

# Biocultural Diversity

An introduction



# Biocultural Diversity Studies: Key Points

- What is Biocultural Diversity?
- The Three Manifestations of Diversity
  - Biodiversity
  - Cultural Diversity
  - Linguistic Diversity
- Understanding the Connections
- The Biocultural Diversity Extinction Crisis
- Hope for the Future

# What is Biocultural Diversity?

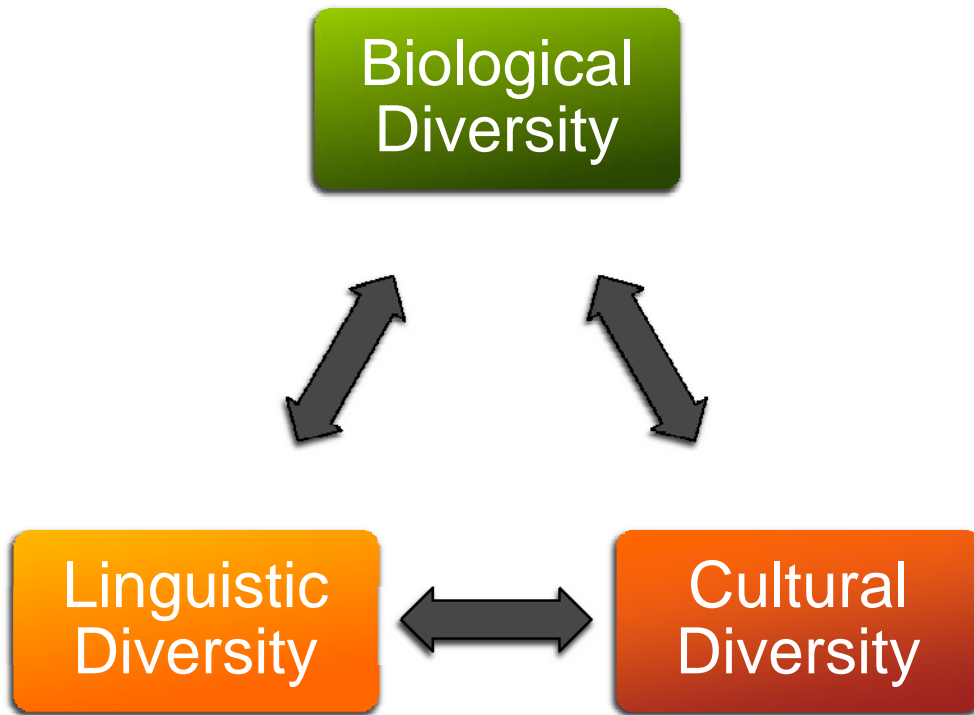
Biocultural Diversity comprises the diversity of life in all of its manifestations – biological, cultural, and linguistic.

The diversity of life is made up not only of the diversity of plants and animal species, habitats and ecosystems found on the planet, but also of the diversity of human cultures and languages.



(Image: J. Hegarty 2011 © Terralingua)

# The Three Manifestations of Diversity



These three manifestations of the diversity of life do not exist in separate and parallel realms. Rather, they are interrelated and interdependent, as different aspects of a single, complex socio-ecological adaptive system.

(Image: J. Hegarty 2011 © Terralingua)

# Biological Diversity

Biological diversity – or biodiversity – is the biological variety of life on earth: animals, plants, their habitats, and their genes. It comprises the total variety of ecosystems and living organisms found in a given region or in the whole biosphere.

Biodiversity is a complex phenomenon with many interrelated dimensions. Species richness (the number of species in a given area or globally) is often used to provide a simple measure of biodiversity.

There are an estimated 7–100 millions (identified and unidentified) species in the world today.



(Photo: © T. Aguila 2010)

# Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is the variety of human cultures found in a specific region, or in the world as a whole. There are about 4-5,000 distinct cultures in the world today.

The total diversity of the world's cultural systems forms an “ethnosphere” – a global web of human cultures – that is deeply interlinked with the biosphere.



