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Let Hundred Flowers Bloom? The Rising of Local Authorities and the Governance of Agricultural Affairs in the French Countryside

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Let Hundred Flowers Bloom? The Rising of Local Authorities and the Governance of Agricultural Affairs in the French Countryside

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Working paper

Abstract:

“Flowering Meadows” is the name of a new style of agri-environmental contract which has been included into the French Rural Development Plan 2007-2013. This contract is unusual in all respects. Management prescriptions are given up: the farmer is free to tend his meadow as he wants as long as he complies with an ecological performance. This performance is defined in a very simple way: a list of flower species among which 4, at least, must be found in each third of the meadow. This innovation has been proposed by the National Federation of Natural Regional Parks (NRP) which the farmers’ organisations and the agricultural administration consider as a truly environmentalist institution they would like to keep only managing protected areas. However, NRPs have succeeded in implementing Flowering Meadows outside Natura 2000 sites. Since then, they claim to be considered as a fully fledged representative in reframing the agri-environmental policies.

The paper will examine the rising of non agricultural actors in the governance of agricultural affairs in the French countryside. To overcome the tension between global definition of conservation targets and objectives and the implementation of the Habitats directive, France has chosen to promote local agreements on biodiversity conservation, giving more power to local authorities among which the NRPs. I will show how NRPs seized this opportunity to extend their conservation activities on farmlands by using the most powerful incentives of the modernization process: the Common Agricultural Policy’s resources and the professional contest for excellence. Farmers could also find in Flowering Meadows contracts a legitimization of their activity and contribution to the society: producing food and producing biodiversity or ecosystem services (pollination). The scope and the limits of the rising of territorial governance that could help farmers to switch from productivism to ecologically sound based agriculture will be discussed in the broader context.

Key words: environmental policy, agricultural activities, governance frameworks, political decentralisation, interplay, Natural regional parks,

The starting point of my paper is a simple agri-environmental contract which has been incorporated into the French Rural Development Plan (RDP) running from 2007 up to 2013. Known as « Flowering meadows », GRASS_07 contract is unusual in all respects. First, its requirements are formulated in two single specifications: at least 4 plant species (ecological quality indicators) must be found in the meadow from a list and this list must be specific to regional or local conditions. In other words, the notion of ecological performance replaces management prescriptions - e.g. limitations in the use of fertilisers or in grazing intensity - which are the usual specifications on which are based agri-environmental measures as well as “good agricultural and environmental conditions” (cross compliance) under the provisions of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Second, GRASS_07 is a bottom-up specification: it has been proposed by local actors who draw the concept from German Land of Baden-Wurttemberg (de Sainte Marie, 2009). Although political decentralisation, enshrined in the series of laws enacted since 1982, transferred considerable policy making and implementation powers from the State to local government, agricultural policies still remain highly centralised in France (Bodiguel and Buller, 1995). Significantly, France has chosen both to adopt a single unique RDP rather than a series of regional plans as in some other Member States and to focus its agri-environmental scheme upon a national grassland premium. Tailored to suit local conditions, GRASS_07 is unusual too with respect to long established governance frameworks and procedures.

Last, but by no means the least, this new style of agri-environmental contract has been included into the Rural Development Program, known as CAP’s pillar two, thanks to the Federation of Natural Regional Parks. The mainstream farmers’ organisations and the agricultural administration consider these Parks as a truly environmentalist institution which they would like to keep only managing protected areas. This is one of the reasons why GRASS_07 has been dedicated to habitats of community interest in the French RDP. However, Natural Regional Parks (NRPs) have succeeded in implementing Flowering Meadows outside Natura 2000 sites for the first time in 2008. Since then, NRPs claim that Flowering Meadows should be applied without any zoning, questioning the long standing policy separation that has characterised the French approach to agriculture and the environment.

