

Managing the environment and metamorphoses of the State: the French experience

Gestão do ambiente e metamorfoses do Estado: a experiência francesa

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolution of the State's role in management of the environment. The French experience, characterised by a highly-centralised State, presents researchers with a situation where any permanence, like any change, tends to be extreme. Therefore it acts as a starting point for our analysis of changes in the State's role in the management of nature, which was formerly considered as a resource to be exploited, and is now redefined as an environment to be protected. In particular, diachronic analysis enables us to grasp the dynamics of these social changes. On the basis of an interdisciplinary exchange between a historian and a sociologist, this article suggests that we should qualify theories of the disappearance of the State by giving ourselves the means to differentiate, in management of the environment, what is new and what is not, by highlighting the capacity for "*integration of criticism*" (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 1999) by institutions. The environment is an instrument of hybridisation that questions old dichotomies: between nature and culture, between local and national, between the particular and the general, between vernacular knowledge and scientific knowledge. This questioning tends to deprive science and politics of their respective monopolies as representatives of nature and of society¹. Against this background, the central State becomes a manager of socio-natural diversity, the technocratic State gives a voice to local know-how, and the State concedes a certain plurality to the general public interest of which it no longer has quite a complete monopoly. The State is no longer quite what it was, in its role and its functioning, but the State endures. Thus, the society is changing, but the categories of the XX^o century are not totally obsolete yet.

Key words: management of the environment; French State; socio-history.

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1 In the framework of a Nation-State, as in France, the expression "politics speaks in the name of society" may take the more precise form of "the State speaks in the name of the 'community of citizens'".

RESUMO

Este artigo examina a evolução do papel do Estado na gestão do ambiente. A experiência francesa, caracterizada por um Estado altamente centralizado, propõe aos pesquisadores uma situação onde qualquer permanência, assim como qualquer mudança, tende a ser extrema. Assim, ela serve como um ponto de partida para nossa análise das mudanças no papel do Estado na gestão da natureza, que era anteriormente considerada como um recurso a ser explorado, e agora é redefinida como um ambiente a ser protegido. Em particular, análise diacrônica nos permite apreender a dinâmica dessas mudanças sociais. Com base numa troca interdisciplinar entre um historiador e uma socióloga, este artigo sugere que deveríamos qualificar teorias de desaparecimento do Estado nos armando dos meios para diferenciar, na gestão do ambiente, o que é novo e o que não é, através do destaque da capacidade para a “integração da crítica” (*integration of criticism*, BOLTANSKY; CHIAPELLO, 1999) pelas instituições. O ambiente é um instrumento de hibridização que questiona velhas dicotomias: entre natureza e cultura, entre local e nacional, entre o particular e o geral, entre conhecimento vernáculo e conhecimento científico. Este questionamento tende a privar a ciência e a política dos seus respectivos monopólios como representantes da natureza e da sociedade¹. Contra este pano de fundo, o Estado central se torna um gestor da diversidade sócio-natural, o Estado tecnocrático dá uma voz ao saber-fazer local, e o Estado concede uma certa pluralidade ao interesse público geral, do qual ele já não tem mais um monopólio tão completo. O Estado já não é mais bem o que ele era, no seu papel e no seu funcionamento, mas o Estado perdura. Assim, a sociedade está mudando, mas as categorias do século XX ainda não estão totalmente obsoletas.

Palavras-chave: gestão ambiental; Estado francês; sócio-história.

Introduction

The borderless nature of environmental flows requires to question the boundaries between the natural and the social, and the forms of categorisation internal to these two fields. Among the categories questioned, and not the least, is the Nation-State, which was all too often taken as the virtually natural scale of analysis by classical social sciences. The Nation-State, as a category of thought and action, is a construction, i.e., it is historically situated, and therefore not universal, unchanging, nor infinite. Sociology now provides analyses in terms of breakdown of social cohesion, the weakening of the State², or even the withering away of the Nation³. This paradigm of the weakening of the State is based on the observation of two dynamics that are apparently opposite: globalisation and/or regionalisation. Whether it is feared or desired, the end of the Nation-State is associated with radical modification of

social cohesion, whether it is a move towards an alienating or enriching world-wide system or, on the other hand, a revitalising revival of local identity or a bloody separatist withdrawal. In this context, the State, which represents the *community of citizens* (SCHNAPPER, 1994) and is the guardian of national unity, would lose its reason for existence if citizenship becomes “*post-national*” (FERRY, 1991), if borders are broken down by the cyberworld or redrawn by regionalism, and if unity gives way to diversity or chaos. The environmental question is fully involved in this double globalisation/regionalisation process. Frederic H. Buttel, Arthur P.J. Mol and Gert Spaargaren (2000) note that the accident in the Chernobyl nuclear power station was one of the most momentous events that revealed the limitations of the “Nation-State” as a scale for understanding and managing the physical and social space. In this respect, one remembers how, for several years, the French State tried to deny that the radioactive cloud had passed over the country. Just as radioactive clouds do not

² In this respect, one may mention the concept of “*Europe of the Regions*” (LABASSE, 1991).

