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ARTICLE



# The role of environmental placemaking in shaping contemporary environmentalism and understanding land change

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## ABSTRACT

It is important to understand environmental and conservation consciousness, commonly referred to as ‘environmentalism’, considering the crisis of global environmental change. Environmentalism of the North has been characterized as focused on ‘pristine’ landscapes of wilderness. In contrast, discussions on environmentalism of the South focus on indigenous and long-settled communities with intrinsic associations to nature, keeping social justice at the core. In an increasingly globalized world characterized by migration, teleconnections and changing ecologies, environmental placemaking helps us move beyond these dichotomies to understand the dynamic process by which diverse social and ecological practices, meanings and attachments to nature can be collectively harnessed for conservation. We discuss the growing body of literature that examines environmental placemaking and argue that this literature contributes significant explanatory power to land change science, by helping understand the motivations that act as precursors to shape both proximate drivers of land change, and responses to them.

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## 1. Introduction

This essay seeks to situate an understanding of the role of ‘placemaking’ within the established discourses on environmentalism of the global North and South. Environmental consciousness and attempts towards conservation, commonly referred to as ‘environmentalism’, are indispensable in the world that we inhabit today, confronted as we are by the challenges of global environmental change, the collapse of ecosystems, and the loss of biodiversity (IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2018). In today’s fast-changing world, we identify ‘environmental placemaking’ as an important concept that helps us understand the emergent, dynamic processes by which diverse social communities build meanings and attachments to places of nature, shaping stewardship and collective action for conservation.

Scholars have characterized Northern environmentalism as largely focused on the protection of ‘pristine’ or ‘wilderness’ landscapes by minimizing human presence and influence, and Southern forms of environmentalism as focused on indigenous and long-settled rural communities embedded in local ecologies, with deep-rooted intrinsic cultural affinities for nature, and long-standing livelihood dependencies on the ecosystems in which they are located. In other words, literature on environmentalism seem to rely on well-characterized, even typified forms of nature conservation. However, in an increasingly globalized world, environmentalism is also shaped by migration, teleconnections and

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novel or altered ecologies induced by climate and anthropogenic influence. Some of these factors, such as migration, can lead to conflicts between different kinds of environmentalism, leading to 'pathologies' (Gill, 2010) that need to be better explored. In other instances, networks of place-based collective action can help to augment a sense of place for a range of communities and can help to equalize socioeconomic disparities. As Massey (2012) argues, in today's fast-changing world, social relations are at the core of whether or not it is possible to create pathways of inclusive placemaking.

We begin the next section of this paper by exploring 'place' as a geographical location in social sciences (Clifford, 1992; Moore, 1998; Escobar, 2001; Chaudhuri, 2017) and counterpoising this against the idea of ecological place, as described in the literature on Northern forms of environmentalism. We also examine the literature on Southern environmentalism, demonstrating how such literature, despite acknowledging the role of people in shaping social-ecological systems, has often provided a somewhat static description of remote regions of the world with indigenous communities and communities with long-standing, enduring social and cultural ties to their local landscape.

We then describe the emerging literature on what we characterize as environmental placemaking, drawing from the growing literature on environmentalism, but situated in diverse social-ecological contexts. We conclude that such literature can help us understand how to move beyond singular narratives of environmental protection, to better explore the diverse forms of environmentalism that can help address the global ecological crisis that the world now encounters.

## 2. The role of place in Northern and Southern forms of environmentalism

Placemaking as a process is nuanced. Chaudhuri (2017, p. 156) uses the term 'place-making' to explore the social processes through which various events, individual place-based attachments and physical experiences are discursively integrated to create a shared sense of place-identity. Friedmann (2010, p. 159) refers to collective undertakings such as 'making street corners safe for pedestrians or simply paving a street that during the rainy season turns into ankle deep mud', as integral to the process of placemaking. Following similar lines of thinking, we use the term 'environmental placemaking' to describe the ways in which distinct and disparate practices, meanings and ideologies are utilized towards forging a collective identity for a place of nature, as a shared social-ecological 'place'. Such ecological places or landscapes, conserved collectively, can provide resource provisioning services to multiple actors, as well as serve critical social functions like fostering social interactions, building communities, and increasing mental and physical wellbeing (IPBES, 2019; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Practices of placemaking are essentially diverse, encompassing complex and often disparate attempts to forge relationships with nature and localities (Escobar, 2001; Raffles, 2004).

Places in geography are typically conceived of as a physical and geographical setting, with specific built-in attributes. However, there is a growing body of literature (Marshall et al., 2019, p. 580; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Enqvist, Campbell, Stedman, & Svendsen, 2019) on an alternative imagination of places as physical locations imbued with emotions, meanings and attachments, emerging from human interactions, experiences and relationships with the place. In sociology, place is similarly conceived of as a 'fusion of human and natural order' (Relph, 1976, p. 141). Early sociological scholarship has shown how places have been imagined in their socio-cultural setting, through the creation of specific subjective meanings (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 45). Hybrid cultural processes and de-territorialized social relations also add to the imagination of place as a locus where belongingness is exhibiting (Clifford, 1992; Li, 2000). The image of place also shapes articulation of the politics of belongingness, by evoking disparate cultural histories to represent collective identities and attachments to land (Karthik & Menon, 2016; Li, 2000). For instance, Moore (1998) suggested how a cultural politics of place helps to situate subaltern resistance, by emphasizing translocal linkages as well as 'multiple modalities of power'.

