

Preservation and Restoration of Native Forests, Resistance and Intergenerational Transfer. An Experience in the South of the World; Rural Sector of Balmaceda, Municipality of Rio Bueno, Chile

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Introduction

This contribution comes from the rural sector of Balmaceda, part of the commune of oil Bueno, Chile. Geomorphologically, the country is longitudinally differentiated by 4 landmarks, from east to west: The Andes Mountain range, the Plain, the Coastal range and the Coastal [1]. The Balmaceda sector is located in the plain, being a flat area, as its name indicates, between two mountain ranges that present different natural conditions.

Regarding the national historical context, as indicates, in the last six decades the country has experienced a series of dizzying and high-impact transformations, beginning with the agrarian reform of the 1960s that lasted until the early 1970s. This changed the structure and configuration of the agricultural sector, which was dominated by large landowners and large estates, through a process of expropriation and collectivization by means of peasant settlements. In this process, and as reported by due to various factors in the context of the Cold War, the Chilean army in conjunction with the CIA of the United States organized and perpetrated a coup d'état [2].

This led to a military dictatorship that lasted from 1973 to 1990. During this period, the rural world changed again through the return of land to large landowners and the territorial dispossession of indigenous communities (again). Peasant settlements were dismantled, transforming them into small landowners, and resistance was eradicated through imprisonment, exile or assassination, especially in the early years of the dictatorship.

From the return to democracy in to the present, various sectors of the country have undergone economic changes. As a result, the nature of the place has been affected due to the increasing entry of international holdings, as well as the investment of large capitals, which are generally focused on resource extraction. These changes cause damage at different levels, and at the most serious extreme, create sacrifice zones.

Characterization of the Place and Problem Located

From the above, the Balmaceda sector is transformed by these national historical changes. There is no formal record of the history of the territory, being the oral transfer, the consequences of the changes suffered, and the presence of toponymy of the Mapuche people, those that configure the historical remnants of the sector in broad strokes, from the dictatorship to the present.

Small peasant landowners are constrained by the fact that they are unable to compete against the large amounts of capital entering the country. They migrate to the city and sell or lease their lands, which are transformed into monocultures or become a means of subsistence, favoring industrial-scale production, which has been especially accentuated in the last two decades.

With regard to nature in the Balmaceda sector, all these processes and unethical practices have resulted in incipient deforestation, erosion, and desertification. Especially through monoculture eucalyptus plantations, which, with an extension of 800 hectares, amplify these problems in a much larger area. These problems have an impact on underground water tables and favor droughts, which are amplified year after year. This is added to several other problems such as the lack of recycling, animal abuse by the dairy industry of international holdings, the creation of hydroelectric plants, among others.

From Activism

For all these reasons, four of us convened ourselves to visualize these problems, to which are added the inconsistencies and laxity of laws and public policies. With respect to the environment, in terms of control and regulation of industrial activity, we consider the example of the Mapuche people. Historically, they have defended nature, a product of their own worldview, in which at an ontological level they consider themselves part of the earth.

The presence, although not territorially in the Balmaceda sector, is found in the toponymy of the rivers, sectors and hills, along with the surrounding Mapuche communities, making their presence clear. In addition, one of the members is a direct descendant of a lonko (community leader). All this allows us to visualize that, on the one hand, from the laws, there are a series of factors that prevent them from fulfilling their function. On the other hand, it is necessary to take a decolonial look at our episteme that responds to the hegemonic culture.

We consider the lack of interest and/or awareness regarding environmental damage on the part of the inhabitants of the sector and its surroundings to be central. If there are no social actors to utilize or pressure them, it is merely an empty discourse. Therefore, we believe that preserving and recovering native forests in rural areas is fundamental. We consider the specific reality, aiming to bring this issue to the public and legal debate. In doing so, we hope to raise awareness and influence others, with the expectation of creating a community or collective that ultimately defends nature in the political-legal sphere.

