

Professor Atabay's Contributions to Sustainable Land Management and Ecological Planning

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It is a real pleasure for me to write something on the contributions of Professor Semra Atabay to the field of Ecological Planning in Turkey in connection with the publication of the first issue of the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Sustainability*. I have known her since the late 1960s, when she was one of the youngest staff members of Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul, and later as an extremely active scholar organizing national and international meetings on issues such as Eco-Technology, Eco-Economy, Eco-Architecture, Global Climate Change, Ecological Landscape Planning, Ecological Tourism, and Bio-Diversity. I firmly believe that she is one of those rare scholars who have devoted their years in the university to train students and future public servants. These students have become sensitive, thanks to her instruction, to the rational implementation of urban, cultural, natural, and environmental values. She has also managed to bring together, over many years, scholars, experts, and practitioners from all over the world to discuss these matters and to exchange views. Almost all of her publications, both in Turkish and in other languages, have focused on the topics mentioned above, with the aim to increase the level of awareness and consciousness with regard to sustainable development (Atabay, 2002, 2003, 2014; Atabay, Karasu, & Koca, 2014; Atabay & Özbakır, 2011).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) defined the concept of sustainable development as that which can meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Much effort has been made at both international and national levels since the adoption of the

report by the UN General Assembly in the early 1980s in order to make the principle of sustainable development both applicable and respected. The concept has been widely used in such international legal instruments as in the Rio, İstanbul and Quito (1992, 1996, 2016) Declarations, and in a series of conventions adopted during the Rio Summit on Environment and Development.

It is a well-known fact that technological progress and urbanization have drawn the attention of mankind during the second half of the 20th century to the risks created by the degradation of ecological assets. Although concern for the environment has been subject to action and cooperation at national and international levels since the early 1960s, in many countries it can be seen that at present special institutional and legal measures are being taken, international organizations are being set up, and even an International Environmental Law is emerging.

An Environmental Science is also emerging which aims to remove the negative effects of 20th century technology upon both the natural and man-made environments in the same way that the discipline of Social Policy was born as a result of the reaction to the economic and social problems created by the Industrial Revolution in 19th century Europe. The difference between the concept of Environmental Science and Ecology, which is much older, is that the latter usually deals with the study and analysis of “what it is”, while the subject matter of the former is to look for solutions and existing environmental policies.

Traditional rights and freedoms served the purpose, as conceived today, only after they were complemented by the economic and social rights born out of the post-war developments. The social consequences of the Industrial Revolution, and the need to cope with them, influenced these developments greatly. Therefore, it is observed that the development of the doctrine of social, economic and human rights took place simultaneously with the development of the concept of social welfare state.

During the 19th century, reactions to the concept of unlimited individual freedom have contributed to strengthen an understanding that it would be wrong to deal with a human being as an abstract personality separated from the environment and society in which he lives. In other words, this movement extended the concept of individual human rights of the past centuries into one that acquired a social content.

One of the most important changes brought about in the present century with regard to traditional fundamental freedoms is the fact that the right of ownership guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.17) cannot be used in violation of the public interest. A similar provision in the Turkish Constitution (Art.35) stresses that the ownership right cannot be used in contravention to the principle of public interest.

Restricting the use of the right of ownership in land, which is a key factor in the shaping of the human environment, in the protection of nature and natural beauty, and in the accomplishment of local planning functions, is one of the important guarantees for the protection of ecological values. Thus, the right of ownership, which seems to be an individual right, acquires a social content more appropriate to the needs and development level of the present century, requiring individuals to not deteriorate natural values and to take measures to improve the bio-environment.

The United Nations has dealt with such issues as urbanization, urban public services, regional disparities, housing, industrial estates, and territorial planning since the post-war years, when the differences between developed and developing nations, development problems and the experiences of planned development became important socio-economic questions. In fact, this important international organization that strives for the well-being of mankind could not remain indifferent to the miserable living conditions in many cities of the less-developed world.

Therefore, the concept of the environment used in UN circles has been expanded to include the questions of pollution of air, water, and land.

Since both the beneficiary and the destroyer of bio-environment is man, educating him about his responsibilities for the future of mankind becomes crucially important because “birds do not need maps or passports to make their way across national borders, but they are assisted by laws which mitigate the dangers posed by people engaged in hunting, farming, and industry (Osterwoldt, 1986).”

Many cities are using peripheral and fertile agricultural lands for urban-related purposes in a wasteful manner while existing serviced lands and infrastructure may not be adequately developed and utilized, in the absence of wisely prepared ecological plans. Appropriate urban density and mixed land-use guidelines are of prime importance for rational urban development. Green and open spaces and vegetation cover in urban and peri-urban areas are also essential for biological and hydrological balance and economic development. Since land is a finite resource (Mooney, 1982), it must be used more carefully than any renewable natural resource. It is for this reason that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002) and the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito (2016) emphasized that fundamental changes were needed in the ways that societies produce and consume limited natural resources.

Effective implementation of the principles of International Environmental Law is crucially important in this respect. However, legal instruments adopted by international organizations may be simply the kind of soft law that is not legally binding for nation states. They may simply serve as guidelines for the formulation of official policies. Second, the incorporation of international principles into domestic legislation may not be enough. There is also a pressing need for them to be enforced properly. Enforcement may be defined as a set of actions that governments and others take to achieve compliance within the regulated community and to

correct and halt situations that endanger the environment. Third, international conventions may possess provisions regarding the monitoring of the implementation of the principles of conventions. Fourth, the principle of integration of Environmental Law is particularly important for the sustainable management of land use because it requires the integration of the sector with all other related sectors of the economy. Finally, we have to remember that moral and social values for environmental quality in general, lack of public support for environmental concerns, social respect for the rule of law, and a clear government cause to enforce legal rules are of prime importance (Keleş, 2008).

All these and similar warnings and recommendations have been insistently expressed by Professor Semra Atabay in her classes, publications, national and international meetings, which have greatly contributed to the realization of the integration of ecological considerations into the traditional planning process in Turkey. I take this opportunity to congratulate my Dear Colleague and to express my gratitude to her.

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