In anthropology as well, scholars have critiqued the image of place as a mere physical setting and have considered them as one having 'multiple meanings which are constructed spatially' (Rodman, 1992, p. 641). Chaudhuri (2017, p. 168) discusses how different communities, with their subjective

regional identities, interact with each other in conserving local natural landscapes collectively and in the process help fulfil their individual aspirations of being identified as 'global environmental citizens'. Instead of well-defined cultural identities rooted in place-based customs, subaltern identities often exhibit multiple associations, and draw on cross-cultural histories of belongingness across blurred spatial boundaries, to situate their struggles (Escobar, 2001; Moore, 1998). In sociology and anthropology, places have thus been contextualized in hybrid and de-territorialized settings, where unique as well as itinerant historical lineages were combined to assert cultural identities, combat power inequities, and render physical places meaningful.

A range of scholarship has also integrated 'place' into research on ecology. Bird and Nimmo (2018) draw attention to a range of ecological functions performed uniquely by place-based indigenous communities, which helped in ascertaining ecological baselines, understanding ecological changes and recognizing the significance of traditional land-use patterns. Several critiques of such approaches to place, like that of Lien (2005), point out how contemporary conservation associates territorial links and spatial boundedness with pristine environments. Nature and ecological attributes, by being 'singularized' and identified with indigenous communities alone, limit their potential of being accommodated within diverse ecological landscapes and from collective human interventions in heterogeneous societies in flux.

Placemaking as a dynamic, hybrid, multi-actor process requires deeper integration within scholarship on environmentalism. In a now-classic paper, Guha and Alier (1997) illustrated the distinction between 'full stomach environmentalism' of the global North and 'empty belly environmentalism' of the global South. While Northern ideologies on environmentalism arose from a consciousness garnered over widespread environmental degradation, they stated that in the global South, threats to ecology and denial of rights to livelihood, fueled by commercial exploitation of natural resources elicited environmental movements. Conservation policies in the North sought to protect supposedly pristine sites of wilderness, free of people, to preserve the aesthetics of nature. Southern environmentalism literature pointed out that indigenous life-worlds are intrinsically associated with nature, separating themselves from a Northern-centric environmentalism that seemingly sought to disregard traditional ecological knowledge (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). The importance of traditional ecological knowledge in conservation has been strongly demonstrated in pioneering scholarship on Southern environmentalism (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993).

Scholarship that studies wildlife habitat loss and the extinction of native species has focused on the impacts of urban and suburban expansion in exacerbating ecosystem decline (McKinney, 2002). Trends of large-scale human migration are also believed to foster ecological problems and pose challenges for the protection of biodiversity (Oglethorpe, Ericson, Bilsborrow, & Edmond, 2007). Such a view of environmentalism restricts the scope for alternative socio-ecological relations by foreclosing the prospect of unconventional, politics-based, yet integrative and place-based knowledge systems in designing viable conservation methods (Sen & Pattanaik, 2017, p. 877–878). Other conservationists have of course largely dismissed the merits of community conservation, focusing on exclusionary protected areas (Corlett, 2016). Environmental placemaking, as a process incorporating multiple ecological practices and diverse trajectories of belongingness, provides significant possibility in engaging with diverse emerging versions of environmentalism.

Northern environmentalism primarily originated in wealthier countries of the North like Norway, Germany and preeminently, the United States of America. Emanating from a widespread unhappiness over rampant environmental destruction, environmentalism in the North intensified during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, mostly driven by conservation scientists (Grove, 1992). Most of the proposed approaches, which exclusively aimed towards conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, precluded human associations with nature. Environmentalism in the USA, for instance, advocated wilderness protection by 'freeing' the parks from human habitations and productive activities (Guha, 2000, p. 367). A version of Northern environmentalism, 'deep ecology' (Naess, 1973) proposed that the intrinsic worth of nature is independent of human needs. One of its principle tenets has been the shift from an anthropocentrism to biocentrism (Guha, 2000) and an egalitarianization of

environmental philosophy, focused on realizing the intrinsic value of ecology and biodiversity (Keller, 2008, p. 206). Other forms of Northern environmentalism have been critiqued as 'utilitarian', where nature is 'consumed' by wilderness lovers for its aesthetics, ignoring its socio-ecological role (Guha & Alier, 1997, p. 18).

