



“Now they tell me to preserve it”: Changing environmental imaginaries in southern Chile

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the environmental imaginaries behind disputes between conservation and industrial projects in the province of Palena, Chile. In particular, we study Pumalín Park, the first and most controversial Tompkins Conservation (TC) project in Chile, and how TC projects and ideas have affected environmental imaginaries in southern Chile. We revisit the question of why conservation initiatives have generated so much friction and what aspects of the environmental imaginaries in dispute, and in which ways, have been adopted by local inhabitants. We conducted participant observations in Pumalín Park and 22 interviews with conservationists, park rangers, entrepreneurs, local authorities and inhabitants of Chaitén and El Amarillo between 2018 and 2022. In addition, we reviewed 72 press articles and institutional documents. We argue that, rather than embracing these environmental imaginaries of conservation or industrialist development, local inhabitants have adopted a pragmatic view of conservation that values nature as a means to improve their living conditions and local economies. This ‘bottom up’ environmental imaginary emerges in response to historical conditions of isolation and relative State absence, and to a shift in the economic drivers present in Palena, from an economy dependent on extractive industries to one increasingly based on green tourism. These findings show that it is not just the vision of the State or the market that dictates the composition of territories; imaginaries can also be formed from below, according to local needs.

1. Introduction

This article investigates the trajectory of Tompkins Conservation (TC), the largest private conservation initiative in Latin America, along with the frictions it has generated and its effects on inhabitants of the area surrounding Pumalín Park in Chile. In particular, we study the environmental imaginaries behind disputes between conservation and industrial projects in the province of Palena, and how imaginaries of territory, development and nature circulate within the park’s neighbouring communities. Douglas and Kristine Tompkins began acquiring land in Palena for conservation purposes in 1991. After two decades of buying and restoring lands through various NGOs, TC began to donate its Private Protected Areas (PPAs) to the Chilean State for the creation of national parks. Some of these donations were completed after the death of Douglas Tompkins in 2015, at which point Kristine Tompkins was leading the foundation. In partnership with State agencies, TC has since helped form national parks such as Pumalín, Corcovado, Yendegaia, Patagonia, Isla Magdalena, Hornopirén, Melimoyu, Cerro Castillo and

Kawésqar, which together cover nearly 4.5 million hectares of protected land. Since 2021, TC has launched Rewilding Chile, an NGO that works to restore ecosystems and to involve local communities in the protection of species.

TC initiatives in Chile were at the centre of numerous frictions (Tsing, 2004) sparked by differing ways of seeing the territory (Scott, 1998), mainly those held by businesspeople and politicians in favour of industrial projects such as salmon farming, forestry and hydroelectric plants, but also those of local settlers who kept animals and made use of the forest. The formation of Pumalín Park, in particular, was plagued by controversy. The fact that an American millionaire was buying large tracts of land was considered suspicious in itself, and the ideas of deep ecology that inspired Tompkins were seen as contrary – or indeed a threat – to economic development (Covarrubias, 2002) and Chilean sovereignty. Representatives of the Catholic Church questioned deep ecology as a pantheism that positioned natural entities above human interests (Camus & Hayek, 1998). Political actors also criticised Tompkins for not integrating local communities into his parks and for evicting

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settlers from lands purchased (Velasco, 2018).

TC projects in Chile have been studied from various angles (Holmes 2014, 2015, 2018, 2022; Hora, 2018; Jones, 2012; Louder & Bosack 2019; Martelli & Westcott, 2020; Wakild, 2013) Some scholars have focused on the TC conservation model. Holmes (2015, 2018) describes it as a form of neoliberal conservation due to its land acquisition strategy, the entrepreneurial management style applied to its foundations and parks, and its financing through private donations and tourism. The neoliberal conservation model (Igoe & Brockington 2007; Brockington & Duffy 2011) proposes to use market mechanisms for the protection and commoditisation of natural resources led by private actors (Fletcher 2010). It is often argued that the State's failure to adequately protect nature on a vast scale justifies the intervention of private parties with the resources to acquire and preserve territories (Langholz & Lassoie 2001). TC complies with this neoliberal model to an extent in that, for example, it seeks funding from international donors, purchases low-cost land in the Global South, and promotes green tourism. On the other hand, it is a non-profit organisation, and by donating its PPAs to the Chilean State, TC sought to protect land and limit industry expansion. Wakild (2013) and Hora et al. (2018) agree with the above, pointing out that, although Tompkins made use of 'market-based' strategies, in his projects, the free market is used to limit the extraction of resources. According to Tecklin & Sepúlveda (2014), it was precisely this application of Chilean legislation against resource exploitation that generated resistance among national politicians and businesspeople.

Others have examined TC's relationship with the communities that live near its parks. For some (Jones, 2012; Louder & Bosack 2018), Tompkins' search for pristine territories led to "fortress-conservation"-type dynamics; that is, conservation initiatives that exclude local communities and their connexions with the territory (Fletcher 2010). For example, Jones (2012) argues that Tompkins' projects pay little attention to local relationships with the land, since they do not fit the image of wilderness that they sought to pursue. However, Hora (2018) found that local opinions of Pumalín park are mostly positive. More than 70 % of people surveyed in Chaitén considered that the park contributes to local development by creating jobs and attracting tourists. Similarly, scholars have studied the contribution of TC parks to local economies by hiring park rangers, supporting tourism services, and generating forms of sustainable agriculture (Covarrubias, 2002; Espinoza, 2002; Katz, 2002).

Scholars have also focused on TC's relationship with Chilean conservationists. Tompkins engendered "love and hate" among local environmentalists. Instances of collaboration in his search for resources contrasted with disagreements concerning their different styles and criteria (Ulianova & Estenssoro, 2012). For example, Tompkins never joined CODEFF or other NGOs involved with private and indigenous protected areas in Chile. Others have studied Tompkins' impact on businesspeople interested in acquiring land in Patagonia and dedicating them to conservation (Wakild, 2009). Nuñez et al. (2021) suggest that the process had mixed effects. Although it increased the protection of territories, it also opened the possibility for the expansion of green capitalism in Chilean Patagonia by transforming it into a global consumer good.

