

**The Need for Ecological Metanoia:
A New Book on the Environmental Humanities – *Eco, Green,
Blue, Sustainable in the Humanities***

Ignac Navernik
AMEU ISH
Kraigherjeva 26, SI-2250 Ptuj, Slovenia
ignac.navernik@gmail.com

Abstract

At the end of March 2022, a new book in the field of environmental humanities was published in the Slovenian language, *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, edited by Lenart Škof and Ignac Navernik, which is briefly presented in this paper. This is the first work in Slovenian to address the broader field of environmental humanities and not just one aspect (e.g., environmental ethics); however, it does not cover the entire humanities field and is thus open to further reflections. Along with foreign authors, Satish Kumar, Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, Ronnie Lessem, and Alexander Schieffer, Slovenian authors are thematically organised into four sections: the religiological section (chapters on the new materiality of Christ, ecofeminist theology, the contemporaneity of ecological-theological thought of Vekoslav Grmič, and a Slovenian pre-Christian group of nature worshippers), the literary-historical section (chapters on ecocriticism and nature in the Roman Empire), the pedagogical section (chapters on the eco-pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and philosophy for children in environmental and animal ethics) and the applicative section (chapters on the Integral Worlds approach and its use in the Slovenian context – Integral green Slovenia).

1

Keywords: environmental humanities, ecology, deep ecology, philosophy, Anthropocene.

1 To Live in the More-Than-Human World

We are not alone on the planet. This simple finding is so mundane that it is unusual to think about it. We are currently discussing many aspects of ecology in public, but those are primarily voices about climate and environmental change, cataclysmic weather, reductions of carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, and perhaps ‘green’ technologies. Of course, these are very current topics that require immediate action, but it is not paced at an expected (accelerated) velocity. Bruno Latour (2022) suggests that this is due to the difference between knowing and feeling in one’s skin, leading to different everyday behaviours. It is about fundamental change, which in theological discourse is characterised by the word *metanoia*, meaning conversion, to live in a new way. This will not be possible without expanding the realisation that we are not alone on the planet by no longer perceiving the environment as objects we can handle but as co-living, meaning until we realise that we live in the more-than-human world. The monograph *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki* (Eco, Green, Blue, Sustainable in the Humanities), edited by Lenart Škof and Ignac Navernik, published in Ljubljana and Koper at the end of March 2022 in collaboration with three publishers (Alma Mater Europaea – Fakulteta za humanistični študij, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis; Društvo Gibanje za trajnostni razvoj Slovenije – TRS; Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Koper, Annales ZRS), addresses precisely these humanistic issues that can help make the necessary steps towards ‘our’ common environment bolder and more determined. The word ‘our’ applies not only to humans but equally to animals, plants, air, water, and soil.

The monograph is the first work in Slovenian that systematically deals with issues of the environmental humanities in its wide field and is not narrowly specialised to a particular thematic area. The interdisciplinarity of the presented papers and their applicability are distinct advantages of this monograph. The work is not further divided into individual thematic sections, as the editors structured it as a kind of mosaic and not as an introduction to the environmental humanities, although the monograph also addresses some of these introductory questions. Fourteen chapters and seventeen authors outline the religious, literary, historical, pedagogical, and philosophical aspects of environmental considerations or interdisciplinary research. In this paper, I aim to briefly present the contents of each chapter to spark interest among other researchers and thus prompt additional humanistic considerations in the form of papers, articles, or monographs in our scientific community. Therefore, it is not a critical book review but rather a presentation of editorial work and our collaborative effort to highlight the problems and proposed solutions to (environmental) challenges of the Anthropocene.¹

2

2 Humanities Spectrum of Responses to Environmental issues in Anthropocene

Ecology and sustainable development have come to the attention of the general public in recent decades. The topic has long been part of the study of various researchers, not only in the natural sciences and social sciences but also in the humanities (from philosophy, ethics, literature, theatre, and film, to history, religion, theology, psychotherapy, ethnology, education, law, etc.). Reflections on the importance of protecting the environment, green and blue sustainable practices are inevitably becoming the daily routine of our future.

