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PART I

An interdisciplinary perspective on commitment to act for nature

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DRAFT
The Quest for Meaning

A quest is a special kind of journey – according to the original denotation – a journey in search of a specific good. The best-known example in Europe is the Quest for the Holy Grail, made famous by the Arthur Legend. In that tale the Holy Gail stands for a mysterious but very precious good, and the Quest for the ultimate dedication to find that good. What the Grail is or can offer is not unequivocal. But Arthur and his knights know that there is no higher purpose in life than the search for the Grail, and that the search is as important as the finding. They also know the Grail will only reveal Its purpose after it is found, and that It only can be found by those who have the right motivation and demonstrate the right behaviour during their quest. Only a knight with a noble heart and noble behaviour can find It. It is all about excellence. A second important aspect of the Quest for the Holy Grail – in fact any quest – is that both the quest and purpose of that quest (the good) are embedded in a specific broader narrative. In the case of the Quest for the Holy Grail Christianity supplies that overarching story. The Holy Grail is (often but not always) equated with the vessel Christ used during the Last Supper. In other quests the ‘grail’ and the narrative differ. In for instance the Gilgamesh Epos, the ‘grail’ is an herb that bestows immortality, and the overarching story is the question what humanity and civilisation mean, whereby the City of Ur represents civilisation and everything outside its city walls represents wilderness. A third aspect of a quest is that it has to fit in an accepted, inherited set of examples, social norms, habits, routines, which give direction to the quest and a ground to the narrative. In the case of Holy Grail, only knights, and only those who are virgin and pure of heart, are allowed to engage in the Quest. They have to stick to certain norms and behave in prescribed ways.

We use the example of the quest as a motto, because it clearly articulates the central findings of BIOMOT, the fact that all motivated people, in fact all people, have the same urge for meaningful action, i.e. meaningful for themselves and for others and for the environment they live in, and the fact that this urge is rooted in a combination of supportive narratives, examples, experiences, and shared rules or norms. Change these conditions and the nature and orientation of the motivation will change. Destroy the conditions and motivation will fade away. Some conditions are better than other to motivate people. If conditions, for instance, offer no room for meaningful nature related stories, practices and norms, motivations to act for nature or support nature oriented actions will dwindle.
Introduction

The need to motivate people to act for biodiversity is widely acknowledged, and many efforts have been done to achieve this. The results however still are disappointing. People and society remain reluctant to come into action for biodiversity, even if they know that this is the rational thing to do. It looks as if the motivational power of rationality, reasoning, or utility, is rather thin when it comes to actually motivating people to act for biodiversity.

The goal of BIOMOT is to come up with solutions to break this stalemate, and provide answers that work to really motivate people to act for biodiversity.

We decided that the best method to understand the motivations of people and organisations (of and by people) to act for biodiversity was to study the motivations of people (and groups of people) who demonstrably had undertaken that kind of action. What kind of motivations triggered them, and what barred them? This was the first focus.

We also decided to focus our attention on the motivations of individuals, especially highly motivated individuals. This decision was based on the insight, derived from the literature and previous studies of some of the BIOMOT partners, that real transformation always originates from highly motivated individuals.

A third decision was to extend the research scope from motivations to act for biodiversity to motivations to act for nature. This decision was also based on literature and previous studies of Biomot partners. The motivational potential of biodiversity is limited, because of its abstract meaning, it mainly appeals to reason. However, this rational appeal will only motivate few people, mostly higher educated people or professional in the field of biodiversity. Nature is a much broader notion with a strong and historically proven motivational appeal. And we also know that people willing to act for nature, will also include biodiversity in that willingness, since diversity is next to authenticity and otherness a main appeal of nature, aesthetically and ethically.

So, we decided to look at the motivations of passionate individuals, active for nature, to find out what triggered them to act, i.e. to become engaged and translate that engagement into action, and to find out what kept them going over the years, and or what blocked them from doing so, and how they inspired others. We compared their motivations with those of other people, motivated for other causes, and with the motivations of people who were by profession or coincidence active for nature, without necessarily being motivated to do so. This last group was explicitly targeted by Biomot work package 2 (WP2), which investigated the motivations, policies, governance and social learning processes in 35 biodiversity projects in the seven countries involved in the Biomot project.

We started our investigation by studying the connection between values and interests. This choice was prompted by the fact that the most prevailing view on human motivation nowadays is that people are motivated by values or interests, and that they act on the basis of a more or less consciousness comparative appraisal of these interests or values. This offered a good argument to start there. We, however, enriched this view with the help of a more philosophical line of approach, which makes a distinction between the view that people act or are supposed to act because of (rationally grounded) reasons and the reverse view that people first and above all act...
because of sentimental reasons, irrespective of the question whether those reasons are rational, and often fit to be rationalized.

We also decided that we wanted to confront this value oriented line of approach with a different, competing outlook on motivated action, derived from environmental ethics, i.e. the idea that motivated people are not driven by values /interests or sentiments, but by ‘contextually and narratively embedded’ meaning, by a search for meaning, an urge to understand – not to determine- what is true, so-called Wahrheitsverstehen (see Gadamer, 1960). People act in a certain way because it is ‘natural for them’. They value what they do because it is depicted as meaningful by the stories, traditions, examples, norms, and practices that surround them.

We started the research into the motivational power of values and interests by investigating the role of economic values and valuation. We started there, because stressing the economic value has become the dominant approach to stimulate people to act, also in mainstream contemporary policies addressing environmental issues, including those regarding ecology and biodiversity. This approach reflects the widely shared view that putting the right prices on environmental issues will automatically trigger the right behaviour, and that getting the prices right for ‘goods’ is merely a question of creating a market for these ‘goods’. Once there is a market, optimal environmental outcomes will be generated by the interplay between supply and demand. No need to stimulate or change motivations or behaviour by means of argumentation, education or force, the market will do the job.

This discourse has indeed become so overriding that even the proposition that motivations or arguments are important to enhance or protect biodiversity or nature is sometimes shoved aside. At the same time however, it is clear that stressing economic valuation and marketization does not solve the issues they are supposed to solve, does not motivate the broader public to act, and in practice demotivates them, and even block the articulation of alternatives.

These and other economic valuation related questions Biomot took up, mainly in work package 1 (WP1).

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1 The main remaining problems are: the double question of translating not-yet-economic values in marketable economic terms, i.e. use and exchange values, and dealing with issues that defy this type of translation; the problem of handling market failure; the problem of distributive justice, i.e. what to do with people with no or bad access to the market; and finally the problem of handling people who resist or revolt.
Findings

Motivation cannot be bought
WP1 investigated the different connotations of the notion of value, more in special the notions of economic values and valuation and their impact on motivations to act for biodiversity or nature. The results are remarkable and endorse the central idea of BIOMOT, i.e. the idea that significant action for nature and biodiversity ‘cannot be objectivised or bought’ but requires the dedicated action of motivated people (see D. 1.1).

