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CHAPTER EIGHT

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND POLITICS IN WASTE MANAGEMENT IN FRANCE¹

CLAUDIA CIRELLI AND PATRICE MELÉ

Abstract

This chapter deals with the different forms of citizen involvement in debates on the evolution of waste management policies. In a context of rapid evolution of waste treatment techniques, of pressing need to reduce waste and to develop a more sustainable management system, grassroots organizations are being called on to participate in awareness-raising actions and in consultation or participatory bodies. However, the mobilised groups wish to be recognised as legitimate actors not only on the basis of their practices and knowledge of the local context but also on the basis of their competence in a specific field of public action. The results of our study thus show the importance of highlighting both the processes whereby scientific knowledge is translated into the capacity for action, and the forms of learning and “expertification” entailing mastery of the technical discourse of professionals. However, the paper shows that democratising this technical field does not simply mean improving the participation mechanisms to take account of user’s opinions. It is also necessary to make space for the positions of groups involved in the politics of expertise.

Key words: waste, collective action, participation, expertise, environmental conflicts

Introduction

Individuals and households occupy a central position in the strategies of public authorities to bring about a change in the way waste is managed. Citizens are considered first as users, whose behaviour needs to be changed through information and awareness-raising actions, the development of behavioural engineering, or by including them in management procedures (Barbier 2002; Fudge et al. 2013). More generally, human and social-sciences research on the conditions required for ecological transition has focused on either understanding changes in behaviour and analysing the

¹ This work was supported by Centre-Val de Loire Region, under grant APR IR 2017.

habits and actions of individuals (Wallenborn 2007), or how the norms or rules of behaviour are constructed at the societal level and incorporated in social practices (Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012).

In this chapter, we take a different approach, centred on forms of citizen involvement in discussions about changes in waste-management policies. As in other domains, this involvement can take the form of either top-down participation, initiated institutionally, or bottom-up participation through the creation of various kinds of associations (Fung 2003) wishing to be considered as stakeholders; in other words, “invited” or “uninvited” participation (Wagenaar 2014). This is a domain of public action that is characterized by ongoing conflict, in spite of the increasing possibilities of participation. We have shown in other studies that attempts at participation remain incomplete and have little impact on decisions (Bobbio, Melé and Ugalde 2016; Cirelli 2013; 2016). Plans for waste-treatment facilities continue to encounter fierce opposition from local residents (Bobbio 2002; Rootes and Leonard 2012). Moreover, in a context of rapid developments in treatment methods, and the need to reduce waste and develop a more sustainable system of management, grassroots organizations are being called on to participate in awareness-raising actions and consultation or participatory bodies. This limited opening up of the debate to non-professionals in the waste domain, as in other domains of environmental public action, can be considered by some as an achievement for civil society as a way to promote democracy, or as a ruse by the public authorities to build social acceptability (Lochard and Simonet 2009; Lochard and Simonet-Cusset 2016; Fischer 2000). In addition, here, we take a broader look at other forms of engagement in the waste-management domain, where many groups advocating a new societal relationship with waste are carrying out local waste prevention or reuse and recycling experiments.

In this chapter, we explore the hypothesis that the mobilized groups wish to be recognized as legitimate actors on the basis of not only their practices and knowledge of the local context (Deboulet and Nez 2013; Sintomer 2008) but also their competence in a specific field of public action. We address the issue of the role of citizens’ demands for participation in changes in waste-management policy by focusing on the tension between the place given to lay people by institutions and the forms of expertise claimed by citizens participating in grassroots organizations.

Our text is thus in line with work re-assessing the relations between community mobilization and expertise (Chesta 2021; Pellizzoni 2011). Our position is in keeping with French studies in political sociology, which take a relational approach to expertise (Barbier et al. 2013; Trépos 2002). This approach distances itself from the so-called realist positions (Collins and Evans 2006) and differentiates between knowledge, competence or specialist knowhow, and expertise. This position stresses that what ultimately characterizes an expert is being in a situation of expressing a judgement (Trépos 2002). Our aim is thus to analyse the strategies implemented by organizations based on what could be called the politics of expertise as defined by Ricardo Emilio Chesta (2021); in other words, the search for counter-experts and for competent and

recognized allies, and also according to our own definition, namely the construction of the political and institutional conditions allowing their voice to be heard so that they can participate as experts. This chapter is based on research carried out in the Centre-Val de Loire region of France.² The specific feature of this project is its analysis of all the collective actions related to waste, irrespective of the nature of the organization, from informal collectives to broad-based environmental organizations, or new groups specifically addressing the issue of waste management. We carried out a survey and review of initiatives, with qualitative interviews and observations of interactions between the groups and the public authorities in the framework of institutionalized participation schemes.

