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The role of local populations in tourism development projects: the case of Loango National Park in Gabon

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1 It has been observed that community tourism projects implemented within protected areas in developing countries of the Southern hemisphere have a record of failure. The same issues tend to persist and new ones emerge within these sensitive areas. Recurring problems include conflicts of use, rural exodus and the poor redistribution of income from the tourism industry. And yet, the addition in 2007 by the World Heritage Committee of a fifth ‘C’, standing for ‘Communities’1, to the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage, indicates the strategic significance of the role that local populations should play in the conservation and development of tourism in protected areas.

2 The community ecotourism pilot project (Protected Area Development Programme, PADP), developed in 2003 by the European Union in Loango National Park, is a concrete example of this situation, with conflictual relationships existing today between the local inhabitants and conservation and tourism actors.

3 This protected area presents all the characteristics of 'Outstanding Universal Value' that distinguish World Heritage sites, given that it contains 'the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity [mangroves, for example], including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation [such as the gorilla or the elephant2]'. Furthermore, by signing the World Heritage Convention in 1986, Gabon committed itself to the protection of its national heritage. This national park can thus be studied in the same way as a World Heritage site, for its universal value reflecting the richness and diversity of the natural heritage of the world (World Heritage Centre, December 2011).
The desire to develop this heritage through tourism, with the resulting socio-economic benefits, is, however, a long-term process. The case of Loango National Park demonstrates that the participation objectives originally set are still far from being met. The question is thus whether or not the tourism development of protected areas leads to effective involvement on the part of local communities in countries of the Southern hemisphere.

The role of local populations in the development and management of protected areas has been fuelling debates since the early 2000s and has become central to all development issues. The ‘empowerment’ of these communities is today a key concept in political discourse and cooperation. These new priorities have led to the development of ‘pro-poor tourism’ and ‘community tourism’, which target effective participation by the local people in tourism projects and the equitable redistribution of the revenues generated by these activities. Participatory management mechanisms have been established in tourism development policies, the globalisation of this term evidence of an international desire for the harmonisation of development methods.

The environmental attributes and fragile nature of protected areas make them special areas for tourism development. Such development has been deemed fundamental to preserve these natural heritage sites, while also generating revenue to remunerate the management bodies responsible for these areas as well as the local populations, adversely affected by new restrictions. Among these cultural areas, 211 outstanding sites across 153 State Parties have been listed as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. These include 37 sites in Africa and 38 in Latin America, the majority of them being located in Europe and Asia, and all benefitting from special legal protection under the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, August 2012).

The main challenge here is to achieve the sound management of natural resources for the common good, while satisfying the requirements of the local populations who have traditionally inhabited these areas, living off the land and dependent on it for their traditions. Tourism development projects are thus likely to generate conflicts of use that can destroy conservation efforts. The goal is therefore to create projects that encourage local communities to take responsibility for managing tourism activities, thereby generating economic benefits at the local level and guaranteeing greater self-sufficiency for the population.

Community tourism in its broadest sense, that of ‘ecotourism’, has nevertheless revealed its untenable nature from a social point of view. Indeed, during the second half of the 20th century, a form of exclusion was created in protected areas as a result of the unequal distribution of revenue generated by tourism, the local populations being relegated to third place after the State and foreign tour operators (Rodary, 2010, p. 62). It therefore seems essential today for local populations to be even more involved in the management of these areas, in order to ensure a more equitable redistribution of resources (Méral, 2011, p. 134).

Experience has shown that the differing expectations of each category of actors have often been the source of major problems in the management of tourism activities in protected areas. The new concept of ‘participatory governance’ thus aims to create the conditions necessary for organised power and collective action. It differs from other modes of management by the processes it uses, notably extensive consultation with the
different actors, including representatives from the local populations (Lequin, 2004, p. 86).

Moreover, and even though it includes development goals, community tourism involves certain limitations and risks for the local communities, who can come to consider themselves ‘victims’ of the project.