(Photo: © C. Mittermeier 2010)

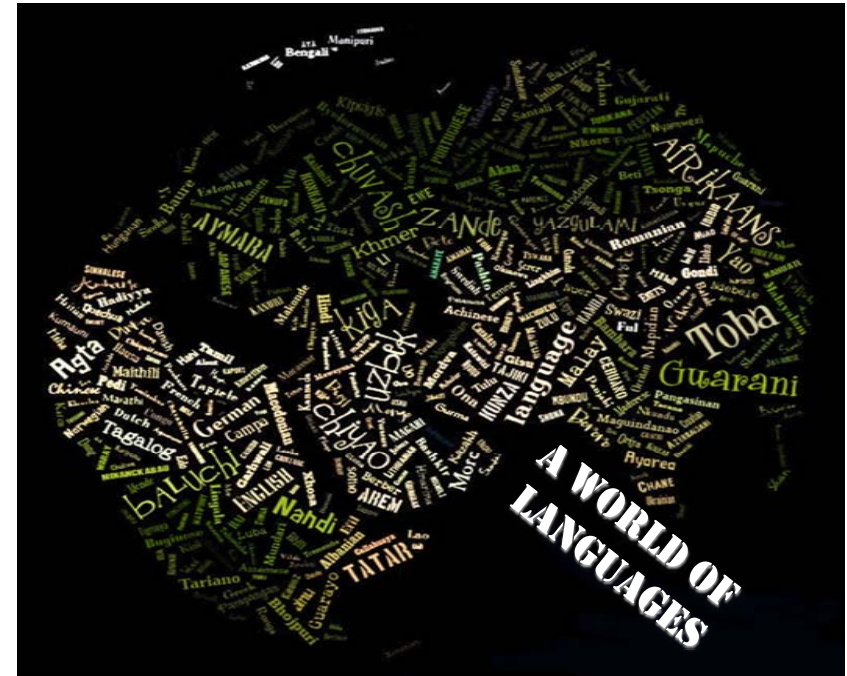
Humans are part of nature, not separate from and dominant over it. Human societies depend on biodiversity and the functions of ecosystems to sustain themselves and thrive. In turn, biodiversity and ecosystems depend on human stewardship to maintain their vitality and resilience, and to make all life – including human life – possible.

# Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity is the variety of human languages spoken in a specific region, or in the world as a whole. There are about 6-7,000 different languages in the world today.

Language and culture are interlinked. Language is the main tool for the transmission of culture. It is also a fundamental marker of cultural identity.

In turn, language and culture are intimately linked to the environment. Each language expresses the specific cultural world view, values, beliefs, and knowledge of its speakers – including vital knowledge about the environment and about human relationships with nature.



(Image: M. Aguila and D. Dilts  
2011 ©Terralingua)

# Understanding the Connections

To understand the connections between biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity, we first need to think of how people in different cultures around the world interact with nature.

