E-participative mobilizations to promote local public actions in a globalized French Basque Country

CIPAST citizen participation in science and technology

Subject

E-participative mobilizations in the French Basque Country as an empirical case-study.

Rationale

The objective is to understand how e-technologies can allow wide-open-citizen and territorialized mobilization over the traditional State borders. *Pays basque numérique* is e-label defended by the *Agence Pays basque des NTIC* (aNTIC), which is linked with a Public administration (Communauté d'agglomération Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz). Doing so, indirectly, aNTIC can develop e-geographical solidarities, promotings own democratic "e-dynamics", empirically, thanks *to* Basque citizens participation and *for* Basque actors and citizens.

Main steps

A Basque Label to defend Basque Numerical property

The *Pays basque Numérique* proposition has been presented for the first time in October 2005, called "Build together a Numerical Basque Country". In February 2006, the project is presented to the Civil society: the will is to define wide territorial strategic perspectives, thanks to a new action-models, as a collective and governance-inspired models and through a collective object the "Numerical Basque Country" Label. Meetings are organized but a website holds information about NICT, about the project, about its evolution.

-1. This first step is the time of observation, when everyone can make its opinions (January-September 2004).

-2. The time of exchanges (*concertation*) with the experts and workshops (June 2005-April 2005).

-3. The period of propositions and of sharing opinions (April-September 2005).

-4. The time of the definition: the Values of the mark (a), the communication support (b), the Chart of utilisation (c) (October 2005-April 2006).

-5. The time of Self-management of the Mark (Autonomous agreement comitee… June 2006-December 2006), the official presentation of the mark has been made in January 2007.
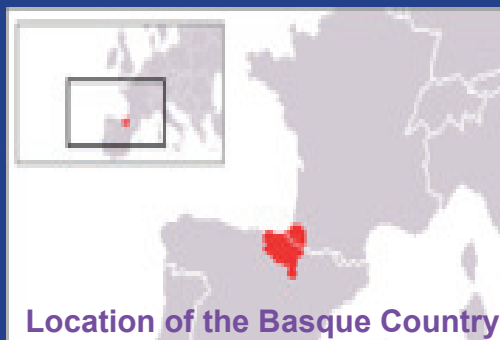
The initiative is open to all the individuals or societies who want to defend the project. Delegated ambassadors are chosen to study the candidatures. Candidates are allowed from the associative world, the public administration (*collectivités territoriales*, Institutions…), firms… All the choices are deliberated.

A Label to promote Basque e-territory over the e-World

Thanks to the aNTIC Pays Basque, NICT allow Basque *entrepreneurs* to keep on defending an e-territory over French State limitations. It allows to manage an own collective action, culturally close to the governance procedures defended by the European Union and marginally supported by the French administration. In this context, most of them, with intuition, think that the identity is a resource in a competitive territorial market as it is for the merchant market.

The apparent complementarily between the High-tech Design of the Spanish Basque Country makes think about a dragging process for the Low-tech economical design of the French territory. The 2007-2013 Operational programs of the European Union, promote transborder solidarities, in term of economical, civilian... exchanges from both side of the frontier. The public action must be backed by governance procedures. So the role of transborder/transnational structures established with actors from the Spanish Basque Country could appear as a very attractive opportunity for the French Basque actors who participate in *Pays basque numérique* Label. Nevertheless, until today, even if there some contacts with Spanish Basque actors, it's quite limited. An in term of NICT uses, the Spanish Basque Country seems to be more developed, because they knew a real Industrial Revolution, because they are much more structured and strategically oriented thanks to their local governmental institutions. For example, the Town Halls, local institutions and Development structures are unified thanks to NICT in specific platform as Garapen ("Development") or sometimes another Development agency. It's not only the fact of a local governance but overall the fact of a regional policy.

aNTIC Pays Basque shows that localized specific mobilizations about public action around Basque identity (Economic intelligence exchange, territorialized dynamics, Basque language…) is able to structure a territory that the State doesn't want to identify. In a multilevel system, these dynamics are not only alternative to contemporary State policies (French State, local & regional scales, or Spanish and European levels…) in an international context, they also illustrate unusual management in unconventional actions, beyond the traditional states authorities within the Globalization. The e-mobilization in a specific territory as French Basque Country that the economic actors have totally integrated, thanks to economical identity market, allows cultural and political mobilizations alternatively to administrative boundaries. It produces a kind of bottom-up mobilization (local actors: firms, association…), supported marginally by local agglomeration administration. So, they are able to manage decentralized democratic public actions/policies alternative to top-down democratic institutional shapes.

In the French Basque Country, the NICT make the local actors, but not political representatives, produce democratic e-policies around their own interests (economic development, language defence…) evading the administrative locking. In centralized State like France is, others territories with a strong identity culture (French Flanders, Corsica…) get inspired in this alternative way of local management. (Cf "Corse numérique" Label…) and try to promote some decentralized governance their way… Do cultural aspects take other e-mobilizations appearances elsewhere than in the French Basque Country?

Location of the Basque Country

References

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Methodology

Following social anthropological methodology, the findings for this contribution are the fruit of long-term fieldwork carried out using the method of participant observation and open-ended interviewed. I participate in the various participative democracy and governance projects in Basque country (included the Spanish Basque country): More specifically, over the course of 2005 and early 2007, I spent significant time participating in meetings, interviewing actors (representatives, technique staff, directors of the projects, participants, citizens…). This work has made asking people their personal interpretations, experiences and feelings of the work to explain how and why they get involved in the project. In these contexts, I was able to observe participant behaviour and their interaction with each other as well as with non-members. General and specific fieldwork research was also backed with academic literature basically in political science.

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