

Final Report: Short Research Visit at University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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"Affective Trades – Global Values Conflicts and Humans' Perceptions of
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The exploratory visit I made to the Project Seahorse at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, allowed me to understand the work accomplished in the context of this institute in a very efficient way. Its members were friendly and helpful, and I really gained a deeper understanding of what they accomplish than I had been able to by reading their publications, which I had done before visiting them. The long-term goal of my project is to understand the grounds explaining the diversity of forms of human attachment towards the species of seahorses, from their protection to their consumption. It is particularly significant as long as it is a species which benefits from an unusually large and diversified spectrum of human cultures and societies' attention, and that its international trade has a significant impact on the species.

The seahorses species are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora since 2004. Observations made by Prof. Vincent's research team have proven that some of their sub-species are rapidly declining all over the world, while others' subspecies situation remains unclear. However, according to diverse reports, the global trade of seahorses, which occurs mainly under cover, is estimated to be somewhere between 15 and 150 million per year, mainly for traditional medicine, but also with additional millions caught for aquariums and curio trades. China and southern Asia are the main destinations of the trade.

In the context of this short research visit, my goals were :

- to improve the research project on the protection and consumption of seahorses that I had drafted earlier, as well as to enter the field research by accessing directly to the knowledge of the best experts of the field. This objective was fully accomplished. From the first hand experience of the researchers working in the institute: in particular Prof. Amanda Vincent, who is the world leading

marine biologist concerning the conservation of seahorses, the founder of the Project Seahorse, as well as the chair of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Seahorse Specialist Group.

She has led the efforts of the international community in the listing of the seahorse species in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, in which they were included in 2004, and is a direct witness of what happened since then. Most interestingly for a social anthropologist like me, Prof. Vincent pays significant attention to the cultural tensions embedded within the seahorses fishing issue, and is critical of some measures which have been taken to protect seahorses without taking in consideration the reality of the concerned fishing communities. Her deep and nuanced account of the situation has not only been an academic example for me but as well allowed me to enter the field in the best possible way. The team of Prof. Vincent, composed of younger scholars working all over the world, and their rich experience, were a major source of information for me as well. No other experience could have compared to the fact to meet with these young talented scholars, and to learn directly from them. In addition, this also helped me to gain an understanding of the work of the Project Seahorse, and how it is concretely organized throughout an international network of global volunteers helping them to collect their information about the commerce of the seahorses. Finally, Prof. Vincent very kindly introduced me to other experts from her field with different perspectives on how to address the sustainability issue. It allowed me to gain access to the diversity of views and approaches within their research field, and enlarged my understanding of it.

-a second objective of my visit was to establish connexions with experts in the field of food security in China working at the UBC. This was a rich experience, as well. Prof. Tiberghien, the Director Emeritus of the Institute of Asian Research of the UBC, warmly introduced me to his research and provided advice on my project.

Altogether, this exploratory visit was really successful and helpful. It provided me a unique opportunity to meet with the best experts in the field. On the longer term, I am also very willing to develop this collaboration further. It is my hope that my later research with the concerned populations in Madagascar and China will bring further useful data and an interesting complementary perspective. Based on this rich experience, I believe that my anthropological research will be useful to the biologists and political scientists interested in the field of sustainability in the future.