The wrong assumption of human superiority concerning the environment or the need for its reconsideration began to be pointed out by the authors relatively early. Lewis Mumford, René Jules Dubos, and Murray Bookchin can be regarded as early ecological humanists (Morris, 2017), each progressing from his scientific work, thinking of life from a broader aspect. Aldo

¹ Special thanks to Terry T. Jackson for proofreading the text.

Leopold and Rachel Carson are the father and mother of what Arne Naess later called ‘deep ecology’. Modern research on the human genome has yielded unsuspected confirmations of kinship in terms of the basic building blocks of life, giving new impetus to reflections on universal coexistence. Findings at the nano level are attached to mythologies and rituals, gestures of closeness, described in various literary creations, and musical performances that have been part of human culture since the earliest circles of civilisation. The dualistic divide between human/non-human or culture/nature that prevailed through the history of philosophy is in-depth anthropocentrism, which ought to be deconstructed, as it averts us to see the human embedded condition in the web of life. Or as Val Palmwood (2009, 115) asserts: ‘When we hyperseparate ourselves from nature and reduce it conceptually, we not only lose the ability to empathise and to see the non-human sphere in ethical terms, but also get a false sense of our own character and location that includes an illusory sense of agency and autonomy. So human-centred conceptual frameworks are a direct hazard to non-humans, but are also an indirect prudential hazard to Self, to humans, especially in a situation where we press limits.’

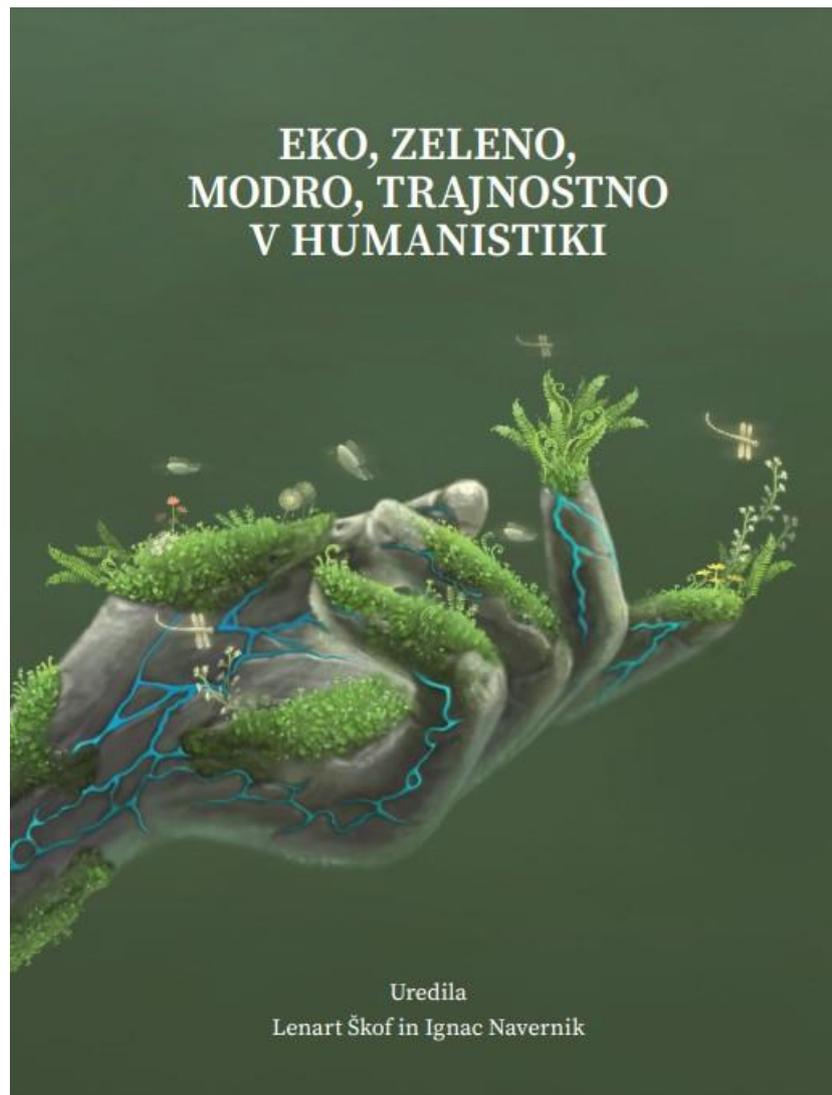
The human, the first focus of the humanities, is never separated from the environment. Some also stand on the position that the humanities are ecological or non-existent. The ‘survival’ of the Earth is not tied to the necessity of the human species’ existence, while humanity, at least for now, is connected to the existence of specific ecosystems on its home planet.

