



Landscape and democracy: reflections based on the social constructivist approach

Structure

1. Remarks on the social construction of landscape and nature
2. Different logics in dealing with landscapes
3. Aspects of the relationship between society and nature
4. Modernity and postmodernity
5. The appraisal of urban nature
6. Conclusions

An aerial photograph of a wind farm. Numerous white wind turbines are scattered across a grassy hillside. In the background, a city skyline is visible through a hazy atmosphere. A multi-lane highway runs along the left side of the image, and a winding road with small stone pillars is on the right. The text "Remarks on the social construction of landscape" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Remarks on the social construction of landscape

Some remarks on social constructivism

- From the social constructionism point of view there is “nowhere such a thing as a **pure and simple fact**” (Schütz 1971, p. 5).
- **Previous knowledge** of the world shapes every perception.
- Hence, our way of seeing the world is rather the result of a “**highly complex interpretation process**” (Schütz 1971, pp. 123-124) than an isolated event.
- Within this process, “current perceptions and **earlier perceptions**” (Schütz 1971, pp. 123-124) are juxtaposed.

Social construction of landscape

Landscape cannot be understood as a given object but rather as a **socially defined construct** of human consciousness.

In the **process of socialization** human beings learn to apprehend what may be designated as landscape.

Moreover, they learn the connections in which these designs apply without losing **social acceptance** when misdoing.



Four dimensions of landscape (Kühne 2008)

- 1) The **societal landscape** “as a socially defined object and ensemble of signs” (Hard 2002[1987]: 233) and hence as a societal store of knowledge (Berger/ Luckmann 1966) on the arrangement and interpretation of **objects and symbols into landscape**. This also gives rise to the stereotypes taking effect in concrete individual construction processes.

Berger, P. L./Luckmann, Th. (1966): The Social Construction of Reality. New York.

Hard, G. (2002[1987]): Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Raum. In: Hard, G. (Hg.): Landschaft und Raum. Aufsätze zur Theorie der Geographie. Osnabrück, 211-234.

Kühne, O. (2008): Distinktion – Macht – Landschaft. Zur sozialen Definition von Landschaft. Wiesbaden.

Four dimensions of landscape II

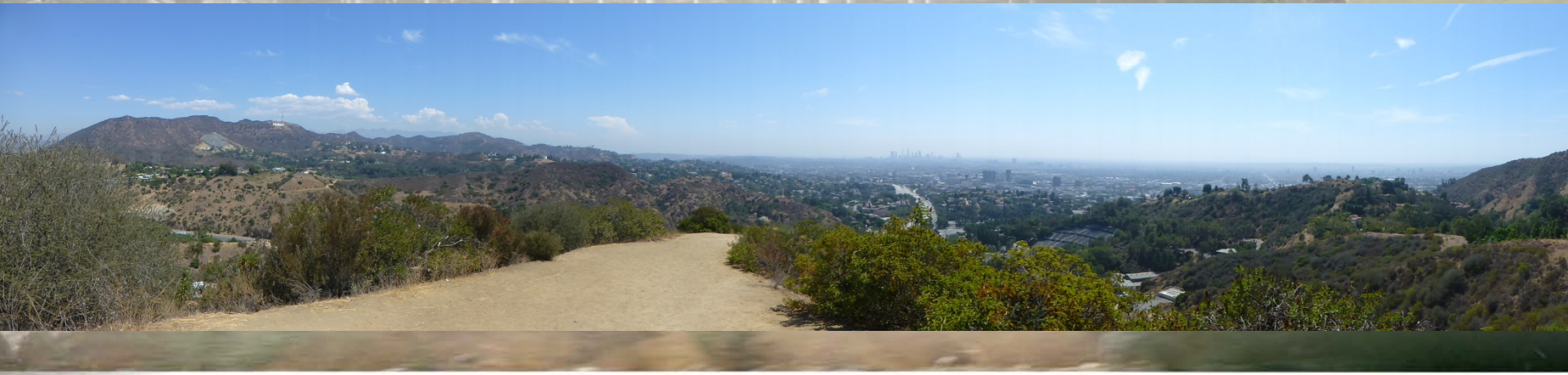
2) The **individually updated societal landscape** as a personal reconstruction based on societal ideas of landscape.

3) The **appropriated physical landscape** as those objects in space that are concretely relied upon for the construction of the societal landscape and its individual updates.



Four dimensions of landscape III

4) The **physical space** as a theoretical conceptualisation of the spatial-relational arrangement of things in general, irrespective of whether they are relied upon for the social and/or individual construction of landscape or not.



Appropriated physical landscape...

- is created by the **dictates** of economic necessity,
- **modified** by social enforced norms and values,
- within the **limits of political will**,
- manifested in the **legally permitted**.

