

Spiritual Values Inspiring Indigenous Forest Management

Cathrien de Pater

independent consultant on

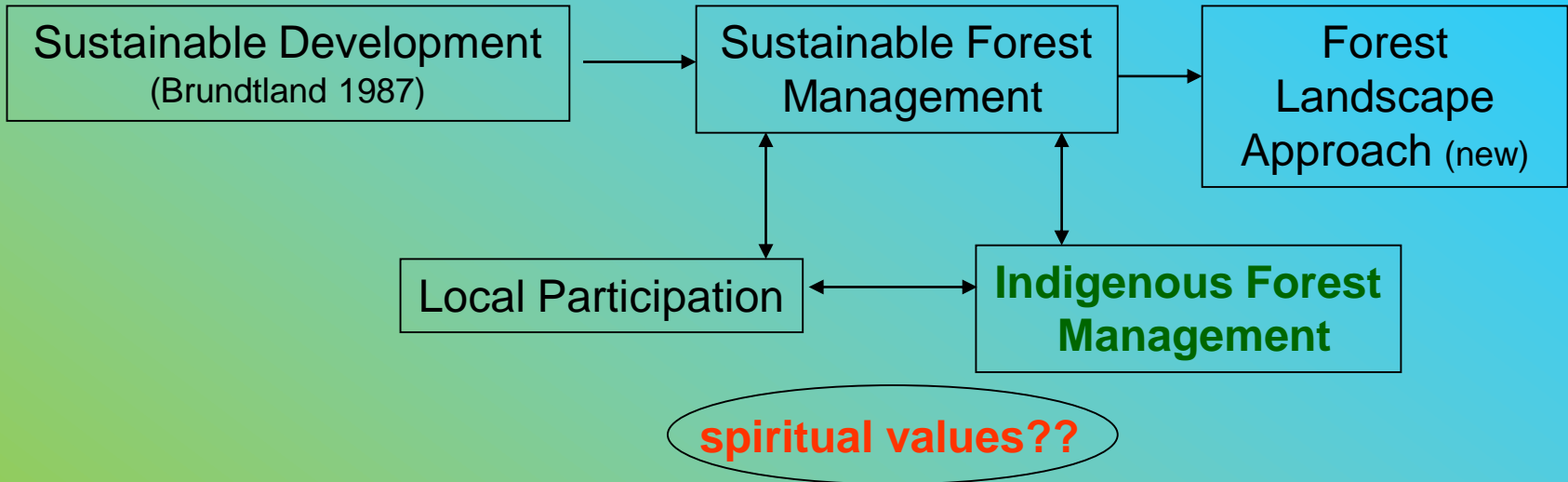
Religion, Spirituality and Nature

cdp@centerforce.nl 06-23551567

Facts

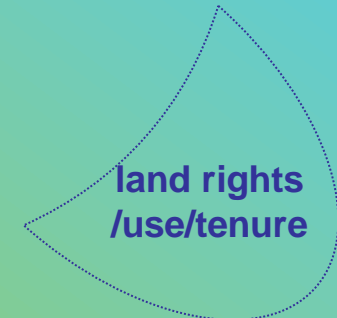
- An estimated 60 million indigenous people are completely dependent on forests,
- 350 million people are highly dependent,
- 1.2 billion have some dependence on forests for their livelihoods.

CONTEXT



Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Rio 1992

- conservation) of biodiversity
- sustainable use) and natural resources
- equitable benefit sharing)



Research Questions

- Are spiritual values important for IFM?
- If so, what are their characteristics?
- How are spiritual values operationalized?
- Could spiritual values meaningfully inform and enrich 'formal' sustainable forest management systems?

Indigenous Forest Management

“Forest management systems are referred to as indigenous when they are primarily based on local experience of [indigenous people’s] ‘local world’, that is, perhaps, most important to them.

