

# Destroying Nature to Save It and other Economic Fallacies of the Green Transition

by  
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# Outline

- 1. Economic Mainstreaming of Social Ecological Crises**
- 2. Financialisation of Nature: How to Make Profit from Crisis**
- 3. The Geopolitics of Energy Transition**
- 4. An Alternative Agenda and Alternative Strategy**
- 5. Conclusions**

# **Part I**

# **Economic Mainstreaming of Social Ecological Crises**

# Competition, Green Growth and the Race for Leadership

"**Make no mistake: A new world order is emerging.** The **race for leadership** has already begun. For **the winners**, the rewards are clear: Innovation and investment in **clean energy technology will stimulate green growth**; it will create **jobs**; it will bring greater energy **independence and national security.**"

Josef Ackermann, **CEO of Deutsche Bank**  
Green Growth: the Role of Financial Institutions.

Global Metro Summit: Delivering the next Economy, Chicago, 8 December 2010



Seeking “sustainable competitiveness”. “This report identifies three main areas for action to **reignite sustainable growth.**”

- (i) closing the innovation gap with the US and China;
- (ii) seeing **global decarbonisation as a growth opportunity** for EU industry, but beware China is a competitor;
- (iii) increasing security (i.e. military spending) and reducing dependencies.

**“digitalise and decarbonise the economy and increase our defence capacity”**

Report by Mario Draghi  
former **European Central Bank President**  
Sept. 2024



# Protect Economic Growth and Increasing Financial Returns



## BETTER GROWTH BETTER CLIMATE

The New Climate Economy Report  
THE SYNTHESIS REPORT

THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON THE ECONOMY AND CLIMATE

## *Better Growth Better Climate: The New Climate Economy Report.*

Washington, D.C.: The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 2014.

**A Political Elite** 2 majors; 5 ex-heads of state, 13 financiers and bankers; 4 leaders of international organisations (World Bank, IEA, OECD, ITUC)

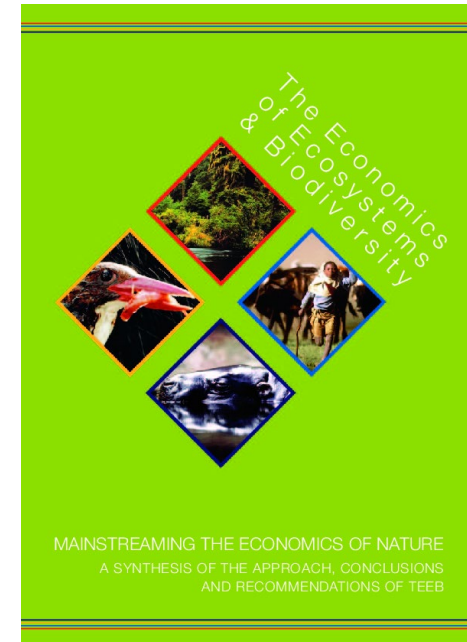
**An Economic Elite** “The Economic Advisory Panel” 9 professors (economist or Nobel prize winners) 6 other economic/finance experts; 1 Lord Stern. (13 men)

**“In the long term, if climate change is not tackled, growth itself will be at risk.” (p.9)**

## *'The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature* TEEB UNEP, 2010

Show politicians how to get economic growth from ecosystems

“investment in natural capital can create and safeguard jobs and underpin economic development, as well as **secure untapped economic opportunities** from natural processes and genetic resources.” “pro-biodiversity investment the logical choice” (TEEB 2010 p.10)



# **Part II**

## **Financialisation of Nature: How to make Profit from Crises**

# Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation (CPIC) est. Sept 2016



Cornell University

CREDIT SUISSE



natureVest

An initiative of  
The Nature Conservancy 

## CPIC Statement of intent 2017

“In order to sustain humanity’s future on earth, substantial **investment in natural capital** is urgently needed”

In order to deliver the volume of investment needed to address the scale of conservation challenges, [...] **delivering at-scale financial returns for investors, will be necessary,**

“**Therefore,** in order to fill this financing gap, **a concerted, systematic effort focused on creating investment products** that provide a conservation and financial bottom line is necessary.”

