



## **"RIGHTS TO NATURE"**

**Tracing alternative political ecologies  
against the neoliberal environmental agenda**

**GEOFORUM 2016 Workshop**

**University of Cambridge  
23-24 June 2016**

# Rights to Nature

## Tracing alternative political ecologies against the neoliberal environmental agenda

### CONFERENCE PROGRAM (summary)

#### 23<sup>rd</sup> June

08.30 – 9.00

**Reception and presentation**

Elia Apostolopoulou (University of Cambridge) and Jose Cortes-Vazquez (University of Sheffield)

9.00 - 10.30

**Plenary: "Nature-society relations after the 2008 financial crash. An academic-activist dialogue"**

Erik Swyngedouw (University of Manchester), Nuria Hernández-Mora (Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua and Universidad de Sevilla), and Bill Adams (University of Cambridge)

10.30 – 11.00

*Coffee break*

11.00 – 13.00

**Panel 1: "The entrenchment of the neoliberal agenda. Conflicts and contestations in Europe"**

Stefania Barca (Universidade de Coimbra), Aris Chatzistefanou (Infowar, author of the documentaries 'Debtocracy' and 'Catastroika'), Maria Christianou and Anni Vasileiou (Ierissos - SOShalkidiki), Mike Geddes and Madeleine Wahlberg (European Network against Useless Imposed Megaprojects), and Peter Thomas (Brunel University of London). Chair: Jessica Hope (University of Cambridge)

13.00 – 14.00

*Lunch break*

14.00 – 16.00

**Panel 2: "Feeding the global grab. The privatization of natural resources after the crisis"**

Meera Karunanathan (The Blue Planet Project), Costis Hadjimichalis (Harokopio University), Damien Short (Extreme Energy Initiative), Ioana Florea (Quantic Association in Bucharest), and Gabriela Vazquez (Ecologistas en Acción). Chair: Dan Brockington (University of Sheffield)

16.00 – 16.30

*Coffee break*

16.30 – 18.30

**Panel 3: "Cashing in on protected natures. Neoliberal conservation in the Global North"**

Bram Büscher (Wageningen University), Katja Neves (Concordia University), Mumta Ito (Rights of Nature Europe), Friedrich Wulf/Sandra Bell (Friends of the Earth), Elia Apostolopoulou (University of Cambridge), and Jose Cortes-Vazquez (University of Sheffield). Chair: Dimitrios Bormpoudakis (University of Kent)

#### 24<sup>th</sup> June

09.00 – 10.00

**Coffee reception and networking**

10.00 – 12.00

**Panel 4: "From the Rights to the City to the Rights to Nature. New urban struggles and resistances"**

Luz Marina García Herrera (Universidad de La Laguna), Alex Loftus (King's College London), Bill Perry (Lambeth Housing Activists), Mary Van de Water (Lambeth Housing Activists), and Michele Lancione (University of Cambridge). Chair: Eszter Kovacs (University of Cambridge)

12.00 – 13.00

*Lunch break*

- 13.00 – 15.00 **Panel 5: “The nature valuation debate revisited: a critique of environmental markets, carbon trading and wetland banking”**  
Morgan Robertson (UW-Madison), Larry Lohmann (The Corner House), Romain Felli (Université de Genève), Elena Gerebizza (Re:Common), and Erik Gomez-Baggethun (Norwegian University of Life Sciences). Chair: Elisa Greco (University of Manchester)
- 15.00 – 15.15 *Coffee break*
- 15.15 – 16.30 **Roundtable, discussion, and closing remarks.** Chair: Bill Adams (University of Cambridge)

## **PRESENTATION TITLES AND ABSTRACTS**

**23<sup>rd</sup> June**

9.00 - 10.30 **Plenary: “Nature–society relations after the 2008 financial crash. An academic–activist dialogue”**

***Erik Swyngedouw (University of Manchester)***

**INTERRUPTING THE ANTHRO-OBSCENE**

The presentation is organized in three parts. In the first part, we engage with the ‘the event of the Anthropocene’ as Bonneuil and Fressoz (2013; 2016) call it. While fully recognizing the active role of humans in co-constructing the earth’s deep geo-historical time, I problematize how this has also inaugurated a potential new ontological framing of radical symmetry between humans and non-humans. In the second part, I interrogate how this symmetrical relational ontology, variously referred to as more-than-human or object-oriented ontology fuels the possibility of a new cosmology, a new ordering of socio-natural relations such that nothing really has to change. Indeed, despite its oftentimes-radical presumptions, I contend that this new cosmology permits precisely the deepening of a particular capitalist form of human-nonhuman entanglements, what can only be referred to as a hyper-accelerationist eco-modernist vision in which big science and big capital join to save the earth. However, as I develop in the third section, there is a possibility to re-cast the depoliticized story of the Anthro-obScene and, through that, to explore the contours of a new politicization of the socio-environmental conundrum we are in, while fully and radically embracing our interdependence with non-humans. This builds upon foregrounding the alterities and heterogeneities that cut through any relational assemblage and renders it ultimately unstable and precarious.

