



Neoliberalism and conservation (Academic version)

There is a growing body of literature about the manifestation of Neoliberal economic policy in conservation theory and practice [1-10, 11: among others, 12-15]. Brockington and Duffy [13] suggest that although conservation is historically closely connected to capitalism, the intensity and variety of this relation has increased significantly in recent years, with new adjustment to Neoliberal doctrines.

Neoliberal conservation is based on the assumption that private owners and market trends of supply and demand can manage natural resources in the most efficient and therefore sustainable manner [16-18]. Many countries adopted these ideas calling for individual titles on land, water, forests, biodiversity, and fisheries, relying on the assumption that higher prices for scarce resources would encourage their protection [19].

Neoliberal Conservation has its own set of metaphors and discourses. The world is presented as an infinite pie where all can share the profits of sustainably harvested natural resources, therefore everybody, including nature, wins [4, 6, 10, 11, 20]. Problems become opportunities for further profit and economic growth.

According to Igoe and Brockington [6] the Neoliberal ideological discourse offers a spectrum of positive promises including aiding cash poor countries to protect their biodiversity. Also they promise increased participation, inclusion, development, empowerment of rural populations, eradication of poverty, encouraging environmentally friendly industries, and educating people to love and steward nature. All of these would be achieved through reduction of restrictive state controls and increased market incentives and private property.

The perception of the infinite resources is reflected in the increasing magnitude of conservation institutions and projects. Greater areas, such as the Meso-American Biological Corridor, are designated to offset environmental destruction but at the same time are opened up to commerce, as well as concealing more destructive economic plans designed to run in parallel in the same areas [21]. Also regional conservation prioritising such as Conservation International's 'hotspots' have been recognized as part of the Neoliberal need for an organization to become a brand for global planning rather than recognized for its purely scientific or conservation based achievements [22]. Chapin [23] describes a general scaling up of conservation planning and operations as means to attract funds. Moreover, the more acute environmental problems are perceived, the scale of conservation required grows, and with it the scale of funding, therefore overstressing large scale degradation is convenient to conservation organizations (Brockington et al. 2008).

According to Igoe and Brockington [6] Neoliberal discourse presents local populations as the primary threat to biodiversity due to their proximity to the forests. The solution offered is the preparation of local people to enter the global economy by granting property rights and building their capacities which will make them 'competent conservationists', local environmental knowledge and environmental initiatives are often ignored [6, 24].

Recent studies suggest that Neoliberal driven governance and conservation initiatives often have negative social or ecological outcomes [12, 25, 26]. However, criticism is scarce [25], Büscher and Dressler (2007) use the term 'layer of discursive blur' to describe how a series of rhetorical concepts such as participation, sustainable development, and win-win solutions are repeatedly used throughout conservation agency networks to conceal complex reality. Igoe &

Croucher [16] note conservationists' need to produce conservation success stories. These simplistic narratives are so efficient in generating funds within the conservation network that they are never questioned [3, 14]. Donor agencies are pressured to pretend that the money they grant will quickly and efficiently fight poverty and species loss [17]. Büscher [3] expressed his concern after attending the 2007 Society for Conservation Biology meeting that the trend of presenting all results as positive and the treatment of criticism as 'unproductive or unnecessarily negative' hinder modern conservationists from reaching their objectives.

Another influence of Neoliberal doctrines on environmental governance is the 'hollowed out states' where the reduction of the state leaves government offices impoverished, lacking resources, expertise or even salaries and therefore, unable to operate [6]. The government position allow these offices to negotiate agreements with private international institutions who pay their salaries and operating fees, thus, creating 'hybrid' actors who juggle between the agendas of their different employers [16, 27]. The dependence of government agents on external funding and expertise made them easy to penetrate and influence (Lemos and Agrawal 2006). Other types of common partnerships in recent years are between state agencies and communities, and between private businesses and communities [27].

Since the 1980s, international conservation has received increasing amounts of funding [28]. The three big NGOs (BINGOs); World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and The Nature Conservancy, are funded in the North and have offices and projects all over the world. A great majority of the world's protected areas (PA's) are connected to at least one of these organizations [9]. Between them, they control billions of dollars, employ tens of thousands of people worldwide, and increasingly adopt corporate structures and methodologies [6]. It has also been suggested that their reliance on international corporations as private sponsors, such as Shell and Chevron, for funds, or having corporate representatives sitting on the board or as trustees, restricts them from acting against these interests [9, 10, 23, 28-30]. Corson [28] finds that funds are transferred between public, private and non-profit institutions with very little money actually spent 'on the ground'. Funds trickle down from the BINGOs by re-granting to smaller, local NGOs, but the mechanism is so complex and the funds are so small that little space is left for creativity [23].

Neoliberal conservation promotes three schemes for the commercialization of nature which frequently affect discourse and conservation project designs; Ecotourism, bioprospecting and payments for environmental services. These are characteristic Neoliberal conservation systems [31]; by commodifying biodiversity, it allows nature to "pay for itself" and through that become an essential actor in a market-driven world, giving states a strong incentive to announce new nationally protected areas, while often disregarding local populations [9].

