

Thesis abstract

Agriculture in the Social Sphere: systems, practices and forms of engagement

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Joint thesis for the doctoral degree in Political and Social Sciences (ULG) and in Sociology (UHA)

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Ref. : Muramatsu, K. (2012), *Usage de l'agriculture dans le social : Dispositifs, pratiques et formes d'engagement*, Doctoral thesis, Université de Liège / Université de Haute-Alsace (cotutelle), Liège / Mulhouse, Belgique / France.

This thesis deals with the ethnographical and sociological analyses of the modes of use of agriculture “in the social sphere” by comparing Belgian and Japanese case studies. Two municipal actions were treated in parallel within the respective contexts of construction (Part I: Chapters I-III) and in their specific spaces of activity (Part II: Chapter IV-V). The Centre for the Creation of Agri-rural Life (*Nô-Life Sôsei Center* in Japanese is henceforth referred to as the Nô-Life Centre) launched in 2004 in Toyota City in Japan is an establishment for agricultural training and mediation for renting farmland from ten sectors. The Nô-Life Centre combines two objectives: agricultural and social; principally the reinvigoration of fallow land and the promotion of activities in order to *ikigai* (render “Life worth living”) for an aging population of permanent residents. In Belgium, the *Entreprise de Formation par le Travail Ferme Delsamme* (the Work Training Initiative at Ferme Delsamme, henceforth known as EFT FD) was launched in 2002 in the municipality of La Louvière. This initiative aims to combine social and economic objectives; namely the socio-professional integration of at-risk adults through organic agricultural practices combined with the economic incentive of the sale of bushels of organic vegetables from the harvest.

The purpose of the analysis was not to assess the success or failure of these systems according to their stated objectives, but to understand and to make comparable these two heterogeneous cases highlighted by politico-historical constructs and the sociological implications of these actions. These systems form specific links between the economic and social spheres: precisely between the use of agricultural activity and the implementation of new forms of social intervention.

Agriculture understood as work taking place in a natural environment (nature work) constitutes a specific space of activity behaving as a "medium" or an "intermediate" to the combination of different forms of engagement and coordination of people and objects. This first definition precedes the definition of agricultural work as the functional support to a general (or public) purpose and as a system of economic production. This methodological position differs from the economic approach, which considers agricultural

production as a system of wealth accumulation as well as that of classical rural sociology that views agriculture as an essential element of the peasant society. Furthermore, other approach contravenes the functionalist approach that addresses agricultural production in terms of its multifunctionality. Our approach aims to address the construction of meaning located between agricultural production and socio-political dynamics and their effects on the individual.

Based on the analysis of forms of engagement of operators and users in their interactions and their efforts at adjustment of the tensions, this thesis proposes the idea of “ethical” regimes of action that are distinct from forms of coordination which are spontaneous (ethnomethodology) or maximalist (based on the principle of justice, Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991), but consist of a minimum number of principles for reflection and practice available to be used by actors. This is not a very explicit grammar of action, valued and formalized, yet active (in practice or potentially) in the individual experience. These regimes need to be particularly connected to adjustment efforts and combined with other forms of coordination in order to be performed. Thus we identified the importance of two characteristic forms of these regimes: compassion (taking an infinite responsibility to address individuals in distress) amongst operators ; social autonomy (the balance between individual autonomy and relational dependency based on the recognition of vulnerability and fragility) amongst users. Agricultural activity is defined here as the intermediate space supporting the combination and the performance of these regimes.

Given the horizontal and marginal nature of the object of study closely related to research fields (agriculture and rurality, social policy, local public action), it was difficult and inadvisable to place that object exclusively in one of these fields and establish a state of systematic knowledge and to subsequently adopt an successive approach. Instead of placing the object of our research within a predetermined field of analysis, we assessed the genealogical contextualization (Foucault) of our object by first examining the basic historical and scientific literatures. In the first chapter, we reviewed the major characteristics of systems of intervention such as: the emergence of new social issues such as long-term unemployment and social exclusion in Europe (Rosanvallon, Castel, Donzelot, et al.). In Japan, these social issues were in particular the aging population (Tominaga et al.). In the third chapter, the history of the use of farming (rural life or agriculture or gardening) for social intervention beginning with the 19th century such as the agricultural colony, the familial colony, and allotment gardens in Europe and Japan; as well as new types of community gardens that emerged in the 1970s (insertion gardens or shared gardens).

The second part (the fourth and fifth chapters) is based on historical reviews taking into account both the institutional and normative composition related to political and legal systems. We studied, by the method of “combinative ethnography” (Dodier, Baszanger, 1997), the forms of engagement and coordination amongst operators and users in their specific spaces of activity as social effects of these systems and as reactions of these persons to the norms.

