



Neoliberalism and conservation (non-academic version)

Dominant conservation has historically been a part of the ruling colonialist, capitalist ideologies. These days, conservation is rapidly adjusting to become a part of a Neoliberal global trend. Friedmann's Neoliberal theory is based on the inherent misconception that natural resources are always renewable and not finite. Similar to the general idea in Neoliberalism that market trends can maintain a functioning, healthy society where costumers control production and policies, Neoliberal conservation is based on the assumption that markets can manage natural resources in the most efficient and therefore sustainable manner. Discourses connected to Neoliberal Conservation describe win-win situations where economic growth brings increasing responsibility towards nature. However, the capitalist, Neoliberal economy is based on the maximal utilization of resources that are regulated solely by market forces. Thus, Neoliberalism deliberately weakens and decentralizes governments, leaving them lacking resources and experts capable of supervising and enforcing environmental laws and ensuring that private bodies take responsibility for supervising themselves or their colleagues. Neoliberalism encourages short-term economic gains and therefore allows very little planning for long term solutions that favour nature or the general public. Projects that call for reduction in consumption, social benefits or conserving forests for their intrinsic values are always pushed aside by economic interests.

Unfortunately, most of the solutions currently offered to environmental problems are also based on Neoliberal principles. Most of the large environmental bodies are becoming more like international corporations operating for profit. They ignore the real causes of environmental problems and offer superficial solutions that deal with the symptoms instead of the root of the problem. For example, replacing petrol with biofuels, selling personal water purification kits instead of protecting the national water sources, and developing robot bees to pollinate crops, instead of protecting bees and their habitats. All these solutions are based on consumption. The discourse that backs up these practices has its own language; nature has become 'natural resources', nature conservation has become 'sustainable development', etc. Nature's right to exist is now measured according to its economic value, which is based on market trends of supply and demand.

Conservation institutions, especially NGOs, report exaggerated or even false reports of their phenomenal successes in order to obtain more and more grants and supporters. Mainstream conservation institutions are increasingly modelling themselves on, and indeed directly reliant upon, commercial businesses. Being part of the dominant economic establishment positions these NGOs as conflicted in their ability (and desire) to take effective action against the root cause of environmental degradation which unarguably stems from uncontrolled capitalist exploitation, accompanied by corruption, broken nation states and a burgeoning world leadership crisis. These large NGOs cannot challenge these overarching systems of oppression because they have become part of them. Privatization is an important part of Neoliberalism and many countries adopted this ideology to privatize and title land, water, forests, biodiversity, and fisheries. The theory is that higher prices for scarce resources would encourage their protection. Privatisation is offered as a solution to most problems, such as in the case of failures in the management of the national parks or in the lack of drinking water. Therefore, private stakeholders have the interest to encourage inefficiency and natural destruction by funding wasteful and inefficient projects. Reclaim Conservation believes that no effective, meaningful conservation can occur under this Neoliberal model and we support grassroots and community conservation models.