

Preface and Acknowledgement

This collection of essays is the result of a Maastricht Research Based Learning (MARBLE) Project that was carried out at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) at Maastricht University in the academic year 2013-2014. The project went under the title 'Conservation Controversies' – funnily misspelled at the university website as 'Conversation Controversies'. Next to having agreeable conversations about conservation, this MARBLE-project aimed to provide so-called research-based learning. Under the guidance of Raf de Bont, five third year students from the Bachelor programs 'Arts and Culture' and 'European Studies' explored the role of experts in controversies about nature and the environment. They did so via particular case studies. Four of these are presented in this volume.

Partially financed by a subsidy from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the goal of MARBLE is to involve small groups of students in research projects. As a rule these projects tie in with ongoing research performed by the FASoS-staff – in this case the NWO-funded project 'Nature's Diplomats'. The papers of this volume reflect the educational goals of MARBLE, but also offer original research results. We hope these will be of interest for everyone who wants to learn about the intricate role of experts in environmental controversies.

We are grateful to Peter Alblas of CNME (Centrum voor Natuur en Milieu Educatie), who took us on a bicycle tour in the region around Maastricht to show how different conceptualizations of nature conservation left their traces in the local landscape. Carijn Beumer of the International Centre for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable Development (ICIS) introduced us to different cultural perspectives that play a role in our present-day conceptions of nature and the environment. Finally, we also wish to thank the MARBLE-coordinator, Pieter Caljé, for his input and support in developing this project.