

Understanding Environmental Heterodoxy via EcoTypes

“Controversies Around Environmental Action among Undergraduates in
BITS Pilani”

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Context: A bit about BITS Pilani, Rajasthan, India

- Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani is an “Institute of Eminence” recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), India
- BITS Pilani provides quality education and training to tertiary level students (undergraduates to PhDs) since its inception in 1964
- BITS attracts high caliber undergrad students through the BITSAT annual entrance exam; admissions at BITS happen on a strictly merit and competitive basis
- BITSians are well known for their world class tech. profiles and professional entrepreneurial spirit (reflective through their start-ups)
- BITSians wield enormous political and economic power within India and elsewhere in the world- a potential area for env. friendly interventions

What EcoTypes survey does?

- The EcoTypes survey offers an empirically-based comparison of environmental frameworks, with five major resultant EcoTypes summarized by names such as Small is Beautiful, Science for Humanity, and Indigenous Justice (Proctor et.al.)
- Provides a starting point for students to explore this heterodoxy of environmental frameworks in the context of three statistically-derived themes—Place, Knowledge, and Action
- Geographic differences are expected to be significant among the participants
- Students from different parts of the world derive different meanings from their experiences of participating in the EcoTypes survey

EDCC course and it's students

- EDCC: Environment, Development and Climate Change is an elective course (both open and disciplinary) attended by the undergrads of various disciplines (Pharmacy, Engineering, Science, Finance and Economics, as well as Social Sciences and Humanities)
- EDCC is offered usually at every odd semester (3 units)
- Curriculum involves various interactive class based assignments including take home assignments, self-study assignments, group discussions, field study, write-ups, role-plays, power point presentations and the like
- Students are expected to make use of the problem-based learning pedagogy, and do proactive learning through group tasks

EDCC students and Ecotypes

- Ecotypes is one such interactive component based on which we designed a continuous assessment for the students of EDCC
- A total of 20% marks were allotted to the Ecotypes assignment with 3 internal components (Survey, self-reflection and interaction)
- 55 students completed the assignment, and a majority of them got the “small is beautiful” as their EcoType survey result
- While a handful other EcoTypes were also reported, none got the “Indigenous justice” EcoType as the result
- Among those with the “small is beautiful” EcoType, some students were surprised with their result, as they did not imagine their preferences would lead them to this type
- A majority of the undergrads were also troubled with the “Action” aspect as they would want more options than were available/given

“ACTION” in EcoTypes Survey

- In EcoTypes- the Action theme builds on the Change, Diversity, Future, Social Scale, Society, and Spatial Scale axes, all of which address how to make a difference in this world. Can small actions make a big difference? Does big change demand big action? Is change even possible? These questions are difficult to reconcile, but perhaps this leads to the possibility of creative tension (Excerpt from a student’s EcoTypes result)
 - Several students had issues with the place and knowledge themes, but those were weaker in comparison to the theme on “action”

Conflicting views on Place, Knowledge and Action

- Students felt the need for defining action in a much broader sense, and some wondered if we are already beyond options
- They wanted more nuanced approach than considering only small and big actions
- Questioned if a frame of place that does not limit possibilities between humans and non-humans should be devised
- They felt that a perspective that allows for both scientific and indigenous knowledge must be encouraged
- In their personal reflections (which they filled into a google form) they agreed to the overall framework of EcoTypes as it showed their reflection for the first ever time

Future possibilities

- Students from BITS (EDCC class) have shown a lot of enthusiasm towards the EcoTypes Survey as this gave them an opportunity to know their place and preference for environmental causes
- They ended up discussing these complicated and yet controversial issues with great clarity and analytical ease
- They also felt confident to take up these discussions with their peers and friends and family so as to give them the much needed clarity of the ongoing environmental destruction
- They expressed interest to take up some of these ideas into their own start-ups after their graduation

Thank you for your attention!