

Speech by Felix Padel at the opening of the Darwineum at Rostock Zoo, Germany, on 7th September 2012

Herren und Damen, Guten Arbenter und Danke Schön. I thank you profoundly for inviting me here; also on behalf of my great-great-grandfather and Darwin's other descendents. I'm extremely happy to be here, and see such a wonderful creation made in Darwin's name!

I appreciate many things about it, in particular its focus on living animals alongside extinct forms, and its circular plan in preference to the more usual linear presentation of his theory.

I hope this Darwineum will help promote HOLISTIC thinking. Its presence is particularly appropriate here in Deutschland, since the concept "Ecology" ("Oikologie") was first formed in this country by Ernst Haeckel in the 1860s, after he met Darwin and was inspired by his "Economics of Nature".

To me one thing that is great in Darwin is the holistic vision of species interacting and man as an intrinsic part of nature.

As a social anthropologist I note how closely this fits with tribal people's perspective in different parts of the world, which looks on animals, birds, insects, trees and fish as "all our relations". Darwin showed how closely we are related to animals in the structure of our bodies, as well as in our emotions and thinking.

He showed how thousands of species developed alongside each other in different directions. But when the concept of "evolution" was applied to society by Karl Marx and others, in a way a serious distortion was involved – the dominant theory assumed there was a single line of development, through set stages. For example the World Bank and UN classify countries into "developed", "developing" and "underdeveloped", which negates divergent paths of development. This classification underlies massive loans for "development", which frequently finance projects that destroy ecosystems and agricultural communities.

This model of set stages of evolution has often been imposed ruthlessly, displacing tribal societies to make way for a dam on the assumption that this will "bring them forward", when it really does the opposite.

In many ways, tribal societies are extremely highly developed, but in different directions from mainstream society. Generally they are more highly developed than us in principles of sharing and of living sustainably, without destroying their environment.

So throughout India and other countries, tribal societies are facing Cultural Genocide from mining projects, while the ecosystems they sustained for centuries face Ecocide.

In the crises facing today's world, we need more of Darwin's holistic thinking, for example to look at our Economy in relation to Ecology – at our self-interest alongside the interest of other cultures and other species.