Advocacies of natural habitats as social spaces remained limited within the larger Northern discourse on environmentalism. Ecological destruction was by and large attributed to anthropogenic influences. Northern environmentalism essentially promoted a singular, standard prototype of conservation, implying that natural habitats can be best conserved when they are free from the influence of people. Such prototypes were imposed on many parts of the South in colonial times, as critiqued by a number of influential post-colonial scholars. According to Grove (1992, p. 42), such conservation approaches epitomized 'untouched tropical islands' and 'exotic lands' as ideal landscapes, where wilderness could be sustained. As Arnold (1996, 2000) points out, Southern tropics were conceptual places, as well as geographic and ecological spaces, distinctly shaped by Northern representations. Northern ideas, frameworks and methods of conservation were frequently imposed on Southern colonies considered to be primitive, impoverished, and morally inferior. Terming such imposition, a form of 'Green Orientalism', Lohmann (1993) points out the fundamental role of power imbalances between the North and South in shaping such self-perpetuating discourse. With an imagination of a pristine wilderness *sans* people, principles of deep ecology, and legacy of characterization of indigenous people as 'noble savages' living in harmony with nature (Rousseau, 1755; Smithers, 2015), conventional Northern environmentalism does not help address how placemaking can drive environmental stewardship and conservation in human-embedded landscapes that may not be populated by indigenous communities, but nevertheless have been lived in, and shaped by rural communities with long-standing attachment to, and influence on the local ecology.

Southern environmentalism draws substantially on cultural ecology, an area of study focusing on understanding the socio-cultural construction of nature in various culturally specific ways (Steward, 1955). Leach (1994) analyzed gender-specific uses of natural resources within the Mende community, inhabiting the Gola forests of West Africa, and showed the significance of the forests in shaping the social relations of Mende women. Fraser et al. (2016), studying sacred agro-forests and long fallows of West Africa, argued how cultural values shaped by the presence of ancestors' graves influence the potential for conservation. These authors also explored how ethnic indigenous groups like the Loma associate living trees like the *Kola* with commemorations of the birth of individuals, leading to a ban on cutting and burning of trees. The Altaians, an ethnic group in Siberia, have protested the construction of hydro-electric dams on the Katun River, because they consider the river and the springs emanating from the river to be sacred (Klubnikin, Annett, Cherkasova, Shishin, & Fotieva, 2000). The Altaians are also described as innate conservationists, since their social customs limit excessive resource extraction, for instance by restricting access to medicinal plants due to the belief that the plants are possessed by spirits (ibid., 1300). In the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, specific religious attributes are accorded to forest patches as sacred groves, protecting these patches from extraction (Johari, 2007, p. 68–69).

These illustrations demonstrate the socio-cultural meanings of natural landscapes in various places where tribal communities reside, and traditionally informed resource governance practices have evolved across generations. Most of these landscapes have long-standing community institutions of management, whose resilience depended as much on cultural practices as it did on ecological characteristics (Brown & Kothari, 2011, p. 144). Thus, places of ecology and biodiversity are also embedded in a network of social associations, with historical patterns of ecological change and traditional land use patterns, symbolic of the effective links between people and the ecosystem (Bird & Nimmo, 2018).

Ecological Marxism, one of the dominant paradigms of environmental thinking in the global South, regards the threats to resource-based livelihoods as coming from prevailing models of development, led by industrialization and control over the means of production (O' Connor, 1998). A long-standing range of research on political ecology and human geography fed into Southern

literature on environmentalism, underscoring power inequities and threats to livelihood and land (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Forsyth, 2008; Robbins, 2012; Sen & Pattanaik, 2017). In Southern environmentalism, natural landscapes like forests, lakes, mountains and rivers are often represented as repositories of traditional and symbolic values, 'endowed with a sense of sacred' (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2008; Friedmann, 2010, p. 157). A rich body of scholarship on environmentalism of the South focuses on the ways in which traditional ways of life are linked to ecological landscapes (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Forsyth, 2007; Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Smith, 2015).

Yet Southern environmentalism is also limited in its ability to incorporate an understanding of placemaking, despite its human-centric approach, because of its dominant focus on long-standing ecological practices embedded in local landscapes inhabited by indigenous communities. Framings on environmentalism in the global South have often depicted tribal communities as innate conservationists, bound to their natural habitats by intrinsic cultural processes and resource-based subsistence needs (Gadgil & Guha, 1995; Guha & Alier, 1997). It is their geographical location, interpreted and imagined through specific lived experiences over the years, which is believed to help leverage their claims to nature and its resources, in the face of state exploitation. However, even in notionally stable rural areas strongly shaped by their ecology, such as the Amazonian estuary, placemaking operates through both physical and mental trans-locality, and cannot be completely understood by 'a carceral notion of a static and bounded local' (Raffles, 2004). As Hecht, Kandel, Gomes, Cuellar, and Rosa (2006) demonstrate, in countries like El Salvador, expanding secondary forests, shaped by communities committed to conservation, are excluded from conservation debates that focus almost exclusively on seemingly 'virgin' and 'wild' habitats with indigenous communities. A typical framing of Southern environmentalism, drawing as it does primarily from rural locations, also does not help understand the genesis of place-based conservation movements in fast-growing Southern cities as a dynamic and integrative process, conditioned by multi-actor interventions. Recent research on the lakes of Bangalore points to interventions from disparate groups involved in lake conservation, evoked by a range of factors ranging from childhood experiences of nature, to the sight of flowing water (Murphy, Enqvist, & Tengö, 2019, p. 607).

