Public access to areau protected by the Conservatoire du littoral: understanding the demand to qualify the offer

The Conservatoire du littoral, a public administrative institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Ecology, has been conducting a land policy to safeguard natural coastal and lake areas since 1975. It buys land to prevent it from being urbanised, and more generally to prevent it from becoming artificial or even commonplace. It then implements a strategy for the preservation and management of these areas, combining protection of biodiversity, enhancement of landscapes and cultural heritage, and reception of the public. This strategy is implemented in the field by managers: local authorities, environmental protection associations, etc., commissioned by the Conservatory. The Conservatoire thus anchors its action in the territories thanks to more than 300 partner managers who work to carry out long-term projects defined on the sites in conjunction with the local population and stakeholders.

The reception of the public on the Conservatoire's estate is one of the three pillars that constitute the foundations of the establishment's action in terms of heritage management of the estate. This reception is subordinated to the needs of protection, and is organised so as not to interfere with the challenges of enhancing the expression of the ecological and landscape potential of the sites for which the Conservatoire is responsible. For over 40 years, the Conservatoire has worked to define an "offer" for the public that is compatible with its preservation missions. In concrete terms, the organisation of the reception of the public involves both the development of the sites and the role of raising awareness, or even repression, of the coastal guards who are in direct daily contact with the public. Development often consists of channelling visitors, creating different accesses and paths according to the more or less sensitive sectors, depending on the public and their aspirations, positioning and sizing parking areas to limit the number of visitors, installing service infrastructures on the most attractive sites, affixing appropriate signage, etc. Each site is the subject of a unique project defined in conjunction with the manager in charge of implementing the project, according to the particularities of the territory.

With a view to updating its long-term intervention strategy, scheduled for 2025, which constitutes the institution's roadmap for its acquisition projects and its heritage management strategy between now and 2050, the Conservatoire wishes to reexamine the principles that guide its action in terms of welcoming the public.

To this end, the Conservatoire is seeking the support of a CIFRE doctoral student whose research will consist of identifying, understanding, analysing and qualifying the demands of the public who visit the Conservatoire's sites. A detailed knowledge and understanding of the needs and expectations of visitors and users of the Conservatoire's sites would be invaluable to the institution in redefining its offer, particularly in relation to current and future social issues for which projections exist. Among these issues, the metropolisation of the coastline and the consequences of climate change (submersion, erosion) are essential elements.

Research into what is described as "demand", by analogy with the "Conservatoire's offer", could make it possible to approach or deepen certain subjects for which the Conservatoire lacks the knowledge that is essential for building a strategy for welcoming the public. In other words, in order to develop a visitor strategy, what questions should the Cdl and the managers in the field ask themselves?

The relevant geographical scale on which to deal with these issues needs to be considered, but it necessarily includes a wider area than just the Conservatory's land. The Conservatoire's areas of intervention are divided into "coastal units" which are fairly homogeneous in terms of their natural, historical and often socio-economic characteristics: these units constitute an initial proposal for the geographical unit to be retained. The Conservatoire could propose several contrasting study areas that present a wide range of sites, from the most popular ones with elaborate reception facilities to the more confidential ones that often offer a more spontaneous discovery. The Calanques de Marseille, the Gulf of Morbihan and the Côte d'Opale would be an interesting sample due to their geographical location on the three maritime façades, the diversity of the Cdl sites they contain, the level of knowledge already available and the investment of the managers in the subject of reception.