

The Research Group
Ecology and Biodiversity

has the honour to invite you to the public defence of the PhD thesis of

Francisco Javier BENITEZ CAPISTRÓS

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Title of the PhD thesis:

Social and ecological systems dynamics of the Galapagos Islands:
Participatory methodological approaches to support sustainability,
conservation science and management. Joint PhD with ULB

Promotors:

Prof. dr. Nico Koedam
Prof. dr. Farid Dahdouh-Guebas

The defence will take place on

November 9th 2016 at 16:00 h

in Auditorium D.2.01 at the Campus
Etterbeek of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel,
Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Elsene, and will be
followed by a reception.

Members of the jury

Prof. Dr. Ludwig TRIEST (VUB, chairman)
Prof. Dr. Marjolein VISSER (ULB, secretary)
Dr. Jean Hugé (ULB, co-promotor)
Prof. Dr. Matthieu KERVYN (VUB)
Prof. Dr. Tom BAULER (ULB)
Prof. Dr. Luc Lens (UG)
Prof. Dr. Esther TURNHOUT (Univ. Wageningen)

Curriculum vitae

Francisco Javier Benitez Capistrós (born in Loja, Ecuador, 1984) graduated as a master of Human Ecology in September 2011, at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. In 2012 he started his PhD at the APNA research group (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), under the supervision of Prof. Dr. N. Koedam. He performed several field missions to his research area, the Galapagos Islands. In 2013, in the frame of a Joint PhD (VUB-ULB) he joined the SERM group headed by Prof. Dr. F. Dahdouh-Guebas. He has (co)-authored 5 peer reviewed papers and a last submitted paper (Biological Conservation Journal). He has presented at several international conferences, including Ecosummit-2012 (USA), SYKE (Finland) and GTOE (Germany).

Abstract of the PhD research

"Sustainability and biodiversity conservation are inherently related concepts but there are practical differences in their interpretation and implementation. The premise of this doctoral thesis is based on the idea that to achieve sustainability, biodiversity conservation needs to be integrated with development considerations to ensure that the best practices to conserve biodiversity can benefit both nature and humans.

Conservation and sustainability challenges are studied in the Galapagos Islands, where the links between social and ecological systems are identified through the application of three participatory methodological approaches: The Delphi methodology, Q methodology and the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Relevant and legitimate knowledge was jointly constructed and exchanged based on the interacting perspectives of a variety of stakeholders (e.g. scientists, decision-makers and local communities). Different key components of conservation science emerged, including the dynamic inter-linkages of social ecological systems, consensus building, conservation discourses, power relations and conservation conflicts. The generated scientific knowledge adequately integrates social and ecological variables, and is of particular relevance for policy and decision-making processes.

New scientific approaches that combine local knowledge, science and policies to produce adequate and persisting results are urgent to achieve an adequate transition towards sustainability and biodiversity conservation. Though the Galapagos Archipelago and particularly its fauna have an iconic status worldwide, and human-wildlife conflict gets a specific character, this work is a contribution to bridge the gap between different natural and social sciences, methods, science and policies, and scientists and the society in general in this discipline."