable way of life.

Having a relatively small ecological footprint and trying to minimise it further (through self-restraint, attempts at rational behaviour and use of environmentally friendly technologies), ecological luxury differs widely from the predatory one. It knows or at least surmises nature's own intrinsic value. In contrary to egoistic, predatory luxury that only strives to possess anything rare, ecological luxury is willing to act for nature and for the quality of both present and future life. It contains a marked social dimension as well, which is represented in interpersonal and often civic altruism.

III. Simple or Complicated?

In this section, I reflect on two fixed terms that are familiar to the reader not only from environmental texts, but also from rhetoric slogans: 'Voluntary Simplicity' and 'Living Lightly'. Environmental ideologues are mistaken if they consider the struggle for simplicity as the result of their inventiveness and as an alternative opposing the dominant spirit of the time. The longing for perceiving and living in a simple way is rather at home in today's general emotional climate, or more precisely, it belongs to its antagonisms.

Those who use the mentioned terms do not question their correspondence with reality. At the same time, they themselves must sense in their practical life how complicated and demanding the ecologically friendly way of life is in the 21st century.

What actually rests behind the stubborn idea of the simplicity of ecological virtues? Besides the psychological reactions of a human being longing for an escape from the post-modern chaos, it is a very old cultural stereotype connected with an intellectual and logical shortcut: A simple life is good. Ecological life is desirable and good, and therefore simple.

History points to the fact that the longing for simplicity and its identification with a good life are constants that are present in many intellectual traditions. It is a remarkable reaction to the prevailing tendency of both human and natural worlds to grow towards complexity and variety. In Europe, we find such a struggle to liberate life in the Stoic and Cynic traditions developed further by the powerful Christian tradition.

This section reflects on nine dimensions of simplicity that have been accentuated in different epochs and in various contexts: 1) simplicity as non-possession; 2) simplicity as resignation from power; 3) simplicity as an aesthetic category; 4) simplicity as a

simple, plain behaviour; 5) simplicity that is related and close to nature; 6) the principle of simplicity as freedom and free movement, contrary to 7) simplicity as a settled life refusing excess stimuli including travelling; 8) simplicity as refusal of the stimuli of education and 9) simplicity as ease of everyday life and uncomplicated course of life.

All nine dimensions of simplicity are involved in the image of an old peasant. This image has been formed by human culture and shared by environmental ideology with nostalgia to the modern age. The question remains how far this image corresponds to the real life of a farmer as testified by historiography. In some respects, it was simple indeed. Its simplicity was, however, forced. In contrast to philosophers, ascetics, aesthetes and today's seekers of alternative life-styles, it was by no means aimed for or intentional. It is an error to incorporate the farmer's life into the cultural stream struggling for simplification of the overly complicated existence.

Nowadays, the cultural model of good simplicity is embodied in the image of ecologically desirable 'voluntary simplicity'. Is it really so that the ecologically favourable way of life is simple while the ecologically destructive, consumptive existence is complicated? This section ponders upon this with the help of the above introduced nine dimensions.

Caricatures in the environmental magazines depict consumers partly as predators or as unfortunates imprisoned under heaps of junk in their overfilled apartments. Photos demonstrate that the dwellings of the ecologically virtuous resemble a monastery cell or the working room of Lev Nicolaevich Tolstoy. However, visiting the apartments of voluntarily modest people, I saw that their owners liked to be surrounded by objects. Mostly, these things are given, inherited and found. The tendency of these people to create interpersonal relations by means of objects together with the faithfulness to things explains this discovery.

Still concerning other dimensions of simplicity in the relation to ecologically favourable life:

The share in power can be one of the ways to effectively influence the behaviour of society towards nature. I do not believe that the resistance to complicated social rituals, which was characteristic of the alternative movements of the 1960s and 70s, is a part of the present ecologically favourable life-style. With a bit of malicious joy, German and Austrian journalists like to draw attention to rebels in sweaters becoming politicians of the established green parties who have their precisely fitting suits made in the very same factories as their colleagues in Parliament.

The more discoveries that are made about nature, the more evident is its complexity. Even many scientists humbly talk about the impossibility to understand it. (After all: can 'Nature' serve us as a model of moral behaviour? If we look attentively, we stand in awe before its beauty but in vain do we look for expressions of compassion and love for the weak.)

