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Paper presentation

The Territory Game: an experiment in veterinary education of an innovative educational tool to help students career choices.

Educational and career counseling is a major issue for higher education and especially in sectors where the professionals work in rural areas. Indeed, in industrial countries, most of rural areas are touched by a desertification: young people, in majority from urban areas, don't want to go in these places because they can't imagine their life here.

The veterinary profession is in this case and had faced since many years to a "vocation crisis" affecting the activity with production animals called "rural". In this case, we wanted to understand what factors influence involved in career choices of students.

We have designed and achieved a research between 2012 and 2014 to study this situation on vet students (n=1508) in France. We have based our analysis on social psychology by an enter specifically on the Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 2000). We have showed that student choices come from a variety of representations of veterinary profession in rural areas (Dernat, 2013). These can negatively influence career choices. These representations are built on a project (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008) inserted in a temporal perspective: they depend of the social background of students, their vision about the future but also from the curriculum, especially the placements. Placements influence students but don't reflect the reality and give stereotypical pictures of rural areas (Dernat & Siméone, 2014).

For us, this partial perception of rural territories is a major origin of decline of rural practice. Thus, we want to allow students to develop skills in understanding these territories by the use of a pedagogical tool based on the methodology of Territory Game (Lardon *et al*, 2007; Lardon, 2013). For us, this tool could encourage their installation. The territory game is a participatory activity mediated by co-constructed socio-spatial representations. It consists on three steps that are played in a group (5/6 persons): the shared territory diagnosis, anticipation of change scenarios and the planification of actions on the issues identified for the territory.

Our goal is to enable collaborations to link the representations and motivations of students with the situation and the real issues of the territory. Through active participation and the expressing of the plurality of territoriality (Debarbieux & Lardon, 2003), we hope to foster the creation of knowledge and skills closer to the expectations of veterinary students and constraints of rural areas.

To assess the effectiveness of the tool, we want to evaluate the evolution of socio-spatial representations of rural areas between the formed group and a control group (same number and profile of students). We will use semi-structured interviews and mental-maps before and after the experiment and after the first placement in a practice. This method has been tested and validated in a preliminary study to explore career choices of students through their representations.

Our test will be realized on fifteen students (3 groups) in the second year of the curriculum in Lyon's vet school (before the first placement in a vet practice) in February 2015. Our paper will present this experiment: the description of the game process, results of the assessment and consequences on students choices and behaviors in placements.

For us, our pedagogical tool will improve the career choices of students by influencing their representational project. After the experiment, we want to propose a turnkey tool to help veterinary schools in the counseling of students.

Socio-spatial criteria are not enough taken into account in the representation project of students who have to work in these rural areas. Yet, they play an important role in the career choices and our pedagogical proposition aims to fill part of this gap.

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