Influenced by industrial modernisation, the notions of agricultural production and nature protection were understood as separate and exclusive domains of rural space in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. Since the end of the World War II, farmers in most West European countries have come to enjoy a preeminent right over the countryside, as the guarantors of self-sufficiency and availability of foodstuffs for the people of Europe on one end; on the other end, the creation of protected areas in remarkable sites by means of acquisition, expropriation or usage restrictions (nature reserves, national parks) became the cornerstone of nature conservation policies (Selmi, 2006). While protected areas have grown exponentially in the southern hemisphere together with the globalization of environmental issues and the growing influence of international agreements on biodiversity conservation or climate change (World Database on Protected Areas 2010), the protection of natural resources in European Union has recently taken a different path. Along with the invention of agri-environmental schemes at the end of the 1980', the European Directive on the conservation of natural habitats of wild fauna and flora is a clear shift in the former paradigm ruling nature's protection based on sanctuarization. The directive "*intends to promote the conservation of priority natural or semi-natural habitats of Community interest,*" whether within existing protected areas or not, by attempting to reconcile protection with the continuation, or even reintroduction, of certain human activities. Every Member State must designate sites according to a scientific inventory and dedicate a significant portion of its territory to habitat conservation objectives. The idea is to establish a European-wide functional ecological network, named the Natura 2000 network, by connecting these habitats *via* ecological corridors. The Habitats Directive also breaks away from earlier policies by imposing a performance obligation on Member States, though allowing them the choice of means to be dedicated to the restoration or maintenance of these habitats "*at a favorable conservation status*" (Council Directive 92/43/EEC).

The designation of the areas of conservation raised sharp conflicts with landowners, farmers and hunting interests in the French countryside. To overcome the tension between national definition of targets and objectives and population involvement, France has chosen to promote local agreement on biodiversity conservation giving more and more power to local authorities (Pinton 2001). More than 1.300 Special Conservation Zones have been designated in addition to 331 Special Protection Zones following the Bird Directive (1979), representing 12% of

French metropolitan territory¹ and affecting more than 30% of the municipalities (IFEN, 2007).

I'll argue in this paper that this growing environmental responsibility provides an entry point for local authorities, among which the NRPs, into the governance of agricultural affairs in the French countryside. My argumentation will be based on the Flowering Meadows dynamics which originated in the Bauges Massif Park. The questions I will address are therefore (1) how non agricultural stakeholders seized the opportunity of Habitat Directive implementation to extend their conservation activities to the farmland domain? (2) And to what extent the rising of a decentralised governance of biodiversity in rural areas could help to reframe agricultural policies?

1. THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURE AND PEOPLE IN THE BAUGES MASSIF (SAVOIE)

The Bauges Massif is located in the northern part of the French Alps, near the Swiss border. As the vast bulk of NRPs, it lies in area of low density and declining rural population. Agriculture remains the basis of Bauges economy along with forestry. In 2001, farm domain accounted for over 30% (25 350 ha) of the area within the Park. Most of utilised agricultural land (90%) comprises grassland and rangeland managed by 330 dairy farmers (Atlas du Massif des Bauges, 2004).

NRPs were created in 1967 in order to permit the reconciliation of environment and development objectives in rural areas (Bodiguel & Buller, 1995). The Bauges Massif, where Park which was established in 1995, was following this shift in earlier nature protection policies.

1.1 The Bauges Massif: a sanctuary dedicated to wildlife

In 1953, a nature reserve was created in the massif in order to establish a sanctuary dedicated to the preservation of rare or endangered species: namely, chamois and black grouse, which are emblematic of the alpine wilderness. The Bauges Reserve is the most important game reserve in France. Its area covers 5 205 ha, spanning over the main high mountain pastures which were used by local farmers to feed their cows and goats during the summer season. The farmers' lands were bought up by compulsory purchase and transferred to States Agencies (Game and Wildlife Service, Forest Service). Their pastoral equipments were blown up to prevent poaching and disease contamination by contact with domestic herds.

