

Degrowth - Symposium - 7th July 2021 - Sébastien Clément.

To introduce the subject, my research work focuses on gardening practices and knowledge in tropical environments and on the evaluation of their contribution to biodiversity. My research question is : "In Réunion Island, do gardeners contribute to the preservation of garden biodiversity through the transmission of knowledge and the evolution of their practices? »

This research process is undertaken on Reunion island where I live. It is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. At this time I am in France and that's why you don't see pretty palm trees behind me.

This tropical territory is now universally recognized for the exceptional diversity of its landscapes. It is also known for its rich environments and ecosystems, characterized by a high degree of endemism.

My approach is a particular way of tackling the issue of biodiversity, in the current context of "*greening*" this island territory. Indeed, forty percent of the surface has become a national park since twenty oh seven.

To complete this particular geographical situation, I think it is also appropriate to recall the ambient context in which we live. On this island, as everywhere on the planet, the diversity of life is collapsing. Numerous studies prove it. In Reunion Island, the situation is similar. A few decades ago, the State of France was already communicating on this erosion of life.

"Among the shortcomings identified for the preservation of this heritage, the lack of specific and ecological knowledge represents a brake on the improvement of the management and conservation of biodiversity¹.

It is therefore in this context of global health and ecological crisis on an island territory that my research are carried out.

You must be wondering how this long introduction relates to the question of the planetary garden school. I will speak soon about the subject. I thought it was important to give you the context of my research.

Faced with these challenges, my work raises the question of the evolution of our relationship with living beings and biodiversity in the action of gardening.

What relationship do gardeners have with biodiversity? How do their interventions interact with the evolution of life?

What sort of biodiversity are we talking about?

This polysemous term is recent. It has gradually led to the emergence of a new paradigm on the relationship between man and nature. It has various facets. It is difficult to define. There is a diversity of approaches depending on the discipline. We talk about structural, biological, genetic, cultural, *biodiversity*.

Mentioning biodiversity is perhaps talking about a diversity of biodiversities?

Let us remember in this presentation that my work is on a specific biodiversity : the fauna and flora of gardens. A biodiversity that is measurable by simple scientific protocols, to which a cultural biodiversity is added.

To study this relationship with the living in this island context, I chose a medium and an actor: the garden and the gardener. The garden is potentially a place of cultural integration. A place where one can "cultivate" biodiversity, participate in its protection and enrichment.

¹ DIREN website. (2011). Service Environnement. DIREN now DEAL: Direction de l'Environnement, de l'Aménagement et du Logement.

"In Reunion Island, *Creole garden* reveals a great diversity of garden forms. These gardens combine the contributions of people from different parts of the world in different ways.

The hypothesis is that today we are witnessing a loss of "traditional" knowledge and know-how relating to gardening in this territory.

This situation is linked to a mutation of the island's modes of living and organisation of domestic space.

One of my research way is a series of interviews with twenty five gardeners on the island. This is a way of fundamental research. The aim is to better understand their relationship with biodiversity and how their practices have evolved over time. I conducted filmed interviews with a guide.

In relation to this first approach, a second path of my research concerns research in experimentation or research in action through the creation of an experimental garden.

A project in which an attempt is made to measure the evolution of the biodiversity of a garden area compared to a space left untouched.

Finally, the third way is based on the experience of the Planetary Garden School. This structure, which I created in twenty thirteen, is inspired by the concept of Gilles Clément², a popular landscape architect. I anticipate the question : He is not my father because of my name, not my uncle too. Just a good friend.

This representation according to which our planet is like a garden, an enclosed space that it is up to man to maintain and preserve.

This school is a citizen project. It functions like a popular university with activities open to all. The school proposes a sharing of knowledge on biodiversity. The school propose workshops.

They are oriented to organic gardening, beekeeping, plant recognition, roles of insects... and a lot of other thematics.

The school is conceived as a free electron that offers activities throughout the island.

To study the impact of the seven years of activities of this school, I made a survey among the sixteen thousand participants. I tried to find out what this school could bring to citizens and how participants could potentially change their practices.

Have these citizen gardeners changed their relationship with life? Have they changed their gardening practices?

Although the analysis is still in progress, I have been able to identify some first conclusions. This survey has been realized in April with an on line form. I had one hundred thirty eight responses.

The majority of participants (sixty nine per cent) are between thirty-five and sixty years old and twenty one percent are over sixty years old.

Sixty per cent of the participants are also involved in other associations related to the preservation of biodiversity. It should be noted that ninety people have been involved in the school since its creation. They are passionate gardeners, researchers, artists, beekeepers, ethno-botanists, scientists, or even herbalists. They all wanted to pass on their knowledge to the public.

Having carried out more than four hundred sixty activities, the school continues to offer new courses every year.

² Clément, G. (1999). *Le jardin planétaire l'exposition*. (Albin Michel). Société française de promotion artistique, 127.

Seventy six per cent of the participants think that they received important or interesting knowledge in the activities.

This school is also a laboratory for creative ideas on the relationship between man and nature and its impact on the landscape. Educational activities allow the creation of experimental gardens in schools or on natural sites.

Some of the people working with the school have become professional, such as Nadine Fornet, a former nurse who, after a few workshops in twenty seventeen, created her own structure. She is now one of our teacher. Other results of the investigation show a real enthusiasm for this kind of approach: Seventy three per cent of the participants have changed their gardening practices. Fifty eight per cent of the participants have changed their relationship with life. Eighty six per cent of the citizens who participated in the activities think that a school of this kind is useful for preserving biodiversity. Ninety eight per cent think that other similar schools should be created. This demonstrates the usefulness of this kind of structure.

Finally, again in relation to the survey, ninety eight per cent recommend the school to citizens.

This makes it possible to be quite satisfied with the energy committed during all these years. It therefore seems important to continue to develop this kind of pedagogical approach, which is open to the general public and to all citizens.

After seven years of existence, the team is considering the future of this structure. New training courses are envisaged, one of them leading to a diploma will aim to train real gardeners in a tropical environment on this island of a thousand landscapes.

The analysis of the survey will certainly reveal more specific findings.