The hope that economic environmental valuation can become so effective that it no longer is necessary to appeal to other arguments or non-economic motivations turns out to be vain, according to the findings in WP1. Economic environmental evaluation (EEV), and its little sister total economic valuation, (TEV) are not suited to measure, and as a result guide complex ecological behaviour. Current marginal changes in an ecosystem can be tracked, but future erratic behaviour cannot. Local extinctions and loss of ecosystem adaptability can occur unobserved, leading to unexpected state changes. Reactions to perturbations in the ecosystem can lag in time, depending on generation times and seasons. Therefore, relying on EEV or TEV information does not safeguard the maintaining of ecosystem services into the future. EEV and TEV give only a snapshot view and supply no information about the state of the ecosystem itself.

WP1 makes also clear that the notion of value, used in a dominantly economic context or discourse, will crowd out or monetize all other values. Putting services on the market, fundamentally changes the nature of these services, and overrules and push aside values and meanings that are not expressed or expressible in monetary terms. The implications of these findings are far reaching, certainly if we combine them with the above-made remarks on economic environmental evaluation (EEV and TEV). It implies that efforts to qualify ecosystem services in monetary terms changes the nature of these services, erodes the possibility to value these services in other than monetary terms, reduces the range of possible motivations to cost-benefits analyses; and -as if this is not yet far-reaching enough- does not prevent future ecosystem losses, or even complete ecosystem breakdowns (see also Knights, 2013).

The problem with values
The findings of WP1 are even more sweeping. The notion of value itself turns out to be problematic, when it comes to understanding or stimulating motivations to act for nature or biodiversity. This is problematic because the notion of value is the central building brick in all contemporary efforts to measure the value of ecosystems, biodiversity or nature, and in most efforts to motivate people, groups or firms into action. When we talk about motivating people we look at values, and try to use these as a lever to uplift their motivations.

A central problem with values is that we tend to define and use them in abstract, itemized ways. We see values as a kind of independent ‘objects’, detachable and detached from societal practices and norms. But the consequence of this approach is that values, because of their disconnected and abstract nature, have the tendency to proliferate and conflict with each other, and even become incommensurable, since they have no inbuilt criterion to check themselves or become comparable. That
requires the presence of an outside standard, beyond and above the value(s), with an
undisputable authority' i.e. higher value. To give an example: all metric measurement
is based on the presence of The Meter. That Meter does indeed exists. It is a very
unique, very concrete specimen, still conserved in Paris, not supposed to change in
length. But precisely that kind of standard we lack to measure and compare (value)
our contemporary detached, (possibly endless) lists of abstract, itemized values. This
is already true for the values we cherish as a person, but even more so for the values
different people or different groups foster. Solving this double-edged problem of
value plurality and value commensurability is problematic, since every solution, every
choice, and every comparison in itself is also based on a valuation, on values or a
value.

Rational deliberation and context
One at first sight plausible way to overcome this problem, and in fact a very common
way to do this, is to appeal to a cost-benefit analysis. But the problem with that type
of analysis is that it again presupposes the presence of an overarching standard, an
ultimate value, to measure, weigh, compare and aggregate the gains and losses of
each option, in order to come to the optimal solution. If this standard is lacking,
values become incommensurable and rational decision-making impossible. And there
are very strong reasons to suppose that such a standard indeed is lacking in cost-
benefit analyses. Most so-called ultimate values are, on closer consideration, just
instrumental values in disguise, not ultimate at all, and in other words not suitable; or
a so-called ultimate value turns out to be a composite of other values (a hybrid), in
other words, again not to be an ultimate value.

There are other rational approaches, which do not have this problem, at least at
first sight, and can deal with this type of value incommensurability and with value
plurality.

The first one is the procedural account, which holds that a rational decision can be
made on the basis of deliberation that meets the norms of rational discussion (O’Neill
2007: 30; see also Simon 1979: 68). The second one is the expressive account of
rationality, which holds that a rational decision is one that ‘adequately expresses one’s
rational attitudes towards the people and things one cares about’ (Anderson1993: 18).
And a third, alternative approach, defended by O’Neill, Holland and Light (2008:85),
argues that it is enough ‘to have a partial ordering whereby what we have is ‘a set of
admissible solutions which themselves are not ordered. This judgment should be
tutored and informed, and based upon developed capacities of perception and
knowledge founded in education and experience (O’Neill 1993: 117).

However, The first two alternatives in fact run into the same obstacles as the cost-
benefit analysis. They refer to an ultimate value, in this case respectively rational
discussion and rational attitudes, themselves referring to a notion of care. What a
rational discussion is or what makes a discussion rational depends on the arguments
used, the perspectives on rationality of the participants (and their audience and social
environment), and their willingness to behave in a certain way. The same can be said
of rational attitudes, although the notion of care seems to offer a benchmark, but one
that transcends rationality. There is no guarantee, in both cases that the problem of
instrumentality and hybridity does not pop up. On the contrary, both problems seem
to be omnipresent. Besides, everything said just before, already assumes that ‘being rational’ is already accepted as a standard, in other words is automatically good.

The third alternative avoids this deadlock, but this comes at a price. It refers back to tradition and practices, i.e. education and experiences. In other words, it re-embeds values in a very specific gauge: social context, locality and a narrative. That ‘standard’ validates the values, and makes them tangible and related (de-itemized). They fit in a story and derive their meaning form a sharing meaning (shared narrative), shared practices and experiences, and a shared knowledge-tradition, handed over by education or otherwise.

In summary: free-floating values, i.e. values detached from their (social) context are a problem when it comes to motivation. They have to be grounded. But that can only be done by referring to a foundation outside the values, a transcendent underpinning, beyond and before; and that ground is lacking.

De re or de dicto
One other, not yet-mentioned solution to overcome the problem of valuing the value of values without the need to refer to a specific context, is the so-called de re /de dicto distinction, made by some philosophers. This is the idea that values referring directly to a concrete object, a so-called re, are stronger and have more motivating power than values referring to an idea, an abstraction. However, even if this is true the question raises (again) why that is the case, and whether context is not again the deeper reason, the real explanation, for instance for the fact that I love my child more than children in general, or the fact that I love a forest I know more than forests in general. Besides the distinction between de re and de dicto can become blurred, especially for higher educated people or in cases or ‘things’ with a degree of complexity, such as nature or biodiversity, or to take another example, money. Is money a re, or a dicto, even when I talk about my own money?

We dedicated a special chapter in this booklet at distinction between de re and de dicto motivations (see below Part II), because it showed that many of our interviewees, motivated to act for nature, are indeed motivated by de re motivations, even in cases where it seems as if their motivations are de dicto.

Money nor market
It is, because of the above-mentioned reasons, not that surprising that values and valuation methods more often do not motivate people into action or only inspire some of them, or worse: awaken resistance, reluctance, or passivity. We already discussed the tendency of economic monetary based valuation to suppress and even push aside all other types of valuation and values. We, however, did not discuss the fact that this insight is not all that new or unknown, but that this does not hold back decision makers -in the profit and non-profit sector alike- to massively embrace the monetary option, and introduce market approaches and norms all over the place, even there where they do no fit in, or do more harm than good. They even do this when they know that they are clearly crossing the line.

