

## Navigating Ethical Place-Based Research in Transdisciplinary Marine Science (and Beyond)

Ella-Kari Muhl <sup>1</sup>, Vitor Renck <sup>2,3</sup>, Maria B. Battaglia <sup>4</sup>, Lívia R. Cruz <sup>5</sup>,  
Lowine S. Hill <sup>6</sup>, Rafael Lembi <sup>7</sup>, Willem Malherbe <sup>8</sup>, Deborah S. Prado <sup>2</sup>,  
Kinga Psiuk <sup>1</sup>, and Mia Strand <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Marine Sciences, Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Marine Science and Innovation, University of New South Wales, Australia

<sup>4</sup> School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability, University of Waterloo, Canada

<sup>5</sup> Center for Biology and Society, Arizona State University, USA

<sup>6</sup> School of Planning, University of Waterloo, Canada

<sup>7</sup> Department of Community Sustainability, Michigan State University, USA

<sup>8</sup> Savoirs, Environnement et Sociétés (SENS), Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), France

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Coastal and Marine Research, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

**Correspondence:** Maria B. Battaglia ([mbbattaglia@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mbbattaglia@uwaterloo.ca))

**Submitted:** 13 May 2026 **Accepted:** 27 May 2026 **Published:** 30 June 2026

**Issue:** This commentary is part of the issue “Tides of Change: Reflective and Practical Skills for the Next Generation of Marine Researchers” edited by Christopher Cvitanovic (University of New South Wales), Annette Breckwoldt (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research), Asha de Vos (Oceanswell / University of Western Australia Oceans Institute), Leonie Dziomba (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research), Shannon McLaughlin (Wageningen University), Salanieta Kitolelei (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research / University of the South Pacific), Sangeeta Mangubhai (Talanoa Consulting), and Denis Karcher (Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/oas.i551>

### Abstract

Place-based research (PBR) allows for genuine engagement with the deep-rooted dynamics of complex social-ecological systems. Ideally, PBR centres reciprocal relationships with communities to co-produce research grounded in transdisciplinary, participatory, and solution-oriented approaches. Yet, for early career researchers (ECRs), the ethical, relational, and cultural dimensions of PBR can be difficult to navigate, especially when research takes place in social, cultural, or ecological contexts that differ meaningfully from one’s own. While critiques of “parachute science” are widely acknowledged, academic training often falls short in preparing ECRs for the relational and ethical realities of transdisciplinary and context-specific research. Accordingly, in this commentary we offer practical strategies and shared perspectives for conducting ethical, relational PBR by: (a) drawing on experiences, tensions, and lessons from PBR; (b) building on conceptual debates about ethics, positionality, and relational reflexivity; and (c) translating experiences and lessons into actionable practice. Further, we outline tools we piloted to promote reflexive

capacity (e.g., booklet, reflexive archetypes) needed for PBR. We present these practical insights as contributions to help ECRs navigate the deep dynamics rooted in marine and coastal social-ecological systems research to support meaningful, inclusive, and actionable ocean sustainability.

### Keywords

early career researchers; positionality; reflexivity; relational practices; social-ecological systems

---

## 1. Introduction

The importance of research that is grounded in “place” allows for the incorporation of transdisciplinary knowledge and is increasingly recognised as vital for advancing global policy frameworks (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Ocean Decade; Franke et al., 2023). What “place” is, is constituted through layered histories and relations that give meaning to landscapes and seascapes, while also shaping identities, attachments, and governance practices (Grenni et al., 2020). Beyond specific locations, “place” incorporates historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts in addition to ecological and environmental dynamics, co-produced through interactions shaped by broader structural and systemic processes across time and space (Keddie et al., 2025). We therefore define place-based research (PBR) as a mode of sense- and knowledge-making shaped by the specific histories, identities, and priorities of the places and people involved (Jadallah, 2025).

