

Environmentalism, Environmental Ethics, and Some Linkages with Landscape Architecture

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Abstract

Humans have long reflected on their relationship with the environment. In Western culture, environment is the product of a religious tradition (Cronon, 1996). Since the Second World War, concerns over protecting the environment against harm caused by human actions have been raised. Environmentalism first took shape with George Perkins Marsh, whose work, *Man and Nature* (1864), traced the various implications of forest destruction across the natural landscape. The paper first reviews the terminology of environmentalism and its related terms. It will accordingly examine the historical perspective of environmentalism and the moral values underlining relations between humans and the environment: namely, environmental ethics. In conclusion, the paper will review some linkages between environmentalism and landscape architecture, a discipline dealing directly with the shaping of land and environment, through the works of the two great figures in the disciplines, Frederick Law Olmsted and Ian McHarg. There might not be simple answers for the environmental problems we face today. However, understanding environmental thought and its relation to closely related disciplines such as landscape architecture could provide a more inclusive environmentalism and help create more livable places for all.

บทคัดย่อ

ความคิดเกี่ยวกับความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมนุษย์กับสิ่งแวดล้อมได้ถูกสะท้อนออกมาอย่างต่อเนื่องตั้งแต่อดีตจนถึงปัจจุบันวัฒนธรรมตะวันตกถือว่าสิ่งแวดล้อมเป็นคตินิยมทางศาสนาในช่วงสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง มีการยกประเด็นในการป้องกันสิ่งแวดล้อมที่อาจเกิดความเสียหายจากการกระทำของมนุษย์ขึ้น แนวคิดสิ่งแวดล้อมนิยมถูกกล่าวถึงครั้งแรก โดยงานเขียนของ จอร์จ เพอร์กิน มาร์ช ในหนังสือชื่อมนุษย์และธรรมชาติ (man and nature) ในปี 1864 ซึ่งได้สืบค้นนัยสำคัญในการทำลายป่าไม้ในภูทางธรรมชาติ บทความนี้เริ่มต้นด้วยการสืบค้นการตีความศัพท์ทางเทคนิค คือ ‘แนวคิดสิ่งแวดล้อมนิยม’ (Environment) คำศัพท์ที่มีความเกี่ยวข้องกัน บทความนี้ยังได้ครอบคลุมในส่วนประวัติความเป็นมาของขบวนการทางสิ่งแวดล้อม ในส่วนท้ายสุดบทความได้ทบทวนความสัมพันธ์บางประการระหว่างแนวคิดสิ่งแวดล้อมนิยมและภูมิสถาปัตยกรรม วิชาชีพที่มีความเกี่ยวพันโดยตรงกับการปรับพื้นที่และสภาพแวดล้อมผ่านงานของภูมิสถาปนิกผู้มีชื่อเสียง

จำนวนสองท่าน คือ เฟดเดอริก ลอร์ โอมสเต็ด และ เอียน แมคฮาร์ก ปัญหาทางสิ่งแวดล้อมหลากหลายที่เราเผชิญอยู่ในปัจจุบัน อาจต้องการแนวทางในการแก้ไขที่มีความซับซ้อนถึงกระนั้นการทำความเข้าใจในรากฐานทางแนวคิดทางสิ่งแวดล้อมและความสัมพันธ์บางประการกับภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมมากขึ้น จะช่วยสร้างสรรค์สังคมที่น่าอยู่อาศัยสำหรับทุกคน

Keywords

Environmentalism (แนวคิดสิ่งแวดล้อมนิยม)

Environmental Ethics (จริยธรรมทางสิ่งแวดล้อม)

Landscape Architecture (ภูมิสถาปัตยกรรม)

1. Introduction

Human history is one of relentless environmental creation, modification, manipulation and destruction. Since the 19th century, concerns over protecting the environment against harm caused by human actions have been raised. Several environmental movements are apparent, leading to consistent re-examination of interpretation and perception in environmental thought, as well as its relation to man and its values. One significant movement is the manifesto of environmentalism, which will be the focus of the paper along with the linkages between environmentalist thought and landscape architecture. This article is divided into four sections: 'Defining environmentalism and related terms'; 'Brief history of environmentalism'; 'Environmental ethics'; and finally, 'Some linkages between the environmentalism, environmental ethics and landscape architecture'.

