

# The interrelation dynamics between an energy company and local population in the Congo Republic

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## 1. Introduction

An important limit to the social and environmental studies is represented by the shortness of time to conduct a continue on field research. On the contrary, in our case we had the possibility to make a three years long field research (2008-2011). In the same time, we are aware that these issues are always changing and it is necessary an on-going revision. Environmental and social dynamics change with the time modeling the terms of reference of environmental conflicts. Geographical and culturalist approach has been strategic to find out the cultural vision about environments and people coming out from the different social actors. The different moral values conferred by the institutional actors – State of Congo, Energy Company, Civil Society – and general stakeholders – to the natural resources such as hydrocarbons (petrol and tar sands) or wood, design a cultural ecology panorama which in the *geographicalness* of sites plays a very strong role.

In this article we have only hinted at the rich aspects related to environmental conflict issue. This can be in fact approached by different point of views. Here we have given a preference to the confrontation between two of the main organizations involved, i.e., the energetic company and the civil society considered as acting on the territory both socially and geographically. That does not exclude another approach focused on the history of culture in Congo. Our main aim has been to model the interaction between these main synthagmatic and paradigmatic actors involved in the environmental conflict in Africa.

The ethic implications connected with the exploitation of the natural resources has not been deeply faced, but we are conscious that they can represent a valid key to understanding the intricate interactions among the different and opposite interests, in particular where the negotiating contracts are dominants. In these problematic issues we have to look for a win-win solution. Following this direction can be helpful to understand their complexity.

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Fig. 1 – Administrative Map of Congo Republic. Map based on a UN map (Map No. 3813 Rev. 3 January 2004).

Source: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

## 2. Geographical contexte

The Republic of Congo (342.000 km<sup>2</sup>) is extended as much as Italy (Fig. 1) and its latitudinal range is similar, reaching up to 1000 km. This contributes to its wide environmental variability included in the inter-tropical zone. The natural boundary of national territory is represented by the River Congo, in the East side, whereas in the North and West sides, the wet forest and savanna are bounded as a consequence of historical and political factors during the XIX century. At the South side, the Atlantic coast is only 150 km long, but the national sovereignty is represented by the off-shore petroleum platforms. An

internal limit is instead determined by the Mayombe Mountain, a transversal orographic chain which ranges from North-West to South East. In the past, it has represented a natural obstacle to the inner European penetration. From the geological point of view, this chain is the North boundary of the Southern sedimentary basin emerged during the Quaternary Period. Today this basin corresponds to the Kouilou administrative department (13.694 km<sup>2</sup>) which is the richest economic region of the Congo Republic. In the Fig. 2 there is the map of the exploitable resources in the Kouilou Administrative Region (FAO, 2008) and in the Fig. 3 are showed the sites where are localized the oil and mine exploitation claims of the energetic company (Chazan, 2009).

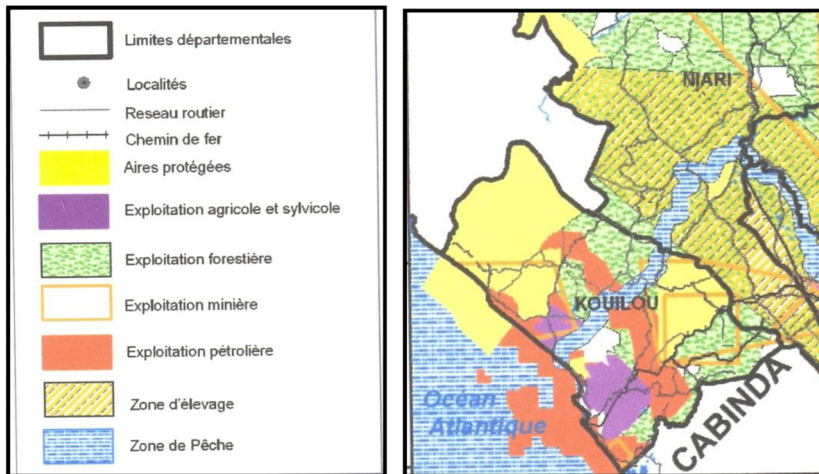


Fig. 2 – Map of the exploitable resources in the Kouilou Administrative Region. An adapted map from FAO (Projet TCP 3101, Brazzaville, Avril 2008).



