

Life on Earth

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PROPOSITIONS

belonging to the PhD dissertation

Life on Earth Controversies on the Science and Politics of Global Nature Conservation, 1960–1980

Simone Schleper

1. In the 1960s and 1970s, most efforts by conservationists and policymakers went into rhetorical compromises, rather than into finding solutions that could satisfy diverse environmental concerns. Often, different interpretations and diverging approaches stayed hidden behind concepts such as *sustainable development*, where they remain up to the present day.
2. Around 1970, systems thinking was applied to environmental problems by actors across the spectrum of environmental expert groups. However, in contrast to their proclaimed interdisciplinary character, these systems approaches always excluded parts of other disciplinary perspectives and implementation strategies.
3. Conservationists at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), while time and again highlighting their apolitical neutrality, remained ignorant of their own colonial aura and the changing role of scientific experts in policymaking. In this way their claims to scientific authority were politicized to their own disadvantage.
4. Institutional and disciplinary memories are short. Arguments made for conservation often disappeared into oblivion for a while and then resurfaced again. In this regard, my findings throw new light on contemporary discussions on environmental problems.
5. Despite the strong entanglement of the domains of knowledge and governance in the environmental policymaking of the 1960s and 1970s, and its relevance for questions on environmental expertise, historians' accounts have tended to keep the repertoires of science and politics strictly separated.
6. The field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) is relevant to historical studies on environmental expertise in international organizations, because it allows researching the institutional and social settings in which approaches to environmental governance have emerged. So far, these contexts of knowledge production have attained less attention by historians of the environment.
7. Controversies on science and politics are useful tools to study environmental decision-making. The three controversies discussed in this dissertation show that decisions on the right kind of environmental guidelines, expertise, and methods need to be treated as the outcomes of long negotiation processes between the scientists, administrators, and policymakers involved.
8. Questions on how to balance the protection of nature with the demands of a growing world population—and whom to trust or burden with this responsibility—remain at the core of present-day environmental policymaking. In times of climate controversies, scientists' attempts to stay out of politics might not be the right strategy.
9. "I just wish the world was twice as big and half of it was still unexplored."—David Attenborough
10. "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards."—Lewis Carroll