In summary, in both Northern and Southern forms of environmentalism, a watertight compartmentalization of place as purely ecological, or shaped by homogenous social-ecological association, precludes an understanding of natural spaces characterized by a 'porosity of boundary' (Escobar, 2001, p. 144). Placemaking is a process which reconfigures the idea of being 'place-based' from a static to a dynamic process (Chaudhuri, 2017; Gieryn, 2000). Placemaking is useful for its emphasis on collective purpose via multiple meanings and multiple loci of attachment, that help construct a connection between single places and the multiple communities and peoples that often inhabit or interface with them (Friedmann, 2010; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). In that sense, the environmental discourse on placemaking draws on a long history of previous seminal literature in geography. Thus,, for instance, Agnew (1987) described three important dimensions of place – *locale*, or the objective aspects of space, *sense of place*, or its subjective social and behavioral dimensions, and *location*, by which he refers to the multi-level networks between a place, and the regional and global socio-political and economic networks within which it is embedded. Massey, another seminal writer on place, interrogates the dialectic between space and place in her book 'Space, Place and Gender' (Massey, 1994). She characterizes space as the more sharply local, while place, she argues, is a more political concept that is neither bounded nor static (though often mischaracterized as such), but deeply contested, with multiple identities shaped by social interrelationships operating across multiple scales in time and space. The writings of these scholars and others, describing place from a geographical perspective, stress the importance of social relationships and help us understand the role of power and politics in shaping whose meanings of place are ultimately influential in driving processes of placemaking, and at what scale. They do not, however, focus on the role of human-nature relationships in shaping a sense of place and influencing placemaking.

Conversely, ecological zones are not always explicit representations of bounded social locations, imbibed with an indigenous-life-world and characterized by a designated place attachment (Raffles,

2004). Such a framing does not address conservation in changing environments as a dynamic and integrative process, conditioned by multi-actor interventions. Wickham and Graefe (2002) suggest that places are shaped by the involvement of communities in recreational experiences, leading to diverse associations. For instance, Stedman (2003, p. 677) observes that place attachment of people visiting a neighborhood lake is influenced by the proportion of people around the lake whom they consider as friends. Alongside, he also observed that physical characteristics of the lake like 'clear water, blue/green end of the color spectrum, with low chlorophyll' are preferred, and constitutive of place attachment (ibid., 678; Masse, 2018).

The diversity of social-ecological collaborations visible in environmental placemaking helps understand how places can be dynamic entities and repositories of collective meanings and practices (Jones & Cloke, 2002). Attachments to physical features, to communities, personal emotions, recreation, the desires to forge social ties, wellbeing and health reasons can all be factors central to environmental placemaking (Braubach et al., 2017; Laszkiewicz, Kronenberg, & Marcinczak, 2017; Stedman, 2003). These are not only forged through territorial ties over generations and social attitudes to reverence for nature but also 'by the geography and the architecture of the place themselves' (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481).

At the same time, processes of placemaking are fundamentally shaped by contestations of power. These determine whose approach to placemaking gains importance when different conceptualizations clash, as demonstrated for instance by Li (2000) in post-Suharto Indonesia or Nagendra (2016) in Bangalore. Thus, any focus on environmental placemaking must also incorporate at its core a consideration of how power and inequality shape processes of negotiation and environmental outcomes, in increasingly socially heterogeneous contexts influenced by translocal and global movement.

In the following section, we review a recent and increasing body of literature, which suggests multiple ways through which evolving socio-ecological cultures define and construct a place and shape environmentalism.

### 3. Environmental placemaking: prospects for an alternative discourse

In an increasingly globalized world, a number of recent trans-national environmental movements help us recognize that regional ecological habitats are socially constituted as 'places' by multiple, often itinerant networks of actors. These movements, which seek to recognize local claims to natural resources, originate in a strongly local sense of place, but are then constituted in conjunction with global alliances, to make their voice heard across spatiotemporal boundaries. An example is the sustained movement by the Dongria Kondh tribes against the Vedanta Aluminum Refinery Project in Odisha, India (Sahu, 2008). Mass demonstrations and protests against the mining of bauxite from the mineral-rich Niyamgiri hills have been supported by national and global action groups like Amnesty International and others who have staged national and international protests. While founded based on concerns of a threat to local ecology and the fact that the Niyamgiri is a sacred mountain for tribal groups, very soon the movement gathered international support. Similarly, the North Dakota Pipeline Protests in the USA, resisting the Dakota Access oil pipeline, gained international support when indigenous groups and climate activists from across the world joined hands with Native American communities to stage protests. Global protests against Adani's Carmichael coal mine in Queensland, joined by Australian students, and protests against mining in critical ecological habitats in Latin America, are other well-known recent examples. Drawing on a foundation of local environmental struggles, these cases show how environmentalism seeks to build on a foundation of 'place-based' alliances and use these to reach out globally, to articulate environmental concerns. Such movements help extricate localized voices against ecological degradation from their territorially grounded narratives, and include multiple actors at larger geographical and governance scales, to characterize ecological abuse of territories as a universal problem. In such cases, places are not only 'local', as Escobar (2001,

p. 143–144) points out, but are ‘indissolubly linked to both local and extralocal practices through what might be called networks’.

