

[Original Articles]

The Participation of Activists and Indigenous Peoples in Climate Governance in Chile*

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Resumo

A Participação de Ativistas e Povos Indígenas na Governança Climática no Chile

Há um consenso cada vez maior sobre a relevância da participação de atores não-estatais na governança climática. No entanto, múltiplas barreiras, tanto nacionais quanto mundiais ainda atrapalham a eficácia deste envolvimento. De acordo com uma pesquisa etnográfica, este artigo analisa como atores não-estatais de duas organizações – Ecos e a Coletivo Indígena Chileno sobre a Mudança Climática – percebem a participação deles na governança climática nacional. Nós realizamos 36 entrevistas semiestruturadas com participantes de dois grupos comprometidos com ação climática, sendo um deles liderado por organizações da sociedade civil e o outro convocado pelo Estado e composto por líderes dos povos indígenas, também envolvidas na observação de participantes. Apesar de terem motivações diferentes, todos compartilham a meta comum de abordarem desigualdades sociais e ecológicas através de respostas que surgem dos seus territórios. No entanto, estes grupos mostram que tanto a política nacional de mudança climática quanto o cenário internacional de governança climática continuam a considerar a participação de atores não-estatais como marginal, simbólica e instrumental.

Palavras-Chave: governança climática; participação; atores não-estatais; transformação

Abstract

The Participation of Activists and Indigenous Peoples in Climate Governance in Chile

There is a growing consensus about the relevance of the participation of non-state actors in climate governance. However, multiple barriers at the national and global levels still hinder the effectiveness of this engagement. Based on ethnographic research, this article analyses how non-state actors from two organisations –*Ecos* and the *Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change*– perceive their participation in national climate governance. We conducted thirty-six semi-structured interviews with participants of two groups committed to climate action, one led by civil society organisations and the other convened by the state and composed of Indigenous Peoples leaders, and also engaged in participant observation. Although their motivations are diverse, all share the common goal of addressing socio-ecological inequalities through responses that emerge from their territories. However, these groups show that both national climate change policy and the international climate governance scenario continue to consider the participation of non-state actors as marginal, symbolic, and instrumental.

Key Words: Climate governance; participation; non-state actors; transformation

Résumé

La Participation des Militants et des Peuples Autochtones à la Gouvernance Climatique au Chili

Il existe un consensus croissant sur la pertinence de la participation des acteurs non étatiques à la gouvernance climatique. Cependant, de multiples obstacles aux niveaux national et mondial entravent encore l'efficacité de cet engagement. Sur la base d'une recherche ethnographique, cet article analyse comment les acteurs non étatiques de deux organisations Ecos et le Collectif autochtone chilien sur le changement climatique perçoivent leur participation à la gouvernance climatique nationale. Nous avons mené trente-six entretiens semi-structurés avec des participants de deux groupes engagés dans l'action climatique, l'un dirigé par des organisations de la société civile et l'autre convoqué par l'État et composé de dirigeants des peuples autochtones, en observant également les participants. Bien que leurs motivations soient diverses, ils partagent toutes l'objectif commun d'aborder les inégalités socio-écologiques à travers des réponses qui émergent de leurs territoires. Cependant, ces groupes montrent que la politique nationale sur le changement climatique et le scénario de gouvernance climatique internationale continuent de considérer la participation des acteurs non étatiques comme marginale, symbolique et instrumentale.

Mots clés: gouvernance climatique; participation; acteurs non étatiques; transformation

Resumen

La Participación de Activistas y Pueblos Indígenas en la Gobernanza Climática en Chile

Existe un consenso cada vez mayor sobre la relevancia de la participación de los actores no estatales en la gobernanza climática. Sin embargo, aún existen múltiples barreras a nivel nacional y global para que este compromiso sea efectivo. Basándose en una investigación etnográfica, este artículo analiza la participación de actores no estatales de dos organizaciones - ECOS y Colectivo Indígena Chileno sobre Cambio Climático - en la gobernanza climática del Estado chileno. Realizamos treinta y seis entrevistas semi-estructuradas y observación participante entre los participantes de dos grupos comprometidos con la acción climática, uno liderado por organizaciones de la sociedad civil y el otro convocado por el Estado y compuesto por líderes de Pueblos Indígenas. Aunque sus motivaciones son diversas, todos comparten el objetivo común de hacer frente a las desigualdades socioecológicas mediante respuestas que surjan de sus territorios. Pero, estos grupos evidencian que tanto la política nacional

de cambio climático, como la arena internacional de gobernanza climática, aun considera la participación de actores no estatales como marginal, simbólica e instrumental.

Palabras clave: Gobernanza climática; participación; actores no estatales; transformación

Introduction

Increasing scientific evidence (IPCC, 2022) and slow and limited progress in technical and multilateral responses (Höhne et al., 2020; Vogel, O'Brien, 2022) have promoted the emergence of non-state actors in international climate change governance (de la Cuadra, 2016; O'Brien and Sygna, 2013).

The participation of non-state actors has been a permanent issue in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) discussions. Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration states, “Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level (...). States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available.” Furthermore, Article 6 of the UNFCCC provides the basis for considering civil society participation. It does so by promoting education, training, awareness, access to information, and public sector involvement.

Parties to the UNFCCC have recognised the importance of involving non-state actors in developing and implementing national climate policies. In its preamble, the Paris Agreement affirms “the importance of education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and cooperation at all levels.” The participation of civil society is reinforced in articles 4, 8, and 12, especially concerning the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) processes. For the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) has developed guidelines¹ to promote non-state actors’ participation, especially in the planning processes and subsequent implementation of NDCs, intending to strengthen both mitigation and adaptation actions. For example, in 2018, the CMA recommended: “enhanced climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation, and public access to information” [decision 17/CMA.1].

Strengthening the participation of non-state actors has gone hand in hand with climate justice discussions (Morrison et al., 2021). Climate empowerment requires that non-state actors, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, have the opportunity to participate in all levels of decision-making processes related to climate action, including needs identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Various programmes under the Convention reinforce this approach. For instance, Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) provides guidance on

implementing strategic planning within nations to facilitate learning and accelerate climate action. Similarly, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) promotes gender equity, while the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) seeks to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' engagement in climate governance.

