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Forms, stakeholders and challenges of participation in the creation of the Cévennes National Park (1950-1970)

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Abstract: The successive paradigms of French sociology have constructed a representation of the evolution of environmental participation that tends to contrast the so-called current «eco-citizen» phase, with a 1950-1970 phase which supposedly witnessed both a massive public adhesion to modernisation trends, and an authoritarian management by the State of diverging views. The recent reform of the French legislation on National parks is highly representative of this evolution. However, we here propose to revisit the 1950-1970 period, when most National parks were created, by focussing on the long and complex history of the “invention” of the Cévennes National Park. It actually appears that the Cévennes experience was characterised

by a heavy involvement of local stakeholders, which may help moderate our sometimes too rigid perception of the evolution of participation levels. Moreover, the specificities of this participatory dynamics - and especially the importance of key individuals and interpersonal relations - should encourage us to better integrate in our analysis of governance matters some subjective aspects, as well as the interpretative capacity of the stakeholders.

Keywords: Cévennes National Park's “invention”, 1950-1970, environmental participation, French national parks reform.

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The issue of civil participation is currently being centrally addressed by social sciences in the light of environmental concerns. The development of environmental policies structured around the concept of "sustainable development" is said to have contributed to the revival of consensus-building and to the emergence of the "eco-citizen" in the last 10 years (Rumpala, 2008). The recent reform of the French legislation on national parks which was developed in the 1960s may appear to a perfect terrain for observing this subject. The French reform took place after it was observed that the Parks were faced with persistent difficulties. These were mainly attributed to a lack of territorial consistency and legitimacy. The French reform is in line with the international trend towards an "integrating paradigm" with respect to the governance of protected areas (Depraz,

2008). By obliging each Park to work with local municipalities to write a charter redefining its mission, objectives and the resources required for their implementation, the law of 14 April 2006 seems to have provided the French national Parks with an opportunity for a new start based on the exemplary mode of participation.

However, this rebirth has not been plain sailing. In the Pyrenees, as in the Cevennes, there was strong opposition during the rewriting of the decree regulating the Parks. This was during the phase prior to the setting up of the participatory process proper of writing the charter. The controversy mainly concerned the change to the delimitation of the core area of the two Parks, which was to be extended, as well as the place, deemed insufficient, allotted to local representatives on the Board of Trustees of the Parks, compared to the "powers" granted to the Directors, who were direct representatives of the State. Ultimately, it was the very capacity of the State to engage a veritable participatory process that was challenged, since the "new" decree would be "imposed".

These difficulties urge us to move briefly away from the current context to put the reflection on participation in National Parks back in a diachronic perspective. In an article published in 2006, C. Claeys-Mekdade demonstrated how the successive paradigms of French sociology have created a representation of the change in "environmental" participation, which tends to oppose the current "eco-citizen" period with the years of economic growth and social change that followed the end of the war (Les Trente Glorieuses). This period was marked by the massive adoption of the modernising wave as well as the government's authoritarian management of protests. We propose a re-examination of the period between 1950 and 1970, the founding period of national parks, in the light of the historical experience of the invention of the Cevennes National Park, which is particularly long and complex¹. Given the far-reaching social challenges raised by the creation of a national park in a mid-range mountain area that is permanently inhabited and farmed, the issue of the participation of inhabitants, users and representatives of the territory concerned was raised in different ways, right from the beginning.

In the first part of this paper, the Cevennes experience will be compared with the chronology of environmental participation identified by sociologists. This will enable us to temper the periodisation and perception of the evolution of participatory modes that are sometimes too rigid.

We will next observe the ways in which local stakeholders were involved during the phase when the project was developed by the public authorities (survey mission), and then the effects of the momentum, which we can call "participatory", on the landscape of the Cevennes National Park, as it was officially created on 2 September 1970.

¹ This history has been the subject of research founded on the cross-analysis of administrative archives of associations and private bodies, as well as on the testimonies of the various stakeholders. K.-L. Basset, *Aux origines du Parc national des Cévennes. Des précurseurs à la création (2 Septembre 1970)*, Florac, Parc national des Cévennes, in the press.