Bibliography

1. Heynen, N., *Neoliberal environments: false promises and unnatural consequences*. 2007: Routledge.
2. Budds, J., *Power, nature and neoliberalism: the political ecology of water in Chile*. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2004. **25**(3): p. 322-342.
3. Büscher, B., *Conservation, neoliberalism, and social science: a critical reflection on the SCB 2007 Annual Meeting in South Africa*. Conservation Biology, 2008. **22**(2): p. 229-231.
4. Castree, N., *Neoliberalising nature: the logics of deregulation and reregulation*. Environment and Planning A, 2008. **40**(1): p. 131.

5. Heynen, N. and P. Robbins, *The neoliberalization of nature: Governance, privatization, enclosure and valuation*. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 2005. **16**(1): p. 5-8.
6. Igoe, J. and D. Brockington, *Neoliberal conservation: A brief introduction*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(4): p. 432.
7. Liverman, D.M. and S. Vilas, *Neoliberalism and the environment in Latin America*. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2006. **31**(1): p. 327.
8. Morris, A.W., *Easing conservation? Conservation easements, public accountability and neoliberalism*. *Geoforum*, 2008. **39**(3): p. 1215-1227.
9. Breunig, L.A., *Conservation in context: Establishing natural protected areas during Mexico's neoliberal reformation*, in *department of geography and regional development*. 2006, University of Arizona.
10. Büscher, B. and W. Whande, *Whims of the winds of time? Emerging trends in biodiversity conservation and protected area management*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(1): p. 22.
11. Sonnenfeld, D.A. and A.P.J. Mol, *Globalization and the transformation of environmental governance*. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2002. **45**(9): p. 1318.
12. Igoe, J., K. Neves, and D. Brockington, *A Spectacular Eco Tour around the Historic Bloc: Theorising the Convergence of Biodiversity Conservation and Capitalist Expansion*. *Antipode*, 2010. **42**(3): p. 486-512.
13. Brockington, D. and R. Duffy, *Capitalism and conservation: the production and reproduction of biodiversity conservation*. *Antipode*, 2010. **42**(3): p. 469-484.
14. Büscher, B. and W. Dressler, *Linking neoprotectionism and environmental governance: On the rapidly increasing tensions between actors in the environment-development nexus*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(4): p. 586.
15. Heynen, N., et al., *Neoliberal environments: false promises and unnatural consequences*. 2007, London: Routledge.
16. Igoe, J. and B. Croucher, *Conservation, Commerce, and Communities: The Story of Community-Based Wildlife Management Areas in Tanzania's Northern Tourist Circuit*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(4): p. 534.
17. Hulme, D. and M. Murphree, *Communities, wildlife and the 'new conservation' in Africa*. *Journal of International Development*, 1999. **11**(2): p. 277-285.
18. Blaikie, P. and S. Jeanrenaud, *Biodiversity and human welfare in Social change and conservation* K. Ghimire and M.P. Pimbert, Editors. 1997, Earthscan: London. p. 46-70.
19. Roberts, J.T. and N.D. Thanos, *Trouble in paradise: Globalization and environmental crises in Latin America*. 2003: Routledge.
20. Harvey, D., *A brief history of neoliberalism*. 2005, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Grandia, L., *Between bolivar and bureaucracy: the Mesoamerican biological corridor*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(4): p. 478.
22. Adams, W.M. and J. Hutton, *People, parks and poverty: Political ecology and biodiversity conservation*. *Conservation and Society*, 2007. **5**(2): p. 147.
23. Chapin, M., *A challenge to conservationists*. *World Watch*, 2004. **17**(6): p. 17-31.
24. Fletcher, R., *Neoliberal environmentalism: Towards a poststructuralist political ecology of the conservation debate*. *Conservation and Society*, 2010. **8**(3): p. 171.
25. Hartwick, E. and R. Peet, *Neoliberalism and nature: The case of the WTO*. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2003. **590**(1): p. 188.
26. Hecht, S.B., *Soybeans, development and conservation on the Amazon frontier*. *Development and Change*, 2005. **36**(2): p. 375-404.
27. Lemos, M.C. and A. Agrawal, *Environmental governance*. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2006. **31**(1): p. 297.
28. Corson, C., *Shifting Environmental Governance in a Neoliberal World: US AID for Conservation*. *Antipode*, 2010. **42**(3): p. 576-602.

29. Romero, C. and G.I. Andrade, *International conservation organizations and the fate of local tropical forest conservation initiatives*. *Conservation Biology*, 2004. **18**(2): p. 578-580.
30. MacDonald, K.I., *The devil is in the (bio) diversity: Private sector "engagement" and the restructuring of biodiversity conservation*. *Antipode*, 2010. **42**(3): p. 513-550.
31. Hayden, C., *When nature goes public: The making and unmaking of bioprospecting in Mexico*. 2003: Princeton Univ Pr.

Questions

- **In general, does the text give a good overview of the term Neoliberal Conservation, or do you think there are better ways to cover this issue?**
- **Does this need more background info?**
- **Is it easy and interesting to read? Does the English needs editing? Can you suggest edits?**
- **Are parts of the text irrelevant, repetitive, or should be rephrased or deleted?**
- **Are there any relevant issues that are not covered by this text? Would you be able to add them or just list them to be added by us?**
- **Can you suggest a person or an institution that might have the right experience and perspective to rewrite this text? Are you happy to forward this text to them?**
- **Do you know of any academic work related to the subject that can be added to this text?**
- **Any other comment?**