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RESEARCH AND THEORY

Placing social imaginaries to reconceptualize conservation from a social-ecological perspective: insights from guided visits to a Patagonian national park

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Abstract
More inclusive conservation approaches are needed to achieve the dual goals of justice and sustainability. This imperative requires developing new strategies to adapt extant models like conservation-based tourism in protected areas to incorporate more plural perspectives. We studied guided tours in Tierra del Fuego National Park, Argentina to assess how nature and people-nature relationships were (re)produced. Specifically, we used ethnographic methods (participant observations, interviews, document/media analyses) with the bricolage analytical concept of 'placing social imaginaries' to evaluate the ways that materialities, practices, meanings, and institutions interact in the visitation experience. We delimited three dynamic areas of tension evident in the data: (i) remoteness - connectivity, (ii) modernity - postmodernity, and (iii) singular nature - plural people-nature relationships. By analyzing how multiple social imaginaries converge and reproduce different people-nature relationships in touristic experiences, we obtained insights into how a 'natural' protected area is conceived, valued, and co-constructed as a dynamic social-ecological system in a specific space-time (i.e. place). We argue that being more intentional and reflexive about the 'placing of social imaginaries' can foster more inclusive approaches to conservation-based tourism.

Keywords Human-Nature Relationships · Diverse Values of Nature · Patagonia · Protected Areas · Social-ecological Transformation · Tourism

Introduction

Currently, research and policymaking seek to protect biodiversity and ecosystems for both environmental conservation and human well-being (IPBES 2019; 2022; Richardson et al. 2023). This paradigm shift towards more inclusive conservation, understood as the recognition and incorporation of diverse knowledge systems and values attributed to nature (Raymond et al. 2023), is supported by scientific perspectives (e.g., Mace 2014) and social movements (Svampa 2012), becoming a near global consensus in intergovernmental biodiversity and development agreements (e.g., UN 2015; CBD 2022). Similarly, while nature-based tourism scholarship increasingly acknowledges its influence in shaping perceptions of 'the environment' the global tourism industry is also beginning to acknowledge its role in these dynamics and is taking steps toward reconfiguring offerings to align with social and ecological justice (Jamal and Higham 2021; WEF 2025). Despite growing commitments

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to justice-oriented approaches, the practical alignment of conservation and tourism with such values continues to prove difficult. Indeed, both conservation and tourism struggle with a 'pluriversal challenge' (Pernecky 2024) to overcome their legacy linked to modernity that reproduced imperial and colonial worldviews and ecological injustice (Higgins-Desbiolles et al. 2022; Murali et al. 2024). Within mainstream conservation, protected areas (PAs) have long been considered an effective approach to protect biodiversity (IPBES 2019), but they are also fraught with examples of how their implementation, management and presentation to visitors can cause conflict and injustice (West et al. 2006; Bontempi et al. 2023; Strong et al. 2024). Similarly, tourism, frequently practiced in PAs, can become a mechanism of dispossession and privatization (Ojeda 2012) that pushes social exclusion and inequalities (Huiliñir-Curío et al. 2019). Consequently, conservation-based tourism has been shown to foster land grabbing in some national parks (NPs) (Ponzi et al. 2024) or it can further integrate private PAs as 'green capital' into the global economy (e.g., interacting with industries like forestry and hydroelectric power) (Holmes 2014), rather than seeking to conserve these areas for their social-ecological or people-nature[1] singularities.

These undesirable situations include perpetuating ideas and practices through visitation to PAs that can reinforce the hegemonic nature/culture dichotomy at the expense of Indigenous peoples' and local communities' (IP&LC) perspectives (Shultis and Heffner 2016; Videla et al. 2021). Inclusive conservation seeks to change these dynamics. Therefore, examining how PAs are imagined and reproduced via tourism becomes central to understanding how conflict, inequality, and exclusion are portrayed through the experience of conservation. However, existing research about the production of conservation-imaginaries and conservation-based tourism has engaged with imaginaries predominantly through their discursive dimensions. Studies have emphasized the role of narratives and discourses to form imaginaries based on local needs (Undurraga and Aguirre 2023), how meanings of landscape are constructed or change (Aliste et al. 2018), and how tourism-related transitions are negotiated (Stokowski et al. 2021). Similarly, political-ecological work on de-/territorialization-processes through conservation and tourism conceptualize geographic imaginaries largely as the outcome of environmental, cultural, economic, and geopolitical narratives advanced by powerful institutional actors and circulated over time (Rasmussen and Mendoza 2023). Others explicitly mobilise the social imaginary framework to explore how nature[2] and tourism are conceived and managed in Argentine national PAs, though the analysis tends to centre on discourses and the broad field of various institutions on national and international scales that have historically shaped the creation and management of PAs (e.g., Anderson et al. 2023).

Consequently, environmental researchers and managers are striving to design and update instruments, such as PAs and tourism, to be more inclusive to achieve multidimensional justice and sustainability by encompassing social and ecological elements; being equitable in terms of distribution (of costs and benefits), procedures (of how to engage the process), and recognition (of different actors, voices and onto-epistemologies); occurring over intra- and inter-generational scales (Jamal and Higham 2021; IPBES 2022). For example, at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the 196 ratifying countries agreed to protect 30% of the planet's surface area by 2030. Known as the 30 × 30 target, this ostensibly 'mainstream' conservation goal is widely discussed, but it has been less communicated that the target must be achieved in a participatory manner with inclusive governance that respects the rights and values of IP&LCs (Anderson 2025). Therefore, there is an imperative to advance the frontier of theory and practice regarding conservation mechanisms that achieve integrated social and ecological outcomes.

In this context, tourism is increasingly understood as an opportunity for transformative experiences, giving the possibility to engage with diverse worldviews, values, and knowledge systems, which potentially can play a crucial role in supporting inclusive conservation efforts (CBD 2022). Thus, it is imperative to develop approaches that apply a more social-ecological perspective to the environment,

[1] While some academic traditions refer to a 'human-nature' category, we use 'people-nature' (see IPBES 2022) to denote that these are not biologically-determined relationships of the human species, but instead constructions of particular social groups and socio-historical periods. As pointed out in social science/humanities critiques of the Anthropocene concept, 'humans' are not dominating the planet, but rather certain groups (e.g., high consuming socio-economic sectors) and practices (e.g., burning fossil fuels) (Lövbrand et al. 2015).

