

Exploring fundamental change in our relationship with nature

Lorenzo Benini (European Environment Agency) & Roger Strand (European Centre for Governance in Complexity)

The European Environment Agency

Mission:

*“The EEA aims to support **sustainable development** and to help achieve significant and measurable improvement in **Europe’s environment** through the provision of **timely, targeted, relevant and reliable information** to policy makers and the public”*

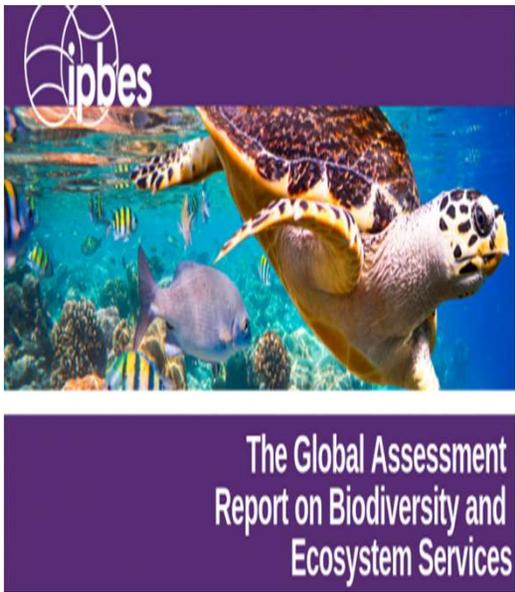


Global context: multiple crises

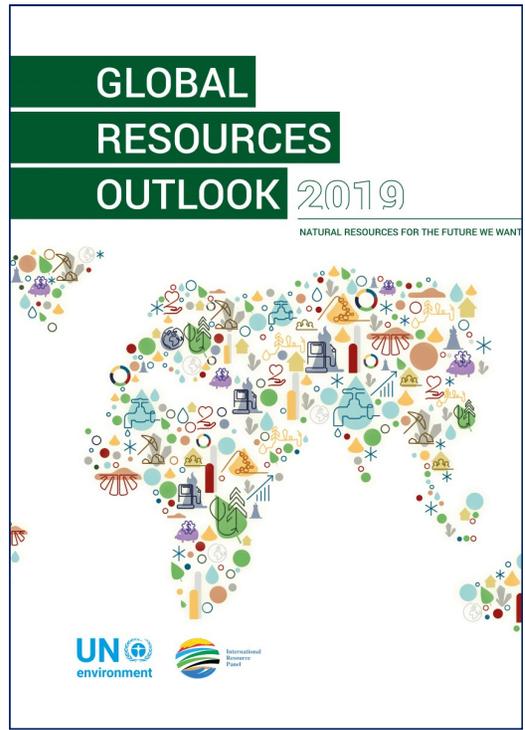
1. IPCC: **climate change**



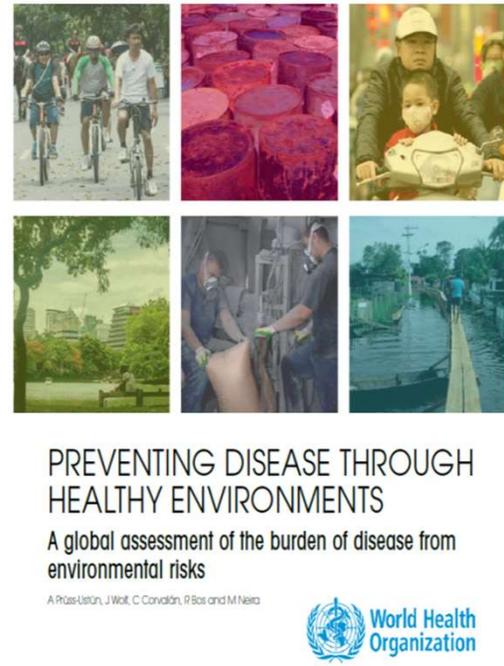
2. IPBES: **biodiversity loss and ecosystem services**