The birth of the idea of a national park in Cevennes in the "modernist acceptance/imposition" phase

As C. Claeys-Mekdade recalls (cited art.), sociological literature distinguishes three main successive phases since the end of the second world war. There was first the phase of modernistic acceptance of French society, which corresponds to the period of reconstruction and modernisation of the country, led by a State that was increasingly strong and centralised. In this context, the development policy, which was welcomed by the majority, was implemented according to a planning rationale. The second phase began at the dawn of the 1970s and was characterised by the challenging of the dogma of economic growth and the policy of major developments. In the third phase, we see the development of proactive consensual policies as an answer to the rising wave of dissension. There are three forms of participation for these three periods. The first was that of "peripheral power" (Grémion, 1976) "based on exchanges behind closed doors between local dignitaries and the central authority to negotiate developments on a case-by-case basis, which more or less modified the projects without compromising the principle" (Claeys-Mekdade, 2006: 2). The second phase was the expression of an opposition without dialogue, driven by a large movement of associations, at a local level. Lastly, there was participation proper, which was "the holding of debates that made it possible to express proposals and counter-proposals" (id., op. cit.: 3). The invention of the Cevennes National Park, which occurred primarily in the first phase, took place in ways that somewhat muddle this layout.

In the mid-1950s, an association was created in the Cevennes region that claimed that the creation of a national park was the development solution to fight the serious economic and social crisis that had swept across the rural population. The initiative was first supported by public figures of the Lozère department (resolution of the General Council in 1956), before being joined by a group of militants from the Gard and Ardèche departments. That is how the Association for a Cevennes Cultural National Park (Parc National Culturel des Cévennes - APNCC) was created in 1957 (APNCC). From the 1960s onwards, this demand to develop the mountain hinterland was linked to the implementation of the Languedoc-Roussillon coastal development plan.

But for all that, the Cevenol movement did not behave simply like a partner that wanted to support the Government. It also included a critical dimension that was strongly expressed by certain militants, who conveyed a philosophy that could be qualified as "green" before the term existed. The APNCC was composed of two trends. The first insisted on the need for reforestation, which it felt had to be the primary objective of the national park: this would be a forest park that would be maintained by the "reconverted" local population, and it would focus on the industrial production of wood and the development of

tourism². The second group placed more emphasis on the maintenance of a rural way of life and the development of a mountain economy. Both groups were also worried about the deterioration of the natural environment. For example, the restoration of the forest cover was, for these militants, an imperative for fighting against the havoc wreaked by floods, including the spectacular floods of autumn 1958, which had marked all minds. It must be pointed out that most of these militants were either not from the Cévennes or were "expatriate" Cévenols. From this viewpoint, the Association claimed the heritage of the forest restoration achieved on the Aigoual Mountain (Nougarède et al., 1985).

However, the Association was not the manifestation of an anti-establishment "eco-awareness" movement. This was expressed by the members of an informal and sociologically cross-cutting group called the Friends of the Sources (Amis des sources). They first explicitly challenged the rationale of profitability and the progressivism of the developers, the public utility, Electricité de France and its grand projects to build hydro-electric facilities that would destroy the landscape and natural resources. Sharing a Christian humanist philosophy, they seemed to see in the creation of a national park in the Cévennes, the opportunity to build a territory that would escape from the general development of modern society – almost a heterotopia as defined by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1967) –, based on a redefinition of the relations between human beings and nature (Basset, 2009b).

We might be tempted not to include in our analysis this minority movement that was not large enough to compromise society's main orientations previously defined with respect to environmental problems. However, we may have still not understood the full measure of the existence of such critical positions in post-war France – described mainly for its modernising momentum –, while a large number of them were at the origin of the development of a heritage awareness and the creation of new territorial forms, which included protected "natural" areas³.