***Nuria Hernández-Mora (Plataforma Nueva Cultura del Agua and Universidad de Sevilla)***

**SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM AND THE DEFENSE OF THE PATRIMONIAL VALUE OF WATER: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW WATER CULTURE FOUNDATION IN SPAIN**

How can researchers and activists interact and collaborate in the generation of shared knowledge and understanding of our socio-political-ecological environments? How is information produced and reproduced and how can it be transformed into actionable knowledge? What role can socio-environmental networks play in the generation of alternative understandings of reality? How can improved knowledge and understanding empower social actors to influence policy? These questions are particularly relevant today in the field of water resources management where water governance approaches—based on the ideas of efficiency, use of economic instruments and participatory management—are promoted at every level as antidote to Political contestations to dominant discourses over water. It can be argued that these “governance-beyond-the state” management approaches, in fact, force actors to collaborate within a given framework that cannot be questioned or altered and that profoundly conditions the terms of the debate and thus the final policy outcome.

The experience of water-related networked citizen organizations (Citizen water networks or CWN) and the New Water Culture Foundation (Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua or FNCA) in Spain can provide some relevant insights. These networks are coalitions of environmental groups, citizen organizations, activists, scholars, local municipalities, and

other actors (sometimes farmers and other local entrepreneurs) organized to defend the patrimonial, social and economic values of water. They operate in Spain at the river-basin, regional or national scale, and are articulated and interconnected through shared meanings and understandings that emerge from the ideas of the New Water Culture. In a country where the "hydraulic paradigm" has dominated since the early 20th century and a closed water policy community has controlled decisions over the management and allocation of water, activists and scholars have collaborated since the early 1990s to question the dominating paradigm and generate alternative discourses and policy alternatives, with a potential socio-political content. The different manifestations of the emerging water governance approaches were seen by these networks as potential tools for transformation and therefore embraced and even promoted at the expense of more radical-democratic strategies of contestation.

Recent experiences have re-Politicized the debate and mobilized social actors, with emerging networks and connections. On one hand reforms undertaken since the start of the financial crisis have deepened the mercantilization of Spanish water policy, with privatization of urban water services, expansion of water markets or the growing role of private capital in water resources management. On the other hand, the timid attempts at public participation processes in the postdemocratic context of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Spain have failed to alter the power balance in decisions over water. Finally the emergence of new political parties in Spain that attempt to embody the voices of different social movements that want to move the debates from the realm of policies to that of the Political, present important opportunities but also threats to alternative hydro-politics.

***Bill Adams (University of Cambridge)***

#### CONSERVATION IN AN ERA OF AUSTERITY

Progressive neoliberalization has brought many changes to conservation ideas and practice. First, there has been expansion, the creation of new conservation territories, new commodities and new actors, and new kinds of actors to plan, manage and facilitate transactions and transformations with respect to nature. Second, there has been transformation in the way nature is conceived of and defined, and where it is understood to be located: nature is reformulated as spectacle, and relocate to new terrains (the Tropics, the Poles), and to the virtual world. But what is the specific contribution of austerity to these transformations? I see its contribution primarily as a constriction, in the ability and willingness of the state to fund conservation, in the idea of nature as something needing and deserving separate engagement or specific management, and in the policy frameworks developed to manage and protect nature. This constriction is entirely compatible with, and indeed furthers, core dimensions of the neoliberalization of conservation. I illustrate this argument using the example of conservation in the UK following the 2008 crash, where I would suggest that mainstream conservation in an era of austerity has been reframed as a concern for the nature that can be afforded, the nature for which there is a market, and the beneficiaries who can pay. At the same time, against this restricted 'conservation from above', there exists the possibility of 'conservation from below', of citizen action, of urban and hybrid natures and concern for an ecology of metabolism rather than diversity.

11.00 – 13.00

#### **Panel 1: "The entrenchment of the neoliberal agenda. Conflicts and contestations in Europe"**

***Stefania Barca (Universidade de Coimbra)***

#### BEYOND GREEN NEW DEAL: WORK, ECOLOGY AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN POST-GROWTH EUROPE

Engaging with the activist/research approach of this workshop, my paper will develop a critique of the Green New Deal strategy, as elaborated by OECD, WTO, IMF and European green parties, from the perspective of social reproduction. I will look at how the GND discourse is received by organized labour at different levels (from the European Trade Unions Confederation, to national unions' confederations and grassroots movements in Italy and Portugal), and offer a reflection on what alternative possibilities exist for theorizing new labor/environment relationships in a context of economic crisis and post peak-growth.

***Aris Chatzistefanou (Infowar, author of the documentaries 'Debtocracy' and 'Catastroika')***

GREECE: FROM GUINEA PIG OF AUSTERITY TO THE GREENHOUSE OF NEOLIBERALISM

The effects of extreme austerity and massive privatization to the environment in Greece. The cases of Skouries mine in northern Greece and Ellinikon (old international airport of Athens).

***Maria Christianou and Anni Vasileiou (Coordinating Committee of Ierissos - SOShalkidiki.gr)***

BEYOND WINNING AND LOSING: THE RISE OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT AGAINST MEGA-MINING PROJECTS IN NORTHERN GREECE

Small-scale mining activity in Northeastern Halkidiki has been going on for many decades, as have the struggles against its destructive consequences. During the years of economic crisis and “memoranda of understanding” the mineral-rich field of Northeastern Halkidiki was transformed into a field of neoliberal politics, repression and simultaneously the space of a dynamic social movement. The proposed large-scale mining project, the logic of “investments at any cost” and the total absence of informed public consent brought about an ominous certainty to local communities that their homeland was being transformed into a sacrifice zone. Slowly -and through much effort- a mass social movement was born. Faced with the logic of imposed decisions, local communities responded with scientific documentation, a legal struggle, wide dissemination of information, local assemblies, actions, protests, resistance - throwing public debate around silenced issues wide-open. To which the state mechanism answered through a campaign of violent repression, propaganda, intimidation and finally prosecution. This social struggle is far from over, if one presumes that such struggles can be definitively won or lost. Whatever the outcome, what surely remains is the awareness that in a world where corporate profits dictate lives -wielding power through manipulation of the political sphere- local societies have no choice but to respond by taking matters into their own hands.