Humanistic research sometimes preceded active solutions to a concrete situation; in other times, it resulted from previous solutions. Directions of considerations have emerged that have been linked to the prefix ‘eco’ (ecophilosophy, ecocriticism, ecological ethics, ecopolitics, ecofeminism, eco-theology, ecological psychology, etc.). Later, criticisms of the ‘eco’ direction emerged, mainly admonishing the predominant focus on economic development and indicators. If the first approaches to ecology encompass more protection and care for the environment to maintain the parameters of economic growth, later reflections deal with the need to change the fundamental paradigms of growth and progress as primordial coexistence, which presupposes a change in the mental mycelium. In this way, what we call ‘environmental humanities’ came into academic discourse. ‘The emergence of the environmental humanities is part of a growing willingness to engage with the environment from within the humanities and social sciences’ (Bird Rose et al., 2012, 1).

3

In the following, the book’s chapters are presented through some findings and conclusions or emphasised questions.

Figure 1: Cover of the monograph



4

2.1 *Eco, Green, Blue, Sustainable in the Humanities* Chapter by Chapter

An introduction is followed by a chapter entitled *Lookouts on the Humanistic “Fields” of Ecology* (Navernik, 2022), which brings a study of various directions and contributions of the humanities to ecology. The chapter acts as an overture to the following divisions, representing in unity a ‘mosaic’, as described by the editors, of the entire book. The main note is to give an insight into the history, traditions, and classifications of interactions between the environment and humanity through the history of humanistic thought: from the first beginnings in antiquity, where it means more or less detailed observation of the environment, to modern authors with ‘deep’, ‘green’, and ‘blue’ solutions prevailing throughout considerations of the fundamentally connected more-than-human world.

Satish Kumar (2022), in the chapter *You Are, Therefore I Am: A Reverential Ecology*, emphasises that the Western concept of ‘I’ is never out of relation, relying on the Hindu concept of ‘So hum’: ‘You are, so I am’. Cartesian logic is ego-centric, and it often overlooks the ‘other’, be it human or non-human, animals, plants, soil, or Earth as a whole. Other traditions are more attentive to the interconnected web of various forms of life. In the end, all existing things are in some way just earth or soil (lat. *humus*) transformed. Therefore, only humility towards life and

the recognition of extreme dependence on each other, on animals, plants, and the Earth, will enable a step towards a better future for all.

Bruno Latour's chapter, entitled *The Anthropocene and the Destruction of (the Image of) the Globe*, is, as previous and following, a translation from English. Latour (2022) discusses the Anthropocene's impact on mental images of a complete, all-encompassing organisation of knowledge, frequently presented with the sphere or globe. The author calls this more or less theological obsession 'Atlas's curse', after the mythological demigod who has to hold up the heavens or sky but is, after Gerardus Mercator's counterpart, the result of combining the myth with a theological image of God's hand, burdened with the whole universe. The image of the sphere, as a totality encompassing knowledge, has ended in Anthropocene, so data obtain their original form as fragments that must be formed in a narrative. Instead of the image of the globe, there is Lovelock's Gaia, an image with no universalist tendencies. For Latour (2022), Gaia is not a spherical system but is just a name proposed for all the intertwined and unpredictable consequences of factors, a few-kilometres-thick membrane surrounding the planet, a delicate envelope of critical zones, a fabric of loops we need to recognise to become more sensitive and more responsive to the fragile envelopes in which we live. Hence, the destruction of the globe brings forth enough room and time for new narratives, historical and theological.

