

# Introduction

## Sustainable Development, A New Age for Conservation?

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Since the genesis of sustainable development discourse, the place of protected areas in environmental policies has fuelled heated debates. As the main subject of conservation policies throughout the 20th century (while nature protection remained a marginal issue consigned to peripheral reserves), protected areas have become a central issue which has extended to the management of the global environment. The aim of this publication is to assess whether the environment has emerged as a primary referent for public policies, or, on the contrary, it remains secondary to the imperatives of economic development and resource exploitation. Applied to protected areas, the debate amounts to addressing whether they should become the tool of sustainable development policies, or they should be confined to the more restricted role of protecting 'outstanding' biodiversity. In this publication these issues will be addressed through an evaluation of the extent to which protected areas become zones of experimentation for sustainable development.

Since nature conservation policies are at the core of the notion of sustainable development, it comes as no surprise that such policies share the ambiguities of sustainable development. During the last decades, this notion led to important advances in environmental policies: from participative projects during the 1980s to regional and global approaches initiated during the 1990s and, more recently, to the 'back to the barriers' movement that tried to return to stricter forms of conservation.

These transformations were the result of political choices: they reflected empirical findings as well as the evolving representations of conservation actors. This had two effects. First, conservation policies became more complex as policy goals and actor categories were restructured. Indeed, during the last 30 years, the historical sector of conservation has opened up towards society, with a restructuring of the classic forms of the 'field' of conservation, where new actors and new power relations are challenging the previous order. Second, it also led to interactions between the local and the global, which in turn caused important redefinitions in the methods and tools used in conservation policies. Nowadays, national public policies are required to integrate international or transnational factors. These either partly invalidate the classic approaches to conservation, or shift the focus towards other dimensions linked to it, for instance the ecosystem

connectivity, the importance of flows, liaisons and networks, or the influence of global warming.

Because it is now recognised that protected areas can support market activities at the local level, such as the craft industry or ecotourism, but also at the global level with ecosystem services linked to biodiversity protection and carbon storage, and because conservation policies can concern spaces outside of protected areas, an extreme scenario could be the disappearance of protected areas altogether. This theoretical scenario must be the context in which one discusses the objectives of generalising sustainable development practices, or mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in all sectors of society and not only in protected areas. Thus, the questions facing conservation policies no longer concern only the experts of 'nature' protection who no longer have adequate legitimacy to act alone, in defining and applying conservation practices.

Within this frame of reference, this introduction reviews the main orientations of conservation: the invention of parks and their consolidation within the state, the community-based policies and, more recently, the attempts to return to a stricter form of conservation. Indeed, the issues presented in all the chapters of this publication are underpinned by the debates and orientations that have been shaping the world of conservation for over a century.

### *The Main Orientations of Conservation*

The success of protected areas is such, today, that they can be considered as one of the main land tenure system on the planet, occupying 12% of the land and an exponentially increasing amount of the marine surface area. Yet, nature conservation and its techniques are a fairly recent Western invention. The history of conservation policies is linked to environmental representations of different social groups whose spatial appropriation strategies have, more often than not, been conflictual (Adams 2004).

*The Invention of the Parks* Modern nature protection began during the 19th century in North America and Europe (and its colonies), and was based on two great institutional traditions of nature protection: the associations for the protection of nature, and the forestry administrations.

In North America, the descendants of settlers sought to protect what remained of the wilderness, mainly forests. The first parks appeared with the creation of the Yellowstone Park in 1872, to preserve the wilderness and the landscape as they first appeared to White Americans. The encounters of Europeans with the tropics also resulted in policies based on protectionist concerns (Grove 1995). In many British overseas territories (e.g. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa), protected areas were already created by the end of the 19th century (Rodary and Milian, this publication). In reality, when the first settlers arrived in America, or in the tropics, the wilderness they were coveting was obviously not uninhabited. However the myth of the untouched wilderness constituted one of

the strategies for the appropriation of space, and for the control of indigenous populations.

At the end of the 19th century, the protectionist movement fragmented into the supporters of preservation and the proponents of conservation (Nash 1967; Larrère and Larrère 1997). Whereas the former campaigned for the creation of sanctuaries for remarkable natural areas, the latter called for reserves that could secure 'sustainable' exploitation of natural resources. In any case, these two trends found themselves marginalised by the capitalist dynamics of natural resource exploitation. This marginalisation created a 'sector' of conservation policy that intervened only in reserves and parks: the more the environment outside those protected areas was transformed, the more conservation policy focused on them.

In the old rural civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, the protection of the wilderness could only concern small areas scattered within countries that were largely transformed by humans. The policies have focused on protecting endangered species, exceptional natural environments and picturesque landscapes. At the beginning of the 20th century, foresters and tourism associations began collaborating with naturalists to promote nature protection and to contribute to the advent of national policies in this domain (Selmi 2006). In this regard, the conservation task assigned to the state served the public interest through environmental restoration, nationalisation and profitability (Viard 1990).

