Commentary

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Introduction

In this concluding commentary, we have been asked to give an "outsider's view" through our disciplines of geography and political science of the overall objective of the book, that is, how an anthropological perspective can further our understanding of the diversity of environmental communication (see Sjölander-Lindqvist, chapter "Introduction"). Based on the eight studies in the book, we ask: To what extent do we, from our different disciplines, read or interpret the texts in similar or different ways?

As a geographer and a political scientist, we have an understanding similar to the one highlighted by editor Sjölander-Lindqvist in the book's introduction, namely that any situation where there may be divergent

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understandings regarding land, places, and living beings should be approached as contingent and embedded in contexts of interacting interests, values, short- and long-term objectives, ideologies, and particular norms of those concerned.

However, these types of nested situations may, despite a similar understanding, be interpreted in quite different ways depending on the discipline and the theoretical underpinnings in focus but also on methodological choices. Social sciences have many overlapping theoretical and methodological approaches; in fact, the different disciplines are inspired by similar ideas about society developed by scholars all the way from Hegel to Habermas. Depending on the discipline and subfield, geography, for example, contributes an analytical perspective on the spatial effects of human–environment interaction. Political science, for example, includes the study of institutions, governance, politics, democratic representation, and participation. Anthropology, which underpins this book, studies human experience; this includes the exploration of the worldviews, ways of life, and forms of knowledge surrounding human environmental existence, as Sjölander-Lindqvist states in the introduction. What unites anthropology, geography, and political science is their focus on power and its structuring effects. However, this unity is challenged by the lack of a common language and common definitions of key concepts between disciplines. In retrospect, after reading the various chapters of this book, we acknowledge the need to move beyond disciplinary comfort zones in order to engage productively with the different perspectives and contributions that each field has to offer.

Environmental communication, which is a truly interdisciplinary research field, may in that sense have the potential to bridge the gap, not only between science and society but also between our different disciplines. In its extension, environmental communication may thus contribute to advancing the understanding of the interplay of the environment and political, economic, social, and cultural factors in practice, but also to advancing the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical positions of the different disciplines. We will return to this point at the end of our commentary.

One of the overarching aspects that we have identified among the various chapters of the book is what can be defined as the need to establish a dialogue between the many different "ways of seeing" the world by the

different groups and actors. This requires a much more fundamental sensitivity toward contexts and cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors, including spiritual factors. It is fundamentally important to prevent what Joosse et al. refer to as "discursive colonization" (2020, p. 6), that is, "the reproduction of the interests of the powerful through certain narrowly defined forms of knowledge and scholarship" (Stoffle, chapter "Cultural Transmission in Slovak Mountain Regions: Local Knowledge as Symbolic Argumentation" of this book).

We see that many of the texts in this book carry this sensitivity. We also see the present and future of the local communities and places presented through these eight cases as being challenged by various types of "modernization processes" coming from a profit-seeking perspective that don't seem to leave the local communities better off. Social change, power, and identity are at the core of these processes, and the ongoing various ways of trying to handle environmental communication. In many of the cases, environment, climate change, and adaptation are the emperor's new clothes for exercising power and control over environmental resources, landscapes, and ultimately profit making.

Environmental communication is also exercise of power. The many mandatory requirements of planning and licensing processes, often ambitious in terms of participatory processes, local involvement, and so on, are good examples of *how* environmental communication is or may be carried out, as part of exercising power. For example, while Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (EIAs) are required in many countries as a tool in the planning processes of larger environmental and landscape interventions, they too often fail to fulfill their function, or become part of further power and communicative structures, creating conflicts and further injustice as a result (Stoffle & Minnis, 2008; Stoffle et al., 2013). Also, the cheapest bids for carrying out the EIAs often win, and the quality of some of these processes may be questioned. Furthermore, these planning processes and legal requirements in many cases do not include social impacts, which in turn may lead to power struggles and the mobilization of people, actions, and resources through, and as a part of, environmental communication (Eckerd, 2017). In the following part we will, based on our reading of the chapters, highlight four different aspects of these power struggles and mobilizations of people.

Attempts to Decolonize Land While Challenging Modernization

Several of the chapters in this book highlight the role of environmental communication as a tool among Indigenous Peoples around the world in processes of decolonization and struggles for self-determination. Indigenous Peoples have, with varying degrees of success, reclaimed histories and cultures that have been ignored or misinterpreted by researchers and land managers in order to reconnect to traditional lands. However, as highlighted by Van Vlack (chapter "Dancing with Lava: Indigenous Interactions with an Active Volcano in Arizona"), in other places it may be an ongoing struggle which, as part of decolonization processes, also tends to question modernization in terms of its ethnocentric or even Eurocentric worldview.

