

## Feedback by Prof Peter Söderbaum to my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> PhD progress reports

### My PhD: Why does mainstream economics ignore ecology?

Official PhD topic: The place of ecology in undergraduate economics education; the case in three European countries (La place de l'écologie dans l'enseignement de premier cycle en Science Economique: le cas de trois pays européens) - Ecole Doctorale, Università di Corsica

My 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> PhD progress reports can be downloaded here (see comments):

<https://www.tuncalik.com/2019/08/why-does-mainstream-economics-ignore-ecology-my-3-phd-progress-report-august-2019/>

### Who is Peter Söderbaum?

Peter Soderbaum is Professor of Ecological Economics at Mälardalen University, Sweden and author of a number of books including Ecological Economics (2000). His numerous articles have been published in journals such as Ecological Economics, Journal of Bioeconomics, Post-autistic Economics Review, Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics, Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management and International Journal of Green Economics. (ref: [google books](#))

Prof Söderbaum is one of the co-authors of the book Economics and the Ecosystem (2019) edited by E. Fullbrook and J. Morgan. His article in this book: [Toward sustainable development: from neoclassical monopoly to democracy](#) (in [www.paecon.net](http://www.paecon.net))

A paragraph from my 4<sup>th</sup> progress report:

Peter Söderbaum is one of the many unorthodox economists, who think, there is not much difference between neoclassical and neoliberal economics: "The neoclassical paradigm is specific not only in scientific terms but also in ideological terms. The ideology of neoclassical theory and method is close to market fundamentalism. In terms of ideological orientation, the neoclassical theory and conceptual framework has contributed to legitimize neoliberalism."

Homepage of Peter Söderbaum with his latest articles in English and Swedish:

<https://www.mdh.se/staff?id=psm01>

### Söderbaum's feedback to my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> PhD progress reports (as emails)

#### Email on 13.3.2020

I have now read your PhD-report with exception for the many links. I may take a look at them later on.

It was a pleasure to read. There is a lot to discuss of course.

I think that the research questions that you suggest with case studies of specific universities in specific countries are well chosen. Here are some initial comments:

1. At some place you are pointing to the so called Nobel Prize in Economics and referring to it as a Swiss prize. But it is (as you probably know) the Bank of Sweden Prize in

Economics in Memory of Alfred Nobel. This Prize was initiated when the Bank of Sweden celebrated its 300 year birthday and financed by the Bank of Sweden.

2. At page 12 or something there is a list by Fullbrook where Point 4 argues that economics should be "knowledge driven, not ideology driven". As I see it neoclassical economics as well as the kind of alternatives that you and I believe in are both knowledge and also ideology driven. "Values are always with us".
3. At some place you are observing that I am including neoclassical theory and method in my plea for pluralism. Pluralism must include perspectives that I like as well as the perspectives that I do not believe in. I think that the neoclassical perspective is dangerous to society but you and I need this perspective as a reference when comparing with some other perspective. It is also true that many actors in society refer to neoclassical theory after many years of indoctrination (even globally in countries such as China).
4. You are advocating interdisciplinarity, pointing to anthropology and the like. I was thinking of management science (or business studies departments). In business economics there are not many obstacles for bringing in knowledge from social psychology or other disciplines and there is not a monopoly for one paradigm. I wonder if it is meaningful to compare with departments of management science (which are expanding while economics is losing students). Students in business management are not afraid of pointing to competing perspectives for example: Mats Forsgren, 2017. *Theories of the Multinational Firm. A Multidimensional Creature in the Global Economy* (third edition). Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, and William A. Jackson, 2019. *Markets. Perspectives from economic and social theory*. Routledge, London.

#### **Email on 1.6.2020**

Thank you for progress report and ideas about books to read.

I have just printed your progress report and hope to read it within 14 days or so.

As I have probably argued already I think that you have an excellent background for writing a PhD-thesis and you have already more or less completed a literature study.

I will read first before commenting but I think that you should at some stage acknowledge that ecology is not completely neglected in mainstream economics. Neoclassical environmental economics has existed for some time as an extension of the mainstream. But I completely agree that this is not enough.

