

**Panel proposal – IIPPE Fourth Annual Conference in Political Economy
“Political Economy, Activism and Alternative Economic Strategies” – 9-11
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Panel title: Producing Environmental Conservation: Crises, Conflicts and Possible Alternatives

Panel Organisers: Bram Büscher, Michela Marcatelli and Alonso Ramirez (Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University)

Abstract: Environmental conservation has over the past two decades become central to the global political economy. Going ‘green’ is no longer something that tree-huggers do, but has literally become ‘serious business’. Contemporary policy initiatives such as those around the ‘green economy’ or ‘The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity’ (TEEB) have become part of mainstream ways of dealing with the ongoing financial crisis, while many businesses, NGOs and governments are trying to change their operations in a more sustainable direction. Central in these discussions is the idea of changing ‘production processes’, while the ‘production’ of environmental conservation itself is also seeing radical changes within the context of the uneven dynamics of the global political economy.

This panel session aims to interrogate and better understand ideas, practices and discourses related to the production of environmental conservation and the rendering more sustainable of production processes. The papers in the panel aim to critically assess these processes and place them in an explicit political economic framing in relation to – for example, the global financial and ecological crises, resource conflicts and possible alternatives.

We have three presenters:

1. Alonso Ramírez Cover (ISS)
2. Kleoniki Kipourou (WUR)
3. Bram Büscher (ISS)

Abstract Alonso Ramírez Cover

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Title: Uneven neoliberal territorializations: sea turtle conservation in Las Baulas Marine National Park, Costa Rica

Abstract

The commodification of nature through environmental conservation always requires appropriate institutional frameworks to be put in place. Such frameworks often entail making market-conservation practices the only viable choice for accessing and using natural resources. State territorialization constitutes a driving process as it delineates the authority required to determine who has access to and control over natural resources, how and when. In a neoliberal context, such processes of territorialization tend to involve and be oriented by several non-state actors encouraged by interests of securing the means for environmental conservation and capital accumulation. However, by referring to the case of a small Costa Rican protected area called Las Baulas National Park; this article argues that disputes may arise between the chosen stewards, in this case: tourism-related real estate entrepreneurs and conservationists. Moreover, in contexts determined by contradicting scales of governance such conflicts may render neoliberal territorialization partial and unclear.

Key words: state territorialization, protected area, neoliberalism, Costa Rica, biodiversity conservation

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Title: Pesticides turning green: Redefining environmental sustainability or redefining the industry?

In pesticide politics in the past few years, experts and the industry are allegedly becoming ardent supporters of environmental sustainability. The new risk assessment principles proposed by a recent EU expert panel - some of the experts having close ties with the industry - make the case for raising environmental standards in the application of chemicals. At the same time, agrochemicals multinational corporations (MNCs) support the new FAO/WHO framework for the registration of pesticides, claiming that it fosters environmental sustainability. The same corporations have for years argued that more stringent pesticide regulation is threatening food security. Is this observed change of long-held views by mainstream actors only an instance of green-washing or are we witnessing more a fundamental shift in the political economy of pesticides? What industry purposes this change serves? Is the change a manifestation of cracks in the system (see John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*), caused primarily by environmentalists' pressure or, instead, the appropriation and re-definition of the green agenda by the mainstream is actually an illustration of the limits of the green agenda? In this paper, I address these questions by examining to what extent the green turn of agrochemical MNCs is linked to increased competition from pesticide manufacturers in the global south. My hypothesis is that this green

turn is predominantly an instrument to maintain a competitive edge; however, this turn might actually represent an opportunity for a systemic crack, since MNCs are even more likely to be held accountable for failing to deliver their green promises.

Abstract Bram Büscher:

Title: The Environmental Condition: Hannah Arendt and the Political Economy of Nature Conservation

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Abstract:

Under pressures from global capitalist restructuring, rapidly changing geopolitical power structures and increasing impacts of climate change and other environmental problems, it is clear that the notion of conservation as well as its institutionalised, political forms demand radical rethinking and new forms of theory. The work of political philosopher Hannah Arendt provides an excellent start for such fresh and unconventional theorization. Rarely used in relation to nature conservation and political ecology, Arendt's insights with respect to the 'human condition' and the relations between labor, work and action (her *Vita Activa*), 'technology and society', imperialism, 'world alienation' (rather than Marx' self-alienation) and culture/nature are of great relevance to understanding the contemporary political economy of nature conservation and our 'environmental condition' more broadly. Building on these insights, the paper emphasises the role and meaning of 'production' within this environmental condition. It concludes that a radically different understanding of the role and meaning of 'production' may help to engender the rebirth of a notion of conservation that encourages rather than discourages just and sustainable human-nature relations.