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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Knowledge encounter: multispecies perspectives on land use change in the southwestern amazon

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Abstract

This study explores how shifting knowledge regimes shape multispecies land use in the tri-national region of Madre de Dios (Peru), Acre (Brazil), and Pando (Bolivia). Moving beyond isolated interpretations of environmental change, it traces how external discourses, multispecies entanglements, and historically rooted practices have shaped contested relationships between humans, land and the forest. The research draws on epistemic mobility (Hornidge, Herbeck et al. 2020), discourse analysis (Keller 2024), and multispecies ontologies (Tsing 2015, Haraway 2016) to examine how meanings of land shift over time and space, and how forests and land themselves “think” and participate in land use knowledge creation alongside humans (Kohn 2013).

The region’s long-standing fragmented state presence and first extractive interventions were intensified by the rubber boom: a knowledge tipping point that commodified the forest and marginalised Indigenous knowledge systems (Córdoba 2019). Following the division of the region into separate nation-states and fluctuating rubber prices, land-use paths diverged in each of the countries (Stoian 2000). Contemporary developments such as the Interoceanic Highway and expanding digital access have further entangled the region in global capitalist circuits. While these knowledge shocks enabled livelihoods like ecotourism and new forms of trade, they also intensified gold mining (Swenson, Carter et al. 2011), cattle expansion (Hoelle 2015), and transnational crime (Schönenberg 2019).

Our findings show that enduring extractive discourses continue to shape monetary dependencies amid land-use and climate pressures. Multispecies actors respond to knowledge transformations through adaptive yet self-reinforcing strategies, such as migration, altered habitats, and extended livelihoods, sometimes leading to epistemicide or extinction, while humans are further engaging into informality and corruption to fulfil the modernist paradigm of progress. Yet, knowledge co-creation workshops also point to a desire for rural land-use models that merge alternative economies with sustainable extraction. Framing the Southwestern Amazon as a contested epistemic landscape, we advocate for multispecies justice perspective and governance that confronts imperial legacies, dismantles corruption, and honors plural ways of knowing and relating to land.

Keywords: Bolivia, Brazil, Knowledge Sociology, Land use change, multispecies ethnography, Peru, social tipping point, Southwestern Amazon

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