1 6,8 millions hectares most of which (41%) are farmlands lands, accounting for 9,6% of the Utilised Agricultural Area

1.2 The Bauges Massif: the “terroir” of the Tome cheese

The beginning of the 1990’ opened up a new chapter with the creation of the Tome des Bauges producers’ association. The Tome is the local cheese processed in the massif and « terroir » is a French term which has no translation: it is used as such in the international arenas dealing with the legal protection of geographical indications (World Intellectual Property Organization, World Trade Organization). According to French and EU regulations, the designation of origin protects the name of a product the quality of which is essentially or exclusively due to a particular geographical environment with its inherent natural and cultural factors (local practices and knowledges of the producers). In France, protected designations of origin (PDO) have been used mainly in less favoured areas whose agriculture has been marginalised by the process of modernisation since the sixties. It was designed as an alternative model for mountain agriculture which based its development on quality label products. The Bauges Massif was still a blank in the landscape of PDOs alpine cheese at the end of the 1980’. This situation enforced the feeling among its inhabitants that their land would return to the wild unless they could base local development on quality products offering quality landscapes for recreational activities.

Parallel to the creation of the Tome des Bauges association, the same people engaged in another association which aimed at establishing a Natural Regional Park in the Bauges Massif. A NRP is very different from the National Reserves or the National Parks which manage protected areas in France.

First, NRP is a bottom up institution: it exists by the will of local elected authorities. The decree of October 1975 handed both the initiative for the creation of PNRs to the region, subsequent to consultation with the other relevant tiers of local government, and the overall responsibility for the Park management. 58 municipality councils, the 2 departments of Savoy and the Rhône-Alpes region were involved in the drawing up of the Bauges Massif Park, the latter providing most of its financing.

Second, it is based on a contractual agreement between these local authorities and the State, which is set in a charter. Designation procedures are being run by the Ministry of the Environment.

Third, its mission combines the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the community and the development of its economy

1.3 The Bauges Massif: a Natural Regional Park

The labellisation of the local cheese became one of the main Park's priorities. Raw milk, local breeds of cows and their feeding with pastures and hay are the key specifications of the Tome des Bauges which finally obtained its designation of origin in 2002.

Concerning natural heritage, two ecologists were appointed by the Park.² They based their work on the requirements of the Habitat Directive which was promulgated at the time when they began their inventories. The zoning corresponding to natural and semi-natural habitats of Community interest is coloured in green on Map n°1. It covers some 2 500 ha, that is hardly 10% of the area in grasslands. Most of them are high mountain pastures, located in the National Game Reserve.

Such scientific inventories were a clear asset to the Park's ecologists. They used them to gain leverage on the Game and Forest Agencies and the farmers, allowing the Park to be appointed project manager for the Bauges' Natura 2000 sites. They seized the opportunity of the implementation of the Habitat Directive to establish their conservation activities on the preserved domain and the farmland domain.

2 TRYING TO IMPLEMENT THE HABITAT DIRECTIVE: A DEAD-END

Bauges' Natura 2000 sites being drawn up on the basis of existing protected areas, Park entered into the preserved domain as co-manager of the National Game Reserve. With regards to other sites, Park's ecologists had to negotiate the implementation of management plans with landowners or tenants. Trying to implement contractual agreements with farmers turned out soon to be a brain-teasing.

The EU Habitat Directive is a plant sociology based policy: each kind of habitat requires a specific management plan. To achieve a favourable status of conservation, the Park's ecologists based their requirements on traditional farming methods, such as no mowing or no grazing until the midst of July.

The first difficulty arose in the mismatch of spatial and functional scales: habitats zoning hardly fits farm management units. Each natural meadow or pastoral sector is a mix of habitats (and non habitats). For each farmer entering into an agri-environmental contract, this means the addition of many different management plans and the deduction of the surfaces occupied by habitat structures - as patches of blueberry shrubs which are needed for the black grouse - for which they can't be paid under the provisions of the EU regulation defining the

² one is a botanist and the other was an environmental activist

arable land eligible for CAP payments³. As a matter of fact, local farmers didn't welcome Natura 2000 since they were thinking at past policies arduously imposed upon them in the name of nature.