Fig. 3 – Oil and mine exploitation sites in the Kouilou Region.

Source: *The Wall Street Journal On-Line*, <http://online.wsj.com>, (2009).

Our research was carried out in the Hinda administrative district (4579, 27 km<sup>2</sup>), about 70 km North of Pointe Noire, the main industrial town of the Congo Republic. The territory of Hinda District is characterized by low-rise hills (230 m above sea) and plateaux. Here there are sandy poor and very porous soils. The phytogeography of the natural spaces take part of topic sequence that starts from the Atlantic coast to the Mayombe chain. This sequence is characterized by savannas, forest-savanna mosaic and dense wet forests. The rainfall is about 1000-1200 mm per years with a 8 months wet season and 4 months dry season.

### 3. *Socio-economic context*

In the past, the Kouilou Department was crossed by migration flows coming from Europe and Middle-East (XV-XX Centuries), and then from the American Continent. During the French colonial period, there were forced migration phenomena as the people deportations from the Chad, in occasion of railway construction of *Chemin de Fer Congo Ocean* (Vennettier, 1968). Part of the human groups living in the Congo Republic are today represented by bantu people originally coming out from Cabinda and Angola territories, that in the XV Century were part of Condo Kingdom. The native people are represented by the Pigmy People, living below of the sub-equatorial forest cover. Today the Kouilou Department is a multicultural society such as in the Pointe Noire Town (4306 km<sup>2</sup>) (APNI/ MIDR, 2009). Here, the demographic increase, recorded during the 1999-2008, was around 44% (from 774.786 to 1.116.016 people), while the metropolitan area grew about 50% (from 667.806 to 1.000.000 people). The population composition of Pointe Noire reflect thus the social and demographic situation of the whole country. Recently, there were some mechanisms of reciprocal inclusiveness between countryside and urban people. Part of the poorest urban population is nowadays active in agriculture and part of people working in industry and living in rural area, is included the weakest social segments. The multiethnic composition of people living in small areas can be the cause of land conflicts. It is difficult today to distinguish the rural from the urban areas because the urbanization process is spread in an anarchic way on the original natural space (savannas and forests). This phenomenon happened before the agricultural colonization phase. Spatial crossroads and urban-rural overlaps have had an effect on urban morphology whereby the rural margins are confused with meddling and lengthening of suburban built – up area of Pointe Noire metropolis. It is thus right to define this urban structure such as a very far or a semi-peripheral rural areas absorbed by central urban texture. The delimitation between center and periphery is applicable to the economical geography space. There is in fact a polarization between mining activities and environmental context. The agglomeration of economic activities such as mining and petroleum extraction, is more evident inside the town because the *clustering* phenomena (Scott, 1998) is very marked. The classical Center-Periphery Model could be here applied to describe the petroleum site localization. A shortage of

production creates unemployment and lack of benefits for local people, and the richness (oil, gas or tar sand) is going away. Using the Raffestin's point of view, we consider the exploitation sites (oil camps and platforms) like "knottiness or condensing centers of economic power" (Raffestin, 1981). These knotting points positioned on the territory "catch paradigmatic actors that becoming as synthagmatic ones will find in the same case a centrality, which will determine *ipso facto* a marginality". Thus there is a progressive system where the geographical "knottiness is *versus* the centrality and the centrality is *versus* the marginality" (Raffestin, 1981). Among the synthagmatic actors mentioned before, and following this particular point of view, it is better to concern on "organizations or groups that are in a centrality situation and organizations or groups that are in a situation of marginality" (Raffestin, 1981). In the case of oil exploitation in Congo, the power relationship between centrality and marginality is marked too geometrically and it is too evident, and it impacts strongly on the rural landscape. In the Fig.4 is showed the oil exploitation site of Mboundi (source: <http://www.banktrack.org>). Here, it is evident the gas flaring and its impact on the natural environment.



Fig. 4 – An image of the gas flaring at the oil exploitation site of Mboundi.

Source: <http://www.banktrack.org>.