Another contentious dimension of the Cévenol movement emerged when the Government developed, in the early 1960s, the doctrine that would become the framework of the law on the creation of National Parks in France. The draft bill was prepared by the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture (Nature Conservation Directorate). However, APNCC militants decided that they had to have their say. They feared that the law would alter the spirit of the Cévenol project, by conferring on the national parks a mission that was too focused on preservation and far removed from human concerns. The APNCC therefore supported the changes proposed by the rapporteur, Pierre Dumas, a defender of the Vanoise Park and also a partisan of a park that would be a "land-use planning

² See Charles Bieau, "Du grand Parc Forestier des Cévennes au Parc National des Cévennes", *Causses et Cévennes*, IX, 3/1961, pp. 382-387.

³ See, in the same period, the role of Gilbert André in the creation of the Vanoise National Park (Mauz, 2003) and of Pierre Martel, creator of the Alpes de Lumière movement and developer of a Park in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence (Basset, 2009a).

tool" (Mauz, 2003), and managed to get two amendments voted through its Cevenol MPs. In the end, the law enacted on 22 July 1960 seems to be a framework that was flexible enough to undertake both nature preservation as well as human development missions at the same time, assigned respectively to the park area proper and to the peripheral area. At the time, the Cevenol Park developers considered themselves to be the co-authors of the law on national parks, as they wrote on several occasions.

However, the implementing order of the law (31 October 1961), which interprets this law in a rather conservative and repressive meaning, is not far from being considered, as was the case in the Savoy region, as a betrayal by the Administration. Some elected representatives lost all desire to back the creation of a national park, and a part of the militant movement spoke out against the administrative interpretation of the law, preferring henceforth to defend "a development of the Cevenol highland". Supporters of this position created a new association, independent of the APNCC, called Font Vive, which included the Amis des sources mentioned earlier on⁴. It was in this way that the protest against the authoritarian, if not non-democratic, practice of political decision-making came to join the protest movement against a development that was considered destructive to natural environments.

⁴ The articles of the Font Vive association state: "The purpose of the association is to carry out an educative action, promote cultural activities, encourage scientific research and study the human development of the Cevenol Highland, in the spirit of the law of 25 July 1960 on French national parks".

Figure 1. Editorial and map of the Cevennes National Park project, Font Vive, No. 1, May 1960, pp. 2 and 3

However, this picture is not so straightforward. This protest movement, which was relatively early compared to the generally accepted periodisation (since it was well before May 1968), was not expressed in its radical form (as described for the environmental opposition fuelled by the social unrest of the 1970s) and excluding all forms of dialogue with State representatives. On the contrary, the protesters of the Cevenol movement never departed from their desire to participate, founded on an attitude that was a combination of "cooperation and protest", in the words of Roland Calcat, chairman of Font Vive⁵, thus heralding the (post)modernity of today's associations (Neveu, 1996). The creation of a Federation of Cevenol Associations (FAC) in August 1965 was precisely aimed at facilitating dialogue between local stakeholders and national and regional authorities.

However, in the beginning this request to participate went unanswered. The creation of the Cevennes National Park was written into the 5th Plan in December 1965. In January 1966, the Director of farming services in Lozère (DDA) was appointed to carry out an initial feasibility study. He entrusted the writing up of this survey to a very fresh civil servant, Pierre de Montagnac de Chauvance, an engineer from the Rivers and Forests division and a rural engineer.

⁵ R. Calcat, "Coopération et contestation", *Font Vive* magazine, No. 11, 1966, p. 2.

The report that he wrote, in a purely administrative spirit, did not take into consideration the reflection and field work carried out during the previous ten years by regional groups nor the very negative reaction caused by the publication of the public administration regulation.

