

EuroNatur Award 2021 presented to

Dr. Eszter Kelemen (Hungary), Dr. Yunne Shin (France), and Dr. Josef Settele (Germany) on behalf of all scientists working with IPBES – the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Schloss Mainau, Lake Constance, 14. October 2021

Laudation

hold by Professor Thomas Potthast (President of EuroNatur)

Esteemed festive assembly, dear colleagues, dear friends!

with great respect and pleasure, the Board of EuroNatur Foundation has nominated the scientists working with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for the EuroNatur Award 2021. I am very happy to present the award to Dr. Eszter Kelemen from Hungary, Dr. Yunne Shin from France, and Professor Josef Settele from Germany on behalf of the worldwide international community of scientists of IPBES. This is to honour your outstanding engagement for the protection of biodiversity and the environment.

The laudation starts with some brief and well-known information about the reasons and the motivation why we are all here – the threatened state of biodiversity (I.). Then I provide a sketch on the structure and work of IPBES (II.) and the achievements of the works of our esteemed guests and the IPES scientist community (III.), and finally end with some remarks on the current context and prospects of science, politics, and biodiversity (IV.).

I. Biodiversity is in crisis

What makes us concerned about biodiversity, ecosystem services, the biosphere as a whole? It is the ongoing loss of species and habitats that regrettably has been an issue for almost 150 years now, ever since the pioneers of nature conservation have been starting to push this loss into the focus of society and politics. And ever since, the situation has not really improved, to the contrary: we are now facing an encompassing global crisis of biodiversity: Human activities related with a resource-intensive, extractivist and globalised-imperial way of life have directly altered three quarters of the land worldwide; also two-thirds of the upper ocean layer is increasingly suffering from these effects; about 85 per cent of wetlands have been lost since the year 1700; and 77 per cent of rivers over 1000 kilometres long no longer flow freely from source to sea. Coastal ecosystems are experiencing some of the largest and most rapid declines in recent times. The stock of living corals has almost halved in the past 150 years. Coral reefs are likely to largely disappear within this century if climate change is not immediately and strongly curbed. Every ten minutes a species becomes extinct, and the speed of extinction is 10 to 100 per cent faster than the natural extinction rate. I stop here with these well-known and bad news. Why does all this matter? Why do people care about nature and the decline of our fellow living beings? The answer is threefold: Firstly, we care because human life as we know it can only be maintained if, and only if, biodiversity and ecosystem services are maintained in a way that allows for mutual co-existence. The current biodiversity crisis is threatening this in an existentially relevant way. Secondly, as part of human flourishing, we relate to biodiversity in various and culturally different ways to biodiversity for our good life, also beyond mere biological survival. Philosophy has a Greek word for this good and rich and fulfilling life – eudaimonia. Recently, colleagues have dubbed this dimension of human-nature-

relations “cultural ecosystem services”, in other parts of our planet, people rather talk about “buen vivir” or “sumak kawsay” or “ubuntu” to characterise a life of living together of humans, fellow species, and nature as a whole. And thirdly, humans cherish and respect biodiversity and nature simply because the latter have an intrinsic value in their own right, beyond any human interests and direct functional aspects. So, it is not only about the facts of declining biodiversity, it is also about the values – and only in and by this combination it is why we care and act against the biodiversity crisis and for the sake and flourishing of biodiversity.

II. IPBES

Compared to the long history of nature conservation, IPBES is a young institution, yet it has a fascinating background of its implementation: It has to be understood from a context dating back to the United Nation’s World Commission for Environment and Development established in 1983, and its famous Report of 1987 “Our Common Future” – this so-called Brundtand Report established Sustainable Development as an ethical and political principle of justice, justice between all living humans as well as future generations, the priority of the needs of the poorest, and the need to take into account the environmental and planetary boundaries that allow and limit the way how human flourishing can be practised. The UN summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992 then set the Agenda 21 for Sustainable Development and issued, among others, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – becoming the major global political framework for nature protection as part of Sustainable Development.

Now, IPBES has been established based on the so-called Busan outcome as part of the CBD-follow-up-processes. Busan in South Korea was the location of the “third ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem

services”. Subsequently, participating States at their plenary meeting in April 2012 adopted a resolution that established IPBES as “an independent intergovernmental body,” with the seat of the secretariat located in Bonn, Germany. The first session of IPBES took place in January 2013. So, it took more than 20 years from CBD to IPBES.

As you know, IPBES is following the idea of the “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change” IPCC, founded already in 1988, and it was hoped that IPBES would achieve a similar standing and impact as IPCC as a reliable source of scientific information for global environmental policymaking. Although legally independent, IPBE is administered by the United Nations Environment Program UNEP and has a set of precise institutional arrangements – functions, structures, and processes – that provide a complex framework of rules, principles and procedures to govern the Platform’s work. Let me try to very briefly explain this.

Members: IPBES was established in 2012 by close to 100 participating governments, i.e. nation states, and its membership has continued to grow as IPBES' impact has increased.

Bureau: The Mandate of the Bureau is set out in the functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of IPBES as contained in the appendix to the resolution establishing IPBES. The Bureau consists of 10 members. The current Chair is Ana Maria Hernandez Salgar, a leading international relations environmental expert from Colombia. Past Chair has been Robert Watson, an eminent environmental scientist and ecosystem services expert from England.

Secretariat: The Secretariat, based at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany, is the only permanently located structure of IPBES. The Secretariat is responsible for administrative functions, which include the drafting of working documents, facilitating communications, preparing the budgets and coordinating the outreach activities of the Platform. Important for us today is the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel: Its mandate, among others, is to

- Manage IPBES' peer-review process to ensure the highest levels of scientific quality, independence and credibility for all products delivered by IPBES at all stages of the process;
- Engage the scientific community and other knowledge holders with the work programme, taking into account the need for different disciplines and types of knowledge, gender balance, and effective contribution and participation by experts from developing countries;
- Explore ways and means to bring different knowledge systems, including indigenous knowledge systems, into the science-policy interface.

