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Scaling claims of common good:  
transnational and intercultural advocacy  
in the Brazilian Amazon



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## Abstract

As the single largest forested area in the world, the Amazon is valued by the scientific community for its key role in global climate. The pace of deforestation, however, has worried many international agencies and state governments. Most of the forest destruction is due to the private expansion of agriculture, farming and mining. The conflicts that criss-cross the area combine two fields of strong tension: between public and private interest, and between different understandings of territory and value stemming from contrasting cultural conventions. Although a social assemblage cannot be said to enclose a single cultural set of fixed understandings, the way in which a territory is used usually requires a minimal degree of consensus in accordance with cultural principles. This paper explores how one non-governmental organization tries to engage stakeholders in the area to subsume their private interests to public concerns through an idea of a global common good. Its advocacy agenda is on developmental conservation, in opposition to resource extraction or deforestation in this frontier area. The NGO in question is an independent research institute that carries out original research and uses its results to promote a balance between social development and ecological conservation. It is part of transnational advocacy networks and is in constant contact with the Brazilian government and international agencies. Through what I call ceremonies of consent, its members explain contrasting potential consequences from different scenarios of policies, rules and commitments. Their language and performance usually include references to data that many stakeholders can relate to. Through these efforts, it is suggested here, NGO members hope to bring a consensus between conflicting cultural understandings of territory, environment and development. Their actions are geared towards scaling up the common good.

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Social life is intertwined with its environment. Humans have for millennia modified landscapes and ecological systems in order to inhabit or exploit them. Historical developments are framed by geographical characteristics and uses of biological life. In modern bureaucratic states, this transformation has gone into an overreaching built environment. An exception of this trend so far is the Brazilian Amazon, the single largest forested area in the world, accounting for nearly half of the globe's tropical forests. It is mainly appreciated for its role in global climate regulation (it produces roughly one-third of the world's oxygen), and its valuable biodiversity (it is home to one-third of the Earth's known species). For many members of its growing population, however, it is literally difficult to see the forest for the trees. Their own private interests are placed before the protection of the area for public benefit. When they do claim to seek the common good, furthermore, they make claims to different scales of it, that are usually in conflict: some purport to seek the economic prosperity of their family, others, of their community, and yet others, of Brazil. This paper tells the story of a non-governmental organization (NGO) and its efforts to achieve an arrangement that allows for a balance between social development and ecological conservation. It pursues this with a strategy of 'intercultural advocacy', that is, to navigate through conflicting visions of the common good stemming from different cultural conventions. It is mainly active as an independent research institution carrying out original investigations on the region's ecology. Its personnel use their results for academic publications and teaching, but mainly for advocacy work in transnational networks that seek to protect the Amazon forest. It is suggested here that these individuals seek to scale-up the concept of the common good among stakeholders to achieve agreements that will be compatible with international agendas on territory, environment and development. Paradoxically, this effort needs to be framed as being in accordance with the 'national interest' in order to avoid political problems and to include assistance from government bureaucracy.

The situation portrayed in this paper is an example of the increasing role of transnational advocacy networks within individual states. Around the world, these networks have become involved in local political arenas in a wide array of issues. The case presented here is an example of how one institution, as a member of a particular set of networks (devoted to development and environment), defines and carries out its work in a context of high sociocultural diversity. The key intent of its labour is named here 'assembling consent', which means that the various projects its personnel are involved in, and the information they gather and process, all have the ultimate purpose of serving as the basis for agreements between the stakeholders involved.

These agreements – or consent – around an issue, serve as a basis for potential political negotiations with institutional actors such as local or national governments for inclusive policies and regulation. The agreements provide such negotiations with the required legitimacy that lies at the base of political decision-making. In order to pursue their aim of assembling consent, several stages were identified in their different projects: identification of stakeholders, arrangement to ensure frequent contact and communication with them, identification of problems by each stakeholder, independent research on overall situation, analysis of own data, formulation of a report with suggested measures that require accord, meeting with all stakeholders to present report and assess the reception of its suggestions, conducting of further negotiations, and approaching of government authorities to recommend relevant policies. The underlying effort to achieve an agreement among all stakeholders requires a motif that allows for each of them to maintain their involvement without feeling relegated. This is where the scaling of common good takes place.

Each project initiated by an advocacy network is therefore an effort to establish a system of symbolic correlation among problems, actions and coordination. If both stakeholders and governments are convinced to undertake a series of concerted deeds to reduce a problem, then the chances of this happening increase substantially. The purpose of advocacy networks, therefore, is the performance of a modern ceremony of consent. The consensus sought centres, first of all, on the problem; secondly, on the framework of changes needed; and thirdly, on the measures required by each of the stakeholders. This type of approach follows a typical development NGO participatory strategy, by including all stakeholders in the definition of problems and in the debate about ways of dealing with them. Advocacy networks are made up of a wide variety of groups with different types of organization and formality. Key members within these networks are NGOs, which are institutions with external funding focused on an issue area. The research project from which this paper draws its data and analysis focused on one Brazilian NGO, the Environmental Research Institute of the Amazon (IPAM), and studied its work within the several advocacy networks it formed part of between 2004 and 2005. As will be explained below, this organization has a particular profile in combining independent scientific research and advocacy. Such a combination provides it with a special legitimacy in its claims and assertions in the eyes of government officials and businessmen. Its grass-root engagement, on the other hand, provides for legitimacy with social movements and local communities. In this sense, this organization is placed in a privileged place in order to exert influence on different social groups.



The IPAM is an independent scientific research centre that uses its studies to advocate for an improved environmental management of the rainforest while allowing for the economic development of the local population. Its team is comprised of Brazilian and American researchers, and it is part of wider transnational networks of NGOs, universities, foundations, government agencies and international institutions interested in protecting the Amazon Rainforest, aiding its populations, or developing the area. The IPAM has an active role in lobbying the Brazilian Federal Government, as well as several state and local governments, to implement changes in their policies as part of wider visions of the future. It takes part in projects of various scales, from small localized ones, such as sustainable logging or river fishery management, to global ones, such as the role of the Amazon rainforest in worldwide climate change with NASA. Its scientific expertise is supported by publications of staff members in recognized peer-reviewed journals, as well as participation in high-level international meetings on climate change or sustainable development. Its legitimacy as an institution that produces scientific knowledge helps it encourage a particular view of the forest for the future.