[2] Mainstream conservation often relies on a human-nature dichotomy, especially in Western thought. However, this conceptualization of 'nature' is contested (Murali et al. 2024; Gudynas 2010). In English, and as used commonly in conservation, the term can refer to "all the animals, plants, rocks, etc. in the world and all the features, forces, and processes that happen or exist independently of people, such as the weather, the sea, mountains, the production of young animals or plants, and growth" (Cambridge English Dictionary 2023). Mainstream conservation, therefore, often prioritizes ecocentric worldviews, based on scientific-ecological knowledge systems. Consequently, these approaches have frequently failed to recognize (or been conducted at the expense of) Indigenous peoples and local communities (IP&LCs). Indeed, no equivalent word for 'nature' exists in many languages (Ducarme et al. 2021). Other ways of conceiving people-nature systems are as kinship, families, or relational communities (Berning et al. 2023). A social-ecological perspective of conservation should account for these multiple ways of understanding different 'nature(s),' based on different ontologies and not just epistemologies. Here, we often use 'nature' in the English vernacular sense, but seek to overcome this dichotomy when possible.

including the more-than-human world (see also convivial conservation debate, Massarella et al. 2022). Nevertheless, existing scholarship has paid relatively limited attention to the contemporary everyday touristic (re)production of imaginaries in PAs and how PAs can actively promote (or hinder) the constitution of social-ecological spaces, places, and people via embodied practices and material arrangements that shape lived experiences and spatial relations through placed imaginaries. For example, PAs can fail to achieve their potential for both justice and sustainability when they prioritize only intrinsic or instrumental values, while overlooking their many relational values and sociocultural practices (e.g., geopolitical and national objectives, history and cultural identity, or leisure/recreational space for urban residents (Mrotek et al. 2019; Freitas 2021)).

Here, we focus specifically on the (re)presentation of a NP, which are often the standard-bearers of state-based conservation and historically associated with an ecocentric, 'fortress-of-nature' approach (Gudynas 2010). Yet, some NPs have striven to make their sociocultural relationships explicit, particularly in the context of being linked to social and economic development via tourism (Anderson et al. 2023). For example, since 2023, Argentina's Administration of National Parks has been investing in the landscapes that link NPs to surrounding communities and their ways of life (Gobierno Argentina 2024). However, this conservation strategy has been conceived of and designed to function mostly as a barrier to anthropogenic disturbance of nature. People–nature interactions are clearly more complex than humans as 'negative' or 'disturbances' to what is conceived as a 'pristine' natural environment (Anderson and Pizarro 2023), and conservation-based tourism can act as an agent of social transformation versus merely an economic growth model, but in both cases, it is contingent on it being able to effectively engage broader social-ecological dynamics.

In this study, we used the bricolage concept of 'placing social imaginaries' to explore how conservation is represented in Tierra del Fuego National Park (TFNP), using ethnographic data obtained from guided visits to the park and secondary sources. TFNP serves as an exemplary case study, as it is located in southern Patagonia, where NPs historically functioned as 'instrument of colonisation' (Kaltmeier 2022) and the construction of imaginaries of Patagonia as 'nature' or 'wilderness' has been deeply entangled with Indigenous genocide or restriction of Indigenous lifestyles and practices, border-making, and the assertion of state sovereignty (Sepúlvelda and Guyot 2016). We then organize our findings around three key tensions - understood as continua that commingle in the same space-time of how TFNP and Patagonia are conceived/created: (i) remoteness - connectivity, (ii) modernity - postmodernity, and (iii) protecting singular nature - conserving plural people-nature relationships. Finally, we discuss the implications of our work in light of pressing challenges to align conservation and tourism instruments with the broad values that are actually being sought (e.g., justice and sustainability) (CBD 2022; Raymond et al. 2023). We expect these findings can foster more intentional ways of designing and implementing PAs and tourism that include nature's multiple values (IPBES 2022).

Theoretical framework

Placing social imaginaries of people and nature(s) in protected areas

To understand how PAs are conceived and presented during touristic visitations to TFNP, our analysis uses two theoretical concepts: 'place' (*sensu*, Cresswell 2019) and 'social imaginary' (*sensu*, Castoriadis 1993; Taylor 2004). The former highlights how natural and social environments are constantly (re-)created through the day-to-day 'placing' of practices, materialities, and meanings. Here, we use the verb 'placing' to emphasize the constant production, reproduction, and subsequent contestation of meanings of PAs. The latter notion seeks to identify shared beliefs (including discourses and values), practices, and institutions (including not just official organizations, but also formal rules and informal social norms) that organize individual and societal decisions and actions (Castoriadis 1993; Taylor 2004). Hence, the notion of 'placing social imaginaries' enables us to understand the emergence of social imaginaries based on their day-to-day (re-)production and contestation. Both concepts understand 'nature(s)' as a co-construction between the human and more-than-human world, interlinked with the meaningful appropriation and production of space, making them social-ecological and spatio-temporal processes. Together, they draw analytical attention to PAs as 'places', where physical and symbolic social relations and ways of being, doing, and living (and their associated beliefs and values) are produced and normalized via their institutionalization (in this case via regulated or informally standardized ways tourism-related activities are conducted).

Place | placing

Place theory arises from the idea of a deep connection between people and the world (Tuan 1977). By foregrounding how society crystallizes in tangible locales, place provides a lens for examining the in-situ emergence of social reality (Schmid et al. 2019). Place offers the opportunity to engage with the production and attachment of accumulated, individual, and collective meanings to 'places' (Cresswell 2019). Therefore, place allows for in-depth exploration of

how people are and become connected to PAs, and how they make sense of their surroundings. Places become particularly relevant when shared meanings (e.g., of nature conservation) initiate social practices and actions (e.g., to keep up the separation of humans and nature(s).

As an assemblage of practices, materialities, and meanings (Cresswell 2019), place facilitates a perspective of people-nature interactions as the coming together of heterogeneous elements to create 'unique wholes' (DeLanda 2006). This approach allows inquiring about why certain structures arise, how they hold together or disintegrate, and how they expand spatially, shape space, or are shaped by space (Müller 2022). As such, placing highlights a dynamic conceptualization of the production of PAs as places, where produced social meanings (e.g., different ideas about people, nature(s), and their interactions) are continuously contested, negotiated and reconfigured. With the verb 'placing,' we draw attention to the daily in-situ production and the emerging dynamics of PAs, rather than consider them static entities given by a universal 'nature'.

Social imaginary

The social imaginary concept offers another analytical entry point into touristically-produced imaginaries of PAs and conservation by evaluating how people imagine and create their world (Taylor 2004). Social imaginaries shape and codify ways of thinking and behaving that affect the emergence, formation, and reproduction of social norms and practices (Adams et al. 2015). As imaginaries are often taken-for-granted, the concept supports examining their often unacknowledged effects and underscores their dynamism (Gregory 2017a; 2017b). In other words, PAs are not simply designed, managed, and presented as neutral spaces; rather they emerge from multiple – sometimes competing, but always interacting – imaginaries that inform how conservation and the connection of nature and culture are understood (e.g., to protect as wilderness or as culturally-meaningful landscapes). At the same time, shared discourses and practices institutionalize and may change social imaginaries (e.g., relational, participatory, philanthropic, or protectionist conservation). Importantly, imaginaries are not individual, but are shared by groups, emphasising society's collective dimension (Adams et al. 2015). In addition, social imaginaries are not only mental or psychological conditions, but rather, they are influenced by a practical understanding of society (Gertenbach 2011; Herbrik and Schlechtriemen 2019). Moreover, the institutional lens helps assess both the implicit establishment, stabilisation, and normalisation of social imaginaries via informal social practices, customs, and traditions (e.g., by understanding common assumptions and the training of tour guides) and formal rules, laws, or organisations (e.g., visitor regulations to stay on trails or not enter certain protection zones) (Archibald et al. 2020). The institutional lens thereby facilitates a fruitful differentiation of established ways of saying and doing. Social imaginary institutionalization through practices and meanings give a sense of moral order, guiding restrictions, and expectations (e.g., of what can be said or done under the idea of 'nature protection'). Nevertheless, social imaginaries are never fixed, allowing for the possibility of competing imaginaries of social-ecological understandings being reproduced and simultaneously as well as their change through their reinvention over time (Herbrik and Schlechtriemen 2019). Therefore, to explore PAs as social-ecological systems through the lens of social imaginaries, shared practices, meaning-making, and institutions are central elements of their (re)creation (Adams et al. 2015).