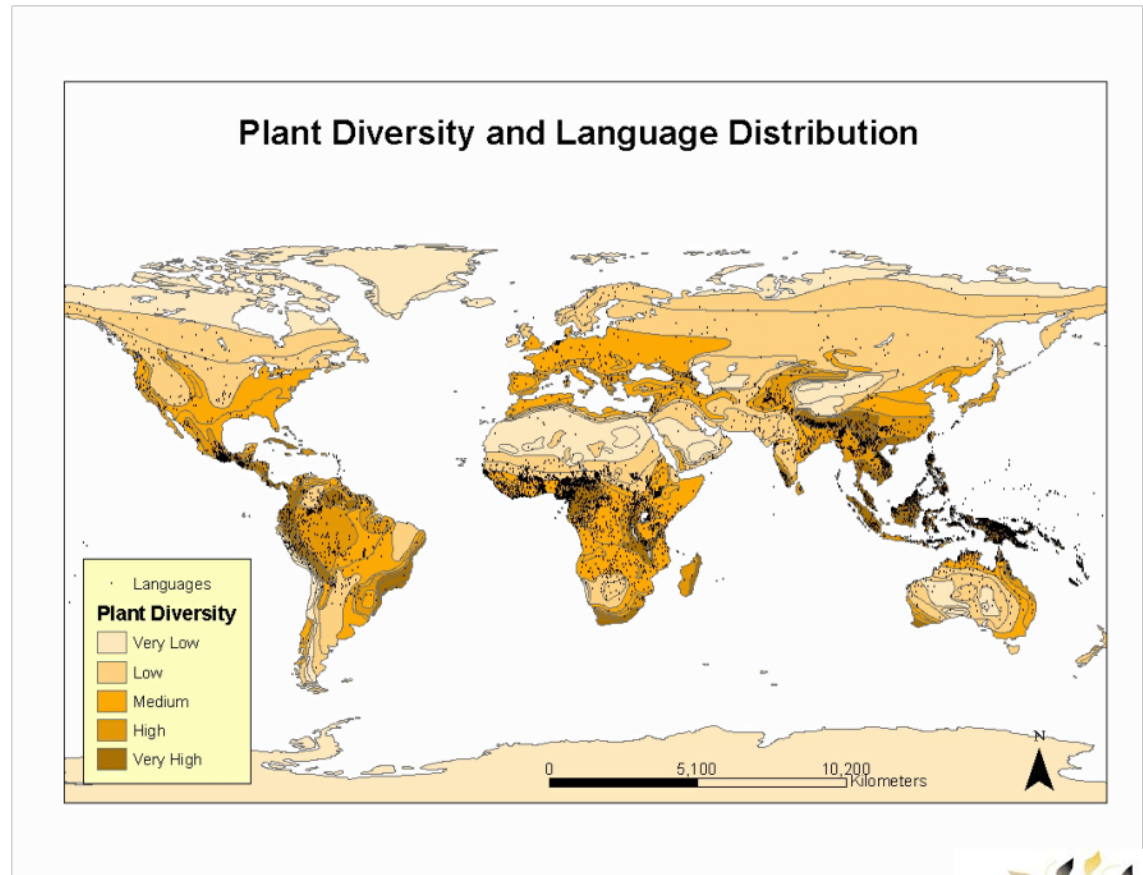
Each human society derives all the material and non-material necessities for life from the local environment. In so doing, each society develops specific cultural knowledge and practices about the environment. This cultural knowledge and practices are reflected in and communicated through language.



(Photo: © S. Zent, 2010)

# Understanding the Connections – cont'd.

At the global level, the links between language, culture, and the environment become apparent in the overlap in the distribution of biodiversity (here represented by plant diversity) and cultural diversity (here represented by linguistic diversity).