Refusing travelling, the seventh dimension of simplicity is environmentally significant. It really holds good here that living in an ecologically favourable way means to simplify one's life, i. e. to reduce stimuli. Most ecological activists are, however, devoted travellers. In addition, what about the eighth dimension of simplicity by refusing education? Many texts on voluntary simplicity warn against excessive rationalising and analysing: the left hemisphere of the brain, the feminine approach to the world, intuition and sensibility rather than complicated rational thinking should lead us. I am convinced that nowadays the ecologically favourable life is not thinkable without education.

Nevertheless, the biggest error in the identification of an ecologically favourable way of life with simplicity lies in the idea of its easy everyday life. Books and magazines of alternative culture are full of living lightly. According to those, we should leave the hardships connected to complicated life-style to consumers. Even if we believed Thoreau's experience from the 19th century, the fact is that modern technology and civilisation have turned things upside down. If anything should be easy nowadays, it is the life of a consumer. Whole production branches work on the simplification of our existence. The products that were made at home in the past are to be bought. House chores are simplified to extremes by all types of machines. Nature burdening plastic makes our lives easy by means of wrappings, dishes and other disposable objects. Not only ecologically favourable self-sufficiency but also cooking at home is in decline because of their being complicated. Have any of the advocates of voluntary simplicity tried to travel with small children and luggage with public transport to a remote place?

Ecological problems have many unexpected complicated connections in our everyday life that did not exist or were not yet evident fifty years ago. It is out of the question that a person can be acquainted with these problems without prior knowledge and without the ability to think sensitively. It is not enough to follow ready-made instructions. Ecological luxury is a reflected attitude that requires rethinking those aspects that have appeared as given, clear and simple so far. Not by accident did The Ecologist magazine have the subtitle "Rethinking Basic Assumptions".

The text wants to point out what a difficult situation we are in if we try to employ ecologically favourable steps in our everyday life. It shows examples of side effects that we are not aware of in our lives. It ponders on ecologically risky effects of e. g. presents of flowers and the liking for keeping dogs, on environmental impacts of the production of objects, e. g. cotton T-shirts, that are favoured by environmentalists, and even on the impacts of vegetarianism.

The analysis of the unexpected side effects stemming from the struggles for ecologically favourable life leads to depressing findings. At the same time, it confirms the beliefs that lie in the base of the book: my existence is inevitably connected with interventions into nature but it has the sense to differentiate among them and to reduce them.

IV. Slowly or Rapidly?

However well and multidimensionally the topic of modern acceleration is considered, most attention has not addressed the consequences for nature. Nevertheless, there is a growing number of texts dealing with the connection of the apprehension of time with environmental problems, which is the so-called ecology of time. Some authors write sharply that the vehement change of our time measure is the basic cause of the destruction of nature. How should we, however, explain to ourselves the very contrary message in the slogans such as "there is no time to spare!" or "it is five to twelve!?" Since the topic of time is not easy and is the key in the reflections on ecological luxury, the book ponders on it in a more detail.

The text points out the gradual transformation of biological time into social time in the course of history. The time of hunters and gatherers converted to the time of agriculture and of the church. Further, the text addresses briefly the two basic types of the apprehension of time: cyclical and linear. The tendency to accelerate has been one of the essential features of the capitalist society up to nowadays.

The critics of the free market are right saying that the free market economy does not know anything that we could label as a negative feedback braking the acceleration. For nature, it is a catastrophe that this acceleration underwent the process of radical democratisation in modern society. Nowadays, this acceleration does not only manifest itself in the work-style of the competing capitalists; we all behave in this way. Modern European culture pays regard to human activities through the prism of time. They are so closely connected that we have got conditioned to it and do not realise any more that things have got out of hand. If we evaluate

the day in the evening, we most probably take into consideration our performance - the amount of work that we did. Questions such as "why?" or "where to?" are asked only rarely, which even amplifies our haste, anxiety and unrest.

This applies to fast, modern technologies in an outstanding manner. As though they were living their own life, they thrust their logic and dynamics upon us being stimulated by the rapidly developing scientific knowledge. Their environmental consequences are fatal but due to the complexity of processes, it is extremely difficult for us to become aware of them. Therefore, I name here garden equipment, lawn mowers, strimmers, chain saws and the vacuum cleaners for leaves as examples of direct ecological effects of fast technologies. I address briefly the dramatic shortening of life cycles and of the life of domestic animals.

