

Annual Workshop of the Paris Risk Group

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# More Participation, Better Technological Choices? Participation and Access to Evidence. The Case of Conservation Agriculture.

Pauline Landel, PhD AgroParisTech

[Landel.pauline@gmail.com](mailto:Landel.pauline@gmail.com)

Parallel session 3: Public participation for decision-making

Results from a PhD research in political sociology on *Participation and Technological Lock-In in the Ecological Transition for Agriculture. The Case of Conservation Agriculture in France and Brazil*

(ADEME/INRA/AgroParisTech, 2015)



## Context. Participation and Evidence in the Risk Society

- The **idea of participation** has gained success in the past 30 years
  - Both in academic literature and public policies
  - Regarding environmental issues and management of technological risk and uncertainty
- In order to cope with complex issues, urgent need for **evidence that is as adequate, reliable and robust as possible**
  - *Evidence : a specific kind of knowledge issued from systematic investigations or cumulated experience*
  - *Adequate : which is appropriate for the decision maker's needs*
  - *Reliable : evidence which domain of validity is explicit and known*
  - *Robust : evidence that is grounded on empirical data*

## Key Question

*Is participation an efficient idea to improve the access to adequate evidence for evaluating and making technological choices ?*

# Outlines of the presentation

1. **Theory** : What does the academic literature tells us about participation and the issue of accessing good/adequate evidence to make technological choices?
  - *Some blind spots*
2. **In practice**: Analyzing conditions of access to evidence in which participation is embedded
  1. *Great changes in the regime of knowledge in France since the 1960s*
  2. *Different doctrines on participation and evidence*
3. **Conclusion**: Why participation may not be enough and can even have some perverse effects for public debate on technological choices

Fourth Paris Risk Group Workshop

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# More Participation, Better Technological Choices?

1. Participation and Access to Evidence :  
What do social sciences have to say?

Pauline Landel, PhD AgroParisTech

[Landel.pauline@gmail.com](mailto:Landel.pauline@gmail.com)

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## 1.1. A blind spot on conflict and controversies

- A pattern since the 1990s:
  - **Institutionnalisation** of the idea of participation in **very numerous devices** linked with the environment, risk assessment/evaluation...
- A « hybrid project » of researchers and practitioners (Fourniau, Blondiaux, 2011) : the **normative tendancy towards an « ideal » of participation**
- Focusing on procedures (Mazeaud, 2011) and « **institutionnal design** » (Blatrix, 2012)

➔ Blind spots / pioneer fronts in research :

- conflictuality and controversies in democratical life and technological debates
- Actual effects and efficiency of participary procedures **on public policies (Behrer, 2011)**

## 1.2. A blind spot on the material conditions of access to evidence

- A very rich field of (ethnographic) studies at a micro level (practices, interactions, representation...) (Fourniau, Blondiaux, 2011)
- But **few macro analysis** on the structural conditions that stakeholders have to access the evidence they need to defend their interests in participatory processes

➔ Little taking into account of **inequalities in accessing resources** (such as evidence) and asymmetry of information between actors, especially in scientific and technical debates

- Fouilleux 2013, 2010; Berriet-Sollicec et al., 2014; Ferretti, 2007; Levidow&Marris, 2001...

➔ Blind spot on the context of technological debates linked with economical interests (Gaudillière, Bonneuil, 2001)

## 1.3. A common epistemic principle : the symmetry of knowledge

- A methodological (and efficient) posture of sociology of science to analyze controversies and actors' relationships and conflicts (Callon, 1984; Latour)
- A common (normative) idea : symmetry of knowledge helps achieving democratic debate. Lay Knowledge = Evidence
- Explicit opposition : Co-production VS. Evidence-Based Policy (Elgert, 2010)



### Blind spots on crucial issues regarding quality of evidence :

Do stakeholders have equal resources to access adequate evidence to defend their interests?

Do participatory devices improve the **content** and **quality** of technological debate and decisions? How can we evaluate that ? Tackling very current issues such as reliability of evidence used in risk assessment...