The emergence, in the 1970’s, and development of a scientific and political discourse on social exclusion has reshaped the social question and the mode of social intervention (Chapter I). Breaking with the theme of poverty, social exclusion has not only been treated as the problem of lack of resources to

compensate for those who are excluded, rather it has also been treated as the process of loss of multiple links (cultural, social, economic) to prevent or reorient a person from exclusion. Different discourses and systems emerged and developed to face the process known as social exclusion – through insertion, activation, an active welfare state, human capital, promoting *ikigai* of the elderly in Japan, active aging – and involving a series of formal features and real change. This change takes place at the formal level: as the individualization, contracting, accountability with the notion of human capital (individual as an entrepreneur) as well as on the real level, transversalization, territorialization, psychologization, corporalization, and spatialization.

The evolution of the field of the agriculture used for social intervention has occurred in parallel with the development of a discourse and systems for the treatment of social issues. The agricultural colony and the familial colony constitute a field which is "minor and offset from the issue of social rights (Rosanvallon, 1995)", two contrasting techniques of social assistance through providing work in agriculture. The first technique is disciplinary: the control of individual behavior; the second is a security device (*dispositif de sécurité*) : the regulation of the freedom of a population (Foucault, 2004). This is how the development of *jardins ouvriers et familiaux* (workers' and family gardens) occurred in the 19th century. This initiative was an innovative and complex form of assistance by providing work as a means of support of familial, social, and economic integration for the working-class family unit. This initiative combined the techniques of disciplinary and security action. Allotment gardens developed from this 19th century model as a pioneer form of social assistance through work. By combining the disciplinary and security aspects, this initiative provided support for integration within a family unit through agriculture as well as providing, in parallel, social and economic development for the working population. Such initiatives presented an opportunity for a stable and self-sufficient life-type as well as the free use of private space for leisure and primary sociability.

The new market-type community gardens (insertion gardens) and non-market (shared) gardens were introduced in France and Belgium in the 1980's as a new approach to social issues in order to assist with social insertion thereby empowering the individual on both the professional and socio-cultural levels. These gardens, in their various forms, constituted a departure from allotment gardens by contacting individuals that had been adversely affected by the process of social disaffiliation (Castel, 1995). Their activities are also open to different spheres (local economy, lifelong learning, dignity, civility, conviviality and ecology). As shown in the case of Belgian solidarity gardens, the transversal, territorialized and personalized nature of these gardens can be an adverse factor in acquiring their institutional recognition.

Japanese Citizen Gardens (*Shimin nôen*) were created in the mid-1960's to respond to the needs of both urban and rural areas. These gardens utilized agriculture to address the increasing social and cultural concerns of the population such as education, autonomy of vulnerable people, and *ikigai* of the elderly since their public recognition in 1990.

In the second part, the cases of the Nô-Life Centre of Toyota and EFT FD of La Louvière show in common local public policy actions elaborated at the initiative of their mayors and project managers in a

transversal approach (*ikigai* / agriculture at Nô-Life Center and insertion / organic gardening at EFT FD), and more or less independently from the sectorial and administrative logic of control exercised through the agricultural policy for the Nô-Life Centre and the social policy of EFT FD. The logic of the common good of a territory (Lascombes, Le Bourhis, 1998) gained importance in the process of intermediation between the logic of the purely social (*ikigai* and insertion) and the logic of efficiency. However, this transversality was used in the assessment criteria with difficulty due to its complexity and the difficulty to render objective the personalized and territorialized effects of the system. Above all, the policy of *ikigai* and that of insertion involves taking into account the subjectivity and the disposition of each user, which causes a dilemma amongst the operators of public services and the low morale amongst their users.

Under these cognitive and normative conditions, we found two predominant regimes of action in the field amongst operators and users. On the one hand, the operators (the social workers of EFT FD in particular) effect the regime of compassion which combines the ethic of infinite responsibility when faced with the distress of others along with civic responsibility based on equity and solidarity (Corcuff, 1996 ; 1998 ; 2005). On the other hand, most of the trainees at the Nô-Life Centre effect the regime of social autonomy which associates the concern for individual autonomy (taking initiative, inspiration, dignity) with relational dependency (domesticity, appurtenance, affectivity) based on the recognition of the vulnerability and fragility of this population.

The situations characterized by these regimes of action explain both the difficulty in increasing the visibility of the social effects of these policies, and the difficulty of the generalization of specific practices in this field. This observation is consistent with the specific features of new systems of social intervention that we identified in the first chapter (see above), and it further explains the difficulty of instituting these practices from the internal perspective of the operation systems used in such initiatives. The genealogical analysis of systems and the combinative ethnography allows the analysis of external and internal supports for collective action.

In conclusion, this thesis addresses the agriculture used for social intervention and suggests a framework to understand the modes of agricultural practices in their social contexts. This method distinguishes itself from the three usual paradigms: the productivist (integration to the State or to the market economy); the community-based (embedded in the village community or family); the post-productivist (positive externality of non-market goods). The use of agriculture for social intervention as we have studied it, is derived from the subjectivity of its practitioners, as the support and intermediary space of their relationships with the human and non-human spheres and with the society.