

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FORMATION OF ECO-AESTHETIC THINKING**

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**Abstract:** The article examines how, in the fundamental theoretical understanding of ecological existence, the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and praxeological functions of aesthetics manifest at various practical levels — from everyday customs and traditions to forms of ecological activity based on complex technical and technological culture. From this standpoint, the issue is subjected to scientific and theoretical analysis.

**Keywords:** ecological culture, ecological thinking, environmental education, ecotourism, environmental situation, “pristine” nature, hedonistic and eudaimonistic, nature–society–human, ecological need, ecological existence.

**Introduction.** Today, unlike in the twentieth century, the direction of tourist flows is changing not only toward industrially developed countries but increasingly toward developing countries — that is, toward states where the impact of technogenic civilization on the pristine state and sustainability of nature has been relatively limited. The tourism industry of developing countries is mainly developing through ecological tourism, or ecotourism. Ecotourism, as a special form of ecological activity aimed at the rational use and protection of natural resources, prioritizes valuing natural comfort over mass communication, modern infrastructure, and other tourist facilities; contemplating and appreciating natural beauty; deriving pleasure from it; achieving spiritual enrichment through interaction with nature; preserving natural heritage; and protecting the traditional ecological culture and values of local communities, while fostering a sense of involvement and responsibility toward them [1, p. 719].

**Methods and Methodology.** The formation of society’s ecological consciousness and culture as a social phenomenon, and its aesthetic attitude toward nature, is characterized, on the one hand, by its functions: ontological — constituting and manifesting a distinct form of existence; epistemological — creating and systematizing the basic concepts and categories of cognition; heuristic — discovering new methods and means of “re-creating” reality; axiological — attaining and reinforcing the status of value; praxeological — applying results in practice; methodological — indicating methods, tools, and ways of activity; pedagogical-didactic — defining aspects of education and upbringing.

Both the process and the outcome of aestheticizing ecological consciousness and culture clarify the functional significance of forms of social consciousness aimed at strengthening the individual’s active life position in nature protection and the rational use of its resources. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider aesthetic education and upbringing aimed at forming ecological culture as an integrated and holistic phenomenon. In other words, environmental education manifests simultaneously at the level of rational aesthetic theory and empirical aesthetic practice. This is because, within the system of human ecological needs, the unity of material and spiritual, empirical and rational aspects fully reveals human essence in all its dimensions.

However, at certain stages of societal development, within the system of human needs, the satisfaction of material needs and the development of the means and methods for meeting them have acquired the status of a dominant principle in relation to spiritual needs. Ecotourism, and tourism industry in general, represents a unique direction and type of activity in which its core

function — observing the natural environment or its components, rare species of animals and plants, landscapes, and similar natural monuments, and preserving biodiversity — is harmoniously combined with hedonistic and eudaimonistic enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, and economic interest.

Indeed, the main purpose of traveling into nature is not only to allow tourists to directly experience living nature, the customs, traditions, lifestyle, and culture of local populations, to form hedonistic and eudaimonistic emotional experiences, and to enhance their ecological knowledge, but also to play a significant role in their psychological and physical well-being. For this reason, it is no coincidence that many physicians recommend the effective use of ecotourism in treating the “ecological illnesses” of modern industrialized, urbanized, and information-based societies.

**Results.** To implement these recommendations, it is necessary—based on the pressing importance of education and upbringing in solving global environmental problems—to correctly define the current state of ecotourism, its development trends, and its prospective objectives. In particular, the development of individual ecological consciousness and culture aimed at protecting the natural environment and improving the ecological situation requires: first, at the epistemological level, that all population groups and social strata engaged in various professional fields understand the significance of ecotourism within the education and training system; second, at the methodological level, the selection of effective methods and tools that shape an individual’s aesthetic attitude toward nature, consciousness, and culture within a continuous environmental education process; third, at the organizational level, the integration, coordination, and goal-oriented alignment of the activities of all social-civic institutions and state organizations responsible for the ecotourism sector; and fourth, consideration of the informational and intellectual foundations and necessities for organizing collective efforts and creating a professional workforce to ensure the mass character and effectiveness of ecotourism.

**Analysis.** At every historical stage of the “nature–society–human” relationship, methods, means, and forms for transforming ecological culture have emerged in accordance with the level of societal development. Historical evidence from ancient written sources and the results of archaeological and ethnographic research confirm that distinctive ecological cultures arose in connection with people’s natural and geographical living conditions. Indeed, even in the earliest periods of human history, everyday social practices related to nature protection—customs, rituals, and practical traditions—served as emotional and spiritual modes of expressing the human attitude toward nature. In particular, in ancient folklore, mythological, philosophical, and religious worldviews created artistic images that encouraged nature-protective activities or prohibited actions harmful to nature.

The principal characteristic of this period was the dominance of religious–moral principles expressed through divine and mythological images and representations in regulating the “nature–society–human” system. Subsequently, the artistic–aesthetic orientation of a more “civilized” and “cultured” attitude toward nature and its transformation intensified. At the same time, the growing role of eco-aesthetic values associated with humans’ natural living conditions in organizing and governing the “nature–society–human” complex found expression in works of artistic creativity [2, pp. 13–14].

