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Assessing the effects of an experimental policy instrument: associations as intermediary agents?

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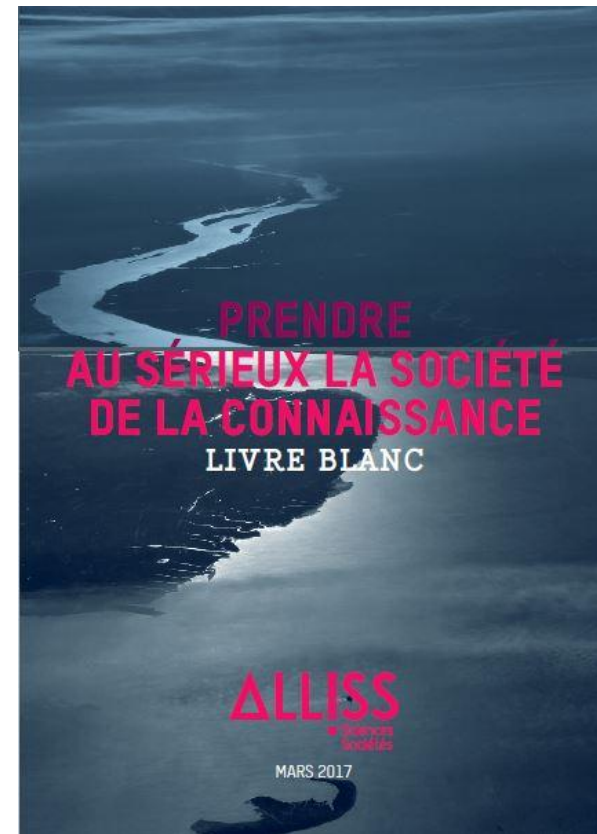
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Impact assessment of an experimental policy instrument: 1. mapping intermediations in associations

Evelyne Lhoste



Introduction



Introduction

- This policy instrument = Fonjep-Recherche
- Finances participation of associations to research and aims at developing a culture of research and innovation.
- Third sector organisations :
 - Civil society organisations
 - Associations (80%)
 - Structured in networks = leader
- Public aid rooted in two major strands of State policies :
- 1. Development of Social Economy Act (2014),
- 2. Youth and Popular Education Act (1964); a State label “youth and popular education” (JEP) + a Fund (Fonjep) = delegate public parascolar socio-education services to associations.

Introduction

- 2019 = Fonjep-recherche =
 - finance associations for their participation to research
 - Replicates an existing policy instrument.
 - Support a project that requires the employment of a qualified employee in an association.
 - allocated for 3 years, renewable twice.

Introduction

- Research question :
 - what do grant winners do ? What objects do they construct ?
- Hypothesis :
 - promote and facilitate interactions between society and sciences through networks, objects and devices (intermediations)
- Methodology :
 - Case study : 35 grant winners 2019-2020 calls
 - Qualitative analyses based on interview, participatory observations, documents
 - Analytical framework

The associations in a nutshell

- 35 associations differ in :
 - geographical areas : from very local to international ones.
 - size : 2 to 100 employees
 - history : 2 to 60 years old
 - Fields / mission : socio-cultural, social and humanitarian, activism, education to sustainable development goals, amateur sciences, innovation for social and environmental transitions....
 - socio technical devices : third place and lab, publishing house, research center, learning center

Two domains of research

- I. Nature sciences
 - astronomy, botany, zoology
 - intermediaries between nature - « crowdsourcers » - researchers
 - Expected impacts: education/outreach, scientific knowledge production, nature conservation
- II. Social innovation
 - Action-research, reflexivity
 - intermediaries between non-human objects – users - researchers
 - Expected impacts: social innovation, education, advocacy

Four types of activities

- Five associations intermediate the participation of volunteers to data collection in public researchers led projects (in two cases, they are at the origin of the research project)
 - Structure and manage a community of volunteers, whether these are amateurs or professionals
 - define an operating mode acceptable for field work and ensure the reliability of the data collected
 - Mobilise, train and support volunteers (includes knowledge transfer and outreach)
 - Align academics to participatory research
 - Problematize research questions
 - Design and co-manage fauna and flora observatories in partnership with research institutions

Six types of activities

- 32 associations are transition intermediaries (Kivima et al 2020, Kanda et al 2019).
 - 4 provide technical knowledge and engineering capacities to local actors for transitions.
 - 6 are “leader association”. They mutualise structures and activities for a network of associations : counselling, training programs and tools, reflectivity and participatory research, advocacy.
 - X associations intermediate the participation of users (beneficiaries, field professionals) to action-research: Build a niche + generalize
 - Five associations intermediate the participation of volunteers to data collection in nature sciences.
- 3 associations are knowledge brokers (Meyer, 2010). They translate and transfer scientific knowledge on transition issues to empower citizens and third sector organizations. They are not intermediary per se, since they are not involved in participatory research processes.
- They all are grassroots innovation intermediaries

Nature sciences

- Amateur community management
 - Structure and manage a community of volunteers, whether these are amateurs or professionals
 - Mobilise, train and support volunteers
 - Mobilize/assist academics in knowledge transfer and outreach
 - Produce tools and methods for participation
 - define an operating mode acceptable for field work and ensure the reliability of the data collected

Nature sciences

- Problematize research questions
- Coordinate or participate to research projects
- Design and co-manage fauna and flora observatories in partnership with research institutions
- Challenges : Assymetry in interactions :
 - Advocate for legitimacy of the role of association in research (gouvernance of networks, data property)
 - expect citizen participation to change behaviours towards nature and science in a diffusionnist approach
 - Mobilize researchers

Social innovation

- Hybrid network management
 - Identify unsolved problem = field professionals, beneficiaries, network of associations
 - Look for and mobilize researchers
 - Align users needs to those of researchers
 - Incubate an hybrid network to problematize research questions
 - Manage a network (space)
 - Nurture experiments in the niche they built
 - Identify and mobilize stakeholders in a territory (public authorities, associations...)
 - Generalize experimentations through identification, diffusion, networking, and advocacy
 - Produce tools and methods for « knowledge crossing » and for generalisation (observatories, training, ...)
- Challenges : assymetry in interactions
 - Acknowledge the legitimacy of field knowledge (excluded groups)

Common challenges

- Build a hybrid epistemic community
 - Acknowledge and legitimate their role in research
 - Legitimate experiential knowledge and provide tools for collaboration and inclusiveness
 - Produce and manage tools and methods for cooperation
 - Develop a common culture and objectives
 - Articulating the needs of some and the expectations of others
 - Aligning resources and skills through networks
 - Managing conflicts and taking advantage of controversies
 - Generalize experimentations
 - Facilitate knowledge transfer between projects and between organizations
 - Mobilize new stakeholders
 - Structure cooperation with institutions at the local and national levels

Conclusion

- Conceptual framework to understand research intermediations in participatory research processes.
- The award-winning associations lay at the border between the worlds of research, third sector, and public authorities.
They accomplish a “boundary work” to address the challenge related to the complexity of building an epistemic community, legitimize experiential knowledge, and contribute to acknowledge of their role as institutional entrepreneurs.