We aim to answer the following questions: (1) What types of knowledge are mobilized in the grassroots organizations or in the framework of participation schemes? (2) What forms of expertise can be identified? (3) How can citizen knowledge gain legitimacy? To this end, first we describe the specific characteristics of waste management with regards to the debate about the relationships between knowledge, competence and expertise. We then discuss the role of protest groups, Zero Waste collectives, and finally grassroots organizations in the participatory processes established for drawing up the regional plan for waste prevention and management.

Knowledge, Competence and Expertise in the Domain of Waste Management

For a long time, the waste issue was marked by a strict separation between the public authorities who were responsible for the type of management chosen in the name of public interest on the one hand, and the position of grassroots organizations or groups of residents on the other. The latter were unable to make their views heard other than through protests against the undesirable effects of existing facilities or the adverse effects on their lifestyle of new infrastructure projects. Furthermore, waste management is characterized by forms of modernization that reinforce the technical nature of the domain. It is also a domain in which the general public's right to information was recognized relatively early, in the same way as high-risk facilities. However, public participation was not seen as a form of democratization, but rather as a means of strengthening social acceptability, following decisions that were blocked as a result of the increasing number of protests. Rebuilding confidence in the functioning of the "expert system" (Giddens 1990) of waste management was achieved

² AGIRE Project: Collective Actions, Local Involvement and Waste Management in the Centre-Val de Loire Region (2018–21), UMR CITERES, University of Tours. We conducted one hundred interviews with the leaders and participants of grassroots organizations. To ensure anonymity, extracts are referenced in square brackets by the name of the group or organization to which the interviewee belongs only. Our study was conducted within the territory of the region, which is organized around two medium-sized towns (Orléans and Tours), and small rural towns and villages, providing a context that seems particularly suitable for examining the spread of interest in transition with regards to waste.

through greater transparency of management methods and by including grassroots organizations in the commissions set up to monitor the facilities.

However, changes in the way that society relates to waste have had a profound effect on the role demanded by residents and users. On the one hand, the protests can provide the conditions for people who wish to be involved in the issue and who develop a position about desirable management methods; and on the other, the position of the waste problem in the broader environmental issue has changed profoundly. Today, it is a domain in which action to reduce the distance between environmental values and lifestyle appears both possible and necessary. The groups promoting zero waste base the legitimacy of expressing their views on personal, family or group experiences of transitioning to a zero-waste lifestyle. In addition to organizing awareness-raising actions, they also create opportunities for experimentation and learning.

To examine these questions, the first step is to take into account the diversity of the profiles of the non-professionals who have become involved in the issue (local residents, zero-waste groups, environmental activists and academics involved in the experimentation with new ideas), and also the different ways of relating to public action, types of knowledge, and means of legitimization. Another important aspect concerns the relations between different groups, forms of hybridization, mutual learning, and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1998). Within each group, we discovered people investigating new developments in the domain and who wished to be recognized as local stakeholders in the full sense of the word. They carry out localization work, actualizing locally the trajectory of the public waste-management issue, demonstrating a capacity for multilevel action. These people have become specialists in the domain, as well as acquiring activist skills enabling them to implement forms of community lobbying, with the aim of creating the conditions enabling them to be proactive in local waste management.

The representatives of these groups are not laypeople trying to break into the world of public policies. They consider themselves to be competent in the overall functioning of the system and in the possible forms of transition in this domain. When they criticize the proposed infrastructures, their position is one of providing a second opinion, discussing projections for reductions and the real needs of the facilities. When they are invited to consultation meetings, they adopt the role of experts, repeatedly drawing attention to the meaning of regulations, and the role of regional planning; they produce clearly argued notes referring to experiments conducted in other contexts, recalling elements of case law. In discussions with local authorities – who frequently raise questions regarding the difficulty of organizing the service, the financial constraints, problems of acceptability of changes to the way the system is organized, and the obstacles related to the behaviour of the general public – they put forward a different perspective, adopting a view following the line of public policies designed to bring about a change in habits, while demonstrating the public demand for transition.

