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Special Issue: Exploring Convivial Conservation in Theory and Practice

Human-Wildlife Coexistence: Business as Usual Conservation or an Opportunity for Transformative Change?

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Abstract

The term 'coexistence' is increasingly being used by academics and practitioners to reflect a re-conceptualisation of human-wildlife interactions (HWI). Coexistence has become a popular buzzword and is central to several proposals for transformative change in biodiversity conservation, including convivial conservation. Although ideas about how to achieve coexistence proliferate, critical exploration of the framing and use of the term is lacking. Through analysis of semi-structured interviews, webinars and online and offline documents, this paper critically interrogates how 'coexistence' is being conceptualised and translated into practice. We characterise coexistence as a boundary object that reflects a broadly agreed on 'hopeful mission', while being flexible enough to be meaningful for a wide range of actors. We identify three main framings of coexistence, which reflect the ways of knowing, values and approaches of different epistemic communities. We find that although the idea of coexistence has the potential to help facilitate transformative change in wildlife management, so far it largely manifests in practice as a positive-sounding label for standardised packages of tools and incentives. We argue that as the meaning of coexistence continues to be contested, there is an opportunity for activists, academics, and practitioners to reclaim its transformative roots. We identify a role for convivial conservation within this agenda: to re-politicise coexistence through the concept of 'meaningful coexistence'.

Keywords: coexistence, human-wildlife conflict, human-wildlife interactions, convivial conservation, buzzwords

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, the concept of coexistence has become central to wildlife governance discourse, as well as wider biodiversity conservation discourse. Coexistence is the focus of myriad academic inquiries (Pudyatmoko, Budiman, and Kristiansen 2018; Pooley, Bhatia, and Vasava 2020; Frank, Glikman, and Marchini 2019; Madden 2004; Carter and Linnell 2016), and is a central theme of conferences and events, including the Jane Goodall Institute ConservAction week 2019 (https://jgisconference2019.peatix.com) and Human Dimensions of Wildlife conferences (https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/pathways/history/). It is explicit in many NGO missions, including Defenders of Wildlife who aim to "foster transformation in both human attitudes and how wildlife and people interact, from conflict to coexistence" (Defenders of Wildlife 2021). We thus identify coexistence as a 'buzzword'—a popular term that signifies a desired shift in the understanding and management of an environmental issue, becoming instrumental in the policy-making arena (Cornwall and Brock 2005; Bock 2012).

In the context of HWI, coexistence signifies a shift away from the focus on human-wildlife conflict (HWC) that has long been a central part of conservationists' work (Hazzah, Chandra, and Dolrenry 2019; Frank 2016). It is argued that a focus on conflict limits the possibilities for meaningful change in how HWI are perceived and managed, due to a

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number of factors. First, HWC has negative connotations and implies incompatibility of human and wildlife interests (Pooley et al. 2017). Second, a focus on conflict reflects a simplistic framing using Western analytical categories that belie the complexity of HWI (Goldman, Roque de Pinho, and Perry 2010). Finally, a focus on conflict obscures the fact that much 'human-wildlife' conflict is actually 'human-human' conflict between people with diverging values, interests and priorities (Peterson et al. 2010; Glikman, Frank, and Marchini 2019). Shifting emphasis onto coexistence is an opportunity for "radical innovation" to "shake up the conservation agenda" (Hazzah, Chandra, and Dolrenry 2019: 360).

Despite the growing popularity of coexistence, few attempts have been made to define the term (Pooley, Bhatia, and Vasava 2020). The definitions of Frank (2016: 2), who defines coexistence as "when the interests of humans and wildlife are both satisfied, or when a compromise is negotiated", and Carter and Linnell (2016: 575), who define coexistence as a "dynamic but sustainable state in which humans and large carnivores co-adapt to living in shared landscapes" remain the most widely referenced. Yet, as our analysis shows, these popular definitions do not reflect the diverse meanings and uses of coexistence. Notable studies have started to unpack coexistence in more detail (Pooley, Bhatia, and Vasava 2020; Frank, Glikman, and Marchini 2019; Lute et al. 2018). The focus is largely on coexistence as an ideal outcome at the local level, emphasising behavioural, emotional and psychological factors (known as the 'human dimensions') and a better understanding of place-based social-ecological systems. However, critical investigation into coexistence as a signifier—a political object through which "crucial contests over meaning" happen (Rear and Jones 2013a: 376)—is lacking, and it is that gap that this article addresses.

Our critical exploration of coexistence is particularly timely as the term is increasingly being used within diverse proposals for transformative change in biodiversity conservation, developed to address the accelerating loss of global biodiversity (Massarella et al. 2021). These proposals call for a paradigm shift in how humans perceive and manage our relationship with non-human nature (Lorimer 2015; Srinivasan 2019), how conservationists perceive and relate to people who live in and close to areas of high biodiversity (Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Hazzah, Chandra, and Dolrenry 2019), and in the political economic structures that perpetuate crises (Otero and Nielsen 2017; Büscher and Fletcher 2019). Differing concepts of coexistence, including 'peaceful coexistence' (Bekoff 2015) and 'sustainable coexistence' (Otero and Nielsen 2017; Pudyatmoko, Budiman, and Kristiansen 2018) are central to many of these transformative proposals.