# Policy Proposals to Increase Financial Business

Financing Nature: Closing the global biodiversity financing gap. The Paulson Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability. 2020

## 2019 estimate vs 2030 claimed potential (US\$ billions/yr)

## Average Proposed Increase in Financial Flows

### Nature-Based Solutions and Carbon Markets

From US\$ 0.8–1.4 to US\$ 24.9–40.0 billion/yr

**2850%**

### Biodiversity Offsets

From US\$ 6.3–9.2 to US\$ 162.0–168.0 billion/yr

**2029%**

### Green Financial Products

From: US\$ 3.8–6.3 to US\$ 30.9–92.5 billion/yr

**1122%**

### Natural Infrastructure

From US\$ 26.9 to US\$ 104.7–138.6 billion/yr

**352%**

### Sustainable Supply Chains

From US\$ 5.5–8.2 to US\$ 12.3–18.7 billion/yr

**124%**

### Official Development Assistance (ODA)

From US\$ 4.0–9.7 to US\$ 8.0–19.4 billion/yr

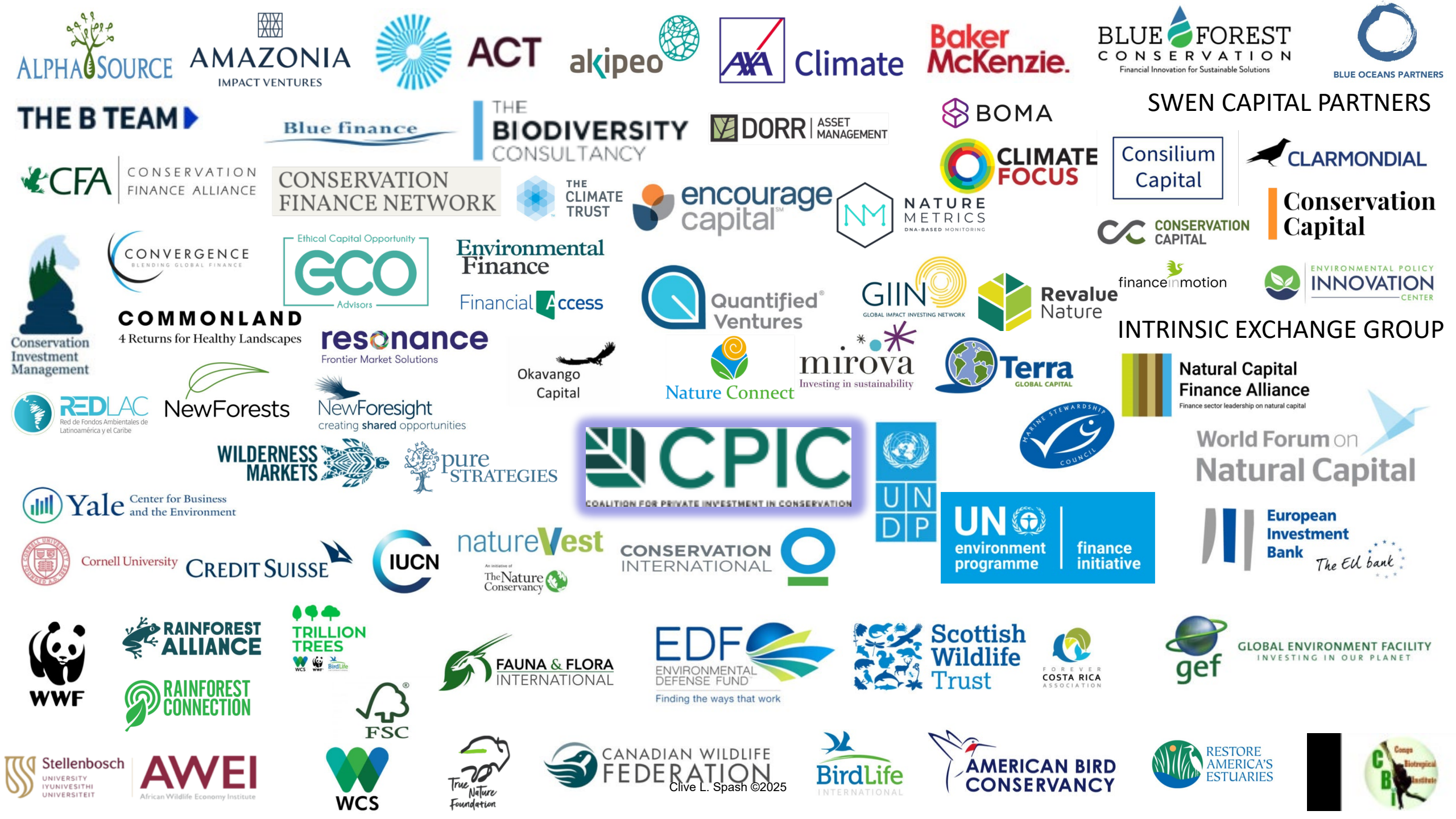
**100%**

### Domestic Budgets and Tax Policy

From US\$ 74.6–77.7 to US\$ 103.0–155.4 billion/yr

**70%**





ALPHA SOURCE

AMAZONIA  
IMPACT VENTURES



ACT akipeo



Climate

Baker McKenzie

BLUE FOREST  
CONSERVATION  
Financial Innovation for Sustainable Solutions

BLUE OCEANS PARTNERS

THE B TEAM

Blue finance

THE BIODIVERSITY  
CONSULTANCY

DORR ASSET  
MANAGEMENT

BOMA

SWEN CAPITAL PARTNERS

CFA CONSERVATION  
FINANCE ALLIANCE

CONSERVATION  
FINANCE NETWORK



encourage  
capital



CLIMATE  
FOCUS

Consilium  
Capital

CLARMONDIAL

Conservation  
Capital

CONSERVATION  
CAPITAL



CONVERGENCE  
BLENDING GLOBAL FINANCE

Ethical Capital Opportunity  
ECO  
Advisors

Environmental  
Finance

Quantified  
Ventures

GIIN  
GLOBAL IMPACT INVESTING NETWORK

Revalue  
Nature