Notwithstanding the richness of these investigations, insufficient attention has been paid to how TC projects and ideas affected environmental imaginaries in southern Chile. Research on the latter have largely focused on how national and global projects give shape to territories, especially in Patagonia (e.g., Archibald et al., 2020; Mendoza et al., 2017; Núñez et al., 2021). In this study, we revisit the question of why conservation initiatives generated so much friction by looking at the environmental imaginaries in dispute between TC and those who opposed their conservation projects in the district of Palena in northern Patagonia. Our starting point is that the conflicts between TC and its opponents were based on irreconcilable environmental imaginaries surrounding the ideas of territory, development and nature. We reconstruct these disputed environmental imaginaries as ideal types (Weber,

2008) and wonder how they "travelled" and were interpreted by local inhabitants. To do this, we analyse the case of Pumalín Park, the first and most controversial TC project in Chile, which was subject to intense debate before becoming the benchmark for other conservation projects. Specifically, we study the extent to which TC's conservation approach and the visions of industrialists and the State have endured in Chaitén and El Amarillo – towns adjacent to Pumalín Park – and what aspects of the environmental imaginaries in dispute were adopted by their inhabitants. In pursuit of this objective, we conducted participant observations in Pumalín Park and 22 interviews with conservationists, entrepreneurs, local authorities and inhabitants of Chaitén and El Amarillo between 2018 and 2022. In addition, we reviewed 72 press articles and institutional documents belonging to TC and the Chilean government. Based on our empirical research, we argue that, rather than embracing previous environmental imaginaries of conservation or industrialist development, local inhabitants adopted a pragmatic view of conservation that values nature as a means to improve their living conditions and local economies. This "bottom-up" environmental imaginary takes elements from TC's conservation model – e.g., protecting nature through small-scale tourism – while distancing itself from fortress-conservation-type approaches that romanticise the wilderness and exclude local communities. This environmental imaginary emerges in response to historical conditions of isolation and relative State absence, and to a shift in the economic drivers present in Palena, whose economy has moved away from dependence on extractive industries and increasingly towards green tourism.

The paper is organised as follows. After explaining our research methodology, we review the debates surrounding environmental imaginaries and how we understand them. Next, we present the history of TC in Chile and some of its most notable disputes with political and industrial actors, characterising the disputed environmental imaginaries in relation to nature, development and territory. Subsequently, we examine how these environmental imaginaries travelled among local actors in the vicinity of Pumalín and TC's resulting legacy. We close by discussing the role of environmental imaginaries as a research tool for understanding the inner frictions of conservation projects.

2. Methods

This article draws on fieldwork conducted in Chaitén, El Amarillo and Pumalín Park in 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022. Field stays varied in length, averaging a week and totalling 38 days. Pumalín, covering 400,000 ha, was the first and most contentious PPA created by TC. The gatekeepers who initially helped us to access the field were key TC officials, who provided us with basic insights into the park's situation. We accompanied park rangers in their daily routines – maintaining infrastructure and caring for the forests – and witnessed their work guiding tourists and educating park visitors.

In addition, we conducted interviews with key local actors in Chaitén and El Amarillo. The interviews helped us reconstruct the history of TC and understand its effects on communities adjacent to Pumalín Park. In total, we conducted 22 interviews with National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) officials (2), municipal officials (1), park rangers (4), TC officials (4), conservationists from southern Chile (2), and residents of Chaitén and El Amarillo (9). In general, the people interviewed showed great interest in telling stories about the park and discussing their perspectives on conservation and development. Finally, we also examined 72 press articles published between 1990 and 2021, and institutional documents belonging to TC.

We analysed the interviews, field diaries and documents using Nvivo. We interpreted the materials according to two objectives. First, we reconstruct the history of TC in Chile with a view to identifying the environmental imaginaries thrown into tension by the organisation's conservation project and industrial opposition to it. We contrast their views on nature, development and territory as an analytical lens for their disputes. Second, building on the fieldwork material, we examine how

TC's ideas are currently perceived in the territories near Pumalín. Guided by the literature on conservation and the sociology of valuations, we openly coded the material, paying special attention to the environmental imaginaries of nature, conservation and tourism development expressed by interviewees. Pseudonyms are used to protect interviewees' identities and public officials are referenced only in terms of their institutional affiliation (e.g., CONAF official).

Hirsh, 2020). These descriptions offer images of desirable futures and narratives on how to achieve them, such as development projects in Latin America (Perrault and Valdivia, 2010).

Environmental imaginaries emerge as a co-production between human groups that inhabit a territory (McGregor, 2004), in which the interaction between practices, ideas and environments help to produce reality (Watts & Peet, 1996). Given their situated nature, environmental



Map of Pumalín Park.
Source: Rewilding Chile.

3. Environmental imaginaries

The concept of environmental imaginaries refers to a set of collective ideas about nature (Watts & Peet, 1996). When speaking of nature, we refer to a social construction with a strong narrative component (Cronon, 1995) that emerges from interaction between human societies and the environments in which they live. Environmental imaginaries correspond to a particular type of social imaginary. Taylor (2004) defines social imaginaries as the way ordinary people understand their social existence, in other words, how we imagine relationships between individuals, expectations of others, the functioning of society, and its norms. Imaginaries usually include images and narratives that help to discursively underpin the order of society. Given this discursive character, imaginaries can be analysed through stories, metaphors, press, social networks and other representations. Social imaginaries are produced collectively and shape different aspects of reality (Delanty, 2021), yet their agency is equipped and mediated by laws (Purdy, 2015), institutions (Archibald et al., 2019) and instruments (Hirsh, 2020). Imaginaries describe possible states of the world that are embodied in institutions, materialities and political projects (Barandiarán, 2019;

imaginaris vary temporally and contextually, and are shaped by economic interests and political projects (Pellegrini, 2016). In other words, they undergo historical evolution (Archibal et al., 2015; Mendoza et al., 2018; Nesbitt & Weiner, 2001) and can change according to national contingencies and the presence of other imaginaries (Barandiarán, 2019). For instance, Urrutia et al. (2019) argue that the environmental imaginary of Patagonia helped create the national identity of Chile: intervention by the State and the army was justified to tame an indomitable nature, and national identity was then reinforced through the nationalisation of landscapes and dramatic images of the southern zone. Patagonia has been described as a marginal, uninhabited and backward territory. In this view, livestock farming was presented as progress and nature as an obstacle to development (Aliste et al., 2018). By contrast, the contemporary environmental imaginary of Patagonia portrays it as an ideal space for tourism and for exploiting renewable energies and carbon markets (Mendoza et al., 2017). In other words, it is a life reserve for a new capitalist utopia of eco-extractivism (Núñez and Aliste, 2020; Nuñez et al., 2021).