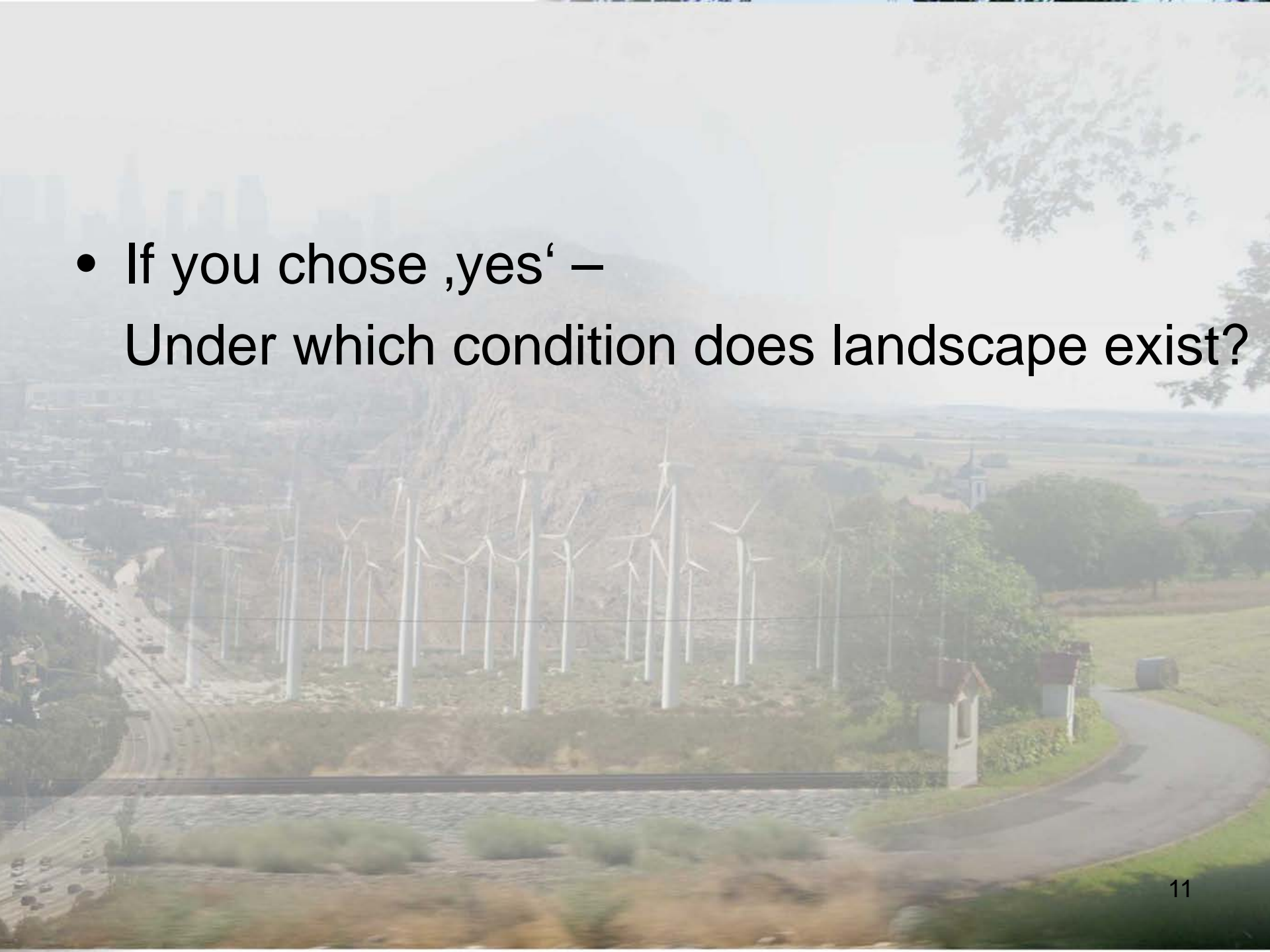
The result: landscape is created by physically manifested spatially-social by-effects of the action of differentiated **quantity of power**.



- Does landscape exist in ,reality‘?



- If you chose ,yes‘ –
Under which condition does landscape exist?



The background image is a composite. At the top, a city skyline with several tall buildings is visible under a hazy sky. Below the skyline, a large field of white wind turbines stands on a grassy hillside. In the foreground, a multi-lane road curves through a landscape with green grass and some trees. A small, white, square guardhouse with a brown roof is situated near the road. The overall scene suggests a blend of urban, renewable energy, and infrastructure themes.

Characterization of the democratic political System

	Democracy	Authoritarianism	Totalitarism
Legitimation of power	sovereignty of the people	mentalities	closed ideology
Access to domination	open (universal electoral law)	limited (restricted electoral law)	closed (no electoral law)
Domination monopoly	at democratically legitimated institutions	at leaders / oligarchies by using mentalities "legitimized" and protected by repression	at ideologically legitimized and by repression secured leader(s)
Structure of domination	pluralist (division of power, inhibition of power, control of power)	semi pluralistic (largely limited division of power, inhibition of power, control of power)	monistic (no division of power, inhibition of power, control of power)
Claim to domination	very limited	extensive	unlimited
Way of domination	constitutionally	constitutionally to non-constitutionally, repressive	not constitutionally, systematically repressive, terrorist

Basic forms of democracy

- Direct democracy
- Referendum democracy
- Electoral democracy

Institutional guarantees in democracies

- Freedom of association,
- Freedom of expression,
- right to vote,
- passive voting rights,
- Right of political elites to compete for votes and support,
- freedom of information,
- free, equal and secret elections,
- Institutions which make the government policy depending of votes and other expressions of citizen preferences.

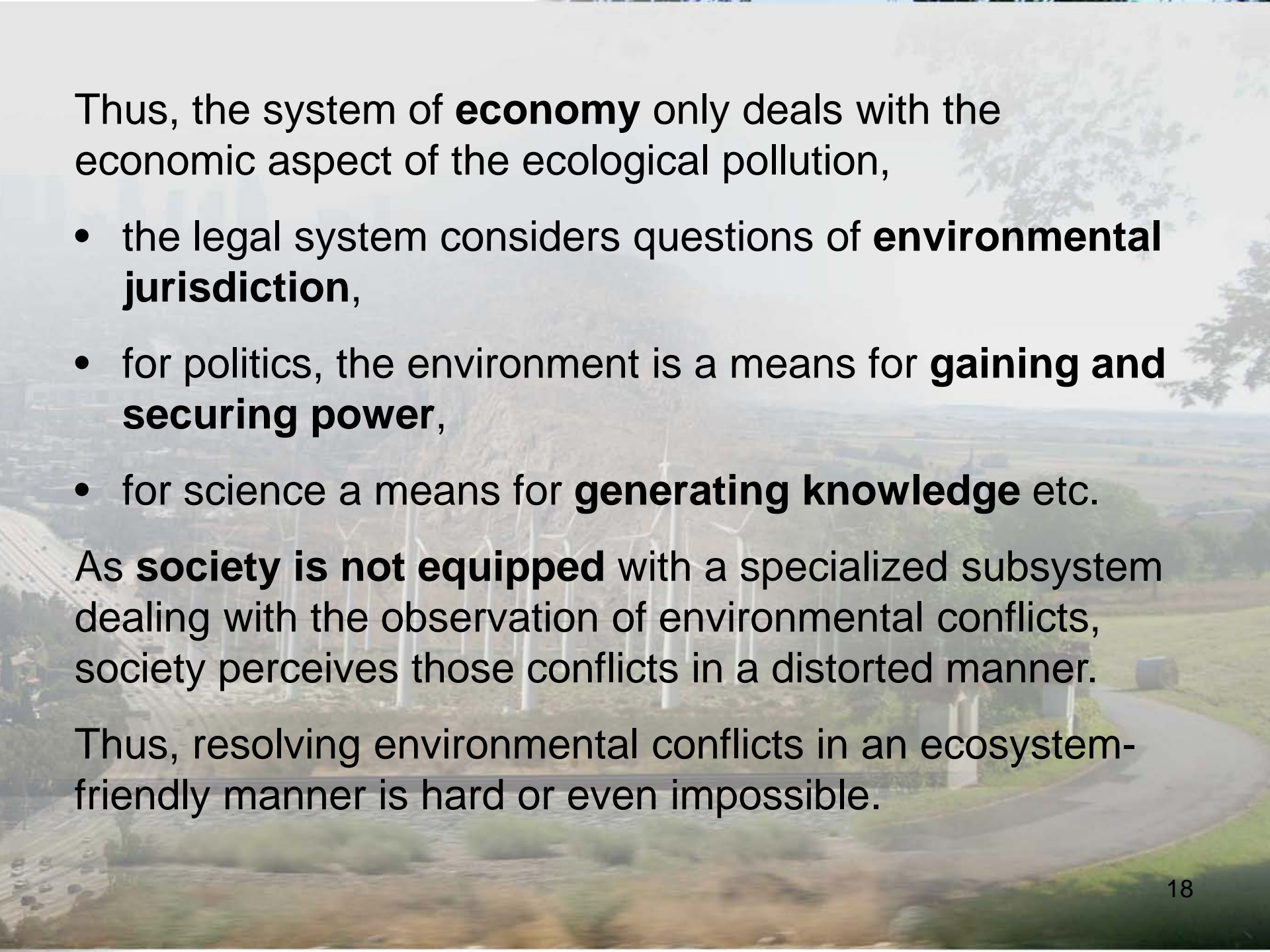
Different logics in dealing with landscapes



