

**Neoliberal devolution, post-politics and biodiversity conservation: Big Society in
England**

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Abstract

Local and consensual governance modes are currently considered globally as panaceas to halting biodiversity loss. As laudable as local and conflict free decision making may be, advantages and disadvantages have to be considered under the lens of wider political-economic changes. In 2010, the Coalition government in England launched the Big Society project, a policy initiative that aims to devolve power to local communities and increase participation beyond-the-state in all policy areas, including biodiversity conservation. By investigating changes in biodiversity conservation-related policies implemented in England, we try to relate the state-enabled nature neoliberalization and governance rescaling to a de-politicization of public life that foregrounds technomanagerial and local-scale solutions to environmental problems, while foreclosing their political dimension. We discovered that the Big Society project actually represents a deepening of neoliberal conservation policies that is directly related to the rescaling of biodiversity governance. As novel instruments are built around privatization, nature commodification and competition, consensual decision making at the local scale de-politicizes conservation and becomes the vehicle for embedding these changes. Using critiques of the post-political condition, we conclude by arguing that Big Society and similar projects around the world entail a confinement of localities and communities to the neoliberal trajectory, effectively reducing the democratic potential of devolving power to the 'nano' level.