***Mike Geddes and Madeleine Wahlberg (European Network against Useless Imposed Megaprojects)***

BUILDING OPPOSITION TO NEOLIBERAL MEGAPROJECTS ACROSS EUROPE

This proposal is from a European network of activists against megaprojects. Megaprojects – which are commonly understood to be projects that cost at least a billion dollars, though often far more – play an increasingly important role in contemporary patterns of capitalist accumulation. They include not only tunnels, bridges, dams, railways and highways but also airports, cruise ships, offshore oil and gas rigs, aluminum smelters, communications systems, Olympic Games, aerospace missions, new towns—the list goes on and on. In many cases such projects are economically questionable and socially harmful, and are imposed on citizens and communities by processes which make a mockery of democratic principles.

The UIMP network is an umbrella for activist groups across Europe and beyond united in opposition to neoliberal megaprojects, including high speed rail (No Tav, Susa Valley, Veneto and Firenze, Italy; Pays Basque and Lyon-Turin, France; LGV Tangier-Casablanca, Morocco; Stuttgart 21, Germany; Stop HS2, UK) airports (Notre Dame des Landes, France), and gold mining (Rosia Montana, Romania).

The network supports member activist groups by enabling them to share information and experience (Robert 2014). It also undertakes collective action, including lobbying the European Commission and European Parliament. Recently it has participated in a public Inquiry undertaken by the Permanent People’s Tribunal and hosted by No Tav Val de Susa into megaprojects (Presidioeuropa 2015). The network revolves around annual conferences - in Val Susa (2011, Italy), Notre Dame de Landes (2012, France), Stuttgart (2013, Germany) Roşia Montană (2014, Romania), Bagnaria Arsa, (2015, Italy). The 2016 meeting will be in Bayonne, France. The network is strongly aware that the issues confronting anti-megaproject activists are if anything even more serious in the global South, and has been developing links with activists beyond Europe and the global North.

The paper to the Rights to Nature conference will start from a critical examination of the role of infrastructure and other megaprojects in neoliberal political economy, (Flyberg 2003; Geddes 2012) and, in particular, their contribution to ruling

class routes out of crisis. This analysis will draw on the network's Tunis Declaration, adopted at the time of the Tunis World Social Forum, which argues that UIMPs are economically and environmentally disastrous; exclude citizens from decisions; do not meet local needs; generate exorbitant profits at the cost of public debt; and underpin the global dominance of capital.

The paper will then consider alternative agendas to those associated with megaprojects, drawing on the experiences of the UIMP network and its member organisations. This will include discussion of environmental alternatives, including more environmentally sustainable transport strategies, and also issues of power and democracy. In the process, the strengths and weaknesses of the network will be evaluated.

#### References

Flyberg B 2003 *Megaprojects and Risk*. Cambridge: CUP.

Geddes M 2012 A rich man's plaything. *Red Pepper* June/July, 22-24.

Presidio Europa 2015 The judgement of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, Turin, 2015. <http://www.presidioeuropa.net/blog/la-sentence-du-tribunal-permanent-des-peuples-turin-2015/>

Robert D 2014 Social movements opposing megaprojects. <http://stophs2.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/D-Robert-Social-movements-against-UIMP.compressed.pdf>

***Peter Thomas (Brunel University of London)***

#### CONJUNCTURES OF CRISIS

The contemporary conjuncture (post 2007) is defined by the complex articulation of a variety of crises in different fields - financial, economic, political, juridical, social, and ecological. This paper will explore the ways in which crisis-dynamics in these different fields contradict, reinforce and under- and overdetermine each other. It will be argued that the separation and isolation of these dynamics in distinct fields has thus far constituted one of the most significant means by which states have attempted to manage and govern them, in a process of 'disarticulation'. Finally, the paper will conclude with some reflections on the implications for oppositional political strategies of this distinctive conjunction of crises, and the potential for establishing relations of translatability between these overdetermined fields.

14.00 – 16.00

#### **Panel 2: "Feeding the global grab. The privatization of natural resources after the crisis"**

***Meera Karunanathan (The Blue Planet Project)***

#### THE CORPORATE APPROPRIATION OF HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION DISCOURSE TO LEGITIMATE STRATEGIES OF ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

Inspired by Gramsci's notion of a "war of position", this paper investigates the role of corporate appropriation of human right to water and sanitation (HRWS) discourse as a strategy for building consent for the accumulation of wealth through corporate control of water resources and services. It draws upon David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, and a content and critical discourse analysis of nine policy documents published by the 2030 Water Resources Group – a consortium comprised of multinational corporations, development agencies and international financial institutions. The analysis is structured around the themes of financialization, commodification of water resources and state redistribution strategies. The findings suggest that the narrative advanced by this lobby group undermines human rights while simultaneously appropriating key elements of HRWS discourse to advance neoliberal water policy objectives which, in turn, reflect efforts of the transnational capitalist class to consolidate class power by controlling discourse.