The system of society as a whole has primarily differentiated subsystems that are entrusted with **specific social problems**:

- The **political system** deals with public matters,
- the **system of jurisdiction** is responsible for the adherence to law,
- the **economy controls** society's supply with goods and services,
- **science** the definition of truth ,
- the **media** the definition, communication and keeping of news etc.

According to Niklas Luhmann (1986), the problem of the pollution of the natural environment is only considered by the subsystems with regards to their own system structure.



Thus, the system of **economy** only deals with the economic aspect of the ecological pollution,

- the legal system considers questions of **environmental jurisdiction**,
- for politics, the environment is a means for **gaining and securing power**,
- for science a means for **generating knowledge** etc.

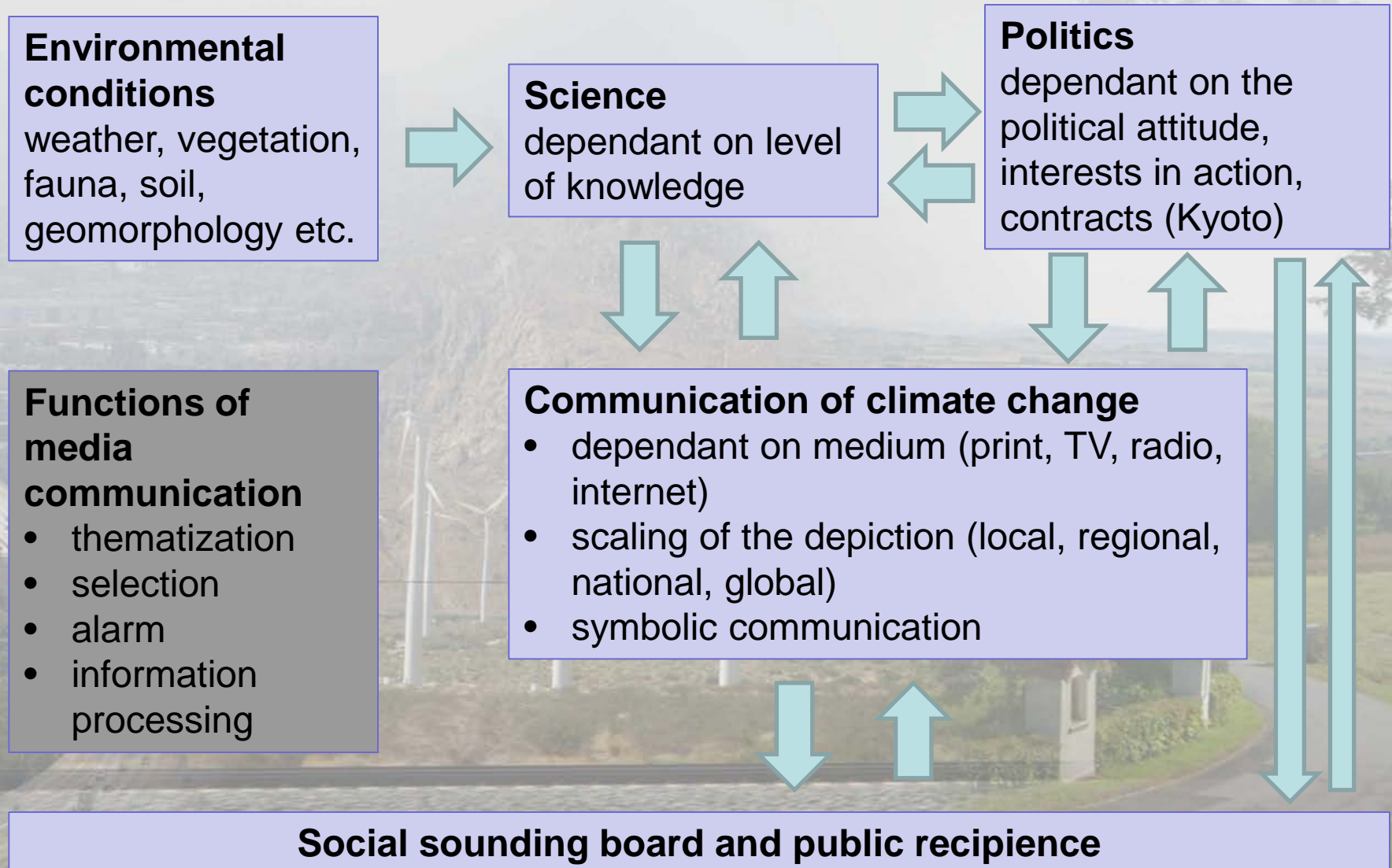
As **society is not equipped** with a specialized subsystem dealing with the observation of environmental conflicts, society perceives those conflicts in a distorted manner.

Thus, resolving environmental conflicts in an ecosystem-friendly manner is hard or even impossible.

Mass media (Luhmann 1996)

- It is able to mention directly what no other functional system can mention in such a **direct way**: Society as a whole.
- It is able to create the highest possible degree of **confusion** due to the information and non-information that refer to a constantly new present, and it is in turn able to react to the slightest confusion.
- It integrates the **medium of moral**, which is endemic in no other functional system anymore.