The empirical case of the Southern Paiute people near the Little Springs Lava Flow in northern Arizona, USA, is illustrative as a case where there exist differences in interpretation of the landscape and its uses over time between Indigenous People on the one hand, and researchers and land managers on the other. While it may be difficult to bridge between different epistemologies in this specific case, Van Vlack suggests that, instead of continuing to exclude the Southern Paiute people from the governance and management of the area, one solution could be to open these processes up to multiple voices. Environmental communication could then be used to further explore the landscape and its use while at the same time promoting social learning.

The case study of the Iliamna Lake Central Yup'ik Place Name Project in Southwest Alaska in the chapter "Community Voices, Practices, and Memories in Environmental Communication: Iliamna Lake Yup'ik Place Names, Alaska" by Kugo is an illustrative example of this type of learning process, where the recognition of indigenous place names not only empowers the Indigenous population but it may also contribute to improved relationships between Indigenous Peoples and, for example, authorities in terms of communication needs.

Despite the many good examples in the book, the chapters also confirm that more or less mandatory tools for assessing consequences of new land utilization, such as EIAs, generally lack the tools to take multigenerational experiences, oral narratives, and local knowledge into consideration. The planning tools often rely on a specific type of knowledge and use very narrow time perspectives. As the EIAs often are carried out by

competing consultancy companies, the cheapest bid often wins. In one recent example from wind energy development, two separate areas in Norway had their EIAs carried out in a total of three days according to their own records. These investigations "are so insufficient, they are almost without value," a county governor representative stated (Thunold et al., 2021, trans. Katrina Rønningen). In the chapter "Living Stone Bridges: Epistemological Divides in Heritage Environmental Communication," Stoffle demonstrates how understandings of landscape are based in long-term interaction with the environment, which is a feature of communication that is also discussed by Sjölander-Lindqvist in the chapter "Arsenic Fields: Community Understandings of Risk, Place, and Landscape."

In other words, very short-term observations may be used as a basis for decisions with profound consequences. These processes, which are sometimes designated as "neo-colonialism" or "green colonialism," largely fail to take different ways of knowing into consideration. Anthropological methods on the other hand, often based on long-term field work, may through their methodology provide an alternative approach that is sorely needed.

Hence, environmental communication could be one way of including and integrating local and indigenous knowledge. However, this also requires a more thought-through planning process, more funding, and another type of competence, namely anthropology, to be able to map land use properly. Another approach would be to insist that new activities in an area need to operate according to seasonal movements. Rhythm analysis, for example, may allow for multifunctional and multipurpose use, and a way to integrate many various needs, wishes, and purposes (Flemsæter et al., 2019). The exploration of place names may reveal environmental and spatial information, but also emphasize the temporal and spiritual relationships between the people and the land (Kugo, chapter "Community Voices, Practices, and Memories in Environmental Communication: Iliamna Lake Yup'ik Place Names, Alaska").

Acknowledgment of a Diversity of Thoughts

While several global assessments such as IPBES (2018, 2019) and the Global Environmental Outlook (2019) have opened themselves up to the idea that we live on one planet, but in multiple worlds, the society–nature dichotomy is still the prevailing way in which states and societies are organized (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al., 2020). Indigenous worldviews and

different understandings and conceptions of nature, as well as society–nature relations are rarely acknowledged in practice, and when they are, it is often an add-on to existing environmental policy, programs, or projects, instead of being in epistemological parity with them.

The case of Living Stone Bridges by Stoffle (chapter "Living Stone Bridges: Epistemological Divides in Heritage Environmental Communication") illustrates this very well in what is defined as discursive colonization having an effect both on what type of knowledge, and thus also who is recognized and involved, and on what grounds, in the governance and management of protected areas.

The same pattern is repeated all over the world, including cases where Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is recognized, such as at the Laponia World Heritage site in Sweden. TEK is acknowledged, but not on its own terms; instead it is for the sake of biodiversity (Reimerson, 2015), for example. Since indigenous conceptions of nature vary, as each ethnic group has their own way of envisioning nature and understanding the relations that come with it, an appreciation of TEK also requires an appreciation of diversity in thought, worldviews, and values (Berkes, 2012).

Environmental communication could play an important role as a bridge between different worldviews—both between scientific disciplines and in particular as a kind of mediator between different ways of knowing. Furthermore, while acknowledging TEK, which often is holistic and not constructed on the basis of the society–nature dichotomy and other modern dichotomies like body and spirit, we may be able to—in collaboration—develop what is often called for: more encompassing and holistic views on the governance and management of the environment.

