

EDITORS' FOREWORD

Contemporary Debates on Ecology, Society, and Culture in Latin America

Marianne Schmink
University of Florida

José Ramón Jouve-Martín
McGill University

For the past two decades, studies on ecology, society, and culture in Latin America have multiplied rapidly, mirroring the increasing importance of ecological and environmental debates worldwide. The environment has become the object of a multidisciplinary research endeavor in which the natural sciences, policy and technical sciences, social sciences, and humanities converge. This special issue of *Latin American Research Review* brings together some of today's most innovative social science and humanities research on environmental issues in Latin America and aims to make it more widely known to scholars working in other fields of Latin American studies and to the public at large. Contributors come from such diverse disciplines as political science, geography, history, anthropology, and literary studies and adopt a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. From a geographical perspective, we have tried to be as broad as possible in our selection of articles to give readers a sense of contemporary environmental discussions in different parts of Latin America. Articles in this volume deal with Chile, Peru, Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, and particularly Brazil, which receives special attention because of its important role in contemporary conservation and environmental debates. Cases examined range from islands and aquatic environments to rain forests, agricultural fields, and protected conservation areas, from the rural-urban interface to the arenas of international policy making.

Latin America's historical dependency on natural resources, both for local livelihoods and to supply an evolving global market, has made environmental issues central in policy debates and in widespread contests over the meaning and use of natural species and habitats, carried out against the region's persistent legacy of inequality. Many scholars of Latin America have addressed these complex issues from the perspective of economic development and globalization, but perhaps less so through the lens of environmental conservation. Yet the two are intertwined. Conservation of protected areas has grown worldwide, as has the mobilization of citizens at different levels, often in unlikely alliances, to propose new, alternative models for the governance of natural resources that incorporate diverse perspectives and stakeholders in often complex transactions. As conservation has become internationalized, these debates have meshed with the development concerns long of interest to scholars of Latin American studies, through parallel streams

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of literature such as cultural ecology, environmental justice, political ecology, and environmental discourse.

Historical transformations in global economic, institutional, and ideological forces, as they play out in local and regional contests over resources and territories, underlie the complex ecological, social, and cultural relationships analyzed in this issue. These transformations take place within the framework of the region's global history, including the persistent legacy of inequality and changing responses to it at different times and places. Under current conditions of globalization, dominated by market-driven neoliberal policies, the distribution of benefits and costs among social groups in Latin America from both development and conservation has only worsened. At the same time, the growth of cross-scale socioenvironmental social movements and the increasing attention to alternative energy and development policies as a result of the global economic crisis have broadened the frame of both action and discourse at international forums. The articles gathered in this special issue focus on the environment as a contested domain of markets, livelihoods, rights, and identities, within a context of globalization, commodification of nature, inequality, and contestation. To frame the articles, it is useful to consider how paradigms of conservation and of development have evolved in complex and intertwined ways over the past two centuries (Mulder and Coppolillo 2005). In tandem with ideas and approaches to development, paradigms of conservation also have moved through distinct historical phases, whose goals, approaches, and protagonists are depicted in simplistic form in table 1.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, alongside the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of global capitalism, the earliest concerns with the protection of nature led to the setting aside of natural areas to be protected from human exploitation. Yellowstone National Park, created in 1870, became the icon of this top-down, protectionist approach to conservation, which has persisted to the present in different degrees. Other strands of conservation thinking that took a more utilitarian approach—protecting natural resources because of their usefulness to people—emerged in tandem with the postwar development boom and the modernization paradigm that was particularly important in emerging Latin American nations. Such instrumental perspectives on nature—reconceptualized as natural resources of use to humans—went hand in hand with the development of more efficient, scientific production systems and with the growing conversion of nature itself into commodities for the world market.

By the postwar period, Latin American economists were producing important critiques of the impacts of modernization on poverty, on social justice, and on center-periphery relations (Furtado 1967; Prebisch 1950), and by the 1970s, Latin American intellectuals had articulated dependency theory, arguing that the poverty of countries in the periphery of the world system was not because of their lack of integration into the world system but because of their disadvantaged position in market interactions with wealthy nations (Cardoso and Faletto 1972; Frank 1970). These influential theories led Latin American nations to seek a more autonomous development strategy based on industrialization rather than the export of raw materials in exchange for manufactured imports.

Further major shifts in conservation paradigms took place in the 1970s and

Table 1 *Changing Paradigms of Conservation and Development*

Period	Phases	Goals	Approaches	Protagonists
1870s– 1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial Revolution • Political independence • <i>National parks</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalist production • <i>Preservation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraction substitution • <i>Protection</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalists and workers • <i>Elites and professional land managers</i>
Postwar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development • <i>Scientific management</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth • <i>Sustained yields</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernization • <i>Utilitarian</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elites and technicians • <i>Professional managers</i>
1970s– 1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependency • Social justice, gender • <i>Global conservation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous development • Equity • <i>Protected areas</i> • <i>Sustainable development</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Import substitution industries • Participatory • <i>Integrated</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periphery • Women, poor • <i>Big NGOs</i> • <i>UN Brundtland report, 1987</i>
1990s– present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • Economic crisis • Social movements • Emerging nations • <i>Climate change</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalist markets • Alternative development • Multilateralism • <i>Reduce greenhouse gases</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neoliberal • Structural adjustment • Devolution • Green markets • <i>Environmental services</i> • REDD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalists, multinational corporations, World Trade Organization • Local people • World Social Forum • <i>Big NGOs, United Nations</i>

Note: Development paradigm phases are shown in boldface; conservation paradigm phases are shown in italics.