Coexistence is also a central theme in convivial conservation; the transformative proposal with which this journal's special section engages. Convivial conservation is a "vision, a politics and a set of governance principles" that responds to pressing issues facing biodiversity and its conservation, including global political economic structures, the rise of authoritarianism and growing social and ecological violence (Büscher and Fletcher 2019: 283). Convivial conservation calls for transformative change in global political economic structures and more consideration of environmental justice (Büscher and Fletcher 2019, 2020). The goal is to move towards a system that better enables "meaningful coexistence" between humans and non-humans, as opposed to the "shallow commodified encounter[s]" that are driven by, among other things, an over-emphasis on tourism and other market-based conservation approaches (Fletcher et al. 2020: 207). However, like many of the transformative proposals that use the term, the convivial conservation proposal is yet to define what it means by coexistence.

We address these knowledge gaps by asking how coexistence is being framed and how it is translated into practice, and what function(s) the term is fulfilling. We also ask what the implications of these findings are for transformative change in biodiversity conservation, and what the role of convivial conservation could be in bringing about the desired paradigm shift associated with coexistence. We draw on critical scholarship of buzzwords, along with science and technology studies (STS) concepts including boundary objects, signifiers, idea translation and standardised packages to analyse interviews, webinars, online resources and documents, and unpack how human-wildlife coexistence is manifesting in discourse and practice among academics and practitioners. We then discuss the implications of these findings for transformative change and convivial conservation. Studying buzzwords enables exploration of which actors dominate discussions, so that contested meanings, ideological differences and power structures can be highlighted (Cornwall 2007). We contribute to the understanding of buzzwords, as well as transformations to sustainability scholarship, by highlighting the importance of buzzwords in the process of transformative change and theorising how these words can both catalyse and block change. We also contribute to the development of convivial conservation, identifying how it can help realise the transformative potential of coexistence.

EXPLORING BUZZWORDS IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

This research is grounded in the sub-field of political ecology that critically engages with environmental discourse. Discourse is defined as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer and Versteeg 2005: 175). Discourse analysis is based on the understanding that although issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss are real, the way they are framed—that is the assumptions, interpretations, methods, and values used to understand and communicate them—is socially constructed (Leach, Stirling, and Scoones 2010). Framings matter since they discursively establish what the problem is, who is responsible and who has the legitimacy and authority to solve it, ultimately determining courses of action that privilege some actors and disadvantage others

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(Hajer 1995). Discursive struggles over meaning are therefore common, particularly in the case of biodiversity conservation (Büscher and Whande 2007).

Individual words—especially those classified as buzzwords—are important units of discourse analysis. Buzzwords are political objects that reflect broader trends in environmental understanding and management (Cairns and Krzywoszynska 2016), reflecting a host of meanings, images and storylines, and playing an important role in framing policy solutions (Cornwall and Brock 2005). Buzzwords can motivate people and mobilise resources by signifying that "they have now got the story right and are really going to make a difference" (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 1043). Examples of buzzwords that have been studied discursively include 'participation' (Leal 2007), 'sustainability' (Brown 2016; Scoones 2007) and 'good governance' (Mkandawire 2007; Büscher and Mutimukuru 2007). Studies find that buzzwords become powerful by being ambiguous in meaning while signifying an agreed-on normative goal (Cairns and Krzywoszynska 2016) and that their often radical roots quickly become diluted or lost altogether (Mkandawire 2007; Chandhoke 2007). It is thus important to study buzzwords: how they develop, how they travel and how they influence practice, as well as to ask what functions buzzwords *as words* fulfil (Cornwall and Brock 2005).

We draw on some core concepts from STS and political theory in our exploration. The first is the concept of signifiers, which are units of language that represent (or signify) concepts and ideas (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Conceptualising words or phrases as signifiers positions them as political objects that are used as "an attempt by the agents of a discourse to subtly transform or renegotiate meanings of the term as it is concurrently used by agents of another, competing discourse" (Rear and Jones 2013a: 375). The (somewhat subconscious) aim is to establish what is known as a 'hegemonic signifier' whereby the dominant meaning, or framing, becomes so powerful that it has reached the status of common sense (Rear and Jones 2013b; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Through this process, certain 'facts' about the world we live in become 'stabilised' (Latour 1987; Fujimura 2010). 'Wilderness' can be described as a hegemonic signifier, as despite its contested meaning, one framing (that of North American conservationists) dominates (Cronon 1996). Establishment of a hegemonic signifier can have a wide range of implications, not least in relation to justice, as their apparent universality conceals struggles over ideology and contested meanings, leaving unquestioned injustices caused by actions done in their name (Cornwall 2007; Rist 2007).