From a national political and economic point of view, this situation is a typical example about an African country trapped by its richness in natural resources (Collier, 2007). As a consequence, this economic situation is basic to include the social environmental conflict mechanisms.

#### 4. Methodology

The methodological approach carried out during our research is firstly referred to the Claval's eclectic cultural geography (Vallega, 2003; Claval 2002). We have thus introduced a description criteria which links up the neopositivism with the post-structuralism in geography. In this way we have used both the methods in natural science and the qualitative ones in social science. It has been important for us to follow Claval's observation because he stated "the geographers in particular in Africa are led to inspire to the use of the techniques that are typical of ethnographers" (Claval, 2002). The research methodology has been applied on this field and is thus based on these three fundamental steps: 1) to observe; 2) to ask, and 3) to read.

1) To observe. Using the participant observation in anthropology “we observe what is happening in a society” (Corbetta, 1999). We know well that this technique “is difficult to code: it is an experience and not a procedural system” (Corbetta, 1999). In our case, its utilisation has been done similarly to the sub-cultural studies from the School of Chicago when the researcher introduced itself in a particular human context and became as a part of the studying context. In particular, the Author had a job in the energetic company and approached gradually the human context. This situation allowed him to apply the interpretative approach of social research. In fact “in the qualitative research following the interpretative paradigm, the relationship between theory and research remains open and interactive. The qualitative researcher wants to refuse the theory built before to start a field work, because that could limit the full understanding of the point of view of the subject to be studied” (Corbetta, 1999). When the participant observation is oriented to analyse the values, the social relationships, the dynamics among people inside institutions and organisations we refer to the ethnography of organisations.

2) To ask. This research phase integrates the first one. The researcher provokes a free reply from the people interviewed. Usually, we made occasional or not systematic interviews with local people thanks to an anthropological informant which was speaking local dialect (Vili and Monokutuba) and helped the Author to interpret some cultural aspects of the congolese people. We have not used structured interviews. Following Corbetta (1999) we consider the oral documents such as a storytelling as a not-structured interview.

The interviews have been done to the people living in the villages near the industrial installations. Considering at least 11 main villages located around the main oil platform, the number of population attainable was about 10.000. Moreover, the agents working for the energetic company and other minor contracting enterprises were about 2.500. In a very dynamic internal migrant situation, where there is a very fast turn over in workers, considering both expatriates and nationals, is resulted very difficult to set up a systematic plan of interviews. Individual interviews occurred during the working days on field, both in the villages and inside the industrial sites. Many collective meetings have been done, such as official communication moments from the energetic companies to the direct stakeholders or beneficiaries, or more informal talks with the chiefs of villages or their representatives. Moreover, the direct participation to the traditional ceremonies or to the inauguration events of new industrial installations has represented for the Author a very important opportunity to explore the cultural interface related to the natural resources perception between resident people in rural areas and external agents working for the energetic company.

3) To read. To link to the before research phase, the Author read precedent sociological questionnaires or surveys related to the social context of Kouilou. An other important information source came out from the meeting minutes. The on field work has been accompanied by a archive

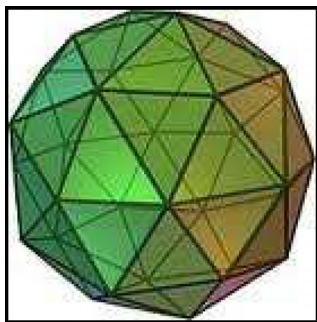
research in the French Cultural Centre of Pointe Noire, ex-ORSTOM library, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Geology. Other documents came out from the main media such as newspapers, news, documentaries video, and narrative books or novels.

As a conclusion, we outline the importance of the physical traces on the territory as valid documents to describe the environmental context and the impacts of industrial activities. This information has been integrated with the other ones and it represents the naturalistic side of the eclectic approach in geography. In fact, photos of landscapes, soil and water chemical analysis, pedological descriptions and pollution air data have supported the participant observation. All these issues explain the relationship between the man and the environment in the Kouilou Region.