³ This is how Dominique Schnapper’s book (1994) starts: “the weakening, or withering away of the Nation today, universally observed ...”

stop at borders, many environmental issues question, or even challenge, the relevance of the national scale. Thus, the “*environmental flows*” (MOL; SPAARGAREN, 2003) make us revise our mindsets concerning society as much as “nature”. On the basis of this observation, these analyses stress the obsolescence of the national scale with respect to “sub-national” and “supra-national” scales. These analyses are based on observations that are very often unquestionable. Nowadays, it is difficult to deny these two dynamics of globalisation and regionalisation. However, does this therefore mean that we must analysis this process in terms of weakening of the State? Are we witnessing a “withering away” of the State or rather a change in its role and a transformation of its forms and methods of action?

This article examines the evolution of the State’s role in management of the environment. The French experience, characterised by a highly-centralised State, presents researchers with a situation where any permanence, like any change, tends to be extreme. Therefore it acts as a starting point for our analysis of changes in the State’s role in the management of nature, which was formerly considered as a resource to be exploited, and is now redefined as an environment to be protected. In particular, diachronic analysis enables us to grasp the dynamics of these social changes. On the basis of an interdisciplinary exchange between a historian and a sociologist, this article suggests that we should qualify theories of the disappearance of the State by giving ourselves the means to differentiate, in management of the environment, what is new and what is not, by highlighting the capacity for “*integration of criticism*” (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO 1999) by institutions.

1. The State as manager of the environment: the old and the new

In the analysis of social change, one way to avoid jumping to hasty conclusions about “withering away” is to

compare two perspectives that sociology tends to define classically as opposed: social reproduction and social change. Whatever the theoretical and ideological stakes involved in this opposition, it initially seems to be very logical: the immobile is opposed to the mobile, permanence to change. However, reproduction and change are not as opposed as pure logic would have us believe. Not to be reducing, one should no longer envisage the transition from reproduction to change as a sudden, radical turning point. This is what Alexis de Tocqueville⁴ suggested, when saying that revolution makes change visible, or even accelerates change, more than it creates it. From this analysis, we shall particularly retain that changes which affect the present time have their source in the apparent, but only apparent, inertia of yesterday. This is also the message of what is called the history of mentalities, that other history advocated and developed particularly by Georges Duby and Fernand Braudel⁵, who, in getting away from the events-based approach and into the long-term perspective, reveal the illusory rupture between permanence and change. Yesterday’s so-called “permanence” contains not only conditions, but also the components of today’s changes. Or, in brief, the present was already (at least partly) in the past and, conversely, the past is still (visible) in the present.

One of the figures of this intertwining between past and present, between social reproduction and social change, is the *integration of criticism*, followed closely by the *disarming of criticism* (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 1999). Integration by a former collective, although it leads to disarming of criticism, cannot be reduced to the schematic idea of social reproduction. For this integration involves modifications of the former collective, whether in its composition and/or its organisation. The integration of criticism is not a sudden radical change either, since the former collective continues to exist, at least partially.

During the 19th century, the State affirmed itself as the architect of projects for planning and developing rural and urban areas. In this respect, may we speak of management of the environment? According to the meaning

4 The French Revolution was a “violent, rapid process in which the political State was adapted to the social State, facts to ideas, and laws to customs” (TOCQUEVILLE; 1986).

5 One may particularly mention “*La Méditerranée*” (BRAUDEL; DUBY, 1985) and “*La dynamique du capitalisme*” (BRAUDEL, 1985), in which the author thus explains his approach: “What I see as primordial in the pre-industrial economy, in fact, is the coexistence of forms of rigidity, inertia and sluggishness of a still elementary economy, together with movements that were limited and in the minority, but vibrant and powerful, of modern growth. [...] So there were at least two worlds, two foreign types of life, according to which, however, the respective masses explain each other”.

now given to this expression, it was not a real environmental policy designed to protect nature and limit the harmful effects of anthropogenic changes of the physical environment. In the 19th century, and during a large part of the 20th century, the term “environment” did not exist, or did not have the same meaning (its current meaning only appeared in the United States during the 1960s, and in France in the very early 1970s). The State is concerned with protecting nature as a resource and to protect people against natural and industrial uncertainties. These declared aims of State policies do not mention the protection of nature itself. The developer’s aim is to place nature at the disposal of humankind and to control its excesses.

As affirmed by Carrion Nizas, orator of the Tribunat on 16 September 1807 concerning the act of parliament on the draining of marshes:

The physical sciences, which are more audacious and more powerful every day, will provide their efficient assistance... Nothing will stop the advance of a government that is accustomed to working wonders, and which is jealously intent on putting the mark of Man’s work on all material objects, to show the power of Man’s genius and moral strength [...] ⁶⁰

Technical services put in place by the State developed expertise in the development and management of nature. Two major institutions of the French State formed the secular arm of the public authorities. The *Corps des Ponts et Chaussées* [the “Bridges and Roads Corps”], founded in 1740 and reinforced during the French Revolution had the tasks of carrying out all major planning and development projects, roads, railway lines, canals, drainage of wet areas (after the 1807 Act), river embankments, irrigation canals and water supply to towns. The *Corps des Eaux et Forests* [“Waters and Forests Corps”], founded in 1801, had the tasks of enforcing laws for the protection of forests, particularly concerning the timber industry and reforestation. It conducted a very ambitious programme of reforestation of upland areas on the basis of the 1860 act of parliament.

1.1. Towards a new paradigm: nature subjected to scientific rationality

However, while the State’s policy was oriented towards the development of nature for the benefit of humankind, laws motivated engineers and political and economic players to ask themselves new questions on man’s relationship with nature. Scientific and technical knowledge developed in order to carry out government programmes within a perspective of economic and social modernisation. But this planning and development policy gradually led to new considerations that sometimes prefigure current ideas.

