

Chapter 17

(Re)Imagining the Relationship Between Society and Nature in Northern Chilean Patagonia: Encounters and (Mis) Encounters with the Modern World



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Abstract In this chapter, we examine the emergence of alternative ways for inhabiting the territory of Southern Chile which invite us to consider that other models of living are possible. First, we compare Indigenous and Western paradigms for sustainability. This serves as a framework through which we can then evaluate different alternative living projects. We document and describe three local community projects that are being developed in the mountainous area of the Araucanía region, which have raised awareness through a profound transformation of the way people relate to nature, to each other, and to themselves. The three projects are as follows: (1) a community project that recreates Mesoamerican Indigenous practices; (2) the *Waldorf* Educational Project, which represents a pedagogical counterproposal developed by the European spiritual thinker Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925); and (3) permaculture projects that seek other, new forms of food production through a close link with nature. We observe that although these projects open paths, they also present limitations and contradictions to re-imagining our relationship with the world. We suggest that in order to respond to the current multidimensional crisis we must construct new forms of living that break away from the dualistic ways of thinking that we have inherited from modernity.

Keywords Patagonia · Human-nature relationships · Indigenous practices · Waldorf pedagogy · Permaculture

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T. Gale-Detrich et al. (eds.), *Tourism and Conservation-based Development in the Periphery*, Natural and Social Sciences of Patagonia,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38048-8_17

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17.1 Introduction

17.1.1 *Spaces of Opposition in Northern Chilean Patagonia*

Contemporary times are characterized by the confluence of multiple crises, with the ecological crisis gaining relevance as evidenced by environmental degradation and the increasingly dire consequences of climate change on ecosystems and their biodiversity (IPCC 2021; Magnan et al. 2021). This situation has led the scientific world to identify the *Anthropocene* as a new geological era characterized by the role of humans as a transforming force of nature of global and geological scope, influencing the dynamics, and stability of ecosystems and their components (Svampa 2019). The responses of the modern state to the crisis have been to incorporate sustainability criteria in its policies that allow adjusting economic development models considering the preservation of the environment, goods, and services (Reyes-Guillén et al. 2018). However, these institutionalized sustainability efforts, generally derived from international pronouncements and agreements, have been insufficient to respond to the current situation of the planet. For example, we have exceeded by 74% the capacity of ecosystems to regenerate the natural goods that sustain life, thus exacerbating multiple social and political tensions, pushing the global system toward unknown changes (Rockström et al. 2009).

The above-described planetary situation reverberates in the Patagonia of Southern Chile. Forestry plantations (mainly of exotic trees such as pine and eucalyptus) have been driven by public policies that favor big capital, triggering socio-ecological conflicts in the territory, such as lack of access and land rights for Indigenous communities, elimination of native forests, water scarcity, food insecurity, and migration of peasants to urban areas (e.g., Carte et al. 2021; McNamara et al. 2021). At the same time, Chilean Patagonia has received an important migratory flow from the country's main urban centers, a flow characterized by young adults seeking to reinvent their ways of life in spaces associated with natural amenities (Hidalgo and Zunino 2012): a process that is sometimes associated with a deeper reinvention of their being and their relationship with others (Zunino et al. 2016; Zunino and Huilifñir 2017; Mardones and Zunino 2019).

In this chapter, we examine the emergence of alternative ways for inhabiting the territory of Southern Chile which invite us to consider that other models of living are possible. First, we compare and contrast Indigenous and Western paradigms for sustainability. This serves as a framework through which we can then evaluate different alternative living projects. We will document and describe three local community projects that are being developed in the mountainous area of the Araucanía region, which have raised awareness through a profound transformation of the way people relate to nature, to each other, and to themselves. The three projects are as follows: (1) a community project that recreates Mesoamerican Indigenous practices; (2) the *Waldorf* Educational Project, which represents a pedagogical counterproposal developed by the European spiritual thinker Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925); and (3) permaculture projects that seek other, new, forms of food production through

a close link with nature. We observe that although these projects open paths, they also present limitations and contradictions to re-imagine our relationship with the world. We argue that these community initiatives are commendable and provide a first step but are insufficient to transform broader social scales. We suggest that in order to respond to the current multidimensional crisis produced from modernity, we must construct new forms of living, based on a rupture with the dualistic ways of thinking that commodify nature, generating the illusion of having an infinite economy in a finite world. This mechanistic illusion intertwines a model of domination and technical exploitation, dissociated from society and culture, which serves the reproduction of this hegemonic model and its mechanisms of power, knowledge, and being.