##### *5. The social macro-actors acting in the case study*

In term of environmental and cultural geography the analysis of this case study can contribute to define the main references of socio-environmental conflicts that are represented by the social actors in a real context. Nowadays, there is a strong dualism between requests coming out from local people and civil society, on one side, and the political position of State institutions and energetic companies, on the other side. In the first side in fact it is prevalent a cultural vision based on local environmental knowledge and competence, while, in the second side, there is a context rationality based on western view of environmental issues. These two conceptual sides are often in disagreement. They show the existing alternative between global society and local collectivity (Faggi, Turco, 2001). In Congo, the conflict rising from this comparison can be considered primarily as economic, and consequently as environmental and political one. When the communication amongst the social actors becomes very important this type of conflict can reach up to an ideological character. At this point it is correct to mention a meta-conflict stage which is enlightening to describe the macro-organizations as big social actors, and in our case study, they respectively are the energetic company and the civil society. To understand the environmental conflict as a process we have to compare the two above mentioned macro-level organizations: the energetic company is a typical hyper-rational modern organisation based on the technology which in the Human Person is able to carry on a “not making power” capable of stopping its functioning mechanisms. Therefore, the power is diffused and each Human Person can hold a functional and negative power. The hierarchical structure of company organogram becomes here inefficient. On the contrary, in the case of the civil society organizations, the Human Person holds a central role and represents the genetic base of the conflict. As a negative consequence, some political drifts due to individualistic form of criticism addressed against to the foreign energetic companies can burst out. Behind this criticism there is sometime a hidden political opposition to the actual monocratic State power in Congo. In the Fig. 5 we illustrate the plastic representation of both the energetic company and civil society organizations.

## The two complex organizations



Environmental Knowledge

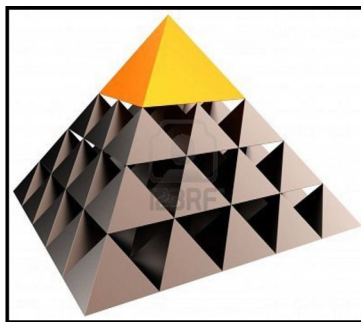
Environmental expertise and rationality  
of environmental and social context

Fig. 5 – The geometrical plastic representation of both the energetic company and civil society organizations. These are free images from the internet source.

*Source: these are free images from internet source. They have been used by the Author to create its model.*

The first one is represented as a metallic and glass polyhedric framework having the same number of regular faces are the functional and strategic roles in its organisation. This globular and rigid structure rolls time by time leans on each face. Its slowing movement occurs on the figurative sandy substrate which means the fluid and adaptable socio-economic context of Congo. This context is elastic, mobile, unstable and changeable about its different forms: it is incoherent such as the sand. In fact, this external social context is adaptable to the company organization but not vice versa. It requires a lot of informational energy to move on. Thus, we are not in presence of a classical pyramidal organizational structure, because there are some functional and autonomy cells which are corresponding to the divisions and departments of energy company. They are represented by each faces of our metaphorical image. The hierarchical vertex of this organizational structure is not thus apical but it is situated into the centre of this volumetric figure. This centre is at the same time connected with each polyhedron face. The relationship established between centre and faces is functional. By this image we want to communicate a cultural description of economic organisation of energetic company, that is, at the same time, rigid and multiform, and it has a structural handicap to communicate with the human context of Congo's society. This rigidity is typically bureaucratic. The "sand" of external context reflect the image of Congolese protean society where the infrastructures and industrial bodies are producing as a main consequence, many negative environmental and social impacts. In the Tab. 1 we describe part of this impacts highlighting the conflict causes raise up by local communities, and the risk perceived by them.



Tab. 1 – The mine and oil industry activities: their environmental impacts, actual risk and risk perception form the local population.