Imaginaries are among the first scenarios where material aspects are disputed in environmental controversies (Watts & Peet, 1996; McGregor, 2004). Multiple imaginaries can coexist within a space, competing for the legitimate representation of nature. Nesbitt & Weiner (2001) highlight the normative and political dimension of environmental imaginaries. Disputes over development models and the correct use of resources imply different ideas about what nature is and the correct way

to relate to it. Consequently, it is possible that different environmental imaginaries compete in a given territory. The presence of different imaginaries, however, does not necessarily imply the existence of mutually exclusive points of view. Environmental imaginaries can be interpreted as fields of possibility in which different visions represent alternative and latent ways of relating to the territory (Barandiarán, 2019). The way in which environmental problems are framed affect the values that they prioritise and the explanatory theories that they adopt, envisioning different futures (Lele et al., 2018).

Here we understand environmental imaginaries as images and collective narratives concerning nature that define what is possible and legitimate in a given socio-natural space. These narratives have agency to transform territories, affecting how environmental problems are understood, which solutions are possible or unfeasible, and which actors are entitled to intervene in the territory. In the following section, we explore the two main environmental imaginaries in dispute around Palena in relation to TC projects. First, we address the romantic imaginary (Purdy, 2015, Fletcher, 2014) of TC, characterised by the quest for pristine nature, protecting native forests and scenic beauty; second, we examine the utilitarian imaginary (Purdy, 2015) maintained by economic groups opposed to conservation projects that inhibit the exploitation of natural resources. It should be noted that these imaginaries are ideal types (Weber, 2008) for analytical purposes. In reality, imaginaries are plural and rarely pure. For instance, although TC's conservation model romanticises the wilderness, it is also oriented to sustainable development and nature-based tourism, which is partially utilitarian. By highlighting the imaginaries in tension, we show how nature is imagined and appropriated by local inhabitants in pragmatic ways. Furthermore, our approach does not mean that these are the only environmental imaginaries present in Palena. For instance, there is the environmental imaginary of land protected by the State through national parks managed by CONAF. Since the early twentieth century, the Chilean State has protected areas both for their environmental value and to ensure future exploitation in accordance with an imaginary of economic development (Klubock, 2014). There is also the environmental imaginary associated with indigenous knowledge (Araos, 2018), which may converge in valuing nature, but is based on different histories, discourses and interests.

4. Tompkins Conservation in Chile: Environmental imaginaries in dispute

The first land purchased by Tompkins in Chile was a 16,800-hectare plot in Riñihue, home to ancient *Alerce* trees – one of Tompkins' emblems of conservation. Today, the area is part of the 400,000-hectare Pumalín Park (Tompkins Conservation, 2020). When TC began to buy land in Palena, other private conservation projects were already in existence, but most of the country's protected areas were held by the State. During the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), the business class gained strength in terms of both capital and political organisation (Undurraga, 2015; Undurraga, 2016), expanding its presence in extractive industries such as mining, forestry, agriculture and aquaculture. From 1990 onwards, PPAs rapidly grew in number, and today there are 308 (Hora, 2018). PPAs such as Huilo-Huilo, Futangue and Tantauco are led by Chilean investors and are generally orientated towards real estate and green tourism operations. Paradoxically, the neoliberal rules – protection of private property and low prices – that enable exploitation of vast areas of natural resources also provide the conditions to purchase extensive tracts for private conservation (Holmes, 2014).

During the 1990 s, political authorities and businesspeople opposed TC projects, citing the geopolitical risk posed by the purchase of so much land by a foreigner. Purchases were covert and secretive, taking place through intermediaries and thus engendering mistrust. Political, economic and ecclesiastical elites questioned the legality and effects of TC's conservation goals, issues that were heatedly discussed in the Lower Chamber. For example, Congressman Ramón Elizalde accused Tompkins

of interfering with State projects to develop Patagonia:

“Mr. President, I am concerned about ... (the) ... activities of American millionaire, Douglas Tompkins, who seeks to acquire more than a third of the province of Palena (...) What we want today is to foster development, human settlement and the creation of living conditions that, naturally, would be impossible to achieve along a considerable portion of the Carretera Austral should that territory remain in the hands of individuals.”

Session No. 67, 21 April 1993. *Cámara de Diputados de Chile, 1993*

Debate surrounding development in Palena was intense. Whereas industrialists and the State promoted integration of the southern region through exploitation of natural resources, Tompkins opposed extractive activities, proposing local development based on green tourism and conservation. Furthermore, intense disputes occurred regarding the idea of nature itself. While for businesspeople and certain politicians, the purpose of the natural world is instrumental, TC views nature in terms of wilderness and scenic beauty, linked to the imaginary of Patagonia as a natural reserve (Nuñez et al., 2020). To examine these frictions, we analyse the environmental imaginaries involved in disputes surrounding TC projects in Palena, addressing three analytical elements: territory, development and nature.

4.1. Territory

Territories are associated with ways of producing space (Lefebvre 1991), in which different ideas shape human-environment relations. Patagonia was historically described by the State as a territory devoid of social life and thus in need of colonisation and subsequent exploitation (Aliste et al., 2018). During the 1990s, in the early years of the transition to democracy, the legacy of military rule influenced debates of national sovereignty – for example, Chile's narrowly-avoided war with Argentina in 1978 over islands in the Beagle Channel. For the navy and parliamentarians of various colours, TC initiatives were considered a geopolitical threat associated with extensive foreign acquisition of land. Patagonia was framed as a strategic territory for national interests, including natural resource exploitation. Since land purchased around Pumalín stretches from the ocean to the Argentine border, Tompkins was accused of dividing the country in two, putting national sovereignty at risk and hampering State colonisation efforts.

President Frei's Secretary of State, Belisario Velasco (1994–1999), accused Tompkins of expelling peasants from their lands. Chile had historically promoted the colonisation of the far south as part of territorial objectives, and the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), for instance, extended the *Carretera Austral* (Southern Highway) in order to reinforce the border with Argentina and expand resource extractive initiatives (Urrutia et al., 2019). Tompkins, by contrast, seeking to protect pristine nature and ecological niches around Pumalín, opposed construction of the *Carretera Austral* between Caleta Gonzalo and Hornopirén. In addition, Velasco claimed that Tompkins was searching for military secrets and managed to involve the army in investigating the claim, tapping phones and using military aircraft to surveil Tompkins' properties (Velasco 2018). These accusations heightened doubts about the motivations of foreign conservation.