Other ecological landscapes, largely devoid of a significant indigenous presence, may also be shaped by diverse peasantry who do not identify as indigenous but have long-standing place-attachments to their rural location (Li, 2000; Raffles, 2004). In such cases, collective attempts to situate places as the locus of identity and claims to resources are made by diverse communities who do not have a territorialized or rooted history of belongingness (Menon & Karthik, 2017, p. 5). Chhotray (2016), drawing on the Gahirmatha sanctuary in coastal Odisha, explores how a regional environmentalism or ‘eco-nationalism’ sidelines place-attachments of other communities who are non-indigenous and thus not ‘authentic’ inhabitants of the place. Correspondingly, the environmentalism of immigrant communities, although non-indigenous, are equally rooted to the sanctuary, transgressing territorial boundaries. Sen and Pattanaik (2017) explore a similar line of inquiry in identifying place-attachments of a ‘non-indigenous’ and migrant forest-dependent community of the Indian Sundarban, who demonstrate an established socio-ecological process, despite being ‘unauthentic’. Chaudhuri (2017), drawing on instances from the Periyar Tiger Reserve region in Kerala, shows how incentives generated out of the ‘Kerala model’ altered conservation ideologies in the region, through a combination of trans-local influences, resulting in a unique form of cosmopolitan placemaking, shaped by a large and relatively new network of ideologies and political actors.

Placemaking may also be shaped by newly-forged communities of individuals having diverse trajectories of belongingness, as especially obvious in cities, which attract migrants from across the world. Urban physical neighborhoods are in a constant flux and acquire identity and meanings through multiple patterns of social interactions, subjective attachments and encounters (Friedmann, 2010). Proximity to spaces of nature impact physical and mental health, longevity and enhance social ties which help invoke a sense of place (Chatterjee, 2018; Kimpton, Wickes, & Corcoran, 2014). The presence of nature in one’s immediate environment and its continued association with the neighborhood augments place-dependence for a range of communities and can help to equalize socio-economic disparities (Chatterjee, 2018). For children, community green spaces provide trees to read under and act as safe places to play. Green spaces also help reducing symptoms of depression for the people belonging to lower-income groups (ibid).

For marginal groups as well for privileged sections of society, the environment is often seen as a ‘habitat’ with a defined set of physical characteristics, social relations and evoked sentiments, which may be quite contrasting (Baviksar, 2018, p. 88). Thus, in Bengaluru, urban ecology is differently understood by a range of individuals with diverse connections to the nature in the city (Nagendra, 2016; Sen & Nagendra, 2018). Wooded street trees in the city of Bengaluru support livelihoods of street vendors and evoke a strong sense of affinity and fondness from them, for the shade they provide during sunny days, as screens of privacy for bathing and domestic chores and as sources of herbal medicine which they relate to while narrating tales of previous generations (Nagendra, 2016, p. 104–106). Many of the vendors are not multi-generation natives of the city, but are relatively new inhabitants. Interactions with nature develop a unique sense of place, demonstrated by the way in which they describe interactions with a range of urban wildlife like birds and butterflies, making the daily occupation of the vendors less mundane (ibid., 107). A study by Collard (2012) argues that places are usually in flux for non-humans also, which – like cougars in this case – produce new spaces as habitats. Rapid transformations can be observed in usage patterns and socio-cultural associations with the lake commons in Bangalore, caused by industrialization and growing aspirations for development (Nagendra, 2016; Unnikrishnan & Nagendra, 2018). Yet, several lakes still support traditional forms of livelihood-based usage, like agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing, and foraging, along with ‘new’ urban uses of jogging, walking, and recreation. There are efforts to develop a unique co-production of knowledge that combines formal lake management techniques with customary norms of conservation (Nagendra, 2016). Nagendra and Ostrom (2014) show how collective action from urban residents is augmented by a wide array of actors, including government

agencies, civil groups, naturalists, researchers, court, and legislative groups, to stimulate lake rejuvenation in Bengaluru. Such multi-actor intervention in placemaking helps in negotiating decisions about the environment of which they are a part of (Strydom, Puren, & Drewes, 2018, p. 166). Landor-Yamagata, Kowarik, and Fischer (2018) similarly discuss how urban foragers in Berlin identify closely with the urban biodiversity and readily share their knowledge on a range of species, both native and non-native. Yet power is never absent from such efforts, and in these as well as a number of other urban conservation efforts, dominant views of placemaking, often those expressed by wealthier residents who are more recent migrants, tend to have a stronger signature in urban restoration as compared to the voices and placemaking narratives of poorer migrants or earlier residents of erstwhile villages swallowed by the city (Nagendra, 2016; Baviksar, 2018).