***Costis Hadjimichalis (Harokopio University)***

#### LAND AND LANDSCAPE DISPOSSESSION IN THE ERA OF PRIVATIZATION AND FINANCIALIZATION

Financialization turns tangible and intangible assets to traded products and land and landscapes are no exception. Companies and their shareholders exchange land shares as any other commodity, a notable distinction from the previous faces of capitalist land commodification. As we all know, land is a social relation, not a commodity in the classical sense and as a natural asset has no price in capitalism. Violent enclosures of the commons in the past and violent privatizations of public properties today are required to turn dispossessed land to a fictitious commodity with a market price. I use this framework to discuss the case of Cavo Sidero in eastern Crete, where a Scottish company plans to develop a huge integrated luxury tourist and golf resort in dispossessed public/monastery land. The company will capture monopoly rent through the creative destruction of landscape and the dispossession of the landscape's symbolic capital.

***Damien Short (Extreme Energy Initiative)***

POWER, CORRUPTION AND LIES'? NEOLIBERALISM AND THE UK'S FRACKING AGENDA

Abstract TBC

***Ioana Florea (Quantic Association in Bucharest)***

EXPLOITING RESOURCES, PRIVATISING DISCOURSES: CYANIDE-MINING AND FRACKING IN ROMANIA

In the last decade, there have been two major environmental conflicts in Romania: one related to open-pit gold extraction using cyanide, in the Apuseni Mountains in the centre of the country; the other related to shale gas exploitation using hydraulic fracturing, in several areas of the country.

The massive cyanide mining project in Apuseni Mountains was first talked about in the late '90s, by the authorities in Roşia Montană (mountain locality with a long history of traditional/ conventional mining). A state-owned area covering several mountains was given in concession to a private Canadian company, which embarked on the elaborate process of authorizing the mining project. Resistance to it started soon after, as the local population became aware of the imminent eviction, and continued to grow into a social movement, as the Canadian company intensified its aggressive intrusion in the Apuseni Mountains and its aggressive lobby.

Shale gas exploitation through "fracking" burst into public discourse in early 2012, as the state president held a speech in the Parliament, suggesting changes in the mining legislation that would allow companies like Chevron to start fracking; opposition started with massive protests in the North-Eastern municipality of Bârlad, where shale gas "exploration" was planned to start. In 2012-2013, large state-owned terrains in several areas were given in concession to Chevron and other oil and gas corporations. Some time was needed to understand what fracking is about, for the local, regional, national authorities to clarify their positions, for the locals and environmentalists to organize the resistance.

Then, local and national resistance to both extraction projects peaked in late 2013, when the Romanian Parliament was almost to change the mining legislation, transforming the corporate projects of RMGC and Chevron into projects "of national interest", granting them state support, resources and fast-track permits as for any public work. Weekly street protests followed, gathering more than 10 000 people in several cities and international support protests; the state authorities employed thousands of riot police agents against the protesters and protecting the corporate operations.

In this confrontational context and throughout its intense history, the main discourse of the resistance movement was built around protecting local private property against foreign private/corporate property, opposing the ancient/ inherited/ pure private property of the worthy locals to the corrupt interests of the unworthy foreigners. This framing centred on local private property easily led to nationalism penetrating the dominant discourse of the main environmental movement in Romania, and to issues of public resources, equal rights to nature, cross-border environmental impacts, and environmental justice becoming marginal.

How to bring (back) these marginal issues into the heart of the resistance movement and its main claims? Considering the post-socialist Romanian context, marked by ubiquitous privatisation, how can alternative framings of the

environmental movement be built? I will discuss the attempts made so far in this direction, the conflicts raised and the current developments in cyanide mining and fracking in Romania.

***Gabriela Vazquez (Ecologistas en Acción)***

**OFFSETTING PRO-GMO PROPAGANDA**

Biodiversity privatisation is one of the many dark faces of the so-called "free market", one that could take a huge toll on future generations and seems to be widely irreversible. As in many other areas, the very agents causing these problems tend to be the ones trying to sell new magical techno-solutions to the population.

In the case of GMOs, safety concerns are added to the mix, which nonetheless gives rise to a very profitable market in the short term. In the EU, grassroots opposition to GMOs has been key to stopping people's exposure to these and their widespread cultivation.

Spain remains, however, one of the big havens of GMOs in Europe, and the industry's propaganda usually runs way ahead what scientific papers actually say. I am a biotechnologist working at the "Observatorio OMG" (GMO Observatory), which tries to offset this propaganda by offering critical information on genetically modified organisms and neoliberal solutions to the food challenges ahead.

16.30 – 18.30

**Panel 3: "Cashing in on protected nature. Neoliberal conservation in the Global North"**

***Bram Buscher (Wageningen University)***

**THE INEQUALITY OF NATURES. ON THE GLOBAL CONFLUENCE OF CAPITALISM AND CONSERVATION**

Following the financial crisis and its aftermath, it is clear that the inherent contradictions of capitalist accumulation have become even more intense and plunged the global economy into unprecedented turmoil and urgency. Governments, business leaders and other elite agents are frantically searching for a new, more stable mode of accumulation. Arguably the most promising is what we call 'Accumulation by Conservation' (AbC): a mode of accumulation that takes the negative environmental contradictions of contemporary capitalism as its departure for a newfound 'sustainable' model of accumulation for the future. Under slogans such as payments for environmental services, the Green Economy, and The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, public, private and non-governmental sectors seek ways to turn the non-material use of nature into capital that can simultaneously 'save' the environment and establish long-term modes of capital accumulation. In the paper, we conceptualise and interrogate the grand claim of AbC and argue that it should be seen as a denial of the negative environmental impacts of 'business as usual' capitalism. We evaluate AbC's attempt to compel nature to pay for itself and conclude by speculating whether this dynamic signals the impending end of the current global cycle of accumulation altogether.

