



Editorial

Global Environmental Humanities: Indigenous Knowledge about Environmental Change in the Arctic, Amazon, Himalayas, and South Asia

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Welcome to a new edition of *The Highlander Journal*, in which we dive into the enriching confluence of traditional knowledge and environmental humanities. In this issue, we draw extensively on the ongoing efforts and recent insights from the Ekologos project, a collaborative endeavour initiated in 2022 and set to run until 2026. Spearheaded by UiT The Arctic University of Norway, the initiative comprises a consortium of global and local partners, including the Norway-based Institute for Marine Research (IMR), the Brazil-based State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), and three India-based organizations: RV University in Bangalore (RVU), Doctors For You (DFY) in Mumbai, and the Highland Institute in Kohima (THI). The collective endeavour emphasizes a nuanced understanding of the environmental challenges faced by diverse societies, including indigenous peoples, across some of the Earth's most vulnerable regions: the Arctic, Amazon, Himalayas, and South Asia.

Ekologos has already made significant strides in integrating a diversity of cultural perspectives with academic research to foster a more inclusive discourse on climate resilience and sustainability. This initiative's significance is ever more pertinent as we face rapid ecological transformations demanding adaptive educational policies and practices.

Since its inception, the project has seen vibrant activity, including several student and staff exchanges from Norway to India and from Brazil to Norway, which have fortified academic and cultural bonds across continents. Moreover, the incorporation of DFY as a project partner has expanded opportunities for students to engage in practical, community-focused environmental health initiatives in India, further enriching the educational experience and broadening the project's scope.

The highlight of the past year was undoubtedly the Ekologos Winter School, coinciding with the annual Highland Gathering hosted by the Highland Institute in Kohima, India, 13–19 December, 2023. This event saw over 50 participants from the partner institutions come together in a series of workshops

and discussions that highlighted the dynamic interactions between traditional indigenous practices and modern scientific approaches and brought together anthropological traditions in Brazil and India in particularly fruitful ways. This issue is intended to share some of the insights gained with a broader audience.

In this Issue

In his article titled ‘Crossing Tipping Points in the Amazon Rainforest: The Decisive Decade,’ Luiz Marques provides a profound analysis based on his public lecture at UiT in September 2023. He elaborates on how certain regions of the Amazon may have already surpassed ecological tipping points, with significant portions of the forest potentially reaching points of no return due to a synergistic cycle of deforestation, degradation, and subsequent ecological collapses. This critical exploration, the first in a series of Ekologos public lectures, integrates detailed assessments of anthropogenic impacts like deforestation and regional warming, offering vital insights that resonate with the project’s commitment to addressing climate resilience through the lens of indigenous knowledge and scientific evidence.

In his article, ‘Threats to Rivers and Indigenous Heritage in the Amazon: A View from the Upper Xingu,’ based on his lecture in Kohima in December 2023, Antonio Guerreiro details the severe impacts of environmental changes on indigenous communities along the Xingu River. His analysis, rich with ethnographic insights from the Kalapalo people, emphasizes the critical need for indigenous knowledge in formulating sustainable environmental strategies. Guerreiro’s work underlines how local ecological disruptions – such as altered river flows and degraded water quality from mining and deforestation – pose existential threats to the cultural and spiritual practices of these communities, advocating for a profound reconsideration of our ecological interactions.

The special section dedicated to the Highland Gathering and the Ekologos project features several innovative contributions: Anna Ziya Geerling, in a collection of short essays, gives us a glimpse into the vibrant intersection of environmental humanities and indigenous pedagogies through the pioneering work of the Intersubjective Ecology Lab. Geerling not only orchestrates a discourse enriched by collaborative art and experimental pedagogy but also helps redefine our engagement with the non-human world. Her session, ‘Dialectics of (un)learning,’ deftly navigates the thematic terrains of decolonizing relationships with nature, challenging participants to unravel entrenched colonialist perspectives and embrace a more interconnected existence with our environment. Further enriching the discourse, Geerling introduced the ‘Proverbial Observatories and Bestiaries of the More-than-Human’, utilizing improvisational theatre as a transformative tool for embodied and participatory storytelling. This approach not only facilitates a participatory learning experience but also highlights the dynamic potential of artistic methods in academic and ecological dialogues.

In a similar way, ‘Tasting Tomorrow: Exploring Climate Adapted Cuisines in Nagaland’ by Tümüzo Katiry, Akumtong Imchen, and Saktum Wonti offers a flavourful journey through the adaptations of traditional Naga cuisines to changing climate conditions, reflecting on how local food systems can inform global sustainability practices. Evan Tims’s ‘Generating Climate Futures Through Collaborative Workshops: A Method Brief’ discusses the facilitation of future-oriented thinking through collaborative methodologies, directly supporting the project’s goal to create actionable climate strategies through communal engagement.

Shyamal Lakshminarayanan’s presentation on the ‘Ekologos Wiki – A Tool for Online Project Collaboration’ illustrates the project’s dedication to fostering a dynamic platform for global collaboration on indigenous and environmental research. This private wiki, restricted (for now) to project participants, enables the asynchronous and collaborative development of content, leveraging features like reference templates, visual editing, and media uploads. More than a repository, it’s a lively space for knowledge exchange, where ideas and insights can be shared and refined over time.

The contributions from Nagaland to India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, detailed by Kenilo Kessen and colleagues, illustrate effective integration of local initiatives into national frameworks, showcasing practical implementations of indigenous knowledge in policymaking.

Our photo essays for this issue, including Thomas Bøhn and Jutta Kapfer's stunning visual narrative of Kaziranga National Park and Luiz Felipe Medina's intimate portrayal of a young Guarani's journey in the Arctic, both capture the essence of environmental and cultural interconnectedness that the Ekologos project seeks to highlight. Miguel da Cruz's reflective piece, 'A Reminder to Let the Gaze Linger,' invites readers to pause and engage more deeply with the natural world, a call that resonates deeply with the project's ethos of thoughtful and sustained engagement with our environment.

Through these diverse lenses, this issue of *The Highlander Journal* not only reflects the rich landscape of global environmental humanities, but also amplifies the voices and visions that are essential for understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change. Each contribution, rooted in the core themes of the Ekologos project, extends the conversation beyond academia into the realms of policy, practice, and lived experience, marking a significant step forward in our collective journey towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

Concluding the issue, we then turn to the Highland Institute's own research and community activities. This final section features a series of reports highlighting various projects and initiatives aimed at addressing environmental, cultural, and social issues within the Naga communities and beyond. From the Earthkeepers Project exploring conservation efforts along the Noklak border to studies on the impacts of climate change in three Naga villages, and from an examination of the burgeoning tourism in Kohima to intimate portrayals of the daily lives of Naga women, each piece offers a unique lens through which to view the challenges and opportunities faced by these communities. Additionally, the Highland Film Club, which connects people and cultures through film, encapsulates the spirit of collaborative learning and cultural exchange that the Highland Institute embodies.

Thank you for reading *The Highlander*!
Michael T. Heneise, Editor