

Biocultural Ethics and Conservation for Sustainable and Just Futures

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I have applied to the RCC 2020–21 cohort of senior fellows with the topic “Futures” with the aim to elaborate on over twenty years of work on “biocultural conservation”. In 2000, I added the term “futures” to the concept of biocultural diversity to emphasize the need for action. I proposed that: “1) biological and cultural diversity are inextricably integrated, 2) conservation of biocultural diversity needs to include [ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically] both humans and other living beings, and 3) social wellbeing and biocultural conservation go together” (Rozzi 2001,10). Later, together with a team of collaborators, I identified ten practical principles for participatory approaches to biocultural conservation, which were effective for creating the Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve (CHBR) in Chile. The creation of the CHBR from 2000 to 2005 was a process involving multiple actors, disciplines, and scales, including a close collaboration with German colleagues headed by Prof. Kurt Jax, supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Later on, in 2008, I proposed the term “biocultural homogenization” to describe processes that entail simultaneous and interrelated losses of biological and cultural diversity due to the replacement of numerous species, cultures, and native languages by a much smaller number of species, cultural habits, and cosmopolitan languages. Those processes first take place on a local and regional level before expanding rapidly on a global scale. Biocultural homogenization is driven by complex and interrelated feedback effects from the homogenization of cultural habits and biophysical, symbolic-linguistic, and institutional-infrastructural dimensions of habitats in the Anthropocene. Subsequently, in 2010 I defined the “3Hs” conceptual framework of biocultural ethics, which values the vital links among “co-in-Habitants,” their life “Habits,” and shared “Habitats.” Confronted with growing pressures of habitat degradation and land grabbing, the conservation of habitats and incorporation of traditional and evolving socio-environmental practices represents an ethical imperative to address issues of socio-environmental justice.

My goals for my RCC senior fellowship are: (1) to theoretically systematize the “3Hs” conceptual framework of biocultural ethics, and (2) to examine its implications for biocultural conservation practices that can effectively contribute to sustainable and just futures.

On a theoretical level, I plan to conduct interdisciplinary research focusing on the diversity of worldviews and environmental values in Amerindian, Asian, as well as European cultural traditions. I will contrast this biocultural diversity with currently prevailing anthropocentric, often narrow, economically

oriented decision-making processes, which override biocultural diversity and consequently eliminate options for sustainable and just futures.

On a practical level, I will also assess and propose models for implementing biocultural conservation. In 2022, we will inaugurate the Cape Horn International Center (CHIC) in Puerto Williams, at the southernmost point of Chile. CHIC will serve as the research, education, and policy center for the Cape Horn BR and at the same time as an international center for global change studies and biocultural conservation. In this context, I will collaborate with Eveline Dürr at the RCC on community-based sustainable tourism as a methodological approach to implement biocultural conservation. Additionally, together with Kurt Jax and other collaborators, we will conduct research on the UNESCO–MAB Program that aims to foster social, economic, and environmental sustainability by the creation and implementation of biosphere reserves. This approach overcomes polarized dichotomies between developers and preservationists and enables traditional and innovative, sustainable, and socio-environmental practices and policies.

In summary, having worked on biocultural conservation in Latin America for three decades, during the time of this RCC senior fellowship I will work on the integration of sciences and the humanities with the aim to contribute to sustainable, just, and bio-culturally diverse futures. In this way, I will contribute to address the Thematic Cluster Futures statement: “Western understandings of ‘the future’ are primarily based on ideas of progress and intention; but in today’s world, other understandings are needed.”