<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Risk perception</b>
Reducing access to natural resources such as soil, water and forest.	The oil platforms hamper the access to the cultivated fields and contaminate the natural resources around them.	The main perceived risk is linked to the yield loss and thus to the smallholder revenues lacking.
Air pollution due to the gas emissions from gas flaring.	Black particulate falls out on the 11 villages around Mboundi oil field. Yield and productivity losses caused by the gas flaring and particulate fall out. Local population establish direct correlation between the gas flaring and air pollution. This relationship is associated to the emerging and spread diseases.	Local population is aware about the main environmental issues linked to the oil exploitation. The agricultural products are considered as contaminated by the local people. This products are potentially carriers of diseases such as gastrointestinal illnesses. The emerging diseases are correlated to the worsen quality of the air and soil.
The lifestyle changes of local people in negatives or positives terms are bring back to the industrial and oil extraction activities.	There is an enormous discontent about both the land use and monetary compensation.	This situation is perceived by the local population as disadvantageous whereas it is considered advantageous for the enterprises.
There is a negative relationship between local people and oil company. This situation is enhanced by the weak institutional context in the Congo Republic.	Local people are discontent respect to the labour policy carry out by the oil company. Labour quota assigned to each village do not meets the local labour needs.	There is potential labour supply from the oil industry. This do not guarantees the local full occupation. Local people abandon them current agricultural jobs waiting to be engaged in oil exploitation activities.

*Source: this table has been elaborated by the Author from the original data collected on the field.*

The geography of sites is here very important, and as already mentioned before, to describe that one we have in part adopted the terminology and concepts issue from Raffestin (1981). In fact, on the territory, these two organisations act as two synthagmatic actors in an environmental conflict context. Here, on the contrary, local communities and governmental bodies play a secondary role as a paradigmatic actors. The Government of Congo, by its rationality of State system, seems apparently indifferent as regards the conflict. Instead of developing a particular interest about it, sometimes the

State is positioned at the origin of the same conflict and it assumes on the territory a backseat behaviour. The State does not fulfil its social obligations connected to hydrocarbon exploitation performed by the international energetic companies. It abandons them and it does not give responses to local needs of residential communities. At the end, private corporations will substitute the State in its social role, and for what they will compensate it building new infrastructures and implementing micro development projects.

#### 6. *The role of the civil society in the arena conflict*

Even if in the precedent paragraph the description of the socio-economic context has been very synthetic, it can anyway introduce some social-geographical categories used in our research. By the geographical literature (McIlwaine, 1998) the locution “civil society” is a sort of space or “arena of associational culture or associational grouping comprising various types of organized activity. [...] They generally refer to voluntary organizations, community groups, trade unions, church groups, co-operatives, business, professional and philanthropic organizations, and a range of other NGOs. Although civil society is usually defined as made-up of these various groups, there has also been a tendency to view NGOs as primary ‘vehicle’ or ‘agents’ of civil society. The NGOs themselves as a primary have been subject to a lot of definitional scrutiny, however, serves to undermine the clarity of the civil society concept. Similarly, social movements, which are also themselves subject to varying interpretations, are also said to be part of civil society, although not equated with it. NGOs and social movements are therefore constitutive elements of social society, but are not conterminous” (McIlwaine, 1998). The civil society considered as a fabric of society where the environmentalist issues have represented the main instances to be embedded into the national and international political agenda has been discussed in Blacksell (2006). Here we refer to this Author to outline the importance of environmentalist organizations to composite the civil society bodies.

Another concept to be introduced is related to the locution of “local community”. In this article it is used in relation with the industrial activities considering the meaning given by the agents of the energetic company to their beneficiaries. We can find similar expressions, with the same meaning, in some official publications of energetic enterprises (Eni 2007, 2009); for this reason the “local community” or simply “community”, is considered only as a human group living near the industrial installations. This is not a limitation to the local community meaning but it is a specification referred to the particular context of our study, where the relationship with the allochthonous nearby presence of industrial installation is conditioning the internal and external social mechanisms in human settlements. Nowadays, the local community is not the pure cultural expression of an ancient and well rooted tradition, as sometimes is maybe happening in some countries of West Africa (Turco, 2009). Here the traditional knowledge are disappearing. They are threatened by the incipient modernization. The ethnic composition of the villages is today

very heterogeneous, and the *mythos* and *technes* for which is articulated the old knowledge of territory (Turco, 2009), are used in an instrumental way by the residents faced to the energetic company agents. There is an opportunistic aptitude by the villagers to use their cultural tradition to obtain some benefits from the energetic company upon the ceremonies opening new oil platforms. The permission and access to the exploitation of the sites is therefore bargained between the energetic company agents and the chiefs of the villages. Some Authors (Katz, 1995, 2000; Nguingui, 1997) have confirmed this aptitude which can be explained by the colonization history of Kouilou Department. In the past, the autochthonous human groups living in this region were the first ones to meet European people and immigrants coming from other parts of Congo and Africa. In a pragmatic way, “the reference to the tradition is served as a pretest and is changing, depending time by time on the context: in one case is due to the *genius loci* presence, in an other one, is linked to the traditional land appropriation” (Katz, 1995).

