

Project Description:**1) Applicant's qualifications:**

My name is [REDACTED] and I hold a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale. I am a Latin Americanist by training and I have an extensive research background in South America including Ecuador and Peru. I have spent a total of approximately thirty three months conducting research in South America. My specific qualifications for this project include conducting preliminary research in the Peruvian Amazon in 2012 and 2013. I am fluent in Spanish and I am familiar with the region and I have established numerous local contacts as a result of my previous research. I have presented my research from Ecuador and Peru at numerous regional, national, and international conferences and symposia and my research has been published in the following peer-reviewed journals: *La Revista de Antropología Experimental*, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, *The Latin Americanist*, *The Applied Anthropologist*, *The Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, and *Ethnology*. Most recently, I have presented the findings of my preliminary research from Peru at the meetings of the Central States Anthropological Society and I am currently working on an article for peer-review based on that research.

The proposed project relates to my continuing scholarship by focusing on natural resource utilization and culture change in the rural Amazonian Peru. My previous research has focused on such varied themes as community based economic development, identity politics, cultural ecology of native fishing communities in Ecuador and Peru. The proposed research aims to continue in the same general trajectory while having a specific focus on the use of *Astrocaryum chambira*, a species of palm that is widely used throughout the Peruvian Amazon.

2) Proposal Background:

The proposed project will examine the distribution and use of *Astrocaryum chambira* by peasant populations of the Peruvian Amazon. *A. chambira* is a native species of palm that is harvested by indigenous and non-indigenous residents of the northwest Amazon. The term “*chambira*” is the vernacular and will be used here forward in this proposal. The proposed project entails two components. The first is to examine the transition in value of *chambira* from a utilitarian product for household use to an aesthetic product that connects local Amazonian communities to a global market. The second is to examine whether or not there has been a shift away from the use of wild *chambira* to cultivated *chambira*.

The earliest accounts of the use of *chambira* by peoples of the Amazon date to the early twentieth century (Burret 1934). *Chambira* is noteworthy amongst the wide variety of ethnobotanical resources utilized by Amazonian peoples due to its wide distribution as well as its utilitarian value. As such, scholarly work on *chambira* has focused on the role of *chambira* as a nontimber forest product (NTFP). For example, Vormisto (2002) provides a detailed account of

chambira production into hammocks and bags. Holm Jensen and Balslev (1995) provide similar insights with specific emphasis *chambira* procurement and processing. In related studies, Coomes (2004) and Padoch (1988) examine the economic dimensions of *chambira* exploitation and use. The vast majority of the existent literature on *chambira* comes from the field of botany with specific focus being paid to the economic value of *chambira* as a NTFP. Moreover, the existing literature emphasizes *chambira* use for the making of utilitarian products such as hammocks and bags. This literature is of great value, but there is a gap in what is known about the significance of *chambira* from a cultural perspective.

My previous work in the Peruvian Amazon indicates that the use of *chambira* is not limited to making the utilitarian baskets and hammocks that are the staple of scholarly literature pertaining to *chambira* use. *Chambira* is also being woven into decorative baskets that are marketed to tourists as traditional crafts despite a recent emergence of *chambira* basket weaving. Guel and Penn (2009) and Popescu (2009) provide insight into contemporary basket weaving as related to tourism in rural Amazonian Peru. The focus of this work is on the economic dimensions of basket weaving. The proposed research is concerned less with this aspect, and more with whether or not an increased demand for *chambira* results in an increase in cultivation as opposed to wild resource extraction as well as understanding whether or not there is a change in the cultural value of *chambira* due to the increased marketability of *chambira* as a NTFP.