Despite these advances, the participation of non-state actors remains a challenge. While it is undeniable that the global governance of climate change has become open to the emergence of non-state actors and climate activism, global climate change negotiations have been led mainly by international agencies (Aykut et al., 2017). Various non-state actors involved in climate negotiations, including NGOs, grassroots organisations, and indigenous groups, highlight the inequality inherent in these processes (Blair, Isenhour, 2022). Institutional approaches often shape people's participation in presenting their demands in a legitimised way, generating new mechanisms of control (Bolados, 2009; Lupien, 2015). As expert knowledge holds sway, North-South inequalities are reproduced, resulting in the marginalisation of local actors and the hierarchisation of participation in the international arena.

The participation of non-state actors in the face of climate change has been a social science research topic since the late 1990s. Studies have observed how climate change impacts social structures and cultural practices (Adger et al., 2013). Others have observed how climate change impacts and potential consequences promote social responses that tend to be invisibilised by governmental and scientific actors (Urry, 2011). Although during the 2000s, anthropology began to pay more attention to the link between climate change and society, the focus was mainly on the countries of the Global North, paying less attention to the countries most affected by disasters and the climate crisis (Vázquez et al., 2020). In Latin America, social sciences have mainly focused on analysing climate social movements (Postigo, 2013) and politics (Edwards, Roberts, 2015; Spikin et al., 2016). Attention has been paid to how activism seeks to influence global policy (Martínez et al., 2021) and climate governance. However, insufficient attention has been paid to how non-state actors aspire to build new models of coexistence outside the institutional framework (Biskupovic et al., 2021).

Social sciences have also examined Indigenous Peoples' climate policy participation (Gustafsson, Schilling-Vacaflor, 2022). These studies have focused on the implications of multilateral measures on Indigenous terri-

tories (e.g., Ulloa, 2017). Research has also analysed the demands for participation in international climate governance (e.g., Comberti et al., 2019; Delgado, 2019). However, analysing how these demands materialise and influence climate policy in different countries is limited (Shea, Thornton 2019). Therefore, barriers that hinder Indigenous Peoples' participation in national climate governance remain unexplored.

Research in Chile shows that the two biggest challenges of climate governance are non-state actors' participation and knowledge mobilisation (Aldunce et al., 2016; Arriagada et al., 2018; Sapiains et al., 2017; Blanco, Fuenzalida, 2013). Although researchers recognise non-state actors' involvement as crucial in responses to climate change (Center for Climate and Resilience Research, 2019), their role has not been effectively acknowledged or studied in depth. Non-state actors have been excluded from climate change dissemination, definition, and governance (Hasbún-Mancilla et al., 2017). The literature suggests that including non-state actors in climate decision-making has been fragmented and associated with negative stereotypes, such as identifying Chilean political culture as passive, depoliticised, and apathetic to participatory processes (Sapiains et al., 2017).

This article aims to analyse how the non-state actors respond to climate governance in Chile, how activists perceive the governance of climate change, and how these actors position themselves vis-à-vis the institutions to make their demands heard through the collectives that emerged during the COP25 preparations: the ECOS collective and the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change². Studying how these activists perceive non-state actors' participation in climate governance implies observing how citizens communicate, argue, and express their opinions when addressing the public problem of climate change (Avila, 2017). It also means analysing the confrontation, claims, opinions, and collaborations around climate governance. Climate governance refers to how states coordinate their efforts on climate change, including diplomacy, mechanisms, and specific response measures (Jagers, Striiple 2003). It involves a set of stages and processes for planning and articulating diverse actors and institutions at various scales (Billi et al., 2021). During these opportunities, actors from distant locations participate, and new collectives emerge in the public space, and with them, a myriad of controversies (Callon et al., 2021).

We present the trajectories and objectives of ECOS and the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change through their members' voices. We hypothesise that, despite the inclusion of non-state actors in institutional

events (Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change) and the presence of knowledgeable and experienced environmental activists within Chile, these actors continue to have marginal and limited involvement in climate change governance. This perpetuates the existing limitations of Chilean democracy. Faced with this challenge, these actors strengthen their support of collectives committed to responding to climate change through democratic practices in collaborative and self-sustained spaces (Star, 2012). Although participation has been a recurrent issue in Chilean public policy, its conceptualisation remains blurred. Until a few decades ago, participation tended to be reduced to institutional processes, marginalising civil society-led processes (Biskupovic, Stamm, 2022). We view participation as the tentative paths forged by non-state actors to influence, express their opinions, and be heard in decision-making bodies. To better understand this process, we must also examine the motivations and knowledge that emerge during coordination and planning, which can inform new political approaches to climate change.

The climate issue currently benefits from a growing audience and social credibility (Charbonnier, 2022). However, climate crisis challenges require converging and articulating diverse actors from civil society, the state, and the private sector. This convergence implies dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making, allowing previously distant actors to take sides in a dynamic where they must contribute and explore possible options (Callon et al., 2021). In this sense, we draw from the work of Rosanvallon (2006, 2009), who emphasises participatory democracy as being founded on public deliberation, legitimised by inclusive decision-making processes while valuing the voices and experiences of non-state actors. In this sense, enhancing the climate problem's legitimacy involves opening the scientific and political-institutional spheres to non-state actors and local and Indigenous experiences, particularly in a context of disengagement from traditional participation channels (Elstub et al., 2021).

The study of participatory spaces in climate governance is an emerging field of research in recent years, mainly focused on how devices that distinguish deliberation processes operate (Fourniau, 2019).

Analysing non-state actors' attempts to participate in climate governance provides valuable insights into how this problem is constantly reframed. Integrating other issues into the debate also allows us to reflect on how different collectives understand participation at the political level, how they

collaborate between themselves, and what they learn in the process. The study of climate participation also allows us to observe how institutional, activist, and intercultural spheres connect and influence each other.

Climate Governance and the Participation of Non-state Actors in Chile

In Chile, citizen participation in local public management has had little impact on decision-making (Hernández et al., 2019). Despite the proliferation of initiatives aimed at strengthening participatory institutionality in public management in recent years, the design of public policies has failed to satisfactorily include the population's demands. It has not been successful in enhancing access or promoting community participation (Biskupovic, Stamm, 2021).