1980s. Conservation concerns became globalized through the United Nations and the emergence of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with the environment, linked together in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which represents more than two hundred government organizations and eight hundred NGOs in 140 countries. Many countries rapidly expanded the number of protected natural areas during this period, often using a command-and-control strategy based on the U.S. model of national parks, but such lands in Latin America and elsewhere often were inhabited by traditional peoples whose informal and collective land tenure institutions were invisible to

outsiders. The conflicts that arose from the displacement and repression of these local populations generated a growing wave of resistance to conservation initiatives, as well as a burgeoning literature on people and parks that was critical of top-down conservation initiatives (Wells, Brandon, and Hannah 1992; West and Brechin 1991). At the same time, the influential 1987 Brundtland report (*Our Common Future*) articulated and popularized the first comprehensive statement calling for “sustainable development”—or the integration of development goals with environmental concerns.

The growing dominance of neoliberal policies and a new wave of globalization in the 1990s, exemplified in the World Trade Organization, led to increasing resistance by environmental justice movements in emerging nations and complex new forms of cross-scale partnership, such as the World Social Forum and the Via Campesina, sites of ongoing contestation of global development paradigms under U.S. hegemony (Deere and Royce 2009). A multitude of alternative local initiatives were linked to global fair trade and “green” niche markets. By the twenty-first century, sustainability—an elusive and abstract concept—had emerged as a catchword that united the increasingly intertwined competing paradigms of conservation and development. The sudden explosion of global concern with climate change after 2005 overshadowed the myriad unresolved problems from earlier periods, as the global system shifted resources to focus on complex market-driven strategies to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases through compensation for environmental services, most recently packaged as proposals for Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD).

The articles in this special issue address the impacts of the complex evolution of these paradigms in different places and periods of Latin America. Given the emphasis on historical change, it is fitting that the issue begin with two different approaches to environmental history. Stuart McCook’s “The Neo-Columbian Exchange: The Second Conquest of the Greater Caribbean, 1720–1930” addresses the distinct transformations in global commodity trade that took place in the post-colonial period (leading up to the first phase depicted in table 1). Retaking the arguments behind the classic book by Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (1972), McCook focuses on the social and environmental transformations that took place afterward in the Caribbean, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Increasingly driven by commodity-led economic development, changes during this period often were mediated by emergent national and transnational scientific institutions. These changes expanded the Caribbean region’s global connections as far as Asia and the Pacific, introducing new organisms (people, plants, animals, and pathogens), technological innovations, and environmental transformations that resulted in dramatic changes to the Caribbean social and natural landscapes in the initial postcolonial period.

Myrna Santiago’s “The Huasteca Rain Forest: An Environmental History” expands the historical frame as far back as the Paleolithic period to offer another example of commodity-induced environmental change beginning in the early twentieth century. She retraces the transformations of the Huasteca Rain Forest in Veracruz, a region in the northeastern part of Mexico centered on the Pánuco River watershed that became an important extraction site for the Mexican oil in-

dustry in the early twentieth century. Santiago shows the persistence of forests through long periods and extensive political changes, looking beyond the short-term framework of markets to measure the larger trends and patterns of transformation in the relationships between human societies and the environment visible only in the *longue durée*.

The next article to appear in this special issue addresses commodification, environmental justice, and social inequality as applied to the underexplored topic of Latin American aquatic and marine environments. Focused on the fin-fish aquaculture industry in Chile, John Soluri's "Something Fishy: Chile's Blue Revolution, Commodity Diseases, and the Problem of Sustainability" combines environmental history with commodity chain analysis to explore the more recent expansion of commodity markets for aquatic resources. Noting parallels with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century expansion of agro-export commodities in Latin America, Soluri analyzes strategies of industry expansion and capital accumulation during the most recent period that exploit existing socioeconomic inequalities while ducking environmental risks.

More recent trends also are the focus of Karl S. Zimmerer's article "'Conservation Booms' with Agricultural Growth? Sustainability and Shifting Environmental Governance in Latin America, 1985–2008 (Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia)," which examines conservation trends in those five countries. As Zimmerer points out, protected natural areas in Latin America have rapidly expanded since 1985 both in number and in total covered area to the point that the region now contributes almost 15 percent of global coverage, with almost 3,500 sites and covering more than 1.2 million square miles. This unprecedented growth has far surpassed the estimated increase of agricultural land use over the same period and has brought with it an enormous expansion of civil and state institutions and agencies devoted to environmental governance. In his article, Zimmerer explores the shift among Latin American countries from the set-aside model of Yellowstone National Park to an approach that recognizes the territorial rights of local populations who contested the creation of these exclusionary units, especially since the 1980s. Moreover, he aims to explain the seemingly counterintuitive fact that the conservation boom in the region took place under predominant neoliberal governments, which are frequently accused of the commodification of nature. With recent national political shifts toward the center-left, support for conservation has become less certain and more contested, especially with the monopolization of attention and resources, at a variety of levels, and is oriented toward environmental services payments, particularly the carbon trade.