They probably do this out of pure pragmatic reasons. The market is indeed all overriding; you have to comply as decision maker; that is what pragmatism is about. They also do it because money has this inbuilt tendency to equalize everything and treat everything alike, even the incommensurable, i.e. all values, irrespectively of
their differences. It delivers the ultimate standard for (pragmatic) decision-making, better than even the most sophisticated rationality can forge. It is simply very handy to have this kind of standard at hand as a policy maker, the more so because it is a standard you do not have to reflect upon, or defend, at length. Its value seems self-evident, neutral and omnipresent. It fits neatly the dominant discourse of our time, like the idea that the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church for a Roman Catholic.

However, the costs are high, even higher than described above. The first obstacle is as clear as it is insurmountable within the logic that has erected this barricade. Everyone and everything with no currency, little currency, or less currency has no or less access to a value market. This is a very simple, indeed self-evident truth, but one with very far-reaching consequences. The market only serves those who have access to that market, and those with the best access are served the best. Installing a market and letting it do ‘its job’ is a political and moral choice: a market is not morally neutral or beyond moral categorisation. It is an imagined reality, a social construct.

It is indeed very advisable for every decision maker to take the time to let this self-evident truth and its consequences really sink in, and let it re-shape her or his choices. It implies that even the most perfect market is unjust in certain ways and produces injustice; it has an inbuilt tendency to do and reproduce injustice, which hits the less off hard, and the most less off the hardest. The opposite reasoning is also true: the richer you are, the more you profit. The victims are the poor, but above all the non-human species with no access to this market and in fact every market whatsoever. Humans decide for them, i.e. the humans who construct, order, rule the market; the ones with power and money. You do not even have to refer to intrinsic values of nature or non-human species to understand this, to see that translating values in market values or marketable functions or ‘services’ is exclusive and disadvantageous for many human poor and most of the non-human species. And it is a problem that cannot be solved by adapting or extending the market or the market mechanism.

Discourses on monetary valuation
This insight is again not that new, since we also found it back, when analysing the different discourses in seven EU countries about monetary valuation, amongst academic, governmental and private sector economists; representatives from NGOs and other groups critical of the economic valuation of nature; and other figures prominently involved in the economic valuation of nature debate (see Biomot D 1.2). We found four discourses, of which the dominant, the economic valuation discourse, indeed states that market failure is a major cause of environmental problems and bringing the environment into the market system the solution.

The other three discourses doubt or even reject this claim. The discourse on value pluralism sees money as an inappropriate metric, and as a tool that undermines feelings of obligation, fails to respect that people value the particular irreplaceable history of the places they know, and an approach that dangerously assumes that no natural place is valued as unique or irreplaceable. The discourse on social justice underlines the remarks already made that the expansion of market institutions into the environmental domain represents a further transfer of power to corporations and the very rich; and that the harms will fall most severely upon the current poor and future generations. The third discourse, labelled eco-deliberation, claims that a participatory approach for environmental decision making should be adopted, and that economic
valuations of ecosystems do not provide an indication of the ability of the ecosystem to provide ecosystem services into the future.

Three out of four discourses on economic valuation, popular amongst environmental professionals, question, doubt or bluntly reject the idea that monetary or even economic valuation will solve or is the way to improve environmental problems. However, the one in favour of market solutions is the dominant discourse. All the economists in our sample supported it, and also rather insensitive for the assumptions and arguments of the other discourses. Discourses are noteworthy difficult to reconcile, but this even truer for some discourses. Above we already gave some reasons to why economic, and more in special monetary valuation, is so powerful and attractive, below we will give more. The first step to do so is based on some insights provided by (social) psychology.

**Crowding out**

We have already discussed in BIOMOT D.2 the values-model of Schwartz. But what we have not discussed in depth yet is the idea that values always come in clusters, and always stand in opposition to other values and clusters of values. Some values are closely related and have the tendency to link up, such as for instance the values of benevolence, universalism and self-direction, or their antipodes: achievement, power and security. To use the words of Schwartz himself “the closer any two values in either direction around the circle, the more similar their underlying motivations. The more distant any two values, the more antagonistic their underlying motivations” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 2).

The implications of these findings are huge. It implies that the tendency to link up with related values and crowd out opposing values is not restricted to monetary values: all values have this tendency.

It also becomes clear that values such as hedonism (defined as personal pleasure),
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achievement (defined as personal success), and power (social status, prestige, control or dominance over people and resources) exactly oppose the values that esteem and promote the wellbeing of others, people and nature. Moreover, it puts a new light on the hope or belief that you can combine or even merge those two clusters of opposite values into one tool or toolbox to motivate people into action. That hope becomes rather naive, to put it mildly, because the values we need to appreciate nature and biodiversity stand opposite to the values we need to live a life of pleasure or become socially and economically successful.

If we combine this insight with the conclusions drawn by WP1 that monetary and economic valuations have the tendency to proliferate at the cost of other valuations, and the knowledge that we live in a society that above anything else values personal luck, social-economic achievement, and prestige, expressible in competitive and monetary terms, it becomes clear that we have not quite generated the proper starting conditions to motivate people into action for nature and biodiversity, as well on an individual as collective level.

**Goals and the common good**

One could argue that all the above-made remarks only refer to values, and that motivations are about more than values, in fact more about goal setting. However, the findings off Schwartz are confirmed by the findings of Grouzet (2005), who investigated goal setting. Grouzet researched and classified the goals of 1800 students in 15 countries, also non-western countries, according to a division based on a distinction between on the one hand intrinsic and extrinsic goals, and on the other hand self-oriented and self-transcendent goals. A distinction he derived from the very influential studies of Deci and Ryan. Grouzet looked at the strivings, i.e. the motivations, of these students, not their values. Grouzet also represented his findings in the shape of a wheel, because he also found that related goals cluster, that they stand in opposition to other goals, and try to push aside their antipodes. Here, I will use the slightly reworked version, made by Tim Crompton (2010), who complies several of the ‘Grouzet-wheels’, into one figure.
Some similarities between the ‘wheels’ of Schwartz and Grouzet are striking, although we also saw some remarkable differences, such as the places of hedonism and self-acceptance, and the place of conformity\(^2\). However, in overall both models show the same tendency and – what is even more important – the same pairs of clusters and opposites, certainly when it comes to values or goals required to act for nature or biodiversity.

Grouzet in fact confirms the findings of Schwartz. The search for status, prestige and financial success (extrinsic and self-oriented goals) stands sharply opposed to the striving to do something for the other (community or nature), i.e. intrinsic and self-transcendent goals. Grouzet also provides an important additional insight. A person will start to do things that transcend her/his self-interest only if it is willed or required to ‘fit in’ socially.

**Demotivation**

This implies that people in theory can act for nature out of selfish reasons, but also that the options to motivate people into action for nature – or any common good– become slim, if the striving for self-acceptance is best served by gaining status and personal (financial) success, and going for pleasure, health, safety and affiliation; in other words, if these types of intrinsic and extrinsic goals overlap. That is precisely what is happening nowadays, almost all over the world.

