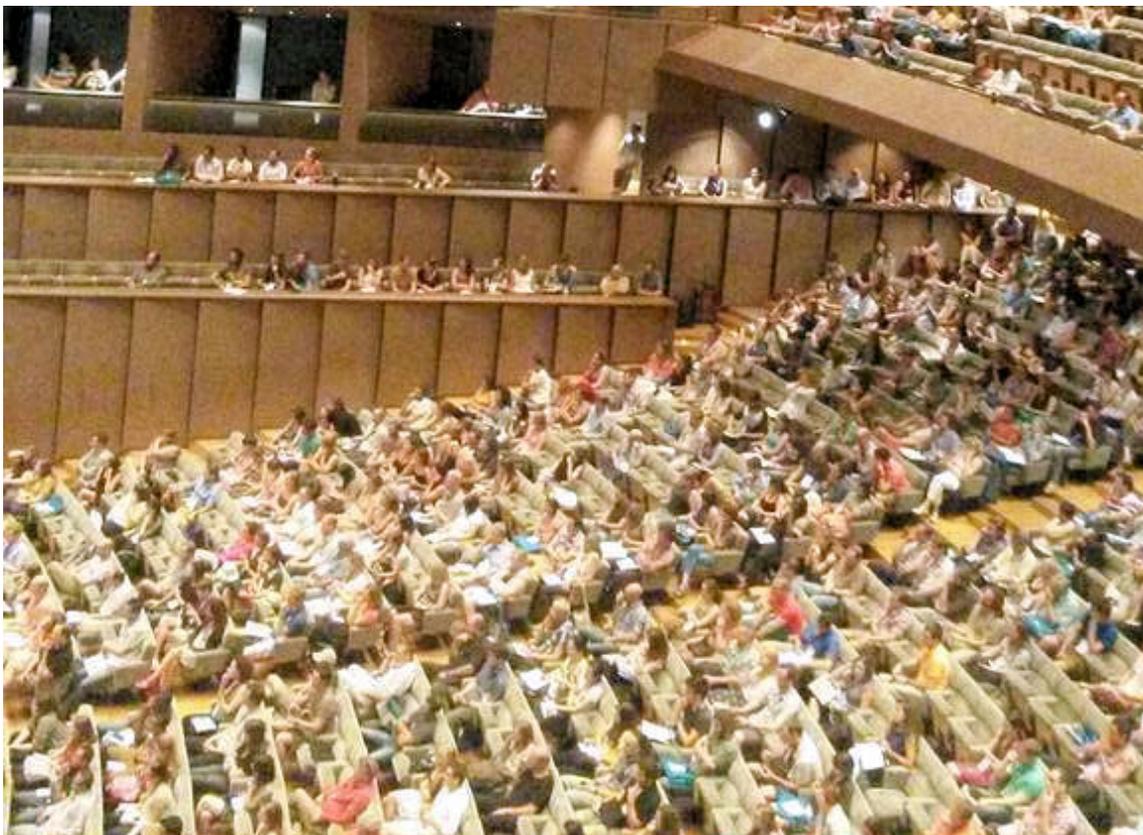


## New Paths for Conservation

### Peter Kareiva vs. Clive L. Spash: The Debate

Chaired by György Pataki (*posing selected written questions from the audience*)  
27<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology, and 4<sup>th</sup> European Congress for  
Conservation Biology “Mission Biodiversity: Choosing New Paths for Conservation”  
Montpellier, France  
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[A plenary talk and debate was held where first Peter Kareiva and then Clive Spash presented lectures and afterwards they answered questions in a format advertised as a debate, with a moderator György Pataki. The talk by Clive Spash received a standing ovation, the transcript is available online (with the original overheads) at [https://ideas.repec.org/p/wiw/wiwsre/sre-disc-2017\\_01.html](https://ideas.repec.org/p/wiw/wiwsre/sre-disc-2017_01.html). That transcript, along with the one here of the debate, came from a recording made by a member of the audience. Unfortunately, the organisers failed to make a recording or video (despite the event being held in the fully equipped modern multi-story Montpellier Opera house). This appears to be the only existing recording and was made on a hand held device, affected by echo, due to the size of the room, and distortion from occasional audience laughter, making some parts inaudible. Transcription was further complicated by the multiple accents of the participants. Best efforts have been made to reproduce the discussion *verbatim*. Where the recording was indecipherable this is noted.]