The cultural component of this research relates to a substantial amount of scholarly interest in the globalization of native culture and the commodification of traditional crafts. For example, Stephen notes that for tourists and global consumers, material culture becomes a symbol of a homogenized “Indianness” (1993:40). In which *Chambira* baskets are marketed as indigenous or native crafts as they are “converted from use articles to handicrafts” for sale to tourists and for export (Stephen 1993:40). Implicit in this is the notion that the meaning attributed to the material items changes to reflect the commodification of *chambira* products. Just as the promotion of international tourism “involves selling a country as a product”, the commodification of “indigenous” crafts involves selling the indigenous or native identity as a product (Gesheker 1978: 70). Thomas (1994) makes similar claims in his analysis of the commodification of native art forms for elite western consumption. For the purposes of the proposed research, the concern is with whether or not an increase in *chambira* craft production and the marketability of *chambira* products, impact or transform the cultural value that native residents of the Peruvian Amazon attribute to *chambira*.

3) Significance/Goals and Objectives:

The proposed project aims at addressing the following questions: 1) What is the contemporary cultural significance of *chambira* beyond its utilitarian value? 2) How has the use of *chambira*

changed in order to respond to growing markets for NTFP's? 3) With a growing focus on *chambira* as a marketable NTFP is there a corresponding increase in the cultivation of *chambira* as opposed to harvesting it in the wild?

The significance of the proposed project is that it aims to expand on the existing literature on *chambira* palm use by moving the focus away from the economic dimensions of *chambira* use and emphasizing the cultural significance of *chambira* and the transition from a utilitarian product to an aesthetic craft that is being marketed internationally. This is relevant because it will contribute to what is currently a limited body of literature on *chambira* use. It will also be the first anthropological study of *chambira* use. In addition to providing insights pertaining to *chambira*, the proposed project also has the potential to contribute to an established academic literature on craft production the global commodification of indigenous products. The research will provide insights into how emergent markets impact the local use of native resources and how that use shifts to address the needs of such markets. The research has the potential to contribute to knowledge on conservation, ecology, culture, and economics.

4) Project Description and Methods

The proposed project will entail three weeks of field research requiring travel to the Peruvian Amazon in the summer of 2014. Research is scheduled to take place in late July and early August, 2014. This is the optimal time to conduct research in the region as it is the dry season and access to research locations is significantly easier when water levels are low. Research will take place in the *Area de Conservación Communal Regional Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo* (ACRCTT). The area consists of approximately 420,000 hectares and is notable because there is a strong emphasis on the conservation and management of native species including *chambira*. It is an ideal research site because it is one of many locations throughout the Peruvian Amazon where *chambira* crafts are being produced for sale to tourists and for export. Research will include conducting interviews and surveys in three villages. The rationale for choosing three villages is due to the fact that *chambira* products are predominantly marketed to tourists and the communities are not equal in their access to tourists. Río Blanco (pop. 200) is located near a tourist lodge and has a weekly market that caters specifically to tourists. San Jacinto (pop. 50) is approximately thirty minutes away by boat and does not have the same amount of interaction with tourists. Ayacucho (pop. 40) is approximately two hours away from San Jacinto. Ayacucho has virtually no tourist presence.

The goal of this research is to compare the level of *chambira* cultivation in each community as well as to gain an understanding of the cultural value of *chambira* for local residents. I hypothesize that access to tourists and the increased marketability of *chambira* will be associated with an increase in *chambira* cultivation in household gardens. I hypothesize that there will be evidence of a continuum in the distribution of cultivated *chambira*. Residents of Ayacucho will rely almost exclusively on wild harvested *chambira*. Residents of San Jacinto will have a higher

incidence of cultivation of *chambira* and residents of Río Blanco will have the highest incidence of *chambira* cultivation in home gardens and horticultural plots.

The methods for this project include: 1) conducting surveys of home gardens in each of the three communities and 2) interviewing community residents about the use and cultural value of *chambira*.

1) Surveys: A survey of household gardens will be completed for each household in Río Blanco (approximately 40 households), for each household in San Jacinto (approximately 12 households) and for each household in Ayacucho (approximately 10 households). Survey data will focus on the size of household gardens, the existence of cultivated *chambira*, and the number of *chambira* plants per garden and household. The rationale for this component of the study is to understand if farming *chambira* represents a response to limited wild supplies (e.g. is supply driven), if it is based on limiting the labor investment needed to harvest wild *chambira* (e.g. is labor driven), or if it is a combination of both. This data will help to illuminate any patterns with regard to *chambira* use. (See Appendix A for Sample Survey).

