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Technical rationality and (de)politicisation of standards
Multi-stakeholder initiatives in sustainable agriculture

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Introduction

Following the launch of the forestry certification initiatives at the beginning of the 1990s, "sustainable voluntary standards" concerning the agricultural commodities sectors (coffee, cocoa, oil palm, soy, biofuels, sugar cane, cotton etc.) have been developed through a process of "roundtables"[1]. These "multi-stakeholder" initiatives have developed globally through "open" mechanisms, bringing together a wide range of economic operators from the agri-food industry mirroring the operators in the "global value chains" (producers, buyers, wholesalers, importers, distributors, national and multinational firms and bankers) as well as the so-called "social" and "environmental" NGOs. Intended to be "private" and voluntary ("non-mandatory") in nature, these initiatives are founded on a rationale focussing on the "failure of governments", in particular in the countries of the South, to take responsibility for environmental goods. The objective of WWF, the leading NGO in the initiative[2], is to "*adopt market mechanisms – such as pressure through a coalition of demand – with a view to solving the problems caused by the market – such as the deterioration of resources*" (interview with WWF, Brazil).

While claiming to be founded on "voluntary" approaches, these initiatives also aim to ensure that the standard is universally adopted (including potentially by producers who do not participate in the roundtable processes) by means of incentives and sanction through demand, i.e. the market. The standard is intended for the world and, moreover, the "mainstream market", contrary to the differentiation approaches adopted for products available on "niche markets" ("organic", "fair trade", etc.). Irrespective of location, it should ensure the equivalence of sustainable agricultural raw material "commodities" (Daviron and Vagneron, 2010) while in particular solving the problem of the deterioration of forestry resources resulting from "mass" agriculture (in particular "agro-industrial" agriculture).

These roundtables, which aim to promote "sustainable" agricultural raw material value chains, focus on two main objectives: the joint identification of good agricultural practices ("sustainable") and the establishment of control of voluntary agricultural production sites by means of third-party certification.

The "multi-stakeholder" format gives the process a specific dimension of collective action and discussion of the solutions to be adopted in light of the environmental and social problems faced. This particularity lies in the drafting of an agreement between parties representing different private or "specific" interests (the "*stakeholders*") who nevertheless aim to define and protect a "common good" focussing on sustainability, as the aim is to define "sustainable agriculture" on a worldwide scale.

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[1] Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) created in 2003, Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS) in 2005, Better Sugar Cane Initiative (BSCI) in 2006, Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) in 2006, Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB) in 2008.
[2] The NGO launched the concept of the first roundtable (RSPO).

The legitimacy of these initiatives, in particular with regard to other methods of public regulation (by governments), is founded on an "inclusive" and open" rationale, i.e. on their capacity to ensure the "*balanced*" participation (and representation) of "*all categories of stakeholders*" in "*participatory*" and "*inclusive*" processes (possible inclusion of all future stakeholders who wish to participate) by means of "*dialogue*" and the desire for "*consensus*" (defined by the absence of sustained opposition).

The participation of "all stakeholders", and by the same token of a "wide range of interests", is at the heart of a new form of legitimacy of action. These "multi-stakeholder initiatives" (MSI) are concomitant with the development of works on "partnered governance" in the academic and consulting sphere, promoting the inclusion of a diverse range of actors in regulation, in particular "private agents" (Zadek and Radovich, 2006; Glasbergen, 2006; Glasbergen *et al*. 2007). The "stakeholder assemblies" are presented as new forms of regulation, through the participation of non-state actors, where more traditional forms of public regulation would be ineffective (Ruggie and Kell, 1999). This literature highlights a certain number of advantages of these new forms of governance, in particular the effect of learning and sharing knowledge and expertise among stakeholders and beyond the limits of the firm (Jenkins *et al.,* 2002) and the involvement, through the principle of inclusion, of all interests groups concerned by the subject (Boström, 2006). These elements would be the basis for the principles of efficiency and authority of these initiatives (Fransen and Kolk, 2007). This legitimacy is shaped and confirmed beyond the academic field by a certain number of guidelines and protocols[3].

This legitimacy is also part of a broader liberal political model of "balancing group interests and power", a model which has become a common locus in American political sciences (Thévenot and Lamont, 2000). The legitimacy of the coalition results from the fact that, in this field, it speaks for a large number of disparate voices representing a wide range of interests, or that it has identified the pros and cons and offers a broader perspective (Thévenot, 2001).

The traditional criticism of these models (MSI) concerns the unequal resources and competences of the participants and the inevitable asymmetry in the balance of power (Fransen and Kolk, 2007).

Echoing the analysis of L. Thévenot (2009a) in "Governing life by standards", we will attempt in this paper to extend this criticism to another criticism. We will illustrate how these

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[3] The guidelines drawn up by *Pi environmental consulting* (2005) and financed by the Swiss Secretariat of Economic Affairs describes the principles for which it is difficult to contest these forms of action – once again the consensus and inclusion of all parties concerned: "*Multi Stakeholder Process enjoys/garners maximum credibility as the outputs are the results of a consensus between (ideally) all the relevant parties and are therefore difficult to contest*".

initiatives lead to a form of "de-politicisation"[4] of standards the insofar as they focus action on the technical rationality and strategic engagement of the actors in the opened public[5] space. These multi-stakeholder initiatives lead to exclusion, despite the "inclusion" precautions taken by all the stakeholders because by focusing the action on a strategic regime and the negotiation of interests, they eliminate other possible forms of participation. Participants, in particular "local communities" and small family farmers feel they have difficulty in making their voices heard in the format of debate proposed. These people see the initiative as a forum where the expression of the principles of justice which they are seeking is put to one side in favour of a regime of strategic action, a regime of negotiation between the parties promoting different interests, which is *a priori* less convenient to them.

Those initiatives indicate a shift in authority towards a contemporary form of "government by objective" (Thévenot, 2009b) which "focuses [reduce] political debate on a measure and an objective". We will show that those initiatives have great difficulty in recognising the multiple principles of justice in the definition of the "common good"[6]. They also find it difficult to take account of personal attachments, opening up to people who are "affected" in their real lives.

The results presented here[7] are based on participatory observation since 2003 within the RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) and RTRS (Roundtable for Responsible Soy), in Asia and Latin America[8]. They are also provided by interviews with participants and non-participants in Europe, Brazil, Argentina, Malaysia and Indonesia (NGOs, plantation firms, industry, foundations and sponsors, consultancy firms, certifiers, family producers and "local communities" in Indonesia).

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[4] I use the term "political" in the sense of "life in the City" and using the definition adopted by L. Pattaroni (2001): organisation, at any level, of the fact of living together, i.e. the coordination of individual activities with a view to constructing a "good" collective (translated from French).

[5] "Public" in this paper is not used in the sense of the state or its institutions. The term refers to the opening of **a forum for political exchange in the plural where individuals explain their visions in public**. The roundtables claim to be an open, participatory forum oriented towards dialogue and providing the opportunity for individuals to express themselves in a public forum. "Public" is used to differentiate both from the concept of "private" and the concept of "proximate" (opening up to attachments, singularity, familiar. Thévenot, 2006).

[6] "Common good" is used in the philosophical sense of the word in reference to the notion of a life which is "good" (Richard-Ferroudji, 2008). It expresses the ordinary meaning of just and unjust (Thévenot, 2006).

[7] This research has enjoyed the support of the National Research Agency (Agriculture and Sustainable Development Programme, project "NORMES. Governing by standards – the standardisation mechanisms in sustainable agriculture", 2006-2009). I would like to extend my particular thanks to Laurent Thévenot for his valuable comments during a work meeting concerning this research, Laura Silva Castaneda, Eve Fouilleux and Philippe Barbereau with whom I regularly exchanged ideas throughout this project as well as all my colleagues in the "Normes" project. I am also particularly grateful to Benoît Daviron and Audrey Richard-Ferroudji who took the time to read and comment on a first draft of this paper.

[8] The annual RTRS conferences (soy) are held in Brazil, Argentina or Paraguay and mainly bring together European and South American actors. The annual RSPO conferences (palm oil) are held in Indonesia, Singapore or Malaysia and mainly bring together European, Malaysian and Indonesian actors (the last two countries contribute x% of global palm oil production).

In the first section, we will present the works in the field of the French "Sociologie pragmatique" which will enable us to extend the criticism of the asymmetric balance of power to a criticism in terms of "formats of participation". These "formats" are founded on a number of different "regimes of engagement" (Thévenot, 2006). They enable us to characterise different constructs of "commonality" in the plural. In the second section, we will present the "regime of engagement" requested by the *roundtables* device. This is based on the stakeholder's capacity to negotiate and defend an interest and favours a liberal construct of commonality in the plural. It weakens the tests of construction of commonality based on the recognition of the plurality of principles of justice of the participants. Arbitration causes certain participants to be eliminated and the critical tests (section 3) to be closed. These initiatives are promoted by a coalition of "international NGOs and industries" which find this construct of commonality suitable. But by prioritising negotiation between parties promoting interests, "detached" from the individual, these initiatives also have great difficulty in recognising the people affected locally.

Section 1. Situating participation in a range of different "regimes of engagement"

1.1. Extending the criticism: from the asymmetric balance of power to the formats of participation

In the academic literature, the traditional criticism of MSIs concerns their inability to regulate the balance of power, in particular between the organisations in the North (which assume key governance positions) and the South (Wolfgang, Reinicke *et al*., 2000; Fransen and Kolk, 2007). It also concerns the incapacity of the organisations in the North, and more specifically NGOs, to represent "vulnerable groups" in their actions, both because they are inclined to defend "global issues" relevant to the countries of the North (global development) and because they are far removed from the vulnerable groups in question, at best enjoying only indirect links with these groups (Fransen and Kolk, 2007). This criticism echoes the criticisms voiced by a number of Brazilian NGOs which refused to join the roundtable on responsible soy (RTRS) due to an imbalance in the forces present both between NGOs and industries and between local/national and international NGOs (Cheyns, 2008). Those Brazilian NGOs felt that the imbalance was too great to "sit at the same table" in search of an agreement beneficial to them.

Works on participation propose to extend this criticism and shift the observation towards another constraint – that of the "formats of participation" (Thévenot, 2006; Charles, 2007; Richard-Ferroudji, 2008). Richard-Ferroudji (2008) demonstrates that the requirements

contained in the "participation imperative"[9] reduce participation to a liberal format of action, excluding other forms of participation. The public arenas involve specific requirements to achieve commonality. People who are not prepared for this commonality can be disqualified. Hence Doidy (2002) demonstrates the difficulties encountered by a fisherman when expressing the adverse circumstances he suffers or talking about the river in terms other than personalised and localised landmarks.

Bühler (2002) illustrates how, by emphasising procedural objectives, participation can lead to de-politicisation and a difficulty "in taking sufficient account of the complexities of real people's real lives", in particular affected or marginalised people. Based on a survey of the Zapatistas movement in Mexico, she suggests "re-scaling" participation beyond the local and resituating "justice" and "dignity" ("recognition of what you are and respect for what you are") at the heart of participation for rethinking the debate around exclusion. These propositions must act as an antidote to forms of manipulation, instrumental rationality or consensus which do not reflect what the participants really think or are too far removed from the fate of the individuals who "engage their life stories".

Richard-Ferroudji (2008) demonstrates that participation as a "stakeholder" excludes types of participants. She questions the capacity of the devices to accommodate forms of legitimacy other than that of the stakeholder. The criticism no longer only concerns the imbalance of power or capacities between stakeholders, but also the disqualification/de-legitimisation of participants other than stakeholders. For example, the participation of a local person or inhabitant should be seen as legitimate even if the person in question cannot claim a representativeness on the scale concerned (Beuret, 2006), or the components of the device should be organised such that the voices of people not prepared for the liberal format of the action can still be heard.

The objective of participation therefore focuses on the devices and their capacity to provide a set of components enabling everyone to be heard (Richard-Ferroudji, 2008). This formalisation is proposed through the works conducted in the field of the French "Sociologie pragmatique", in particular the sociology of "the regimes of engagement".

These works enable us to resituate strategic engagement (largely shaped by the sociology of organisations) as one of, but not the only possible form of action and not to restrict participation to strategy. They also enable us to understand the mechanisms of exclusion through the nature of the formats of participation and to open operational prospects for intervention in the devices themselves.

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[9]This imperative is accompanied by an emphasis on certain terms: discussion, debate, dialogue, participation, partnership and governance and is deployed around the discursive formulation of collective will, openness, the possibility for argumentation and a desire for consensus (Blondiaux and Sintomer, 2002).

1.2. Plurality of "regimes of engagement" and participant figures

In this text, we will rely on the works of L. Thévenot (2006) which provide an analysis framework for breaking down the structure of living together based on different "regimes of engagement". These works enable us to envisage a variety of ways for people to engage in the world or vis-à-vis their environment, from the most public stances to the closest forms of proximity, by highlighting three regimes of engagement in particular: engagement aimed at qualifying a common good ("justifiable engagement"), strategic engagement which is better known in the social and political sciences ("engagement in a plan") and "familiar" engagement (table 1). They enable us to characterise different constructs of "commonality" in the plural.

We also refer to the works of Richard-Ferroudji (2008). The author drew on this diversity of "regimes of engagements" to formalise participation in local water management initiatives. She considers three types of participant who may be expected or invited, each of whom embodies a form of legitimacy: the "moral subject", the "stakeholder" and the "attached person" (table 1). The capacity of the mechanism to deal with the differences between participants is called into question by incorporating several forms of "legitimacy", i.e. different "participant figures".

Table 1. Plurality of regimes of engagement

Regime of engagement	Understanding of things	Participant figure	Good engaged or targeted
Justifiable action, qualification of the common good	**Qualified** object	**Moral subject** (question the common good)	**Common good**
Engagement in a plan and Strategy	Object as a **function**	**Stakeholder**, project promoter, highlight his interests, strategy	Satisfaction of the **accomplished action**, voluntary capacity
Familiar engagement	Understanding through **personalised** landmark	**Attached person**	Physical ease, care, affection

From Richard-Ferroudji, 2008, based on Thévenot, forthcoming.

Let us specify the nature of these types of legitimacy through the three regimes of engagement.

The "moral subject" in the regime of "justifiable action"

A first possibility for participation in the composition of an agreement can be found in the regime of justifiable engagement. This regime of engagement was explained by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), focussing on the plurality of principles of justice which define the

characteristics of the "common good". In this regime, the people qualify what is "just" (without delving deeper into the strategic positions). They are expected as the "moral subject"[10]. This regime of engagement enables us to take the moral capacities of people seriously together with their tendency to engage in the composition of a common good which goes beyond specific interests (Richard-Ferroudji, 2009).

The challenge for the participation devices therefore concerns their capacity to incorporate a plurality of voices based on the recognition of a **plurality** of values, world visions or **principles of justice** among the participants (Thévenot, 2006; Richard-Ferroudji, 2008, 2009).
This pluralism has been formalised in six "orders of worth" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). The environment can thus be qualified by its beauty or the unexpected pleasure derived from the distant noise of a jaguar in a forest ("inspiration" worth); by its patrimonial value and an attachment to a place, for example of the individuals who grew up there ("domestic" worth); according to an "industrial" worth of efficient production (agro-forestry management is disqualified for its capacity to produce efficiently on a large scale); in relation to a "market" worth (a profitable means of management); its capacity to provide equal access to resources ("civic" worth); or its ability to communicate with general opinion ("fame" worth).

These different orders of worth can be brought together in an agreement on the common good by people with different world visions. These people create what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) refer to as the "compromise": "the possibility, bounded in space and time, to make two or more orders of worth compatible and to encompass them, within these limits, in an overarching, unifying qualification".

Within the scope of creating a common good, people must clarify the "orders of worth" engaged in the situation and what they have (or do not have) in common. This regime requires a public justification; the participants must be able to present and explain their principles or their conception of "sustainability" ("*a more efficient production to feed the planet*", "*a more equitable distribution of value between operators in the chain to guarantee living conditions for rural populations in the South*" etc.) and remove themselves from their singularity in order to talk about a common cause.

The "stakeholder" in the regime of "engagement in a plan" and "strategy"

Another form of participation lies in the "engagement in a plan" (Thévenot, 1990, 2006), where the typical participant is the "stakeholder" who defends one or more specific interests. In this regime, the environment is no longer "qualified" in the same way as in the previous regime; it is seen as a function. It must enable "the accomplishment of an action or need to be satisfied". In this context, forests are by turn seen as means and needs to "*stock carbon*" (an international environmental NGO), to "*hunt*" (an inhabitant), to "*plant and supply the*

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[10] By moral, we understand "the expectations weighing on each individual and guiding his engagements according to whether he is aiming for what is fair or what is good" (Pattaroni, 2001 – translated from french).

markets" or to "*satisfy a demand*" (a plantation firm). For the participant, engagement in a plan is a strategic engagement, founded on voluntary capacity, individual intent, choice, the project, the interest, the strategy and the plan to achieve the goals and objectives. In the case of multi-party composition, the imperative of "public justification" is not necessarily called on; it gives way to a construct which engages the "individuals making choices in the liberal public" (Thévenot, 2008). Communication with the other participants then takes the form of a clearly identified choice (promoting an opinion, defending an interest) or even a preference. Multi-party composition aims to include or weight these different individual positions or preferences (Thévenot, 2006, 2009b).

Coalitions of interest groups favour this regime of engagement by adopting practices aimed at negotiation between parties with conflicting interests or needs (for example between those who wish to use the soil to grow food crops, those who want to farm industrial cash crops and those who wish to preserve the forests).

The "attached person" in the regime of "familiar engagement"

In the case of "familiar engagement" (Thévenot, 1994, 2006), people demonstrate attachment and recognise intimately personalised relations with their proximate surroundings which are familiar to them. However, the familiar engagements of others are foreign to us and impossible to create commonality (Thévenot, 2007). An inhabitant who is familiar with his environment may be capable of managing changes to his milieu through personalised landmarks removed from the distant and objectifiable knowledge of "environmentalists" educated at university, although he is unable to give them common form. To be sharable, "local", "personal" and "familiar" information must be given a common form (Richard-Ferroudji, 2008).

This regime also enables us to consider the adverse circumstances suffered by the participants who are affected in person: "[you do not know what it is like] "*to lose your land or to be dependent on industry. Many of our compatriots finished in a psychiatric hospital*" (Indonesian villager).

Lastly, this regime recognises the role of "care", which "requires familiarity with the other in all his peculiarities" (Pattaroni, 2001). "Taking care of another person presupposes a concern with what touches and affects this person most directly in their proximate surroundings" (Thévenot, 2009). In the case of the roundtables, this "concern" is more easily achieved by participants who are engaged directly with the people affected where they live; however it becomes highly abstract when the participants have not put any roots down or have no attachment there. This is the case of almost all the representatives of the international and European NGOs participating in the roundtables.

In light of this framework, the "production" of standards in the "multi-stakeholder" devices can be examined with a focus on the capacity of these initiatives to operate with a plurality of stakeholders (argument of the authority of the MSIs), as well as a plurality both of principles of justice (qualifying the common good from a pluralist perspective) and of attachments (in the proximate surroundings) with a view to interact in the plural (Richard-Ferroudji, 2008). This framework therefore extends the concept of "multi" (with several participants) beyond the presence of the "stakeholder" only. How do the roundtables focus the legitimacy and engagement of the person? How do they process the pluralism of values? What is their capacity to accommodate local, proximate elements?

Section 2: Focusing participation in the roundtables: strategic engagement

The object of this section is to identify how and to what end the roundtables focus the legitimacy and the engagement of the individual. We will discuss the role and qualities expected of the ("good") participant, the material components and the forms of dialogue and debate proposed.

2.1. Role and expected qualities of the participants

We feel that it is important to examine the role of the participants for two reasons. First, it is regularly mentioned by the participants ("*did they fulfil their role well?*", "*would they be able to play their role*", "*you have to play your role!*"). Second, it provides an initial focus for the action, even if the roles subsequently change and become more complex. We will examine the issue of role in terms of functions but also the qualities implicitly and explicitly expected of the participants.

2.1.1 Defending an interest

In the roundtables which we have studied – RSPO and RTRS – the status of member and the principle of representativeness deployed are founded directly on the concept of the "stakeholder", who is the central participant figure. In the RSPO, therefore, it is essential to belong to one of the 7 categories of stakeholder stipulated in the statutes to be a member: "growers, processors and traders, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks and investors, environmental/nature conservation NGOs, social/developmental NGOs". The stakeholders "promote specific stakes" or "defend specific interests" and at numerous points in the discussions, they are grouped into categories referred to as "interest groups".

The state and the research institutions are not considered as stakeholders in their own right. The roundtable accords them the status of "affiliated" members or "observers", granting them the right to attend general assemblies but without the voting rights of the other members

("ordinary members"). These entities ("regulatory authorities, governmental agencies, academia, major donors") are considered to be little or less concerned from the point of view of specific interests.

Once this definition of a participant has been established, the principle of "good representation" at the roundtable lies in the capacity to ensure the participation of "*all the categories of stakeholders*" as well as guaranty a balance of interests ("balanced representation"). "*It is a very common feature of Multi Stakeholder Process to group stakeholders into different categories, so as to achieve an* <u>*optimum balance of interest*</u>" (Pi environmental consulting, 2005). Similarly, "*inclusiveness*" is quantitatively[11] defined by the number of members and by the "*balance of power in decision-making*" (*Idem*). This balance is in particular reflected in the decision-making bodies by the number of seats per category of stakeholder.

It is expected that each participant "plays a role": that of "defending a specific interest". Even if the roles become increasingly complicated, the "social NGOs" are expected to defend social interests, the "environmental NGOs" are expected to defend environmental interests etc.:

"*If WWF, which deals with the environment, says it's OK, then it's OK [concerning the specifications]. We (the industry) aim to earn money and increase our profits.*" (Board of oil and margarine producers, NL).

The legitimisation of the roundtables is thus founded on the capacity of the participants to defend an interest and to belong to an "interest group": "*if you are an individual[12] you are invisible*" (social NGO) and the capacity of the initiative to facilitate a "balanced" representation of the interest groups and a very large number of participants.

2.1.2. Occupying the space, being proactive

A second important characteristic of participation is based on the capacity to be voluntary. The aim of the roundtables is to implement so-called "voluntary" standards. Generally, the participants are not formally invited to the roundtables (for example by a committee); they "invite themselves" (by registering for the conferences and working groups, by applying to be a member, etc.) or are "co-opted" (encouraged to participate through the influence of their networks). The qualities of "good participant" are based on this voluntary capacity which is a key element in the negotiations: it is essential "*not to be shy*", to know the others' plans, "*to understand the stakes*", "*to be proactive*", to take ones place (the "victim" figure is disqualified), "*to lobby*, "*to take the floor*", "*to intervene*", or "*to make the first move*". A

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[11] While the "soy" roundtable has experienced difficulty in increasing the number of its participants, the "palm oil" roundtable has stimulated considerable interest, the number of members rising from 55 in 2004 to 103 in 2006 and to more than 300 in 2008. Producers engaged represented 55% of the global volume produced. This quantification is one of the elements of the representativeness and credibility of the process expressed by the roundtable.

[12] In the sense of "not represented by a category of stakeholders".

Dutch certifier asked about what limits the participation of "smallholders"[13] in the RSPO explained the voluntary capacities necessary to negotiate and provide information on the required format, i.e. the expression of a preference rather than a public justification ("I want that!"):

> *There are different cultures. I mean Dutch are very direct: "I want that!" Faced with this, you need to be able to resist, not to be shy. [...] For directors of Indonesian companies, it's different: they have travelled, they are used to negotiating, to speaking with other cultures, for example European cultures* (certifier, NL).

2.1.3. Engaging in practical, quick and effective action

Finally, participants are expected to engage in the action in a "practical" manner in order to find a quick and effective solution. It is not so much the understanding of the common problem that counts but the search for quick solutions.

> "*Here, it is different from an "ecological foot print" or scientific approach. Scientists can spend years finding an ideal solution which may, furthermore, prove to be inapplicable. The RSPO is not a scientific approach but a multi-stakeholder approach, i.e. what is the best we can do at present so that everyone can implement it? We are not dealing with the absolute or the ideal; we are looking for a practical solution*" (representative of a board of industrialists, NL).

The notion of "stakeholder" incorporates this requirement of being operational and focusing on a specific, precise and circumscribed subject, for example "the sustainability of palm oil". Consequently, the absence of governments in the decision-making processes[14] of the roundtables is justified (by the organisers) by their "*incapacity to take a quick decision*" and because their mandate extends to much broader or "horizontal" themes ("global issues"), such as the issue of land rights, trade regulation etc. which would require an extension of the good concerned.

"*If you involve governments, it becomes more political. It takes too much time. They need mandate to take decision. It is like United Nation process (climate regulation, Kyoto protocol, etc.)*" (Board of Industries, Europe).

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[13] "Smallholder" is a term used by the participants in the roundtable to designate family producers farming small areas (< 50 ha).

[14] The representatives of the state can participate in the open forums (plenary sessions, etc.) but do not have the status of ordinary member (including the right to vote in the general assembly) like the other categories of "stakeholder"; nor do they have a seat on the Executive Board.

2.2. The components of the device: a world of opinions and interests

The material components also focus the action. We will present here certain components of the collectivisation of discussion.

The roundtables can be broken down into a wide variety of "scenes" ranging from plenary sessions, which are the most public scenes, to more informal lunches and "aperitifs". The annual conferences can enjoy the participation of up to 500 people and are built around the different components of the device: plenary sessions in a traditional conference format (large room, timed interventions, presentations on the rostrum with "PowerPoints", session chairman, microphones etc.) as well as more "atypical" forms proposed by consulting agencies, for example the "world cafés" (debates in small groups which are more convivial and encourage "conversation") and the "Open Space Technology" (*infra*). These instances of dialogue are combined with more or less formal breaks or work sessions, discussions over coffee, aperitifs, dinners with "local" festivities (dances etc.) and gift presentations. Parallel meetings with varying configurations are organised (sometimes as an informal event) by the participants (working groups, meetings "between NGOs", press conferences, bilateral negotiations, side events, etc.). Outside these annual meetings, small groups meet more frequently, in particular the working groups (for example the group responsible for drafting the sustainability criteria document) and the Executive Board which is strategic in decision-making.

2.2.1. Engagement in a plan, lobbying and strategy

The circulation procedures between different scenes are explained and each participant can be aware of the duration of a given process as well as the scenes in which it is handled. For example, the process of drafting the principles and criteria (P&C) of the RSPO is defined in accordance with a very precise plan known to all: a London consultancy firm (Proforest) would prepare a first draft based on a limited consultation with the stakeholders, then a working group of 25 "experts" would be appointed and meet in person three times over a period of 18 months to prepare the final version. This 18-month period will be punctuated by 2 public consultations on the Internet, each lasting 60 days, and by a number of debates held during the annual roundtable. The 25-person working group would be placed under the supervision of the Executive Board. Finally, the final document will be amended by a vote during the general assembly of the members.

Some scenes are clearly strategic: drawing up the agenda of the annual roundtables, appointing the experts for the working groups, etc., are tasks conducted by restricted groups, such as the Executive Board or the Organising Committees in which the initiators of the roundtables play an important role.

The means of appointing the participants in some restricted working groups ensures a decisive role for the network and for access to information. In the case of the group of experts responsible for defining the criteria for sustainable palm oil, co-optation led to "top-down" representation. The 25 people responsible for developing the criteria for sustainable palm oil were selected by restricted group (organising committee) and, throughout the entire process, were supposed to consult actors within their category using a list which they drew up themselves (generally by calling on their network).

Similarly, the positions of hosts/coordinators of the world café debates and workshops and summary author are potentially strategic and perceived as such by certain participants to influence or focus the debates. The role of the "lobbyists" is thus potentially very important in a number of these scenes.

2.2.2. Organising a market of ideas and opinions

Certain components of the device attempt to move away from the format of "engagement in a plan" to explore new forms of engagement (and dialogue), in particular through technologies implemented by consultancy firms such as the "world cafés" and "open space technology".

The "world cafés" are times for short discussions (20 minutes) in small groups of approximately ten held in several rounds. At each round, the participants break up and form new groups. The aim of the promoters of this concept[15] is to establish a format for discussion reminiscent of "*conversation*", a creative exploration ("*play, experiment, and improvise*") and the development of a collective intelligence based on the numerous encounters: "*link and connect ideas*", "*allow for a dense web of connections*".

In "open space technology"[16], the groups are all placed in a circle in a large room with no physical separation between them. The participants move from group to group as they wish with no specific plan in a room where the centre remains empty in order to create the conditions necessary for encounters as the different participants move around. The aim of this technique is to break away, momentarily, from planned action in order to embrace the excitement of the game, listen to contrasting opinions while connecting them through the creation of a "market place" where human exchanges and ideas can be found (Owen, 1997). The so-called "two feet" rule offers the chance for "fluttering" mobility: "*if you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and go somewhere more productive*" (Owen, 1995). Symbolised by the image of a butterfly, the rule encourages participants to move from one group to another according to their focuses and their curiosity, while the image of the bee illustrates that the action involves "pollinating" (ideas) from group to group.

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[15] www.theworldcafe.com

[16] www.openspaceworld.org. This concept was formalised by the consultant Harrison H. Owen in the United States.

Furthermore, the process is directed by another important rule: "*Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened*". This rule should ensure that the severe constraints weighing on the search for ideal solutions or the integration of the future are relaxed: "*this principle keeps people focused on the here and now, and eliminates all of the could-have-beens, should-have-beens or might-have-beens. What is the only thing there is at the moment* (web site). Owen specifies that the very essence of this principle is to focus on: "*what is" in the room at this moment and at this time. In other words, open space technology is a present-centred approach to holding meetings, here, now*". He stresses that recognising this principle saves us from "great anxiety, which would be too much to bear, in order to remain focused and see the opportunities of the present" (Owen, 199x).

These meeting technologies are "connectionist" and aim to increase the interactions between people over short period of time. The search for solutions focuses on the creation of a "web", a multi-stakeholder market for ideas and opinions. These components of the initiative do not focus on a regime of qualifying the common good. The diversity of the participants and the speed of the exchanges more often than not lead to lists of opinions being produced or choices being made between the different options provided. The questions examined in the world cafés, for example, aim to confirm choices ("*what are the strengths and merits of the RSPO certification procedure?*"), to work on the choices of options using technical documents prepared in advance ("*debate on the certification systems and verification options*") or to make suggestions concerning highly specific and technical questions ("*how can smallholders be trained?*"). The compartmentalisation and specialisation of the questions do not require participants to envisage a common horizon focusing on issues which engage the common good. The initiative allows the pressure on the participants to be relaxed in terms of "moral responsibility". The principle "*Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened*" emphasises this idea of detachment from moral requirement or from stakes which "weigh" on the future of humanity in order to focus on the present and the set of opinions which, when connected, should produce solutions.

Focussing participation, both through the legitimacy of the "participant figures" and through the "formats of participation", therefore leads to the strategic action and the stakeholder being given a major role. The aim is not to put a common good in perspective or to express the pluralism of values; on the contrary, they give way to individual public expression in terms of debatable opinions and negotiable interests proper to the individual engaged in the "liberal public" (Thévenot, 2007).

2.3. Exclusions relating to strategic engagement

These expectations vis-à-vis the participant give rise to a certain number of exclusions and raise problems concerning the imperative of equal participation contained in the notion of "balanced representation".

First, people or groups who are not members of "informed" networks or who are not organised in visible groups are "absent"[17]. This was the case of "smallholders" and "local communities" during the early years and even now of workers on the oil palm plantations, in particular migrant workers.

The observed absence of an important category of actors from the RSPO, that of the "smallholders" (who supply 30% of the world production of palm oil), was justified during the early years by the "*inability*" of these people to provide visible representation of a large group: "*it is too early for an association of smallholders to be present on the RSPO Board* [on which a seat is reserved for it] *as they must be able to consult and represent all smallholders, whereas this is far from being the case at present*" (Board of Malayan planters).

Second, the participants who do not take their place at their own initiative, in particular if they belong to little-recognised or little-esteemed groups, then risk seeing their representation be replaced by other participants. In a certain number of restricted working groups, "smallholder" and "local community" representation is thus entrusted primarily to so-called social NGOs and to consultancy firms. In larger or more open scenes (plenary sessions, parallel workshops, "world cafés", etc.), their representation is substituted by every category of stakeholder present, talking about "the case of smallholders", taking decisions concerning them or presenting points of view which engage behavioural standards; this may involve industrial firms in the value chain, plantation companies, certifiers, bankers etc., a fact which may appear paradoxical if we are aware of the divergence between their own interests (if we examine interests) and those of the people on whose behalf they speak. This substitute representation of smallholders, in particular by plantation companies, is not new in the history of the development of palm oil which has long pigeon-holed smallholders in a position of "assistance".

For certain members, the absence of local communities and smallholders raises the problem of the legitimacy of the process, but the participants must "take their place": "*yes, the absence of smallholders in the RTRS affects its legitimacy, but they didn't want to come*[18]*; the RTRS is open!*" (Dutch consultancy firm). Beyond the non-recognition of the capacities of autonomy (prolonging "assistance"), it is the capacity to occupy the space which is at stake ("lobbying"). This capacity can be seen in all the scenes, whether it is a case of occupying the debate in the workshops or the world cafés or of being the first to take the floor during the short periods of debate in the plenary sessions. However, this contradicts other visions of discussion in plural, in particular the vision which provides for time-sharing and a system where by each participant speaks his/her mind, in a longer process. Hence, an Indonesian farmer expresses his disappointment at the length of debates (in general lasting 15 to 30

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[17] The inverted commas indicate that they can be present physically but do not have any "legitimacy" recognised by the participants.

[18] In the case of the RTRS, the federation FETRAF-SUL (family agriculture) decided to withdraw from the process.

minutes) compared to the number of participants present and at the organisation of the right to speak:

 "*The debate times in the plenary sessions are too short. When the room is full like that* [500 participants], *you need 30 minutes. 30 minutes of questions. Here, there were only 3 questions. And you have to leave time for people to answer; even if it takes several hours to answer, the time has to be allocated [...] Second, there are no "rules": someone asks a question and the others don't have the chance [to do so].*
- What rules would be good, for example?
- OK, we sit down in groups: "the smallholders [sit] here, the NGOs here, the planters here". So you can see who is who. You can see who is asking a question. And whoever is chairing the meeting should allow everyone to speak. That way, all the groups speak in every session during debate" (Interview with an Indonesian farmer, "smallholders" group).

These proposals underline the disparity between the rules of debate where each participant must take his place and those where the device is responsible for granting a place to everyone (in this case the chairperson, but also through the distribution of the participants in the room).

Finally, the necessary operationality and concentration on a specific, precise and circumscribed theme ("the sustainability of palm oil") leads to participants being sidelined if they attempt to refocus the debate on a broader issue, implying a moral and political burden and an extension of the good considered.

Focusing the roundtables according to each agricultural "commodity" therefore leads participants to avoid examining issues which are considered to be "transversal", "horizontal", global" or "too political": questions concerning land rights and in particular customary rights, living conditions and the conditions of "migrant" workers on plantations, the use of GMOs, production or consumption ways (what are we willing to change in our ways of consuming, what agriculture do we want tomorrow?), etc. During a workshop with a small group of participants aimed at validating a negative social impact of soy (RTRS), one of the participants voiced his criticism publicly: "*The problem is not only soy, it is more complex; it concerns questions of price-setting on the international market and subsidies. It is the entire agricultural model which must be discussed. The model of maximum profitability pushes small-scale farmers to sell their land and the farmers to migrate!*" However, these remarks were brushed aside: "*our discussion here must stay within the framework of a private initiative aimed at proposals concerning soy!*" (workshop coordinator, consultancy firm, NL).

Similarly, the "indigenous people" and "smallholders" who see the RSPO as a political arena to make the problems linked to "land issues" known to the international community are systematically disqualified during their interventions in the plenary sessions on the pretext that they are "off the topic". The way in which they tackle a political issue in the arena – "giving farmers justice" with regard to land rights and considering the people affected – is in

contrast with the technical rationality generally applied within the framework of the roundtable:

> *"- What do you mean by: 'We [WWF] are not political'?*
> *- Other NGOs have clear <u>political implication</u>. For example, Greenpeace have political implication in social issues. And I agree on those. But <u>our role</u> (WWF) is to be sure <u>industry</u> wants to talk. […] We also protect local communities, but we still do it in a very formal way. For example, if you look at the local communities: you say 'it should be clear whose land is it'. Because it is not clear. To be <u>neutral</u>. So you do not say: 'you decide! Or you must protect the communities!' It is a general statement. <u>Everybody should agree</u> with what you propose" (interview with WWF).*

Tackling the debate in terms of "*it should be clear whose land is it*" reduces the settlement of the land issue to obtaining deeds and legal rights, thereby strengthening the position of the plantation companies and the states in the conflicts (although this is not examined in the context of the roundtable)[19]. However, the local populations are fighting on other levels of rights which are not clearly recognised in their countries: customary right in a human rights perspective[20] (i.e. with respect to the social and historical constructs) which, if examined during a roundtable, cannot ignore an open debate in a political perspective (not only technical).

2.4. Urgency and the fear of disagreement as a justification of the de-politicisation of the action

2.4.1. Urgency, expediency or justice?

The desire to keep industry on-board, to involve it in finding an agreement ("*Our role is to be sure industry wants to talk*" – WWF), will lead to the legitimisation of a "*pragmatic*" or "*realistic*" attitude (<u>in the common rather than academic sense of the word here</u>). This attitude focuses on finding quick and effective solutions and on negotiating solutions based on the principle that they exist. At the level of interests, this participant figure opposes the "idealist" who would aim for the common understanding of the problem and, more specifically, would endeavour to qualify what is just or fair.

> *"Ideally, you would say "stop soy production". But <u>pragmatically</u>, that is not going to happen. There are too many <u>interests</u>. If they make money with soy, companies are not going to stop. So NGOs need to be <u>pragmatic</u> and establish a set of criteria that allow them to continue while on the other hand saving part of the nature or the social values. That is the balance you try to find" (environmental NGO, NL).*

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[19] From a legislative point of view, it is very difficult for indigenous populations and local communities to obtain access to land titles and, in certain cases, the legal implementation framework is not yet in place (for example for collective lands), Le Bihan *et al.*, forthcoming.

[20] UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This "pragmatic" attitude can also be defined as the acceptance of an "industrial" reason which might for example lead to naturalising "global demand" and the market: "*industry must produce and it produces what the market wants*" (following section):

> "*The industry only works on production, and they say: 'we just produce what is demanded. We do not have responsibility to those kinds of things'* [should we eat meat or soy?]. *We take that as a fact, that soy is needed. […] If not, many people will disagree. The production is a reality and you should work with reality*" (interview with environmental NGO, NL).

The so-called "realistic" or "pragmatic" attitude, based on a notion of urgency, will lead to the debating of world visions and the composition of a common good being put to one side: instead it will be a question of negotiating on the basis of existing solutions rather than debating.

> "*I have my heart, and I think a lot of nice things have to be done. But we are in a hurry also. So I do not have time to wait for all people to be educated and understand the problem and analyse and bla bla bla. And there are solutions*" (interview with environmental NGO, NL).

The term "bla bla bla" crystallises this criticism of engagement towards the qualification of a common good.

Furthermore, this attitude will lead to the justification of disparities in legitimacy in terms of participation, in particular for minority voices: "*Small producers are not involved in the RTRS. […] I mean we want the poor people to be well represented. But how do you manage to do so? It's very hard. I am afraid we are a bit more pragmatic. I would love to think it could be possible, but in the meantime you have to do something. It is not ideal, but we have to move*" (interview with environmental NGO, NL).

This disparity is presented as the desire for a balance between two requirements, that of acting quickly and achieving the desired ends without being bound by the rules of what is "just" and that of legitimacy, which raises the question of what is "just": "*The challenge for any multi-stakeholder process related to sustainable commodity production is to strike the right balance between the needs of expediency and legitimacy*" (Pi environmental consulting, 2005). "Expediency" refers to the idea of quick, useful and necessary action even if it is not necessarily fair; it similarly includes a sense of self-interest which runs contrary to that of justice[21].

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[21] The definitions of the term "expediency" in two **English** dictionaries:
"An action that is useful or necessary for a particular purpose, but not always fair or right" (Oxford University Press); "The use of methods that produce an immediate result or solution to a problem, but may not be fair or honest" (Macmillian) ;
and in three **American** dictionaries: "The quality or state of being suited to the end. A mean of achieving a particular end"; "A regard for what is politic or advantageous rather than for what is right or just. A sense of self-interest"; "Providing an easy and quick way to solve a problem or do something".

We clearly see here the difficulty in handling the notion of justice, necessary to idea of legitimacy and yet brushed aside by the argument of "pragmatism".

2.4.2. Technical rationality or the weighting of criteria: the fear of disagreement

Although the RSPO targets a "better world" and the promotion of "sustainable" palm oil[22], the participants interviewed agree that there were no debate, even within the smaller groups such as the "Board" or the "Criteria working group", on the definition of sustainability or the type of "common goods" engaged in the negotiation. The expression of "values" is postponed in favour of a regime of more strategic action:

"*The definition of sustainability has not been debated, even in the first restricted groups; everyone comes with his own hidden agenda!*" (consultant for the creation of the roundtable).
"*We have very few debates concerning the principles and very few discussions concerning the long-term visions. For example, what will be the level of demand in 20 years? Should we produce palm oil or something else? Thinking about development in relation to the world in general, they don't even do that at the G8!*" (member of the working group defining criteria on sustainability).

Avoiding debate on the principles of sustainability should enable tensions or potential disagreement to be avoided: "*What is sustainability? You will disagree. It's too long. Nobody has the same vision!*" (interview with WWF). It is the PC&I method[23] (Principles, Criteria, Indicators) which is put forward by the initiators to lead the participants towards an agreement on the specifications of sustainability. Applied here, this method involves drawing up lists of criteria without fully considering the principles.

> "*[this method] provides the possibility not to frighten in the beginning. You agree first at a general level, you do not go into details. You are not fighting. […] Because you need to have a commitment from the industry*" (interview with WWF, NL).
> "*With the criteria, the roundtable became technical, it became less and less political*" (consultant, NL).

The debates are therefore guided by technical rationality[24] which leads a disregard for the discussion of the "principles" which is nevertheless a source of unveiling pluralism (and apparent disagreement), concentrating instead on lists of "criteria" where each participant can

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[22] The aim of the RSPO is to "*promote the growth and use of sustainable palm oil*"; "*for a better world*" (rspo.org web site).

[23] The method involves defining the general principles of what sustainable palm oil is which then gives rise to a certain number of criteria. A principle can be divided into several criteria. The indicators are the data collected which, often taken together, allow us to measure whether or not a criteria has been satisfied.

[24] Contrary to the notion of political, page 4 (political in the sense of life in the City).

put his opinion by suggesting "his criteria" while avoiding the process of composition around a common good.

In this regime, the actors see compromise as a negotiation reminiscent of sharing a cake. Irrespective of whether or not we can envisage making it bigger, we have to "surrender" part of our potential gain.

> "- *How do you define negotiation?*
> - *I go there, and <u>I am of the</u> <u>opinion</u> that biodiversity loss should be stopped. And then, there are farmers, and they tell me, that is all very fine, but 'I want to develop, I want to cut the forest to install a farm and make a living'. And then <u>we sit down, talk</u> to each other, and come <u>to a decision that allows him to cut maybe part of this forest, and conserve the rest</u>, or whatever. So that's negotiation*". (NGO, NL)

While the principles were the subject of very little debate in the context of the RSPO, the negotiations concerning the criteria lasted 18 months, giving rise to a list of 39 criteria. The preparation of the list of criteria and their content was organised by interest groups. The procedure intended each (interest) group to discuss the criteria "*that directly related to their own constituent group*": industry examined the criteria in the "economic" pillar, the social NGOs examined the criteria in the "social" pillar, the environmental NGOs examined the environmental criteria etc. This separation of discussions by interests, similar to "pillars", reminds us that the participants play a role linked to one of the "3 pillars", defending a given interest while also illustrating the difficulty in establishing convergence around different world visions in a context where partitioned negotiation between promoters of interests is given priority. Once again, this separation is presented as a solution which will help to avoid conflicts and prevent strong tensions from surfacing. In particular, it will prevent fundamental divergences from being revealed.

Section 3: Oppression[25] of the regime of strategic engagement

The roundtables justify their action by the inclusive and open nature of the process. However, the characteristics of the device that we have presented assume that the participants are "stakeholders", i.e. proactive, informed, represented by an interest group and prepared for a regime of negotiation, a description which does not necessarily apply to all participants. The acceptance of an "industrial" reason and the threat of a breakup resulting from the differences between the participants lead to political elements being reduced. Deploying a technical rationality and reformatting disagreement as a choice of options has enabled participants to meet whereas this was rarely the case in the past. Some arguments and people have nevertheless been excluded in the process. What has become of the participation of actors

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[25] In reference to the analysis framework presented in Thévenot, 2009a.

who request other engagements, such as the desire to "talk about justice"? How is pluralism dealt with? Do these initiatives allow the people affected to be taken into consideration?

3.1. From pluralism to the closure of the criticism: arbitration relating to the common good

"Sustainability", expressed by means of its specifications (and in particular the 39 criteria), is characterised by the confirmation of the pre-existing "market-industrial" compromise in the development of the cash crops in question (large-scale production to satisfy a global demand). This compromise, observed from the very first negotiations in 2002, is reaffirmed in the different scenes of the roundtable, in particular the presentations during the plenary sessions. Justification focusing on what should be good to do, specifying a common cause, is therefore not completely eliminated from the roundtables. However, it is not organised around a composition recognising a broader pluralism of values and world visions. Furthermore, these moments of public justification, during which the agreement on sustainability is confirmed, has great difficulty in incorporating the critical test from other principles of justice. "Arbitration"[26] operations have led to certain orders of worth being put aside due to the risk of not being able to find an agreement.

3.1.1. Consolidation of the agro-industrial production models: affirmation of "market" and "industrial" orders of worth

The "market-industrial" compromise was confirmed from the first restricted committee meetings between European NGOs and industries. The agreement was defined around the idea that it is "good" to promote the agro-industrial development of palm oil farming, but only in locations which do not encroach on forests. Industry turned to the "economic" and "social" pillars of "sustainable development" to counterbalance the environmental requirement of protecting resources. It justified the virtues of the development of the crop by means of macroeconomic and social variables such as "the development of poor regions", "lifting the populations of the South out of poverty", "creating employment in rural areas", etc. In subsequent roundtable meetings, the naturalisation of the global growth in palm oil demand was also constantly reaffirmed, demand supposed to "*increase from 28 to 50 million tonnes in 2030*", and led to "*forecasting a corresponding global increase in production to satisfy the increased demand*" (plenary session, 2nd roundtable, industry, NL). In subsequent meetings, WWF together with the other conservationist NGOs would accept this industrial reason if it were accompanied by protection of the forests, the focal point of the 3rd "environmental" pillar of these roundtables: *Representatives of WWF "emphasised that WWF fully recognises the social dimension of sustainability* [justified and adopted by industry*] and is therefore not*

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[26] The composition test is refined by removing participants or objects relating to certain "orders of worth" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

against the development of new plantations, but "it is mindful about where you established these plantations" (official report of the preparatory meeting in Europe, 2002).

In the end, it is the term "sustainable growth" which summarises the compromise made with industry and, in its statutes of 2004, the RSPO therefore had the task of "*promoting the growth [and use] of sustainable oil*". By the same token, the notion of profit (of the firm) would be naturalised in the "economic pillar" of sustainable development: "*If you have the view of "sustainable growth", yes industry can take responsibility for the common good. However, it is difficult to ask firms to reduce their profit levels*" (Board of oil-producing industries, NL). The definition of the "economic pillar" content by means of the term "profit" (of the firm) is regularly confirmed in the roundtables with the use of the "managerial" version of "sustainable development" created by consultancy firms and focusing on the "*3 Ps: Profit, People, Planet*" to designate the "3 pillars", where "profit" becomes one of the three focuses of sustainable development.

The agreement between these "market" worth (corporate profit) and "industrial" worth of production (economies of scale, efficient production, satisfying global demand) on the one hand and the environmental requirement (conservation of the forests) on the other is reflected in the confirmation of the choice of intensifying agricultural output as expressed by the revised term "ecological intensification". This agreement would lead to a consolidation of the agro-industrial production models already in place for more than 50 years: economies of scale, improved yields, intensification, monoculture, (bio)technologies, etc. The fact that GMOs seeds were accepted in the "responsible soy" specifications of the RTRS by the environmental NGOs contributes to this desire to channel agriculture without calling into question its productive and economic function – through an increase in the productivity of the soil – to better ensure the conservation of the forests elsewhere. This agreement is different from other production models which, on the contrary, envisage agriculture-nature integration (systems of associated or diversified crops, agro-forestry etc.).

3.1.2. Arbitration relating to pluralism

The plural composition of commonality, in a regime of qualification of the "common good", assumes openness to the plurality of all the orders of worth "so that no specification of the common good is neglected in the political debate within a specific community" (Thévenot, 2009b). This engagement is perceived as a threat of the breakup of the community as soon as the differences in principles of justice between the participants appear insurmountable (*idem*). This threat of breakup is avoided by means of a certain number of arbitrations that led to the exclusion of participants and arguments, in particular those arguments seen as being too far removed from the "market-industrial" compromise.

We will cite the case of Fetraf-Sul[27] (the federation representing family agriculture), which hoped to mobilise the RTRS to open the debate on the agro-industrial production model for soy in Brazil. The federation was finally pushed to withdraw from the process, precisely because it proved impossible to open this debate. Called on by the WWF in 2004 to participate in the RTRS as a member of the organising committee, the federation publically manifested its position, from the very first roundtable in 2005, in favour of a model of diversified agriculture to define sustainability (opposing the monoculture model) and against GMOs "*which reduce the autonomy of family farmers and threaten biodiversity*". In a subsequent meeting of a smaller number of members, different members of the organising committee, including industry and the environmental NGOs, requested of Fetraf-Sul that two issues – "monoculture vs. diversification and GMOs vs. non-GMOs" – remain "outside the roundtable debate" due to the excessively large disparities between these production models (Fetraf-Sul interview).

The subsequent withdrawal of Fetraf-Sul from the soy roundtable illustrated the difficulty in reaching a compromise between two models presented as opposites (table 2), the intensive model linked to business ("agro-business") and the model based on family activity and agricultural diversification ("family agriculture"). The first relies on a "market-industrial" compromise adopted in the roundtables while the second emphasises a "civic-domestic" compromise through the search for autonomy, unitary collective action, a more equitable distribution of wealth, equal access to resources and the recognition and respect of indigenous land rights. Fetraf-Sul, together with other organisations opposed to the soy roundtable, are aligned in their criticism vis-à-vis the "market" order of worth. They criticise the neo-liberal market and "agro-business" which lead to the "*subordination of agriculture to industry, the production of goods rather than food, the concentration of capital, the exclusion of farmers from their lands, the deterioration of the eco-system and the loss of food, territorial and economic sovereignty*", meaning among other things the unequal distribution of wealth, income and land.

Table 2: Discursive elements specifying and differentiating food production models

Agro-business ("dominant" model for soy in South America)	Family agriculture
Agro-business Intensification Monoculture GMO or conventional Currency market	Agro-ecology Diversification: income and food security + multi-functionality No GMO Change markets and distribution of wealth (added value in the chain) / solidarity-equity Autonomy (vis-à-vis factors of production Food sovereignty

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[27] Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura Familiar da Região Sul.

Similarly, very little attention is paid to "civic" claims at the palm oil roundtable focusing on "sharing value" in the global chain. While the "economic pillar" promotes the principle of "*long-term profitability*", we discovered, although only at the end of the process and during a public consultation on the Internet, that other principles could have been included in this "economic pillar", in particular the principle of equity or value sharing. Whereas industry defines "long-term profitability" by means of criteria which comply with the requirements of satisfying demand and with more intensive practices (high output, use of optimal selected seeds etc.), the public consultation on the Internet concerned another dimension, that of equity or value sharing which could also have been included in the "economic pillar": "*an additional criterion on the fair and equitable price of palm oil for producers needs to be considered* <u>*under the economic viability principle*</u> *for continuing long-term investment in crops on small farms*". Despite the fact that little attention was paid to these comments in the roundtable, they have the merit of repositioning the "market" worth of the "economic pillar" as one possible principle among many others rather than a naturalisation. We can see what the content of a "civic" principle might have been had it not been put to one side.

To qualify this position, it should be noted that between 2003 and 2005, the so-called "social" NGOs contributed to formulating a "civic" principle, taking responsibility for defending the "social pillar" initially claimed by industry. However, "civic" arguments concerning <u>solidarity</u>, reflected in a demand for a more equitable distribution of wealth ("value sharing in the value chain" between family producers and the downstream operators in the chains), which were at the heart of the demands of numerous Brazilian NGOs and Indonesian family producers, were almost non-existent in these forums (sidelined or not considered). They gave way to another "civic" dimension[28], promoted by the NGOs and accepted by industry, focussing on the <u>equality of rights</u> similar to a liberal conception of "legal right" (although constructed here in a "non-mandatory" framework): workers' rights, the right to be informed, the right to give prior consent, the right to a minimum wage, the ban on exercising any form of discrimination based on "*race, caste, national origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, union membership, political affiliation or age*". Furthermore, the arguments of this principle are isolated in a "social" principle dedicated to this effect and are more part of a negotiation and weighting of interests than of the composition of a common good.

Other critical elements are pushed to one side, such as examining the consumption models (consume less meat and therefore less soy etc.). This examination would lead to the requirements of "global demand" being revised and this "market" and "industrial" requirement being denaturalised.

The arbitration thus performed and the emphasis on technical rationality (focusing on the PC&I method, section 2) reduce the engagements of the participant to the "plan" format. They indicate a form of "government by objective" while implementing two restrictions (Thévenot, 2009b): the <u>political debate</u> is focused [reduced] on the definition of an objective and a

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[28] This difference is presented by Thévenot and Lamont (2000) in the use of civic equality (legal rights) in the United States vs. solidarity in France.

measurement (a list of criteria and indicators to measure them) while political evaluation focuses on the measurement of the level of achievement of the plan (certification by evaluation of the criteria and indicators). In the final reckoning, the criticism is locked in a format which is already made up of tests: the measurement of the level of achievement of the plan (*idem*). This interview clearly explains the narrowing of political evaluation (legitimacy) around certification (which will be "the rule"), i.e. a field measurement of the "outcomes":

> "*What legitimises us is that we enjoy a broad participation and that our results can be measured. Anyone who wants to sell RSPO oil will have to respect the rule [certification]. Many NGOs [non-members of the RSPO] question our legitimacy. The only proof is that we have a measurable outcome. This gives us our legitimacy. Are there any questions about pesticide monitoring? Come and measure the results in the field, come and see! Furthermore, we really need researchers to come and measure the outcomes and report*" (Dutch consultancy firm).

3.2. Capacity of the device to recognise the people affected?

This compromise around the definition of sustainability is promoted by a coalition between international NGOs and industries which, in addition to agreeing on interests, share forms of knowledge and disposition towards the managerial figure as well as "forms of language" which match to strategic engagement. These specificities are at the root of a specific format which excludes part of the participants: "*some of the people go to a conference every week. Most of the small farmers have never come to a conference before in their life!*" (social NGO). These devices have great difficulty in recognising proximity, local knowledge and affected people as being legitimate (table 3).

Table 3: Distinctions in the roundtables between forms of knowledge and "language"

	International "NGOs-industries"	Local communities/smallholders
Knowledge and forms of the plausible	Biology, agronomy, biodiversity. Global knowledge Statistics, measurement	Familiar knowledge Localised knowledge Document cases
Attachments, consideration for the real lives of the people	Personal detachment, turnover, network (managerial figure) "Strategic"/technical speech	Attachments, roots "Speak from the heart"/ ask for "justice"/convictions

3.2.1. Tensions and exclusions relating to forms of knowledge

The members of international NGOs and industry share converging knowledge focusing on biology and agronomy as well as a certain business practice.

The representatives of environmental NGOs and plantation companies rely on competences in biology and agronomy respectively which, by their "industrial" nature, converge on numbers, measurement, technical tools and efficiency. Alphandery and Fortier (2009) demonstrate how the arrival of the "conservation of biodiversity" regime (distinct from that of the protection of natural heritage, for example) leads to a change in the regime of the production of knowledge and is accompanied by the exclusion of practical or local knowledge. By the same token, interventions in the plenary session are based on this regime of "industrial" proof using statistical data, graphs, histograms, macro variables etc.

These participants also share managerial competences[29]. This is not surprising on the part of managers in industry or the plantation companies who sit on the roundtables. However, the same is also true of most of the representatives of the international, environmental and social NGOs, either because they have a dual training including "business" or communication practice (for example combining a university education in biology and a business school), or because they have already spent part of their career working in corporate consulting firms before joining an NGO. These shared competences explain, in part, a facility in strategic engagement.

The aforementioned points bear witness to a break with other forms of knowledge, in particular that of smallholders and local communities which are not as well-grounded in business management and bring a different type of knowledge or argument to the roundtable which is not "industrial" in nature. These arguments, of monographic type, are based on the evocation or documentation of a case: report on dispute case, "specific" case histories in the first person, etc.

> "**I** – *How do people perceive the last plenary interventions by smallholders, when they take the floor in debates?*
> **NGO representative** - *They do not like it! Because they use this forum to express complaints about one particular case.*
> *(…)*
> **I** – *But they do not "accuse" all the time, they also express their situation ("I have 3 children, I encounter that problem etc.").*
> **NGO** - *Yes, but they have a <u>long</u> story. It is difficult to contribute to the discussion, there is this tension, between <u>somebody expressing his own problem</u> and raising an issue which is of general interest of the discussion.*
> *(…)*
> **I** – *Participants do not like it when they speak about their story?*

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[29] See also the work of M. Djama and A. Verwilghem, applied to the audit in the certification of RSPO palm oil, forthcoming.

NGO - *They do, they do... But <u>they do not think it is relevant</u>*" (interview with a social NGO, NL).

It is in relation to this dichotomy of knowledge that the local minority voices are disqualified in most scenes (no access to the presentations in the plenary sessions, etc.). This disqualification occurs in terms which distinguish local from global knowledge. Thus, according to the executive secretariat, smallholders could not present their points of view or works directly in the plenary session as their vision is "too local" in nature:

"*Even if they could make a presentation in the plenary session, the problem remains that the smallholders could not answer the subsequent questions as they are not fully aware of all the technical aspects, they do not have a <u>global vision </u>(for example concerning greenhouse gases). They do not have a sufficiently <u>broad vision</u> of the problem. They will present their case but they couldn't answer questions such as: "can you compare your case to what is happening in Papua?" for example*".

This point of view generally obtains among the participants, who feel that the "local" vision of the smallholders does not enable them to be involved in international debate. To quote a certifier who explains the limits of smallholders' participation: "*They only know their job, not the market demand, EU politics, etc. They have never travelled*".

Nevertheless, none of these participants questions his own limitations, in particular his difficulty in accessing the local or representing these people.

Inversely, smallholders claim another form of legitimacy which recognises "practical" knowledge: "*Some people only talk about their [theoretical] knowledge. They are only interested in making a good presentation, irrespective of whether or not it is possible to achieve it! <u>It is just theory</u>. Someone might be good in theory but he has no <u>practical experience</u>. I have seen a lot of people like that in the RSPO. If I prepare a presentation, I will use PowerPoint, but it will be based on practice*".

On a similar level focussing on the participation of the Zapatistas in Mexico, Ute Buhler (2002) calls into question the provisions for participation "that set up a dichotomy between local knowledge and outside expertise and privileges one or the other" and which also finds it difficult to take sufficient account of material realities.

3.2.2. Tensions and exclusions relating to attachments: "speaking from the heart"

"RSPO-speak" or the language of the roundtables is a language softened by a form of "liberal civility" (Thévenot, 2008) intended to interact in plural without confrontation. Among the language deviations, emotion and affect are sidelined. The form of personal detachment which dominates the public scenes is the rule.

This detachment firstly assumes a capacity to transform personal attachments into opinions or interests (*idem*) which will be incorporated into a forum of "sharable" choices. Contrary to the local communities which express a strong sense of attachment, the representatives of the international NGOs transform their personal attachments, such as a passion for wild or mystical nature ("inspired" worth), into industrial-format opinions such as the need for "carbon stocks" or into technical arguments focusing on the emission of greenhouse gases (macro environmental variables), better suited to the format of these roundtables.

By manifesting attachments which are too strong, the local communities make the participants uncomfortable. In addition to presenting specific cases, the participants criticise them for being "too emotional" or even "aggressive":

"*They should try to express themselves more constructively. When we hear them speak, we don't have any desire to help them. […] They were aggressive. They talked about <u>land rights every time</u>, it was very <u>repetitive</u> and it was not the topic of the discussion. […] They create more <u>negative energy</u> rather than positive*" (Board of industrialists, NL).