This rich body of new scholarship collectively shows that place, often defined as 'politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple construction' (Rodman, 1992), implies more than a native physical and geographical setting. In addition to indigenous communities with specific territorial linkages, various long-standing communities and recent migrants with varied socio-economic conditions, political and cultural contexts identify with natural habitats as a 'place'. Different communities having disparate histories of belongingness relate to neighborhood environments (Nagendra, 2016; Chatterjee, 2018; Unnikrishnan & Nagendra, 2018). New actors also stake claims to local landscapes by mobilizing themselves through a politics of place-identity, since they are non-indigenous and are thereby denied 'authentic' rights to land (Karthik and Menon 2016; Sen & Pattanaik, 2017). Disparate ideologies from transnational linkages also collaborate with regional identities to the making of ecologically recognized places (Chaudhuri, 2017; Chhotray, 2016). This is specifically true of internationally important biodiversity habitats, which attract significant attention from international donor agencies (Chaudhuri, 2017, p. 161). In diverse empirical instances, placemaking results from a form of environmental consciousness which is constructed under different socio-political conditions. Communities belonging to multiple locales strive to reinforce a place identity to meet specific ends. Such identities are forged through the interplay of location or the spatial distribution of socio-economic activity, sense of place or specific attachments to place and the locale or the setting in which the particular social activity occurs (Rodman, 1992, p. 643). The kinds of environmentalism which correspond to the multilocality embedded in places are essentially 'extra-regional' in nature, as Chaudhuri points out (2017, p. 156). Ecological places are thus, as Escobar (2001, p. 143) points out, 'characterized by openness rather than by a unitary self-identity'. Places have a unique reality where meanings are shared with other people and places (Rodman, 1992, p. 643). Rather than being 'culturally defined locations' with 'topographical stereotypes', for each inhabitant the place has an 'unique reality', whereby meanings are shared with other people (Appadurai, 1988 in Rodman, 1992, p. 643).

Placemaking cannot, however, be construed as a process always beneficial to environmentalism. Narratives of placemaking can have racist and fascist undertones and have often been employed as justifications for legal and institutional approaches that reject migrants as 'others', especially those at the bottom of the prevailing social hierarchy such as refugees and asylum seekers, domestic workers and casual labour – as witnessed in contexts ranging from historical Nazi Germany to contemporary Europe (Gill, 2010) and India (Roy, 2008).

A just pathway towards environmentalism requires a progressive definition of 'sense of place' that goes beyond a Heideggerian conception of place as a static reality, instead recognizing places as dynamic locations of interaction between groups at the centre and periphery, where social relations are at the core of empowering inclusive placemaking (Massey, 2012). Thus, (following core traditions of Southern environmentalism), political ecology and considerations of power and equity need to be central to the study of environmental placemaking.

#### 4. Environmental placemaking in land change science

The field of land change science has a long-standing tradition of in-depth, place-based research from across the world. Integrative research on land change science built on this foundation to construct a broad framework of proximate, i.e. local, place-based drivers of change, and distal drivers that emanate from global contexts (Geist & Lambin, 2002). This framework has been influential in developing meta-analyses of land-use drivers and impacts that have advanced our understanding of the drivers of major categories of global land change such as deforestation (Geist & Lambin, 2001) and agriculture (Keys & McConnell, 2005), in modelling land system change (Verburg et al., 2015), understanding the role of global drivers such as telecoupling (Munroe et al., 2019) and developing middle-range theories of land change that help explain land-use spillovers such as displacement and land sparing (Meyfroidt et al., 2018). Such integrative research has greatly expanded the capacity of land change science to identify the broader principles that influence why and how landscapes change in specific and diverse contexts.

Yet, a major challenge for the theorization of land change stems from the fact that landscapes or places are simultaneously biophysical, ecological, environmental, symbolic, cultural, spiritual, administrative, territorial, and institutional (Meyfroidt et al., 2018). Thus, processes such as deforestation, agricultural expansion and urbanization unfold over multiple spatial and temporal scales, and involve a variety of actors who engage with each other sometimes cooperatively, at other times contentiously, often even violently. Within the same landscape, embedded in the same context of proximate and distal drivers, it is common to find patches of forest that are degraded and being cleared, alongside other patches that are being protected, even regrowing (Nagendra, Pareeth, Sharma, Schweik, & Adhikari, 2008; Nagendra, Rocchini, & Ghatge, 2010; Robbins, Chhangani, Rice, Trigosa, & Mohnot, 2007). By examining the motivations of actors in these landscapes, environmental placemaking can help us move beyond analyses of the explanatory power of (for instance) roads vs markets in driving urbanization, to understanding the motivations of different actors, and the contestations and collaborations that evolve as a result of social negotiations between these actors, precursors that help shape the differences we observe in the explanatory power of these variables.

