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*THE MIDAS TOUCH. THEORETICAL  
ESSAYS IN ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY,  
PRO UNIVERSITARIA, BUCUREȘTI, 2016.  
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*The Midas Touch. Theoretical  
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Filip M. Alexandrescu

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In 'The Midas Touch' Filip Alexandrescu argues in the favor of a social constructivist perspective of what society considers to be natural problems. The author presents theoretical evidence for analyzing the root cause of problems within the natural environment, aiming to reduce the gap between the natural and social sciences, concerning the causes and effects of changes in the natural environment upon the one constructed by individuals. Mostly due to detailed incursions in the literature referenced, this book is not an introduction to the sociology of environment, nor a book addressed to those interested to learn about environmental sociology. This is a book addressed to those who have a background in social or natural sciences and are interested in learning about the connection between these two sciences. It is mostly a book which aims to include the environment more frequently in sociological analysis, using theoretical references for reasoning. It provides arguments for bridging the barriers between social and natural science, by encouraging social scientists to include the environment among the objects of study.

Filip Alexandrescu presents through sociological lenses several scientific fields focused on studying the interaction between the social and natural sciences, such as the human ecology, emerged in the '1920s, and the environmentalism, as developed in the US in the '1970s.

The book contains seven chapters presenting six essays which, despite being self-standing, are also interconnected. Their sequence is logical and each one represents a deeper understanding of the environment through social theory.

Chapter one presents the translation of the natural processes of ecology to social life by explaining the vision of the main representatives of the Chicago School on human ecology, which appears to be one of the first approaches in sociology` to focus on this relation` (p. 11). The entire chapter draws the connections between the plant and animal ecology and human ecology, between the natural and social sciences, presenting mostly the contribution of Robert E. Park; the connection between the two parts is especially clarified in the 1.4.1. section which addresses

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Darwinism and social thought, as Darwinism (in particular, the 'struggle for existence') and plant and animal ecology are 'explicitly acknowledged (?) sources of inspiration for human ecology' (p. 18). The author concludes that even though human ecology sets correspondents between the natural and social sciences, the field doesn't make exponential progress in including 'the natural environment' as a variable in sociological analysis (p. 27).

Chapter two presents several models which tries to include the environment into the social studies. One such model is POET, an acronym standing for its major 'clusters of variables: Population, Organization, Environment and Technology' (p. 28), developed in the second part of the XX<sup>th</sup> century by Otis Duncan. In his model, the four elements are interrelated, and all act and react on one another. Based on the POET model, in the '1970s, Riley Dunlap and William Catton propose a model for the sociology of the environment referred to as the 'ecological complex'. The latter model is rather focusing on the exchanges between the social and natural systems. Other models developed from the POET model, such as: PISTOL (elaborated by Kenneth Bailey in 1990) and Michael Micklin and David Sly (unnamed) model, elaborated in 1998. Further on, the author presents the environmental sociology from a political economy approach, discussing how production and consumption are related to the environment. Though briefly addressed, this chapter presents an application of the PISTOL model on the Maya population, bringing a concrete case study to support the theoretical framework.

By referring to the 'sociological imagination' coined by C. Wright Mills (1959), the author presents in chapter three the theory of Kenneth Boulding (1950, 1958); the theory 'tends to blur the distinction between the social and the non-social' (p. 47), by considering the social system to be integrated into the ecosystem. Referring to the work of Gadgil and Guha, another case study is introduced, analyzing the Indian modernization. The class struggle is defined in terms of access to resources and their meaning, discriminating between ecosystem people, biosphere people (or omnivores) and the ecological refugees. The model proposed by the cited authors in the book 'Ecology and Equity' (1995) highlights the intersection between the social and ecological relationships, and unveil a potential constructivist approach of the environment meaning for different social classes (with different cultural backgrounds).