On the other hand, if we consider both all the local communities that are interacting with the energetic company and other intermediate bodies of the Congo society, such as associations, NGOs, ecclesiastic organizations, and so, we have a part of the congolese society that can be well defined as “acting civil society” respect to the oil and mining industrial sector. Thus, in this case, the civil society is strictly defined only referring to the industrial activity of the energetic company, because it represents the public interest faced to the economic gain coming from oil and mining exploitation. In this sense, the local communities are part of civil society when they express a public opinion about the industrial activities, and at the same time, have a geographical site on the national territory. In spite of this, the civil society is not always linked to a geographical position, but it can include both supranational and international levels. The criticism of energetic company is not exclusively expression of localisms; it can in fact come from social networking linked to the human rights and environmentalist international organizations. While the local communities are part of the civil society geographically defined, on the contrary, the civil society as a whole is not always strictly localized in Congo. All these considerations allow to understand the reason why the energetic company includes in its category of stakeholders both local community and national institution, and organizations belonging to the civil society at the supranational and international levels. At the end, although the exploitation economic system based on oil and mining activities is well localized and geographically determined, the range of its social and environmental interest is very large and it can go beyond its physical boundaries.

As a paradox, in this context, the national civil society of Congo keeps sometimes a certain distance respect to the territorial articulation characterised by localisms, parochialisms and private uses of common goods. In developed countries, this phenomenon is well known as the NIMBY syndrome (Not In My Back Yard). The strong sense of territoriality expressed by African people is not yet well organised as a spontaneous antagonist or

movementistic forms, as is occurring in Europe or Italy (Bobbio *et al.*, 1999). Anyway, there are some institutional forms of advocacy that are able to prevent spontaneous protests or uprisings. Sometimes, indeed, these protests are banned by the public force. There is a weakness hitting the national civil society in Congo. The national NGOs and media are not immune from their vicious. “Dependency from abroad, scarce skills, difficulties to adaptation, and bad governance” represent the main limits to the autonomous behaviour of the civil society organisations. “The NGOs of Congo are not able today to undertake a beneficial initiative of found raising at national level or to create consensus in the public opinion. [...]. Many NGOs are like an image of the opposition political parties and they exempt themselves from their obligation related to a democratic internal governance. They replicate the same wrongs they have before denounced to the public authorities, such as the personification power, the abuse of social goods, the lack of creativity in resolution problems for the suffering population...” (Nkaya, 2009). At the same time, the international co-operation organisations are not very diffused and well tolerated in the Congo because they are like the “eyes on” the Country, without any filter to the interpretation of political and social facts happening inside the Country. This approach of the Congo State is an heritage of its old Marxist regime during the Seventies. In fact, “regularly, the Government of Congo accuses the members of civil society as subversive agents acting against the Country or it tries to assimilate them to the political opposition party” (CARITAS, 2011). Moreover, the main media of Congo “are away from playing a useful role to pull out a really democratic society. They do not play a real role in political opposition and do not help to stimulate an awakening of the collective and public awareness” (Nkaya, 2009). In the geography of the power in Congo, the role of information system (public media) is marginal. It is as an amplification chamber of the Governmental power, where “the intellectual have renounced to reflect about the crucial problems undermining the society in Congo. [...]. They have definitively renounced to analyse the actions of political makers” (Nkaya, 2009).

