

Myths and Perspectives on Land-Use and Land-Cover Change in the Amazon

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The Amazon has often been associated with exaggerated myths about its biophysical and human landscape. Its vast extension is partly responsible; the eagerness to know it while having incomplete information is also involved; and both visioning it as a "paradise" and the desire of its "conquest" have led to myths with a life of their own, eventually making their way into policy for the region, even in the absence of supporting evidence. In this paper, a product of a LBA synthesis workshop on human dimensions held in Manaus in May 2006, selected myths are identified and discussed. Examples of myths include: the Amazon as El Dorado, a place rich in resources waiting to be taken; population growth as the main driving force of environmental degradation; inversely, a demographically empty region that needs large flows of immigrants to be developed; the assumption that urban growth and development has little impact on the forest; the view that small farmers only use archaic technology and are incapable of adopting new ideas and technological advances to contribute to economic development; or, in reverse, that small farmers are the answer to environmental conservation while medium and large farmers destroy the environment; that Amazonian soils are uniformly poor and thus biophysical limiting factors impede the success of substantial and permanent agropastoral activities. The paper examines each of these myths and their relation to the perception of environmental degradation and sustainability in the region.

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