Local players who felt dispossessed of their traditional prerogatives often oppose the State’s projects with varying degrees of success. But they also asked for development projects to meet the requirements of competition and the increase in productivity. In rural areas, for example, local players asked drainage and irrigation and constructions to protect against rivers.

Following the major floods of 1856 in the Rhone and Loire valleys, the State intervened in the form of a programme for the protection of populated areas and industrial areas. Napoleon III explained clearly that this protection was one of the State’s duties (to guarantee the right to safety) and that science and the engineers modern technology would master the river floods. The engineers, apparently for the first time, calculated the river’s maximum theoretical flood level and completed works that protected the Camargue until 1993, transforming the Rhone delta’s natural characteristics. Nevertheless, the Camargue, made of a complex system of embankments, artificial irrigation and drainage is nowadays an international symbol of wild life (PICON, 1978).

Another example of State intervention and the reactions that it causes is that of forests. In France, kings had protected forests since the 13th century to preserve mature standing timber in order to build the ships of the royal navy and traders. Nevertheless, the destruction of private forests continued, and the French Revolution’s free market approach threatened the forest with disappearance. In the 19th century, the State again took charge of the

6 Le Moniteur Universel, 18 September, 1807.

protection of forests, with which it entrusted the Eaux et Forests Corps. Two major acts of parliament, in 1827 and 1860, organised the protection of existing forests and the country's reforestation, particularly in upland areas, which had the effect of accelerating the rural exodus by depriving small farmers of many pastures. The aim of the reforestation of upland areas was to protect lowland areas threatened by the change of regime of mountain rivers that are no longer regulated by a forest cover. This was how the State developed the national territory according to an overall vision of the water system that it was given by the specialised services of the Ponts et Chaussées and Eaux et Forests corps, on the basis of work by the engineer Surell, who, in an 1841 publication, showed that deforestation was responsible for floods⁷. This work, ratified by the Council of Engineers of Ponts et Chaussées, was not discussed or questioned -before the early 20th century.

The social consequences of this legislation on reforestation are considerable, and they caused population displacements which, in addition, the State considered as predators who were responsible, because of their so called "archaic methods", for the floods that grew in number in France in the 1840s. One may also add that, again on the basis of the reports by expert engineers, whole regions were entirely transformed. This was the case in the Landes, a marshland area which, at Napoleon III's will, was transformed into one of Europe's largest forests.

The two above examples of the State management of nature (Camargue and Landes) show very clearly how the State contributed to create and manage natural resources, nowadays considered as "wildlife", and then protected as then.

This massive State intervention was backed up by scientific work that globalised environmental problems and no longer viewed them from a simple local, partial viewpoint, but interpreted them on a much broader scale. This was how the concept of the catchment area started to be developed for rivers when it was planned to build "insubmersible" embankments after 1856. In all of this, there is hardly any nature protection policy that was not devised for agricultural or industrial end purposes.

Despite everything, forms of resistance arose. In reaction to the legislator's plans for reforestation, societies

of friends of the forest were set up to defend another conception of nature. In 1909, the association "Silva Mediterranea" was founded, grouping together foresters who worked in Mediterranean areas, with the aim of adapting forest developments to local conditions and to escape from solely economic requirements. Their declared aim was to preserve existing forests and to create others. Their approach was based on science, but also conveyed the idea of the decadence of modern civilisation. This was not ecologist awareness in the modern sense of the term – no more than State intervention could be considered an environmental policy, as we saw above – but it was the beginnings of a new awareness, partially freed from productivist aspects. This was the case of the French geographer of the late 19th century, Elysée Reclus who denounced man's intervention that disturbs natural cycles, and took the Camargue as an example of what should not be done. Locally, some landowners who adapted the vulnerability of their lands to the river floods denounced this plan to completely embank the Rhone, because it risked preventing the river from bringing its fertile silt to the delta.

Other schools of thought started to mythify the foundational nature of the "true values" that only farmers who respect ancestral traditions could understand and protect. In Provence, Frédéric Mistral, the Marquis de Baroncelli and Charles Maurras were the representatives of this conservative ideology⁸. All three reacted against a modernisation that they considered excessive and depraved, leading to the loss of the Provençal language, the neglect of traditions, and the transformation of social relations. They advocated the return to values of yesteryear, respecting a mythified nature that bore the essential values of humanity. Some years later, Jean Giono exalted this communion of man with nature, in a sort of rural pantheism.

1.2. The management of nature: a power issue

One must stress a little-known political aspect of the policy of major planning and development projects in the 19th century in France. The State took advantage of these projects to impose itself to the detriment of local powers,

⁷ SURELL, 1841, *Études sur les torrents des Hautes Alpes*.

⁸ PICON, Bernard. *L'espace et le temps en Camargue*. Actes Sud. 1978.

mainly that of eminent local personalities who were educated and rich, and had public power (TUDESQ, 1964). This social group, which was strongly in-bred, exercised its political power over local societies through town halls and electoral mandates. Its economic power was exercised in the learned professions, trade, and ownership of large rural lands. Holding all local powers, they decided, among other things, the suitability of rural physical planning developments, and, through a collective network, they controlled drainage, irrigation and flood protection, wherever it was found necessary. As in most old or recent countries, the central State tried throughout the last century to reinforce its prerogatives.

