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Research Article

Protecting Wilderness or Cultural and Natural Heritage? Insights from Northern Patagonia, Chile

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Abstract

Protecting 30% of the planet's terrestrial and marine ecosystems by 2030 (30x30) is the most recent call for global conservation action. Toward this end, the creation of protected areas is a central strategy. The various parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have committed to this global goal, including Chile. Against this backdrop, this article explores current narratives and practices around five protected areas in northern Patagonia, Chile. We argue that environmental discourses are key to understanding these narratives and practices. Environmental discourses influence the values central to the creation and development of protected areas, as well as the prevailing management approaches for these areas. Our findings show that two discourses are of particular importance: the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse and the 'cultural and natural heritage' discourse. Based on our findings, we also discuss three emerging topics: the rewilding and rebranding of Patagonia, optimism around nature-based tourism, and implementation of global conservation goals within the national context. We reflect on the implications of our findings for further developments in Patagonia and for the global conservation debate. We contend that the future of protected-area management in northern Patagonia will depend on how community-based management initiatives are fostered and argue that aligning with such inclusive conservation approaches will be a critical requirement for the implementation of the 30x30 goal moving forward.

Keywords: Environmental discourses, Protected areas, 30x30 target, Rewilding, Livelihoods, Aysén.

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INTRODUCTION

Conservationists worldwide are asking for '30x30'—a global conservation target protecting 30% of the planet's terrestrial and marine ecosystems by 2030 (Campaign for Nature 2021). In December 2022, this goal was adopted by the COP15 summit in Montréal, Canada (CBD 2022). The summit also underlined the key role of indigenous communities in managing ecosystems. The 30x30 goal moves significantly beyond the CBD Aichi biodiversity Target 11 set in 2011, which aimed at protecting "at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water, and 10% of coastal and marine areas" by 2020 (Woodley et al. 2019: 20), and wherein effective and equitable management should have been developed (Woodley et al. 2019). In conservation practice, these two principles entail actual and potential tensions.

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Protected areas have been for a long time a flagship expression of the mainstream conservation discourse worldwide (West et al. 2006; Büscher and Fletcher 2019). Creating new protected areas or expanding existing ones represents a central strategy within the global conservation ambition. Recently, proponents of the 30x30 target have claimed that the financial and non-monetary benefits of increasing the coverage of protected areas toward the 30% target would outweigh the

costs by a factor of at least 5:1 (Campaign for Nature 2020; Waldron et al. 2020). However, a series of concerns has emerged in relation to the effects of the expansion of protected areas on indigenous people and local communities worldwide (Agrawal et al. 2021). Moreover, critics have associated the protected-areas approach with land grabbing, conservation by dispossession, and fortress conservation, claiming that it has damaged the efforts of biodiversity conservation (e.g. Holmes 2015; Louder and Bosak 2019).

According to Adams (2020), the spatial expression of conservation ambitions is still growing, and conservation ideals continue to be underpinned by imaginaries of pristine and wild nature, along with recent ideas of rewilding, private conservation, and militarisation of protected areas. In this regard, conservation imaginaries keep on putting pressure on cultural landscapes with multiple-use purposes, resulting in new ideas of land management and in new ways in which local nature is perceived.

For instance, the initiative called the "last of the wild" is a proactive approach to protect wilderness areas that have very low human influence (Promis et al. 2019). By means of global ideas of 'what's left to protect', formerly peripheral remote places have been transformed into global conservation spots (Inostroza et al. 2016), thereby attracting increasing global demand for nature-based tourism experiences. Nature conservation developments in Patagonia, Chile, have also been subject to this criticism (Holmes 2014; Inostroza et al. 2016).

Even when it represents just a small surface within 'what's left to protect' on a global scale (Watson et al. 2018), Chilean Patagonia is a case in point in this intensified protection debate. Historically, Chilean Patagonia has faced a series of socio-spatial transformations driven by ideas on development and environment. From a development point of view, Chilean Patagonia, and specifically northern Patagonia, transitioned from extensive livestock ranching in the early twentieth century to small-scale agriculture, nature-based tourism, and industrial salmon aquaculture (Bachmann-Vargas 2021). From an environmental perspective, northern Patagonia holds more than 45,000 km^2 under protection, equivalent to approximately 30% of the total nationally protected surface in Chile (ODEPA 2019). At the same time, it has been claimed that as part of these developments, cultural and natural heritage associated with the rugged terrains and the livestock farming traditions, is being replaced with renovated meanings of pristine and wild nature (Aliste et al. 2018). These features make northern Patagonia a prime location for research on nature conservation and its interplay with local and global environmental discourses.