Placing social imaginaries: towards a co-construction of people and nature(s)

These two theoretical constructs are mutually enriching to better understand dynamic people-nature interactions. While placing highlights the dynamic, in-situ reproduction of understandings of PAs and conservation, the social imaginary framework foregrounds the connection of meanings, institutions, and practices. Both concepts share the link between how we collectively 'conceive' the world, and how we 'co-construct' the world (DeLanda 2006; Cresswell 2019; Taylor 2004). Combined, they allow analysing the presentation of nature protection and cultural conservation in PAs to better understand the production of dynamics and tensions of people and nature(s). In this paper, we use the analytical categories of shared *meanings*, *materialities*, *practices*, and *institutions* that form the central elements of this bricolage conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

Placing social imaginaries pays special attention to the role of materiality, which helps link social and physical surroundings, including human-made and so-called natural elements. Rather than treating materiality as a passive backdrop, this perspective emphasises how material environments, including more-than-human entities actively participate in shaping meaning and practice. In this way, it coincides with social imaginaries, as Castoriadis (1993) also considers more-than-human entities as part of lived social worlds (Adams et al. 2015).

Focusing on materiality, therefore, recognizes the sociomateriality of placings and attributes agency to more-than-human entities, which is elemental to a social-ecological understanding of PAs. This is particularly relevant for engaging with non-Western and Indigenous ontologies in which humans and more-than-humans are not conceived as separate domains, but as relationally entangled (Dietz and Engels

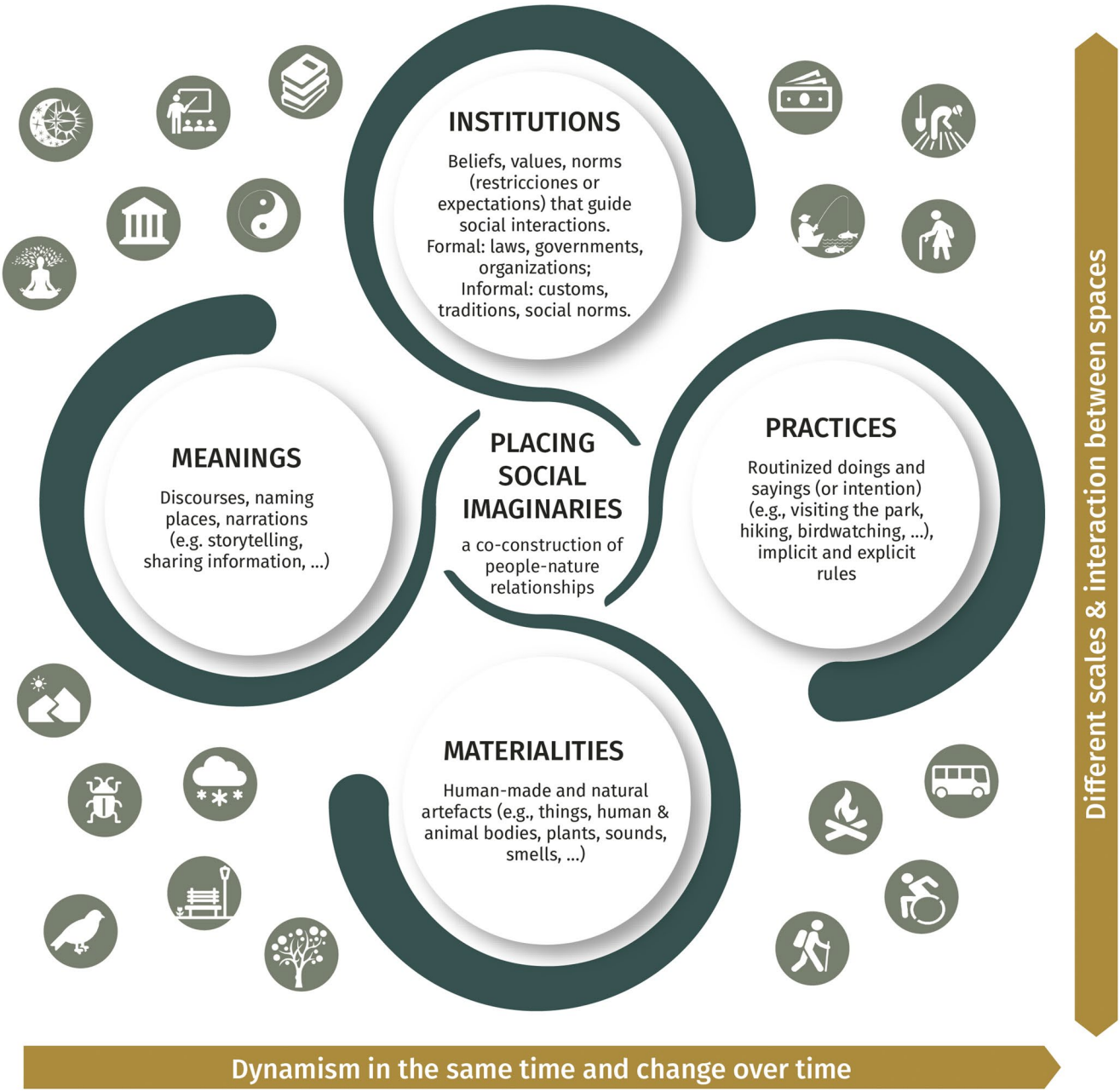

Fig. 1 Conceptual framework of placing social imaginaries as a co-construction of people-nature relationships, combining elements of shared meanings, materialities, practices, and institutions that interact to (re)create people-nature relationships in protected areas. (Content: JB and CBA; Design: Katrin Wycik)

2014; Acker et al. 2016). This understanding seeks to help overcome the ontological separation between society and nature (Latour 2008) and forges a more relational understanding of people and nature(s) by taking into account the internal logic of the environment, thereby allowing plants or animals to become more central elements of social change and transformation (Acker et al. 2016; Müller 2022).

Moreover, the placing of social imaginaries is not limited to a specific location, but can influence and be influenced by socio-spatial configurations at different spatial scales (Fig. 1). For instance, nature protection and cultural conservation in southern Argentina is not limited to local ideas, conceptions, and practices; it is also influenced by broader epistemic configurations inscribed in the everyday (re)production of PAs (Raya Rey et al. 2017; Anderson et al. 2023). These configurations could be, for example, certain landscape architecture and forestry concepts, international guidelines and resolutions, or specific knowledge formations and practices of nature protection and cultural conservation (Kaltmeier 2022). Therefore, the placing and change

of social imaginaries is never based on only one scale, but is connected to several places, necessitating the incorporation of secondary sources that explain the broader social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological context of PAs (like the Tierra del Fuego tourism strategy or the national NP guidelines that are manifest in the local management plan).