Chile aims to meet climate change challenges and implement the commitments adopted under the UNFCCC. Since UNFCCC's ratification in 1995, the state has steadily built its climate governance by creating committees, offices, and action plans (Moraga, Araya, 2015). These actions have strengthened the institutional framework and mitigation strategies. However, climate governance has been characterised by being highly centralised, and therefore, integrating sub-national levels and civil society participation are two of its most significant challenges (PNUD, 2021). Furthermore, specifically, Indigenous Peoples' participation has been almost non-existent, especially at the international level, despite the state's international commitments to respect their rights, including the right to participation (Cayupi 2019; Millaleo 2020; Carmona 2024), as stated by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of the International Labour Organisation Convention, also known as ILO Convention 169.

Barriers to the participation of non-state actors in climate governance can largely be attributed to authoritarian enclaves inherited from the dictatorship, which persists in Chilean institutions and have undermined participatory culture (Garretón, 1995). These structural barriers are reinforced by short-sighted policies, a lack of economic and human resources, and a low political will among authorities (Sapiains et al., 2017). This situation is compounded by the difficulties of translating knowledge about climate change, which is often complex and presented in a highly technical language (Tironi et al., 2011).

Participation has historically been limited to primary information and diagnosis stages, mainly done via the Internet (Sapiains et al., 2017). Even though the climate debate was intense in the international sphere during the 2000s, environmental NGOs in Chile focused on changing the neoliberal development and economic model, positioning themselves as pressure groups, just as they did in the 1990s. It was not until 2015, in Paris, that Chile's leading environmental NGOs started participating in the Conference of the Parties (COPs).

In 2020, at an international congress held annually in Chile ("Future Congress"), Maisa Rojas, a renowned climatologist and current Minister of the Environment, appealed to the concept of transformation and called for new ways of organising and acting in the face of climate change. Aldunce and Vicuña (2019) note that transformation requires the participation of diverse actors at different scales and "includes stages of learning, leadership, ownership, and collective action and collaboration between institutions, organisations, and social groups" (Aldunce, Vicuña, 2019:12, author's translation). Despite this emphasis on transformation, the participation of non-state actors in climate governance remains limited in national debates.

In an attempt to address these goals and reduce the participation gap, the state initiated the drafting of a Framework Law on Climate Change in 2018, which aims to assign specific responsibilities for implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. This elaboration involved workshops, dialogues, and public consultations. Although this process is a step forward regarding participation in law drafting, standards remained poor, especially concerning Indigenous and gender participation (Carmona, 2024; Millaleo, 2020; Cayupi, 2019). Participation activities only included information and consultations, limiting the spaces for effective involvement, as noted by the Climate Change Law Observatory for Chile of the University of Chile (Moraga et al., 2020). Information dissemination was inadequate, workshop attendance was limited, and almost half of the participants were public officials. However, after a revision based on internet comments and scientific advice, the Climate Change Framework Law was approved in March 2022 and officially published three months later.

Although state-driven participation is limited, the law aims to strengthen the role of civil society in Chilean climate governance. It incorporates principles of equity, which refers to a balanced allocation of burdens, costs, and benefits, and mainstreaming, ensuring the participation of

civil society in climate change management. One of its principles stipulates that the state must promote the participation of the private sector, academia, and civil society in climate change management. Specifically, Article 31 states that civil society “shall have the right to participate, in an informed manner, in the development, review, and updating of climate change management instruments, through the mechanisms provided for this purpose in this law.” However, the law does not mention Indigenous Peoples, thus marginalising them from the national political and scientific discussion of climate change (Carmona, 2024).

Participation is also strengthened by the National Action Plan on Climate Change (PANCC) 2017-2022. The PANCC emphasises the relevance of education, training, and awareness-raising on climate change and promotes society’s engagement through regional councils. These components are further supported by the National Adaptation Plan and Chile’s latest NDC, which recognises that strengthening the participation of the private sector, academia, and civil society while also including gender and Indigenous Peoples is a challenge.

The state is currently designing a Strategy for Capacity Development and Climate Empowerment to institutionalise participation. This strategy seeks to generate and articulate capacities and commitments that propel action in the face of climate change, contemplating participation as one of its articulating dimensions. While all these commitments look promising on paper, the involvement of state actors is still lacking (Madariaga, 2021).

One factor driving civil society participation was the organisation of the COP25 in 2019. The state emphasised that it would have a high level of citizen participation. In this context, different non-state actors began organising autonomously or in response to state calls to address local demands. Notably, among these autonomous initiatives, the coordination of the organisation ECOS stands out. ECOS is a coalition that has brought together more than eighty environmental organisations, including territorial movements, professional associations, trade unions, and political and academic organisations. Its objectives include raising awareness of the climate emergency and demanding alternative solutions. Additionally, the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change is particularly significant among the state-promoted initiatives. It aimed to involve Indigenous Peoples in Chile in the global climate change debate through their participation in COP25.

Methods

This research was conducted between 2019 and 2021 using a qualitative approach. Data collection and analysis fed back into the ethnographic process, interviews, and genealogical work, which focused on Chile's origin of climate governance on the one hand and climate activism on the other.

To access the trajectories and objectives of the actors involved in ECOS and the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change, we conducted thirty-six semi-structured interviews among their active members. Participants were asked about their knowledge of climate change, the organisations they lead and participate in, their assessment of the problem, their perception of national and international debates, their motivations for participating in climate governance, their assessment of state processes, their trajectories in climate action, and their future projections. One-third of these interviews were conducted in person, while the remainder were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2021.

We also conducted participant observation in these groups' in-person and online activities. We observed their group meetings and seminars, as well as dialogues and activities organised by the government, where these groups presented their ideas and demands.

We also participated in thirty-two internal organisational meetings of ECOS, both in person and by videoconference. We attended four climate change conferences, three of which were held in person: the Bonn Climate Change Conference in 2019, the COP25 in 2019 (organised by Chile but held in Madrid) and the COP26 in 2021 (organised by the UK in partnership with Italy and held in Glasgow). The Bonn Climate Change Conference in 2021 was conducted online. During these conferences, we observed the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change members' participation and interaction with national and international delegates. Furthermore, in 2019, we observed the participation of Indigenous leaders in pre-sessional meetings and negotiations. Moreover, in 2019 and 2021, we observed their participation in side events and the space for civil society.