17.2 Theoretical Framework

17.2.1 *The Depth of the Current Crisis and the Limits of Institutionalized Efforts*

Contemporary times are characterized by a growing concern for the degradation of nature: forest fires of unprecedented size, extreme temperatures, mass extinction of species, melting glaciers, to name a few disasters that face us to an uncertain and catastrophic future (IPCC 2021). This ecological crisis has gone beyond the sphere of universities and academia to colonize everyday spaces, where climate change and global warming are recurring topics of conversation. The English newspaper *The Guardian* graphs this situation in all its intensity:

The signs of change are becoming more frequent in Sicily, where in August a monitoring station in the south-eastern city of Syracuse recorded a temperature of 48.8 °C, the highest ever set in Europe. Data collected by the Balkans and Caucasus observatory put the average temperature rise on the island over the past 50 years at almost 2 °C, rising to 3.4 °C in Messina on the north-east coast (Tondo 2021, para. 13).

The crisis we face as humanity is not only ecological, but interferes with four fundamental dimensions of community life: it is a *social crisis*, in that it manifests itself as a fracturing of society through racism, oppression, and marginalization of people; it is a *cultural crisis*, represented by the deployment of individualism, consumerism, and materialism in different spheres of our lives; it is an *economic crisis*, in that only a few people are owners of the means of production and global wealth; and it is a *political crisis*, marked by the elimination of spaces for deliberation, participation, self-determination, and emancipation of people and societies (Giraldo 2014; Segato 2013). This multidimensional crisis crosses all spheres of reproduction of life, thus transforming itself into a civilizational crisis with its root in modern logic. Under this paradigm, the *Self* is reduced to a point that it reflects on an external world that is alien to it, forgetting that the existence of the *Self* is only possible

through an inter-corporal relationship with everything else: that is, in the link with other plant-bodies, other animal-bodies, other water-bodies (Giraldo 2012). Accordingly, several works define this hegemonic model as epistemi-cidal, eco-cidal, agro-cidal, and communitari-cidal, insofar as it proposes a homogeneous global society disconnected from local community logics, breaking the singularity of the local, of culture, to establish a (single) hegemonic and homogeneous way of life that can be controlled globally (Agoglia 2012; Giraldo 2012).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, concepts such as sustainability and resilience have been constructed as an institutional response to the crisis; multi-scale strategies designed and applied by governments and international organizations in the search for economic development models that can bring together elements of environmental and social equity (Reyes-Guillén et al. 2018). The accepted concept of Sustainable Development (SD) aims to enable the satisfaction of the needs of this generation without compromising the satisfaction of the needs of future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). The notion of resilience has emerged in parallel to the concept of sustainability and focuses on the amount of change that a system can undergo without losing its functions and structure. When considering social-ecological systems, the definition of resilience broadens to incorporate the capacity of the social system to organize and increase its ability to adapt to changing conditions in the socio-economic and natural environment (Folke et al. 2010, 2021).

The present circumstances we are experiencing, with accelerated climatic and environmental collapse, show the limitations of these institutionalized strategies. Between 1970 and 2016, in tandem with the emergence of the concepts of sustainability and SD, a global average of 68% of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish became extinct, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean. So, after more than 50 years of the SD paradigm and a model based on indefinite economic growth, the concept of sustainability is being questioned for its inability to respond to the problems associated with the style of development that prevails in the world today (Herrera 2020). From these traditional sustainability discourses, problems can be solved only within the current scheme of thinking, with an exacerbated reliance on technology as the only solution to environmental and climate problems (e.g., Østergaard et al. 2020). Recent research aims to explore actions and conceptual tools that are radically different from the classical approaches to SD. This exploration becomes relevant when we recognize that the continuity of our civilization, based on capitalist forms of appropriating nature and human beings, has become unsustainable due to the lack of resilience of social and ecological systems (Bennett 2016; Ceballos et al. 2017).

