

New meanings for old habits? Representations of climate change in France and Germany

De nouvelles significations pour d'anciennes habitudes ? Représentations du changement climatique en France et en Allemagne

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate how global ecological problems (such as climate change) affect everyday knowledge and practices in different sociocultural contexts. A qualitative research design based on interviews and focus groups was applied in France and in Germany. Results show that 1) causes and consequences of climate change remain unfamiliar in both countries because of identity stakes (changes in nature will affect our culture) even if 2) in Germany risks are represented with a higher proximity. 3) Climate change and ecological practices are anchored in different categories in each country: moral categories in Germany, linked to a global interpretation of climate change; political categories in France, associated with a local interpretation of climate change. Finally, ecological practices embody

Résumé

Cet article vise à comprendre comment les problèmes écologiques globaux (tels que le changement climatique) affectent notre savoir quotidien et nos pratiques dans différents contextes socioculturels. Une recherche qualitative menée à partir d'entretiens et de focus groupes a été réalisée en France et en Allemagne. Les résultats montrent que 1) en raison d'enjeux identitaires, les causes et les conséquences du changement climatique demeurent étranges dans les deux pays (les changements dans l'environnement naturel vont affecter notre culture) même si 2) en Allemagne, les risques sont représentés comme plus proches. 3) En fonction du contexte, le changement climatique et les pratiques écologiques viennent s'ancrer dans des catégories de pensée différentes : des caté-

Key-words

Climate change, social representations, practices, anchoring, culture

Mots-clés

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the very tension between nature and culture and are a way to link past relationships to nature and a possible future society.

gories morales en Allemagne, à mettre en lien avec une lecture globale du changement climatique, et des catégories politiques en France, à mettre en lien avec une lecture plus localisée du changement climatique. Enfin, les pratiques écologiques incarnent la tension nature-culture et font le lien entre des rapports ancestraux à la nature et une possible future société.

Talking about the weather is as common as asking "how are you?". To qualify the weather as *strange for the season* became common too, since scientific experts proclaim climate change as being a major issue of our century. Therefore, when saying "*what a sunny day today*" we often add: "*it is unseasonably hot, isn't it?*" But does climate change elicit deeper reorganizations of our everyday life, our knowledge and our practices? In fact, science itself is *astonished* by the "discovery" of the role of human activity on climate changes. For example, Chakrabarty (2009) shows how the anthropogenic explanations of climate change alter the well-established dichotomy between "human history" and "natural history". The human becoming a geologic agent, human History is now concerned with nature. Also historical science must develop new thought categories able to support this relationship. But what are the consequences of climate change for everyday knowledge and practices? In this article we will analyze how everyday knowledge and practices face the idea of a global ecological problem in two sociocultural contexts, France and Germany.

Science, common sense and social representations approach

Weber and Stern (2011) suggest a number of explanations why there is no convergence in scientists' and nonscientists' understanding of climate change: it is intrinsically difficult to understand, personal experience can easily mislead, judgments are influenced

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