

Nature and its role in the transition to a green economy

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Working with nature should be at the heart of the transition to a green economy. Human and societal well-being depends on nature and nearly all sectors of the economy benefit directly or indirectly from nature. There is a need for a clear understanding of the multiple values of nature and the growing appreciation of the roles and values of nature should be taken into account in public and private decisions. In certain contexts this can help demonstrate the dangers of a brown economy to nature and help inform policies looking to reduce trade-offs and hence 'green the brown economy'. In other contexts it can demonstrate where investments in nature can also save money, promote development and economic growth, and hence inform green economy initiatives that offer multiple synergies and win-wins. Furthermore, in policy contexts, it can be helpful to demonstrate that the designation and management of protected areas and/or investment in wider green infrastructure can address a range of policy objectives beyond biodiversity conservation – for example, water security, climate mitigation and adaptation, food provision, local and regional development, culture, education, health and livelihoods, innovation and growth – i.e. offering 'nature based solutions'.

Together the evidence and its communication could help the integration of nature into policies and support the transition of a green economy. Care should, however, be taken in promoting the multiple values of nature, not focusing only on values with existing markets. This should also include both reflection of intrinsic values and values of the multiple benefits to society in the economy and hence avoid trade-offs between intrinsic value and benefits for society and the economy. Furthermore, the case on the roles and values of nature should make use of a mix of valuation metrics – qualitative, quantitative and monetary - and be sensitive to locational, distributional and inter-generational issues.

In practice, the transition to a green economy can usefully build on a range of building blocks – some directly focusing on nature, and others focusing on other issues and sectors, but with benefits for nature conservation and the wider environment. The building blocks include: (a) Minimising losses and avoiding inappropriate trade-offs of policies & measures between economic, social and environmental objectives (and between biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as between ecosystem services themselves); (b) Investing in environmental infrastructure to comply with environmental standards (i.e. water and waste management infrastructures); (c) Active management of environmental risks to minimise risks and impacts (e.g. climate change and invasive alien species); (d) Proactive investment in natural capital to promote sustainable use and restoration of natural capital; (e) Further eco-efficiency for relative decoupling of the economy from impacts on nature,

the wider environment and health; (f) Absolute decoupling of the economy from resource use and its negative impacts to ecosystems so that resource and ecosystem limits are respected; as well as (g) Good governance - an integral part of each of the building blocks. Nature is clearly core to the fourth building block; it is also an integral element of the others. All the building blocks are needed for the transition to a green economy and there is a need for a step-change in the pace of commitments to meet the challenges of addressing biodiversity loss and meeting the wider needs of sustainable development.

A range of concrete tools and measures available to integrate and take up natural capital in decision-making can help the transition – from regulation and spatial planning, to market based instruments, to education and transparent information provision, community engagement, investment, procurement and purchasing choices. The decision as to which instrument (mix) is best depends on national contexts and an increased evidence of multiple values of nature can inform (but does not dictate) instrument choice. For example, protected area designation and management, supported with restoration of degraded ecosystems, and complemented by new investment in wider green infrastructure is a combination that has proven both its benefits to biodiversity and to the many other benefits for society and the economy. These approaches should therefore be a core element of a transition to a green economy. Understanding the role of nature in the transition to a green economy and the effects of green economy instruments on nature can help inform those engaged with protected areas and green infrastructure in working with policy makers to make the transition to a green economy the right transition that benefits from nature and benefits nature.

References

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The work on *Nature and the Transition to a Green Economy* is ongoing within the 7FP [OPERAs](#). Please contact ptenbrink@ieep.eu for further information.