The park concept was also adopted by relatively vast countries with areas considered to be almost undisturbed by human activities. This is the case for Brazil where, from the 1930s, conservationist policies were tentatively developed, to save what was considered to be a national heritage. The first protected areas were created in the urbanised South of the country, and subsequently followed the expansionist movement of the society (Barreto Filho 2004). Closely related to the advance of pioneering approaches, they embraced the model of integral protection, thereby excluding local populations. This led to an increase in the conflicts between local populations and protected areas worldwide, thereby challenging the legitimacy of these procedures.

In France, where the creation of national parks turned out to be politically difficult, the first parks were established in the colonies (e.g. Indochina, West and Equatorial French Africa, and Madagascar). From 1925 onwards, these colonies became places of nature protection experimentation (Berdoulay and Soubeyran 2000; Ford 2004). In metropolitan France, the first regulations relating to eminent domain were voted on in 1958, and the first national park, the Vanoise National Park, was created in 1961. The park was conceived as a core area, protected from human activities and isolated from the outside world by peripheral zones, as such following the preservationist model. In time, this model of protected areas changed with a series of crises experienced by rural society: the modernisation of agriculture and industrial development, the impetus given to land use planning and, finally, the mobilisation of scientists joining associations of nature protection. Finally, the links between protected areas and agricultural, pastoral or even forestry

practices were acknowledged: this led to the invention of regional nature parks in 1967, as a break from the national park model. Since then the regional nature park has become a land use planning and protection tool over which elected officials have control.

During that period, in terms of international politics, environmental concerns drew closer to development ideology. This in turn transformed the main orientations of the global movement of nature conservation.

*The Turn of Participative Management* The 1970s have indeed been a period of profound crises for conservation policies. The management of biodiversity by the state led in many cases to serious social and ecological crises, and to strong criticism vis-à-vis centralised and state-controlled nature conservation. *The World Conservation Strategy*, published in 1980 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Wildlife Fund (today the World Wide Fund for Nature – WWF) and the United Nations Environment Programme (IUCN et al. 1980), tried to address these criticisms and was the first international document to use the term ‘sustainable development’ (Vivien 2005). The initiative from UNESCO to implement the biosphere reserves within the framework of the Man and the Biosphere Programme, and the first experiences of community-based management of nature, renewed all the objectives and operating modes of conservation. The management of resources was entrusted to local actors, by presenting community identities and private economic issues as central for conservation policies. This evolution characterised a radical change in the perception of relations between human activities and the permanence of nature. At the beginning of the 1990s, the social sciences participated in this movement by acknowledging the role played by traditional knowledge within local ecosystems. In parallel, the Convention on Biological Diversity legitimated the necessity for a profound overhaul of protected area models, by promoting management at the ecosystem level, instead of at the level of the species. This was the last step of a larger movement for which the goal was no longer to freeze nature into sanctuaries, but to protect the evolutionary potentiality of ecological processes, while maintaining certain human practices enabling the populations to benefit from their conservation efforts. Protected areas were to be integrated into territories occupied and laid out by societies. Conservation programmes moving in this direction were implemented as early as the 1980s, through ‘participation policies’, ‘community-based conservation’, ‘sustainable development and use’, and ‘integrated programmes for development and conservation’ among others. In 1996, the World Commission on Protected Areas of the IUCN (IUCN-WCPA) and the WWF produced a document entitled *Principles and Guidelines on Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas* (IUCN and WWF 1999), which highlighted the need to manage these areas together with indigenous people and to respect their knowledge about the environment.

The participation of the local population, which is political (through decentralisation), and at the same time economic (through the redistribution of

revenues generated by the natural resources and through local employment), became dominant in the conservation rhetoric. The will to bring together conservation and development provoked a very strong trend, reinforced by the concept of biodiversity associating ecological diversity with the diversity of human practices, and bringing together scientific analysis and political action. The collaborations between various organisations multiplied to give rise to an important global epistemic community producing both global expertise and advocacy on conservation issues. For conservation NGOs, this was a political opportunity to become aligned with global governance and to become the central operators of sustainable development (Dumoulin and Rodary 2005). For the conservationists, if environment were to become the heart of all sectors of public action, 'integrated' conservation policies could be extended to many sectors that were historically unrelated to nature protection, such as land use planning or agriculture.

*Back to the Barriers* Local participation naturally creates expectations that have often ended in disappointment. In this regard, various criticisms have questioned community-based approaches. A first set of critics have focused on a political analysis and have showed that conservation based on local mobilisation is often a failure (McShane and Wells 2004; Brosius et al. 2005; Spiteri and Nepal 2006; Shackleton et al. 2010a; 2010b). This is due for instance to the fact that egalitarian participation in local socio-political structures was an impossibility, due to overriding representative systems and, *a fortiori*, to non democratic structures. This is also due to national political influences such as the limitations imposed on decentralisation by various stakeholders, and to economic networks which are almost always national or international. As a result, The "localo-liberal" discourse (Rodary and Castellonet 2003) according to which the local would be the ideal form of natural resource commodification and the most suitable political organisation for biodiversity management, is more a matter of rhetoric than a reflection of reality on the ground (Pinton and Roué 2007, Rodary 2009).