Finally, the centrality of social practices in both concepts evidences the dynamism unfolding over and within time (Fig. 1). Drawing on practice theory (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2002; Shove et al. 2012) - which locates the production of the social not only in discourses but also in the situated enactment of practices and their associated materialities - social imaginaries are continuously (re-)produced and potentially transformed through practices. Change may occur even within the same time period when practices are performed in new contexts, are taken up by new carriers, or through the integration and disintegration of certain elements of practices (see also Taylor 2004). As practices carry implicit and explicit meanings, their reinvention (may) change placed social imaginaries (Reckwitz 2002; Herbrik and Schlechtriemen 2019). More generally, with practice theory, the placing of social imaginaries is conceived of as the tension between stability and the possibility of change (Reckwitz 2002). Practice theory also allows us to think about implicit and explicit rules that shape the enactment of practices (e.g. why a natural element is presented in a certain way) (Schatzki 2002). Thus, both the difficulty of changing people's understanding of nature(s) and the opportunity to do so can be explained by practices. Further, such an understanding enables thinking about (i) simultaneously occurring, competing, and changing social imaginaries that shape the conception of PAs as social-ecological, and (ii) how placed social imaginaries can be (intentionally) changed. Consequently, integrating these frameworks paves the way for conceiving PAs as a more dynamic co-construction between people and more-than-human worlds and between stability and change, through the analytical categories of shared practices, materialities, meanings, and institutions.

Materials and methods

Study site

Established in 1960 (Argentine Law #15,554), TFNP is located in the southwest corner of the Argentine portion of Tierra del Fuego (TDF) Island, bordering Chile. Its objectives include conserving (i) the southernmost Magellanic forest, including marine, coastal, and intertidal ecosystems; (ii) watersheds that contribute to regional water regulation processes; (iii) other landscape elements of geological, geomorphological, and palaeontological importance; and (iv) archaeological and historical cultural heritage sites. Additionally, the park promotes nature-based sustainable tourism and recreational opportunities (PNTF 2021). Of its 68,909 ha, 20% is off limits for recreational visitation. Only 0.2% is designated for intensive visitor use, including roads and facilities along the Beagle Channel that access the park's main attractions visited independently or on guided tours (e.g., Ensenada Bay, Lapataia Bay, Acigami/Roca Lake, Alakush Visitor Center, etc.). Another 79% is for extensive visitor use, with low impact activities (PNTF 2021), but the accessible part is just a few hiking trails (e.g., Mount Guanaco, *Hito XXIV* or Geodesic Marker 24, Coastal Trail, Caminante Lake Trail). Consequently, guided tours generally report to visitors that only 3% of the park is publically accessible.

TFNP is one of the four most-visited NPs in Argentina along with Iguazú, Los Glaciares, and Nahuel Huapi NPs (SIB 2024). It is only accessible from Ushuaia (~80,000 inhabitants, IPIEC 2022), which promotes itself as the 'world's southernmost city' and receives > 500,000 tourists annually, including those visiting Antarctica on cruise ships (INFUETUR 2019). Visitation to TFNP increased by 65% between 2012 and 2022, reaching almost 440,000 visitors in 2022 (SIB 2024). This growing importance positions it as a key 'institution' and 'place' that can be influential in how people conceive nature and relate to it in a specific context. These insights offer perspectives that can be applied on a broader scale for TDF, Patagonia, and Argentina, making our findings transferable beyond the case (Baxter 2021).

Methodological approach and analysis

Informed by a focus on the practical enactment of PA visitation, we use a qualitative, ethnographic case study approach for an in-depth analysis of people-nature interactions in TFNP. Case studies offer the necessary detail to evaluate how theoretical concepts hold - or fail to hold - in certain contexts (Baxter 2021). Moreover, ethnography allows investigating highly contextualized practices and behaviors, forms of knowledge, and material culture inscribed in social entities and phenomena. Therefore, an ethnography of this NP sheds light on the interacting meanings, materialities, practices, and institutions that constitute 'placed social imaginaries' in the (re-)presentation of PAs. We focused on guided tours as an important mechanism for constructing and transmitting information to a large number of visitors and establishing standardised collective experiences that have the potential to influence social imaginaries. While being present and active in the field (Breidenstein 2020), ethnographic methods were used to collect field data during the austral summers of 2021/22 and 2022/23 and included (i) participatory observation of guided tours, facilitated by

different tour-operators based in Ushuaia, lasting several hours each, documented with field notes and audio recordings ($n=7$). Since, for data protection reasons, the NP does not make available a list of all companies operating in the park ($N=51$), the selection of companies and tour guides was made using both a snowball sampling method (based on discussions with experts and tour guides) and direct inquiries to companies based in Ushuaia that offer guided tours to TFNP. Although we worked with different tour operators, it should be noted that saturation was achieved through this rather small number of time-extensive participations as all 'regular tours', on which we put the focus here, follow a similar pattern regardless of the company. This is also because guides often work as freelancers for several companies simultaneously or move between companies over time. Incorporating more 'active tours' (e.g., bird watching, canoeing excursions) could be a next step, but here we decided to focus on the major representation of the park. Moreover, (ii) semi-structured interviews with guides of the respective tours and one additional guide (n=8) and individual visitation and observation in the park, especially along thematic theme trails (n=8); (iii) interviews with local and regional experts, with administrative, political, commercial or representative expertise, regarding TFNP's representation (n=9); and (iv) secondary sources related to formal texts like management plans, online resources used to promote tourism, and seminal and relevant academic and gray-literature sources that contextualize the socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological situation of PAs, conservation, and development in TDF and Patagonia. Data were collected during guided tours and interviews in both Spanish and English; translation into English was carried out by the authors.

Guided by the conceptual framework, we analyzed our primary qualitative data using open and focused coding techniques inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz 2025). Analytical ideas were generated by breaking up the collected material, followed by identifying the most relevant categories. These were then put in constant comparison with the existing data (Bading and Bosch 2018), resulting in the final conceptual themes of the four dimensions of 'placed social imaginaries' in TFNP. We finalized this analysis process by contextualizing these themes through engagement with existing academic literature on imaginaries of Patagonia, resulting in three 'meta-themes' related to tensions in the imaginaries of TFNP: (i) remoteness - connectivity, (ii) modernity - postmodernity, and (iii) protecting singular nature - conserving plural people-nature relationships. These categories of meaning are not mutually exclusive; they can overlap from the interconnection of meanings, materialities, practices, and institutions (i.e. the co-production of place or the comingling of dynamic social imaginaries in the same space-time). The following Results and Discussion section is structured around the three meta-themes. Each begins by situating Patagonia and TDF within existing literature, then engages with our field data and concludes by exploring its implications for a social-ecological understanding of conservation.