As an example, Aldrich, Walker, Simmons, Caldas, and Perz (2012), discussing land change in the Amazon's 'arc of deforestation', conclude that such heterogeneity stems from the fact the prevailing explanatory paradigms of proximate and distal drivers of land change miss the role of social processes of interaction, negotiation and contestation, shaped by a variety of actors with differential power and politics, whose mental imagination, motivation and interaction pre-date and shape the proximate causes of land change. Similarly, examining cultural politics in Brazilian bureaucrats involved in designing and implementing that country's contentious agrarian land reform, Wolford (2016) describes fundamental differences in their orientation – while some treat the work as a professional calling, others are committed to maintaining the power of the State, and a third set is passionately driven by the political and normative ideal of land reform and redistribution. The contestations between these actors, all working within the same bureaucracy, shape the concrete nature of land reform either towards pro-poor frontier expansion or tenure protection for wealthy ranchers in diverse places – an important factor that many conventional analyses of the drivers of land change in the Amazon are unable to capture.

In essence, land change actors are not passive, homogeneous or static respondents to drivers of change, whether local or global. Fishers in Cornwall (Urquhart & Acott, 2014) are deeply attached to fishing, and define their identity as fishers – understanding fisheries policy and market mechanisms, while undoubtedly important, will not help scholars address why fishers do not operate according to economic and policy decisions, and are reluctant to move to other livelihoods when fishing is no longer economically viable. Similarly, in Norway, Brandth and Haugen (2011) find farmers reluctant to engage in off-farm activities.

Yet, as the cultural, economic and spatial context within which place meanings and values are defined become redrawn, place meanings are continuously reconstructed, both individually, and as

**Table 1.** Uses and contradictions of environmentalism and environmental placemaking.

Environmentalism	Environmental placemaking
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A form of environmental consciousness in a world confronted by global environmental change, the collapse of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity.</li> <li>2. Often articulated through binaries, like that of the North and South. Such binaries proscribe the possibilities of fluid and novel environmental practices.</li> <li>3. Conservation policies in the North largely sought to protect supposedly pristine sites of wilderness, free of people, to preserve the aesthetics of nature. Although some framings represent a contrary pro-people method of conservation, such framings are also linear.</li> <li>4. Southern environmentalism on the contrary points out that indigenous life-worlds are intrinsically associated with nature, separating themselves from a Northern-centric environmentalism.</li> <li>5. In both Northern and Southern forms of environmentalism, a watertight compartmentalization of natural spaces as primarily ecological, or shaped by long standing social-ecological associations, precludes an understanding of fluid, rapidly changing social and ecological spaces characterized by a porosity of boundary.</li> <li>6. Northern and Southern framings of environmentalism have a limited capacity to help understand the process by which environmental consciousness can be constituted in an increasingly globalized world, shaped by migration, teleconnections and novel or altered ecologies induced by climate and anthropogenic influence.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An emergent, dynamic process by which diverse social communities build meanings and attachments to places of nature, shaping stewardship and collective action for conservation. Distinct and disparate practices, meanings and ideologies are utilized towards forging a collective identity for a place of nature, as a shared social-ecological 'place'.</li> <li>2. Helps explain how place-based environmental movements collaborate with trans-national environmentalism via a conjunction of global and local alliances, to make socio-ecological concerns heard across spatial-temporal scales.</li> <li>3. The meanings, values and expectations of different communities for the same given ecological place are often contrasting, and can be oppositional or collaborative in different contexts and at different points in time.</li> <li>4. Processes of environmental placemaking are thus fundamentally shaped by contestations of power. These determine whose approach to placemaking gains importance when different conceptualizations clash.</li> <li>5. Placemaking cannot be construed as a process always beneficial to environmentalism or social justice. Narratives of placemaking can have racist and fascist undertones, and have often been employed as justifications for legal and institutional approaches that reject migrants as 'others', especially those at the bottom of the prevailing social hierarchy such as refugees and asylum seekers, domestic workers and casual labour.</li> <li>6. Land change actors are not passive, homogeneous or static respondents to drivers of change, whether local or global. They constantly interact to continuously reconstruct place meanings, both individually, and as shared social and cultural practices.</li> </ol>

shared social and cultural practices (Williams and Stewart 1998). Environmental placemaking helps us understand how these processes of redefinition take place, ultimately shaping the direction of land change.

Wolfhorst et al. (2016), studying land change in a ranching community adjacent to a growing metropolitan region in Idaho, document the diversity in the expression of sense of place by rangers, who perceive themselves as stewards responsible for the land and the community, tourists, who value the landscape for the recreational opportunities it offers such as off-roading, and conservation agencies. Yet, they caution that 'characterizing sense of place as unworkable polarization, as many do, fails to capture the ways in which meanings can continue to evolve to new, shared images' (ibid: 180). Such collaboration helps create new opportunities to co-evolve shared pathways to desirable land change, as witnessed in this region.

