
Biodiversity Conservation and Global Change: A Political Ecology of Adaptation Policies in Southern France

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Abstract

Overall, conservation biology is often critiqued for not sufficiently addressing the social dimensions while social sciences are critiqued for weakly integrating ecology in their analysis related to conservation issues. In the context of global changes, the drivers are often combined, and have complex non-linear feedbacks across spatial and temporal scales, and between governance systems, users, resource systems and biodiversity. While many adaptation actions have beneficial outcomes, some adaptations may result in unintended consequences for social and/or ecological vulnerability, either locally or elsewhere. In a context of exacerbated pressures and growing interdependencies among social-ecological components, and with the development of adaptation policies in various activity sectors our paper explores a central question: how do adaptation policies integrate non-humans and biodiversity conservation issues? To answer that question we examined adaptation policies developed by regional planning decision-makers and landscape managers in the Languedoc Roussillon coastal area (France). We implemented a political science framework based on identifying the main core entities (adaptation of what to what?); agents (who is responsible for adaptations?); assumptions about relationships (how is social-ecological vulnerability produced?); sciences (what is the place of science?); narratives and illustrative cases (what stories are told?); prescriptions (how do agents adapt?). We conclude with a discussion on the consequences of these results, especially the need of both social and ecological theories to address power relationships issues related to biodiversity conservation and adaptation plans if we aim to avoid systematic transfers of vulnerability on biodiversity. We also present future directions for both research and conservation policy.

Keywords: Global change, adaptation policies, political ecology, coastal areas, biodiversity conservation, vulnerability transfers

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