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I realize that you experience some difficulties in your attempts to interview Swiss professors of economics.

I therefore want to point out that there is a Swiss tradition beginning with K. William Kapp and his book "The Social Costs of Private Enterprise", Schocken Books, New York. 1950 (reprinted 1971). As I see it Kapp was the first economist all categories to deal with environmental (and ecological issues) seriously. He also wrote articles in *Kyklos* Vol. 29, No 2, 1976 and *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft und Statistik*, Jahrgang 108 (December 1972) Heft 3. In German there is also a book by Kapp "Für Eine ökosociale Ökonomie. Entwürfe und Ideen - Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag,

Frankfurt 1987. (Herausgegeben von Christian Leipert und Rolf Steppacher and translated from English).

I was lucky to meet Kapp one time and received reprints from him.

#### **Email on 3.6.2020**

Just a short additional comment concerning Kapp. There is a Kapp Foundation that you can check.

Sebastian Berger and Rolf Steppacher are two enthusiasts in relation to William Kapp. They have edited a book "The Foundations of Institutional Economics" where peaces of Kapp's work are brought together, Routledge, London, 2011.

#### **Email on 7.6.2020**

I have read your progress report of February 27, 2020 and I am impressed. Few others have brought together so much of what is relevant for a reconsideration of economics education in universities. Actually, I sometimes feel that you are dealing with two projects, one where you present your own answers based on a literature study and another where you interview and listen to ideas and proposals from active university professors in a PhD-study. (For this PhD-study you certainly also need a part of the background from the present progress report.)

It is not so easy to see the structure of your progress report. I can see some subtitles but I would like to see a list of contents. When there is such a list of contents, it will be easier, I guess, to see elements of a normal structure of a PhD with background, problems to be discussed or research questions, purpose, method, results, conclusions. (There are many ways of finding a relevant structure.)

It is probably a good idea to take a look at some existing PhD-studies where university professors have been asked about economics education in relation to sustainable development. For the moment I have only one such proposal:  
Carina Borgström Hansson, 2003. Misplaced Concreteness and Concrete Places: Critical Analysis of Divergent Discourses on Sustainability, Lund Studies in Human Ecology 7, Lund University.

This is a PhD-study in Human Ecology and it may be easier to study economics education from a position in some other University department like "Human Ecology". (I sometimes wonder if the only way to change things is to add something outside an economics department but that is hopefully a too pessimistic view.)

As you may know there is a journal International J. of Pluralism and Economics Education. It is edited by Jack Reardon, a name mentioned in your report. In this journal there may be relevant articles for your PhD-study. There are also edited books on pluralist approaches in teaching economics:

Decker, Samuel, Wolfram Elsner and Svenja Flechtner, editors, 2020. Principles and Pluralist Approaches in Teaching Economics. Towards a Transformative Science (Routledge Advances in Heterodox Economics). Routledge, London.

In this book I have written a chapter "Ecological economics in research and teaching. A matter of theoretical and ideological perspective". In that chapter there is a subtitle "Ten years of ecological economics at Mälardalen University: some experiences"

In the early 1990s we had some positive experiences of encouraging students to choose between neoclassical and ecological (institutional) economics at Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala. From 1995 to 2005 I led a Bachelor and Master program in Ecological Economics at Mälardalen. It should be added that not so much is left from these positive experiences.

I think that you in your PhD-study should point to some environmental problems, climate change, biological diversity, pollution of soil and water and then ask the professors how these problems are presently dealt with in the department and if the professors have any proposals for a change. You can then bring in your own proposals for change but it is important that you start by listening to them and to their ideas of what may be needed. This is a long letter but your study or your two Projects are important!

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Just one more point that may be of some value for you.

In Switzerland there is a professor who has been and probably is part of the European Society for Ecological Economics. His name is Beat Bürgenmeier. He is an economist and is connected with the University of Geneva and its Centre of Human Ecology and Environmental Science.

He is probably retired but may still be connected in some way with the University. It may be a good idea to consult him when it comes to professors and universities in Switzerland to interact with.