



International Conference on
The (Re)appropriation of Knowledge and Know-How
Actors, Territories, Processes and Issues
19-20 May 2016
Paris 7 Denis-Diderot University

Current research on the elaboration, circulation and usages of knowledge forms has focused on the hybrid nature of these constructions and the various ways of borrowing and re-composition used by them. It has tended to oppose, at times in a rather simplistic manner, supposedly scientific forms of knowledge and those that are seen as being traditional or indigenous ones. The notion of knowledge transfer, extending beyond that of acculturation or borrowing (M. Espagne, Werner, L. Turgeon et D. Delage), has often been employed to explain this process. Although this does in effect enable us to question the circulation of all types of knowledge by different actors and their transposition in varied contexts, it may tend to assume some sort of permanence or autonomy of these knowledge forms. This may at times lead to a study of circulation that is dissociated from the actors who implement it, as well as the ever modifying contexts, both spatial and temporal ones, in which it occurs, and which leave their mark upon it. Thus, in spite of often strong and large scale situations of asymmetry and domination, the process of globalization does not always lead to a standardization of knowledge forms. As Arjun Appadurai has demonstrated it, it is this very tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity that defines the complexity of globalised situations. The emerging contrasts call for an in depth analysis of the multiplicity of the procedures of transformation that are at work. The process of homogenization or the tendency towards standardization, as well as the numerous inventions, new creations or re-compositions lead us to question the validity of the concepts of appropriation and re-appropriation as means of comprehension. The issue also needs to be contextualized, and recent phenomena need to be observed on a long term basis while testing the magnitude, indeed the reality of what we call the present day rupture.

It is our intention, in this conference, to reflect upon the concept of appropriation or re-appropriation of forms of knowledge on the basis of specific situations. We shall carry out this analysis from the point of view of the actors, their involvement, their aims and objectives, while examining their agency and the strategies that they make use of in the production and use of knowledge. It shall be less a question of reception than that of (re)appropriation of knowledge and practices by the actors, both on an individual as well as on a collective basis. The purpose is not to fix the definition of these processes of (re)appropriation, but to envisage these notions from a methodological and heuristic point of view. We intend to determine not only who or what are the actors involved but also to examine the emerging processes and their dynamics.

In this respect, a one day workshop was organized in April 2015 by the members of the research group « Constructions and usages of knowledge forms » of CESSMA during which various themes linked to social, cultural, linguistic or political phenomena were studied. The participants focused upon a wide array of issues and concrete situations, both contemporary and past, in Asia, Africa and America as well as their ramifications upon the rest of the world.

The aim of this international conference is to pursue the reflection on these topics while focusing our attention upon the following points:

The multiplicity of the actors, individual as well as collective ones, their mutual collaboration or competition, and the historical, social and spatial context within which they act shall be at the core of the debate. How do local actors, institutions, governments and international organizations coordinate their dynamics or indeed contradict themselves in the process of adapting, mastering or benefitting from various forms of knowledge?

The very concept of knowledge forms is central to our debate. A wide range of these shall therefore be studied, whether it is knowledge or know-how seen as being “scientific” - both formal and informal - “professional” or indeed “traditional”, popular, classical or erudite ones. Questions linked to the process of heritage designation shall be an integral part of this reflection. The 2003 UNESCO convention on intangible heritage has reformulated erstwhile norms and opened the way for acknowledging hitherto neglected forms of knowledge, thus reconsidering notions of ownership, authenticity and transformation. The creation of new categories of cultural property has led to the emergence of new modalities in terms of legitimization of indigenusness, whether institutional or not, while at the same time contributing to the emergence of new actors, both locally present or belonging to diasporas, community members or researchers (Bortolotto 2011, Tornatorre 2010 et 2011, ANR Fabriq’am).

What exactly is meant by the appropriation, re-appropriation or incorporation of knowledge forms? How is the relationship between an observer or a learner and a

known form of established knowledge? What are the methods or critical perspectives that enable us to identify knowledge forms that exist but are not recognized as such within their society of origin or within the culture of the observer? Is this a matter of theoretical or practical positioning, or one of ideological or political involvement on the part of the participants or the researcher as much as that of the scientific detachment of the observer and analyst?

We could thus examine all the phenomena of (re)appropriation or incorporation of knowledge forms, emanating from specific regions or cultures, as indeed the processes leading to the transformation of their meaning and usage, thus bringing about their possible re-elaboration and re-invention. Different languages, whether juxtaposed or co-related, techniques of translation or transposition as well as prosaic or literary forms of (re)appropriation could also constitute possible lines of research.

Particular attention will be paid to the role that specific events, situations of conflict and crises may play in the process of (re)appropriation. We shall also follow the circulation of these forms of knowledge over time and space and look at not only how they are transmitted amidst social actors (individuals, groups and generations) but also at how ruptures and resurgences can occur in the process of transmission. Does the (re)appropriation of forms of knowledge necessarily lead to the wiping out of heritages, identities and cultures or does it bring about the emergence of more subtle re-combinations. How are certain knowledge forms subject to reinvestment and rediscovery and, when this occurs, to reinterpretation or reinvention? What kind of rupture and resurgence occurs in the process of transmission of perpetuation of knowledge forms?

The appropriation of knowledge forms does not necessarily have to reach purely intellectual, cultural or scientific ends. It is therefore essential to determine the purpose and the motives for which actors (re)appropriate knowledge forms. To what extent does this (re)appropriation bring about the construction of cultural and social identities in a value based system? How can it serve the objectives of individual or collective valorization, including the quest for efficiency or legitimacy aimed at attaining symbolic or real benefits, in the arena of social hierarchy, power and communication?

And finally, we shall also dwell upon the (at times undesired) consequences of this appropriation, depending upon the relative positions of the actors, whether they occupy a dominant position or a subaltern one, whether they are linked by relations of dependence, alienation or of autonomy. To what extent do the processes of (re)appropriation appear subversive or dangerous? Do they aggravate forms of mutual competition, or are they perceived as unsuccessful and illegitimate, being signs of the renunciation of a supposedly original identity or culture? Do they transform – and if they do, how - the relationship that individual or collective actors share with themselves and with the rest of the world?

Your proposals (3000 characters) should specify the perspectives and the field from which you plan to analyze the subject as well as the period under study. They may adopt one or several of the viewpoints enumerated above or may follow any other original approach related to the theme of the conference. Your proposals may be written in French, English or in Spanish and should be sent by 10th December 2015 to the following address:

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The decisions of the scientific coordination committee shall be communicated by 15th January 2016. The papers can be presented in French, English or in Spanish (in the latter case a two page résumé of the talk, written either in English or in French will be required).

Scientific committee

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