Though the Park's ecologists did all their best, only 9 farmers embarked on contractual agreements covering hardly 55 ha- *e.g.* 2% of Natura 2000 zoning - after five years of implementation. The management plan itself raised questions about the performance of the so called "ecofriendly practices" imposed on farmers. Poor results and deadlocks in the conservation of remarkable habitats raised a more radical question. Quality labels on cheese did not prevent neither farming intensification nor abandonment of marginal lands which are the main threats on the Park's natural heritage: what about the 6 000 ha of rich species meadows out of the designated sites?

3 (RE)CONCILIATING CONSERVATION AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES: THE WAY OUT

When facing a dead-end, the Park's ecologists decided to break out of Natura 2000 framework.

3.1 Science: bringing together ecological and agricultural knowledges

The first way out was crossbreeding their knowledge in plant sociology and agricultural science. They work hand in hand with research teams from National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and from German Institute for Agro-ecology. This collaboration lead to a method for assessing habitats' status: a list of 24 species. This list, I have mentioned before as Grass_07 main specification, is both:

- **A comprehensive indicator.** All existing grassland habitats in the Bauges Massif can be described with a set of 24 species, whether these habitats are pure or mixed, whether they are of community interest or not. In other words, contractualization doesn't depend anymore on habitats zoning.
- **A simple indicator.** All of the species set in the list are flower species. Flowers have been chosen not because of their aesthetic value but because you don't need to be a botanical expert to identify them. For ecologists, some of these flowers are quite ordinary as *trifolium pratense*; for farmers, others are supposed to be weeds, as *Rhinantus alestrolophus*.
- **A functional indicator.** Many and rare flower species can be found in outstanding meadows but their agricultural value is rather poor. The German findings show that a minimum of 4

³ Permanent pasture is defined as land used for grass production (sown or natural) on a permanent basis (five years or longer) (Regulation 2316/99 CE). This definition of arable land excludes therefore scrubby an/or wooded pastures of nature species grazed and/or browsed.

flower species is insuring a good status of conservation on grassland habitats while permitting a more than acceptable agricultural output (Oppermann & Gujjer, 2003). These flower species may be different or more or less abundant from one part of the meadow to the other. The only thing that matters is that 4 of them can be found in each third of the field (Mestelan & de Sainte Marie, 2007)

Setting up this list was clearly the invention of an agri-ecological norm of high value, since it holds together « the restoration or maintenance of habitats at a favourable conservation status » and the provision of feed resources for the maintenance of domestic animals at a favourable production status.

3.2 The use of the most important incentives of the modernisation process

3.2.1 *The agriculture contest*

The second way out was the use of the most symbolic incentive of agriculture modernisation: the professional excellency contest. The first “Flowering meadows contest of the Albanais” took place in foothills of the Bauges Massif Park in June 2007. It was designed as a field test to assess both the method and its social appropriation.

At first glance, the flowering meadows contest seemed to fulfil all the necessary conditions of any agriculture contest: competitors, in field assessment by a jury, evaluation sheets, prize award ceremony. The Park ‘ecologists seized the opportunity of a major event for Bauges’ farmers – a cow show - to reward the winners of the flowering meadows contest with the same type of medals they are proud to hang on their barns’ door.

When examining more carefully the flowering meadows contest, it appears that the test has radically changed.

First, while agriculture contests promote the productivity of cows or grasslands, it awarded the best agri-ecological balance in a natural meadow managed by farmers,

Second, while professional excellency is assessed by peers, the panel of judges assembled different stakeholders. A botanist expert, an agricultural expert, a beekeeper, a restaurant owner, a local elected official and representatives of local associations (hikers, nature protection) confronted their skills to select the winners.

And finally, the organiser was the NRP that local people regarded as an “environmentalist” institution. Against all expectations, the flowering meadows contest was an undoubted success: among the 36 Albanais’ farmers, half of them candidated. The local agricultural

bulletin, “Terres de Savoie”, put this event on its front-page. The headline was a statement about « The Marriage of Agriculture and Ecology ».

