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The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) An exploratory study

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Land Acknowledgement

The King's University is located in Amiskwaciy-waskahikan, a gathering place and home, past and present, for many indigenous peoples, now part of Treaty Six territories, and the Métis homeland.

List of acronyms

(in alphabetic order)

AMA	World Assembly for the Amazon
ANPECOM	Associação Nacional por uma Economia de Comunhão
AUSJAL	Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CEAMA	Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon
CELAM	Latin-American Bishops Conference
CIDSE	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité
CIMI	Missionary Indigenist Council
CLAR	Confederation of Latin American Religious Congregations
CNBB	Brazilian Bishops Conference
COICA	Indigenous Confederation of the Amazon Basin
ENA	Ecclesial Networks Alliance
EoF	Economy of Francesco
FOSPA	Pan-Amazonian Social Forum
FUCAI	Fundación Caminos de Identidad (“Identity Pathways Foundation”)
IACHR (CIDH)	Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (OAS)
IAHRS	Inter-American system for the protection of human rights (OAS)
INCUIPO	Institute of Popular Culture
IRI	Interfaith Rainforest Initiative of the United Nations
OAS	Organization of American States
REIBA	Amazon Intercultural Bilingual Education Network
REPAM	Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network
SJPAM	Pan-Amazonian Jesuit Service
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The socio-environmental challenges facing the world today require more than technical, legal and political responses. There is a need for broader ethical and existential responses and, above all, a need for a dialogue between these various scattered and often inarticulate realms. The techno-scientific “tunnel-vision” in addressing the current environmental situation, a potentially important factor is often forgotten, namely: religion. Historically, however, religion has significantly influenced ways of feeling, thinking, and acting, encompassing all the major issues of individual and collective life, including the relationship between humans and non-human nature. Consequently, thinking about the role of religion for a socio-ecological transition can contribute to an expanded understanding of sustainability (which includes economic, ecological, social, and spiritual well-being) and its cultural assimilation, as well as to the orientation of policies, programmes and everyday practices for building just and sustainable societies (Beling & Vanhulst, 2019).

This paper summarises the findings of an exploratory inquiry on the Pan Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM, for its Spanish and Portuguese acronym), an ecclesial service, platform and network affiliated to the Roman Catholic church, which was formally founded in 2014 to promote cooperation among Church organizations, civil society actors, and communities in protecting the cultural and biological diversity and protect the vulnerable populations of the Pan-Amazon¹ from the relentless expansion of the extractive frontier in this vast territory which comprises 34 million inhabitants, distributed across 9 countries, with a total surface of nearly 8 million square kilometres (SIREPAM, 2019).

The relevance of REPAM in the context of global socio-ecological sustainability governance is twofold: first, in its critical role as global climate stabiliser², its unparalleled biological and cultural richness and diversity, as well as in the exponentially progressing depletion thereof as a result of unsustainable *glocal* development patterns, the Amazon can

¹ The terms “Amazon” and “Pan-Amazon” were first introduced by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), an intergovernmental body formed in 1995 to reinforce cooperation among the eight signatories of the 1978 Amazon Cooperation Treaty (Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname), and hitherto forming the only the only statal socio-environmental block in Latin America (<http://otca.org/en/about-us/>). The conceptualization of the Amazon as a common territory implies understanding the whole area comprising mainly rainforest, but also grasslands and savannas, as a single *biome* - that is, a larger ecosystem-, which the governments of the eight countries have committed to preserve in its biological and cultural diversity and make a rational use of its natural resources.

² The Amazon is crucial to maintaining global climate balance. It has a great influence on heat and water vapor transportation to higher latitude regions. It also has a particularly important role on atmospheric carbon sequestration, and consequently it contributes to the reduction of global warming (<http://otca.org/en/amazon/>)

be seen as a ‘small universe’ mirroring the relationship between humanity as a whole and “our Common Home” (Pope Francis), and therefore a critical setting to learn about and experiment with socio-ecological transformations, particularly in the context of ongoing intensification and expansion of the extractive frontier in the region. Second, REPAM has kickstarted a domino-effect of (self-)reflection and transformation across geographical scales and institutional levels. First, REPAM has inspired and played a role-model function for various analogous experiments taking shape in “other biomes/ territories that are essential for the planetary future” (REPAM, 2019): the Congo River Basin, the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, the tropical forests of the Asia Pacific region, and the Gran Chaco and Guaraní Aquifer, in South America, among others, which, in turn, are initiating a global meta-networking effort to explore and realize synergies at the global level: the Ecclesial Networks Alliance for an Integral Ecology (ENA), hosted by the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

In addition, the REPAM-experiment has played an instrumental role as trigger and key actor of theological and institutional church-transformative processes at the global level (the “Amazonization of the church”, in Pope Francis’ wording) (cf. section “History”).

While this paper focuses on the functional role of REPAM as an institutional agent of social-ecological transformation on the ground, an inquiry into the co-evolving Church-institutional transformation processes is integral to understanding the nature of REPAM’s agency, actual and potential. The paper closes with a critical appreciation of the role this religious actor has had on a territorial level, highlighting both its ground-breaking achievements and its shortcomings, which sheds light on the role that REPAM might continue to play in the future as a result of co-evolving institutional and territorial drivers of change.

Chapter 2

Methodology

In view of its exploratory character of this research, data sources were limited to online available information, as well as internal documents and AV materials available from and about REPAM (many of them through personal communication with key informants); and to online interviews with key informants on the REPAM process, with the implicit limitations due to often deficient connectivity infrastructure in non-urban areas of the Amazon region. A total of 10 semi-structured interviews of 60-90 min each were conducted with members of REPAM leadership and practitioners on the ground. In addition, 35 documentary sources were reviewed, on top of those included in the list of references (see Annex at the end of this paper). Data sources were codified and analysed with NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis assistance software to facilitate visualization of recurrent and emergent themes, connections (correlations, attributions of causality, etc.). Given the emergent and constantly evolving nature of the phenomenon under study, however, as well as the loose and aggregative character of the REPAM network (cf. sections “Identity” and “Functioning of REPAM” below), which consistently engenders attribution problems, leaving consistency of interpretation across the data corpus as the only possible source of internal as well as external validity of the findings of this study.

However, in view of the fact that, by lack of other indicators, the perceptual and reflexive-analytical elaborations by the leadership as well as by on-the-ground practitioners of REPAM-related plans and activities remain the only guideline on which the present and future trajectory of REPAM builds, the data corpus on which this study draws can be safely seen as robust, notwithstanding the above-mentioned limitations regarding the exploratory character of the study. A complete list of the data sources used has been compiled in the Annex enclosed to this paper. Interviewee’s names have been substituted by pseudonyms to guarantee their anonymity and for uniformity purposes, even with a vast majority having agreed to their real names being disclosed.

Chapter 3

Description of REPAM

Brief history

The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) was called into life in April 2013 in Puyo (Ecuador) as the result of a process of territorial articulation of the church in Ecuador, yet with a Pan-Amazonian outlook. Its formal foundation took place in 2014 as a joint endeavour of Caritas Internationalis, Latin-American Confederation of Religious Congregations (CLAR), the Amazonian Commission of the Brazilian Bishops Conference (CNBB), and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). The pre-history of REPAM can be traced back for decades, however, at the latest, to the 5th General Assembly of the Latin-American Episcopate in Aparecida (Brazil), in 2007, which denounced that the Amazon is being depleted in the sole economic interest of transnational corporations (Cavanaugh 2018; Hummes, 2019); moreover, the whole conception of Western-style development, of which the extractivist expansion in the Amazon and other key planetary biomes is part and parcel, is placed under scrutiny; in fact, says Victor Heredia, REPAM core leadership team,

our mandate comes largely from the Aparecida document, which calls for an alternative sustainable economic development model³. Now, that is the official position of the Catholic Church and REPAM needs to be very focused on that. (Victor Heredia, 22.2.2022, [01:22:14])

Today, the network is made up of hundreds of Church organizations - local, national and international organizations, congregations, specialized teams and missionaries - from the nine countries that make up the Pan-Amazon region (Brazil, Venezuela, French Guiana, English Guiana, Suriname, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia)⁴.

REPAM was formally presented at the Vatican in Rome in 2015, while Cardinal Claudio Hummes and then Bishop Pedro Barreto (now Cardinal), both trusted collaborators of Pope Francis, were designated to serve as

³ "Raise awareness in the Americas about the importance of the Amazon for all humanity [...] To establish, among the local Churches of various South American countries in the Amazon basin, a joint pastoral ministry with differentiated priorities to create a model of development that favours the poor and serves the common good." (Aparecida, § 475)

⁴

https://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-ecclesial-Pan-Amazonica-milagro-plena-selva-201811180152_noticia.html?ref=https://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-ecclesial-Pan-Amazonica-milagro-plena-selva-201811180152_noticia.html

president and vice-president of REPAM, respectively, which is indicative of the importance attributed from the outset by the Vatican to the "REPAM experiment".

Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical *Laudato Si'* highlighted the need for immediate protection of the world's key ecosystems or biomes, particularly the Amazon and the Congo as the two largest and most biodiverse (LS §38). This set the precedent for the progressive creation of REPAM "sister-networks" in several biomes of global significance, and eventually of an Ecclesial Networks Alliance for an Integral Ecology (ENA) that connects them all on a global level. Pope Francis' appeal to live an integral ecology and to respect the cultural ecology of the ancestral peoples animated the work of REPAM and its nascent siblings, which also found a privileged interlocutor in the Vatican in the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, created by Pope Francis in 2016.