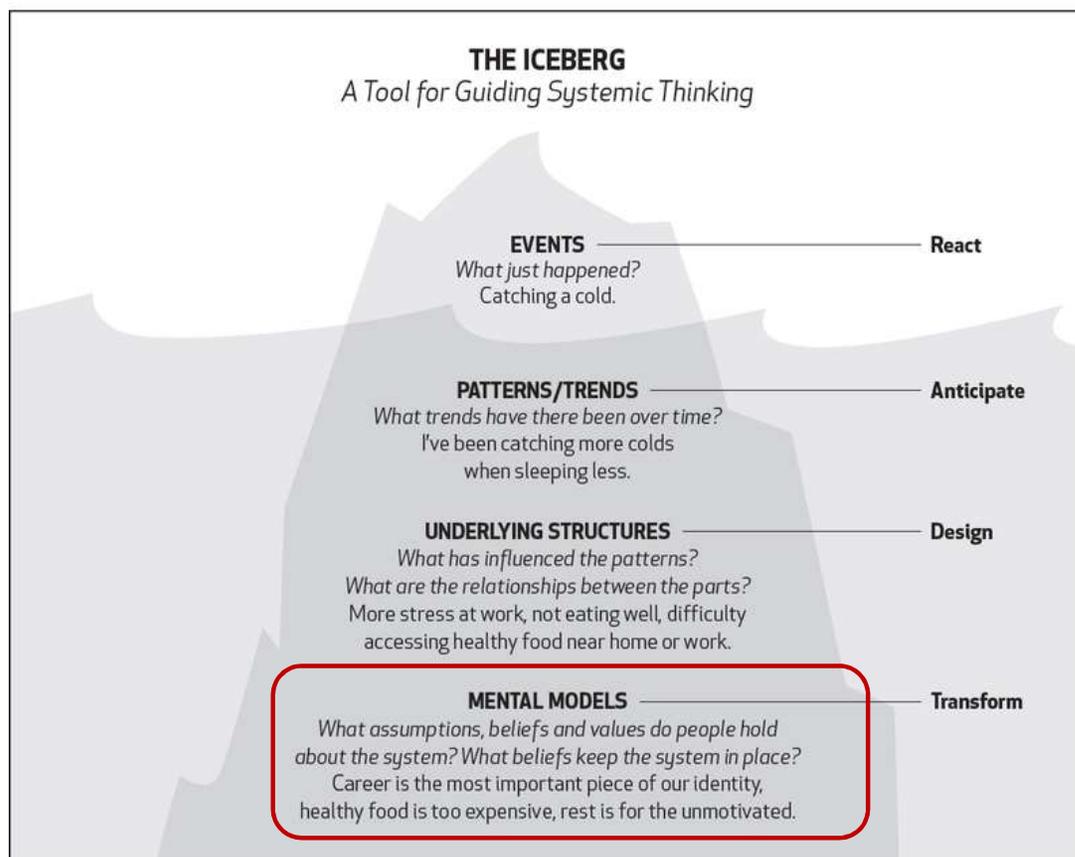
3. IRP: **unsustainable resource use**



4. WHO: **environment and health**



EEA's evolving knowledge base: transitions and transformations



EEA's Narratives *for* change



European Environment Agency



BRIEFING

Growth without economic growth

Economic growth is closely linked to increases in production, consumption and resource use and has detrimental effects on the natural environment and human health. It is unlikely that a long-lasting, absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures and impacts can be achieved at the global scale; therefore, societies need to rethink what is meant by growth and progress and their meaning for global sustainability.

Published 11 Jan 2021 — Last modified 19 May 2021 — 15 min read — Photo: © Ricard



Jason Hickel @jasonhickel · 19 Jun
My eyes popped when I saw this. The European Environment Agency has acknowledged that green growth is "unlikely" and calls for post-growth and degrowth alternatives to be integrated into EU policy.



Growth without economic growth
eea.europa.eu

73 1,598 3,617

Show this thread



Christoph Gran @christo... · 19 Jun
Replying to @jasonhickel
There was quite some resonance in Brussels, e.g. when the paper was discussed at the @Green_Europe....