financeinmotion

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY  
INNOVATION  
CENTER

COMMONLAND  
4 Returns for Healthy Landscapes

resonance  
Frontier Market Solutions

Financial Access

Okavango  
Capital

Nature Connect

mirova  
Investing in sustainability

Terra  
GLOBAL CAPITAL

INTRINSIC EXCHANGE GROUP

Natural Capital  
Finance Alliance  
Finance sector leadership on natural capital

REDLAC  
Red de Fondos Ambientales de  
Latinoamérica y el Caribe

NewForests

NewForesight  
creating shared opportunities

WILDERNESS  
MARKETS

pure  
STRATEGIES

CPIC  
COALITION FOR PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN CONSERVATION



UN  
environment  
programme | finance  
initiative

World Forum on  
Natural Capital

Yale Center for Business  
and the Environment

Cornell University

CREDIT SUISSE



natureVest  
An initiative of  
The Nature Conservancy

CONSERVATION  
INTERNATIONAL

European  
Investment  
Bank  
The EIB bank



RAINFOREST  
ALLIANCE

TRILLION  
TREES  
WCS WWF BirdLife

FAUNA & FLORA  
INTERNATIONAL

EDF  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
DEFENSE FUND  
Finding the ways that work

Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust

FOREVER  
COSTA RICA  
ASSOCIATION

gef  
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY  
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

RAINFOREST  
CONNECTION



Stellenbosch  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

AWEI  
African Wildlife Economy Institute

WCS

True Nature  
Foundation

CANADIAN WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION  
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BirdLife  
INTERNATIONAL

