

# Nature provides more to people than material benefits

January 19 2018

---



Drying quinoa on the roof, Tigua, Ecuador. Credit: Sandra DÃaz

The role of culture and diverse knowledge systems needs to be recognized when assessing nature's contributions to people, a new policy forum paper in *Science* states. Alexander van Oudenhoven and thirty global experts present a new approach that will increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of policies and decisions relating to nature and environmental change.

## **New approach for protecting and restoring nature**

All over the world, people depend on nature for their wellbeing, in the

form of food, clean water, flood protection and other benefits. So, in a rapidly changing world, one of the main challenges for humanity relates to protecting and restoring nature. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) provides policy makers with scientific assessments about the state of knowledge regarding the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems and their contributions to people. Nominated by the Dutch government and the IPBES secretariat, Alexander van Oudenhoven is involved in IPBES as one of the youngest lead authors.

Together with thirty global experts associated with IPBES, and led by Professor Sandra Díaz and Professor Unai Pascual, Alexander van Oudenhoven has published an open access policy forum paper today in the journal *Science*. The authors write about an innovative new approach: using different perspectives on and a wider range of nature's contributions to people to inform policies and decisions.



Entangled lives of people and nature in Northern, Morocco. A sacred oak tree in northern Morocco marks the presence of a demised Saint. Credit: Yildiz Aumeeruddy-Thomas

## Nature and culture

In an official press release by IPBES, Sandra Díaz explains: "The notion of nature's contributions to people emphasizes that culture is central to all of the links between people and nature, and recognizes other knowledge systems, for example those of local communities and indigenous peoples, much more than before."

Alexander van Oudenhoven has been involved in discussions on the IPBES approach since 2015, when he and his fellow authors started the regional assessment of biodiversity and [ecosystem services](#) in Europe and Central Asia. What excites him the most about the paper is the call to look beyond Western science as a way to collect information. "If the notion of nature's contribution to people is to appeal to decision makers worldwide, then we need to understand how different cultures experience nature," he says. "Nature shapes peoples' identities, contributes to physical and mental health, inspires art and design. The social, cultural, spiritual and often religious significance of nature needs to be acknowledged and valued, in addition to the "Western' notion that nature provides goods and services. That is exactly what our approach enables."

One of the many concrete applications of this new [approach](#) is its uptake in large-scale expert assessments and how these are conducted. The IPBES regional assessments of Europe and Central Asia, co-authored by

Alexander van Oudenhoven, are expected to be released in March this year, together with three other IPBES regional assessments. These assessments have already included unprecedented efforts to tap indigenous and local knowledge. In addition, nature's contributions to people are already a central feature of the IPBES global assessment, expected in 2019.

**More information:** Sandra Díaz et al. Assessing nature's contributions to people, *Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1126/science.aap8826](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap8826)

Provided by Leiden University

Citation: Nature provides more to people than material benefits (2018, January 19) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-nature-people-material-benefits.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.