The social mediation process of landscape change



Different ,**ownerships**‘ of appropriataed physical landscape (Olwig 2002)

- **Individual ownership** of individual objects
- **Common good** of landscape

Dimensions of societal landscape (Ipsen 2006)

- **cognitive**
- **functional**
- **aesthetic**
- **emotional**

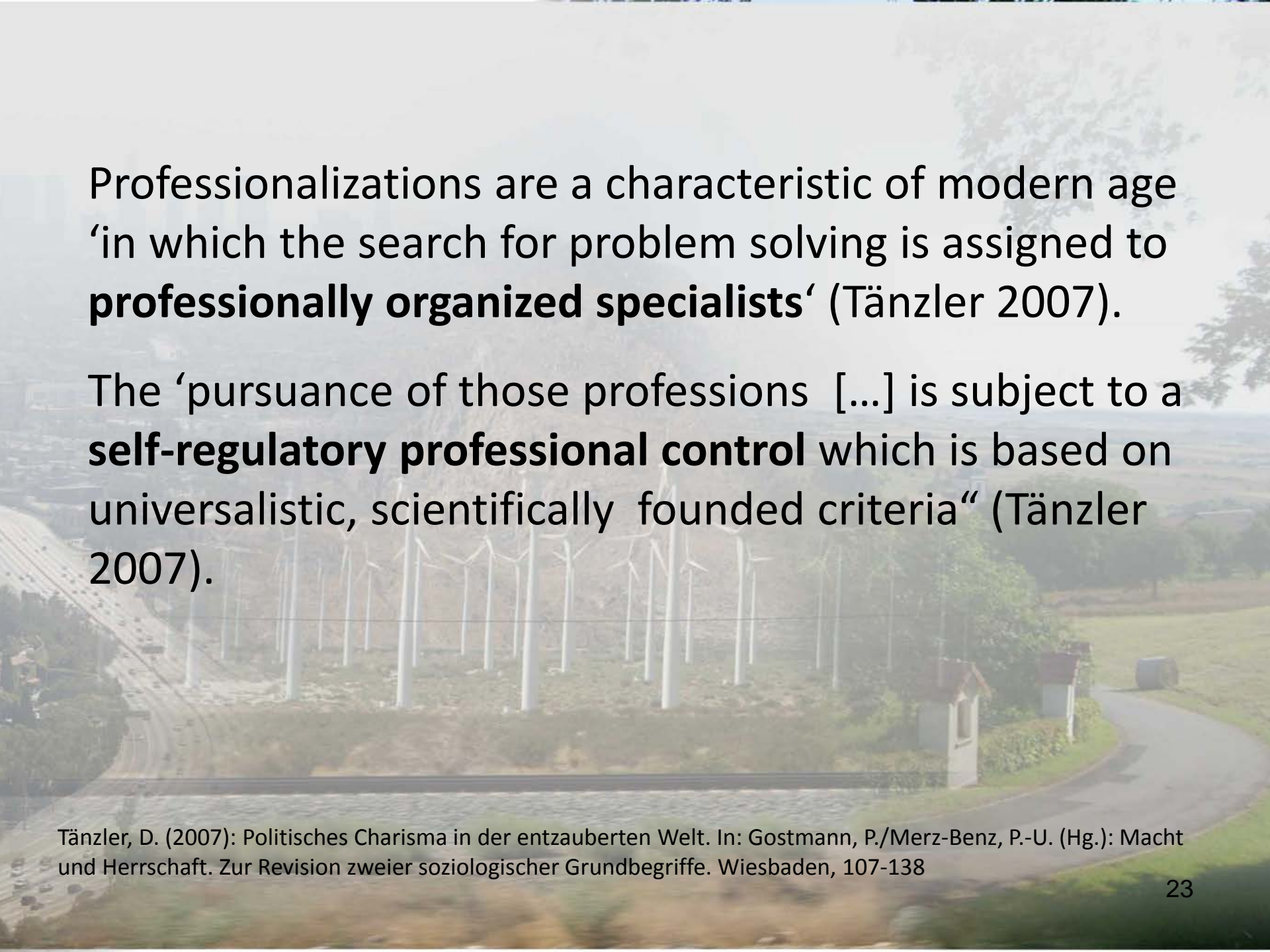
Ipsen, D. (2006): Ort und Landschaft. Wiesbaden.
Olwig, K. R. (2002): Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic. From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World. London.



	Percentage	Mentions		Percentage	Mentions
Woods	96,26	438	Smaller towns	32,09	146
Meadows	95,16	433	Single people	21,32	97
Brooks	91,21	415	Sounds	20,88	95
Villages	83,08	378	Groups of people	19,56	89
Farms	73,63	335	Industrial firms	14,07	64
Scents	61,54	280	Wind generators	10,99	50
Atmospheres (in the sense of moods)	60,66	276	Cities	8,79	40
Mountain ranges	59,12	269	Motor-ways	8,79	40
Clouds	51,65	235	Cars	6,37	29
Country roads	44,84	204	Other	5,05	23
Showers	41,10	187	I don't know.	0,22	1
Single flowers	35,38	161			

Survey in the Saarland. 455 survey participants, several answers possible: 'What belongs to a landscape?' (Kühne 2006)

Kühne, O., 2006. Landschaft in der Postmoderne. Das Beispiel des Saarlandes (Landscape in the Postmodern Era. The Example of the German State Saarland). Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, Wiesbaden.



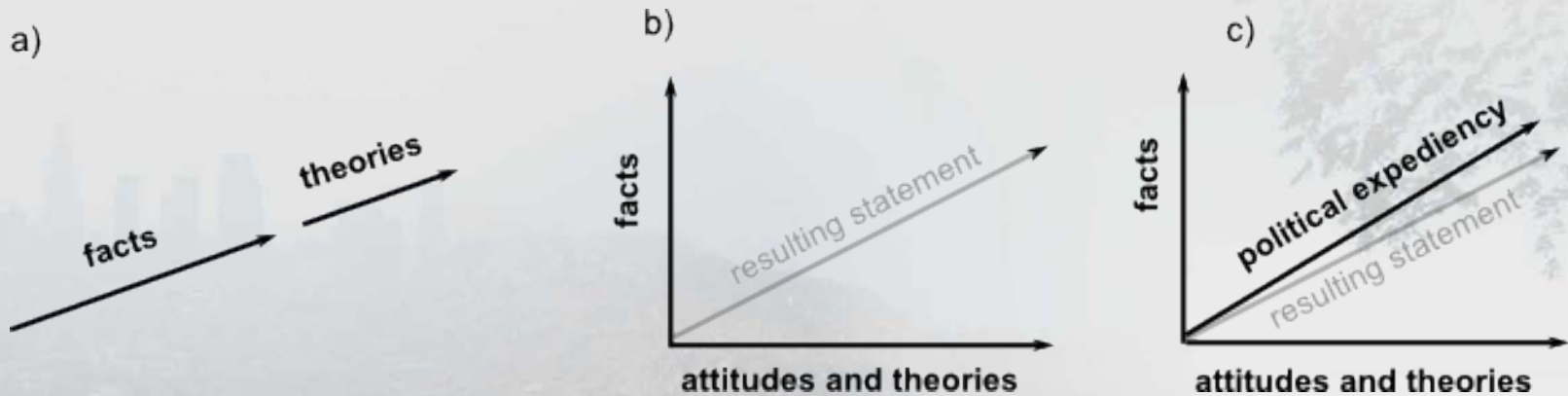
Professionalizations are a characteristic of modern age
'in which the search for problem solving is assigned to
professionally organized specialists' (Tänzler 2007).