Taking northern Patagonia as its focal region, this article sets out to explore how conservation and development debates are playing out at the local level (e.g. Blair et al. 2019; Núñez et al. 2020; Louder and Bosak 2022). In doing so, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of environmental discourses as "social dimensions of conservation and management" in Patagonia, a research gap recently pointed out by Martínez-Harms et al. (2022: 11). At the same time, this research aims to enrich the debate of nature conservation in northern Patagonia by encompassing different categories of nature protection and their nuances related to prevailing environmental discourses, symbolic attachments, and conservation practices. Such aspects, we will argue, are also relevant for the future implementation of the 30x30 initiative. Overall, this article contributes to the broader literature on environmental discourses and conservation practices by showing how local environmental discourses are not only descriptive and context-based, but also performative (Turnhout 2018), with non-state actors having a prominent role.

We acknowledge the uneven social-ecological research that has been conducted so far addressing different categories of protected areas in northern Patagonia. Building on previous research by the first author (Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen 2020), we use local environmental discourses of northern Patagonia as a conceptual framework, and we inquire into the interplay between environmental discourses and nature conservation practices. We analyse how meanings and values embedded in local environmental discourses are reflected in the narratives and management practices of five Patagonian protected areas. Following this analysis, we discuss emerging topics that we expect to be influential in actual and future conservation debates. The paper closes with conclusions.

Environmental Discourses as Social Dimensions of Conservation and Management

A discourse can be understood as a relatively coherent set of ideas in which particular meanings are highlighted. Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 175) define discourses 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". As this definition highlights, ideas not only exist as symbolic representations, but are closely related to concrete acts or practices, in continuous interaction with the social and material reality in which the discourses are embedded. As Van der Hoff et al. (2015) show for REDD+, discourses can have material implications through the implementation of policies, and therein lies the relevance of studying discourses and their societal and policy implications (Gustafsson 2013).

Amongst discourses relevant to conservation policy and management, environmental discourses are of particular importance, as they give meaning to a broad range of ideas related to the environment such as nature conservation, biodiversity, wilderness, local livelihoods, sustainability, and climate change (e.g. Van Koppen 2000; Dryzek 2013; Gustafsson 2013; Büscher and Fletcher 2019). Such ideas are of influence as "linguistic devices articulating arguments about the relationship between humans and their environment" (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006: 458). Thus, environmental discourses can be considered as crucial elements informing social dimensions of conservation and management.

Turning to northern Patagonia, recent research has identified "Patagonian wilderness" and "cultural and natural heritage" as predominant environmental discourses in this region

(Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen 2020). Their local characteristics reflect, to a significant extent, the contemporary global debates on nature conservation that we referred to above. One important aspect of these debates is the tension between global, neoliberal conservation strategies and local cultural views and practices (e.g. Igoe and Brockington 2007; Jones 2012; Österlin et al. 2020; Borrie et al. 2022). While the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse conceptualises local nature as the last wild place in the world that must be protected, the 'cultural and natural heritage' discourse emphasises the co-existence of culture and nature, and the need for value creation based on the local heritage.

The 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse owes its reproduction in great extent to the highly influential work of Tompkins Conservation (Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen 2020). Tompkins Conservation, recently renamed as Fundación Rewilding Chile, is a non-profit organisation, co-founded by the American environmental philanthropists Douglas Tompkins (1943–2015) and Kristine McDivitt Tompkins. Over the past thirty years, Tompkins Conservation has carried out extensive work on nature protection throughout southern Chile and Argentina, setting a precedent for private as well as public conservation by creating protected areas and implementing rewilding programs (Busscher et al. 2018; Hora 2018). In 2017, Tompkins Conservation signed a cooperation agreement with the Chilean government aiming to create new national parks in Patagonia, enlarge the surface of three existing parks, reclassify national reserves as national parks, and create the Route of Parks of Patagonia (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2017a). Launched in 2018, the Route of Parks is "a vision of economic development based on conservation and ecologically-minded tourism" (Tompkins Conservation 2021). Inspired by the 'last of the wild' (Promis et al. 2019), the route envisions the Patagonian territory as a network of 17 national parks encompassing 60 local communities, wherein "tourism should be developed as a consequence of nature conservation" (representative of the Route of Parks, Int_3).

Contrastingly, the 'cultural and natural heritage' discourse aims to represent the local efforts toward an integrated valuation of cultural as well as natural aspects of northern Patagonia. This discourse emphasises that northern Patagonia is not only about natural attractions, it is also about people, culture, and traditions (Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen 2020). Aysén's cultural heritage is acknowledged for the courage and the strength that the colonists—the *pioneros*—had during the (modern) colonisation period, surviving and cultivating a very hostile natural environment. The *pioneros*' heritage is still shaping mostly rural life, where the handling of nature reaffirms the Patagonian identity (Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen 2020). It is worth noting here that the handling of nature that took place in the past signified an intense landscape transformation, which is visible even today. For example, in the early twentieth century, forests were seen as an obstacle (Yarrow and Torres 2009) and large extensions of native forest were set on fire to prepare the land for ranching. Currently, fire is no longer used to clear the land, and small-scale agriculture persists amid the rural transition driven by nature-based tourism (Blair et al. 2019). Hence, cultural manifestations, such as the traditional lamb barbecues and the horse-taming shows, are attracting tourists nowadays. Meanwhile, folk music finds inspiration in family traditions such as cattle branding, and also has served as an expression of resistance amidst environmental conflicts related to hydropower projects (Yañez and Valenzuela 2014).