In environmental literature, we read sentences such as 'it is necessary to get connected to the rhythm of the symphony of nature' or 'it is necessary to synchronise the pace of our life with the time plans'. But how should 'paces of nature' be understood? Seeing the slowness of 'time plans of nature' as absolute, authors identify them with a slow pace. If there is any acceleration in nature, it is understood as a pathological anomaly. Jay Griffiths takes up that speediness is a "cultural drug - attractive and hallucinogenic" (Griffiths 1997:42). The acceleration of time is understood as a mistaken social phenomenon and mostly as the result of macro-social and technological processes of the modern and post-modern era. Historiographical research would, however, most probably prove the historical omnipresence of haste and so would palaeontology the existence of fast pace and acceleration in nature.

Fast movement is, for example, an evolutionary advantage for all living creatures escaping from danger and also, of course, an advantage for predators. Human cultures resumed and unfolded the ancient, ethologically explainable and evolutionarily advantageous drive to swiftness in different ways. The universal and trans-cultural tendency towards haste stems perhaps from there. Nevertheless, it seems that it is the modern European culture and especially its technological branch that strengthens the tendency to acceleration in a significant way. Why exactly European culture? It is perhaps the consequence of its Christian, final apprehension of time that stresses the inevitable and definitive finality of human life. We want to use the time and to achieve something.

At the same time however, some significant and variously powerful struggles to brake follow from historical studies. It is interesting to study folk sayings and philosophical statements regarding time. We

would not find encouragement in speediness there but very often the opposite: frequent instigation to slow down. Yet, following the sayings reproaching speediness and impatience, we find out that in our cultural environment it is actually not an appeal for stopping. It is symptomatic of European apprehension that it does not warn against the haste itself. We should move slowly in order to be able to move effectively forwards – *festinatio tarda est*. We will not sense here the peace of a yogi but only the clever and pragmatically managed unrest of a European. Not even being aware of the harmfulness of haste, we are not able to rest in the Buddhist peace, we are not able to conquer our drive to always head for a target.

Should it not be so, after all? Nature today does not need our passivity but our well-considered action. On the way of searching for a more concrete answer, it could be helpful for us to think about the two types of time: cyclical and linear. Cyclical events have a relaxed pace by nature. The pathology of our way of life consists in our making them faster. I will not speed up the developmental changes that I am interested in by hectic efforts. Paradoxically, I might succeed in doing so if I am able to live without haste. My struggles for saving nature will become more effective if I go for a usual walk, if I allow myself time to meet with friends and even if I work more slowly, according to ecological luxury. It is perhaps good to keep a bit of scepticism regarding the attainability of big targets and not to overestimate the significance of one's strivings.

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A reflection on time in evolutionary macro-scale would give us further impulses for our ideas. There is an interesting antithesis in the discussion of older authors who understood evolution as a gradual slow process on one side, on the other side are those who presume that acceleration is a significant principle of evolution. Considerable acceleration occurred in some periods in which life reacted to certain crises. Such a jump can be, for example, the evolutionary invention of photosynthesis or an intense growth of the efficiency of organisms in receiving energy through aerobic oxidation, the rise of a cell core of organisms, the expansion of the famous large reptiles and the rapid development of hominids and a human being.

At first sight, the macro-evolutionary point of view seems to bear no significance for the reflection on our way of life because here we are dealing with paces of a different and incomparable order. It is, however, good to consider the paces of evolution in the connection with an ecologically favourable way of life. Thanks to that, we would be able to take a standpoint towards the opinions that make the

view on ecological crisis relative and that despise the struggles for ecological virtues.

According to those opinions, the rash dynamic of civilisation that seems to be ecologically destructive can have an evolutionary function. What if one of the significant jump-periods of the unforeseeable evolution is at play here, the ways of which head for the unknown? From another viewpoint: what if there is a test at stake here that will decide the elimination of the evolutionarily unsuccessful species *Homo sapiens* or for its happy reversal? Whatever the answer might be, the attempts to hamper the fast civilisation processes by the action of environmentalists are said to be foolish in the face of long term evolution.

If we are searching for environmental solutions, it is also good to make an opinion on the idealistic evolutionary conceptions that give hopes to some seekers. Accelerated evolution can be based on rash, qualitative changes (Prigogine, Capra, Sheldrake). Who is courageous in ideas and dares go beyond the borders of the established science, could put hopes into an accelerated evolution of attitudes and behaviour of human beings: into changes that are, according to serious sociologists, very slow and almost impossible to be counted with in solving complex and urgent environmental problems.