Indigenous refers to knowledge and practices that have originated locally and are performed by a community or society in a specific place.” (Singhal 2000:133)

(... but not *a priori* ‘ancient’ or static)

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

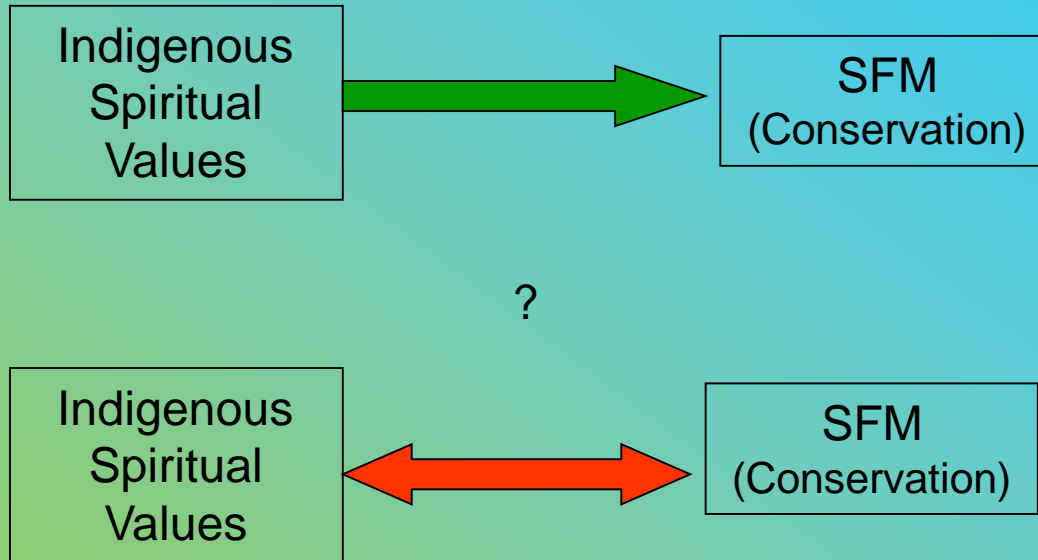
“the culturally and spiritually based way in which indigenous peoples relate to their ecosystems. This knowledge is founded on spiritual-cultural instructions from ‘time immemorial’ and on generations of careful observation within an ecosystem of continuous residence”
(Winona LaDuke in Brosius 2001:128).

interrelated components:

- *beliefs* about the human-environment relationship,
- *knowledge* (biological),
- *practices* (management/extraction).

(Berkes in Wiersum 2000:22)

The Dichotomy

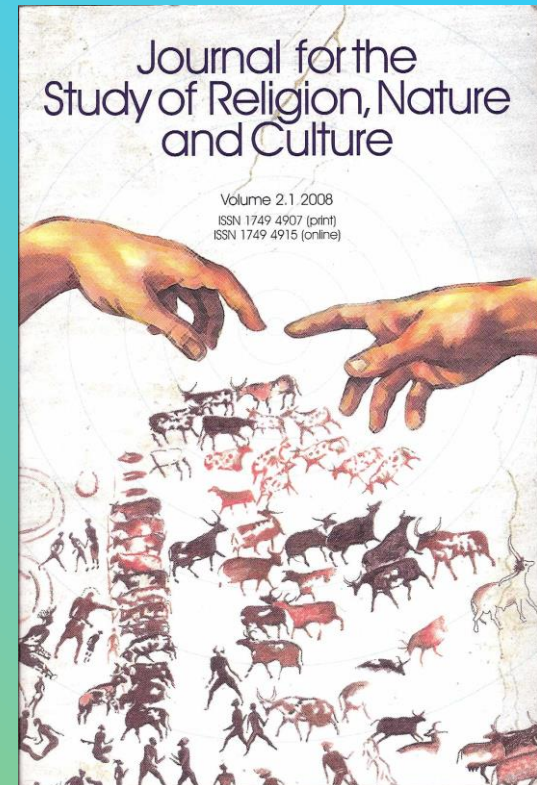


(Snodgrass & Tiedje, 2008)

Seven ways out (1)

(Snodgrass & Tiedje, 2008)

1. Tremendous diversity *across* indigenous societies
2. Animistic worldviews & behaviour are not (the same as) conservation thought & action
3. Tremendous diversity in cultural models *within* indigenous societies



Seven ways out (2)

4. Individuals vary: how are cultural (widely shared) ideas linked with collective arrangements (agents, norms, power)?
5. How are collective arrangements embedded? → Institutions:

Seven ways Out (3)

5. Institutions regulating conservation practices:

- a. *Accidental / epiphenomenal* conservation
- b. *Mix* of conservation and anti-conservation
- c. *Disconnection*: individual eco-friendly beliefs – lacking institutions → levels:
 - grassroots
 - tribal / intermediate
 - national / federal