Another study of the takeover of vacant lots by community groups in Boston (Foo, Martin, Wool, & Polsky, 2014) suggests that the number, extent and location of vacant lots in US cities are shaped by macroeconomic processes, but local perceptions and attitudes about such plots are shaped by social meaning and ethnic identity. These perceptions and attitudes influence the location of plots taken over by communities, thus influence the possibility of reversal of the social and ecological decline in low-income inner-city neighborhoods. The collective sense of alienation that urban communities develop as a reaction to macroeconomic drivers can be reversed through such collective placemaking.

Doreen Massey (Massey, Bond, & Featherstone, 2009) describes other interesting possibilities of collective placemaking at macro, international scales. Describing the Inuit Circumpolar Council's efforts to draw global attention to climate change, she narrates how they formed alliances with other

Pacific Islands endangered by climate change, creating a shared construction of island places in danger. Similar to the example of collective action around the Niyamgiri forests in India described previously, this shows how indigenous groups have creatively employed placemaking to be able to effectively cast themselves as more than passive victims of environmental destruction, and move towards a greater sense of active agency in reconstituting their own futures.

## 5. Conclusions

In a fast-changing world, indigenous and regionally specific histories of socio-cultural attachments to landscapes are not the only factors contingent to the conservation of nature. In other words, such attributes are not binding or essential for establishing place-identities with nature. We need a better understanding of the factors that can shape environmental action in rapidly transforming, teleconnected and novel emergent contexts.

To this end, we provide an overview of the integrative literature discussing patterns of environmentalism in the global North and the global South. We argue that both forms of environmentalism contend on certain specificities as central to the process of nature conservation. In a fast-changing world, reconfigured by urbanization and globalization, these frames do not help us sufficiently understand the emergence of environmental action. Environmental placemaking has significant potential in this regard.

Early fundamental work in geography helps us develop a more nuanced and accurate understanding of placemaking as a fluid, unbounded and changing concept, but in its focus on social processes of collaboration and contestation, does not sufficiently develop an understanding of the role of environment, and human-nature relationships, in constituting a sense of place and shaping placemaking.

The concept of environmental placemaking can help us understand how specific ecological spaces can be locally conserved through integrative alliances, between groups with contrasting cultural attachments to place that span across multiple scales in space and time. Ecologically diverse neighborhoods like parks, forests and lakes are often considered as community green spaces for a range of individuals, in different ways, and each group can play a role in conserving them (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Biodiverse green spaces like forests have a significant influence in engendering a sense of placemaking within communities, yet the nature of values and symbolic meanings accorded to them and the services rendered from them vary across communities (Thompson, 2002; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Chatterjee, 2018).

Drawing on a range of place-based studies from different contexts, we further demonstrate how environmental placemaking helps add value to theoretical and empirical research on land change science, helping us move to a deeper understanding of the environmental meanings and multi-scalar place attachments that act as precursors influencing proximate drivers of land change, and influencing human responses to micro- and macro-economic drivers of change.

However, the meanings, values and expectations of different communities for the same given place are often contrasting and can be oppositional or collaborative in different contexts and at different points in time. The role of power and social processes of negotiation in shaping multi-actor networks for converting environmental place-making into environmental stewardship is an important area that demands further research in diverse contexts. When migrants and local residents come together, whose vision(s) of placemaking triumph, and which ideas and imaginations take a backseat? When local communities in the global South seek to collaborate with trans-national and global alliances, which are often shaped in very fundamental ways by exclusionary discourses of conservation emanating from the global North, how does the inherent power imbalance embedded in this process alter meanings of placemaking, and impact environmental and ecological outcomes? Such knowledge gaps need to be explored in greater detail using specific case studies, enabling land change science to better understand the interplay between the politics of environmentalism and the co-creation of place and ecology.

In conclusion, this paper calls attention to environmental placemaking as an important concept that advances scholarship on environmentalism and land change. Via environmental placemaking, social meanings and attachments to the environment can be interpreted, imagined, harnessed and sustained in multiple ways – not only through innate territorial linkages but also through spatially and globally forged syntheses of associations. Although certainly not free of conflict and power relationships, environmental placemaking has been creatively employed by a range of actors and networks, from indigenous groups to migrants and transnational activists. In this process place-meanings are continuously reconstructed, both individually, and as shared social and cultural practices, and in rural and urban areas. Understanding the role of the environment in placemaking is critical to appreciate that land change actors are not passive, homogeneous or static respondents to drivers of change, whether local or global, in the era of the Anthropocene. Further research is needed to understand how a sense of place is co-produced via collaborations between different actors with different worldviews, and to identify where fissures or fracture lines can develop, how these are navigated, and what outcomes result as a consequence of the imbalances in power that often underpin the process of environmental placemaking.

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