In her book Eco-Republic (2012) the philosopher Melissa Lane also draws this conclusion. In this book she discusses the best way to reorganize the commitment of individuals, and how to enable them to act for the common good and nature. She also underlines that values can be mutually reinforcing, but also stand in opposition to other –clusters of related- values. Adherence to specific values excludes the support of other values, and the strengthening of certain specific (clusters of) values weakens opposite (clusters of) values. Money, economic output and fame belong to a cluster that stands opposite to a cluster encompassing benevolence, community sense and care. Even there where a cluster of values, which according to the model of Grouzet (see above) supports as well intrinsic\(^3\) or extrinsic strivings, are adjacent, the cluster of financial values and personal achievement and pleasure still remains the complete opposite of benevolence and community- and care-oriented values. I.e. the values needed to motivate people into sustainable action for nature or any other common good.

According to Melissa Lane our society stimulated precisely the wrong values to motivate people into action for nature, if only by motivating exactly those values that

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\(^2\) These differences have partly to do with differences qua definition (for instance with regard to the notion of conformity, restraint to harm others, or conventions for Schwartz, and an effort to fit in for Grouzet), and partly with differences in the overall classification system. The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic, and between self-oriented and self-transcendent goals makes it very difficult for Grouzet not to classify self-acceptance in the self-oriented and intrinsic quadrant. The same reasoning is true for Schwartz, but pointing into another direction. His division between on the one hand openness to change and self-transcendence and on the other hand conservation and self-enhancement, makes it almost obligatory to rank self-direction in the category of openness to change. One could say that the typologies for the self of Schwartz offer better opportunities to discriminate between the different roles of that self.

\(^3\) Intrinsic goals are defined as those pursuits that are generally congruent with the psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence proposed by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and thus are inherently satisfying to pursue, in and of themselves. Intrinsic goals include those for self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical health. In contrast, extrinsic goals are primarily concerned with obtaining some reward or social praise; because they are typically a means to some other end or compensate for problems in need satisfaction; they are less likely to be inherently satisfying (see Deci & Ryan, 2000). (Grouzet, 2005, p. 801)
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oppose the values required for nature action oriented action. Contemporary society drums in the wrong values and striving, or in her words: “it stimulates the wrong virtues”. Our societies seem to be organized to demotivate individuals to act for nature or biodiversity, in fact any common good. “The environmental movement must beware of appealing to materialistic motivations, as these are inherently hostile to the very notion of intrinsic goods, intrinsic motivation, and identities based on anything other than the rewards of consumerism” (Lane, 2012, p. 121)

Our contemporary western society goes even further according to Lane. The overall and permanently repeated message is that any individual is too trivial a player to make socially any difference. Therefore, the permanently repeated message is that individual people do not have to care for the common good, nor should they feel guilty about not doing so. Taking care for the collective good is the task of other players or platforms, institutional players, such as the state, expert-groups or the market. We in fact live in a society that on the one hand promotes the freedom of choice and action of the individual and on the other hand belittles the capacity of that same individual to make a difference, with the exception of so-called super-heroes or geniuses, comparable with antique semi-gods.

Meaning and story
Lane also makes clear that this deadlock cannot be broken by means of arguments, certainly not by arguments that run counter to the values people consider essential for their identity, or arguments intended to undermine values people cherish by stressing the irrationality of those values. Do this and aiming at that will in fact have the opposite effect, it will only strengthen the will to stick to these values.

Lane wants to overcome this stalemate by means of new stories and images that stress self-transcendent goals and values. In this sense her recommendation links up with the ideas discussed before, the idea that values have to be embedded in a context and supported by narratives. She adds however two extra dimensions, i.e. the idea that its best can be done via the notion of virtue, and the idea that the kick-off to generate this change has to come from individuals, not institutions.

Those values and motivations that stimulate and support care (for people or nature) need longstanding and enduring nourishment and support, in words and deeds. This will strengthen these values and motivations, and weaken their antipodes. In other words, the strategy is not to downplay so-called negative values and strivings, but to promote their opposites. And the suitable way to do this is not via debate and argumentation, but via meaningful narratives and sustained practices, intended to embed these values and strivings in personal and societal habits, routines and norms; i.e. by educating and training the right virtues.

These processes have to be initiated by precursors, individuals who set the ‘trend’, and break the above-mentioned demotivational deadlock, which disheartens people to act for the common good. Their stories and practices should be studied, adopted and adapted, scaled up, and translated in social learning processes.

Virtue and meaning
The qualities required to promote the common good resemble, not surprisingly, according to Lane, the so-called classical virtues. They need practice and training to realize their potential, like the classical virtues did. A potential that is partly
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incorporated in the practices aimed at bringing them about and partly exceeds and directs those practices, like muscles need training and make that training possible and gain in strength the more they get trained (see also Sandel, 2010, p 4). Excellence (virtue) is to be found and realized in the combination of goal, potential, and exercise; in short the goal of the undertaking, and the undertaking itself, i.e. in the quest.

The qualities needed for the promotion of the common good also have, qua constitution, much in common with the classical virtues, according to Lane. The cluster of qualities needed to promote that common good are more or less those of the four classical cardinal virtues, i.e. justice, or the capacity to do the good and correct wrong-doing; temperance, in order, to use the words of Durkheim “to pursue conduct towards enduring goals”; fortitude or courage, to overcome fear and resistance, and stick to the right choices and practices; and prudence or wisdom, the capacity to see what will promote and what will hinder the realization of the good. She adds one (cardinal) Christian virtue, the virtue of charity or care. She in fact swaps the classical virtue of friendship for charity.

This view on the virtues relies deeply on the ideas of Plato, but even more Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. What is essential in this type of virtue ethics is the way the relationship between means, ends and actions is defined. Virtues are simultaneously means, goals and practices, or otherwise formulated as well ends as means, or to use the words of Alasdair Macintyre who revived the idea of virtue ethics: “For what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life. We thus cannot characterize the good for man adequately without already having made reference to the virtue. The immediate outcome of the exercise of a virtue is a choice, which issues in right action: ‘It is the correctness of the end of the purposive choice of which virtue is the cause’ (1228a1, Kenny's translation, Kenny 1978), wrote Aristotle in the Eudemian Ethics…

Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by the cultivation of the virtues. Moral education is an 'education sentimentale’.” (After Virtue, 1984, p. 149)

In other words a virtue should not be confused with an inborn disposition or a natural talent. “A happy gift of fortune is not to be confused with the possession of the corresponding virtue; for just because it is not informed by systematic training and by principle even such fortunate individuals will be the prey of their own emotions and desires” (Macintyre, 1984, p. 149).

Self-determination
These ideas are in line with the central findings of BIOMOT. But before we go into that, we have to discuss the relationship between motivation and self-determination as worked out by Deci and Riyan (1985, 2000). Their motivational theory, called self-determination theory, forms the backbone of part of the analyses in BIOMOT, certainly in work package 2 (WP2).

Ryan and Deci define motivation as to being moved to do something (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 54), and make a distinction between different types of motivations, based on the underlying reasons or goals (1985, 2000). The most important distinction they make is between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They define intrinsic
motivations as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions, rather than for some separable consequence (2000, p. 56). They define extrinsic motivations as a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome (p. 60). Intrinsic values will occur only for activities that hold intrinsic interest for an individual, -those “that have the appeal of choice, opportunity, novelty, challenge, or aesthetic value for that individual” (p. 59). Furthermore they state that events and structures that stimulate feelings of competence can enhance intrinsic motivation, but only if these feelings of competence are accompanied by a sense of autonomy, the idea of self-determination. “Intrinsic motivations can be strengthened by positive feedbacks, and undermined by negative feedbacks” (p. 58). Moreover extrinsic, i.e. control based motivational drivers, such as rewards, threats, deadlines, directives or competition pressure, diminish intrinsic motivation (p. 59).