***Katja Neves (Concordia University)***

**POST-NORMAL CONSERVATION: THE RE-ORDERING OF BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION GOVERNANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUBJECTIVITIES**

Abstract TBC

***Mumta Ito (Rights of Nature Europe)***

**WHY WE CANNOT HAVE A RIGHT TO NATURE WITHOUT THE RIGHTS OF NATURE / OR RIGHT TO NATURE AND RIGHTS OF NATURE: 2 SIDES OF THE SAME COIN**

The right to nature and the rights of nature are 2 sides of the same coin. This talk walks through how recognising rights of nature in law changes the game, the actions taken around the world to achieve this and the upcoming European Citizens Initiative to put Rights of Nature on the legislative agenda of the EU.



Despite hundreds of environmental laws nature is still in decline. These laws are failing because they are based on the premise that nature is property to be consumed. Laws carve out minimal protections against this consumption, but they are piecemeal, reactive, and for the most part an observable failure.

Recognising Nature's rights in law subverts this property paradigm. Nature is fully protected as a rights bearing subject of the law. An acceptable level of human activity is then settled on - but this activity must not threaten the functional integrity of the ecosystem in question. Nature rights establishes a duty of care towards nature and embeds the reality of our relationship with nature in law.

Giving local people the right to defend nature - in the name of nature - removes all the technical legal hurdles one currently needs to jump in order to defend nature in court. As these hurdles are based on property, damage to property and planning procedure very often it is simply impossible for people to defend nature itself. If property damage is proved, the recompense goes to the property right owner and not to repair the ecosystem. NGOs have standing but grounds for cases are limited to technical arguments about decision making processes. We face a choice as a society: either we further commodify nature, price it up and sell it on the financial markets, or we establish nature as a defensible presence within our legal system.

### ***Friedrich Wulf (Friends of the Earth), and Sandra Bell (Friends of the Earth)***

#### **WHY HAVING NATURE IN OUR LIVES IS A RIGHT**

Friends of the Earth's European network is campaigning for full implementation of vital laws to protect nature. Many national Friends of the Earth organisations are working to protect specific nature sites, as well as on drivers of biodiversity loss. Yet in addition to winning policy changes, battling to protecting nature sites, and encouraging thriving nature on the ground; we need a new public debate to frame public understanding of the importance and relevance of nature.

The debate about our crisis of biodiversity loss has tended to be about conservation of specific species and nature reserves. It tends to separate nature from people and society, and has appealed to a quite narrow demographic of public and political support and understanding. Friends of the Earth sees it differently. Nature protection is also a vital issue of social and environmental justice.

Protection or destruction of nature has deep effects on people and communities. Nature is essential for everybody's mental and physical health and well-being. But too often it is marginalised communities with the least power and money who are denied the ability to enjoy and experience nature, and who are losing their quality of life, linked to loss of nature.

Being able to benefit from vibrant nature – enjoying it, exploring it, sensing it, exercising in it – should be considered a fundamental right for everyone – regardless of our backgrounds. <http://www.foeeurope.org/right-to-nature>

Friends of the Earth is extremely critical of biodiversity off-setting and attempts to commodify nature <http://www.foeeurope.org/nature-not-for-sale>. We believe that integrating nature into market based instruments and turning biodiversity into a tradeable commodity can breach people's right to nature in their locality, as well as ignoring nature's intrinsic value.

Our presentation will be about why we believe having nature in our lives is a right for everybody, and why biodiversity off-setting threatens to undermine that.

### ***Elia Apostolopoulou (University of Cambridge) and Jose Cortes-Vazquez (University of Sheffield)***

#### **NEOLIBERAL CONSERVATION AS A CONTESTED PROCESS: CRITICAL CHALLENGES IN POST-CRISIS EUROPE**

Since the 2008 financial crash the expansion of neoliberalism has had an enormous impact on conservation policies. In this paper we look at how different social groups justify, legitimise, or oppose the neoliberalisation of nature conservation in the EU through the comparative study of cases in four countries: Spain, Ireland, Greece and the UK. We focus on cases of green grabbing, where environmental arguments are used to support the expropriation of land and resources, and un-green grabbing, where hitherto protected natures are expropriated without any pretence at

"greenness", because their dialectics can expose neoliberal conservation's dissonant geographical practices. We aim to find expressions of their transformative character in the shifting dialectics of consent and coercion apropos of new social conflicts between those who capitalise in these forms of neoliberal conservation and those who are negatively impacted. This will permit us to identify the key role played by new forms of environmentality in governmentalized subjects that engage with the increasingly contradictory character of neoliberal rationality. Neoliberal conservation aims to attract positive forms of engagement. Nevertheless, the neoliberalisation of nature conservation has so far been a highly contested process. We conclude that as ecosystem's characteristics can impede capitalism's attempts to reduce non-human nature to the commodity form, similarly places can be the locus of resistance against the socio-spatial injustices of neoliberal conservation.

**24<sup>th</sup> June**

09.30 – 12.00

**Panel 4: "From the Rights to the City to the Rights to Nature. New urban struggles and resistances"**

***Luz Marina García Herrera (Universidad de La Laguna)***

NEOLIBERAL STRATEGIES, SOCIAL STRUGGLES AND PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE: THE CASE OF CANARY ISLANDS IN SPAIN

Keeping in mind the socioeconomic features of Spanish economy and its real estate boom and collapse, this paper explores, on the one hand, the increasing entrepreneurial practice of urban and island governments, under a nationalist discourse, and its penchant for large infrastructure investments. Taking Tenerife as a case study, we analyse the social struggles around two contested mega-projects, an industrial port and a motorway around the island, with a heavy ecological impact. On the other hand, both projects are linked to processes of valorisation and redifferentiation of urban space as well as a growing uneven development in the island. As a result, we hope to contribute to know the specific practices of neoliberalism in the islands, to say, to the variegated processes of neoliberalization.