These criticisms echoed another set of issues coming from ecologists, and particularly from powerful international NGOs, which favoured ecological and biological sciences, and relinquished poverty alleviation and livelihoods policies. The failure of sustainable management gave them new grounds to legitimate their political discourse (Brechin et al. 2003; Hutton et al. 2005). Indeed, according to these actors, a return to classic forms of conservation is justified first by the fact that local attempts at sustainable development likely to address biodiversity protection and livelihoods, have turned out to be unachievable; and second by the fact that the rate of destruction of the biological diversity requires urgent mobilisation. This political discourse amounts once again to excluding social issues from the sphere of conservation which is reasserted as a biological issue above all (Terborgh et al. 2002). The search for sustainable strategies at the local level was then abandoned in favour of more direct modes of investment associating ecological with economic efficiency, without direct social concern.

This reversal was clearly conveyed from the end of the 20th century, with the reassertion of the importance of outstanding natural areas, and with the rise of conservation NGOs in protection programmes. The three largest NGOs, i.e. the WWF, Conservation International (CI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are increasingly marginalising local populations from the lands where they are conducting conservation programmes. The ‘back to the barriers’ approach and the re-establishment of the ‘fortress conservation’ for large scale conservation programmes, inevitably enhance the image of the large and powerful NGOs, since they are the only ones able to implement them, working at transnational or global level through hotspots, ecoregions and the like (see Rodary and Milian 2010). These regional or global policies reinforce the commodification of nature, for which globalised economic issues are becoming increasingly meaningful within conservation.

### *Outline of the Publication*

Thus, for the past 30 years or so, the world of nature conservation has been experiencing important transformations in its objectives and operating modes. The main organisations dedicated to conservation have seen their means reinforced. Protected areas, as the main tools of conservation policies, continue to spread worldwide.

Today, protected areas around the world refer to a wide array of objectives, management models and legal statuses. They can offer complex forms of land use and resource planning or management: ‘national parks’, ‘regional nature parks’, ‘protection areas’, ‘game reserves’, ‘biosphere reserves’, ‘agro-environmental measures’, ‘conservation networks’, etc. Protected areas can also indicate the return of authoritarian policies legitimated by science. At the international level, the conceptualisation of protected areas has undergone three major evolutions that are expressed, in the best case scenario, concomitantly: the fact that human activities are taken into account, the constitution of transnational networks, and the extension of conservation issues to other sectors of activities. Their legal status linked to the pursuit of diversified objectives, their international networking and their transformation within large natural infrastructures confuses the very definition of protected areas. How is this expressed on the ground?

The choice of texts presented here aims to account for two simultaneous processes: the extension of the surface area of the protected areas, and the multiplication of their management methods. The aim is to determine whether the dynamics currently at work in the world of conservation, extend and reinforce former policies, or on the contrary, bring change, either via rupture, or through innovations likely to profoundly transform the modes of utilisation of nature. The book analyses the coherence between the definitions and the tools mobilised on the one hand, and the commitment of the actors on the other. The texts of this publication are developed in three main sections: How are protected areas redefined? Have new tools been mobilised? Have new territories been created?

These various contributions account for a certain continuity in the actions of conservation. In this regard, the emergence of sustainable development does not seem to have fundamentally modified operating modes, whether in the relations between local knowledge and scientific expertise, between scientific statements and political formulations, or yet in the organising modes between the local and the global. Although the current tendencies for returning to strict preservationist methods associated with the reinforcement of regional and international conservation policies and with international financing, are certainly modifying the tools conservationists have at their disposal, they are nonetheless prolonging a type of nature protection that was dominant during the whole of the 20th century.

Ruptures will more likely be found within the emergence of participation. For the past 20 years, the notion of participation has become the central theme of public intervention, present particularly in the process of widening and diversifying forms of conservation. Some associate it with the advance of democracy, others prefer to emphasise the community-based commitment to manage natural resources, while others only see ecological imperialism or a mere public relations exercise. The majority of the cases studied shows that the management of protected areas involves transformations and social connections as well as a conservationist injunction that both undermine any strong local participation. This does not mean that 'local' actors are deprived of their capacity for intervention. On the contrary, some of them find that conservation areas are places of training, spaces of negotiation or simply represent new opportunities. At this stage, the scientific challenge is to transcend participation to assess the way in which the collectivisation of conservation can foster innovative practices within local societies. Certain examples show that local re-appropriation is possible, even if that does not mean that local conflicts will be resolved or that the influence of market factors and transnational political systems will be reduced. Should these examples be verified, then sustainable development, through participation, will have caused a real innovation in the already long history of protected areas.

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