**Integrating extrinsic motivations**

Extrinsic motivations are important to get people into action, certainly if internal motivations are frail or absent. It will however be difficult to do so, and certainly to uphold those motivations and the accompanying action, if the intrinsic interest of people to be involved is feeble, provisional or casual, certainly if the external incentives become weakened or start to fade away. This is a very well known motivational problem. The way to solve it, according to Deci and Ryan, is to foster the internalization of supporting extrinsic motivations, i.e. the underlying values of these motivations. Their internalization will enhance personal commitment and identification, and the quality of engagement.

The highest form of internalization, according to Ryan and Deci, the ultimate, most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, entails that all the required “regulations have been fully assimilated to the self” (Ryan and Dec, 2000, p. 62; see also Deci and Ryan, 1985). Initially this internalization has to be ‘externally prompted’, and people will be do this if they know “that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel or want to feel connected”. But this is not all that is required. Another crucial step is to internalize extrinsic goals is “perceived competence… the idea that one understands the goals and has the skill to succeed”. However, the most crucial step towards real integration and not just introjection is autonomy, according to the authors: “only autonomy will yield integrated self-regulation… People must inwardly grasp its meaning and worth” (p. 64).

Ryan and Deci specifically do not equate intrinsic motivations with (strongly) internalized extrinsic motivations. They in fact warn against doing so. But they show that the main factors that promote intrinsic motivation, i.e. competence and autonomy, also enhance the internalisation of extrinsic motivations. They also show that there is an extra, a third important factor, when it comes to the internalization of extrinsic motivations, i.e. endorsement of that motivation by an esteemed person, group or community, or society as a whole. They call this factor the ‘sense of belongingness’, or ‘relatedness’.

These findings of Ryan and Deci seem to imply that these three factors can be used to strengthen, deepen, bridge and link extrinsic motivations. That is good news. However, the next task is to apply this insight wisely. We have to make sure that we select and enhance the right motivations, i.e. only those that increase and improve action for nature and biodiversity. That is not an easy task, because we know, thanks
to the findings of BIOMOT WP1, Schwartz, Grouzet, and Lane, that not all motivations -intrinsic or extrinsic- will do this, to say the least. We also know, thanks to them, that enhancing specific (clusters of) motivations or values will weaken specific other, opposite (clusters of) motivations or values. And we also know that extrinsic motivations, based on external control, undermine intrinsic motivations, even closely related ones.

What does all this imply for the analyses of BIOMOT, at this stage especially those in work package 2 (WP2), which investigated 35 biodiversity project in seven EU countries, to trace the motivations and values of biodiversity that initiated and drove these projects and the individual and collective actor involved?

Inclusive decision-making

WP2 explicitly zoomed in on extrinsic motivations and the possibility to internalise them and link them up with intrinsic motivations. The reason to do so is that: “Sometimes policy tools supportive of intrinsic motivations are not available or the most appropriate tool. [And] policies based on extrinsic motivations act faster and on a broader scale. A mix of tools based on intrinsically motivated and extrinsically motivated behaviour will often be required” (Dedeurwaerdere, 2015. p. 3).

The assumption was that participatory approaches perhaps offered the best entrance to realise that symbiosis. Participatory approaches offer room for (perceived) self-determination, and as a result of this perhaps also promise higher results than approaches based on purely extrinsic incentives. This last supposition, however, had to be handled with care, since participatory approaches turned out to be not always more effective. This perhaps could be partly attributed to their dependency on factors that negatively influenced the perceived fairness of the procedure and the perceived self-determination of the participants.

The first step was to select, at random, a large sample of successful, multi-actor (government, business, society) biodiversity initiatives in seven EU countries. Out of this sample in total 35 initiatives were selected, five in each country. The initiator of each initiative and four key stakeholders were interviewed, by means of a meticulously organised questionnaire with closed and some open questions. Apart from the form, the initiator was also asked to participate in a qualitative life story interview, and a motivational card game.

The interview-findings were submitted to two probit-models, one (P1) to analyse the governance arrangement model of actors who joined in for other than economic reasons; and another (P2) to do the same for actors who mainly joined for reasons of economic benefit to them. Both models were tested to find out the importance of the intrinsically motivated behaviour versus internalised extrinsically motivated behaviour, and to find contextual factors that favour or inhibit the expression of intrinsically motivated behaviour and the internalisation of extrinsically motivated behaviour.

The results show that it indeed is possible to design successful governance initiatives combining intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They also show that governance mechanism based on autonomy and competence- supporting context played a significant role for actors who joined in for other than economic reasons (P1). These findings are in line with those of Ryan and Deci.

Another interesting finding is that the role of social recognition or esteem was not
significant. This matches the findings of both Schwartz and Grouzet, who made clear that the search for recognition and self-esteem belong to different sometimes even opposite (clusters of) motivations or goals oriented at the promotion of the common good.

A next finding was that non-economic motivations to become and remain involved were slightly more widespread than economic motivations, but that the difference was not as high as perhaps expected.

More thought-provoking but not completely unexpected either, was the finding that motivations, based on autonomy or a feeling of competence, are difficult to implement in “initiatives whose survival strongly depends on the exploitation of resources”, and that, “when economic benefits to participants strongly depend on government incentives or the selling of products, the combination of autonomous governance, support for autonomous competence and duty/collective aim is less likely to occur”.

Overall, the most important motivation that came out of the large-scale comparative analysis is the role of the self-determination of the actors. Inclusive decision-making is crucial. That is especially true for projects where non-economic motivations are key (more centralized decision-making seems more appropriate for economically oriented projects). Bottom-up processes that take into account the motivations of the societal actors and stakeholders, by means of authentic dialogue, that are supporting the initiatives always stand central; it is all about interdependence. Successful initiatives amongst the 35 analysed cases became successful, due to the existence of effective bridging organisations -generating social learning- between these two above-mentioned actor groups, with organised social learning and knowledge exchange in an inclusive and non-coercive manner.

**Duty as a dilemma**

What we did not (yet) measure is the question whether and how specific types of motivations cluster and in doing so, reinforce each other and/or crowd out or weaken specific other (clusters of motivations). Although one result, the finding that duty as (an internalized) motivation can link up with an intrinsic motivation, such as enjoyment, is a step in that direction. However, the main conclusion to be drawn thus far is that internal and external motivations can link up and become mutually reinforcing, not that duty as such is the most suitable motivation to internalize, certainly if the goal is to promote widespread motivated action for biodiversity or nature.

Duty in fact seems a rather unlikely candidate to realize that, at least at first sight. Duty is commonly defined as a claim or demand to conform, out of social, legal, rational or moral reasons, and as such, at least according to the model of Grouzet, the antipode of feelings of autonomy and competence (self-acceptance). The same reasoning is true for Schwartz. His value-model offers only space for duty in the spheres of power, achievement or conformity, which are antipodes of self-direction (autonomy). Duty can be internalized, according to both models, via the desire to comply with friends or family, fit in socially, or gain respect; in short, via the notion of belongingness. This is also in line with the ideas of Ryan and Deci.