All the information was systematised and analysed through bottom-up content analysis, assisted by Atlas.ti software.

The content analysis combines observations and interviews. The systematisation of this analysis involved two main steps. First, we regrouped the interview extracts by codes,³ identifying units of analysis deductively to

recognise the particularities and latent content of the discourses of the organisations' participants. Second, we organised the content into overarching themes or groups (such as forms of advocacy, internal operations, advocacy, roles of civil society) and further subdivided them into subcategories or codes (such as activism, individual-group articulation, definition of commitment to climate change, definition of advocacy, deliberation, institutions, organisations, elections, climate change emergency, strategies, funding, relationship with authorities, training, social movements, public opinion, internal organisation, prospects for modernisation, role with politicians, results, knowledge, among others).

We must acknowledge that the online format poses different methodological limitations. We perceive differences between what happens in person and how the actors interact through digital platforms. Online interviews often lacked the intimacy of face-to-face interactions, making it more challenging to establish trust with participants. Furthermore, people were less open about addressing difficulties when interviewed online.

Moreover, building trust among participants was more accessible before the pandemic as we introduced ourselves and our work in person. In online meetings, finding time to explain in detail what we do was challenging. Time is scarce because activists and leaders have had many online conferences. Finally, it is worth mentioning that not all organisations can participate in online activities due to connection problems or access to technological tools. Consequently, we have not been able to observe the interactions between actors in remote territories in depth.⁴

COP25 and the Engagement of Non-State Actors in Chile

ECOS

Different actors have mobilised and activated informal participatory spaces to respond to the effects of climate change in Chile (Arriagada et al., 2018). These spaces include civil society organisations (CSOs), national and international NGOs, territorial organisations, and academia. These collectives have contributed to translating knowledge between different spheres, from science and public institutions to the territories (Callison, 2014). By facilitating capacity building and the transmission of various knowledge on climate change (Valle-Cárdenas et al., 2020), CSOs enable

the consolidation of collective decision-making processes (Aranguren, Abella, 2017). Therefore, they are also co-participants in developing technical-legal knowledge and designing alternative and innovative strategies to address environmental and climate challenges collectively. At the local level, CSOs lead projects and responses to climate change, such as creating vegetable gardens, environmental education, and rescuing and conserving native flora and fauna (Bellacasa, 2017). These experiences include the Citizens' Roundtable on Climate Change, which is promoted by a national foundation and brings together twenty NGOs and ECOS.

According to an ECOS participant, who is a lawyer and one of the directors of a leading environmental NGO in Chile, this organisation emerged from the desire for “an articulated environmental movement that operates in a relatively coordinated way. [They wanted] to be a movement and not just a few individual organisations” (interview with Mario, 14/09/2021). In 2019, the organisations that constitute ECOS set out to organise a “parallel COP” to promote democratic dialogue and effective citizen participation in the face of climate change. One of its founders, a sociologist and member of two socio-environmental studies centre, points out:

The origin of ECOS was specific and had to do with organising a parallel COP when Chile was going to host the COP. Environmental NGOs that wanted to do something together, plus organisations like Foundation X⁵ that were not strictly environmental but had an environmental area, got together. It was very institutional. A call was made, and there were about 200 organisations at that time. ONG M⁶ was leading (interview with Javiera, 09/08/2021).

Mario explains that around 50 organisations attended the first meeting. Its members saw the organisation of the COP as an “opportunity to demand what we had to demand”, and because of this, they committed themselves to carry out “highly professional, meticulous work, in which the human and professional quality of all those who have been a part stands out” (interview with Mario, 14/09/2021). The participants also aspired to develop other activities related to the COP and climate change, such as a Latin American Youth Encounter, the Social Summit for Climate Action, and other COP side events led and convened by civil society activists.

Unlike other CSOs, ECOS comprised national, international, and local organisations and was not restricted to territory-based organisations. “In ECOS, there is a slightly wider diversity of organisations, which allows you to understand what is happening in different territories in Chile,”

says a young engineering student who represents a youth NGO and works as a coordinator in another influential national NGO. According to this student, ECOS was configured as a “space for learning and collaboration” (interview with Francisca, 29/10/2020).

Over time, more organisations joined ECOS. A participant who works in a corporation with children and adolescents in low-income sectors explained in 2021 that thirty organisations are always present, fifty collaborate directly, and fifty others adhere to the project. Among these, we distinguish between NGOs, foundations (with international funding), and territorial, regional, and national organisations. Sharing tensions and common objectives, these organisations promote different types of participation and advocacy. According to one of its participants, ECOS has a broad objective: “to bring about profound change in how Mother Nature and people live together” (interview with Juan, 2/8/2021).

From the interviews conducted, we observed that ECOS expands on various environmental topics. It articulates collaborations, organises meetings, discusses cross-cutting issues, and establishes learning spaces. In this way, its members cultivate a capacity for collective advocacy. Not only do they pose claims, but they also create platforms for information and education. In participatory terms, the organisation raises concepts and issues, such as “environmental justice” or “territorial justice” (ECOS presentation at a hearing at the Constitutional Convention⁷, August 2021).

In addition to making these different topics and actions visible and expanding on them, ECOS also promotes their articulation. According to one of its participants, a commercial engineer with a long career in environmental activism and working with civil society organisations in different regions of the country, ECOS provides technical input “to raise strong messages, rooted in science, in the grassroots, in reality” (interview with Andrea, 27/10/2021).

Although the organisation’s ambition is significant, ECOS members must decide where and how to participate because, as one member— a journalist representing one of the oldest and most influential environmental non-profit organisations in the country—acknowledges, “at the moment, we do not have the human capacity to be present everywhere” (interview with Manuela, 11/08/2021).