The 'pursuance of those professions [...] is subject to a
self-regulatory professional control which is based on
universalistic, scientifically founded criteria" (Tänzler
2007).

An aerial photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, a multi-lane highway curves from the bottom left towards the center. To the right of the highway, a paved road leads to a small, white, square chapel with a brown roof. Behind the chapel, a large field of tall, white wind turbines is visible. The background shows a hazy, rolling landscape with more trees and distant structures.

The relationship of authority of landscape experts is based on a **twofold recognition process**:

“On the recognition of the **superiority** of others who determine the level and function as decisive factors and on the endeavor to **be appreciated by** those people, to receive signs of probation” (Popitz 1992).



The generation of knowledge according to

a) the traditional theory (Mode 1),

b) the critical theory (Mode 1),

c) the Mode 2 - science.

(In accordance with: Horkheimer 1937, Habermas 1982, Latour 2002, Nowotny 2005)

Horkheimer, M. (1937): Traditionelle und kritische Theorie. In: Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, Jg. 9.

Habermas, J. (1982): Analytische Wissenschaftstheorie und Dialektik. In: Habermas, J. (Hrsg.): Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften. Frankfurt am Main.

Latour, B. (2002): Die Hoffnung der Pandora. Frankfurt am Main.

Nowotny, H. (2005): Experten, Expertisen und imaginierte Laien. In: Bogner, A / Torgersen, H. (Hrsg.): Wozu Experten? Ambivalenzen der Beziehung von Wissenschaft und Politik. Wiesbaden

An aerial photograph of a large wind farm with numerous white turbines. In the background, a city skyline is visible through a hazy atmosphere. The foreground shows a road and some small structures.

Modernity and postmodernity

Postmodernism

- “Postmodernism is not so much a critique or radical refusal of modernism but its radical *exaggeration*. It is **more modern** than **modernism**.”
- Postmodernism hyperbolically accentuates the processes of increased turnover time, **speed** of circulation and the **disposability** of subjects and objects” (Lash & Urry 1994, p.3).
- A central idea of postmodernism is the incredulity towards **meta-narratives** (Lyotard 1979).

Lash, S. & Urry, J., 1994. *Economies of Signs and Space*. Sage, London.

Lyotard, J.-F., 1979. *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*). Les Ed. de Minuit, Paris.

Politics and Postmodernity

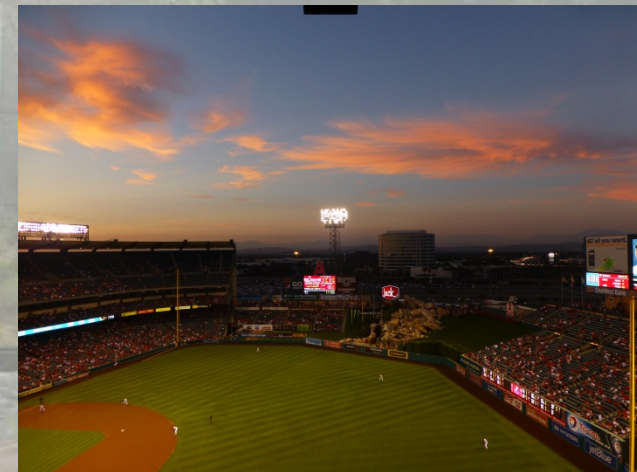
Asymmetry of political problems and political viability.

Displacement of politics in the competition for power, law and fundamental questions of social order "in favor of economic, legal, scientific, media and **dramatic and symbolic-aesthetic discourses**" (Jain 2000: 423).

Reversal of policy, "**in system external 'constraints'**" (Jain 2000: 423)

Politics and Postmodernity

Postmodern understanding, "according to which it must be the moral qualifications of the people who contrives in remarkable ways to shape societies and against all odds it - to **secure survival** - more or less happy" (Bauman 2009: 54).



