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THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF CONSERVATION: WHAT'S THAT THEN?

A recent article in *Conservation and Society* explores, once again, the parks-people-poverty relationship. In this paper, however, the authors - **Bill Adams and Jon Hutton** - note that to date this discussion has not been based, to any great extent, on an explicit understanding of the political and economic dimensions of conservation policy. They suggest that one important reason for this is "the disciplinary gulf that exists between predominantly natural science-trained conservation planners and predominantly social science-trained critics of conservation."

The authors suggest that field of political ecology offers a way forward in bridging this gulf given that it "explicitly addresses the relations between the social and the natural, arguing that social and environmental conditions are deeply and inextricably linked." To illustrate this the paper reviews six different dimensions of the political ecology of conservation:

- 1) the significance of how nature is understood for the way conservation has been thought about and practiced – in particular ideas about the separateness of humans and nature in concepts such as 'wilderness';
- 2) the nature, extent and significance of the social impacts of protected areas – particularly that of physical displacement;
- 3) the scale and distribution of economic costs and benefits from conservation;
- 4) the issue and politics of indigenous rights – particularly over identity and territory – and the potential clash with protected area designation;
- 5) the links between poverty and conservation – and in particular the broad potential and specific role of conservation in meeting global and local poverty reduction objectives;
- 6) the renewal of calls for "science-based" biodiversity conservation that focuses on a core agenda of conservation biology and a return to strictly protected, people-free parks.

Many different authors have grappled with the various strands of this long debate. Adams and Hutton provide a great service in condensing and clarifying this. Pulling this disparate debate under the umbrella of political ecology provides a greater sense of structure – or at the very least, some comfort in an all-embracing terminology and common point of reference – and this article should prove a valuable resource to those embarking on – or already embroiled in – a conservation career, from whichever disciplinary perspective. The authors identified a disciplinary gulf as a major constraint to modern conservation – this paper serves as a great first step towards bridging that divide.

SOURCE

Adams, W.M. and Hutton, J. (2007) 'People, parks and poverty: political ecology and biodiversity conservation', *Conservation and Society* 5 (2): 147-183.

The report is available to download from:

<http://www.conservationandsociety.org/cs-5-2-1-147-adams.pdf>

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