Indeed, the tourism development of an area, carried out with the aim of ensuring cultural development, can actually lead to a form of ‘folklorisation’ of the local population. According to Estienne Rodary (2010, p. 43, [translation mine]): ‘Tourism is an exhibition of the self, the (re)construction of an identity and a culture to portray a uniqueness that justifies “the trip”. But this re-creation also reconfigures the power relations, which can cause an institutionalisation of this culture, with it becoming as foreign to the tourists as to the host who welcomes them. So if nature tourism has created a marginalisation by imposing a specific view of nature, the cultural approach can produce an acculturation of the host who acquires a “tourist” identity.’

Community tourism is sometimes recommended for those destinations that are considered perfect for this type of activity in order to satisfy the local communities. This system of external value is then imposed on the inhabitants of these areas who, however, are not always in favour of this form of development. Numerous studies have found that the best jobs created by such projects tend to be held by outsiders. Indeed, because communities located in the rural areas of developing countries do not have access to higher education, their inhabitants primarily occupy secondary jobs (Froger, 2010, p. 58).

Grégoire Chauvière Le Drian (2010) shows that the various major international bodies and organisations involved in such tourism development projects increasingly direct their policies towards greater involvement on the part of the local populations. However, the concepts of ‘empowerment’, ‘governance’ and ‘participation’ used by financiers in calls for projects tend not to define the level of involvement required. They are therefore often criticized by researchers and professionals for their general nature, encompassing very different degrees of involvement by local populations in development projects. The ‘conflict of temporality’ referred to by Lapeyre (2010, p. 215) also undermines the sustainability of community tourism projects, dependent on the project owners and their short-term programmes.

My experience working on the Loango National Park project for two consecutive years led me to observe first-hand the same failures highlighted in this research. Within the framework of my subsequent return to education, I adopted the stance of ‘researcher-actor’ in order to examine the causes of the non-appropriation of community tourism projects on the part of local populations by continuing the analysis of the case of Loango National Park.

Since the departure of the European Union in 2006, the tourism development of the Park has been carried out under the auspices of the National Agency for National Parks (Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux, ANPN), whose competence is mainly conservation- rather than anthropology- or tourism-orientated. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has also been playing an important role since 1992 in the management of this protected area and its environs. With the objectives of this international NGO focused on the conservation of flora and fauna in the area, the local communities have suffered from being relegated to ‘second place’. Participation by the local people, although taken into consideration in national policy, is not yet effective. The lack of skills in
anthropology and tourism development on the part of organisations involved in the development of the area is not the only reason for this failure. Is the local population truly involved in the decision-making process? Is the socio-anthropological context sufficiently taken into account? Does effective communication exist between the different actors?

16 The desire to involve the local people in the tourism development process is real. Various tools designed to facilitate this involvement have been developed and used, including meetings, awareness campaigns, and the creation of cooperatives. But are these tools appropriate within this context? Perhaps it would be necessary to allocate more funding and time to the development and implementation of these communication tools so that they are no longer a simple ‘pretext’, but rather are designed with the primary aim of encouraging culturally different populations to assume responsibility over the long-term.

17 This paper aims to demonstrate how community tourism projects in protected areas can often fail due to both a lack of communication between the actors, resulting from an approach that is much too rhetorical, and the insufficient integration of the relevant socio-anthropological issues. This research is based on participant observation, on semi-structured interviews with the different categories of actors, and on documentary research based on reports made by organisations acting within the area. Strategies that allow for moving towards greater consensus among the various stakeholders are proposed in the conclusion.

Involvement by the local population in the Loango National Park community ecotourism project

Loango National Park: the perfect setting for community tourism?

18 Established in 2001 by the President of the Gabonese Republic, Loango National Park is one of 13 such parks throughout the country. Located in the south-west, it covers an area of 1,500 km², along 86 km of coastline and including 175 km of a Ramsar listed lagoon. It has many habitats, some of which are considered threatened by the IUCN. These include sea, beach, savannah, lagoon, dry and flooded forest, and mangrove. The Park’s isolation has helped preserve these natural areas, but does not facilitate tourism development in the region.

19 Loango National Park’s tourism potential is high thanks to its abundant wildlife and birdlife, including African forest elephant and buffalo, bushpigs, gorillas, chimpanzees, antelope, pelicans, ibis, touracos, crocodiles, turtles, manatees, hippopotamuses, dolphins, and whales. Culture and traditional practices still represent an integral part of daily life in the villages. Crafts, making palm wine, local food, the use of medicinal plants, Bwiti rituals and working in the fields are all specific to the area and likely to be of interest to visitors.