Results and discussion

From remoteness to connectivity

The tension between remoteness and connectivity permeates all of these analytical categories (Table 1). For example, in TDF, there is a strong idea of being at a 'frontier,' or as the Argentine-British pioneer Lucas Bridges famously entitled his book - *The Uttermost Part of the Earth* (Bridges 1947). It is still common to find scientific and social representations

Table 1 Placed social imaginaries related to 'Remoteness' versus 'Connectivity' in Tierra del Fuego National Park (TFNP) and Tierra del Fuego (TDF) generally, distinguishing primary data obtained during guided tours to TFNP and *secondary sources* that are underlying these processes more broadly

	Remoteness	Connectivity
Meanings	Slogans like 'End of the world'; 'World's southernmost city'; Landscape change through ecological and geological processes; Harsh weather conditions; *Last remaining wilderness areas; Disconnected island*	Pan-American Highway; TDF as a place of economic opportunities and security; Ushuaia as an international tourism destination; Southernmost tip of visiting Patagonia, Argentina and/or Latin America; *Gateway to the Antarctica*
Materialities	Promotional materials; TFNP signs; Road signs for 'End of the Road' of the Pan-American Highway; 'End of the World' train and post office; *Books*	Urban expansion of Ushuaia; Presence of international visitors; National flags at the train station; Invasive introduced species; *Major port; Cruise ships; Airport*
Practices	Narrations; Visiting and taking pictures at 'End of the World' sites and signs; Sending postcards from the 'End of the World' Post Office	Multilingual tours; Visiting TDF and TFNP; *Immigration to TDF from other parts of Argentina*
Institutions	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism companies; *National and local tourism industry; INFUETUR*	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism companies; *National Law #19,640*; *International tourism industry*

of Patagonian NPs and conservation generally in terms of images that connote nothingness and extremity that largely omits humans and local cultures (Moss 2011). In line, global conservationists have classified two southern Patagonian ecoregions as among the world's last remaining wildernesses (Mittermeier et al. 2003). In TDF, since the 1990s, the Fuegian Tourism Institute (INFUETUR) has been a central institution in positioning the 'end of the world' slogan (INFUETUR 1992), which continues to this day with a dual emphasis on promoting nature and its use in adventure tourism products (Mosti and Sallies 2016). However, this representation creates a tension between the area's isolation and other representations that evidence its regional-global connectivity (Raya Rey et al. 2017).

The idea of remoteness is reproduced within TFNP in the way it is visited physically and is presented discursively and materially. Visitors often enter the park via a vintage train that once transported prisoners and wood between Ushuaia and a sawmill in what is now the park. This 'Train at the End of the World' is an attraction in-and-of-itself and is accompanied by the 'Post Office at the End of the World,' a private enterprise within the park, constructed on the shores of Ensenada Bay. Likewise, when visitors arrive at the terminus of National Route 3 (RN3) at Lapataia Bay, they are greeted by signs that announce 'Here ends RN3,' but also distances to faraway places like Buenos Aires and Alaska. The practices of visiting these places, taking pictures with the signs, and getting passports stamped at the post office on guided tours embody the implicit logic of revelling in the peculiarity of this remoteness, as something rare in the world.

Furthermore, while riding the train, predominant narratives recount the prisoners' lives from the period between 1902 and 1947, when Ushuaia was used by the Argentine government to house a penal colony. These stories are connected to the surrounding environment, including the idea that prisoners who escaped would die in the extreme weather, reinforcing the region's identity as a desolate and lonely place. For their part, many tourism companies portray this nature as a faraway paradise, reinforcing the idea of remoteness and untouched natural beauty through promotion slogans like 'Discover the natural paradise at the end of the world' (Gobierno de Tierra del Fuego 2025). These narratives contribute to the notion of a remote frontier, emphasising an untouched natural environment separated from humans. Moreover, by highlighting geologic landscape formation processes (e.g., the Beagle Channel and valleys carved by glacial retreat) while entering the park on guided tours, rather than human or historical phases impacting today's landscape, tourism narratives imply that present-day nature remains untouched by contemporary human activities, such as climate change.

Contrasting this idea of remote, unsullied nature, TFNP's material infrastructure provides narratives and practices that connect this frontier to other scales and places. While traveling the highway into the park, visitors see the multiple construction sites of new neighbourhoods sprawling from Ushuaia towards the park entrance, demonstrating local urbanisation. Moreover, National Route #3 evidences TDF's connectivity to the rest of the Americas via the Pan-American Highway all the way to Alaska, and "connecting various countries like Peru, Costa Rica, Mexico, USA" (guided tour #5). Tour guides further support this multi-scalar materiality, referring to the region's rapid population and economic growth in recent decades. Furthermore, the experience of visiting the park itself, especially in high season, is a clear experiential juxtaposition to the idea of remoteness. Traffic jams, particularly of large buses carrying literally hundreds of tourists (mostly cruise ship passengers) are frequent in locations like the park entrance and Lapataia and Ensenada Bays, embodying the park's connection to the world via the bustling activity of national and international visitors.

While connectivity highlights the linkages between places (and social-ecological realms), remoteness reproduces an imaginary that detaches them from each other, thus impacting people-nature relationships. Placing Patagonia as remote, wild, and untamed nature has been identified in Chilean Patagonia as a way to reinforce exclusionary practices, such as domination of land through infrastructure and development projects (Urrutia et al. 2019). Furthermore, it is implicated in the branding of TDF, mercantilizing nature in a way that prioritizes some stakeholders or values (Rodríguez 2014). Remoteness tends to decouple discourses and practices of people from and their impact on nature (Müller et al. 2021), but the potential benefits that people could derive from such interactions can be overlooked. This fact limits the ability to consider the distribution of and access to nature's contributions to people and to evaluate who bears the burdens or consequences of nature's loss or protection (i.e. distributive justice; Lenzi et al. 2023).

Between modernity and postmodernity

In southern Patagonia, we can find both modern and postmodern ideas of people-nature relationships in the notions of nation-states, development, production, and conservation (Table 2). Focusing on social-ecological interconnections, the tension between these imaginaries can be described between a modern anthropocentric perspective, guided by market principles, following a productivity paradigm, and focusing on the nation-scale while the postmodern view is grounded in a more holistic or ecocentric worldview and aligned with a sustainability approach that applies global-thinking and local-action approach (Laterra et al. 2021).

