Tropentag, September 16-18, 2026, hybrid conference

"Towards multi-functional agro-ecosystems
promoting climate resilient futures"

Living *with* forests: Insights from the past into land 'use' for climate resilient ecosystems and futures

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Abstract

Land use is one of the most tangible expressions of our intensifying impact on the Earth system in the Anthropocene. This is particularly the case in the latitudinal tropics, where alterations to land cover have impacts on biodiversity, the climate, and carbon cycle which can be felt on regional and global scales. While these human-forest-Earth system relationships are key parts of a number of so-called 'Anthropocene crises' in the 21st century, their origins lie much deeper in the past. In this talk, I argue that the past is key to understanding baselines of change, feedbacks between human activities, land cover, and the Earth system, and historical path dependencies and inequalities which characterise human-forest relationships in the latitudinal tropics today. I highlight how multidisciplinary approaches to historical land use change are providing a tangible, quantitative, and contextualized bases for charting more just and resilient future courses, enabling us to test and validate scenarios of land use change and ecosystem and Earth system response. Moreover, I emphasise how archaeology, history, ethnography and, critically, amplifying the voices of Indigenous communities, can lead us to consider more diverse perspectives to our relationship with land and forests than simply 'use'. In this way the past, instead of being an anecdote, becomes a key landmark for understanding the diversity of ways people not only *have* but also *can* live with tropical ecosystems.

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