As you see, scientific quality as well as ethical and intercultural aspects are coming together to provide information on the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services. IPBES already has had an enormous impact on the way how this being done by its Conceptual Framework 2015: This framework includes six interlinked elements constituting a social-ecological system that operates at various scales in time and space: 1) nature; 2) nature's benefits to people; 3) anthropogenic assets; 4) institutions and governance systems and other indirect drivers of change; 5) direct drivers of change; and 6) good quality of life. Why is this so important? Because by this framework, biodiversity is based on, but not restricted to knowledge from natural science, but entails social sciences and humanities as well as indigenous sources of expertise.

The expertise produced is controlled by a meticulous and again complex review process which includes scientists, civil society stakeholders, and governments.

By this, information on the global state and possible futures of biodiversity is provided in an interdisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary way – scientists are part of a science-policy-interface to provide information that is both – state-of-the-art and high-quality as well as relevant for policymaking.

III. Impact of IPBES and role of scientists

How do scientists work in and for IPBES: They are nominated by their nation states, they devote a considerable amount of their working time – often 20%, i.e., one workday per week, the lead authors more – to IPBES, and they review the existing bodies of knowledge. This is a hard and tedious task: The 2019 GLOBAL ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SCIENCE-POLICY PLATFORM ON BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES in its published version comprises roughly 1.200 pages. As Josef Settele (one of the three coordinating lead authors of the report) reports in his recent book from 2020, about 500 researchers from 50 countries have been involved as co-authors. In a three-year-process, innumerable publications have been screened by a systematic keyword search, more than 15.000 have been chosen as relevant, have been scientifically assessed, condensed, and brought into policy-relevant context and communicated in an understandable form. The review process of producing the report contained 20.000 – as Josef notes “more or less critically constructive” comments from science, society, and politics. It is precisely this work that we want to highlight by the EuroNatur Award. All the scientists are experts of their respective fields, but what they contribute here is not their own research but a synthesis of the all the best available knowledge with regard to the biodiversity crisis.

This form of knowledge-production requires not only the scientific virtues of impartiality, exactness, critical analysis and self-reflexion, but also the art of finding the relevant knowledge in an almost limitless universe of digitalised information, of focusing on the important issues and putting them into context, and of balancing different needs of quality and quantity and kind of knowledge at the science-policy-interface. And from colleagues working for IPBES I know how high the intrinsic personal motivation is – and has to be – to contribute.

Let me illustrate the impact of this work by a few outcomes: The influential Conceptual Framework has already been mentioned, also the 2019 global report, which has become very influential in three ways: it first showed the disastrous state of affairs on global scale and identified the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss (I cannot go into details here), second, and equally important, it offers detailed scenario elements for PLAUSIBLE FUTURES OF NATURE, ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEOPLE AND THEIR GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE (Yunne-Jai Shin has been one of the coordinating lead authors of this chapter). Thirdly, the report provides OPTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS (Ester Kelemen has been one of the lead authors of this chapter), which stresses the importance of societal transformations, also regarding a sustainable economy including taxing, consumption and trade regimes. This chapter very aptly addresses biodiversity and ecosystem function as part of the full spectrum of topics of Sustainable Development, and not as often and wrongly stated, a seemingly sectoral issue.

In the same vein, this year IPBES and IPCC issued a workshop report on the interlinkage between climate crisis and biodiversity crisis. Maybe this can be understood as the most important task for future policymaking, not telling apart these two crises, although powerful players try to do so in order to weaken both climate protection and biodiversity protection.

I am aware, that I missed to address the important regional, i.e., mainly continentally specified assessments, the reports on land degradation, on pollination, and many more. But allow me to proceed to some final remarks.

IV. Final remarks

Some people might think that the information on declining biodiversity, destruction of habitats and ecosystem services, identification of drivers and

socio-economic backgrounds of these processes, and the need for global societal transformations towards Sustainable Development are not new. But this view is missing important perspectives: i) Scientific information is no timeless truth but subject to constant critical revision so that we need continuous state-of-the art reviews and updates, ii) based on this, scientific information also needs to be contextualised in a problem-oriented way by including civil society and governmental actors, iii) scientific information has to be made available at the science-policy-interface in a transparent and understandable way. For all this, the community of scientists working for IPBES stand in.

Allow me to add a personal remark also being a scientist: It is precisely not the outdated motto “Speaking truth to power”, neither, sorry, “Follow the Science” – but it is science and civil society and decision makers (the latter hopefully democratically legitimized) talking and interacting with each other in order to address the biodiversity crisis and discuss sustainable ways out.

Eszter Kelemen as a Hungarian socio-economist, Yunne-Jai Shin as a French marine scientist with family roots in Asia, and Sepp Settele as a German terrestrial ecologist, if I dare say, with Bavarian roots, – you stand for the whole community of scientists of IPBES with a diversity of disciplines and countries. The presence of three European representatives simply has pragmatic and travel sustainability reasons.

Your work as scientists for and within IPBES enables policy makers to better understand the complex mechanisms and more effectively address the ongoing loss of biodiversity and habitat destruction by providing information on the status and possible future scenarios of biodiversity. Whilst remaining scientifically independent and transparent, your work is relevant in and for politics. Explicitly, your work shall be understood as not being directly prescriptive but, at the same time, you clearly speak up for the preservation of

nature and sustainable development, thereby showing your personal commitment as global citizens for human-nature partnership.

That is why your work is more motivating than ever for our commitment for a sustainable shared future of humans and fellow living beings and the biosphere.

Thank you very much!