
Between place and cosmos: biodiversity knowledge, expertise and the IPBES

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Abstract

The first official plenary session of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) took place in January 2013, in Bonn. The ambition of this emerging advisory body is to encourage governments and decision-makers to take action to prevent biodiversity loss and ecosystem services degradation. Several initiatives had been preparing the ground for IPBES, especially the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and the consultative process for an International Mechanism on Scientific Expertise for Biodiversity (IMoSEB). In this paper, using STS concepts and methods, we draw our attention to (1) the origins and the early stages of the life of IPBES and (2) the tensions and challenges facing ecology as it goes global. While ecology has traditionally been described as a "science of place" (Kohler, 2002), the inscription of the "biodiversity crisis" on the international agenda and the empowerment of ecology in global institutions of scientific advice such as IPBES raises some questions regarding the production of ecological knowledge. The "biodiversity crisis" that IPBES is meant to address has a strong local component and while for climate change it has been possible to construct "global kinds of knowledge" (Hulme, 2010), such an aspiration does not seem possible (nor desirable) for IPBES. While the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has often been referred to as a model of success in the field of global environmental governance, weaknesses regarding, inter alia, its model of expertise have also been highlighted.

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