3.2.2 CAP fundings

The third way out was the use of the fuel of agricultural modernisation process. Until then, the implementation of the Habitat directive in the Bauges Massif (scientific inventories, designation of sites, drawing up of management plans) has been funded by financial instruments supporting environmental and nature conservation projects (EU LIFE program and French Ministry of the Environment’s budget) in addition to RDP resources allocated to few agri-environmental contracts.

The Park’s ecologists realized that they depend on CAP funding to extend their conservation activities on farmland as well as to gain credibility with the farmers’ organisations.

They managed to bargain for a support to rich species meadows and pastures in the forthcoming Agri-environmental scheme. This was done in close association with the Parks Federation at the national level and finally, GRASS_07 was included into the French Rural Development Plan (RDP) running from 2007 to 2013. The farmer entering into a flowering meadow contract receives 79 € per hectare in addition to the national grassland premium (76€/ha). On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture focused State and EU funding on two priority targets: the restoration of water quality within sensitive watersheds and management plans within Natura 2000 sites. The RDP’s resources have been allocated to these designated “zones of priority action” in order to increase the efficiency of AE schemes run by the regional councils.

Relying on their success in field-test, the Park’s ecologists obtained the implementation of Flowering Meadows contracts within the entire Bauges Massif since 2008. According to their evaluation, figured in Map n°2, 2/3 of the Bauges’ farmers will be allowed to sign such contracts (coloured in green) versus less than 5% with the pastoral management plan in Natura 2000 sites (coloured in blue). However, the importance of these N 2000 contracts is far for symbolic: they support the comeback of domestic herds into the National Game Reserve.

And finally, the Park’s ecologists got the upper hand on the definition of permanent pasture arguing that the Habitat Directive is a binding obligation for Member States and that EU regulations allow for setting up local standards in order to reflect the diversity of agricultural practices within the Community. Within some limits, scrubs, shrubs and group of trees are entering good agricultural and environmental conditions (cross-compliance). This local

adjustment is potentially time bomb because it might affect the present distribution of CAP's payment between productions, farmers and regions.

4 WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES TODAY'S FLOWERING MEADOWS SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING?

4.1 On the farmers' side

Participants in the contest were interviewed in the end of 2008. When we examine what the Bauges' farmers thought at first, there's no doubt that the Flowering meadows contest was regarded with suspicion (Insert N°1).

In their opinion, the maintenance or restoration of nature qualities is regarded as an environmental service disconnected from modern farming. They strongly oppose to the task of "nature gardeners" that society might assign to farmers, even those in less favoured areas. Providing environmental services would radically question their professional identity. In the current state of affairs, most of policy makers, agricultural services and farmers' organisations are not avid proponents of the ecologization of French agriculture (Deverre and de Sainte Marie, 2008)

Insert n°1: Interview of competitors (extracts)

by Lucie Dupré & Christine de Sainte Marie, INRA

What do they thought at first:

« The Park's ecofreaks piss us off with their lovely flowers »

« Our meadows are not museum! »

What do they think now:

« We only had professional farmers in this contest, no part time ones »

« We were not calling them « Flowering meadows » but we were doing just that »

« Our work is really recognized for once. It's very important for us to show we aren't « big polluters! »

« The good farmer will be rewarded and the bad one won't be. Until now, you could do a terrible job and still be OK as long as you were doing your [CAP] paper work »

When we examine what do they say afterwards, their opinion is rather different about flowering meadow they consider as a "package". For Bauges' farmers, the contest was a

public recognition of their professional skills in managing rich species meadows they “*were not calling them like that*”. The shift from compulsory methods to result based approach is, in their statements, what it is that make those flowering meadows so different and so appealing, rather than an additional payment. A farmer entering into a GRASS_07 contract is free to tend his meadow as he wants so long as he complies with an ecological performance. He becomes accountable then for the wise use he makes of natural resources on his farm.