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Selection of Protected Areas in Northern Patagonia

Northern Patagonia falls within the administrative region of Aysén, which is the third largest and least populated of Chile's 16 administrative regions. With a population of 103,158 residents in 2017 and a population density of nearly 0.9 inhabitants per km^2 (INE 2017), Aysén holds around 52 areas under some sort of protection (see Table, supplementary material), representing more than 50% of the regional surface.

Protected areas are primarily administrated by the National Forest Corporation (CONAF), under the National System of Protected Areas (SNASPE). However, other agencies such as the Regional Secretariat of Environment, National Monuments Council, and Ministry of National Assets also have authority over some protected areas.

Out of the total number of protected areas located in northern Patagonia, five areas were selected to analyse their relationship with the local environmental discourses. The selected areas were composed of three national parks (NP), one multiple-use marine protected area (Spanish acronym: AMCP-MU: Area Marina Costera Protegida de Múltiples Usos), and one nature sanctuary (NS). These areas are Cerro Castillo NP, Patagonia NP, Laguna San Rafael NP, Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU, and Capilla de Mármol NS (see Figure, supplementary material). These areas were selected based on three main criteria. First, the range of conservation objectives—covering the strict protection of species, scenic geological formations, and cultural landscapes—should be broadly representative for protected areas in the region. Second, the local opportunities provided by the areas should vary from mainly eco-tourism to multiple-use, as is characteristic for the region. Third, feasible options should exist for access to secondary information and the possibility to contact local informants. While the five areas selected as cases represent a small sample, we believe this selection offers a fairly representative overview of protected areas in relation to the current environmental discourses in northern Patagonia.

Cerro Castillo National Park

Created in 1970 as a national reserve, Cerro Castillo was reclassified in 2017 as a national park. The park is projected to become one of the main protected areas in the Aysén region, based on nature-based tourism development (Blair et al. 2019). The park is surrounded by six villages, Villa Cerro Castillo

being the closest one. The ecological and landscape features of the park are dominated by the presence of *huemules* (South Andean deer) and by castle-shaped mountain peaks, which have made the Cerro Castillo NP a mandatory destination for trekking activities. Cerro Castillo NP is part of the Route of Parks of Patagonia (Promis et al. 2019).

Patagonia National Park

In April 2019, Tompkins Conservation donated the Patagonia Park to the state of Chile in order to create the Patagonia National Park (CONAF 2019), in combination with two former national reserves, Lago Jeinimeni and Lago Cochrane. The park protects ecosystems such as Patagonian steppe, deciduous forest, wetlands, and high mountain peaks, with important fauna components such as *huemules*, *guanacos*, and *pumas*. To date, Patagonia NP is administrated by CONAF, and it is also part of the Route of Parks of Patagonia.

Laguna San Rafael National Park

Laguna San Rafael NP was created in 1959 as part of the SNASPE, and in 1979, it was designated as a Biosphere Reserve (Moreira-Muñoz et al. 2014; CONAF-EULA 2018). The park covers a vast extension of terrestrial and marine areas, and protects the entire extension of the northern icefields, one of the most important continental freshwater reservoirs in the world (Moreira-Muñoz et al. 2014). Tourist visitation is increasing, mainly attracted by glacier hiking tours and by the navigation to the San Rafael lagoon. With the opening of the Exploradores valley road, Puerto Río Tranquilo village has become one of the closest gateway communities. The Laguna San Rafael NP is also part of the Route of Parks of Patagonia (Promis et al. 2019).

Capilla de Mármol Nature Sanctuary

Created in the 1990s, the Capilla de Mármol NS (also known as The Marble Caves) was considered as a national tourist attraction due its landscape aesthetics (Ministerio de Educación 1994). Fifty hectares were decreed as Sanctuary, while the boundaries remained unclear. The Marble Caves are featured as a "must see" of the Aysén region (Revista Enfoque 2018). The marble formation located in the General Carrera lake (Chelenko lake) is visited everyday by local boat tour operators based in Puerto Río Tranquilo village. Since its designation as protected area, tourist demand has steadily increased (Bachmann-Vargas et al. 2022).

Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU (Multiple-Use Marine Protected Area)

With the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF Chile), Melimoyu Foundation, and Regional Secretariat of the Environment (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2015a), the local community of Raul Marin Balmaceda village engaged in a co-management strategy that saw its first results in 2014 with the designation of the protected area, and later on in 2019 with the approval of the management plan (Seremi del Medio Ambiente región de Aysén 2019). Based on a co-management approach, the management plan aims to tackle the threats to conservation objectives through four strategies: a) effective monitoring of illegal fishing; b) sustainable artisanal fisheries; c) responsible aquaculture, and d) sustainable tourism (Seremi del Medio Ambiente región de Aysén 2019).

