

## Institutionalisation of the RNP model abroad: Madagascar



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Since 2007, the Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin Regional Nature Park (RNP) has been helping the Atsinanana Region to set up a Sustainable **Development Area** (SDA), drawing on the French RNP model. This assistance is part of a global partnership agreement between the Lower Normandy Region and the Atsinanana region as part of decentralised co-operation. The intervention of the RNP is one of the components of the agreement. It is aimed at assisting its Malagasy partner in setting up a local development tool. The local structures are the Atsinanana Region and Tamatave University.

The co-operation programme is also supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at local level by Tamatave University.

### TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

Madagascar is officially divided into 22 regions as a result of the gerrymandering of the six former provinces. The Regions are divided up into départements, which are in turn subdivided into communes.

### ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

In the context of its co-operation with the Atsinanana region, the Lower Normandy Region suggested involving the Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin RNP in assisting the Malgasy region in considering how it might incorporate the RNP concept. The Park offers support by receiving delegations from Madagascar and offering technical assistance.

At the beginning of the co-operation agreements, the adaptation of the RNP concept to the local context was not so much a request from the Malgasy actors as an idea **put forward by the Lower Normandy Region**. The local actors responded to the project with a degree of mistrust as they had the impression that the RNP model was the same as a national park and national parks are associated with conflict. The visits by Malgasy delegations to France helped to clear up the confusion and to foster interest in this type of park.

In Madagascar itself, Tamatave University was interested in the idea of co-operating in the field of sustainable development for research and training purposes. An initial **DESS** (Diplôme Supérieur d'Études Spécialisées) (Master's degree) on the subject of RNPs was introduced at Tamatave University. The University was therefore the driving force for the project at local level in Madagascar. The **DESS completed in 2011 led to the idea of setting up a Sustainable Development Area (SDA)** in the Atsinanana region on the basis of the RNP model.

### LESSON TO BE LEARNED

*Fears arising from the fact that the RNP model was thought to be the same as a national park*

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*were dissipated after Malgasy delegates visited a French RNP. The on-site observation of an unfamiliar model helped gain support for the project once preconceptions had been proved wrong.*

## ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS

The Sustainable Development Area (SDA) is still in the process of being established. Before reaching the current stage, it took two years to find the right partner for the project in Madagascar and as a result the process was held up.

- During the period 2007-2009, a visit was made to Madagascar to meet local actors and a French student went to Madagascar for six weeks to meet local actors in the project as part of her training course. The mission did not really make it possible to lay the foundations for the transfer of the RNP concept but it did help identify the parties interested in the project.
- **Tamatave University** and two of its teachers showed interest in the project concerning the adaptation of the RNP model. They became the local driving force and played a key role in bringing other actors into the project.
- In 2010 the University set to work. In particular it introduced a **DESS** (Diplôme Supérieur d'Études Spécialisées) (Master's Degree) for a Malgasy student **on the subject of RNPs and the transferability of the model**. The introduction of this DESS was a significant factor in the continuation of the co-operation project.
- Over the period 2010-2013 several Malgasy **delegations** (comprising students and representatives of the Region and the government) visited the Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin RNP, while the project advisor from the Lower Normandy Region travelled to Madagascar to make contacts and mobilise the authorities on the ground and gain their support for the project. This took a long time as the different stakeholders had different concerns and the Park's potential to arouse people's interest and enthusiasm was relatively limited. A representative of the Lower Normandy Region responsible for the implementation of the overall co-operation agreement between Lower Normandy and the Atsinanana Region is also responsible for keeping track of the various dossiers and in particular that of the SDA.
- At the end of 2011, the Malgasy student on the DESS course presented his work. Many stakeholders were present to hear the presentation, which subsequently made it easier to launch the project and set up a **Steering Committee** comprising representatives of the Atsinanana Region, the Lower Normandy Region, Tamatave University, various Malgasy government departments and qualified technical staff. The aims of this committee, which was headed by the Atsinanana Region, were to study and assist the establishment of the Sustainable Development Area. The term "park" was banished from the project, as it is tainted by the idea of conflict that it conveys for local populations, in the light of the history of national parks in Madagascar.
- In 2012, 2013, and 2014, a method was introduced for preselecting 5 "study areas" in the Region, aimed at identifying the pilot area where the project could initially take place. Students from Tamatave University were entrusted with the comparative study of these sites. During the RNP mission in February 2015, local stakeholders asked that the study take more account of cultural aspects. The objective is to finalise the choice of the pilot area in late 2015.
- The project applies a method which attaches considerable importance to **consultation** among the different partners in the territory and to **dialogue** between actors at local or regional level to ensure integrated territorial development.