The Frei government's opposition to TC projects was particularly evident in the purchase of the Huinay Estate, formerly owned by Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV). Huinay was a key piece of the Pumalín puzzle, effectively bisecting the park. Politicians mobilised their networks to prevent Tompkins from acquiring the plot, and the decisive blow was delivered by Frei himself following an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the estate by State means. The president subsequently asked Endesa (a Spanish electricity firm) to buy the land and the transaction was finalised in 1998. Ironically, PUCV sold Huinay on the condition that it would be destined for preservation, and another conservation foundation, financed and managed by Endesa (today Enel), now operates in the middle of Pumalín Park.

The environmental imaginary of political and business elites in the

1990s was based on the notion of territory as a sovereign space, especially for its strategic resources. For TC, by contrast, a territory emerges as consequence of protecting nature. The acquisition and enclosure of extensive lands was justified by the need to maintain the biodiversity of ecological niches and avoid their exploitation. Tompkins' relationship with politicians improved during the Lagos administration (2000–2006), to the extent that State and Naval lands were combined with TC properties to create Corcovado National Park in 2005. Private conservation began to be framed as a contribution to national development (Azócar, 2016). As Senator Girardi commented, the paradox of TC is that it uses market mechanisms to protect nature: “the great success of the Government has been to demonstrate that these instruments can serve to preserve forests, instead of cutting them down” (Lower Chamber, 2004).

4.2. Development

Notions of development and how to achieve it differed starkly between detractors and supporters of TC plans in Palena. Patagonia has historically been a frontier for development and various extractive booms have taken place: timber, livestock, fishing, aquaculture, conservation and tourism. TC projects might be considered part of this development trajectory. Issues relating to the growth of the Austral zone, the exploitation (or not) of natural resources and the infrastructure available were fiercely debated (Programa Chile Sustentable, 2002). For Chilean businesspeople, particularly during the 1990s, development mainly equated to economic growth. In this utilitarian imaginary (Purdy, 2015), social and environmental well-being is a consequence of economic growth (Escobar, 1995), and nature is subordinated to productive needs and the imperative of exploiting business opportunities. By contrast, TC's view of development emphasised conservation and ecotourism as the means to transform local economies. Tompkins' proposal of banishing industry from rivers, forests and large areas was interpreted by business elites as “locking” local development (Covarrubias, 2002). In the words of Tompkins himself, Chilean businesspeople “believe the myth of growing and growing to infinity; it's part of their global view that industrialising the world is okay. They have never considered the beauty of the place or tourism” (Martinez, El Dinámico, 03.07.2014).

These contrasting views of development were manifested in the HidroAysén project, which proposed construction of five dams on the Baker and Pascua rivers and electricity transmission from Patagonia to central Chile, affecting protected territories in eight regions. The managing companies – Spanish Endesa and Chilean Colbun – argued that Chile needed energy autonomy to continue growing, threatening catastrophic scenarios if this were not achieved (Romero 2014). Jorge Rosenblum, Endesa president, declared in 2013: “our geography and nature endowed us with a powerful source of energy. Chile's oil is water and water is energy” (La Tercera, 2013). In response, several environmental NGOs and civil society movements coordinated in opposition to the project. TC called on international organisations and provided resources to mobilise against HidroAysén, helping to finance the campaign “Patagonia without Dams” (Silva, 2016). For TC, the preservation of Patagonia as a region of endemic biodiversity and natural beauty, unspoiled by industrial intervention, was invaluable (Karpik, 2010). Following years of territorial, legal and public opposition, HidroAysén was scrapped in 2014.

While Chilean businesspeople generally hold that conservation is a secondary priority to development, TC argues that development may be a consequence of conserving nature, with the beauty of nature considered to have aesthetic value. As with conservation of green developments in other contexts (Blok, 2013; Lafaye & Thévenot, 2017), the beauty of nature is one of TC's guiding principles. An illustrative example is the beautification project at El Amarillo (Tompkins Conservation, 2019), a settlement located at the southern entrance of Pumalín

Park. The project sought to integrate residents with the park, encouraging local pride and care for the environment through the aesthetic enhancement of 20 houses, public spaces and landscaping along the main thoroughfare. Although Pumalín Park is today considered to make a valuable contribution to the development of Palena, bringing tourism, providing access to protected nature and activating the local economy, scholars still question the limited influence of TC projects on local habits and behaviours (Covarrubias, 2002; Espinoza 2002; Martelli & Westcott, 2020). In other words, notions of conservation and ecotourism as means of transforming the local economy are yet to be fully accepted as a scalable alternative development model for the region.

4.3. Nature

Conservation and/or exploitation of nature mobilises diverse notions about what nature is and how to relate to it. For some, nature is considered an objective reality with its own intrinsic rules and values (Naess, 1995); for others, nature is a cultural construction (Cronon, 1995) in which different imaginaries coexist (Purdy, 2015). At the core of several clashes between TC and the business/political elites were contrasting interpretations of nature. Whereas the former promotes ideas of wilderness and pristine landscapes for conservation and green tourism, the latter tend towards a utilitarian view that prioritises extractive industries. For them, nature is inert matter available to satisfy human needs, create wealth and produce economic growth.

TC is inspired by deep ecology, an environmentalist movement which claims that all beings have intrinsic value (Naess, 1995). It proposes an ethical approach to nature in which humans should seek to extract resources to sustain human life while doing as little harm as possible to ecological systems, thus guaranteeing “a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things” (Naess, 2005, 68). TC adopts a *sui generis* interpretation of deep ecology, lending it an aesthetic dimension. This ‘garden-like’ form of conservation echoed what Igoe (2017) terms “nature as spectacle”. TC projects offer an experience of nature mediated by aesthetic concepts and dramatic representations of a beautifully produced natural world that aims to generate local pride, environmental care and an active local economy (Tompkins Conservation, 2019). (See Table 1)

While these imaginaries underpin contrasting approaches to nature (protecting it versus exploiting it) they also lead to differences regarding conservation activities. Many Chilean investors approach conservation in Patagonia with a view to developing tourist opportunities and green business (Mendoza et al., 2017), both for prestige and as real estate investments (Tecklin & Sepulveda, 2014). As one Aysén property broker states, “there is no renowned businessman in Chile who has not looked at the area with interest” (De la Fuente, 2010). As Holmes (2012) argues, the conservation of nature through philanthropy may belie covert economic interests, directing attention towards positive industrial outcomes and downplaying risks. An example is provided by Chilean businessman and former president Sebastián Piñera (2010–2014; 2018–2022), who bought 118,000 ha to establish Tantauco Park on Chiloé. Although there are commonalities between TC and private conservation efforts led by Chilean businesspeople, the former's considerable resources, time and care devoted to wilderness and producing spectacular natural environments reveal a different valuation of nature. While Chilean businesspeople tend to engage in private conservation with a view to future financial gain or as a form of prestige, TC does it with a conviction for conservation. This critical difference is most evident in the Tompkins' donation of national parks to the State. TC's main objective is to preserve natural territories, and the organisation decided to donate most of its land to the Chilean State thinking it the best long-term caretaker of nature. By contrast, to date no Chilean entrepreneur has donated a large piece of conservation land to the State. As one of TC's official comments, “Douglas used to say: the day a Chilean businessman donates land for a

Table 1
Environmental imaginaries of nature, development and territory.