From 2018 onwards, however, REPAM turned much of its efforts to the intra-ecclesial sphere⁵, as it took on the preparatory work for a Vatican Synod on the Amazon convened by Pope Francis in 2017 and held in October 2019 in Rome, which proposed "new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology"⁶, and constituted a historical "occasion to encourage profound changes in the way the Church can accompany and respond to the signs of the present times that threaten life" on Earth (REPAM, 2019). The Synod culminated in the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation "Querida Amazonia" (transl. "Dear Amazonia"), where the late Pope Francis presented his pastoral vision for a synodal Church, incarnated in the territory and promoter of the integral ecology outlined in *Laudato Si'*. Furthermore, the papal call to create a "Church with an Amazonian face" (QA, 61) ushered in what has been interpreted by many as a veritable pastoral (if not theological) revolution, namely: the peripheries of the world – geographical, but also existential, religious, discursive – are to take centre stage in the life of the Church, so that they "would submerge her, change her, and restore her vitality" (Armeni 2023). REPAM is thus also set to embody this vision of a "peripheralization of the Church".

⁵ Significant efforts on the ground were still advanced during this period, however, such as the mapping project SIREPAM (cf. section on Identity) or the school of Human Rights (cf. section on Highlights)

⁶ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html>

The global Covid-19 pandemic also pulled a brake on REPAM's work in the territory, forcing it to divert resources to address the humanitarian emergency. Meanwhile, on the internal front, after six years of headquartering the REPAM Executive Secretariat in Quito (Ecuador), in 2020 a transition process was started to resettle in Manaus, Brazil, with a change in leadership from Mauricio López Oropeza to Fr. João Gutemberg as Secretary Executive. The opportunity was used to conduct an external evaluation process in two phases, focusing on the internal structuring of the network and its external articulations and impacts, respectively.

At the global ecclesial level, in the post-Amazon Synod period, synodality as a slogan increasingly permeates ecclesial self-reflection and debate, with two major processes on the horizon: the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, an unprecedented process of systematic and institutionalized hearing to the voice of the "People of God" in the region, which concluded at the end of 2021, just in time for the kickstarting of the preparatory process towards the Vatican synod held in 2023, with synodality as its thematic axis. Also here, the process of territorial embedding of the church in Amazonia has been a key influencing factor in the conception, methodology and scope of the "Synod on Synodality"⁷.

The 2019 Amazon-synod had also left a mandate for the institutional restructuring of the Church in the Amazon, with the creation of a Pan-Amazonian Episcopal Conference, which later, in the global context of the synodal process, ended up being constituted, in 2021, as an Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), that is: a body of official representation of the Amazonian Church, not open exclusively to bishops, but instead to a diverse representation of clergy, laity and Church organizations. Another mandate of the Amazon-synod was the restructuring of CELAM, which is a still ongoing process, following in the pastoral guidelines outlined in Querida Amazonia. As part of this process,

the Pastoral Center of CELAM, which is a continental Bishops' Council, is being occupied, for the first time ever, by a Layman. Mauricio López went there to provide impulses and oversee the CEAMA process and the creation of the Chaco & Guaraní Aquifer Network. (Victor Jara, representative of REPAM key institutional partner, 8.2.2022, [00:48:40]).

⁷ Atahualpa Yupanqui, private email communication on 8. April 2025

This brief overview of REPAM history is indicative of at least two developments that form the backdrop scenario that cuts across the analysis in this paper: first, of the influence and positive resonances of REPAM's vision of the Church and its role throughout the Catholic world; and, second, of the purposive quest for and rapid institutionalization of such vision, over a period of merely eight years. The relevance of these developments for the Amazon region as a whole will be addressed in the analyses that follow.

Identity

REPAM's identity and mission can be described by expanding on the three concepts combined in its name: network, ecclesial, Amazonian (Caetano Veloso, REPAM core leadership team, 11.2.2022, [00:05:39]) - though one may arguably need to add a "biomatic" component, in so far the territorial dimension is conceived as organically integrated into the larger whole of the terrestrial biosphere, along the lines of *Laudato Si'*:

The fundamental aspect of REPAM was that global view, that pan-Amazonian view (...) In terms of advocacy, in terms of biome, in terms of solidarity in the face of the problems and realities experienced by the Amazonian territory and the peoples who live there. (Silvio Rodríguez, CEAMA and REPAM core leadership team, 9.2.2022, [00:05:31])

REPAM has strengthened its identity as a network in opposition to that of a faith-based organization. The specificity of this network identity is conceptualized in functional terms, as "a strategic device in a fragmented world", which makes it possible to transcend the limitations inherent to the institutional structures of the church (Caetano Veloso [00:08:36]) - particularly dioceses, where the local bishop *de facto* "often acts as a feudal lord" (Victor Jara [00:07:25]) - or to the boundaries of nation states. But the network identity is important also in symbolic and institutional-political terms, where several interviewees have emphasized the caution taken so REPAM would not be perceived as displacing or undermining existing institutional structures, but rather complementing them to enhance their efficacy in subsidiary fashion, concentrating as little as possible, while seeking to preserve and realize synergies by way

of connecting actors, pooling resources, rendering visible the marginalized/subaltern, scaling up initiatives/ideas, and homologating them across geographical and institutional boundaries. At the same time, some interviewees have pointed out that not all ecclesial actors in the Amazon feel as part of REPAM, or have even heard of it:

Within the Church, one can sometimes feel great resistance to this movement, as well as a reaction of questioning, a surprise, a cautionary attitude, as if saying: "wait, but this is not exactly what we do, this does not concern us, this is not a priority". At least "it is not exactly what the Gospel asks of us". So, there is resistance of this type. (Alfredo Zitarrosa, amazonian missionary linked to REPAM and partner ecumenic network, 23.2.2022, [00:02:46])

The dynamics of REPAM are invariably defined as bottom-up: "We are not building a network based on big actors, but on the actors in the territory, based on concrete realities." (Joan Manuel Serrat, representative of indigenous peoples linked to REPAM, 23.2.2022, [00:02:59]); even though many strategic decisions, in particular those pertaining to the liaison of the territorial level with meso- and macro spheres of incidence (cf. section "Functioning of REPAM" below) are taken by the institutional coordination. REPAM-sponsored projects and actions diffuse into a heterogeneous, complex, contingent and rather unstructured prism vaguely unified through the network links. So far, no centralized track-record of actions (let alone measurement of impacts) has been developed. Conversely, REPAM does offer a centralized service of information (diagnosis, mapping) to identify salient issues, commonalities and differences among the diverse territories through a georeferenced information system called SIREPAM, whose quality has been praised by several interviewees.

The network-identity of REPAM is perceived by some of the interviewees to be both a source of strength and a source of weakness: "REPAM is a sui generis network that has difficulties in defining its own membership (which ranges from grassroots collectives, priests, bishops' conferences, all the way to ad hoc groups such as so-called 'itinerant teams')", yet it also has shown impressive leverage, particularly at the global church-institutional level - "it even got to organize an Amazonian synod in the Vatican!" (Victor Jara [00:09:55], [00:39:37]).

Turning to REPAM's ecclesial identity, "it is a very strong identity, because for REPAM it does not mean self-centeredness, on the contrary: it is an ecclesial network for society, which connects ad-intra and ad-extra" (Caetano Veloso [00:05:39]). This bridge-like quality between church and the rest of society takes roots in a major shift in the ecclesiology of the Catholic Church: "REPAM embodies a new conception of the Church: the synodal model, whose roots can be traced back to the Document of Aparecida" (2007) (Silvio Rodríguez [00:08:57]), and which establishes the goal of creating a joint pastoral plan for the Amazon region. This church "takes on the social and environmental challenges of 'the people of God' in concrete territories" (Victor Jara [00:07:25]). According to Atahualpa Yupanqui (REPAM core leadership team, 8.2.2022),

however much one might wish to make readings that are more associated with certain dimensions of the social, the political, the ecological, and even the intercultural, the starting point, the nodal point that determines the identity of REPAM, is the ecclesial one, that is, its network identity, which is also a novelty in terms of church dynamism. It is an explicitly ecclesial network, in deep dialogue with diverse actors at all levels and from a territorial perspective. ([00:03:46])

Indeed: in theological-ecclesiological terms, this emergence of a "network church" amounts to a veritable identity turn for the Church, namely from "mater et magistra" (mother and teacher) to "sister and listener" (Victor Heredia [00:22:59]). This ecclesiological turn, which falls in line with a wider sociopolitical trend towards enlarged and intensified citizen participation and democratization, has deep-rooted implications for the role of the Church as an actor at the territorial level, as we shall see.

A further implication of the synodal commitment to lending voice to the unheard, together with the decolonial aspirations of many peoples in the Amazon, REPAM's identity is defined in antagonistic terms vis-a-vis conventional (Westernising, top-down, homogenising, prescriptive) development. (Caetano Veloso [00:25:26])

The third and last dimension of REPAM's identity is its geographical anchorage in the Amazon region. Like the two precedent dimensions (ecclesial character and networked structure), this "territorial turn" also

aligns with a broader socio-political trend in the region (Svampa, 2013), constitutes another major novelty in the self-understanding of the church.