World-known physicist and philosopher Karen Barad (2022), in the chapter *After the End of the World: Entangled Nuclear Colonialisms, Matters of Force, and the Material Force of Justice*, points out that even the smallest particles of an atom are always already in a network of connections and do not exist separately, in other words, a 'void' is not nothingness. If the Anthropocene destroyed space, it also destroyed time: atomic bombs detonated or imploded time that has since been 'out of joint' (Lamb, 2000, 66). Barad explores the intertwining of hospitality and violence, using the atolls of the Marshall Islands as a starting point, where the United States staged a 'manifestation' of nuclear weapons during the Cold War and, in the aftermath, attempted to cover plutonium remains and other material traces of the violence of colonial hospitality with the construction of a concrete tomb. These attempts are seen by Barad as acts of 'erasure and a-void-ance', because these places were never void of inhabitants, human and non-human alike, and neither was there a 'no man's land', as the international political community of the time would have had it. During the current climate crisis, this geographical region is once more at significant risk of ceasing to exist. Barad hence argues that radical hospitality, seen as an infinity of possibilities for interrupting state-sanctioned violence, is written into the structure of matter itself in its inseparability with the void.

5

In such a state, in which space and time are no longer supreme rulers, theology and Christ can be seen in a much more unifying light. In the chapter *Being in the Heart of the Matter: Reflections on the Cosmic Christ for a New Theology of Nature*, Lenart Škof (2022) outlines the new theology of nature, in which Christ is revealed as embodied in the heart of the matter. The incarnation of God in Jesus is seen in the light of recent deep incarnation theologies aligning with deep history, combining Christian evolutionary thought and recent findings of the evolution of our *homo sapiens* species. Therefore, if modern humans have Denisovan and Neanderthal DNA, this also is the materiality of incarnated Christ. Furthermore, Christ's materiality is the cosmic materiality, if we accept the fact, that we all are 'star dust, made of ancient particles' (Caputo, 2013, 250) and that these particles are the nucleus of all materiality, then, finally, cosmic Christ reveals himself 'as being incarnate in the heart of the matter, with the sacredness of every living being testifying to a newly revealed environmental theology of flesh' (Škof, 2022).

The embodied material Christ is finally also the feminine Christ because, according to Christian belief, he took his body only from Mary – he is her flesh. Nadja Furlan Štante (2022), in her chapter *Environmental Stewardship and Holistic Ecology from the Perspective of Christian Ecofeminism*, focuses on the need to critically confront the idea of dominion (domination) as a form of managing creation that we encounter in the first pages of the Bible. The God-given task to humans, according to ecofeminists and other theologians (for example ‘Eco-Pope Francis and Ecumenical Green Patriarch Bartholomew I’), is one that we should describe as environmental stewardship or holistic ecology.

Nature Worshippers and Nature is the topic of Cirila Toplak’s chapter. She presents the western Slovenian socio-historical phenomenon of the community of nature worshippers and their attitude toward nature. The community was documented by Pavel Medvešček-Klančar. Toplak (2022) describes communities’ specific attitudes toward the surroundings and interprets them in the context of relevant contemporary social science concepts and theories, such as animism, totemism, biocentrism, and carnism. Although some critical reactions to the discovery were presented in scientific circles, this pre-Christian way of living in nature and with it is the bright local tradition to lean on to rediscover ways of more sustainable contemporary living.

Some features of ecology in the writings of Vekoslav Grmič, Slovenian Roman Catholic theologian and bishop, often accused of being the ‘red bishop’, are presented in the chapter *Vekoslav Grmič’s Theological Views on Ecology in the Light of Laudato si’* by Ignac Navernik and Ivan Rojnik (2022). Grmič was one of the first theologians in Slovenia who, following global trends, dealt with the intertwining of environmental, ethical, and theological issues. When the topics of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’*, for example, ecological issues and the poor, the environment as a network of life and the inherent value of every form of life, critique of technological patterns and forms of power, are compared with Grmič’s thought, we find a significant amount of similarity. These findings can be explained through Grmič’s theological insight and the fact that both are inspired by socially and politically critical theological thoughts of the South American continent.