	The Chilean business community's utilitarian imaginary	Tompkins Conservation's romantic imaginary
	Frontier and source of economic value:	Organising principle:
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature is a space for conquest; resources for development Conservation as a form of capital accumulation Economically oriented environmental protection Aimed at progress and economic growth:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation guided by wilderness and beauty Harmony between nature and human living Sustainable development and territory are consequences of protecting nature Based on nature conservation and local economies:
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic growth as measure of progress Territory is produced in order to extract strategic resources Nature may be protected if resource extraction is unhindered National sovereignty:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation considerate of environmental cycles and aesthetic experience Local economies stimulated through green tourism and home-grown businesses Deep ecology view of space:
Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish national presence in Palena Palena has strategic geopolitical value and is a reserve of vital resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To protect environmental niches and biological corridors To promote wellbeing of environmental systems, limiting human impact on nature

national park we will have fulfilled the goal with this business world. Sadly, that has not happened yet”.

While TC managed to protect nearly 4.5 million hectares, its presence also strengthened the emergence of an environmental imaginary bordering on elements of neoliberal conservation (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). In other words, TC promotes conservation through private donations and green tourism but does not seek to make a profit, as in the neoliberal conservation model. This type of conservation preserves territories in order to insert them into local and global markets according to the idea of unique, remote and exclusive nature. Behind it often lies an imaginary wherein capitalism and nature may be reconciled by freeing up territories for private development which is to some extent “green”, protective of nature, and/or sustainable. At the same time, we found a local environmental imaginary among community members, park rangers and local tour operators, which involves elements of TC’s conservation imaginary combined with pragmatism. In this view, nature is a source of work and pride, an entity to be taken care of, although rather than focused on contemplation of a pristine natural world, the latter is considered an entity with which to work and of which to take advantage.

5. How are these environmental imaginaries perceived around Pumalín Park?

In what follows, we study the impressions expressed by residents of Chaitén and El Amarillo and by TC collaborators regarding these environmental imaginaries in dispute. Through interviews and participant observations in the field, we examine how the environmental imaginaries described above were appropriated, contested and transformed, especially in terms of the notions of nature, development and territory. First, we show that rumours concerning TC are still present in the local imaginary. These rumours echo past territorial discourses from the Chilean State and illustrate the mistrust associated with the purchase of land by foreigners. We then describe two elements of TC’s

environmental imaginary that permeate local actors: nature as a source of green tourism and beauty. Finally, we review the extent to which TC’s conservation ideas were adopted pragmatically by local entrepreneurs, and how theoretical principles such as deep ecology or fortress-conservation were not locally appropriated in Palena.

5.1. The power of rumours

“People in government worked for Tompkins. It was obvious. They had the data; they knew who owned what (land). Tompkins was astute. He was a businessman,” says Juan, a taxi driver en route to La Paloma airfield, Puerto Montt. Rumours about TC surfaced multiple times during our fieldwork. Thirty years after Tompkins’ arrival, fifteen after declaring Pumalín Park a sanctuary, and three since the park was donated to the Chilean State, rumours continue to structure environmental imaginaries in the area. Holmes (2022) argues that rumours and frictions are inherent to conservation projects. After mentioning that we were investigating TC, people in Puerto Montt, Chaitén and El Amarillo almost spontaneously recalled controversies surrounding Tompkins’ projects. As a senior TC official commented, *“until recently, introducing oneself as having ties with TC provoked resistance and prejudice.”* Mistrust of TC projects in Palena had different motivations, including harsh living conditions, lack of State presence, and isolation. Access to Palena is possible only by ferry or light aircraft, and isolation is part of the narrative for developing the area, along with the geopolitical discourse regarding Chile’s presence in Patagonia. It justified projects such as the *Carretera Austral*, Tompkins’ opposition to the extension of which through Pumalín generated friction. As Chaitén’s Mayor (interview, 2019) points out, *“Extension of the Carretera Austral was emblematic for us, and TC opposed it. They wanted another road along the coast. It was a clash of ideas and needs.”* The isolation factor reinforced rumours that painted Tompkins as a national threat who, for example, wanted to split Chile in two or found a new Zionist State.

In a context of isolation and minimal State presence, Tompkins’ status as a foreigner and millionaire certainly increased mistrust among local inhabitants. Pablo, a tourism entrepreneur, recalls people’s mistrust of TC’s offer to aesthetically improve houses in El Amarillo: *“Chileans will always ask you: what do you want in exchange for beautifying my house? Nobody does something like that for free.”* For the CONAF regional director, mistrust for Tompkins was related to a general lack of knowledge regarding conservation, and his project in particular: *“Since the community were unfamiliar with conservation concepts, these aroused fear and mistrust. Lots of myths were born under the umbrella of ignorance. Yet all those who sold were willing to place a value on their land.”*

Weak relationships with local communities were a common criticism of TC projects. Azócar (2016) argued that TC might have avoided public resistance had they hired a public relations firm to manage outreach. TC officials are also aware that they could have integrated better with the community, acknowledging that their focus was on building, rewilding and maintaining the parks rather than community collaboration. Park rangers who worked for TC and, since the donation of Pumalín have been CONAF employees (2019), offer a good contrast in this regard. In their view, the main concern at TC was maintaining the beauty of Pumalín Park. They still strive to do so today, albeit with fewer resources, while working to educate communities and visitors, and developing fauna monitoring programmes.

5.2. Nature and tourism

Each of our visits to Chaitén (2018, 2019, 2020, 2022) was accompanied by incessant construction noise. The town is expanding with new housing and public facilities, including a new hospital, although it is still recovering from a volcanic eruption in 2008 that destroyed much of its infrastructure. Although its 5,000 inhabitants were invited to relocate to nearby Santa Bárbara (Lara & Calderón, 2015), most of them rejected the new location and insisted on returning to Chaitén despite the risks.

