

Multispecies Roundtable for Climate Impact: A Speculative Proposal

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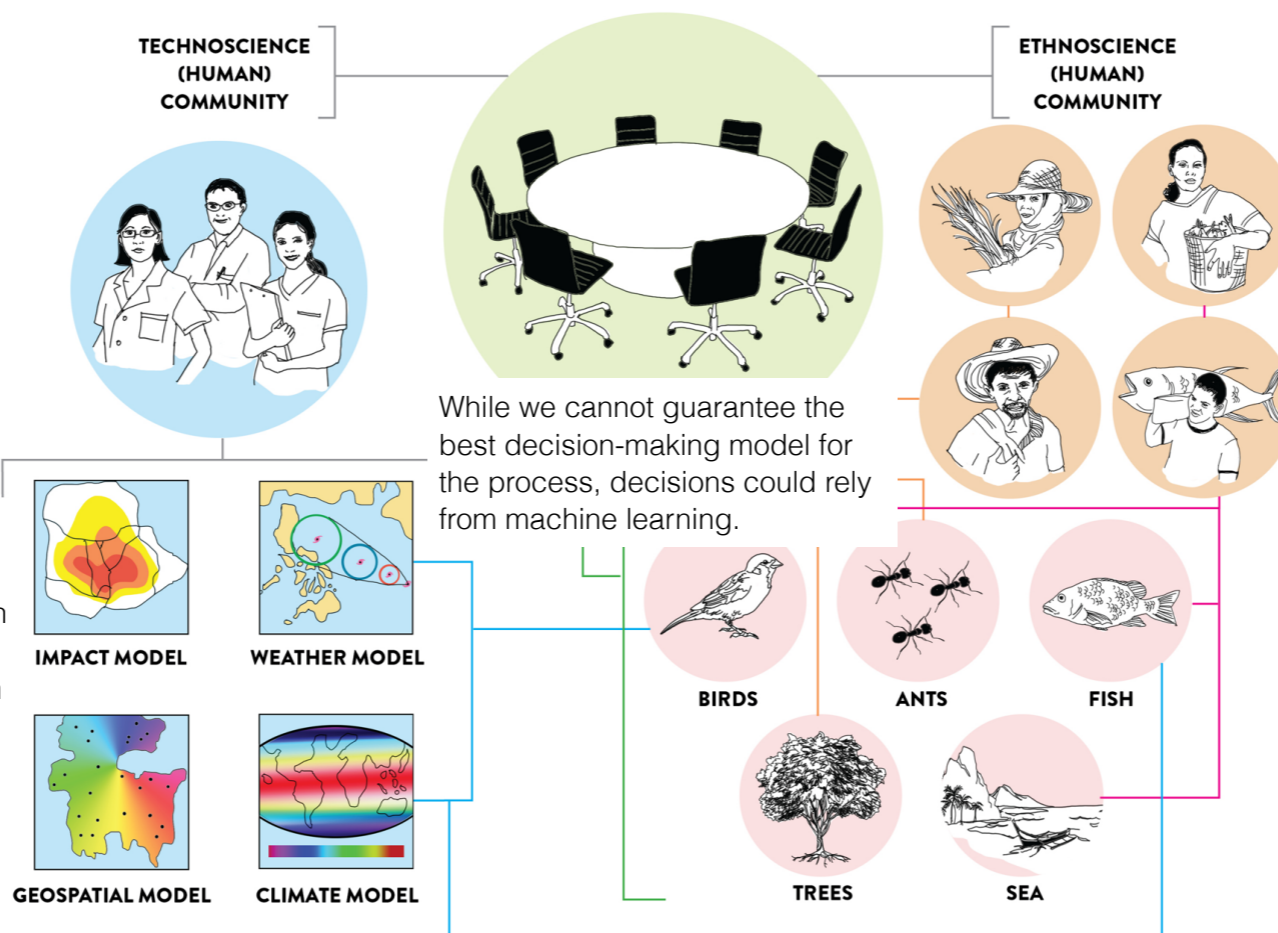
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The Philippines is one of the most typhoon prone countries in world (Bankoff, 2003), and its government has invested significantly in data technology which has proven to be critical in planning for climate impact. However, there is conflict as to how this data ought to be interpreted and used by the technoscientific community on one hand and, on the other, by sectors of society who rely on traditional and embodied knowledge of the natural environment. How do we interpret the information equitably to make decisions that can protect lives, natural and artificial resources, and livelihoods?

We take artist Angelo Vermeulen's notion of a multispecies roundtable for co-creating systems—in which plants, computers, and people are brought together in mutually beneficial ways (Vermeulen, 2016)—and apply it to the context of natural disaster management. Based on our previous experience working in post-disaster reconstruction and design (Cajilig & Salva, 2014), we propose a design concept to integrate ethnoscientific models for weather and climate prediction by indigenous and artisanal groups.

As an initial step, representatives and the technoscientific community sit at the roundtable to negotiate how ethnoscientific information can be used with the latter's predictive models.

Existing predictive models can be integrated, while new techniques can be explored. For instance, at BunB 2017, artist James Cunningham suggested enhancing data collection strategies for natural phenomena on which the ethnoscience community relies. If the community relies on the sighting of certain snakes as a predictor of climate events, for instance, the technoscience community could work to enhance monitoring of these animals.



While we cannot guarantee the best decision-making model for the process, decisions could rely from machine learning.

Populations on the ground have a complex relationship with predictive models from the technoscience practitioners: the models are helpful but because they are probabilistic their implications are considered against other probabilities that imply greater urgency for those affected. For example, our experience in conducting post-disaster social housing and livelihood design workshops demonstrates how geophysical hazards maps imply that certain populations will need to evacuate their homes to be safe from the potential consequences of flood, earthquakes, or storm surges. However, people may resist these implications because there is only a probability of geophysical disaster, whereas they perceive that relocation will certainly reduce their income and disrupt social ties that are critical to everyday survival. Meanwhile, groups affected by climate change, such as coastal populations, also rely on ethnoscientific methods to respond to the environment. These include embodied ways of predicting climate events include a felt change in the temperature ("cold enough to have sex in"), local understandings of wind direction (such wind blowing from or towards Manila bay), and observation of animal behaviour (birds, crabs, cockroaches, etc.).

This design concept explores how we can make better decisions for the common good by building a community practice around climate impact that is made up of humans, non-human animals, and artificial intelligence. Further iterations of the concept will explore the involvement of other agents. In the future, for instance, what if artificially intelligent machines can be considered as a stakeholder? What if animals and plants also had a seat at the roundtable? We allow for a pluralistic view of participation, agency, and inhabiting that accommodates unforeseen potential stakeholders in the question of climate change.

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