In the conceptualization of REPAM, the territory has, in turn, two dimensions: first, what we could call a lifeworld dimension, in the phenomenological sense (hereinafter, the “territorial dimension” proper), which constitutes the world of lived experience of the Amazonian population⁸; and, second, a biomatic dimension, which underscores the key role of the Amazon as a stabilizer of the global biosphere, including the global climate system. This duality of the territorial approach underpins the shift in the Church’s self-understanding:

I believe that this is where the germ of a new ecclesiological paradigm was born: the territorial paradigm. There is a novelty of impact: at the level of the hierarchical, structural, sometimes vertical Church, the notion of the peripheral, the undesirable, the disposable, now becomes a cornerstone. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]).

The acknowledgement that now even the affluent societies from the centre depend on the periphery⁹ of the human world - including the church itself - ought to have come as a shock to many. “Some bishops have taken the commitments of the Amazon Synod seriously, and are very active and very dynamic, but others [...] are oblivious to all these processes and are not very interested in them.” (Silvio Rodríguez [00:50:49])

We know that Pope Francis' position is very much aimed at re-uniting a popular Church, a Church of the people of God, of the great masses. But it is in a more prophetic and philosophical sense than in terms of the Church's actions. But the other issue is to make a structural change that is not yet very

⁸ To be sure, the territorial dimension proper is a category that is also relevant from a human geography vantage point, as well as from the perspective of political institutionalization. However, in view of the emphasis given to the lived experience of Amazonian populations in the sources from and about REPAM, it seemed more sensible as a counterpart to the biomatic understanding of the territory.

⁹ “The periphery is the place where there is no access to life. The place of the poor, of the forgotten, of the mistreated; it is the place where there is abuse, violence, mistreatment” (Victor Heredia [00:09:48]). According to Victor Heredia, the notion of “periphery as a new centre” is a renewed understanding of the pastoral “preferential option for the poor” from an integral ecology perspective.

close. I think that the ways of doing things are changing more than the forms of structures. (Violeta Parra, REPAM executive secretariat team member, 23.2.2022, [00:49:57])

Conversely, rendering the biomatic dimension visible and relevant for the lifeworld reality of agents on the ground constitutes a parallel challenge for REPAM: “at the beginning, no one believed that it was possible to take on a biomatic vision to develop a strategic, transformative and long-term ecclesial process.” (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]). It is this biomatic dimension which gives rise to the idea of a “Pan-Amazonian” world, thus shifting the emphasis from domestic issues to transboundary issues, from nuanced differences towards commonalities:

One of the issues that we are beginning to see and confirm is that the reality of indigenous peoples in the Amazon, regardless of the country they live in, is very similar. It is a reality that is very much affected by the aggression on their territories, by the aggression on their rights, by the issue of large infrastructure, oil extraction, mining projects. (Joan Manuel Serrat [00:02:59]).

The aforesaid notwithstanding, the biome remains an abstract idea in the face of the everyday challenges of its residents ¹⁰. This should not come as a surprise, since

there is no such thing as Amazonia. We have to talk about Pan-Amazonia as an ecosystem, because of its territorial and geopolitical importance. But be it in terms of the defence of life, be it in terms of the projection of new ecclesial,

¹⁰ “The biome is, let's say, a very viable and complete concept in biological terms of the ecosystem. But in sociological terms, in cultural, anthropological terms, it doesn't fit: you're talking about 400 different nationalities of native peoples; 9 or 8 countries and an overseas territory. You are talking about multiple dynamisms, including community and peasant dynamics. You can't homologate, I think that's the key. There is an integrative view of the biome that gives meaning to the whole, but then you have to immerse yourself - that is the incarnational perspective -; an incarnate spirituality in particular realities, in specific territories. So I would say that in many places this interface depends on the particular situations and subjects, on conflicts that are being experienced or on the pre-existing experiences with the Church, for example. In each of these spaces, what we have been trying to do is to create conditions for listening processes to unfold.” (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:27:15])

economic, or whatever paths, we need to refer back to the concrete territories. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:27:15]).

Hence, an interface is required between the sociologically empty concept of “biome” and the sociologically full concept of “territory” (understood as lifeworld). According to Atahualpa Yupanqui, in the work of REPAM the river basin has often served this purpose: “the basins are a natural system that remits to the logic of articulation: the rivers that integrate, or the rivers that separate; the dynamics of fishing, of economic life” ([00:27:15]); furthermore, the shared basin-level lifeworld would also “foster a common identity”. In addition, many social groups in the Amazon, particularly indigenous peoples, have a strong intuition of the biomatic dimension as a central element of their ancestral cosmogonies (Beling, Vanhulst & Gomez, 2014; Estermann, 1998), that is, as part and parcel of their lifeworld, which contributes to bridging with the biomatic scale.

Hence, this third descriptor, the territory, appears as a binder of the other two identity markers, namely the ecclesial and the networked character or REPAM:

The notion of synodality, which means articulating processes, creating synergies in ecclesial matters, was not considered possible. What made it possible? A proper reading of territoriality, the ‘biome-factor’, and a diverse participation. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46])

Aims

REPAM is committed to a broad range of aims which were found not always to be stated in the same way or priority order, which is possibly attributable to the loose, morphing character of the network, as outlined above, and its decentralized, bottom-up approach. What follows is a collection which draws on the multiple sources consulted for this exploratory study. I will rank them according to their level of generality and generative character (“at the source”), down to the most concrete and derivative ones (“end-of-pipe”):

- Articulating local and global, territory and system-level, that is: sustainability of lifeworld and (Earth-)systemic sustainability
- halting or mitigating the intensification and expansion of the extractive frontier, hence contributing to the preservation of cultural and biological diversity at the territorial level
- Transforming the unsustainable global culture that drives extractivism at territorial level.
- Developing and running joint pastoral planning and care in the Pan-Amazon, structurally emphasizing those most vulnerable, excluded, and/or subalternized ¹¹
- Community (political and socioeconomic) empowerment. Promoting alternatives to development (buen vivir), socio-environmental justice, new modes of production, food sovereignty ¹².
- Defence of human rights of the Amazonian peoples
- coordinated humanitarian assistance and improved visibility (e.g. mitigation of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, including mapping of impact)

In a diachronic review of the documents database gathered for this study, it becomes apparent that REPAM is a live, ongoing process, which is constantly reviewing its self-presentation and self-organization, which becomes visible, for example, in the disparate mission statements found across the corpus, or in the reorganization of REPAM's thematic nuclei. By implication, while the core substance of REPAM's identity and aims has remained unaltered, their formulation, categorization, etc. have been subject to changes.

¹¹ This coincides with a broadened conceptual definition of “the poor” in the Aparecida Document (§402)

¹² though sometimes the emphasis is shifted from food sovereignty to food security, e.g. in the coalition of catholic Amazonian universities) (Violeta Parra [00:20:28])

Chapter 4

Functioning of REPAM

How does the above description of what REPAM is translate into its structure and dynamics? From the beginnings, the process of internal structuration evolved in parallel with the hearings process on the ground and the coordination process with other (foremost ecclesial) institutional instances. Still, an analytical distinction between ad intra and ad extra organization appears useful for display purposes, even though both realms are strongly intertwined.

Ad intra

The internal structure of REPAM is organized around thematic nuclei. The term “nuclei” was preferred over the initial “thematic axes” for semantic reasons, seeking a better match for REPAM’s network identity: “The nucleus is like the seed, a seed that develops; it advances from the small to the macro, right? The axis of a machine cannot change, an axis is very institutional.” (Caetano Veloso [00:08:36]). Historically, thematic nuclei have been progressively redefined, both in rhetoric and in action, to reflect the evolving self-understanding of REPAM and also shifting challenges as they are recognized, as well as the changing importance attributed to certain issues (e.g. after the Amazon Synod, a nucleus on the role of women and of the youth were added).

In the original scheme, four central target-areas were identified as key to the indigenous and other vulnerable groups of the Amazon: 1) defence of their human rights; 2) alternatives to development (later renamed “socio-environmental justice and buen vivir”); 3) development of and training in methods for a pastoral ministry from a Pan-Amazonian perspective; and 4) catering to the special needs of churches at the frontiers (i.e. state borders). These four priority target-areas are, in turn, supported by three service-provision thematic nuclei: a) “mapping and research” on the diverse salient issues across the vast Pan-Amazonian territory; b) “communication for the social transformation”, “to help people on the ground to develop their own narratives and communicate it to the world” (REPAM, 2018, 3:50) ; and c) network-building at the international level, “where we try to think how to impact ‘the other jungles’, as we call them, because if you don’t change; nothing will change in our territory” (REPAM, 2018, 3:52).

Furthermore, with the aim of flattening the way for articulation with the preexisting national church structures, so-called “national REPAMs” take up many of the tasks of REPAM within their own national territory. This is viewed critically by some of the persons interviewed. Indeed, “while REPAM was born as a loose network, it increasingly evolved towards matching pre-existing structures, i.e. building upon the existing jurisdictional scaffolding of the church and of nation-states” (Joan Manuel Serrat [00:23:10]), in coherence with the growing ad-intra orientation of REPAM leading up to the Amazon Synod and beyond, which risks REPAM drifting into a more structured, bureaucratized, and conditioned dialogue with ecclesial and non-ecclesial partners, but also a more institutionalized articulation, which allows e.g. for fast-tracking communication and coordination through existing channels¹³. Figure 1 below depicts the original internal organization just described.