In addition to shedding light on environmental conflicts, contesting socio-ecological policies, and articulating organisations, ECOS’s members influence the knowledge that is considered legitimate or illegitimate,

showing alternative ways of understanding the territory to those of policy. According to another participant, an engineer in Renewable Natural Resources who works in an international foundation that is part of ECOS, they try to be “as respectful as possible of the different knowledge that exists” (interview with Ana, 30/7/2021). This participant explains that the role of civil society is

to push and always demand greater ambition (...). The government’s role is to reach a consensus, seek agreements, and reach a middle ground. The private sector (...) must always maintain certain profit margins. And the social organisations are the ones who, at the end of the day, are always negotiating, and we always have to demand and push for demands to be made. I feel that this is the role of civil society: not to let the issue or the ambitions decline despite the socio-political contexts, which can be very complex (Ana, 30/7/2021).

In pursuit of their objectives, ECOS members engage in different types of environmental or climate activism. One of these types involves academic work, institutional activism, and political advocacy. One product of this activism was publishing a book on the Ecological Constitution. Another type of activism is linked to the idea of seeking “meaningful work that can contribute.” Among these contributions are different ways of influencing and understanding the problem of climate change. For example, according to one participant, climate change pushes us to look for a different way of living, which entails rethinking “consumption patterns, the impact of industries, the impact of production, and the economic and political system we are living in” (interview with Juan, 2/8/2021).

According to the general coordinator of ECOS, by combining all these aspirations, this organisation is an open, “transversal, conciliatory, democratic, and pleasant space. Everyone participates according to their capacity, has access to information through a Google Group, and has the right to express their opinion” (interview with Paula, 29/9/2021). Thanks to this, ECOS has achieved several milestones, notably elevating the visibility and significance of civil society in the framework of international discussions on climate change. “Before the COP25, the topic was unknown in Chile; it was a bit like ‘what does this have to do with us?’ I think that it was only after the COP25 that we began to understand what the COP was” (interview with Javiera, 09/08/2021). Furthermore, ECOS has played a crucial role in positioning climate change in the constitutional debate that has

been taking place in the country since 2019. “We will continue to insist on the constitutional convention, on the need for the constitutional text to address the climate crisis” (Paula, 29/9/2021).

Collective support, social pressure, and demands for greater ambition shape the political work of ECOS. This work aims to transform and create new possibilities. Expectations of transformation impact the roles and actions of climate activists. ECOS interviewees emphasise that one of the primary roles of civil society is advocacy:

Advocacy is what we expect the most, what we need. We hope to have regulations and policies that effectively promote transformation, a profound transformation. To do that, we need an ambitious constitution and more ambitious climate action. For that, you need to lobby multiple organisations. The potential of ECOS is to generate high-level advocacy supported by many organisations (Ana, 30/7/2021).

Nevertheless, there have also been many challenges. Despite efforts to open up spaces for participation and to try to impact different areas, the lack of capacities often hinders the achievement of the expected results, leading to many actions falling short. For instance, an international climate march organised by the Fridays For Future movement in September 2021 faced significant setbacks. While participation was high in some cities, this was not the case in Santiago, the capital of Chile. Not all ECOS activists showed up, which generated frustration among the members.

Another source of disappointment for ECOS is the reception they have received from the state. So far, they consider that their participation in the institutional sphere has been marginal, often reduced to being a mere “checklist” for the government to fulfil (interview with Fernanda, 2/6/2022). They receive inadequate invitations to events, which often clash with their schedules, and they are excluded from climate policy planning.

The Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change

The Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change was formalised as an autonomous group in 2020 by sixteen Indigenous leaders –six Mapuche, four Aymara, three Colla, two Kawesqar, one Rapa Nui, and one Diaguita. However, its origin dates back to the previous year. When organising the COP25, the Chilean Presidency called on Indigenous representatives

to constitute a “COP25 Chilean Indigenous Caucus” on climate change. The call stated that the general objective of this group would be to “fortify the participation of the Indigenous Peoples of Chile in the discussion of global strategies to confront Climate Change” and facilitate their participation in the COP25. Nevertheless, the main objective of the state was to project an inclusive image to the international community (Carmona, 2024). Sixty people applied, and the group was formed with 25 Indigenous representatives –five Aymara, two Collas, one Diaguita, two Kawesqar, two Likan Antai, ten Mapuche (including one Lafkenche and one Williche), and three Rapa Nui– and five officials from the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI).

Among its members, the motivations for participating were diverse. However, most expected to bridge the gap between the local and international levels, where the particular needs of territories are generally overlooked, leading to negative implications for communities (Ulloa, 2017). These actors aimed to make visible the multiple pressures faced by their Peoples and communities, specifically the impact of climate change and specific climate policies, such as the production of green energies that alter the relationship with the territory. Many aspired for their opinion to be considered in environmental decision-making processes because “we are not important. It is said that we are custodians of biodiversity, but finally, we have no influence” (Interview with Maria, 24/02/20). Moreover, their engagement depends mainly on their capacity to position themselves and demand participation: “We have to be in these spaces. If not, nothing will change” (Interview with Patricia, 10/11/21).

An Indigenous woman leader believes that through her participation in climate change, she can address multiple challenges:

It is not only climate change; it is not only health; it is not only food; it is a whole range of aspects in which we can contribute to society. I believe that is what moved me. Nowadays, there is also climate change; in other scenarios, it is also our ancestral knowledge and women's rights. Moreover, when we talk about Indigenous women, I have something to talk about from our point of view. Because I suffered discrimination, I lived through certain things that, in the end, one does not like to remember, but I do not want my children or my grandchildren to suffer any of that discrimination, so I bring up issues such as women's rights or other aspects that are also relevant (Interview with Patricia 10/11/21).

The Chilean Indigenous Collective met four days a week before the COP and wrote a “Reflection and Proposal Document,” which they hoped, as stated in the call, would be incorporated into a supposed global strategy. In this document, the members clarify that they do not represent their people. They point out that Indigenous Peoples are guardians of the environment, and the states are responsible for the crisis. The document underscored the invisibility of Indigenous Peoples’ responses to climate change and the denial of their fundamental rights, even though they should have a leading role. Additionally, it proposed specific actions, such as denouncing the effects of climate change, protecting ancestral territory, and preserving biodiversity. At the same time, it stresses the necessity of forging alliances among peoples and across the international, national, and private spheres, as well as with the scientific community, to facilitate knowledge exchange. Finally, the document demands the recognition of ancestral knowledge, concrete mechanisms to influence decision-making, and prioritisation of environmental education and compensation initiatives.