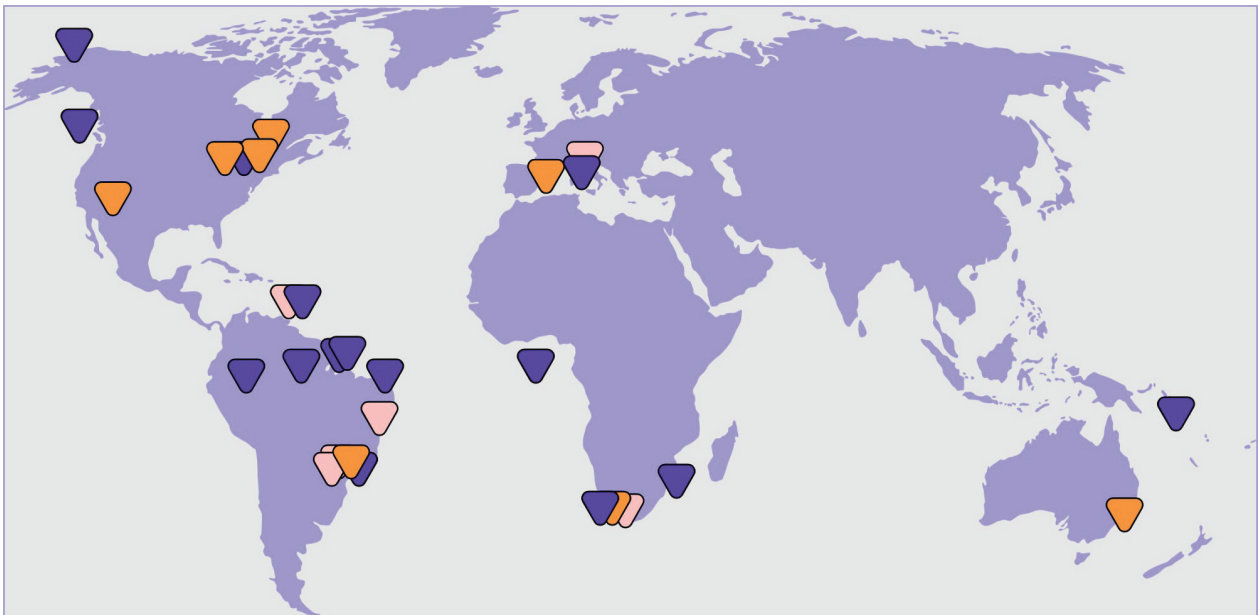
PBR shapes how we understand and engage with the living fabric of marine and coastal systems. Yet navigating the ethical, relational and cultural currents of PBR can be challenging in practice for early career researchers (ECRs), especially in situations that differ from their own. Although the inequities associated with parachute science and academic coloniality are well recognised ‘in theory’ (de Vos & Schwartz, 2022), conventional academic training often offers limited preparation for the ethical considerations, relationship-building, and practical challenges involved in transdisciplinary, place-based work (Alonso-Yanez et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2026). There is a need for practical, context-aware, emotionally-conscious guidance for ECRs emphasising relational awareness.

Our aim in this commentary is to offer practical strategies and shared perspectives for conducting ethical, relational PBR as ECRs. We have structured this perspective into four key sections. First, we identify positionalities we bring to our work. Second, we reflect on the shared experiences, tensions, and lessons from our PBR processes. Third, we provide insight, tools, and grounded reflections to support ECRs doing ethical, relational PBR in marine and coastal contexts. Finally, we unpack key tensions, critiques, and unresolved questions for further consideration amongst researchers in this field. We hope, through sharing our insights, tools, and grounded reflections, to support other ECRs and practitioners in the field doing ethical, relational PBR.

## 2. Panel Description: The Navigating Ethical Place-Based Research Working Group

This commentary emerges from our interdisciplinary working group, Navigating Ethical Place-Based Research, which brings together PhDs and recent graduates from six continents (Figure 1) under the newly

launched Society for Social-Ecological Systems (SocSES; de Vos et al., 2025). Our working group's objective is to cultivate a culture of care and responsibility amongst ECRs conducting PBR. Our group is composed of 10 ECRs engaged in PBR in marine and coastal social-ecological systems, while some also work in other social-ecological systems, including freshwater, terrestrial, and urban environments. We believe that our diverse research contexts strengthen the capacity of the group to produce learning that can be transferable across spatial and disciplinary boundaries, thereby also making it useful both in complex marine and coastal contexts.