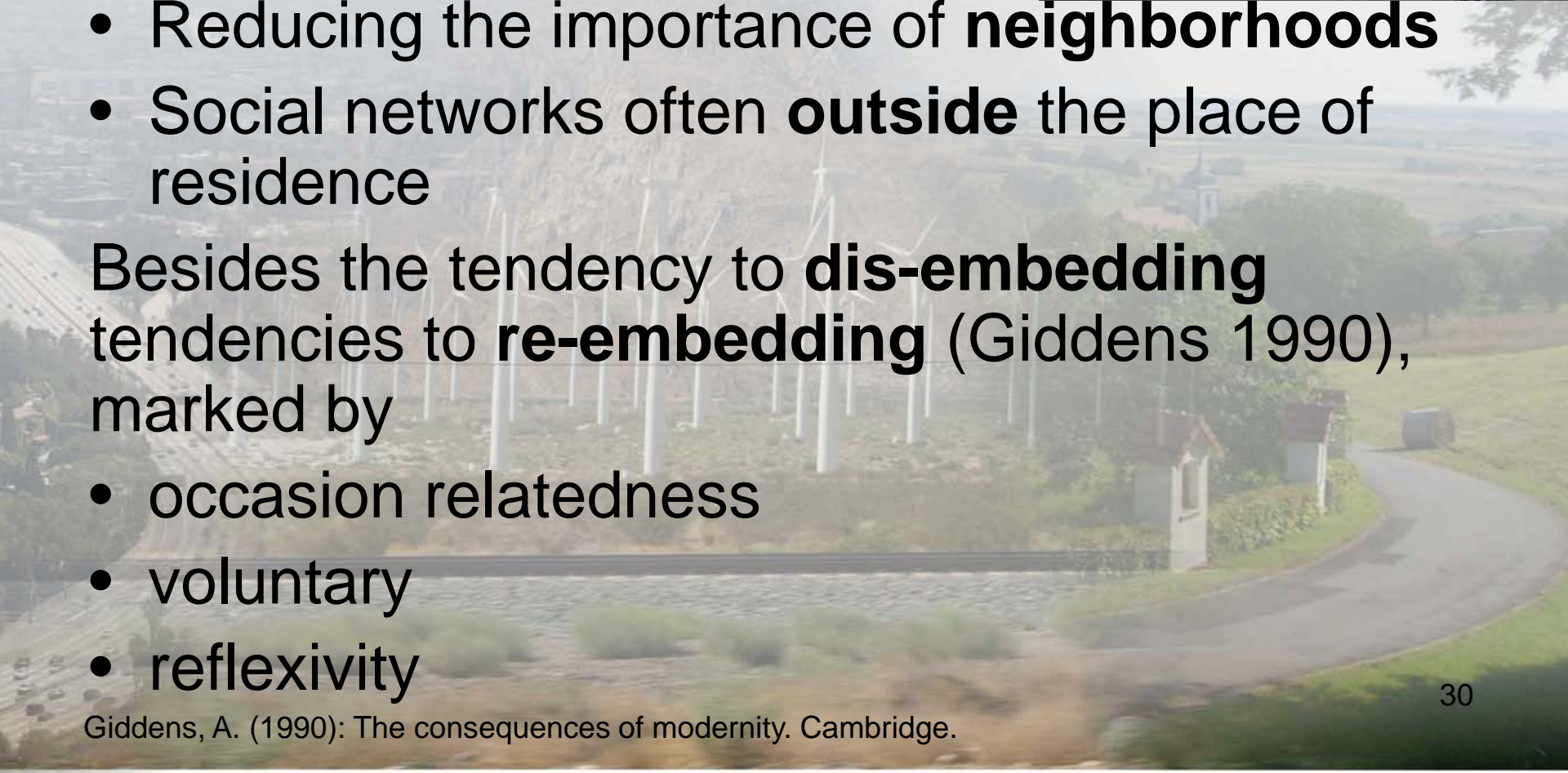
Flexibility of social relations

Increasing mobility

- (Partial) resolution of the traditional village community
- Reducing the importance of **neighborhoods**
- Social networks often **outside** the place of residence

Besides the tendency to **dis-embedding** tendencies to **re-embedding** (Giddens 1990), marked by

- occasion relatedness
- voluntary
- reflexivity



Postmodern aesthetics

- Rehabilitation of **emotions**,
- the aesthetic mode of the **sublime** gains in importance (Lyotard 1979),
- reality is increasingly '**aesthetically constructed**' (Welsch 1995),
- valorization of artifacts from the **past**,
- esteem of **hybridity**.





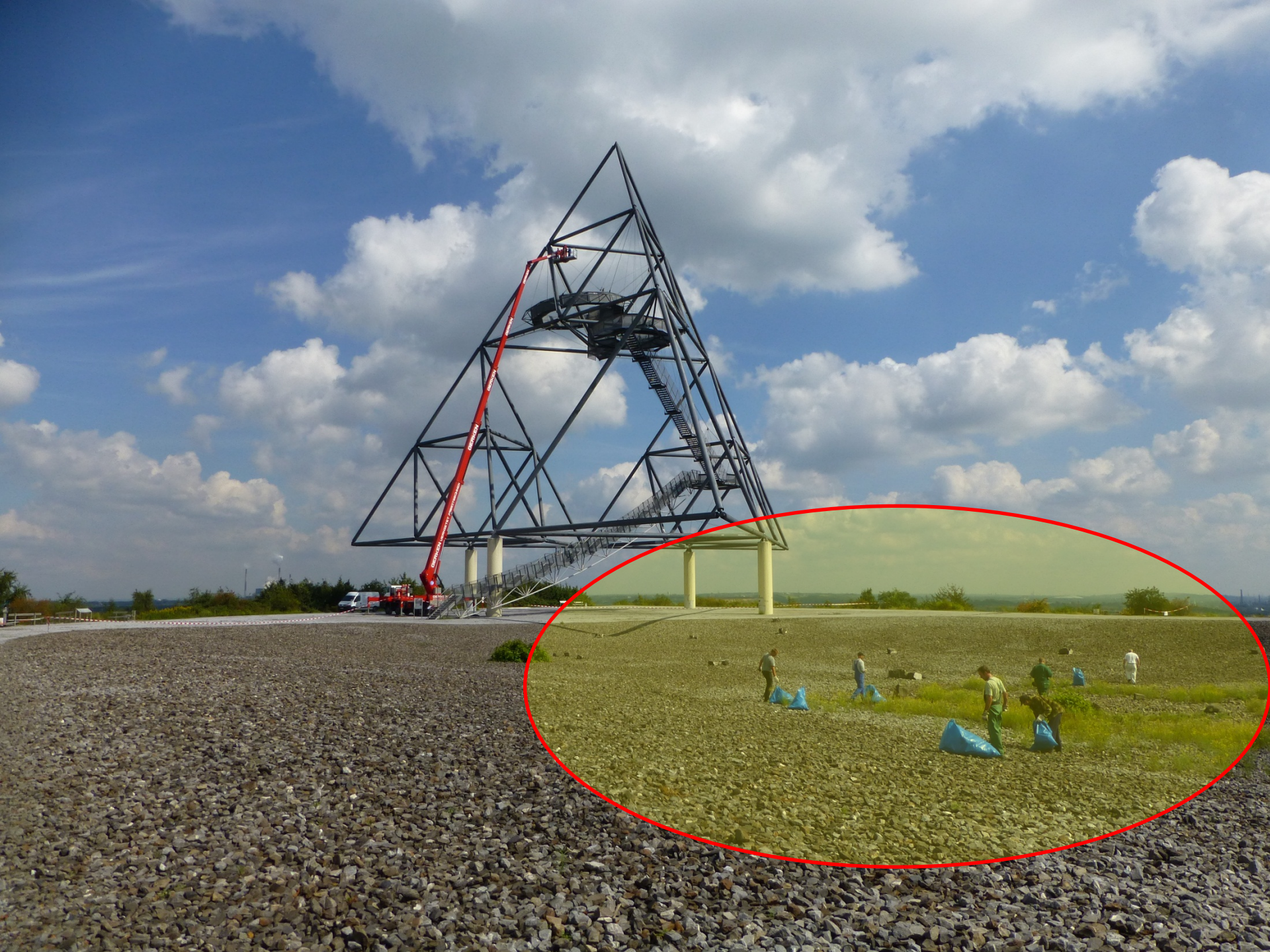
The postmodern city and nature

- Postmodern aesthetics challenge and **deconstruct the dichotomies of city and landscape, culture and nature, cognition and emotion** (Sloterdijk 1988).
 - Postmodernity accepts **hybridity**.
 - So postmodernity **tolerates the less domesticated nature** in cities.
- ➔ This tolerance opens up new possibilities of the **composition of the cityscape**, especially for ruined buildings and areas.
- ➔ Postmodernity “uses the richness of historic waste and practices as continuous recycling of stocks from the sphere of discarded to the sphere of the **accepted**” (Fayet 2003, p.167).