## LESSON TO BE LEARNED

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*Ownership of the project by local actors is a key factor in the success of the Sustainable Development Area project. Tamatave University was the driving force in this process.*

## CHARTER

The project has not yet reached the stage where a charter needs to be drawn up. The study aimed at identifying the pilot area is still underway.

## ACCEPTANCE BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POPULATIONS

To date the project has been presented mainly to institutional stakeholders, who, once the initial fears (National Parks associated with the idea of conflict) had been dissipated, expressed interest in the approach. Local populations have not yet been informed of the proposed project.

It should be noted that the group which was most open to the idea of the project was the academic community, which considered it to be an interesting opportunity for research and training. The University made the necessary changes to its teaching programme and students can now take a course where they learn about the RNP approach. Exchanges now take place between Tamatave University and Caen University.

### LESSON TO BE LEARNED

*National Parks do not have good press among local populations and socio-professional groups because they are associated with the idea of restricted use of resources, if not restricted access to land. It is therefore important to provide clear information about the project and to explain the approach and clear up any misunderstandings. The project initiators at local level have an important role to play in this.*

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The process has not yet led to the establishment of a concrete institutional framework, as it is believed that consideration of the legal framework at this stage is more likely to prevent the process from moving forward than to give it impetus.

The principle is, together with the Atsinanana Region, to make progress in terms of the feasibility of the project **at local level** and only after the foundations are laid, will it be possible to consider the institutionalisation of the model. This type of approach is possible under Malgasy law.

### LESSON TO BE LEARNED

*The project stakeholders decided to adopt a pragmatic approach, starting with the establishment of a Sustainable Development Area and subsequently working on the more complex issues relating to the institutionalisation of the model.*

## MAIN INCENTIVES AND OBSTACLES

When preparing the project, it soon became clear that the term “Park” had a negative effect on the Malgasy partners’ understanding of an RNP. National Parks are the standard in Madagascar and are seen as a regulatory mechanism. Providing information to explain the RNP approach and visits by delegations helped clarify the aims of the project.

The unstable political situation in Madagascar (coup d'Etat, postponement of the presidential elections, decentralisation process held up ...) also had an impact on the implementation of the project, which, in this context, was no longer considered a priority. The choice of the pilot SDA

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territory, in accordance with objective analytical criteria, will probably have to take account of a local political component, which explains the slow progress and the local authorities' hesitation in making their choice in this regard (request to look more closely at new criteria).

In the context of this project it is vital that one person be responsible for the RNP over the long term (forging of inter-personal relations) and that one employee be present on site to run the project on a daily basis (role of the decentralised co-operation advisor from the Lower Normandy Region). Once the territory has been identified, one of the challenges will be to recruit a Malgasy project manager and to raise the necessary funds to allow the project to continue to make progress.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

*The Sustainable Development Area project was initiated by the Lower Normandy Region as part of its decentralised co-operation with the Atsinanana Region. Identifying a partner who was interested in the project was a key aspect of its implementation. The approach adopted consisted in first raising awareness and subsequently encouraging the Madagascar actors to devise an appropriate project for their territory. The presence of a project advisor seconded by the Lower Normandy Region to guide the project at local level was a factor which helped the project to progress.*

*The project is being conducted in a pragmatic manner and consideration of the legal framework for the SDAs will take place subsequently. The existence of an enduring co-operation programme between the two regions also allows for considerable flexibility with regard to the*

Another question is that of the future of the Upper and Lower Normandy Regions which are to be merged; there is therefore some uncertainty as to how co-operation priorities will be managed in the context of the new Region.

## **OUTCOME OF THE PROCESS**

The project has not set itself any objectives in terms of time for establishing the Sustainable Development Area. This need for flexibility is the outcome of the socio-economic, political and cultural context of Madagascar, and is possible in view of the enduring **institutional co-operation framework** between the Lower Normandy Region and the Atsinanana Region.

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*deadlines for completion of the project.*

*The future merger of the Upper and Lower Normandy Regions means that some uncertainty remains as to the future of the project, which has to date been supported and promoted by the Lower Normandy Region.*

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