Development and management of the national territory for the overall modernisation of society was part of State strategies. The State considered these eminent rural personalities to be backward-looking conservatives opposed to progress. Weakening their power and replacing them by State services was a constant strategy in the 19th century. The State reduced the eminent local personalities' power firstly on a political level, then on the social level. For their powers, it substituted the role of the State and its experts. It created the reign of what was to be called in the 20th century the elites who had power because of their education and the place they held in the State apparatus. Fatalism, the woe of the time, nature's resistance to man's exploitation faded away in the face of the State's will to control. The other side of this imposition of public force on nature was that responsibility was transferred to the State. Nature ceased to be all-powerful, and became a controlled nature – in appearance – that only an error of the State could free from human domination. Napoleon III proudly declared in 1857 that “*It is to the State's credit that rivers remain in their beds*” – to which people still react nowadays by blaming the State when a river bursts its banks.

This strategy of increasing State power was analysed by Michel Foucault (1961), who shows that this tendency is part and parcel of the desire to normalise behaviour and establish an order based on rationality and continually controlled by the State. Local authorities and, more so, private individuals were dispossessed of their traditional know-how and their capacity to act, which were not catered for in this State framework. Legislation was developed in the late 19th century, concerning health, the planning and development of natural areas, forests, coastlines, etc. This aim of control, which affected all aspects of the lives of individuals, could only intervene in the tense relationship

between man and nature. But the State also had a certain conception of modernity and, in the area of major development projects, priority was given to the development of modern industries, and the State took charge of providing the structures necessary for industrial capitalism. This was how an area designated for fishing and leisure such as the Etang de Berre lagoon near Marseille was designated for oil refining in the 1930s. To allow ships to unload their oil cargo, the public powers deepened the canal linking the lagoon to the Mediterranean Sea and greatly altered the lagoon's ecosystem. In the Alps, several dams were built for electricity production until the 1960s, creating industrial valleys and the development of transport systems, again to the detriment of the alpine flora and fauna.

Thus, in the 19th century, the State reinforced its power by giving itself the monopoly of the defence of the general public interest and by reducing and delegitimising the powers of individuals and local communities. In so doing, it imposed the monopoly of its expertise by using science to legitimise its action, through the intermediary of the major State engineering institutions. To use Hervieu and Léger's expression (1979), “*behind the forest, the State*”.

1.3. From the inherited system to the beginnings of its questioning

Therefore, the State initiated planning and developments that now form a real inherited system. In France, also, people have acquired the habit of looking to the State every time there is a problem of green or grey environment. This is particularly sensitive in the risk area, where, since the 19th century, the State has claimed a monopoly of expertise and imposed preventive measures according to the standards that it itself has established. This results in it being challenged every time a catastrophe occurs. The State claims to ensure its citizens' safety; accordingly, the citizens consider the State as responsible. Thus, during floods of the River Somme in 2001, the rumour went round that the State had dumped surplus water through the canals of the area into the Somme in order to protect Paris and its catchment area. This unfounded rumour resulted in the prime minister Lionel Jospin being taken to task when he went to visit the flooded area on 9 April 2001.

The State expert and developer continued to carry out large projects until the 1960s, and the opening of the

Serre-Ponçon dam on the River Durance (in the Alps) marks the culmination of this policy. The State, the *de facto* manager of the national territory, modelled it according to its own criteria determined by its own experts. The idea of protecting nature that developed in the first half of the 20th century was taken up for its own ends by the State. This was translated notably by a subdivision of the national territory according to specifications determined by the State services. Certain parts of the territory were designated for nature conservation and others to industry or tourism. This characteristic zoning had a legal framework in the creation of nature reserves. Thus, in the Alps, it is not rare to find preserved villages which have kept their former appearance and, just a few kilometres away, some of Europe's largest skiing resorts.

The Camargue, mentioned above, has become a nature reserve, despite anthropogenic changes in the area through water management for economic ends (PICON, 1978). The preservation of its specific ecosystem requires the presence of several organisms, and a nature reserve was created in 1927, and a regional nature park in the 1960s. Numerous researchers continually monitor changes of a habitat in which there are activities as diverse as the salt mining industry, speculative agriculture (mainly rice growing), very lucrative hunting, and relatively large-scale summer tourism. A short distance away, the Etang de Berre has been designated since the early 20th century for industrial activity that resulted in the establishment of a petrochemical complex in the 1930s, the construction of tens of Seveso class sites, and the arrival of a canal built by EDF [the French national electricity supply authority] to supply electricity power stations. In addition to these industries a growth in urbanisation has transformed the Etang's shores. This industrial area is the antithesis of the Camargue. the Etang de Berre and the Camargue are both the product of the specialised use of areas according to the development criteria defined by the State's experts.