The Role of Groups Protesting the Siting of Waste-treatment Facilities

In France, as in many countries, it is generally the opponents of waste-treatment facilities (incinerators or landfill) who win the battle, in spite of attempts to create project coalitions based on political agreements or dialogue processes (Bobbio, Melé and Ugalde 2016; Rootes and Leonard 2012). In the Centre-Val de Loire region, these controversies have had a strong impact on local situations due to their intensity and length, but they have also led to the emergence of new collective players.

In all the conflict cases identified,³ local residents anxious about proximity to an existing or planned facility have come together to make their opposition heard by the decision makers. They use the press and litigation, and sometimes carry out actions disrupting public order (demonstrations, blocking traffic, interrupting municipal council meetings). In the cases studied, we observed a shift from the particular to the general in the arguments used by the opposition groups, from identification of potential nuisance factors to questioning the management method in general. Their argument is based first on intimate knowledge of the area where a new facility is planned, or of the functioning of an existing facility when there is a plan for its extension. They justify the legitimacy of their argument and involvement in discussions by adopting the position of local residents (Fourniau 2007) and citizens affected by a public decision. With regards to existing facilities, these groups are called on by consultative bodies for their role in warning about malfunctions (pollution, noise, etc.). Facilities operators ask residents to become part of “nose networks” to report odour nuisances in order to identify emissions. Residents are thus asked to provide a report of a sensory experience linked to their proximity to the facility. However, they want to be involved on the grounds of their contextual knowledge (Fischer 2000), linked to their everyday use of the place. They develop expertise that comes from living next to a waste-treatment plant; they know the quality of the river water and the local fauna, they know if the height of the stored waste has increased, they know that a proliferation of birds means that organic waste has been buried, and that stronger smells may indicate a malfunction of the flares that burn the methane. This contextual knowledge is coupled with monitoring activity around the facility (vehicles entering and leaving, types of buried waste). For these people, all these reasons justify their participation in discussions about the future of the area and local waste management (Cirelli and Rocher 2013). However, their local-resident status and proximity to the facility or project on which they base their rights to act and express their views also constitute their main fragility, as they may be deemed incompetent to discuss issues of public interest and seen as being concerned only with personal and selfish interests (Cirelli

³ Including a project for an incinerator in Tours blocked in 2004 and a methanization project dropped in 2019; the Indre department’s revised plan for household-waste disposal was cancelled in 2014 by the administrative tribunal following an appeal by a local group opposing the focus of the plan on a landfill site in Châtillon-sur-Indre; and a lengthy dispute in Chinon (lasting more than ten years) about whether incineration should be maintained or stopped. New forms of conflict linked to methanization projects in rural communities have also become increasingly widespread.

2016). They reject accusations of Nimbyism on the grounds that their protest concerns the protection of the environment or is in the general interest (Trom 1999; Fedi and Mannarini 2008; Inwinkl 2011).

Grassroots associations created as a result of opposition to infrastructures often choose a generalist name referring to protection of the environment or preservation of a way of life. After the protest, they extend their interests to other environmental issues, adopting the position of vigilant citizens (Roux 2006) capable of producing an informed opinion – a sort of counter-expertise – about other domains of the environmental question (Ollitrault and Jouzel 2015). Generally, after the most intense phase of the conflict, these groups comprise only a few people, but some maintain a vigilant stance, alerting the public to local environmental risks. Through the knowledge acquired during the campaign, and through meeting other groups (e.g. generalist environmental groups, zero-waste organizations), these people have developed a capacity for gathering information and for reflective analysis. This enables them to identify relevant information by contacting nongovernmental experts, and using resources on the Internet or disseminated via national NGOs. As described by Francis Chateauraynaud (2011), they carry out work connecting their living space with the trajectory of a case (e.g. incinerators, landfill sites, methanization units), which involves being able to identify the precedents, possible ways of constructing arguments, and other groups involved in different situations. The inquiries that they carry out, as defined by John Dewey (1927), and the desire to act as spokesperson involve identifying who will be affected by the project and acquiring greater knowledge of the area they wish to protect. Moreover, they develop the ability to sift through the mass of available information, arguments and precedents, and to find allies and resource people. The skills that people acquire during protest campaigns lead to not only a new relationship with the place but also a capacity for multilevel action.

