

VALUES AND ENVIRONMENT

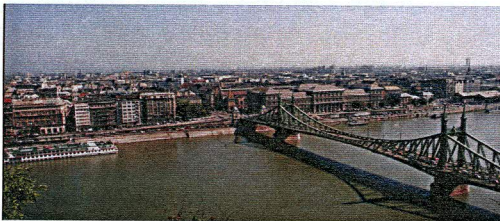
Merrill Findlay

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Melbourne, Australia

1. Back-casting wild otters and sturgeon into the Danube river

An informal Ecovercity workshop with Merrill Findlay, to explore the social transformations required to rehabilitate the Danube River, as seen from the University, and re-introduce wild otters and sturgeon, along with all the other native species that once thrived in this great river and its tributaries.



The canalized Danube River as it flows under Liberty Bridge and past the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration, which is just visible on the far right of the bridge.

Photo from Gellert Hill by Merrill Findlay, September 2001

The fossil record reveals that Planet Earth has suffered at least five mass extinction events since life emerged. At the end of the Permian period 250 million years ago, for example, some scientists suggest that an estimated 90% of all species disappeared. Fifty million years later, between the Triassic and Jurassic periods, mammal-like reptiles disappeared from what we now call the super-continent Pangea, a catastrophe that created the evolutionary space for dinosaurs to evolve. Sixty five million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous, another extinction event wiped out an estimated 40-50% of all biological diversity – including the dinosaurs. Some scientists suggest this one was caused by a direct hit by a giant piece of space debris: an asteroid, meteor or comet. Earth's biodiversity took 10 million years to recover, but in that time many ancestors of the species we are now familiar with, including mammals, had time to evolve.

Biologists now claim that we are in the midst of another mass extinction crisis. This time the culprit is not an asteroid, meteor or comet, but *Us*. Does it matter

