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For special session on Beyond Nature™ Inc.: Degrowth and Environmental Conservation (by Bram Büscher, Institute of Social Studies and Robert Fletcher, University for Peace)

Title: Convivial Conservation: Degrowth and the quest of overcoming Capitalist Conservation

Short Abstract:

A growing body of literature is exploring the intertwined histories and current dynamics of global capitalism and global conservation. One of the major arguments in this literature is that the development of global conservation is directly related to the development of global capitalism, and thus to capitalism's sine-qua-non, economic growth. This paper reviews these intertwined histories and dynamics in relation to contemporary debates on degrowth. If conservation is indeed tied to capitalism, and degrowth by definition means the end of capitalism, the argument is that this should have consequences for conservation. The paper asks what these consequences might be, and outlines a proposal for 'convivial conservation' or the potential role for conservation in a post-capitalist world.

Long Abstract:

The fate of modern conservation has been interwoven with capitalist trajectories since its inception in the 18th and 19th centuries (Grove, 1995). In fact, the preservation of the world's 'last wild places' appears as a classic Polanyian double-movement, a direct response to the alienation of humans from nature and massive transformation of nature under capitalist expansion (Cronon, 1996). At the same time, by separating rural people from their land conservation aided in the formation of the labour force that industrial capitalism needed (Perelman, 2007), while proving a valuable tool in colonial administrative control (MacKenzie, 1998). More recently, an intensive and pervasive proliferation of protected areas has accompanied the rise of neoliberal capitalism since the late 1970s (Brockington, et al, 2008) while the 1990s and 2000s have given rise to popular paradigms such as 'payment for ecosystem services' and

novel approaches such as biodiversity derivatives, wetland credits, species banking and more (Robertson, 2004; Cooper, 2010; Sullivan, 2012). All these are based on the assumption that capitalism and conservation are compatible, and hence that conservation is directly related to, and tied in with economic growth.

A key issue that has arisen in recent years is that our measurements of GDP and growth deserve rethinking to better take social and environmental issues into account. Indeed, in order to get to a more sustainable planetary trajectory, analysts have recently argued that for a green economy to work, a strategy of managed degrowth of the economy is necessary (Kallis, 2010), pointing at the fact that the only time when global environmental impacts seemed to be decreasing was during the 2007-2008 global economic crisis and related dip in global growth levels. A key issue then emerges in that if conservation is tied to capitalism, and degrowth by definition means the end of capitalism, the argument is that this should have consequences for conservation. Vital questions include whether if the exploitative pressures on ecosystems and natural resources diminishes due to managed degrowth strategies it 'automatically' means that there is more space for biodiversity and ecosystems to develop and thrive and how conservation organisations, policies and practices – now increasingly geared and attuned to fitting conservation in capitalist growth strategies – can or must adapt and transform in order to support a degrowth political economy.

The paper explores these questions and the consequences for conservation and outlines a proposal for 'convivial conservation' or the potential role for conservation in a post-capitalist world. Convivial, here, is meant to directly build on its etymological roots of 'con' (with) and 'vivire' (living) or 'living with'. Hence, it fundamentally concerns a conservation that does not separate humans and nature – as the mainstay of conservation through protected areas has long done and continues to do - but indeed rejects this false dichotomy and focuses on a conservation that enables a humans to 'live with' biodiversity (Turnhout et al. 2013) and emphasises affective hope and different ways on relating with nonhumans than destructive capitalist ratio (Sullivan 2013; Singh 2013). In so doing, the paper builds on and extends Tim Ingold's (2000: 61; 77) argument that "humans have risen above, and have sought to bring under control, a world of nature that includes their *own* animality" and his critique about the "grand narrative of the human transcendence of nature" related to "the self-domestication of humanity in the process of civilisation". Convivial conservation,

in short, needs to move beyond ideas and practices of control, domination and self-domestication to ideas and practices of engagement, trust and relationships.