One of the spin-offs of this State intervention in physical planning through experts is that a system was put in place for understanding reality on the basis of scientific knowledge developed by and for experts. The scientific approach provided justification for the State's major projects and gave them a legitimacy that had its sources in classical academic science (BECK, 1992). This scientific justification enabled the technician State to impose a sort of apparent neutrality that placed its action within the sphere of the development of nature, beyond the political divides that mainly concern social policy and foreign policy. These

scientific and technical references placed the State's planning and development policy within the idea of progress shared by most French people of all political persuasions. The republican school, founded in 1881, was one of the great vehicles for conveying this approach and making it accepted, while delegitimising all other approaches. At the time, the French Left and extreme Left supported the idea of humanity's continual progress through the development of scientific rationality. Thus, the major State engineering institutions were exempt from all partisan political reproach, to such a point that many people of the Left imagined that the work of these major State institutions was deliberately restricted by the French Right when it was in power, because the Right was considered a conservative force opposed to progress. Against the supposed conservatism of right wing parties, the major servants of the State were considered to be driving forces of a new, politically neutral world in the service of the great ideals of progress. This was how there were so few protests against the construction of large dams until the 1960s, the submersion of inhabited valleys and displacement of village populations, and also few protests against the chosen forms of energy production. Let us look again at the two local examples already mentioned: the Camargue and the Etang de Berre. In 1895, a commentator revelled at the sight of a stream of black smoke over the Camargue because it was a sign of progress and of human activity. In the case of the Etang de Berre, there was no, or at least few, protest against the establishment of the petrochemicals complex from the 1930s to the 1960s. In a system of shared values, opposition became difficult, except to defend a backward-looking position against the idea of progress, as was the case with Provençal cultural associations to protect the Camargue.

This State involvement in physical planning justified by a scientific paradigm certainly made the French State receptive to the environmental discourse that appeared in the late 1960s, to the point where a Ministry for the Protection of Nature and the Environment was set up in 1971. In this case, the State, which is usually caught unprepared, created a Ministry at the very time when the issue was emerging. The State developer was naturally the State "protector" of nature, without fully realising the underlying challenge of the foundational scientific paradigm by the ecologist movement. Initially, the State considered that it also had to have the monopoly of environmental management, thereby underestimated the new social partners who intervened in the form of citizens' associations which denounced the new dangers that the

State always underestimated, since it was too closely attached to the requirements of production (Beck, 1992). One may therefore consider that the creation of a Ministry of the Environment did not change the State's behaviour, and, at the same time, it continued to be primarily concerned with productivism. However, since around thirty years ago, change seems to have caught up with the State.

The current questioning of this pattern of State intervention through its experts and an ideology of preservation of resources and protection of human activities results from observation of the globalisation of environmental problems through international catastrophes, which were sudden, as in the case of Chernobyl, or more insidious, as in the case of acid rain in industrialised countries. In addition, scientific theories have evolved, and they take into account the interdependence between phenomena, whether in nature sciences (e.g., atmospheric circulation that disseminates pollution, as in the case of Chernobyl or acid rains, or the spreading of plants and animals via transport systems) or theoretical sciences, such as mathematics, with Chaos Theory and the theory of catastrophes developed by René Thom, which shows how much a slight initial disruption can have consequences of on an incomparably large scale. These recent discoveries in the last third of the 20th century had the same effect as the 19th century engineers' theories which showed the interdependence of phenomena by changing explanations from the regional scale to the national scale for which the Nation-State framework is no longer appropriate. Today, this globalisation goes beyond the national framework and obliges States to envisage other forms of action.

However, in a diachronic perspective that takes the past into account, we cannot ignore the weight of former management institutions, which are still in place, and the State's power strategies, which must be studied as such, independently of the declared ideological contents. To preserve its prerogatives, the State can change the objectives of these policies and adapt itself, but also maintain its power of control. This perspective is quite characteristic of certain French schools of thought following the work of Michel Foucault (1961), who studied the many forms of power and knowledge, since France is face with a centralisation that makes the State a very meaningful problem. For Foucault, the State, by nature, exercises a power of control that it tries to extend by all means. Wherever it is applied, power is somehow independent of the end goals of action, even if this action may be related to political and social contexts. Seen from this angle, the change of paradigm in relation to environmental problems may modify the forms

of State intervention and the end goals of its action, but, in this case, the State tries to exercise power differently. In other forms, and with original particularities, one may suppose that, anywhere where there is a State, it exercises a power that it tries to maintain or increase. According to Lampedusa, the Sicilian prince Salina, who accepted Italian unity and the Garibaldian revolution to the surprise of his entourage, was supposed to have said: "*One must accept the fact that everything changes, so that nothing will change*" (LAMPEDUSA, *The Leopard*, 1958). In our opinion, this hypothesis deserves to be taken seriously.

II. Changing is not disappearing: towards recomposition of the relationship between the scientist, the politician and the citizen

Environmental sociology has contributed greatly to the analysis of social changes. The emergence and development of environmental questions are not just results of these changes, but are driving forces of them. The changing role of the State caused by environmental questions is one of the major changes that provokes thought on the theories of the State and of social change. However, the analysis of these changes must not be restricted to the State itself. To grasp the scope of this change, one must widen the analysis to its underlying socio-political foundations: the general public interest and citizenship. The Nation-State founds its legitimacy on the basis of a certain definition of the general public interest and citizenship. When the definition of these two foundations changes, the State is inevitably affected.

II.1. Diversification of the general public interest

As pointed out in our historical perspective, the State's legitimacy is traditionally based on the monopoly of the general public interest. Just as the principle of representatives draws and legitimises the barrier between those who have *power of voice* and the others, so established Science and technical rationality draw and legitimise the barrier between those who have knowledge and the others. And, when the boundaries of *power* coincide with those of *Knowledge*, then we have the combined ingredients of a technocratic rationale, as particularly incarnated by the

major French State engineering institutions. In the name of the general public interest, the State started major national modernisation projects in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly with policies for developing the roads and motorways system and for energy production (hydroelectric dams, nuclear power plants). State technocratic rationality also got involved in the protection of nature, which then took the form of zoning (e.g., the Mediterranean coastline was divided into three zones, the Etang de Berre was designated for industrial development, the Languedoc-Roussillon area for mass tourism, and the Camargue for nature conservation (PICON, 1978). Local communities had to accept these State decisions conceived on scientific and technical bases advocated by the major State institutions.

