not only, but also

about more-than-western epistemologies

plug-in #03

mother of time-space, the benevolent fertility goddess who
presides over planting and harvesting.
worshiped in the andes mountains.

For them, our stories are myths,
our doctrines are legends,
our science is magic,
our beliefs are superstitions,
our art is craftsmanship,
our games, dances, and clothing are folklore,
our government is anarchy,
our language is a dialect,
our love is sin and baseness,
our walk is crawling,
our size is small,
our appearance is ugly,

our way is incomprehensible.

Sub-comandante Marcos
Milpa Alta, DF, 09.03.2001

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"Not only, but also" is a conceptual medium that helps us to recognize the limits of our ways of understanding the world. Acknowledging these limits is essential for engaging with other epistemologies on equal terms. For example, the phrase "not only, but also" challenges the idea that nature is **only** biology, geology, or forestry by recognizing that it is **also** something more.

In many indigenous communities, nature is not merely a scientific category; it is part of an extended family, a home, and a source of knowledge, philosophy, science, and medicine. This perspective should not be dismissed as just a "belief from the global south" or a "cultural view." Such labels create a false hierarchy, suggesting that wes-

tern scientific knowledge is more advanced or the only valid way of understanding nature. Instead, we must recognize that nature is **not only** biology and geology as defined by western science, **but also** an interconnected, living entity within indigenous knowledge systems.

An example will be provided to help illustrate and embody an understanding of this conceptual medium; at the end of the booklet, you'll find some guiding questions to reflect after the example, as well as some additional references.

Thank you.

This plug-in is supported by the following guiding principles which are meant to be understood as a container of complementary values. They intend to orient pedagogoical methods applied during lessons.

With <u>not only but also</u> the aim is to reflect on more-than-western epistemologies and the ways they offer complementary understandings of nature, knowledge; existence. By engaging with these principles, we can begin to question dominant narratives and explore new ways of relating to the world that move beyond extractivist and hierarchical models.

For further insights of these concepts, please refer to the plug-in #01 'wor(l)ds for guiding principles'.

SENTIPENSAR

RE-EARTHING OF LIFE

more-than-western

biocultural diversity

more-than-humans

SOCIAL IMAGINATION

interdependence

<u>*visual representation of merged guiding principles*</u>

A plug-in is a complementary approach that enriches the curriculum through care, reciprocity, and mutual respect, expanding learning with collective, collaborative, and participatory dynamics. In this case, this plug-in *'not only, but also'* intents to complement the syllabus in different occasions, such as:

WHERE/WHEN TO PLUG-IN?	*HOW TO PLUG-IN?*
Recognizing and critically evaluating historical sources	Engaging with knowledge that is often overlooked or dismissed. Rethinking what counts as a 'valid source' and to recognize the diversity of methods used to make sense of the world
Engaging with plural ways of knowing and diverse methods of rationalization	Explore how knowledge can emerge through lived experience, spirituality, and relational connections, not only through western rational frameworks
Knowledge as an evolving construction based on diverse perspectives	Challenging the western tendency to separate rationality from other ways of knowing, urging participants to reflect on how knowledge is constructed, validated, and ordered across different cultures and historical contexts

WHEN/WHERE TO PLUG-IN?	*HOW TO PLUG-IN?*
Discussing status quo	Critical questions, considering complementary/ plural epistemologies beyond categorisation of facts and truth as equally worth
Critical self-reflection & positioning	Reflection for questioning human-centered thinking; expanding with relational thinking by questioning the individual (bringing in the dimension of ecological responsibilities with collectiveness & nature)
Self-positioning, formulating personal statements	Listening/reviewing other further realities and perspectives
Stories, poems and images as didactic tool for learning	More-than-western perspectives as a complementary extension of the syllabus
Civic education	Potential space for introduction of pluriversal understandings, more-than-western perspectives, not only social responsibility but also in relation with more-than-human entanglement

To apply this concept of *'not only but also'* we created a compilation of diverse amazonian epistemologies, to open the discussion about more-than-western epistemologies through a reflection moment in which participants will listen to an *audio record* of this epistemology while having the translated version with them. Later, participants are encouraged to reflect on different questions regarding the production of knowledge, history as an interpretative science, and more-than-western epistemologies.

Living forest; a living and conscious being, subject of rights

In the heart of the amazon, among winding rivers and vibrant vegetation, the jungle stretches out as a living being, breathing and communicating through every element that composes it. In this sacred territory, the forest is not just an environment but a "living forest", a space where existence forms a deep web of relationships between humans, animals, mountains, rivers, and both visible and invisible beings.

In some of their languages, the word "nature" does not exist as it does in other tongues. Instead, they express the union of time and space as a single, inseparable concept within their worldview. Everything that inhabits this land has life and consciousness—from the trees to the waters, from the mountains to the spirits that dwell within them. The land is not only a resource but also a shared being, one with whom people coexist in reciprocity.

The interconnection that defines this world is sustained by spirituality and a deep bond with all beings. Trees are ancestors, silent witnesses to entire generations. Their roots sink into history, while their branches reach toward the sky, holding the balance of all that exists.

Land recognizes those who inhabit it, even in moments of disorientation. Here, ownership does not define the relationship with the land; instead, people live in harmony with it. The health of the land is the health of the people, and ancestral knowledge is not a relic of the past but a guide for the present and the future. The wisdom of those who have walked this land for centuries continues to shape the lives of those who follow in their footsteps.

"living forest" embodies coexistence with the jungle. This vision, displaced and devalued by development models that see the Amazon only as a resource for extraction, offers an alternative: a world where there is no separation between human beings and their environment, because humanity itself is part of the forest.