The Amazon rainforest is of global environmental interest due to its status as the largest single forested area on the planet. It covers the basin of the Amazon River, which runs from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean. Most of its territory lies within Brazil. Its rich biodiversity is matched by a cultural diversity that includes most of the world's uncontacted tribes as well as numerous migrants from around the world. Over the last few decades, it has become the last major 'frontier' of development in the area (Alston, Libecap, & Mueller, 1999; Branford & Glock, 1985). This status refers to a mythical sense of the nineteenth century American 'wild West', where an organized polity moves into a territory in order to exploit its land, timber, minerals, and use it to expand its inhabited urbanized area (Cleary, 1990; Hemming, 1987). Due to the extent of the area in Brazil, however, there is a lack of state institutions and policing that allows for violent conflicts over land property rights. As in previous frontier areas, a large migration influx to the Amazon area has followed state development policies (Lisansky, 1990). In visits to IPAM project sites in the states of Pará, Amazonas and Mato Grosso, I heard references to an idealized image of the American 'wild West' from many local farmers. "Americans did away with most of their forests and look at them now...why would we not have the opportunity to do the same?", a local farmer told me under a banana tree while leading a team of NGO personnel on a tour of his farm. His point of view was similar to many others

I heard during my fieldwork, all of which in turn mirrored the Brazilian state policies that brought them there in the 1970s (Schmink & Wood, 1992).

International pressure has risen on the state of Brazil to reduce deforestation because of an increased awareness of the Amazon forest's role in the global ecosystem (Kolk, 1998). The Rio Summit in 1992 brought about a sense of urgency in policy circles to design new tools to at least reduce the speed of deforestation. This international attention resulted in more funding for independent research and advocacy in the region. Many organizations dedicated to the defence of indigenous groups and promotion of their rights combined their efforts to the environmental drive (Schwartzman & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman, Peres, Malcolm, & Turner, 2001). It was a logical development of the socio-environmental movement that had started taking shape in Brazil since the 1970s. This national movement had been in turn the product of a particular combination of transnational and local activism and advocacy. Many of the international non-governmental organizations working in the Amazon started supporting a movement called 'Peoples of the Forest'. This was an alliance between indigenous communities and other forest dwellers led by the rubber-tapper union leader Chico Mendes (Mendes, 1992: 47-48). Mendes was an outspoken defender of forest-dweller ways of life against the onslaught of deforestation for farming, agriculture or mining. Due to his high visibility, he was one of the activists interviewed by Gro Brundtland for the UN report she supervised entitled 'Our Common Future' (WCED 1987). It also allowed him to address the Inter-American Development Bank in March 1987 in an attempt to stop a road project in the Amazon for the preservation of the forest and the livelihoods of the local population (Souza, 1990). Among the proposals of his coalition were 'extractive reserves', protected areas where local inhabitants have the right to live off the forests' products, such as rubber or nuts (Hemming, 1985). Mendes' public profile, however, did not stop him being assassinated on December 22 1988 by a local rancher who felt threatened by his activism. An international outcry over his death followed, after which the Brazilian government approved several reserves of the sort proposed by 'Peoples of the forest'.

The tension over the use of forested territories in Brazil illustrates the tension that exists between local communities, states, and humanity as a whole. Several issues reveal the difficulty of such conflict: 1) the insistence of groups of people who insist on their indigenous identity to claim rights over territories (Dove, 2006); 2) the implications of how the environment as an ecological system is understood (Little, 1999); 3) ideas of development as guidelines for policies that would alter population dynam-

ics and landscapes (Mosse, 2005); and 4) the political economy of a pioneer frontier (Cleary, 1993; Foweraker, 1981). These matters are all related to a struggle for legitimacy over decisions about a choice of development for the region. This paper suggests that the role played by transnational advocacy networks in the Brazilian Amazon has been essentially one of negotiation between contradictory claims of common good. The protection of extractive areas is an example of home grown campaigns being backed by transnational networks of environmental activists and advocates. Other projects have attempted to achieve the same international appeal without disaffecting local interests. It is therefore neither a simple local vs. global nor a society vs. state debate. A key ingredient that has allowed transnational advocacy networks to influence Brazilian government policies is their use of scientific research on the ecological system and on human populations in the area.

The fact that the Amazon region has been the recipient of incoming migration from other parts of Brazil and the world while maintaining high levels of cultural diversity among small groups known as ‘indigenous’, makes this case clearly intercultural. The mediation of claims of the common good therefore requires cultural sensitivity and the building of bridges across contrasting visions, historical resentments and distrust. In order to develop its case, this text is divided into three sections the first is an ethnographic description of the strategies used by the observed NGO personnel to achieve consensual decisions among organizations and individuals with conflicting interests. These strategies are termed here ‘ceremonies of consent’ and mainly consist of schemes to visualize the effects of various activities in the region. The second explains the concept of ‘common good’ under the influence of transnational advocacy networks and how it is used for claims in order to garner political legitimacy. The third and last part concludes with a general reflection on the applicability of intercultural moral frameworks as a method for scaling up of the common good.

## Ceremonies of consent

“We need to allocate actions, for people to take responsibility of what they can do”, said an NGO representative at the start of a small meeting located in the city of Canarana, in the state of Mato Grosso. The temperature in the meeting room that had open windows and a fan in the ceiling running at top speed, was still very hot.

Part of the reason was that it was full of people who were also noticeably tense. The attendances were visibly diverse, as there were representatives of indigenous groups, large soy agribusinesses, small-farmers, regional schools, local municipal governments, the state government, and NGOs. A voice on a microphone could be heard at a distance, coming from the main auditorium of the three-day conference. This small meeting of leaders of each of the stakeholder groups, had the purpose of drafting a document that would serve to publicly launch the campaign to protect the springs that supply water to the Xingu River (a tributary of the Amazon). It was the first time that all groups represented were in the same room, and they had all agreed to sign a document to start an environmental campaign. This took place on October 27, 2004, at the end of a three-day meeting of all stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> The conveners were two NGOs: the IPAM<sup>2</sup> and the Socioenvironmental Institute (ISA<sup>3</sup>). The campaign has since won awards and involved more organizations and people. The originally identified threats to the springs were deforestation and chemical pollution due to pesticides and artificial fertilizers. In the course of its running, the campaign achieved to combine many small actions by a wide variety of local actors, and also involve many people and organizations to gather funding and promote their cause. The name of the campaign is *Y Ikatu Xingu*, which means ‘good, healthy water’ in the Tupi language, one of many spoken by local indigenous populations.

