



The final BIOMOT/BESAFE conference through the eyes of a graduate student (part 1)

At the end of my graduation project, I had the opportunity to join the final conference of BIOMOT&BESAFE held at the 10th and 11th of June in Brussel, Belgium. At this final conference, the results of the two projects would be presented to European policy makers. I thought this would be a great opportunity to see how research projects funded by the European Union were conducted and how their results were shared with EU policy makers. My graduation project is focused on the science-policy interface of nature policy in the Netherlands and uses BIOMOT results to see how Dutch policy makers respond to and make use of scientific information. This event was therefore a great opportunity for me to see how the biodiversity science-policy interface is established on the European level.

The conference was held at Les Ateliers des Tanneurs, a beautiful building mosaic located in the heart of the Marolles district. Originally intended for wine trade and textile stores in the 19th century and famous for its 'art nouveau' style by architect F. Symons, the building mosaic is now known as an important economic and cultural hotspot for the city. It was at this business center that the conference was held in one of its beautiful rooms.

Running up to the event I learned that it was going to be a special one as the conference aimed to break new ground. We all know biodiversity in Europe continues to decline. Despite decades of policy making, business involvement and citizen action we have not been able to prevent further loss of biodiversity. New approaches are needed and this conference showed promise in this regard. By presenting the results from the BESAFE and BIOMOT research projects and creating a space for discussion in science-policy interface sessions, stakeholder meetings and various panels, the conference aimed to take strides forward in biodiversity protection. I would like to describe what I have learned from the results of the two projects.

The first day started with a general introduction to the conference by Birgit de Boissezon, Head of Unit for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and part of the European Commission. Her opening speech was hopeful, stating that the results from the BESAFE and BIOMOT projects represented thinking that was already present within the European Commission. She stated that the results also showed how to make that thinking practical. She was followed up by the man who had been the driving force behind the two projects: Martin Sharman, former EU Policy Officer responsible for biodiversity and ecosystem services. He made an emotional speech about how until now EU policy had largely failed to prevent biodiversity decline and that he hoped that the results from these two projects would be able to give new meaning to the way we can protect our biodiversity.

Then the results from both projects were presented by the two project leaders' prof. Wouter de Groot and Drs. Rob Bugter. I learned that BESAFE looked at the contribution of ecosystem services in

demonstrating the value of biodiversity. Their results showed what kind of ecosystem services arguments and protection strategies were effective in various contexts and where and when they could be applied in biodiversity protection. The goal of the BESAFE project had been to further explore the ecosystem services discourse present in literature and policy and in my view it had succeeded in doing so. Their aim for the future is to create a framework that will incorporate the value of ecosystem services arguments into the whole policy cycle. This framework could offer insights on the changing effectiveness of different arguments along the development trajectory of policy making and could therefore increase the effectiveness of the use of these arguments for biodiversity protection. Learning this, I thought this was a very sensible route to take.

While the BESAFE project had focused on the valuation of biodiversity through the use of ecosystem services, the BIOMOT project focused on something completely different. Their goal had been to address the problems surrounding building and sustaining motivation to act for biodiversity. For the project, this meant a comprehensive rethinking of what the values and motivations of people actually are, as current values do not seem to be sufficient in halting biodiversity decline. Their results revealed that people act for nature not primarily for economic or moral reasons; they act for nature because they feel strongly connected to nature, and doing something for nature makes their life meaningful; they hope to make a difference in the world. This connection is established especially in early youth, in intensive encounters with nature and often outside of adult supervision. For these committed actors nature can be everywhere: a forest, the beach, a meadow, the city park or even a garden.

Having a better grasp on which ecosystem service arguments actually work when involving stakeholders in projects in the field (BESAFE) could be of tremendous benefit in making these projects succeed. And having an understanding what drives people who are committed to act for nature (BIOMOT) could help to rethink and reshape current policy making decisions to create room for these drivers. It is where these two results meet however, that I foresee a problem. I will describe this, and the rest of the day in more detail in the following Findings For All.

(This Findings for All was written by Ruud van den Heuvel, a Dutch student.)