But taking that road comes with a price. The combination of autonomy and competence, buoyed by a feeling of belonging, is the strongest possible motivational
setting to move an individual into action. To translate duty into willingly and joyful personal motivation, specific personality traits have to be addressed which stimulate conformity, but thwart self-transcendence, the central quality needed to be motivated to act for the common good in general and more in special biodiversity and nature. Belongingness, the desire to fit in, can in this case act as a bridge, but only if the requirement to act for nature is already a central, widely established social norm, with which everyone has to comply who wants to fit in socially. In most if not all other cases duty and conformity, combined with self-orientation (Grouzet) or self-enhancing (Schwartz) will not promote the common good, but most probably undermine it and by doing so weaken the possibilities to motivate people to act for biodiversity or nature. Not all duties are good, and many duties, even very good ones, are not suited to stimulate action for nature or biodiversity. They work perhaps better if they are not internalized, or cannot be internalized, if only because society tends to drum in the wrong duties or values, as discussed before in this paper. The view that duty does probably not offer the best approach towards motivation to act for nature is confirmed by our own analyses, based on a ‘motivational card game’ we developed and applied to find out what are the most important and what are the least important motivations of people acting for nature. See below for a more extended description of that ‘card game’. Here we just want to use to show that duty was mostly mentioned in the category ‘least important’.

We, in short, need more insight in values, goals, and meanings of concrete actors who acted for nature and/or started up projects to stimulate others to do so. We have to know what triggered and stimulated them and what worked to trigger, stimulate and organize others. That is precisely what is done in Biomot work package 3 (WP3).

**The value of life stories**

The aim of WP 3 was to dig into the personal motivations of individuals, who act or did act for biodiversity/nature, or for other more directly at society oriented activities. About 30 in depth life story interviews were undertaken in each, 15 with representatives from the first category in each country, and 15 with representatives from the other category. 5 of the representatives of the first group were the persons who initiated one of the WP2 cases mentioned-above. In total we realised a bit more than 200 interviews.

Each interview contained three parts (1) a qualitative life story narrative interview, based on a interview guide, taking about 1,5 hour; (2) a card game, taking about 15 minutes, to be ‘played’ at the end of the life story, asking the interviewee to classify and value 20 pre-given motivations; (3) and an online survey, to be filled in later, lasting about half an hour.

The purpose of the life story narrative was to find the main drive of the interviewee, and find out when and how they were formed, in what period (of their live), and by what influences (by people or environment) or experiences. The assumption was that the habitus -the ideas, motivations and routines- of (most) people were formed in their younger years, and that this formation has a decisive impact on their motivation to act or not to act for nature/biodiversity. We distinguished, based on the literature, f.i. Piaget, three life-shaping periods: 0-15, 15-25 and 25 and later; and asked the interviewees to tell us about the life they lived in those period and their social and physical environments they lived in.
We also searched in the life story interviews and the survey for a special motivational drive, seen as crucial in the psychological literature: the quest of significance (see for more formation the Common Concept document and below). That quest does not necessarily have to be experienced as positive or work out positively. Another assumption was a particular kind of peak experiences, so-called environmental epiphanies, could have funnelled the interviewees into a certain direction, during one or more of these periods. Both ideas were especially tested in the survey, which also served as a control on the findings of the narratives.

Next to the life story interview and the survey, we developed a card game, to test and deepen out some of the answers given by the interviewees during the life story interviews. The main purpose of the card game, put before the interviewee at the end of the interview, was to select important and less important motivations to act for nature, or for another case considered to be important, another so-called ‘main thing’. The card game contained twenty cards, with on each card one important motivation for people to act. The choice and formulation of these twenty motivations was based on the literature and our own research. Each card contained the title and a very short description of that motivation. The interviewee was asked to rank the cards. They had six possibilities, ranking from most important to least important. Those motivations that played no role whatsoever could be discarded.

**Formation and childhood**

WP3 delivered a huge amount of data and findings. The first, and perhaps most important finding, when it comes to long term policies, is that early, childhood contact with nature, i.e. early nature experiences, have played a crucial role in moulding and directing the motivations to act for nature of the majority of the interviewed actors for nature, in all countries. Most interviewees mention this impact, but it is also confirmed by the analyses of more indirect statements. These results are already telling, but not that surprising, since other research has already confirmed the important role of childhood experiences on motivations and actions later in life. The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that a major way to improve the motivations of people to act for nature later in life is to make sure that they have (frequent) contact with nature during childhood.

Our interviews showed, however, that sheer contact is not enough. It became very clear that the character of the contact and nature count, even more than the frequency of contact. Some types of experience are more important than others, and some natural settings are better suited for these experiences. Finding this was in fact one of the main reason to do life story-interviews.

**Curiosity, competence and autonomy**

We found out that the majority of people who have become active for nature or biodiversity shared specific types of childhood nature experiences. Autonomy, competence and curiosity and learning played a crucial role, and the same was to a somewhat smaller degree true for connectivity, or in short the quest for self-determination. This result is in line with other findings in Biomot (see above). But we also discovered something else. We found out that the quality and make-up of the quest itself (the search, or the action) were as important as the result, and, for that reason, also the natural setting of that quest. We will start with the last aspect.
The BIOMOT project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement # 282625

The interviews make it possible to indicate what kind of nature is most suited for experiences that stick and engender the motivation for nature-oriented actions later in life. Suitable nature (= natural places) offers a platform for exploration (curiosity and learning); practicing autonomy (freedom), training and developing competences, alone or with friends (adventure); inventing and attributing new meaning (stories); escaping ‘beaten tracks’; and moulding new forms of connectivity with humans or nature. That nature has to be a place, where a child can escape, explore and transcend, i.e. find and test, autonomously or with peers, her or his competences (virtues) to engage the world, the self, and social conditioning. Good examples are brownfields, wastelands at the edge of cities or on deserted industrial sites. They figure prominently in our interviews with people who grew up in cities. Other examples are forests or seashores. They obviously play an important role in the stories of people who grew up on the country site, but also often come back in the life stories of other interviewees.

**Beauty and otherness**

The experiences of our motivated interviewees have even more in common. Here nature experiences really start to diverge from other types of experiences. Before we go into that, we want to stress again, that the perceived otherness of nature, the fact that nature is not (completely) human-made, is crucial to understand and place the findings we discuss below.

A remarkable amount of the BIOMOT interviewees reported to have been inspired, struck or even overwhelmed, at some stage of their life, by sensation of beauty, connectedness, and/or otherness, transcendence, mysticism or spirituality when they encountered or dwelled in nature. They often clearly stated that these feelings of awe had stimulated or even prompted their motivation to become active for nature. It is clear that nature (= natural settings) has the capacity to stir feelings that transcend, stop or even and break up daily routines, habits, worries, and thoughts, and sometimes even re-direct someone path of life.

The diversity of these experiences and their importance for those who have undergone them yield already very good reasons to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to experience nature, from early childhood onwards. There is, however, also another compelling reason for doing this.