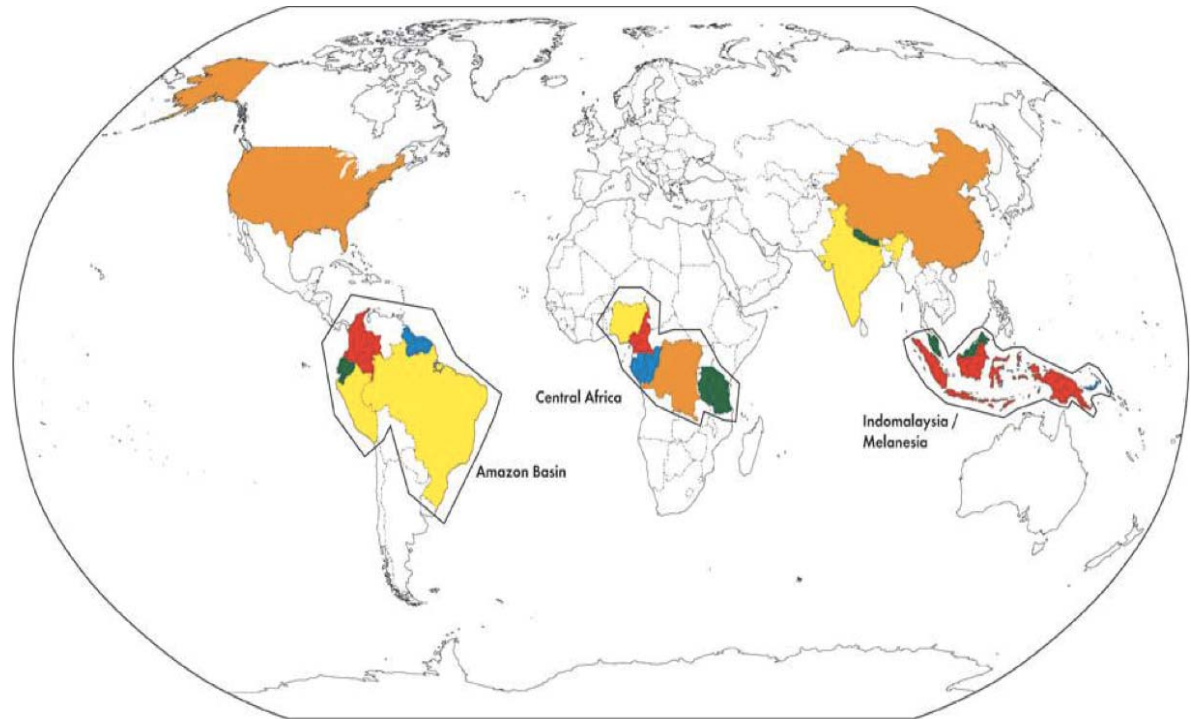


(Source: Stepp et al., 2003  
for Terralingua)

# Understanding the Connections — cont'd.

Certain areas of the world, especially between the tropics, are especially rich in biocultural diversity.

But strong links between biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity exist everywhere, even in deserts and Arctic regions.



## Core Areas of Biocultural Diversity

(Image: D. Harmon and J. Loh, 2004 © Terralingua)

# The Biocultural Diversity Extinction Crisis

Biologists agree that we have entered the sixth mass extinction of biodiversity—the first one to be entirely caused by human activities. Each year, hundreds of thousands of species may be lost globally. Extinction rates are estimated to be 1,000-10,000 times higher than background extinction rates.

But we are also causing an extinction crisis of cultural and linguistic diversity. An ever growing number of cultures and languages worldwide are at risk of disappearing because of pressures from dominant cultures and languages.

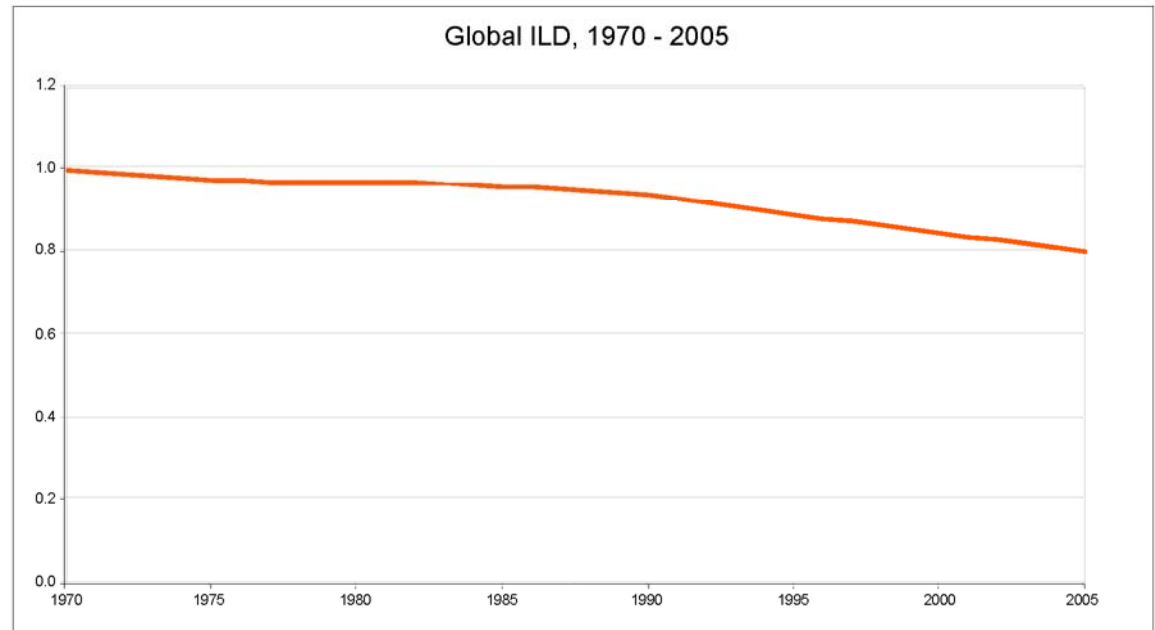


(Photo: © C. Mittermeier 2010)



# The Biocultural Diversity Extinction Crisis – cont'd

A new measure, the Index of Linguistic Diversity (ILD) shows that between 1970 and 2005 there has been a 20% decline in global linguistic diversity. This decline is calculated by computing the changes over time in the number of mother-tongue speakers of the world's languages.