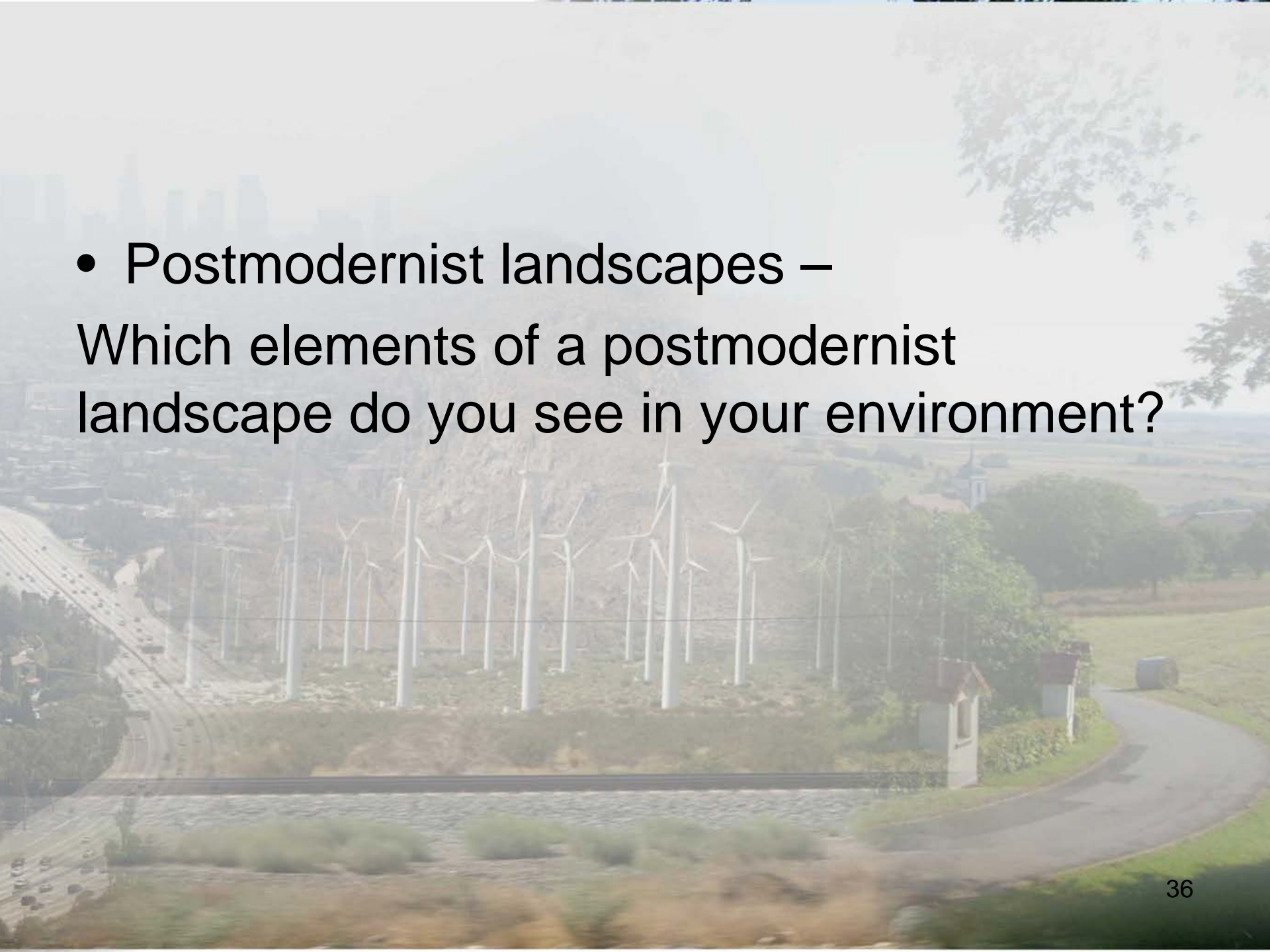


Fayet, R., 2003. *Reinigungen. Vom Abfall der Moderne zum Kompost der Nachmoderne* (Purifications. From the Waste of the Modern to the Compost of the Postmodern). Passagen-Verl., Wien.

