Applicability of biocultural diversity

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Biocultural systems in the Anthropocene – how to build on existing connections between people and nature in development interventions?

Panel session at PECS 2015 Conference: Social-ecological dynamics in the Anthropocene

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INTRODUCTION

- Founding work investigated the relationships between biodiversity and cultural/linguistic diversity.
- Revealed at a global scale they are spatially related.
- With the highest overlaps in the tropics, and particularly in the Amazon Basin, Central Africa, and Indomalaysia/ Melanesia.

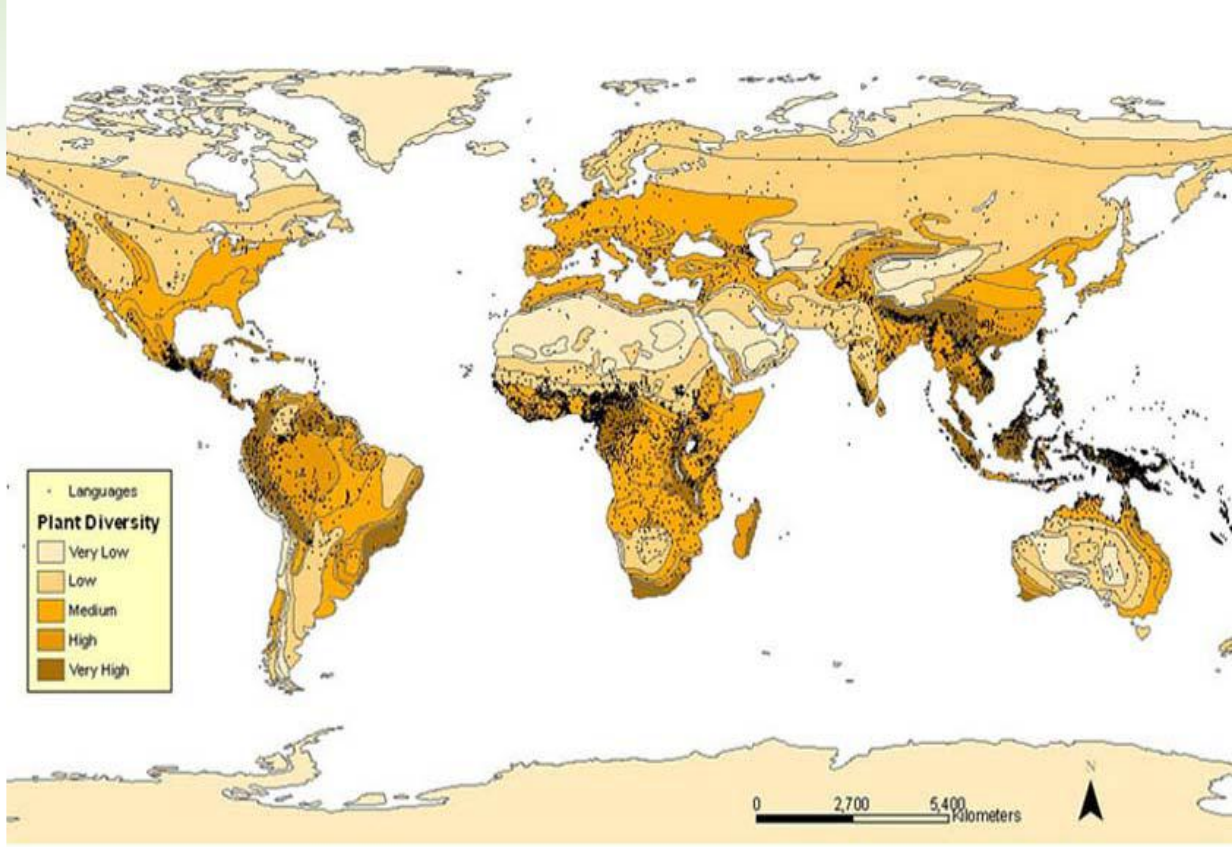


Figure 1 of article by Stepp et al., pages 267-270. Global Plant Diversity and Language Distribution

