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SOCIAL SCIENCES

AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE: THE STRENGTH OF WORDS – SOME INSIGHTS FROM A GUADELOUPIAN PERSPECTIVE

¹Marion Gessner, ²Valérie Angeon and ³Eduardo Chia

¹CIRAD/INRA - UE PEYI, Domaine Duclos, 97 171 Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe, marion.gessner@cirad.fr, ²INRA –URZ, Domaine Duclos 97 171 Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe, vangeon@antilles.inra.fr, ³INRA – UMR Innovation Inra Supagro, 2 place Viala, 34060 Montpellier, chia@supagro.inra.fr

Abstract

Acknowledging the contribution of agriculture to global changes and its negative impacts on the environment, it is now seen as unavoidable for it to participate to the ecological transition. This research aims to understand the performativity of legal texts. This performativity does not only reveal the institutions' approach of the model to implement. It also aims to change, in the meantime, the reality (Ambroise et al., 2015). The objective of this research is to stress the importance of concepts' definitions in policies implementation when agricultural system reframing is at stake, and to highlight an uncertain use of words may produce. However, little attention is given to the choice of terms concerning the definition of a greener agriculture in official texts: terms are often mixed up without any clarification. Applying content analysis to official documents, we provide an analytical grid to grasp in what extent the unclear use of words and what they namely designate, lead to ambiguous policies eluding aspects of the concept of agroecology underlined by researchers or associations. We also shed light on the local appropriation process of the concept and its specification in the French Indies.

Key words

Agro-ecology, viability, territorial coherence, policies, governance, content analysis

Introduction

Given the exacerbation of global changes, the agricultural productivist system built at the end of World War II and based on the standardization of production patterns has come to an end and is now seen as obsolete (Caplat, 2014 ; Duru et al. 2014). From the 1970s, some farmers (Griffon, 2014) and then official institutions have put an emphasis on moving to a more sustainable way to grow food (Caplat, 2014). This change in the agricultural production processes is now widely called "agro-ecology". However, this term designates either a fundamental change in the organisation of the agricultural system or only describes the steps to make the productivist system greener (M. Duru et al., 2014). We assume those confusions lead or are linked to an uncertain use of some concepts such as "viability" and that there is no consensus as to what the concept of "agro-ecology" encompasses. We postulate that confusion from the definition of this word lead to an uncertain use of this concept and some others such as "viability" or "durability". It is now relevant to take stock of the use of words linked to "agro-ecology" in official texts related to policies, planning policies or agricultural development. Are those terms used in a performative issue? We also specifically emphasize the use of the concept of viability in official texts concerning Guadeloupe to discover what it designates. We wonder if there is more stability concerning the use of this term. The aim of this research is to give some insights and to stress the strength of words in policies to rethink the agricultural system on a territorial scale and make it clearer to apply in terms of territorial governance.

Method

This research focuses on content analysis of recent official texts. Our study is based on a grounded theory approach as it is an exploratory research and follows an inductive path. From documents, we build several transitional hypotheses. We use mixed methods: mainly qualitative but also quantitative in the treatment of data. We build an analytical framework from the official texts to analyse the use of some chosen words linked to agro-ecology and agriculture in the Caribbean. The French Agricultural law of 2014 and official texts of the French Indies on different scale (national, territorial and local) are specifically analysed. Using the software N'vivo, we look for the occurrence of words in the texts and the nodes between those words and others. We also pay attention to the literal definition given to each concept by each text and the vocabulary used and if any specific place or example is given to illustrate the concepts. Taking account of the definition of the different forms the concept of agro-ecology embraces (Duru et al., 2014), we classify the definitions of agro-ecology given in the texts. We use a 2D dial to identify the meaning each text give to the words studied according to two different stresses : if the approach is either individual or global, and if changes in the agricultural system come from an external or an internal drivers (cf. figure 1).

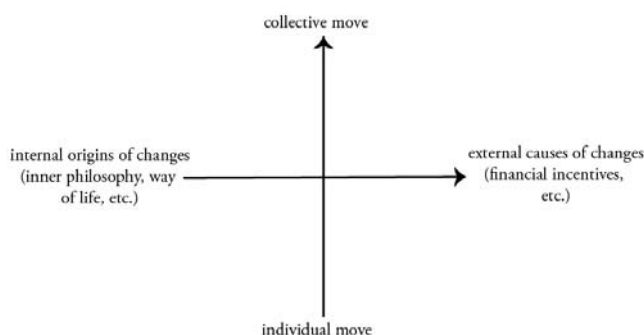


Figure 1 - Framework designed to analyse the definition of concepts. Gaïa-Trop, 2016.

« Strong agro-ecology » would be in the upper part of the graph whereas « weak agro-ecology » would be in the lower part. The left lower part represents the individual work of agricultures as opposed to the right upper part which represents the collective work to achieve for agroecology to become the « paradigm » off rural development.

Results

The first results derived from basic statistics dealing with the frequency of chosen words and some of their synonyms (cf. figure 2). We identify who uses those terms and what they argue using them. We determine if those words are truly followed by means or territorial projects to be implemented or if they reveal a passing trend.

	agro- écologie	viable- viabilité	flexibilité	pérennité	vulnérabilité/ vulnérable	adaptation	Résilience	durable- durabilité	territoire- territorial	gouvernance	exploitation(s) agricole(s)
Loi d'avenir pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et la forêt (2014)	10	7	0	2	2	9	0	33	66	1	46
Vers des agricultures doublement performantes (2013)	92	6	4	0	3	36	3	57	85	8	29
Loi Grenelle II de l'environnement (2010)	0	0	0	1	7	17	1	95	125	6	2

Figure 2 - Frequency of appearance of chosen terms in three main French official texts. Gaïa-Trop, 2016.

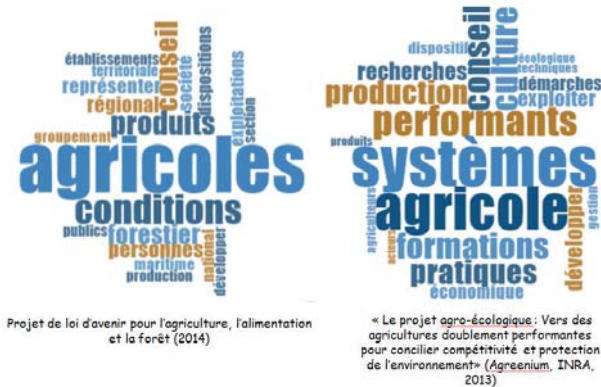


Figure 3 - The 20 most frequent words in two institutional texts. Gaïa-Trop,2016.

Graphically (figure 3), we can see that institutions use different concepts or term to develop their activities or proposals. Thus, concerning development issues, the law text focuses more on production whereas the Agreenium-Inra report has a more systemical approach putting the concept of production system in the centre of the text. Figure 4 highlights the multiple meaning of terms. In the case of “viability”, the hypothesis that this term is not part of a common paradigm is confirmed: given the increasing importance of the term, it rather emphasises the idea that we must be « politically correct ».

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Figure 4 - The use of the term «viability» in two official texts (Loi d'avenir pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et la forêt (2014) et « Le projet agro-écologique : Vers des agricultures doublement performantes pour concilier compétitivité et protection de l'environnement » (Agreenium-INRA, 2013)).