

Forest in the Making: The Transformation of Forested Landscapes as the Interplay of Vegetation Dynamics and Human Management Practices

This project blends the perspectives of human, historical, and evolutionary ecology to look at how forested landscapes are transformed over time through the interplay of vegetation dynamics and human management practices. I will conceptualize human-environment relations at the heart of this process in a way that permits the integration of 'natural' and 'cultural' parameters, allowing a representation of their mutual dependence in co-evolutionary scenarios which enables the diachronic modelling of the ensuing phenomena.

Specifically, I explore how the mechanics of human-environment relations escape the contrast between 'nature' and 'culture' and propose an alternative methodology which focuses on human action as a link between natural and human science perspectives. I will apply this to empirical evidence of land and resource use, especially in the tropics. As this approach generates a consistent idiom that can be used to describe and compare cases across space and time, the functional parallels and structural continuities between them become visible and the parameters of land and resource use become identifiable. Hence, it becomes possible to develop and manipulate models of subsistence and landscape change over time. What emerges as the fundamental dynamic at the heart of such change in forested landscapes is the productive dialectic between human disturbance and forest regrowth, which recurs in apparently disparate scenarios, thus demonstrating their likeness.

The subject matter and temporal dimension situate the project at the interface of ecology, anthropology, and archaeology, as it employs an ecological framework, an anthropological approach, and an archaeological angle. Indeed, it touches on the philosophy of science because it examines the notions of 'nature' and 'culture' which inform our concepts of human-environment relations.

The project relies on data from my own long-term ethnographic field research in Papua New Guinea, on the work of collaborators specialising in agroforestry worldwide, and on published material, both ethnographic and archaeological, in the field of subsistence studies. This study encompasses two book projects, both already in progress and to be realised and concluded in the course of twelve months:

- **Clearings at the Core: Principles of Tropical Rainforest Subsistence and its Lessons for Human Ecology** (monograph)
- **Cultured Trees: Transformations in Agroforestry Systems** (collection, co-edited with Diane Russell; contract signed with Berghahn).