

# How do we talk about forest biodiversity? Monetary value, intrinsic value and hybrid discourses



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# Seeing the forest beyond the trees

- Historically, the economic value of the timber product has monopolized the way we talked and thought about forest biodiversity
- Plurality of values (1970):
  - Emerging stakeholders
- Plurality as value (1990):
  - Global environmental governance
  - Social and biological diversity
- Legitimation crisis of forest management in Québec (2000)





# Public participation

- A way to mediate the diversity of interests and values surrounding forest resources

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Does participation allow innovative discourses to be acknowledged?
- Does it foster alliances? If so, are they based on shared values rather than shared interests?
- Do we walk the talk? Does deliberation have an effect on forest laws, policies and programs?



# Commission Coulombe: Quick facts

- Fully independent from Québec's government, although appointed by the Prime Minister
- “Stemmed from an environmental crisis, but came to look at the forest regime as a whole”
- Objective: to evaluate the management of Québec's forest regime
- 15 municipalities
- 3 First Nation communities
- 39 days of public hearings
- 303 documents submitted

# Discourse analysis (part I)

- A stratified random sample of the 303 documents submitted to the Commission was analyzed
- Each of the 9 strata corresponded to a subtype of forest stakeholders
- This allowed to identify:
  - Values and discourses put forward by each subtype of forest stakeholders
  - Values and interests shared between stakeholders

# Discourse analysis (part II)

- The sample of the documents submitted to the public hearing was analyzed in relation with other documents:
  - The final report of the Commission
  - Legislative texts
  - Various programs and policies
- The objective was to:
  - Show to what extent those documents incorporated elements from the documents submitted by the stakeholders

# Discourses on forest and biodiversity

- Environmental groups:
  - Intrinsic value
  - Environmental sustainability
- First Nations:
  - Intrinsic value
  - Socio-cultural, historical and political value
  - Socio-economic value
  - Want their role in the protection of forest and biodiversity
- Public administration:
  - Value expertise
  - “MRNF employees could play a key role in the protection of fragile ecosystems if they had the resources to do their job” (SFPQ, 2004)

# Discourses on forest and biodiversity

- Timber industry:
  - Monetary value
  - Timber as a source of profit
  - Economic sustainability
- Regional communities and forest workers:
  - Socioeconomic value
  - Timber and non-timber forest products as a source of livelihood
  - Socioeconomic sustainability



# The formation of coalitions

## (preliminary results - example I)

- Easier among actors sharing the same interests or short term goals even if they don't share the same belief systems
- Wildlife organizations and environmentalists:
  - Shared interest in the protection of landscape and biological diversity
- Value biodiversity for different reasons:
  - Loss of biodiversity is correlated with a loss of income for wildlife organizations

# The formation of coalitions

(preliminary results - example II)

- Can be more difficult among actors sharing similar values, but having competing interests
- First Nations and white municipalities dependant on natural resources:
  - Both value the economic development of their respective communities
- Compete for resources:
  - Both claim the adjacent territory as their own
  - Both wants the taxation on timber extraction to benefit their communities

## Do we walk the talk?

- The most drastic legislative changes were more the result of the MRNF's need for legitimacy than the result of the deliberative process
- However, the discourses who had a significant influence on the organizational culture of the MRNF were the ones who encompassed the more diversity (i.e. Hybrid discourses)
- “The spirit of the Commission has soaked in. [...] And today, no one in the Ministry would even think about shrugging off the ecosystemic approach, the diversity of forest uses or the sustainable development issue”

# Hybrid discourses

- DEFINITION: “A discourse bringing together different belief systems”(Bakhtine, 1981)
- Simultaneously environmental and economical
  - Sustainable development
  - Forest certification
  - Payment for environmental services
  - Sustainable forest management





# The ambivalence of hybrid discourses

- Because of their semantic malleability hybrid discourses are inherently ambivalent:
  - Foster dialogue and cooperation
  - Encourage innovative thinking
  - But also allows influence by dominant actors and hegemonic discourses
- The various semantic possibilities and the power relationships they entails should be acknowledged by every actor engaged in the dialogue

# Example: The new regulation on sustainable forest management

- This regulation:
  - Result indirectly from the Coulombe Commission
  - Will replace the actual RNI
  - Is currently the subject of public hearings
- “The social aspect of sustainable development seems more difficult to comprehend and to implement” (Consultative committee, 2008)
- “Economical preoccupations might dominate” (Consultative committee, 2008)

# Conclusion

- This calls for further research on the formation of conservation coalitions
  - The hypothesis that collaboration is easier among actors sharing the same interests and goals rather than the same belief systems needs to be tested
- The potential and pitfalls of the routinized use of “hybrid discourses” should be put into question
  - Further research on how those discourses are put into practices would be interesting