Farmers sound practices lead to role reversals. The agricultural advisor can’t play the expert’s role anymore because he knows how to harm a natural meadow but he doesn’t know yet how to manage an agro-ecosystem.

And, even more, Flowering Meadow embarks on a on a drastic change in CAP’s procedures. The farmer receives a reference sheet with the CAP’s papers he has to file every spring. Photographs of indicators species with their vernacular names come along with the list. GRASS_07 control consists in going through the plot which the farmer has reported on his farm map for CAP payments along a diagonal. The control agent checks on the list every referenced species he observes around him in each third of the meadow. In field inspection replaces papers’ control and roles are reversed: the burden of the proof falls now on the State. In all those respects, Bauges’ farmers regard « Flowering meadows » as a U turn.

The local farmers’ organisation and the Tome des Bauges association made flowering meadows their own and backed the Park’s ecologist in their claim that Grass_07 should be applied within the entire Bauges Massif. This involvement of agricultural stakeholders in the project was crucial in the decision process managed by Rhône-Alpes region and decentralised services of State administration.

The notion of agri-ecological performance, as the Park’s ecologists designed it, fits well with modern farmers’ ethics. Biodiversity conservation is no more regarded as an environmentalist claim or a mandatory obligation but it results of a “good” work. Mountain farmers could find in Flowering Meadow contracts a legitimization of their activity and contribution to the society, defining themselves as producers of nature qualities as well as producers of milk for quality cheese. The counterpart might be the extension of the notion of ecological quality to the « terroir »...

4.2 On project managers’ side

In 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture commissioned NRP’s Federation and INRA to undertake a survey of Grass_07 present situation at the national level (Fargier and al., 2009).

The survey indicated that Flowering Meadows contracts were covering about 7 500 ha in France after three years of implementation of the Rural Development Plan.

The most significant finding was that the area and the number of contracts are higher outside Natura 2000 sites, than within them, by one third. The latter are funded by European and State budgets, the former must rely on self financing.

Who provided these resources? When examining now current Flowering Meadows' projects, we can notice that most of the area is managed by 8 NRPs and 4 municipality groupings⁴ that got their financing from regional councils and departmental councils. That means that conservation of ordinary biodiversity is clearly a priority target for local elected authorities. Another significant finding was that farmers' organisations are entering into Natura 2000 sites management, considering themselves as stewards of nature.

Surprisingly, the strongest opposition to the Flowering meadows measure did not come from the agricultural organisations but from environmental bodies: the Ministry of the Environment and, at the regional level, the Botanical Conservatories on which many Parks and all municipality groupings depend for the setting of the list. For nature managers, replacing compulsory farming methods with an ecological performance means that they lose direct control over the farmers. In most cases, they went beyond the ecological quality standard of 4 flower species and selected more rare or remarkable ones. This latter choice is bound to their aesthetics of nature rather than to money and power issues. In their opinion, nature is an art gallery and it must remain deluxe and delightful.

4.3 On Parks' side

Although GRASS_07 territorial impact might seem negligible compared to the national grassland premium (900 000 hectares), its social impact is far more significant.

Decentralisation process engaged in since 1982 gave the regions greater policy making autonomy arguably in only very limited areas among which the environment (Bodiguel & Buller, 1995). GRASS_07 proved to be an entry point for Parks into agricultural issues and their integration into a coherent strategy promoting natural grasslands by means of support for farming activities associated with these ecosystems. In Morvan for example, where mesophilic pastures are non remarkable habitats under the provisions of the European Directive, the Park's ecologists went out to each farm to encourage farmers to keep these low

⁴ Known under the generic phrase of "intercommunalities", these new forms of municipality grouping have been introduced by successive governments since the mid 1970s to promote local development policy, along with NRPs.

potential lands within the existing production system. This case by case negotiation functioned well in the framework of contractual agreements based on results that give the farmers the opportunity to adapt their management practices to specific conditions. Some 100 farmers have been engaged in Flowering meadows contracts, covering 2 500 ha.