2. Defining Environmentalism and Related Terms

According to Milton (1993), environmentalism is a state of being or a set of policies concerning environment. For some, its central issue is the right of people to pursue their traditional pattern of resource-use. For others, the significance is the survival of environment and humanity in general, regardless of cultural variations. Sociologists have positioned environmentalism as a social movement, whereas political scientists have analyzed it as a distinctive political ideology. Different institutionalized ways of thinking and acting have been related to different interpretations of two concepts, environment and nature, as discussed in the following sections.

Environment

Environment has its roots in the French word 'environ,' which means to surround, to envelop, to enclose, and the closer term, "milieu," which is often

taken to mean the same as environment. In common usage, the environment usually refers to the physical world which environs or surrounds something (Barry, 1999). Anything that surrounds or environs is an environment; however, we need to know what or who the subject of discussion is in order to define an environment (Barry, 1999). Understanding environment involves recognizing that human life is lived as an integral part of the physical and cultural medium, under conditions through which people and places join together to achieve shape and identity.

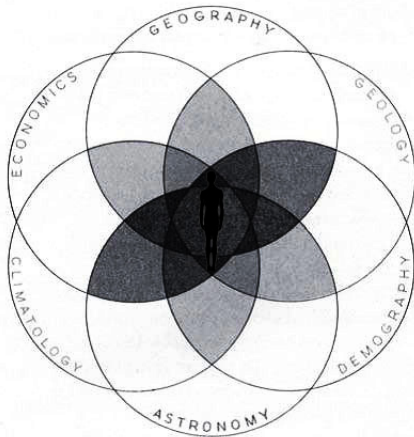
Nature

While the term 'environment' is considered a concrete concept, 'nature' is often understood in an abstract, universal sense. The terminology is often understood as referring to the conditions of life and all that exists on this planet as a whole. Its root comes from the old French word "nature" and the Latin word 'natura,' meaning to be born (Raymond, 1988). Nature is usually defined as that which takes place independently of humans; it is contrasted with the artificial, with the results of human skill or artifice.

Therefore, the two terms can be variously interpreted; they are not utterly coherent. However, Barry (1999) notes that both nature and environment are viewed in opposition to human society and culture; however, this separation does not mean that humans do not have a relation with their environment. This provides us with a retrospective understanding of the cultural milieu and the key role that environment plays in society.

3. Brief History of Environmentalism

The history of environment is often understood as the story of human engagement with the physical world (Figure 1), with the environment as object, agent, or influence in human history (Arnold, 1996). To attempt to cover the whole range of environmental history and to try addressing momentous



Source: Adapted from Bayer, 1953.

Figure 1. A composite of man's environment by Herbert Bayer.

issues in history would clearly be impossible: the focus, necessarily selective, is on two distinct environmental movements, which can be identified in most western industrialized nations.

The first movement of environmentalism can be traced to the emergence of the conservation and natural protection of wildlife, wilderness and natural resources, spanning from the late 19th century to the 1950s (Lowe & Goyder, 1983). It was a period of growing economic, political and environmental dominance and a time of growing consciousness on environments and the people who inhabited them in western culture. In 1864, George Perkins Marsh (Figure 2) published "Man and Nature" and inspired generations of environmentalists. Marsh is acknowledged as the first American

environmentalist in the sense that he raised concerns about the destructive impact of human activity on the environment, and argued for development to be assessed for its potential disruption of nature. The environmentalists of this period, along with poets, intellectuals, and political activists, focused on conservation and preservation, yet brought up environmental issues ranging from the regulation of industrial pollution to the creation of national parks (Buckingham & Turner, 2008). Together with transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, they established a firm base in environmental thinking through the 20th century.

