COMPARING THE IMPACT OF ADVOCACY COALITIONS ON PUBLIC POLICY ACROSS MULTIPLE SITES: LESSONS FROM A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS IN FRANCE


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Abstract

This paper aims at understanding variations in the implementation of water policies and pollution control within one country (France) through a comparison of multiple sites (n=20) experiencing heavy environmental impacts from various sources (agriculture, industry, mining). Although all the sites share the same legal and institutional context, the public policies activated appear highly dissimilar, with outputs ranging from command and control types of intervention to non-decision, short-term technological fixes or symbolic actions. To explain these differences in policy options, we developed a mix of methods based on comparative techniques (Qualitative comparative analysis, QCA) with elements imported from the Advocacy coalition framework (ACF). It leads us to collect data on two key elements in each site: the pro-environment or pro-exploration coalitions connecting various policy actors (politicians, experts, public officials, activists, business interests, journalists, etc.); the strength, resources and relative power of these coalitions. By conceptualizing and operationalizing coalition resources, the paper also aims at filling some gaps identified in the ACF literature.
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Over the past few decades, public policy research has often shed light on variations in governmental programme implementation that are dependent on national or regional application context. Empirically, these works refute legal and normative theory, which postulates uniform policy execution across the territory of a public authority (Hill and Hupe, 2008). The very first formulations of this result arose out of pioneering work on implementation by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), yet one of the biggest sets of studies documenting this differentiated application of public programmes is found in environmental policy, ranging from non-compliance to the exceeding of set objectives (Ringquist 1993; Hornbeek 2011; Bourblanc and al. 2012; Knoepfel 2007; Bondarouk and Liefferink, 2016).

The case of chemical substance pollution provides an exemplary illustration of this type of observation. Having become a major issue in the 1960s, toxic pollution is subject to regulatory measures, and their activation varies enormously between territories. Research on toxic waste policy has also stressed variations between both nations (Kagan and al. 2003) and infra-national practice, in terms of control and implementation of national regulations (Hawkins 1984; Lascoumes 1994; Hoornbeek 2011). Regardless of how risk is controlled, observed toxic pollution events do not systematically result in any public intervention, and even where they do, such interventions fluctuate wildly in both frequency and form, from one territory to another. These discrepancies result in unequal environmental situations on a spatial basis (in the United States: Bryant 1995) including areas characterized by damaged environments (decline in biodiversity, fish mortality) and impacts on public health.
(contamination of drinking water, health risks and excess mortality or reduced life expectancy among local populations).

Research on the application of governmental programmes has long reduced these variations to implementation gaps. From this perspective, local situations have mainly been studied as a way of shedding light on those factors determining the successful, or dysfunctional, nature of the implementation process (Winter 2009) in relation to a nationally-defined goal. This type of interrogation was at the heart of early, top-down implementation studies and remains dominant in the sectoral literature, currently widely applied to this research topic (Soetren 2014 and 2005). Since the 1990s, in response to a series of difficulties linked to this top-down model, theoretical works have shifted attention towards policy change conditions (Sabatier 2005; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993) and the explanation of horizontal variations between local policy outputs (Winter 2009: 165).

By focusing on the level of policy execution and the range of regulatory responses (including non-response) given to the public problem of toxic pollution, this communication aligns with this evolution. Its focus can be justified by the specific nature of the policies followed. Regulations on toxic pollution stand out for their located character, conveyed as they are by locally-based government resources (plans, authorizations, procedures, funding, etc.), themselves subject to a fairly low-level national legal framework. Though certain standards setting limits and thresholds do exist (especially for drinking water), most policy tools arise out of a procedural approach that does not determine in advance which behaviours are authorized or sanctioned. This particularity makes it difficult to use analysis frameworks that presuppose a clear-cut split between the national (or European) level formulation of a policy and its local execution. In a context in which several levels of government must collaborate (due to the singularity of the problems to be dealt with) the focal point must necessarily be positioned at local level, so that the activation (or non-activation) of policy at this level can be understood, along with its specific production and orientation. Yet this situation is not unique to political purposes: European institutions

1 Procedural policies set the terms on which actors involved in implementation (mainly the state and other stakeholders) decide on the substance of the standard to be applied to a particular territory or situation. This type of regulation has often served to formalize established bureaucratic practice in terms of local interpretation of national standards.
increasingly turn to procedural measures for policy formulation, and this shift demands renewed research into their implementation (Bondarouk and Mastenbroek 2017).