17.2.2 *Beyond Sustainability*

From the perspective of Servigne and Stevens (2015), new adaptive actions must be advanced in anticipation of collapse. This implies an extraordinary effort to holistically understand and interpret, based on evidence, creativity, and imagination, in order to emancipate ourselves from our current capitalist dependence and embrace a holistic, radical, and systemic socio-technical transition. From a critical perspective of sustainability, in order to think of alternative ways of relating to each other and to our environment, it is central to overcome the cognitive separation between theory and practices, between the object and the subject, shifting attention to human beings and the way we construct realities from our experiences and stories. In this way, we recognize social movements, disputes, and actions as alternatives to modern hegemony, which question and build new ways of living, amalgamating the material, the human, and the natural with the spiritual, validating other frameworks of production and reproduction of life (Escobar 2011, 2012, 2019).

In particular, the Latin American decolonial perspective proposes the implementation of methodologies that allow us to value and consider *other ways of knowing*, encouraging a political model that seeks to change the terms and conditions of conversation between European knowledge, local knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge (Mignolo 2003; Robbins 2006; Restrepo and Rojas 2010). In recent years, a significant number of initiatives have arisen aimed at constructing spaces for thought and practice based on the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples of the continent, inviting us to think about the “pluriverse,” where multiple forms of knowledge are possible (Escobar 2019; De La Cadena 2010; De Sousa 2010; Gudynas 2011). These efforts are oriented toward the construction of a relational ontology that allows us to overcome the abyss that separates us from the world, reconnecting us with nature and other human beings. Indigenous groups do not artificially separate nature and people; instead, they focus on holistic thinking and the relations and interdependencies between people and the environment. Social-ecological systems approaches attempt to do the same, but from a Western perspective.

This interweaving of different kinds of knowledge is hampered by the difficulties we modern researchers have in experiencing connections with our own natural and social environments. For more than 500 years, scientific thinking has colonized our practices, positioning us as passive observers of a reality that is alien to us. For Indigenous peoples, knowledge is revealed through an inner journey in which the person relates to a cosmic whole, based on his or her experience with their place and territory. This inner journey toward knowledge is part of a collective identity that is articulated around Pachamama (or *Ñuke Mapu* for Mapuche people) which enables the recognition of spiritual forces or energies that govern nature and grant powers to the elements it contains (Neira Ceballos et al. 2012). For Cajete (2004), the knowledge of Indigenous people about nature derives from direct phenomenological experience with the lived space, practices from which cosmologies are derived that connect human beings with the universe, and they, as participants, are an active and creative part of that totality. Similarly, Ñanculef Huaiquino (2016) described that

the Mapuche people, the original inhabitants of Chilean Patagonia, employed phenomenological observation to understand nature, based on a sense of unity with nature. This unity is also reflected in their language: Mapuzugun is the onomatopoeia of the primordial sound that emerges from nature and communicates its essence and state, the manner in which nature speaks to human beings, and in which nature and human beings converse through a universal, indivisible, indecipherable language.

Thus, efforts toward a pluriversal understanding of the world must overcome the shortcomings of Western research in order to fully comprehend the Indigenous relationship with the world. More often than not, these limitations have resulted in proposals that are largely reflective and theoretical, lacking in lived experience. It is precisely for this reason that we have chosen to consider the practice-based efforts of human communities that are trying to foster other ways of relating to the social and natural environment. These social experiments aim to re-imagine; to construct spaces for deliberation, participation, self-determination, and emancipation from the ethics of nurturance. They seek to provide new spaces to reconsider our relationship with nature, by emphasizing the interdependence between people and nature (Battson 2018). For Knierbein and Viderman (2018), relational ontologies have grounded many of the communal initiatives that have been developed, where they have generated spaces that attempt to interrelate human beings with the non-human worlds that surround them. In this way, from the multidimensional crisis that we have characterized, new spaces have emerged for rethinking human relationships with nature that center their focus on the interdependence between people and nature (Gilligan 2017).