**Chair:** [*inaudible ... laughter*] I think we should try to consider the future in two thousand and fifty. So, if we try a constructive way of thinking. What would you start with?

**Karieva:** So, I actually, I think we could agree on that picture we paint of the future world. Ahh, that picture of 2050, of that future world. We paint a picture of more empathy, of richer lives, nature in it, ah, ah, you know, freedom, tolerance, we paint a very, very similar picture. My point is, if you start there, and you ask “what is the best way to get there?”, “what’s the most likely pathway by which we can get to that future?” ... um ... that’s the debate, that’s the debate, “what’s the most likely pathway by we can get to that future?”. And the pathways I suggested ... um ... from practice, from practical experience is that the pathway ... [*pause*] It’s certainly true, but do think you mischaracterised a lot of conservation, a lot of goods and services, ‘cause one fact is that people, the natural capital project its done over 24 projects around the world on ecosystems services, never!, never!! has it been asked for a dollar value. They hired economists, they had first class economists, they never convert to dollars, in the exercise of just recognising other people’s values is what makes it work and so... [*pause*]. I think we want the same future, I also suspect that we even have the same values. My three values would be species values, human values and also would be less important for me, but very important for a lot of people, individual animal values. So species add a value to existence, humans and human wellbeing is a value and individual animal welfare is a value. I would be surprised if those weren’t three values we share.

**Spash:** I guess I express my value commitments in a different way, erh, so I wouldn’t actually try to objectify human senses, but I’ll stick with the question, um. Sorry I’m just a little slow. [*laughter as lecture was fast*] I think we do agree, but we agree that the world is in a really awful state. We agree that there’s a massive loss of biodiversity and ecosystem, we

also agree that the social and the economic need to be incorporated into addressing the issues that we face, as humans, and I think on all those points we agree on. The change is needed, we also agree on that; fundamental change is needed. I think that we, where we start to diverge on that aspect of change is in what needs to change? The agenda that I see is a slight progressive agenda, it doesn't address the change that is needed, it doesn't go anywhere near far enough and it doesn't address the problems. We agree about poverty. But I see poverty, in the way Peter expresses it, as an attack on conservation is a misdirected and half-hearted attack, where we can see its easy to go pro for what happens with development. What are the serious problems with poverty: the way poverty arises and how they get decimated by corporations and development projects and so on; and rich states and corruption and all these sorts of things. There's many aspects in which we would agree around this generality, but as soon as we get to the specifics then we diverge. *[pause] [passing mic back with some difficulty] [laughter] Divergence. [more laughter].*

**Chair:** Alright, ah *[pause, laughter]* I tried to loosen up the joint vision but ... erh *[pause]* ... I also think ... erh ... the social scientists for the training in economics and economic ... erh..., interesting that economics could be different from social sciences, so I guess you agree Clive we consider ourselves social scientists. Umh. So, we have this basic divide between conflictual view of the world and harmonious view of the world and that was one of my thinking, during the sentences of your talks ... that seems to be clear. A slight difference of views that whether by two thousand and fifty that can get rid of all these conflicts which were very much clarified by Clive. So is it possible, and not wishful thinking, to go, think towards, rather than accepting conflict, differences, and then try to defend solutions, try to design mechanisms to see these conflicts in a way which can be constructive as much as possible.

What do you think? How does it relate to your vision, is it harmony, conflictual, should we get rid of conflicts or ...?

**Kareiva:** So I want you, I actually did find a fair amount of differences [*interpreted meaning; recording unclear*]. I'm a sort of a optimistic with regard to beauty [*...few inaudible words...*] harmony, and I think you have a more contested view of the world anticipated, in terms of differences, about amount of differences. The way I think is Texas for example [*referring to his preceding lecture and a Texan campaign against littering*]. You could have gone into Texas and challenged all those values of those young Texan men, 40 years or younger, or you could try to have empathy and understand their values, the culture in which they live in and achieve the outcome which you wanted, what you could stop.

