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PhD in Human Ecology
2017-2018

INVITATION to the Public defence of

Rik DE VREESE

To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN HUMAN ECOLOGY**'

"This forest isn't a forest" Mainstreaming Stakeholder-based Transdisciplinary Ecosystem Service Assessments in decision-making for planning and management

Friday 16 March 2018

Auditorium **Piet Brouwer**, 16:00
Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/campuses>

Summary of the dissertation

The concept of ecosystem services (ES) – the benefits that nature provides to humankind – has gained momentum in academia in the last twenty years. The concept has been adopted in several policy frameworks, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020. But, the uptake of the ES concept in land use planning and nature and landscape management in practice is very limited. Literature suggests that this implementation gap is linked to the limited compatibility between the ES concept and the notions of nature with stakeholders (decision-makers, politicians, land use planners, natural resource managers, public). First, our research looks into individuals' images of nature and stakeholder groups' social representations of nature and discuss how these converge with the ES concept. Our results show that the anthropocentric and utilitarian perspective in the ES concept is only partially reflecting people's notion of nature.

Secondly, we apply a social mapping technique for localising stakeholders' perceptions and use of nature. We illustrate that this approach is beneficial to traditional methods, and needed to integrate social assessments with economic and biophysical ES assessments.

Finally, we develop an operational framework for integrating stakeholder-based ES assessments in "real world" planning and management processes. This framework illustrates how our methods can contribute to a common ground and common language for ES assessment.

Our methods contribute to designing tailored ES assessment processes, that are grounded in stakeholders' representations of nature and eventually can see an enhanced uptake in practice.

Curriculum Vitae

Rik De Vreese graduated as Master in Applied Biological Sciences (specialisation in Land and Forest Management) at Ghent University in 2000. He joined the Human Ecology Department at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in 2008, where he coordinated several Master Programmes (2008 – 2012).

He started his PhD research within the framework of the BelSpo-project VOTES (Valuation Of Terrestrial Ecosystem Services in a peri-urban region, 2010 - 2012). Rik joined the Public Health Department in 2012, where he continued his research on mainstreaming social representations of nature and stakeholder perceptions regarding ecosystem services in planning and management processes. He combines his research activities with a position as project coordinator at the ngo BOS+. Since November 2017, Rik is working as consultant for the Resilience Programme at the European Forest Institute (EFI), where he is developing the new research and science-policy interface programme on urban forestry.

Rik is member of the International Steering Committee of the European Forum on Urban Forestry (EFUF) and was awarded the Young European Urban Forester award in 2015. He (co-)authored eight peer-reviewed articles and contributed to six book chapters. He has been active in several research networks and science-policy-practice interfaces regarding urban forestry, forest governance and policy, nature & human health and well-being, integrated valuation of ecosystem services, and ecosystem services provided by forests for water protection.