Figure 1

In the period following the Amazon Synod (i.e. from 2020 onwards), as the synodal/participative, territorial, networked identity and approach of REPAM was mainstreamed into the Catholic church at large, a more complex and formalized structure of inter-ecclesial coordination started taking shape, as discussed below (cf. “Functioning of REPAM”).

¹³ For a deeper discussion of the gains and losses from such trend, cf. section “Critical assessment of the role of REPAM..”

Ad extra

For us, the notion of Pan-Amazonia is like the great Amazon River, which is like the sum of all these tributaries and, hopefully, in terms of transformation, a periphery that illuminates the centre at the mouth of the ocean. But if we do not start from the water spring, which is the territory, we cannot go beyond the world of ideas. And that source is sacred. REPAM never appropriated the notion of the essential, original source of water, which are the peoples, which are the incarnated churches, but it did help a little to project the subsequent convergence of the tributaries ([00:34:50]). [...] That which now is the Ecclesial Networks Alliance (ENA), which will likely take years, decades maybe, has its starting point in this territorial spring. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:49:07])

REPAM was conceived with an explicit trans-scalar design, which is depicted in Figure 2 below. The first two scales - the territorial and the national one - preexisted REPAM, as they coincide with the conventional institutional organization of the Church. The third sphere (the Pan-Amazonian, that is, a biomatic sphere), in synergic interconnection with the prior two, is the true differential value added by REPAM, as discussed in the section on “Identity” above:

In terms of a biome, an ecosystem, we can identify areas, lines where we understand that there is convergence for the defence of global rights from an inter-American perspective, or to promote transformative pastoral processes. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:27:15]).

A further innovation brought about by REPAM, adds Atahualpa Yupanqui, is the fourth sphere, referred to in the REPAM jargon as “the sphere of incidence”: “the world of international organizations was reduced either to smaller organizations albeit with large capacities, or to the Holy See, with its particular status at the United Nations, but without involving anyone from the territory.” REPAM, in turn, aims to serve as a liaison between the actors on the ground and the highest representative instances at international level, such as the EU organizations, the national

parliaments of central countries with economic interests in the Amazon or a leverage in international bodies (USA, Canada, Germany, Norway, etc.), in a way that is “not just a mere ‘advocacy tourism’, but a continuous process that has been explicitly articulated”, and not as a mere aggregation of small institutional actors doing advocacy, but as “a whole network that, from the very beginning, took on an explicitly advocacy vision”. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46])

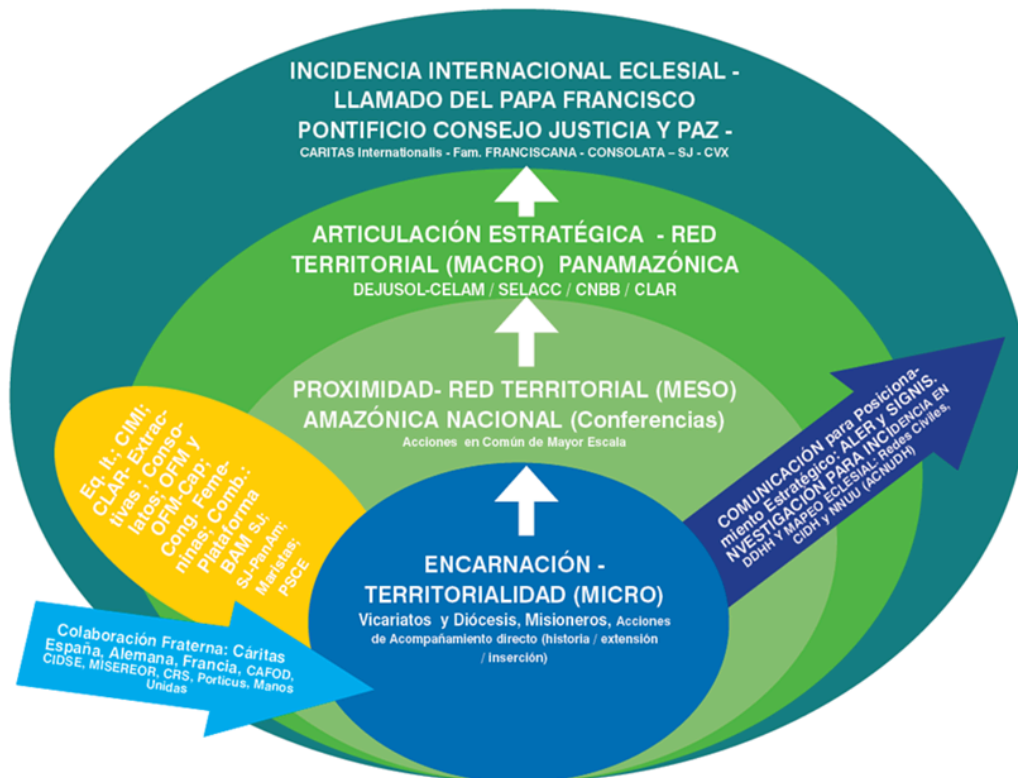


Figure 2

In addition to this “vertical” axis of articulation, REPAM strongly emphasizes its prioritization of a logic of horizontal articulation with grassroots actors for the purposes of situation diagnosis, identification of challenges and needs; but also for alliances and for training purposes, so as to empower actors on the ground to speak for themselves. But how does this horizontal articulation work in practice?

there was an explicit and progressive participation of territorial actors in the process, including indigenous peoples and peasants. First, from a perspective of intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and articulation, and then formally

inserted in the processes of advocacy, training, and even now in the governance of the network itself and in the spheres of advocacy. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46])

Worthwhile noting, also, that it is not only REPAM, but “the Church as a whole” that “is generating agreements and working arrangements, mutual recognition in areas of common concern, and this was replicated throughout the Amazon thanks to the existence of REPAM” (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]). REPAM has hardly generated, however, any protocolized procedures or standard structures/channels for cooperation; rather, each individual process of articulation is highly tailored to the peculiarities of the specific territory and contingent on its existing institutional infrastructure (particularly ecclesial) and human capacities (Victor Jara [01:05:19]).

In spite of the horizontality ethos, however, the role of leadership has still proven to be key in REPAM’s work. Indeed, personalized liaisons are key in explaining certain processes in the evolution of REPAM - in particular, the Vatican connection via the late Cardinal Claudio Hummes and Cardinal Pedro Barreto, with Cards. Michael Czerny and Jean-Claude Hollerich among their European interlocutors, as well as the Jesuit networks, including the Jesuit Pan-Amazon Service (SJPAM) and the Latin-American Jesuit University Network AUSJAL - were key in opening windows of opportunity and fast-tracking communication, attracting attention to the theological, ecclesiological, and territorial vision of REPAM, etc. Of course, the reliance on personal connections can also be a sign of structural precarity, which REPAM seeks to wave away through strong institutional alliances.

There is a predisposition to live an ad-intra-ecclesial process that has been urgently needed for a long time. It is taking on greater prominence, perhaps to take advantage, in a way, of the fact that Francis still has strength and is there at the head of the Church. So, there are many things that build up momentum for focusing on the ad-intra work of the Church, which will undoubtedly not last forever. (...) A time will come when these processes can be led by the grassroots movements and their organizations. I think there is a lot of risk in putting the Church at the centre of this issue, because, as I have already told you, the Church's logic is generally one of building pyramids. (Violeta Parra [00:58:10])

The interviewees have overwhelmingly concluded that, when it comes to building alliances and establishing cooperation, ecclesial actors (preferably catholic: dioceses, vicariates, congregational structures, in particular the Jesuit order) are prioritized over non-ecclesial ones.

Moreover, the four founding institutions (CLAR, Caritas, CNBB, CELAM) still form the backbone of REPAM's structure and dynamics, with Brazil weighting increasingly higher, which, in a way, seems reasonable insofar Brazil gathers more than half of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the Amazon, with the potential risk of further "Brazilianization" associated with the transfer of the headquarters of the Executive Secretariat from Ecuador to Manaus (Silvio Rodríguez [00:01:38]). The recent institutional innovations of the Catholic Church in the Amazon and worldwide - in particular, CEAMA - create new complexity, and with it come greater coordination and thus transaction costs, but also the opportunity for a more efficient division of labour, with the potential to unburden REPAM from intra-ecclesial draining resources from the impact-oriented work in the territory (cf. "Conclusions and Outlook")

Within the ecclesial sphere, ecumenic and interreligious dialogue is also gradually gaining ground, with a new REPAM/CEAMA thematic nucleus of its own. An important historical REPAM-ally in the fight against extractivism has been the Churches and Mining Network ("Red de Iglesias y Minería"), a Latin-America-wide ecumenic network that is "committed to strengthening popular movements and sectors, democratic values, gender equality, respect for multiculturalism, interculturalism and inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism"¹⁴, and driving a "Divest from Mining" campaign, analogous to the larger Divest movement sponsored by the Vatican, in the wake of which over 250 catholic institutions have pledged a commitment to divest from fossil fuels and other harmful industries¹⁵.