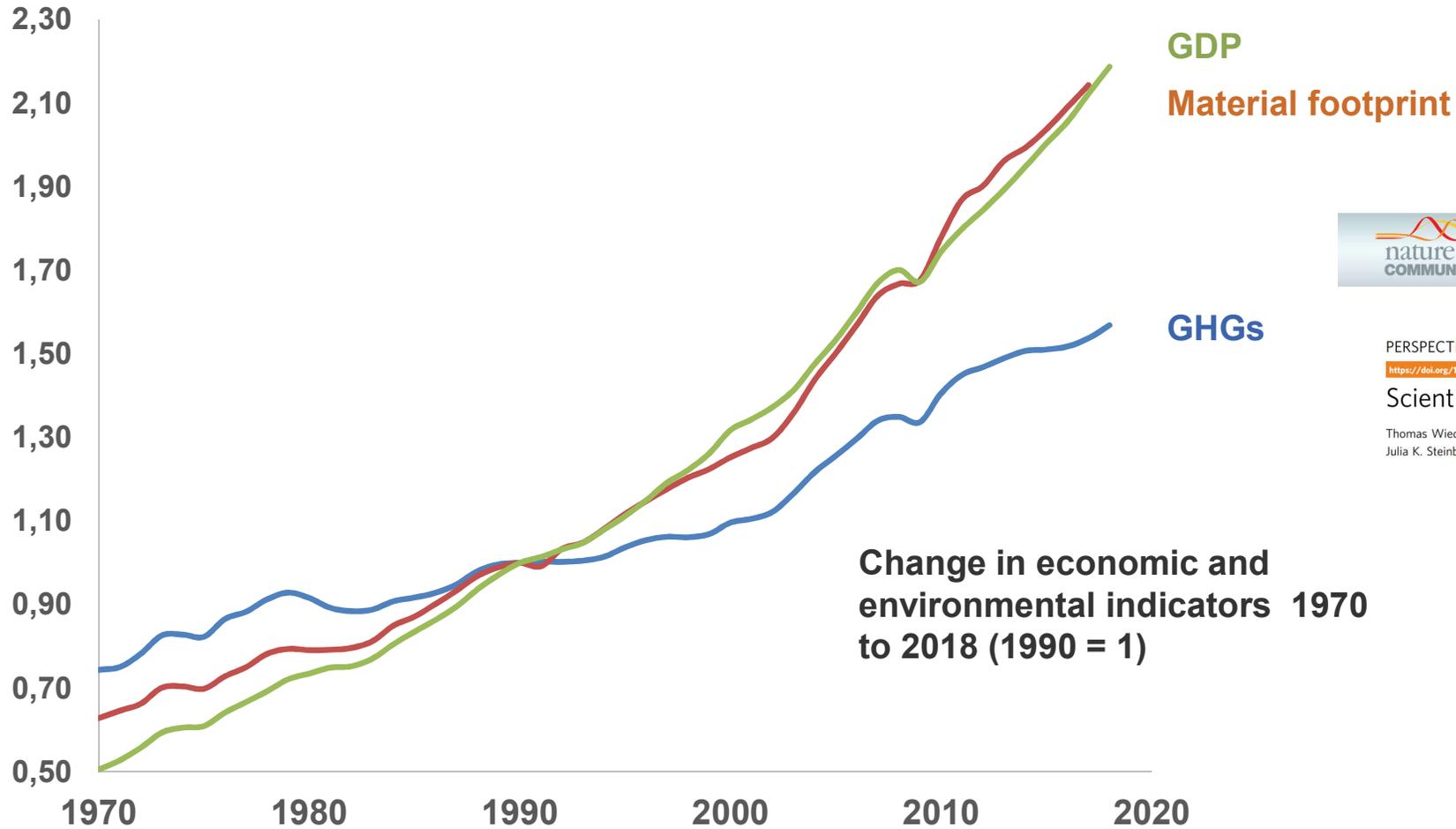


Growth without economic growth -...
eeb.org

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Global decoupling? Not really..



Sources: Modified from Wiedmann et al. (2020).