V. Ecological Luxury in Reality – Some Examples

Environmentally focused books and articles most often deal with the critique of the consumer society. Provided they are looking for ways out, they are usually formulated in the 'sollen' perspective². We will not find out what is but what should be. This book, however, seeks real changes in human behaviour. It deals briefly with an ecologically favourable way of life in communes. I go back to my research on *The Colourful and the Green* from the year 1992 (Librová 1994) and remind the readers of its most significant results. In somewhat more detail, I introduce one Dutch case study that was carried out at the same time by the Dutch sociologist Wilma Aarts (1993). With the example of her modestly living rich respondents, I will indicate the difficulty of spending money that is saved through a modest life-style. Easily and indirectly, it becomes an ecological risk. The environmentally favourable way out of the vicious circle of production, earnings and consumption is a lower wage for the bearer of ecological luxury. What can we, however, advise the one whose job is very well paid?

What should we save for? Not even saving is without environmentally risky consequences. Financial institutes invest our money instead of us and make the mechanism of production and

consumption spin without us being able to influence it. Ecological luxury can still look for an acceptable solution in 'green' banks in the western countries that guarantee the ethical responsibility of their investments. They promise clients that their money will be put into ecologically favourable projects.

A partial and humanistic solution is offered by the so-called Fair Trade system (however the economists point out that, on the macro-economic scale, the redistribution of income causes a rapid growth of consumption). We can put money into an environmental project through the mediation of a reliable environmental organisation. Or, when wealthy enough, we can personally invest money in nature ourselves. As an example, I mention the ecological luxury of the famous physicist James Lovelock who afforested seventeen hectares of his piece of land in Coombe Mill with original species (Lovelock 2000).

Further, I mention some passages from the popular book 'Bobos' by David Brooks (2000) on the life-style of American elite that touches the topic of ecologically favourable way of life in only a loose way. Though ironical, Brooks provides us with a realistic description making evident that the luxurious life of Bobos has a surprisingly strong relation to nature. Are we dealing here with the predatory luxury that I described in the 2nd chapter or perhaps with a rising ecological luxury? The way of life of Bobos bears some features of green consumerism that is often sharply criticised by radical environmentalists. In the light of this book we shall see, however, that green consumerism can become a possible impulse for a deeper reflection on the environmental consequences of our behaviour in everyday life. I can imagine a sensitive and thoughtful green consumer adept in luxurious self-restraint and ecological luxury.

VI. Ecological Luxury in Reality – Some Details

The research on the colourful and the research on Dutch doctors tried to record ecological luxury in the multidimensionality of everyday life. In order to give us a better idea, the 6th chapter deals with some aspects and details of ecological luxury.

Talking about consumer life, we most often have in mind shopping and the 'buy and throw away' mentality. Less often do we read about the consumer essence of using services and leisure time activities. The manner in which many environmental authors write about travelling and its ecological consequences is rather symptomatic. Being passionate travellers themselves, they are not ready to cast general doubt on frequent business trips and far-away holidays. Trying to defend tourism in exotic regions, they retreat to

the ideology of soft tourism that they present as an ecological virtue.

Thinking the connections of spatial mobility through, we have to admit that it is not soft tourism in far-off regions but the faithfulness to the local that is the basic ecological virtue. This faithfulness is a typical luxurious self-restraint connected with the joy of the rediscovery of the near and with the appreciation of the beauty of the landscape in which we live our everyday life. Dwelling in the near countryside – in the bio-region (Sale 1985) - offers us the advantage of a long-term observation and knowledge of the natural and cultural contexts. Furthermore, talking about faithfulness to a place, we can have in mind hiking, gardening and also creating home in a strict sense of the word, and taking care of the house and the apartment. Both studies in ecologically favourable way of life (e. g. Ray – Anderson 2000) and studies originating in environmental psychology (e. g. Sibley 1995) support a growing attachment of people to their flats by evidence.

Food, cooking and dining are a special chapter in the usage of home. I make the international society "Slow Food" familiar to the reader. It is a society that was founded in 1986 in a town called Bra in Piedmont and that can be considered as a representative of ecological luxury. It is a club of gourmards insisting on their right to enjoy quality food and wine, and of producers resisting food standardisation.