Nevertheless, it was not until the emergence of modern environmentalism during the 1960s that environmental concerns became widespread. Buckingham & Turner (2008) states that in many respects, the 1960s represented a period of economic wealth, but also vast destruction of the environment across the world. A number of seminal books on environmental issues published at this period propelled environmental concerns. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) (Figure 3) alerted the world to the effect of pesticides on animal life and human well-being, contributing to the subsequent growth of environmental awareness in North America and Western Europe (Carter, 2001). According to Carter (2001), the characteristics of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s can be summarized as follows:

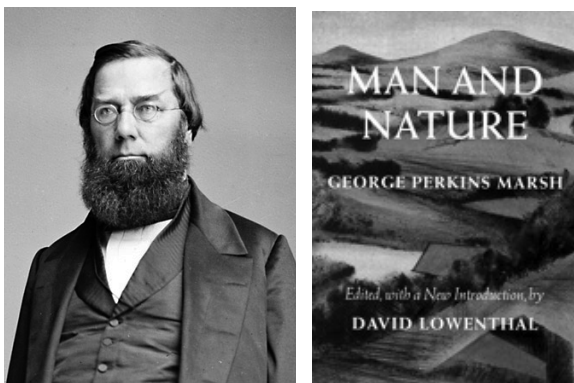


Figure 2. George Perkin Marsh (1801-1882) and his book, *Man and Nature* published in 1864.

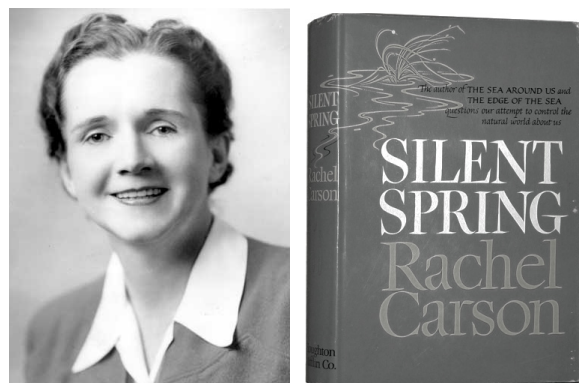


Figure 3. Rachel Carson (1907-1964) and her book, *Silent Spring* published in 1962.

1) Modern environmentalism was driven by the idea of an imminent global ecological crisis.

2) It was a political and activist movement which demanded a radical transformation of the structures of society.

By the early 1970s, environmentalism had expanded and become much more complex; the thought had shifted its central focus over time. In order to understand environmentalism and define the linkages between environmentalist thought and landscape architecture, it is vital to understand the moral values underling human interventions in the environment, namely environmental ethics, as reviewed in the following section.