Psychologist Role

Up to this point, I have focused on describing my relationship with environmental activism, but I am also a psychologist. I work in a school with high rates of "social vulnerability". After some years of working and being aware of the clientelism that can arise, I decided to integrate the school community to some extent in this activism. I especially focus on transmitting environmental awareness to the students who are part of the institution. I use the institution as a platform, which could be considered an open system in the tradition of with access to other institutional networks. However, it is also affected by slow and bureaucratic processes, which makes it difficult to merge activism and my professional role [3]. This necessarily implies tensions in both my role and that of the institution, and directs inter-institutional logics towards other purposes for which they were created or objectives that are not their central focus.

From all these considerations, an activity emerges in which the recovery of the native forest is carried out by planting native trees with the students of the school where I work. In collaboration with the teachers and a kimelfe (traditional Mapuche educator), in the Balmaceda sector, the local institutions are utilized and tensioned, mainly with CONAF, which donates native trees (a state institution in charge of protecting the environment). In addition, there is the support of DAEM (responsible for public schools in the commune of Río Bueno, which helps with mobilization) and the Pampa Ríos School as a platform to connect with the institutional network.

In relation to the aforementioned tension, this implies, on the one hand, that the purpose of these actions is to transmit them from generation to generation and make them visible so that others can reproduce them. In addition, it seeks to generate resistance from the community against the environmental damage of the context. On the other hand, all this is not directly aligned with the objectives of the institutional platforms used. However, it does laterally address issues that should be addressed, so the tension is twofold. On the one hand, from the institutional side, between economic interests and the ethical objective of these platforms. On the other hand, from the activist side, between the

freedom of action of self-convened activism and the power of social influence and institutional resources. This implies that as one increases, the other decreases, in a nuanced trend of inversely proportional correlation.

All of the above generates at least 4 critical nodes: A Cooptation, the use of institutional platforms greatly enhances the risk of being "trapped" by them; therefore, praxis is vital. B Social times versus nature: there is a gap between the functioning of globalized society and the local, as well as social changes impossible to determine, which do not adjust to nature's own times, generating uncertainty in the possible effects of these actions. C Differentiated motivations: the group driving the activism has different objectives and reasons to mobilize, which, extrapolated to a larger number of mobilized people, leads to an amplification of heterogeneity. This implies reflecting on the minimum common ground to speak of environmental activism actions. D Coloniality and cultural incommensurability: From this perspective, activism is based on Western cultural hegemony, together with its institutions and contradictions. The debate is centered on the monoculture of production which oscillates between obtaining sustainable resources and depredation [4].

In this context, the Mapuche culture, which has historically protected nature from its own cosmovision, is found in a neighboring way. Etymologically, the Mapuche name means "people of the earth". This indicates that nature is seen as an integral part of them and they thank the "ñuke mapu" (mother earth) from which they obtain "newen" (strength). In this sense, the sense of territoriality, belonging, and protection largely transcends the western sense of this activism [5, 6].

In prospective, the cultural incommensurability is denoted with respect to the ultimate goals of these actions. I make this explicit in a critical sense, but with a positive framing. I believe that it is of utmost importance that this last difference be seen as a wake-up call to transform the treatment and relational paradigm of the human being with the environment. There is ancient knowledge that can save us, in the face of an unsustainable western hegemony in time [7].

Conclusion

This environmental activism is a small part even in the larger context it comes from. It also shows that the world is connected in multiple ways (including the present contribution), and that networks are platforms that can go beyond established ways of thinking because they are interconnected. These ways of thinking were created in a context where there are multiple ways of getting involved, which is a result of the social diversity that exists [5]. This diversity is often seen as problematic, which reveals the colonial nature of Western knowledge. The latter mistakenly equates uniformity with unity, when unity should actually come from appreciating and respecting diversity. In the ever-changing present, an accurate metaphor could be drawn between a native forest and a monoculture forest.

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