Chapter four is the most complex essay of the book, and it presents an ideal type of interactions between society and the environment. The essay presented in chapter four is also the longest of the book. It addresses the stabilization of the social species and the eco-social groups as concepts in environmental sociology. Framing through the 'Weberian concept of ideal types' (1949) (pp. 56-57), Alexandrescu is reconstructing the concept of *social species* by using the multi-species theory of Edward G. Stephan (1970). By proposing three dimensions through which the concept can be empirically studied, the author blends the natural and social perspectives; the following dimensions are presented below: (a) ecological view, (b) social structural view and (c) social constructionist view.

The term 'eco-social groups' contains a sum of relations and interactions between the humans and the environment. It is rather derived from the concept of social species which was coined by sociologist Edward Stephan (1970), who borrowed the concept of species from ecologists, while the additional term, *social*, makes a clear reference to the human population. It refers to the fact that humans are part of an ecosystem and it includes the exchanges between the two. However, based on occupations and the activities performed by individuals in society, they interact in various manners with the environment. These units which are bounded to a place and communalities in scope represent the eco-social groups. Because the society and the environment interact in multiple manners, a multi-species model applies.

The eco-social group is defined as 'any human group that can be identified- from an *ecological* perspective- as part of an ecosystem and, from a *societal* perspective, as part of a social structure and an universe of socially constructed meanings' (p. 57). The first dimension of the eco social groups refers to unmediated relation between the group and the environment, basically answering the questions of: how does the group uses the environment, and how are the two influenced by one another. To answer these questions one must look at the social structure in which the groups participate. But not all groups interact in the same manner, and not all groups held the same level of power in deciding how to use the resources in the environment. The second dimension includes a social structural point of view. Referring to the treadmills of production and consumption elaborated by Allan Schnaiberg and Kenneth Gould (1994) and Michael Bell (1998), considering social order (including culture, politics and economy), the groups share disproportionately the goods and the risks.

The third dimension, from a social constructivist perspective, views the eco-social groups as having access to different systems of meanings, when referring to their relation with the environment. The concluding remarks contain the endeavor to show the connections between the three dimensions, and alludes to the next essay by underlying the differences between two social species, namely the environmentalists and growthists (concepts proposed by Morrisson in 1973) or catastrophists and cornucopians (developed by Cottgrove in 1982).

The fifth essay of the collection presents, through the social constructivist lenses, the development of the environmental movement. This chapter represents an example of the framework mentioned in the previous essay, focusing predominately on the third dimension of the model. It described the environmental groups as an eco-social group, a unit which presents an ideological perspective arguing for a deeper relationship between the individual and nature. Besides focusing on the social construction of environmental problems, the author brings into focus elements of the structural perspective, in order to describe the environmentalists. The author concludes that 'this movement can be associated with a specific value orientation' and that 'some of the movement organizations rely on the intellectual resources of «professionals»' (p. 98).

The chapter before the concluding remarks, namely the six essays of the book, focuses on the evolution of the environmental sociology. It presents mostly the developments in the USA, where it was more predominant, but also referring to the European sociology's focus on environment. The author presents the main approaches in environmental sociology, describes three clusters of factors which influences the developments within the subfield and its perception in society, references studies describing the environmentalists and their (non-)political stance, all from a sociology of knowledge perspective.

The aim of the book, as stated by the author, is to highlight that the sociology has been concerned with the environment for decades; the sociologists formulated questions to make sense of how do the natural world's principles apply in society. Also, the sociologists want to understand the consequences of increased transactions with nature, brought about by modernization and industrialization. Thus, the environment was referenced for better understanding society, from both comparative (between the natural world and society) and integrative approaches (how environment affects society and vice-versa).

The author aims to pinpoint the connections between individuals and nature, and why this relation is studied and should continue to be studied by the social scientists and by sociologists in particular. By comparing different perspectives and borrowing terms from natural science in order to describe the social realities, the author focusses on reducing the gap between society, on one hand, and the society's perspective of nature, on the other.

At the end, Alexandrescu explains the title of the book, basically concluding that, giving all the meaning and understanding of different mediums by society, occurrences and processes shouldn't be neglected by sociologists, as long as the knowledge is produced within society itself. I recommend the book to the sociologists interested in order to enrich their knowledge in the reference with how the social sciences have sought to theorize the environment, across the XX<sup>th</sup> century.