This campaign is one of many similar efforts carried out by several advocacy networks in the area. The fact that it is still active in 2011, almost seven years after its launch, speaks of its effective organization and operation. In its report of achievements, the team organizing the campaign highlights the commitment of local municipal governments, indigenous groups and other stakeholders in what is termed ‘a project for socioenvironmental responsibility’ (de Souza & Junqueira, 2007). This process necessarily requires a strong involvement by stakeholder groups in the area. The key mediation tool has been a clear appraisal of contrasting cultural understandings of territory, environment and development. This part of the paper includes two brief ethnographic descriptions of the ‘ceremonies of consent’ led by personnel from the IPAM. The first case is the already presented ‘Y katu Xingu campaign, while the second is a ‘meeting of social leaders along the BR-163’. Before expanding on both cases, a brief context is provided.

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1 The official webpage of the campaign is: <http://www.yikatuxingu.org.br/>

2 URL: <http://www.ipam.org.br/>

3 URL: <http://www.socioambiental.org.br/>

Populations in the Amazon rainforest have long provided for thorough studies by anthropologists (Roosevelt, 1994). The many groups that inhabit the lowlands have helped researchers to theorize on numerous issues central to the anthropological endeavour. Instead of focusing on a single population assemblage, however, this paper focuses on how a small organized group that is not bound together by ethnicity, tradition, heritage or kin relations, mediates political issues in a socio-culturally diverse milieu. On the one hand, the core group of NGO personnel are driven by a belief in the value of their contribution. The key motivation of their work is that they are actually ‘improving’ things, as is framed in the stated goals and aims of the organization. It is an action-oriented assemblage with its own bureaucratic structure. As part of what is known as organized civil society, it complies with various legal requirements of registry with the Brazilian Government, and it participates in policy and research circuits both within Brazil and internationally.

The populations with which the IPAM works are all based in the Amazon forest area. They can be considered within three broad categories of populations: 1) traditional heritage groups who live in the forest and have been recognised by the Brazilian Government as ‘indigenous’ populations to the area; 2) migrant small farmers from the rest of Brazil, but mainly the South; and 3) entrepreneurs of various trades, including miners and loggers, but also large agribusinessmen. Members of the first category seek to maintain a way of life away from urban centres and with a high mobility within the forest. They form social units with various degrees of cultural cohesion and some of them have been awarded protected areas for their use. Most of these groups seek to maintain the forest in order to pursue their traditional ways of life. Since the late eighties they have mostly framed their struggles in environmental terms (Pieck, 2006). Members of the second category, on the other hand, engage in small or medium-scale agriculture or farming. Some of the more established ones have migrated in clusters of families or neighbours from Southern Brazil, and use their associations to create new urban areas. The third group is loosely connected and uneven. Mining has increased in the area since gold was discovered in 1980 (Cleary, 1990), and many of those who take part in it are highly mobile and self-employed. Large agribusinesses, on the other hand, use considerable areas and export mainly soy to the European and Chinese markets and buy produce from smaller farmers. The combination of land uses has pushed the edge of the forest further inward. The mediators who work within NGOs can be considered as a fourth population group common in the area: the group of environment advocates. Although locally rooted, this group is transnational at its core (Stark, Vedres, & Bruszt, 2006). The mem-

bers of this group seek various types of equilibrium of ecological systems and social life in the area between the previous groups, the Brazilian national government and international agencies.

“It is in the interest of all our communities for us to work together”, said a senior NGO leader into the microphone in front of a full auditorium at the beginning of the Canarana meeting. While he spoke, a screen behind him showed a computer animation of the Earth seen from space, it then zoomed into Brazil, and then into the Amazon region and stopped in the area around the Xingu River basin. His speech was full of references to Brazil as being the main motivation behind the campaign that gathered all who were sitting in plastic chairs in the audience. The speaker explained that the protection of the springs around the Xingu River was meant not only to the benefit the Xingu National Park or of the River that crosses it, but rather was “for the good of the country”. Such use of the nation as a central symbol to motivate participation in the campaign appeared to serve the purpose of finding the common concern among all those taking part in the meeting. The same tone was used by speakers of the inaugural panel, who represented attending groups as well as local and federal governments. They all made references to the endeavour as being “for Brazil”. Of the several indigenous leaders who spoke, one put it bluntly: “let’s do politics, let’s do a good job, let’s work together, let’s go ahead... but it has to be for nature, because it’s not only the Xingu [River] that is dying, it’s the whole of Brazil”. These initial speeches set the tone for the three days of workshops and meetings that took place to design and launch the campaign.

During those three days, several participants told me how surprised they were about being so close to groups they had always distrusted. A small farmer told me that it was the first time that he had been at the same negotiating table as people from Grupo Maggi, the largest soy agribusiness in the world. A representative of this group told me in a restaurant that he did not understand why most indigenous communities with allocated protected territories did not lease their land for the production of soy: “with only a few thousand hectares producing soy, all the community could make enough money to retire comfortably in Florida”, he said with a wry smile. One of the key NGOs in charge of the campaign was ISA, an organization with long experience of working with indigenous communities in the Amazon. Its members had advocated in favour of the different groups who shared the Xingu National Park. The ISA was a new organization founded by individuals who had previously worked mainly on indigenous rights. As part of a trend to frame such rights in environmental terms, they had successfully established a link between conservation and protected areas for



indigenous communities. Similar to the IPAM that works with scientific research for its own publications and advocacy, the ISA also carries out original research to help its efforts and campaigns. Their history of contact and interaction with indigenous groups allowed them to be considered as legitimate mediators on many issues. The IPAM and the ISA were the convening NGOs for the ‘Y Ikatu Xingu campaign. As such, they combined knowledge obtained through scientific research, with that inherited by tradition (of indigenous groups or of small farmers, for example).