Inter-group relations can also take the form of creating extended collectives, coalitions of opponents at an intermediary level bringing together residents, activists from environmental organizations, and ordinary people engaged in actions related to waste management. This was the case in Tours, where the anti-incinerator Arc-en-Ciel (French for “rainbow”) collective has had a lasting local effect, bringing together eleven local groups including a large registered environmental organization called SEPANT.⁴ This collective played a major role in mobilizing the public, in organizing information meetings and events, claiming to have more than one thousand participants, resulting in the withdrawal of the project in 2004 following a moratorium on incineration signed by the Socialist party (which held the main positions in the local authority) and the Green party before the municipal elections (Rocher 2016). Action against the

⁴ SEPANT was originally a naturalist organization, a member of France Nature Environnement, aimed at protecting natural habitats. As indicated by its name (Association for the Study, Protection and Management of Nature in Touraine), it combined investigative activities and participation in consultative bodies as a registered NGO. However, some people in the organization had participated in identifying the environmental risks linked to municipal dumps as early as the 1980s.

incinerator was thus characterized by a shift from opposition to the site of an incinerator to action against incineration. The Arc-en-Ciel collective also provided a forum for learning and discussion, bringing together people from very different horizons, including local residents who were essentially homeowners in outlying villages, environmental activists, and experts on the waste issue. It declared its support for a transition to zero waste in a process described as the construction of a “collective intelligence” and “maturation” (see interview with Waste Group of SEPANT). Following the experience of participating in the actions of Arc-en-Ciel, some members of other groups joined SEPANT to create a waste sub-group with the aim of taking up the issue and to be in a position to give an informed opinion, and hence be recognized as having a key role in discussions with the public authorities on this issue.

After fourteen years of the status quo, during which time the capacities of existing landfill sites were extended, a new facility was blocked in 2018 following opposition. This involved a plan to construct a mechanical-biological sorting and recycling facility coupled with a methanization unit in an industrial zone in the inner suburbs of Tours, which had to be abandoned due to a campaign by a local-resident group advised by the experts of Zéro Déchet Touraine⁵ (see below) and the waste group of SEPANT.⁶ The increasing competence of local organizations in Touraine, and (as we will see) their desire for transition in the waste-management domain, together with the lack of consultation with local residents and groups prior to announcement of the project, led once more to delaying the decision to construct a local waste-treatment facility. However, the prospect of the closure of local waste-disposal sites (two landfill sites) in the near future, and the legal obligations to reduce the volume of waste and separate biowaste, obliged local stakeholders to revive the debate on waste management.

The Spreading Influence of the Zero Waste Groups Across the Region

More recently, other means of engaging with the waste issue have increased and been introduced across the region. The zero-waste groups that have been created to prevent and reduce waste often reject the traditional form of environmental organizations and do not use the language of conflict, and their main aim is to raise awareness and promote a different way of life.

We identified ten zero-waste groups in the Centre-Val de Loire region. Two main profiles of the people leading these groups emerged clearly from the interviews, and two main ways of relating to knowledge and expertise. First, there are the people whose role is to develop the local group; mainly women aged thirty to forty, with a high level of education and generally one or two children. The interviews frequently reveal a link between adoption of zero waste as a way of life, engagement in collective action, and residential and family history. The second profile, observed in the Zéro Déchet Touraine group, is what we could call zero-waste activists; often academics,

⁵ We have retained the French names of the organizations.

⁶ Highlighting the obsolescence of this type of facility, which does not include the separation of biowaste.

with extensive knowledge of waste-management methods, and with some also involved in other environmental or social solidarity economy organizations. They are more likely to adopt a stance of putting pressure on waste-management operators.

However, all the people we interviewed describe zero waste as a process, starting with taking control of food and consumption at the individual level, and the adoption of a lifestyle that enables the family unit to obtain a degree of autonomy. Overall, they have a positive vision of individual and collective action, and belief in the possibility of driving change or transition through local actions concentrating on practical questions within the reach of everyone. Transition to zero waste is presented as a procedure involving an attempt to solve practical questions and overcome the difficulties of adopting a lifestyle that rejects consumer products from the dominant supply chains. Collective action – the creation of a zero-waste group – is essentially described as a sharing of experiences, an exchange of practical ideas enabling access to new knowledge that has been put to the test and evaluated for its capacity to resolve concrete problems.

The interviews frequently took the form of narrative accounts of how these women “conduct a real investigation” to gather information and implement actions and practical solutions that allow them to take back control of their consumption and “find alternatives to a whole heap of things” (see the blog “Camille se lance”).