When it comes to alliances with non-ecclesial actors, the picture is less clear. At the territorial level,

¹⁴ Source: <https://iglesiasymineria.org/quienes-somos/> (retrieved on 04.03.2022), author's translation

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vatican-environment-idUSKBN23P1HI>; <https://laudatosimovement.org/act/divest/>; <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-10/ahead-of-cop26-uk-churches-join-global-divestment-announcement.html> (visited on 04.03.2022)

The first essential non-ecclesiastical allies were the communities themselves, starting above all with the indigenous peoples, where the Church was already involved in dialogue processes, which were now formalized in this network expression. Secondly, with the indigenous organizations, peasant organizations and also productive initiatives, economic initiatives. It is impossible to name them because they are 'at the source', and in each country they are different. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:38:02]).

REPAM (or its subsidiary organizations and agents) have also articulated with many of the national indigenous organizations in the Amazon, but, most effectively, with the Indigenous Confederation of the Amazon Basin (COICA), the most important indigenous organization in the basin (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:38:02]), even though collaboration between COICA and REPAM has noticeably diminished in the recent past. The list is enlarged with a plethora of environmental, social and humanitarian NGOs, development cooperation agencies, as well as local governments - national governments would not be trustworthy alliance partners, as they often violate agreements, the rights of their citizens, and have a track-record of instrumentalizing grassroots initiatives -, as well as strategic instances of articulation at a higher scale

within international governance forums where pressure could be exerted on the specific issues pertaining to the Amazon itself; and then in social forums: the World Social Forum, the Pan-Amazon Social Forum and some alliances that were created, such as the World Alliance for the Amazon (AMA). (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:38:02])

However, other interviewees have indicated that extra-ecclesial partnerships appear to be much less organic, but rather sporadic and with a lower degree of prioritization on the side of REPAM:

FOSPA [the 10th edition of the Social Forum of the Pan-Amazon] is the big event this year in the Pan-Amazon; how can REPAM not be part of this activity? Or also the platform at the World Assembly of the Amazon, which brings together very different actors, but there are not many from the Church... (Alfredo Zitarrosa [01:01:22])

Exceptions to the aforesaid are the above mentioned Indigenous Confederation of the Amazon Basin (COICA), which is the strongest, more far-reaching partnership of REPAM with the world of Amazonian indigenous organizations, as well as some stable partnerships in specific countries, such as that with FUCAI Colombia (Fundación Caminos de Identidad, transl. "Identity Pathways Foundation").

One key issue in the functioning of REPAM which has not been yet addressed is that of funding. As a network overlapping with preexisting structures and actors, REPAM does not possess, but also deliberately seeks to avoid managing large amounts of funds. Instead, it would offer a pooling function (that is hardly developed up to its potential) and rather decentralize all administrative functions to partner organizations that will implement the particular projects, "because a network with too many resources of its own, with many own assets, ceases to be a network and is already institutionalized." (Caetano Veloso [01:14:07])

Accordingly, the funding structure of REPAM itself is not too diversified, either, and comprises not more than a handful of church charities from the global north such as various national chapters of Caritas, CAFOD, CIDSE, or MISEREOR, together with private philanthropy.

In sum: plurality of actors, horizontal integration, prioritization of territorial agenda (synodality), capillarity. Ecclesial structures (founding institutions: CLAR, Caritas, CNBB, CELAM) form the skeleton of REPAM's structure and dynamics: Jesuit-overlap in structure (to an extent), Brazil with a higher specific weight, ecclesial agenda as collected from territory (bottom-up), but with a transversal aim. Ecclesial actors in the territory realized the need for a higher, interconnected instance to address their challenges more effectively.

Relationship between ends and means in the work of REPAM

The multiplicity of means on which REPAM relies to on to pursue its diverse aims can be classified three categories:

- a) direct action on the ground, encompassing pastoral ministry, socio-economic and technological support through training, (channelling of)
- f) funding, peer-exchange, organizational and planning assistance,

environmental protection, and subsidiary action when facing humanitarian emergencies.

b) horizontal networked articulation (ad intra and ad extra ecclesia), mainly through strategic institutional articulation, collective action, and movement-building, and

c) incidence in public discourse and official international deliberative or decision-making fora such as the IACHR, the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties, or the EU Parliament, through advocacy, public communication, as well as knowledge production.

In addition, intercultural dialogue plays a cross-cutting role as a binder among the three categories above.

In the pursuit of the larger, longer term goals of articulating territory and global, system-level sustainability, advancing the transformation of the prevailing unsustainable culture of consumerism and accumulation which drives extractivism in the Amazon and other vital ecosystems, as well as when it comes to halting or mitigating the expansion of the extractive frontier on the ground, a premium is placed on communication (denunciation) and on international incidence, sometimes combined with equipping people on the ground to resist better, but relying less on extra-ecclesial networking and movement-building (i.a. Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:45:07]). The same is true for the goal pertaining to the defence of human rights, which in many ways appears as REPAM's poster child (Victor Jara [00:25:48]). A critical appreciation of these strategic choices can be found in section "Critical assessment of the role of REPAM" below.

Conversely, when it comes to the goal of tending to the Amazon's poor through an integral Pan-Amazonian program of pastoral care and community (political and socioeconomic) empowerment along the lines of "alternatives to development" and buen vivir, it is the direct-action means listed under a) above which take the upper hand, insofar synergic opportunities emerge from the network nodes.

Let us now turn to a discernment of pluses and minuses in terms of the impacts of REPAM's work, based on the perspective of key informants (interviewees) and the author's own analytical judgement.

Chapter 5

Critical assessment of the role of REPAM in addressing the integrated socio-environmental challenges in the Amazon region

In order to understand and sensibly assess the impact of REPAM's work in pursuit of its declared aims, one should first keep in mind that we are not looking back at a historical phenomenon; rather, REPAM is essentially work-in-progress, an ongoing process in every way, from its identity definition, passing through the operationalization of its mission and objectives, all the way to its larger institutional underpinning. Moreover, given its visionary and therefore necessarily ambitious, complex, and rather abstract goals at multiple scales and across multiple dimensions of collective life, it should be expected that many of the impacts of REPAM's work cannot possibly be measured, either because they are inherently not measurable (e.g. "articulating territory and global, system-level sustainability"), or because the impacts are long term and therefore not immediately observable ("transforming consumerist culture"), while some might simply go unnoticed. Instead, our analytical focus shall turn to the creation of favourable conditions for a social-ecological sustainability transition. The more concrete, short-term, and discernible the aims ("end -of-pipe solutions"), some impact measurement should be possible, of course; however, such measurement is often non-existent or non-available. There are various plausible explanations for this: on the one hand, because more often than not, REPAM operates as a facilitator rather than as a ground-level implementing agency, as a result of which the track-record of actions and impacts becomes highly dispersed. On the other hand, since its creation in 2014, REPAM's capacities have been largely devoted to institutional bridge-building and reform, so that it seems to have hardly devoted any resources to impact measurement. In both sets of objectives, then, upstream and end-of-pipe, framing the analysis from an ongoing processual perspective would seem a meaningful approach.

Highlights

New conception of territoriality: the "biomatic outlook".

In view of global ecological interdependencies and local social, economic, cultural, and political heterogeneity, the biome-framing - understood as a melting pot of the lifeworld and systemic dimensions of

social-ecological life anchored in concrete territories -, seems a promising way forward in operationalizing the idea of an “integral ecology” at the ground-level of territorialized lifeworlds. The concept of biome is operationalized in REPAM’s network and has prescriptive value in terms of its institutional articulation work, synergy-building, and territorial action, but also into (church-)institutional design (see point “Driving self-interrogation...” below), in a way that is unprecedented: “The baseline in these processes does not exist, there is no other experience of [biomatic] territoriality.” (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:23:33]). REPAM has been instrumental in mainstreaming this model, insofar it has enabled

the reinforcement of multiple initiatives in the territory that today have been made visible, reinforced, better funded and strengthened in light of this network [...] I don't know what other ecclesial experience of broad scope can articulate the social, political, ecological, cultural, anthropological, intercultural, intergenerational justice dimensions as clearly as REPAM has. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:49:07])

But the biome-framing also opens up an “inter-biomatic” perspective that adds a global connectivity element and highlights global interdependencies, thereby flattening the way towards a global sustainability transition. And this was made explicit from the beginning at the highest institutional instances of the Church (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]), and eventually underpinned the recent creation of the Ecclesial Networks Alliance for an Integral Ecology (ENA), as an instance to address common issues and pool resources.

Driving self-interrogation and transformation processes at the Church-institutional level worldwide.

REPAM has sparked, oriented, and coordinated efforts aimed at Church self-transformation, from the territorial scale to the highest institutional level, including theological innovations with direct implications for the role of the Church as an agent of social-ecological change; most prominently, perhaps, with the idea of the territory as a theological locus and a new

ecclesiological subject, and the related role model of a synodal Church, with far-reaching and probably long-lasting impact:

the conversion that has taken place in the synodal processes for the Church worldwide in terms of listening to and participation of the people of God and the issues of the periphery, as well as the direct voice in the spaces. This has already become, I believe, irreversible. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:49:07])v

This transformative ecclesiology has transpired in the various milestones in recent church history mentioned earlier: the encyclical letter *Laudato si'* (2015), the Amazon Synod (2019) and subsequent creation of CEAMA (2020), the Latin-American Ecclesial Assembly (2021), or the ongoing restructuring process of CELAM along the lines of Pope Francis' post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Querida Amazonia*" (Victor Jara [00:47:13]), as well as in cross-cutting issues such as the role of women in Church leadership, etc.