**Figure 1.** Putting the “place” in place-based research. Orange markers are positioned where we (members of the Navigating Ethical Place-Based Research Working Group) currently live; purple markers show where we conduct(ed) our research; and pink markers indicate the places which we consider home.

### 3. Place-Based Reflections, Stories, and Learnings

When considering shared experiences, tensions, and lessons from our PBR processes, we first felt it was important to get a sense of who we were in relation to both one another and to “place.” We unpacked where we come from, the contexts we work in, and the experiences that shaped our practices and research. We wanted to share our own encounters with PBR, including the moments when we felt unprepared, as well as the breakthrough moments that affirmed our approach and created shared learning. A central pillar of our collective experience was the commitment to learning from and with one another’s place-based experiences. Using a shared Miro board, we curated a collage of photos from the field and written reflections. This allowed us to “see” the textures of each other’s research sites, from the coasts of Brazil to the Alaskan tundra, and to identify commonalities that transcend geography. This process built a space for sharing vulnerabilities, consequently building trust, and guiding our shared reflections.

We identified three themes that speak to the ethical and relational dimensions of PBR. The first theme is the importance of embodied immersion and how it leads to the (inner) transformation of researchers and their conceptions about the place in which they work. We shared that as ECRs, we often arrive with a mental map built from literature, photographs, maps, and stories; however, being physically present, and open to

the human and more-than-human encounters colours this map. Even in familiar home contexts, “wearing the researcher hat” adds new perception. For instance, a researcher from our group working in her home country of Brazil found herself learning new body languages and dialects in a coastal region in Amazonia, effectively becoming a “student” of her own culture. In another account in South Africa, an encounter with a hippo while in the field served as a visceral reminder of the agency of more-than-human beings in shaping human decision-making and movement. While another researcher reflected on the differences in lifestyle between the local community of Northern Alaska and her own, in turn these reflections led to her own inner transformation and an unexpected personal journey. These stories suggest that PBR is not just about observing a place, but continually being re-made by it, which consequently leads to (re)imagining and (re)understanding place and our embedded lived experiences.

The second theme we identified is the relational foundations of PBR that create the unseen and often unreported network that supports research processes. For example, one researcher shared his experience of building deep friendships within the queer scene in Santarém, Brazil, which was essential to his connection to the place, and subsequent work and understanding. Another researcher shared her admiration and gratitude to the people and landscapes she encountered, while also revealing eventual feelings of unsafety, aspects that are not explicitly depicted in her academic outputs. Our stories revealed that PBR takes place beyond the space of academic inquiry and data collection. This space of reflection can span multiple elements, however, often our work is only possible because of the help and care that we received from community partners that welcomed us. We see these relationships as a reinforcement of how much researchers rely on local people’s kindness and knowledge in unknown places.

Finally, perhaps the most poignant theme our stories reveal is the tension between the long-term nature of trust-building and the short-term reality of ECR life, which creates controversies and tensions. As ECRs, our next steps are often unknown. We are frequently moving between short-term contracts and navigating the uncertainties of academic job realities and the countries and contexts determined by funding calls (Figure 1 clearly shows this pattern). This dynamic creates a structural barrier to ethical PBR when the nature of the work dictates a swift turnaround time in unfamiliar contexts. Effective PBR requires “slow science,” which involves relationship-building based on reciprocity and “moving at the speed of trust.” As many of us noted, it was only after extended time in the communities that the most “sensible” and essential topics were brought up by community members. However, the importance of caring for relations and devoting time to build trust and get to know and be known goes beyond aspects of “data.”

