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Working Group 1.8
Reframing and reconfiguring agricultural, rural and food policies

Let Hundred Flowers Bloom?
The Rising of Local Authorities and the Governance of Agricultural Affairs
in the French Countryside

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Abstract : “Flowering Meadows” is the name of a new style of agri-environmental contract between the State and the farmers which has been included into the French Rural Development Plan 2007-2013. This contract is original in all respects. Mandatory methods are given up and the farmer is free to do what he wants so long as he complies with an obligation to ecological performance. This performance is defined in a very simple way: a list of flower species among which four, at least, must be found in each third of the meadow. This proposal has been made by natural resources managers. Natural Regional Parks of France (NRP) are campaigning for “Flowering Meadows” contracts which have been implemented outside Natura 2000 areas for the first time in 2008, at the scale of the Bauges Massif Park (Rhône-Alpes Region). Last but not least, the obligation to ecological performance in habitat management is reframing the local norms defining agricultural lands.

To overcome the tension between global definition of conservation targets and objectives and the implementation of the Habitats directive, France has chosen to promote local agreement on biodiversity conservation, devolving (giving) more power to local elected authorities among which the NRP. In this paper, we show how NRP seized this opportunity to break out of the boundaries of protected areas and extend their activities to farmlands by using the most powerful incentives of the modernization process: the Common Agricultural Policy resources and the agricultural contest for (agri-ecological) excellency. Farmers could also find in Flowering Meadows contracts a legitimization of their activity and contribution to the society: producing food and producing biodiversity or ecosystem services (pollination). The scope and the limits of a new mode of governance of agricultural policies and activities in the French countryside will be discussed in the broader context (ecologization of the CAP or shift back to productionism ?)