These institutional changes also suggest a "decolonial turn" in the Catholic Church under Francis' papacy (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:02:46]). All of the above appear as enabling preconditions for REPAM to play a more prominent role as a change agent of the unsustainable development model in the Amazon, as argued in extenso in the section "Relative neglect..."

Human rights: local empowerment and international incidence

With anchorage in its thematic nucleus of human rights protection, REPAM "articulates efforts and alliances of ecclesial, social and political organizations for the defence and promotion of human rights" (REPAM, 2020). Their human rights work is arguably regarded as the most successful of REPAM's endeavours, at least on two interrelated accounts:

First, due to the successful articulation with the Inter-American System for the Defence of Human Rights (IASHR), which has a political branch via the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and a juridical branch, with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In 2016, REPAM signed a memorandum of understanding with the IASHR,

whereby both parties commit themselves to cooperate for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Amazon region through technical consultancies, internships, and the possibility of submitting petitions for precautionary measures at Pan-Amazonian scale (REPAM, 2020), which de facto implies the possibility of historically unprecedented jurisprudence at the Pan-Amazonian level . A similar agreement for joint petitions of precautionary measures was reached with former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, whose mandate ended in October 2019 (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]).

Second, through an innovative training model aimed at equipping local actors on the ground with legal knowledge and tools: the REPAM “School of Human Rights”, which is about to launch its fourth edition in 2025, is “an incredible work done to empower the people to raise their own voices to denounce human rights violations” (Victor Jara [00:16:32]). Departing from their personal situation of vulnerability and from their own experiences of conflict and abuse, community leaders are trained by lawyers and jurists in an intensive on-site 5-week course, together with a pastoral agent. The goal of the course is that the participants “be able to draft, in operational terms, their own conflict, and present it, together with REPAM, at an official hearing of the Inter-American Commission” (Victor Heredia [00:39:38]).

REPAM has always pursued this important axis of advocacy and human rights and, in order to stop all these threats, organization and training are needed. [...] One woman told me: “what has helped me the most [...] has been the Church, because REPAM gave me the knowledge about my rights, and, by knowing my rights, I can demand and defend them”. (Horacio Guarany, REPAM core leadership team, 9.2.2022, [00:19:57])

The method of in-pairs-training, which is rooted in liberation theology, has moreover often led to the local church taking ownership of the community’s grievances: “many bishops have now integrated it into their positioning as well: to be neutral is not to be on either side”. (Violeta Parra [00:35:45]). This model has had ripple effects beyond the church and the particular territories: “The IACHR adopted REPAM’s model themselves, and so did a Pan-Amazonian university consortium, which based their ‘human rights clinic’ on REPAM’s model” (Victor Jara [00:19:22]).

Knowledge production and communication

The production of knowledge to serve as a basis for church-based and broader action plans across the Amazon territory has been a key engine of REPAM since its beginnings, responding to the assumption that information is a crucial input to shape more effective interventions, as well as to unveil certain aspects of reality and render them more visible to official governance institutions (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:38:02]).

There are two main experience of knowledge production and systematization that are worth highlighting here: the Information System on the Ecclesial Reality of Pan-Amazonia (SIREPAM) and the monitoring of COVID-19 impacts, which led to the establishment of a permanent network-run Pan-Amazonian health observatory.

SIREPAM is a bilingual platform (Spanish and Portuguese) developed in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Nucleus on the Environment (NIMA) of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), which makes publicly available all the information gathered during the first ever mapping process to be carried out for the 104 ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the Pan-Amazon region. Its goal is to “offer local churches the opportunity to strengthen their articulations and work in a network for the care and defence of life in this territory”. The platform provides access to graphs, tables and general data for each of the REPAM thematic nuclei, with the visualization of the data being organized by Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, Regional, Country and Pan-Amazonian level. This information “will allow a diagnosis of the reality of the territory and can be used as a starting point and guideline for the formulation of Pastoral Plans, community action strategies in the face of problems and threats to the Amazon, as well as support for local or international initiatives”¹⁶. Notably, however, after this unprecedented effort at systematization, SIREPAM was not further updated or promoted after the Amazon Synod in 2019.

While SIREPAM was born out of a generic interest in having more systematic information about the Amazon, the humanitarian crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pan-Amazon put REPAM responsiveness to the test. While direct and immediate assistance (shelter for displaced persons; bioprotection material such as masks,

¹⁶ Source:

<https://redamazonica.org/2021/09/repam-lanza-el-sistema-de-informacion-sobre-la-realidad-ecclesial-de-la-Pan-Amazonia/>
(retrieved on 03.03.2022)

alcoholic gel, etc.; financial emergency assistance in lieu of daily wage) flowed mostly through the conventional structures of the Church, REPAM undertook the task of mapping COVID impacts across Amazonian territory, based on the information coming from the Vicariates and from the local public health posts: “Since 17 March 2020, REPAM has been periodically collecting and monitoring information on contagion, on morbidity and mortality related to COVID-19” (Violeta Parra [00:01:33]), thus enhancing their visibility, and the advocacy role vis-a-vis official authorities.

The political leverage of REPAM helped a lot to make visible what was happening in the Amazonian territory, to highlight this reality. But it was not the Church that intervened to bring vaccines to the territory; instead, it was demanded that the health authorities themselves would do it. (Violeta Parra [00:25:50])

This emergency service, however, mouthed in a permanent initiative under the name of “Territorial Health Observatory of the Pan-Amazon”, which was set up in cooperation with four Jesuit universities from the AUSJAL network - the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, the Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University in Peru, the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, and the Catholic University in Ecuador -, and aims at becoming “a virtual information centre about health issues in the Amazon region from a salutogenic perspective” (Violeta Parra [00:11:58]).

Aside from knowledge-production and systematization, REPAM has several communication programs aimed at the broad public, with AV contents that have reached sizable audiences and aim to give visibility to certain aspects of REPAM’s work or to certain heroic figures, such as human rights or environmental activists. Examples are the series “*The Traveller from Assisi*”¹⁷, which seeks to raise awareness on environmental issues and their connection with social injustices, with approx. 40.000 on YouTube; “*Defensores de la Tierra*”¹⁸ (transl. “Defenders of the Earth”), which brings together the testimonies of struggle of those who defend the Amazon on a daily basis (approx. 1500 views); and “*La vida por la*

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrGiaWFiS1M&list=PLzlcvq4GuiUb3wRr2Q728zVICYYIgNAvT>

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0_MCfxCNa4&list=PLzlcvq4GuiUYpWcNViHBzYV3rb_kLui_z

*Amazonía*¹⁹ (approx. transl. “Giving one’s life for the Amazon”), which was jointly produced by REPAM and SIGNIS ALC²⁰, recollecting part of the life stories and legacy of the people who gave their lives as martyrs in defence of the Amazon (around 20.000 views). In particular, REPAM fancies indigenous peoples featuring prominently in their communication, by way of a kind of “restorative justice” to lend visibility to a historically marginalized and subalternized population group. The radio series “Ajuri”, produced by CIMI (Conselho Indigenista Missionário)²¹, is a case in point.

Last but not least, REPAM communication’s nucleus produces pedagogical or training materials such as the “Amazonian Basket”²², aimed at community leaders, or the methodological guide “Cuidemos la Pan-Amazonía” (transl. “Let us take care of the Pan-Amazon”), from the social pastoral ministry Caritas²³

The above mentioned examples, however, paint a rather impressionistic picture of REPAM communication, which remains largely captive in endogenous circles and is far from having exhausted its leverage potential in terms of cultural and sociopolitical discourse. Indicative of the realization that a “communication for social transformation” ought to reach well beyond current targets, REPAM is starting to take actions, e.g. by partnering with long-time funders Porticus and with the Brazilian NGO Instituto Clima e Sociedade²⁴ (transl. “Climate and Society Institute”) to launch a communicational campaign directed mainly at faith communities in order to place Amazon-relevant themes in the political agenda towards the coming national elections in Brazil (Victor Jara [00:16:32]). Yet this remains far from being a systematic strategy of REPAM.

¹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq45Bcen5RE&list=PLzlcvq4GuiUYpWcNViHBzYV3rb_kLui_z&index=9

²⁰ <https://signisalc.org/>

²¹ <https://redamazonica.org/multimedia/ajuri/>

²² <https://www.repam.net/es/publicaciones/cesta-amazonica/que-es-la-cesta-amazonica/>

²³ <https://redamazonica.org/multimedia/cuidemos-la-panamazonia/>

²⁴ <https://www.climaesociedade.org/>

Pending issues

While the achievements highlighted above are significant in church history - and may yet prove to be so in world history, as well - a number of critical issues were also identified, that might eventually cause the REPAM process to drift away from its self-declared aims of effectively responding to “the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth” (Pope Francis) from an integral ecology perspective. After considering these shortcomings and the risks implied therein, we will review a range of hypotheses that shed light on their possible causes.