Since the COP took place in Madrid as a consequence of 2019 mobilisations, the state only facilitated the participation of two representatives from the Indigenous Collective. Five other members managed to secure resources to travel independently. They attended the second meeting of the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the LCIPP, held from November 28 to 30 in Madrid. This Indigenous Collective was coordinated by a consultant, who was also responsible for the initial call. The consultant introduced them to the platform’s work and supported them in all the activities in Madrid. Nevertheless, the Indigenous leaders expressed difficulty in understanding the purpose of the LCIPP, a sentiment shared by several Indigenous observers attending for the first time. They found the mechanism highly technical.

Chilean Indigenous leaders travelled with the expectation of contributing to the climate discussion, but more specifically, of positioning the claims of their Peoples and territories. However, when they arrived at the COP, it was unclear how to do so. Consequently, disillusionment and distrust did not take long to appear. During informal conversations, they wondered why the state had invited them to the meeting on this platform, which had not been disseminated in Chile.

The members of this collective also participated in the preparatory meeting of the International Indigenous People Forum on Climate Change, where they felt welcomed and heard. They shared their experiences,

contributed to the collective work, and were invited to open ceremonies during the COP. The leader from Rapa Nui represented Indigenous Peoples at the opening of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), a great source of pride among the group. Her intervention was closer to what they expected from their participation: positioning their demands before the Parties.

During COP25, these leaders joined various activities to present their diagnoses and challenges. Some participated in meetings in pavilions within the Blue Zone, the official zone for the negotiations, while others participated in conversations in the Green Zone, designated for civil society. Some were interviewed by the press. Many were interested in establishing links with NGOs that could support their causes and believed that this was an excellent opportunity to extend their advocacy networks. Additionally, they attended a dialogue with the Presidency, during which they delivered their document to the Minister of Environment, Carolina Schmidt and the co-chair of the FWG. However, as this delivery was done without microphones, the meeting attendees could not hear the message conveyed by the document's presenter. In a subsequent interview, the presenter recounted her message to Schmidt: "Minister, you ask us to take care of the forests, to take care of biodiversity, but to do that, we have to have a voice. [And] to have a voice, we have to be recognised, [and] to be recognised, we must have constitutional recognition" (Interview with María, 24/02/20).

Although this leader felt welcomed by the minister, she considered this act somewhat symbolic.

We still do not have a voice because none of the Parties could hear our opinions. The official delivery of this document by the Indigenous Peoples of Chile was made to the minister, but the Parties did not listen to us because the text was not even read publicly, so it was a symbolic act (Interview with María, 24/02/20).

Despite these interventions, a sense of perplexity prevailed among them. Their expectations of advocacy in the face of a colonialist space were minimal; they continually asked themselves: "What can we do? How can we contribute?" Moreover, they wondered about the state's intentions in summoning them. While one group considered that the state acted in good faith in convening them, another felt instrumentalised, as they believed that the state did not assume the responsibility of strengthening

their capacities to attend this event and that it only did so as part of a “checklist” to comply with international standards and appeared to have an intercultural policy that does not exist in practice. One participant said lean up its image, but Chile has no policy or agenda in this matter or other Indigenous issues” (Interview with Antonio, 08/01/20).

Although most value the opportunity to have attended and conveyed their demands, the evaluation of the participation of the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change is mixed among the participants. Those who feel instrumentalised consider that they do not have an articulated agenda and that the group reflects the deficiencies of the national policy for Indigenous Peoples. Others see this as an opportunity to advance their territorial demands:

We reinforced strategic land claims and highlighted health and Indigenous knowledge techniques in international forums. We could speak to our ministers in international spaces, where they listened –because they do not listen to us here. So, there was awareness-raising (Interview with Pedro, 10/30/20).

Participation in the COP25 allowed them to establish links with international actors and learn about the UNFCCC processes. “We saw the opportunity to make contacts, to make arrangements, to make contact with others, with foundations, with NGOs. That was our work” (Interview with María, 24/02/20). This experience motivated them to become more involved in climate processes and demand higher engagement in Chile. Some of them remained involved with the International Indigenous Peoples Movement on Climate Change (IIPFCC), enabling them to keep up to date with the position of the international Indigenous movement on climate change.

After the COP, the members of the Chilean Collective sought to maintain contact with each other. Nevertheless, several have withdrawn from the group. Sixteen members remained, and the group was renamed in order to continue independently. Two of them have continued to be directly linked to state climate policy: one was a member of the Advisory Committee for Climate Action formed in 2020, and another was involved in the participatory process of a Climate Strategy. Intending to extend the committee’s influence, both leaders were the only representatives of the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change at COP26 in Glasgow, but this time without government support. Only one of them made it to the COP27 in Egypt, funding the trip with personal funds.

Discussion

recent research shows that environmental participation is weak in Chile (Arriagada et al., 2018), and the engagement of non-state actors, such as activists and Indigenous Peoples, is marginal (Madariaga, 2020; Biskupovic et al., 2021). The institutional participation promoted by the state is mostly reduced to consultation and, in some cases, tokenism. Climate policy and governance in Chile reproduce vertical management of the climate problem, where the participation of non-state actors remains “symbolic,” “instrumentalised,” and a “checkbox.” Civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ participation in formal events is mainly limited to the primary stages. Mechanisms for permanent and effective participation are not yet in sight. Furthermore, there has been little collaboration in implementing state-designed measures and even less in monitoring, reporting, and verification systems. Access to information and the promotion of participation in international negotiations have also been limited.

The lack of participation can be attributed to several constraints and barriers, including the absence of participatory mechanisms, not only in the climate field but also in the environmental domain in general (Sabatini et al., 2000). Non-state actors have been excluded from decision-making due to reforms in environmental institutions (Barandiaran, 2016), and policies have failed to integrate diverse groups (Arriagada et al., 2018; Barton, 2013; Blanco and Fuenzalida, 2013; Hasbún-Mancilla et al., 2017; Sapiains et al., 2017). As a result, non-state actors are disappointed with the state’s responses, and many feel marginalised and even instrumentalised. Attendance at official activities is quite limited, as are expectations of the advocacy capacity. Most actors think they cannot influence the state’s role.