6

Barbara Jurša Potocco (2022) is the author of the chapter entitled *Ecocriticism as a Part of Literary Science and (Post) Humanities*. The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment began in the 1980s to emphasise ecocentrism within literary and cultural studies. The first attempts in the United States were connected to the semi-literary genre of nature writing, while in the United Kingdom, they rekindled an interest in Romantic poetry. Later, ecocritical readings focused on the intertwining of anthropocentrism and discourses of gender, class, ethnic or racial difference. At present, ecocriticism is attentive to post-humanities, while its methods have become informed with new materialisms, which discuss literature as a material-discursive practice.

Gregor Pobežin (2022), in his historical and philological study entitled *Nostris Manibus Quasi Alteram Naturam Efficere Conamur... Man and Nature in the Roman Empire*, thematises Pliny’s critique of the exploitation of the environment. The thesis that this critique could be seen as a kind of germ of a proto-environmental mentality would be too bold in Pobežin’s opinion, so he focuses on presenting the mental framework of the ancient perception of the natural world. Over-exploitation, for example, is a significant topic for both ancient and modern people, causing numerous negative impacts on human and non-human inhabitants and on the planet itself. This includes philosophical views as far as they touch on the environment; Pobežin thus attempts to illuminate the mental framework within which ancient man perceived the environment.

Paulo Freire's concept of ecopedagogy is the primary focus of the chapter entitled *Ecopedagogy: Educational Concept and Social Movement for Sustainability of the Planet* by Tadej Košmerl and Borut Mikulec (2022). Ecopedagogy applies to both the educational concept and social movement. The central idea is the inseparability of social and environmental problems; therefore, anthropocentric considerations and attitudes are to be overturned in the direction of planetary citizenship, governed by the laws of environmental and social justice. To achieve this social transformation and increase social and environmental justice, (adult) education and critical awareness-raising are crucial.

Urška Martinc and Tomaž Grušovnik (2022), in the chapter *Philosophy for Children in Environmental and Animal Ethics: Critical Perspectives*, question and present examples of the inclusion of environmental and animal ethics in the philosophy for children approach. The cultural value system determines, for example, which animal is (more) valuable and therefore acceptable to be a pet. The concept of carnism allows us to have pets whilst raising animals for economic use. The authors emphasise animals' importance in a child's development, both in learning and development (emotional and social); the philosophy for children enables and empowers children (and adults) argumentation and reflection on the relationship with the 'other' in a way that can be extended to the whole environment.

The monograph concludes with chapters arising from the Integral Worlds approach, a more holistic view of the world and development. Ronnie Lessem and Alexander Schieffer (2022), in *Integral Worlds and Integral Economy*, present the basics of the Integral Worlds approach, a special feature of which is its rootedness in concrete space and time. This standpoint establishes contact with a dynamic cultural core, which carries diverse and unique solutions which have been built up over centuries and are tied to the capabilities of the natural environment in question. It is about the interaction between integral realities (worldviews), integral kingdoms (fields of knowledge), integral circles (different levels, from oneself to the world), and integral rhythms (transformational rhythms). In the second part of the chapter, the presented approach is applied to the economy.

In *Integral Green Slovenia: A Conceptual and Systemic Innovation for Sustainable Development*, Darja Piciga (2022) presents the model Integral Worlds applied to Slovenian concreteness. Specifics of the Slovenian cultural space and its givens are used for solutions that include the natural environment as an inseparable part of more sustainable contemporary future life. EU policies, including the European Green Agreement, also support the potential for holistic, sustainable development and integration into the innovation ecosystem. The vision of Integral Green Slovenia is well-being for all and preserving a healthy natural environment, departing from social responsibility and equal inclusion of cultural dimensions, in addition to more conventional environmental, social, and economic ones.

