

## **Report, Methodological Workshop “Transnational mega-events global environmental governance”**

With support from the GIS Climat Environnement et Société and the IFRIS

Location: ISCC, 20 rue Berbier du Mets, Date: 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Through a methodological workshop, the first day focused on the various ways of collectively studying transnational mega-events. In a first instance, participants – French and non-French academics having collectively study one or various transnational mega-events – were asked to briefly present their research interests. What emerged out of the discussion is the diversity of projects: both in terms of scale (international, national), type of mega-event studied (climate conferences, social forums...) and research object (citizens mobilisations, medias, climate governance, biodiversity, cross-cutting issues such as adaptation).

There followed a rich discussion on the methodological questions specific to each of the projects presented and the potential linkages between projects. Discussions focused on the birth and management of collective ethnographies and the specific difficulties that are associated with them: impact of national research contexts on their funding and preparation, establishment and day-to-day management of the research collective, drafting a project and writing/publishing papers/books.

The discussion subsequently focused on the distinctiveness of transnational mega-events and their specific methodological challenges. We discussed the issue of mega-event “embeddedness” in their national context as well as their “translocal” dimensions (especially when dealing with annual conferences such as the UNFCCC). Regarding the specific challenges of mega-events from a research perspective, participants highlighted the obstacle posed by fieldwork access (accreditations, access to the different spaces...) and more generally when it comes to the space offered to researchers (the fact, for example, that there is no specific right of access for academics working on UNFCCC conferences but that they have to be associated with a ‘Major Group’).

The day ended with an exchange on potential future collaboration(s) – especially in view of the Paris COP21. Various forms of collaboration were mentioned. Among them was the possibility of exchanging data – within and between research collectives – and the questions and challenges that this would raise: what type of data? What level of confidentiality? Participants all agreed on the benefits of informal exchanges – especially through collective debriefings during the COP21. It was also decided that a mailing list would be set up to pursue the dialogue, and identify potential crosscutting themes.

The second day was devoted to a series of more formal presentations open to the public. Our intention was to present, beyond the strictly methodological dimension, the main results from different projects on transnational mega-events.

The first session focused on the previous day’s methodological issues. The idea was to focus on their significance when it comes to understanding the global environmental governance process. Noella Gray (University of Guelph) presented a common methodology for four different projects involving North-American academics and whose aim was to study transnational mega-events in the field of global biodiversity governance (IUCN global congresses in 2008 and 2014, Biodiversity COP and Rio+20). Presented as “collaborative event ethnography” - approach grounded on qualitative analysis and participant observation – their methodology undoubtedly constitutes one of the most elaborate and reflexive approaches to transnational mega-events. It has given rise to a number of timely publications. Jean Foyer (CNRS) then presented the main results from a collaborative study of Rio+20 (2012). The project framed the event as a “testing ground” for the broader project of ecological modernisation. Beyond its declared ambition to reconcile economic growth, development and environmental protection, the

Rio+20 event also highlighted the existing geo-political tensions, contradictions between capitalist development and ecology, and the difficulty to include civil society.

The second session's aim was to discuss the emergence of a global civil society through transnational mega-events. Johanna Siméant (Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne) presented two collective projects carried out during the World Social Forums in Nairobi (2007) and Dakar (2011). Beyond their methodological dimensions, both projects highlighted the importance of the linkages between the events and the African continent, and the particular place of African activism in the construction of the "alter-globalisation" movement more broadly. Clare Saunders (University of Exeter) presented the methodology that was used by a team of researchers coordinated by Christopher Rootes (University of Kent) in their study of the main climate march during the COP15 (Copenhagen). While such an approach raises a series of methodological difficulties – especially when it comes to the representativeness of the sample population –, it nevertheless offers some interesting results: for instance, the relative existence of a climate justice movement, far more visible in organizations and intellectual circles than among the grassroots activists taking part in the march.

The third session was more specifically centred on the COP21 negotiation. Stefan Aykut (LISIS) and Amy Dahan (Centre Koyré, CNRS) put the Paris 2015 negotiations into perspective by drawing on the broader context of global climate governance. They highlighted to need to go beyond the climate regime *per se* by focusing on other regimes and addressing questions that the climate regime hardly addresses (in particular, the energy question). They then presented possible ways forward in order to come up with a new "governance order" allowing for a much needed re-politisation of the climate question. Bjorn Ola Linner (Linköping University) presented a long-term analysis built on a series of questionnaires collected during COP side events since Bali in 2007. It not only offers interesting insights into the role of side events during COPs and on individual reasons for participating in COPs, but also on peoples' perceptions of the negotiating process (mitigation, adequacy of measures...) depending on their status (NGO, negotiator...) and/or country of origin. Jonathan Kuyper then presented a study – jointly produced with Karin Backstrand – on the democratic procedures within UN Major Groups.

Finally, the fourth session focused on the media's coverage of COPs. Two projects were presented. Elisabeth Eide (University of Bergen) and Risto Kunelius (University of Tampere) presented a series of results from the Mediaclimate project. They drew attention on the importance of national contexts in the media's framing of transnational events. Hartmut Wessler (Universität Mannheim) presented a study on the interactions between journalists and NGOs. Through qualitative and quantitative studies during the COPs in Cancun, Doha and Warsaw, they offer a typology of different configurations of coproduction of information between journalists and NGOs. What comes out of this panorama is a certain interpretative proximity with regards to the climate debate.

### **Key messages**

The workshop showed the usefulness and productivity of studying "global environmental governance" through collaborative sociological and ethnographic studies of transnational mega-events. It also showed important diversity in existing approaches and the need to coordinate different collaborative research projects before and during the Paris climate conference. Also, the workshop highlighted that the need for such collaboration increases with growing complexity of climate governance.

### **Follow-up actions**

Regular meetings during Paris conference in December 2015.

International conference to share and compare results in summer 2016.