The local economy in Palena was traditionally based on natural resource subsistence, namely the use of forest and marine reserves. Beginning in the 1990s, salmon farming grew exponentially along the coast, but tourism gradually became the main economic activity, with the town of Futaleufú – and its river – the main hub. Surrounded by rugged landscapes, Chaitén was traditionally a stop-off point between other locations. The declaration of Pumalín as a National Park in 2005 helped to revitalise the local economy, and for some it has “put the town on the map”. Alfredo, a local resident, comments: “*Tourism has increased hugely: cabins, transport, bikes, so many things. Every day more people are arriving to work here.*” Another supporter is Felipe, who runs a hostel and campsite. On the reception table lies a copy of the TC publication “*Tourism & Conservation. A Healthy and Effective Partnership*”. On the growth of local tourism, Felipe comments: “*In about ten or fifteen years, Chaitén will stop being a stop-off point. Soon it will emerge as a tourism destination.*”.

Lidia runs one of the first hostels in El Amarillo and began receiving tourists in 1986. Before the park, “*the hot springs were the only attraction. There was no road. The forest was unknown. Now people from all over the world come here.*” State officials offer similar accounts, stressing that “*today the Palena area is a land of opportunity for commercial and tourism ventures*”. This view of Pumalín as a source of local development echoes Hora’s (2018) finding through surveys with local residents: more than 70 % of Chaitén’s inhabitants consider that the park had a positive impact on tourism, handicraft sales, job opportunities, and services. The town’s mayor, for instance, initially had doubts about the park, but now thinks that Pumalín has brought about a change of mentality within the community:

“Nowadays, when one talks about nature and the value of territory, people think of making trails to show off the forest. If I had asked someone thirty years ago how to make use of a tree, they would have told me to cut

it down. Now they tell me to preserve it. A new concept of development has been opened up through ecological tourism.”

(Interview, October 2019).

The mayor’s words capture the transformation of an environmental imaginary based on extractive activities into one in which conservation has a fundamental place. This change in the local relationship with nature does not mean that inhabitants of Chaitén and El Amarillo have totally adopted Tompkins’ ideals of pristine nature; rather, we found an environmental imaginary involving an instrumental approach to nature and conservation linked to green tourism. It must also be acknowledged that these assessments are made by those most interested in nature tourism, such as local authorities, entrepreneurs and Pumalín officials. As one park official perceives it, “*People who work in tourism realised that, thanks to the park, tourists visit 2, 3, 6 trails and spend longer in the area, meaning they need lodging and transportation*”.

5.3. Visiting Pumalín Park today

Pumalín Park has been managed by CONAF since 2019. The transfer from private to public hands has generated tensions and insecurities among local actors, mainly because the State administration has fewer resources than the amounts that TC could attract through international donations. As one park official comments, “*there is a predisposition to focus on how we have begun to deteriorate. People are surprised that we’ve been able to maintain standards.*” Park officials feel the transfer has created a climate of criticism towards the park among local people, but since most of the rangers who worked for TC have stayed on under CONAF, continuity has helped to build trust with the authorities and within the team.

In our visits in 2019, 2020 and 2022, we noticed that the park continues to maintain TC standards. Grass care is meticulous. Entrance gates are managed by CONAF rangers, who register each visitor and give



Fig. 1. Park ranger cutting the grass “golf course”-style in Pumalín Park.

instructions regarding infrastructure and rules. Pumalín has several campsites, many of them screened by bushes and offering spectacular views of the Michimahuida volcano. Camping Grande, for instance, consists of a huge circle of neatly cut grass approximately a half kilometre in diameter, with tall bushes strategically positioned to create a sense of privacy for campers. Despite its considerable size, Camping Grande looks like a tiny island in the middle of an ocean of trees. The design is reminiscent of Arne Naess' (1995) "Gestalt Shift", a concept that proposes environmental education based on the exchange between background and form in everyday life. In practical terms, it is about making nature an immersive experience, a background, reducing human presence in the landscape to a minimum.

In the midst of a spectacular landscape of forests, glaciers, rivers and volcanos, the park design stands out. Low stone walls mark parking areas; lawns are perfectly manicured; roads are clean and smooth. (see Fig. 1). There are refuse sites, a central barbecue area on campsites, and impeccable bathrooms. TC's conservation approach put strong emphasis on use of native materials, landscaping, trail maintenance and aesthetics. Inspired by deep ecology, these painstaking factors complement the stunning scenery as part of TC's aim to recreate pristine and unpolluted nature where human factors do not necessarily disappear but exist in harmony with the landscape. Paradoxically, this harmony is sometimes interrupted by the very machines that help to produce this landscaped nature, as illustrated by the following field diary excerpt:

"I was sitting reading by my tent when I began to hear a loud, deep noise in the distance. An enormous machine came up through the entrance to the campsite and went all the way around the outside of the oval of grass, levelling the roadway. This interruption lifted me from my immersion in 'nature' several times."

(Field diary, February 2022)

Although Pumalín park achieves its goal of conveying a sense of

wilderness, the contradiction between pristine environment and the intense landscape interventions required to produce it is evident: cutting the grass, making borders, or keeping roadways smooth with the help of machines requires a lot of invasive work. These observations are similar to what Skewes (2019) identifies as the manufactured character of pristine nature in private parks in Chile. In the case of Pumalín, the human aspects of conservation are very noticeable and are not always in harmony with the environment. As the above excerpt shows, the same tools that help to produce natural beauty break the "Gestalt" that the TC model attempts to build.

5.4. On beauty

"I have come to realize that (aesthetic) beauty is, in a way, the sum of everything. If I could synthesize the crisis in which we are trapped, I would say that it is summarized in the absence of beauty."

(Douglas Tompkins, Tompkins Conservation, 2020, p.55).

"When we started working with Douglas, he instilled in us the concept that beauty prevailed over all things" says Julian, a former TC official. "I said to him, Douglas, how can a person who doesn't have their basic needs met think of painting a fence or cutting their grass?" Julian currently has a landscaping company and warehouse in El Amarillo, where he has incorporated concepts such as scenic beauty and environmental harmony, and in fact often cuts the grass along El Amarillo's main street. Matias, another of the town's residents, comments: "There is always someone cutting the grass along the verge. There is a lot of care taken with that. Julian does it using his own resources."

Tompkins' parks have been characterised by their beauty, attention to detail, and use of local materials (Franklin, 2021; Azocar, 2016). Martelli & Wescott (2020) even suggest that Tompkins prioritised aesthetics over conservation goals. In their view, the choice of natural spaces for protection is guided more by an ideal of wilderness than by



Fig. 2. Greenhouse in El Amarillo.