When considering tensions, we also shared moments where we felt we were “parachuting,” despite our values. By co-creating a safe community to admit these tensions, we increased our capacity for reflexivity. The goal is not to achieve a “perfect” ethical status, but to remain intentional about the choices we make and how they align with our relational commitments, and, where possible, find time—whether now or in the future—to pay back that trust. It was from these reflections that we built tools to help foster reflexive capacity.

#### 4. Tools to Build Reflexive Capacity

We identified and created three practical tools to support researchers in reflecting on their identity, positionality, assumptions, and learning while working in different place-based contexts. These tools were co-developed and piloted by our working group, with input from other place-based researchers. These

resources are intended as interactive, living resources to accompany researchers through different stages of PBR.

First, our *Reflexivity Booklet for Social-Ecological Researchers* (Battaglia et al., 2026) is a self-paced tool designed to accompany place-based researchers during each phase of their research process. The main purpose of the booklet is to encourage its users to move beyond transactional models of knowledge generation and towards approaches that value and honour people and place. Through a series of questions, three chapters guide and invite researchers to consider their own positionality and the intent with which they approach their work throughout their research stages (before, during, and after). More importantly, the booklet users are encouraged not just to answer the proposed questions, but also to critically interrogate themselves on the implications of the answers they provide. This booklet has been created as a living document, and we encourage researchers to engage with it, test its content, and share feedback that will inform future adaptations.

Second, reflexive archetypes are a participatory exercise for exploring how researchers respond to perceived ethical tensions in practice. Reflexive archetypes help to identify patterns in how fellow place-based researchers respond to situations—shaped by their ethics, values, emotions, and relationships. These help participants reflect on tensions and trade-offs when conducting PBR. Through movement-based triads, participants position themselves in relation to prompts, making visible their values, blind spots, and uncertainties. Specifically, participants are presented with choices, each accompanied by three possible responses mapped to the triad's corners (see Figure 2). As these are not mutually exclusive and do not have a “right” answer, participants may move freely within the space, including the centre. Once positioned, there is a pause to reflect and observe their relation to others. Voluntarily, participants then share reflections grounded in their lived experience. Across multiple rounds, participants shift positions as new choices are introduced, and they are assigned stickers coded to the triad corners or centre that they are closest to. This is then used to create groups with similar sticker patterns to conclude with group reflections structured around specific prompts reflecting trade-offs, uncertainties, and challenges, humanising the research process. Piloted in three conference workshops and a research retreat, this exercise supported meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue. It also showed promise for training and early-stage collaborations.

Third, our final output will take the form of a postgraduate-level training course designed to address the identified gap in equipping students with the reflective capacities required for conducting ethical PBR. The course (in development) aims to strengthen reflexivity, ethical sensitivity, care, and relational accountability as core capacities for researchers to reflect on their research process as opposed to outcomes. The course draws on the collective reflections of our working group and insights gained from using the reflexivity booklet and/or conducting the reflexive archetypes exercise. Our goal is to shift the prevailing culture of academic research away from perverse incentives mentioned in the next section (Section 5) and move it toward a culture in which care, sensitivity, and relational accountability can take centre stage.



**Figure 2.** Triads showing responses across three different choices, namely: (a) leverage points in research (policy, values, and systems structure); (b) researcher relationship dynamics (personal relationships, strategic reciprocity, and professional boundaries); and (c) knowledge-creation processes (practical impact/solution orientated, stakeholder/community ownership, and academic rigour).

## 5. Tensions, Critiques, and Unresolved Questions of Doing Ethical PBR

ECRs often find themselves navigating tensions between institutional or funding expectations, such as performance metrics (e.g., “publish or perish”), and the needs and priorities of the community they engage with (Lee, 2024). In this section, we outline the key challenges and tensions shaping PBR in marine and coastal contexts. We show that these issues are not only interpersonal or methodological, but are also produced by wider institutional, funding, and governance structures, highlighting the need to move beyond reflexivity alone, and toward accountability, reciprocity, and structural change.

