

Kristina Birn

## **Research on Development Strategies and Natural Resource Protection in Latin America**

The publications reviewed here deal with chances and risks linking development strategies and protection of natural resources in Latin America. They cover a wide range of investigation objectives spanning from general introductions into the subject to “manuals” for sustainable development paths. Raza as well as Pinchón et al. published compilations of multidisciplinary research on the subject; while the first concentrates on the neoliberal development model and its consequences on nature, the latter is intended to lay the foundations for a revised and sustainable strategy in natural resource management. One of the basic convictions expressed in Raza’s volume is reflected in the following two publications: Successful development requires in the first place a new way of thinking in the industrialized countries. While Santana Cova highlights the programmatic aspects of this conviction, Kaltmeier chooses the epistemological approach to the subject. The contributions of Pinchón, Rogge and Díaz-Briquets / Pérez-López contain more practical studies with extensive illustration through case-studies. Breckling / Birkenmeier and Zoomers finally published reports on development projects with lessons to be learned and – to a certain extent – generalized.

The main goals of *Werner G. Raza’s* compilation are on the one hand to present an actual inventory on evolution and effects of the neoliberal development model on environment and society in Latin America, on the other hand to search for socio-political answers in the face of neoliberal dominance in the global society. The central thesis is that the fundamental changes in the economies of Latin America initiated by neoliberal development strategies have also and especially influenced other societal dimensions; neoliberalism is interpreted in first place as a political project rather than an economic strategy. Another point to be illustrated is the rejection of the liberal economic theory that private property automatically leads to an ecologically considerate allocation of environmental resources.

The three parts of this collection investigate the subject from different viewpoints: Part I presents a general overview of the state of the environment and societies of contemporary Latin America; all three authors stress the importance of international as well as interregional coalitions to overcome the environmentally and socially devastating effects of the last decades of Latin American development policies in general and especially neoliberal strategies. The main goal of Part II is to embed the more general findings of the first part into an international context, to clarify the link to global social movements and to draw the necessary scientific background. The concept of “ecological debt” is outlined as a promising support of the Third World’s position in international negotiations. Part III presents actors and strategies in the search of alternatives to Latin American neoliberalism, showing the whole spectrum from adaptation to open resistan-

ce. The first three contributions of this part analyze showcases from the rural space, while the last two essays investigate in urban strategies.

This compilation provides a broad overview over the different aspects of neoliberalism in Latin America. The ecological part is solely analyzed from a utilitarian viewpoint – the main focus lies in contrast to what the title might suggest on the social consequences of environmental destruction rather than the rights of Nature itself. The essays cover a wide range of intentions (from basically scientific analysis to rather programmatic claims) and observation objects. There is a geographic restriction on South America, but this is where neoliberalism in Latin America plays. Most of the authors are strongly influenced by the Dependencia-School, which leads to a sometimes one-sided concentration on the external causes of environmental degradation and social injustice. The contributions serve the purpose they were presumably meant for: to introduce the subject to interested readers. Rather than presenting new insights or ideas they illuminate the facets of Latin American neoliberalism from many different angles, illustrated with a range of well-chosen showcases and last but not least a nice (unfortunately uncommented) collection of pictures.

*Nancy Santana Cova's* article deals with the different aspects of the neoliberal development model as well – she labels it as “Western techno-bureaucratic industrial development” – and its implications on a growing process of natural resource exploitation. In fact her diagnosis and interpretations as well as the recommendations are quite similar to the findings in Raza's compilation: Sustainable development is no more than a new adjective for the same model, as long as it is not interpreted as political option; like a couple of authors in Raza's volume she criticizes the definition of development success as synonymous to increased rationality in terms of efficiency, effectivity and higher revenues. The “Old World Order” is only economically orientated and doesn't consider interdependency between environment and development; technical progress, initially intended to increase human welfare, has led to sharp contradictions such as poverty, hunger, pollution, exploitation and the nuclear threat. Raza stresses the need to strengthen social and political movements especially in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to diminish the devastating social and ecological effects of the prevalent development model and to turn Sustainable Development into a true “Humane Sustainable Development” which should be more than an ideological justification of capitalistic progress.