Other signifiers, such as 'biodiversity' (Gustafsson 2013) and 'global citizenship' (Moraes 2014) are described as 'floating', as they float between different epistemic communities, adopting multiple meanings depending on the worldviews, values and priorities of each community (Farkas and Schou 2018). The goal thus becomes stabilisation of the meaning of floating signifiers and the associated environmental policy and practice (Rear and Jones 2013a; Cornwall 2007). Other signifiers, such as 'sustainability' (Brown 2016) and 'resilience' (Weichselgartner and Kelman 2015), are described as 'empty', as they become emptied of meaning and instead become tools for justifying multiple goals and limiting contention (Moraes 2014; MacKillop 2018). Empty and floating signifiers often function as 'boundary objects' that facilitate action by being "both adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to maintain identity across them" (Star and Griesemer 1989: 387). Boundary objects, such as 'sustainability' and 'conservation corridors', are easy to translate, enabling cooperation across disciplines and between science and policy (Goldman 2009; Scoones 2007).

STS inquiry also focuses on the travel of signifiers, challenging what was historically framed as processes of diffusion, meaning concepts do not change as they spread and are just accepted or rejected by different actors. Instead, the focus shifts to processes of translation, whereby concepts are modified as they come into contact with different actors (Latour 1984). Buzzwords often begin as signifiers of radical change but as they travel they become modified and lose their transformative potential, translated in a way that maintains the status quo (Chandhoke 2007; Mkandawire 2007; Brown 2016). In fact, the strong ideological connotations that buzzwords often evoke can be used to legitimise and re-energise existing policies and interventions (Büscher and Mutimukuru 2007). This process of idea translation continues as buzzwords become material reality through policies and interventions. The ambiguity and flexibility of boundary objects can be combined with—or translated into—'standardised packages' of methods, approaches and tools (Fujimura 2010), such as modelling, wildlife ecology and wildlife corridors (Goldman 2009). This results in boundary objects being "fluid in meaning" yet "solid in their presentation" (Goldman 2009: 338), becoming translated into technical fixes that simplify and depoliticise complexity (Scoones 2007; Li 2007).

Critical scholars exploring transformations to sustainability have found that what is labelled as transformative change is often shallow and does not reflect radical shifts (Blythe et al. 2018; O'Brien et al. 2013), with 'transformation' itself considered a buzzword. We therefore posit that by unpacking the term coexistence in relation to buzzwords, signifiers, boundary objects, processes of translation and standardised packages, we provide important insights into contemporary debates on the processes of, and barriers to, the transformations to sustainability that convivial conservation—and others—call for. Our analysis supports understanding of key issues identified in the study of transformative change (Blythe et al. 2018), including how and why radical ideas lose their transformative edge through processes of translation (Mkandawire 2007), and why concepts with transformative potential may not translate into practice (Corson et al. 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We focused our analysis of framings and practices on 'conservation professionals': academics, practitioners and activists. It is these groups who are currently most

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active in defining and using the coexistence buzzword (although as we will discuss further, the actual practice of coexisting with wildlife is far from new), and the perspectives of these professionals influence broader HWI policies (Lute et al. 2018). Data was collected by the first author between June and September 2020, using three main sources: literature (academic papers, books and NGO documents), webinars and videos, and semi-structured interviews. A qualitative, inductive approach to data collection was taken with all three data sources collected simultaneously. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used (Blackstone 2012). Both authors are familiar with the HWI discussion so we started by purposively identifying key academics and practitioners for interviews, representing a wide range of approaches to HWI and different country contexts, as well as core texts and NGOs (see Table 1).

Additional data sources were identified using the snowball method, asking participants to recommend other texts, webinars, conferences and interviewees. Literature and online sources were identified by doing google searches using key search terms: *Human-wildlife coexistence*; *Human-wildlife conflict + coexistence*; *human-carnivore conflict + coexistence*; *human-carnivore coexistence*; *coexistence; and human-wildlife coexistence + cohabitation.* Analysis focused on content published between 2014 and 2021 to capture the most recent coexistence discourse. Data was collected and analysed until 'data saturation' was reached (Fusch and Ness 2015). Data collection was both enhanced and restricted by COVID-19. The focus on online content meant that there was more access to conferences and seminars, but the challenges people have faced reduced availability of interview participants. We note that not all countries/contexts are represented and that the perspectives collected are from 'professionals' only and do not reflect the full picture of coexistence in discourse and practice. However, this 'professional' perspective gives a good idea of how the coexistence concept is influencing international and some national activity on HWI.

All interviews and video materials were transcribed and organised using ATLAS.ti software. Data analysis began inductively (Blaikie 2007), guided by key elements of discourse analysis summarised in section two. Key features were identified and compared across data to find patterns. Features included problem definitions, common assumptions, proposed solutions, practices of blame, contrasts and consistencies (Mogashoa 2014), and received wisdom: long-established assumptions, often based on simplistic interpretation of information, that drive certain framings and storylines (Leach and Mearns 1998).

THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF COEXISTENCE

The hopeful mission of coexistence

Like all buzzwords, coexistence signifies current thinking and trends in environmental management (Cairns and Krzywoszynska 2016), in this case related to HWI. Traditionally dominated by conservationists grounded in natural sciences, understanding and reducing conflict was central to wildlife management practice, led by the rationale that much killing of wildlife was a direct result of damage to human property. The emphasis was on protected area (PA) formation to reduce human-wildlife competition (Amaja, Feyssa, and Gutema 2016). However more recently, and in part due to the rising influence of the 'human dimensions' field of conservation social science, the discourse of HWI has shifted. This shift includes moving from an emphasis on PAs to conservation both within and outside of PAs (Dorresteijn et al. 2014; Western et al. 2019; Hartel et al. 2019). The concept of coexistence has become a signifier for this shift:

> "I think coexistence has to have some element of co-occurrence…if animals only live in sort of the proverbial Zoo of Yellowstone where they're killed as soon as they leave Park boundaries or something, you'd be hard pressed to make the case, at least in my mind, that that would be called coexistence" (interview, academic—social ecology and practitioner, USA).

A desire to shift from negative framings of wildlife management that HWC signifies, towards more positive discussions of what "better futures look like" (interview, academic—environmental historian, USA) is identified. Coexistence signifies a "move away from this constant focus on what we think is wrong to also looking at what we think is right" (interview, academic—social science and activist, India), focusing instead on "all the neutral to positive interactions people have daily with wildlife" (interview, academic—natural sciences/human dimensions and practitioner, Canada). Coexistence thus signifies an opportunity for imagining a "different way of living" (interview, academic—political ecology, UK), offering an alternative "human philosophy" for conservation (interview, academic—social ecology and practitioner, USA). This positive outlook is reflected in the use of coexistence within the discourse of the 'conservation optimism' movement that

Table 1
Data collected

Method	Data collection	Regions represented
Semi-structured interviews (24)	Academic-practitioners (4); practitioners (8); academics (10); academic-activists (2)	South/Central America (3); North America (6); South Asia (4), East/Southern Africa (5); Europe/UK (6)
Online Content	NGO/non-profit/foundation materials (12 organisations) Lectures/seminar (7*) Online conferences (6*)	South/Central America (9); North America (8); East/Southern Africa (5); East/South Asia (5); Europe/UK (3)

*Multiple cases and presenters

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strives to "build a world in which nature and people can coexist" (https://conservationoptimism.org/).

The idea of coexistence often signifies the importance of indigenous and local communities and acknowledges the role of "the knowledge, the abilities and histories of communities" in facilitating coexistence (interview, academic—social science and activist, India). Concerns that the traditional knowledge and cultural practices enabling coexistence might be lost over time due to broader socio-economic changes are also reflected in academic papers (Mwamidi, Nunow, and Mwasi 2012; de Silva and Srinivasan 2019), interviews and webinars on coexistence:

> "In Kenya...local Maasai communities have lived with their livestock alongside wildlife...maintaining a landscape of exceptional biological and cultural diversity. This coexistence is enabled primarily by the increasingly threatened communal and semi-nomadic form of local land use, which encourages mobility to ensure survival" (recorded lecture: Western, 2019).

The 'hopeful mission' of coexistence reflects three core characteristics of buzzwords. First, they have a strong, shared normative goal (Cairns and Krzywoszynska 2016; Cornwall 2007). Second, they signify the potential for radical change, at least in the early stages of their use (Chandhoke 2007; Mkandawire 2007). Third, and closely linked to the previous points, buzzwords signify that academics, policy-makers and practitioners have finally landed on an idea that will bring about much-desired transformative change (Cornwall and Brock 2005). This shared vision enables coexistence to function as a boundary object by combining a normative goal with an adaptive flexibility that enables use across multiple epistemic communities (Scoones 2007; Goldman 2009). We now unpack some of the ways in which different epistemic communities frame and use coexistence, first highlighting the two most dominant framings (sections 4.2 and 4.3) before discussing an alternative approach (section 4.4).

Coexistence as co-adaptation

The academic field known as human dimensions of wildlife has been instrumental in establishing coexistence as a buzzword, developing a particular framing that we loosely call 'coexistence as co-adaptation'. Although nuanced across organisations and individuals, common characteristics of this framing can be identified. The burgeoning academic field draws on psychology and behavioural studies to understand how humans and wildlife can 'co-adapt' and better tolerate one another (Amit and Jacobson 2017; Dietsch et al. 2019; Ceaușu et al. 2019; König et al. 2020). Academics working in this field understand humans and non-humans as existing in complex socio-ecological systems that are context-specific, dynamic and influenced by myriad factors (Lischka et al. 2018). Different scales of governance and their interaction with local values and behaviours are also explored (König et al. 2020; Glikman, Frank, and Marchini 2019).