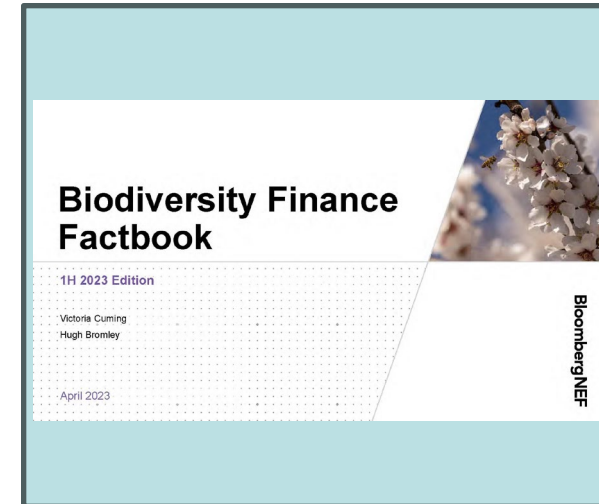
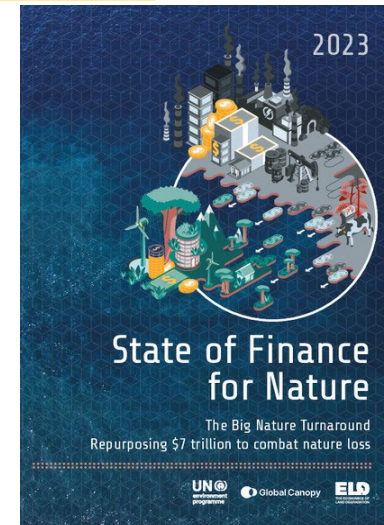
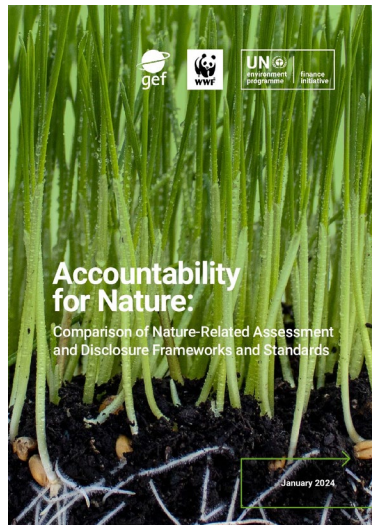
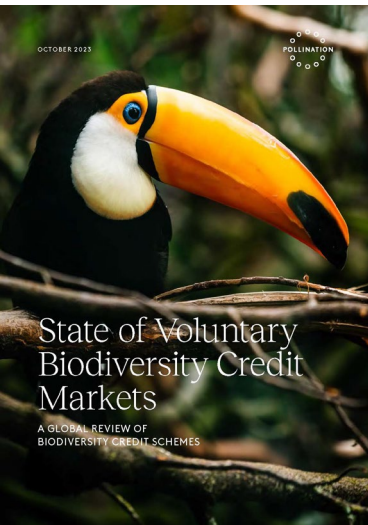
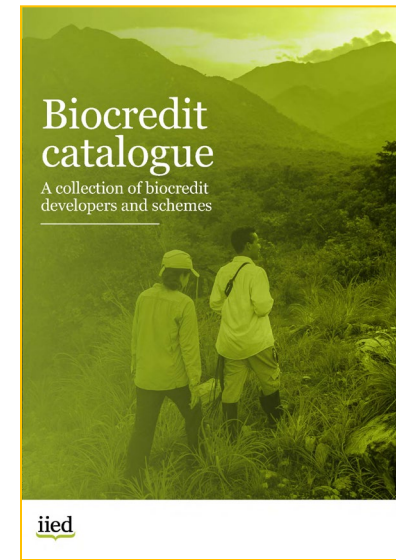
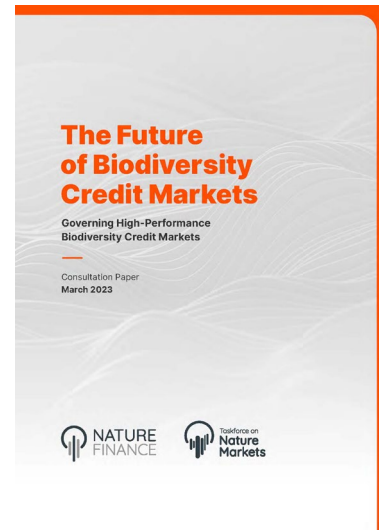
AMERICAN BIRD  
CONSERVANCY

RESTORE  
AMERICA'S  
ESTUARIES



# 2023-2024 A Year of Advocacy for Financialisation of Nature

UNEP Climate Finance Unit “**embedding nature and climate incentives in trade agreements**, and by actively developing and **supporting businesses** that put nature, climate and equitable benefit sharing at the heart of **economic growth** in the 21st century.”



# Trading and Offsetting: Financiers Creating Markets at Scale

**Create harm** by emitting pollution, mining, building on green sites, eradicating habitat

**Equate harm to good** legitimise another action as if equivalent to the harm e.g. planting a tree to sequester carbon, conserve a species

**Create a Market Trade** legalise the right to create harm if money is paid

## Markets are built on creating equivalence (commensuration)

- If ecosystems or species are unique they cannot be traded for others
- Scaling up markets requires expanding equivalence

## Markets assume instrumental functionality

- Values relate to a general function (e.g. an ecosystem service)
- Denies values concerned with the particular (e.g. having a sense of place or loving a specific tree or location)
- It means species can be lost and a function maintained e.g. are whales or trees better for carbon sequestration?

