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## Book Reviews

**The Business of Biodiversity, Mark Everard, 2009, WIT Press, Southampton and Boston, ISBN 978-1-84564-208-2, 240 pp.**

Against the background of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) which emphasized the importance of biodiversity for ecosystem services, human well being and sustainable development, this book presents the business case for conserving biodiversity. It notes that once business people realize that biodiversity still represents the primary source for all business activities, then the business case for embedding biodiversity concerns into corporate strategy gain importance. The book elaborates on this theme over several, albeit brief, chapters (24) organized under seven parts.

Part 1 entitled 'Biodiversity Basics' provides background information about biodiversity, its importance and linkages with natural and economic systems, and for business. Biodiversity and other attributes of the earth's ecosystem will increasingly set the parameters shaping the future of business. The wider links between business and biodiversity and the practical ways in which they may be integrated into mainstream decision-making are explored. The challenge before business and society is to bring about a change in mindset from the industrial revolution paradigm of a world of unlimited resources to that of a finite world and the interdependent nature of complex ecosystems which, if harmed, will ultimately affect the long term interests of business and society.

Part 2 demonstrates the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services for society and business in particular. If these values could be internalized into decision-making, it will benefit governments, societies and business to create a more sustainable future and markets. It emphasizes that business needs to respond proactively rather than reactively to growing environmental concerns. Ignoring these concerns and public opinion can dent corporate image and trust, as bitterly learnt by business entities such as Exxon, McDonald's and Monsanto.

The next part analyses the implications for business and society when biodiversity and ecosystems are exploited beyond sustainable levels. Ecosystems provide a diversity of goods and services that support the needs and aspirations of society and business.

Examples are provided from fisheries, forestry, agriculture, water and other sectors to illustrate how short sighted policies and unsustainable practices affected their sustenance. Faulty governmental policies and perverse incentives also contributed to this state of affairs.

Part 4 discusses various initiatives to address sustainability concerns, especially where there is close interface between business and biodiversity. Initiatives such as SCaMP for integrated catchment management, Forest and Marine Stewardship Councils for responsible management of forest and marine resources, etc. are discussed to show how better management practices can benefit companies and societies. All these can generate new opportunities for business.

Part 5 synthesizes the ideas discussed in the book to develop an integrated framework whereby biodiversity concerns are integrated into business decision-making. With changing market conditions, public and corporate values, consumer awareness, investors' attitudes towards risk, and tightening regulations, business needs to refocus its strategy to take advantage of new business opportunities. The need to be able to

implement simple audits of the footprint of business decisions on biodiversity and social cohesion in future is also emphasized. The last two parts provide an epilogue and various definitions of biodiversity.

The author has collated a lot of facts and information from a variety of sources to write an insightful and stimulating book of great topical value. Although there is a lot of repetition of statements in the book, its non-technical nature makes it easily accessible to the general public interested in conservation issues. The business community in particular, apart from others, needs to read this book if they are to be geared to meet the challenges of the future.

K.N. Ninan

Centre for Ecological Economics and Natural Resources,  
Institute for Social and Economic Change,  
Bangalore 560 072, India  
E-mail address: [ninankn@yahoo.co.in](mailto:ninankn@yahoo.co.in).

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**Farewell to Growth, S. Latouche, 2010, Polity Press, UK, ISBN: 978-0-74564-617-6, 180 pp.**

Serge Latouche is the main intellectual force behind the popularization of *décroissance* (degrowth). This certainly has something to do with his ability to present theoretically-heavy concepts and ideas in simple terms, accessible to the average reader. This is the first book by Latouche translated in English. It is a short and distilled summary of his voluminous work in French. It is a "degrowth for beginners" with no loss in quality of content. As Latouche argues in the opening of the book his aspiration is to advance beyond making the case for degrowth and to respond to the frequent question of "how to degrow", or in other words, how to organize socially a transition process of "quiet contraction".

The first part of the book explains what is degrowth. For Latouche degrowth means to abandon the goal of exponential growth. This has to be an active abandonment, a process of "escape from the economy". Escape is not only a cognitive practice, e.g. of ignoring growth economists and their indices, but also a material one, of creating new autonomous spaces of social interaction and production. Why should we do this? Latouche synthesizes the two different intellectual sources of degrowth, the culturalist (anti-utilitarianism and eco-municipalism) and the ecological (bioeconomics and ecological economics) and makes the case that: i) growth is energetically (entropically) unsustainable, ii) our ever-expanding ecological footprint and carbon emissions lead us to a disaster that cannot be averted by efficiency improvements since savings "rebound"; iii) growth does not increase happiness; iv) credit, advertising and planned obsolescence of products maintain a crazy treadmill of consumption and growth for growth's sake; v) the idea of development as growth is corrupting non-Western cultures.