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## 2. Historical highlights:

In what context is the idea of participation declined and used for decision making ?

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## Replacing participation in structural transformations linked with evidence

- Analyzing the evolutions of the « **regime of knowledge** »
- The production, evaluation and access to evidence **have greatly changed** in the last decades
- Though there is also a largely shared view that knowledge would circulate in a more open society, without any institutional issues
- Actually **new institutionalized compromises** have emerged between the State, the productive and private sectors, and other actors
- Which **determine the access and the quality of evidence** for evaluators and decision makers

## 3 periods in the evolution of French Knowledge Regime

### 1) 1960s: Modernizing agriculture and compensate inequalities in accessing resources (i.e evidence)

- Organising access to evidence for the State administrations (Ministry, local authorities)
- Reinforcing technical and statistical competencies; combining social sciences and agronomy
- Investments and new missions for public research :evidence for public policies and applied research; conception and evaluation of innovations & impacts
- Identical in EU countries (cf PROAKIS project)
- Re organisation of applied research institutes and extension services,
- mutualized means of access (common publications, databases, experimental fields, labs...)

## 3 periods in the evolution of French Knowledge Regime

- 1) 1960s: Modernizing agriculture and compensate inequalities in accessing resources (i.e evidence)
  
- 2) 1980s: Crisis of the (not so ideal) regime
  - Crisis of the political compromise on modernization:
    - Internal crisis in the profession and farmers' unions
    - Economical failures of the dominant technical model ; exclusion of less intensive technical alternatives
    - Environmental, territorial and sanitary impacts (+Rio 1992, Cork 1996)
  
  - Liberal turn in international agricultural policies (end of agricultural exception – Marrakech 1994 / retreat of the State in public policies)

## 3 periods in the evolution of French Knowledge Regime

- 1) 1960s: Modernizing agriculture and compensate inequalities in accessing resources (i.e evidence)
- 2) Crisis of the (not so ideal) regime
- 3) Liberalisation and regulation through opacity
  - A new project for agriculture: the State, the agro-industry and the « big farms »
  - Numerous technological projects to transform or green-wash agriculture; no political compromise => Complexity/uncertainty
  - Fewer adequate and shared evidence to base decisions on
    - Reorganisation of the Administration (missions, resources)
    - Fragmentation of the R&D system and greater involvement of private firms in back-office
  - The idea of participation to regulate access to information and evidence
  - Ex. of working groups in Grenelle and Ecophyto