The Bauges Massif pioneering experience inspired many other Parks. The following generation of Flowering Meadows contests were organised in close partnership with local NGOs, farmers' organisations and producers associations of quality labelled products, involving the "Gruyère de Comté" and the 'Reblochon' which are the main PDO cow cheese in France. Parks also promote contracts between farmers and beekeepers by delivering their own label on the honey produced in flowering meadows.

All this was done in close association with the Parks Federation at the national level. The next step in the political agenda of the Parks' Federation is a national contest in 2010, the United Nations proclaimed to be the International Year of Biodiversity. Year 2010 was also supposed to mark a turning point for environmental policies thanks to vote of Grenelle II Act by the French Parliament resulting from the Grenelle environment process. This process was initiated in 2007 to tackle key environmental issues (climate change and biodiversity loss). It intends to establish a governance model based on public debate and participative approach to policy making which are clear breaks from current regime. "Ecological governance" is seen as a continuation of the Grenelle Environment Round Table process, which involved representatives of local authorities, trade unions, business and civil society, giving institutional recognition to environmental NGO's.

With regards to rural areas, the most emblematic outcomes of the Paris Grenelle Environment Round Table Process were the consensus reached upon the need to undertake an ambitious plan to embark farmers on road to "ecological and productive agriculture" on one end, and the implementation of an ecological network, connecting protected areas or habitats through corridors on the other end. Local authorities are in charge of such implementation by means of negotiation.

The Parks' Federation have decided to use the Flowering Meadows contest to reinforce their claim for transferring more public resources from farmers' income support to agri-environmental performance support. This could be achieved by means of ecologization of the national grassland premium as well as by means of cross-compliance. Such a drastic shift needs to bring together agricultural interests and NPR's interests. Parks' Federation clearly undertook the setting up of the contest Steering Committee as a coalition building process.

Along with the national associations of PDO cheese and beekeepers whose commitments were entrenched, Parks' target was the Chambers of Agriculture Permanent Assembly, a public elected body whose backing is crucial in the formulation and implementation of agricultural policy and rural development programmes. Finally, Chambers of Agriculture decided to participate in the contest and seized the opportunity of Paris International Agricultural Show to announce, in February 2010, that the prize awards ceremony will be held in their head office. The contest outcomes will therefore be a (crash) test for assessing major agricultural players' involvement into emerging forms of "ecological governance".

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn from the implementation of agri-environmental policies in France is a considerable widening of social concern and involvement towards nature conservation. Local authorities became responsible for natural heritage in the countryside.

NRPs decided to break out of the sand box into which farmers' organisations and State administrations wanted to keep them in. NRPs Federation claimed to be considered as a fully fledged representative in CAP's reform negotiations. They did gain legitimacy in that role.

The ongoing Grenelle Environment process strengthens the power of local authorities in the governance of biodiversity. Moreover, within local authorities, NRPs aren't marginal stakeholders, with 45 Parks covering 13% of the French territory today. This area could reach 20% in 2020 with the designation of 15 Parks currently projected.

So, let's hundred flowers bloom? Does this rising of local authorities in the governance of biodiversity conservation policies allow for reframing and reconfiguring agricultural policies in the French countryside?

In France, where political decentralisation is at its beginning, the State is transferring more and more responsibilities to local authorities without transferring the funding that goes with it. The ecologization process' engine is clearly the potential to transfer huge financial resources from support to industrial agriculture to support to ecologically sound based agriculture. However the Agri-environmental Schemes will hardly receive 5% of the current CAP's budget and the resources devoted to rural development will decrease by 16% per cent in France compared to former RDP running from 2000 up to 2006.