Agroecology is one of the relevant practices associated with a new relational paradigm that is evolving as a counter-hegemonic proposal capable of transforming the agri-food system, based on other ways of inhabiting and relating to nature, in its totality. Agroecology breaks with modernity by defining itself as a plural and pluri-epistemological science, which coordinates the contributions of diverse disciplines and forms of local, peasant, or traditional knowledge, with the aim of developing and promoting sustainable, resilient, and locally based agri-food governance systems (Carlile and Garnett 2021). Thus, Agroecology develops horizontal and egalitarian ways of connecting people, establishing bonds with the past and the future by rescuing agricultural management practices that have been shaped over thousands of years, adapting themselves to changing climatic conditions and thereby providing resilience to these productive systems. These concepts have been fostered by peasant and Indigenous movements, claiming their ancestral culture, and are based on organizing work and production around principles of solidarity and cooperation. They relativize the capitalist economy by recognizing, valuing, and promoting non-capitalist forms of production and consumption, based on collective action; thus, establishing sovereignty and ensuring the right to food—which is inextricably linked to the right to life—as an exercise in transforming the world (Holt-Gimenez and Altieri 2013).

In the northern part of Chilean Patagonia, which we will refer to as *Norpatagonia*, various initiatives and community practices have emerged that offer alternatives to

experience other social orders and ways of life. Many of these initiatives are being articulated through migratory processes of idealistic young people who have ventured into the reconstruction of their own lives and sense of identity (Huiliñir-Curío and Zunino 2017; Mardones and Zunino 2021). In this chapter, we will reflect on three active community projects that will allow us to observe and discuss the possible ways to respond and add meaning to our contemporary world and the multiple crises we face as humanity. Through our observations, we will reflect on the enormous challenges facing our society, to overcome the abyss between people and nature that our way of thinking has generated, making us strangers in the world we have created (Sanhueza-Céspedes 2018).

17.3 Case Study Methods

In this chapter, we will focus on the territory along the northern shore of Villarrica Lake, in the northern reaches of Chilean Patagonia (*Norpatagonia*). The city of Pucón is the epicenter of this territory and the setting for an interesting migratory process. Although there are no statistical surveys that show the magnitude of this migration, qualitative evidence suggests a strong migration during the period between 1992 and 2002, during which the total population of the Pucón Commune increased from 14,000 to 22,000 inhabitants (Chilean National Statistics Institute 1992, 2002). This wave of migration has been characterized through the term *lifestyle migrants*, which refers, in this case, to young adults who are relatively well-off (i.e., persons with graduate degrees, or entrepreneurs with significant social and cultural capital), and choose to migrate to places that—for various reasons—offer them opportunities to achieve what can be broadly defined as a better quality of life (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). In Pucón, the impact of this migrant population on the socio-cultural fabric of the commune has been remarkable. The arrival of lifestyle migrants has contributed to expanded social and cultural options, as expressed in numerous tourist ventures, including restaurants, hostels, bars, and non-traditional services featuring a variety of alternative products. This process of social transformation has unfolded in parallel with the consolidation of the tourism industry and the actions of public-private agents that have *touristified* the city, through infrastructure and services that have been designed solely for tourists at the cost of local culture and presence, resulting in early forms of socio-residential segregation (Huiliñir-Curío et al. 2019).

Our research focuses on three amenity-migrant driven initiatives unfolding in the mountainous area of the Araucanía region. Generally, these three initiatives have been undertaken by people who have intentionally decided to migrate to the Pucón Commune from large urban centers. The three initiatives of interest included a neo-Shamanic-inspired community, an educational project, and permaculture movements taking place in the territory. Specifically, we sought to characterize the initiatives that are driving lifestyle change, to reflect on the possibilities of social transformation they are provoking, and to visualize internal and external tensions

that emerge from participants' realization of their life projects. We will work with three sources of information. First, we will use secondary sources to systematize the initiatives that are being deployed in the territory, drawing from social networks and recent research that has studied community initiatives from the perspective of lifestyle migration. Second, we will incorporate data from a set of in-depth interviews undertaken during the last 7 years with lifestyle migrants in these three alternative communities. Third, through self-reflective work, we will integrate our own direct first-hand experiences with people who are participating in these initiatives, during their daily deliberations. In analytical terms, we privilege the practical dimension of these experiences, emphasizing the deep observation of the phenomenon, moving away from abstraction to dialogue with *the phenomenon itself*.