# Changing Ecological Concepts and Values into Economic

## Nature as Capital

Nature is of value if it provides a financial return. The higher the return on investment the more valuable is Nature. For example, slow reproduction means whales and old growth forests are a bad investment.

## Ecosystems as Service Providers

Focus on economic and social values of ecosystems—to the detriment of the idea that humans have an ethical responsibility towards Nature—irrespective of its value to humans.

**Narrow definitions of instrumental values  
that can be translated into money,  
substituted and traded off**

# 'New' Conservation

- Instrumental value, Nature as resource
- Moral action → anthropocentric consequentialist, doing what has the 'best' outcome for humans
- Central concern: financial returns, growth, corporate profits
- No absolute protection, all is in comparison with other goals and subject to financial re-evaluation
- Land is to be managed allowing for development, resource extraction and ecosystem (re)construction (Nature as human artefact)
- Neoliberalism is implicitly accepted along with market institutions, e.g., offsetting, banking
- Policy approach: corporate responsibility & market mechanisms

# 'Good News' for Business, Financiers and Capitalist Elites

“The good news is that policymakers don't have to choose between protecting nature on one hand, and **promoting economic growth** on the other. In fact, more business leaders are already **choosing to save money, reduce risk, and attract capital** by **going green.**”



## MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

businessman, politician, former NY mayor and stock trader

\$106.2Billion

Forbes real time net worth as of 15<sup>th</sup> June 2024, #15 in the world

## Business as usual

Gaining private property rights over resources

Creating opportunities to continue environmentally destructive 'development' projects

Using financial instruments to capture the surplus and to accumulate money

**Obtaining the legal right and economic authority to trade ecosystems functions and non-humans as assets that are only valued if they give a financial rate of return**

# Part III

# The Geopolitics of Energy Transition

# Critical Raw Materials

Critical Raw Materials: Ensuring secure and sustainable supply chains for EU's green and digital future.

