

Cultural Models of Nature Across Cultures: Space, Causality, and Primary Food Producers

Abstract

This cross-cultural research investigates cultural models (CMs) of nature held by populations across several cultures and five continents ranging from long-time primary food producers, e.g., farmers, fishermen, herders (and also hunters and gatherers) to those who recently shifted to become primary food consumers due to globalization forces. CMs of nature, typically held out of one's or a community's awareness, affect environmental actions in ways not necessarily predicted by more traditional ecological models. The project comprises fifteen scholars and six graduate students who are experts in a particular cultural area. Linguistic and experimental data will be collected and analyzed by a common protocol that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Methodology and ethnography play paramount roles.

Researchers expect to discover a variety of CMs of nature that characterize each community investigated. These CMs represent specific organizations of the constitutive categories underlying the concept of nature, that is, humans, animals, plants, weather, physical environment, and the supernatural. They also expect causal relationships to be one of the major forces (in addition to spatial relationships) weaving together these categories. Similarly, while attributed to different elements and in a different potency, intentionality will be universally present.

The results, because of the focus on primary food producers, will provide insights on how this kind of population typically constructs a CM of nature. In addition, one can explore the possibility that conceptions of space are central to the construction of CMs (in this case, of nature), thus, provide supporting evidence for an architecture of the mind that includes a major role for the spatial domain in the forming of other domains of knowledge. Finally and more importantly, the findings are intended to supply policy makers, i.e., major actors in finding solutions to climate change induced problems, with information on indigenous CMs of nature that will assist them in their decision-making. ([Full Proposal](#))