17.4 Results

In this section we present a summary of each of the three amenity-migrant driven initiatives unfolding in the mountainous area of the Araucanía region, with examples of the data that informed the subsequent discussion section in which we focus on the possibilities and limits of social transformation and the larger process of rethinking our relationship with the world.

17.4.1 *The Community for Life Neo-Shamanic Community*

Our study indicates that the Community for Life (CFL) neo-shamanic community offered a locus for people of diverse origins to discuss and adapt traditional knowledge to a contemporary context. Although CFL was not an Indigenous community, it characterized itself as a depository of original knowledge that has been passed down from ancestral Indigenous communities. Spiritual leaders of CFL identified themselves as *mestizos*, a Spanish language term which signifies "mixed," in English, and is used to refer to persons of mixed Spanish and Indigenous heritage. They considered themselves to be descendants of one original community that shared in brotherhood with all beings on Earth, forming a great *family of life*.

Similar to other neo-shamanic communities that have formed in Latin America, we observed the CFL adding a contemporary context to traditional symbols and rituals. For example, members of CFL placed Mother Earth at the center of their cosmovision, referring to the community as follows:

[CFL] is there... to be able to serve the spirit... to be able to honor Pachamama [Mother Earth], to be able to honor nature, to honor life from a spiritual sense, and to follow ancestral traditions, that is it. There is nothing new, nothing new is invented, ancestral traditions are being followed, that is the substance, that is the basis, that is what motivated me [to be here]. (Interview 1)

Mother Earth is conceived as the divine element permeating all that is perceived and is related to the sensitivity and intuition that flourishes in the South American continent.

Another example of the adaptation of traditional symbols to the contemporary context lies in one of the core aspects of the CFL's belief system, the Prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor. In the prophecy, the condor represents a force streaming from the south and is complemented by the eagle, a symbol of logical thought coming from the north. According to the prophecy, the union of the forces of both hemispheres will harmonize life and create knowledge to protect the Earth and all sentient beings (LaDuke 1992). This prophecy plays a central role in symbolizing the spiritual drive of CFL and is frequently referred to in ceremonies and rituals. One community member explained the prophecy, saying:

... the "Prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor" is to join the poles, join the two halves of the Earth, and from there create a better humanity, which is in tune with nature, with Earth. Religion is re-linking with the Earth, it is going back to the natural roots... it has to be guided by the stars, to be guided by the moon, to respect, to honor what is there, what it gives us, that is, how to see again.

The power of the cosmos was behind the impulse to seek a better, more united humanity. While nature, earth, and the moon are understood as the female elements of the cosmos, the stars symbolize the male element, the Great Spirit. This prophecy shows the duality of the world and the need to unite the opposites. The drive for balance and the harmonization of opposites also appeared in the impulse to unite people of diverse origins and overcome the detrimental aspects they perceive in society. Our interviews helped illuminate CFL members' dissatisfaction with the world they left behind and their hopes for the future:

And suddenly this space, this spiritual current, based on ancestral traditions, gives people better satisfaction, gives them more answers to their concerns, whereas traditional religions do not give them those answers. I consider that it is because of the spiritual need of people, to fill that emptiness they feel, which leads them to approach [the community], and many discover an affinity with these ancestral traditions, and begin their journey.

17.4.2 The Waldorf-Pucón Education Community

At the time of this research, the Waldorf-Pucón education community occupied 40,000 m² in the Los Riscos sector of the Pucón Commune, about 5 kilometers from the city of Pucón, along the shores of Villarrica Lake, one of the main tourist destinations in the territory. The land for this community was donated by a private individual with the explicit purpose of building an anthroposophical-oriented school. Contributions from the education community were used to finance the school complex, consisting of three classroom modules with a total of approximately 220 m² of floor space. One of the modules is used primarily for community activities and administrative purposes.