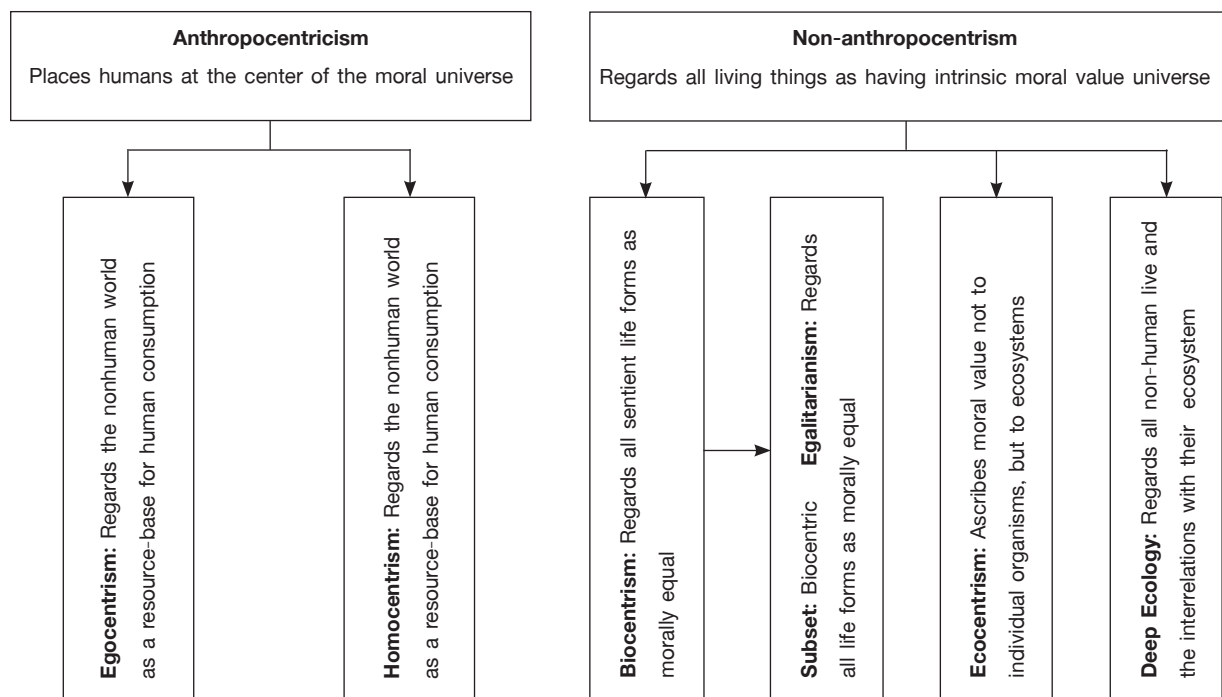
4. Environmental Ethics

In the early 19th century, the emerging environmental crisis had provoked concerns over the relationship between humans and the environment.

According to Thompson (1998), after the publication of Aldo Leopold's seminal essay in 1949, the new distinct division of moral philosophy called "environmental ethics" developed. Environmental ethics is a subfield of philosophy, which is extensively concerned with the moral values of the human and nonhuman worlds toward their environments (Kibert, Thiele, Peterson & Monroe, 2006). Two broad divisions of environmental ethics, divided by their consideration of the intrinsic values of human or non-human species, are illustrated in Figure 4.

4.1 Anthropocentricism

Anthropocentricism places humans at the centre of the universe, separated from nature, and endowed with unique values. The rest of nature is of instrumental value; it has value and deserves moral consideration only as it enhances human well-being. Anthropocentricism can be divided into two categories, as follows:



Source: Adapted from Thompson, 1998.

Figure 4. The range of commonly accepted environmental positions.

Ego-centrism

Ego-centrism regards one's self-interests as the most important. For ego-centrism, nature is seen as a resource to be exploited for human benefit (Thompson, 2000). Typically, ego-centrism is associated with liberalism, capitalism and free markets, etc.

Homocentrism

Homocentrism is grounded in notions of health and the welfare of society and regards nonhuman life (environment) as a resource base for human consumption.

Technocentrism

According to Thompson (1998), the technocentrists have faith in the capacity of science to solve environmental problems in the long term. They believe that society will be able to sustain economic growth and technology will be able to cure any environmental difficulties.

4.2 Non-anthropocentrism

Non-anthropocentrists base their beliefs on the intrinsic value of non-human nature, separate to its usefulness to or appreciation by humans. Subdivisions of non-anthropocentrism comprise biocentrism and eco-centrism, as described as follows:

Biocentrism

Biocentrism extends the boundaries of moral significance to include other members of the biotic community, that is plants and animals (Thompson, 2000). Bio-centrists value ecosystems, but on the basis of the plants and animals contained within them.