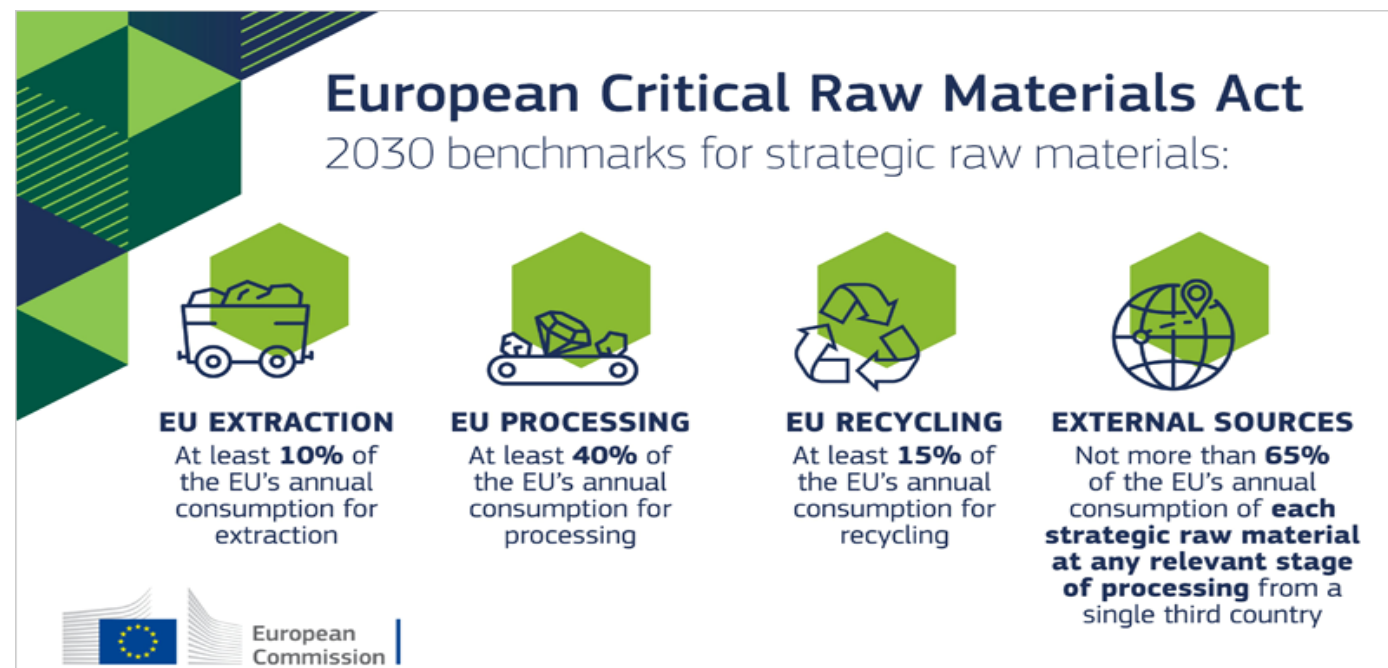
Brussels, 16 March 2023

The global market for net-zero technologies is set to triple by 2030

- Batteries for **electric vehicles forecast to drive-up demand for lithium** 17 times by 2050
- China supplies Europe with 97% lithium (von der Leyen 30 March 2023)

“This Act will bring us closer to our climate ambitions. [...] It’s in our mutual interest to **ramp up production...**”

(von der Leyen 16 March 2023)

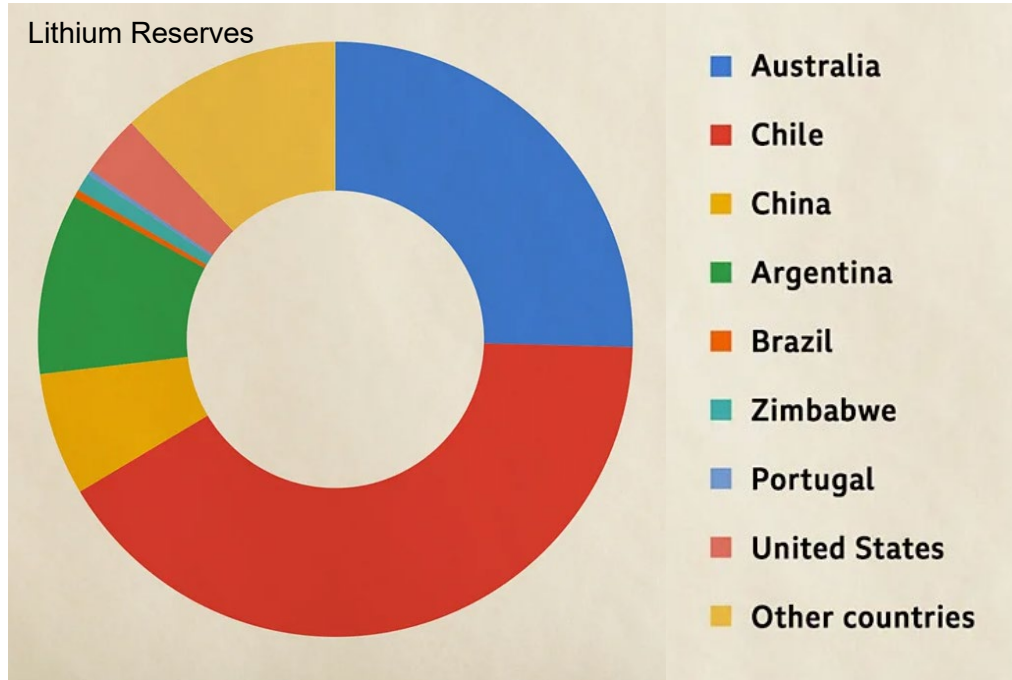


**Wind turbines, photovoltaic power systems, electric vehicles and digital technologies** require a range of resources. zinc, molybdenum, aluminium, chromium, iron, lead, silver, nickel, rare earths and critical minerals such as indium, gallium, germanium, selenium. Batteries alone require cobalt, copper, nickel and lithium.

However the report recognises that “**The EU will never be self-sufficient in supplying such raw materials**”.



# Green Energy: Lithium Extractivism



**South American Lithium Triangle:** 53% of reserves are in the High Andean salt flats and wetland ecosystem between Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, where many Indigenous communities live.