Research Methods

Data collection

The data collected for this article are primarily based on textual sources in the form of technical reports, scientific articles, and online sources (Table 1). Textual sources were supplemented with six semi-structured interviews related to the selected protected areas, allowing the gathering of first-hand information about the current developments on the ground. One interview was conducted face-to-face, while the other five were online. Interviews also included representatives of two ongoing programmes related to protected areas in northern Patagonia namely, the Route of Parks of Patagonia and Austral Patagonia. In general terms, interviews enquired into the trajectory and meanings associated with the protected areas the respondents are related to, about their visions of culture and nature in northern Patagonia, and their relationship with the local communities. Furthermore, this article draws upon to some extent on more than ten years of research experience—both ecological and sociological—conducted by the first author in northern Patagonia, including BSc., MSc., and PhD theses along with consultancy projects and published scientific articles.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and August 2020. Interviewees were selected according to their role in relation to protected-area management, private conservation, local use, and scientific research. Respondents were contacted by e-mail and gave their consent to audio-record the interviews, allowing the use of quotes and mention of their role in relation to the protected area or programme they are related to, though their opinions do not necessarily represent the organisation's stance. Interview transcripts were indexed anonymously, by adding an identification code and a consecutive number (e.g. Int_1). Given the key role of the respondents within the organisation they represent, along with their autonomy to either accept or reject to be interviewed, no formal ethical approval was deemed necessary for this research. The data collected are confidential.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed a deductive-inductive strategy, whereby the textual material along with interview transcripts were analysed with the aid of the Atlas.ti software. First, environmental local discourses were used as macro categories of analysis. Second, through an iterative reading-interpreting process, textual material was codified based on an open coding strategy (Kumar 2014: 318), whereby two elements emerged as key links between protected areas and environmental discourses, namely, currents narratives about the creation and

Table 1
Data sources

Selected protected areas	**Textual material**	**Interviewees**
Cerro Castillo NP	CONAF 2007; CONAF-CIEP 2017a; Blair et al. 2019; Villarroel 2019; García and Mulrennan 2020; Tompkins Conservation 2020	Park representative
Patagonia NP	Bantle 2010; Louder and Bosak 2019, 2022; National Geographic 2020; Tompkins 2020; Vega 2020; CONAF 2021	-
Laguna San Rafael NP	Moreira-Muñoz et al. 2014; CONAF-CIEP 2017b	Representative of the tour operators association
Capilla de Mármol NS	Ministerio de Educación 1994; Bachmann-Vargas et al. 2022	Tour operator
Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU	Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2017b; Araos 2018	Representative of the Pitipalena-Añihué Foundation
Complementary sources	**Textual material**	**Interviewees**
Route of Parks of Patagonia (Tompkins Conservation)	Promis et al. 2019; Zorondo-Rodríguez et al. 2019	Representative of the programme
Austral Patagonia Programme (Universidad Austral de Chile)	Sepúlveda et al. 2019	Representative of the programme

development of protected areas and management approaches. Codes such as 'motivation', 'objectives', 'vision' informed the narrative dimension, whilst codes such as 'management plan', 'local usage', 'conservation', and 'local management' informed the management approaches dimension. The reliability of the findings was enhanced by triangulation between interviews, textual material (Azungah 2018), and observations (field notes) made by the first author in previous research (e.g. Bachmann-Vargas et al. 2022).

Limitations

We are aware that our data are limited. Up to now, scant social-ecological research related to the selected protected areas has been conducted in northern Patagonia, with exception of Patagonia NP and Cerro Castillo NP. Since the interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, we could only (but for one exception) communicate with respondents that were available online, rendering a small sample. On the positive side, online communication allowed to conduct research within a range of 1,000 km, which otherwise would have been impossible for time and budget reasons. Findings related to Patagonia NP relied solely on secondary sources, as these are sufficiently available, by reproducing quotes of its representatives already published elsewhere.

RESULTS

Findings are structured as follows. First, we focus on the current narratives about the creation and development of protected areas. Second, we examine the management approaches.

Current Narratives Guiding the Creation and Development of Protected Areas

In the case of Cerro Castillo, an important development was its designation as national park. Prior to this designation, it was a rather conventional, state-led nature reserve. The shift to national park was partly influenced by the work of Tompkins Conservation, who shaped a private conservation trend with ideas of the wilderness, along with initiatives to return formerly private-owned land to the Chilean state (García and Mulrennan 2020). The park's representative indicates: "The upgrading from national reserve to national park was done to incorporate Cerro Castillo to the Route of Parks of Patagonia, which accelerated the process, but we had been discussing this for a while, given the natural conditions of the park" (Int_5). Talking about the current developments, the park's representative explains: "It has been a process since we took over the park. The park had very little development and very little community outreach...Currently, this has changed, and we have incorporated within the visitor use plan the concessions, and new community outreach initiatives" (Int_5).