- In 1988 the ***Declaration of Belem***

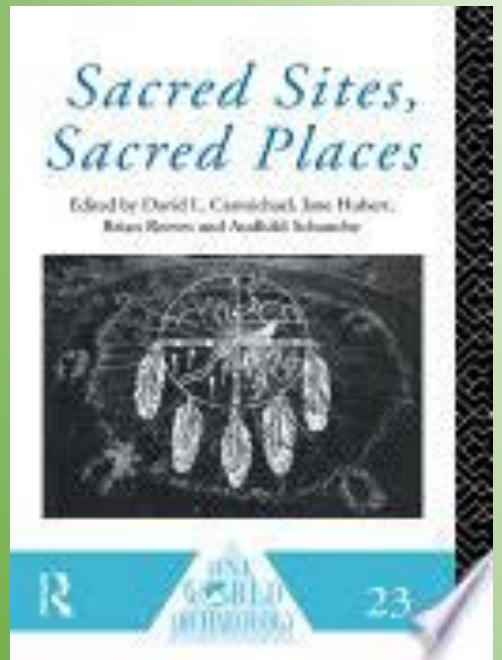
Gave recognition to 'inextricable link' between biological diversity and cultural diversity.

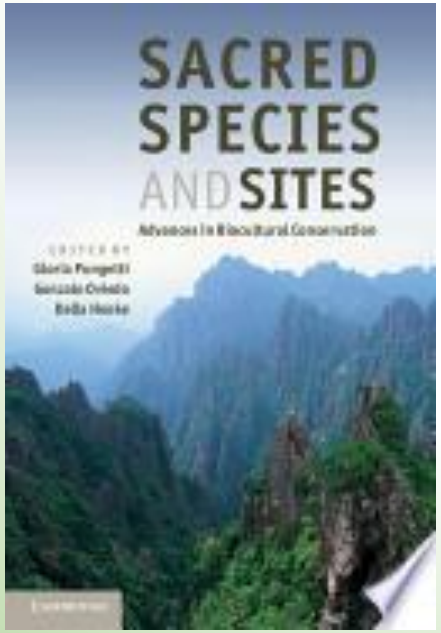
- The concept of ***Biocultural diversity*** used to denote this link.

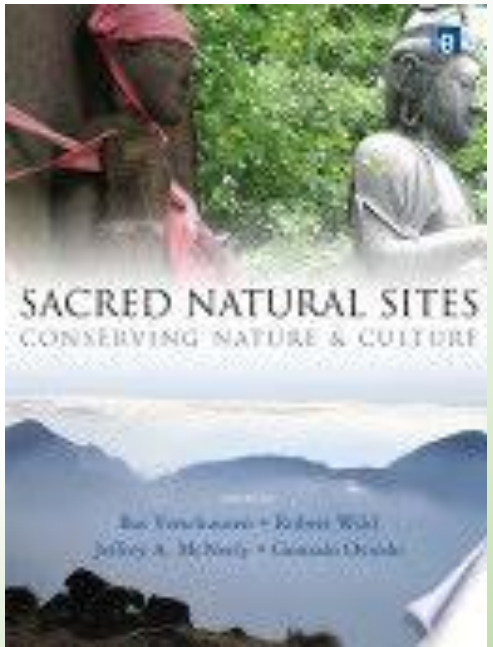
The field of study has given rise to the acknowledgement of:

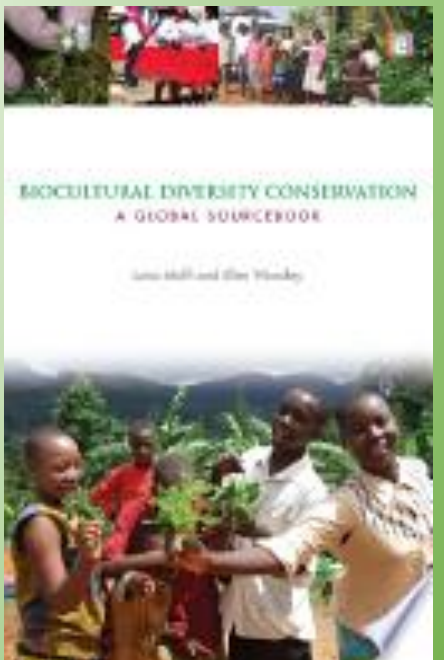
a) many places and species that are regarded as sacred by local indigenous people are protected (e.g. Posey, 1999; Sheridan & Nyamweru, 2008; Verschuuren et al., 2010).

b) sacred places represent "the oldest form of conservation known to mankind" (Wild & McLeod, 2008) have become "of vital importance for safeguarding cultural and biological diversity" (UNESCO 2005: 1).