This method of action reflects the political power play at the time, where local communities did not have the role that we give them today and where authority was primarily in the hands of the central administration and government representatives at the regional level. In a recent interview, P. de Montaignac recalled this mindset: "Paradoxically, local elected representatives played a much lesser role than the role they could have played today. You wouldn't think of writing a report like that without consulting with the General Councils involved, for example. Nobody did that: it didn't cross their minds. The General Council was under the orders of the Prefect, who was the one with executive powers. [...] And the State technical departments were much more independent of the Prefects than they are today." (P. de Montaignac)

We must now examine how, in such a context and despite everything, the various local stakeholders managed to express themselves and have their voices heard in the institutional establishment of the Cévennes National Park.

Participation during the survey mission phase (1967-1970)

Protest as a form of participation

As a direct consequence of the absence of a participatory approach by the authorities, the survey mission for the creation of the Park, launched officially in the spring of 1967 after the approval of the National Parks inter-ministerial committee got on to a very bad start.

The report written by the DDA was first of all intended to convince the central services that the Cévennes region was perfectly suited to the law on National Parks. It therefore insisted on the decline, and even the inevitable disappearance of farming activities in the selected Park area (85,000 hectares), which made this vast area perfect for the preservation of nature and landscapes⁶. It also planned, in accordance with the law of 1960, a strict division between the core preservation area, on the main Lozère massifs, and the peripheral area where development would be possible. However, as Jean Capiaux wrote, "if such a separation appeared logical for the two national parks that existed at the time (La Vanoise, Western Pyrenees) because there was a clear opposition between the high mountains ("white mountain") and the habitable zone ("green mountain") and the demarcation line therefore corresponded to a concrete fact, the delimitation was more problematic, if not even arbitrary in the Cévennes" (Capiaux, 1979: 80).

⁶ *Pour un parc national des Cévennes*, Lozère Departmental Division of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, September 1966.

The dissemination of the report opened an initial phase of consultation with elected representatives, professional organisations, associations and personalities. Despite the special emphasis on the expected participation in this "dynamic achievement that the government wishes to implement with the rural population and for them"⁷, objections were immediately raised after this survey was released. Between summer and autumn 1967, about a dozen municipalities expressed negative opinions and two opposition groups were created (the Comité de Jalcreste and the Terre Cévenole association). The regional press reported the heated debate for several months as opponents expressed fears about restrictions to freedom of use and the loss of local political autonomy that would result from the creation of a national park. There was also a deeper worry about the relevance of a national park as a solution to the economic and social crisis that had hit the region.

The administrative authorities could not let matters rest if they did not want to risk jeopardising the project for good. A process of information, dialogue and consultation was then launched that lasted more than two years. It ended in a majority vote in favour of the national park which was expressed during the public inquiry.

A broad-based participation, orchestrated by missionaries big and small

Two men played a decisive role in this process. The first, Georges Mazenot, who had been recently appointed sub-prefect of Lozère, took on the task of reconciliation between the government authorities and the population. He also took part in writing the preliminary draft regulations of the national park. The second man was the person in charge of the survey mission, Pierre de Montagnac. He was in charge of informing the population about the project as well as working very concretely to define the Park's boundaries. The two men accomplished an immense hands-on task, listening to the inhabitants, establishing personal contacts and carrying out individual negotiations practically house by house. This physical and psychological presence made a lasting impression and played a major role in ensuring the success of the project.

To ensure that the population would adopt the project, the two "great missionaries" had to obtain the backing of those who exercised a veritable political and moral authority on the field. In this respect, local elected representatives were the main "targets" of an intense information campaign: personal visits to the 67 representatives concerned, meetings in all municipalities, etc. A visit to the Vanoise National Park organised by Georges Mazenot in August 1968 won over most of

⁷ Lozère Prefecture, "standard letter", undated, archives of the Cévennes National Park, Lozère departmental archives

the elected representatives⁸. These took up the support of the project through an action committee for the creation of the Cévennes National Park and a vigorous campaign in the regional press.

