La Fabrique Ecologique
FONDATION PLURALISTE DE L'ÉCOLOGIE

Data, the new driver of the ecological transition?

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SYNTHESIS

29,000 gigabytes - this is the amount of data published around the world every second. An unbridled growth at the root of what is known as "big data", a volume of data so large that it exceeds the analytical capabilities of conventional computing tools. The ecological data contained within this is a valuable source of information in addressing the many challenges related to climate change (green mobility, energy efficiency, agricultural transition, etc.).

Ecological data can be harnessed in a natural environment, in which case it is a measure of a natural phenomenon which, by definition, does not belong to anyone. Other data may represent a human or industrial activity, but one that has an ecological use. Many initiatives mostly originating from companies, large groups or start-ups are already using the potential of this data. However, there is a lack of coherence and especially of governance to capitalise on these experiences and achievements. This means that more than ever before, a joint, collaborative and integrated action is required. This action must be part of the double ecological and digital transition, two major transformations that sometimes conflict with each other, but which will have to be combined in order to meet the needs of our society.

There are several obstacles to the efficient use of ecological data and data with an ecological use: difficulties in understanding techniques and data processing; an inconsistent mass of legislation that sometimes results in contradictory obligations; a lack of dialogue - or even a mutual mistrust - between the world of technology and that of ecology. Regulations should urgently be harmonised to both encourage and reassure stakeholders. It also seems essential to foster coordination at European level, even if it is difficult at this stage to define its parameters. Finally, to address the lack of awareness of this subject on the part of elected officials and the general public, the issue of education and awareness-raising is paramount.

Two proposals are put forward in this note for a more efficient use of ecological data:

1) **An exceptional status for ecological data:** there would be a differentiation between ecological data and all other types of data, with the former being granted a free license by default, in order to be available to as many people as possible. This would help initiatives to emerge and circulate, so that the whole planet can benefit from the collection and treatment of this data.

2) **A more intensive and operational application of data with an ecological use**, notably through two measures: at local authorities level, providing a Green Data Officer to help local representatives define and achieve their objectives, with a strong guiding line - better understanding data in order to listen to citizens better; at State level, promoting data use in particular through the creation of a "nudge unit" within the Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition.