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Landscape assessment by capabilities

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According to the Indian economist Amartya Sen (born in 1933), the "capability" is a term that emphasizes the positive freedom, that is to say, the ability to a person to be or do something. In the work of Sen, a capability represents all human functioning (ways of being and acting), accessible to a person, whether he uses it or not. The capability approach focuses on the free choices of men, the potential plurality of their lives, and not strictly on their living standards (badly) measured by their incomes, or merely on the utilitarian purpose of their behaviors.

Developed to better reflect the questions raised by poverty, famine and inequality between men and women, the economic approach of social choice by capabilities leads to the question of well-being and the means to freely achieve it. Including by renouncing his own well-being (Amartya Sen presents the example of the hunger strikes of Gandhi, whose purpose was to obtain, without violence, the independence of India.)¹

It is possible to find in this approach ways to broaden the issue of monetization of landscape resources; to highlight issues related to landscape preferences and the benefits that everyone can take from a landscape or another (for his house or a trip for example). If landscape capabilities exist, they represent the ability of a person to freely choose (more or less) the places where they live, or the places they visit or cross. This possibility would oppose the difficulty of not having choices, which is an obstacle to individual freedom.

More choice we have on destination on where we live or what we visit, more diversified are landscape opportunities from the most attractive to the most ordinary. That is to admit all possibilities regardless of their nature and who chooses them. The well-being in a popular camping cannot be compared to a luxury hotel. However it has a relative sense for a person who is feeling different kinds of well-being at different moments of his life, of a year or a day.

Then, it cannot exist, as explains Sen (p.356) equality of capabilities; since everyone can decide his choice if he has that choice. The capability to access a camping is comparable to that of a palace (but is not equal to). There would be no reason to help the campers to access luxury hotel, nor that there would be reason to help old men to die before women, unless the intention is to equalize the life expectancy, which is fair and not disputable ; unless the objective is the equal access to accommodation, which is egalitarian and can be discussed.

The capability approach would allow to articulate landscape and justice by avoiding the issue of social participation in public debate advocated by the European Landscape Convention, Firenze. By identifying the advantages or disadvantages of a person who has to choose his life environment or visit destination, then all landscapes are placed at a same level, without any a priori depreciation. This does not prevent from conceiving several ways to enforce a right to landscape quality, without prejudice to its nature and who adopts it.

In other words, the capability would provide new solution to the issue of landscape assessment. Instead of analyzing landscape values and positions of groups of stakeholders and users of a territory in the

¹ Amartya Sen. *L'idée de justice*, Paris, Flammarion, 2009, p. 350.

manner of anthropologists² in order to identify issues of landscape transformation, it would be possible to ask these same actors and users what options they have identified to come, live or practice a hobby. But also what solutions they have chosen.

Landscape assessment becomes then, the assessment of the capabilities of individuals, but also the achievements of the choices of social practices with spatial dimensions.

One example: Settling in suburban area is often conditioned by the financial capabilities of the candidates, but also by the nature of the landscapes they find there. Then, we find those who have the same budget in similar types of homes and landscapes, whose noticeable character however, vary according the organizations of the public and private spaces³

The inequities reducing in living environments can then be conceived not in terms of transcendental justice (the utopia of the society and institutions of the fairest possible), but in terms of expanding choices and fight against the possible reduction of freedom to decide the best environment of life for ourselves and our family

The challenge of this approach, in line with the economic liberalism, is to judge lived worlds not from values imposed by institutions and their procedures, but based on evaluations of real social achievements.

² DROZ Y, MIEVILLE-OTT V., FORNEY J., SPICHIGER R., 2009. *Anthropologie politique du paysage, valeurs et postures paysagères des montagnes suisses*, Paris, Karthala, 167 p.

³ On this issue, see : Jean Cavaihes et Daniel Joly (éd.), *Les paysages périurbains et leur prix*, Besançon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2006. The researchers have shown that the certain characteristics of landscape had a price, et that the attractivity of suburban living environment is a factor in the residential choice.