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Managing nature and people: the production of knowledge and norms for biodiversity management

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Introduction

In this introduction, I will briefly present to you first, the collective scientific program to which all the researchers presenting in this session contributed, and afterwards, two case studies that will not be presented here.

This scientific project is called “Managing people and Nature: the production of knowledge and norms for biodiversity management”. It began in 2005. It gathered around 30 scientists (sociologists, anthropologists, economists, geographers, ecologists, etc.), mostly from France (but also from Belgium, Senegal and Madagascar) belonging to several scientific institutions (INRA, IRD, CNRS, CIRAD, Universities). It has been funded by the French Ministry of Research.

Scientific questions

The starting point of our reflexion was the existence, mentioned by some observers, since the beginning of the 90’s, of a new social dynamic called “ecologization”. This means that many public policies (in development, in agriculture, and in other fields) but also many social practices have incorporated environmental concerns. We have decided to study such a dynamic in the cases where there were some links between rural activities (agriculture, livestock, and forestry) and the conservation of biodiversity. In what sense and in what matters is the conservation of biodiversity producing some ecologization dynamics in the rural areas where farming, livestock and forestry exist?

The conservation of nature constitutes an important and old environmental concern. In the 90’s it gained in political and scientific importance and changed its name to “conservation of biodiversity”. In our research project, we have tried to understand the production and the circulation of political norms, and of scientific and lay knowledge which were created in the name of conserving biodiversity. We have studied norms and knowledge in political action. Our sociological or anthropological questioning is of the relationships between power and knowledge.

This normative and cognitive production mainly occurs at an international level, in multi-governmental and non governmental organizations such as the Convention on Biological

Diversity (CBD), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) etc.

The crucial importance of this international level has led us to choose a collective methodology for studying both this international level and its links with different local scenes (fields) in southern countries (Madagascar, Brazil, Senegal, New Caledonia, Vanuatu) and in northern ones (France and Belgium). Because the questions raised by the conservation of biodiversity are world-wide and because it is at the international level that many decisions are taken, and that much scientific knowledge and many political norms are elaborated, we have chosen to conduct fieldwork in the North, in the South and at the international level. Due to this comparative approach, we can highlight the links and interactions between those levels.

The production of knowledge and norms at the international level has been studied by Monica Castro and Guillaume Ollivier. Monica will present here some results of their research.

The other presentations of our session are mainly focused on different local arenas even though some of them will try to show the links with international levels. But I will not summarize them.

I will just end this brief introduction by rapidly presenting two case studies of our collective research program that will not be presented here.

The restoration of biological rest periods in the Biosphere Reserve of the Saloum Delta, Senegal. When traditional ecological knowledge and practices meet scientific knowledge.
Hélène Montamat

The first one focused on the Biosphere Reserve of the Saloum Delta in Senegal. The research was conducted by Hélène Montamat. She has studied the links between traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and scientific knowledge around the question of the restoration of what is called biological rest periods in this Biosphere Reserve.

Interest in TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) has been growing since the 1980s. Indeed it is during the 80s that environmental organisations, led by IUCN, started to develop new biodiversity conservation strategies, more “integrated” and “participative”.

In 1984, IUCN created its first working group on TEK. This group of international scientists developed various studies of TEK, including TEK related to fisheries management. The purpose of this work was to identify and record knowledge and “wise” local practices that could meet the objectives of international biodiversity conservation.

In Senegal, IUCN is responsible for the elaboration of a management plan for the Biosphere reserve of the Saloum Delta. The organisation works in collaboration with Senegalese scientists and finances environmental and social studies, including research on TEK. National experts in fisheries management worked on traditional local practices such as not harvesting from sea shell gathering areas during the rainy season. This study (also part of an international research programme, coordinated by Unesco) contributed to the definition of new integrated development and biodiversity conservation strategies.

Indeed, to reduce human pressure over the most exploited shellfish species and to promote participatory biodiversity conservation, IUCN decided to restore these old and abandoned practices of “biological rest”.

This model of “participatory” resource management was possible because:

- “biological rest” is a scientific concept used in many fisheries management policies throughout the world. “Biological rest” consists in stopping harvesting a species during its period of reproduction, allowing time for the stocks to recover.
- Some traditional knowledge and practices are compatible with objectives of biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries management in the Biosphere Reserve.
- Senegal started to decentralise natural resources management to rural communities. This implies the production of new rules at the local level and the creation of local management structures.
- IUCN has been working in the Biosphere Reserve since the 90s and projects are being implemented in the area to develop alternative income generating activities for those women who used to harvest shellfish.

The second research project I would like to present here, is concerned with **the implementation of conservation units in Amazonia** (in the State of Amazonas in Brazil). It is conducted by Florence Pinton (sociologist at the IRD).

In the Amazonas’ state there is an important conservation project which consists in the creation of a central corridor in the Amazonian forest which will constitute 25% of the land area of the Amazonas State. The delimitation of this corridor will include the incorporation of existing conservation units and of indigenous lands. This means that the local and indigenous population is one very important actor in this conservation project. So the government of Amazonas’ state has chosen to implement a participatory approach which consists of signing agreements (process of contractualization) with the local population. This process is implemented by some NGOs. These new social dynamics reveal a deep change in the management of biodiversity and in the status of those traditionally dominated and marginalized local and indigenous populations.

One objective of this research project is to compare these new social dynamics, this process of signing agreements between governments and local populations, with similar social processes and procedures observed in Madagascar by Chantal Blanc Pamard. She is a geographer (CNRS) and she is also participating in our collective research project. In Madagascar, she has also studied such signatures of agreements between local states and local populations. Florence Pinton and Chantal Blanc Pamard have then observed the similarities of

the management of biodiversity and populations in those two very different countries. Brazil and Madagascar have implemented ambitious socio-environmental policies, with a participatory approach, because of the co presence of indigenous/local populations and conservation units. Those socio-environmental policies have led to great territorial and social changes in the rural areas concerned. So finally, they both try to study the different figures of bio power (biopouvoir) in contemporary societies. Is it a way of acting on humans in order to govern nature?

Conclusion

I will conclude by presenting the organization of our session.

We can say that since the early 90's, new links among science, society, State and markets are arising. These new links are characterized by:

- A crisis of the linear and top-down model of political decision making, that used to consider science as a superior type of knowledge
- The growing participation of citizens in research and innovation
- The strengthening of market logics
- The growing role of non governmental actors
- The blurred commitment of States

In this session, we propose to explore the construction of those new links in the field of biodiversity management, in local and international arenas.

The session will be divided into two parts:

1. The production and circulation of knowledge, whether scientific or lay, in the process of biodiversity conservation policy making. We shall explore the history and role of science in the construction of international conventions and knowledge about biodiversity. We will also focus on the mobilization of lay knowledge, discourses and policies appealing to local communities. We will question the traditional views which distinguish science as a universal good from knowledge as a local and particular good.
2. Social and territorial reconstructions arising from the implementation of those biodiversity management policies. We shall explore a new model of political action for the management of nature, which resembles the one already established for sustainable development. Research analyzing the shift of responsibilities from the State to citizens, the growth of corporate and non governmental actors (such as environmental NGO's) and the increasing participation (or exclusion) of local population will be presented.