Eco-centrism

The eco-centric views humankind as part of an ecosystem, and subject to ecological laws. Aldo Leopold is the most influential figure in the development of an eco-centric environmental ethics. The science of ecology developed during his lifetime, and

he was the first person to call for a radical rethinking of ethics in light of this new science.

Deep Ecology

Deep ecology advocates the existence of non-human organisms, and is also concerned with its inter-relations with other elements within its ecosystems. Deep ecology relies on ecology to provide a fundamental understanding of natural ecosystems and the issues that underlie the environmental crisis. However, deep ecology involves the search for a more objective consciousness and state of being as a way of life. Some scholars have commented that the thoughts of the deep ecologists are similar to certain religions such as Taoism, Buddhism and Hinduism, which contemplate nature passively.

As environmental issues become much more complex, new positions in environmental ethics have also been updated. However, for the purpose of the paper, the above review is sufficient. The following section reviews some relationships between environmentalism and landscape architecture, as well as their positions in the realm of environmental ethics.

5. Some Linkages between Environmentalism, Environmental Ethics and Landscape Architecture

Waterman (personal communication, March 31, 2012) notes that "if there are any dialogue between human and environment, then most of the times, we're talking about landscape architecture." The discipline and profession of landscape architecture intervenes in the environment for a variety of social, aesthetic and environmental motives (Thompson, 1998). The disciplines of environmentalism and landscape architecture share numerous concerns; however, their inter-relationships are rather unfamiliar. The subsequent preliminary review linkages between the two disciplines through the works of two great figures in landscape architecture. It also reviews their positions in environmental ethics.

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)

The first figure in landscape architecture, whose works were linked with environmentalism, was Frederick Law Olmsted (Figure 5). Best known for New York's Central Park, Olmsted also participated in environmental protection. Already famous for his park, in 1865 Olmsted was asked to chair a commission to recommend what should be done with Yosemite (Spirn, 1996). He subsequently outlined his findings in 'Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report (as shown in figure 6),' which envisioned Yosemite becoming a natural conservation reserve for a diversity of plants and animals. Though Olmsted's vision for the Park was not fully perceived and his involvement in the Park was brief, his report has marked him out as one of the 'pioneering environmentalists' (Martin, 2011). The Park eventually became a national park in 1890 and received federal protection.

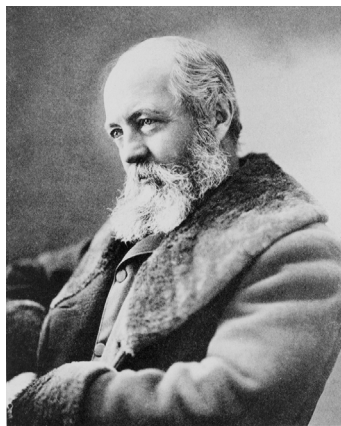


Figure 5. Frederick Law Olmsted.

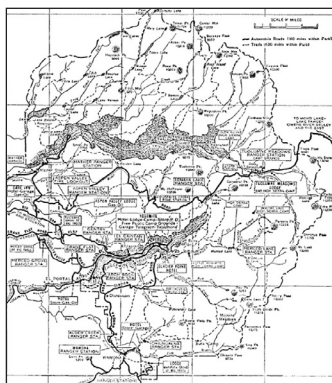


Figure 6. Map of Yosemite National Park.

The other project, which provoked the idea of environmentalism, is the Back Bay Fens (1887), part of the Emerald Necklace park system in Boston, Massachusetts (Figure 7). The project turned a site of tidal flats and floodplains, fouled by sewage and industrial effluent, into a park which purified the water and protected adjacent land from flooding. They also incorporated an interceptor sewer, a parkway, and Boston's first streetcar line; together, they formed a landscape system designed to accommodate the movement of people, the flow of water, and the removal of waste. The Back Bay Fens is marked as one of the first American active wetlands restoration in the history, and the concept of landscape ecology was rapidly flourished and become one of the profession's major challenges in the days after Olmsted's. The idea of park network system from the Emerald Necklace also remains it relevant. The park network system is not only to perform environmental functions for the cities, but it also immensely brings social benefits and control urban sprawl (Horayangkura, 2011).