And I think businesses when I, just a slight personal aside, when I first joined the Conservancy I did not join as a foreigner, I mean I did not join as staff, I joined as a, as a foreigner. And they always have scientists on the Board. And I was thinking "nope" and I went in there thinking actually very much like you, in the sense of thinking "What am I doing here? These corporations are the enemy". And these corporate leaders are [*pause*] I'd demonise them, I disagreed with every one of them, you know, and took notice and I'd change my view. They have deep personal values and commitments as corporate leaders. And here you told a story about Mark Tercek. Mark Tercek doesn't get paid anything for his job. He's the CEO of The Nature Conservancy, takes no money, for it. That's his commitment, takes no money for it. And maybe you could say he's got plenty of money, but that's still really a commitment. So I came to think, this gonna sound corny, I came to think that it is creating empathy with different values and different points of view. And, and that leads to the services talk, if you get all the tradeoffs and stakeholders at the table that are

talking, creating that empathy and shared construction is what it'll get us, not going into the disc-flinging.

**Spash:** Well, I guess I should answer the question first, before I reply to that. I would say that we need good judgement that's for sure, we need a vision of the future and that vision is separate from how we get there. So there's also an issue about how we get forward. But what happens time and time again is people say, "we've got to take the first step", "we can't do that, it's too far", "it's too uncertain". Let's face it, we live in a society fixated on growth. You can't get more utopian than economic growth. Let alone calling it sustainable. Sustainable development, what a farce, right? I mean the Brundtland Report was recommending 3-4% growth in the already industrialised countries and 10-12% growth in developing countries! I mean in a world extracting resources like crazy. You just destroyed the planet and you call that a vision for the future that is meant to be practical, and our first step somewhere else. I mean, we've got crazy utopian visions being justified on the basis of being practical. I want us to see a utopian vision and that also has to be practical and specified. Those kinda specifics have got to be social, ecological and economic and we've got to be embedded in that understanding, which I don't see.

This idea that corporations are full of nice, friendly people and they all have values, right? Great! *[laughter]* Look, go and watch the film *The Corporation*, if you've never watched it I recommend it to you. It exposes this fallacy between producing and institutions and organisations and structures, down to individuals. It may well be that there are nice people in corporations, but multi-national corporations are structured in a way that is not nice. They are classifiable as psychopaths. *[laughter]* They do not care. They hire and fire, they run over people willingly, right! So, it's the fact that people who seemingly have nice values, and seem to be nice people, are embedded in running these structures is the problem, right! That

people give in to these flawed institutional frameworks. So, you know, fine, go and talk to the CEO of BP and he turns out to be a nice guy. So what? BP is devastating the climate, through resource extraction. Talk to the guys who do fracking and have a beer with them down the pub. Great! You know, so what!? It doesn't change what company's doing, just because they happen to be nice guys. [*loud applause*]

**Chair:** I do think that statement is also raising a very important point of differentiating between the level of society and social organisation, the individual and the corporate as an institution. So I think that lesson was taken on. There are very interesting questions, towards the future of the planet, particularly the conservation biology and society. Training, most of the people trained, especially today, which is not trained for interdisciplinarity. Although Clive is based at a University, so Peter is not alone, he has lots of affiliations at Universities and experience. So, I would like to ask this question, from the University user, how do you imagine, or how do you practice in Vienna at the University of Economics and Business .. erh .. new type of science for conservation, for training for conservation, you can say, but what do you think of as practitioner Peter, how do you see the change studied? Since the question is raising issues that if they are trained in ecology and conservation and biology, how do you link politics, psychology, economics, all subjects interacting with these topics?

And if you could just recommend it with another issue from the audience: What is the difference between environmental and ecological economics? So why do you choose to go towards ecological economics, because you started also as a type of environmental economist (as I did). So, and also, Peter, how do you think that this changes issues, change the rules influencing conservation and the idea of conservation, even the expression.

