

Deke, O.: Environmental policy instruments for conserving global biodiversity

XX, 392 pp. Springer, Berlin 2008. Hardback, € 177.65

Charles Palmer

Published online: 18 September 2008
© Springer-Verlag 2008

Anthropogenic interference in the earth's ecosystems has and continues to cause an unprecedented loss of global biodiversity, comparable in scope and scale to 'mass extinctions' in the distant past. The net effect of this loss is unknown, although human wellbeing may well be adversely affected. One of the first international attempts to deal with biodiversity loss can be seen with the creation of the convention on biological diversity (CBD) that was adopted by a majority of the world's states in 1992. In *Environmental Policy Instruments for Conserving Global Biodiversity*, Oliver Deke sought to address two issues at the heart of discussions about the sustainable use of biodiversity and policy to enable this. First, the regulation of cross-border trade in genetic resources and whether the commercialisation of this trade creates effective incentives for its preservation. Second, the protection of biodiversity and whether or not this can be organised effectively at the international level. In a nutshell, the book focuses on bioprospecting and protected areas policy and their effectiveness and efficiency in preserving biodiversity. While these are both undoubtedly key planks in biodiversity policy, more could have been made of other policy instruments such as payments for environmental services (PES) and ecotourism that have recently been gaining popularity and policy interest. As such other instruments are referred to only where they might be relevant to protected areas or bioprospecting.

To address these two broadly defined issues, the author takes an economic approach while acknowledging the need for an integrated approach. Given this need, the question that follows is what does this study add to the burgeoning economic literature on biodiversity? At a total length of 355 pages, much of this literature is exhaustively reviewed in the book. It has also been undertaken in a logical and clear manner.

C. Palmer (✉)
ETH Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
e-mail: charles.palmer@env.ethz.ch

Moreover, for the most part, the book is well-written and can be understood by those even with only a rudimentary grasp of the topic. That said, at times the text does get bogged down in too much detail, which could have been improved with crisper editing. For example, sentences such as: ‘Given the multiple valuable ecosystem services and their connectedness, trade in ecosystem services that represent private goods assists the maintenance of public-good-like services for which no market comes into existence’ (p.99), are overlong and indigestible. Occasional indigestion, along with the odd typo, repetition and missing reference is perhaps to be expected in a book of this length. But I felt that the author could have still made his points, and perhaps more succinctly while losing a good 100 pages or so. At 355 pages, this book is therefore far too long for all but the most determined and/or interested reader.

Book length would not be such an issue had it been structured in a more economical and reader-friendly way. Beginning with an introduction to biodiversity, Chaps. 3 and 4 follow with a focus on genetic resources and market-based policy instruments and biodiversity as an international and global public good, respectively. The final chapter offers some conclusions based on the findings of the previous chapters. Thus, the main meat of the book is contained within Chaps. 3 and 4, each of which runs to around 150 pages. Given this kind of length I easily lost the thread of the argument and worse, became bored by the time I reached say section 4.2.2.5! There is no justification for chapters of this length. Furthermore, some of the author’s best work is buried among the detail and multiple sub-sections. For example, about 100 pages in, in Chap. 3, the author presents a very nice analysis of a modelling approach by (Simpson et al. 1996), using formal modelling, numerical simulations and empirical data. At this point, the book really comes alive and the reader is motivated to read on. However, is it really necessary for the reader to wade through 100 pages (of the same chapter) before reaching this point? While it could be argued that some of this material is necessary to understanding the analysis of Simpson et al. (1996), the inclusion of an index would have been helpful for those readers who do not need the background. The lack of an index in a book of this size is a big minus.

For readers with patience and time, it is clear that this book does make some contributions to the literature even if only to thoroughly assess important previous contributions. In light of the huge chapters (3 and 4), it is a shame that these contributions do not come through clearly in the final, conclusions chapter. Here, the author is content to summarise some points but without really asking what the policy implications of all these are. Instead, he makes some obvious points that have been made by other researchers in the past such as ‘the market price for genetic resources is comparatively low’ or ‘land use other than preserving in situ is likely to be more profitable from the point of view of the landowners’ (both on p. 345). Hence, overall, this book would be of interest for the researcher or scholar coming into the topic for the first time, although the lack of an index may put him or her off. For a more accessible, up-to-date and comprehensive guide to the economics of biodiversity and policy related to biodiversity preservation, I would instead recommend a look at an edited works such as *Biodiversity Economics* by Kontoleon et al. (2007). In a book such as this, the reader can dip into the book at his or her convenience according to personal needs and without worrying about losing his or her way.

References

- Simpson D, Sedjo R, Reid J (1996) Valuing biodiversity for use in pharmaceutical research. *Journal of Political Economy* 104(1):163–185
- Kontoleon A, Pascual U, Swanson T (2007) *Biodiversity economics. Principles, methods and applications*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York