Table 2 Placed social imaginaries related to 'Modernity' versus 'Postmodernity' in Tierra del Fuego National Park (TFNP) and Tierra del Fuego (TDF) generally, distinguishing primary data obtained during guided tours to TFNP and *secondary sources* that are underlying these processes more broadly

	Modernity	Postmodernity
Meanings	Nation-building; Production; Natural resources as extractive goods; Development; Control over nature; *Industrialisation; Extractive industries; Nature-based economy; Fantasy island*	Nature protection; Conservation of biological and cultural diversity; Instrumental, intrinsic, and relational values of nature
Materialities	End of the World Train; Tree trunks; Prisoners (actors); Peat; Fences and signs for conservation; *Prison (in Ushuaia)*	Peatland and forest ecosystems; Native species; 'Black pond' and 'High pampa' thematic hiking/walking trails
Practices	Train ride; Re-enactment of prisoners; Narrations; Imagining national borders; Forgetting about certain aspects of history	Stopping at and explaining about ecosystems and species; *Engaging with responsible tourism; Designating more cultural and natural protection zones*
Institutions	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism agencies; Creating uncontested experiences; *Tax benefits (Law #19,640)*, *Manufacturing industry*	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism companies; *Provincial and community-based conservation; NGOs; Projects between science and tourism sector; International agreements (e.g., CBD, 2022)*

Arguably, this tension has characterised TDF since the 1860s, when European colonists became permanently established, and Argentina and Chile began to incorporate TDF into their nation-building projects. These discourses are evident not just in Patagonian PAs, but in the entire Argentine NP system that arose in the 1920s and consolidated in the 1950s, largely as a reflection of ideas adopted from the USA and elsewhere (Anderson et al. 2023; Kaltmeier 2022). Also, Chile's Patagonian tourism industry and PAs align tightly with a modern neoliberal environmental paradigm, consisting of ideas of singular, pristine, and beautiful nature (Astaburuaga et al. 2023). Moreover, in Chilean Patagonia, current processes of rural 'green gentrification' driven by narratives of nature protection can be understood as forms of 'eco-colonization' (Núñez et al. 2024). In 1972, the Argentine government conferred beneficial tax status (Law #19,640) to TDF, and this political economic decision catalysed an industrialization process, particularly in electronics manufacturing, oil and gas extraction, natural-resource industries (e.g., fishing, forestry, livestock), and increasingly in land-based and cruise-ship tourism (van Aert 2013; Borla and Vereda 2015). Industrialization also led to population growth as TDF became 'Fantasy Island' with continuing construction of formal and informal housing (shanty towns) in the forests surrounding Ushuaia (Fank 2022).

However, ecosystem degradation due to economic activities and population growth also bring forth civil, political, and scientific engagement, and potentially resistance, based on alternative, postmodern imaginaries, aiming to protect biodiversity and ecosystems and promote sustainable ways of living/being with the natural environment beyond TFNP. The Onashaga Commitment is a constructive example of such engagement between scientific, governmental, and tourism stakeholders, who work together to establish responsible tourism protocols for the Canal Beagle (or *Onashaga* in Yaghan). Likewise, the 2022 designation of Peninsula Mitre Provincial Park was achieved by a coalition of social actors to conserve this place's coastal and terrestrial ecosystems, and biological and cultural identity.

In TFNP, on the one hand, we find ample portrayal of nature conservation as the park's main goal. At the same time, elements of modernity pervade some aspects, often in a romanticised manner. For example, we see a partial exclusion of Yahgan history. Indeed, a focus on nation-building sometimes overshadows (while not denying) other early European forays into the region, such as British naval/scientific explorations (Darwin 1845) or the influence of the Anglican missionary founders of Ushuaia (Bridges 1947). On the 'End of the World Train,' though, there is a strong emphasis on the stories and practices of penal colony inmates, framed with nation-building narratives of Argentina's late 19th-century expansion where "dominance had to be confirmed here in the remote and harsh south" (guided tour #7). During today's touristic train trips, company employees reenact the period by dressing as prisoners, taking humorous pictures with visitors, and by doing so embody particular historical portions. The aim is to "relive that history [of the prisoners], giving it a slightly nicer twist" (expert interview #7), which expresses an institutionalized norm to ensure visitors have a pleasant stay. Simultaneously, this presentation shapes the ways in which this history is selectively presented and interpreted in the touristic context, creating a tension between entertainment and more critical engagements with the past. Other voices take a more critical stance: "What they are doing is something very satirical. […] You're on holiday, what you want to have is a good time and laugh, but the story is, beyond the fact that it's interesting, a dramatic story. I get the feeling that they make it funny and curious, how they choose to present it and resignify it… for the market" (interview #6).

Additionally, when travelling this historic railway, the route's landscape is studded with tree stumps that are visual

reminders linked to inmate labor and forest use for firewood and timber. These so-called "hard-boiled pioneers" and "first settlers" (guided tour #7) are connected to the emergence and development of Ushuaia through the construction of the prison, the establishment and maintenance of public buildings, and the advancement of energy supply for the city. Therefore, they are part-and-parcel of the institutionalization of Argentina as a nation in the far south (Edwards 2016).

Further notions of nationalism are part of placing the park's natural environment. For example, while being transported towards Lake Acigami/Roca, tour guides prompt visitors to envision a line across the mountainous and lacustrine landscape to delimit the Argentine-Chilean border. Reaching the lake, we find a demarcating sign that uses its Indigenous name since 2010. "Acigami is the original name, given by the Yaghan, which means 'long basket' but it is known on the Argentine side as Lake Roca and on the Chilean side as Lake Errázuriz, who were the two presidents who signed the 'Treaty of the Border' in 1881" (guided tour #4). However, this narrative fails to recognise President Roca's (1880–1886 and 1898–1904) responsibility for the Desert Campaign (*Campaña del Desierto*), one of the most significant national military efforts aimed at subduing Indigenous communities throughout Patagonia to 'Argentinize' the region. The resulting deaths and imprisonment of over 14,000 Indigenous people is often considered genocide (Feierstein 2016). Looking more closely at this way of presenting the lake, we identified informal rules in guiding related to the objective to make the tours a nice experience for the visitors: "You have to be very objective, you have to be careful […]. If you are going to talk about religion, nobody thinks the same about religion, nobody thinks the same about politics" (interview #4). While trying to be 'objective', this informal norm reproduces a highly colonial notion of TFNP as a place.

Adding to this territorial and ideological manifestation of modernity through the focus on the nation-state, there are coexisting ideas regarding the productiveness of TDF. As mentioned, the material landscape one sees aboard the End of the World Train includes tree stumps of a previous forest exploited as a natural resource that was used for the establishment and development of Ushuaia. Further, peat bogs, present in the publicly-accessible area of the TFNP, and a fundamental landscape feature of the valley bottoms of the TDF province (accounting for 95% of all Argentine peat bogs; Ponce et al. 2014), are placed in discursive contrast. On the one hand, the local protection of peatlands is highlighted based on the global goal of sustainability, as experienced on the 'Black Pond Trail' and as explained by tour guides regarding the formation and development of these ecosystems. However, their ecological qualities (e.g., their diversity or their capacity to filter water) are in some cases combined with the promotion for their commercial exploitation because of their good fertilising properties (guided tour #7), which ultimately (re)tells a modern idea of nature as production.

Arguably, PAs are increasingly managed (at least discursively) within the postmodern domain (CBD 2022). However, their formal narratives and practices (e.g., also including informal rules and norms on how to present and experience national parks) can still highlight a modern perspective, based on nation-building projects, connected to notions of historical and contemporary development and placed as facilitated through the use and extraction of natural resources. These tensions can indeed become explicit value conflicts. For example, the unilateral name change of Lake Acigami (June 2024) by the administration of Argentina's self-described 'anarcho-capitalist' president, was communicated as 'restoring' it to 'Lake Roca' and highlights the ongoing dynamics of power and negotiation of stakeholder interests and identities, which must be considered to achieve lasting recognitional justice in PAs (Arias-Arévalo et al. 2023).

