Reflection on Tammy Lewis’ “Ecuador’s Environmental Revolutions”

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 Abstract

As Lewis states, “The goal of this chapter is to present a typology of environmentalisms in Ecuador, with a focus on environmental organizations. In the spirit of Max Weber, I present four ideal types. Ideal types are not simplifications or replications of concrete reality; rather, they exemplify typical features of a subject of study that logically fit together.” Typology is the study of different types and in this chapter, you will see many different types and levels of environmentalist groups. Another study mentioned is Taxonomy. It is mentioned in the first sentence of Chapter 3. It states, “Taxonomy (the science of classification) is often undervalued as a glorified form of filing—with each species in its folder, like a stamp in its prescribed place in an album; but taxonomy is a fundamental and dynamic science, dedicated to exploring the causes of relationships and similarities among organisms. Classifications are theories about the basis of natural order, not dull catalogues complied only to avoid chaos.” (S.J. Gould, 1989-98) Mentioning these studies is very important for this chapter as it is organizing environmentalism as a whole. The ideal types Lewis speaks about include “ecoimperialists”, “ecodependents”, “ecoresisters”, and “ecoentrepreneurs”. This chapter also speaks about transnational funding and the impact it has on environmental organizations and the environmental movement in Ecuador. A scholar at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) states, “Latin-American countries like Ecuador began setting up measures to further integration and facilitate access to resources and services (like land, education and jobs). Others, such as Bolivia, have introduced even more radical changes.” There is a second level of sorting to the “ideal types”. They get sorted into what Lewis claims is, “transnational”, “national”, “regional” or “local”. Later in this review, all of these terms will be explained and discussed. It seems that the way Weber, whom Lewis mentions, is a logical way of identifying what the groups purposes are and who they are as an organization. The take away message from this chapter reflection is the classifications of environmentalisms.

*Keywords: Typology, Taxonomy, “Ideal Types”*

The first ideal type is known as “ecoimperialist organizations” which fund Ecuadorian environmental organizations from abroad. Transnational funding is considered funding from abroad as well. Ecoimperialist organizations provide funding to ecodependent organizations. With offices in the Global North, there main actors are professional conservationists and their primary agenda is biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Some of the environmental groups in this ideal type include, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The type of projects these organizations do typically include land conservation and sustainable development. The state is mostly cooperative with these groups. The Ecuadorian people, however, are not very big fans of these types of organizations as they are known for “forcing their will”. There have been four main criticisms. One, they are infamous for inflicting a foreign agenda on Ecuador by funding and prioritizing land protection over Ecuadorian’s goals. Two, they bypass Ecuadorian organizations. Prior to 2006, they would act as intermediaries, channeling funds from their home offices to Ecuadorian NGO’s, which would implement the project for the foreign-based INGOs, carrying out the priorities of the INGO. The third criticism comes from indigenous groups and ecoresistant organizations who believe that foreign organizations are trying to purchase land as a means of controlling water resources and to create private reserves. Lastly, a final criticism has to do with the INGOs practices within their home nations of cooperating with polluting multinational corporations. Environmentalists in Ecuador consider such relationships suspect and definitely unethical.

*Keywords: Transnational, Criticism, Controlling*

 The second ideal type is known as “ecodependent organizations”. These organizations are funded by ecoimperialist organizations and are a national and regional level organization. In fact, 50% of their funding comes from other countries, also known as, “transnational funding”. Their main actors are professional environmentalists and their primary agenda is biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The types of projects they do include land conservation and sustainable development. The state is mostly cooperative with them. As you can tell, they are very similar to ecoimperialist organizations. However, their focus is not necessarily on a narrow geographical area and they are independent on project based funding provided from abroad, so their budgets vary a bit from year to year. The Ecuadorians call them the “Nonprofit Mafia”. Ecodependent groups approach to development trajectory include some against the neoliberal model in theory, but not primary focus of actions. Some of their accomplishments are the scientific inventories they have conducted and the parks they have managed. Organizations like Fundación Natura, EcoCiencia, and Fundación Maquipucuna are considered to be ecodependent. They are considered to be the most prevalent type, especially during the boom era. Most of the organizations are politically similar and reformist in their goals. Their work fits into the dominant economic-political framework of the country. There are three main issues with the ecoimperialist-ecodependent relationships. First, is the inconsistency in funding. The second, is the organizations’ lack of goal-setting autonomy. Lastly, ecodependent organizations must compete for funds.

 *Keywords: National & Regional, Varied Budget, Reformist*

The third ideal type is the ecoresistant groups. I refer to them as groups because not all are considered organizations. These groups receive little to no funding from ecoimperialist organizations. They are national, regional, and local. Their main actors are volunteers and a small percentage of paid staff. Their primary agenda depends on community and local extractive industries. The type of projects they do include defensive and alternative economic development which is different than the projects that the ecoimperialists and ecodependent organizations do, which are much more environmentally based and not as much socially based. The relationship the ecoresistant groups have with the state is adversarial. Ecuadorians have mixed opinions about ecoresistant groups. Ecoresistant groups approach to development trajectory is against the neoliberal model, formulating alternatives, and favors “buen vivir” and “sumak kawsay”. A few examples of accomplishments this group has are the lawsuit against Chevron and Texaco, and delayed mining. Ecoresisters are known for facilitating the process of local popular organizations standing up to fight in defense of their territories and rights. Ecoresisters oppose the dominant development model and seek independence from outside influences. Their primary goal is to resist the forces of “development,” particularly resource extraction, due to its negative impact on the environment and communities. Extraction isn’t the only issue. To name one, a scientist from the University of California in San Diego states, “Researchers have found higher blood pressure and pesticide exposures in children associated with a heightened pesticide spraying period around the Mother's Day flower harvest. This study involved boys and girls living near flower crops in Ecuador.” This is why we need these types of organizations.

Examples of organizations of ecoresistants include Acción Ecológica, DECOIN, C-CONDEM, and FUNDECOL. Their prevalence type is fewer than ecodependents, more than ecoalternatives, less visible and not necessarily registered or explicitly environmental as mentioned before.

 *Keywords: Little to No Funding, Volunteers, Resist*

The last ideal type mentioned is the ecoentrepreneur organizations. This type is funded locally through service fees as a means of ensuring “sustainable funding”. For instance, they protect the watershed that the water company relies on in an exchange for a fee. They are national, regional, and local. Their main actors are technicians and financial professionals. The primary agenda of an ecoentrepreneur organization is quality of life issues including clean and safe water, and safe transportation. The type of projects this group does includes urban, such as urban parks and water use. The state is relatively cooperative with this group and the Ecuadorian’s tend to think of them positively. Their approach to development trajectory does not address explicitly and the premise operates within market-based structure. An example of their accomplishments is they have created public/private funds to ensure protection of watersheds. Organizations under the ecoentrepreneur ideal type include Vida para Quito and FONAG. Their prevalence type is the smallest type, may grow with increased state environmentalism and payment for ecosystem services (PES) approach. Ecoentrepreneur organizations are part of the most recent wave of strategies to protect the environment that can be classified under a broad category of payment for ecosystem services (PES).

 *Keywords: Quality of Life, Urban, Ecosystem Services*

Citations

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