First, challenges are intensified by the structural conditions shaping research in marine and coastal spaces. Temporal misalignment between short-term project cycles and the long-term commitments required to build trust and reciprocity limits sustained engagement. At the same time, the political economy of knowledge production, including funding priorities, donor agendas, and geopolitical interests, often influences research questions, timelines, and partnerships and shapes how far research can respond to local priorities (Enrici et al., 2023). These challenges are often linked to unresolved questions of data ownership, interpretation, and knowledge sovereignty. However, ethical PBR requires an inherently relational approach that

transcends disciplinary and spatial boundaries, especially in marine contexts where fish and other marine species lack borders.

Second, while increasing use of positionality statements reflects an effort to enhance transparency in research and is encouraged institutionally, there is a risk of reducing reflexivity to a performative exercise (Gani & Khan, 2024). As argued by Subramani (2026), reflexivity without accountability can become a “comfort narrative” that sustains colonial and epistemic injustices. Reimagined beyond static, checklist-like formats, reflexivity must move beyond self-positioning toward action, solidarity, and engagement with enduring structures of inequality, power, and privilege (Hill et al., 2023). At the same time, reflexivity alone cannot resolve the potential risks and unintended consequences that research may pose to communities, including misrepresentation, political exposure, structural harm, or appropriation of knowledge (Chowdhury, 2022). In marine and coastal contexts, these risks are reinforced by overlapping governance regimes, including for instance fisheries management, conservation regimes, and emerging blue economy initiatives, which shape whose knowledge is legitimised and whose interests are prioritised (Strand, 2024).

Third, reflexivity itself is not immune to co-option. When institutionalised without structural change, reflexivity can become a tokenistic exercise that reinforces, rather than transforms, extractive practices. This is compounded by the uneven distribution of the emotional and relational labour required to sustain ethical research, which remains largely invisible and undervalued. Although critiques of “parachute science” are widespread, equitable alternatives remain poorly defined. Concepts such as transdisciplinarity and co-production are often invoked, yet remain ambiguous in practice, especially in relation to power (Adame, 2021; Stefanoudis et al., 2021). As a result, ECRs are often tasked with navigating and resisting these dynamics, despite limited institutional support.

Addressing all these challenges cannot rest solely on ECRs. It requires a shift in institutional, disciplinary, and funding structures. Ultimately, these tensions raise unresolved questions about (a) whether ethical PBR can be fully realised within existing research systems, (b) whose standards of “ethics” prevail, and (c) how far power can be redistributed without broader structural transformation in transdisciplinary research. Ethical intent alone does not guarantee ethical outcomes; even reflexive and well-intentioned research practices can reproduce inequities when embedded within unchanged institutional and epistemic structures. Ethical PBR, in this sense, cannot be reduced to a set of practices or principles but is an ongoing, relational process, grounded in reciprocity, trust, and accountability.

## 6. Conclusion: An Invitation, not an Answer

PBR is a commitment to an ongoing ethical practice, which is iterative, uncertain, and shaped by relationships, contexts, and lived experiences. As our reflections illustrate, conducting PBR in coastal and marine systems requires navigating tensions between institutional expectations, personal values, and community priorities. Ethical PBR emerges through continuous reflexivity, relational accountability, and openness to transformation, both within the research process and of the researchers themselves. In this sense, ethical PBR is less about achieving a predefined standard and more about cultivating an orientation toward care, humility, and responsiveness to place.

The tools and reflections presented in this perspective piece provide scaffolding rather than a blueprint to support ECRs in developing reflexive habits to articulate ethical tensions and collective learning. We hope that by making visible the emotional, relational, and often invisible dimensions of PBR, we can broaden what counts as knowledge and rigour in transdisciplinary marine science (and beyond). Looking forward, the next generation of marine researchers and leaders will face increasingly complex social–ecological challenges that demand more than technical expertise alone. Ethical and effective PBR will require reflexive, relational, and accountable approaches that recognise the co-production of knowledge with communities, and the responsibility that comes with working in diverse places. Supporting ECRs and considering the tensions they face in developing these capacities is therefore essential for fostering inclusive and actionable ocean sustainability research.