The 338-page monograph concludes with abstracts, information on authors and co-workers, two scientific reviews, and an index of names.

3 Conclusion

In the introduction, the editors wrote that the humanities are a joint work – as we stand on the shoulders of the giants of the past, so the present book is to be understood as one of the steps in this progress towards new insights. The work covers a wide part of the spectrum of environmental humanities but does not exhaust it, as the editors point out, and thus calls for further additions within individual humanities disciplines or interdisciplinary research. The monograph is, therefore, seen as a unique stimulus and calls for new diverse research projects in the field of the environmental humanities.

It is worth mentioning here the legal aspects of nature protection, psychological, psychotherapeutic, and other social projects in which animals, plants, and the natural environment as such occupy an increasingly prominent place. In the fields of ethnology and cultural and medical anthropology, the protection of cultural heritage and other disciplines highlighting environmental problems and solutions is increasing. Thus, there is more than enough work, and the signs of the times force us to continue seeking real metanoia, the global change in ways of living and acting so that the awareness of living in the more-than-human world can be fully expressed.

References

- Barad, K. (2022). Po koncu sveta: prepleteni nuklearni kolonializmi, materije moči in materialna moč pravičnosti. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 95–119.
- Bird Rose, D., Dooren, T. van, Chrulew, M., Cooke, S., Kearnes, M., and O’Gorman, E. (2012). Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities. *Environmental Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1–5.
- Caputo, J. D. (2013). *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Furlan Štante, N. (2022). Okoljsko skrbništvo in celostna ekologija iz perspektive krščanskega ekofeminizma. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 135–143.
- Jurša Potocco, B. (2022). Ekokritika kot del literarne vede in (post)humanistike. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 181–193.
- Košmerl, T., and Mikulec, B. (2022). Ekopedagogika: izobraževalni koncept in družbeno gibanje za trajnost planeta. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 209–220.
- Kumar, S. (2022). Ti si, torej sem jaz: spoštljiva ekologija. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 53–60.
- Lamb, S. ed. (2000). *Shakespeare’s Hamlet: Complete Text + Commentary + Glossary*. New York, Cleveland, Indianapolis: Hungry Minds.
- Latour, B. (2022). Antropocen in destrukcija (podobe) globusa. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 61–93.
- Lessem, R., and Schieffer, A. (2022). Integralni svetovi in integralna ekonomija. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 237–263.
- Martinc, U., and Grušovnik, T. (2022). Filozofija za otroke v okoljski etiki in etiki živali: kritične perspective. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 221–235.
- Morris, B. (2017). *Pioneers of Ecological Humanism: Mumford, Dubos and Bookchin*. Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books.
- Navernik, I. (2022). Razgledi po humanističnih »poljih« ekologije. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 13–52.

- Navernik, I., and Rojnik, I. (2022). Teološki pogledi Vekoslava Grmiča na ekologijo v luči Laudato si'. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 161–179.
- Piciga, D. (2022). Integralna zelena Slovenija kot konceptualna in sistemska inovacija za trajnostni razvoj. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 265–291.
- Plumwood, V. (2009). Nature in the Active Voice. *Australian Humanities Review*, No. 46, pp. 111–127.
- Pobežin, G. (2022). Nostris manibus quasi alteram naturam efficere conamur ... Človek in narava v rimskem imperiju. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 195–208.
- Škof, L. (2022). Biti v srcu materije: razmišljanja o kozmičnem Kristusu za novo teologijo narave. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 121–134.
- Škof, L. and Navernik, I., ed. (2022). *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*. Ljubljana, Koper: Alma Mater Europaea – Fakulteta za humanistični študij, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana, Društvo Gibanje za trajnostni razvoj Slovenije – TRS, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Koper, Annales ZRS.
- Toplak, C. (2022). Naravoverstvo in narava. In *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, ed. Škof, L. and Navernik, I., pp. 145–160.