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Standards, knowledge, power in the production of naturalist data in France

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Context and topic

► **Framework** : The risk society (Beck)

science paradox : a cause of risk which calls for knowledge and experts to prevent the loss of biodiversity

⇒ the loss of biodiversity has been built up as a planetary risk and declared a global public good

► **Context** : the number of biodiversity conservation policies have strongly increased. This develops means at various scales

⇒ The increasing need for knowledge is linked to a dynamic of rationalisation of their production

Aim of research : to study the characteristics and work of the standardization scheme set up in France to manage naturalist data : SINP

Issue and method

- ▶ The environmental public policy is based on the concerted production of standards with private and public actors
- ▶ It uses a scheme that involves practices, institutions, different scales and legitimacy
- ▶ Hypothesis : this scheme deals with the production of knowledge and a reshaping of power
- ▶ Method: a qualitative approach based on two parallel paths: the analysis of the standardisation process and an anthropological study of the collection practices on the ground

Inventory of naturalist resources in France

The French situation is characterised by :

1. Production of data being considerably dispersed around the country
2. Great heterogeneity among organisations producing data : public or quasi-public bodies, such as the ONF (forestry authority), universities, research centres, voluntary associations, consultancies, etc.
3. Great heterogeneity among data themselves because they are produced under different protocols and systems of reference □ Here is a problem with quality of the data

⇒ The problem of visibility + difficulty to compile data

□ necessity to set standard about data

Naturalist data put to the test of standardisation

What is a piece of naturalist field data ?

1. An observation made in the field that gives : the name of the species in question, place and date of observation, observer's name.

E.g. : 1 buzzard at Rhinau, 21/06/06, by M. Courtecuisse

Production of data is associated with a particular geographical area, and is based on personal relationships characterised by reciprocity and trust

2. The process of normalisation has led to a new conception of data : objective information (without social aspect and context), defined in a conventional way, and easily mobilised by using a data base

In the first case, the diversity of motivation and the forms of commitment are involved in data collection. In the second case, the objective of data production is to meet a need for public policies and European directives.

A new system for rationalisation (1)

Creation of a system by the ministry of Environment : an Information system on nature and landscapes (SINP). Unprecedentedly broad in scope.

Aims of SINP :

1. To standardise data, encouraging access to them through a concern for transparency and for making them accessible to EU authorities and to citizens
2. To set up a web portal to identify who is producing what type of data, where, and using what methods.

Features of SINP : a governance instrument gathering a large variety of institutions involved in data production at different levels :

- at the national level a large committee based on a scientific group in charge of the elaboration both of methodology and a common system of reference
- at the local level they promote a multi-actor committee to set up an organisation. The actors and the institutions must respect the standards drawn up at a national level

A new system for rationalisation (2)

- ▶ **Setting standards must not be reduced to scientific and technical aspects. It also raises political and social struggles :**
 - There is a great diversity of institutions involved in data production
 - The production of data mobilises heterogeneous actors and the relationship between some of them is complicated.
 - Data are very strategic for the institutions especially for NGOs, symbolizing their wealth of material, their expertise, their reputation and their influence.

- ▶ The drawing up of standards mobilises resources and different kind of experts (professionals, enthusiasts with experience) at different scale which are under the responsibility of reknown scientists on a national scale : it raises the question of the taking upon by the enthusiasts of the standards at the local level.

Conclusion

► The standardisation process of SINP deals with various stages

1. Moving from an artisanal and personalised way of collecting to a standardised way
2. The professionalisation of the work of associations : skills without convictions?
3. Changing the limits of public and private areas
4. Bringing several kinds of legitimacy into play : in the name of science (Museum), of a good management dealing with distinct scales (from local to national), of civism (transparency), of world public goods (our common heritage), of governance (cooperation between public and private), of lay knowledge
5. Designating a specific place of knowledge in social, political and economic relations involving practices and values

► SINP essentially limits itself to inventory data