

Carrying out both management of visitors and socio-economic development in a labelled protected area: the role of a Regional Nature Park (RNP)

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Introduction

Natural areas are often settings of diverse activities, either productive ones or leisure ones. Furthermore we talk here about inhabited areas. Hence the relative stakes are numerous and contradicting : to protect nature and landscapes, to maintain or to develop the human social and economic activities. Management of these areas is then organizing and designing policies and action devices which fit. Protected areas are governed by various forms of organization in Europe, which are more and more considered as being instruments for protection of the environment but also for regional development (Mose 2016). In France the Regional Nature Parks (RNPs) are managed by groups of local communities, hence they stem from bottom-up processes, but they are also endowed with statutory missions. Since the origin of RNPs (1967) these missions are equilibrated between protection and development (Marsat 2009).

The subject of our analysis concerns the management of the site “la Chaîne des Puys”. It is a volcanic area located in the Auvergne (France). Its summit and emblem, the Puy de Dôme is labelled as « Grand Site de France », and the whole site candidates to be on the Unesco World Heritage List. Finally it is included in a much more extended volcanic area, labelled as RNP (Parc des Volcans d'auvergne). This RNP, as organization, is in charge of leading the management of the site.

Here the main tension occurs between the leisure activities of visitors, and the protection of environment and also other economic activities. The visits endanger quality of the milieux (erosion, stamping on flora, disturbing fauna). Labels (Grands sites de France, Unesco) will cause enhanced frequenting of the site. Inversely protection of the site may include ban of accessing some parts of the site, hence limitation of leisure and tourism activity. Other tensions occur, like the ones between leisure practices and agriculture or forestry.

Methodology

The communication tells an analysis of the way the RNP of the Volcans d'Auvergne carries out its integrating remits. It is based on three main empirical sources : 1- the telling of her activity by one of the authors, who is in charge in the RNP, 2- the documents which set the diagnoses and the frames of management of the site, and 3- the observation of the on-going processes by the other author.

The conceptual framework of this analysis is the theory of paradox (Poole et Van de Ven 1989; Smith et Lewis 2011). Coping with opposite stakes and objectives, interaction may take diverse forms, some of them (in italic, below) relate to what can be called “*paradoxical management* » (Josserand et Perret 2003) :

- Calling-off of one of the items : either by effect of force or power, after conflicting or resigning, or by the *change of the objectives* of any stakeholder (especially after some change in its representation, that is after *re-framing*) , or through any *innovation* which changes the objective features of the problem
- Trade-off, or long term sharing, by which none of the stakeholder realizes totally its objectives. For example it may be a partition of the area (zoning).

- Finally the dynamical process of *dialogue* between the actors, of « *round trips* » between opposite situations, may favour the previous cited forms (reframing, innovation, trade-off).

Results

The studied management system of the site shows some distinctive features. The action led include : laying out, protecting or restoring the milieux, monitoring visitors, regulating sport events, driving stakeholders, coaching (farmers, owners, ...), valorizing heritage, educating the public. The stakeholders and their main objectives are diverse as in other sites, with some particularities (complex landownership, proximity with urban area, interest of local great businesses...). The frames for this management are particularly numerous: objectives and constraints of Natura 2000, of the procedure “site classé”, of RNP, management plans of Grand site de France, of Unesco WHL.

Regarding the requirements of the Unesco WHL, no new organization was created for the management of the site; the decision was to rely on existing actors. An agreement links the main institutional actors. In parallel a trust was built by big local firms in order to bring also support and financial means.

The action of the RNP integrates protection and development, with a potentially exemplar balance. The opportunity of more tourism is acknowledged: “*it lacks a real project of tourism development in the site...*”. But this is expressed mainly in terms of better coordination, more than quantitative growth, and in a vision of *protection* of the places “...*out of those dedicated to tourism*” : we identify here an example of “trade-off”, by splitting the area. More generally a “differentiated management” of the site is being carried out.

Finally, inside of the RNP, the action oriented to the professional actors of development is achieved by two different internal teams, who *converse*: the one dedicated to the site, and the other dedicated to economy and tourism.

Conclusion

In conclusion the case presents interesting particular features: the peri-urban context, a policy seeking well-known labels, the existence of the trust of local businesses, and a particular form of governance, where the RNP applies a “paradoxical management”.

On the side of the theory, the case suggests that “paradoxical management” of the tension “protection-development” may refer to *a mix of solutions* : some *trade-off* (splitting the area, limiting activities), some *innovation* (including lay-out which changes locally some features of the problem), some *re-framing* (through teaching professional actors of tourism), and some *dialogue* (in particular inside of the RNP).

References

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