

**Proposal for a symposium on  
PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS  
for the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the European Society for Ecological Economics,  
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Contributions to the symposium (participation confirmed):

1. Stefan Baumgärtner (University of Lüneburg, Germany): *Introduction: The philosophy of Ecological Economics – problems and perspectives*
2. Inge Røpke (Technical University of Denmark, Lyngby, Denmark): *History of modern ecological economics*
3. Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland): *Integrating ecology, economics and ethics: A philosophical analysis of objectives and conceptions*
4. Richard B. Norgaard (Energy and Resources Group, University of California, Berkeley, USA): *Epistemology of collective interdisciplinarity*
5. Reiner Manstetten, Bernd Klauer, Johannes Schiller (UFZ Environmental Research Centre Leipzig-Halle): *Organisational implementation and evaluation of interdisciplinary environmental research*
6. Christian Becker (University of Heidelberg, Germany): *Integrating ecology, economics and ethics – the role of concepts, models and case studies*

### Short Abstract:

This symposium reflects on the philosophy of ecological economics. Making recourse to the philosophy of science the contributions deal with the rationale, foundation, character and practice of inter- and transdisciplinary environmental research, and discuss its potential and limits. One focus is on general philosophical considerations about its scientific status. Second, the specific meaning of inter- and transdisciplinarity within environmental research is discussed. Third, the symposium refers to the specific aspects and problems of ecological economics. Finally, a focus is on implementation and evaluation of inter- and transdisciplinary research within existing structures of disciplinary research.

Keywords: ecological economics, epistemology, interdisciplinary environmental research, philosophy of science, normal and post-normal science, science theory

### Long Abstract:

This symposium reflects on new approaches to the philosophy of ecological economics. It brings together internationally renowned scholars who have made significant contributions to the recent discussion of this topic.

In the light of the history of ecological economics and the latest trends in this field (Røpke 2004, 2005), the symposium reflects on the subject matter, the aims, the approaches and forms of ecological economics. For this sake, the symposium particularly makes recourse to current insights from general philosophy of science and philosophy of environmental research (Baumgärtner 2006, Baumgärtner & Becker 2005). This guarantees a well founded reflection on the philosophy of ecological economics, which includes current research results on interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity (Hirsch Hadorn 2002, Hirsch Hadorn et al. 2006), as well as on problem-based environmental research (Schiller et al. 2006). The discussion focuses on different levels of abstraction:

(i) On a general philosophical level, the contributions deal with the rationale, foundation, character and practice of inter- and transdisciplinary research, and discuss its potential and limits. This includes a discussion of the different forms and definitions of inter- and transdisciplinary research, as well as general philosophical considerations about their scientific status (Baumgärtner & Becker 2005).

(ii) On a second level, the specific meaning of inter- or transdisciplinarity within the field of environmental research is discussed. Are there specific features of environmental research, which require new forms of inter- or transdisciplinary research? For example, is the solving of real, complex problems or the orientation on practical action of particular relevance for environmental research? (In contrast to the aim of merely generating knowledge) Or is there a particular importance of other forms of knowledge, which differ from pure scientific knowledge (such as e.g. practical know-how)? And, if this is the case, what does this imply e.g. for specific forms of participation of individuals or social groups in a (transdisciplinary) scientific process, or for making recourse to their knowledge? (Hirsch Hadorn 2002, Norgaard 2004, Lélé & Norgaard 2005, Norgaard & Baer 2005).

(iii) This general philosophical considerations on interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and environmental research provide the basis for a fundamental discussion of the philosophy of ecological economics. Historical and current forms of this research-movement as well as its self-characterizations are analyzed, and new approaches to define and practice ecological economics are discussed (Becker et al. 2005, Becker 2006, Røpke 2004, 2005). These reflections are of great importance for the further development of ecological economics, and it is now one the agenda to further them. Until a science “has reached a certain stage of

development, definition of its scope is necessarily impossible. For the unity of a science shows itself in the unity of the problems it is able to solve, and such unity is not discovered until the interconnection of its explanatory principles has been established. [...] At an earlier stage, any attempt to discover the ultimate nature of [a] science [is] necessarily doomed to disaster. It would have been waste of time to have attempted it. But once this stage of unification has been reached not only it is not waste of time to attempt precise delimitation. It is waste of time not to do so. Further elaboration can only take place if the objective is clearly indicated.” (Robbins 1935: 2f.)

(iv) To give an encompassing reflection on the philosophy of ecological economics, the symposium finally addresses the operationalisation, implementation and valuation of ecological economic research. Concerning the operationalisation, we refer to the example of an integration of economics, ecology and ethics which provides a new approach to an integrated inter- and transdisciplinary research within ecological economics (Frank et al. 2006). Concerning the implementation and valuation of ecological economic research, the symposium reflects on the possibilities and preconditions of implementing inter- and transdisciplinary (environmental) research into the existing structures of disciplinary research and on criteria for an adequate evaluation of this form of research (Schiller et al. 2006).

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