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## Book Review

**Konecki, Krzysztof, Anna Kacperczyk,  
Piotr Chomczyński, and Marco Albarracín. 2013.**  
*The Spirit of Communitarianism and the Cultural  
Background of the Limoncocha Community in  
the Context of Sustainable Development. Quito:*  
**Universidad Internacional SEK Ecuador**

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Imagine a community comprising of 80% teachers living in a nature reserve, deep in a tropical forest. Imagine, then, that 88% of inhabitants feel that this community needs external help, especially by providing them with knowledge and teaching them to solve their problems. Why would these teachers not be able to solve their problems on their own? What have they been taught to teach? And, finally, how can they overcome these challenges and ensure the sustainable development of their community?

These are real questions, posed in a real community. These questions have been studied by a team of sociologists from the University of Lodz, working together with Ecuadorian colleagues in Limoncocha National Biological Reserve in Ecuador. This is a fascinating case study, in particular for sociologists and anthropologists. The history of the community living in the reserve can be seen as an experiment, with its members uprooted from where they had lived be-

fore, brought to Limoncocha by powerful external forces, and then left on their own. It weaves together (neo)colonialism, evangelization, globalization, oil extraction, and environmental protection. And it takes place in a country which itself is now seen as a large-scale social experiment.

In a relatively short time, Limoncocha has experienced a number of very peculiar situations, many of which are representative of other sites in developing countries. Examples include relocation of people for (neo)colonial purposes, related to evangelization, the (neo)colonial administration, the adaptation of the community to new circumstances, and then an attempt to self-organize after the end of the neocolonial rule, with the new initiatives undertaken by regional authorities to fill-in the administration gap. Furthermore, in the background, we have the important social-ecological conflict, which again is very representative for many developing countries—thus, the

authors touch upon many important trade-offs that our civilization faces (such as oil extraction vs. the preservation of a tropical forest, a challenge that is particularly evident in Ecuador).

The authors report on a study they carried out in Limoncocha with the use of multiple methods. They managed to observe the life and culture of the community and derived much information from the interviews. The use of random sampling in such a rural and isolated setting is particularly noteworthy. Thanks to this multi-method approach, the authors managed to find not only what is normally exposed but also the relatively hidden social norms. Looking carefully at the different aspects of community life, the authors managed to avoid the paternalistic approach and idealizing of local cultures.

This study follows a particularly interesting approach of linking cultural and biological diversity. Indeed, this approach is increasingly advocated in international committees and policy circles, in particular referring to the so-called biocultural diversity. Biocultural diversity captures relationships between local communities and biodiversity and refers to the diversity of life in all its manifestations (biological, cultural, and linguistic), which are all interrelated within a complex social-ecological co-evolving and adaptive system (Pilgrim and Pretty 2013; Cocks and Wiersum 2014). The authors address the essence of the social-ecological systems approach when they underline that “the environment consists of both nature and culture” (p. 8) and when they acknowledge that human behaviors, practices, and attitudes shape the environment, but also that the environment shapes those behaviors, practices, and attitudes.

In this context, the authors address the important issue of non-monetary values that people attach to nature. With regard to the importance of collective meetings and deliberations which were studied by the authors, this report is in line with the broader literature on deliberative processes as a way of eliciting shared values, which is an increasingly important body of literature in the area of sustainable development and in the studies of social-ecological systems (Kenter et al. 2011; Raymond et al. 2014). Interestingly, some of the cited statements from interviewees provide evidence of eroding social values.

The main focus in this report is on communitarianism, the community spirit still present in Limoncocha, as reflected in the social and cultural life of the community. As we find out, the inhabitants still undertake collective work for the community. However, we can also see that the Limoncochans do not have an effective common property management system. This is particularly evident with regard to environmental protection and contrasts with much research on indigenous communities elsewhere, within which internal rules evolved for governing the sustainable use of natural resources over millennia (Berkes and Folke 2000; Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2003). Most often, such rules have evolved as a result of some kind of communitarian spirit, community work, or deliberation, coupled with an understanding of the community's dependence on its natural surroundings. The Limoncochans do understand that they depend on nature, but they are not able to set the internal natural resource management rules by themselves. Perhaps, this can be related to the fact that this community was uprooted and subject to extremely strong external influence. Or, maybe this is linked to the fact

that the Limoncochans originate from Tena, a town about 300 kilometers away, and not an indigenous group that would have lived according to a more traditional way of life. Indeed, it would be particularly interesting to do further research on how the culture these people have today differs from other cultures in the country with regard to environmental management, especially compared to the inhabitants of Tena, and indigenous peoples still living in natural conditions.

Anyway, it will be necessary for the people of Limoncocha to learn how to use the available natural resources in line with the concept of sustainable development, as these resources are scarce, population numbers are growing, and the environment is under pressure from additional activities (oil industry). We can see some initial ideas on how this could be achieved, with tourism (ecotourism and birdwatching in particular) indicated as the most promising option. 74% of Limoncochans perceive tourism as a development opportunity, to benefit from which they generally understand they need to protect nature. I fully support the authors' conclusion referring to the opportunity of using the extraordinary story of the village, along with the Limoncocha lake's natural assets, as tourist magnets. Nevertheless, such

a potential development strategy has to be very carefully planned. In line with the concept of sustainable development, special attention needs to be paid to obeying the local ecosystem's tourist carrying capacity (Cater 1995; Kronenberg 2014).

In short, Limoncocha has been affected by typical problems of economic development clashing with environmental objectives. On top of those issues, Limoncocha can be seen as part of a larger story of disappearance of cultural and biocultural diversity, resulting from the expansion of Western culture, religion, and consumption patterns. Indeed, the widespread expectation among the Limoncochans that someone from the outside will help them solve their problems contrasts with the communitarian spirit highlighted by the authors. Apparently, in this case, communitarianism can no longer translate into the community's ability to solve their own problems. This might be another interesting research avenue to pursue in the future in Limoncocha.

There is still a lot to learn for the teachers of Limoncocha on how to ensure the sustainable development of their community. And there is a lot to learn for us from this very interesting case, with this book as an interesting contribution to this mutual learning process.

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