

The study of international environmental negotiations

International environmental conferences (IEC) are the primary places where concepts for environmental management are forged. This why it is important to understand how do they work, and what are the power relationships, the representations, etc., that shape such concepts.

The Pau team of the laboratory **PASSAGES** joined a national-level research group which studies international negotiations (Rio+20 and COP21). For every major international environmental conference, this pluridisciplinary and multi-subject group follows the event, from the first “zero draft” until the application of the agreement, with the purpose of performing an ethnographic study of the negotiations.

Work like this is necessary because IEC are often criticized for producing weak results, or results lacking in concrete effects, and for their lack of ambition when addressing environmental problems. Because of their size and visibility, these conferences are the stage for power struggles among a multitude of different actors (states, businesses, NGOs, etc.), each representing a different view of what society is and what it should be in regard to environmental challenges. Whether they should be criticized or not, it is undeniable that IEC are defining moments of political debate and political change.

The Passages team studied IEC political logic, the actor that choose to participate in them, or to oppose them, and the scientific and social discourses and practices they deploy. The aim in this reseach was to understand:

- * The process of international negotiations at the UN level: how, why and by whom political choices are made, as well as the key factors for success or failure of the official process.
- * The gap between the official political process of the negotiations and the socio-political process take place outside of official arenas.
- * The consequences (in terms of technological, economic and/or social solutions) evolution of the choices made over the course of the political process,as well as choices made through other types of engagements.

The principal result of this research, while not original, is the identification of two different narratives summarzing opposing views of how society should act and organize to face global environmental challenges. On one hand, the techno-market discourse, and on the other, the socio-ecological discourse. Each has its own logic and vision of the future. In between thte two, a third, emerging discourse was identified: the eco-technological, that aims to combine the opposing views. The Passages team identified how these discourses are defined, who their advocates are, how they play out in society at large, and how they coexist (conflict being a form of coexistence) in concrete situations, that is, in specific geographic areas or debates.

This work led the publication of two books, and to publications in two published volumes, as well as a great number of scientific articles.