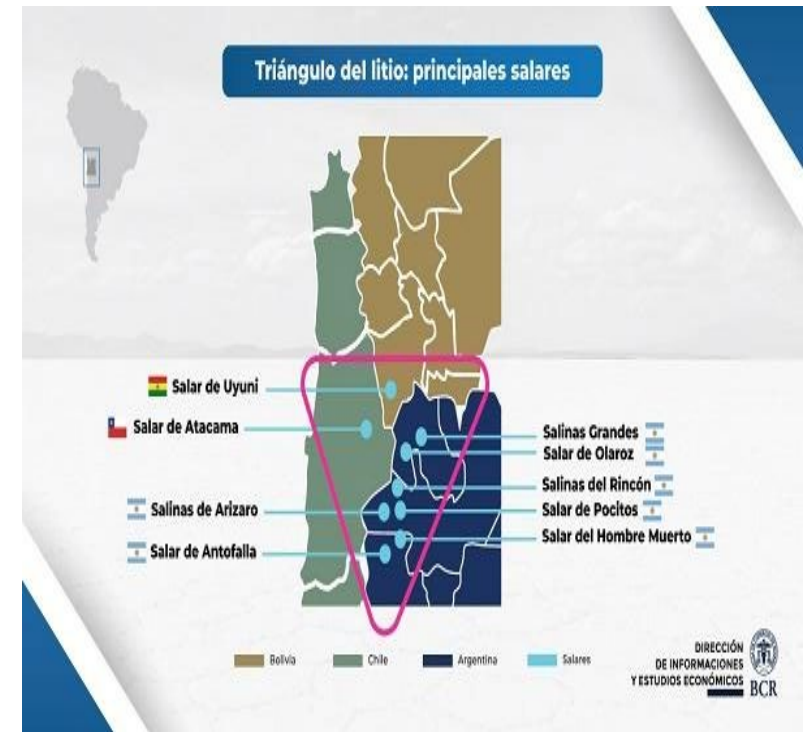
**S. America 1 tonne lithium requires 2.9 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> and 1.9 million litres of water**

## Ramping-up Production



**Australia** largest mine, and largest in the world, accounting for 20% of global production in 2021 received permission to double the site's size in 2019.

**In Australia 1 tonne lithium creates 9 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>**



# Powering the European Green Transition



Ursula von der Leyen President of EC meets President of Chile Gabriel Boric firming up green economy trade agreements on lithium and 'green' hydrogen 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**EU-Chile Advanced [Trade] Framework Agreement** deepens the trade and investment relationship

“**The more we grow**, the more we can redistribute [...]. A **green economy** can help to make the world a better place”  
President Gabriel Boric. (translation by Nina Schlosser 2024)

Dominant actors: Ministry of Mining, State economic development agency *Corfo*, and international corporations SQM and Albermarle earning billions



**Lithium in Serbia: 'sustainable' raw materials, battery value chains, and electric vehicles.** Greenwashing corporate extractivism while sacrificing environmentalist fighting a right-wing authoritarianism allied with Rio Tinto. German Greens prioritise EVs and securing Serbia's lithium with Rio Tinto before China or Russia.

The logo for Rio Tinto, consisting of the words 'RioTinto' in white serif font on a red rectangular background.

“The development paradigm pushing for **a new wave of extractivism and greenwashing neo-imperialism** has to change.”

(Predrag Momčilović 2024)



German chancellor Olaf Scholz shakes hands with Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić after signing an EU supply deal at the Serbian Critical Raw Materials Summit in Belgrade, Serbia, 19 July 2024. (*Bloomberg*)

# Corporate Energy Transition

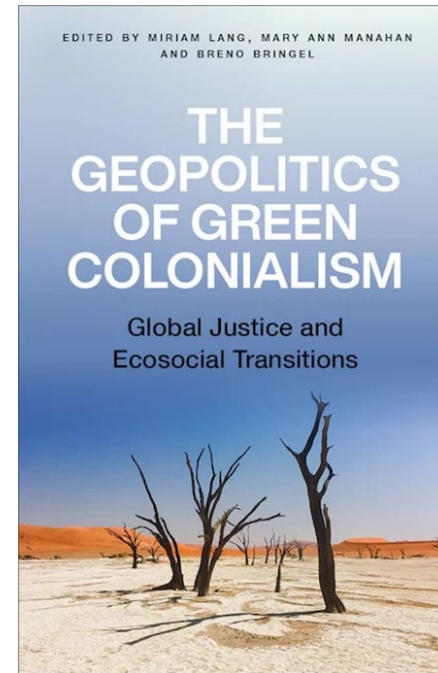
Energy transition as a potential for wealth accumulation and geopolitical dominance.

