

HUMANKIND: THE REAL VICTIM OF ECO-CRIMES AND LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

The relationship between mankind and the environment has always alternated between a profound respect for nature's harmonious balance and the struggle for survival of mankind against the elements. The Industrial Revolution, along with positivism, sanctioned the domain of the latter conception in western culture: human needs had to be fulfilled by subduing nature and the environment, whose only true value would be decided on the market.



Consequently, environmental protection was regarded as an eccentric belief opposing the advancement of progress and science. The positivist line of thought saw nature as being of no use to mankind, as it would not provide any service to man. On the contrary, nothing could be more wrong, and the fact environmental services are usually not calculated does not mean they do not exist. Our biosphere, indeed, is essential to all living organisms, man included. Ecosystems and biomes do provide for erosion and pest control, as well as water and air filtering, and many other more. The value of such services was calculated by Robert Costanza, co-founder of the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) and Director of the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics. In 1997 he estimated these services to be worth between 18 and 56 trillion dollars, with an average yearly value of \$33 trillion, which was almost twice the size of the global GNP at the time. When calculating the value of Earth's biosystems with the replacement method (i.e. how much it would cost to replace our planet's precious services), the price of such natural capital rose to \$195 quadrillion, about 3000 times the current global GDP in 2008. In fact, the protection of the environment today is not only a matter of personal sensitivity or of different values and priorities: it is the ultimate "tragedy of the commons." Environmental protection has become an intricate, crosscutting issue, encompassing the fields of human rights, corporate accountability, organized crime and government transparency and, above all, the present

and future prosperity of the world population, its living conditions and even its survival. Nowadays environmental issues, from environmental crimes to climate change, are far beyond the capacity of a single nation to cope with, no matter how powerful: these are unprecedented complex issues, transnational in their nature, whose functioning mechanisms and repercussions are not yet fully understood. These are global problems with local outcomes, whose answers can only be global. This is why the key to protect the environment, and vicariously mankind too, lies in a concerted and multilaterally agreed response. Will it be enough? Hardly. Many emerging economies already possess state-of-the-art environmental legislation, and the international community has already successfully addressed incumbent problems such as the ozone layer depletion or the trade in endangered species. The fight against environmental crime needs to be considered as a priority. The perception that a crime against the environment is less serious than other types of crime proved to be wrong: if we calculate how many deaths a crime against the environment can cause, we will gain a glimpse of the real dimension of its danger. As in almost any domain of governance, the real discriminator is the existence, or not, of the political will to act for the protection of the environment. So far, this will has been too weak and ineffective, also because the diffusion of responsibility of these commons does not allow to provide a guilty entity to hold accountable. It appears now that the countdown for the survival of the humankind can be stopped only by a real global will to intervene.

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