

13th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology,
Montpellier, France, 20-25 May 2012

**S02 -Conservation and the sense of belonging in nature:
a reflection on the proper place of humans in nature**

Thursday, May 24, 2012. Botanic Institute, Auditorium Charles Flahaut

Chairs: Miguel Alexiades¹ and Sarah Laird²

Overview

Conservation interventions, particularly those conceived and implemented around protected areas, are often based on implicit, often unexamined, yet powerful assumptions regarding such fundamental issues as the proper place of humans in nature or the relationship (read disjuncture) between tradition and modernity. Because conservation has become a distinct arena for economic and social development in many regions undergoing rapid change, and because its discourse is hegemonic in terms of how it naturalises particular kinds of environmental identities, ideologies and relationships, its effects are equally profound.

This panel sought to examine the effects of conservation interventions upon a core of human experience; the sense of belonging and the social and emotional attachment to place. A number of specialists from different backgrounds and with experience in different settings presented a range of case studies examining the effect of conservation on local people's understanding of their proper place in nature, including their emotional attachment, their understanding of self through nature or the particular kinds of economic or social activities through which their place in nature is defined and renewed.

We are particularly interested a contradiction that is profoundly embedded in the personal experience of many disaffected urban conservationists and which reflects one of the key consequences of the effects of modernity: the profound sense of nostalgia and the search for belonging created through the historical processes of uprooting and displacements, hallmarks of modernity. It is no coincidence that conservation efforts are often spearheaded by 'outsiders' and resisted by 'insiders'; the assumptions behind many conservation efforts and the resulting conflicts often reveal the contradictory aspects and effects, in terms of belonging and alienation, emplacement and displacement. We are therefore intrigued by how the nostalgia for belonging and the historical experience of uprootedness creates a framework and ideology for uprooting and displacing others, often in the guise of its opposite. Notions, fears and longing for belonging and attachment, often mirroring the opposite- alienation, detachment and

¹ School of Anthropology and Conservation University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NR, UK, malexiades@gmail.com

² People and Plants International, P.O.Box 251, Bristol, VT 05443, USA, sarahlaird@aol.com

displacement- are important constituents of the conservation dynamic, and visible both at the symbolic and material level.

The fact that the different social actors involved or affected by conservation initiatives are themselves complex, heterogeneous and fluid raises the possibility for internal contradictions and conflicts to emerge, and following the multiple possibilities that exist in terms of belonging and being in nature.

We understand 'belonging' to reflect a matrix of interconnected symbolic, affective, social, economic and ecological relations, and different papers focused on a number of these dimensions or a combination of them, including:

-- How some kinds of 'belonging' or ways of being in place are encouraged or discouraged, (de)legitimised or transformed in particular social settings or amidst particular kinds of power relations.

-- How concepts such as 'culture', 'nature', 'biocultural diversity' or 'sustainable development' and constructed in different contexts or settings, and how this in turn privileges or marginalizes different forms of being in nature.

-- The effect of market--based approaches, given their mandate to create very specific notions of value to place and to the place of humans in nature.

-- Conservation interventions often create certain hierarchies in terms of who is considered more representative and legitimately linked to place. We were therefore interested in exploring the assumptions and consequent dynamics and conflicts over representation and control that follow from particular claims to legitimacy and belonging. Who and why is recognized as belonging to place and who and why is not even considered is a complex and important question.

Papers presented

E. Martin (Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, CNRS, France)
'Conflit de natures, le cas de l'ours des Pyrénées'

Abstract:

In parts of the Pyrenees, the mountain is a hostile environment which needs to be mastered. Livestock farmers and the shepherds have the noble task of breeding and raising livestock in order to feed their communities. Due to a number of factors, the brown bear disappeared from this landscape and within one or two generations, people lost the habit and techniques to raise livestock amidst large carnivores. In the meantime, certain urban elites developed a philosophy of the environment based on the conservation of the biodiversity and the idea of a pristine nature. For some, the mountain became the emblem of a wild zone, which, to cover all its attributes, must be populated with wild animals, and among them, the biggest and strongest European mammal: the brown bear. The brown bear, the former "king" of animals, lost his status for the benefit of the lion at the end of the Middle Ages, to become an animal of exhibition to be ridiculed, before becoming the object of hunting

during the last two centuries. In the middle of the 1990s, a re-introduction program of bears from Slovenia was initiated. Since then, a struggle between those 'for' and 'against' the bear has ebbed and flowed, highlighting an opposition between the urban and the rural, between outside and inside interests and politics...but it is also a confrontation between the 'nature' of some and that of others. The bear remains a ghost, about whom we speak, but who we do not see. The comparison with the Slovenian or Italian situation allows a better understanding of the specificities of the French case.