Many members of the IPAM and the ISA were chosen by all those taking part to lead most of the workshops that took place. This happened for several reasons: they were known by everyone, they had ample experience leading workshops, and they had evident leadership skills. As workshop coordinators, they pushed for agreements on several issues: the allocation of tasks among those taking part, the definition of goals per area, the progress supervision instruments, and the required steps and meetings. To achieve these agreements, a participatory method was used, which is common in the NGO community. By the end of the three days, a list of responsibilities and commitments had been compiled. The inclusion of all voices in drafting key documents for the campaign was an essential part of what I call the ‘ceremonies of consent’. It is a similar process to what Riles described as an aesthetic quality of the performance of organized civil society networks (Riles, 2000). The final words pointed to a letter signed by the leaders of all groups that would be published in a national newspaper and serve as the basis for the campaign. The desired effect was to motivate participants with an optimistic note. This did not stop a group of male dancers of various groups from holding a ‘war dance’ as their last act to finish the event. One representative said on the microphone that it was performed to symbolize their distrust after having been deceived on many occasions by government officials and others. “This is a reminder of our obligation to do things right this time”, said the person on the microphone.

The second account of ‘ceremonies of consent’ is of a network of social leaders involved in the paving of Highway BR-163. This highway was originally laid out in the seventies by the military government in their drive for a ‘colonization’ of the Amazon region. After clearing thousands of kilometres, the planned pavement did not follow. It has since been a dirt road that is seriously affected by each rainy season. The recent boom in soy production in the state of Mato Grosso, however, has transformed it into an export route. It leads to the port city of Santarém, in the Amazon River, from which container ships sail towards Europe and China, as the largest export markets for Brazilian soy. This has meant that big agribusinesses are

asking the government to pave the road in order to increase their export capacity through this route. The referred network had the purpose of agreeing on a strategy as a response to the paving of the road. It was spurred by some environmental groups who were worried about the potential deforestation that would follow the paving. This worry is based on experience. In the past, when similar roads have been paved, an acceleration of illegal deforestation followed. The IPAM has developed projections through detailed analyses of satellite photographs and secondary data about particular circumstances in the area.

The network, however, does not oppose the paving of the road, because it is in the interest of all stakeholders involved to have better roads. For small farmers, the paved road would help them to reach markets. For other inhabitants, a good road simply means being able to travel a lot more easily in an area where a short trip can take long hours on bumpy roads. The network decided to demand for a governance model from the Federal Government, which would include local communities in decisions and ensure enough policing to minimize a potential increase in illegal deforestation. One of the meetings of this network that I attended took place in a riverside hotel in Alter do Chao, close to Santarém. Over two days, those attending had been seeking agreements about the forthcoming actions of the network. Again, the IPAM and the ISA were the convening NGOs. This meeting had a more urgent tone than the other one, in that those attending were under increasing pressure by illegal loggers to stop their activism. The lives of several people present had been threatened, and some had witnessed shootings of other activists who opposed illegal logging.

The referred meeting had visible tensions, between those who preferred to negotiate with the government, and those who wanted to stage larger and stronger protests that would force the government to react. These differences were evident among some of the stakeholders, but also within the IPAM's team, where there was a difference between those working mainly as scientific researchers and those working as political operators. During the last couple of hours of the meeting, the debate became heated because the political operators considered it necessary to block the highway during the harvest. This would bring exports to a halt and draw international attention to their plight. The other group, who outnumbered this radical one, claimed that such a move would work against them and would affect the network's negotiation capacity. Part of the problem had to do with the fact that the purpose of this association was not to oppose something, but to try and ensure an improved development for the area. A federal attorney present at the meeting compared this plight with a previous one opposing the construction of a dam. "That fight was easier because it was



simply ‘no to the dam’. This is harder because it’s not about rejecting the paving of the BR-163.” In the end, the conciliatory measure of negotiating with the government prevailed over blocking the highway. Those present voted for a name for the network: ‘Consortium for a Socioenvironmental Development of the BR-163’ (Condessa BR-163). In doing so, they emphasized their aspiration for a similar viewpoint to that of the IPAM and the ISA.

The two examples portrayed here involve networks of NGOs that were focused on ‘assembling consensuses’ among stakeholder groups. They did this through a combination of methods and stages of political negotiations and through the sharing of information. It is not clear whether the reached consensuses was similar to the positions originally sought by the NGOs. In interviews and in conversations, NGO personnel always insisted that the participatory process implied inclusiveness in decisions and even in the naming of problems. A long debate has occurred in development studies about what is termed the ‘tyranny’ of participatory processes (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). The basic argument of this critical perspective is that one can easily find a clear distance between how participatory methods may claim to be and the degree of participation at their actual implementation. It is common, the authors pointed out, to find many practitioners more devoted to comply with a ritualized form of participation, than with ensuring the open and inclusive involvement of all stakeholders involved. Some of the obstacles to the realization of participation are the clear central role of NGO personnel in convening advocacy networks, their influence in defining working methods, their legitimacy in establishing a documentary base of ‘scientific facts’, and the unspoken hierarchies present between them and the rest of the participants.

The two networks that were observed for this analysis, however, did seem to work in such a way that most of the criticisms were considered by the conveners. The key that may allow for a better application of certain methodologies is the forming of networks between stakeholder groups. This means that although two single and influential NGOs were leading the debates and convening, the network structure was used to make all those participating feel as the ‘owners’ of the projects decided. This was evident in debates and in decisions taken collectively, such as the names of the networks and the activities decided upon. This situation is different from the work of a single NGO, agency or foundation, with a given population or situated in a particular region. It also avoids the ‘social construction of success’ that is so common in the aid industry (Mosse, 2005). These networks served as intercultural negotiation schools, where discussions had to be carried out over a long period of time in order

to avoid misunderstandings. This implied a sustained effort by the leading NGOs, with periodical visits by NGO personnel throughout the year. Meetings as the ones portrayed above, where all stakeholder groups would come together, were but one moment in a long process of negotiation.