***Alex Loftus (King's College London)***

DEMOCRATISING THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

In this paper we consider struggles for the democratisation of energy and water as practices of appropriating the right to the city. We thereby seek to challenge narrower readings that focus only on demands for access to basic needs. Instead we seek to make sense of the often contradictory political claims within water and energy struggles. Our twin empirical focus is on the Berliner Energietisch (Berlin Energy Roundtable) campaign – which successfully forced a city-wide referendum in November 2013 – and the last decade and a half of struggles over water in the post-apartheid city of Durban. Although the very different historical and geographical contexts cannot be ignored, both studies suggest ways of rethinking the relationship between the state as a social relation and practices of commoning. Thus, in Durban the struggle for the right to water implicitly points towards a struggle to democratise the production and consumption of this most basic resource. And in Berlin the movement for energy democracy was forced to negotiate a complicated relationship within, against and beyond the state. In both, we see the possibility for rethinking the city as a produced environment, and find hope in the desire to democratise that production.

***Bill Perry (Lambeth Housing Activists)***

Title and abstract TBC

**Mary Van de Water (Lambeth Housing Activists)**

ENGAGING WITH THE DECISION MAKERS - WHAT IS A GOOD OUTCOME? AND FOR WHOM?

A small neighbourhood stood together to resist its entire destruction and out of scale replacement. A good or poor outcome? Or "partial".... Our experiences on Knight's Walk

**Michele Lancione (University of Cambridge)**

RECENTERING HOME-LESSNESS. ON THE BLURRING OF THE SUBJECT-CITY-NATURE INTERFACE

How is homelessness? What are those constitutive relationships of bodies, matter, atmospheres, power and more, which bring homelessness to the fore in its everyday unfolding and enduring trauma? The paper claims that homelessness' knowledge and policies lack a clear account of the lived experience of homelessness, and tend therefore to reproduce analytical abstraction, normative knowledge and ineffective interventions. In a word, policies that tend to reproduce the 'same' (lessness) without accounting for the 'necessary' (home). To encompass these limitations, what we need is a clear understanding of the subject-city-nature interface: What is at play in the entanglements of bodies, environments and urban forms? What does this generate and with what consequences? How, more importantly, is the experience of homelessness constituted in the more-than-human field, and what politics does it evoke? In order to investigate this interface, the paper presents extensive ethnographic material on the constitutive entanglements between homeless people, policy making and the more-than-human ecology of the urban. In blurring the boundaries of the subject-city-nature interface, the paper foregrounds a post-human account of 'home' as the key element of a renovated politics of homelessness able to break from the failures and redundancies of traditional interventions. The activist and scholarship work should therefore be devoted to find new ways to recenter the 'home' in homelessness.

13.00 – 15.00

**Panel 5: "The nature valuation debate revisited: a critique of environmental markets, carbon trading and wetland banking"**

**Morgan Robertson (UW-Madison)**

A RATIO FOR EVERY RISK: ENVIRONMENTAL OFFSET MARKETS AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF ORDINAL NUMBERS

In market-based strategies to compensate for impacts to protected resources, it is very common to see ratio multipliers applied to compensation requirements to account for everything from the risk of the ecological failure of the replacement site, to the risk that financial assurances will not be adequate to complete compensation activities, to the temporal lag between impact and compensation. These are quite technical aspects of project administration where environmental impacts are involved, but these ratios embody both concepts of how ecological restoration science works and the source of demand and therefore market generation in credits for ecosystem services. Market thickness has been identified as a primary source of failure in such market-based mechanisms -- the application of trade ratios is important to both market enthusiasts desiring robust price signals and to ecologists desiring to make compensation both more accurate and more costly. It is a key but rather obscure technology in the construction of environmental markets and the valuation of nature.

**Larry Lohmann (The Corner House)**

VALUE AND STRUGGLE IN ECOSYSTEM SERVICE MARKETS

The objective of ecosystem service markets, according to a prominent proponent, is "to transform environmental regulation into tradable instruments." What is the role of these circulating units in capital's systems of value? How are they constructed? What is their relationship to profit crisis, rent and territory, wages and work, interest and capital?

What is the nature of the natures engendered by these new forms of regulation and the competitive processes of commensuration that they institute? How best to characterize the forms and effects of privatized law that are involved?

What sort of struggles over class, race and knowledge are emerging as a result, and what are their characteristic trajectories? All of these questions are important to address if effective links are to be built between social movements battling ecosystem service markets and other movements often characterized as anticapitalist.

***Romain Felli (Université de Genève)***

THE CARBON FORUM RATHER THAN THE CARBON MARKET: LAND-USE RIGHTS AS A MODEL FOR THE ALLOCATION OF GHG EMISSIONS

I compare the regulatory mechanisms by which the State (in Switzerland) grants access to limited resources in two different cases, climate policy and land-use rights. Although in both cases access is granted to a limited resource, the modes of allocation are widely different: in the first case, it is essentially a market mechanism, whereas in the second case democratic deliberation and public consultations are at the heart of the procedure. In conclusion I reflect on the possibility to use the deliberative mechanisms of land-use rights to allocate emission rights and hence to repoliticize climate policy.