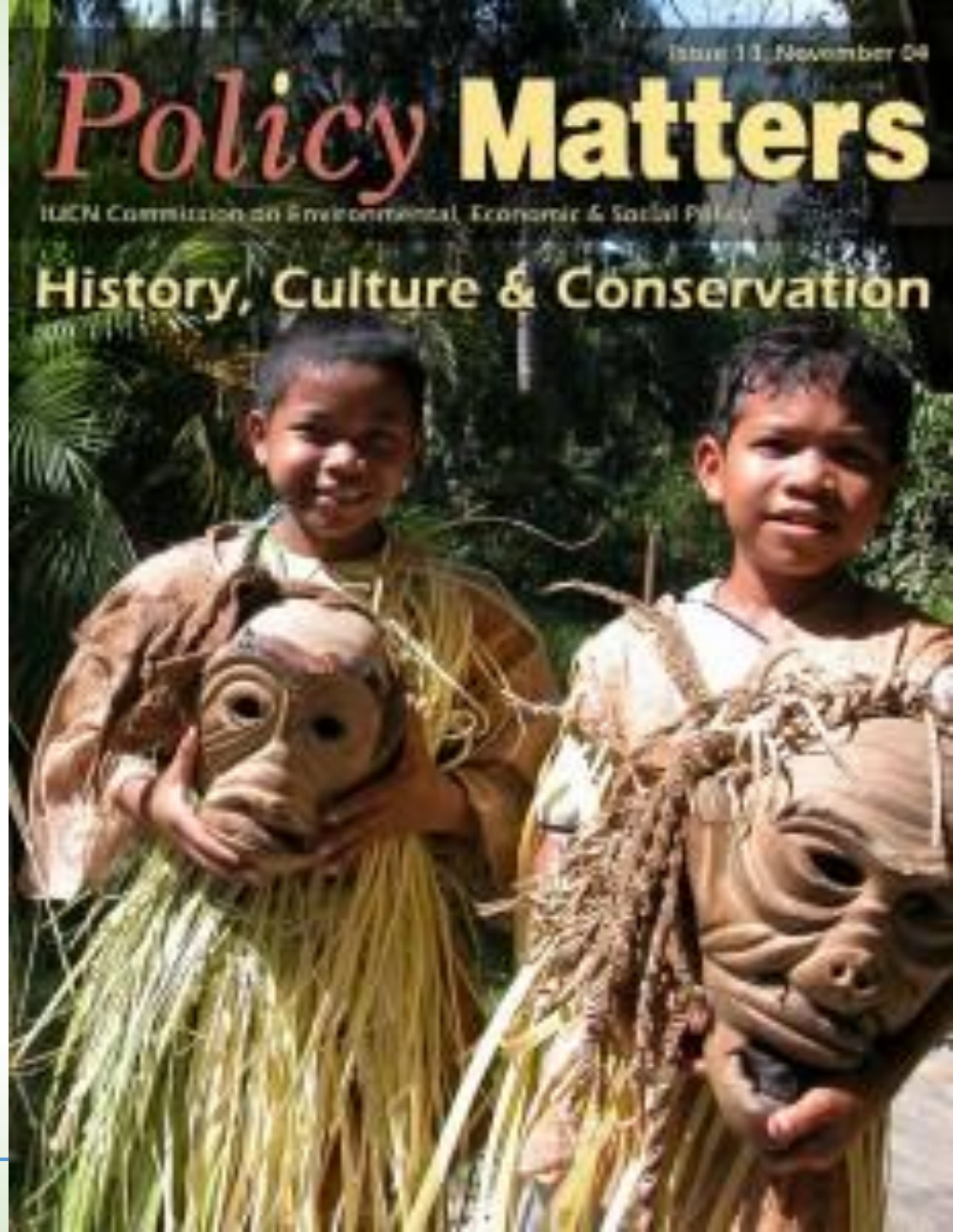




Concept used to identify options for conservation with indigenous people and conservationists.

Framed representing:

'natural alliances'.



- Cultural values do not only relate to components of the vegetation or fauna, e.g., forests as dwelling places for spirits, burial places for ancestors, sites for ritual ceremonies and sacred natural features such as springs and caves (Laird, 1999; Posey, 1999; Seeland, 1997) also to the wild resources harvested (Cocks 2006, Cocks et. al. 2006; Cocks et al. 2008).
- Since its inception, the concept has been modified to not only refer to indigenous and traditional people, but also modernized communities (Cocks 2006).
- Come to represent how people live with biodiversity (Turnhout *et al.* 2013; Cocks and Wiersum 2014).

