

Conservation biologists question the economic growth paradigm

“Worldwide decline of biodiversity is largely driven by the misconception of an economic growth paradigm that is disconnected from Earth’s resources”, say conservation experts attending the 27th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB) in Montpellier, France. Members of the Society for Conservation Biology, the European Society for Ecological Economics and the Degrowth movement emphasized that there is an urgent need by the public and policy makers to encourage and promote equitable ways of reducing production and consumption for the benefit of both human wellbeing and biodiversity.

Professor Clive Spash, Chair of Public Policy and Governance at the WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria, earned a standing ovation for his critique of market-based approaches in biodiversity conservation during a debate with Peter Kareiva, Chief Scientist of The US-based Nature Conservancy. “The current neoliberal capitalist development model assumes limitless economic growth, and that market failures can be corrected by pricing Nature”, says Spash. “This system is neither economically, socially nor ecologically sustainable. Allying with corporations is nothing more than supporting the old ideology of economic growth, neoliberalism and technocracy”.

A group of several tens of scientists, practitioners and decision-makers attending a follow-up workshop on “degrowth and conservation”, agreed that a new economic model is needed that places human wellbeing and a healthy planet at the centre. They urge governments, policy-makers and the public, especially in the developed world, to adopt policies of degrowth, while equitably sharing the planet’s limited resources to ensure a dignified life for all the world’s human and non-human inhabitants.

“International and European targets of biodiversity conservation will not be reached unless the religious belief in eternal economic growth is abandoned”, says Iago Otero, member of the association Research & Degrowth and researcher at the Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human-Environment Systems (IRI-THESys) of the Humboldt-University of Berlin.

“Consumption behaviour comes with growing demand for production, which Earth simply cannot support”, says Guy Pe’er, a researcher at the UFZ – Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research and Chair of the Communication Committee of the Society for Conservation Biology – Europe Section. “Community-based conservation and local production-consumption chains show that there are better alternatives”.

Storified debate: <https://storify.com/jocelynesze/iccb-2015-kareiva-vs-spash>

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