Olmsted and his British architect partner, Calvert Vaux, were involved in planning parks and green open spaces in numerous U.S. cities between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His professional activity was in the same period as George Perkins Marsh (1801-1882), whose works stirred the first movement of environmentalism and also the transcendentalists, Henry David Thoreau

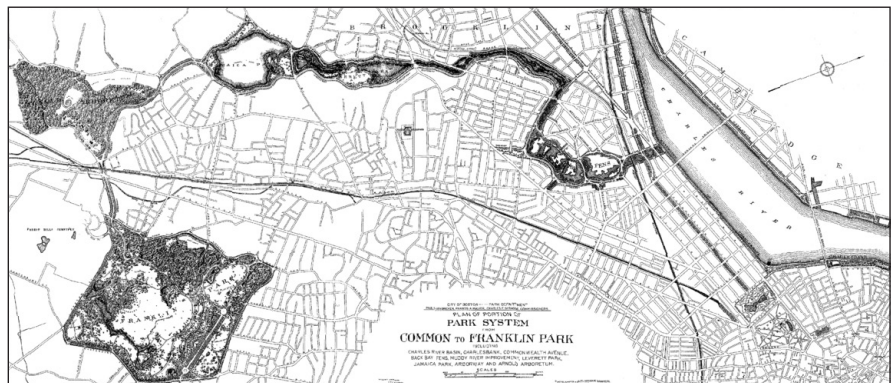


Figure 7. Emerald Necklace (1887).

(1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

Though their works were never directly referenced, nevertheless they worked in the same directions of how humans could co-exist harmoniously with the environment.

In term of environmental ethics, Thompson (1998) states that most pre-1960s landscapes, including the works of Olmsted, were concerned more with the visual quality than the intrinsic values of the environment. Human beings were more important and the environment had value only in terms of its human worth. And when aesthetic values in landscape design were discussed, they were mainly mentioned in humanistic terms. Therefore, Thompson (1998) concludes that the attitudes toward the environment of landscape architecture in this period, such as Olmsted's work, can be positioned as homo-centric.

Ian McHarg (1920-2001)

The second key landscape architect was Ian McHarg (Figure 8). Prior to McHarg's time, most landscape architects of his time focused primarily on garden and park design. The year of 1962 was noted as an important time for environmentalism, McHarg, and landscape architecture (Spirn, 1998) as Rachel Carson published the *Silent Spring* and McHarg also firstly taught a studio course with an ecologist. During 1960s, McHarg taught a seminal course, "Man and Environment," where he invited diverse thinkers for class participation. The stimulating discourses from the class were eventually culminated into his renowned publication, *Design with Nature* (1969) (Spirn, 1998). Within the book, McHarg proposed overlay map method (as shown in figure 9), which integrated scientific data from sociology, geology, geomorphology, hydrology, soils, vegetation, wildlife, and biology. The process spatially referenced the inventoried data and weighted its relative importance to design decision-making as part of the analysis. The overlay map method is the key to McHarg's ecological model and a precursor of computerized Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Through numerous projects, McHarg illustrated how the process could identify environmental impacts of proposed projects and to determine the suitability of various land uses. McHarg have profoundly influenced

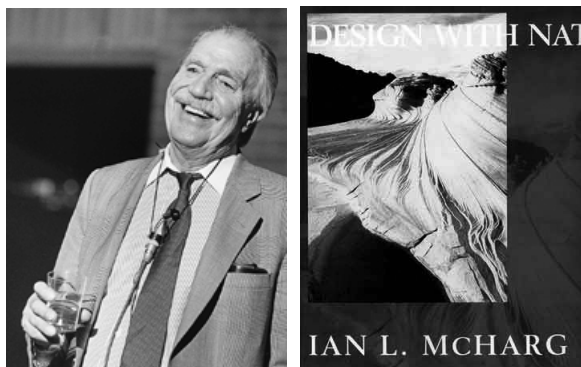


Figure 8. Ian McHarg (1920-2001).