In the case of Patagonia NP, ideas of saving the wilderness at the end of the world and the collaboration between Tompkins Conservation and the Chilean government paved the way to create the national park. However, the creation of the Patagonia NP entailed a contested process that involved the mutation of a number of meanings ascribed to the land (Bantle 2010; Louder and Bosak 2019). The "production of Patagonia NP as a spectacle of pristine nature" (Louder and Bosak 2022: 2) rebranded one of the largest ranching areas in Chile (Estancia Valle Chacabuco), triggering local discontent and revealing the two sides of 'Patagonian pride' (Bantle 2010). On the one hand, saving the wild at the end of the world is a source of pride for environmental organisations. On the other, local residents expressed their concerns about how their pride in local traditions related to lamb production and consumption was being dismissed by new ideas about land management and nature conservation, imposed by foreigners (Louder and Bosak 2019).

On the contrary, Laguna San Rafael NP has slowly gained the attention of the neighbouring communities, mainly through the work of local small-scale tour operators (field notes). However, the representative of the tour operators' association points out: "There is not so much interest by the community in the

park. They have lived their entire life surrounded by glaciers, so there is no fun on going hiking on the ice" (Int_2). The interviewee indicates that local life experiences and symbolic attachments are associated with the Exploradores valley, an adjacent geomorphologic unit to the park, but not with the Laguna San Rafael NP as a protected area, adding: "Maybe I am wrong, but I do not think local people have a sentimental attachment to the park" (Int_2).

In contrast, current narratives about the Capilla de Mármol NS highlight the importance of this natural attraction within the local identity, as well as part of the local economy (field notes). One of the interviewees emphasises: "The Marble Caves are unique, and they are in Patagonia. On the contrary, glaciers are here and in many other parts of the worlds. In fact, many Europeans come with previous experience on ice climbing, but they do not have the Marble Caves" (Int_6). Nevertheless, the interviewee indicates, "Because of the low cost to visit the Marble Caves, tour operators from Coyhaique are offering the tour, which has massified the number of tourists, and the Capilla de Mármol is being overexploited" (Int_6).

Meanwhile along the coast, narratives around the industrialisation of the Patagonian fjords and the southward expansion of salmon farming and illegal fishing (Araos 2018) motivated the local community of Raul Marin Balmaceda (ca. 200 inhabitants) to pursue the creation of the Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU, wherein artisanal fishermen played a key role in its designation (field notes). The AMCP-MU has been highlighted as a reference model in Chile (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2017b). Commitment of the local community was an important factor, as explained by the representative: "There always must be someone from the community to be willing to work for free, for this to happen. If there is no one from the community who is empowered, this does not work out" (Int_1). According to the interviewee, such community engagement is not common: "This management model of public-private partnership has not happened anywhere else in Chile. The community here is empowered" (Int_1).

Management Approaches

Currently, the public use of Cerro Castillo NP is mainly managed through concessions. Concessions are a tourism management instrument within state-run protected areas, which aim to "contribute to improving the quantity and quality of tourism services within the SNASPE, through promoting and attracting investment (infrastructure, equipment and services) and management capacities (knowledge, entrepreneurship and know-how) from third parties" (CONAF 2007: 7). In this respect, the representative of Cerro Castillo NP points out:

> "Today, we are a National Park...we had to implement tourism concessions, which is a form of productive relation with the neighbouring communities, because all our concessions are local. Though we have had bigger (tourism) proposals, it is not our vision to become a business centre either nationally or internationally; what we want is to foster the local communities, so we are working hard on that" (Int_5).

Furthermore, incipient co-management efforts are taking place around Cerro Castillo NP. Drawing upon the visitor-use plan (CONAF-CIEP 2017a), the park administration is aiming "to generate a governance mechanism with the local communities" (Int_5). Thus, in 2019, the local tourism council of Villa Cerro Castillo was created, congregating 14 local organisations (Villarroel 2019). With the support of the national development agency (CORFO) and the Universidad Austral, the local tourism council aims to co-administrate the visitor use plan of the park (Int_5), seeking to generate a working relationship between the community and the park along with tourism opportunities around Cerro Castillo NP and foster a sense of attachment.

Looking at the Patagonia NP prior to the land donation, Tompkins Conservation had implemented a rewilding strategy in the terrains of the park. Rewilding "promotes the idea that we will bring back species where they have gone missing" (Tompkins 2022: para. 1). Since 2005, efforts have been made to monitor and restore iconic Patagonian species such as *huemul*, *puma*, and *Darwin's rhea*. Kristine Tompkins indicates: "our rewilding projects in Chile are gaining ground on low numbers of several key species in the Patagonia region. The huemul deer that is truly nearly extinct, the lesser rheas and building the puma and fox populations back up" (Tompkins 2020: para. 13). One of the latest achievements, by Tompkins Conservation along with CONAF, has been the release of 14 Darwin's rhea specimens in May 2020 (National Geographic 2020), resulting in a hatching season with six new chicks in November 2020 (Vega 2020). Moreover, since the designation as national park, tourist services located in the Chacabuco sector have been granted to a major tour operator, while tourist services in other areas of the park are under the administration of CONAF (CONAF 2021).

