

NEWS AND VIEWS

New Editor for Ecological Economics

After 12 years as founding editor of *Ecological Economics*, I'm stepping down. I'll be moving to the University of Vermont to take up a new endowed chair in Ecological Economics and direct the new Gund Institute for Ecological Economics. The editorship will pass into the capable hands of Cutler Cleveland from Boston University, beginning in September, 2002. Dr. Cleveland has been an active leader in *Ecological Economics* since its inception and will bring a true transdisciplinary balance of natural and social science to the job. Dr. Cleveland will engage a new managing editor at BU to take over from Janis King, and we are all looking forward to a smooth transition.

These 12 years have brought enormous growth and changes in the burgeoning transdiscipline of *Ecological Economics*. This time of transition of editorship is a good one to reflect on what has worked, what has not, and what remains to be done.

1. What Has Worked

Costanza and King (1999) surveyed the first decade of *Ecological Economics*, including quantitative data on the numbers and types of papers published. They concluded that, in general:

“the journal has indeed achieved most of its goals. It has survived for 10 years (no small accomplishment in today's environment) and provided a unique forum for the publication and discussion of important transdisciplinary ideas that did not have a ready home before the journal came into existence”.

Ecological Economics has indeed survived and thrived over the past 12 years, indicating that we are doing at least *some* things right. This success has been due, I believe, to four main factors:

- 1) We have maintained an openness and commitment to pluralism in the content of articles published in the journal. *Ecological Economics* is a *transdiscipline*. It is also a *metaparadigm*. Rather than espousing and defending a single discipline or paradigm, it seeks to allow a broad, pluralistic range of viewpoints and models to be represented, compared, and hopefully synthesized into a richer understanding of the inherently complex systems it deals with. This aspect of the endeavor has not, however, been fully appreciated by everyone. There have been continuing calls to make *Ecological Economics* into a single paradigm or a new discipline in the mold of the older, more established disciplines. But this would ultimately be self-defeating, since a primary reason for founding *Ecological Economics* in the first place was to avoid the traps that the established disciplines had fallen into. We have therefore resisted these calls and have steadfastly held to the original vision of *Ecological Economics* as a radically new approach to the whole idea of single disciplines and paradigms (Costanza et al. 1997).
- 2) The editorial office of *Ecological Economics* has been run very efficiently, due mainly to the diligence and competence of our managing editor, Janis King. This has allowed relatively short turn-around times and relatively quick decisions – characteristics which are very important to potential authors.

- 3) The ‘weak link’ in the review process is usually the time it takes to get high quality external reviews on articles. We successfully addressed this problem by negotiating an annual “contract” with our potential reviewers. Each year we send all potential reviewers a letter asking them how many articles they would agree to review in the coming year and in what topic areas. We promise, for our part, not to send them any more than the pre-committed number of articles. This system has worked exceptionally well, producing a much higher than average reviewer response rate and generally high quality reviews.
- 4) Finally, and most importantly, the quality of our reviewers has been outstanding. They have upheld our commitment to transdisciplinary pluralism while at the same time insuring that the papers we publish are of the highest quality. Their reviews are consistently constructive and help to make all the papers that are published much better than they would have been without the review process. We appreciate that the task of reviewing for this Journal is more difficult than for other journals because of our goal of reaching across disciplines. We are very grateful to the ever-growing list of professionals, both ISEE members and non-members alike, who contribute their time to read and review manuscripts.

2. What Has Not Worked

Aside from the occasional annoying production and distribution delays, the major thing that has not worked has been our inability to reach a broader, non-academic audience. This may be too much to ask from a basically academic journal. In fact, we at one point decided that it *was* too much to ask from a single journal and created the *Ecological Economics Bulletin* to provide a more accessible, policy and commentary oriented companion journal, similar to what the Society for Conservation Biology has since done with *Conservation Biology in Practice*. The *Ecological Economics Bulletin* was well on its way to fulfilling its goals by the beginning of 1998

when new leadership at ISEE decided to abandon the project. This unfortunate decision is at least partly responsible for the fact that ecological economics ideas are still largely confined to the academic sphere and have yet to have the influence on policy and public debate that they should. Hopefully this will soon change.

3. What Remains to be Done

Reaching beyond the academic community, while at the same time continuing to provide the highest quality venue for the publication of transdisciplinary ideas at the interface between the natural and social sciences in the metaparadigm of *Ecological Economics*, is a priority goal for the future. Whether this can be done within the pages of the current journal or will require a separate initiative is a problem best left for the new leadership of the journal and ISEE. Cutler Cleveland picks up this and several other topics concerning the history and future of the journal in his following editorial in this volume.

References

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