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Franz Gatzweiler

The Changing Nature of Economic Value

Indigenous Forest Garden Values
in Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Preface of the Editors

What is the value of nature? In their famous study Constanza et al. (1997) estimate the economic value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital to average US \$ 33 trillion per annum, compared to the global annual national product of US \$ 18 trillion. The authors conclude that their study "makes abundantly clear that ecosystem services provide an important proportion of the total contribution to human welfare on this planet. We must begin to give the natural capital stock that produces this services adequate weight in the decision-making process, otherwise current and continued future human welfare may drastically suffer. (p 259)" Nobody would really disagree with this statement but some may argue that the concept of value used in this study is too narrow, and that the value of nature is much more than just a number. Nature and its protection may belong to the fundamental values of a society, like freedom, justice, prosperity and peace (e.g., Kasper and Streit 1998: 70-89). Advocates of this view may argue that for preventing ecological degradation nature has to become part of the fundamental values of society instead of just assigning a monetary value to it. The question of the value of nature, therefore, also raises the opposite question: What is the nature of values?

Like head and tail of one coin, the value of nature and the nature of values build the theme of this book by Franz Gatzweiler. The study develops interesting insights by starting from the question , which seems rather simple at first glance, whether contingent valuation methods could be applied to value tropical rain forests in indigenous societies of Dayak people in Kalimantan, Indonesia. Problems of applying this technique in the cultural context of Dayak people leads Franz Gatzweiler to very fundamental questions regarding the concept of value in different disciplines, the interaction between values and culture, and different valuation techniques. The discussion shows that values and valuation techniques are culturally defined and depend on fundamental institutions of a society. These fundamental institutions, however, are not constant but have been changing slowly, and with them also the value concepts have changed. Contingent valuation methods were developed in Western societies where values are mainly, but not solely, expressed on markets. Valuation techniques for non-market goods, therefore, try to simulate markets to value these goods and services. Applying these methods to other societies may, however, lead to inconsistencies and contradictions. In the context of Dayak society, Franz Gatzweiler discovered that contingent valuation methods can be applied, but the results do not enable us to understand the behaviour and values of the Dayak people. The values of the Dayak society are, according to Franz Gatzweiler, better understood by examining the institutions that are developed at the interface between nature and society in order to achieve sustainability. He

characterizes the Dayak society as a moral economy where the values of nature are embedded in its culture, tradition and norms. Applying contingent valuation methods in such an economy certainly leads to some monetary value but the consistency and reliability of this number is highly questionable. Franz Gatzweiler concludes that we have to treat values as culturally defined ones, and that valuation techniques should take this fact into account to achieve reliable results.

In view of this conclusion, it is important to keep in mind that market economies are never purely market-oriented but also moral economies that are based on some fundamental values. Valuation studies of whatever kind are therefore part of a process of institutional change that shapes the fundamental values of modern societies. Nature protection is increasingly conceived of as an important element of the fundamental values of modern societies that are more and more reflected in their norms and institutions. Modern societies may therefore have much in common with traditional indigenous societies, e.g. the changing nature of economic values. Looking for solutions for sustainable development, modern societies may even learn from indigenous societies – this is the most interesting and fascinating evidence that is revealed in this study by Franz Gatzweiler.

Berlin, October 2003

Volker Beckmann & Konrad Hagedorn

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Dr. Tom Tomich from the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), now the World Agroforestry Centre, supported my work in the field during my frequent stays in Indonesia and during my stay in Bogor. As research fellow at ICRAF, I had the chance to profit from the work of a professional and very dedicated team of researchers. Eric Penot, who at that time established field trials for rubber intercropping in Sanggau, West Kalimantan, introduced me to several village leaders and farmers whom I was able to interview.

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Franz Gatzweiler

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