The dissertation in social sciences of *Olaf Kaltmeier* differs from the rest of the here discussed contributions in respect to the chosen analytic structure: It discusses the conflicts between cultural identity, subsistence and ecology with a strong methodical background; the case study of the Yapacaní region rather illustrates the theoretical findings than being in the center of the analysis. The central thesis is that the modern concept of one universal order has been replaced by a postmodern variety of limited, regional orders, which are selective as well as exclusive. Kaltmeier defines a “Modern” and an “Andean” order and analyzes the power of epistemological, political-economical, ecological and institutional forces in explaining the clash between the two concepts. As this dissertation is written with an epistemological background, a specific attention is given to the role the intellectual observer plays here, his own background and experiences and their influence and reach when interpreting the conflict. Analyzing the Yapacaní region Kaltmeier develops three “perspectives” as possible starting points for alternative development strategies of *Comunidades*: cultural identity, subsistence and ecology (i.e. pro-

tection of natural resources). His further recommendations resemble as well some of the findings above: a fundamental break-up with the modern-capitalistic development paradigm and its political representations and a revitalization of indigenous presence – not in the sense of reproduction, but by creating something new. (Although Kaltmeier admits to have no idea what this new alternative could be like, he silently assumes that it will combine social justice and environmental protection.)

The publications of Santana Cova and Kaltmeier root from a *Dependencia*-based point of view, which traces Latin American development problems back exclusively to external effects. Although the chosen methodological strategies differ significantly the basic findings are very similar; the recommendations remain in both cases vague, and there is no discussion on how conflicting development goals could be harmonized. The naïve faith in almighty technological solutions justly criticized is replaced by an equally naïve faith in the capability of social movements in general and indigenous movements in particular to define new development paths which maximize social welfare and ecological sustainability simultaneously.

The Workshop on Traditional and Modern Natural Resource Management in Latin America held at the World Bank in 1995 served to “bring together a diverse group of experts” and to address the most burning problems of rural development in Latin America from a more practical perspective compared to the above. Several interrelated major themes are defined and reflected in the chapters of the compilation by *Pinchón et al.*: Profound analysis of traditional resource management strategies as starting point for research and development programs, design of participatory strategies for farmers and other relevant stakeholders, diversification of agriculture towards mixed cropping (agroforestry), introduction of multidisciplinary natural resource management strategies and finally greater involvement of the private sector and NGOs in research and development programs. “The scenario that most concerns development practitioners at present is one of high, and often increasing, human populations who depend on agricultural activities for their livelihoods and who inhabit fairly delimited risk-prone areas.” The authors suggest a shift from long-term, large-scale solutions to a complex system of many small modifications. Similar to Annelies Zoomer’s report (discussed below) they do not recommend a complete change of strategy but rather a combination of micro- and macro-level projects, of high-potential and risk-prone areas. In order to alleviate poverty in an environmentally sustainable manner there has to be a strong focus on integrating the now neglected risk-prone rural areas – at the price of development efficiency tradeoffs – without neglecting the rehabilitation of degraded high-potential zones. The multidisciplinary approach seeks to blend the best out of modern Western science and traditional local/indigenous knowledge in order to provide useful solutions.

This compilation is an up-to-date and quite complete inventory of scientific knowledge on natural resource management in Latin America. The authors are open to different viewpoints and scientific schools and try to formulate “guardedly optimistic” feasible development strategies, being well aware of the fact that there are tradeoffs between desirable development goals and that the best way probably has to be a compromise.

The in-depth case-study-section is opened by *Jan Rogge*, who spent four months in the Northeast of Pará to investigate in the German-Brazilian project “Studies on Human Impacts on Forests and Floodplains in the Tropics” (SHIFT). Small-scale farmers face a transformation process due to population growth, land concentration and decreasing yields,

the traditional forms of slash-and-burn-farming are no longer sufficient to earn a living. The unions being on the one hand the official representatives of field workers and small peasants, but being instrumentalized by changing authoritarian and national-populistic regimes on the other, are trapped in the conflict between tradition and change. Rogge tries to find some answers to the question how rural unions react on deteriorating living conditions in a changing society on its way to democracy and what ecological discourse they follow. Since the beginning of the 1990s the former protest movement *Grito de Campo* became institutionalized as annual demonstrations of trade unions and popular movements, who developed from violent confrontations with the police to powerful nationwide levers in negotiations with governmental institutions like the development bank. Although participation of the civil society increased there is still little influence on public planning for the Amazon region. But Rogge states a growing influence of the peasant unions on municipal level (in spite of the still existing contradictions), supported by public credit programs. The chances lie in a widespread introduction of ecologically sustainable farming methods, a revalorization of small-scale family farming methods and a swift clarification of property rights. The unions play an important role as local mediators between peasants and NGOs – to what extent they can efficiently improve the rural living conditions is yet to see.