From the 1970s, there was growing opposition to State projects. This resistance to the State developer by users and by local communities was mainly through community associations (BLATRIX, 2000). The above examples of the Camargue and the Etang de Berre again provide a good illustration. The zoning decreed by the State (all-out protection in the Camargue versus production on the rim of the Etang de Berre) was initially accepted almost passively by the local populations. However, community groups and associations now voice opposition to these policies by advocating a mixed use of areas, with, in brief, an aim to take into account human activities in the Camargue, and a call for redesignation of the Etang de Berre as an area of nature conservation and leisure.

This rising force of community association assertiveness was particularly expressed in concrete terms by the increasing number of their legal actions. On the national level, in the field of town planning alone, legal actions increased from 2,600 in 1978 to 6,300 in 1986, and reached over 10,000 in the 1990s (SEGAUD, 1998). This increasing number of procedural actions was certainly one of the factors that explain the development of participative processes since the 1970s in the context of urban policies and which were given new life during the 1990s in the context of environmental policies (BLATRIX, 2000). The development of these participation policies is part of what Pieter Leroy (2002) calls “*political modernisation*”.

The development of these participation policies may be analysed as a response to what certain authors have described as “*a deep crisis of the French public policies model*” (MULLER, 1992). The model of a central state, the only guardian of the general public interest and therefore solely qualified to decide in the name of all the citizens that it represents, appears to have lost its legitimacy. Therefore putting in place participative processes would be a means of avoiding conflicts that the public power is no longer certain of winning. Everything happens as if the reasons of State and the modernisation of the Nation are now no longer sufficient arguments for having public policies accepted. This change can be understood through several concomitant phenomena:

- The gradual spread of the environmental question since the 1970s has contributed to weakening of the ideology of progress and modernisation incarnated by the State, by providing arguments for its criticism, and by extending to the world outside work and to non-human beings the connection between *social criticism* and *artistic criticism* that emerged from movements in May 1968⁹.
- The environmental issue particularly addressed by community movements contributed to stimulating and transforming these movements, giving them a new lease of life at a time when the weakening of their loose ideological-political conglomerations seemed to herald “the end of militants”. As Jacques Ion (1997) suggested, it is more correct to speak of new forms of association and new militants. The weakening of loose ideological-political conglomerations means that community movement demands are no longer necessarily a political translation of (in simplified terms) the Left/Right opposition, which tends to oblige the decision-maker to dialogue directly with the community associations, since it cannot negotiate with their Paris-based “politician” spokespersons.

9 Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello (1999) define *artistic criticism* as a denunciation of capitalism as a “source of disenchantment and inauthenticity” and a “source of oppression”, and *social criticism* as a denunciation of capitalism as a “source of misery” and a “source of opportunism and egotism”. Firstly conveyed by different social groups, the first by intellectuals and artists, the second by movements of workers and trade unions, these two criticisms converged in the demands of May 1968 - demands made by both students and workers.

- The weakening of loose ideological-political conglomerations also creates conditions for specialisation of the militant, no longer according to a vertical approach (e.g., campaigning for workers' rights, the bowls club, or pensions schemes), but a horizontal approach (e.g., campaigning against the development of natural areas, whether against a T.G.V. high-speed railway line, a motorway, a high voltage electricity line, or the disposal of nuclear wastes in landfill sites). This enables these new militants to acquire specialised expertise (CLAEYS-MEKDADE; JACQUÉ, 2007). The "pros" of mobilisation against State development projects are found firstly on a local scale, then on a national level, such as the spokespersons of F.N.E. (France Nature Environment), and on the international level (such as WWF or Green Peace).

Against this background, "the Hegelian State governing over particular interests and deciding in the name of the general public interest" (MERRIEN, 1993), which had previously been the pillar of representative parliamentary democracy, now looked for renewed legitimacy in the principles of participative democracy. By giving citizens a voice, not only in elections, but also in the implementation of environmental policies on the ground, the State more or less recognises that the definition of the general public interest is itself debatable. In other words, the initiation of participative processes by the State breaks with the former State monopoly and allows diversification of the general public interest, which is then negotiable.

The opposition to State monopoly, particularly on environmental questions, implies possible (re-)definition of the general public interest by other social players. Community group action is a powerful force for this diversification of the general public interest. In order to achieve this, the militant has had to redefine his/her status, becoming an *aware local citizen*.

II.2. *Emergence of the aware local citizen*¹⁰

If they are too locally-oriented, militants are accused of having the narrow-minded NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) attitude. If they are too globally-oriented, they lose their local territorial anchorage. This constraint on militants is the necessity to meet two contradictory requirements: to prove their local everyday knowledge, and to prove their "citizenship". This makes militants divided between the necessity to go beyond the singularity of their demands and the need to prove their "capacity to live" (LAFAYE, 2000). However, it is not impossible to resolve this dilemma of the militant. A possible compromise that escapes from the tension between the general and the particular, between the citizen and the local inhabitant, took shape in the context of environmental campaigns. The construction of this compromise produced the figure of the *local citizen* (CLAEYS-MEKDADE, 2000, 2003).

