
Pokhari in the Nepalese plain: from multi-purpose ponds to exclusive fish farming in the tense context of territorial transformations in the eastern Tarai

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REFERENCES

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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- ¹ Resource management is one of the major contemporary challenges for rural societies. In the eastern Tarai plain (southern-east region of Nepal), with its high population densities (over 500 inhabitants/km²), territorial restructuring has forced local populations to cope with strong pressure on land and water. This has led to profound changes in the way these people use *pokhari*. These water bodies, which vary in size (from 0.01 to 6 hectares or more), are defined as multi-use ecosystems. Whether publicly or privately owned, *pokhari* are managed either collectively by Tharu or Madhesi village communities who are originally from the plain, or individually by

independent Pahari farmers who favour personal initiatives. Though *pokhari* are omnipresent in the districts of Saptari and Sunsari, where fieldwork was conducted for this PhD, it is only since the 1990s that they have become the target of public policies aimed at boosting the plain's economic productivity by developing intensive fish farming in *pokhari* and by auctioning licenses for their private management. Local populations have come up against new competition from individual and private endeavours, the latter reinforcing social and economic inequalities between on the one hand powerful landowners and on the other hand low-caste populations in the Tarai, who defend multi-purpose *pokhari*. According to the typology established during this doctoral work, of the 232 ponds located in Saptari and Sunsari districts, combined with a spatio-temporal analysis of how the surface area of these water bodies has evolved, the recent productivist logic defended by the Nepalese state has resulted in various changes to the way *pokhari* are used. Some rural communities have rallied support to counter further social exclusion, while others have preferred to abandon these hydro-social systems because the restrictions on the use of *pokhari* do not allow them to adapt to the changes.

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