*Sergio Díaz-Briquets* and *Jorge Pérez-López* face the difficult task to analyze the ecological situation of a country where independent scientific studies are nearly impossible: Their study on the environmental impacts of the Cuban regime is consequently based on desk research and interviews with emigrated scientists. In contrast to the Marxist-Leninist dogma that environmental deterioration only occurs as a consequence of capitalistic profit-seeking (and thus can't occur under a socialist regime) they analyze the mechanisms of environmental destruction inherent in the Cuban system. The title of the study alights the core thesis: "Under socialism Cuba was prepared to go to any lengths to conquer nature" – the radical interference in natural processes was no surprising side effect but a main ideological goal in the line of socialist development to transform Cuba into a better place to live. The causes of environmental problems in Cuba thus differ according to their viewpoint significantly from the situation in other developing countries and rather resemble the problems in other socialist systems. While in developing countries the roots of resource destruction generally lie in an extensive population growth and extreme poverty due to an unequal access to resources, Cuba faces neither of these problems. But it suffers from improper use and neglect of natural resources due to "systemic failures", the waste of vast amounts of Soviet foreign assistance invested mainly in gigantic development projects and an over-mechanized agricultural industry. These factors are reinforced due to a personalistic style of government under an "infallible leader". The authors stress the fact that the Cuban government (and above all Fidel Castro) tend to blame everybody else for the few environmental problems it is actually willing to face: Cuba's capitalistic past, its ongoing exploitation by industrialized countries and – since the fall of the Soviet Union – its former allies, who were forcing Cuba into industrialization and a green revolution it was not prepared for. The consequent and ongoing disregard of environmental and social consequences of the ambitious development projects is likely to aggravate the ecological situation even further – in spite of new development goals of the "Special Period" of the 1990s.

This study tries to contribute from the outside to reverse this process in presenting for the first time a thorough analysis of socialist development politics and their environ-

mental effects in Latin America as a starting point for field research and hopefully effective protection strategies. Although the authors thoroughly disassemble the socialist system in Cuba they finally admit that a reorientation towards a more open society and capitalistic economic structures will not necessarily lead to a more sustainable development – and the experience in other Latin American countries gives little reason to optimism. . .

*Breckling and Birkenmeier* summarize the experiences of the Proyecto HIFCO (*Huerta Integral Familiar Comunal*) which started in the mid-70s in the northeast of Peru. This project tries to diminish the negative external effects on traditional rainforest-societies, their cultural identity and natural resources. The main goal is to secure the sufficient and sustainable supply with staple food developing ecologically sustainable methods of land-use who don't collide with traditional farming methods. Instead of opening new economic perspectives it offers alternatives on a subsistence-level. The background is the authors' conviction, that clinging to forms of subsistence farming is crucial in maintaining cultural identity as well as in safeguarding physical survival in the face of increasingly deregulated economic conditions on a national level. This basic belief out of ten years of development project experience is not discussed further – which, above all, isn't the authors' intention anyway – but serves as starting-point for the following manual: In several chapters it describes in details and with illustrations the cultivation of plants and breeding of small animals, emphasizing the importance of sticking to endemic species (in order to avoid the risks of introducing "exotic" species) and embedding the cultivations in their natural environment. Hygienic aspects are as well discussed as sustainable slash-and-burn-methods and the possibilities of installing whole landuse-systems and adapted alternative technologies, refraining not only on local traditions, customs and knowledge but also on modern science and the experiences of ancient cultures like the Mayas' and the principles of Feng Shui. The Ecological Theory of Landuse serves as scientific framework, summarizing the requirements of a sustainable system of small-scale farming and explaining the interdependency between Man and Nature in the Amazon rainforest.

The report stresses the crucial influence of cultural aspects on development projects in general without going into details. It has a strong focus on implementation and assumes certain requirements like for example a general acceptance of external support by the local population and no regional interference by any kind of extractive industry. Breckling and Brinkmeyer composed a handbook which is vivid and easy to accomplish – provided that there is a basic agreement to return to subsistence structures. Their recommendations might fail with communities who explicitly wish to participate in regional or national economies.

