

# Towards inclusive urban green space management: identifying blindness towards community-led organization through decolonial lenses

Geovana Mercado, SLU  
Lisbet Christoffersen, SLU  
Ingrid Altamirano, Lund Uni.



# Motivation

- Urban green space and inclusivity:
- are UGS universally beneficial?
  
- Emerging problems around UGS:
  - Marketization of urban green space
  - Green gentrification
  - Elite green ghettos
  - Environmental privileges
  - Green dispossession
  - Locals displaced, e.g. in Mexico and Columbia, but also in Portugal
  - Inequality in access to green space and decision making



# Motivation

- How can we be inclusive as urban planners, managers and researchers
  - if we don't understand the cultural and historical background?
  - if we fail to see the social structures that already exist?
  - if we try to analyse different realities (GS) from the global north?
- The concerns question own assumptions/privileges (not only for GS)
- Could we identify our (unacknowledged) assumptions?
  - to prevent blindness to already existing landscapes, relations and institutions
  - and promote more humbleness among planners, managers and researchers

# Objective

Through de-colonial lenses, we aim to

- develop a framework to identify and visualise the clash between seemingly different management discourses and practices
- explore how the influence of colonial processes affect current urban green space management in the Global South.



# Own background/Situating our research

**Geovana** (Bolivia-Brazil):  
Public Policy & Governance  
research with indigenous  
Aymara population in the  
Bolivian Altiplano.  
BSc. Agronomy engineer;  
MSc. Agribusiness;  
PhD. Development Studies

**Lisbet** (Denmark):  
Cooperation with indigenous  
peoples in the Amazon  
region South and Central  
America since 1980's as an  
activist, student, consultant  
and researcher.  
BSc. Forest and landscape  
engineer;  
MSc. Agricultural Dev.;  
PhD. Political Ecology

**Ingrid** (Mexico- Sweden):  
Research and coop. Anti-  
mining orgs. Action research  
in Malmö.  
BA. International Relations,  
Geopolitics/Nat. resources  
MA. Human Ecology &  
Epistemology of the South.  
PhD. student: Human  
Geography

# Background/De-colonial lenses

De-colonial theory assumptions: Global North/South relations

- Continuums – the power of discourse:

Undeveloped  
Traditional  
Primitive  
Informal



Developed  
Modern/Scientific  
Advanced  
Formal

- Terminology – why “global South”?



# Background/Decolonial lenses

- Utopia
- Better world where multiple ontologies & epistemologies are possible and have a place to be
- System - Has privileged the culture, knowledges and epistemology produced in the Global north inferiorizing “the rest” (Leyva & Alonso; Grosfoguel; cf. Mignolo; Maldonado-Torres; Escobar)
- Western centric political imagination
- Governance practices



# Background/Decolonial lenses

- Decolonial theory assumptions: nature/extractivism/urban-rural
- Consequence: Invisibilization: “Not seeing”
- Ergo “Blindness”
- What are the elements of blindness?
- How can we recognize blindness?





# Methods

## Re-reading Breen et al 2020:

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW article  
Front. Sustain. Cities, 29 October 2020  
Sec. Urban Greening  
Volume 2 - 2020 |  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2020.572360>

This article is part of the Research Topic  
Transformative Urban Greening: advancing green space  
governance  
[View all 9 Articles >](#)

### From “Government to Governance”? A Systematic Literature Review of Research for Urban Green Infrastructure Management in Latin America

 Anya Breen<sup>1</sup>  Emanuel Giannotti<sup>2</sup>  Muriel Flores Molina<sup>3</sup>  Alexis Vásquez<sup>3\*</sup>

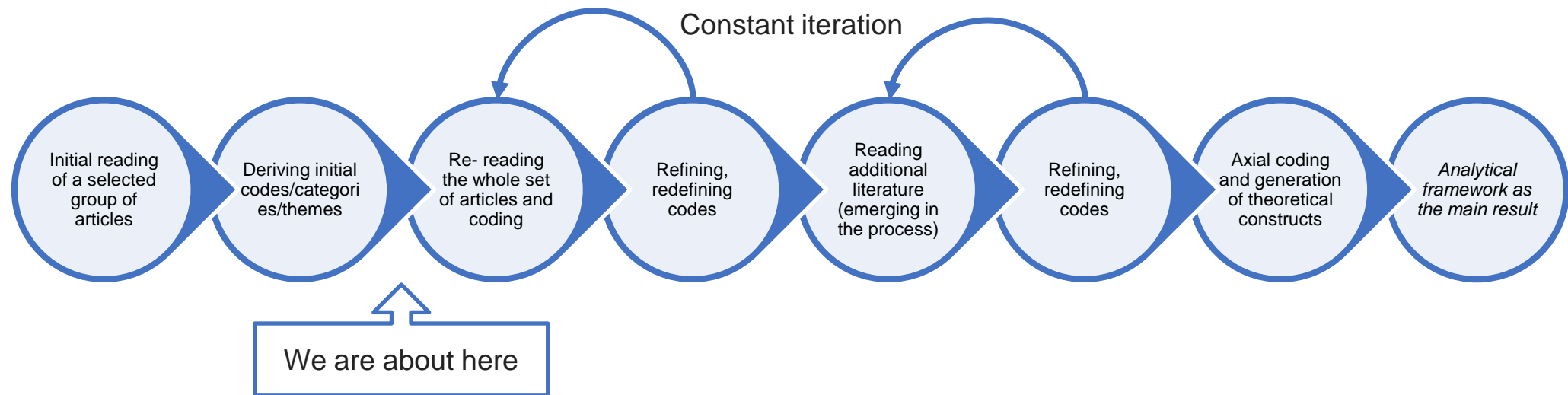
<sup>1</sup> Facultad de Ciencias Forestales y de la Conservación de la Naturaleza, Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile  
<sup>2</sup> Departamento de Urbanismo, Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile  
<sup>3</sup> Departamento de Geografía, Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile

### *Breen et al 2020, research questions:*

- What are the research trends in terms of topics and case studies that characterize UGI management research in Latin America? Which management types are the focuses of this research?
- 47 publications reviewed

# Methods

- *Re-reading through “de-colonial lenses”*
  - *Iterative process of questioning the literature with a different lenses*
  - *Looking for evidence within the literature: invisibilization, blindness, colonial relations, blind spots*
  - *Exploring coloniality and colonial practices hidden within the literature*
- *Coding process based on Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990)*

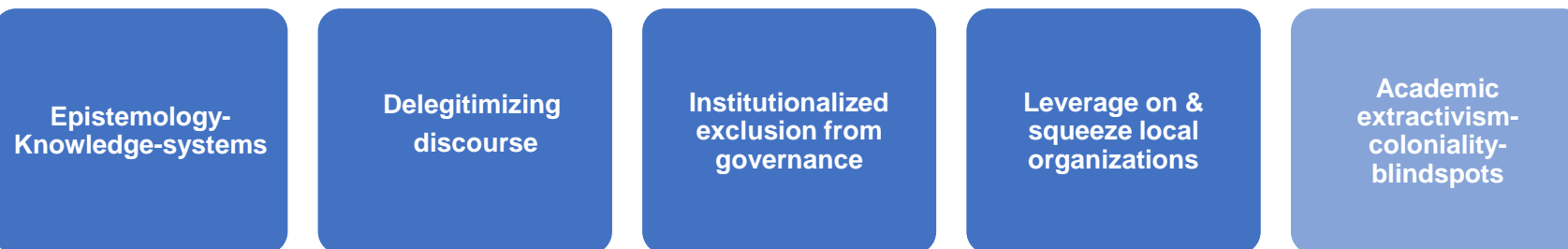


# Initial results

- Developing a code scheme

## Elements of Blindness

Initial categories



# Epistemology-Knowledge-systems

- **Commodification of nature**
- **“Lack of”**
  - Capacity, planning, monitoring, execution capacity
  - Education, skills
  - A specific approach/concept i.e., “landscape” “green infrastructure”, etc.
- **Disregard of**
  - Historicity
  - Local cultures
  - Traditional land-use practices

## EXAMPLE:

We find that, as the Municipality of Medellín tries to contain and beautify low-income neighborhoods, some local communities are dispossessed of their greatest traditional assets (location, land and access to nature, social capital and voice) under the rationale of serving the greatest public good and providing parks, vistas and an urban growth boundary ‘for all’ (Anguelovski et al. 2019 p.135)

# Delegitimizing discourse

- **Unplanned/ Informal**
- **Weak/Underdeveloped**
- **The ones to Blame** i.e. blamed for 'pollution'; blamed for disasters; self built places/settlements framed as 'invaded public spaces'

## EXAMPLE

“In the West Zone of São Paulo, the community of the Vila Nova Esperança has developed initiatives to protect and develop green areas in their region. These initiatives emerged at the same time the community became threatened of eviction due to its location in an ecologically protected zone and its proximity to a manancial zone. The threat has been emphasised by authorities through a political discourse around the argument that the community pollutes the area.”(Diep et al. 2019)

# Leverage on & squeeze local organizations

- Co-optation of current organizations
- Relocation
- Land Grabbing
- Green gentrification

## EXAMPLE

Along the Água Podre River in the West zone of São Paulo, families were evicted by the local government in prevision of such a project. Yet, for a majority of these projects including that of Água Podre, the plan has only been partially implemented, or never been implemented (Diep et al. 2019)

# Institutionalized exclusion from governance

- **Centrality dominance**, top-down decision making i.e., local government vs local organizations
- **Reframing Local governance structures** as ‘informal other’ such as “collective action”; “grassroots movements”; “social movements”; “networks”
- **Not recognizing local organizations** i.e., voluntary work, still asked to contribute but not acknowledged & unpaid

## EXAMPLE

*Self-governance* initiatives in Latin American countries:

- 77% of urban parks in Bariloche, Argentina were neighborhood run (Betancurt et al. 2017)
- Community initiatives most common for urban agriculture in Santiago de Chile (Contesse et al. 2018)
- Not a shortage of bottom-up governance initiatives, but rather their integration into government planning (Breen et al 2020)

# Initial results and reflections (L)

- Institutionalization of concepts and knowledge-systems deriving from the global North
  - - in practice as well as in academia
- Blindness towards already existing practices in green spaces
- Blindness towards already existing governance institutions
- Unawareness about de-legitimatising discourses
- Academic extractivism-coloniality-blindspots



**THANK YOU!**

Questions?

Comments?

Suggestions?