In the contemporary period, during the transformation of ecological values and aesthetic attitudes toward nature into artistic expression and art forms, two interdependent tendencies are evident. The first is that the law of prioritizing ecological needs within the structure of human needs assigns a specific, individualized task to every form of social consciousness, every art form, and every genre of artistic creativity in nature protection. The second tendency is that the complex-systemic character of ecological activity strengthens the integration of directions for its

representation across various artistic genres, forms of social consciousness, and artistic functions, thereby prioritizing factors that aestheticize these processes [3, p. 68].

In addition, socio-political changes in human life, along with unprecedented growth in science, technology, technological progress, and intellectual potential, require a serious re-evaluation of the criteria for assessing “human–nature” and “society–nature” relations and a reconsideration of the methods and means of their aesthetic-artistic representation and transformation [4, p. 160]. As a result of the intensification of anthropotechnogenic impacts on nature, the inadequacy of artistic-aesthetic methods and tools that stimulate ecological activity aligned with the evolutionary development of the biosphere has become apparent, placing the achievements and future prospects of human civilization at serious risk. On the other hand, expressing ecological consciousness and culture through artistic images constitutes a process of aesthetic relation to nature and represents a special form and level of socio-historical practice. Its specificity derives from: 1) the characteristics of its object; 2) the individuality of needs; 3) the commonality of interests; 4) the clarity of cognitive methods and tools; and 5) the universality of pedagogical-didactic outcomes. Most importantly, aesthetic attitudes toward nature and their artistic representation are attributes of society’s spiritual life, requiring an approach grounded in philosophical categories to determine their functions.

In studying the functional significance of ecological consciousness and culture in shaping and stimulating aesthetic attitudes toward nature, it is theoretically and methodologically important, on the one hand, to determine the role and status of aesthetic attitudes in the constructive-rational organization of ecological activity, and, on the other hand, to identify the functional integrative characteristics and directions of genres that artistically express aesthetic relations to nature [5, pp. 3–8].

As a component of societal culture, the aesthetic attitude toward nature is based on the need to transform ecological information by its subjects toward its objects. In this process, the adequacy of the transformed information—both in content and form—to the existing state and development trends of ecological reality is of particular importance.

In the fundamental theoretical understanding of ecological existence, the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and praxeological functions of aesthetics manifest at various practical levels—from everyday customs and traditions to ecological activities grounded in complex technical and technological cultures. From this perspective, organizing human relations to existence in general, and to ecological existence in particular, according to the principles of aesthetic culture requires, first, identifying the motives of aesthetic attitudes toward ecological reality and distinguishing their modes and tools of expression (their status and significance) from other forms of social consciousness; and second, organizing the functional interconnections of material and spiritual, theoretical and practical activities across various cultural domains in nature protection in accordance with the laws of beauty [6, pp. 15–17].

In the present era, the need and objective necessity to address global environmental problems across different peoples and countries have intensified processes of spiritual integration, leading to the globalization of a universal eco-aesthetic mode of thinking and corresponding practical actions. Through the integration of ecological and aesthetic activities, this process creates opportunities not only to address environmental problems but also to confront the social, economic, political, and spiritual-moral causes that generate them. This is because resolving environmental problems through artistic-aesthetic methods and tools entails organizing the expression, in artistic images, of goals and aspirations to transform society’s political, economic, legal, moral-ideological, and other social relations in accordance with the interests of environmental protection and to reshape human “ecological qualities” [7, pp. 9–14].

However, this is a complex process, the outcomes of which depend on society's capacity to meet material-economic needs, its understanding of ecological and aesthetic interests, the selection of adequate methods and tools, and especially the continuity with, and development of, traditionally formed cultural heritage. Therefore, fostering a creative attitude toward the aesthetic and ecological historical heritage in the field of nature protection within the education system is of great importance. Preserving, creatively developing, and integrating national eco-aesthetic historical heritage as a component of universal human spiritual values, as well as forming and implementing new directions of eco-aesthetic culture, constitute pressing demands of the present time.

**Conclusion.** Restoring and developing national eco-aesthetic historical heritage is a complex socio-psychological task. A conscious, creative attitude toward it represents a means by which individuals comprehend the essence of real ecological existence and express it through artistic images. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to integrate alternative theoretical doctrines of eco-aesthetic culture aligned with universal ecological goals and interests and to harmonize their modes and styles of expression; on the other hand, the “technology” of revealing the socio-spiritual content of eco-aesthetic culture in “human–nature” relations should be viewed as a method for the creative development of historical heritage. This is because the perception characteristic of the recent past—of humans as rulers of nature—has largely been replaced by the understanding that humans and society are part of nature and that it is necessary not to dominate nature but to establish harmonious relations with it. Consequently, contemporary reality requires the creation of solid theoretical-methodological foundations and innovative pedagogical-didactic technologies by all educational institutions responsible for aestheticizing ecological activity and ecologizing aesthetic consciousness. In turn, these needs are intensifying processes of integrating various forms and levels of social consciousness and cultural domains within the framework of ecological interests.

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