

More than Language is Needed in Valuing Ecosystem Services

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More than Language Is Needed in Valuing Ecosystem Services

Raymond and colleagues (2013) have contributed an insightful response and partial remedy to address diverse critiques about the way scientists and managers represent and value ecosystem services (ES). Their call for broadening the discourse on the human–environment relationship beyond the economic discussion should be heeded, and the integration of their multiple metaphors is a positive step toward this goal.

But to salvage the utility of the ES approach, more fundamental change is needed than just teaching ecologists and managers to speak the language of their respective target groups. What is not discussed in any of the critical work on ES valuation is the historical development of ES research that has led to the shortcomings in the assessment process. Since the 1990s, including the writing of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the field has been dominated by ecologists and economists. Although this has led to productive research and effective integration of economic tools into conservation, it has also led to the problems outlined by Raymond and colleagues and threatens to make the ES conceptual framework irrelevant for policy.

For the ES framework to maintain its relevancy, the reservoir of scholars working in the field must be broadened to include more (noneconomist) social scientists. This is true for three reasons.

First, by emphasizing improving life for humans, the ES framework is anthropocentric. ES assessment should also be. As Jax (2010) notes, “To assess ecosystem services in a particular region, we have to work our way backwards from society and its specific needs to ecosystem processes—and not vice versa, as scientists mostly do” (p. 70). If ES assessment is conducted to understand how to inform and guide human behavior, who is better equipped to study how humans perceive and respond to ES than those whose profession is human centered?

Second, an explicit goal of ES assessment is to advise policy. Policymaking is primarily a social process (Cohen 2006). Ecologists should have a role in environmental policymaking, but they are only one of many stakeholder groups involved. The ecological community is beginning to realize this humbling truth and is engaged in soul searching regarding how to strengthen its role in civil discourse and policymaking (Groffman et al. 2010). Social scientists of all stripes (e.g., political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, planners) can help navigate the policy process, provide socially relevant data for policymakers, and assist ecologists in understanding and communicating with people. Rogers and Schmidt (2011) suggest that social scientists can contribute to ES assessment particularly in the realm of stakeholder integration, including identifying stakeholders (non-social scientists tend to identify the most prominent stakeholders or those most easy to work with), their values, and the impact of ES management scenarios on stakeholders.

Finally, integrating social scientists into ES assessment can help remedy the chronic undervaluation of cultural services (Spangenberg and Settele 2010). Cultural services are the perennial last-on-the-list ES, following provisioning, regulating, and supporting services, presented as a potpourri of intangible benefits. Cultural services rank high in public consciousness in their importance (Sagie et al. 2013) and may be one of the most effective vehicles with which to communicate the importance of protecting ecosystems. Economists employ numerous methods to estimate their monetary value; the constraints of these methods are well known. Since cultural services are valued in spiritual, aesthetic, ideological, and educational (i.e., nonmonetary) currency, their valuation is best expressed in the lexicon of the (noneconomic) social sciences.

Opening up ES research and assessment to a broader array of disciplines has the potential to fundamentally

change the discourse around valuation (including the promotion of the multiple metaphors advocated by Raymond and colleagues); to provide better social knowledge to conservation discourse; and, ultimately, to strengthen land-use and natural resource policy.

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Engaging Multiple Disciplines in Ecosystem Services Research and Assessment: A Reply to Orenstein

We thank Orenstein for discussing our recent article in *BioScience* (Raymond et al. 2013). His central argument is that social scientists need to be better engaged in ES assessment if the concept is to be mainstreamed into policy and practice. We agree. Along those lines, we called for a deliberative approach to ecosystem management that actively engages multiple stakeholder groups in meaningful dialogues in order to understand the ways