'Environmental Leadership' and Power in Antarctic Geopolitics

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While environmental stewardship has emerged as one of the goals and main legitimating strategies for national policy towards the Antarctic in the last few decades (Antonello 2020), it has not yet been investigated how environmental credibility translates into influence and power for nation states in Antarctic politics. This project utilizes a constructivist international relations (IR) lens to explore the effects of environmental leadership claims, their domestic base, and their constitutive role for Antarctic diplomatic relations, as well as their impacts on international relationships beyond the Antarctic Treaty System. Finally, it tries to contribute to the IR subfield of global environmental politics by asking how the more-than-human, in this case Antarctic 'environments,' themselves feature in these leadership-follower relations.

Research on leadership has been the subject of much scholarship in international relations, and foreign policy analysis, as well as global environmental politics, but Young's lament that leadership is a "complex phenomenon, ill-defined, poorly understood, and subject to recurrent controversy among students of international affairs" (1991) arguably still remains valid. An important starting point is that leadership is a social and relational concept—it is the ability to attract followers, which differentiates leaders from pioneers or first-movers (Kopra 2020). Leadership appears to be an important factor in shaping as well as understanding political change, and the concept touches on related ideas such as authority, legitimacy, credibility, power, and influence, as well as identity. How does environmental leadership—the claim to be an environmental leader *for* the environment—depend on followers? What qualifies a leader, and what qualifies a follower? What role is there for the more-than-human? How can environmental leadership not just happen in Antarctic environments, or through Antarctic material and non-material resources, but *with* Antarctic ecosystems?

This project looks at two case studies at the center of human-environment-relations in Antarctic politics: first, the discussion around Marine Protected Areas, in particular the Ross Sea MPA, where questions of species and ecosystem protection as well as harvesting are negotiated between nation states, industry representatives, scientists, and environmental activists, as well as 'the marine living resources' themselves. Second, the building of infrastructure such as research stations and runways, with a focus on the Scott Base rebuild by New Zealand and the Davis Aerodrome plans by the Australian Antarctic programme where environmental impact reduction is contested as 'environmental leadership' by those who would rather see untouched ecosystems conserved instead of 'risk mitigated.' How is 'environmental

leadership' claimed here, on which expectations and recognition practices by others does it depend?

The project attempts to advance sociological role theory from IR (see Harnisch et al. 2011; Flamm 2019) through the incorporation of more-than-human agency and contributes to the study of leadership in global environmental politics as well as to critical Antarctic studies. Environmental leadership is here approached as role that allows the study of an actor's self-identification in relation to its leadership claims, as well as the expectations and recognition practices from significant and generalised others. How can the more-than-human be conceptualized as part of a socio-ecological system or assemblage? This project builds on Rosenberg's reconceptualization of the international as "the consequences of societal multiplicity" (2016) and on Corry's (2019) materialist notion of 'societal,' which allows human-natural and international dynamics to be grasped together.

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