However, this does not mean that non-state actors are not mobilising. We observed how ECOS and the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change are activating new and different spaces for engagement through their experiences. These groups allow for a more complex analysis of climate action –traditionally focused on global politics and movements– as their actors aspire to promote local transformations.

The study of deliberative democratic spaces in climate governance has had global resonance, demonstrating the effectiveness of involving informed citizens in decision-making, discussions, and debates to deliver recommendations (Boswell et al., 2023; Elstub et al., 2021; Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003; Talpin, 2013). Experiences in the Global North provide successful

precedents in deliberative settings, which have been proposed as viable and effective ways to leverage public support for ambitious climate policies (Muradova, Walker & Colli, 2020). Nevertheless, there is no single way of understanding participation, and our results show that this diversity poses a challenge to environmental participatory democracy (Claeys-Mekdade, 2006).

The climate action undertaken by ECOS and the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change actors represents new ways of defining environmental activism. These new actors are articulated around both national and global climate policies currently being implemented in the country. Their political practices and advocacy do not fit into what is generally known as the new social movements (Knox, 2020). Although there is continuity with the climate activism initiated by the main national environmental NGOs –especially in the case of ECOS– their actions are not centred on protests and campaigns aimed at pressuring state institutions. Instead, the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change illustrated how the state’s interest in projecting an inclusive image at the international level can provide the basis for non-state actors to demand better standards of participation at the national level.

Because of the above, the agency of these groups is pluriform; it is not limited to concrete measures but also involves addressing new challenges and placing demands that tend to be dismissed by climate governance, such as reducing discrimination and social inequality. Through this advocacy, these actors develop new expertise that allows them to access information, engage in global climate change debates, and connect these discussions with the particular situations they face in their territories. Following Knox, these experiences allow us to assess how climate knowledge enters politics, much like how climate science “enters” people, affecting them and prompting them to act. “In using the phrase thinking like a climate, I propose that it is analytically helpful for the anthropology of climate change to consider climate as a form of thought” (Knox, 2020: 8).

The participants’ motivations to get involved, along with their objectives and expectations, stem from multiple factors, particularly their experiences in their territories and communities, their professional and leadership trajectories, and their knowledge of the multilateral sphere. Disillusionment with multilateral processes, which have not yet addressed the problem fairly and effectively, also drives action. The COP and the international organisations involved in these events are questioned because

they are associated with the interests of Global North societies that aim to maintain their lifestyles and growth patterns. This disappointment is reinforced by Chile's limited influence in these processes. Furthermore, the lack of competencies often prevents these actors from accessing, let alone influencing, these spaces, which are far beyond their range of action. This frustration, combined with growing knowledge of climate projections, leads them to look for spaces –mostly local– where they can have influence and improve their communities' future.

Accessing the motivations of climate activists and Indigenous Peoples allows us to understand why engaging diverse non-state actors and consolidating participatory processes is crucial for improving climate action (Center for Climate and Resilience Research, 2019). Moreover, it is a fruitful field for studying the diverse knowledge at play and fostering the co-construction of social responses to the problem (Fustec, 2011). While all participants share the motivation to be part of the solution for climate change challenges, many view this participation as an opportunity to address long-standing conflicts and inequalities, as well as to rethink our relationship with nature and our consumption patterns. In this sense, non-state actor's participation provides a different perspective on addressing the problem, moving beyond biophysical or economic indicators, which have historically dominated state climate governance. In contrast, their advocacy reflects the urgent need to integrate diverse challenges, including historically constructed inequalities and the legacy of colonialism, into climate action, policy, and governance.

The forms of participation that activists aspire to differ from the institutional frameworks and possibilities offered by the climate bureaucracy (Knox, 2020). Analysing the two cases presented in this article shows that activists and Indigenous leaders demand recognition of their knowledge, emphasising the importance of local and Indigenous concerns, practices, and aspirations commonly excluded from the institutional climate debate. These actors represent diverse territorial communities and communities of meaning. They analyse how global power dynamics and relations influence national climate policy, decisions, and legislation. By highlighting their exclusion from the debates, these actors underscore the interests at stake and question the legitimacy of the measures taken at both national and international levels. In doing so, their work is positioned as an intermediary body that, as Rosanvallon (2009) suggests, pushes for moral representation through the surveillance of public institutionality.

ECOS's experience demonstrates that civil society is constructing alternative and more inclusive spaces outside institutional frameworks. These spaces build on the work carried out by environmental organisations mobilised since the 1970s, which are positioning themselves today as local movements. Despite facing multiple barriers to joining global decision-making processes, they mobilise in response to climate change and articulate their knowledge using concepts that transcend their everyday frameworks for action, such as environmental or territorial justice. In this way, their demands intertwine with and expand upon the climate justice demands of other groups at the international level. Furthermore, they also seek to influence state policy, such as the drafting of a new constitution⁸.

Despite its setbacks, the Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change demonstrates how Indigenous leaders aim to overcome the barriers imposed by technocratic procedures and expand their spheres of influence. They want to address both climatic and non-climatic pressures, such as land conflicts affecting their territories. Therefore, these positions are intertwined with their demands for environmental justice and aim to address both their climate vulnerability and long-standing problems. Although limited, the possibilities of interacting with other Indigenous actors who advocate at the international level have allowed them to strengthen their cooperation and solidarity networks, as well as identify referents that inspire them to articulate similar initiatives at the national and local levels.

Although we can acknowledge the state's initiative in convening them for the COP25, this call did not respond to an articulated agenda, nor did it facilitate an effective transfer of information that would allow for more impactful participation. Furthermore, as observed by other authors in Chile (Sapiains et al., 2017), this participation is hindered by the lack of mechanisms for financing. The Chilean Indigenous Collective on Climate Change received no support to participate in the COP26 or the COP27. The extent of Indigenous leaders' participation lies in their capacity to engage and access support from other organisations. For these initiatives to succeed, capacity building of all parties involved is urgently needed.