The framing of what these advocacy networks actually do is of central importance for their existence and persistence. In order to ‘assemble consensus’, NGOs need to engage stakeholders, funding institutions and involved governments, with an overall sense of common purpose. What the networks portrayed here are doing, forms part of international and transnational networks of activism, research and advocacy taking place throughout the world (Tarrow, 2005). The overall strategy they seem to have adopted seems to follow the stated interest in a socio-environmental equilibrium that was discussed in the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled ‘Our common future’, and the following United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Rio Summit, of 1992 (Little, 1995). These similarities show the interweaving of interests and agendas between intergovernmental bodies, such as the UN, funding agencies, private donors, and NGOs. Both NGOs portrayed here were actually founded shortly after the summit as part of a surge of new groups responding to the complexity of the challenges identified. Both NGOs, nevertheless, were created on the basis of previous groups and thus inherited expertise and personnel. They are part of a pragmatic wave of associationalism at the global level that can be witnessed in many issue areas. Advocacy networks have become influential political actors in what appears to be a challenge to government-led political decision-making (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). This paper suggests that their influence in socio-environmental matters in the Amazon relies on the successful scaling-up of the common good. The next part of the paper explains this frame in more detail.

### Claims of common good: legitimacy in scale?

The common good is considered here as an expression of collective benefit by a social arrangement. This means that if a state of affairs is maintained, all those included in the referred collective will profit to some degree. Rather than taking this concept as a given, however, it is always considered here as the subject of a ‘claim’. Its assertion carries with it, an effort to persuade a collective of the convenience to follow a certain

path, either by taking action or by a declared support of allegiance. It is, nevertheless, a statement of moral aspiration instead of a promise of assistance (Haldane, 1996). It is usually political or religious leaders who invoke the common good as an inherent bond for social cohesion. As a concept, it has strong theological roots in what has been termed Catholic social thought (McCann & Miller, 2005). In political philosophy, it has a long history that is intertwined with the debate between liberalism and communitarianism (Mulhall & Swift, 1992), and has been related to considerations on justice (Rawls, 1999) or citizenship (Dagger, 1997). All these matters, however, refer to the concept's relevance for social assemblages. It is used in this paper not because any of those involved insisted on it openly, but because their efforts pointed to its meaning as an underlying motive for their endeavours. The following part of the paper seeks to provide a working definition of the term in the light of the case studied. It will attempt to clarify how it was put into practice, as well as its use as a basis for legitimacy and its relation to scale, from its local to its transnational implications.

In the first case portrayed above, the IPAM and the ISA appealed to all stakeholders in the campaign to protect the springs of the Xingu River with a message of common interest. Their effort was clearly aimed at convincing them of becoming involved with activities, funding or backing. As will be explained below, the word 'stakeholders' in NGO-jargon, itself already implies that the individuals involved have a stake or a special interest in the issue. This implies that all actors invited to take part in the campaign were deemed to share an interest in its success. The purpose of the campaign, to improve the flow and quality of the water that feeds the Xingu River, would allow all of them to benefit in some way. This fact points to a localized sense of the common good: the preservation of the Xingu River. It is common because it is not limited to an individual but to many people. On the most immediate level, it is to those living in the area; on a second level, to those with business or interests in the region; on a third level, to those in charge of the administration of government institutions. These three levels of connection are direct, but there are others whose interests are indirect, especially in the case of transnational advocates. How can the preservation of a local river serve the common good of people from another continent? Apart from its local projects in the forest, the IPAM is also involved with international teams researching global climate fluctuations. By promoting the conservation of the Xingu River, one of the main tributaries of the Amazon River, the IPAM is combining local and global issues. It is perhaps easier for international funding agencies and donor bodies to understand the impact of this local action on the global scale.

The scaling of the common is the process through which specialized agents induce a sense of a shared common good in all those involved in a particular campaign or project, from small farmers to international funding agencies. The common good is, therefore, not the conservation of the river itself, but rather the sense of an environmental balance or equilibrium in ecosystems. Part of the strategy of conveners seems to lie in showing issues of specific relevance to each stakeholder while maintaining clarity on how everything fits together. In this sense, for most of the participants in the meetings I witnessed, the perceived common good was the river and its surrounding ecosystem. The other case, on the BR-163, had a similar strategy. In order to garner legitimacy to push for policy changes at local, national and international levels, IPAM's team established the relevance of its purpose at the three levels: local, national and global.

The choice of 'common good' as a key concept to understand the work of advocacy networks responds to an attempt to examine negotiations of contrasting understandings of territory, environment and development. The divergent cultural legacies involved strain negotiations regarding long-standing values. The scaling up of claims of common good, therefore, portrays an effort to increase the pool of commonality and purpose. The chosen concept, however, is not of easy use, due to its heavy philosophical luggage. The discussion that follows, attempts to clarify its usage and its implications for transnational interactions. The word 'good' is meant here as a state of affairs that is convenient for a social assemblage. It is 'common' because of a collective sense of the shared value of such state of affairs amongst the members of the assemblage. The size of the assemblage determines the scale of its applicability. Rather than having the 'common good' as a normative definition of what ought to be, as Aristotle seemed to consider it, it is used here as an idealized quality that stimulates the maintenance of a social assemblage.

The use of 'common good' in this paper is a chosen one, as there is no agreement within or among various academic disciplines. The position adopted here is close to Taylor's concept of goods as intangible principles (Taylor, 1995). He argues that two types of goods are inherently common or social as they cannot be limited to the individual or be of a private character: those of a shared culture, which make possible the feelings, decisions and actions of individuals; and those that essentially incorporate shared understandings of their value (Taylor, 1995). The latter emphasise the collective construction of shared meanings. In doing so, they establish social boundaries within groups. A key finding of this paper is that the quest for a common ground between all stakeholders leads to a renewed sense of symbolic community. This new sense of imagined community may be one of global reach.

The concept of the commons has been paradigmatic in order to explain collective uses of territory or goods. It is useful to comment briefly on them to avoid any misinterpretation about unintended relation with the case stated in this paper. Perhaps the best-known reference to the concept of the ‘commons’ is the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968), a theory about how overpopulation would damage common resources as people did not feel an obligation to take care of it. As a provocative hypothesis it generated a long debate about ‘common-pool’ resources (shared goods). Further studies refuted Hardin’s hypothesis by showing that there were many examples throughout the world of communities that successfully managed shared goods (Ostrom, 1990).

