



## The final BIOMOT/BESAFE conference through the eyes of a graduate student (part 2).

After the BESAFE and BIOMOT projects presented their results in the morning and we had lunch, it was time to hear what the EU commissioners thought of the project outcomes. In the beginning of the afternoon a Science-Policy Forum was held on the transition towards social-ecological resilience in ecosystems service provision. Two commissioners were attending, which is apparently a lot, namely: Kurt Vandenberghe, Director for Directorate I – Climate Action and Resource Efficiency and Pia Bucella, Director for Directorate B – Natural Capital. They both voiced their concerns on biodiversity decline and how the results from the two projects could provide a framework for the right step forward in propagating action to combat this decline.

What bothered me a little bit was the way how the results from these two projects were interpreted. The BESAFE results align with and expand on the course that has been taken by the EU to create solutions for environmental problems, namely through the use of economic valuation of biodiversity. BIOMOT on the other hand, presents a framework which reveals that the economic argument does not seem play a role of importance for people to actually be involved in committed action for nature. Other incentives play a much bigger role for committed actors which have nothing to do with the current economic route of protecting biodiversity.

The speeches of EU Commissioners were interesting and engaging. They focused on the core tenets of the present-day EU perspective on dealing with biodiversity decline, speaking in terms of ecosystem services, natural capital and investment opportunities. BIOMOT results do not deny the importance of these mainstream concepts, but they do add alternative ways of thinking about reasons to act for nature. Obviously, there still is a fascinating road ahead to bring the BIOMOT results to the hearts and minds of policy makers!

Ecosystem services, seemingly have become the new route to take when trying to understand how nature could be valued and described in such a way that people will make an effort protecting it. A big part of this framework is its economic valuation and during the conference it became clear to all whom were attending that building a framework solely on economic arguments would not be sufficient to actually make any change happen for biodiversity. The solution? Incorporating the other arguments, consisting of moral, ethical and spiritual values within the framework! Within the ecosystem services framework these other values could be assigned under a label named 'alternative arguments' and become part of ecosystem service evaluation.

I can understand this line of thinking but in my opinion this doesn't make sense. What BIOMOT is trying to describe is that the reasons people have for taking care of nature have nothing to do with how much benefit they can derive from their relationship with nature. People do not base their relationship with nature on what services it can provide, be it ecological or economical. Of course

these services are important for us as a human species and we should not neglect them, but being the dominant discourse in how we talk to one another for protecting biodiversity and the environment is in my opinion a very dangerous route. I see this subtle reshaping of the ecosystem services model to incorporate these alternative values as an attempt to mold new research in an old paradigm. This is in my opinion futile as looking at the world through a calculated, economical lens has been proven not to work and will not continue to do so in the future.

If we truly want to make a change for the human species and the future of our planet we need to start looking at this old paradigm critically and let new research findings direct and reshape it when they reveal surprising and interesting routes. This includes taking a critical look at the current core principles that drive biodiversity protection (economic and ecological reasons) and questioning the way we as humans view our relationship with nature. BIOMOT shows that another route exists should we be willing to question our current paradigm.

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



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