Exploitation and Commodification of Natural Resources and Knowledge

Developing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), local, indigenous knowledge and language into a "business model" that local and indigenous groups can monetize is one optimistic approach. Crucial knowledge of many types of land use and management could be gathered into maps, GISs, and GPSs. This could potentially increase these communities' social capital, making them and their knowledge relevant through a modernizing process. But if that happens, then crucial cultural heritage is commodified, ushering in all the problems associated with that. Still, what is the alternative? Will purist approaches keep them irrelevant?

There is potential for both conserving and using indigenous and local knowledge by commodifying it. It may give this knowledge a function in contemporary society. As demonstrated by Murin (chapter "Cultural Transmission in Slovak Mountain Regions: Local Knowledge as Symbolic Argumentation"), this is dependent on TEK being shared across generations. This transmission of knowledge is challenged by modernization processes, as we can see from Murin's case study of remote mountainside settlements in Central Slovakia, where the change and abandonment of traditional land-use practices, due to outmigration to urban centers and aging rural populations, has implications for the ability of the local community to manage community-based agricultural resources and protect the cultural landscape.

However, there are numerous examples where the commodification of indigenous knowledge, plants, and other resources leaves nothing to the communities that developed or traditionally utilized and survived upon them, except for the knowledge that they have been robbed. Intellectual property rights and patent rights are part of this. The core issue here is how to both protect and monetize cultural heritage. Commodification involves a high risk of exploitation by outsiders—who owns it, and who has the right to exploit it?

The MBT Maasai sandal is one such example. As a reaction, the Maasai Intellectual Property Initiative Trust educates the community about the value of their brand and hires lawyers "to persuade multinational companies to recognize the Maasai trademark—and pay for it" (Pilling, 2018). Intellectual property rights, patents, and so on comprise a huge and difficult industry in themselves, dealing with which requires resources that many small (indigenous) communities do not have.

Another example of what are termed processes of communicative struggles is the chapter "Power, Conflicts, and Environmental Communication in the Struggles for Water Justice in Rural Chile: Insights from the Epistemologies of the South and the Anthropology of Power" by Alarcón. Questioning the very nature of property rights and to what extent it is possible or even morally right to exploit common goods such as water, Alarcón shows how environmental communication becomes entangled with everyday production of epistemologies and thus cannot be understood without taking this into consideration. Environmental communication may thus be used to understand power struggles and conflicts, but it may also be understood as shaping these struggles and as such be a double-edged sword.

Risk Communication, Perception, and Agency

Risk communication is a crucial part of environmental communication. The story told by Sjölander-Lindqvist in the chapter "Arsenic Fields: Community Understandings of Risk, Place, and Landscape," describing arsenic fields left by copper mining in Sweden, how local residents negotiate the meaning of place, and how identity and loyalty are important to the place, is in many ways touching. At the same time, it reminds us that, for a large part of the world's population, there is no way out. How do you then deal with information on environmental risk to very poor people with no alternatives in highly contaminated areas, which, if you take it seriously, will set severe limitations on practically all activities—from having children to eating the produce from the land. And if we take it one step further: How do we all relate to the communication on climate change that is altering the entire world?

Concluding Remarks

While reading this book from the perspectives of geography and political science, we have recognized the need to identify the many "ways of seeing" the world, which requires sensitivity toward contexts and cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors, but also acknowledging the need to include different "ways of knowing" in order to be able to admit and potentially integrate different ontologies and epistemologies. Finally, and from our specific perspectives, we would like to highlight the need to also acknowledge different "ways of doing"; in other words, how to turn the different ways of seeing and knowing into legitimate regulations, processes, institutions, and legal frameworks for the potential sharing of benefits and burdens linked to natural resources and places.

In the chapter "'The Sea Has No Boundaries': Collaboration and Communication Between Actors in Coastal Planning on the Swedish West Coast," Larsson and Sjölander-Lindqvist highlight this particular need in order to understand the processes of environmental communication and how they are or become embedded in institutions and guide the interaction between actors in specific institutional settings.

More specifically, ways of doing can be understood as different modes of governance and management (see also Mårald et al., 2017), where collaborative governance, as in the case of coastal planning, requires navigating a context where power is distributed across diverse societal subsystems

and among many actors with different ways of knowing, ideas, and desired benefits. To be able to handle such complex socio-ecological realities, mutual interactions and learning across social levels are key. Environmental communication may, as we have seen in this book, contribute to bridging this gap by integrating different ways of knowing. Not the least, environmental communication, with its strong links to and further developed within anthropology, may also contribute to bridging the gap between the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical positions of our different disciplines by "further[ing] our understanding of […] the different ways people—verbally and non-verbally—communicate about and with their surrounding environments" (Sjölander-Lindqvist, chapter "Introduction", p. 2).

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