Corporate environmentalism and the “technocratic-capitalist narrative”.

Within this framework, the issue is controlling access to energy, materials and technologies.

**Green Colonialism** associated with transnational corporations, which in the name of Green Transition **reproduce the domination over nature and populations**.

Maristella Svampa “Decarbonization Consensus and Green Colonialism”  
Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET), and  
Universidad Nacional de la Plata, Argentina. Presentation Vienna 10 June 2024.



# **Part IV**

## **An Alternative Agenda, and Alternative Strategy**

# Materials Critical for What and for Whom?

“Without CRMs most sections of society would not be able to function, as they are found in many everyday appliances and in **products essential to the economy of every member state.**”

Council of the European Union  
12 September 2024



Examples include:

- ❖ electric vehicles = lithium, cobalt and nickel
- ❖ building and flying aeroplanes = magnesium and scandium
- ❖ wind turbines = boron
- ❖ vibrating technology in phones = tungsten



# Technology in Social Ecological & Economic Relations

Technology is not neutral socially, ecologically or economically  
Why do we 'need' these technologies?  
What legitimises a technology?

The role of technology in shaping relationships:

- Social and Individual
- Social & Political
- Human and Non-human
- Economic: Social Provisioning and Reproduction



Clive L. Spash ©2025



# Infrastructure Provision: Technical vs. Social Structure

infrastructures is typically considered as the physical, and material with a concern for high tech and hard engineered structures.

Infrastructure as social or public space is still conceptualised in terms of hard engineered facilities (e.g. community centres, libraries) or constructed physical spaces.

Social infrastructure needs to be understood in terms of providing community and relations of care with others and how this is reproduced via paid and unpaid work. Supporting a care economy.



# Social & Political Relations

## Current Tech

Expert & elitist

Science & tech serves a minority

Estranged from culture

Eradication of local cultures

Technocracy

Centralised

Top-down

Serves capital & military

Innovation motivated by profit & war

Limited by finance

## Alternative

Lay & inclusive

Science & tech serves all

Integrated with culture

Preservation of local cultures

Democracy

Decentralised

Bottom-up

Serves people & community

Innovation motivated by needs

Limited by law and ethics

Technology empowers specific economic actors. Current technology supports a specific and narrow range of economic systems and social relations. This denies the potentiality for alternative social-ecological economies.



# Relationship to Nature

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## Current Tech

Ecologically dangerous

Heavily polluting

Artificial systems

Estrangement from Nature

Destruction of non-human life

Human domination

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## Alternative

Ecologically benign

Aligned with sink capacity

Natural systems

Integration with Nature

Respect for non-human life

Harmony

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The current policy debates and approach of economics are also heavily biased in their treatment of Nature

- Capital approach
- Ecosystem as productive service providers
- Commodification
- Offsetting
- Financialisation

# A Variety of Utopian Positions

## **Dominant**

Capitalism  
Neoliberalism  
Welfare economy  
Sustainable development  
Bio & Hi tech  
Green growth

Based on a capital accumulating system, cost shifting, individualism, high tech.

## **Alternative**

Communitarianism  
Eco-socialism  
Care economy  
Post development  
Appropriate tech  
Degrowth

Based on scientific understanding of biophysical and social reality, community, appropriate tech., eco-social ethics

**Scientific or Concrete Utopia**

# Conclusions!

# Economies as Alternative Provisioning Systems

Technology transforms relationships with respect to others both human and non-human.

**Social-ecological crises & systemic transformation.** What is called “the economy” is a specific form of system that entails destructive relationships between economies, society and biophysical reality.

**Materialist and technical fixes** (e.g., bio-economies, Green economies) entail a specific set of social relations that can be recognised as perpetuating social and ecological crises.

**There is no singular economy** even within market capitalism, there is variety, but more than this there are both **actual** alternative means of social provisioning and the **potential** for more.

We need radically different thinking to establish social-ecological transformation and to recognise the full potentiality of alternative social provisioning systems

**Social provisioning to meet human needs within an ethical framework of care and justice for others, both human and non-human.**



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# FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS

THE FIGHT FOR REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN ECONOMIC THOUGHT



# The End!

# Thank You

# Danke Schön

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