Biosketch

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**Whose faith, whose biodiversity? Multiscale issues in the contribution of faith to biocultural conservation: Central Italy as a case study**

Synergies between conservationists and the world’s faiths have been growing considerably over recent years. In particular, it has been highlighted that the spiritualties of indigenous people as well as mainstream religions often carry a message of caring for Earth, and can be powerful vehicles of conservation. Similar partnerships are also fully coherent with a consolidating paradigm

of community-based resource management, where conservation of biodiversity is expected to be grounded in local values and understandings. Despite increasing enthusiasm, however, the actual potential of faith-based conservation remains a disputed issue. NGOs, practitioners, and a growing strand of scientific literature present some cases of positive outcomes, but there still is little systematic evaluation.

This symposium aims to bridge that gap on the grounds of the empirical evidence available. It will bring together some of the world’s leading scholars and practitioners who work at the interface of faith and conservation, and address such questions as: in what contexts do spiritual beliefs help to promote conservation? When do they not? Are environmental awareness and involvement actually rising within faith groups worldwide? What can be done to strengthen cooperation across faiths, and between faiths and conservationists, for the sake of protecting life on earth?

There are increasing expectations about the role that the world’s faiths can play in the conservation of biological diversity. This understanding, however, is often based on a theoretic examination of the ‘values’ associated with different spiritual traditions rather than on empirical evidence. In particular, it is seldom recognized that faiths are dynamic manifestations in which contrasting values and multiple levels of spatial and social organization frequently coexist. In this paper, I illustrate this multilayered character with case studies drawn from years of socio-ecological research in Central Italy. Based on spatial, ecological and ethnographic data, I show that even within the same faith tradition, Roman Catholicism, there are multiple ways to conceive and realize the relationship with the environment. I show that divergent views and tensions around the spiritual meaning and management of biodiversity-rich sacred sites are frequent. I review some of the practical and ethical implications that this has for faith-based conservation and suggest that faith-based initiatives should ideally be conceived in a framework equally attentive to both biological and cultural diversity. I conclude by calling for more systematic research in the future: without a thorough understanding of and engagement with each local context, faith-based conservation will hardly be able to deliver its expected bounty.

**Speaker Biography**: Fabrizio is an interdisciplinary conservation scientist working on the linkages between cultural and biological diversity. Fabrizio earned a BA and MA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Iceland, and a MSc in Environmental Sciences and PhD in Ecology from the University of Zurich. He is currently a visiting scholar in Religion & Nature at the University of Florida, thanks to a grant by the Cogito Foundation. Fabrizio has worked extensively on sacred natural sites in Central Italy, highlighting their important role as biocultural refugia. Fabrizio's other research interests include traditional knowledge, common property, pastoralism, food sovereignty, and the relation that all these have with biocultural diversity. Fabrizio is co-founder and co-editor of the Sacred Sites Research Newsletter (SSIREN), and has served as vice-president of the Religion and Conservation Biology Working Group (RCBWG) of the Society for Conservation Biology since 2013.