A focus only on conflict or on achieving a situation where all species live in harmony is framed as counterproductive, with coexistence instead conceptualised as a process of co-adaptation between humans and wildlife towards tolerance (König et al. 2020) or 'sustainable coexistence' (Pudyatmoko, Budiman, and Kristiansen 2018). A core concept is the 'conflict-to-coexistence continuum': a framework used by conservation social scientists to describe HWI, to "shed light on coexistence and tolerance, rather than only conflict", and to be used as an analytical tool to investigate the "reasons behind negative to positive attitudes/behaviours toward wildlife" (Frank 2016: 741).

Several practitioners and conservation organisations also draw on this framing of coexistence. For example, the Sri Lankan NGO Trunks & Leaves aims to facilitate "peaceful coexistence of people and elephants" by promoting community well-being, supporting livelihoods, and understanding factors influencing human behaviour towards elephants (https://trunksnleaves.org/). Their approach reflects the importance of involving local communities in conservation and ensuring that they benefit from interventions, which is highlighted by both academics and practitioners:

> "A key principle of course should be [a] community-based approach…there is almost no other way we can get acceptance or stewardship" (interview, academic—social science, UK).

The EU platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores also focuses on community engagement, using expressions like "exchanging knowledge" and "working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way" (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm).

However, ideas about coexistence developed in the academic sphere also go through a process of translation (Latour 1984) as they are adopted by practitioner organisations. In some instances, academic emphasis on tolerance shifts to an ideal of 'positive' or 'peaceful' interactions, with coexistence described as:

> "The sharing of time and space (between) wildlife and humans, in a way that the negative impacts are lowered, and the positive impacts are maximised" (interview, practitioner—conservation biologist, Costa Rica).

Rather than emphasising co-adaptation, the focus of many human-wildlife management interventions is on behaviour change, particularly through education programmes:

> "We try to promote tolerance for coexisting with these animals, by education…The idea is to make people understand that these animals live in our backyards, and we need to change our behaviour at times so that they can survive" (interview, academic—environmental science and practitioner, Canada).

Instead of focusing on the multiple actors at different scales that are central to a socio-ecological approach to research, the emphasis in practice largely remains on the local level and the values and behaviour of people living close to wildlife. Education programmes are assumed to be needed because "…people have not had any educational training about how to safely live with elephants" (recorded lecture: von Hagen, 2020) and other animals. Academics and practitioners also

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advocate for financial support in the form of compensation schemes for predated livestock. For example, the Big Life Foundation has created a predator compensation fund to offset part of the financial burden from local livestock owners and "reduce the motivation for retaliatory killings" (https://biglife.org/what-we-do/human-wildlife-conflict-mitigation/predator-compensation).

The practice of coexistence mirrors community-based conservation approaches in advocating for the inclusion of local communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of conflict mitigation strategies and conservation interventions. This typically means involving local communities in research or in the development of alternative livelihoods, such as ecotourism initiatives and green labels for local produce. Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) are used to minimise the economic impacts of HWC on local livelihoods with the goal of increasing the tolerance of people towards wildlife. An example of this is the 'human-elephant co-existence for livelihood protection' initiative founded by the World Bank's Global Wildlife Program in Sri Lanka, which aims to generate a "wildlife-based economy to ensure the benefits from wildlife outweigh the costs associated with living among them" (https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/corridors-coexistence-reducing-human-wildlife-conflict).

Our analysis of coexistence as co-adaptation shows that although the discourse indicates a potential paradigm shift for HWI management, in practice it currently manifests as 'standardised packages' of long-standing tools, technologies and approaches to conservation (Fujimura 2010; Goldman 2009), including education, financial incentives and ecotourism. This is a common pattern in international conservation and development, as complex ideas are simplified and 'rendered technical' (Li 2007). One of the reasons for this easy translation, we posit, is that coexistence is still being framed within Western ways of knowing (for example by quantifying attitudes and behaviours) that align with the values and objectives of conservationists. It is thus amenable to practice and does not challenge the status quo. We continue to follow this trend as we look at a second dominant framing of coexistence.

Coexistence as conflict mitigation

The idea of coexistence has also been adopted by people and organisations working within the natural sciences, including wildlife ecologists and organisations like Defenders of Wildlife, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and WildEarth Guardians. Here, the idea of coexistence is translated through an ecology research lens. Framed using community and landscape ecology notions, HWI are often described in terms of spatial overlaps. Just as 'coexistence theory' in community ecology offers a functional perspective on how multiple competing species coexist (Chapron and López-Bao 2016), the natural science-based framing of coexistence focuses on competition between people and wildlife:

> "In an area of northern Botswana, roughly the size of Yellowstone National Park, 15,000 elephants compete with 15,000 people for access to water, food, and land" (http://www.ecoexistproject.org/challenge/area/).