2) Interviews: Brief interviews will be conducted with residents in each village. Potential candidates for interviews will be selected based on the survey data. Interviews will be conducted only with individuals who cultivate, harvest, or work with *chambira*. The goal is to conduct twenty interviews in Río Blanco and ten interviews in both San Jacinto and Ayacucho. If time permits, more interviews will be conducted. Interviews will focus on how people use *chambira* with attention paid to the cultural value of *chambira*. (See Appendix B for Sample Interview Questions).

The aim of this project is to complete all outlined components in the allotted time of three weeks.

Week One:

- Day One: Arrival to Iquitos, Peru
- Day Two: Travel to Tahuayo; preparations for research
- Day Three: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Four: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Five: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Six: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Seven: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews

Week Two:

- Day One: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Two: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Three: Río Blanco: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews

- Day Four: Río Blanco: Wrap up surveys and interviews
- Day Five: San Jacinto: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Six: San Jacinto: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Seven: San Jacinto: Wrap up surveys and interviews

Week Three:

- Day One: Travel to Ayacucho
- Day Two: Ayacucho: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Three: Ayacucho: Morning survey (5 households); afternoon interviews
- Day Four: Ayacucho: Wrap up surveys and interviews
- Day Five: Return travel to Tahuayo
- Day Six: Return travel to Iquitos, Peru
- Day Seven: Arrival Evansville, Indiana, USA

5) Project Evaluation:

Project success will be determined based upon the quantity and quality of the data collected. Quantitative data from each village and each garden plot will be tabulated and compared using the following *sample* table. Additional elements will be added as deemed necessary.

	Río Blanco	San Jacinto	Ayacucho
<i>Number of Household Gardens</i>			
<i>Total Number of Cultivated Chambira Plants</i>			
<i>Average Number of Cultivated Chambira Plants per Garden</i>			
<i>Highest Number of Chambira in a Single Garden</i>			
<i>Lowest Number of Chambira in a Single Garden</i>			
<i>Average Garden size</i>			
<i>Year that Garden was Established</i>			

Qualitative data from interviews will be compared in order to look for patterns pertaining to the cultural value attributed to *chambira*. A comparison of interview data from the different villages will provide insights into the existence of differing cultural values and uses.

Success for the proposed project will be based on the overall quantity and quality of data and the ability to synthesize data into an article for peer-reviewed publication. The results of this research will be written up and submitted for peer-reviewed publication upon completion of this project. I also plan on presenting my research findings at the 2015 Meetings of the Latin American Studies Association.

6) Budget: \$4422 Total

The following budget estimate is based on my previous research trips to the Peruvian Amazon in 2012 and 2013.

Personnel Expenses: N/A

Non-Personnel Expenses: \$4422 Total

A. Travel: \$3900

Travel to research site:

Airfare: Roundtrip Evansville, Indiana, USA – Iquitos, Peru: **(\$1700.00)**

Per Diem:

Lodging while in the Field: **(\$2000.00)*** Includes room and board for 18 days/17 nights

Lodging will be at the Tahuayo Lodge and Amazon Research Center.

Additional per diem for travel days: (\$50 per day x 4 days) **(\$200.00)**

B. Equipment, Supplies, and Materials:

B1. Equipment (Unit price > \$5,000): N/A

B2. Materials and Supplies: \$522 Total

- 16GB SD Memory Card for Data Storage (\$30.00)
- 6 Notebooks for Data Entry @ \$2.00 each (\$12.00)
- 100 Meter Field Tape Measure (\$30.00)
- Garmin 600 Oregon GPS (\$450.00)

The data storage card will be used for storing digital photos and video of the distribution of home gardens as well as for recording footage pertaining to the processing and use of *chambira*. Interviews will also be recorded using digital video.

Notebooks will be used for daily field-notes and data collection.

A field tape will be necessary in order to measure the size of homegardens.

A GPS unit is necessary in order to map the location of home gardens during the process of the garden survey.

C. Other Direct Costs N/A