Effective strategizing and action towards broader transformation in the unsustainable development model and its underpinning cultural imaginary

The narrative leitmotif of REPAM emphasizes extractivism and the predatory economic model (REPAM, 2014), as well as the idea of *buen vivir* in opposition to that, whereby *buen vivir* is understood as an indigenous counterpart, or a functional equivalent, to the ethos of “holism of *Laudato si*” (Victor Jara [00:20:09]). However, in this narrative, both the problem and the solution identified appear as if they were endogenous to the territory, while exogenous factors remain tacit. REPAM does explicitly acknowledge the embeddedness of the territory in a global economic architecture, as well as the high-consumption culture of affluent societies and social groups as a driving force in extractivist expansion (REPAM, 2018, 3:52)²⁵, and yet the question of how the defence of the territory is to be articulated with an “offensive” move towards a purposeful transformation of the prevalent yet inherently unsustainable cultural model is not a question that seems to have been given due consideration - not, at least, beyond the advocacy playground. Some of the key informants interviewed in the framework of this study admitted to “have never really thought about it”, least in operational terms. If extractivism and consumerism are two sides of the same coin, however, focusing on one while dismissing the other is a self-defeating strategy, as it would amount to placing the battle against extractivism, and, therefore, the defence of the territory and its populations, onto a constantly steepening slope.

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Paur6gY2OdE>

Prioritising alliance- and movement-building beyond church boundaries as a key strategy of social change

In view of REPAM's ambitious transformative aims, the larger the first deficit referred to in the previous section, the more important it becomes to compensate it with strategic alliances pooling together the efforts of like-minded collectives at all scales. In particular, alliances with actors beyond the ecclesial sphere appear of utmost relevance, insofar the Catholic (and, to a lesser degree, also the ecumenic) church is a latecomer to the global sustainability debate (Beling & Vanhulst, 2019, Vogt, 2018). Indeed, such alliances offer an opportunity to harness and amplify the experience, expertise, financial and human resources, and historical trajectory of collective reflection and debate that the church necessarily lacks, and enable cross-fertilization and synergetic co-construction and collaboration.

As emerges from the process of external evaluation of REPAM, up until now, REPAM has gained significant visibility in the Amazonian extra-ecclesial world, but has rather engaged in dialogue fora and processes (e.g. taking part of the Social Forum of the Amazon) than in building action-alliances²⁶ (Victor Jara [00:42:21]). One reason for the slow progress observed in this front can be found in a self-imposed restriction: "Our [REPAM's] horizon is very clear: we don't make alliances that are not in accordance with our identity" (Caetano Veloso [01:14:07]). There is doubtlessly a positive aspect to this, as it constitutes a shield against co-optation or instrumentalization of church actors by particularistic interests:

As REPAM became increasingly well-known, I was very careful regarding with whom we interacted, but especially with whom we built alliances. Obviously it was not so explicit, but when we identified lines associated more with a green economy, in the sense of pure resource management, although this is sometimes not so obvious and not so easy to identify. But in everything that involved associating with governments that justified the destruction of ecosystems, but making a little bit of a facelift... or monetising the care of the

²⁶ Noteworthy exceptions to this general statement are e.g. REPAM's part-taking in the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative of the UN (IRI) in favour of indigenous rights and deforestation prevention, or the nascent collaborative project of creating an Amazonian Intercultural University (Victor Jara [00:42:21])

common home, there was open opposition. And, in general, I think also against national governments, because of their lack of seriousness in fulfilling their commitments. Not that there was no dialogue, but no alliances. (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:45:57])

But there is the risk that all-too-narrow identity definitions fatally shrink the space of possible alliances that are nonetheless indispensable in the pursuit of REPAM's aims:

We have not gone far enough; this is quite explicit, and we have acknowledged it also in other inquiries performed on REPAM: This is a limitation of REPAM, a big one: it does not understand itself as a network open to other networks. (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:45:07])

In addition, REPAM has clearly privileged advocacy as a means towards the goal of influencing the governance of global affairs that affect the Amazon biome, instead of alliance- and movement-building. Regardless of the possible merits or flaws of this strategic decision, it is noteworthy that it implies a major shift (if not an outright inversion) in REPAM's modus operandi: Indeed, while at the territorial level a form of 'horizontal articulation' (among peer-partners) is preferred, in coherence with REPAM's network identity, at the global level this is substituted for a pattern of 'vertical articulation', whereby REPAM comes to play a liaison role between the grassroots and the official governance institutions at the international level. An alternative would be to pursue the same pattern of horizontal articulation with peer-organizations and networks at the global level, with whom REPAM shares common goals (e.g. in defence of the commons, the social-solidarity economy, agroecological and food sovereignty, etc.). In view of the inherent limitations of an advocacy approach to advance larger socio-economic transformations (i.a. Blühdorn 2007, Hausknost 2020; Newig, 2007), as the history of sustainability governance abundantly demonstrates (i.a. Lohmann 2007; Bäckstrand 2011; Hopwood et al. 2005, Newell 2005), mainstreaming alliance- and movement-building as a complementary incidence strategy appears only sensible.

Relative neglect of the thematic nucleus “Socio-environmental justice and buen vivir” (formerly: “alternatives to development”)

Even though it is acknowledged that “providing the communities with livelihoods and means, not only to defend their territory, but to also have a future, an economic future, is very important if we want to achieve sustainability” (REPAM, 2018, [3:22]), the corresponding thematic nucleus did not enjoy the same success as others within REPAM:

Unlike what happened with the human rights thematic nucleus, where there was a clear strategy, a good positioning, and a momentum of human rights violations in the territory, and also the fortuitous contact we made with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights - a series of happy coincidences, so that all went wonderfully [...] In all honesty, this thematic axis [Socio-environmental justice and buen vivir] did not have the desired impact. It was limited to mere discussions; it remained a forum for the exchange of experiences. In fact, in the surveys we conducted for the evaluation, the question of impact was salient. (Victor Jara [00:25:48])

The Brazilian Climate and Society Institute (iCS) is working with Porticus and REPAM towards a more organic development of REPAM’s strategy of direct action towards socio-economic transformation. First steps are collaborative efforts with organizations such as ANPECOM (Associação Nacional por uma Economia de Comunhão, transl. “National Association for an Economy of Communion”), which is promoting the *Economy of Francesco*²⁷ (EoF) in Brazil, or with the business-sector-led Sistema B²⁸. Also CELAM is currently readying a systematic mapping process of Economy of Francesco initiatives across Latin-America and the

²⁷ The Economy of Francesco (EoF) (<https://francescoeconomy.org>) is an initiative launched in 2019 by Pope Francis, calling upon “young men and women studying economics and interested in a different kind of economy: one that brings life not death, one that is inclusive and not exclusive, humane and not dehumanising, one that cares for the environment and does not despoil it”, aiming at entering into a “‘covenant’ to change today’s economy and to give a soul to the economy of tomorrow”. (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190501_giovani-imprenditori.html. Retrieved on 02.03.2022)

²⁸ Sistema B is a certification system launched in 2012 with the goal of “promoting ways of economic organisation that can be measured from the well-being of people, societies and the Earth simultaneously, and taking into consideration the short and long term” (<https://www.sistemab.org/en/about-global-b-movement/>. Retrieved on 02.03.2022)

Caribbean, as part of a wider effort to engage religious communities in livelihood creation; “but a very first effort; there is not even a mapping of faith-based organizations or an analysis of how they can synergize with the ecosystem of institutions and organizations that seek to usher in the ‘new economies’.” (Victor Jara [00:45:13])

The operationalization of regulatory ideals of sustainable livelihoods anchored in Amazonian cultures, such as *buen vivir*, also show promise in terms of illuminating pathways forward for REPAM’s role in promoting a territorially rooted socioeconomic transformation (Victor Jara [00:21:23]).

However, an vital question remains open, and does not appear to have been given due consideration in critical-strategic terms, namely the question of what kind of outcomes can be reasonably expected from which alliances, in terms of ushering in a model of socio-economic organization shaped after the vision of an “integral ecology”:

The Economy of Francesco is in danger of getting stuck in seeking merely analgesic alliances from within; but we have seen the incredible capacity of capitalism to reinvent itself [...] It is very dangerous because they have much more capacity, resources and people to reinvent themselves without departing from a principle, which is always the same: to extract for profit. And I think our position should be outside of all this. (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:55:53])

Possible causes underlying REPAM’s shortcomings

Regarding the possible causes of the above listed shortcomings and blind spots, several hypotheses could be identified from the interviews conducted, which range from a lack of organizational or professional capacities, through a matter of strategic prioritizations, to a breadth of obstacles and limitations of a symbolic/identitary or political nature ad intra the church institution. Also external factors seem to have played a key role. The interview excerpts below elaborate on these possible causes:

The problem is one of management. You need professionals [...]; you need at least a rudimentary map of the local actors with whom you could build partnerships to produce, of those who provide you with supplies. You need more of a project management view; we are not talking about something very sophisticated. The people are very willing, they work hard, but it's a different profile. (Victor Jara [00:34:49])

Indeed, unlike in the field of education, for example, which has been central to the Catholic identity historically and where the Church has expertise, trained agents, and even entire religious congregations dedicated to the topic, in the realm of socioeconomic action (e.g. cooperative work) this infrastructure is largely lacking (Victor Jara [00:30:07]), but also a corresponding institutional identity and tradition: “it is more legitimized for there to be a Catholic school, but it is not so legitimized for there to be a Catholic cooperative; do you see? There is no use, there is no tradition within the institution for this type of thing” (Victor Jara [00:33:10]).

In addition, REPAM’s capacity to handle a rapidly growing scope of themes and projects is limited, and caution seems to be the watchword rather than: “Too much growth can also be a contradiction, because energy is also limited. Slow growth is better than an explosion that is not sustainable” (Caetano Veloso [01:21:59]). Moreover, it is not always clear up to which point REPAM should be growing to accommodate projects that cannot be linked directly to demands coming from the ground.