The figure of the *local citizen* is made possible by dissociating two dichotomies that were previously concomitant: the local/national dichotomy and the particular/general dichotomy. The correspondence between the local and the particular on one hand, and the national and general on the other hand, is not universal. It is a central characteristic of the French tradition, based on the principle of the Nation State. However, the figure of the *local citizen* breaks with this perspective by making the local/general correspondence *acceptable*. The construction of concordance between the local and the general enables militants to move towards the more general without losing their local connection, and conversely, to maintain their local connections while moving towards the more general. From this viewpoint, a locality may be defended in the name of the general public interest. And this is a radical breakaway.

The principle of *local citizenship* does not question the national dimension of the notion of citizenship and, by extension, its inclusion in the Nation-State, since it involves a French citizen who lives in a given locality. This citizen

10 The notion of "local citizen" was first proposed by Neveu (1999) and Claeys-Mekdade (2000, 2003). We propose here to precise it by adding "aware".

may make specific claims and demands, but without undermining the Nation-State. That is, uniformisation is opposed, but not unity. In this case, it is a growing awareness of localness or locality, while still supporting the existing national unity. Local citizens are not separatists, i.e., they do not challenge the principle of the Nation as it has been constructed in Western society, i.e., as “the effort of tearing away from identities and the bonds of belonging, experienced as natural by the abstract concept of citizenship” (SCHNAPPER, 1994).

Therefore local citizens are those who know how to turn the defence of the locality into a general interest. They do not defend the locality only for itself, but because it contributes to rich socio-natural diversity. The local citizen is also an *aware citizen* (ESTADET; RÉMY, 2003). Just as they know how to widen issues to the general scale without losing touch with the locality, local citizens have local knowledge, while knowing how to make use of, or at least refer to, scientific knowledge. The citizens’ increased access to scientific controversies has been facilitated by the French provision of mass education resulting from a policy for democratising access to schooling¹¹. But, particularly in the field of the environment, it is also the increasing complexity of questions asked of science that has contributed to making its internal controversies visible (LATOUR, 1999).

The implication of the aware citizen into scientific controversies takes mainly two forms. The first one is what we proposed to call the “Science by proxy” (CLAEYS-MEKDADE, 2000, 2003), that is to say, when the citizen asks for counter-expertises. The second one, is what Elisabeth Rémy (1995) proposes to call “Win over the science”, that is to say when the citizen tries (and succeeds) to use science and technology by him/herself. We must precise the aware citizen is not necessary a scientist, but he/she is often well qualified, as most of associative militants (HÉLAN, 1988) and particularly green militants (PICON, 1978, CHAMBOREDON, 1985, ASPE, 1991).

Therefore these *aware local citizens* contribute to permeabilising the barriers of the *power of voice* and of *Knowledge*. Furthermore, there may no longer be just one single *power of voice* nor one single body of scientific *Knowledge*: they may take on many diverse or opposing

forms, representing different viewpoints. Against this background, the technocratic central State seems to be losing some of its monopolies, but does this necessarily mean that it is in the process of disappearing and being visibly weakened?

II.3. The State redefined as a manager of socio-natural diversity

The State has not been deprived of its mandate as voice of the *community of citizens*, but the nature of its mandate is changing. For the diversification and the possible negotiation of the general public interest does not reduce the State to the rank of just an arbitrator or a moderator¹², but participates more widely in a redefinition of political cohesion by recomposition of the relationship between the local and the national. The re-emergence of the local, carried strongly by environmental campaigns, was initially partly accepted passively by the central State. However, paradoxically, it did not weaken the State, but led to its redefinition, according to a rationale of “*integration of criticism*” (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPPELLA, 1999). This integration of criticism was mainly in the form of new public consultation policies.

The generation of consultative procedures in the 1970s and 1980s (in the context of urban development) was part of a decentralisation policy, by directly giving municipal authorities the responsibility for organising deliberative procedures. In contrast, the second generation of consultative procedures developed within the framework of environmental policies are rather part of a deconcentration movement, since the initiative and organisation of such procedures are the responsibility of the State and/or its deconcentrated services. Paradoxically, this relative revision of the principle of decentralisation in favour of deconcentration would result in a desire to have local concerns increasingly taken into account. State consultative procedures would be occasions for discussions and negotiation between “citizens” and representatives of the State and its deconcentrated services. And, when the State initiates a procedure for directly consulting the lo-

11 For an analysis of the mass provision and democratisation of education in France, see particularly Duru-Bellat and Kieffer (2000).

12 The notion of the State as moderator is from Jacques Donzelot and Philippe Estèbe (1994).

cal population, it can go as far as disregarding the representation power of the local elected representative, giving their voice the same rank as that of the average citizen (BALLAN; CLAEYS; LEBORGNE, 2002).

In this context, the State, which had previously been the guardian of national unity, would not necessarily be weakened, but would play a different role. This “new” State would still be a guardian of the nation, but no longer as a single unit, but in all its diversity. Indeed, the creation of local districts known as “*Pays*” and also the public consultation policies are in line with this approach. The public consultative procedure, as a direct dialogue between the State and local communities, would be both a recognition of national diversity and an affirmation of the State’s management of this diversity. In the name of the environment, the State organises and provides a framework for local dynamics, particularly through legislation. The Act of parliament concerning Public Debate (the Barnier Act, dated 2 February 1995) and Acts concerning the creation of the “*Pays*” districts (LOADT, 1995; LOADDT, 1999¹³) are revealing in this respect.