Some describe their experience on blogs or Facebook, for example: “I tried it and it works,” which is also a way of attracting new people to the lifestyle. In this way, Facebook is a way of constituting their public (Quéré 2003), even if some people question the real interest of the people who have signed up and the quality of interactions. The Facebook page is used to present work directly, as well as pass on information from a variety of sources, offering local advice and providing links to related resources and national or international blogs. It thus involves a process of experimentation, of knowledge acquired through practice, involving considerable reflexivity and putting individually or collectively tried solutions to the test. Moreover, the creation of a local support group is a way of maintaining momentum, of going (back) into action, as well as being a resource for people who wish to “take the plunge.” The actions set up thus aim essentially at winning over individuals, while also constructing an environment in which it is possible to adopt a zero-waste lifestyle and to pursue the process. The zero-waste groups are communities of practice (Wenger 1998), creating opportunities for learning, united by forms of local collective action and knowledge sharing.

The claims and legitimacy of people who are active in the zero-waste world are based on the extent to which they have transitioned to zero waste, personally and as a family. While the tone is essentially one of benevolence, acknowledging that individuals must advance at their own pace, their exemplariness is based on their own achievements.

The largest organization, Zéro Déchet Touraine, which is affiliated with Zero Waste France, was created by an alliance between a group on Facebook and other people,

essentially men, at the instigation of academics who were engaged in the process and who were joined by a variety of people, some of whom were members of other environmental-protection or grassroots organizations. Based on their considerable technical knowhow and capacity for innovation, these people developed a new model of community composter: the Compostou.⁷ They attempted to position themselves as experts or counter-experts of public policies at local and regional levels. The objective stated by the leading member of Zéro Déchet Touraine is to encourage institutions to move away from the “unculture of waste valorization” to “a culture of waste prevention,” and to be seen as credible and respectable by local authorities and waste-management operators in order to drive the change of institutional practices.

However, this collective also includes people with the first profile we identified, and thus functions not only as a means to promote the zero-waste approach but also as a space for its members to learn about the functioning of local authorities and the role of legislation. This is the position adopted by the president of the organization, who is a biology lecturer and personally engaged in a zero-waste procedure, embodying the link between this dual role of mobilization and awareness raising. In his lectures, he talks about his own experience of transitioning to a zero-waste lifestyle and encourages people to take a gradual approach. It was these lectures that brought together the people who created the organization and enabled its rapid growth.

Zéro Déchet Touraine has thus constructed a specific position, embodying the movement for transition to zero waste, which hopes to be taken seriously by public institutions, companies and other organizations. It takes a position of constructive criticism in order to put forward concrete solutions for waste-management problems. The lead members of the organization distance themselves from traditional forms of activism, and do not wish to be likened to ecological or environmental organizations or degrowth activists, or to be part of what is presented as ideological opposition, in order to extend its audience, and “to set in movement all the elements of society.”

Participation of Grassroots Organizations in Regional Planning

In the waste domain, there are few institutional consultation or participatory bodies that take into account the positions of grassroots organizations. For each existing facility (landfill and incineration), as for all classified facilities,⁸ there are monitoring commissions that are open to local residents’ groups. However, these are not participatory bodies, only a means of complying with statutory obligations regarding the public’s right to information and of linking a facility to its institutional environment. These forms of including local residents on a voluntary basis, criticized by some groups

7 The Compostou is an organic cold composter, which is the fruit of a research and development programme set up by a laboratory at Tours University and funded by ADEME (Agence française de la transition écologique). Its developers promote this method as a cheap alternative for small local collectives to manage organic waste in urban areas (Moreau 2019).

8 Any industrial or agricultural facility that may create risks or cause pollution or nuisance, particularly for the safety and health of local residents, is a classified installation.

as manipulation, are supposed to increase confidence in the functioning of the facilities. These bodies are not a forum for discussion and play only a small role in controversies or conflicts (Rocher 2006; Cirelli 2016). Due to the amount of investment at stake, municipal waste-treatment facilities are not generally obliged by law to organize a public debate, and at the national level, only the largest projects choose to have recourse to the National Public Debate Commission.⁹

