

Graduate School and Research Social and Environmental Sciences

Workshop

*How do environmental dynamics affect
population movements?
Interdisciplinary overview, debates and
research perspectives*

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Organizing Board

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The issue of environmental or climate migration is nowadays increasingly debated in international organizations, civil society and even in the academic field.

Environmental degradation is often cited as a new and now decisive cause of migration. However, this phenomenon is not new and, as Patrick Gonin and Véronique Lassailly-Jacob point out, "The history of humanity is marked by migrations caused by incessant climatic variations over time, natural disasters, demographic or economic crises and even wars" (Gonin and Lassailly-Jacob 2002).

Today, there is probably more emphasis on environmental degradation and resource scarcity than on its wider evolution.

The purpose of this workshop is to propose a critical review of the links between environmental degradation and population movements.

It is based on a study of the environmental dynamics at stake to better inform what some disciplines have described as "environmental crises" and on a non-deterministic analysis of their effects on society.

For more than ten years, research has begun to be structured in this field, and has resulted in the publication of reports, books and journal issues¹. It focused particularly on:

- measuring environment-related mobility (Kelman 2019; Véron and Golaz 2015);
- identifying the still unclear contours of categories that include such extremely broad realities as "environmental displaced", "climate migrants", or even "climate stateless" or "ecological refugees" – although these latter expressions do not correspond to any category or regime of protection defined by international law;
- analyzing the positions of international organizations that have created these categories²; the environmental activists who mediatized them and the academic community that has sought to question them (Cambrézy and Lassailly-Jacob 2010).

¹ See in particular the EACH-FOR project (Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios) funded by the European Commission between 2007 and 2009 (Vag 2009) and EXCLIM report (Vlassopoulou 2013).

² The term "environmental refugee" appeared in the 1980s in the title of a UNEP report (Cambrézy and Lassailly-Jacob 2010). Le terme « environmental refugee » apparaît dans les années 1980 dans le titre d'un rapport du PNUE (Cambrézy and Lassailly-Jacob 2010).

From a juridical point of view, the main aim is to examine the work carried out in international and regional law on the protection of displaced persons in order to determine to what extent mobility resulting from environmental damage falls within existing legal regimes (Borges 2018).

The analyses focus largely on the protection needs of people displaced by environmental or climate change (Cournil and Vlassopoulos 2015), the status to be granted to people travelling for environmental reasons, the choice of terms to be used (“refugee” or “displaced”) (Bétaille 2010). In addition, it is necessary to measure the mobilization of other legal tools, in particular in the field of international environmental law, in order to assess the consideration of population movements, in particular in the definition of international obligations and the implementation of international responsibility for environmental damage.

Finally, it is necessary to explore the normative and operational action of international organizations such as UNHCR, IOM or the European Union (the Lisbon Treaty provides a legal framework for taking better account of displaced people, a subject increasingly debated within the EU), in the management of “environmental crises” (Gemenne, Cointe, Durieux and Boncour 2010).

Thus, while the study field of the environmental degradation and migration nexus is expanding, this workshop has a threefold purpose :

1. To review the state of the art in the social and environmental sciences, taking advantage of interdisciplinarity. Indeed, studies have focused on the complex relationships, over time, between environmental dynamics and the demographic, social, economic and political dynamics of populations. The perspective of the sciences of the past will be used in this workshop as a way of putting current dynamics into perspective³. The aim is to understand what is really “new” in these “environmental migrations”, even though the movement of populations in connection with the evolution of resources and climatic conditions is a constant element in the history of human societies. On the other hand, one may wonder what archaeological and historical research provides as essential information to understand these current population movements on a medium and large scale, on the dynamics of settlements and voluntary or forced movements linked to environmental dynamics. The impact of the environmental context and its changes on population movements, towards distant lands or within a pre-existing territory, is a question that archaeologists are constantly asking. The answer is never unequivocal. When the documentation is extensive and accurate enough, it generally appears that environmental and socio-economic-political parameters interact to trigger socio-cultural crises and changes, which may not always be easy to determine whether they involve population movements. Moreover, the impact of environmental changes on societies is not proportionate to their magnitude.

³ See in particular Armiero and Tucker 2017; Berger, Lespez, Kuzucuoglu, Glais, Hourani, Barra and Guilaine 2016; Berger 2012; Garcia and Le Bras 2017; Kuper and Kröpelin 2006; Kuzucuoglu and Tsirtsoni 2016; Van Der Leeuw, Favory and Fiches 2003.

It is rather the dependence of societies on some resources (themselves affected by change) and above all the flexibility and adaptability of the operating system of these resources that determines the resilience of societies in the face of changes in their environment.

Closer in time, the decades of drought in the Sahel (1968-1994) are of major scientific interest for this issue. Indeed, they constitute one of the most important fluctuations in the current climate and are co-occurring with significant migration flows.

However, to move from co-occurrence to causality, it is necessary to have an objective knowledge of the fluctuation of rainfall in the Sahel on the one hand and the consequences on Sahelian societies on the other.

The bibliographical review will make it possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current theoretical currents on these issues, while situating the challenges of environmental issues in the context of migration studies.

2. To propose new research avenues able of both generating academic knowledge and informing policy decisions while the issue of environmental migration governance is increasingly present on the agendas of governments, NGOs and international organizations. However, this research must move beyond a superficial understanding of environmental dynamics and be conducted in an interdisciplinary way. Exploring the biological and physical reality of the impact of climate change on cultures and resources, as well as reasonably estimating variations in resource abundance, are necessary, but not sufficient, prerequisites for an analysis of the environment-migration nexus. Once these have been empirically established, it is necessary to grasp the non-mechanical reality of their effects on the societies they affect: they are mediated by the social relations, and in particular the relations of power and the distribution of resources, that are specific to each society.

3. To establish, in this a dialogue between the academic world and the international organizations in charge of a new global governance of environmental migration and the development of recommendations to address the issues of forced migration related to environmental dynamics.

PROGRAMME

9h : Welcome of participants

9h15 : Introduction

Julien Andrieu (UCA-ESPACE) et **Christian Rinaudo** (UCA-URMIS)

9h30 – 12h30 : Session 1

Chair : Claire Delhon (UCA-CEPAM)

- **Jean-Paul Bravard** (Lyon 2-Unité Environnement, Ville et Société) : Les oasis du Désert occidental égyptien du Nouvel Empire à la fin de l'époque romaine : les contraintes environnementales pouvaient-elles provoquer des crises économiques et démographiques ?
- **Julien Andrieu** (UCA-ESPACE) : Les décennies de sécheresse au Sahel : conséquences sur les ressources, les territoires, et les migrations ?
- **Chloé Vlassopoulou** (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne-CURAPP) : Mobilités humaines et environnement. Politiques publiques et instruments juridiques.

12h30-14h : Lunch break

14h00-16h : Session 2

Chair : Lucie Bargel (UCA-ERMES)

- **Marco Armiero** (KTH Royal Institute of Technology-Environmental Humanities): Environmental History of Modern Migrations
- **Sylvain Souchaud** (IRD-URMIS) : Crise environnementale, transition démographique et peuplement au Brésil. Les premiers pas d'une recherche transdisciplinaire dans le semi-aride de l'État du Ceará

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