Additionally, in April 2020 Tompkins Conservation signed a cooperation agreement with CONAF, with the aim to create a biological corridor for *huemules* through the Cerro Castillo NP and the adjacent lands owned by the environmental organisation (Tompkins Conservation 2020).

Just like Cerro Castillo NP, the public use of Laguna San Rafael NP is being managed through tourism concessions (CONAF-CIEP 2017b). Tourist visits are concentrated in two sectors of the park: Exploradores glacier and San Rafael lagoon. In the case of the Exploradores glacier, tour operators explain how the increasing visitation has transformed the tourism offerings, emphasising that "it was profitable, but not sustainable" (Int_2). In 2018, through a public tender, CONAF granted permits to access the Exploradores glacier to nine local tour operators based in Puerto Río Tranquilo village, who in total can bring 90 tourists per day into the park (field notes), while two tour operators have been granted concessions in the lagoon sector (field notes). Nevertheless, tour operators claim that "CONAF does not have any power to forbid the access. At the end, anyone can access the park, without paying, while we keep paying the permit" (Int_2). For instance, tour operators

that approach the San Rafael lagoon from the sea and do not disembark at the park and do not pay entrance fee (field notes).

In the case of the Capilla de Marmol NS, local boat tour operators have been the main actors defining the fate of the protected area (field notes). Though some regulations have been imposed by the Navy concerning navigation and tourist safety, the boat tour operators have developed an informal but self-organised management strategy while reproducing the boat tour—a sort of adaptive, learning-by-doing approach (Bachmann-Vargas et al. 2022).

Meanwhile, in the Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU, the implementation of the multiple-use management strategy, including both industrial and artisanal usage, has been a great achievement (field notes). The representative indicates: "the topic of multiple-use is very relevant, because it has allowed us all who share the *maritorio* (maritime space) to sit at the table. Before, that would have not happened" (Int_1). Based on a public-private partnership between the local community and the environmental authority and supported by WWF, the co-management strategy is the essence of the Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU. In this respect, a WWF Chile representative indicates (quoted by Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2017b):

> "To start managing this area a Foundation was created, which truly belongs to the community; next, the Regional Secretariat of Environment joined the initiative to protect the area, and finally our work and the work of other NGOs. There is a virtuous relationship, where each party contributes with their experience. This is what allows a real protection".

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In this section, we further explore the differences and similarities between the cases presented and identify emerging tensions and trends. First, we analyse the meanings constructed around the areas that guided their inception and current development and explore how these meanings were affected by the local prevailing discourses. Then, we explore the interaction of these meanings with the management approaches and the local use associated to the protected areas. Table 2 summarises the analysis.

Table 2
Prevailing environmental discourses and key concepts associated with the selected protected areas

Protected Area	Prevailing environmental discourse	Associated key concepts
Cerro Castillo NP	Cultural and natural heritage, and Patagonian wilderness to a lesser extent	Community outreach
Patagonia NP	Patagonian wilderness	Rewilding
Laguna San Rafael NP	Cultural and natural heritage to a lesser extent	Tourist attraction
Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU	Cultural and natural heritage	Co-management approach
Capilla de Mármol NS	Cultural and natural heritage	Tourist attraction, local identity

Each of the protected areas in this study embodies different meanings. Since its inception, Patagonia NP has portrayed the strongest ideas about nature conservation. Starting with an effort to protect a piece of 'wilderness at the end of the world', it became a large-scale conservation effort with the globally resonating label—and brand—of 'Patagonia'. Currently, it is identified as 'rewilding', in line with this global trend in conservation. These meanings have certainly influenced the development of the protected area, which nowadays is under the national conservation regime. On the contrary, Cerro Castillo NP has been shaped by geopolitical and conservation ideals, and more recently, ideas about the rewilding of Patagonia have complemented the efforts of nature conservation. Meanwhile, Laguna San Rafael NP remains mostly as a tourist destination, holding an incipient local attachment driven by the local tour operators.

In contrast, Capilla de Mármol NS was designated based on national tourism interests but has been developed at the core of the local community. Small-scale tourism has become an integral component of the local livelihoods and local identity, thus shaping the touring practices around the nature sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the designation of Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU is an example of local organisation underpinned by meanings of cultural heritage, ecosystem functions, and local livelihoods. This case entails a community-based management initiative with a greater sense of attachment and local agency.

In terms of discourses, the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse clearly prevails in Patagonia NP; the 'cultural and natural heritage' discourse is dominant in Capilla de Mármol NS and in Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU; and we find influences of both in Cerro Castillo NP.