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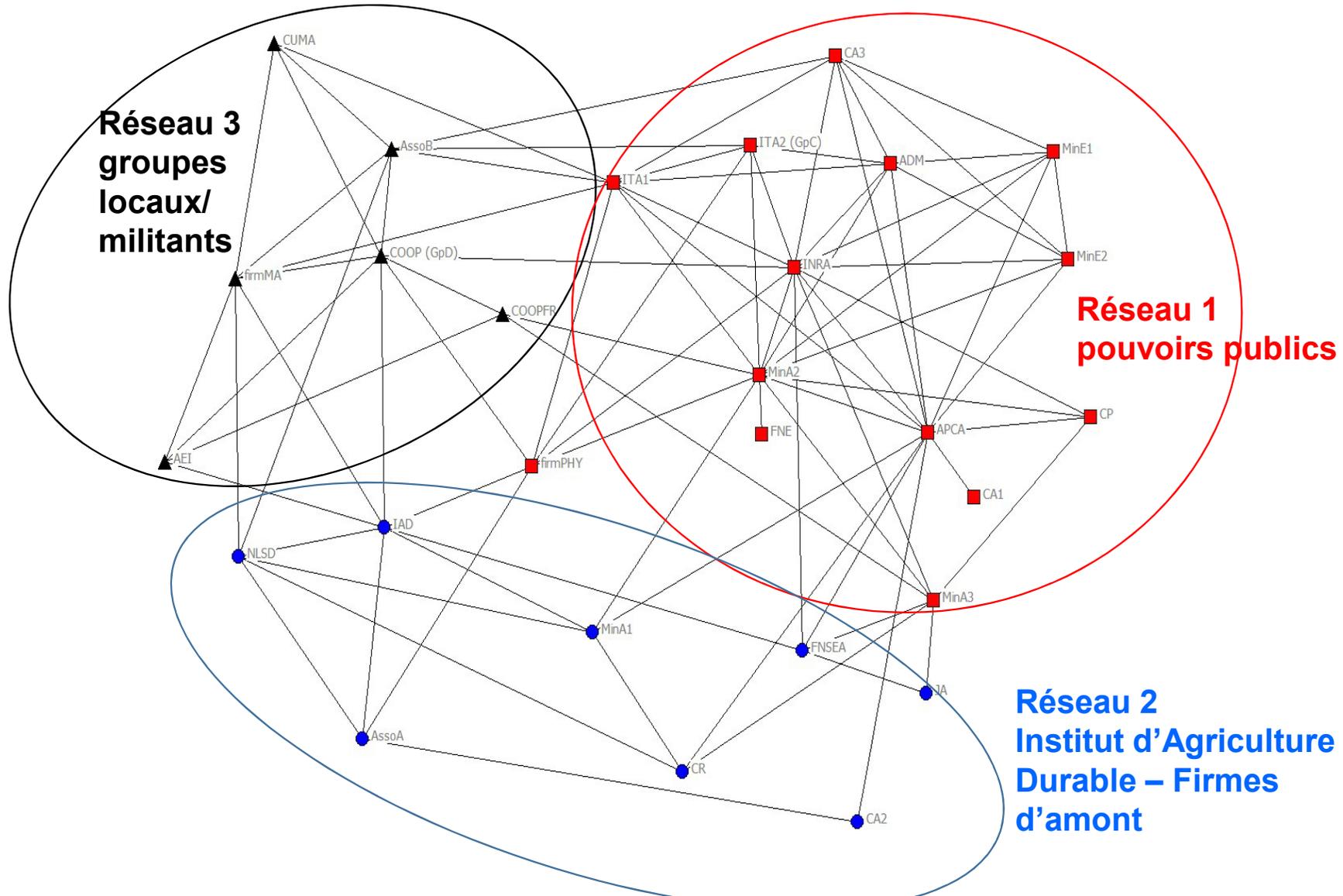
## 2.2. Why participation does not compensate these structural transformations

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# Conservation Agriculture in France : 3 networks...



... sharing 3 different doctrines on participation and evidence

	<b>Network 1 "State administration"</b>	<b>Réseau 2 "IAD" /firmes</b>	<b>Réseau 3 "Groupes locaux /militants"</b>
<b>Function of participation</b>	Producing consensus Delegating the State's prerogatives on evidence	Accessing local innovations and recruiting farmers	Enlarging access to evidence on alternatives to pesticides; innovating and managing risks; mutualizing experience in the absence of collective resources to do so
<b>Access to evidence issued from systematic investigations</b>	Loss of competencies and resources in administration depts.  Little systematic evaluation and capitalization of evidence.  No organized access in working groups and participatory bodies	R&D departments of firms  Collaborative open access platform  Extension services & technical advisory services	Mainly evidence issues from experience Occasional collaboration with individual researchers

# Concluding remarks : Perverse effects of the idea of participation

A common reference that veils very different phenomenon :

- A lot of existing work and efforts on participation is about democratizing debates, improving representativity, enhancing the minorities' implication and the recognition of points of views
- Inequal dynamics in accumulating evidence between the State, private firms and practitioners / actors of local change that prevent from democratizing technological debate and evaluation
- Growing involvement of private firms in the regulation of information and availability of evidence for decision-making, without systematic evaluation
- Complementary analysis and efforts may focus on improving material resources to access adequate, reliable and robust evidence in participatory devices

Thank you for your attention !

# Matériau et démarche