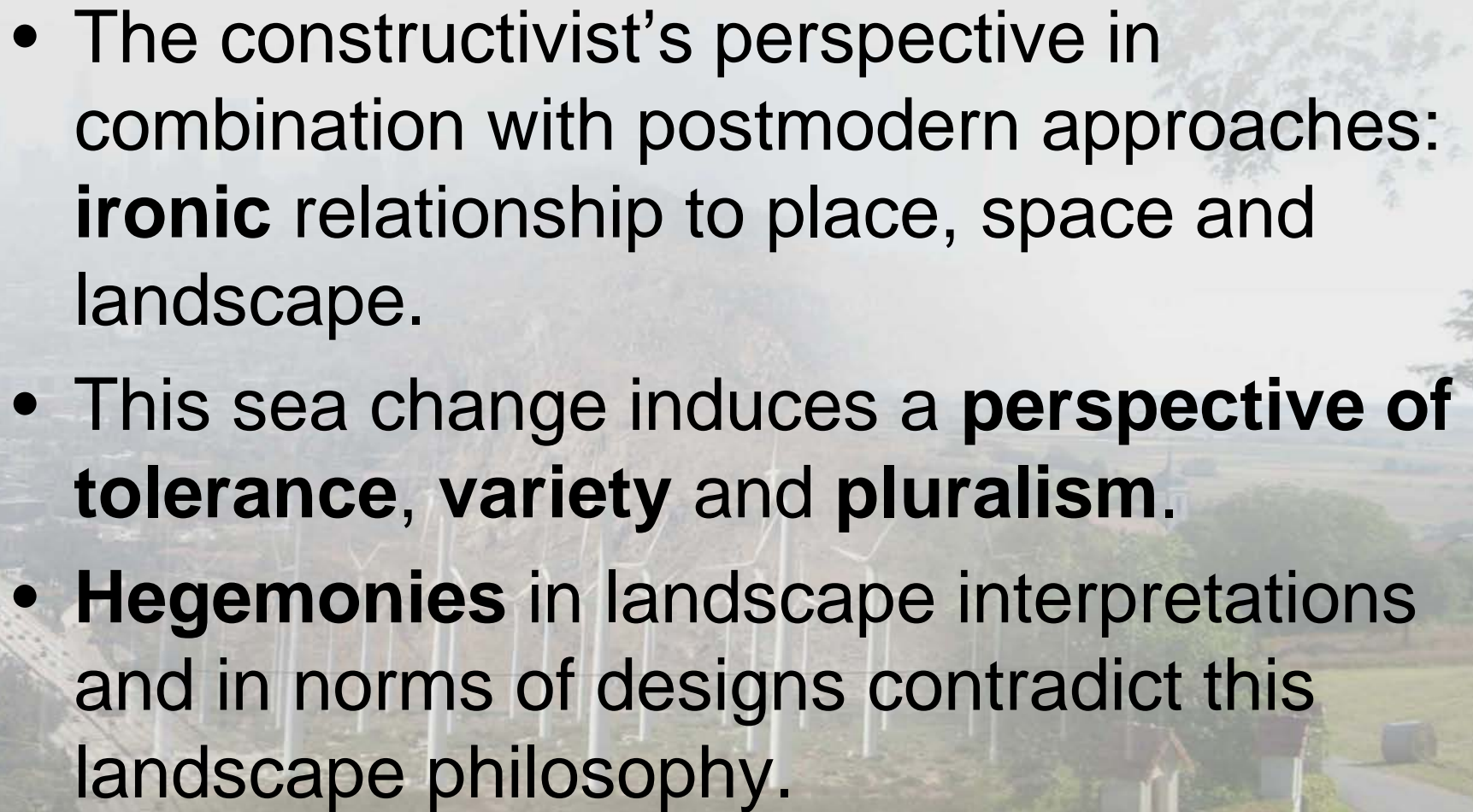
Sloterdijk, P., 1988. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Univ. of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis.

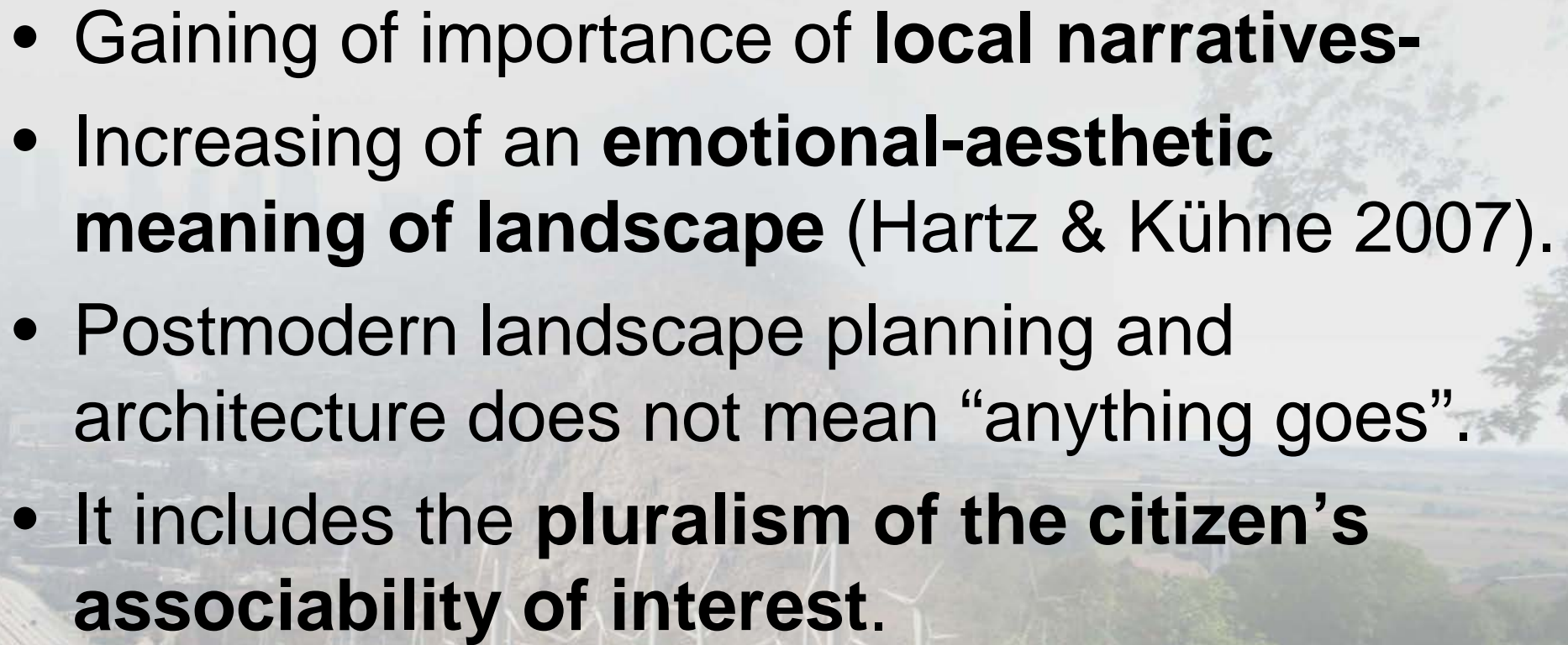


- Postmodernist landscapes –
Which elements of a postmodernist landscape do you see in your environment?



Conclusion

- 
- An aerial photograph of a landscape, likely a coastal or rural area. A paved road curves through the foreground and middle ground. To the left, there's a body of water or a wetland area. In the background, there are green fields, some small buildings, and a distant shoreline. The overall tone is somewhat muted and hazy.
- The constructivist's perspective in combination with postmodern approaches: **ironic** relationship to place, space and landscape.
 - This sea change induces a **perspective of tolerance, variety** and **pluralism**.
 - **Hegemonies** in landscape interpretations and in norms of designs contradict this landscape philosophy.

- 
- An aerial photograph of a landscape featuring a large wind farm with numerous white turbines. A road curves through the foreground, and a small building is visible near the turbines. The background shows a hilly area with more trees and a distant horizon.
- Gaining of importance of **local narratives**-
 - Increasing of an **emotional-aesthetic meaning of landscape** (Hartz & Kühne 2007).
 - Postmodern landscape planning and architecture does not mean “anything goes”.
 - It includes the **pluralism of the citizen’s associability of interest**.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION

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Further questions we could discuss

- Which consequences do you see concerning a democratic and an autocratic dealing with landscapes?