Seven ways out (4)

6. Interaction Indigenous --- global system →

Introduction of 'Modern' / 'Western' / 'Scientific' conservation systems

(Intrusion of 'world religions' → syncretic religious systems
→ bearing on environment)

7. Distinguish levels of scale:

- thought – action
- individual – community – extra-communal

My framework

- A. *'Accidental'* conservation
- B. *Mix* of conservation and anti-conservation
- C. Interaction with 'national' SFM systems: from *disconnection* (persisting individual eco-friendly beliefs – fading indigenous institutions)
 - levels:
 - grassroots
 - tribal / intermediate
 - national / federal
- D. ... to *re-connection*: new spiritual inspiration intentionally leading to environmental action c.q. IFM

A. Spiritual values and 'conservation by accident'

Cases:

- (more or less) passive correlation between spiritual belief and ecology: Highlanders in Cambodia
- Active spiritual inspiration and correlation with ecological 'result': Yukuna & Tanimuka in Colombian Amazonia (Elisabeth Reichel 1992)
- Active spiritual inspiration but no correlation with ecological 'result' the Kantu' of Eastern Kalimantan (Michael Dove 1999)

Colombian Amazonia (1)

(Elisabeth Reichel 1992)

Yukuna & Tanimuka:

- Cosmovision: Connection with natural world 'owned' by spirits
- Forest management: shifting cultivation, gathering, hunting, fishing
- Negotiating with supranatural world on 'price to pay'
- Shamans mediate by 'travelling in thought', rituals, myth
- Maloca (dwellings & fields) represents cosmovision



Colombian Amazonia (2)

- Tremendous TEK
- Shamanistic mediation apparently used to work
- But does it have effect?
- Context complicated, security risks, but institutions still somehow continued (Tropenbos Colombia)

Kantu' East Kalimantan (1)

- Swidden cultivation highly unpredictable
- Key element: location of fields
- selection of field is done by bird augury by spiritual expert

→ No correlation between prediction and harvest success!

(Michael Dove, 1996, 1999)



Kantu' East Kalimantan (2)

No correlation, BUT: Cultural meaning:

Diversifying strategies for survival ->
maximising chances for success.

Thereby the augury is:

- Not: 'scientific' management with convergent *rules to eliminate* uncertainties
- Rather a *system to 'celebrate' and transcend* uncertainties

→ *the more unpredictable the ecology,*

the more strategic deployment of TEK?

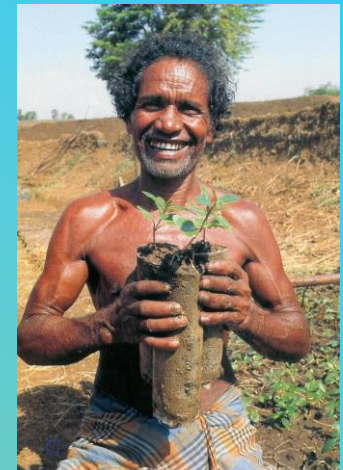
B. Spiritual values with ambiguous effects on conservation

Sacred Lands / Forests / Trees / Mountains etc.:

- Havens of biodiversity,
- or romanticised (Western) construct?

Cases:

- Bhil Adivasis S-India: **ambiguous role of land rituals**
- Religious forests in Nepal (Andrew Ingles, 1997): **used!**
- Sherpas Solukhumbu, Nepal (Obadia, 2008): **paradox:**
 - » Sacred forests kept - but cut when need arises
 - » Rare species: the rarer, the more spiritually wanted

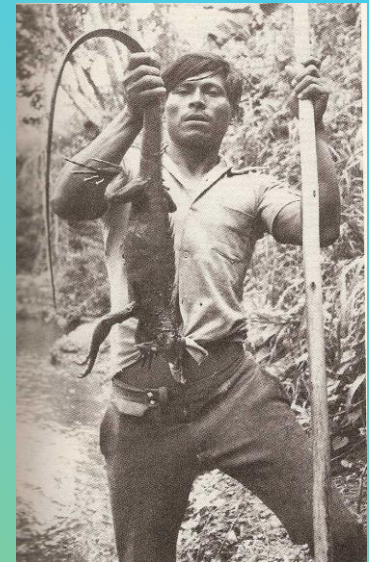


→ **take a contextualised, multi-levelled, historic, unsentimental view** (Nugteren, 2005)

