
Biodiversity Preservation through Heritage Policies. Andean Potatoes' Values in Protected Areas and Beyond

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Résumé

The preservation of ecological systems and their biodiversity against the pressure of economic development is one of the major challenges humanity is facing today. Heritage policies count among the more promising instruments for protecting ecosystems, while bettering the livelihood of their human dwellers. New projects are currently implemented all over the world, that proceed to formal protection of landscape or species, drawing a permanent link between their ecological and symbolic values and cultural communities in charge for their preservation. This paper is concerned with the heritagization of potatoes agrodiversity, which count among the more propitious crop for improving life conditions of vulnerable peasants societies and reduce malnutrition in the South more generally.

When also concerned by poverty reduction and economic development, heritage policies foster agricultural assets' commoditisation, calling for the assignation of increased monetary value on particular species. Thus heritagization fosters commodity "pathway diversions", following Kopytoff's expression. Pathway diversion means (a) that an object is removed from its commodity pathway for its protection and preservation, contributing to the singularization of the object. Diversion also occurs (b) when a previously removed object is commoditized through reentry into the commodity pathway after having gained value through its absence. The target of my research is to identify the pathways diversions of potatoes species generated by heritage policies; and how these diversions articulate with pre-existing local pathways and values. Comparing the different biographies of tubers, depending on their integration into safeguarding policies, the paper evaluate possible production or/and destruction of economic, ecological and symbolic values in the process of heritagization. Special attention is paid to eventual clashes between different regimes of value at one particular stage of potatoes' social life so as to point out any challenge regarding articulation between local perspectives on biodiversity and ideology promoted by external institution.

As a case study, my research focuses on the FAO initiative for the preservation of specific agricultural systems and landscapes, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders. Started in 2002, this program establish the basis for international recognition, dynamic conservation and adaptive management of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) and their agricultural biodiversity, knowledge systems, food security and cultures throughout the world. FAO experts have identified 8 pilots systems where dynamic conservation approaches have been developed, to assist national and local stakeholders in

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the sustainable management of the systems and their components. The pilot phase, ended in 2012, served as basis for a long-term programme through which GIAHS of the world will continue to be identified and internationally recognised so that specific policies and actions programmes will be devised for their dynamic conservation and adaptive management.

Among pilot GIAHS, this work focuses on Andean tuber farming in Peru. This case study is particularly relevant for different reasons. First of all, Andean highland societies are faced with an extremely unstable and severe climate, which has led to unique agricultural innovations in terms of species variations and culturally shaped productive practices. Andean crops are indeed renowned for their exceptionally rich biodiversity; and in the Highlands, tubers provide the major example. Potatoes are of fundamental importance in the whole Cordillera indeed. From an economic point of view, they have a prominent role in agricultural production and rural nutrition. Tubers also are of importance for their symbolic dimensions as they encapsulate peasants' ethnic identities.

Based on a threefold enquiry aimed at tracking potatoes regimes of value, taking into account ecological, economic and symbolic appreciation, this paper addresses the efficacy of heritagization policies regarding biodiversity preservation; in an attempt to achieve a synergy between economic development, transmission of intangible cultural heritage and preservation of biodiversity.

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