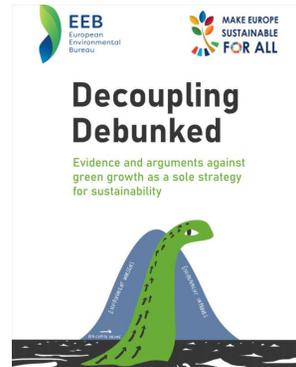
PERSPECTIVE

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16941-y>

OPEN

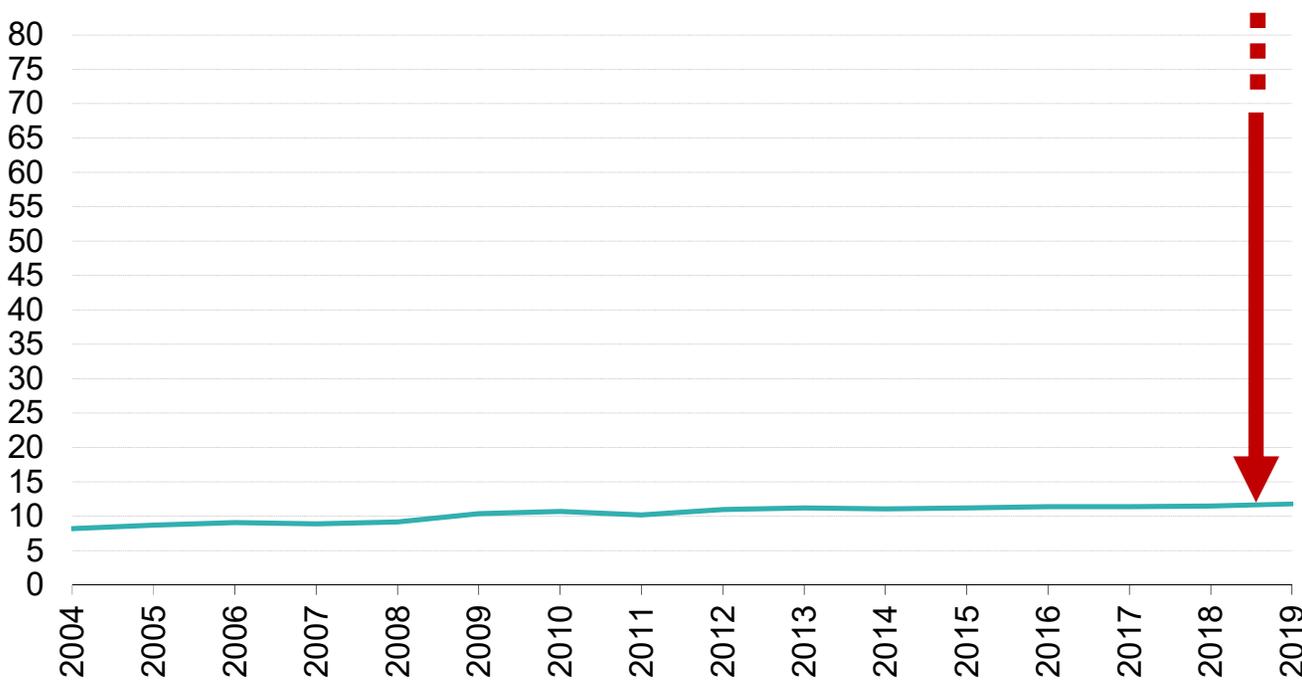
Scientists' warning on affluence

Thomas Wiedmann^{1,2}, Manfred Lenzen², Lorenz T. Keyßer³ & Julia K. Steinberger⁴



100 % circularity is impossible

Circularity rate, EU-27, 2004-2019
(%)



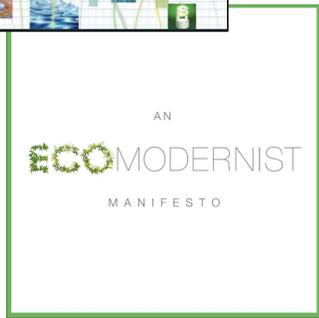
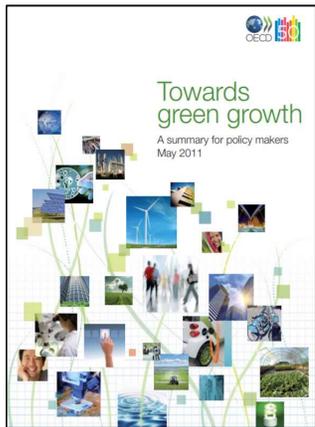
Source: Eurostat (online data code: env_ac_cur)

- **energy carriers are degraded**
- **biomass** is largely transformed and often rendered not suitable for recycling;
- **construction materials** are added to the **building stock** (long recycling periods)
- **¼ of metals are recovered, but they amount to just 5 % of the total throughput**