### Funding

This study was financed, in part, by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), Brazil (process numbers 2022/10321-8, 2023/08372-6, 2025/00827-0, and 2020/16028-5).

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### References

- Adame, F. (2021, June 29). Meaningful collaborations can end ‘helicopter research.’ *Nature*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-01795-1>
- Alonso-Yanez, G., House-Peters, L., Garcia-Cartagena, M., Bonelli, S., Lorenzo-Arana, I., & Ohira, M. (2019). Mobilizing transdisciplinary collaborations: Collective reflections on decentering academia in knowledge production. *Global Sustainability*, 2, Article e5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2019.2>
- Battaglia, M. B., Strand, M., Malherbe, W., Muhl, E.-K., Cruz, L. R., Hill, L. S., Lembi, R., Prado, D. S., Psiuk, K., & Renck, V. (2026). *Reflexivity booklet for social-ecological researchers: Navigating ethical place-based research*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19867527>
- Chowdhury, R. (2022). Misrepresentation of marginalized groups: A critique of epistemic neocolonialism. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 186(3), 553–570. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05229-4>
- de Vos, A., Quinlan, A., Biggs, R., Bennett, E. M., Martín-López, B., Norström, A., Peterson, G. D., Schoon, M., Allen, C. R., Andersson, E., Baird, J., Balvanera, P., Berbés-Blázquez, M., Berkes, F., Calderón-Contreras, R., Carpenter, S. R., Castro, A. J., Cumming, G. S., Falardeau, M., Fick, W. L., ... & Wallington, C. (2025). Welcome home! Introducing SocSES: A society for inclusive and impactful social-ecological research. *Ecology and Society*, 30(2), Article 32. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-16164-300232>
- de Vos, A., & Schwartz, M. W. (2022). Confronting parachute science in conservation. *Conservation Science and Practice*, 4(5), Article e12681. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12681>
- Enrici, A., Gruby, R. L., Betsill, M. M., Le Cornu, E., Blackwatters, J. E., Basurto, X., Govan, H., Holm, T., Jupiter, S. D., & Mangubhai, S. (2023). Who’s setting the agenda? Philanthropic donor influence in marine conservation. *Ecology and Society*, 28(3), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-14091-280302>
- Epstein, G., Lobo, R., Andrews, E. J., Battaglia, M. B., Jorgensen, I., Muhl, E. K., & Shilomboleni, H. (2026). Navigating ethical spaces in common property research. In S. Partelow (Ed.), *Ethics and the commons: Building ethical awareness in research and practice*. Springer Nature.
- Franke, A., Peters, K., Hinkel, J., Hornidge, A.-K., Schlüter, A., Zielinski, O., Wiltshire, K. H., Jacob, U., Krause, G., & Hillebrand, H. (2023). Making the UN Ocean Decade work? The potential for, and challenges of,

- transdisciplinary research and real-world laboratories for building towards ocean solutions. *People and Nature*, 5(1), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10412>
- Gani, J. K., & Khan, R. M. (2024). Positionality statements as a function of coloniality: Interrogating reflexive methodologies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 68(2), Article sqae038. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae038>
- Grenni, S., Soini, K., & Hurlings, L. G. (2020). The inner dimension of sustainability transformation: How sense of place and values can support sustainable place-shaping. *Sustainability Science*, 15(2), 411–422. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00743-3>
- Hill, L. S., Ghorpade, S., & Galappaththi, M. (2023). Toward decolonizing sustainability research: A systematic process to guide critical reflections. *FACETS*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2022-0254>
- Jadallah, C. C. (2025). Positionality, relationality, place, and land: Considerations for ethical research with communities. *Qualitative Research*, 25(1), 227–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241246174>
- Keddie, K., Beaver, S., Law, E. A., Ives, C. D., Bennett, N. J., Thorn, J. P. R., & Friedman, R. S. (2025). Place-based sustainability transformations for just futures: A systematic review. *Geo: Geography and Environment*, 12(2), Article e70040. <https://doi.org/10.1002/geo2.70040>
- Lee, D. (2024). Exploring the determinants of research performance for early-career researchers: A literature review. *Scientometrics*, 129(1), 181–235. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-023-04868-2>
- Stefanoudis, P. V., Licuanan, W. Y., Morrison, T. H., Talma, S., Veitayaki, J., & Woodall, L. C. (2021). Turning the tide of parachute science. *Current Biology*, 31(4), R184–R185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2021.01.029>
- Strand, M. (2024). Advancing transdisciplinarity as an epistemology for more ethical engagements with fishing communities. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 82(6), Article fsae148. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsae148>
- Subramani, S. (2026). Complicity or accountability? The limits of positionality statements. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 6(2), Article e0006042. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0006042>