Goods, on the other hand, can be understood in a variety of ways. It is relevant to explain why they are not considered here as central to this paper. Haldane offers a set of distinctions between individual, private, collective and public goods (Haldane, 2004). The difference between them is that they are ‘enjoyed’ by different subjects (Riordan, 2008: 9): individual goods are enjoyed by individuals but are not exclusive to each individual; private goods are those that are available only to a single individual; collective goods are aggregates; and public goods are those of which the enjoyment no one can be excluded. With this in mind, Haldane explains that common goods “are only available to members of groups” (Riordan, 2008: 9), and would not be available to them as individuals and are secured by a type of cooperation through which “bonds of community are strengthened” (Haldane, 2004).

It is perhaps useful to point out that the common good as used here is not limited to an idea of well-being as the ‘good life’. This clarification is deemed necessary especially because in political philosophy, for example, Aristotle refers to the common good as a political community’s pursuit of the good life (Riordan, 2008: 25). From an anthropological perspective, Aristotle’s idea of a rational base for political life is rather limited and blind to many other social arrangements. Anthropologists have described numerous social arrangements that rely on various symbolic stances in order to maintain a political community. Written law and bureaucratic institutions of conflict solution comprise only one part of a complex interweaving of relations and influence. Power management within social groups, for example, usually combines a symbolic use of tradition and heritage with personal charisma. In a political community, the common good is a heuristic inasmuch as it entails the pursuit of something that is not completely clear from the start that will become clearer in the process of pursuit. The mere existence of a political unity requires each member to exercise restraint about her or his particular view on how to live life, in order to estab-

lish a basis for the regulation of common life (Rawls, 1999). This, however, entails the awareness of avoiding the difficult agreements on ultimate ends, and limiting collective accords to a minimal. For Hobbes, security and survival are the instrumental goods that people can agree on; while for Locke it is securing rights (Riordan, 2008: 105).

Claims of the common good have a transcendental character especially when expressed through theological principles. This fact highlights their moral dimension in human interactions, not because morality is linked to religion, but rather because both can help an assemblage achieve some type of communal cohesion through symbolism. The risk of such an assertion, however, is that an outright misunderstanding ensues by comparing moral understandings with ceremonial practices. Akin to cultural traits that entail a complex web of performed meanings in flux, so does morality exist in quotidian performance (Zigon, 2008: 18). Such performance, however, is unreflective and thus not necessarily ceremonial. Rather than a strict sense of principles or norms, morality is therefore a practice in constant adjustment according to individual interactions and significant communal experiences. When framed with a stated purpose, concerted collective action can enhance its meaning to individuals taking part because of their recognition of its value. This recognition usually takes place according to an existent set of customs and norms. The definition – even by inference – of a common good therefore entails consequences for individual and collective deeds.

The scale of claims of the common good is necessarily related to physical scale (Herod, 2011) through the process of establishing a relation between territory, community and a certain quality of well-being that is derived from individual actions. The scaling-up of such claims therefore means that an effort is made for people to consider themselves as being part of a community that is wider than initially evident. It is what Herod refers to as a structuring principle (Herod, 2011: 40). This means that relations between different localities and social groups are made evident with the use of visualization tools or methods. In the campaigns that are analysed here, these were usually maps generated with satellite photographs on which different layers of information were added. These layers highlighted recently deforested zones, conservation areas, indigenous parks, political borders of municipalities, river basins, as well as roads. The importance of such maps for the networks was evident in the care NGO personnel put in their preparation and presentation. Their development and use within each campaign required time for data gathering, analysis within each NGO, feedback from other scientists and academics, preliminary presentations to



key stakeholders, and a final preparation. This would ensure that the end product was clear for all involved as well as meaningful.

One of IPAM's main research projects is called 'Scenarios for Amazonia', and consists on modelling potential future scenarios according to available data. One of the best examples was published by several researchers from IPAM, in collaboration with others, in the acclaimed international journal *Nature* (Soares-Filho, et al., 2006). In it, the authors combine data from many sources to present two extremes of a plausible range of trajectories of deforestation for the year 2050. One model depicts a 'business-as-usual' model while the other depicts a 'governance' one. The first is an estimation of what would happen if the rate of deforestation until 2005 would continue. The second represented what would happen if more policing would take place and conservation legislation would be implemented successfully in the area. This exercise of imagination about what the future may hold has a clear agenda: it is an invitation for government officials and the international community to make sure that the governance model prevails. Two key elements of the published article are maps of what the Amazon forest would look like in each scenario described. Their purpose is for a clear visualization of each option represented. A similar effect was sought on a smaller scale with grassroots organizations in the networks described above.

The claims of the common good described here are therefore related to the environment. This relation allows for a scaling-up to a global level through transnational advocacy networks. In this respect, it is convenient to consider the implications of what the United Nations Organization has described as 'global public goods'. The UN identifies three types of global public goods (Kaul, Grunberg, & Stern, 1999). The first are 'natural global commons', such as the shared natural environment to the benefit of all when protected and to the detriment of all when harmed. The second are 'human-made global commons', such as the code of universal human rights, or the infrastructure of global telecommunications. The third type are 'flow goods', which include global conditions, such as peace, financial stability, and health in the sense of absence of disease or epidemics such as malaria, TB or HIV/AIDS (Riordan, 2008: 132). In this classification, the environment is recognized as of public utility.

The invocation of public goods implies a protection that avoids depletion that would stop others from enjoying their benefits. In this sense, it appears that what environmental advocates seek is to establish the status of public good for the standing forest. I have chosen not to frame my analysis in this way, not because I dismiss this possibility, but because I instead focus on the process of intercultural advocacy.

In relation to public goods, it can perhaps be said that in order to establish clarity about public goods, a previous process to achieve a legitimate idea of 'common good' is required. This, again, leads to the problem of scale.