Grenelle or not, CAP's health check didn't change this situation, the historical reference being still in force in France until 2013. Such a decision prevents local authorities from reframing agricultural activities on more ecological sound basis. On the other hand, the opportunity for

local authorities to finance biodiversity conservation on their own budget might create a competition between regions and between projects. And who might be the winners of such competition? According to some scholars, who express critical views on changes in rural development governance driven by EU policies (Kovach and Kucerova, 2006; Deverre, 2009), they could be those actors which have both natural resources and established access to institutions and administrations.

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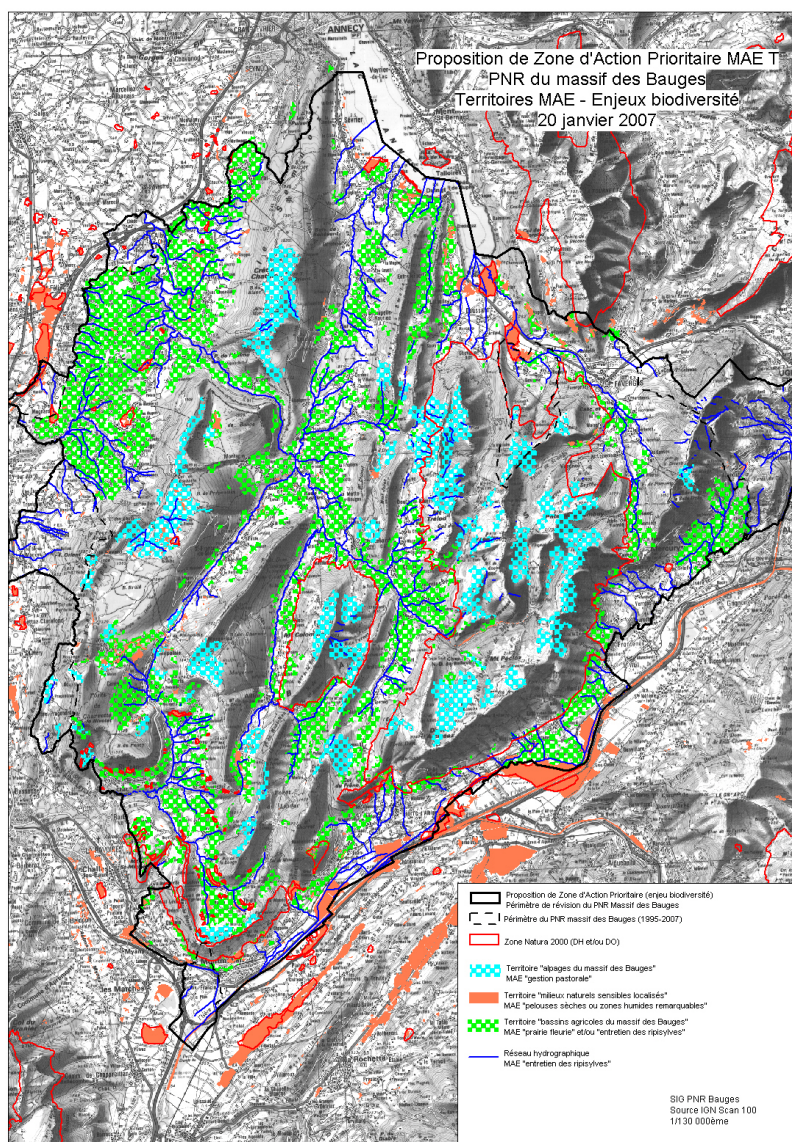
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Map n°1 : Bauges Massif Zoning

Source: Natural Regional Park of the Bauges Massif, Atlas 2004.

Map n°2 : Bauges Massif Park's Agri-Environmental Scheme 2008-2013



Legend :

NRP boundary

Grass_07 « Flowering meadows »

Target : 4 000 ha (220 farmers)

Cost (5 years) : 2 041 520 €

Grass_09 « Pastoral management plan » (Natura 2000 sites)

Target: 750 ha (15 farmers)

Cost (5 years): 267 375 €

Source : NRP of the Bauges Massif. Report submitted to the Regional Commission in charge of Rural Development Plan (Rhône-Alpes), January 2008