20 Three villages are involved in the community ecotourism project set up by the European Union in the southern part of the Park: Sette Cama (50 inhabitants), Pitonga (20 inhabitants) and Sounga (seven inhabitants). Sounga is located within the Park itself, while Sette Cama and Pitonga are located along its southern periphery. The inhabitants of the villages live off traditional activities such as fishing and agriculture. The young
people leave to find work in the cities, notably in Gamba with Shell Gabon and its subcontractors.

21 The area immediately surrounding Loango National Park forms part of the Gamba Complex of Protected Areas. The Park’s periphery therefore benefits from the status of protected area and its villages must also comply with current legislation, especially with regard to the management of wildlife resources. The devastation of plantations by wildlife and restrictions on fishing constitute the main conflicts of use within the area. A specific zone regrouping all of the villages in the southern part of Loango National Park and its surrounding area is, however, currently being established in order to reach consensus concerning the management of these resources with all of the inhabitants concerned.

22 The national tourism development policy aims to improve the living conditions of local populations, mainly through job creation. The Government’s goal with regard to the level of participation reveals a significant desire for greater involvement on the part of these communities. The view of the ANPN complements these prerogatives by including the involvement of the local populations at all stages of discussion and decision-making concerning the tourism development of national parks and their surrounding areas.

23 However, in the case of Loango National Park, interviews carried out with the local population reveal that life in the village of Sette Cama is not structured around a community. Each household is responsible for their own plantation and for cleaning their own space within the village. No common organisation has been initiated with the aim of creating synergy and combining efforts. Minko Mve and Nkoghe (2008, p. 109) evoke a change in Gabonese society stemming from the questioning of beliefs, the cultural uprooting of human beings, the severing of community ties and the loss of traditions.

24 According to the authors, this dynamic has a destructive effect on the desire of the people to live under the yoke of tradition. It is responsible for the collapse of community solidarity and the establishment of a new cultural dynamic that sometimes leads to nihilism.

25 This lack of community synergy tends to hinder the sustained implementation of a community ecotourism project. The European Union’s Protected Area Development Programme (PADP) recognised this difficulty right from the outset (Prunier, 2006, p. 46).

Strategies for involving the local population in the PADP project

26 The PADP project leaders claim they requested village participation at all decision-making and operational levels, involving each demographic group (men and women, the young and the elderly) either directly or indirectly in tourism activities. They favoured an approach whereby the actual project was conceived by the inhabitants, avoiding pre-established concepts in order to ensure greater appropriation of the project from the outset. The local population was thus consulted at each of the different stages of assessment of the area, the design and marketing of tourism products, the development of professional, organisational and decision-making capabilities, and, finally, the establishment of a cooperative and a community fund (into which a percentage of the entrance fees and proceeds from tourist accommodation was to be paid).

27 Interactive meetings and training sessions were conducted to create a group of twelve women caterers, a group of twenty artisans, and a group of ten ‘eco-guides’ for the
southern part of the Park. Once these skills were established, the development of tourist accommodation, a welcome centre and nine itineraries allowed for creating the fabric of community tourism in the area, based on the enhancement of the environment and traditional know-how. The management of Case Abiétu, accommodation specifically developed for tourists, was entrusted to GIC Tourisme, an independent community initiative agency of the Regional Council of Ndougou.

The success of this new tourism product was short-lived, the little data available concerning bookings at Case Abiétu revealing a significant drop in the number of visitors, from 315 nights in 2006 to only 193 nights in 2010.

And what of the involvement by the local population?

**Overview of the involvement by the local population**

Interviews with local inhabitants revealed a decline in their level of participation following the departure of the PADP project leaders. The empowerment framework in Document 1 (adapted from Scheyvens, 1999) determines the impact of this community ecotourism project on the local population. It paints a rather negative picture, with the community not pursuing the initial project objectives.