A second circle of mediators played an extremely singular role. In the Cévennes, we know the importance of the religious factor which, during that period, determined political attitudes even more strongly. The Protestant population is in the majority in the Cévennes valleys (south of the Lozère and Gard departments) and has always shown a strong mistrust of the government, probably a throwback from the historical struggles of the 18th century. The Park had been designed and supported from the beginning, mainly in Catholic circles, and the person in charge of the mission was himself a leader of Catholic scouts in the Lozère. According to several witnesses, this had a strong impact on psychological attitudes concerning the project. In the end, it was the religious authorities who were finally called upon to facilitate the "freeing of philosophies" according to an expression coined by P. de Montagnac. In such a context, local personalities engaged in an ecumenical action to bring religious communities together played a crucial role as a relay with the Protestant population⁹. The issue of the future of the rural world, and therefore the National Park, became a subject of shared dialogue, structured around the conviction that it was necessary to maintain populations and their traditions and promote life in these villages, and in particular by encouraging "smart" tourism (Paul Bastian).

In the rural environment, the Catholic and Protestant action circles intersected with professional circles through farming unions. The Park benefited from the commitment of leading personalities who were strongly involved in projects to develop and modernise the rural communities. Some of them would end up on the Board of Trustees of the public institution.

We must also mention the strong involvement of cultural players in the debate about the Park. While two magazines (Cévennes et Mont Lozère, magazine of the APNCC created in 1963 and Font Vive, created in 1960) were specifically dedicated to the Park, the Lozère regional magazine Lou País took the initiative in 1967, to open a monthly column of information and debate on this issue. Whereas the first two publications had a limited circulation and appeared to be socially removed from rural populations, Lou País was, on the contrary, a popular magazine that enjoyed a wide circulation in Catholic circles, but was also read in Cévennes circles and by the "diaspora"¹⁰.

⁸ Some 40 or so elected representatives and local personalities travelled across the Park with its director, Maurice Bardel, who had been asked to place special emphasis "*on all the human aspects*" (P. de Montagnac).

⁹ For example, Pastor Paul Bastian, who, as president of the 10th Region of the French Reformed Church, officiated over a large part of the territory of the future park.

¹⁰ *Lou País* had a circulation of 4000 in 1967 with a record of up to 7000 copies at the peak of the debate on the national park in 1968 and 1969.

Figure 2. Cover of the magazine Lou Païs, November 1967

A few months before the beginning of the second phase of the procedure (vote by organisations and then by municipalities), the beginnings of the institutionalisation of participation emerged, through the organisation of theme-based commissions (architecture and construction, protection of sites, tourism, agricultural balance, legal studies), composed of personalities engaged in the Cevenol area, including opponents to the State project¹¹. Nevertheless, some heads of departments expressed their concern about the existence of these commissions, which they did not want to be "made too official"¹².

¹¹ Mr Roux, the chairman and co-founder of Terre Cévenole, main opposition group to the State project, took part in several of these commissions.

¹² Memo from the director of the Departmental Division of Agriculture (DDA) on the subject of "commissions", 9 February 1968, Lozère departmental archives.

The effect of participation on the landscape of the Cevennes National Park

The national park was therefore successfully established according to a strong and leading State rationale. Nevertheless, this was done after dialogue and exchanges with a wide range of stakeholders strongly involved in the debate, and there was also a real attempt to integrate the objections. This circulation of speech and "active listening" successfully implemented by the people in charge of the project resulted in a park with an original landscape, which eventually tried to adapt the regulations to the land. Admittedly, all the various viewpoints were not heard, nor were all the local claims met, especially with respect to the nature of the managing organisation¹³. However, during the survey mission, the project was redefined (Mormont *et al.*, 2006) and this is probably what helped it to obtain a majority vote during the preliminary inquiry and then the public enquiry.

This redefinition was based on the shift in the meaning of the mission assigned to the National Park. "The doctrine [in 1966] was that a national park was a sparsely inhabited or uninhabited territory where the primary objective is the preservation of nature" (P. de Montaignac). And yet the project that was finally submitted to the vote of the population had two major reorientations.

