

Food styles and new approaches to innovation

Sociological analysis of innovation co-design processes in the food industry

ABSTRACT

As a first step, we lead some exploratory interviews in order to understand the practices of innovation and its challenges into the multinational. The actors interviewed expressed their willingness to innovate in a pertinent and structured way, integrating the holistic dimension of food, which correspond to the conception and elaboration by the nutrition team of two methodologies (dispositifs) by the Nutrition team, in collaboration with socio-anthropologists. Then, in a second step, we focused on the Food Styles methodology, that have been created in 2009 in collaboration with the Cirad. A network has been developed through this approach, inside the firm and also in collaboration with external scientists (from medical sciences and human sciences). With their own elaborated mission: to bring health through food, to the largest number of people; this socio-anthropological studies appear as an opportunity to know subtly and understand contexts of the countries into which they are growing. This dispositif appears as innovative in their way to think innovation. Nevertheless the valorisation of this socio-anthropological data into a product still requires its proof. The perspective of innovation is faced to several limits as the volunteer to think long-term innovation with very short chances. Nevertheless, these data give to the actors sense in their professional realizations and appear as vectors of the social corporate responsibility of the enterprise, in a specific configuration between the global and the local filiales. The team who is carrying these projects has to convince of the double pertinence, strategic and business of these methodologies, they are using for that a certain register of justification; in a specific context of the enterprise, modelled by the double imperative societal as economic. We finally identified in this research the difficulties that marred the cooperation between the firm and the social sciences research team responsible for collecting anthropological data as part of Foodstyles, in particular on time to transform this data into concrete innovation. The issue of temporality dissonance between research activity and innovation design in the firm is central to this, as well as the borders of dispositif set up by the partner team. This is particularly the place given to socio-anthropological knowledge by corporate stakeholders that we questioned, highlighting the fact that these could be considered "fair", or "just", in the sense of justice and rightness, by nature, when she did not allow as such to resolve the specific issue of building markets for innovations generated.

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Project leader : Frederic Goulet

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Project leader's RU : INNOVATION

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PERSPECTIVES

In line with this work, and with the discussions in the academic community generated by the article published in the journal Innovations, we started with colleagues from UMR Lisis (Paris) and SciencePo Paris reflections on a research possible project analysing the forms of commitment of agricultural inputs companies in the design of responsible innovation, concerned particularly with the environmental field. The case of alternative products to pesticides, in particular biocontrol products, is actually the main case study identified.