Within the selected protected areas, local environmental discourses and their associated meanings are being reproduced by four management approaches, namely, rewilding, co-management, management through concessions, and adaptive management. For example, implementing rewilding programs clearly materialises the ideas of the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse, while the co-management approach, management through concessions, and adaptive management can be seen as different mechanisms whereby conservation objectives relate to the local use of the protected areas. Moreover, the rewilding and the co-management approaches show how conservation imaginaries differ, with the former aiming for wilder landscapes and the latter for more inclusive environmental management with state and non-state actors.

Local livelihoods associated to protected areas are mostly based on the provisioning of tourism services, and to a lesser extent on artisanal fisheries (Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU). Either way, environmental discourses converge on protected areas, driven by different motivations, finding different types of synergies and with diverse consequences for local livelihoods. On the one hand, the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse aims to finance nature conservation through tourism development within national parks, through which local livelihoods should be developed as a consequence of the tourism activity. On the other hand, the ideas of 'cultural and natural heritage' aim to

generate local revenues through multiple-use protected areas, which imply different livelihood practices, and wherein tourism development is seen as one of the potential uses.

Our findings also show how protected-area developments affect and are affected by different actors. For instance, while powerful non-state actors such as Tompkins Conservation are promoting wilderness ideas, other environmental NGOs and universities are providing technical and scientific support to assist the definition of multiple-use protected areas.

In sum, this comparative analysis shows how the environmental discourses, 'Patagonian wilderness' and 'cultural and natural heritage', are interrelated with nature conservation practices. By means of designating protected areas, implementing management approaches, and developing livelihood practices, discourses are being reproduced and materialised. Overall, our findings on the interplay of local environmental discourses and management practices suggest that multiple-use protected areas are slowly gaining ground in northern Patagonia. The wilderness discourse, however, has gained traction too.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss three topics derived from our analysis that have a broader relevance for the conservation debate and provide avenues for further research in northern Patagonia, namely, the trend of rewilding and rebranding, the promises of (eco)tourism, and the tensions between global, national, and local aims.

The Rewilding and Rebranding of Patagonia

Rewilding is a relatively new, contested, and multidimensional conservation management approach, which has gained ground within the growing expansion of protected areas and environmental activism across the world (Jørgensen 2015; Prior and Ward 2016; Holmes et al. 2020). In the case of Patagonia, the land donation made by Tompkins Conservation to the Chilean state marked a milestone in environmental philanthropy nationally and globally (Quammen 2020). The donation added more than 4,000 km^2 to the SNASPE (CONAF 2019) and positioned the ideals of rewilding Patagonia as a proactive ecosystem management approach, specifically in the Patagonia NP, and to a lesser extent in the Cerro Castillo NP, thus reinforcing the 'Patagonian wilderness' discourse and its conservation imaginaries (cf. Adams 2020).

The rewilding of Patagonia is being underpinned by the wishes of 'bringing back to life' wilderness areas through the reintroduction of charismatic fauna species, removal of fences, and creation of biological corridors across national parks. The rhetoric of bringing back something that was apparently lost because of human action (cf. Jørgensen 2015) implicitly decouples the cultural and natural heritage associated with the northern Patagonian landscapes, which nowadays seems to mainly serve (eco)tourism initiatives such as the Route of Parks of Patagonia. Further research on the local impacts of rewilding Patagonia may provide key insights on how to advance toward integrated nature conservation initiatives, which can encompass local livelihoods, fauna and flora components, and ecosystem functions.

Meanwhile The Route of Parks of Patagonia is one of latest ideas that is rebranding Patagonia. Although its mission states: "to protect and support the natural and cultural heritage of Chilean Patagonia and its 17 national parks..." (Tompkins Conservation 2021), key concepts such as (socio) cultural sustainability, multiple-use protected areas, and community-based management are not part of their main narrative. Smaller protected areas such as the Pitipalena-Añihué AMCP-MU and the Capilla de Mármol NS hold a secondary position on their website. The Route of Parks Patagonia is claimed to present a territorial vision that aims to impose a new ecological imaginary (cf. Mendoza et al. 2016); yet, it is lacking local validation. Its persistence over time will depend on how local communities embrace such ideals (Borrie et al. 2022).

By looking at the example of the Protected Area Network (PAN Parks) in Europe, which aimed to balance local development, nature-based tourism, and nature conservation through certified parks (Puhakka et al. 2009), a number of lessons can be learned for further development of the Route of Parks of Patagonia. First, contested discourses emerge when analysing the network of parks and their effects on the local sociocultural sustainability. Second, value-laden connotations underpin the ideas of wilderness, local development, nature protection, and protected areas. Third, lay-person knowledge should be acknowledged within protected-area management. Fourth, the creation of a network of parks enhances collaboration, but requires the willingness of local participation, and socioeconomic trade-offs are likely to emerge from such tourism-driven initiatives.

