

## **Degrowth and payments for ecosystem services: highlighting the tensions**

The ecosystem services approach, that is characterized as the benefits provided by ecosystems to humans, (Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2010) became probably the foremost trend on conservation and sustainability science. The concept has received over the past few years, an increasing attention as a way to communicate human dependence on ecological processes, a utilitarian reason to protect nature (Redford and Adams, 2009). The idea of ecosystem services brought possibilities to understand nature within market ideologies, to recognize the environmental destruction and therefore safeguard nature.

Following this logic, among other projects, payments for ecosystem services (PES) emerged and have been fostered with much enthusiasm (Engel et al., 2008; Muradian et al., 2010). PES initiatives, which are characterized by rewarding environmental 'resource' managers through economical benefits for their efforts in providing ecosystem services, or not to damage the natural environment, compel progressively more the ecological science to measure and quantify these services, restricting conservation to "[...] a nature that capital can 'see' [...]" (Robertson, 2006: 367), to the 'Nature<sup>TM</sup> Inc' (Arsel and Büscher, 2012).

However, at the same time the 'green' clamming of growth continues to develop innovative and alluring instruments, such as PES, other alternatives emerge to counterpoint the economic growth imperative. Degrowth movement has been much considered as a response to the multiple crises that the dominant economic growth imposes to humanity and to the natural world, and can represent a response to the misleading way humans perceive nature under economic growth assumptions, avoiding the valuation of what should not have economic monetary value, such as nature, care and relations.

Degrowth may be defined as an equitable and democratic transition to a moderate economy with a more contained production process and consumptions (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010) increasing human wellbeing, but enhancing ecological conditions in the short and long term and at global and local level (Schneider et al., 2010). But beyond a concept degrowth is a political slogan with significant theoretical implications (Latouche, 2009), an activism that soon became a movement (Demaria et al., 2013) that opposes to the current developmentalism stream, representing an effort to re-politicize the debate around the so much urgent socio-ecological transformation, searching for new alternatives, and at the same time presenting itself as an alternative proposal (Demaria et al., 2013).

The way we conceive the natural world and its ecological functions can seriously reverberate in conservation policy trends. Once degrowth emerges as a dissident process, it may require a reconsideration of preestablished conceptions and values in the idea of ecosystem services and its related tools, such as PES. As long as we continue to understand nature as a service provider, the logic of growth will not be easily abandoned. As Cattaneo et al. (2012: 515) affirm, this would require "[...] avoiding the trap of getting tangled in economic proposals and an economic idiom when envisioning the transition to a degrowth society, i.e. avoiding the 'economicism' that characterizes industrial society and which is at the heart of the ideology of development".

This paper defends that PES is aligned with neoliberalization of nature, built on the logic of economic development growth, the same which led to the deterioration of nature and human relations (Büscher, 2012; McAfee and Shapiro, 2010). Leaned on ecosystem services approach, PES simplify the relationship between humans and nature, reducing it to a single exchange unity, representing a commodity fetishism and thus ignoring the plurality of languages around this relation (Kosoy and Coberra, 2010). PES also reproduce the idea of natural capital to represent what once was perceived as nature. The question is not only if PES is a market or not, i.e., independently of their relation to market, PES discourage a more serious governance concerned with ethical and justice assumptions, not only in relation to humans, but also with the nonhuman world.

The purpose of this paper is to relate PES and degrowth, highlighting the tension between them. This exercise takes place relating PES with the inspirational sources of degrowth (Bayon et al., 2010; Demaria et al., 2013; Flipo; 2007). Thereby, 6 sources are identified (Demaria et al., 2013):

- i) *Ecology*;
- ii) *Critiques of development and praise for anti-utilitarianism*;
- iii) *Meaningful life and well-being*;
- iv) *bioeconomy*;
- v) *Democracy*;
- vi) *Justice*.

The relation to be developed here is essentially conceptual and ideological. But it is a warning that although both degrowth and PES have convergence points and similarities (Marangon and Troiano, 2012), they are far apart, almost opposites, conceptually and ideologically. PES can work in certain situations and may benefit some people and sometimes even the natural environment (especially what is conventionally called ecosystem services). Otherwise, it would not have attracted that attention. One of the problems is that PES work in the same economic growth logic that is largely denied by degrowth.

Concluding, degrowth should not consent with the ideology of commodification of nature that corrupt the relationship between humans and nature and put an obstacle on recovering and encouraging the virtuous relationship that can exist towards nature.

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