The "professional style" recognised in the context of the roundtables is a technical speak "which avoids major confrontations" and favours indirect formulations and a certain degree of caution. Some criticises it as a "technocratic" or "bureaucratic" style or compare it to an "NGO style" or UN-speak" (consultant).

> "*The NGO style does not allow conflicts. It is a very indirect, polite, diplomatic style. Proforest was highly professional. They said nothing about the issues I talked about which were not politically correct (land issues). It has a highly conflict-shy politically-correct style (…). Highly antagonistic issues remain hidden in cautious formulations or are postponed*" (consultant, NL).

This technical speak intended to achieve apparent neutrality (section 2) runs counter to a prominent request from the local communities and smallholders to talk about "justice": "*the side events [bilateral negotiation] are as if we were whispering. We want to talk in public in the plenary sessions and other scenes. The most interesting for us is to talk about justice, freedom. They should give more time to talking about how the farmers live and give the firms less opportunity to make the presentations*" (smallholder).

The demand of these local participants is to push the other participants into "speaking the truth", "*being honest and speaking from the heart*":
"*In the RSPO, there must be no lies: all the parties must be able to adopt <u>good</u> strategies. If the RSPO exists, it is because of the negative effects. The RSPO must <u>come from the heart</u>. That is what I think because I have seen a lot of people make a presentation [in the plenary sessions]. They don't speak from the heart. Some of them lie*" (Indonesian farmer).

For the smallholders, this genuine language must be capable of integrating emotions or more direct positions, even if this means appearing "hard or shocking" to some participants: "*It is best to speak from our hearts. There is no need to speak with sugar on our lips when in our hearts and in reality, it's not sweet*".

3.3.3. From detachment to real lives

Finally, tension exists between the participants' capacity to play and change roles and the capacity to recognise people affected in their real lives.

Most "international" participants have only a very limited knowledge of the living conditions of the "local minorities", often in remote and very inaccessible locations; they are more accustomed to major hotel chains and conferences in cities throughout the world. The roundtables primarily emphasise the capacity to be mobile and not remain rooted in a particular territory, living in a "connectionist" world as described by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). This capacity is illustrated by the figure of the "manager" of the international participants (*idem*). In this world, isolated, local, deeply-rooted, attached participants are "small" in the eyes of the "big fish", who are capable of detachment and connection.

For example, we observe a high "turn-over" of participants: departing participants replaced by their successors the following year to represent an institution or a shift between institutions for the same participants in the roundtable (for example we note departures from WWF to join a certification body, a consulting firm or another NGO active in the roundtable, a shift from one NGO to another, from consultancy firms to NGOs and vice versa, etc.).

This capacity to change rationale and position by shifting from one institution to another illustrates the capacity of these participants both to play and to change roles. It also suggests a capacity for detachment (abandoning deep-rootedness and attachment) which is in stark contrast with the attachment of "local" figures such as family producers and local communities who defend rights while putting their local daily lives at risk, without being paid by one or other of the institutions.

"*The difference between them and me is that they are here as part of their job whereas I am here to defend our very lives, and we aren't paid for that.*" "*Look at A for example. He has a professional style. He is just here to pick up his salary. He walks in like a salesman, taps the microphone and says "Thank you!" He starts by saying 'Anyone would think that my theme is sustainable and so am I because this is the fourth time that I have made a presentation to the plenary session of the RSPO'*" (Indonesian farmer).

While the smallholders have, without success, asked to speak to the plenary session for a number of years, the individual referred to as has already made 4 presentations "concerning smallholders" without for all that belonging to this category. We see here the frustration and indignation of the farmers at being "prevented" from expressing themselves in the plenary sessions when they come to represent their real lives, their place instead being taken by people "who come to pick up their salary" or to play a role which does not engage their daily life and material fate.

This legitimacy through detachment is called into question by the local figures themselves who, on the contrary, claim the importance of people's convictions:

"*I liked the world cafés. I preferred to follow the same people during the "3 rounds" to hear their comments on the different themes, to see if they were <u>serious or liars</u>; because in the world cafés, you can say one thing at one table and something different at another. I am Arifin, a smallholder. When I change tables, I am still Arifin, a smallholder. But I was curious to see if this was true for the others? Perhaps they are Arifin here and someone else at another table, talking here on behalf of a firm and there as a farmer. That's just an example to show that <u>people can change their positions</u>, <u>their opinions</u>. Here you agree about greenhouse gases and there you have a totally different opinion. It is a question of strategies. In the end, the final restitution will tell the world: it is our input and it is a multi-party process. This is just a hypothesis, because there is very little criticism in the inputs*" (Indonesian famer).

In addition to a certain lucidity concerning the feeble opportunities for expressing criticism and the strategic positions to be held in the world cafés, this participant expresses a form of genuineness attached to the individual. He echoes the doubts of Ute Buhler (2002) concerning the legitimacy of the participants who have no deeply-rooted attachment for the place or who have not experienced marginalisation and exclusion and "who might not have to account with their life histories". Ute Buhler rightly recalls the critical comments of indigenous peoples in 1960 addressed to God's bishops: "*You have lived among us and shared our lives. We regard you as our brothers and sisters. But is it your desire to be our brothers and sisters for all time?*"[30] The author questions the international participants with regard to their engagement vis-à-vis the local: will they also "*account with their life histories for the consequences of decisions that are taken?*" – the condition for becoming "genuine participants, with all the risks this entails".

These results reflect tensions between the different regimes of engagement. We have highlighted here:
- the desire of the local communities and smallholders to talk about justice "from the heart", where convictions are disqualified (i.e. they are considered as a form of "militancy" or "idealism" which has no place at the roundtables);
- the desire for genuineness which assumes that everyone's life history will be considered.
These two forms of engagement oppose the format of choice where options are detached from the individual who chooses them (Thévenot, 2009b).

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[30] John Womack Jr., **Rebellion in Chiapas. An Historical Reader**. New York: The New Press, 1999. Cited by Buhler (2002).

Conclusion

An initial conclusion of this paper, which echoes Thévenot's analysis in "Governing life by standards" (2009a), is that these multi-stakeholder initiatives, based on strategic action and opening options and interests to debate, stifles engagement towards the qualification of a common good. Under the pressure of urgency or pragmatism, the opportunity for an open political debate at these roundtables is removed. At the same time, the technical rationality introduced leads participants to "forget" that an implicit politics has been subsumed into the elaboration of choices made: in the final analysis, we clearly see the conservation of an agro-industrial model of agriculture founded on a "market-industrial" compromise, the predominance of an approach by "rights" rather than by "solidarity" in the "social principle", etc. It is this dual movement between the impossibility of open political debate and a belief in the objectivity of the decisions taken, because they are technical and mask political choices, which lead us to talk about (de)politicisation, the brackets reminding us that the increased technicality of the variables is in no way apolitical.

The requirements of "pragmatic" attitude for participants means that the decisions taken relate to a short-term project, a quick and effective action which can be implemented with few constraints. Consequently, the practice of opening elements which are too uncertain to debate is sidelined as the forum is not a place for major controversies, rarely a world of "uncertainty" – discussion time is limited and the format of the debates is very specific: quick discussions in the "world cafés", debates on the choice of options resulting from technical documents prepared in advance, technical questions, etc. The march of time is not governed by a choice of equal participation but by the rhythm of deforestation that found a notion of "urgency".

Focusing participation, both through the legitimacy of the participants and through the formats of participation, leads to the regime of "engagement in a plan" (strategic action) and the "stakeholder" being given a privileged place. The aim is not to put a common horizon into perspective or to express the pluralism of values. The threat of breakup and the stress surrounding the management of the differences between the participants is removed by a technical rationalisation of the action and by "arbitration" excluding here the "civic" order of worth relating to the principles of "solidarity" and shared value.

The principle of inclusion remains a real challenge, both because not all participants are geared towards the format of strategic action and because some of them claim other forms of legitimacy or engagement which are not accommodated by the device. Why do individuals with broad international knowledge enjoy a legitimacy not granted to people who have "local" knowledge? It is the refusal of forms of legitimacy other than that of the "stakeholder" which creates the conditions of unequal or asymmetric participation. Hence, without being excluded, the power relations are also understood as pressure or oppression exerted by one regime of engagement upon another (Thévenot, 2009a).

These "multi-stakeholder initiatives", which form part of a broader liberal political model of the "coalition and balance of interest groups and power", are built against the explicit risk of a "tyranny of the majority" (Thévenot, 2001). Nevertheless, while speaking for a large number of voices and are founded on the principle of "inclusion", they find it difficult to recognise pluralism in defining the "common good". They also experience difficulties in taking account of personal attachments opening up to people "affected" in their real lives.

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