

Cap our natural resource use! - Why is it so important to establish a coalition on resource use?

Budapest, Hungary – over the past 60 years, people have influenced the natural environment more extensively than in any period in the history. Due to world population growth and overconsumption, human demand and exploitation of natural resources is increasing. This causes damages which can be irreversible. Realizing this threat, CEEweb for biodiversity is calling to establish a coalition on capping resource use in order to decrease the pressure on our natural environment caused by humans.

The incredible rate of economic growth, which is based mostly on increasing resource exploitation, cannot continue forever within a finite system like the Earth. Its carrying capacity was already exceeded in the seventies. Since that time, humanity has been in a state of overshoot where people are consuming natural resources faster than they can be regenerated. In other worlds, we are using up resources meant to be used by future generations.

However, the effect of unsustainable resource use can be already felt in the growing number of economic, environmental and social issues: such as economic tensions between resource depletion and unequal access to scarce resources; climate change and biodiversity loss, and also health problems due to pollution.

Until increased efforts to increase the sustainability of humanity's operation, economic, environmental and social problems will be regenerated.

Solutions till now - grabbing the end of the pipe

Current situation shows that stakeholders often tend to focus on problems within the established sectoral framework and apply end-of pipe solutions: economic actors work out strategies to aid resource depletion; environmentalists designate pieces of land as protected areas to save the valuable resource biodiversity; and transport and industrial pollution limits are set to protect people's health and the planet's climate.

Decision-makers with different backgrounds and interests are often not aware of numerous interactions and connections between the seemingly disconnected issues and they prefer not to go deeper into discussions and relationships between them. This leads to focusing on only current situation in the short run, always within the existing sectoral framework, instead of looking into the future and trying to develop more holistic solutions.

The best way to tackle the problem – cap our resource use

CEEweb is convinced that effective and long-term solutions to today's many folded issues are only possible if we are able to see the root of the problems and ready to tackle it. In our opinion it is crucial to look beyond the pressures and consider the driving forces behind them. These driving forces are three leveled.

There exist structural drivers, such as production and consumption patterns, the urban and spatial structures cause, directly environmental pressures like pollution, habitat degradation or exploitation of natural resources. These drivers are determined by institutional ones, such as the current legislative and economic regulatory framework, which allow the loss of natural heritage not to be compensated. Therefore, the framework lets energy expensive products and services flourish due to the cheap unlimited access to natural resources compared to human labor. The institutional drivers are lying on cultural driving forces such as values and approaches of the society. Among these values the far most dominant is the belief in material wealth and in the continuous growth of GDP on the expense of other values such as healthy environment, happiness or security.

Analyzing the complex structure of the drivers shows that introducing resource use caps would change their course. Due to the limits, natural resources would become scarce globally, which would lead to the spread of products and services with low energy demand. This would not only result in decreased pressure on the environment, but would have positive social consequences because of the re-spread of human labor. Additionally, people would also start consuming less due to the locally produced goods, which would cause a greater appreciation for the true cost of our daily lives.

The time is ripe to kick off the coalition on capping resource use

Resource efficiency is widely on the political agenda right now. Using this momentum, CEEweb wants to emphasize that this initiative should also contribute to overall reduction limits in order to avoid Jevons' Paradox. This paradox explains that more efficient use of a resource normally leads to increased use of the same resource rather than to its reduction. That is why efforts on resource efficiency have to be carefully designed not to be eaten up by parallel growing demand.

CEEweb strongly believes that in order to tackle overuse of resources, strict regulations should be put in place and indicators should be developed to measure their success. By 2012, we would like all decision makers to realize that capping resource use is essential and by 2014, see relevant measures are taken.

We are aware of the importance of specialists operating in different environmental, social and economic fields in this process, which is why we aim to establish a coalition of European stakeholders interested in resource use capping. Existing measures have failed to tackle the problems because there has not been enough collaboration between different organizations. In our opinion more discussion is needed especially on seemingly disconnected issues. Our goal is to build a wide network in which we could share our experience, speak with common voice and take more holistic approach. This would enable us to influence more effectively all the ongoing processes both at European and global levels.

What's next?

The CEEweb of Biodiversity is organizing the kick off meeting of the Resource Cap Coalition 3rd November in Hungary. The main aim of the meeting is to gather all stakeholders interested in this initiative, to listen to different approaches and ideas achievements so far, as well as to brainstorm about the possible common cooperation. This meeting will be crucial in planning the next steps and activities of the coalition, including a public European campaign for reduced resource use and a high level event for decision makers to mainstream the idea of resource capping.

About CEEweb for Biodiversity

CEEweb for Biodiversity is an umbrella organization of NGOs in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.

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