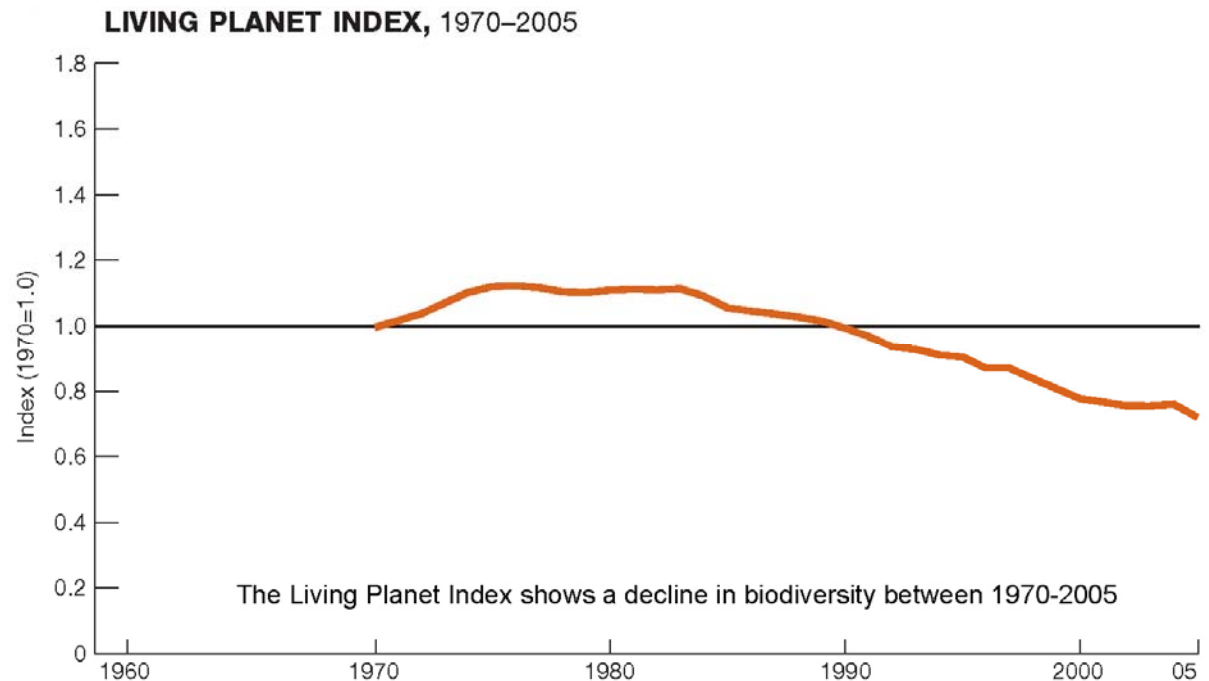
(Source: Harmon and Loh, 2010. © Terralingua)



# The Biocultural Diversity Extinction Crisis

This trend mirrors closely the trend in the loss of biodiversity during the same period of time, as measured by the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Index.

This similarity suggests that the loss of biodiversity goes hand in hand with the loss of cultural diversity.



(Source: World Wildlife Fund)



# Hope for the Future

We have been the cause of the problem, but we also can and must be part of the solution. By realigning our values and behaviors to be in harmony with nature and to respect and protect biocultural diversity, we can stem the crisis and set out on a more sustainable course.

Youth, the citizens and decision-makers of tomorrow, have a major role to play in this effort. In them lies our greatest hope for the future.



(Photo: © S. Ross 2010)

# For More Information

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