**The power of stories**

Humans are storytelling animals⁴. We not only exchange information about what is, but also tell stories about what is not, about imagined things, or entities. This capacity to tell stories, to create imagined worlds and meaning, is unique for humans and far-reaching in its consequences. This can be illustrated by the following example given by Harari (2014): “No chimpanzee could ever be convinced to hand over a banana on the promise that this would guarantee access to the chimpanzee heaven”. Human beings, on the contrary, are very strongly motivated by stories about imagined things, creatures, places or more abstract ‘goods’ or ‘bads’. We highly appreciate motivations that transcend time, place, biological conditioning and other ‘curbing’ reality. Stories offer ideas, ideals, examples, and idols. They hold beliefs that inspire and unite

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⁴ See Harari, Sapiens: a brief history of mankind 2011, 2014, for a recent and very instructive expounding of this idea.
people, even people who will never meet, and have never met. A good example is the widely shared belief in Jupiter in Ancient Greek and Rome. A more recent example is the belief in the existence of nations. Without stories people cannot function and our societies would break down. Stories build, stimulate and spread motivations, and shape shared desires.

However, stories also have a tendency to become stiff and inflexible, and by doing so prevent the emergence of new stories. They have an inclination to reify, to become ‘carved out in stone’. Especially this last aspect is important when it comes to stimulate motivations to act for nature.

To give an example: suppose a dominant story is that individual happiness is the highest good to strive for, and that a living in a big city offers the best conditions to actualize that happiness, certainly if that city has a high variety of shops, catering, art galleries and the like; and suppose also that all these conditions are realised (literally carved out in stone). In that case, it becomes very difficult to motivate a broader public by means of stories that praise the values of rural living. This will be even more problematic if earlier experience of rural living is lacking, and even more so, if the possibility to experience rural living is limited or absent. It becomes impossible if the supposed audience has been immersed in the above-mentioned city discourse since their childhood, and has grown up in complete city-environments.

That is the reason why compelling stories about nature are very important, and moreover, why we need natural environments that offer opportunities to experience and ‘practice’ these stories, from childhood on. We found that people who are motivated to act for nature have stories that stem from their earlier experiences with nature. We also found that nature experiences generate stories that differ in crucial aspects from stories that stem from non-natural environments, and that those stories appeal to other sensations and thoughts, often very strong epiphany-like feelings. See for a more in depth explanation Part III.

Motivations to act for nature need (contact and connection with) nature to arise, and nature is the only platform that enables stories that transcend complete man-made realities and reifications, i.e. circularity. That is what all those by our interviewees mentioned, epiphany-like experiences tell: humans need nature to test meaning.

**Mentors**

This links up with a second crucial finding based on the analyses of the life stories: the role of mentors, i.e. significant others. The majority of our interviewees mentioned to be influenced by a mentor in their life, mostly during childhood or adolescence. They found and needed an example or someone who could guide them or show the way. Mentors, as stories, stimulate, articulate and combine intrinsic and extrinsic meaning. They, however, also made clear that a mentor is a special type of person; someone who inspires but does not imposes her or his opinion. According to the interviewees, their mentors had an impact on them, because they stood apart, took them ‘seriously, stimulated their curiosity and competence, respected or addressed their autonomy, showed new meanings, explained otherness, or just pointed out the way to new horizons, beauty, or awe. Most mentors were typically not direct parents or teachers, at least not teachers who’s task it was to formally teach the ‘capacity to respect or study nature’. This implies that implementing care for nature in the formal school curriculum is probably good, but not the way to promote mentorship.
Mentors were mainly important during childhood or adolescence. In later years acting for nature to benefit other people and society became more important.

**Meaning of life**
Motivations to act for nature are about meaning: giving meaning to your actions, and articulate meaning by acting. It is indeed a quest, as assumed before. The meaning, i.e. the purpose and enjoyment, is as well in, before, after and beyond the action. It is about more than goals or results or action in itself. It is, as several of our interviewees mentioned, a form of homecoming, in the sense of ‘building your home where your heart is’. That home can be a physical place -a very dear thing- or a feeling that ‘things start to converge’, that life starts to make sense. The importance of feelings of meaning, convergence and connectedness that surpass the level of direct utility or happiness oriented drives, is further underlined by the findings in WP3 on epiphanies.

We found four different types of epiphanies, i.e. intellectual, realization, connectedness and awakening. People who are highly motivated to act for nature had more epiphanies than others. These epiphanies occurred during childhood or, and even more, in the period between 15-25 years. The group of highly motivated actors for nature is characterized by having more awakening and connectedness epiphanies than the group of others. The group of others experienced more aesthetic epiphanies, and these experiences happened often earlier in their life, during childhood (see more information our WP3 reports).

This perspective on motivations to act for nature is not even remotely connected to the dominant economic and political discourse, and still a long shot from the more at deliberation, social justice, or value plurality oriented policy discourses discussed earlier. Even in those last three discourses the focus is more on efforts to reconcile different opinions and protect non-monetary values than on motivations that, according to our interview findings, demonstrably trigger people or groups into action.

There is a big rift between what policy-makers belief and do and what people who act for nature or biodiversity mention as their main drive to act. This split is understandable since politics, economics and policy are always about more than motivations to act for nature and biodiversity alone, even in the cases where this topic is their main object. Even then, they have to reckon (sic) with all kind of related or unrelated issues, interests, arguments and actors.

However, this answer, although understandable, falls short, if motivation is the issue, and we accept the idea that motivation is the key to successfully addressing and reversing the trend of biodiversity decline, in the EU and elsewhere, as the EU did when it commissioned BIOMOT to find out what really could motivate people to act for biodiversity. If we accept the by now proven insight that continuing to do ‘business as usual’ or ‘removing market failures’ will not bring about the required motivations to act, and certainly not on a large scale.

When it comes to creating the right conditions and environments for motivations to act for nature, the goal and the rules of the game, and in fact the game itself

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5 Environmental epiphanies have to do with the natural environment and with Nature, and they impact on a person's relationship with it. They are “experiences in which one’s perception of essential meaning of her/his relationship with nature shifts in a meaningful manner and it is usually followed by behavioral changes” (Vining and Merrik, 2012, p. 497).
changes. We are no longer talking about policy, economics and politics in general, or about the undefeatable supremacy of existing political and economic powers, players and scales. In that case we are talking about policies and politics that can and will create and promote conditions and environments to foster, diffuse and scale up these indispensable motivations to act for nature. Doing this, is, as we have seen, about offering space to initiators; about creating proper educational, formational and natural environments from childhood onwards, that stimulate experiences and stories; about mentors; and about autonomy, curiosity and learning, relatedness and care; in short, about meaning and the quest for meaning.

There is however more to it. We also have to answer the question why so many good initiatives remain local or confined to niches, or restricted in scale and time. Why do so many people decline to act or join in, even if they acknowledge the urgency of the problem? Why do so many people even claim that not acting, or denying is the best form of ‘action’?

Answering that question requires a more systemic approach than the one that has followed thus far; not an answer that addresses alleged systemic causes of biodiversity or environmental decline, but an answer that looks at the causes and consequences of systemic demotivation.