**Document 1: Evaluation of the impact of the PADP community ecotourism project on the local population, 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic empowerment</th>
<th>Signs of empowerment</th>
<th>Signs of disempowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benefits of the community ecotourism project: women-centred, eco-guides, and artisians. Village of Sette Cama connected to the telephone network.</td>
<td>Spatial imbalance: the other two villages do not benefit from the economic benefits of the project, and only 3% of the total population benefits from donations. Tourism activities essentially constitute additional expenses. No improvement in housing or living conditions: water supply from a well accessible only by walk, no electricity, the clinic no longer receives medical supplies. Payments into the community fund have stopped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological empowerment</td>
<td>Development of know-how for a large part of the population via training. Desire to continue training on the part of the guides. Pride of the local population in their land.</td>
<td>Lack of interest on the part of the younger generations for their traditions, and loss of traditional know-how. Recurring conflicts of use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social empowerment</td>
<td>Organization of the group of women centred via a co-operative system. Integration of a guide of a different ethnicity from a nearby national park.</td>
<td>Lack of community organization for the cleaning and maintenance of the village, and for managing the plantations. The number of staff at the school has been halved. The past is shared among the group of women of the village. Respect for support on the part of the artisans and the women, of the supply of raw materials. Faculty or ethnic division leading the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political empowerment</td>
<td>Informal dissolution of the co-operative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 75% of the inhabitants involved at the start have since left the project, representing a drop from 39 direct jobs in 2006 to only nine in 2012. There has been no improvement in living conditions since the start of the project. The community management systems are no longer run, and today only the village of Sette Cama still benefits from some tourism-related income. The psychological empowerment achieved throughout the duration of the project has not been taken advantage of by the local people to establish a more community-based social and political system.

The community ecotourism project initiated a process of empowerment and development within the villages concerned by the PADP. All of this progress ceased, however, with the departure of the project leaders. What are the reasons for this failure?
Barriers to involvement by the local population

A system of communication resulting in the marginalisation of the local people

The study of the meetings and interviews held with the different categories of actors reveals a dichotomy between official discourse and that of the local population. While official discourse indicates, for the most part, a satisfactory participation level on the part of the local people, the latter express a feeling of marginalisation in the process of the tourism development and conservation of the area.

The vast majority of the inhabitants are dissatisfied with the lack of communication concerning the tourism development of the Park:

‘Since tourism in the area began, nobody has been to discuss this issue with us.’ (Village chief, Sounga)

‘During the PADP, things ran smoothly. But since GIC took over the management of Case Abiétu, we don’t see anything happening anymore. As for the percentage due to the village, we do not know where it goes. Since politics became involved, the whole project has become one big mess. So if you want to know about the activities that take place in the Park, go ask the village counsellor. He’ll tell you what’s going on today. We see nothing.’ (Village elder, Sette Cama)

GIC Tourisme, on the other hand, expresses satisfaction as regards exchanges with the local population:

‘Well, I still have meetings with the local inhabitants when an issue is unclear, like this matter of the percentage due to them, which needed clarifying [a percentage of the proceeds from the management of the tourist accommodation is supposed to be paid into the community fund]. The meetings take place in total and absolute calm, and we understand each other very well. This is why we have a very good relationship with the villagers today […] Even if people are in the bush, they attend the meetings to listen, because they understand that it is not the responsibility of the State, but the responsibility of all of the actors involved.’ (Chairman, GIC Tourisme)

The population of Sette Cama acknowledges having had meetings concerning the tourism development of the Park, but these were few and far between. The inhabitants of Sounga and Pitonga, however, do not recall being included in this process of discussion and participation.

The reason for this lack of information lies notably in a misunderstanding on the part of the community of the role of each actor present in the field. Interviews with residents of Sette Cama, Sounga and Pitonga unanimously demonstrate the general confusion that reigns concerning their actions and objectives:

‘For us, it’s the same thing. We do not know the exact role and specific tasks of all these organisations that work towards the protection of the environment.’ (District chief)

Invitations to attend information or consultation meetings are extended through the village chiefs. The chiefs, however, do not always pass these invitations on to the rest of the inhabitants, who lament the fact that this process is not ensured via the local radio.

This lack of information and more regular exchanges does nothing to facilitate the appropriation of community tourism projects by the local populations living in protected
areas. It could be said that the participatory democracy to which the policy makers aspire is really only at the stage of ‘representative democracy’.

The recurring questions regarding conflicts of use on the part of the local population in Loango National Park not only reveal that appropriate solutions have not been found to date, but also that the information provided by tourism and conservation actors has not always been clearly understood. While there is regular dialogue between the actors and the inhabitants during the meetings, the satisfaction felt by the various participants at the end of a meeting is short-lived.

