Tourism, Wellbeing and Ecosystem Services
Commodification and conservation?

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While we might have had social science for modernizing and emancipating humans, we have not the faintest idea of what sort of social science is needed for Earthlings buried in the task of explicating their newly discovered attachments.

- Latour 2007: A Plea for Earthly Sciences, p. 3
Key definitions

• **Ecosystem services.** Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as regulation of floods, drought, land degradation, and disease; supporting services such as soil formation and nutrient cycling; and cultural services such as recreational, spiritual, religious and other nonmaterial benefits.

• **Well-being.** Human well-being has multiple constituents, including basic material for a good life, freedom and choice, health, good social relations, and security. Wellbeing is at the opposite end of a continuum from poverty, which has been defined as a “pronounced deprivation in well-being.” The constituents of well-being, as experienced and perceived by people, are situation-dependent, reflecting local geography, culture, and ecological circumstances.

  Alacamo, et. al., 2003: *Ecosystems and Human wellbeing*, p. 3, see also Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005
Key points of critique

• ES replace biodiversity and divert our gaze from conservation?
• ES unethical as it relegates existence values to secondary status?
• ES the whole sale integration of nature into the processess of commodification and allowing for the “selling out of nature”

Points raised by de Groot, Wageningen 3rd September 2013
# TobeWELL

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Fish, 2011: *Progress in Physical Geography*, 35(5)
Key concern here...

- What is the complex relationship between tourism and nature and how can ES make sense of that relationship?
- What is the value of landscape, trying to hold on to notions of existence valuing?
Dimensions of wellbeing

- Objective life conditions:
  - Physical Wellbeing
  - Material Wellbeing
  - Social Wellbeing
  - Development and Activity
  - Emotional Wellbeing

- Subjective Feeling of Wellbeing:
  Satisfaction with:
  - Physical Wellbeing
  - Material Wellbeing
  - Social Wellbeing
  - Development and Activity
  - Emotional Wellbeing

- Personal Values and Aspirations:
  Importance of:
  - Physical Wellbeing
  - Material Wellbeing
  - Social Wellbeing
  - Development and Activity
  - Emotional Wellbeing

- Overall assessment of wellbeing

Felce & Perry, 1995: Quality of Life: Its definition and measurement, p. 62
Natural capital, ecosystem services and the hierarchy of needs

Wu, 2013: Landscape Ecology, 28(6), p. 1007, inspired by Daly’s triangle and drawing on Dominati, 2010
The ecosystem service cascade model

Theoretical aspects, impacts and interdependences

Proprietorship

Public / conservation  →  Private / commodification

Health

health  →  wellbeing

Resources

Security  →  Affluence/choice

Geography

Immediate / proximate  →  Delayed / far off

Fisher, et.al. 2009: Defining and classifying ecosystem services for decision making, p. 647
Methods

Ecosystem services are extremely important, but need to be drawn into conservation strategies with great care

Redford and Adams, 2009: Conservation Biology, 23(4), p. 787

In dealing with nature, we are always attended by the invitation to mistake the ordering of appearances for order itself (Mitchell 1988, 60), to mistake the difficulties of classifying and categorising nature for the intransigence of nature itself. Let us continue to refuse the invitation

Robertson, 2012: Measurement and alienation: making a world of ecosystem services, p. 397
The ecology of capitalism

[A] new frontier in the production of nature has rapidly opened up, namely a vertical integration of nature into capital. This involves not just the production of nature ‘all the way down’, but its simultaneous financialization ‘all the way up’. Capital is no longer content simply to plunder an available nature but rather increasingly moves to produce an inherently social nature as the basis for new sectors of production and accumulation. Nature is increasingly if selectively replicated as its own marketplace.

Commodification
Taking ESS too far?

• Valuing for those with purchasing power and market volatility
• Neglecting non-monetary valuing
• Circumscribing biodiversity and equity
  – Designing single purpose ecosystems
• Individualisation of values and ethics
• Neglecting negative externalities
  – Regulating flows only in a human timeframe

Too great a focus on economic valuation, and the assumption of rational economic behaviour, results in an unfortunate narrowing of perspectives that tends to obscure ethical and political issues and the role that natural science can play in understanding how people and nature are linked.


Commoditising nature

The main question -- does capital create its own barriers or limits by destroying its own production conditions? -- needs to be asked in terms of specific use values, as well as exchange value. This is so because conditions of production are not produced as commodities, hence problems pertaining to them are "site specific," including the individual body as a unique "site."

“Pricing in all the wrong places”

we should pay particular attention to the justification of initiatives to commodify “ecosystem services” such as clean air and biodiversity... efforts to fact-check neoliberal claims are much more potent when inserted directly into the political and policy realm... It can be very effective to produce answers that recognize the actual conditions under which entrepreneurs and consumers make decisions, using venues and language likely to engage rather than repel their interest ...

Roberton, 2007: Discovering Price in All the Wrong Places, p. 521, see also Robertson, 2004; 2012
Valuing ecosystems – the role of tourism

the need to provide understandings of social and physical processes within the context of places and regions has never been more important. ... Future research challenges include describing how the ecological structures and functions embedded in such systems link to service outputs, and how sensitive these outputs are to the various drivers of change. Such knowledge is needed before an economic valuation of ecosystem services can be made and to avoid the problems of double counting. More importantly, it is an essential ingredient of the ethical and political debates at the interface of people and the environment.

Landscapes as horizons of hospitality

Landscape sustainability is the capacity of a landscape to consistently provide long-term, landscape-specific ecosystem services essential for maintaining and improving human well-being in a regional context and despite environmental and sociocultural changes.

Wu, 2013: Landscape Ecology, 28(6), p. 1011

Due to the irreducibility of the landscape to its terms, it is within each of us, yet ours—a whole that is never the sum of its parts. It is through this capacity that a landscape can be shared.

Huijbens and Benediktsson, 2013: Inspiring the Visitor? Landscapes and Horizons of Hospitality, p. online first
We are now farmers on Earth’s troubled land, forced to come ‘down to earth’.

Concluding points
Through the processes of valuing, value gets created

• ‘Landscape services’? (Wu, 2013, p. 1018)
• Landscape specificity for integrating tourism
• Tourism feedback loops, the positive feedback of visiting tourists, enhancing natural capital?

Missing outlook

• ‘Earthly’ perspective, accounting for external disturbances – the anthropocene and aviation

The real problem - the industrial-consumer complex that is overhauling the world in an orgy of exploitation, overproduction, and waste – is treated with kid gloves, taken as given, and regarded as beyond the reaches of effective challenge