Rural landscape in the former Ciskei homeland

Urban township suburb of King William's Town

Homestead as locations for religious ceremonies

***Ubuhlanthi* (kraal) as symbolic status**

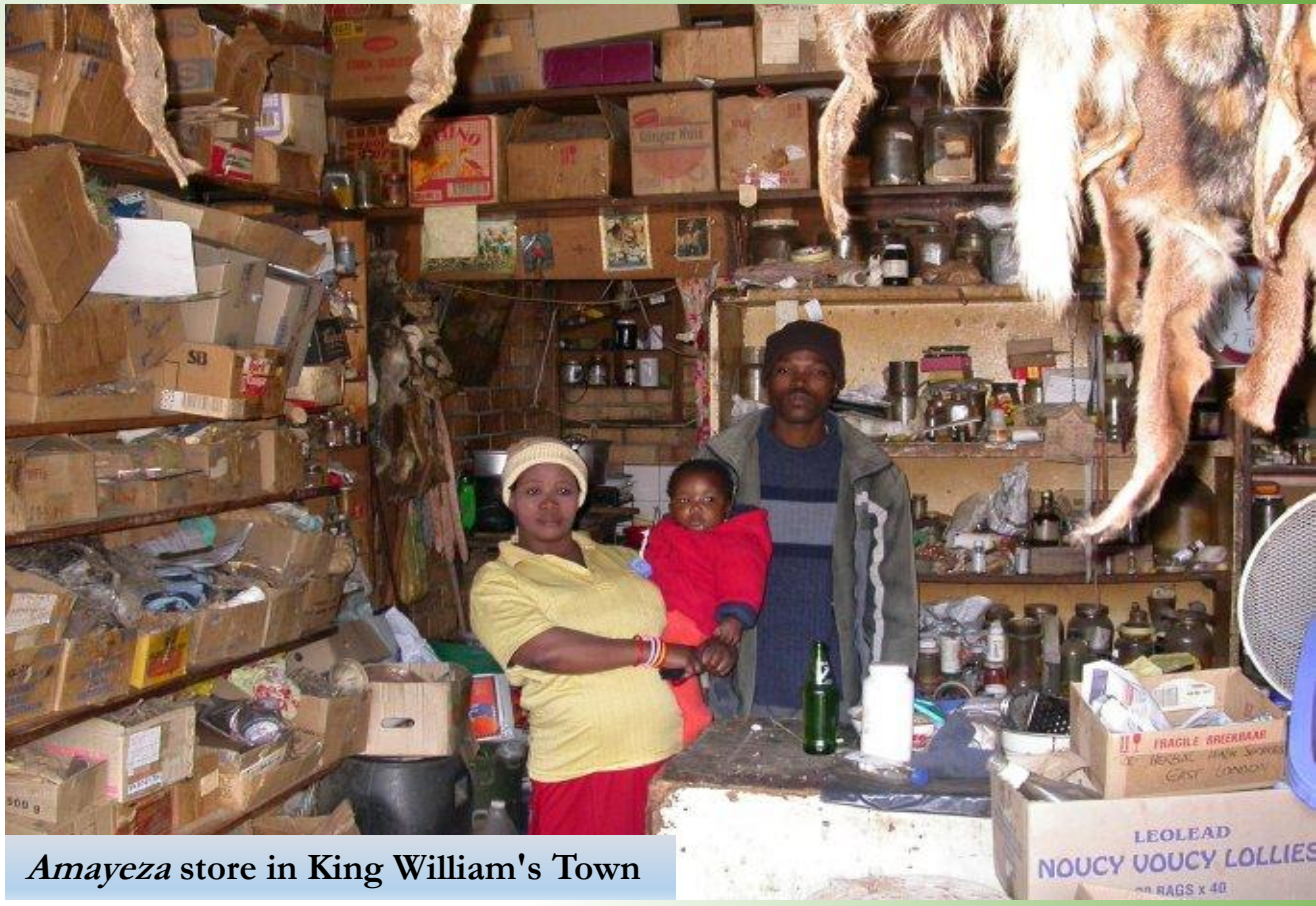
Key symbol of male identity

Within each homestead the kraal forms a major cultural artefact.

These *ubuhlanti* feature prominently in Xhosa idioms, and expressions.

Within the Amathole region about 80% of the *umzi* still own and maintain an *ubuhlanti*.

Informal medicinal plant market in King William's Town



***Amayeza* store in King William's Town**

- Informal medicinal plant market and *amayeza* stores operate within most urban town and cities.
- 80% of the pollution still used medicinal plants to treat health related needs.

Relevance of cultural practices and need for natural spaces and products to carry them out amongst urban dwellers in Grahamstown (Cocks et al in press)

	% respondents (of 143)
Does your family perform amasiko (rituals)?	**92**
Are ancestors present in *ihlathi*?	**80**
Are ancestors present in the river?	**87**
Are ancestors present in the veld?	**52**
Is it necessary to communicate with ancestors in nature?	**84**
Do you need the natural environment for rituals?	**58**
Do you need natural environment for initiation?	**79**
Do you need resources from the natural environment for cultural practices?	**66**

Continuity and change in values and practices….

The commodification of certain traditional socio-cultural markers causes them to become socio-economic markers for eg. *amagoqo* in the past were seen as markers of a good, hard-working wife, nowadays they are seen more as markers of wealth and status. Wood is now bought rather than collected.

"Those with the many big wood piles are the ones who have money for trucks or donkeys... everybody knows this."

Continuity and change in values and practices

- Local cultural identity formation and maintenance does not remain constant and immune to the processes of rural development and socio-economic modernization but oscillate between adherence to cultural heritage values and practices and adjusting to the changing development contexts.
- Movement is not linear, i.e. from deeply traditional to modern but one of moving between world assemblages.
- Peoples' worldviews are maintained to a large extent even as their day-to-day lives are radically transformed (Groenfelt 2003).
- Cultural dynamics is recognized as vital component in representing ways in which indigenous, traditional societies and modernized societies live and associate with biodiversity (Pretty *et al.*, 2009).