‘There are never any concrete decisions taken at the end of these meetings. It’s all just empty words, and that is why we decided we would no longer take part.’ (Village elder, Sette Cama)

The analysis of official discourse by public and private decision-makers demonstrates an attitude of condescension with regard to the local people, who do not have the same level of education. Despite the use of Lumbu, the local language, during meetings, the technical concepts and vocabulary used are beyond the comprehension of the inhabitants. The very terms of ‘tourism’ and ‘development’ have no equivalents in the vernacular. These technical concepts are used on a daily basis in the world of conservation and tourism, but do local populations grasp the same meaning?

It would no doubt be beneficial to increase awareness among and provide training to both policy makers and local populations, in order for everyone to be better equipped for this communication. In what ways could exchanges between these two categories of actors be improved? Interviews with all of the local actors involved in conservation and tourism reflect the lack of appropriate tools for participatory management in their dealings with local populations. The interpretation of information thus takes place at two levels of understanding.

The established communication system therefore does not encourage taking full account of the needs of the local people. This lack of communication can also be observed between the actors involved in conservation and tourism.

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The dependence of the local population on logistical support

Participatory management targets community empowerment in the medium term. The local people must therefore in turn become project managers through the empowerment processes established within this framework.

However, the analysis of the discourse of the inhabitants of Loango National Park highlights a certain frustration with regard to the logistical support they would like to receive from the Government and NGOs. This support includes, notably, electricity, oil (for generators, lights, and boats), medical supplies, and basic commodities for the women caterers.

During the PADP project, the local population benefited from the support of Total Gabon, who supplied fuel for the collection of the raw materials necessary for the local crafts and for running the generator providing electricity to the village of Sette Cama. As part of its social responsibility, Total Gabon also provided medical supplies to all of the villages that boasted a community health clinic. Recent changes, encouraging more sustainable community empowerment, have led to the abrupt withdrawal of this support, resulting in a sudden worsening of living conditions for the local people. There is no fuel for the
generator, leaving the village totally without electricity, and the clinic no longer receives medical supplies.

In addition, the women caterers benefited from the assistance of the PADP project leaders for the supply of basic commodities (sugar, powdered milk, potatoes, etc.) from the nearest town, Gamba. The group is today protesting against the lack of profitability, the costs incurred in making journeys to Gamba by boat for provisions sometimes exceeding the revenue generated by the service. These ladies are now demanding assistance from GIC Tourisme or an increase in the prices originally set.

The support provided during the PADP project by external or internal project stakeholders therefore did not encourage the empowerment of the local population, whose main claims today concern recovering the advantages they benefited from previously. Studies show that tourism development projects in such areas tend to be short-lived (three years on average). The community PADP ecotourism project perfectly illustrates this phenomenon, since the programmed duration failed to consolidate the foundations of management or to empower the local population.

The funding granted advocated the obtaining of quick results and did not encourage thorough research into the realities specific to the designated site. And yet, community projects require more time to achieve economic sustainability and appropriation by the local people. A 'programme approach' (of medium-term duration, i.e., between five and ten years) would therefore be preferable to a 'project approach' (of short-term duration).

The accompanying measures set up within the framework of such projects should aim to empower the local populations. The lack of expertise in terms of development on the part of external cooperation agents acts as a check on future autonomy. Skills need to be developed in the marketing of the community tourism product. Both public actors and NGOs would benefit from the services of professionals with extensive experience in tourism in order to ensure the long-term success of such programmes.

Methods generating a form of external support for the local people must therefore be gradually replaced by accompanying measures that aim to empower these communities.

**The lack of dialogue between the actors involved in conservation and tourism**

Loango National Park is composed of a complex fabric of actors. State, non-governmental, and private agencies, as well as representatives of civil society, all have different expectations with regard to the tourism development of the area (Nkoghe, 2008).

The observation of the system of actors reveals a lack of synergy between them. Information relating to tourism is not disseminated transversely, often leading to duplication in the projects of some of these actors. The fact that the Ministry of Tourism is not involved in the development of Loango National Park results in a lack of coherence in the actions carried out in the field. And yet the Master Plan for the Development of Ecotourism (Plan Directeur de Développement de l’Ecotourisme, PDDE) targets association with the ANPN for the development of tourism in the area. This major stakeholder would facilitate the coordination of tourism development between the different parties involved in the project.