A different hypothesis focuses on the conditionalities imposed by the progressive engagement of REPAM with inward church-institutional processes, insofar “REPAM and the Church are wheels turning at different speeds” (Victor Jara [00:39:37]):

REPAM was born with a lot of freedom to say 'there is no road built, let's build it'. Well, this freedom of creativity, which is pastoral, but also political, is lost a little once you start walking known roads and return to the internal front. At the level of REPAM's strategic decisions, there was a prioritization of the ecclesial field. And this ends up limiting its creativity to return, instead, to a space of security, because that will give it more continuity, which, on the one hand, is true!; REPAM maintains that level of legitimacy within the

Church because it has not finished breaking things up. (Joan Manuel Serrat [00:23:10])

The above reflects the “duality of structure” theorized by Anthony Giddens (1979), according to which institutions are both constraining and enabling change; but there are also identity-related and church-political strings at play

REPAM is on the border, but with a face that still looks inwards, not outwards. So it is indeed a network called to create bridges, but its concern, its "fear", is what the reaction of those inside will be; that they will say "ah, but they allied with those!", "they are unpredictable!", "they do not fully believe in what we do!", "maybe later they will criticize us...!" There are movements in this direction [...] because not all of the vision of the social movements coincides with that of the Church; that would be impossible, because otherwise they would be part of the Church! So I think it's a reaction to an implicit base, which is fear. But I think that if REPAM doesn't force a breakthrough, nobody else will. (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:46:09])

Other relevant church-internal blocking factors are a) conflicts of interest among different church actors, such as competition for resources, which was mentioned already (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:23:33]), but also b) conflicts of interest within certain church organizations, e.g. established funding-related alliances with actors that have vested interests in sustaining the status quo (Joan Manuel Serrat [00:23:10], Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:46:09]) - hence the above mentioned Divest movement as an institutionalized attempt to untie such interweavings inside the church itself. Additional blocking factors include a weak commitment towards outward alliance-building, which was mentioned above (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:45:07]), as well as network- and practice-related inertias:

It is impressive to see how easily the Church can meet with the mining companies, and how difficult it is for them to meet with the communities that are victims of these same companies. Even at the highest level, like the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. We say it explicitly, to call attention, saying "you have already had four or five formal, official meetings with businessmen, CEOs, high-level leadership from the business sector and

only once have you met with the victims, and just because of our insistence.
(Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:26:21])

External factors would undoubtedly play a role in slowing down REPAM's progress, as well. Indeed, on the one hand, there was, as already mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic, and, on the other, there is the acceleration of extractivist practices in the Amazon under the auspices of Jair Bolsonaro's administration in Brazil, which accounts for over 64% of the Pan-Amazonian territory. Yet aside from the above, the current economic context is one of competition for protagonism among disparate and rapidly changing attempts to capitalize on various forms of economic innovation in the Amazon, with harsh competition for international funds and investment flows. This renders difficult the task of getting a clear picture of the situation, and therefore, of how to best intervene (Victor Jara [00:16:32]).

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Outlook: towards a more outward-oriented REPAM?

The aim of this paper has been to offer a critical appreciation of the role REPAM has played in addressing the integrated social and ecological challenges in the Pan-Amazon, as well as the co-evolving global Church-institutional transformation processes in which REPAM has been involved. The ecclesiological dimension, however, has played a subordinate role in the analysis, as a condition of possibility for understanding REPAM's past and possible future trajectory.

This exploratory inquiry concludes that while REPAM has indeed been instrumental in the Church regaining presence, trust, and outreach in the Amazon territory (Atahualpa Yupanqui [00:03:46]), as well as inspired and propelled a process of Church-institutional transformation with far-reaching implications for the role of the Church as a socio-ecological agent on the ground but also as a socio-political actor on the world stage -, its actual impacts in terms of protecting the rights of vulnerable population groups, fostering the creation of ecological livelihoods, or slowing down deforestation has fallen far short of REPAM's self-declared aims.

The explicitly pro-extractivist and anti-environmentalist policy-orientation of the Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022), with only partial reversals undertaken by the new administration in the Amazon's largest country, Brazil, has undoubtedly delivered a major setback in this regard, let alone the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023). Yet the reasons identified behind REPAM's shortcomings are complex, and pinpointing them sheds light on the way forward towards a much stronger role of REPAM in bringing about an "integral ecology" in the Amazon region.

One clear development has been that the church-internal front has outweighed the external front in the first phase of existence of REPAM (2014-2020). While this has doubtlessly drained resources from outward actions, it is however consistent with the need for internal legitimation and ownership-taking of Pope Francis' "new paths for the Church" by the world Church itself, as an institutional precondition for the sustainability of the whole process. To be sure, these "new paths" largely draw on the Amazonian pastoral experience ("Amazonization" of the Church), but it is not less true that their effective institutionalization provides REPAM not only with its theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral underpinning as a "synodal Church incarnate in the territory", but also the institutional backup of the Roman Catholic church at large, while also deepening ecumenic and interreligious ties. In that regard, the ecological self-conversion of the Church appears as a precondition for it taking up

the role of a change-maker towards a global transition to an “integral ecology”.

Another factor explaining the shallow ground-level impact REPAM has had so far is the lack of deeper engagement with theoretical reflection on how societies change, as a foundation for its strategic choices (Victor Jara [00:23:11]). This may appear paradoxical, insofar REPAM does prioritize its relationship with the academic sphere as critical to being able to make sense of the reality on the ground; yet it seems to have dismissed the importance of academic partnerships not only as suppliers of information, but as producers of diverse theories on social-ecological change, which have direct implications for the choice of strategic options regarding how to intervene in reality. As a result, and judging e.g. by its (over-)reliance on advocacy over movement-building (cf. section “Prioritising alliance- and movement-building” above), or by its (implicit or explicit) theoretical assumptions in socioeconomic matters (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:55:53]), REPAM appears to have adopted rather conventional (i.e. discursively hegemonic) means to pursue unconventional ends, while ignoring relevant yet peripheral bodies of academic knowledge that offer important insights into how societies change (see for example, among many others, Shove 2010; Hausknost 2019; and Lang 2019).

As a corollary of the above, REPAM has often found itself addressing emerging issues and grievances at the end-of -pipe, rather than tackling their causes at the source. While there may well be ethical and pragmatic justifications for prioritising the alleviation of suffering over addressing its root causes, sustained failure in addressing the systemic nature of integrated socio-environmental challenges is committed to facing an increasingly uphill battle. A key dimension of the necessary transformation is the creation of “ecological livelihoods” (Miller and Gibson-Graham 2019), which, by implication, should be integral to the program of “new paths for the Church”. However, this implies reconceptualizing and enlarging the scope of means to which the Church has historically resorted to underpin its pastoral mission, and around which its institutional structures have been organized (education, denunciation, conventional diplomacy, etc.). REPAM has hitherto failed to develop a strategic approach for supporting and promoting the direct action of the church or of the communities it serves as economy-transformative actors.

The above shortcomings notwithstanding, the work performed by REPAM’s during its first ten years of existence may have produced the

preconditions for REPAM playing a more assertive role in the future, particularly in terms of slowing down deforestation, livelihood creation, and transboundary movement-building for a broad cultural change. Indeed, with CEAMA officially assuming the representation of the Pan-Amazonian Church (Silvio Rodríguez [00:10:53]), but also the restructuring of CELAM along the lines of Querida Amazonia, a double virtuous effect can reasonably be expected to unfold: First, the existence of a solid institutional foundation for a renewed self-understanding of the Church as an actor promoting the transition to lifeworlds and systems shaped after the vision of an integral ecology, which should, to an extent, at least, free REPAM from the burden of constant intra-ecclesial self-legitimation. Second, the establishment of CEAMA should unburden REPAM from many of the intra-ecclesial tasks it has been playing so far, thereby “discharging REPAM to become more engaged politically, for example, or on projects on economy and buen vivir” (Victor Jara [00:42:21]). Also, the “synodal turn” in the ecclesial sphere potentially has far-reaching implications, not only for augmenting its social legitimacy and outreach, but to “import” skills and capacities available in the society at large which are needed, but which the institutional Church lacks (cf. section “Possible causes underlying REPAM’s shortcomings”).

A further effect that can be expected from the above is for REPAM being restored at least some of “the pastoral and political creativity and freedom with which it was born” (Joan Manuel Serrat [00:51:25]), opening “paths towards the reencounter with social and environmental movements, with all the groups that, like the Church, want to take care of the Common Home; this is a great movement that REPAM has the potential to make” (Alfredo Zitarrosa [00:02:46]).

If this “great movement” is purposively extended to transboundary and global network-alliances, REPAM - and the global Ecclesial Networks Alliance (ENA) - can reasonably hope to bridge the two sides of the “unsustainability coin”: extractivism and accumulation, local and global, sustainability of livelihoods in the territory and at the level of the Earth-system, and fulfil its mission of contribute to ushering in the integral ecology future envisaged by the late Pope Francis and by his successor, Pope Leo XIV.

"I believe that the Pope sees the role of REPAM as an instance of concretization of the paradigm of integral ecology in practice."

Mauricio López Oropeza, 2022

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Annex: Other Data sources

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