In Congo, the territorial characteristics and typology of industrial exploitation sites can determine the genesis of environmental conflicts. As a specific case of Congo’s energetic exploitation system, the local population opposition is firstly not against the geographical localisation of exploitation sites, as is happens in Europe or Italy, but on the contrary it tied to the existence or absence of natural resources, minerals such as forestry. The site exploitation choice is inevitably conditioned by natural resources presence. Each new oil well or well drilling, is compelled in this strict logic about the “to do or not to do”. So that, each industrial choice is obviously conditioned. In this sense, an exploitation permit is not similar to a building or installation permit as usually we can find in an advanced industrial context. The site choice can indeed influence the country richness. This may partly explain the coercive aptitude exercised by the State of Congo against each form of social protest. If in an industrialised society the conflict dynamics

pass through a voluntary acceptance of risk by the local population, without its passive acceptance, in the Congo society, instead, the acceptance is conditioned by the possibility to find a job or to improve the quality of life. These opportunities may in fact be originated from the new industrial infrastructures.

The Congolese civil society is not yet well structured, and it is divided between familiar disputes and antagonism, some forms of individualistic social climbing, in particular in the poor rural context where are still prevailing. In a first step, the risk perception from the local population associated to new industrial infrastructures is related to the job opportunities offered by the energetic company. In a second step, the effects of industrial pollution replace the job scarcity or its failing, and the risk is even more perceived by the local population. Job scarcity can not compensate the damage provoked by the industrial pollution. Where the disillusion linked to job opportunities is high, the environmental risk will mostly be perceived dangerous by the local people living around industrial installations both for its health and economic livelihood.

## *7. Conclusions*

The social injustice suffered by the local people living around industrial installations is increasing in the case where the asymmetry between failing and not received benefits is larger than the benefits perceived and received by the people living very far from the same sites (Bobbio, Zeppetella, 1999). This is a typical case about oil or mining exploitation sites. The environmental injustice is adding to the social one when in particular the asymmetry about the economic benefits is summed up to the asymmetry applied to environmental information spread. In a rural and poor social context the last one is very rare. In an urban context people's opposition to the exploitation choices of energetic companies is more emphasised, because the circulation of information is strengthened.

Whereas benefits and costs of the energetic company are depending on the exploiting of economic advantages, the costs of local population life are related to the failing revenues caused by the job scarcity and crop damages provoked by the industrial pollution. The population benefits are strictly related to a general improvement of their livelihood. The environmental policy axed on the compensation mechanisms, by money or material exchanges, ought to follow a proportional criteria based on industrial damage levels. In this case, the main aim is to internalise the environmental costs by the energetic company. Instead, the truth is difficult to identify the objective consistency of environmental damages caused by industrial exploitation. This fact determines a disadvantage and induces a latent frustration amongst local people. In fact it accumulates dissatisfaction about the compensation measures which are not sufficient to fill the procured complaints, and they do not response completely to their right expectations. All this describes an active phenomenon acting in Congo due to the hydrocarbon industrialisation which

is affecting the poorest strata of rural society. As a macroscopic result, the suspension of the agricultural work activity. People are thus waiting a more important job from the new energetic companies leaving their current activity. They are also waiting for a better future from industrial sector and more and more earnings. Usually, this promise for a better future will never arrive. This self-suspension of every agricultural activity leaves the social space opened to the behaviour deviations and rural exodus. An apathy prospective toward the future can become the main aspect of the African people's waiting capacity. In other words, in a negative sense, we are witnessing an amplification of a cultural characteristic conditioning the temporal and spatial human relationships.