It is also necessary for the state to facilitate access to information for Indigenous communities and organisations and to ensure better compliance with international agreements that protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as the UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169. Compliance with these standards also requires the sensitisation of public services so that

Indigenous and climate issues are integrated at all levels and agencies of the state. This process must start with the creation of enabling spaces for Indigenous Peoples' participation in local and national climate decision-making, always taking into consideration the right to self-determination of the actors involved. Furthermore, this participation must be based on an effective recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems and their ways of relating to nature.

The knowledge promoted by Indigenous representatives and climate activists enables them to establish a basis for influencing public policies and shaping other spheres of action outside the institutional margins. This influence has two main expressions: direct and indirect. The first refers to influencing institutional political spaces, such as the Constitutional Convention or the COP delegation. This advocacy seeks to demonstrate that there is not just one way of making politics in the face of climate change, emphasising the need for policies that are in dialogue with the national realities and territorially located. On the other hand, indirect influence seeks to exert pressure through awareness-raising strategies, such as media campaigns and territorial and grassroots work. This goal involves educating and transmitting information to social or socio-environmental community organisations that are often invisible and lack influence over public opinion. Through awareness-raising and information transfer, new actors and networks are articulated to position alternatives that contribute to generating new knowledge and even transcend institutional boundaries.

By observing the knowledge at stake, we could also observe that the division between climate experts and non-experts is blurring. New and counter-expert knowledge emerges from territorialised experiences (Merlinsky, 2017). These actors position themselves as interlocutors in the arena of the climate problem, implementing participatory innovations and political forms that discuss and propose other implications of the climate issue. Through collaborations, these experiences create new networks between activists and representatives, counteracting the leadership of scientists on the climate change debate (Urry, 2011).

Reports from international organisations and literature on climate governance emphasise the need to strengthen the conditions for non-state actor participation, build capacity, and ensure access to information and education (IPCC, 2022). Our findings enable us to affirm that such participation contributes to new ideas on democracy, organisation, and

advocacy that are crucial to responding to climate change. Although the impact of these two groups remains marginal and differences and challenges persist, non-state actors are committed to nurturing the newly created space, embracing diversity and collective decisions. In this way, they develop “a climatological form of politics” that “challenges bureaucratic practice, it also creates openings for new ways of doing oppositional politics that go beyond the ‘rule of experts’ but also beyond the resistances” (Knox, 2020: 232).

To promote effective and meaningful participation, institutions must generate mechanisms that integrate the plurality of non-state actors and types of participation that contribute to addressing the climate change problem. Therefore, the state must collect these experiences, legitimise them, and integrate them into decision-making processes (Biskupovic, 2015; Biskupovic, 2019; Estades, Rémy, 2003). Including this knowledge in decision-making could reduce the uncertainties and promote a better understanding of how climate change affects policy practice, which is a fundamental step in fostering transformative change (Knox, 2020).

Conclusion

Mechanisms for the participation of non-state actors in climate governance need to be reformulated. International spaces generate frustration, uncertainty, and powerlessness. Whereas national-level spaces reduce participation to institutional activities that largely restrict collective demands and detach them from the territories, leaving behind disillusion. In contrast, the understanding of participation must be plural and diverse. Rather than being reduced to specific mechanisms and provisions, it must be open to the multiple expressions of non-state actors in different territories.

Anthropology and the ethnographic methodology shed new light on the actors’ feelings and thoughts questioning the implications of the environmental crisis. This qualitative approach allows us to penetrate the institutional margins to understand the meaning of an environmental commitment that unfolds through collective knowledge. The spaces promoted by non-state actors generate politics that, based on territorialised experience and collective commitment, vindicate local knowledge that allows us to understand and respond to the problem from a more just and democratic perspective.

The experiences presented here showcase an engaged society that not only positions, critiques, and demands but also actively seeks new ways to challenge the inequalities reinforced by global and local environmental governance. By highlighting the motivations and challenges of non-state actors, we hope to contribute to the debate on their role in climate governance –which to date has been mostly focused on their exclusion. In this way, we also aim to contribute to the climate change debate, moving beyond mere acknowledgement of the problem that affects us to presenting the solutions crafted by human communities. Future research can describe, analyse, and understand the spaces of climate participation in climate change governance, specifically, the activities tailored to the design of climate policies in the local, regional, and international arenas. An ethnographic exploration of these activities will enrich the dialogue with elements of democratic theory on social participation in transnational social movements and transnational networks of activism.

These efforts can facilitate the inclusion of diversity into climate governance. Nevertheless, a reformulation of institutions and intercultural capacity building to make this inclusion possible is even more necessary. If effective, such participation will bring new understandings of the problem to the debate. It will also facilitate the integration of the different challenges we face and, potentially, the redistribution of decision-making power and the creation of new, more appropriate, and rights-based responses. This plurality will allow for the transformative change necessary to address our historic challenge.

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Notes

1. See <https://unfccc.int/decisions?f%5B0%5D=body%3A4099&f%5B1%5D=session%3A4221>
2. The names of individuals and entities have been changed to maintain anonymity and protect the organisations' privacy.
3. We are grateful for the work of [assistant name], who collaborated in this process.
4. This year, we will conduct ethnography in isolated zones of the country to overcome this limitation.
5. We have anonymised the names of the organisations to which the interviewees refer by using letters. X Foundation is a think tank that works independently in diverse areas such as democracy, human rights, cities, innovation, and sustainability.

6. An independent NGO that advocates for the legal protection of the environment.
7. After the major mobilisations of October 2019 in Chile, in October 2020, a plebiscite approved the drafting of a new Constitution written by a Constitutional Convention. This commission has just finished the proposal, which will be submitted to a popular vote through a plebiscite in September 2022.
8. Chile's current constitution was written in 1980 under the Pinochet military dictatorship (1973-1990). In response to the social mobilisations of October 2019, a new constitutional process emerged in Chile that failed in 2022. In a plebiscite, 62% of the electorate rejected the progressive proposal of the Constitutional Convention. In this draft, "eight of eleven chapters and 98 of 388 articles mentioned or alluded to the environment" (Huneus 2022).

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