C. Therville (CNRS, France), R. Mathevet (CNRS, France) and F. Bioret (UBO, France). 'Understanding institutional arrangements within the French Nature Reserve system: looking for integrated conservation and development achievements

Abstract

Interactions between protected areas and their surrounding territories raise on one hand the issues of the place for human activities in areas dedicated to nature conservation, and on the other hand the role played by biodiversity conservation within local communities development projects. If the past protected areas (PAs) were often perceived as areas where local people were excluded by external actors (State and NGOs), more and more modern PAs investigate spheres of economical and social development and community-based management in a participatory approach. This contextual evolution leads to reconsider the potential function of actual PAs and the ability of institutions to legitimize, represent and support conservationist and other functional interests.

Here, we focus on the institutional evolution of French Nature Reserves. With more than 250 sites, Nature Reserves represent one of the main regulatory tools of France's policy to nature protection. As from the seventies, there have been major changes in their claimed purposes and institutional arrangements. On an analysis of case studies, the institutional arrangements and how they try to conciliate the multiple aims and expectations of the diverse actors involved in the Nature reserves governance system are illustrated. Four levels are predominant in explaining the decision making process and institutional characteristics: (i) individual level; (ii) collective level (iii) local settings and opportunities and (iv) dominant paradigm and main tendencies.

We describe how institutional changes have proposed responses to key social transitions in Nature Reserves governance : from NGO activists and volunteers to professional managers and local people contribution, from in-situ to ex-situ conservation, and from national to local level decision makers. We examine how institutional changes can constitute a simple formalization of pre-existing rules in use, a tool to circumvent legal framework constraints, or a profound redefinition of the place of stakeholders in the political chess set.

J.A. Cortés Vázquez (Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, Spain). 'Land-use management and the idea of nature in Southern European Protected Areas'

Abstract

The establishment of a protected area not only transforms the way local resources are managed but also how they are understood. In this process certain idea of nature, conceived as a realm different from 'society' or 'civilization', becomes key to defining the role human beings should play in their conservation. This paper explores how this phenomenon particularly appeals the strategic use of certain environmental discourses at the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park, South-eastern Spain, in order to legitimate both the limitation of farming and fishing activities and the promotion of ecotourism. My aim is to reflect around the political implications of these discourses, stressing the connections between a dualist idea of nature, the ongoing re-territorialisation process that is affecting many areas in the so-called Peripheral Europe and the disempowerment of the local populations.

J.M. Rosso-Londoño, W. Estrada Ramírez and V. Imperatriz-Fonseca (Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil). 'Belarmino and the butterflies: (dis)encounters between culture, research and development in the Colombian Vaupés.

Abstract

What are the unexpected dimensions which a conservation action can effect? Do the transformations effected by these interventions only take place within the territories, relations and ideas of local actors? What happens to the external actors? What possibilities for transformation are created through intercultural dialogue? An encounter in the forest and two stories which converge and diverge from both shores of the same river. They meet, they talk, re-talk and they change each other. Walter is indigenous and a student. He doesn't live within the forest near his elders, but he carries them inside, even though he also wants to "progress". Juan Manuel is a "white person" and nearly a PhD. He lives in the city and pretends to teach about competitive management of biodiversity. What is to be learned from this encounter? The presentation -a two-voice storytelling- will try to share some of the questions, thoughts, contradictions and transformations that emerge from the decision of the actors involved in conservation interventions to have disposition for intercultural dialogue. This demands they confront their own worldviews and to put in other hands their trust and friendship, for a re-signification of their daily work and their being at the world.

Resumen

¿Cuáles son las dimensiones imprevistas que una intervención de conservación puede llegar a impactar? ¿Las transformaciones producidas por estas intervenciones se dan sólo en los territorios, relaciones e ideas de los actores locales? ¿Qué sucede con los actores externos? ¿Cuáles posibilidades de transformación se abren a través del diálogo intercultural? Un encuentro en el centro de la selva. Un "blanco", un indígena y dos historias que convergen y divergen, desde dos orillas del mismo río. Se encuentran, se cuentan, se

recuentan y se cambian. Walter es indígena y estudiante. No habita "selva adentro" junto a sus mayores, pero los lleva adentro, aunque también quiere progresar. Juan Manuel es "blanco" y próximamente, doctor. Habita en la ciudad pero le huye, y pretende enseñar cómo conservar siendo competitivo. ¿Quién será el maestro? ¿Qué habrá por aprender a partir de este encuentro? La ponencia -narración a dos voces- intentará dar cuenta de algunas reflexiones, contradicciones, preguntas y sobretodo, transformaciones, que surgen cuando los actores que intervienen y los actores objeto de la intervención deciden disponerse al diálogo intercultural, lo cual les exige confrontar sus formas de ver el mundo y poner en otras manos su confianza y amistad, para resignificar su quehacer y su estar en el mundo.

A.Carvalho (CIMO, Bragança, Portugal) and A. Frazão-Moreira (CRIA, Portugal). 'Why is wild-life more important than people? Conservation strategies, perceptions and contradictions in two protected areas from Trás-os-Montes, Portugal.

