

Die Wildnisidee: Was sollen wir damit anfangen im Schutzgebietsmanagement?

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For most people today “wilderness” refers to the last wild places that man does not control. There is great interest in wilderness conservation today, a recent trend in our society. I will show how this interest has come about.

In my presentation I will show that wilderness is not a natural entity out there that one can go to and describe it by ecological or landscape variables alone. Wilderness is an idea, a symbolic concept that is shaped by the prevailing society or ‘culture’. I will also show that wilderness has changed its connotations over time. Finally I will present some operational definitions for wilderness conservation.

Origin

For most of their time there was no wilderness for our ancestors. They lived as hunter – gatherers; there was only one kind of environment around them, in which they felt at home, they felt part of it. In the mind of early woman or man the idea of wilderness did not exist.

Change came about roughly 10.000 years ago with the **Neolithic Revolution**: people began to transform some of their natural surroundings into fields and pastures for domesticated plants and animals. They created islands of civilization in a vast natural environment. Those islands were precious. In hard times nature would reclaim the works of man, would reclaim civilization. For the first time people experienced themselves as distinct from the rest of nature.

Now, with the fence around the fields the area outside became wilderness – a target for human projections: wilderness became unordered, dark and threatening. Some wild animals were now seen as wicked and bloodthirsty. Wilderness was not only physically threatening; it was a sinister symbol of the uncontrolled wild in us.

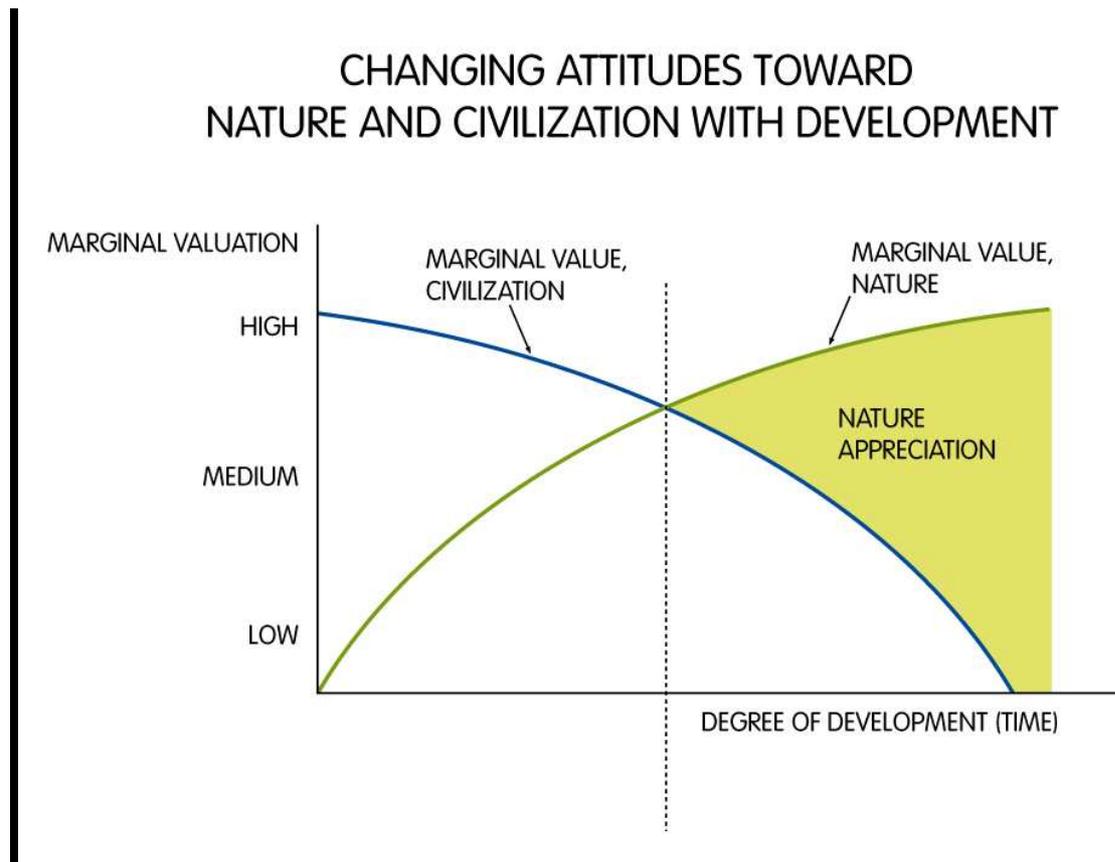
Wilderness was there to be tamed, to be conquered. No wonder a negative connotation prevailed up through the Middle Ages and into the nineteenth century.

