

“Trails of Inheritance” : an innovating project anchored in the territorial history and opened on the future

Monique Paternoster

Conservatoire Botanique de Mascarin, SAINT LEU (île de la Réunion)

How to allow the local population, from an insular context of small size, distant from 10.000 km of the metropolis, to become aware of the vegetable biodiversity which always surrounded it and in which they drew to provide for its needs, without imagining to put it in danger?

How to allow the children who will have to leave their island to seek work, to be rich of an identity and of a single inheritance in the world, while at the school the programs are created for a national context?

How to allow the children today to be interested by their environment and history island and to feel concerned and in charge of its future?

How to allow the inhabitants to perceive conservation of natural environments and the inheritance, not like series of prohibitions but like an economic source of development thanks to new glance by the tourists and their interest to seek authentic values?

“Trails of inheritance”

- An environmental education project for awareness about necessary plant biodiversity,
- a multidisciplinary approach, with transverse and partnership step,
- an pedagogical approach about the ecocitizenship,
- a network dynamic and a chart for partnership operation,
- a methodology transposable on various topics and people.

I. Local context

The district of St LEU, on the West cost of Reunion Island extends over the slopes of the old and inactive volcano (the “Piton des Neiges”), from the sea level until more of 2000 m of height. So, it covers a big variety of environment areas, which many were modified by the human activity today.

It's also a part of first inhabited zones of the island, when the people settled down there hardly more than 350 years ago. Maps, dating the end of the 17th century, mentioned the locality " Repos Laleu ". The district of St Leu offers us the possibility of reading again a part of the history of its settlement by the indigenous vegetation and by the people.

As in an inquiry we have to look for indications to go back up the time and acquire better knowledge about our inheritance. But it is not sufficient. It is necessary to analyze each situation and especially to seek which bonds exist between each one. By understanding better the reasons of the past actions, we can consider new choices, more respectful of the environment, biodiversity and human community

St Leu is likely to gather on its territory several scientific and cultural structures, complementary, invested in actions of education to the environment, but which function little together, for various reasons (set of themes different, statutes different, economic and human opportunities).

The agricultural and industrial Museum Stella Matutina is mainly centered on the culture of the cane sugar which developed since 1820. Its collections make it possible to redraw the modernization of the cane farming techniques and the extraction of the sugar.



- Kélonia, is the centre of studies and documentation on the marine turtles : this association studies and preserves the marine turtles of the Indian Ocean. The tortoises would seem attracted by the smell of the native vegetation. The plantation of endemic species could support the return of turtles to lay to Reunion beaches

- Marine Parc is an association of conservation of the lagoon. This one is weakened by traditional fishing, by erosion of the grounds in mountain during the period of the rains, by the discharges of worn water and by trampling of people looking at corals.

- Botanical Conservatory of Mascarin : to inform and educate publics, we have several landscaped collections. One among it represents the native vegetation before the settlement of the island. Along the trail of this collection, it is possible to observe the distribution of threatened endemic species, as if you traverse a way from the shore to 700 m of altitude. This course allows an instantaneous comparison with a reading of the current landscape.

Another collection enables us to understand the evolution of the landscape since 1650 at our days, by redrawing the development of agriculture, the introduction of exotic species (coffee, spices, sugar cane, ..), the retreat of the forest and the urban extension.

II. The concept of “Trails of the inheritance”

The concept of “Trails of the inheritance” was defined to answer to several complementary objectives on a hierarchical basis of sustainable development education :

- to set network of the partners to gather average competences and finances
- to put in coherence the covered subjects about environment,
- to allow to the target public to become the agent of knowledge on their own life territory,-
- to transpose the tested method to other publics and other transverse topics.

The concept of pathway is important: it translates the interrelationship between the various natural area (from the mountain to the sea) and between the various structures or organizations on the same territory.

It grows rich by a temporal and historical perception; it testifies the evolution of mentalities and the behaviours by opening the mind of the young people to the concept and necessary sustainable development and solidarity.

Since 2003, the Botanical Conservatory of Mascarin integrated the network of “Permanent Center of Initiatives for Environment” (CPIE). This new statute supported certainly a work of setting in network of the various educational actors but this statute is not enough. It was necessary to set up a experimental operation which can prove the educative interest of this project to the politic and financing organisations and to the teachers.

II -1. Schoolchildren : a public target common

Initially, a teaching circuit having for topic “the biodiversity” made it possible to connect the various structures in order to synergize competences of each one.

Schools children could apprehend their environment in a transverse and global way, during 5 days with this progression :

- observation of the native vegetation of bottoms of slopes
- - reading of landscape to day- comprehension of the evolution of the landscape
- - threats on the endemic flora and question about conservation
- - study of the culture of the sugar cane since 2 centuries and the modes of extraction of the sugar
- - observation of littoral areas, study of the marine turtles and question about conservation
- - the lagoon: its ecosystem, threats and conservation- which links between the lagoon and the forest
- - and at the end, the children had also to consider the future of it,.

First year, we supervised 1 primary class.

II - 2. Validation of the methodology and dynamic of network

The following phase consists of in the validation of the methodology implemented for this pathway concept, while transposing it and applying it to other set of themes, territories and actors. It is underlain with the perpetuation of the actions by their integration in the national or regional orientations of type Agenda 21

So, second year, we had 4 classes, always about “biodiversity”, and among which one with accommodation in a guesthouse. Indeed by means of “transplanted classes” (they arrived from un other district), environmental education concern the children both in the school program but also in the life of group and the everyday life.

During this phase of the project we had developed a dynamic of network and a shared will to implicate oneself. At this stage, the group of environmental officers can become more credible, compared to the public and / or financing organisations.

This year, we introduced a new theme : “ *Water, from mountains to ocean*” and new environment officers

II - 3. How to involve adults

The third year, the project was then registered in the policy of the district which allowed us to reach the population by way of the young ones out of school time.

This device allowed us to work with 3 associations of rural environment and to arrange more time to meetings with the children. It allowed us to develop more activities of artistic and home-made creations, to facilitate meeting with young and old people, sharing their testimony (old toys and games, spices and kitchen, manufacture of musical instruments, ...) The children could imply themselves individually and collectively, but also the adults.

One association has worked on the topic of the water. An other one about the place of the plantation of coffee in the life of this St Leu's district and also about the Creole gardens. The third group has worked on the understanding of the landscape and the agricultural cultures of this district enclosed by volcano peaks

Then they prepared an exhibition about all they had discovered and they invited their parents.

The role of the conservatory consisted to create the project, to frame it and coordinate it, to teach the organizers, and especially in assuring the coherence and the continuity between the different topics, in watching to emphasize the place of plants and biodiversity.

III An economic opportunity

Finally the concept is also applicable to the implementation of projects on territorial micro-economies oriented towards tourism : it is then a matter of emphasizing the elements of the natural and cultural inheritance according to a pedagogical approach, not primarily commercial, but in a sustainable preoccupation within the management of the natural and patrimonial resources.

But it needs to propose and organize training sessions and a dynamic network.