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SÉMINAIRE

The identity of ecosystems: an evolutionary approach

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Ecosystems are one of the biological objects whose identity is particularly loose, both in space and time. Moreover, the different fields in ecology do not converge towards a unique definition of ecosystems, and therefore do not delimit the same objects. This might not be an issue, since ecological objects might have a purely heuristic value. It is tempting, however, to look for natural ecosystemic objects, whose identity should be discovered rather than postulated. Since evolutionary theory has been instrumental for the identification of many biological objects, this might also be the case for ecosystems. However, the kind of objects referred by ecologists as ecosystems are so loose that they can hardly be subject to evolution by natural selection. A more restricted approach is therefore suggested, where only some ecosystemic properties evolve, not entire ecosystems. These properties may form intricate clusters, which can serve as an evolutionary basis of ecosystemic identity.