Gardens are the main discussion point in this part of the book. Lately, a revaluation of the previous apprehension has occurred. We used to consider pastimes in the garden luxurious and still nowadays we perceive a shortly cut lawn, a swimming pool and a decorative garden as symbols of luxury. The development towards ecological luxury is on the side of both vegetable and kitchen gardens and it perceives home garden work itself as a value.

Ecological luxury can be observed in the gardens of France, especially by means of the monograph by Louise Jones "Kitchen Gardens of France" published in 1999. Vegetable gardens fulfil the utility function well. At the same time, they are a source of aesthetic pleasure and they have a significant cultural dimension. They are in accordance with the present emphasis on self-sufficiency of households, places and regions, and they bear witness to a serious reflection on environmental issues.

Nation-wide representative research run by the French Government in 1994 found that one half of all French households owns a garden, in which two thirds of those surveyed grow vegetables and/or fruits. 23 per cent of the huge amount of fruits and vegetables consumed

in France is grown directly in family plots. I mention the heterogeneous age and the social structure of the gardeners.

Why is it that the kitchen garden is nowadays so popular in France? The demands of the French on the quality of vegetables and their experience with the products of the large-scale agriculture and economic globalisation with its uninteresting, constant offer of vegetables and fruits transported from all climates certainly play a decisive role here. The utility garden attracts a modern human being by renewing the respect for seasonal changes. For some decades, French growers have made attempts to renew the growing of half-forgotten species and varieties of local vegetables, and they have searched for traditional culinary recipes and for local cultural and historical connections of their usage.

It remains a question how compatible the historical tradition is of artificial French gardens forcing order and human scale on nature with the spread of ecological aspects. French creators of gardens and of the life-style managed this paradox by balancing their nostalgia for old culture and the deepening respect for living nature. Rousseau-like apprehension of the world was a significant historic impulse for them. The present garden culture in France also reacted in a distinctive manner to the impulses of the 1960s and 70s favouring wild gardens. I go into a greater detail with the example of the famous 'Garden in the Movement' of Gilles Clement.

Further, the text reflects on ecological luxury included in some variants of vegetarianism. On the basis of the book by H. Spencer (1995), it informs about the spread of this way of life and its motivations in Great Britain. Since this book is devoted to the half-hearted and the hesitant, and to their vague ecological virtues, the reflection on reducing meat consumption leads into the example of organic sheep breeding in the White Carpathians in Moravia, Czech Republic. I discuss its favourable influence on the landscape and nature, and co-operation amongst the locals and with inhabitants of nearby towns and cities. The latter get the meat from the organic farmers as a reward for their financial contribution. Thanks to the ecological circumstances of the breeding and to the conditions under which the sheep live and are slaughtered, the ethical and ecological doubts, otherwise linked to the meat consumption, fall off.

The following chapter deals with ecological wine growing in South Moravia. It informs readers about the main principles of wine growing and production, and about the economic hardships that are faced. The price of organic wine cannot be raised because the attitudes of consumers are not yet ready and the standard consumer of ecological food drinks hardly any alcohol. At the same

time, lovers of good wine are not well informed and they mostly identify an organic product with something 'too healthy' and accordingly 'unappetising' or 'disgusting'. The favourable effect of the influence of ecological winegrowers on nature is not interesting to them. The hardships of ecological winegrowers make it evident that ecological luxury has not yet found its feet in the Czech Republic.

Towards the end of the 6th chapter, I deal with ecological luxury connected with life without a car. It is based on the results of the research by Nikolaus Huhn and Mathias Lemke (2001) and on their book - ÜberLeben ohne Auto (To Survive without a Car). It is actually a reader of answers to research questions. The published letters make evident that it does not have to be indignation over a car and environmental awareness that are responsible for the refusal of a car. It is rather the fact that life without a car has its own charm and big practical advantages. The authors of the letters describe them in a great detail.

VII. Report on the Colourful after Ten Years

In this section, I report on the comparative sociological research on the ecologically favourable life-style in the Czech Republic that goes back to the research on the colourful depicted in the book *The Colourful and the Green: Some Chapters on Voluntary Modesty* (Librová 1994).

The women have found work, which is one of the most significant changes in the life of the colourful. Some of them did so after having completed external studies. While all of the women were at home in 1992, they are employed now. Two mothers work as teachers educating their children at home.