Concerns about an increasing human population and habitat loss are identified (Chartier, Zimmermann, and Ladle 2011), with an emphasis on gaining specialised knowledge of the behaviour and ecology of wildlife to control HWI and keep people and wildlife in their designated spaces (Chapron and López-Bao 2016). This focus on spatial overlap manifests in concepts such as 'connectivity conservation' (Keeley et al. 2019) and 'landscapes of coexistence' (Rio-Maior et al. 2019). In practice, these concepts translate into a need for more wildlife dispersal areas and corridors (Othman et al. 2019) in order to bolster the existing "network of ecologically representative, effectively managed, and financially viable protected areas" (https://www.wwf-congobasin.org/what_we_do/sustainable_protected_areas/). Thus, although coexistence is linked to broader ideas of land sharing, it is used by some academics and practitioners to advocate for further land sparing, sometimes justifying the relocation of people living close to PAs and corridors:

> "In partnership with other stakeholders, like UN-Habitat, [the park] helps place the community in proper areas like a settlement surrogate… We are using this opportunity to free wildlife corridors" (interview, practitioner—wildlife manager, Mozambique).

The idea of coexistence is also translated into education campaigns to "communicate what is conservation, what are the benefits of conservation" (interview—wildlife manager and practitioner, Mozambique) to local communities, along with the implementation of conflict mitigation tools like electric fences and predator-proof livestock enclosures:

> "What is coexistence? Simply put it's helping people share the landscape with wildlife using innovative tools to reduce the conflicts that people have with wildlife in their natural habitats" (promotional video: Defenders of Wildlife, 2019).

The discourse and practice of 'coexistence as conflict mitigation' is framed as being a small-scale, place-based issue in the context of a specific region or PA. The emphasis is on solving HWC in these spaces quickly, rather than investigating and addressing political-economic processes and broader social issues. The more transformative parts of the coexistence framing become lost, as the idea is translated into standardised packages of conservation thinking and practice. Moreover, it appears that coexistence is being used to legitimise long-standing approaches to conservation that separate people and wildlife (Jeanrenaud 2002), which can lead to widespread injustices (West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006).

Returning to the roots of coexistence

In the previous two sections, we have unpacked some of the dominant ways that coexistence is, as an emerging buzzword, being used in wildlife management discourse and practice. Coexistence is largely conceptualised at the global scale within

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Western institutions and translated into standardised packages of tools. This contradicts the broader understanding of coexistence as something that has been historically practised by indigenous and local communities across the world (Mwamidi, Nunow, and Mwasi 2012). Some activists and academics are therefore challenging the Western conceptualisation of coexistence, instead arguing for a framing that is grounded in indigenous and local community worldviews, values and practices:

> "[Coexistence] needs to recognise that it is not humans and nature, but human beings as part of nature…the whole notion of interdependence and this is where other worldviews, whether it's Ubuntu from Southern Africa or Buen Vivir or Sumaq Kawsay from Latin America or Kyosei in Japan, become important" (interview, academic—social science and activist, India).

Academics working closely with indigenous and local communities, grounded in disciplines like anthropology, political ecology and environmental justice, show how indigenous and local communities do not see themselves as being in competition with wildlife but rather see coexistence as deeply rooted in their culture and identity (Kolipaka 2018). Human societies are perceived as being involved in evolving social relationships with the natural world. For example, in his study of human-snow leopard interactions in Pakistan, Hussain (2019) shows how the complex and reciprocal relationship between livestock keepers and snow leopards maintains rather than threatens the animal's population. This contradicts some of the current practices outlined in the previous two sections, where coexistence is still often envisioned as the resolution of conflicts that need to be managed through outsider intervention. Academics and practitioners taking this alternative approach to coexistence thus challenge the conflict to coexistence continuum, with conflict instead considered part of coexistence:

> "Coexistence can happen both through conflict and cooperation, or collaboration, they are both part of coexistence" (interview, academic—political ecology, Netherlands).

Another important element of this framing is the desire to re-politicise wildlife management, countering the depoliticising effects of the tools and incentives that are so far manifesting as coexistence practice. HWI and HWC are framed as products of historical and contemporary political-economic processes and societal change, including colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, that have changed relationships between people and wildlife (de Silva and Srinivasan 2019; Hussain 2019). This political framing is central to the convivial conservation proposition, which calls to address "the structural, violent and uneven socio-ecological pressures" that underlie conservation conflicts (Büscher and Fletcher 2019: 284). The idea of 'meaningful coexistence' put forward by convivial conservation proponents aims to conceptualise coexistence as much bigger than just local HWI, encouraging tourists to consider sustainable and socially just ways of interacting with biodiverse landscapes (Fletcher et al. 2020).

