

Cultural and legal Heritage of Chile before Chile: A Journey through the Living Culture of Kawésqar and the Roman Law

1 March 2023

Speech of Rector Prof. Dr. Christian Leumann

The spoken word applies

Dear Minister Counselor of the Embassy of Chile to Switzerland,
Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Today the Embassy of Chile in Switzerland and the University of Bern launch a one-month exhibition of Kawésqar culture here at the Faculty of Law.

The exhibition shows the culture of Kawésqar indigenous people from the Chilean Patagonia and the influence of Roman Law for the latter draft of Chiles Civil code, and we are looking forward to hear more about this history from a legal and historical perspective.

The University of Bern is a comprehensive university with eight faculties. We also have ten strategic research centers, such as the Center for Development and Environment CDE or the Wyss Academy for Nature. Both have collaborations with South American countries, and for example with the Universidad de la Frontera (UFRO), Chile.

Their research approaches is to work with indigenous people and their knowledge, for instance to find innovative governance for conservation purposes.

There is increasing recognition that protected area management must draw on traditional knowledge and customary land rights and that consequently, local stakeholders – including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) – should have a greater say in conservation governance. This trend was clearly confirmed at the UN Biodiversity Conference, COP15, held in December 2022 in Montreal.

There is one project jointly implemented by CDE and the Wyss Academy for Nature, which will draw on transdisciplinary case studies from the Peruvian Amazon to identify leverage points that can inform the design of further IPLC-led governance schemes, also in other forest frontier contexts such as in Madagascar and Laos.

Feminization, agricultural transition, and rural employment as well as indigenous communities, land use, and tropical deforestation or environmental justice and sustainable food systems are some of the research topics of CDE and the Wyss Academy.

And now apparently also the Faculty of Law is doing research in a south American country, combining knowledge of history and law, and thus following the University of Bern's aim for intercultural communication and politics and administration.