
How to make "emplaced valuation" matter in processes of political and economic regulation. Understanding the social movement for sustainable degrowth through a pragmatic sociology of valuation

Laura Centemeri*^{†1} and Gildas Renou*^{‡2}

¹Institut Marcel Mauss (IMM) – CNRS : UMR8178, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) – 54 Bvd Raspail 75006 PARIS, France

²Sociétés, Acteurs, Gouvernement en Europe (SAGE) – CNRS : UMR7363, université de Strasbourg – Maison interuniversitaire des sciences de l'homme - Alsace 5 allée du Général Rouvillois 67083 Strasbourg Cedex, France

Abstract

The transition towards a more sustainable use of environmental resources is an issue usually studied through the analysis of governmental and intergovernmental actions and their implementation. The initiatives promoted in order to support the reduction of green house gas emissions are an example of such actions. In these initiatives, experts and scientists play a crucial role in the definition of the problems at stake and in the elaboration of guidelines and incentives to promote the sought after change in patterns of production, consumption, organization and natural resources management.

At the same time, the transition towards a "frugal" or "sober" society - as opposed to a society of mass consumption - is today the goal orienting and federating a wide and heterogeneous variety of actions undertaken on a voluntary basis by citizens in the North as well as in the South of the planet. Under the label "sustainable degrowth", a variety of movements support a voluntary change in the forms of production, consumption and cooperation, oriented towards objectives of social, economic, environmental and epistemic justice. Our hypothesis is that one of the main features that distinguishes actions undertaken in the frame of the development of a "sustainable society" from those meant to promote a "frugal society" is the different practices of valuation that inform these actions, and the practical modes of social and economic organization that they support.

Our hypothesis is that these frugal practices point to the need for a radical change in modes of valuation in order to respond to the socio-economic and environmental crisis impacting our societies. As we are going to discuss in the paper, an accurate concept of valuation has to link together deweyan (situation-based praxis) and weberian (ethos-based axiology) approaches. Moreover, the sociological investigation of the valuable cannot consider this task as separated from the economic investigation on value. This approach to valuation can help us to envisage the various contextual expressions of "voluntary simplicity" not only as manifestation of a structural transformation of the consumer's choices, but as a deeper political

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: laura.centemeri@ehess.fr

[‡]Corresponding author: renou.gildas@club-internet.fr

transformation. The movements for the sober society try to address the current failures of economic organizations and political institutions in their capacity to take into account certain ways of valuing things, environments, and people. We then consider these movements as actors that are engaged in a major process of redefinition of the relevant modes of valuation in our society. What accounts as a worthy job activity? What accounts for a valuable environment? How to value food? What is a valuable mode of cooperation between people? These are just some of the issues these movements are dealing with in their discourses and in the practices they promote.

In this paper we are going to explore how these social actors challenge the dominant market-driven and industrial logics of the valuable. We advance the hypothesis that these movements try to develop logics and practices of valuation, which set up a place for the expression of "emplaced modes of valuing". The relevance of these modes of valuation has been traditionally underestimated not only in the modern conceptions of political and economic regulation, but in the theories of social action as well. By "emplaced" modes of valuing we mean modes of valuing based on the sensory perception of places and people, experienced in ecological-based processes of human life becoming. The pragmatist approach to the dynamics of situated action is a central resource to clarify this point. Furthermore, emplaced modes of valuation can be usefully distinguished from "detached" modes of valuing, based on conventional representations of the valuable, that have been developed in the double perspective of measurability and equivalency required for public decision-making processes.

We propose to illustrate how modes of "emplaced valuation" are empirically promoted by contemporary social movements engaged in sustainable degrowth. The promotion of an extension of the "sphere of the valuable", relevant for public deliberation, influences and modifies, we argue, a variety of political processes implicated in the activities of these movements. As a necessary corollary of this argument, we are going to discuss the conceptual and methodological challenges raised by the need to equip social sciences so to make "emplaced" valuation debatable.

Keywords: valuation, degrowth, social movements, regulation, pragmatic sociology