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ABSTRACTS**

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O64-07 – S64 Towards an unified vision of the central african forests

Thursday 23 June / 08:00-10:00 – Antigone3

Gateway to the Forests of Central Africa: towards a unified collaborative model of forest dynamics

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Background: The tropical forests in general, and those of Central Africa in particular, stand at the cross-road. The combined and interacting effects of land-use change, resource extraction, defaunation, fire, fragmentation and climate change are pushing these ecosystems towards critical points where transitions to altered states will happen. The future of these forests depends on our capacity to understand and anticipate these transitions, and to identify these states the forest ecosystems are likely to take. Yet, to date, there was not a unified model that presented the best available knowledge on the forest dynamics of the regions. The field is highly fragmented and we lack a general overview.

Method: We propose here a general unified model of forest dynamics in Central Africa. This model represents the best available knowledge on the topic and is the result of a collaborative effort based on expert knowledge and an analysis of the literature. We built it using methods issued from the fields of facilitation, participatory modelling and team science.

Result: Our model identifies the main forest types present in the area, the dynamic links and possible transitions between them and the potential impacts of environmental factors - climate, soil, large mammals - and human factors - logging, fire, clearings. It provides a description of these forest types and allows the layman to grasp the general dynamics at play in the region. For those willing to deepen their understanding, we provide all the necessary literature leads to guide them in their discovery of the topic.

Conclusion: Our aim is to propose as an easy to access gateway for those needing to take decisions on how to manage the forests of Central Africa in the coming decades. It sums up our current understanding of the system, helps chart knowledge gaps and highlight avenues for future research, serving as basis for discussions. An accepted common understanding of the dynamics of these forests will be solid foundation for alternative modes of management to emerge, we hope it will foster dialog between key stakeholders, and generate better informed decisions, more resilient to surprises.

O64-08 – S64 Towards an unified vision of the central african forests

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Ethnophotography of Sciences: using photography to foster transdisciplinarity in the forest landscapes of Cameroon.

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The future of the forests of Central Africa is constrained by land use decisions and the response of the socio-ecosystems to global change. The purpose of the CoForTips project is to promote better management of the forests of the Congo Basin, by fostering dialogue between stakeholders. We seek to develop a framework for transdisciplinarity, for collaboration between social and natural sciences, between stakeholders and researchers. How to shift from a collection of fragmentary perceptions of the system to a comprehensive and broad understanding of the multiple perspectives held by each stakeholder?

Alongside other forms of classical research and engagement – interviews, participant observation, participatory modelling – we propose one additional way to foster transdisciplinarity. We have called this approach ethnophotography of sciences. At the core, it uses photography as a medium to confront the perceptions of researchers and stakeholders. It associates long stays in the field, an unconditional positive attitude derived from the field of facilitation, and observant participation. Coupled to the workshops of participatory modeling, the photographer documents the daily life and work of the inhabitants, the researchers in the field and their interactions with locals, and integrates their visions and perceptions of the landscape, its resources and actors in the shooting process. This is done through discussion with the «models» about the way they want to be portrayed, instant photography for quick feedback and pre-exhibition editing evaluation in collaboration with researchers in Europe and on site.

What we propose here is not a talk or a poster, but an exhibition, made of diptychs, with a different take on moments of life as it is experienced in the villages around Mindourou, Cameroon, one of the study sites of the CoForTips project. Each picture, each diptych and the entire set can be understood as boundary objects, bringing the gap between stakeholders and academics.

Our aim is to spark a discussion between an audience used to watch these systems through the lenses of the academia, and that of the villagers, who shaped the way in which they were represented by the photographer.