Fig. 3. Signage at Sendero de Darwin, Pumalín Park, carved by local artisans.

biodiversity. Nuñez et al. (2021) more generously point out that TC projects helped to construct today's image of Patagonia as a spectacle that attracts global investors interested in the environmental imaginary of pristine nature.

Tompkins' collaborators seem to have become aesthetically affected by nature (Latour, 2004) and carefully produce it. Tompkins instilled a particular way of seeing the landscape (Scott, 1998) based on an ethos of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) and a work ethic that stressed performing their duties well, with attention to detail and pride taken in a job well done. "Douglas imprinted on us a passion for detail that sometimes makes me suffer. At every site and trail I see hundreds of details," says Julian. Raquel, a TC official, comments that when she visits other parks, she cannot help noticing when signage is nailed to trees, if walkways are straight or ill-adapted to the geography, when the architectural design is out of keeping, or when the main views are not accessible to visitors. Rogelio, who worked at Pumalín between 2003 and 2016, integrated this 'ethos of care' into his daily routine. He currently runs a campsite and cabin in El Amarillo, both surrounded by neat green grass and rustic wooden fences. The infrastructure is reminiscent of the park. "I keep it tight. Whenever I can, I give it a hand. The same with the garden." Rogelio learnt several environmental practices from the Tompkins, such as collecting native seeds, restoring damaged forests and reproducing organic vegetables in a local greenhouse. (See Fig. 2). He considers that the park has boosted local awareness of nature and concern for appearance. "People take care of their rubbish, maintain their houses, live in their environment. That is why tourists come directly here (to El Amarillo) from Chaitén."

This environmental imaginary, with its emphasis on beauty and care, remains present in Pumalín. Javier, the current park manager, was trained by Tompkins and explains how maintenance remains critical. "One thing that identifies us as a park is maintenance. Especially the green areas and infrastructure... People come and see short grass, tidy trails,

gardens and borders, but they don't know how much work goes into it." Grass is an important aspect in several TC parks. Pumalín officials feel that visitors judge them according to these aesthetic aspects. Visitors to the park tend to acknowledge the beauty, aesthetic and details, and the subject of beauty, care and stunning nature emerged in almost every conversation we had with visitors, park rangers and locals (see Fig. 3).

Accompanying the park rangers in their daily routines allowed us to appreciate the impact of Tompkins' views about care and detail. We saw this both in the rangers' dedication to performing their duties and in how they communicate this care for nature to tourists – where to park, how to minimise human impact on nature, and so on. One park ranger comments on how "Daddy" – as Tompkins was affectionately known – taught them a particular way of preserving environmental beauty: "Sometimes I feel there's someone looking over my shoulder at how to finish details well, how to maintain the beauty of nature".

This environmental imaginary of conservation with emphasis on aesthetics is not immune to controversy, however. It tends to prioritise maintenance over other aspects of conservation, such as reforestation or environmental education. According to Rogelio, TC park rangers were 'spoiled' with every single tool they requested and were too keen on 'gardening' the park, failing to pay enough attention to community relations. Pedro, a CONAF official, made a similar comment regarding Pumalín: "Tompkins' (parks) were good in terms of restoration and recreation, with nice campsites and trails, but they lacked the technical aspects of national parks." For rangers who joined CONAF after Pumalín was donated to the State, the shift has been marked. Vicente remembers with pride what he learnt from Tompkins in terms of conservation, care and attention. Under CONAF, however, he is learning how to monitor animals and carry out environmental education activities. This has meant more work for Vicente, but also a new source of income and training.

Some of Tompkins' aesthetic notions have reached beyond the park and its officials, inspiring changes in local communities and public

areas. On the community side, TC's El Amarillo beautification project was carried out between 2008 and 2014 and sought to integrate the town's inhabitants into the park's vision by remodelling house facades and public spaces and landscaping roadsides. Today, a number of local inhabitants support the park's existence and have incorporated some of Tompkins' ideas into their lives. The park and the town's makeover have boosted the local economy and inhabitants' identity.

Aesthetic criteria have also changed the local government approach to public works. Chaitén's mayor explains how the municipality reproduces the Pumalín aesthetic: "*They (the Tompkins) left us that hallmark of nature, stone and wood as aesthetic design characteristics for public works.*" Interestingly, these criteria have permeated beyond the municipal level, reaching regional bodies such as the Ministry of Public Works and CONAF (e.g., fences constructed from native materials and park maintenance criteria). Raquel notes how their landscaping ideas were adopted by the Los Lagos roads department: "*We worked TC's 'scenic' aspect of the route with the road department in Santiago, Aysén and Los Lagos. We produced a scenic route construction specification, including road levelling, grass cutting, rubbish bins, and checkpoints.*" Current and former TC officials consider this shift a great triumph. As Julian recalls, "*in the old days, all that mattered was for roads to follow a route and for water to flow. Anything on either side didn't matter; it was just full of rubble. If you wanted to take a nice photo, you had to work around sewers and avoid water drainage holes.*" In Julian's description, there is a critical distance between the functional approach to roadbuilding – where the only requirement is that it should work – and one that considers scenic beauty. In material terms, it is a marginal extra expense with a very noticeable effect on road infrastructure. Julian mentions that servicing ditches and keeping the grass cut generates a "virtuous circle" that improves the tourist experience and locals' quality of life.

6. Discussion

Conservation projects generate friction, are highly contested, and involve disputed and potentially irreconcilable environmental imaginaries. These disputes are more than discursive, framing and translating material conflicts involving relations with territories, economic interests, political projects and identities (Watts & Peet, 1996). In the case of Palena, the environmental imaginaries in dispute reveal political and economic groups with divergent and sometimes incompatible interests (Nesbitt & Weiner, 2001): TC's romantic imaginary of conserving and producing pristine nature contrasts with the utilitarian imaginary expressed by Chilean businesspeople of nature as a resource for production.

Regardless of their opposing projects, we found that neither group enjoys a hegemonic position in the region. Rather, inhabitants of Chaitén and El Amarillo seem to share an environmental imaginary involving care for nature and acknowledgement of its value, while also appreciating it as a means of subsistence, largely linked to tourism and real estate. This suggests that TC's notions of conservation resonate with local inhabitants' imaginations, but primarily in the practical valuation of nature. Local conditions in Palena, such as relative State absence, have facilitated the emergence of a pragmatic approach to conservation that makes it more relevant for local inhabitants than the alternatives proposed by private stakeholders or the State.