How has the economic situation of the colourful households developed? Ten years ago, many of them had to manage with an income bordering on subsistence level. Having found their professional careers unsatisfying, the colourful often left them. They found work that made sense to them, but that barely earned them a living. In 1992, I talked with engineers who had put aside their diploma and devoted themselves to crafts. After some time, they made their way into the market. There is yet another significant reason for their tolerable or even good financial situation: the colourful manage with little. They do not buy ready-made food but they cook at home. They grow their own vegetables and fruits, and make jams and stewed fruits. They adjust and mend clothes, they are capable of repairing simple home appliances and they like things from second-hand shops.

A car appeared more often in the households. In 1992, about one half had it. After ten years, all have a car but one, including those who had previously talked about a car in disdain. Apart from the generally shared reason (insufficient public transport and a remote dwelling place), one circumstance was responsible for some colourful decisions for a car: the car is needed for the distribution of self-made products on the market. A bicycle continues to be a permanent part of the life of both adults and children.

In the course of the ten years, my assumption turned out to be right that the colourful would be drawn to some modern technologies. The majority has purchased a mobile phone, which turned out to be necessary due to their remoteness, their contacts with family and friends, and their activities in public life. The colourful like working on computers. Some of them have e-mail accounts and they like searching for information on the Internet.

Those who doubt claim that life in a small village or even in a remote house starts to be unbearable when children start growing up. They go to basic schools or possibly to other schools wanting to participate in some courses and leisure time activities. Having bad bus and train connections, people say the colourful have to give up their life in the small place and move into a bigger locality or even a town. Various reactions to this opinion have been noticed. I mention a more detailed testimony of one mother who describes the joys of her children walking to school in a distant locality from the wilderness of their secluded house.

There is another question regarding the children's position in peer groups. What attitude do the children have towards the modest life-style of their parents? How do the girls and boys in no-brand-clothes react to the competitive attitudes of their schoolmates? Can it not happen that the erosion of voluntary modesty starts by the children and their suffering in classes? Do the parents submit to it? According to the majority of the colourful parents, their children have no problems with fashionable clothes and outfits. Stressing the irresistible pressure by the peers, the public opinion may exaggerate. On the contrary, some self-confident children can affect their surroundings thanks to their demonstratively non-consumer behaviour.

Most strikingly, it is perhaps the organisational and financial accessibility of travelling abroad and the omnipresent advertisement of a 'fabulous holiday' that have belonged to the influences changing the life-style in the post-communist countries in the last decade. In what way has this strongest consumer temptation impressed upon my respondents, who in 1992 said that holidays abroad did not attract them? The colourful have reacted in a way

characteristic of them, that is without any ideological background. Mostly, they did not reject the possibility to travel a priori and tried it out. They did not use the services of travel agencies and travelled not far, most often to Croatia. More or less, they define their travel experiment as disappointing. The colourful do not travel to far-off regions.

In the Czech Republic, the last decade was marked with the people's disenchantment with the development of society and with the declining interest in public life which had been born at the end of the 1980s. This development did not spare the publicly active colourful either. Those who had been elected into local governments in the first free elections were not candidates in the ones following. It is, however, interesting that they would make an attempt in the future on the condition that the political situation in town halls changes in an acceptable way. After all, the colourful have remained intensively active in civic engagement in the local community, e. g. in cultural actions.

Still I observed one trace of disappointment with some colourful people. It was the disappointment with religious life linked to the churches. Since many of the colourful are strong believers, they react with sadness, but sometimes also rather with a feeling of certain liberation.

Modern society puts pressure on us that should unify our life-styles. It is striking how alike and monotonous the lives of consumers are, despite the variety of goods and holidays. The biggest luxury of the colourful is their free conduct and ability not to have themselves manipulated. They react differently to economic, social and political pressures, in accordance with their personal inclinations and their position in the family. Whenever possible, they create their life themselves on the basis of a well-perceived and reflected attitude.

I demonstrate the presence of ecological luxury in the way of life of the colourful with help of five interview questions.

The colourful reacted to my direct question "do you think that your life includes some characteristics that you could label as luxurious?" in an interesting way. Their answers demonstrate their values that are identical with Enzensberger's categories. Does it actually mean that predatory luxury is the life-style of the colourful? No. The ability of self-restraint is peculiar to them, which is an element of ecological luxury: "a human being cannot have everything".

