

Working Group C:
Concepts of Nature and Future: Africa and Beyond
Session at 5th June 2014

The Future of *Nature*: Between Representation and Preservation

This session focused on issues of preservation and conservation for the future in terms of nature/s. The first presentation of **Fabio Vanin**: “(African) Urban Landscapes: The role of nature” looked closely at the work of urban planners to incorporate, control or manage nature in urban environments. One task of urban planners is to try to imagine and to work together with the users of cities with integrating nature in open space as model of a European city. Cities can have ecosystems that have richer biodiversity, because they are protected even if the objective of this protection is to create a green identity of for a city. In African cities most parks are created by colonizers with this model in mind. In contrast single big trees create a social ecology for neighbourhoods.

The second presentation of **Gratien Gualbert Atindogbé**: “Saving Language and Biodiversity: Appropriating Natures in a sustainable way. A perspective from African Linguistics” explored the similarity between biodiversity and linguistic diversity and detailed how multi-disciplinary teams attempt to preserve and document endangered languages with a view to revitalizing them for future generations. In the discussion were highlighted the purpose or role of preservation and the archives of language and knowledge. If languages get lost (were killed) specific words, which are related to practices of using species get lost, too. We could learn a lot about human/nature-relations by analysing notions of species.

The discussion on the politics and role of preservation and conservation brought up the question of what kinds of notions or concepts of nature we can use. We observed two contesting perspectives: the preservationist, who holds that nature is not for the use of humanity and should be permitted to run its course. The second is the conservationist position that nature is something to be shared and improved by all. Three main issues were raised in the discussion, which linked both presentations to the topic of the working groups as a whole. The first was the role of preservation or conservation as related to nature. The second was about how we conceive of nature as a concept. The third related to how we view our research in terms of our epistemological approaches –determinism or functionalism versus post-modernism. As reflexive aspect we discussed the empirical practice of spatial division of the urban (as culture) and the rural (as nature) that further deepens the divide between nature and culture in African studies and neglects a dialectic relationships between humans and nature.