The ANPN’s current policy prioritises the development of high-end tourism with the upcoming establishment of the tour operator Aman Resorts in the protected area. This
policy is accompanied by specifications signed between the Government and the operators. For all that, we can note a certain lack of transparency, notably when it comes to the number of jobs that will be created locally. The lack of a charter common to all operators creates an ambiguous relationship between the ANPN and private tourism companies. The economic issues involved do not encourage full transparency with regard to the presence of this new actor and the subsequent social consequences.

Moreover, local NGOs are competing for the funding on which they depend. The association Ibonga ACPE is thus reluctant to share its engineering work in environmental education with other partner NGOs. The lack of synergy observed between the actors in Loango National Park reveals a conscious and unconscious power struggle between policy makers, NGOs, private companies and the local population. These actors ensure a ‘zone of tranquillity’ for themselves (Crozier, Friedberg, 1977) by making only a part of their knowledge generally available.

The ANPN’s vision for tourism aims to improve the interrelationships between each actor via the creation of a Local Management Advisory Committee (Comité Consultatif de Gestion Locale, CCGL). Partnerships between the Government and the other actors nevertheless tend to be established in a very informal way.

The institutionalisation of the relationship between organisations and the local people would restore equitable power relations and thus promote more transparent communication. Memoranda of Understanding specifying the rights and duties of each category of actor with regard to its partners would officially define their commitments. Exchanges would thus become formal, and information concerning the management of protected areas would be more accessible to the local populations. Ongoing and future projects would necessarily have to be validated by all of the stakeholders involved.

The lack of transparency and coordination with regard to tourism reveals a dichotomy between official rhetoric and the realities in the field. Actors in the area are, moreover, required to abide by specific guidelines decided by global policies. How does the international framework for the management of protected areas include local communities in tourism development projects?

A funding system far removed from the realities in the field


The actors targeted for these field actions essentially concern representatives of civil society. This enthusiasm for the involvement of civil society in conservation projects is a first step in the consideration of the local communities. However, none of the calls for projects directly deal with the issue of active involvement by the local populations.

This would appear to be a classic example of the type of organisation mentioned by Rodary (2008), denouncing the purely rhetorical nature of the concept of ‘participation’. Who will be the recipients of the projects, and will they be able to represent the local populations? How do the project leaders intend to involve these populations?
The dependence of NGOs, associations, and non-governmental research centres on funding by these major donors tends to direct actions towards distant realities, far removed from those encountered in the field. Do project leaders thus become prisoners of bureaucracy? How can they act in order to adapt these calls for projects?

**Conclusion**

Despite their 'humanist' nature and the mechanisms set in place in protected areas for effective involvement on the part of local populations, community tourism projects in countries of the Southern hemisphere encounter many failures. The people living in and around these protected areas still experience the same management-related constraints, and are faced with new and emerging conflicts. This subject has become central in the areas of research and management, and is widely studied. Many alternatives have already been proposed to try to create a system of horizontal governance and redistribute income from tourism in a more equitable way. The socio-anthropological nature of this issue makes it a particularly sensitive and complex subject to be addressed due to the specificity of each area studied. We can, however, note the similarity of the problems encountered in many of the protected areas in developing countries.

Research conducted in the southern part of Loango National Park has revealed difficulties where involvement by the local population is concerned. This project is seen as an activity carried out 'by and for the communities' through the creation of a cooperative empowering the local people in the organisation of tourism. The recent classification of this area as a National Park has radically changed the local user rights, and community tourism is seen here as an alternative that will generate income to restore balance in the face of new social disparities. Nine years after the project began, however, a decline in activity and in the redistribution of income from tourism is to be deplored.

The findings identified for Loango National Park are common to Lopé National Park in central Gabon, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. In both cases, despite efforts conducted by State and non-governmental actors alike, we find that the beneficiaries of tourism activities are primarily the tour operators. The local populations bemoan the lack of implication on their part in meetings and the paucity of information made available to them. Where Lopé National Park is concerned, no programme specifically involving the local population or concerning the tourism development of the area has been initiated by an agency of the World Heritage Committee. The lack of institutionalisation of the relationships between actors can be cited as a factor of failure, and the local people feel they have been left on the sidelines where restrictions in the use of the Park are concerned, in the same way as with Loango National Park (Rousselot Loridan, 2012).