The question remains, however, if the colourful meet the other condition of ecological luxury, which is the conscious reduction of the ecological footprint. The colourful are not indifferent to the

environmental effects of their housekeeping. Some of them are actively interested in environmentally friendly home technologies, which is also a characteristic of ecological luxury. They work and behave both in their gardens and in the countryside in a sensitive way to nature. Many participate in the environmental improvement of decision-making in public authorities, for instance, measures on waste separation. Some of them chose work that is directly linked with the protection of nature.

Nevertheless, the research generally states that the consumption of the most colourful household grew in the last ten years. This is not a result only of a mere reality that the growing-up children are financially more demanding than babies. Some parents submit to their children who return home from school sad after having failed the competition in fashionable clothes. Other outer circumstances increase the household's ecological footprint. For example, reduced public transport has forced the colourful into buying a car. Indirect energetic and material consumption increased with an end to intensive gardening, bottling and repairing after the father became absorbed in his job and the mother started to work. Not only modesty but also ecological virtues are in danger if money comes into a household.

VIII. Will the Ecological Virtues Spread?

Although this book deals with personal solutions and with the way of life of individuals, and does not have the ambition to solve the ecological problem on either societal or planetary levels, I do ask in conclusion the question if ecological virtues can spread. According to what I know about human behaviour, about the characteristics and the speed of its evolutionary, social and cultural transformations, I do not believe in the general conversion of humankind from material demands to spiritual values and to environmental ethics. In this point, I disagree with other authors who deal with the so-called sustainable way of life and voluntary modesty, e. g. D. Elgin (*Voluntary Simplicity*, 1981) or Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson (*The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*, 2000). I briefly mention the opinion of Ronald Inglehart (1990), Helmut Klages (1996) and other sociologists who deal with the changes of values in the present society.

Let us admit through an intellectual experiment that the general conversion of human values towards ecologically favourable modesty really happens. What would that mean? Liberal economists do not admit this question. Neither is it asked by environmental economists. Even the rare 'alternative' among them do not better ask in what way the present economic system would react. They

leave this stage unnoticed in their thoughts and look right away for solutions based on the establishment of new economics. The wide spread of modest life would bring serious if not catastrophic economic and social consequences before the chaos caused by the negative effects of human behaviour on nature could be solved. We could then expect a crisis caused by overproduction, plants and factories closing down, and mass unemployment. A severe decline in standard of living and social shocks would follow, intensified by mass hysteria.

In reality, there is nothing to be afraid of. I do not expect the universal spread of an ecologically favourable way of life. It does not mean, however, that I do not consider the spread of a more modest life important and needy. The number of people aiming at ecological luxury could be very significant because ecological luxury reduces the damages committed to nature and it can provide our life in the 21st century with joy and dignity.

What can be the source of the spread of an ecologically favourable way of life? Sociologists give us the hope resulting from the status behaviour of people. In western countries, some individuals with a professional status, with good incomes and with high education start forming a subculture appreciating self-limitation. Being well-informed about ecological questions and an ecologically favourable way of life single this elite out from the other social strata. As in any case of prestigious behaviour, a paradox occurs also in the case of ecological luxury: ecological luxury should emphasise social exclusiveness but at the same time it triggers off imitation and trends. Such a social situation yields good prospects for the spread of an ecologically favourable way of life in society, the so-called trickle-down effect.

Following this account, in order to reduce their consumption and to adopt an ecologically favourable way of life, an individual would not need either an altruistic attitude or a strong personal motivation and will. The so far weak effect of education could be supported by external social conditions and by the struggle for social recognition. In this context, I turn to the question of snobbery and I try to look at it more kindly than is done otherwise.

Outside sociological circles, the idea rather prevails that it is a developed environmental awareness brought by environmental education that brings the chance of ecological virtues to be spread. Sabine Dyas (2000) estimates on the basis of empirical research, however, that environmental awareness applies only in 10 to 15 per cent among the factors influencing the behaviour of people. Its application in real behaviour is connected to many other circumstances.

It is, however, the essence of the growth of economics together with the artificial stimulation to consume that are inhibiting the effect of environmental education in a most powerful way. Ecological education also collides with psychic barriers created by artificial city environment and by the virtual reality. The majority has so far not accepted ecologically favourable behaviour as a living social norm. Those who would like to behave ecologically favourably under the influence of ecological education, hesitate. It seems to them to have no real sense. Moreover, they are afraid that they would be foolish and laughable in the given social climate.

