

Viewpoint: 'The Amazon Rainforest is not only a natural heritage, but also a biocultural heritage.'

Until the turn of the 21st century, the ruling paradigm was that the soil in the Amazon was too poor to support agriculture. And, without enough food, it's not suited for humankind. Today, there's little doubt among archaeologists that the Amazon was, in fact, a hotspot for plant cultivation.

[Archaeologist] Eduardo Neves is well-versed in this paradigm shift in Amazonian archaeology and its consequences on our view of the past, present and future of the rainforest.

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[Neves]: What is the idea behind domestication? You take a wild plant and then select and manipulate its features in such a way that a new species comes into existence, which is dependent on human intervention for reproduction. In other words, genetic modification is essential for domestication and agriculture.

However, in the Amazon we also see many species that were never domesticated, such as the açai tree, the Brazilian nut tree and the rubber tree. Not domesticated, yet very important, as they have been exploited as part of the rainforest for thousands of years.

The conceptual shift, which archaeology has helped achieve, is that the Indigenous people who used to live in the Amazon did practice agriculture, yet they did so in a different way. What an archaeological survey of the Amazon teaches us is that man and nature were fully intertwined and impossible to untangle. Which leads us to perhaps the most important paradigm shift of all: the Amazon Rainforest is not so much, or not only a natural heritage, but a biocultural heritage.

[\*\*This is an excerpt. Read the original post here\*\*](#)