

# Territories of Life: Exploring vitality of governance for conserved and protected areas

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Unless living under a rock, readers of the *Niche* will surely be familiar with the 30x30 target of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-MGBF). That target expects the global community to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030. Along the way it has spawned an extraordinary amount of activity on trying to define and implement OECMs. Largely ignored in all this frenzy are ICCAs, or Territories of Life, as this work has it. Although ICCA looks like an acronym it is an abbreviation for a global phenomenon that has many diverse manifestations and names. Buen vivir, country, community conserved areas, sacred groves and locally-managed marine areas are among the rich panoply of terms used by local communities and Indigenous peoples to describe not only *where* they live, but *how* they live.

Given the rapidly shortening time to achieve the K-MGBF, this work is both timely and insightful – some 378 pages worth of text, enriched with abundant case studies, lavish illustrations, and a superb bibliography. But as a pdf it offers the opportunity to read, but also to dip into, search, and seek with ease.

The sponsors of this effort (ICCA Consortium, IUCN, and the small grant programme of UNDP-GEF) have done a great service in bringing together these two global experts on protected/conserved area governance. On

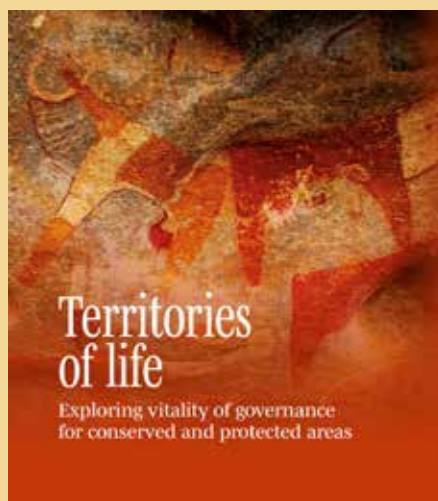
governance, this phrase - ‘governance functions by taking and implementing decisions and rules about the territory and getting those adhered to and respected in society’ perfectly sums up the needs of Territories of Life.

Readers are invited to take a journey through history and case examples, asking questions and exploring answers. Ecosystem understanding is woven with stories from real-life situations. A powerful point that emerges is the notion of custodianship, (think stewardship) by communities that are strongly bound to their life environments. It is this relationship with nature (living *with* and living *as* nature, as the IPBES Values assessment has it) that is the vitality of these territories. These place-based relationships also recognise a close connection with language, culture, and worldview – the cores of biocultural diversity. The authors talk of knowledge

derived by a sequence of historical observations in the same or similar localities as ‘natural experiments – accumulated, compared, reflected upon, refined, and enriched as they are passed on from one generation to another.’ They comment further that ‘Clearly associated with local knowledge is the concept of *mētis* – the know-how that resists any form of codification and is only acquired through engaged local practice.’ This is the embodiment of what Ian Rotherham, and I described as<sup>1</sup> the link between genes and memes (no, not cat videos, but *sensu* Dawkins).

In writing about governance, the concept of adaptive management becomes highly relevant. Adaptive not only as the environment changes, but as the governance systems changes, buckles, tears, and repairs in a constant process. Here is where governance seen through the practice of ecosystem management is a far more rigid structure, and, ironically, less likely to produce results which keep people and the rest of nature in harmony. And that, in the end, is what territories of life are about – harmony between our species and the rest of biodiversity. Dipping into, or reading, this treatise may be daunting, but it is something that all ecologists should aim to do. And, if opportunity presents, have conversations with, and listen to, such communities.

Peter Bridgewater



<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater P, Rotherham ID. (2019) A critical perspective on the concept of biocultural diversity and its emerging role in nature and heritage conservation. *People Nat.* 1: 291-304. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10040>