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The import of public engagement. Towards a sociological modelling of the public participation impacts on decision-making processes

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Abstract: The question of the effects of the participation, of its decisional or democratic impact, its capacity to direct public action toward sustainable development, is at the core of a recurring criticism, coming from actors as researchers. These criticisms draw up lists of potential effects of multiple participation devices, desirable or perverse, and are interested in the procedural or political conditions of their realization. They invariably come up against the diversity of decision's contexts to conclude with largely shared results. Our research project, considering that it is not necessary to close the inventory of the debate's utilities to analyze its import, proposes to model this concept of impact or import like an alternative to the concept of effects that is too functionalist. It is not a question any more of drawing up the synoptic table of the potential effects, apart from actors' experience: the sociological model will describe how actors explore themselves the cartography of the possible effects of participatory processes. This model aims at describing finely how actors articulate their lived experiments in environments affected by a decision, a project of installation, a risk, with spaces of production and information flow on the situation and its consequences, places where public discussion are set, where decisions are processed, and the general principles which enable them to support their causes and to organize their representations in controversies and conflicts. The import of participatory processes is due then to the polyphony of the various levels of perception of the state of the world, of decisional calculation and attachment to values brought into play by an environmental issue. We will apprehend these various levels through the multiple sets of actors and arguments which are spread during the history of an environmental dossier affecting its environment. To produce a sociological model of the concept of import, we will build a space of variation of the risked situations with which a milieu can be confronted. Rather than a cartography of the possible cases, which would hardly have sense compared to shared experience in an milieu, we privilege here an entry through territory, and analyzes of the experience of the variation on a given territory – the western half of the Paca Region, i.e. the great metropolitan area of Fos-Aix-Marseille-Toulon. Our modelling will indeed seek to account for the way in which actors, arguments, information, metrologies, principles, etc, circulate from one situation to another on this territory by transforming at the same time the milieu, the devices and the representations. This approach by the territory will be based on the monthly seminar of EHESS-Marseilles "Public debates

and forms of territorialized mobilization", co-animated by F. Chateauraynaud, J-M. Fourniau and M. Leborgne, which will make it possible to compare the work led on other territories or to other scales. On this metropolitan territory, the team already carried out many works. Dossiers followed over long duration knew moments of territorial conflict, crossed various participatory devices, informal or institutionalized, and are always object of controversies and dialogues. The researchers of the team will invest themselves in the follow-up of the developments (2008-2011) of six major dossiers for PACA Region: participatory processes on the industrial risks of the zone Fos-Åtang de Berre; the conflict on the incinerator of Marseilles; ITER project; the project of VHV power line Boutre- Carros; HST PACA project and the SCOT (urban planning) of Toulon, dossiers on which they were already implied, for various reasons (assistance, research-action or university research). The monographs on each six dossiers will not be carried out simply like a collection of tests, but will be used as a basis for sociological modelling, to support the relevant parameters of them. The seminar of the EHESS will be organized according to a double method – seminar of research and public seminar – allowing at the same time the presentation of work progresses and the results on the various dossiers, their confrontation with the work carried out by other teams of research, and their socialization near a larger audience, associative, technicians and decision makers, implied in these dossiers. On a regional scale especially, reforms awaited following the “Grenelle of the environment” lead professional and administrative spheres to an operational reflection on their practices of participation. When the way towards sustainable development requires a more participative democracy, uncertainties which weigh on the effects of the participation are issues. Social sciences then are frequently called as methodological support with the participation or for targeted analyses of feedback experiences. In terms of results, our proposal for a research aims to answer this request according to a principle inspired of the zone-workshops. The seminar as the modelling suggested will make possible to develop partnerships around analyses and shared tools, in particular with DRIRE PACA concerning the dossiers related to technological risks or the “pole of competitiveness” "Risk management and vulnerabilities of the territories" located in Aix-en- Provence, or with the service research and economic forecasting of PACA Region within the framework of key-projects for the regional policy of installation (LGV PACA or ITER).

Keywords: participatory impacts; public participation; environmental decision-making