Too Much Optimism in Tourism

Financing wilderness protection through (eco)tourism has been strongly criticised in the scientific literature (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Ward et al. 2018; Büscher and Fletcher 2019). The commodification of nature in pursuit of nature conservation tends to be an "elite privilege rather than a democratic possibility" (Büscher and Fletcher 2019: 287), thus turning over wild nature to the wealthy and leaving an unequal distribution of the local tourism benefits. In Chile, nature-based tourism associated with protected areas has extensively been endorsed on a national level as a means for local development, while leaving in a secondary place the integrated and effective management of areas under protection (Sepúlveda et al. 2019).

Conversely, this research has shown that multiple-use protected areas driven by local heritage ideas tend to have better local representation, thus assuring more equitable opportunities for nature conservation and human well-being (Raymond et al. 2022). Nonetheless, the win-win promises of

different types of protected areas remain to be further analysed in northern Patagonia (cf. Chaigneau and Brown 2016).

As Agrawal et al. (2021) have pointed out in their response letter to the Working Paper by Waldron et al. (2020) on the economic benefits of the 30x30 global target, relying too much on tourism to finance nature conservation means firstly overlooking the fluctuations of the global tourism industry, which has clearly been evidenced after the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, it also relies on aviation and its high consumption of fossil fuels. Lastly and more importantly, it does not necessarily foster local resilience (Agrawal et al. 2021).

Global Conservation Goals Within a National Context

Currently, the percentages established by the CBD Aichi Target 11 have already been reached in Chile (Petit et al. 2018). However, the effective management of terrestrial and marine protected areas is still a pending task (Petit et al. 2018). It is worth noticing that in Chile, protected areas remain primarily managed by public agencies in a fragmented sectoral way, underfunded, understaffed, and lacking unified designation and administration criteria (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2015b). Recently, after 13 years of parliamentary discussion, the Bill on Biodiversity and Protected Areas Service, which aims to unify the administration of protected areas amongst other goals, has been passed (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente 2023). According to the Bill, the nature protection categories that currently exist in Chile will be reclassified following the categories defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Nature sanctuaries are likely to be renamed (González 2023).

It remains to be seen how the national commitment toward the 30x30 global target (Piñera 2021) along with the national reclassification of protected areas will be effectively achieved, especially considering the national debate on social inequality and environmental justice around protected areas (e.g. Bontempi et al. 2023) and a societal context where the creation of protected areas is being "both celebrated and contested" (Brain et al. 2020: 11). For example, an ex-ante evaluation, which analysed the acceptance or rejection of new national parks in the Magallanes region (southern Patagonia), concluded that there are divergent opinions, especially related to indigenous communities' rights; while there was no consensus, people tended to accept less restrictive categories of protected areas (Zorondo-Rodríguez et al. 2019). Our insights from northern Patagonia align with such findings and reveal how local environmental discourses represent key dimensions for conservation and management that should be taken into account when implementing the national and/or the global conservation agenda. We would argue that these insights from Patagonia are also relevant to the global debate on biodiversity protection, pointing out that local discourses, in connection with inclusive management practices, are an important component of an effective and socially just global conservation strategy.

CONCLUSION

Protected areas in northern Patagonia are currently facing a series of transformations. The creation of new protected areas, along with the implementation of new management approaches and tourism-driven initiatives, are shaping the way protected areas are being conceptualised. Within this conceptualisation, local environmental discourses play a key role, unveiling underlying meanings attached to certain protected areas, as well as delineating what it is desired and what it is not.

Our research showed that whilst national parks embody the wilderness ideas, multiple-use protected areas resonate with the yearnings for culture and nature protection. In addition, national parks of Patagonia are being framed as part of national and global conservation imaginaries, whereas there is still a lack of local engagement and multiple-use protected areas are still incipient.

The narratives guiding the current developments of protected areas and management approaches illustrate how different ideals of nature conservation are realised, either by protecting the wilderness or the cultural and natural heritage of northern Patagonia.

Protected-area management is closely linked to nature-based tourism. However, its future will depend on how northern Patagonia faces the combined challenges of infrastructure development, effective protected-area management, and sustainable livelihood practices, other than tourism-related services only. At the same time, it will depend on how community-based management initiatives are fostered by bringing to the fore the sense of attachment and the cultural heritage that has historically transformed the Patagonian landscapes.

Supplementary material: rb.gy/e4wdpu

Author Contributions Statement

PBV: Design of the work, data collection, data analysis, drafting of manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, final approval of the version to be published.
KvK: Design of the work, drafting of manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, final approval of the version to be published.
ML: Design of the work, drafting of manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, final approval of the version to be published.

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Declaration of competing/conflicting interests

The authors declare no competing interests in the conduct of this research.

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Research Ethics Approval

The authors confirm that the research did not require formal approval regarding data collection and processing. Informants were contacted via e-mail, and interviews were conducted upon agreement. Respondents were informed about the aim of the research, giving their oral consent to audio-record the interviews and allowing the use of quotes. Their opinions do not necessarily represent the organisation's stance.

Data Availability

The data are not accessible due to privacy restrictions.

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