

- Published: November 5, 2013
- <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001702>

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Six misconceptions in Blomqvist et al.'s response

Posted by **overshoot** on **05 Nov 2013 at 22:33 GMT**

Rees and Wackernagel point out six misconceptions in the above argument:

1) Blomqvist et al.: "...First, the entire global ecological overshoot (footprint of consumption in excess of biocapacity) results from carbon dioxide emissions..."

Rees and Wackernagel: This statement is incorrect. The total Footprint is made up of the sum of all demands. If humanity demanded less food and timber, more land can be dedicated to carbon sequestration. Current carbon emissions alone would not lead to global overshoot.

2) Blomqvist et al.: "...Plantations of fast-growing trees would, by-the-numbers, eliminate the global overshoot."

Rees and Wackernagel: This argument does not apply, since Footprint accounts document what is. They are not a speculation about what could be.

3) Blomqvist et al.: "...We conclude from the above and other arguments in our original paper that we would be better off discussing greenhouse gas emissions directly in terms of tons of CO₂-equivalent (and thus focus on solutions to emissions)..."

Rees and Wackernagel: Footprint research does not preclude the use of tons of carbon as a measurement unit. However, Blomqvist et al. themselves use the land-based argument that plantations could combat CO₂ accumulation in the atmosphere, thereby admitting that CO₂ sequestration is one of several competing demand on biocapacity. Hence they contradict their own argument.

4) Blomqvist et al.: "...and developing a more ecological and ecosystem process framework to capture the impacts humans currently have on the planet's natural systems..."

Rees and Wackernagel: Better frameworks may indeed be possible. But they do not currently exist.

5) Blomqvist et al.: "The appropriate scale for these indicators will in many cases be local and regional."

Rees and Wackernagel: Precisely. We agree, which is why we point out that many of the most policy-relevant Footprint applications are at the local or national scale.

6) Blomqvist et al.: "Any city, for example, would show a deficit, as it relies on food and materials from outside. That in itself, as Robert Costanza has noted, 'tells us little if anything about the sustainability of this input [from outside the region] over time.'"

Rees and Wackernagel: Obviously, large cities cannot sustain themselves from their own biocapacity. But our argument is a different one: it is that cities are running out of hinterland. We point out that not all countries can run biocapacity deficits if the world as a whole should not be in overshoot. Current economic strategies of the vast majority of countries ignore this simple fact.

Competing interests declared: I developed the Ecological Footprint method (in collaboration with William E. Rees) and am president of Global Footprint Network (www.footprintnetwork.org).

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