



# Keynote: From ancestral pathways to climate emergency: the centrality of rivers in an Amazonian perspective

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Amazonia represents the largest hydrological basin on Earth with 16–18% of the global freshwater discharge to the oceans and approximately 13% of global precipitation over continental areas. In 2023 the largest rivers in the Amazon Basin reached its water levels lowest record, the maximum temperature also surpassed previous record values registered. In the same period Manaus, one of the largest amazonian city, had the third worst air quality in the world due to illegal fires and air dryness. The extreme drought left several cities and hundreds of communities isolated, without access to drinking water, food and other essential supplies. In Tefé Lake, state of Amazonas, the water temperature reached almost 40 Celsius degrees, causing the death of hundreds of dolphins and tucuxis.

Through the interweaving of life stories and field notes, I describe how rivers, and specially the Xingu River, structure the way of living, conceiving and feeling the world for Amazonian societies. In a historical journey that starts from the beginning of 20th century to the present day, I describe the particularities of riverine communities everyday life, associated with a diversity of activities, such as collecting, hunting, fishing and planting, and the use of a variety of environments, through a sophisticated system of knowledge about the ecological dynamics of the river and forest, transformed into inhabited world.

The Xingu River, for indigenous people, means “home of gods”, the riverine dwellers consider it as a father and a mother from who we received the gift of life. The rocky stretch of Volta Grande do Xingu form a natural obstacle to navigation, which protected the middle course of the river from colonization efforts, making the region the largest sociobiodiversity corridor in the eastern Amazon and one of the largest blocks of tropical forest in the world. The Xingu river basin has 28 million hectares with 22 Indigenous Lands and 9 Protect Areas, is currently inhabited by 26 indigenous peoples and hundreds of riverine communities.

The damming of the Xingu River in 2016 and the confiscation of its waters for the generation of electrical energy had devastating effects, causing the disruption of the livelihoods and social organization of local communities, as well as a profound rupture in their ontology and spiritual life. Today, the dispute over water use and access to the river puts local communities in direct dialogue with government bodies, regulatory agencies and the private sector. The centrality of the river for these communities took the Brazilian government to recognize the right to return of riverine families forcibly displaced by the dam back to the riverbanks.

Based on a collaborative research of the reterritorialization of these families I highlight some local strategies for coping with ecological disasters and climate emergency. My intention is to instigate a reflection on the importance of the rivers and riverine people for the preservation of the biocultural heritage of the Amazon.