The school began to operate in 2006 in a private, urban residence in the city of Pucón, and in 2012, moved to its current location. The neighborhood is characterized by rapid residential-tourist expansion and constitutes one of the most expensive and exclusive sectors of the city. Following the relocation, school enrollments grew rapidly between 2012 and 2014, going from 18 students in 2007, to 104 students in 2015 (Waldorf Pucón 2015). The school's website (www.waldorfPucón.org) describes its own community, saying,

Many of us are immigrants to this area, either from other parts of Chile or from other parts of the world. We feel the call of nature, of simple living, and the need for time to share with family and to form a human community that supports one another. We have diverse spiritual visions of the world; we accept all religions and beliefs, and we follow the principles of Waldorf pedagogy given by Rudolf Steiner. (Waldorf Pucón 2015)

The school's architecture was a central tenet in their education philosophy, which put education in action through bioconstruction. Classrooms were made from straw bales and mud, with the intention of integrating an educational experience with the natural environment. They included uneven walls, floors, and ceilings, along with the use of irregular geometric shapes for door and window frames; all characteristic of buildings informed by the anthroposophical vision applied to Waldorf education. Anthroposophical architecture strove to create and protect places for socializing, which were used for student performances and as a meeting place for the educational community. This is consistent with research that has documented the natural environment as a central element in anthroposophical architecture, which stimulates contact with the external world and defines spaces suitable for social interaction (Oliveira and Imai 2015).

The Waldorf-Pucón community was organized around the school, with about 20 residences situated in the vicinity. Similar to the results that emerged from interviews with the (CFL) Neo-Shamanic Community, interview participants from the Waldorf-Pucón community described being guided by the drive to construct a world that was different from the one they left behind, specifically noting desires leave behind the individualistic approach of our current societies and instead foster a society that values community support. One of the school's directors described how this drive manifested within the project, suggesting intentional deviation from current educational norms:

[The motivations for this project mark a] ... contrast to the Western world; traditional education is not educating the whole being; it is only transferring knowledge and filling-in with knowledge. Children need to have other types of learning and knowledge instances...

The Waldorf Pucón community was internally divided between those who dogmatically follow Steiner's model of thinking and those who mix different practices and ways of knowing. The search for balance was a constant challenge for the directors of the establishment, and tensions between these two points of view were frequent in meetings and deliberative assemblies. Nevertheless, the community has maintained a certain cohesion, forming a colorful suburban space that brought together a range of community activities, including barter fairs, commemoration ceremonies, various seminars, and recreational activities. Nevertheless, recent research

conducted by Vergara et al. (2019) indicated the Waldorf Pucón community was culturally segregated from the surrounding population, which they characterized as mostly low-income Chilean peasants and Mapuche with a traditional way of life. The researchers also documented that contact between the two groups was restricted to sporadic meetings in the local neighborhood council and/or salaried work of the peasants either in the Waldorf Pucón school or in the homes of Waldorf-Pucón community members.

17.4.3 The Permaculture Movement in the Pucón Commune of Norpatagonia

The first approaches to permaculture in Chile date back to 2008, when the first certified course in permaculture design took place, held in the country's central zone. In the Pucón Commune, there are records of environmental initiatives with a focus on permaculture dating back to the early 1990s, linked to ecotourism ventures that sought to contribute to local development in a more sustainable way and thus enhance the conservation commitment of the people living in the Commune.

These initiatives were mainly driven by European and North American migrants, who reported moving to the region in search of greater contact with the pristine ecosystems that characterized the territory at that time. Vestiges of these early permaculture initiatives are still visible today. For example, one of the ecolodges in the center of Pucón offers its food services through the positioning of inviting visitors to, "...make food an instance to share and savor what the earth offers us today, to become aware of the present and enjoy our community and its locality."