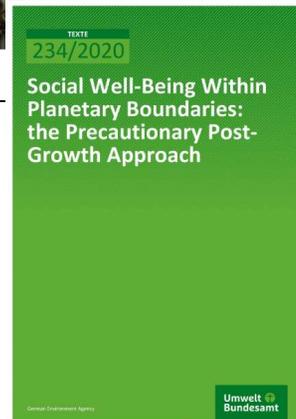
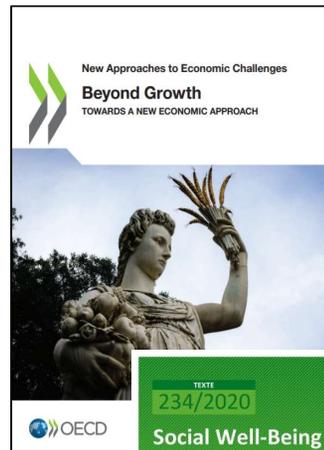


Rethinking growth and progress

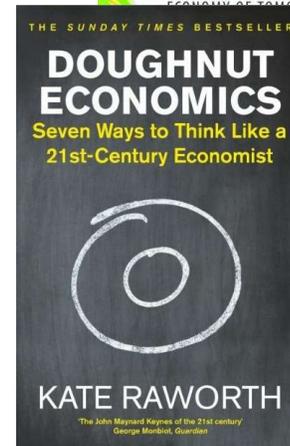
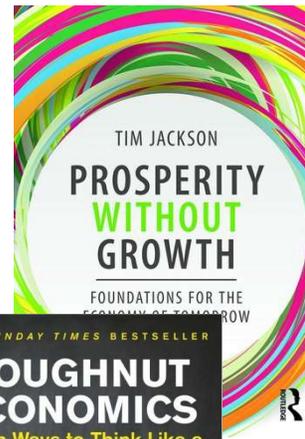
Green growth



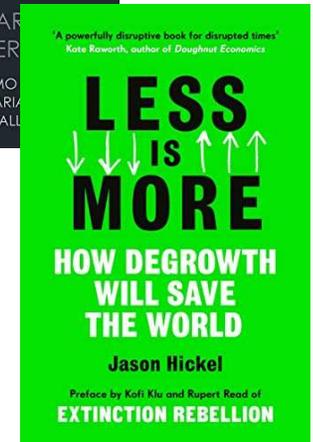
Post-growth



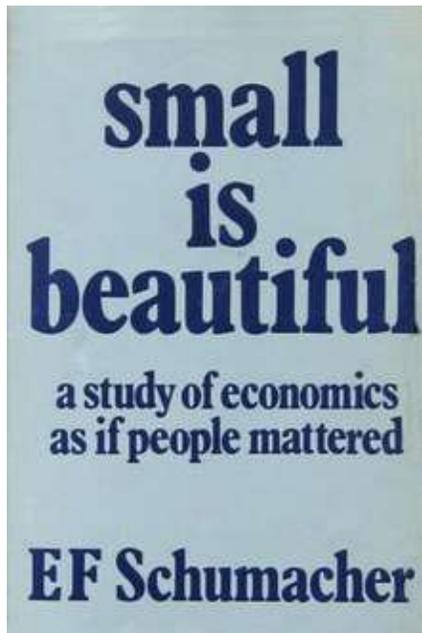
Well-being economy



De-growth



‘Small is beautiful!’ - EU fundamental values are not materialistic





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BRIEFING

Exiting the Anthropocene? Exploring fundamental change in our relationship with nature