***Elena Gerebizza (Re:Common)***

THE DOUBLE LAND GRAB OF BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING: THE CASES OF RIO TINTO IN MADAGASCAR AND MONGOLIA

Biodiversity offsetting is emerging as a contested mechanism establishing theoretical comparisons between different ecosystems and species and de facto introducing some forms of economic evaluation of nature in order to make it tradable. While conservationist groups welcome this approach very much and often benefit directly by managing some project studies and implementation with the sponsoring of the private sector, other civil society groups, including Re:Common, have strongly opposed this option to compensate project impacts on biodiversity, in particular in the case of large infrastructure, energy and mining projects. Biodiversity offsetting is seen as a continuation of the failing logic which promoted carbon trading and forest carbon projects, such as REDD, often posing new challenges to local communities and their livelihoods environment on the ground, and possibly establishing the basis for the construction of new trading mechanisms, leading to a further financialisation to nature.

Despite specific national legislations to regulate biodiversity offsetting have been developed only in some countries – i.e in the EU a single European regulation is still missing and offsetting can be promoted on a voluntary basis by Member States - mining industry is promoting it all over the world to compensate irreversible residual impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems which cannot be mitigated on project mining sites. Thus biodiversity offset projects are developed in other locations in order to achieve a “no net loss” of biodiversity or even a “net positive impact” on it, as enshrined in the policy goal adopted by mining giant Rio Tinto.

In cooperation with other civil society partners and local groups, Re:Common has verified on the ground in the cases of two Rio Tinto flagship mining projects in Madagascar and Mongolia what it means in practice the implementation of biodiversity offsets, how feasible or not is the achievement of a net positive impact and which additional social and environmental problems biodiversity offsetting eventually poses in these specific mining operations. Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the inevitable negative implications that such mechanism has both for local communities and the local environment, so that we are still very far away from what could be regarded as a net positive impact on biodiversity.

In September 2015 Re:Common and the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) carried out a joint field visit to investigate the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset project in the Anosy region of south-eastern Madagascar. Our field investigation found that the reality around the offset site we visited is very different from the picture presented in the glossy

brochures distributed internationally. The biodiversity offset - widely advertised by Rio Tinto as a biodiversity offset model - has been used to justify destruction of a unique forest in the littoral zone – a forest type with extremely high species endemism and with only few unfragmented remnants left. Furthermore, subsistence livelihoods of villagers at the biodiversity offset site at Bemangidy-lvohibe are made even more precarious by the biodiversity offset.

Villagers at this offset site felt that restrictions had been imposed without negotiation and with little regard for their situation. Villagers of Antsotso in particular are left in a dire situation as a result of the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset at Bemangidy-lvohibe, some 50 kilometers to the north of the mining site. They lost the land used to grow their staple food, manioc, at the edge of the forest. The only place left for them to grow manioc now are the sand dunes. Manioc production in the sand dunes is not going well. As a result of the Rio Tinto biodiversity offset project at Bemangidy-lvohibe, families with no cash income to buy food are left without sufficient food to feed their families.

The Oyu Tolgoi (OT) open pit and underground copper mining project, the largest mining investment ever licensed in Mongolia, has been the first project in the country to highlight a biodiversity offset action in its environmental impact assessment (EIA) and related biodiversity management plan - under the guidance of The Biodiversity Consultancy of Cambridge. Oyu Tolgoi is controlled by Rio Tinto for 66% and project costs are about 10 billion \$ and the mine will account for about 30% of Mongolia GDP. Project EIA has been approved in 2013 by the Mongolian environmental ministry, after the government modified the environmental law of the country under advice of the World Bank by introducing the option of biodiversity offsetting. A specific biodiversity offset plan has been agreed by project sponsor, including two specific measures: a monitoring plan of few endangered species in project area – namely Khulan, black tail gazzella, and few birds - and an anti-pouching plan involving different authorities. An international civil society fact-finding mission of April 2015 detected that the actual offsetting project is still under preparation under many uncertainties – including how to implement the new environmental law and its financing – and thus project production for export to nearby Northern China is on-going with its severe environmental impacts since January 2013 without any offsetting of these taking place yet. And it is legitimate to wonder whether a biodiversity offset is possible ever in a desert, such as the Southern Gobi, where OT mine is located.

***Erik Gomez-Baggethun (Norwegian University of Life Sciences)***

#### VALUING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Nature valuation is increasingly used for purposes of awareness rising, trade-off analysis, priority-setting, and instrument design (e.g. PES) but its applicability to informing environmental liabilities in courts remains largely under researched. The paper explores how nature valuation can serve principles of environmental justice by promoting legal actions and frameworks that hold responsible parties in environmental damage more accountable for their actions.

## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION :**

Plenaries and panels will take place at Keynes Hall, King's College, 5 King's Parade, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1SJ. As this is an invitation-only event, please make sure you carry with you the badge with your name that you will be given at reception. There will be coffee and lunch provided at Chetwynd room both days of the conference for all attendants.

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS :**

Each panel speaker will have 15 minutes. Each plenary speaker will have 25 minutes. There will be 30-40 minutes for discussion at the end of each panel and plenary session. Almost 30 people are presenting in one and half days, and having enough time for post-presentation debates is a priority, so **please make sure your presentation adjusts to these time limits.**

Panel chairs will be in charge of time keeping, order debate questions, and will report key ideas and conclusions at the roundtable on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

During the discussions, some conference participants will also deliver a 3-5 minute short presentation of their work.