**Systemic demotivation**

“There is nothing I can do, so the best thing is for me to do nothing”

Demotivation is not simply non-motivation or the absence of a specific motivation, but an indication that the whole mechanism that links motivation to action is jammed. Or formulated otherwise: demotivation is a motivation, a special type, a kind of blockade or paralysis, caused by a split between the awareness that action is necessary and the conviction that all actions are fruitless; i.e. the feeling to be “stuck between a rock and a hard place”, as the expression runs.

The notion systemic refers to the fact that demotivation is not a question of personality, personal preferences or personal circumstances. Motivations and demotivations are formed and refined over a lifetime. That is what, in BIOMOT, we call formation – the idea that collective and individual motivational processes are always socially and politically grounded and organised. Systemic demotivation is caused by inadequate but permanently reproduced and reified notions of the relation between nature and culture, ignorance of the fact that human actions are essentially included in natural processes, and finally the persistent illusion that nature and culture represent two distinct and autonomous spheres (the classic nature/culture dichotomy).

The very core of the systemic motivational obstruction can be observed on the level of individuals and collectives, as well as in policymakers. This obstruction is in many cases intimately linked to a real dilemma: an implicit awareness that the old recipes and ways of environmental action are simply no longer adequate for the type and global scale of the ecological problems that we are facing at this point in history. Nevertheless, it seems that we mostly remain half way: we know that we cannot act in the old manner, and we know that “business as usual” is no longer possible – even in the conception of environmental critique. Still, at the point when we would have to redefine the entire relation between the human system and the natural system, we
instead relapse into dichotomous thinking, which (if nothing else) liberates us from our responsibility to act. It is precisely this combination of the right intuition and the disavowal of its inevitable conclusions that forms the underlying structure of the complex mechanism that we have described by the notion systemic demotivation.

The various forms of systemic demotivation are in depth analysed below, in Part IV of this booklet. Here, however, we want to throw light on some of the principal conclusions.

Systemic demotivation is above all a form of resistance, a reactive formation, to shield societies and individuals from the difficult task of transforming the given social system. It is crucial to understand that this systemic demotivation is not an anomaly and the absence of motivation for an environmental action, but a specific reaction and response to a real antagonism. Only a few decades ago, the field of ecological critique was dominated by the view according to which the negative human influence could be reduced to individual cases and types of interventions, and consequently, that acting for nature could be brought down to positive counter-acting, to the effort of preventing these individual interventions. Yet the systemic processes confronting us today pose an entirely new situation: global systemic change is a consequence of the “normal” functioning of the system, and adapting by only changing some conditions or intensify and upscale earlier approaches no longer is sufficient. In the epoch of the Anthropocene, where the “terrestrial biosphere made the transition from being shaped primarily by natural biophysical processes to an anthropogenic biosphere (…), shaped primarily by human systems,” (Ellis 2011: 1029) the revision of the nature/culture dichotomy is more than a matter of pure theory. This revision needs to take place both in the scientific sphere and in the social context, which means that the theoretical revision of the human relation to nature has become a matter of practical necessity, as far as the persistence of the dichotomy works as an obstacle to the formation of efficient strategies of environmental action.

Motivational paralysis
Precisely this insight causes the motivational paralysis. The more the destructive consequences of human interventions in natural environments become manifest, the more this manifest character feeds resistance to action and the more it legitimises the absence of motivation, placing humans in a position of helplessness, impotence, and even denial. The question is not whether the insufficiency or the absence of environmental motivation follows from the fact that environmental goals are not the only goals pursued by individuals. True demotivation becomes manifest when a contradiction emerges between two different goals that we want to pursue. In such a situation the most acceptable strategy for individuals is to assume the split itself. Rather than being directed to environmental action, people direct their mental energy into sustaining this split. With regard to the information they possess, “normal life” can no longer be lived as it was till now, and a mental investment is needed in order to continue to sustain the status quo in a reality that has altered its “normality”: either direct denial of negative information or the adoption of the illusion that, despite

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6 The multiplicity of different goals and interests in itself does not prevent motivation or action for nature, something that many cases of contemporary ecological movements, in which environmental action without any difficulty accompanies other social, political, economic, and finally personal goals, clearly testify to.
practical ignorance, the people in question do useful work already by thinking of environmental problems and by being concerned about the environment, even if they are practically doing precisely what they should not be doing.

Of course, as far as these people are convinced that they are too powerless, as individuals, to take action, they become demotivated subjects, who transform their lack of action into virtue: There is nothing I can do, therefore the best thing is for me to do nothing.

**Breaking away from organised demotivation**

In order to address the question of motivation on its most fundamental level, we need to move from the *multiplicity of motivation* to the *formal structure of action*. The analysis of the BIOMOT interviews namely confronts us with the problem that was identified as the “contextuality” or “particularity” of motivation. However, insisting solely on the level of particular cases does not answer the most crucial question: What is the structure of motivated action, and how can this action ground a more general strategy to counteract the systemic demotivation?

In the theoretical framework, this problem demands a theory of judgment in which a specific type of articulation between the particularity of actions and their inherent universal validity is at work. One of the basic insights provided by the analysis of the BIOMOT interviews is that the actions of the interviewees, which seem to be contextually determined throughout, manifest the *structure of anticipated certainty*. In the usual, instrumental type of action, the latter is structured as means X for achieving the desired goal Y, whereby the choice of means logically results from the rational analysis of the given situation: this analysis leads to certainty that in order to achieve Y we need to do X. In this type of univocal and consciously intentional action the reality of the situation precedes the action and its certainty. We can say that this type of action is grounded on an already pre-established cognition.

However, in many cases the situation is entirely different and the action creates the conditions and the reality, which retroactively legitimises and grounds the actions undertaken (for this reason we speak of action as anticipated certainty). Action here produces the features of the situation for reason of which a person acts at all. We can call this the *performative model of action*. The same logic applies for the motivational structure of action. Action, so to speak, precedes its own motivation and only retrospectively produces its cognitive rationalisation. Motivation as the driving force and guidance of action results only from the process in which action produces consequences in reality and through them retroactively articulates and verifies the reasons and motivates itself. We are dealing with a singularity, for which we presuppose that it nevertheless possesses some universal validity and value. This universality, however, needs to be constructed. Let us add that the notion of biodiversity is a concrete case of such universality that it needs to be invented, grounded, and justified based on concrete and contextual cases. But to repeat again, this invention is the work of the reflecting power of judgment, which needs to be understood both as a way of thinking and a way of action. Because thinking and action here come together, we can recognise in this structure a specific break from organised demotivation. The importance of this model of action also consists in the fact that it overcomes the multiplicity of motivations by highlighting the structure that drives concrete cases of environmental engagement.
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Policy recommendations (NB: regarding the motivations of people and people’s organisations, not firms, who in fact only have interests)

- Create the conditions for nature oriented formation, from childhood onwards (education, experiences, mentorship, attachments, meaning, rituals)
- Give space and create space for meaningful stories, examples, and practices
- Take away the (re) production settings for systemic demotivation, and the accompanying discourses.
  - Do not emphasize economic values, certainly at the start-up phase of projects.

\[ M = F \times S / D \]

M = motivation to act (for nature)
F = Formation
S = stories in context
D = systemic demotivation

NB: personality and personal dispositions are subordinated when it comes to policy recommendations