In any political system, there is usually distrust towards models in which an elite dictates what is good for the majority (Riordan, 2008: 178). This leads communities to try to defend a local way of life. In this vein, MacIntyre argues that the common good is only achievable in small-scale societies (MacIntyre, 2007). The fact that more small organized civil society groups have come together in networks seeking more impact and effectiveness in their activism or interest, shows that there is an increasing awareness of interconnections and the need for scale. This is the more obvious in what is termed the 'environmental movement', which is not a single coalition or grand organization, but rather a mosaic of groups of individuals who show an interest in improving the quality of ecosystems worldwide (Rootes, 2004). This awareness has led environmentalism in its transformation over the past few decades. One of the characteristics of this change has been to allow for transnational flows of information and priorities to counter the previous trend of centre-periphery (Ignatow, 2007: 6). The result has been a dialogue between scientific research and traditional knowledge of local populations. Cultural or religious components have become usual companions to environmental campaigns.

This is the trend in which indigenous groups have framed their struggles within a set of eco-politics (Pieck, 2006). They have done this in coordination with large coalitions of independent movements and organizations. It is a case of scale shift, as Tarrow has defined it as "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions to a different focal point, involving a new range of actors, different objects, and broadened claims" (Tarrow, 2005: 121). When activists realize they must come together to improve their individual plights, then there is a significant shift towards an encompassing assemblage that increases its potential negotiation capacity. In this process, the scale shift includes targets and claims. An advocacy network, therefore, offers the opportunity to include a wide array of voices to strengthen a unified cause.

## Discussion: transnational scale and the state

Anthropology has paid attention for a long time to human-ecological relations. Its scale of study usually remains within small groups of individuals or some type of local or national polity. The fact that many people throughout the world are inter-



ested in helping sustain the ecosystems of the Amazon forest therefore poses a challenge to the study of their transnational advocacy campaigns. The research carried out for this paper focused on the political practice of NGOs within large transnational advocacy networks. The initial findings were deemed to lie in the ‘management of dissent’ within the networks. In other words, it was perceived that by establishing a large network in which all stakeholders were involved, dissenting views were gradually dealt with in such a way that their main criticism was incorporated into the final position of the network. This particular political practice strengthens networks’ political capital when negotiating with policy makers and international agencies. This paper hopes to go one step further in understanding the motivation behind stakeholders’ voluntary enrolment in a network in which long-time rivals are also members. This leads to the idea of a scaling-up of a claim of the common good. In a historical perspective, the phenomenon of transnational advocacy networks as a political configuration is recent. It is still hard to find complex analyses of their endeavours. Notwithstanding their short experience, they have become central in many issue-areas, such as environmental protection.

The significant loss of the forested area in the Amazon region has gradually occurred over the last century, but it has increased in the last few decades (Moran, 1993). The threat of deforestation is recognized in terms of its effect on ecological systems and the cultural diversity in the area. A deeper understanding of how humanity has affected ecosystems throughout the world has helped make sense of current trends and aspirations. Studies of historical ecologies have recently provided windows into the development of human societies in the Amazon (Rival, 2006). They have been pivotal for the understanding of social impacts on territories over the long term (Sutton & Anderson, 2010). A focus on cultural ecology has allowed for the combination of numerous studies of cultural behaviours in a particular environment (Balée, 1995). As more studies on the region’s peoples and customs have shed light on their cultural configurations, the image of Amazonia has changed (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). Current encroachment on territories of such cultural diversity is already having an effect. It is therefore considered important to maintain both the bio- and the cultural diversity of human groups. This is part of what is known as socio-environmentalism in Brazil.

The fact that this research project speaks solely of the Amazon forest that lies within the borders of Brazil, is proof of how relevant the state is for policy-making and thus for target-oriented activism or advocacy. It was outside the possibilities of the research carried out for this paper to explore similar configurations in all the

other countries that contain part of the forest. Similar to national governments that promote the protection of domestic industries or businesses with specific tariffs and regulations, each regional government has imposed a set of rules for civil society groups wishing to come into the country to help on local situations. These guidelines help to reduce the distrust towards foreigners that seems to be prevalent in the Amazon. Because some key members of IPAM are Americans, they had in the past been suspected of misdeeds. In several interviews and informal occasions, they shared some of the stories about this. The main suspicion occurred in the nineties, and it regarded biopiracy, as the international media had exposed some cases of foreigners illegally taking samples of plants abroad for pharmaceutical research. Because most of IPAM's staff are scientists who work with plant specimens and travel around the Amazon forest, they clearly aroused suspicion. One of the senior scientists attempted to dispel such weariness with humour by attending an annual costume party dressed as a 'biopirate'. A more rooted apprehension with respect to the Amazon is related to the fear of Brazil losing the vast territory of the forest, because it is difficult to police and is so sparsely populated. This fear lies at the core of the military government's decision in the 1960s of 'colonizing the Amazon', that is, moving thousands of people from other areas (mostly, those hit by droughts or overpopulation) and giving them land in the forest. These fears remain as rumours in the area, and require some type of show of solidarity with the Brazilian state by those under suspicion to avoid any misgivings.

For civil society groups, this type of bureaucratic nationalism means that if any strong international organization wants to work in the area, it must do so through a Brazilian office with local staff. It also means that networks must be strongly represented by local organizations and must include local stakeholders in its decisions or actions in order to be considered valid or representative. Both IPAM and ISA are local organizations that comply with these unspoken norms. The networks they form part of, furthermore, clearly favour having either local Brazilians or specialists in the area. Part of the drive behind networks has come through funding agencies that help local organizations. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, has a stated policy of working with 'consortiums'. This is an incentive for organizations to form part of networks in order to be eligible for funds. Both IPAM and ISA are part of several of these consortiums, but claim to design them out of their own priorities and then negotiate with the USAID for funds and backing. Other agencies, such as the European Union, or the International Finance Corporation (of the World Bank), also prefer when their funds are used to enhance

collaborative synergies among groups and stakeholders. Most of these networks are established within states, which is the reason why nationalist discourses becomes central for their on-going endeavours.