This interaction between national development plans and local survival strategies is in the center of *Annelies Zoomers'* final report of a Dutch-Bolivian in-depth study on livelihood strategies among the rural population in the departments of Chuquisaca and Potosí. The PIED-Andino (*Proyecto de Investigación sobre Estrategias de Desarrollo*) was carried out over two years from 1995 to 1997, conducting a comprehensive evaluation of development efforts since the early 1980s and dealing with the problem "whether sound policies at the macro and sectoral levels are sufficient to ensure the success of projects and programs". *Zoomers'* report is intended for policymakers to take into account micro-level considerations and "to shed light on the diversity and dynamics of rural life in the Andes region, to analyze the interaction between farmers' strategies at the micro

level and development interventions and to provide policy-relevant recommendations". She explains the disappointing results of development projects with a lack of insight in project surroundings and livelihood strategies of poor people. Development projects often have little or no effect at all on subsistence strategies because they fail to notice crucial shifts in crucial determinants for the farmers as well as the variety of strategies farmers use, who constantly adapt to changing circumstances searching to minimize risks. Zoomers demonstrates the importance of mutual information and contact networks not only in explaining migratory patterns, but in promoting effective agricultural innovation. Similar to the authors in Pinchón et al. she claims a reassessment of the role and interventions of development agencies and the need to consider invisible and subjective aspects of the farmers' lives as well. She warns to overestimate the sustainability and positive effects of development projects through better donor coordination and a more equal distribution of activities: "Given the population's heterogeneity, a fragmented and partially contradictory package of measures is not always a bad idea." While project planners usually seek efficient, sustainable and permanent solutions, farmers are interested in temporary help which allows them to follow their own, constantly changing development path. "Even brief or unsustainable projects can have benefits for the villagers that extend beyond the duration of the projects."

Zoomers viewpoint represents a quite interesting new interpretation of sustainability: not the search for long-term solutions in a well-tuned concerto of development organizations, but an unobtrusive support of the farmers present way of living, believing that they themselves know best what they need. This is an attitude present in many of the publications analyzed here: Successful development strategies to improve the living conditions of the poor require in first place a change of view and attitudes on the donors' side and a profound acceptance of other people's ways of living. The problem is that successful development strategies to improve the conditions of endangered ecosystems require to take into account long-term and global perspectives – in the extreme case at the cost of Mankind. Like Pinchón et al. express clearly there will always be a trade-off between human development and the protection of Nature – at least on a global level –, such that there is no ideal development path which could be generalized over time and countries; the other contributions still assume more or less that both can be achieved simultaneously and put it down to merely choosing the right political strategies and/or attitudes.

## Bibliography

- Breckling, Broder / Peter Birkenmeier: *Landnutzungsalternativen im Regenwald. Praxis und Theorie der Ökosystemkonformen Landnutzung*. Frankfurt/M., etc.: Lang 2000. 222 pages.
- Díaz-Briquets, Sergio / Jorge Pérez-López: *Conquering Nature. The Environmental Legacy of Cuba*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2000. 280 pages.
- Kaltmeier, Olaf: *Im Widerstreit der Ordnungen. Kulturelle Identität, Subsistenz und Ökologie in Bolivien*. Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag 1999. 192 pages.
- Pinchón, Francisco J. / Jorge E. Uquillas / John Frechione (eds.): *Traditional and Modern Natural Resource Management in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1999. 250 pages.
- Raza, Werner G. (ed.): *Recht auf Umwelt oder Umwelt ohne Recht?* Frankfurt/M.: Brandes & Apsel / Südwind (Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Lateinamerika-Instituts, 4) 2000. 262 pages.

- Rogge, Jan: *Parás Kleinbauernbewegung. Die Kleinbauernbewegung im Nordosten Parás (Brasilien). Geschichte, Selbstverständnis und ökologischer Diskurs*. Mettingen: Brasilienkunde-Verlag 1998. 117 pages.
- Santana Cova, Nancy: "El desarrollo sostenible y la preservación del ambiente. El nuevo planteamiento ideológico del capitalismo neoliberal." In: *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana* 9/2000, pages 95-102.
- Zoomers, Annelies: *Linking livelihood strategies to development. Experiences from the Bolivian Andes*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute/Center for Latin American Research and Documentation 1999. 89 pages.