C. Disconnection (and....)

1. Mayangni (Sumu) Nicaragua:

- Animism faded; since 1840 christianised by Moravian Brotherhood
- Sacred places & spirited trees
- Good TEK for survival
- Commercial logging: labourers
- since 1990s: Autonomy
- since ~2004: SFM and certification : slow progress
(WWF, GTZ, URACCAN, government)



→ *'secularization' of indigenous forest management?*

D. Reconnection (1)

- Canada:

- 800 local communities in 1.4 mln ha of forest
- First Nations Forestry Program:
 - 1700 forest-related projects in 460 communities
 - economy & TEK & interrelationship with nature
- National Aboriginal Foresters Association (NAFA) → strategy:
 - ecosystem approach
 - cultural & spiritual uses of resources → **how?**
- Chaem First Nation (BC): Land = cultural identity
 - Spiritual sustenance by retreat & meditation
 - Use allowed! (selective felling) (Lewis & Sheppard, 2005)
- Manitoba Model Forest Management Plan:
 - Animals protected, studied



D. Reconnection (2)

ABCPF 2005: Spiritual Values are:

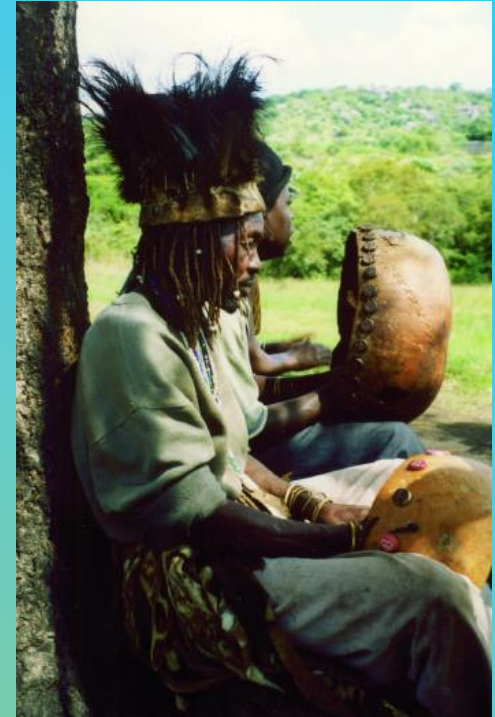
- intangible,
- difficult to measure,
- subjective,
- linked to a moment in time ('peak experience'),
- linked to certain 'places'
- influenced by diverse religious or cultural perceptions
- influenced by urban or rural worldview
- changing with structural characteristics of the forest stand,
- history-created, and
- can be created by ceremony



**→ How to articulate spiritual values
in (indigenous, sustainable) forest management?**

D. Reconnection (3)

- Zimbabwe:
 - African Earthkeepers movement (Daneels 2001):
 - Tree planting and land restoration as a God-given task
 - through spirit mediums & oracle of Supreme Being
 - based on Chimurenga liberation war
 - Synergy of African indigenous religion and African Christianity



Conclusions

- Take a contextualised, multi-levelled, historic, unsentimental view on TEK and IFM
- TEK: not only direct meaning ('medicinal plants' etc.) but also cultural meaning and a 'meta-level' of interpretation
- IFM: from 'artesanal' / subsistence level to larger (commercial) systems: 'Secularization' of IFM?
- How to articulate spiritual values in (indigenous, sustainable) forest management?
- → More dialogue needed between Indigenous - Formal forest management.

Hopeful International Initiatives:

- IUFRO Task Force Traditional Forest Knowledge – report 2010
- World Conservation Union (IUCN): Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas
- World Forestry Congress Buenos Aires 2009: many slots for TEK, CSV etc.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): ‘Article 8j’ on TK, Akwe:Kon Guidelines, increased profile of IP through the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB)
- International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change: voice in discourse on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD, Bali 2007)
- International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture (ISSRNC): Conference on Religion, Nature and Progress, Amsterdam 2009 → section on indigenous peoples’ perspectives

..but what happens on the ground?

THANK YOU!