

Different socio-political and ecological processes undermine or even endanger the continuation of ecological traditional knowledge and related practices and customs of local people living in the neotropics – tropical part of South and Central America. In this scenario of rapid climatic and environmental changes, coupled with people's mobility and migration processes, intensive knowledge exchange, the study of medicinal and edible plants use by rural people from neotropics acquires special significance and attention.

Ethnobotany is an interdisciplinary field or a subdiscipline of cultural anthropology, which studies relations between people and plants, with special emphasis on useful plants, whose use has been developed by trial and error effort, supported with knowledge and embedded in specific ontological frames. Therefore, ethnobotany seeks to study human societies through the lenses of their relations and uses of plant species and the environment in which these societies live. Medical ethnobotany is a special area of research within ethnobotany, which focuses on knowledge, use and significance of medicinal plants to local people and acts on the intersection of cultural anthropology, botany and pharmacology. Ethnobotanical studies document the knowledge of specific plant resources used by local communities, often describing new species for science or new, previously not recorded, applications for well-known plants.

The overall aim of the project is to analyse comparatively the cultural significance of medicinal and edible plants, foodways, and bio-cultural heritage of three different groups living in South America, namely the Polish diaspora from Misiones in Argentina, Paraguayan mestizo people from Argentinean–Paraguayan borderland and Ashaninka indigenous people from Peruvian Amazon. These groups live in similar biomes of the neotropics, yet they have different history of inhabiting this place, cultural background, approaches to exploring the vegetation and different relations with plants based on their specific ontologies. In particular, the project seeks to explore the reasons for the use of medicinal plants by these groups, the scope of health conditions treated with them, forms of administration and forms of plant procurement. Moreover, the research concentrates on the medicinal-food continuum of these groups, especially on the concept of medicinal food. Finally, the research aim is to compare the use of edible plants, including wild edible plants, and to explore foodways and food preferences of these groups.

Within this project I will combine the previously collected ethnographic and ethnobotanical material with new complementary data collected within this piece of research, in order to perform comparative analyses from ethnobotanical and cultural anthropological perspectives. The complementary fieldwork in Argentina and Peru will focus on edible plants and foodways of the study ethnic groups. The analysis and synthesis of the collected material will lead to the elaboration of several scientific articles and a volume written in English, which will be entirely dedicated to medical ethnobotany. Moreover, we plan to publish a monograph written in Spanish language in collaboration with Ashaninka people. This book will be dedicated to their medicinal and food plants. This strategy of joint work on a publication with indigenous people from a given region is a relatively new scientific trend, which aims to empower local groups, negotiate certain meanings with them and make social science more inclusive for different cognitive approaches and perspectives.