## About the Authors



**Ella-Kari Muhl** is a researcher at the Centre for Sustainability Transitions at Stellenbosch University, working on biodiversity, economic development, and sustainability transitions in southern Africa. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on future scenarios, coastal governance, and social-ecological systems, supporting more just and sustainable conservation and development pathways across local and global scales.



**Vitor Renck** is a trained ecologist and interdisciplinary marine post-doctoral researcher at the Federal University of São Paulo and at the University of New South Wales. His work explores the intersection of ethnobiology, human ecology, transdisciplinarity, and decolonial approaches, with a strong focus on the knowledge and practices of small-scale fishing communities.



**Maria B. Battaglia** is a pracademic with a PhD in social and ecological sustainability from the University of Waterloo, Canada. Initially trained as an economist, she adopts interdisciplinary and, when appropriate, transdisciplinary approaches to understand the human dimension of fisheries and ocean sustainability. Her current work focuses on equitable marine conservation.



**Livia R. Cruz** is a Brazilian biologist and PhD candidate in biology and society. Her inter- and transdisciplinary research focuses on understanding changes in social and power dynamics related to community-based conservation from an intersectional perspective. She develops participatory research using arts-based methods with women and LGBT+ youth in the Brazilian Amazon.



**Lowine S. Hill** is a transdisciplinary scholar, consultant, and adjunct professor at the University of Waterloo's School of Planning. She specialises in island, climate, and ocean governance, integrating equity and intersectional perspectives. Working at the interface of science and policy, she bridges horizontal and vertical integration to advance sustainable, inclusive adaptation solutions.



**Rafael Lembi** is a transdisciplinary sustainability scholar who designs, facilitates, and evaluates participatory knowledge co-production processes. His research focuses on just energy transitions in Amazonian communities, particularly energy sovereignty through off-grid solar electrification, and on transformative futures, supporting groups to co-create shared visions and pathways toward more sustainable and equitable futures.



**Willem Malherbe** is a postdoctoral researcher based at Savoirs, Environnement et Sociétés (SENS), Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), France. He specialises in social-ecological resilience for sustainability, with further research interest in the operationalisation of anticipative capacities for resilience building. His current focus is on sustainability interventions in Oceania by applying the leverage points framework for transformative change.



**Deborah S. Prado** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil, and an adjunct professor at the University of Waterloo, Canada. Her work focuses on environmental governance, socio-environmental conflicts, and coastal and marine systems, with particular attention to small-scale fisheries, blue justice, and equitable pathways toward ocean economies.



**Kinga Psiuk** is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University. Her research explores social-ecological identity, and its role in fostering empathy and constructive engagement across human and more-than-human communities, focusing on urban conservation conflicts in Cape Town. Using participatory, interpretive, and arts-based methods, she creates experiential spaces for dialogue.



**Mia Strand** is a marine social scientist and Ocean Nexus postdoctoral research fellow at Nelson Mandela University, South Africa. Her research examines equity and socio-cultural dimensions of ocean governance, emphasising diverse ocean knowledges. Using transdisciplinary and arts-based approaches, she explores more equitable and ethical collaborations with communities, partners, and co-researchers.