Citation for published article: Carvalho, Ana Maria & Frazão-Moreira, A. (2011). Importance of local knowledge in plant resources management and conservation in two protected areas from Trás-os-Montes, Portugal. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 7:36, doi:10.1186/1746-4269-7-36. Downloadable from: <http://www.ethnobiomed.com/content/7/1/36>

Abstract

Portuguese authorities for nature conservation have been engaged in comprehensive resource networks and effective legislation and regulations for protected areas putting together different efforts to sustain biodiversity and to enlist the full range of partners. It appears that the involvement and participation of local communities was the essential basis on which protected areas would build a system of management which has integrity, security and success, particularly those including human settlements. Nevertheless, conservation measures were mostly designed by outsiders who were culturally detached and parks boundaries were mainly based on environmental criteria. Two important natural protected areas, located in the most northeastern part of Portugal (Trás-os-Montes), have a great diversity of natural and semi-natural habitats and humanized landscapes which are repositories of nature and cultural heritage. The territories of the Natural Park of Montesinho and the Natural Park of Douro International are the result of many geographical and historical factors and represent harmonious integration of human activity with nature, allowing ecological diversity to be maintained and valued. Based on key-informants' opinions we explore their personal experience with the parks authorities and their ideas about the management of these protected areas. Key-informants main argument is that national conservation networks and strategies did not take into account regional identity, people background and local beliefs and habits. Moreover, it is perceived that most of the initiatives have never recognized the vital role of human activity in such areas maintenance and the contribution of local knowledge (LK) to the current environment. Many occurrences decrease the intrinsic value of regional landscapes which were considered part of the

cultural heritage and had embedded intangible values such as dwelling, spiritual and aesthetical values, local tradition, neighborly and inter-generational relations. Local ideas of nature have determined distinguishable values of plants and animals and outlined different orientations towards predatory actions.

L. Llutellier (Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et Sociologies Comparative, CNRS, France). 'La place de la forêt dans le "theatre" des projets de conservation a Madagascar: mediation et construction d'une bioculture'.

Abstract

In 2003, at the 5th World Parks Congress in Durban, the former President Marc Ravalomanana of Madagascar declares his intention to triple the surface of Madagascar's protected areas, taking into account local people in the delineation and management of protected areas. My research aims to study the movement of objects and discourse between local NGOs and community based associations (Coba) involved in the establishment of a management plan for a new forest protected area. The case study is a village adjacent to the new protected area called Fandriana-Vondrozo located on the tropical rain forest in the East of the island. The first results show that the issue of the relations between members of a local NGO and community based associations leaders is to confirm power relationships at the expense of narratives contents about ecological management. Coba leaders appear uninterested in forest management, as they denounce the practices of NGOs and the failures of the forest administration in spite of their responsibility for the forest. The members of the local NGO integrate these criticisms from the associations leaders. They use that to justify the need for a community-based conservation on a new process to be adopted: taxation and regulation of the circulation of forest products in the communes around the forest. The proposed presentation aims to understand the processes that lead to disinterest for the forest and the adoption of a new tool to control the forest, leading paradoxically to implement conservation policies at the local level.

Résumé

Dans le cadre d'un projet de conservation forestière à Madagascar, la manière dont les rôles sont proposés et négociés par les différents acteurs est étudiée à partir de deux réunions entre Malgaches techniciens d'ONG, d'une part, et représentants de paysans, d'autre part, l'une à Fianarantsoa, capitale provinciale, l'autre dans un village situé en limite de forêt. Dans la réunion à Fianarantsoa, les techniciens imposent des rôles aux représentants paysans, et à l'ethnologue vazaha (occidentale) pour pouvoir faire passer les projets comme ils le souhaitent. Mais au village, les représentants des paysans proposent une autre distribution. Les scripts finaux permettent de maintenir l'interaction avec les techniciens, mais aussi avec les autres villageois. L'ethnographie des deux réunions montre qu'à chaque fois une place différente est donnée à la nature, chaque représentation qui en est proposée permettant de maintenir l'interaction dans la scène où elle est produite.

A. Frazão-Moreira (CRIA, Portugal). 'Narratives of "belonging in nature" in Gorongosa (Mozambique)'

Abstract

The words are from different people: hunters, journalists, writers, tourists, conservationists, tour guides ... The paper will present the expressions of the sense of belonging in a glorified and commodified nature, the Gorongosa National Park. The narratives present in newspapers, fictional books, guestbook and internet sites will be cross with the testimonies collected from interviews and will allow us to understand colonial and postcolonial visions of nature. Although the Gorongosa National Park is a paradigmatic scenario of dynamic reconfigurations created by conservationist processes, the political and institutional issues, or the dynamics of interaction and conflict with local communities, will not be the main focus of this contribution. The focus will be rather on personal experiences and emotional attachments to place and what they tell us about the ideological processes in a historical perspective. The descriptions of those who were, sometimes only briefly, in Gorongosa, are enthusiastic and expressive manifestations of incorporation in nature. We will listen from the voices that claim the legitimacy of being in place of colonial safari hunters until the nostalgic narratives of contemporary visitors...