Apart from the information measures set up after announcing the projects, in an attempt to limit the intensity of protests or controversies, the public-enquiry procedure, which comes into play once the project has been finalized, is the only way that remains open for the groups opposing new waste-facility projects. This procedure enables everyone to give their opinion about the impact of the project, but it is not a deliberative body. The grassroots organizations can submit their evidence or ask all their members to give their individual opinion, and the inquiry commissioner will then report the general opinion. In this context, the consultation bodies linked to regional planning processes are the only forums for discussion within which grassroots organizations can express their position regarding the waste-management policy. In France, from the law on waste disposal in 1992 and up to 2015, the management of non-hazardous waste and implementation of the principle of proximity and autonomy were the responsibility of the *département*.¹⁰ Initially managed by state departments, planning at the level of the *département* was placed under the responsibility of this level of government in 2005. Since the promulgation of the NOTRe law in August 2015,¹¹ this responsibility was given to the regional councils: a single regional plan for waste prevention and management must now cover all regional waste flows (non-hazardous, hazardous and inert). Each regional plan must set out the national objectives in terms of waste prevention, sorting and recycling, adjusting them to regional characteristics and linking them to local prevention plans.

This reform also involves a profound change in the relations between the stakeholders of waste-management policy. Removing responsibility for waste management from the *département* destabilized the network of stakeholders that had been created at this level during the phases of participation, consultation or monitoring of the plan, and that brought together all the institutions involved in waste management and certain grassroots organizations.

The Centre-Val de Loire region approved its plan in October 2019, following work by an advisory planning and monitoring commission that started in 2017. Grassroots organizations had 26 seats out of 161 in this body, which is supposed to represent all the stakeholders concerned.¹² A complex collegial voting system attributes a third of

9 For example, the reconstruction of the Ivry-Paris incinerator or the redesign of the Seine Aval wastewater-treatment plant, still located in Paris.

10 In France, the *département* is one of the three levels of government below the national level, between the region and the commune.

11 Law on the new territorial organization of the French Republic.

12 Depending on the regulations, in addition to community groups, these include state representatives, local authorities, waste-collection and treatment syndicates, and eco-organizations.

votes to a “civil society” college composed of members of the grassroots organizations and six qualified people.¹³ The region wanted to complement this consensus-building mechanism with thematic workshops open to all and the organization of a panel of randomly selected residents with two representatives in the monitoring commission. Analysis of the discussions and opinions reveals a strong presence of the two grassroots organizations in the Indre-et-Loire *département* (SEPANT and Zéro Déchet Touraine), whose representatives were assiduous and very active, as shown by their many comments about the project during the plenary meetings.¹⁴

The representatives of the grassroots organizations adopt a position of expertise based on extensive knowledge of the law and the issues at stake. Due to their considerable competence linked to their knowledge of the case and also of institutional functioning,¹⁵ their participation in preparatory meetings for the project reinforces the knowledge of stakeholders at the regional level. Overall, their interventions concerned a demand for the strictest possible application of statutory obligations or of declarations of intent of national policies within the plan, proposing tougher prevention measures and shorter enforcement periods. They draw attention to the ambitious aims of the legislation in terms of reducing waste generation and closing some disposal sites (incinerators and landfill); they also highlight the urgency of setting up separate biowaste treatment facilities and incentive schemes.

The situation shows that those responsible for the plan at the regional level – the state representatives and the large grassroots organizations, with a vice-president who is a member of the Green party and who wishes to use all the powers provided by the law – were all united to give greater substance to the planning documents. This was moreover a criticism made by the representatives of the public establishments for cooperation between the local authorities (EPCI) responsible for collecting and treating waste, who have to adapt their operations to the new requirements; they were the only bodies to vote against the plan, stressing the impossibility of meeting the objectives for reduction and the difficulties of treating waste if the number of disposal sites is reduced.

The tone of these discussions reflects the different relationships to changes in the law regarding waste management. For all the stakeholders, regional planning is a question of adapting these changes, seen as ambitious, to the context of a given area. It should also be noted that certain changes, such as incentive pricing schemes, are

13 The other two thirds were divided equally between a “regional” college and a “local authorities and professional representatives” college.

14 Discussion about the first version of the plan included 346 written comments which the regional departments answered to, accepting some modifications. The two grassroots organizations wrote twenty-seven (SEPANT) and twenty-three (Zéro Déchet Touraine) comments, representing the highest number of interventions after those of the state representatives (seventy-three by ADEME, fifty-two by DREAL), and those of the waste-treatment syndicate of Blois (Val Eco). Five other grassroots organizations provided between one and four opinions.