The effort to bring a global scale of the ‘common good’ into regional networks therefore passes through a national lens. The drive to produce artefacts for the visualization of common problems (or common ‘bads’) among stakeholders is therefore essential to the process of scaling-up the claim of common good. If a problem is identified as such among not only the NGO community, but also by stakeholders, governments and funding agencies, then the path to a coherent strategy to tackle it will be easier to manage. It is therefore no surprise that the first speaker at the meeting in Canarana launched the ‘Y Ikatu Xingu campaign with strong and repeated references to the ‘good of Brazil’. Such a starting point to the grand ‘ceremony of consent’ prompted other speakers to follow his lead. References to global benefits, or to the interest of international actors in their work, were thus minimized if mentioned at all. The fact that most of the funding and backing for such meetings was foreign, was hidden in a complex tangle of local organizations, foundations and initiatives. By not emphasizing such transnational connections, the organizers strengthened the locals’ interest and determination.

On the side of the transnational interest, however, the resolve to reduce deforestation and maintain the Amazon forest ecosystems is driven by evidence-based knowledge on their global importance. Recent debates over climate fluctuations have led to an appreciation of the Amazon forest’s pivotal role in the planetary ecological system. Its rapid deforestation and recent droughts (in 2005 and 2010), have raised attention about the stability of the area. For these reasons, various states and international organizations offer assistance to help federal and local governments reduce deforestation. The future of the Amazon rainforest relies on the political decisions being taken within the respective patron nation-states. In the case of Brazil, where most of the rainforest is located, there seems to be a tense negotiation between conflicting views of development. The main drive behind each of the positions at play is a particular claim of advantage. Large soy producers claim to help Brazil’s national economy by exporting a valuable commodity abroad. Small farmers claim to work in Brazil’s interest by having their own production venture that improves their own well-being as that of the nation. Conservationists claim to seek the safeguarding of biodiversity for its own value. Indigenous communities assert their right to live in the forest without threat from pollution or deforestation. Environmentalists and NGO personnel claim to pursue a balance between these aspirations, through a focus on

socio-environmentalism. There exists, of course, an inevitable friction between these standpoints.

Both cases explored in this paper are considered as positive examples of good governance models. This is due to the fact that in each of them, all stakeholders involved have been continuously working in networks to ensure the goals established in their initial collective efforts. The different levels of government, municipal, state and federal, have maintained an engaged involvement within their respective jurisdictions. Both are cases of unspectacular resolutions, as their aims are not achievable as an architectural project or a numerical milestone. In both, what is at stake is to modify the quotidian workings of all stakeholders involved by inserting the idea of 'socio-environmental responsibility' as of value. Both, however, have repercussions for further networked projects. One example is that of REDD, the United Nation's collaborative initiative for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries<sup>4</sup>. In 2008, the United Nations launched this project with the idea of spurring collaboration between NGOs, stakeholders and governments in order to assist countries "build capacity to reduce emissions" (UN-REDD, 2011). This project built on the experience of previous efforts and on the collective experience of NGOs and stakeholders.

The political use of scientifically produced information by independent organizations such as IPAM is part of a transnational effort to combine knowledge from different sources to define uses of space and territory. In order to ensure the involvement of all the relevant social groups (stakeholders), NGOs must ensure a certain level of legitimacy for their campaigns. Legitimacy consists of a validation by others, who are directly involved or interested in the labour of an organization. State governments require the legitimacy of their populations and of the international system. Legitimacy is ensured by a valuation of time, power, or transcendence claims. Time can be valued because of inherited traditions and experience, or because of the age of an institution or organization. Both aspects can signify a long exposure to hardships and a show of ability to succeed or at least endure. Power is certainly relevant for states or other actors, which can mean raw physical power or the threat of its use (coercion). Increasingly, it can also mean a softer version of such, which involves persuading large numbers of people about something. The third element to ensure legitimacy is perhaps the most relevant for the case presented in this paper: transcendence claims. This term is used in its 'theory of knowledge' definition, derived from mod-

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4 URL: <http://www.un-redd.org/>

ern philosophy. The origin of the concept lies in religion, but it now forms part of a secular understanding of knowledge. An idea is transcendental if it goes beyond an initial interpretation, if it transcends its boundaries. States use a combination of time and transcendence when they invent traditions (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). In doing so, the meaning of traditions, heroes and historical events, has the potential to inspire populations, to make them feel part of something larger than themselves. For the case presented in this paper, the transcendental is generated by the facts produced through scientific research. Through their use, NGO personnel are able to put together a discourse that allows for individuals to notice their role in the large scale. It is an ideal way of connecting the individual local awareness with transnational issues, as a change of local habits will surely have an accumulated effect that will change a larger-than-life situation.

Choosing one single NGO, out of the hundreds that work in the Amazon, served a valuable purpose. As an independent organization with its main offices in Belém and Santarém, in the state of Pará, the IPAM has gained a leading role in the area. Its members do not carry out projects in isolation, but rather promote dialogues among stakeholders regarding various issues. In doing so, they actually work as mediators between different interest groups, local inhabitants, and government officials. Working within this NGO, therefore, served as a way to understand the logic behind a complex ecosystem of organizations devoted to care for the environment or promote development in the Amazon. Most of the time devoted to the observation of this group was spent outside of its main offices, in the field of research of some of its various scientific teams or in meetings in cities or in towns in the forest. They combine symbolic exchanges of information with a careful formulation of legitimacy to achieve major societal changes that impact on large scales of ecological systems. It is a political practice that mimics state institutions with the purpose of having an influence on their actual work.

Scale is essential in this situation to understand the combination of attitudes that ends up having an impact in the general situation. In the Amazon forest, local communities may either distrust the state or come to idealize it in some way, simply because it is not visible at their small-scale. A nationalist discourse that comes to re-invent the role of the state therefore fits in perfectly with local aspirations. Such discourse is also relevant for transnational advocacy networks that aim to work in a given locality, as it is a necessary strategy to motivate stakeholders and ensure the support of government bureaucracies. Such discourse is but one element of the 'ceremonies of consent' that NGO personnel design and carry out among all stake-

holders. These ceremonies achieve not only the sought agreements, but also crucially the commitments for action and involvement without which such accords would be fruitless. By establishing ‘claims of common good’ as an unspoken basis for agreements, NGO personnel seek to include an idea of well-being that can serve as a basis for empathic scaling-up.

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