



MEETING OF THE TRIGLAV CIRCLE

14-15 JUNE 2014 - NEUCHÂTEL, SWITZERLAND

THE PLACE OF VALUES IN GLOBAL DECISION MAKING

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Value and Values in relation to nature and conservation

The conservation movement globally is a huge force for good and organisations like WWF have made a vital contribution to these efforts for more than half-a-century. However, despite some remarkable successes, biodiversity loss continues apace. On-the-ground conservation programmes are of course crucial, but alone they are not sufficient.

Systemic and durable solutions to today's profound conservation challenges will require deeper and wider public concern for the protection of the natural world. This perspective is corroborated by many others. For example, we are increasingly encountering private acknowledgement from business leaders that improvements in the efficiency of resource use can only be part of the solution. We also need to begin to tackle the difficult issue of consuming not just differently, but less.

A similar story can be told about other pressing global challenges – climate change or inequality, for example. Such stories are interconnected: closely related cultural values underpin public appetite to address a wide range of social and environmental problems. We need to ensure that a far wider group of actors with the collective potential to create the momentum required to drive systemic changes becomes more active.

The UN system – pluralism and diversity

Over a slightly longer period - the last sixty to seventy years - the United Nations has been at the forefront in helping creating this "World We Want" through the definition and pursuit of targets such as the Millennium Development Goals and lately through the ideas and ideals embedded in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals. These targets and goals are part of a process which should stimulate and engage ideally all those who share the same fundamental goals, but in fact only a fraction of people have so far heard of or felt involved personally in them. There are many reasons for this but one of them is the narrow set of stakeholders who are actively engaged in these processes, and the nature of the discourse. Very few people are primarily moved by data or purely motivated by the intellect; they are rather guided through emotions and especially through their values.

The United Nations system of decision making is also flawed by an assumption of (the desirability of) homogeneity between nations and cultures.

Channels of culture and values

Ultimately we need to see a huge shift in behaviour by large sections of the world in order to live within our natural means. As described above, many of the important decisions that shape the future – like the Sustainable Development Goals – are being discussed by a narrow subsection of society largely drawn from a political, economic, technical, technological and advocacy background.

Many of the forces that actually shape culture and values (and therefore behaviour), or are channels through which values are communicated, are absent from this debate, partly because they are deemed irrelevant by the current intergovernmental systems, and partly because they do not see their relevance to these kinds of decision.

Faiths are an obvious example, and even when they are engaged their contributions are often dulled or diluted by a general desire towards interfaith declarations that can take away the very things that make each tradition unique. Beyond Faith, the Arts are also critically underrepresented. Another huge untapped resource is Sport – an activity that has at its heart many deeply positive values such as fairness, respect, fair competition and the ethos of teamwork.

The role of science in understanding how human behaviour works is also often not brought into these debates – using psychology and neuroscience for example.

The role of NGOs

The role of NGOs in shaping culture and influencing decisions has evolved over the last few decades as they have become increasingly professional. In many ways this is laudable but in the process some of the creative spark and soul has been lost as the NGOs become institutions in themselves, with huge amounts of energy spent either in sustaining themselves as entities or fighting against ‘competitor’ NGOs.

Public perceptions of the problems of biodiversity loss are likely to be importantly shaped by the communications of large conservation organisations. Among these materials, fundraising communications are likely to be particularly important. Fundraising communications comprise a very significant component of conservation organisations’ ‘public communications footprint’.

It is telling that many fundraising communications have gravitated toward engaging intrinsic values (Crompton et al., forthcoming). This is consistent with evidence demonstrating that the engagement of intrinsic values is associated with greater motivation to donate. Some recent experimental work (led by Tom Crompton at WWF who is part of my team and supported by NESTA) has pointed to the possibility of working more systematically to engage intrinsic values, with the effect of:

- (i) Increasing motivation to donate to a conservation organisation
- (ii) Increasing motivation to donate to other social concerns (e.g. disability)

This is work that needs to be treated very carefully. On the one hand, it could be used to help address an important barrier to changing the communications of conservation organisations (that is, concern about potential loss of revenue from individual supporters). On the other hand, it could be used to deflect a wider and more intrinsically-based concern about conservation into a narrowly defined ‘giving behaviour’. As our understanding of the importance of invoking particular values in fundraising communications continue to develop, it will be critical to engage mainstream charities in this debate.

TEEB and biodiversity offsets, ecosystem services, PES

There is widespread and understandable enthusiasm among mainstream conservation organisations for assessing the economic value of nature, and using this to help build political support for conservation efforts. This approach offers an opportunity to align conservation objectives with commercial interests. Perhaps because of the commercial possibilities that it offers, the financial resources have been available for extensive promotion of economic valuations of nature, and this approach has gathered the support of a wide range of businesses, government departments, and conservation organisations.

At the same time, a number of academics, drawn from a range of different disciplines (economists, conservation biologists, anthropologists, psychologists) have voiced strong concerns about some of the implications of using economic valuations of nature in policy-making. Some such academics point to evidence that economic valuations of nature will serve to erode the intrinsic value that many people currently place upon nature, and to engage and strengthen a ‘transactional’ or ‘market-oriented’ frame which is repeatedly found to be antagonistic to expressions of environmental concern.