15 A university lecturer running a course on waste management, a retired executive with a strong interest in the issue, and an environmental activist who had been a member of the regional council in a previous administration.

included in the law as objectives to be met by a proportion of the population at a given date, meaning that it can only be applied through local incentive policies. For the regional representatives and grassroots organizations, the plan is a tool for changing waste-management practices and disseminating measures aimed at changing society's relationship with waste. By contrast, for some EPCIs, it represents constraints that are impossible to impose and that show a lack of understanding about the real possibility of change, and the conditions of waste treatment that are based partly on contracts with private companies. Some representatives of the grassroots organizations also stress that their attachment to the implementation of certain measures (e.g. reduction of biowaste, increase in recycling facilities, extending the lifespan of products) stems from the fact that these were included in the law following lobbying at the national level¹⁶ or changes introduced by European policies, which seem to partly support the arguments put forward by the opponents of incineration in the 2000s.

In the domain of waste, we can see here a relationship with the law that is characteristic of grassroots organizations in the environmental domain (Lascoumes 2012). Representatives of these organizations are invited to participate in the monitoring or inspection commissions on account of their specialized knowledge (generally as naturalists), their knowledge of a specific issue or area, or as representatives of civil society (Fung 2003). However, in the discussions, they often adopt a different position based on their expertise monitoring compliance with the legislation and on knowledge rooted in the history of the national environmental movement and its campaigns.

What we see here is the capacity of grassroots organizations for multilevel action. They can simultaneously apply pressure, create a balance of power to ensure that certain measures are included in the legislation, and contribute to their implementation at the local level by participating in commissions, showing vigilance and reminding local authorities or state departments of their responsibilities. Just as we can speak of strategic litigation (Melot and Vu Pham 2012), whose aim is not only to settle a case but also move the legal proceedings or institutional actions forward, grassroots organizations also play a role in strategic consolidation of planning as a way of strengthening their local position in negotiations with the EPCIs regarding their involvement in prevention policies or in setting up experiments.

Conclusions

The results of our study thus show the importance of highlighting both the processes whereby scientific knowledge is translated into the capacity for action, and the forms of learning and "expertification" entailing mastery of the technical discourse of professionals. These aspects are in line with the conclusions of Lochard and Simonet (2009), who consider that lay experts are something other than non-specialists, calling

¹⁶ In the context of the Grenelle Environment Forum in 2007, which led to the introduction and amendment of a number of laws in many environmental domains, including waste (Halpern 2012).

into question the positions of some authors regarding the impermeability of lay and professional cultures (Barbier et al. 2013; Dhillon 2017).

Expertise can be defined on the basis of situations in which specialist knowledge is used to clarify a practical decision (CRESAL 1985). Accordingly, it is not enough for a member of a grassroots organization to delve into a file and acquire relevant knowledge, terminology and references; they must also try to be in a position to express a view or judgement that could carry weight in public decision making. Part of the work of the grassroots organizations or groups that we observed is to contribute to the production of an intermediate public space in which they can express their views and claim the legitimacy of community knowledge to determine desirable outcomes; they achieve this through protests, debate, the media, awareness raising, or simply by claiming to represent collectives or a space. As such, in the domain of waste management, the associations' experts are only rarely the appointed experts,¹⁷ bringing additional legitimacy to the decision-making process through the mobilization of a specific type of capital, to use the categories introduced by Robert Castel (1985). When they succeed in creating new situations in which they are in a position to transform their knowledge into action, they use a particular form of constitutive expertise¹⁸ (Castel 1985); in other words, one that provides a definition and framework for the issue, and which justifies their intervention.

The associations' experts are thus able to evaluate and certify certain practices in order to assess their compatibility with the conditions for transition of which they declare themselves the guarantors. Our interpretation of the actions of associations, through identification of a politics of expertise, enabled us to characterize the specific nature of the strategies adopted by the groups of citizens and the tests¹⁹ that they agree to take in order to be empowered to act on the basis of their shared knowledge of the urgency of transition in the domain of waste.

17 For example, when they run awareness-raising or prevention operations, or when they intervene as trainers or experts in composting or incentive schemes for the sample group of residents, on the same footing as the representatives of ADEME.

18 In French: expertise "constituante" ou "instituyente" (Castel 1985).

19 Here, "test" means "épreuve" as understood in French pragmatic sociology.

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