Obstacles in the way of spreading the ecologically favourable life are symptomatic of the post-modern period. I deal with two: firstly, with volatility (Bauman 1995) that manifests itself in the acquisitive mentality and in the travelling unrest, and secondly, with present individualism. It is criticised prevailingly from the moral position. It is, however, apparent also in the environmental sphere. Small, often single, immodest households and aversion to sharing objects of long-term use are the consequence of individualism. On the other hand, awaking a particular personal relationship to objects in oneself, individualism can also become a certain hope for an ecologically favourable way of life.

For an individualistically oriented self, objects bear deeper significance. They provide one with a feeling of security and they help one in self-awareness and self-expression. A personality that is able to establish a faithful and responsible relationship to things, does not allow itself to be seduced by advertising tricks supporting our drive to neophilia. So it might happen that individualism not only deepens but also reduces our volatility. In a certain sense and contrary to public opinion, we can say that ownership curbs consumerism.

Also in the following text, I try to argue against the fixed intellectual schemes. I submit short, historical characteristics of hedonism and question its identification with consumerism. I try to understand if hedonism corresponds with predatory or ecological luxury.

The closing pages deal with the reflection on an issue, which is nowadays almost taboo. I dare ponder on the relation of ecologically favourable life with the phenomenon of sacrifice. I do not share the opinion that an old family and a village community lived on the sacrifice of their members. The essence of sacrifice is namely an inner and spontaneous action. The behaviour of people in a traditional society was forced by severe living conditions and controlled through fixed social norms and obligations. Deviations were socially sanctioned. Nowadays, we live in an epoch that is considered sacrifice-free – in a post-moralistic society (Lipovetsky

1995). The awareness of what is good, moral and desirable has not disappeared, however. The presence of a responsible relationship has only moved from the sphere of social pressure, traditions and norms into the area of individual decisions. Brooks writes about a responsible individualism (Brooks 2000). I myself consider it a good result of the previous development and hold a certain even if vague hope for future development. It is included in the very attempts of the half-hearted on ecological luxury.

In addition, in the core of post-moralistic society, there is something enduring or being born that goes beyond the small-scale morality. It takes sacrifice and responsibility in a serious manner. Lipovetsky admits in a negative undertone that it is as if moral fanaticism was returning even though only marginal movements keep it alive. Being rightly angry about the state of this world, we do not notice its bright sides. Statistically they are rare but not exceptional. In August 2002, hundreds of young people left for South and West Bohemia in order to help unfortunates who had been deprived of everything they had possessed and they had lived for by the flooding. Let us notice whom the volunteers helped - people who were not their relatives and not even their friends, whom they mostly did not know at all. They helped animals that had escaped the flood and had lost their owners in the chaos. Is not the present willingness to sacrifice all the greater because it is not focused on one's own family and neighbours, and it goes beyond the borders of a 'tribe'? I consider the sensitive and devoted attitudes towards both handicapped people and animals to be a remarkable phenomenon of the present that strikingly breaks through the indifference of today.

The deeds of today's helpers in an emergency are all the more valuable since they are born in a society that defends the freedom of individuals to make their own decisions. We look here at a sacrifice that is not forced by circumstances and outer pressure. Only due to the freedom of decision can a person understand the sense of sacrifice.

Rising in post-modern society that is filled with liberalism, scepticism and a tolerant sense for variety and reality, the present self-sacrifice and devotion of different sources and of different strengths have the hope of not falling into the pit of doctrine and obligation. A continuous balance between idealism supported by minority life-styles and individualistic society gives birth to the half-hearted and the hesitant. I am not worried that the balancing will reverse with time, that the devoted and self-sacrificing will grow tired and their efforts will weaken, and that the rising ability of inner sacrifice will be consumed by cynicism. I do not believe in the

universal human conversion but thanks to the half-hearted and the hesitant, I am convinced that everybody carries in himself or herself a longing for being better.

Footnotes:

1) Individualisation in Beck's understanding does not mean atomisation and egocentrism, which culture pessimists claim. According to him, something new is arising in the present western society, which he labels as co-operative or altruistic individualism. It manifests itself in the relation to human rights, to other races, in the relationship between the sexes, in the approach to the environment and to animals.

2) Saying that a text or a statement has a 'sollen' perspective, one wants to imply that a normative focus is in question; a focus on what should be rather than on what is. The German word 'sollen' is a modal verb and means 'be obliged to' / 'should'.

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