As a practical response, there is a need to support deeper and more open debate involving both academics who are taking a critical stance, and individuals in NGOs and government who are beginning to work with these valuation methodologies. There is also a clear opportunity for experimental work to directly examine the impacts of economic valuations of nature upon an individual’s motivation to help protect it.

The language of love - Nature vs biodiversity vs ecosystems

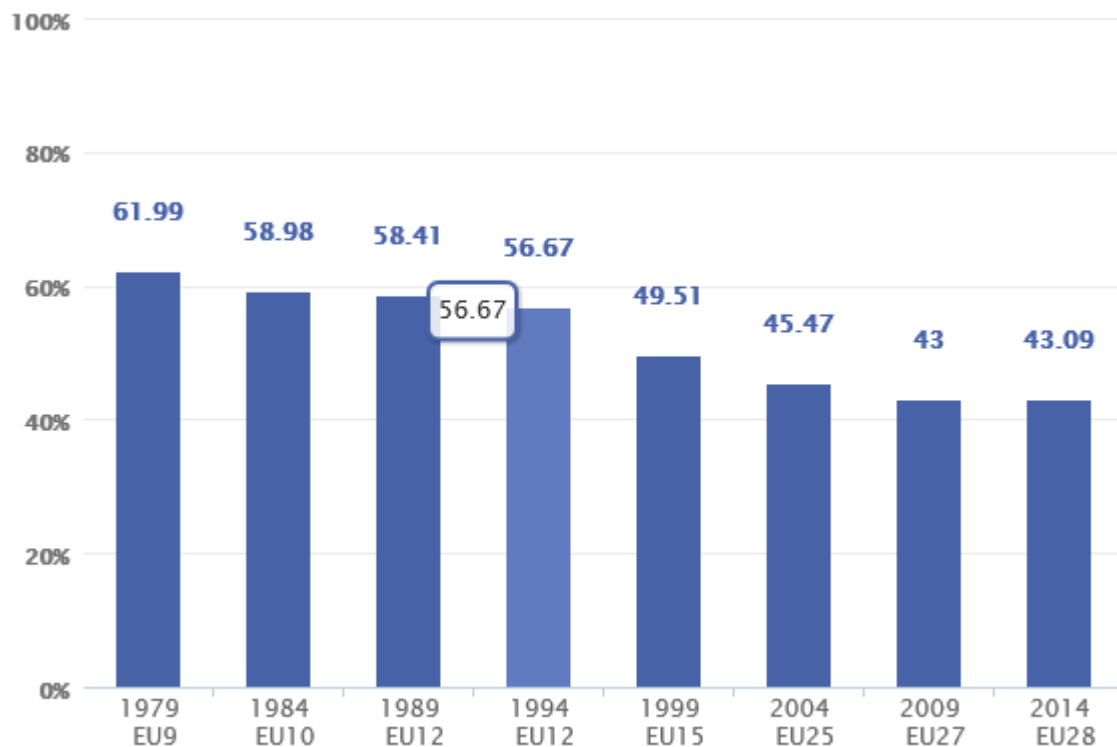
As part of the professionalization of the environmental NGOs we have moved towards quite technical language in describing the things we work on. We rarely use the word ‘nature’ or ‘animals’ preferring to talk about ‘ecosystems’ or ‘biodiversity’. The use of this sort of language can be helpful within a narrow technical audience as each word has a precise and separate meaning; but at the same time reinforces the separation between the language of ordinary people and the elite.

Finance system and the Economy

At the heart of many of our problems is the relationship between finance and economy. We have entered an era where the finance system has become separated from the economy and serves itself rather than the common good. We need a radical reengineering of the finance system so it serves people and planet, as envisaged by several pioneering ventures such as the Finance Innovation Lab (www.financelab.org). We need to bring a real sense of ethics back into our finance system.

(re)engaging global citizenry – apathy wins the election

We have real problems with disconnection at many levels – people are disconnected from Nature, from community and family, and even from themselves. Certainly the majority of people in the West at least are disconnected from the political process. We will face enormous crisis if we do not reconnect a large proportion of the population with these processes.



Using the recent European elections as an example, we see that after 1994 less than half of registered voters even engaged. If we want to reengage people we need to make them relevant to politics and politics relevant to them. As suggested above one issue is the rise of the professional class of politicians and bureaucrats.

At the same time, new spontaneous forms of self-organisation, particularly enabled by the internet and social media – such as Avaaz, the Occupy Movement or activists on Weibo – are allowing mass participation and real change. China is a very interesting example, where the rise in social media has already had huge impact on changing government decisions.

Can we have a new form of engagement where people feel connected to the decisions that shape their lives – a Universal Priesthood of global citizenry?

Taking action

So how do we move beyond theory to action? That is what most concerns me. I am invited to (and attend a few) delightful and stimulating discussions around the world where very intelligent people share thoughts and ideas; and yet in most cases it is not clear how and if this will translate into concrete action. I'd be very interested to explore with the group.

ValuesQuest

Finally I would like to introduce my work on ValuesQuest – a programme in coordination with UNDP to bring the issues of Culture Creativity and Values into the SDG process. This has been cofounded by ARC the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (www.arcworld.org) and the Club of Rome. More information on this can be seen at <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=607>