One of the oldest projects observed through our research was located in the Huirilil sector, 48 km east of the city of Pucón. This community defined themselves as "custodians of a natural valley, lovers of nature and the development of consciousness." The community provides tourist services such as hiking and trekking, camping spaces, and amenities for events and ceremonies, with the objective of providing, "learning spaces that help to build meaning, aligned with the care and protection of the environment, in an attempt to perpetuate life for our future generations."

One of the more recent examples of intentional communities associated with permaculture design was recorded in the village of Ñancul, 65 km from the city of Villarrica, where a couple of health professionals, originally from Chile's capital city of Santiago, bought 60,000 m² in 2016, to develop one of the most ambitious permaculture projects in the territory, including sustainable housing, spaces for activities, and enclosures for cultural and educational gardens and farms.

These examples have laid the foundation for current permaculture trends in the Pucón and Villarrica Communes, where an increase in permaculture experiences was noted by our research team, mainly in peri-urban and rural areas of the territory. Guided by philosophies and concepts deriving from *deep ecology*, a *culture of*

peace, and a desire to *co-create the present we dream of* these initiatives proposed alternative forms of food and fiber production, in harmony with the natural systems where they were immersed. Several of these permaculture projects sold their surplus production in the agro-ecological farmers' market in Pucón, offering their organic products at what was considered a *fair price* (Adams 2005).

Every permaculture project we observed in the study area shared a vision of transforming its communities into sustainable and energetically self-sufficient places that are environmentally and socially resilient. Most of these permaculture projects also incorporated spiritual practices that went beyond food production. Participants sought to increase awareness of the planetary situation, under the precepts that society must understand and cultivate connections with life by contributing to sustainability and good living. Research participants described the need for society to recognize that we are not separate from nature, and as such, the way we treat the planet is actually a reflection of the way we treat ourselves.

17.5 Discussion and Conclusions

17.5.1 Possibilities and Limits of Social Transformation

Our study examined three options emerging in Chilean Norpatagonia for constructing new ways of life that rethink our relationship with nature (and move away from the human/nature duality). The practices outlined above offer spaces for collective experimentation that reclaim the production and reproduction of the commons by reconceptualizing our relationship with non-human nature. They represent promising alternatives to the dominant approach that organizes, normalizes, and homogenizes these territories. Nevertheless, they face a series of limitations and contradictions, and do not succeed in altering the hegemonic dynamics.

In the CFL Neo-Shamanic community, we observed a set of practices that proclaimed unity between the human and natural worlds and the development of *hybrid narratives* (De la Torre 2014), in which traditional symbols and rituals are being adapted for a contemporary context. The Waldorf-Pucón education community aspired similarly, working toward the goal of creating a community environment founded on a living relationship with the spiritual world. Meanwhile, The Permaculture Movement in the Pucón Commune of Norpatagonia has tested alternative forms of food production that contribute to the agro-ecological transition of territories. These three initiatives align with what Svampa (2012) proposed as an eco-territorial shift, based on these new forms of activism and citizen engagement that are being expressed in Latin American territories and are centered on the defense of natural resources, biodiversity, and the environment.

Nevertheless, our analysis also identified some contradictions in the community initiatives. In each case, the initiatives formed segregated and privileged micro-territories, where exclusionary and privatizing practices were common, replicating

capitalist tendencies. The permaculture movements we observed behaved as independent utopian communities: while they practiced and experimented with more sustainable ways of relating to nature, they did not foster social networks with surrounding communities, and are therefore unlikely to be effective in spurring meaningful societal change. Furthermore, such isolation inhibits connection to regional marketplaces and limits their potential to oppose industries—such as resource extraction and other commercial activities—that erode the very sustainable livelihoods they seek to protect. Without local organization, it seems almost impossible for agroecology to grow geographically and to achieve the scale necessary to become a dominant form of food production (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho 2018).