Now we want to recall an other aspect about the environmental conflict in Congo, which is based on the fact that the people working in the energetic companies do not understand the so-called "people's other reasons": the reasons of local population (Bobbio, Zeppetella, 1999). We also add a delay on whatever form of plan between the company and local instances. The top management of energetic company is often perplexed when the local people do not embrace enthusiastically the industrial development plan proposed on a territory, and do not accept any proposed hypothesis of economic and social compensation. It is true that an agreement with local population is asymmetric because first of all the two counterparties are speaking two different idioms and jargons (Bobbio, Zeppetella, 1999). There is also a social asymmetry that creates a dependency to relationship between local population and energetic company and national institutions. A confrontation on the technical aspects about an industrial project or installation, as proposed by the energetic company, is often avoided because the local counterpart is not expert. Anyway, to know some technical aspects on an industrial project could extend to the conflict towards the social and environmentalist international network with which the civil society of Congo is often connected. The energetic company does not want to do that and consequently will shift the relationship with the local population toward other confrontation levels such as the risk perception. Due to its weakness, the local population counterpart will tend to enlarge the economic perception of risks linked to the industrial exploitation. In this sense, it will try to obtain a maximum of gain from the energetic company which will counteract this position refusing to admit the existence of a possible environmental risk and will minimise the possibility of reparation or reimbursement, for every eventual damage. The energetic company as its unique interest will have to persuade the opposition about the real low risks and the high security of its installations. This negotiation aptitude is not efficient to reduce the risk perception of local people. The concrete difficulty to estimate the thresholds of risk in industrial installation carries the dialogue on a stalemate situation. As a consequence of all that, the social compensation measures realised by the energetic company come out not as a final negotiation process result but they are only an univocal action aiming to calm down the local opposition, and to safeguard company public image. In effect,

it is only a marketing approach rigging up to solve social problems around an emerging environmental conflict. The lack of information, a non clear diffusion or an explicit and objective communication, leaves the conflictual situation at a point of no-solution similarly to a not decisional limbo. Each intervention on the territory by the energetic company will be thus deferred to a superior political willpower, but without a realistic connection to each other institution or decision-maker. In this way, every political decision concerning the territory remains vague, while the concrete actions on the field carried out by the agents of energetic company continue undisturbed. These acts become therefore the true social and territorial facts which have very huge consequences against the environmental protection. The lack of environmental information is wanted and it aims to restrict the real reasons of the local people opposition. Whereas the risk perception linked to environmental and economic damage is not confirmed from a scientific point of view, the reasons of local contestation seem attenuated and they lose their explication vigour. The solidarity offered by the international social network on the environmentalist issues can help the civil society of Congo to reply positively to the energetic company.

To approach these thematics from an ethical point of view is not our main aim, but it might represent another way to explain the existing connection between the territorial facts and their moral value. The risk perception respect to the industrial installations can be defined as a moral intuition of resident people (Poli, Timmerman, 1991). This moral intuition can be interpreted as potential falsifiability tool, according to the Popper's Theory: that is a valid tool against the reasons of industrialization. This ethical level of analysis goes beyond the cultural geographical approach to environmental conflict, but it can provide a solution when the moral imperative can stop every form of invasive and dangerous industrial planning. Only a diffuse and shared awareness about the environmental dangerousness of exploitation activities on the territory can, potentially, solve any negotiation impasse, such as we have here tried to explain.

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### *La dinamica dell'interrelazione tra una compagnia energetica internazionale e la popolazione locale nella Repubblica del Congo*

Lo studio è stato svolto dopo tre anni di lavoro sul campo nella Repubblica del Congo, presso una compagnia energetica internazionale, in particolare nel settore della responsabilità sociale d'impresa e dello sviluppo sostenibile. Nell'interfacciarsi con gli attori sociali in gioco (popolazione locale e agenti internazionali) è stato seguito l'approccio partecipativo dell'antropologia, mentre è stata approntata un'analisi del contesto socio-ambientale sulla base dei criteri della geografia culturale. Questo articolo è un contributo allo studio dei conflitti ambientali attuali. In particolare, si sottolinea l'uso dell'approccio culturale all'analisi delle organizzazioni, qui considerate come attori importanti nel conflitto ambientale.

### *La dynamique d'interrelation entre une compagnie d'exploitation de ressources energetiques et la population en Republique du Congo*

L'étude a été conduite après trois ans de travail sur le terrain en République du Congo auprès d'une compagnie internationale d'exploitation des ressources énergétiques dans le secteur de la responsabilité sociale d'entreprise et le développement durable. La méthode anthropologique de l'approche participative a été appliquée dans l'interaction avec la population locale et les agents de la compagnie internationale. Pour la description du contexte socio-environnemental on a utilisé la méthode d'analyse de la géographie culturelle. Cet article se caractérise pourtant pour être un apport scientifique contemporain au thème des conflits environnementaux. Pour cela on souligne aussi comme l'approche culturelle a été importante à la description des organisations impliquées dans cette typologie de conflit.