

## BUCHBESPRECHUNGEN

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### **Widening Perspectives on Biodiversity**

IUCN, Gland, Switzerland & International Academy of the Environment, Geneva, Switzerland, 1994, 473 pp., \$ 30.00

This book, already published in 1994, deals with the subject of biological diversity from 'widening perspectives'. Recently an enormous number of books and articles in almost every scientific discipline have been published about the current interesting subject of biodiversity. The fact that, as said, almost every discipline deals with biodiversity, makes it very difficult to describe what biodiversity really is. For the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity this is one of the major problems. Since this book is a compilation of papers presented at the Global Biodiversity Forum in October, 1993, it is evident that it will use the definition of biodiversity as used in the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed in Rio. "Biological diversity" means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (art. 2).

From this point of view one might be inclined to think that biodiversity, more specific the conservation of biodiversity, is a modern substitute for what we traditionally meant with the idea of "nature conservation". The definition of article 2 of the Convention indeed suggests as much.

However, in section 1, the introduction of this book, we are confronted with the fact that the idea of biodiversity is more than nature conservation alone. Biodiversity also underlines the enormous value of genetic resources which makes it possible to create "human-developed" species necessary, for example, to develop species of crops to feed the still growing world population.

Nature conservation traditionally used to focus on protection of species or of landscapes because they were interesting and important enough to protect them, just because of their inherent value. In the last few decades, however, it has become increasingly clear that for the survival of mankind it will be necessary to protect biological diversity. In addition, protection and conservation of biodiversity has another, more broad perspective. Biological resources, especially genetic resources, are the result of evolution over billions of years. Evolution still goes on but human activities are eroding these biological resources and reducing the world's biodiversity. The main goal for conservation of biodiversity is to ensure sustainable development. It is this problem the book deals with from a great range of perspectives.

Section 2 deals with the implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity. The Convention is seen as a catalyst for many other worldwide conventions, such as the Ramsar Convention and the Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Regional collaboration is one of the means to achieve the Convention's objectives. Examples of collaboration between several states in the Asia-Pacific Region are described. One of the great difficulties in achieving the Convention's objectives is the fact that the Convention constitutes the principle of national sovereignty. It is therefore impossible for one sovereign state to force another (neighbouring) state to achieve biodiversity conservation. Collaboration between states for a number of the Convention's objectives is therefore a must.

Legislation might be one of the means to achieve conservation of biodiversity. Section 4 gives us some examples in Asia as well in the Americas and in Africa. We have to consider that in developing countries the role of legislation is different from the role it plays in Western society. In Western countries legislation is institutionalized in society. Governments play a very dominant role in enforcing laws concerning conservation and protection of biodiversity. In most developing countries we see several 'law' systems, so called legal pluralism: the formal system and a system of rules used by indigenous peoples. That makes it very difficult to achieve the objectives of the Convention. Even if governments of developing countries subscribe to the Convention's objectives because they are aware of the importance of biodiversity, it is not sure that there will be implementation of formal law in that specific country. Governments always have to realise the fact that conservation of biodiversity on the long term is not of common interest to all people in that country. That means that they will have to cooperate with the indigenous peoples and must try to convince them of that importance.

It is already said. Because of the very wide perspective biodiversity deals with, it is understandable that every possible group in society has its opinion on the subject. Section 4 of the book deals with the contribution of specific groups towards implementing the Convention. It is very interesting for example how an Australian farmer or indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh deal with the problem of biodiversity conservation. Probably this is what this book makes clear, biodiversity is of such common interest for the survival of mankind that almost everyone recognizes the problem and is willing to contribute to solutions. Of course there is a difference in the level on which solutions are looked for. Governments must consider long-term effects, local people or individuals have to survive on the short term.

Section 5 deals with the issue of utilising genetic resources. In my opinion this section is of greater importance, so it should have been placed in a more prominent part of the book. The definition of biodiversity as used in the Convention underlines the importance of just these genetic resources. As there will certainly be changes in geophysical circumstances as for instance climatological ones, because of, for example, the greenhouse effect, it will be necessary to have enough genetic resources for adaptation to these changing circumstances. Already part of these genetic resources is lost.

Article 14 of the Convention calls for contracting parties to take appropriate measures to reduce the dangers of loss of biodiversity. Section 6 deals with the issue of Environmental Impact Assessment, in Western countries a current legal instrument. One of the major causes of loss of biodiversity is the fact that we cannot estimate the long-term effects of various types of human activities. Part of the problem is the fact that we do not even know about the composition and nature of many ecosystems. It is for certain that there are many more species than we now know, let alone their importance and the role they play in maintaining ecological balances. Environmental Impact Assessments can play a very important role in protecting biodiversity.

The last section of this book deals with the role of N(on) G(overnmental) O rganisation)s. Implementing the objectives of the Convention cannot be achieved by legislation or policy instruments alone. Part of the process of achieving the Convention's objectives will be a process of negotiation between governments and all kinds of interest groups. Since these pressure groups have their roots in all sections of society it will be very important to cooperate with these NGO's.

Conclusion: This book is of great importance. It opens the eyes for the problems mankind may come to deal with for its survival. The fact that biodiversity plays a dominant role in this struggle for survival is not discussed. Of great importance is the recognition that nature conservation alone, in the traditional way, will not be enough. Conservation of biodiversity is far more. The title of the book however may be misleading. It might suggest that the perspectives for conservation and protection of biodiversity are 'just around the corner', we just have to grasp them. Nothing is less true. The expression 'widening' in my opinion means that there is almost no aspect of human life that is not affected by this problem. The book also gives us so many examples of probable solutions that some optimism is justified.

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**The Strait of Magellan**

(International Straits of the World, Vol. 11)

Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht 1989, 237 S., £ 45.00

In dieser 1978 erscheinenden Serie von Veröffentlichungen über die Rechtslage der Meere der Welt hat Michael A. Morris, Professor für political science an der Clemson University, South Carolina, die Magellanstraße und den Beagle Kanal, also die strategisch und verkehrlich wichtigen Seewege im tiefen Süden des amerikanischen Kontinents bearbeitet, um deren Beherrschung Chile und Argentinien seit über hundert Jahren streiten.