The Barnier Act, particularly concerning major development plans, recommends the organisation of public debates¹⁴. This means that a development plan – which was formerly conceived on a national scale and justified by a general public interest defined by the central power alone – is now no longer (at least in the statute books) opposed to local interests that are reduced to the rank of private interests. The consultation recommended by the Barnier Act requires the wide range of the local community’s diverse aspirations to be taken into account. The Public Debate led by State representatives is followed and evaluated by the *Commission Nationale du Débat Public* [National Public Debate Commission] which, as its name indicates, is a national body.

The regional planning and development legislation encourages the creation of local districts known as “*Pays*”. These “*Pays*”, defined by local players, must constitute consistent geographic, economic and cultural units. The uniqueness of these “*Pays*” is that they may escape from the former administrative breakdown of France, which is

strongly marked by the centralising tradition of the French Nation State. The central State plays an original role in this process: in a way, it goes as far as inviting diversity. On this subject, in his report for DATAR, “*Aménager la France de 2020*” [Developing the France of 2020], Jean-Louis Guigou (2000) writes that “*The strength of French unity can now work with the diversities of which it is composed*”. The turn of phrase is revealing. After building unity, the French State could “*now*” manage diversity, which is raised to the rank of general public interest and described as a factor of equity. However, this recomposition of the relationship between the local and the national does not seem to supplant the Central State, which is still, in the final analysis, the guarantor of equity.

Therefore, in the context of environmental policies, the French State now tends to redefine itself as a manager of diversity: biological diversity, diversity of landscape, but also cultural diversity. The State, which was formerly the defender of national unity, is now the manager of national diversity, composed of many different localities, but also a component of world diversity.

Conclusion

To resume, one can notice first that the French State is characterised by a strong heritage. This heritage includes (a) a legitimacy based on the monopoly of the general interest and of the expertise, (b) an early management of the nature by the State: in a context of rationalisation and power affirmation, (c) a protection of the nature not for itself but as a resource. During the earlier 1970’s, the State stars to protect the environment “for itself”. However it tempts to do so without changing its habits. This “traditional” approach of the “environmental State”¹⁵ is then contested. A growing opposition to State projects is observed which leads it to develop participative processes. The analyse of the growing opposition to State and the development of participative processes goes with the emergence of the “aware local citizen”. Therefore, the State would lose its monopoly of the general public interest and

13 LOADT: Outline Act for regional planning and development. LOADDT: Outline Act for regional planning and sustainable development.

14 See a presentation and detailed analysis of the Barnier Act in “*Le débat public : une réforme dans l’État*” (VALLEMONT, 2001).

15 Here is used the expression proposed by Arthur Mol and Fredric Buttel (2002).

of the expertise. Then, the State would be redefined as a manager of socio-natural diversity. On this point of view, the French State is changing but not disappearing, neither weakening.

To conclude, the analysis of the French experience proposed in this article contributes to reinforcing the thesis of the environment as a factor of social change. The environment produces social change by upsetting traditional social categories. The international nature of environmental questions is one of the most spectacular features of the changes that they bring about. Former borders, built on geopolitical and cultural considerations, are permeable to environmental flows. However, it is not only its international character that makes the environment now a force for social change.

Therefore the environmental issue also affects Nation-States on the inside. Even when the environmental subjects in question do not cross borders, they raise the question of the role of the State. Such an observation contributes to reinforcing the thesis of the environment as a factor of social change but, paradoxically, also partly qualifies it. Sociology has often concluded this regarding the transition from an industrial society to a postmaterialist society (INGLEHART, 1977), a post-industrial society (TOURAINÉ *et al.*, 1980) or a second modernity (BECK, 1992). Although there is an abundance of economic, social and technical indicators of this transition, one must admit that social sciences have been announcing this change for more than twenty years, and that, for more than twenty years, it has been elusive. The new does not completely disintegrate the old. It is not that the prophecy announced

by these theories has aborted – on the contrary, environmental actions seem to be developing – but their loss of radicalism would be the price to pay for their widespread dissemination. Thus, the environmental issue has certainly driven new social forms, but it has also partly reproduced old forms, or has grafted itself onto existing structures. Such is the role of the State.

The green revolution has not taken place. Or rather, according to Bruno Latour (1999), what we took for a green revolution was only the “infantile disorder” of what he calls *political ecology*. The environmental issue does not produce any abrupt change. On the contrary, it involves hybridisation. And this is its primary characteristic. The environment is an instrument of hybridisation that questions old dichotomies: between nature and culture, between local and national, between the particular and the general, between vernacular knowledge and scientific knowledge. This questioning tends to deprive science and politics of their respective monopolies as representatives of nature and of society¹⁶. Against this background, the central State becomes a manager of socio-natural diversity, the technocratic State gives a voice to local know-how, and the State concedes a certain plurality to the general public interest of which it no longer has quite a complete monopoly. The State is no longer quite what it was, in its role and its functioning, but the State endures. Thus, the society is changing, but the categories of the XX^e century are not totally obsolete yet. Is this unique to France, a relic of an old centralist tradition, or is it a general trend whose basic pattern may be observed in other places?

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¹⁶ In the framework of a Nation-State, as in France, the expression “politics speaks in the name of society” may take the more precise form of “the State speaks in the name of the ‘community of citizens’”.

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