Although there will be debates at every panel, there will also be a roundtable on the second day of the conference for a more general and in-depth discussion where a number of conclusions will be collectively drafted for dissemination.

## **COMMUNICATION :**

We will broadcast online all presentations and discussions for those that cannot travel to Cambridge on those days. To this end, we will be using our Skype account "[rightstonatureconference](#)" (if you have troubles finding us, please try through email search: [conservationandtransformation@gmail.com](mailto:conservationandtransformation@gmail.com)). In addition to live broadcasting, we will be video recording all presentations and some of them will be eventually uploaded on our website [www.conservationandtransformation.com](http://www.conservationandtransformation.com) . If someone does not want to be either recorded or broadcasted, please inform any of the organisers in advance (Elia Apostolopoulou and Jose Cortes-Vazquez).

## **IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR INVITED SPEAKERS AND PANEL CHAIRS ONLY :**

Accommodation is provided for invited panel and plenary speakers and chairs at Westminster College, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0AA. For check-in, please go to reception where you will be issued with your room key. They will have a list with all your names. Please note that there are special arrangements for early and late check-in. All the information can be found in the check-in procedures document at the conference [website](#). If you have any question, please contact Westminster college booking desk directly: Abbie - [wmevents@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:wmevents@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

Invited speakers and chairs are also invited for dinner at Downing College, West Lodge & Maitland Room, at 7pm on the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**LIST OF PRESENTERS (Plenary, panels, and short presentations) AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

**(last time this list was updated: 3<sup>rd</sup> June)**

Adams, William	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>	Hernandez, Nuria	<i>Nueva Cultura del Agua (Spain)</i>
Alves, Camila Nobrega Rabello	<i>Freie University Berlin (Germany)</i>	Hiraldo Lopez-Alonso, Rocío	<i>University of East Anglia (UK)</i>
Angel, James	<i>King's College London (UK)</i>	Holmes, George	<i>University of Leeds (UK)</i>
Apostolopoulou, Elia	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>	Hope, Jessica	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>
Armas Garcia, Alejandro	<i>Universidad de La Laguna (Spain)</i>	Ito, Mumta	<i>Rights of Nature-Europe (UK)</i>
Barca, Stefania	<i>Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal)</i>	Karunanathan, Meera	<i>The Blue Planet Project (Canada)</i>
Bell, Sandra	<i>Friends of the Earth (UK)</i>	Kenner, Dario	<i>John Hopkins Cambridge (UK)</i>
Bocquillon, Pierre	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>	Kovacs, Eszter	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>
Bormpoudakis, Dimitrios	<i>University of Kent (UK)</i>	Lai, Huei-Ling	<i>Institute of Social Sciences (NL)</i>
Brock, Andrea	<i>University of Sussex (UK)</i>	Lancione, Michele	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>
Brockington, Dan	<i>University of Sheffield (UK)</i>	Levidow, Les	<i>Open University (UK)</i>
Burballa, Alfred	<i>Ulster University (UK)</i>	Loftus, Alex	<i>King's College London (UK)</i>
Büscher, Bram	<i>Wageningen University</i>	Lohmann, Larry	<i>The Corner House (UK)</i>
<i>(Netherlands)</i>		Neves, Katja	<i>Concordia University (Canada)</i>
Chatzistefanou, Aris	<i>Infowar (Greece)</i>	Nyumba, Tobias	<i>University of Cambridge (UK)</i>
Christiaens, Charlotte	<i>CATAPA (Belgium)</i>	Perry, Bill	<i>Lambeth Housing Activists (UK)</i>
Christianou, Maria	<i>Ierissos – SOShalkidiki (Greece)</i>	Rhoades, Hannibal	<i>The Gaia Foundation (UK)</i>
Cortes-Vazquez, Jose	<i>University of Sheffield (UK)</i>	Robertson, Morgan	<i>UW-Madison (USA)</i>
del Monte, Beatrice	<i>Independent Researcher (Italy)</i>	Robinson, Clare	<i>GMWatch (UK)</i>
Evertse, Vivian	<i>CATAPA (Belgium)</i>	Sachsé, Victoria	<i>Fondazione Frammartino (Italy)</i>
Felli, Romain	<i>Université de Genève (Switzerland)</i>	Sheehan, Linda	<i>Earth Law Center (USA)</i>
Florea, Ioana	<i>Quantic Association (Romania)</i>	Short, Damien	<i>Extreme Energy Initiative (UK)</i>
Garcia-Herrera, Luz Marina	<i>Universidad de La Laguna (Spain)</i>	Swyngedouw, Erik	<i>University of Manchester (UK)</i>
Geddes, Mike	<i>UIMP (UK)</i>	Thomas, Peter	<i>Brunel University of London (UK)</i>
Gerebizza, Elena	<i>Re.Common (Italy)</i>	Van de Water, Mary	<i>Lambeth Housing Activists (UK)</i>
Gomez-Baggethun, Erik	<i>Norwegian University of LifeSciences</i>	Vasileiou, Anni	<i>Ierissos – SOShalkidiki (Greece)</i>
		Vazquez, Gabriela	<i>Ecologistas en Acción (Spain)</i>
Greco, Elisa	<i>University of Manchester (UK)</i>	Wahlberg, Madeleine	<i>UIMP (UK)</i>
Hadjimichalis, Costis	<i>Harokopio University (Greece)</i>	Wulf, Friedrich	<i>Friends of the Earth</i>