Inhabitants of Chaitén and El Amarillo have a greater appreciation of the aesthetic value of landscaping. TC's concepts of beauty became integrated into the lives of former TC officials, local authority discourses, and public space planning (municipal, roads and CONAF). Beauty as an organising principle also penetrated community life in El Amarillo, albeit with limited scope. Some residents have reproduced TC's aesthetic ideas of facade maintenance, grass cutting and locally-sourced fencing, especially those aimed at tourism. This transfer of TC's ideas contrasts with the picture of "fortress-conservation" described by Jones (2012) and Louder & Bosack (2018) – at least around Pumalín – and seems more in line with positive perceptions of Pumalín among

inhabitants of Chaitén, found by Hora (2018).

A critical issue, however, is that beauty requires resources, both inside and outside Pumalín Park. Maintenance demands time, materials and labour, and these are a greater concern under CONAF with its limited resources. Furthermore, organisation of the park according to aesthetics raised contradictions within TC projects, such as between conserving wilderness inspired by deep ecology and producing 'pure nature' (Cronon, 1995) using machinery and hard work. TC's notion of wilderness is less present in communities adjacent to Pumalín and in the discourses of other stakeholders.

In this sense, Chile's traditional State discourse of Patagonian colonisation – a strategic territory for national sovereignty – has faded, while the national development project linked to resource exploitation has endured (Perrault and Valdivia, 2010). However, there is increasing evidence of a new environmental imaginary based on tourism and access to pristine nature, proposing sustainable and green development (Mendoza et al., 2017). TC projects in Palena helped to produce this environmental imaginary through the promotion of eco-tourism as a means of development. The conservation imaginary has also been extended to marine areas, such as the Tic Toc marine park (an extension of Corcovado National Park) and the AMCPMU Pitipalena-Anihue marine reserve (Araos, 2018). TC proposed low-impact tourism, along with craft and agricultural activities, as a means to strengthen local economies. Pumalín Park gave birth to new small businesses and expectations for the future, with various consequences. On one hand, local economies have diversified and local green start-ups – coffee shops, campsites, bike rental – have increased substantially, a factor highly valued by local inhabitants. In this view, economic growth and environmental conservation are presented as compatible, even synergic forces. On the other, Palena's projected economic growth anticipates greater tourist footfall, the arrival of new settlers, and the expansion of real estate activities, which may have negative effects on conserving nature and maintaining an eco-friendly way of life.

7. Conclusion

Territories are shaped by the ways in which the State, private actors or conservationists see landscapes (Scott, 1998), that is, the colonial, utilitarian and romantic imaginaries that have helped to produce Patagonia (Archibal et al., 2015; Mendoza et al., 2018; Núñez et al., 2020). However, they can also be transformed by local ways of appropriating these environmental imaginaries in accordance with pragmatic needs. The environmental imaginaries – utilitarian versus romantic – that clashed in Palena in the 1990s endure today, although their predominance has changed in recent years. While the romantic imaginary of TC was originally rejected by industrial investors and key politicians and ill-comprehended by local inhabitants, today, actors from those groups have assimilated certain ideas. Local authorities and inhabitants greatly appreciate nature as a source of tourism and local pride with which to improve their living conditions and local economies. Pumalín Park is increasingly acknowledged as a source of opportunity for Chaitén and El Amarillo, helping to put the town "on the map". This 'bottom-up' environmental imaginary takes elements from TC's conservation model – e.g., preserving nature and small-scale tourism – while distancing itself from fortress-conservation, which romanticises the wilderness and excludes local communities. The environmental imaginary of green tourism has also penetrated the business class, which strongly opposed TC projects initially. But here there is an important difference. Whereas TC decided to donate most of its PPAs to the Chilean State in exchange for guaranteed conservation, this practice has not been mimicked by Chilean investors. Rather than purchasing land to protect biodiversity, local businesspeople see it as a business opportunity for green capitalism, real estate projects and transforming Patagonia into an international consumer good (Skewes, 2019; Núñez and Aliste, 2020).

What does the case of Palena reveal in terms of the challenges of conservation and the dynamics of territories in the Global South?

First, at the regional level (Palena and southern Chile), the present study expands the scholarship on TC by looking at the environmental imaginaries in dispute. Imaginaries generate frictions and resistance as material conditions are disputed (Watts & Peets, 1996), and because such narratives help to define what is possible and legitimate in a given socio-natural space. Whereas the literature on environmental imaginaries has focused largely on how the circulation of images helps to construct territories and nature as goods for global consumption, such as the notion of Patagonia as a dramatic representation of pristine nature (Igoe, 2017; Nuñez et al., 2021), we have shown how those environmental imaginaries are also appropriated into local spaces. For instance, the integration of aesthetic values in and around Pumalín using locally produced and maintained materials echoes the imaginary of pristine nature without necessarily adopting it.

Second, the case of Palena also calls into question the traditional distinction made in conservation literature between those who reject or promote markets as a means of protecting nature. TC presents an intermediate conservation model that encompasses both traditional forms – i.e., fortress-conservation, community-based conservation – and approaches that embrace neoliberal values (Fletcher & Büscher, 2020). Furthermore, we observe how these distinctions materialise in unexpected ways in local communities. Local inhabitants adopt values that can be connected to neoliberal conservation (sustainable development, nature-based tourism) and environmentalism (care for nature), yet they tend to do so in pragmatic ways aimed not at transcendental objectives, but rather at survival. This pragmatic valuation of nature oscillates between the idea of pricing nature (Fourcade, 2011) as a market good for conservation and nature as an invaluable, unique entity (Karpik, 2011).

Third, the case also helps us to consider the unexpected consequences of portraying nature as a spectacle and the limitations of green capitalism as a conservation tool. The global attention that Tompkins achieved for Chile's southern forests was vital to fundraising and the purchase and protection of land. The images of pristine nature circulated in global markets are far from innocuous, however: they produce frictions and disputes with actors who hold other imaginaries of nature, and they mobilise interest from global investors who transform the dynamics of local territories. Patagonia and Palena are territories increasingly seen as international consumer goods – as new business opportunities for real estate projects that sell the idea of access to pristine nature. This new real estate pressure is increasingly making land in the Global South less accessible to the very people who inhabit such territories, generating new global inequalities. Whereas the spectacle of nature (Igoe, 2017) may have initially helped to protect it, its commodification as a global consumer good may end up restricting access to it. Considering this global dynamic, expansion of the network of public parks and national protected areas is one of the greatest contributions that conservation initiatives can make for future generations.

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Tomas Undurraga: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Supervision. **Gonzalo Aguirre:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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