**Spash:** Right, well in Vienna we're actually running a program "Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy", which is an interesting experience, because what we're doing there is trying to take people to address exactly this kind of problem. How do you take people who are mono-disciplinary and try to broaden their horizons and make them think about the environment and the problems and how to address it. It's a big challenge. And, I start with, actually, Philosophy of Science, and understanding History and Philosophy of Science. Because if you do that, what you realise is that, people who are trained in a certain way of thinking recognise the way they've been trapped into a certain way of thinking, and they recognise the way that other people conduct their discourses—whether they're naive objectivists, empiricists or whatever—and this helps tremendously with being able to analyse problems and actually to think critically. And, especially with critical social sciences, think about the way that people express themselves and their values and the theories that they make. The nice thing about this is that you can then get these students to go through all sorts of documents from the TEEB project to, ah, Footprint Analysis, or whatever it is, and they can see through the analysis. They don't have to be an expert economist or an expert biologist or whatever, they can see through it analytically and see the core constructs and what's going on with the argument. And that is essential to the try to create interdisciplinary thinking and understanding. So, if you can get people to do that then you're a long way down the road. This doesn't address the issue of specialisation; that you still need specialists and you still need people to be brought together, and that's another issue, how do you get people to come into the same room and work with each other. Because, let's face it, the majority of what's called interdisciplinarity is bullshit. I mean, it's basically a lot of people working in parallel, they don't talk to each other. The IPCC reports are classic, they're in separate volumes, right, I mean they're in separate committee rooms, they never talk to each other, and the economists never talk to the climate scientists, my God, anyway... *[laughter]*

So, the other thing was the social eco., actually ecological economics versus environmental economics. So I wrote a book, a textbook on cost-benefit analysis too many years ago, 20 years ago, this is a bestselling book, it's trained lots of people I argue with [laughter]. Basically, why did I choose to move away from that? Because I grew-up a bit. I mean, basically, it's a really funny idea, to go around valuing things with monetary values, and expecting the whole system to change because you just came up with some magic number that they're going to stick in ... what? ... a report, and drop in a filing cabinet somewhere. It's just crazy. Once you get involved in government and you start doing these reports and you see how things really operate, it doesn't take long to come, you know, to realise that its actually doing nothing and the environmental economics community is just reinforcing the system that you actually wanted to change. So it's highly problematic.

So what's ecological economics? Ecological economics started as being something that was meant to be radically alternative, but its a very mixed bag. It's got people who actually were mainstream economists, training originally. There's also natural scientists who know nothing about economics who came in, and they thought any economist who was concerned about the environment must be a good guy. And then they latch on to the people who have highest status and ranking and then work with them. Well, the people with the highest status and ranking are all the orthodox people, because the heterodoxy hadn't much impact, hadn't got going. So, ecological economics has been a fight, throughout. I now advocate Social Ecological Economics. And this is one reason, the thing that I think I would agree with Peter about, its the failure to take the social onboard in the environmental movement. So there's a serious problem there. The social and the human factor has not been incorporated enough, and the sad thing about that is rather than seeing it as ..., a lot of the time social oppression is heavily linked with environmental destruction, you know. And so the two go hand in hand, if

you address social exploitation you're quite likely addressing environmental exploitation as well. So, I refer to Social Ecological Economics now.

**Kareiva:** So first, you know, the question sort about the training. So I just moved in my position, so I had high [?] as special advisor, but I've moved to direct the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at UCLA, I went back to academia. Why in hell d'I go back to academia? I think the big thing that is missing in academia is the disconnect for how, really to implement and create change. You can write about it, you can analyse it, but you can't really go out and try to do it, figuring out, you know, how it works. The thing I like about SLAM, their program, is that, you know, proposals; when you write a proposal, it's a scientific proposal, it's the study of economics, socio, ... yeh ..., biophysical, ecological things, economic trends. But there's a form of the proposal that can't get without implementation, it's that pathway to implementation that is missing in so much of University training, that you could be filled with ideas and theories but have no idea, no concept of what it really takes to, you know, to go out of town [? *inaudible word*], to go to a city and see something change in that city in a tangible way and that's the connection the University's would miss with the environment, that is I think, so the new model of Universities is much more getting students and getting the training out, into the practical.

[*clapping*]

**Chair** Thanks and Ends Discussion.