

Examples of the links between biological and cultural diversity





The impact of demographic shifts on linguistic, cultural and biological diversity

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Massive demographic shifts impact indigenous communities in many different ways: not only their ecosystems are transformed due to the abandonment of the land and their native communities, but ancestral knowledge and languages are lost, and cultural and social practices changed.

Ecuador is a small, multilingual, multicultural South American country of approximately 13 million inhabitants. During the last two decades, this country has experienced massive internal and external migration mainly due to widespread political and economic instability. As much as 20% of the rural population has migrated to urban areas and around 15 to 20% of the country's population has migrated abroad, mainly to the United States of America and Spain. For many indigenous communities the numbers are much higher, with about one third of adults living abroad.

Most of the research on migration and its relationship with cultural diversity has mainly focused on the population that migrates; few have examined the situation of the individuals who remain in the native communities. In this context, The Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador sponsors the project on the impact of demographic shifts on linguistic, biological and cultural diversity in three Kichwa Ecuadorian communities. This project builds on longstanding fieldwork in Ecuador, which includes participant and

non-participant observations, recorded interviews, oral testimonies and narratives in three bilingual Kichwa-Spanish communities each of which has experienced different levels of migration.

This study analyses the ways in which such massive demographic shifts impact indigenous life styles and ecosystems due to the abandonment of the land and native communities, the loss of ancestral knowledge and languages and the change of cultural and social practices. In broader terms, this project aims to determine the different faces of the linkage between migration and linguistic, cultural and biological changes. Additionally, it seeks to understand how those individuals who remain in their native communities develop new strategies to preserve the ecosystems, redefine their social roles, recreate their lifestyles and maintain their ancestral language as one of the main means of intergenerational communication and ethnic identity.

In close collaboration with the communities, this project seeks to implement several local actions



Archaeological remains Tingo Pucara, Ecuador.

for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation, such as the reconstruction of one of the community's main ancestral treasure, Tingo Pucara (Sacred fortress), which is the source of the people's past and present history.

Through 100 hours of recordings and videos, it has been possible to revive part of their oral tradition which describes ancient rites and celebrations about the communities' sacred places, ancestral divinities, productive cycles and landscape preservation, as well as children's tales and music.

On a long-term basis, it is envisaged to generate digital archives that can be easily accessed by members of the researched communities for educational purposes, and by national and international institutions interested in joining the communities' efforts for survival. It is also expected to create awareness about the linguistic, biological and cultural situation at local, regional and national levels through the implementation of public exhibits, open talks, educational programs and the media.