The socio-anthropological context, often overlooked in tourism development projects concerning protected areas, was not sufficiently taken into account throughout the duration of the PADP project, given that certain realities were ignored. The limited duration of this pilot project also failed to ensure effective follow-up by the designated management authorities.

Research has revealed significant shortcomings in terms of communication, acting as a check on the synergy between the actors involved in the efficient tourism development of Loango National Park. The general confusion with regard to the role of the actors, and the lack of understanding on the part of the local people during consultation meetings, are
evidence of the use of inadequate communication mechanisms. The local people are unable to understand pre-established concepts from tourism and/or environmental management models. Meanwhile, representatives from the institutions and organisations involved have difficulty in designing communication methods suitable for each level of understanding.

68 A Local Management Advisory Committee is currently being set up, comprising representatives of each category of actors with the aim of facilitating the formal exchange of information and all consultation and decision-making processes. One can therefore hope for greater consideration of local communities and a better sharing of actions in the future. But is effective communication between rural communities and organisations really possible?

69 The tourism development of protected areas in countries of the Southern hemisphere allows for involvement by local communities only when these communities are in favour of such development. However, communication between actors and the mechanisms of empowerment must be further developed by broadening the socio-anthropological knowledge of each area. The use of participatory management tools (forum theatre, film screening and discussion evenings, rural radio, etc.) and the formalisation of relations would, moreover, promote more effective communication between the different parties involved. The limited duration of community tourism projects needs to be assessed upstream and adapted to the socio-anthropological context of each protected area in order to ensure appropriation by future managers from the local populations.

70 The interviews conducted, both within Loango National Park and in its surrounding area, are proof of the positive attitude of the local population with regard to tourism development and welcoming tourists to their villages, mainly for economic reasons, but also because of their interest in sharing and learning. However, at the most basic level, these people do not subscribe to a community-based organisation of village life. One can therefore wonder how it would be possible to create a model of tourism management in a rural area that does not work on a community basis.

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http://www.unesco.org/

NOTES

1. The ‘4 C’s’ set out in the 2002 Budapest Declaration on World Heritage are as follows: strengthen the Credibility of the World Heritage List; ensure the effective Conservation of World Heritage properties; promote the development of effective Capacity-building measures; and increase public awareness, involvement and support for World Heritage through Communication.


3. The ANPN is the administrative body appointed by the President of the Gabonese Republic for the management of the country’s 13 national parks.
4. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty signed in 1971 for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of wetlands and their resources. This classification, however, does not give rise to specific regulation, the governments of the signatory countries being the sole bodies authorised to regulate the utilisation of their national wetlands.

5. The Bwiti is a spiritual discipline based on animistic beliefs and native to the Mitsogo people of Central Gabon. Today, this practice is widespread, particularly in the southern half of the country (Bonhomme, 2005).

6. The rural population is difficult to assess because many of the inhabitants of the villages are not permanent residents. Data are based on estimates by village leaders in order to be as close as possible to current demographic realities.


9. Rules governing the Small-Scale Initiatives programme (PPI-3) of the FFEM (French Global Environment Facility) in partnership with the French Committee of the IUCN; Thematic programme for Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development in Gabon, Delegation of the European Union in the Gabonese Republic, EuropeAid/132592/L/ACT/GA; CARPE-IUCN Small Grants Programme of 13 January 2012.

ABSTRACTS

This paper will show how community tourism projects in protected areas can often fail due to both a lack of communication between the different actors and the insufficient integration of the relevant socio-anthropological issues. In the same way as a World Heritage site, the case of Loango National Park in Gabon clearly demonstrates that the original objectives of involvement by and empowerment of the local population are still far from being met. This paper presents an overview of a project initiated by the European Union in 2003, analyses the reasons behind the failure of this project, and suggests strategies to achieve greater consensus among conservation and tourism actors and local populations within the framework of community tourism projects in protected areas.

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Keywords: community tourism, local population, governance, protected area, Gabon

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