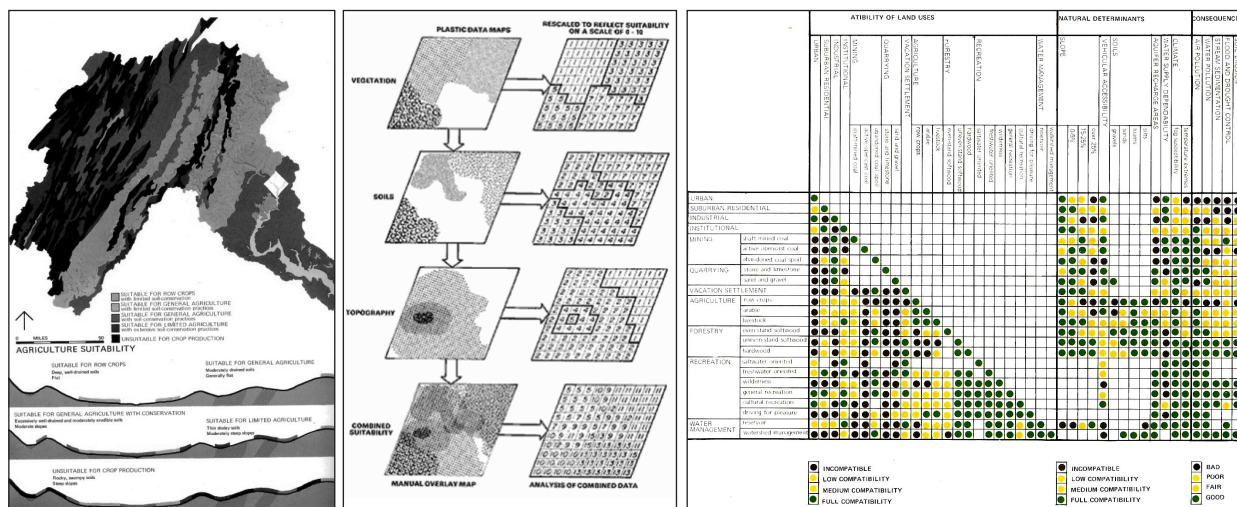


Figure 9. Potomac River's environmental analysis map, published in design with nature.

upon generations of practitioners and widely applied in landscape education today. .

McHarg's work ran in parallel with modern environmentalism, spanning from the 1960s to 1980s. Thompson (1998) positions McHarg's works in dual value systems: homocentric and eco-centric. Most of McHarg works are pointedly eco-centric as he argues that "plants and living species are the supreme creators of value since they are primary creators of ecosystem and other life forms, including human, would have less value" (Thompson, 2000, p. 185). This thinking is in the realm of eco-centricism. However, the importance and uniqueness of humans are not utterly ignored. McHarg also mentioned that humans have played an important and unique role in the creation of the built environment. In addition, Thompson (1998) also notes that McHarg afforded sociological factors the same relevance as biological and physical factors in his layer map method, and in this respect could be accounted homocentric as well.

Although environmental principles were already embedded in the discipline of landscape

architecture, the thoughts and issues generated by environmentalism have run in parallel, overlapped, and intersected with landscape principles and practices. While this paper is only a preliminary examination of the two great figures in landscape architecture, the review could extend much further. Inserting the domain knowledge of environmentalism and environmental ethics could not only enrich the environmental principles to the discipline, but landscape architectural design and planning could also, in return, strengthen the connectivity of environmental networks, and enhance biodiversity. Thus, future landscape architectural design and planning could enable humans and the environment to coexist with each other.

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