Despite the existence of these and other initiatives in the region seeking alternative lifestyles, capitalist expansion has not slowed down in the study area. On the contrary, the cities of Pucón and Villarrica are rapidly expanding into rural areas through subdivisions and land development ventures, which inexorably lead to a disregard of non-human nature's right to existence and a rampant development of the countryside. Rising land values and levels of interest from investors and individuals during the confinements imposed by the pandemic have motivated many area landowners to subdivide and sell part of their land. This rural growth and transformation have been compounded by rural young adults from the region who are migrating to the city (Vergara et al. 2019). The area today appears saturated with people—migrants from nearby urban centers—with increasing levels of segregation, and congestion problems. The subdivision has also produced environmental problems, including the loss of native forest from land clearing, that has affected vulnerable species. Subdivisions are also an important factor in water scarcity problems; first, because as native forests are eliminated, so too are the related water retention ecosystem services they provide, and second, because of the increased resource demands generated by new housing centers in areas that are not prepared. The generation of these new projects in unplanned areas causes territorial segregation, and pressures local governments to provide basic services in areas where they do not have the capacity. Thus, while alternative structures to capitalism have emerged in the area, they have failed, so far, to challenge the predominant model and scale up to more general social and spatial levels.

The inability of these initiatives to bring about meaningful change and propose new sustainability and socio-ecological resilience frameworks is not surprising. Each project was inserted in an already established thought paradigm. This paradigm has its foundation in classical thinkers such as Descartes, Bacon, and Kant whose ideas drove the scientific process for producing knowledge. In these thinkers we find a matrix that enshrines an ontological separation between humans and the world. We ponder over an external world that appears to us as something preordained and alien to our consciousness. This way of thinking is what has shaped our entire institutional system and our various approaches to regulating the social, natural, and territorial spheres. Thus, government plans and programs, bureaucratic and administrative regulations, cultural intervention programs, economic incentive programs, and other forms of intervention are dominated by a hierarchical and linear approach to the development process. Under these conditions, initiatives tend to

replicate the elements that make up the underlying paradigm, including the social, economic, and cultural pathologies that we have examined in this chapter. It seems an illusion to believe that change can be effective without overturning the underlying thought paradigm that anchors us to the world we know and inhibits any impulse to reconnect with other scenarios. Thus, in our opinion, the main challenge demanding our attention is to transform the thought paradigm that we have inherited from modernity, and that continues to act in full force even in those discourses that are more progressive and emancipatory.

17.5.2 Rethinking Our Relationship with the World

Norpatagonia provides a unique setting for the study of alternative approaches to individual and community life that challenge the supremacy of rationality. The communities we have studied offer a starting point for investigating new ways of thinking and relating to other forms of life. Nevertheless, even these approaches have their own tensions and contradictions. We have demonstrated that in some cases, many of the efforts being made to build alternative lifestyles end up replicating forms of social exclusion and harmful human-nature relationships typical of capitalist societies.

We continue to value these efforts to imagine—and put into practice—new ways of relating to one another. These experiments in alternative living offer important learning opportunities for understanding what alternative futures might look like and for critical reflection on how Western and capitalist paradigms often prevail, even in the most well-intentioned projects.

Proposing new ways for civilization is a slow process. It takes time to build living relationships that extend and expand, that embrace diversity, and that reinvent the world, the territories, and the governance of goods and food. We need new socio-environmental pacts and alternatives. Proposals like those that arise from agroecology, from the common good, from *buen vivir*, from radical ecological democracy, from ecovillages, from ecofeminism, from community-based economies, from civilizational transitions, and from cooperative ecosystems. These are just some of the concepts that have been proposed to confront, reinvent, and replace our current social and environmental structures, and move past the civilizational crisis of the twenty-first century with a new paradigm founded on an ethic of respect, care, and equality (Kothari et al. 2019).

Such transformation will require more than a purely reflexive and abstract academic endeavor. We researchers also have to transform the way we understand our relationship with the world. Without this revision, we will continue to find it difficult to affirm the transformative flow that crosses important segments of humanity in these times of multidimensional crisis. We must have the audacity to think differently. This is a relevant epistemological challenge that invites us to observe the world in a different way, redefine our relationship with nature, removing the human/nature dualism through more citizen engagement, increased social networking, and

support that moves beyond the modernist thinking that has colonized the world for more than 500 years. This epistemological revision seems central to contribute to the pluriverse and relational alternatives that have been proposed. The way out of the crisis of civilization should not be sought within it, but outside of it.

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