Another common thread among academics and activists advocating this approach is environmental justice. This incorporates a strong critique of Western science-dominated knowledge production around HWI and management that conceptually separates people and nature (TallBear 2011). Instead, coexistence reflects the fact that people "feel like [they] are a part of nature and not so much disconnected from it" (interview, academic—social science, Uganda). Rights-based conservation practices that are focused on land-ownership, community-led decision making, participatory research and the appreciation of traditional coexistence practices also reflect this framing.

However, although we have identified these conceptual threads within our data, they are not always framed as 'coexistence' explicitly. Similarly, the word coexistence is not being taken up and used as a buzzword to the extent it is in the more dominant approaches (see sections 4.2 and 4.3). This could be because coexistence for some indigenous and local communities is a "self-evident" notion (interview, academic—anthropology and activist, Switzerland) and not something that needs to be managed by outsiders. In this sense, coexistence can be seen to be signifying a shift in Western thinking, rather than reflecting genuine engagement with lived experiences of HWI (Hussain 2019). As such, practitioners and organisations that take the general approach outlined in this section, including Survival International (https://www.survivalinternational.org/) and the Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA) Consortium (https://.iccaconsortium.org/), seem cautious about using the term coexistence.

Nevertheless, it seems that the idea of coexistence is being reclaimed by organisations like Kalpavriksh (https://kalpavriksh.org/), and other critical social scientists and activists focusing on HWI. They frame coexistence as an alternative to exclusionary approaches to conservation, highlighting how traditional local livelihoods and human settlements are not necessarily detrimental to conservation. They propose that indigenous and local communities have a key role in the safeguarding of wildlife and habitats and that conservation could benefit by not only including people, but also protecting and incorporating traditional practices of coexistence. They argue that an understanding of local knowledge, culture and perspectives that have allowed coexistence to occur is to be prioritised over interventions that risk disturbing local equilibriums (webinar: Rai, 2021).

Coexistence, it seems, is being reclaimed by activists, as well as by some academics and practitioners, in a way that aligns with its progressive roots. We thus identify coexistence as a floating signifier: one that takes on different, competing meanings across epistemic communities (Farkas and Schou 2018). This, as we will elaborate on more in section five, presents an opportunity for change, as the term (unlike 'sustainability' and other buzzwords) is yet to be emptied of meaning or stabilised (Rear and Jones 2013b). Interviewees from different epistemic communities noted the changing nature of coexistence and many expressed an openness to its evolution. In some cases, the use of coexistence

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encouraged critical reflection on the practice of "importing recipes" (interview, practitioner—conservation biologist, Costa Rica). However, some academics and activists remain cautious and argue that interventions taking an alternative approach to coexistence can still become translated into standardised packages. For example, Goldman, de Pinho, and Perry (2013) argue that innovative initiatives, such as Lion Guardians in Kenya (http://lionguardians.org/), are still driven by an assumed need for external intervention and a reliance on standardised packages of conflict mitigation tools.

COEXISTENCE, TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AND CONVIVIAL CONSERVATION

Through our analysis of coexistence in discourse and practice in section four, we have conceptualised the term as a buzzword and boundary object. Coexistence reflects current thinking in HWI and signifies a shared normative goal, while being ambiguous enough to be easily adopted by a wide range of epistemic communities across academia and conservation practice (Goldman 2009; Cairns and Krzywoszynska 2016; Star and Griesemer 1989). The normative goal of coexistence reflects a general shift in thinking in HWI and reflects the progressive and radical character of other buzzwords (Chandhoke 2007; Mkandawire 2007). Yet the idea of coexistence is ever-changing, translated through the worldviews, values and perspectives of different epistemic communities (Latour 1984). Several different framings of coexistence have thus emerged and our analysis of three of these framings shows that coexistence is far from a fixed—or hegemonic—term. It can instead be conceptualised as a floating signifier (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Our analysis has several implications for transformative change in HWI management, and biodiversity conservation more broadly. We now consider these implications before reflecting on what this means for convivial conservation.

The opportunities and risks of 'coexistence'

We posit that the evolving nature of coexistence provides potential opportunities for HWI theory, policy and practice. Although some suggest that floating signifiers have less credibility than empty or hegemonic signifiers (MacKillop 2018), we argue that the non-fixed status of coexistence provides an opportunity for transformative change (Rear and Jones 2013b; Brown 2016). Coexistence still signifies an intention and desire for transformative change in the way in which HWI are managed. The term reflects assumptions that people and wildlife can share landscapes (Boonman-Berson, Turnhout, and Carolan 2016), that broader systems, processes and structures influence HWI (Pooley et al. 2017), and that the knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities must be prioritised (Mwamidi, Nunow, and Mwasi 2012). The fact that some activist organisations, NGOs and academics (including those theorising convivial conservation) are trying to maintain the transformative roots of coexistence provides an opportunity. As a boundary object, coexistence is also a meaningful concept for diverse epistemic communities, from ecologists to anthropologists, and between academia and practice. As such, it can provide a useful tool for the increased interdisciplinary engagement needed to tackle the challenges of biodiversity loss (Pooley et al. 2017).