The second part of the book outlines a “concrete utopia” of degrowth. This is captured in eight inter-dependent principles, the “8 Rs” of degrowth: Re-evaluate what matters; Reconceptualize key notions such as wealth, poverty, value, scarcity and abundance; Restructure the productive apparatus and social relations to fit these new values; Redistribute wealth and access to natural resources between North and South and between classes, generations and individuals; Relocalize savings, financing, production and consumption; Reduce production and consumption, especially for goods and services with little use value but high environmental impact; Re-use products and Recycle waste. Relocalization is central in Latouche's degrowth strategy, who envisions self-sufficient, politically autonomous bioregions or “urban villages”, exchanging ideas, but few materials or capital. In Latouche's concrete utopia, food, energy and money will be mostly locally produced. This is a proposal for the Global North. The South is to be left alone to grow to satisfy the basic needs of its population and then define its own trajectory “synthesizing” local traditions with modern tools. Latouche calls for liberating the South from the false paradise of the North citing Baudrillard who once said that “the only thing that keeps Western culture going is that the rest of the world wants to be part of it”.

What I liked in this book is that it is specific, and does not stay at the level of principles. The third part of the book outlines a political program for degrowth. Unlike what the title may suggest, this is not to be implemented by “degrowth political parties”, but to be addressed as a set of demands to other progressive political parties. Latouche's program includes taxes on transport and other environmentally-damaging activities, as well as on global financial transactions and the profits of multinationals (including a carbon and a global wealth tax), support of peasant agriculture, reduction of working time with a redefinition of work that will make jobs available to all, investment on the production of relational goods, such as friendship and neighbourliness, heavy penalties on spending for advertising and a moratorium on large-scale techno-scientific innovation.

Of course all these ideas raise several questions and their implementation is far from straightforward. Ecological-economic and political questions come first to my mind: can we feed the world with local organic produce? What will happen to the development of renewable energy as surpluses and R&D investments contract? Can we work less as available energy declines? Can we work less as capital investments in productivity-improving technologies shrink?

I am also concerned with Latouche's emphasis on the “local” as the scale where solutions should be found. In a globalised world of unfettered capital flows and evolved political and economics interdependencies, how effective can be local solutions? How can the grand changes and redistributions inferred by Latouche take place without an empowerment of centralized national (and international) authority and some sort of a planned economy? Isn't this return to “the local” problematic in a world where global governance and cooperation is what we most need to solve environmental problems? How will be “free-riding” nations or locales regulated in Latouche's utopia? In such appeals for return to the local, there is also reminiscence of fascist ideas about autarchy, community and identity through nature and territory. Latouche of course has nothing in common with such ideas and is aware of this danger and quick to dismiss it. But in my view it is not enough to say “it will not happen because I do not like it”. Unless the envisioned association of locales is specified better, and its particulars are laid out, especially how will restrictions within self-sufficiency limits be applied, and how ideas and people will continue to move while

everything much else is to be restricted, the danger of degrowth ideas being appropriated by extreme xenophobic elements remains.

Latouche, an economic anthropologist working in Africa, is much more of an expert in North–South questions than I am. Still I have a question about the call for North–South redistribution and payment of our debts: how can we do it, other than through development aid, which we know that is failing? I would like to be optimistic about the likelihood of the “South” developing its own hybrid and self-sufficient identity, once basic needs of the population are met. However, the plutocrats that rule many countries of the South could not care less about the self-sufficiency of the masses and are unlikely to surrender power and privilege so easily in a voluntary, endogenously-defined path to alternative development.

Which brings me to my final concern, which is the lack of a vision by Latouche on how could all this happen socially and politically. Latouche somewhat contradicts himself when he claims early in the book that a politician elected on a degrowth agenda would be assassinated the next day, later on to assert that reform through the parliament is the way for degrowth, if it is not to retrograde to the violence of other “big ideas” of the past. The redistribution implied by degrowth is destined to meet fierce resistance if not violence, by those that have most to loose. While at an ethical level, I and everyone writing about degrowth, sign to Latouche's commitment to a non-violent, democratic transition, the question of how can this be done politically needs much more elaboration. The bipolar of political apathy and blind violence that we begin to see in parts of the world these first years of the crisis, and which is scarily similar to the inter-war years of the 20th century, should be worrying us.

Latouche is aware that he is leaving many questions open. This is not only because of the summary form of the book, which refers to more complete works for those seeking more information. It is also because he is a conscious pluralist, careful not to repeat mistakes of the past dictating blueprints, as he acknowledges that the future cannot be predicted or controlled. He sees as his primary task to “decolonise our imaginary” from the myths of economic growth, and cultivate the ground where new possibilities can flourish. Unlike the economists or bankers responsible for the current financial crisis, Latouche is aware enough of the limits of what he knows. But he also knows that to act we do not need to wait for perfect knowledge; in fact, this has never been the case. “Farewell to Growth” offers a pluralist, open vision of social change and a tentative toolkit for its realization. One could not ask for more.

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Giorgos Kallis

ICREA and ICTA, *Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, ETSE, QC/3095,*  
08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain

Tel.: +34 93 581 3749.

E-mail address: [Giorgoskallis@gmail.com](mailto:Giorgoskallis@gmail.com).

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