

Anthropization

The idea of anthropization applies to any intervention by human societies that has an impact on natural elements. It generally concerns the action of man considered as an environmental agent. Whereas some limit the field covered by anthropization to the idea of degradation, others (P. Pinchemel) break down human intervention into appropriation, artificialization and development [the arrangement of space]: This ambivalence towards anthropic actions applies to the selection of cultivated plants and the reduction of animal and vegetal biodiversity, as well as to the regulation of watercourses, the terracing of slopes, urban development and the construction of transport networks.

If we accept that there are very few human activities that do not modify the environment, the beginnings of anthropization would go back to the Neolithic period, with the first clearings for cultivation, the elaboration of agriculture and the development of breeding. Each time human societies encountered an obstacle or a limiting factor, they used the resources and potentialities of their environment to shape territories and make them conform to their present needs. The historical antiquity of the presence of human beings on the Earth leads certain people to conclude that, although complete artificialization seldom occurs, there will eventually be no more totally 'natural' environments.

Today, in many cases, human action is for the most part indirect, as in the degradation of slopes provoked by deforestation, or the modification of the hydrologic regimes of rivers. However, diagnostics and studies on these matters, whether they attribute anthropization to the direct or to the indirect action of man, belong to a system of thought that separates man from nature. In the twentieth century, this idea of separation gave rise to a 'promethean' vision of the nature/society relationship: with the help of science, man would set himself free from the constraints of nature in the interests of human freedom. Other authors (G. Bertrand) suggest that we should consider anthropization to be constitutive of all interfaces between societies and nature, and to analyse not only the 'degradations', but also the whole set of processes (landscape dynamics, agrarian systems) generated by the interactions within this framework.

Bibliographie