Currently, efforts towards more inclusive conservation (CBD 2022) and tourism (WEF 2025) seek to enable plural knowledges, worldviews, and practices, such as the newly installed informational signs that communicate the region's Indigenous history (Tivoli 2022). Legitimizing more diverse perspectives and connections to place (e.g., via tourism) can foster recognition and procedural justice by giving equitable consideration, participation, and authority over meaning and importance of what knowledge(s) counts as true, valid, or important in decision-making (Lenzi et al. 2023). Moreover, a shift from the productivity/modern paradigm to more relational/plural perspectives can help ensure the inclusion of future generations and thus an intergenerational justice approach.

From protecting singular nature to conserving plural people-nature relationships

Scientific and advocacy organisations not only have defined Patagonia and TDF as 'remote' or 'wilderness,' but also have promoted its singularity and need to be protected as either a moral obligation or a 'scarce resource' (Rozzi et al. 2012; see Table 3). While beyond 47°S in the southern hemisphere there is no latitudinal landmass equivalent to austral Patagonia, this notion of singularity can lend itself to considering this place as static, akin to a museum relict, rather than focusing on the relational ontologies (*sensu*, Escobar et al. 2024) involved in constructing these places in the past, present, and future. From a more plural perspective, diverse people-nature relationships create not just

Table 3 Placed social imaginaries related to 'Singularity' versus 'Relationality' in Tierra del Fuego National Park (TFNP) and Tierra del Fuego (TDF) generally, distinguishing primary data obtained during guided tours to TFNP and *secondary sources* that are underlying these processes more broadly

	Singularity	Relationality
Meanings	Unique ecosystems; Ecological importance of this ecoregion; World's southernmost…; Protection 'from' people and invasive species; Scarce resource; Static place	Past, present, and future significance of coastal and aquatic territories for the ways of living and cultural practices of the Yaghan; Instrumental values of nature for people; Interaction of visitors with nature(s); Intrinsic and relational values of nature; Dynamic place
Materialities	Mountain-Forest-Ocean landscape; Impacted Magellanic forests; Waterbodies; Birds; Invasive species; Thematic hiking/walking trails; Fences	Thematic hiking/walking trails; Archaeological sites; Forest ecosystems; Visitor information centre; *Rivers and streams; TFNP as a recreational space for the local community*
Practices	Narrations; Directing attention towards impacted landscapes	Visiting, hiking to, and resting at archaeological sites; Narrations; Observation of wildlife, like birds, horses, foxes; Photography; Photographing flora, fauna, and landscapes; Following/feeding foxes; *Feeding animals*, *picking mushrooms*, *taking shells and rocks*; *Environmental and historical education*
Institutions	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism companies; Training of tour guides; *Tourism industry; Travel*, *fictional and scientific literature*	Argentine NP Administration; Tourism companies; Training of tour guides; *Collaboration projects between science*, *TFNP*, *and society; International agreements (e.g.*, *CBD*, *2022)*

different perspectives on the world, but different 'worlds;' what Escobar (2018) refers to as the 'pluriverse,' rather than a 'universe.'

Similarly, TFNP's natural environment is portrayed considering its ecological uniqueness, "[…] of mountains, forest and sea that no other park in Argentina will ever have" (guided tour 6). Tour guides highlight this fact during visits to Ensenada or Lapataia Bays, where the view reflects these landscapes. Forests are explained in more detail. Technical descriptions are given of native trees (*Nothofagus* spp.), such as the evergreen Magellan beech or *guindo* (*N. betuloides*), the high deciduous beech or *lenga* (*N. pumilio*), and the low deciduous beech or *ñire* (*N. antarctica*), and their symbiotic and parasitic relationships with mistletoes and fungi, but without any references to human interaction. Other biodiversity and ecosystems mentioned in tours include waterbodies (e.g., Canal Beagle/Onashaga, Green Pond, Lapataia River, and Ovando River) and birds. Particular attention is given to the kelp goose (*Chloephaga hybrida*), which is symbolically part of the park's emblem. To further examine why 'nature' is predominantly portrayed in this singular way, it is essential to understand certain rules and norms governing the training of tour guides in TFNP. This includes a mandatory course required to obtain certification. In addition to general regulations regarding permissible behavior in the park, the exam covers topics like landscape formation and the naming of specific flora and fauna (expert interview #3), thereby institutionalizing the values and beliefs of a largely mainstream conservation perspective based on scientific perspectives.

Some people-nature relationships can be inferred, however, within the notion of singularity. For example, guides often present the lichen (*Usnea* spp.), known as 'old man's beard,' as a good indicator of air quality or similarly portray the forest as a sink for human-derived carbon dioxide emissions. In both cases, nature is represented based on instrumental values (i.e. its importance to provide human benefits). Another way of establishing this link could be through water; Ushuaia's three drinking water sources (Pipo River, Buena Esperanza Stream, and Grande Stream) originate within the park (Casteluchio et al. 2016). In contrast, the predominant people-nature relationship that can be inferred relates to the NP's presentation as a way to protect this singular nature 'from' people for its intrinsic value. An important narrative in guided tours includes explaining the situation of introduced invasive species. An emblematic case is the North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*), introduced by the Argentine government in 1946, which was not only a means to secure white privilege in TDF (Dicenta 2023), but has since become the largest driver of ecosystem change in these forests in the Holocene (Anderson et al. 2009). Visitors see their material effects in the landscape through dead trees, ponded streams or a specific beaver trail, where developed infrastructure teaches about this topic at a beaver dam/lodge. Other invasive introduced species presented as 'threats' to TFNP's singular nature are the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), American mink (*Neogale vison*), several trout and salmon species, feral/semi-feral horses and dogs. To illustrate the complexity in how people-nature relationships are constructed, a social media analysis demonstrated that TFNP visitors have high interest in native trees, ducks, and geese, but also introduced beavers (Huertas Herrera et al. 2023), showing that while the singularity of the remote ecosystem is highlighted, people are also actively constructing new relationships with both native and introduced species.

Finally, the representation of Indigenous communities is an important aspect of how more relational people-nature understandings are being placed in TFNP. In 2023, new signs and infographic material were added, portraying the Selk'nam, Haush, and Yaghan who have inhabited TDF since around 10,200 years B.P. (Tivoli 2022). The southern, public-access section of TFNP is Yaghan territory, and their traditionally nomadic, sea-based lifestyle (including their food, hunting and cultural practices, and their relationship with the coasts, sea, and forests) is detailed in new information materials. Beginning in 1520 with European arrival to the 'Land of Fire' (Tierra del Fuego) by Magellan and in the 1860s with the consolidation of Anglican missions, Indigenous lifestyles were massively disrupted, driving their cultures to near extinction. These new additions to park infrastructure raise awareness and shift the focus in three key ways (Balling 2026). First, they redirect attention from the past to the present by evoking the Yaghan Paiakoala Community in Ushuaia (Argentina) and the Mejillones Bay Community on adjacent Navarino Island (Chile). This visibility is particularly important as a broad spectrum of Argentine society erroneously considers this ethnic group to be extinct (expert interview #6). Second, the updated information reveals that what has often been presented as a natural landscape is actually a culturally-shaped environment, exemplified by physical and ecological features like shell middens left behind by the Yaghans. These archaeological sites can be several meters high, cover large areas of the Beagle Channel coast, and host a particular vegetation. Third, established national territorial configurations, institutionalized through the park, are contested, asserting Indigenous claims "to their ancestral territories, access to marine coastal space, and their right to freely navigate these waters, as well as the protection of the natural resources associated with their Indigenous culture […]" (as told on a trail sign; Tivoli 2022). Moreover, representatives of the Yaghan community share their worldview with tour guides in educational formats (expert interview #6), seeking to change established beliefs and ultimately the daily practices and sayings of how this NP is presented.