The issue of environmental governance is in turn linked to the broader political and ideological issue of what Ben Orlove, Renzo Taddei, Guillermo Podestá, and Kenneth Broad call environmental citizenship, an idea that has usually been understood as the conviction that we are an integral part of our environment, but one that they connect to classical definitions of citizenship to also cover "the position of individuals within political collectivities that are constituted in part through their connections to territories with specific environmental characteristics." In "Environmental Citizenship in Latin America: Climate, Intermediate Organizations, and Political Subjects," they focus on the various levels of access

to weather information and climate forecasts in three different regions and their link to specific areas of political, economic, and environmental activity: commercial agriculture in the Argentine pampas, fisheries off the Peruvian coast, and water management in the semiarid northeast of Brazil. They set out to explore, in these diverse sites, to what extent climate information is an economic good or a political, social, or cultural right freely available to all citizens, thus revealing the mechanisms of unequal access to such information.

Marianne Schmink further addresses the dilemmas of environmental citizenship in her article "Forest Citizens: Changing Life Conditions and Social Identities in the Land of the Rubber Tappers." Schmink focuses on the history of the rubber-tapper movement in Acre, Brazil, and the emergence of the concept of *florestania*, a word that combines the Portuguese word for forest (*floresta*) and the word for citizenship (*cidadania*). According to Schmink, *florestania* expressed the state government's goal of drawing on its unique cultural identity, rooted in the defense of the forest environment, to promote development based on improved use of the forest. Her article explores how the newly invented ethical-political field embodied in the notion of *florestania* emerged from the historical specificities, the situated struggles, and the cultural tapestry of Acre and its unique "locality" in an increasingly globalized world. Encompassing both neoliberal and participatory models of citizenship, *florestania* effectively served to manage social differences and to depoliticize social movement struggles by extending social rights, especially in the capital city of Rio Branco, and by absorbing grassroots organizations and leaders as active participants in the project.

The intersection of traditional (i.e., scientific and institutional) environmental discourses with social, political, and even religious narratives is at the center of Candace Slater's "Geoparks and Geostories: Ideas of Nature Underlying the UNESCO Araripe Basin Project and Contemporary 'Folk' Narratives." Drawing from institutional documentation and field interviews, Slater sets out to analyze how these two different sets of narratives describe the (sacred) geography of the Araripe Basin Geopark, the first such geological preserve in the Americas. Although the two sets of narratives diverge, she points out that "both treat the natural world as ancient, fluid, composed of interrelated elements, mysterious, and deeply worthy of protection." These shared conceptions allow for the possibility of establishing a translation or dialogue between them, which, in her opinion, could contribute to the formulation of sustainable tourism policies, thus preserving the region's geological and cultural heritage while bringing economic benefits to the local population.

As in other parts of the world, conservation and climate change currently are at the center of the policy and research agenda in Latin America. The last article of this special issue, Anthony Hall's "Getting REDD-y: Conservation and Climate Change in Latin America," analyzes the rise of interest in environmental services and their significance for conservation policy in the region. Key among them is carbon sequestration, one of the few environmental services for which there is already an emerging world market. This market is set to be further developed in the framework of the UN collaborative program Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD), which, as its name

indicates, aims to generate the requisite transfer flow of resources to significantly reduce global emissions from deforestation and forest degradation through the use of financial and market mechanisms. The discussion of carbon, and REDD, is timely as the international community prepares for the expiration of the Kyoto protocol in 2012.

The hope of many of those concerned with forest conservation in Latin America is that the Kyoto protocol will be extended to include REDD, so that the carbon trade can be used as a mechanism to preserve standing forests, not just plantations (which may actually replace natural forests with much less biodiverse forests) as in the current agreement. However, as Hall points out, "incorporating potential REDD income flows to support conservation policy raises a number of issues that must be considered in both their economic and their sociopolitical dimensions." Prominent among those issues are the need to create the necessary legal framework to regulate payments, the problem of distributing REDD funds among the various stakeholders, the risk of displacing illegal activities from protected to unprotected areas, the impact of REDD on the existing carbon market, and the technical difficulty of establishing effective assessments (Karsenty 2008; Wunder, Engel, and Pagiola 2008).

Hall's sobering discussion of REDD underscores the growing importance of global policy debates for future conservation and development trends in Latin America. In the twenty-first century, environmental goods and services, and nature itself, increasingly are at the center of global contests and international negotiations and contestation, with ever-wider implications for the livelihoods, territories, rights, identities, and futures of populations in the diverse corners of Latin America. We hope that this issue will not only synthesize some of the most relevant work on Latin American environmental studies today but also help inspire groundbreaking research to continue to address these pressing concerns in the future.

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