However, as coexistence becomes used more widely, it is losing its transformative potential and largely manifests in practice as 'standardised packages' of long-standing tools, technologies and approaches (Fujimura 2010; Goldman 2009). Coexistence, therefore, risks becoming a positive-sounding label for business-as-usual HWI management, following the pattern of other buzzwords by losing its transformative edge as it is translated and stabilised through existing narratives, structures and processes (Blythe et al. 2018; Leal 2007; Mkandawire 2007). Boundary objects favour conceptual stabilisation because that enables diverse approaches to be considered as part of a unified approach to conservation (Wyborn 2015), and in the case of coexistence, this stabilisation is likely to favour one of the dominant framings identified in our analysis. Transformative elements of coexistence, including indigenous and local knowledge and practices, broader political-economic factors, and environmental justice, run the risk of being lost as the term becomes depoliticised or 'rendered technical' (Li 2007). There is also the risk that an uncritical acceptance of the term coexistence, and the signified shift away from wilderness ideology, means that hybrid management approaches "come without awareness of what was wrong with the wilderness approach in the first place" (Hussain 2019: 154).

Another limiting factor is the way in which coexistence knowledge is being generated and used. Although coexistence unites epistemic communities, wildlife and people are still largely studied separately by different disciplines and from opposing paradigms (Pooley et al. 2017). As such, the human-nature dichotomy that is at odds with the concept of coexistence remains. Western science dominates coexistence thinking, developing 'knowledge products' that can be used in intervention design (Mosse 2004). Received wisdom, such as a perceived need to educate and change the behaviour of local communities remains largely unquestioned (Leach and Mearns 1998). Transformative approaches to coexistence that reflect the ways indigenous and local communities know and value nature are sidelined, reducing the resonance of the term among these communities (Weeratunge et al. 2000). The concept of coexistence thus risks further legitimising the neo-colonial dynamics of some wildlife management, resulting in unjust modes of intervention (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2006; Büscher and Mutimukuru 2007).

Coexistence and convivial conservation

The convivial conservation vision is built on the premise that transformative change in biodiversity conservation is imperative and that the roots of this radical change can only be realised

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via processes of politicisation and pluralisation (Massarella et al. 2021). The focus on politicisation and pluralisation is highlighted as the basis for just transformations to sustainability more broadly (Martin et al. 2020; Blythe et al. 2018). Our analysis of coexistence supports and builds on this focus by identifying politicisation and pluralisation as key tools in the discursive battle to facilitate the term's transformative potential in the context of HWI management. Through our analysis, we identify two potential roles for convivial conservation. First, and in relation to pluralisation, convivial conservation could focus on supporting the work already being done by progressive organisations like Kalpavriksh and the ICCA Consortium, as well as the activists and scholar-activists who are foregrounding the experiences, knowledge and voices of indigenous and local communities. Convivial conservation originated from academics in the Global North and so care must be taken for it to not become another top-down initiative that sidelines voices from the Global South (Kothari 2021). The focus instead could be on using both research and the channels of influence of Global North academics to amplify the many different approaches being taken to coexistence by indigenous and local communities.

The second potential role relates to politicisation and this, we argue, is where convivial conservation can make the biggest impact on coexistence discourse and practice. In HWI (and broader biodiversity) research there is a notable omission of insights into the impact of political economy (Fletcher and Toncheva 2021). This is despite academics, activists and progressive organisations highlighting the continued influence of factors such as colonialism and neoliberal capitalism on HWI (https://www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org/). As our analysis shows, coexistence is largely depoliticised during the process of translation, manifesting as standardised packages of tools and incentives that fail to address deeper social, political and economic drivers of HWC. Alongside academics like de Silva and Srinivasan (2019), Hussain (2019) and Margulies and Karanth (2018), proponents of convivial conservation can investigate the links between HWI and political economy, in order to support a transformative shift in focus away from the attitudes and behaviour of local communities and the needs and behaviour of wildlife. The global research project associated with convivial conservation (https://conviva-research.com/) has already started to pursue this goal (Massarella et al. 2021).

We also suggest further development of the concept of 'meaningful coexistence' put forward by Fletcher et al. (2020). This signifies a need to shift the attention of conservation onto the impact that broader political-economic processes (such as multi-national business, global consumption habits and international tourism) have on HWI. Meaningful coexistence could also incorporate the shift from protected to 'promoted' areas advocated by convivial conservation, which re-frames biodiversity-rich areas as "places where people are considered welcome visitors, dwellers or travellers rather than temporary alien invaders upon a nonhuman landscape" (Büscher and Fletcher 2020: 164). Developing this idea of meaningful coexistence could provide an important tool in the pursuit of transformative change in HWI, so that coexistence does not become another one of conservation's empty signifiers.

Author contribution statement

Both authors contributed equally to this paper.

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None.

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Research ethics approval

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