First of all, it described a new object of preservation. It was no longer "nature", but "the sites and an entire heritage related to the local civilisation, which must be preserved with special care" (Survey mission, Pour un Parc national des Cévennes, 1968). We recognise in this modification, the orientation originally defended by the proponents of a cultural national park. Another factor which, according to P. de Montaignac, was of special importance from this viewpoint, was the emergence of a philosophy of regional National Parks and the exchange of experience between mission officers.

The redefinition was also in terms of space, since the government went from a strictly Lozerian viewpoint to "a slightly broader vision" (P. de Montaignac). The emphasis placed by project managers on the role of the peripheral area contributed to broadening the vision. This resulted in the design of the National Park no longer primarily as a conservation area, but also as an area where an "overall development project" can be established" (P. de Montaignac).

On the whole, the decree of 2 September 1970 expresses the "negotiated nature of the creation of this protected legal entity" (Capioux, 1979: 116). The layout of the boundaries of the park area particularly illustrates the choice of the compromise made by the administration, in accepting to give preference to human elements over bio-geographical data (Constantin, 1972: 33). The work of the survey mission also resulted in regulations that were more liberal than those in force in the other national parks. The main innovation in this respect concerned

¹³ In the Cevennes, the preference was for a public industrial and commercial enterprise rather than a public administrative institution that was not imposed by law.

hunting in the core area, which is not forbidden, but merely regulated. We also note provisions relating to the building regime and the practice of grazing activities. Lastly, the Administration acceded to the preferences expressed during the consultation procedure, by giving more seats to representatives of local interests on the Park Board of Trustees. Thus they were assigned half the number of seats, while the Permanent Commission, created by the Board, was made up of a majority of local representatives. This is unique in the history of National Parks (Capiiaux, 1979: 145).

We find the footprint of this unique creation process of the Cevennes national park in certain "styles" and management choices made since it was created, from the setting up of contracts with farmers ("Mazenot" contracts), to current attempts to obtain joint management with livestock farmers¹⁴. The history of the Cevennes National Park throughout its 40 years of existence has, of course, had its share of legitimacy conflicts, but it has also been characterised by the permanent search of a "doctrine", that can translate the singular features of this Park marked by a major territorial problem. Today, it is often considered the very emblem of "French environmental singularity". In many respects, the Cevennes Natural Park was indeed the precursor of the new orientations imposed on French Natural Parks by the law of 2006.

Conclusion

Although it confirms the general trends for the classical periodisation of environmental participation, the case of the invention of the Cevennes Natural Park therefore testifies to the diversity of the "models". For example, instead of normatively contrasting periods of history that are more or less "virtuous", we could review the "participatory history", putting aside any critical bias and focusing more on what makes the moment a singular one. Two facts clearly stand out in the creation of the Cevennes National Park. The first was the importance of the intentional dimension – what makes it resemble the model of regional natural Parks, of which it is strictly contemporary (Lajarge, 2007) –, or even below in an emotional register, the dimension of desire, which existed before the project was taken over by the administration. This desire, which is of course multi-faceted, or even contradictory, has succeeded to an extent, in counterbalancing the absence of a participatory administrative culture. The second salient point is the central nature of the individual factor, or even "personality" as an engine of a process of exchange and consultation that is beyond the control of the institutional procedure.

At a methodological level, the Cevennes National Park experience incites us to include more subjective notions and categories into the analysis, both at the individual and collective level, such as desire, commitment, intentionality,

¹⁴ See the articles by Mr Roué and J. Blanc in Larrère R., Lizet B., Berlan-Darqué M. (eds.), 2009.

acknowledgement (Caillé, 2007), or even friendship and to pay great attention to the discourse of the action. As L. Boltanski suggests, this consists in "following the stakeholders as closely as possible in their interpretative work [by] taking seriously their arguments and the proof that they provide, without trying to minimise them or disqualify them by opposing a stronger interpretation" (Boltanski, 1990: 57). This is because there is, in the history of the experience of French national parks, enough substance to build an interpretative programme (Dosse, 1995) that is more attentive to the meaning that the stakeholders give to their action than it has been in the past.

Translation: Accent Mondial

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