This interconnection is expressed in relationality, a network of kinship, an intricate web of intimate relationships with living beings and a shared land. Relationality means being alive in the same way the forest is alive—an existence based on mutual respect and reciprocity. To live in relation is to care, to assume the responsibility of maintaining balance with the territory, the rivers, the trees, and all that breathes. In living forest, everything is woven together in a single spirit, and life is a continuous dialogue of reciprocity and respect.

Adaptation of Tupak Amaru – Viteri Gualinga and Tayak Apu – José María Gualinga Montalvo, and the proposal 'Kawsak Sacha' (2025)

For the spatial arragement, try going to the closest green area you are given; it can be a garden, forest or a river. If this is not possible, then try arranging the room for a natural flow of air to enter; think of it as possible imaginative stations:

* WATER STATION: with the sound of a river, remembering nature's role in memory and orientation.

* LIGHT/SHADOW STATION: A more intimate space for quiet, re-flective listening.

* TEXTURE / MATERIALS: Participants can sit or be around natural elements (wood branches, leaves, soil, woven mats, rocks, stones, etc).
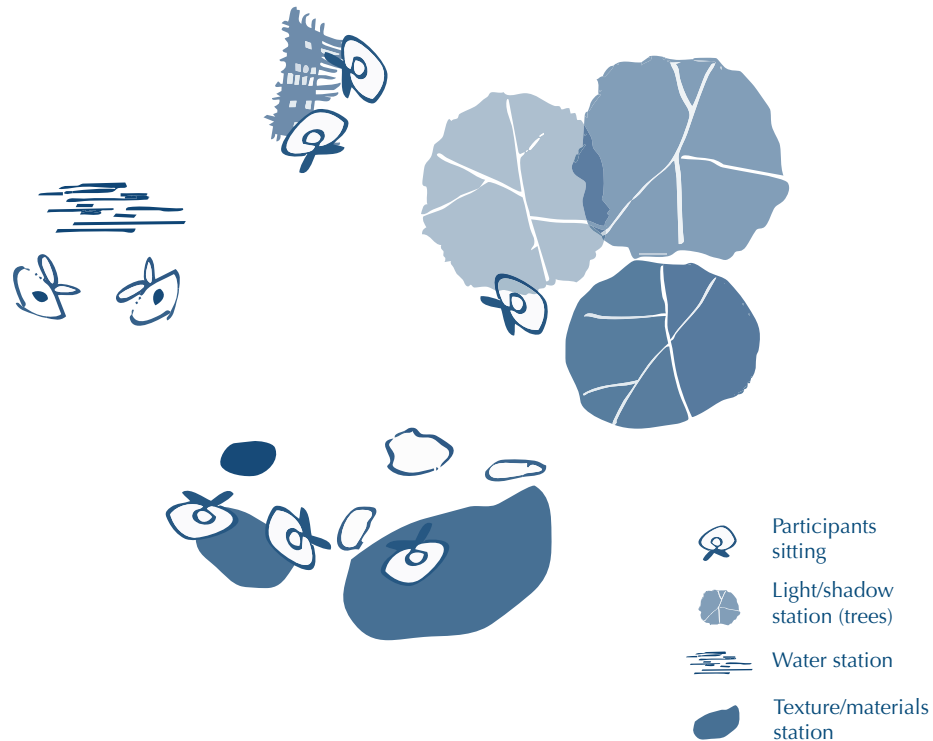
Participants are then asked to reflect on the example, while doing so, the following questions can serve as guidinging threads before opening the space for discussion:

Possible questions can include:

> ** IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE AMAZONIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE 'LIVING FOREST' CHALLENGE THE WAY YOU TYPICALLY THINK ABOUT NATURE?*

> ** HOW DOES THE IDEA OF THE FOREST AS A LIVING BEING DIFFER FROM THE DEFINITIONS WE HAVE OF NATURE?*

> ** HOW DOES LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES SHIFT THE WAY YOU SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT?*

> ** WHY MIGHT THIS WORLDVIEW MAKE SENSE WITHIN A DIFFERENT HISTORICAL, ECOLOGICAL, OR CULTURAL CONTEXT?*

Participants sitting

Light/shadow station (trees)

Water station

Texture/materials station

With this reflective example, we encourage mediators to engage openly with participants, trying to <u>leave space for listening and perceiving</u>, rather than rushing to analyse or compare it to prior knowledge. After listening, allow a few minutes for silent reflection or note-taking before opening for discussion.

For mediators:

* WHAT POWER DYNAMICS EXIST IN MY CLASSROOM THAT MIGHT LIMIT OPEN ENGAGEMENT WITH MORE-THAN-WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGIES?

Write your impressions here:

* Encourage participants to note any emotions, thoughts, or questions that could come during the listening.

* Remind participants that this exercise can work as an expansion of what we believe 'nature' is, rather than a replacement of western-scientific or historical perspective. Use the 'not only, but also' medium as many times as you feel. Frame this concept to think beyond binaries.

* Avoid framing more-than-western worldview as a cultural belief, instead, position it as a valid way of knowing with it's own logic; it is not intended to be put as better or worse than western worldview, but as a result of a different kind of journey.

For mediators:

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* HOW CAN WE CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WHERE MULTIPLE WAYS OF KNOWING CO-EXIST AND WE CAN CO-LEARN WITH THEM?

Write your impressions here:

All sources are referenced inside the **plug-in#01 'wor(l)ds for guiding principles'**; where you can find useful and complementary information of the concepts used to develop this plug-in, as well as the explanation of the diverse guiding principles.

This booklet was designed and produced by maja hauke and miela salgado as part of a master's thesis in Eco-Social Design at the University of Bolzano.

Open-source plug-ins for educators, communities and institutions.
An exchange and collective effort organized by maja hauke & miela salgado