

*Treat or threat? The tilapia issue in the Amazonia of Ecuador.*  
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Although being an introduced species, tilapia fish has become an iconic ingredient in Indigenous and local cuisine in the Amazonia of Ecuador. The farming and consumption of this fish are raising concerns and controversies in this area, especially among local stakeholders working in tourism. Some argue that tilapia is positive for the local economy and food security, while others think that tilapia is negative for the river biodiversity and the locals' culture.

We use a biocultural ethics frame to understand these concerns and facilitate participatory solutions to the tilapia issue in this region. A biocultural ethics frame emphasizes the interrelationships between biological and cultural dimensions of socio-ecological systems and the role these relationships play in the health and resilience of these systems. This frame also highlights issues around rights, justice, and sovereignty of local or Indigenous people. Using qualitative research tools, we analyzed the tilapia issue in this region while facilitating locals' voices in the definition of the issue and their perspectives on how to improve it.

Our research found that the answer to the tilapia issue cannot be based only on how bad this introduced species is for the local environment and culture. Instead, the answer needs to focus on the surrounding cultural context. In this case, this cultural context is shaped by multiple ways of valuing human-environment relationships (e.g., economic, instrumental, cultural). An intercultural dialogue emerged as a strategy to help stakeholders navigate this diversity of worldviews and collaboratively found solutions to the tilapia issue in this region. This case study contributes to streams of knowledge related to biocultural diversity, food tourism, and the cultural impacts of introduced species. Overall, it shows how dialogues among different worldviews and integrating multiple ways of knowing can trigger more sustainable and democratic paths when dealing with uncertain scenarios



*Tilapia fish as part of Kichwa cuisine. Photo by Renato Merchan.*

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