

# Ecosystem Services

Global Issues, Local Practices

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Ecosystem services and their largely invisible values, so vital to recognize for sustainability, have at last begun to percolate into policies. *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB) reports have added much-needed awareness and societal debate about how much our well-being, economy, and even survival depend on biodiversity and ecosystems. At a local level, better informed practices are being implemented in a variety of socioeconomic and ecological contexts, while, internationally, institutions such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) have emerged.

However, our world is still rapidly approaching and even crossing planetary boundaries, including climate, biodiversity, nitrogen and phosphorous concentrations, ocean acidification and freshwater scarcity. Economies worldwide are still headed in the wrong direction, leading to resource exhaustion, social disparities, and persistent poverty. Increasing climate disruptions may cause price volatility and loss of arable land, and the poor will suffer the most from these disruptions. Urgent changes are needed to effect sustainable resource use.

This book originated from a lively community of practice on ecosystem services in a highly urbanized European region, representative for many developed countries. Practitioners, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), policy makers at different levels, and scientists from many disciplines have united to implement ecosystem service approaches. This book—a product of this community of practice—is a “proof of concept” of a transdisciplinary approach involving a broad range of stakeholders to improve and link up knowledge and practice internationally.

From their experiences, a strong and clear plea emerges to reorient ecosystem service research and practice, bringing it back to its “sustainability” roots: to account for boundaries and fairness more than with just lip service or introductory texts; to document, communicate, and cope with uncertainties; to adopt an inclusive and transparent approach; and to evaluate the real impacts of various measures and instruments on materials flows.

The debates presented here are fundamentally important and have repercussions for any ecosystem service research or practice. As we need immediate changes if we want to steer clear of planetary boundaries and avoid large natural disasters, we have to share experiences, knowledge, and debates widely, within and across communities of practice, locally and globally.

The editors rightly argue that ecosystem service research and practice should urgently aim at a more limited and fairer resource use supported by

transdisciplinary approaches and with real-life results. Their diverse contributions offer many practical lessons and tools to address the many challenges across a broad range of issues in assessing and managing ecosystem services.

In short, this book is a “must-read” for academicians conducting interdisciplinary ecosystem service research, practitioners and policy makers aiming to incorporate ecosystem services into their work, and students from the natural and social sciences. If ecosystem service practice is to live up to high expectations as well as urgent requirements to deliver sustainable resource use, the principles put forward in this book will have to be fully embraced.

**Pavan Sukhdev**

*Pavan was Special Adviser and Head of UNEP's Green Economy Initiative, and lead author of their report "Towards a Green Economy." He was also appointed Study Leader for the G8+5 commissioned project on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB).*

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