

Social Ecology as an Approach

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Received 05 January 2026, Accepted 04 March 2026

DOI: 10.59957/see.v11.i1.2026.11

ABSTRACT

Social ecology is a philosophical and social movement that analyzes environmental problems as a result of social, political and economic structures. The theory was developed primarily by Murray Bookchin, who argued that ecological crisis stems from systems of hierarchy and dominance in society [1]. According to him, the destruction of nature is closely related to the exploitation and inequality between people [2]. The article examines the emergence and basic ideas of social ecology, with an emphasis on the works of Murray Bookchin. The socio-economic causes of the ecological crisis are analyzed, including the capitalist model of production, overconsumption and ecological injustice. The need to rethink the place of man as part of nature, rather than as its master, is emphasized.

Keywords: social ecology, ecological crisis, society, environmental problems, alternative approach.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmental problems have acquired global dimensions. In his work *Ecology of Freedom*, Murray Bookchin emphasizes that the roots of the ecological crisis lie in historically formed social hierarchies [1]. In Post-Scarcity Anarchism, he develops the thesis that technological progress in itself is not a problem, but the way in which society organizes the production and distribution of resources [2]. This position lays the foundation for social ecology as a critique of existing economic and political systems. The modern world is faced

with a multitude of environmental problems - climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity and depletion of natural resources. Traditional ecological approaches often view these problems primarily as the result of improper interactions between humans and nature. However, social ecology offers a broader perspective, emphasizing the social, economic and political causes of the ecological crisis.

THE ESSENCE OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Social ecology is an interdisciplinary field that studies the relationship between society and the natural environment. Its main idea is that

environmental problems cannot be understood and solved without an analysis of social structures - power relations, economic systems, inequalities and cultural patterns. According to this approach, the way people relate to each other in society directly affects the way they relate to nature.

HISTORY OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Social ecology emerged in the second half of the 20th century as a reaction to the deepening ecological crisis and the limitation of traditional ecological approaches. It considers environmental problems as a result of social and economic relations, and not only of the interaction between man and nature.

Its ideas have their roots in the works of thinkers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Peter Kropotkin, who analyzed the relationship between society, economy and nature. As an independent theoretical direction, social ecology took shape in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly through the work of Murray Bookchin. He developed the thesis that domination over nature stems from social hierarchies and inequalities. In the following decades, social ecology developed dialogue with other critical theories such as ecofeminism and political ecology and found applications in sustainable development, ecological urban planning and local government. Today, it remains a relevant approach to understanding and overcoming the environmental crisis through social justice and democratic participation.

SOCIAL ROOTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Social ecology emphasizes that hierarchies, exploitation and social inequality are at the root of environmental destruction. Profit-oriented industrial production often ignores long-term environmental consequences. The capitalist model of development encourages overconsumption and continuous economic

growth, which leads to the overexploitation of natural resources.

Furthermore, social injustice leads to an uneven distribution of environmental risks. The most vulnerable social groups often live in more polluted areas and have less access to clean water, healthy food and green spaces.

HUMAN AND NATURE - INTERDEPENDENCE

In contrast to anthropocentric views, social ecology views humans as part of nature, not as its masters. It rejects the idea of dominating the natural world and insists on harmonious coexistence. Natural ecosystems are perceived as complex, interconnected systems that require respect and responsible management.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

According to Bookchin, the development of the state and class society leads to the institutionalization of domination [1]. In his work *Remaking Society*, he proposes a vision of a society based on ecological sustainability and democratic self-government [3].

A biographical study of his life and ideas is presented by Janet Beale in the book *Ecology or Catastrophe* [4], which analyzes the development of the concept of social ecology and its influence on contemporary movements.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Social ecology, developed by Murray Bookchin, is based on several key principles:

- Interdependence between society and nature (1982) - ecological problems cannot be considered separately from social structures. According to Bookchin, the ecological crisis arises from hierarchical and dominant social relations.

- Critique of the Capitalist Model of Infinite Growth (1971) - capitalism, based on continuous economic expansion and accumulation, is in

conflict with the ecological limits of the planet.

□ Decentralization and Libertarian Municipalism (1990) - Bookchin proposes the construction of democratic, self-governing communities, organized through direct democracy and confederations of local councils.

□ Ethic of Cooperation and Social Justice (1982) - a sustainable society requires the elimination of social inequalities and the creation of a culture of mutual assistance and solidarity.

Additional materials and research on the topic are published by the Institute of Social Ecology, which continues to develop and popularize the ideas of social ecology.

SWOT ANALYSIS - IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY IN BULGARIA

STRENGTH (S)	WEAKNESSES (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Holistic approach linking social and ecological issues □ Focus on social justice and democracy □ Critique of hierarchical power structures □ Support for local self-governance and community solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Difficult practical implementation □ Often perceived as radical or utopian □ Limited influence on large-scale public policy □ Lacks detailed economic mechanisms
OPPORTUNITIES (O)	THREATS (T)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Growing environmental crisis increases relevance □ Expansion of civil society participation □ Transition toward a green economy □ Global climate justice movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Corporate resistance to decentralization □ Political instability □ Greenwashing practices □ Economic crises shifting priorities

SOLUTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

Social ecology is not limited to criticism, but also proposes concrete solutions. These include decentralization of power, local community development, direct democracy and sustainable economic practices. Local production, the use of renewable energy sources and ecological agriculture are examples of alternatives that reduce pressure on the environment.

Education also plays a key role. By raising environmental and social awareness, people can develop a more responsible attitude towards nature and society.

Social ecology examines the relationship between society and the natural environment - how social structures, the economy and culture affect the environment and vice versa. Here are some concrete examples:

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN SOCIAL ECOLOGY

1. Urban greening and communities

In cities like Copenhagen, public gardens and green roofs are being created.

Social aspect: people come together, create communities.

Ecological aspect: air quality is improved and urban heat is reduced.

2. Sustainable transport

The development of bike lanes and public transport in Amsterdam.

Social aspect: affordable and healthy mobility

Environmental aspect: reducing carbon emissions

3. Organic farming and local markets

Local farmers' markets promote pesticide-free production.

Social aspect: supporting small producers.

Environmental aspect: protecting soils and biodiversity

4. Eco-villages

Communities that live sustainably (solar energy, shared resources), for example in Germany.

Social aspect: equality and collective decisions.

Environmental aspect: low carbon footprint

5. Citizen movements for the protection of nature

Protests against pollution of rivers or forests.

Example: initiatives to protect Pirin.

Social aspect: civic activism and democracy

Environmental aspect: protecting natural resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Social ecology offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the ecological crisis as a social problem. As Bookchin emphasizes, a sustainable future requires not only technological solution, but also a rethinking of social relations and power structures [3].

In this way, social ecology is established as an important theoretical and practical alternative in the search for more just and ecological society.

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