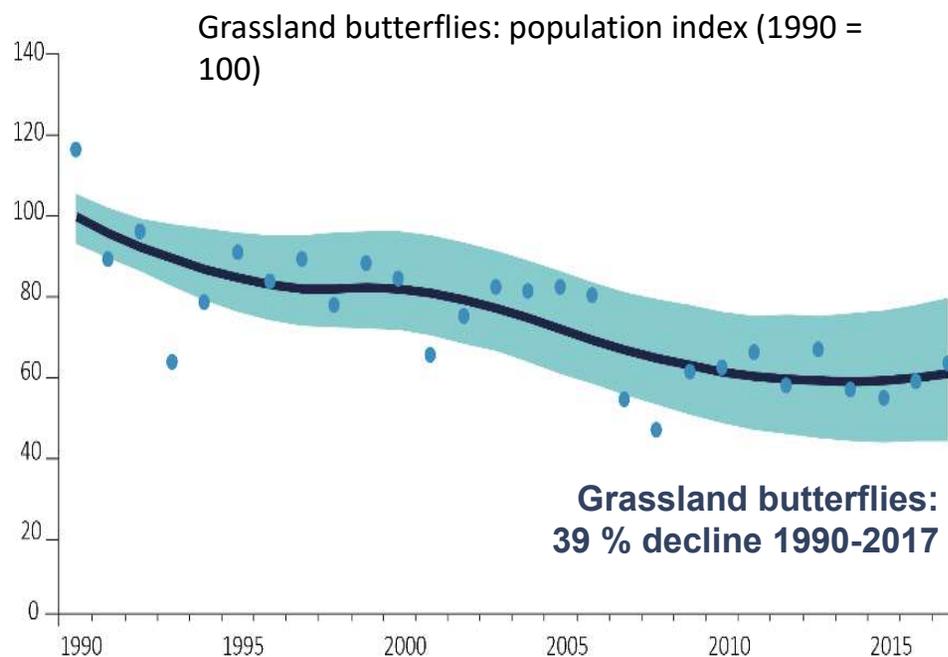
ECGC

European Environment Agency



Globally and in Europe, species and habitats are still being lost...

Pollinators in decline (Europe)



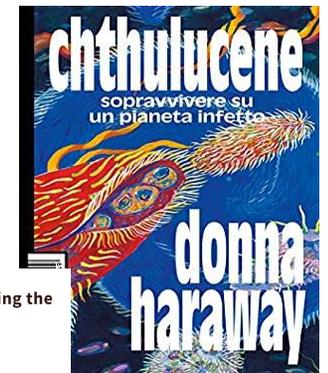
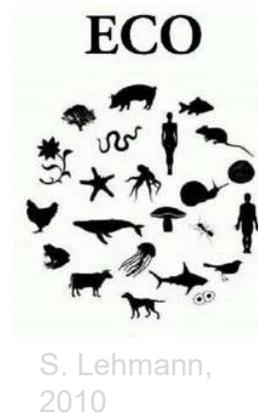
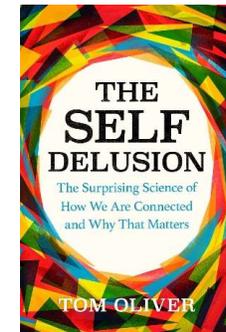
- What is the real problem?
- What is the underlying condition that prevents change?

It is not 'us' and 'them'

Problematic mindset: a sharp boundary between 'us' humans and 'them' non-humans.

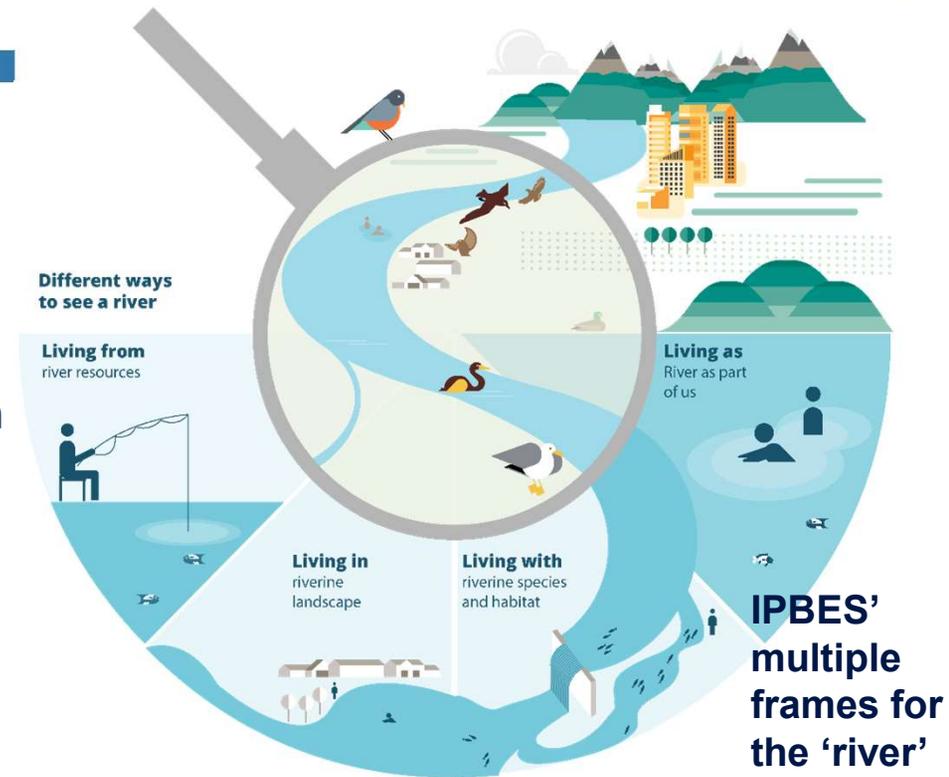
Ecology and philosophy can help us overcome this view:

- **Interconnectedness:** we are nature, atomistic thinking is an illusion e.g. COVID-19
- **Deep ecology:** all living beings have intrinsic value, they have same right to be here
- **Chthulucene / tentacular thinking:** 'With whom am I interacting now?', 'For whom am I responsible now?'
- **Symbiocene:** When we harm others, we indirectly harm ourselves
- **Strong sustainability:** Limits to substitutability of capital forms



Where do we go from here?

- **Can we really exit the Anthropocene?** Is it even feasible? → ‘stay with the trouble’, there is no ‘easy’ way out.
- **Commodification is not everywhere** (e.g. gifts from Nature; ‘Buen vivir’) → ILK, public participation.
- Giving **rights to nature** won’t be enough without a change in **value systems** (e.g. consumerism, growth).
- **Governance should change**, from ‘us and them’ to ‘all of us’, based on an **expanded sense of responsibility**.



Through identification they may come to see their own interest served by conservation, through genuine self-love, love of a widened and deepened self

(Maceo, 1995)



Narratives for Change

BRIEFING

Growth without economic growth

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COVID-19: lessons for sustainability?

BRIEFING

Exiting the Anthropocene? Exploring fundamental change in our relationship with nature

BRIEFING

With people and for people: Innovating for sustainability

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Rethinking agriculture

Coming soon:

‘Public participation for sustainability transitions’

ECGC

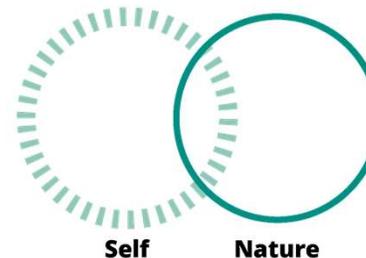
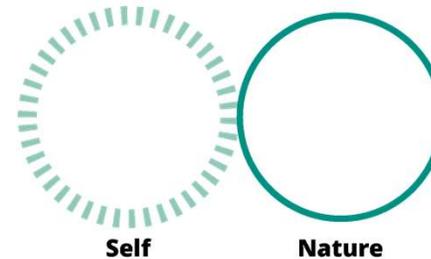
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Evolving institutional mindsets

Conservation

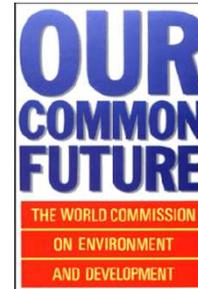
- First form of environmental awareness institutionalised (since 1600's)
- **Cornerstone of environmental governance**
 - **Limited effectiveness**, see European situation
 - Somehow **artificial separation** between humans and nature
 - **Anthropocentric perspective: Humans' interest and wellbeing >> Nature's interest**
 - **Human rights violations**, with forced evictions and displacement of indigenous people



Evolving institutional mindsets

Weak sustainability

- Environmental protection is achieved by **emphasising the instrumental value of nature to humans** (UN, 1987).
- **‘Protecting nature to promote human development’** made possible to develop more **ambitious international policies** (e.g. Aichi Targets, MDGs, SDGs), including in Europe.
- **Yet the framing is essentially anthropocentric** ‘healthy resource base’.
- **Nature is seen as a form of capital that can be substituted by and traded for other forms of capital.**



S. Lehmann, 2010

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Half of World's GDP Moderately or Highly Dependent on Nature, Says New Report

European Environment Agency