Wilderness appreciation

By then much of natural landscape was transformed into civilization. Wilderness was not threatening any more, wilderness itself became threatened. Now emotions and projections began to change. It changed first in the United States, where a sweeping

colonisation had changed much of the land in so short a time. By 1924 the first Wilderness Area was protected (Gila Wilderness, New Mexico) and by 1964 the first Wilderness Law was signed by an American president: The US Wilderness Act.

Now wilderness became a place for inspiration - it was **awesome**. Wilderness recreation became a favourite pastime. Wilderness scholar Roderick Nash thinks that today's appreciation of wilderness represents one of the most remarkable intellectual revolutions in the history of human thought about land. Using valuation theory he illustrates this transformation (see graph).



From Roderick Nash: Wilderness and the American Mind 1982; slightly modified.

The essence of wilderness

As we have seen wilderness is not a natural entity out there that one can go to and describe it by ecological or landscape variables alone. Wilderness is a cultural construct that originated in the Western World; it is a projection of the human mind and it has changed over time. Wilderness is what people think it is. Civilization has created wilderness.

Wilderness has at least two dimensions: a cultural and a biological one. Today some people confuse natural landscape and wilderness. They are not aware of the cultural dimension – the essence of wilderness.

Nature conservation

Wilderness is a distinct category in the Framework for Protected Areas (1992) developed by the World Commission on Protected Areas, Category Ib (IUCN): *A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.*

For practical purposes of landscape planning and nature conservation wilderness has to be brought 'on the ground'. For that purpose it is here operationally defined.

Kinds of Wilderness Areas:

- **Pristine areas**
An area of unmodified or slightly modified land/or sea, retaining its natural character, without permanent human habitation, which is protected and managed to preserve its natural condition.
- **Natural areas**
An area of land/or sea, showing natural character and processes without significant extractive land use, which is protected and managed to preserve its natural condition.
- **Areas for wilderness restoration**
An area of land/or sea, set aside and managed for the restoration of natural processes.

Size

Minimum size is 1000ha (10 km²).

Prohibited activities:

- road building
- logging
- new reservoirs and power lines
- mechanical vehicles

Allowed activities:

- recreational activities such as hiking and camping
- trails and primitive campsites
- rescue activities
- livestock grazing and related facilities, where previously established
- control of fire

Comments:

Pristine Areas untouched by man are few in Europe, such as pristine forests, floodplains or river deltas. They deserve special attention.

Natural Areas with forms of slight landuse have a much larger potential in Europe. Some livestock grazing e.g. has not changed the natural character of the landscape. The Hammastunturi Wilderness in Finland is still an extensive boreal forest with bogs and many lakes in spite of reindeer grazing. Finnish Wilderness Law specifically protects Sami culture. For many people such traditional – non industrial – forms of landuse are compatible with a wilderness feeling in remote areas. Here is opportunity for some forms of subsistence economies.

Areas for Wilderness Restoration has potential where former landuse has modified the face of the countryside and conditions are changing: in former military areas or in depopulated regions. There are even some former commercial forests close to population centers that are under a new regime of wilderness management.

Size is important for the conservation of a full range of species, especially large predators – the so called wilderness species. Required habitat for predator conservation is in the order of magnitude several times higher than the minimum size of 1000ha. Large size is also important for wilderness experience. Smaller areas however have a function in a habitat network. In general the rule for wilderness conservation is: the larger the better.