This renovated Indigenous aspect of the park promotes a more postmodern and relational imaginary, as it confronts mainstream Western hegemonic ideas of living and interacting with nature. The Yaghan, however, still are mostly represented as 'history' in the guided tours, signs and visitor centre educational materials. For example, at Ensenada and Lapataia Bays, infrastructure facilitates experiences with Yahgan information at archaeological sites. Nonetheless, even representations of historical ways of living can foster more relational ideas about people living with the natural environment. For instance, the Yaghan are portrayed by being linked to the archaeological sites or shell middens as semi-nomadic coastal people who travelled the archipelago as far as Cape Horn in canoes made from tree bark, feeding on mussels, sea lions and sea birds, and some forest foods like berries and 'Indian bread' (species of ball-like fungi in the genus *Cytarria* that emerge from trees). Also, the relationships between people and nature(s) are fundamentally different in the Yaghan worldview as evidenced in an interview that reported: "The world has a problem, as we are going from one extreme to the other. We have to balance, like our grandparents did. They had the perfect balance with nature, guided by Mother Nature. […] We are the only species that is separated by nature and we don't see it" (expert interview #6). In summary, narratives, signs, and material infrastructure, combined with practices like visiting archaeological sites can open ways to recognize and experience plural and relational ways of living with the natural environment. Although there is still a focus on the past, new elements have begun to shift this towards a contemporaneous understanding of Indigenous peoples and the need for relational and plural people-nature connections.

The tension of protecting singular nature versus considering plural people-nature relationships is a transversal theme at the core of this study, but is made explicit here through notions of uniqueness and fragility or the need to protect the singular native ecosystem from introduced invasive species (Videla et al. 2021), which also forms part of a mainstream conservation approach (Archibald et al. 2020). On the one hand, this fact highlights the importance and necessity to protect these ecosystems. However, simultaneously framing them as 'singular' elements portrays nature as static, as static and strongly disconnects them from social realms and the transformation/evolution of people-nature relationships (Turnhout and Lynch 2025; Bocci 2022). Placed this way, through the touristic experience of conservation, people are not able to see, conceive, experience, and acknowledge the manifold, co-constitutive, relational, and changing connections of these supposedly 'singular' elements and places with other humans and nature(s), as we have seen on the contrary by the reproduction on the interconnected ways of understanding and living of the Yaghan people.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the entanglements of practices, materialities, meanings, and institutions in the guided visits to TFNP. By being more aware of how social imaginaries in this PA are placed, we argue it is possible to open pathways for a more relational or social-ecological systems perspective regarding conservation-based tourism. Specifically, we identified three key aspects that can be more intentionally (re)considered regarding the reproduction of conservation

and nature via tourism in TFNP and Patagonian PAs more generally: (i) remoteness - connectivity, (ii) modernity - postmodernity, and (iii) singularity - plural people-nature relationships. These tensions underscore that placed social imaginaries not only enable us to see PAs through the lens of a social-ecological system but further highlight the multifaceted nature of people-nature connections and the coexistence, reproduction, and change of different social imaginaries in the same space and time.

Based on these findings, placed social imaginaries is a useful rubric to inform the design and implementation of PAs and their touristic visitation. This approach helps to address the 'pluriversal challenge' (Pernecky 2024) in tourism studies by revealing the in-situ reproduction of universal, hegemonic worldviews transported through experiencing conservation (e.g., nature-culture-divide), while simultaneously opening up space for more equitable ways of experiencing and understanding PAs and conservation. Our results also demonstrate that the ways in which we perceive and produce PAs through tourism are dynamic, shaped by multiple, coexisting social imaginaries. This framework enables us to highlight the interconnectedness of practices, materialities, meanings, and institutions in the continual formation of these imaginaries. This also helps to draw attention and reveal the mostly tacit, unrecognised, and underlying structures involved in presenting a PA (e.g., transmitting ideas of 'singular nature' as learning in a guiding course/exam). We, therefore, suggest that, by placing social imaginaries it is possible to consider them in more intentionally reflexive ways; as such, they can activate considerations of multiple values involved in conservation (Massarella et al. 2022; Raymond et al. 2023). More specifically, guided tours can be modified to better align with conservation and broader values like distributional, procedural, epistemic, or intergenerational justice and sustainability via activities like education initiatives led by Indigenous representatives or new interpretative infrastructure in the park. Although our approach seeks to further a social-ecological perspective of PAs by raising awareness of the often-assumed universality of a Eurocentric approach towards nature and therefore making human-nature relationships 'uncommon' (de la Cadena 2019), we also recognise the opportunity to acknowledge the coexistence and reproduction of diverse social imaginaries. This creates a space for different worlds to coexist, enabling us to develop commons through divergence, involving the building of alliances across worlds that share struggles (e.g., how to conserve ecosystems), even if they might not share identical ontologies of what nature conservation actually means.

This approach complements national efforts by the Argentine Administration of National Parks to consider NPs in the context of their landscape and stakeholder ways of living (Gobierno Argentino 2024) and regional efforts in Latin America to ensure public access to environmental information, public participation in environmental matters, and environmental justice (UN 2018). Likewise, reconsidering touristic visitations to PAs through the placing of social imaginaries can be a tool for addressing the global challenges expressed by the scientific community and in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's imperative to meet conservation targets in inclusive and participatory ways that also respect IP&LC rights, worldviews, and values (CBD 2022; Bachmann-Vargas et al. 2024). In this context, we argue that not only do researchers, managers, and the tourism sector need to develop new strategies, but also put effort into adapting extant policies and practices.

In closing, we aim for (more) inclusive ways of thinking and making PAs in terms of how they are (not) represented as social-ecological systems. We recognize a vast literature from different disciplinary traditions (e.g., human geography, environmental history) and encourage future interdisciplinary scholarship that facilitates knowledge dialog and expands the conceptual and empirical discussion about placed social imaginaries of nature(s). Of course, such dialog would be further enhanced by empowering non-academic stakeholders to participate (i.e. procedural and recognitional justice), which is requisite for transdisciplinary and participatory processes. More specifically, it is our hope that by opening up this discussion of placed social imaginaries in conservation-based tourism, it will be possible to orient PAs in other parts of Argentina, Latin America, and the world towards new understandings of people-nature relationships in the context of inclusive conservation and sustainable tourism that incorporates nature's diverse values (Pascual et al. 2023).

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Data availability Anonymised data will be made available upon request.

Declarations

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