In this communication, we seek to clarify the methodological framework of a research project aimed at investigating these variations and explaining the changes in state environmental intervention regarding the toxic pollution of aquatic waters, within a context of multi-level government. To do so, we have chosen to prioritize an approach that compares infra-national situations by including examples of both policy activation and status quo (non-regulation), in order to identify both the distinctive traits of policy activation situations and the causalities at work. We begin with an introduction to the overall context of this research, the main independent variables selected to explain the state’s form of intervention (dependent variable), and provide some information about the empirical survey. Secondly, we specify the meaning of the main concepts used, as well as the details of the methodological framework established. Lastly, we will come back to how these concepts were put to use in the actual research.

Towards a comparative approach to local coalitions and contexts

A multi-site survey centred on the management of toxic pollution

First of all, we will provide a few contextual elements on the research project for which the methodology detailed in this communication was developed. The survey concerned a series of cases (n = 20) on French territory and an array of policies aimed at preventing or reducing water pollution. These policies are formulated in various European directives and national regulations relating mainly to aquatic water management, drinking water standards, and industrial and agricultural pollution. At the river level, the actual implementation of these regulations depends on a series of local decisions and bureaucratic practices: administrative decrees at the département level authorizing specific amount of pollution by industrial facilities; planning and control measures for agricultural practices; regional, departmental and communal level council policies concerning drinking water or natural sites.

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The range of governmental actors concerned is hence a very broad one: it relies on a series of subsystems that both nest and overlap. The actors targeted include civil servants from the decentralized departments of several sectoral ministries (Agriculture, Health, Environment - including the bureaucratic bodies responsible for managing natural resources and industrial pollution); national and local agents of scientific and technical bodies, actors within communities and local authorities. However, this diversity does not translate into a large number of people involved all in all: because of the limited scope of the cases monitored (within the immediate environment of a source of pollution), the number of pertinent actors involved is generally low (between ten to twenty).

All the cases selected are characterized by a multi-organisational setting where governmental services and agencies are partially dependent upon one another in the implementation of public policy. The cases cover a varied range of chronic pollutions, including industrial point source pollution (pharmaceutical factories, mines, paper mills, etc.) and agricultural non-point source pollution (pesticides and nitrates). We keep an equal proportion of cases where a regulatory policy intervention was observed and cases of non-intervention or mere symbolic action.

**Empirical survey methods**

Coalitions have been reconstituted on the basis of an essentially qualitative survey. Given the low number of relevant actors on average in each of the cases, the use of advanced techniques (such as *block modelling* or other forms of clustering for large groups) was not necessary. Following the technique recommended for the identification of subsystems, we used the ‘snowball’ approach to define the group of actors to study. Data collection across a high number of cases was made possible by the collaborative work of a team of four researchers (authors of this communication), who applied an identical grid and regularly discussed the results together.

The starting point for each field survey was the identification of water pollution situations on the basis of expert reports (by local or national experts) or via documentary monitoring (internet, media). In the selected areas, we met the public actors concerned by the pollution identified: officers of local ministry departments or agencies responsible for management of
the problem, communes, water companies, etc. In the course of our interviews we identified other actors having influence over the situation, beyond institutional actors: environmentalist groups, fishermen, journalists, researchers, private actors, etc. The approach involved conducting between 5 and 10 interviews per case, with transcription, along with documentation collection both upstream and downstream of the interviews. Complementary to this, statistical and general data on the territories and populations concerned were collected, to characterize certain conditions (socioeconomic profile of populations; political majorities) or to support the researchers’ expert testimony underpinning other conditions (socioeconomic power of polluters, civic mobilizations and pressures).

**Coalitions and resources as independent variables**

Explaining the variations of a public intervention presupposes taking a large number of variables into account: one of the most exhaustive reviews of these factors affecting the triggering and orientation of concrete policies thus counted 17 types (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1981: 541) concerning not only the nature of the public problem in question and the target population but also how the public response was organized, and the implementation context. Beginning with lessons learned from earlier research and from environmental policy literature\(^3\), we decided to focus on two main categories of variable: the role of coalitions of actors specializing in policy issues and the weight of local contextual elements acting as resources available to these coalitions in influencing public policy.

Regarding the first category, the analysis suggested stems from institutionalist works on meso-level social orders (Fligstein McAdam 2012) which led to an interest in interactions between social actors (political alliances, coalitions, opposition, etc.) within strategic action fields, and their impact on public policy. We have chosen the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier Jenkins-Smith, 1993) because it offers an analytical approach focused on this type of meso-level social orders\(^4\) and has been widely used in gaining understanding of locally-based

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\(^3\) For a synopsis, see (Le Bourhis 2012)

\(^4\) (Fligstein McAdam 2012: 9): "This first element of the [field] theory is the insight that action takes place in constructed meso-level social orders, which is implied in various versions of institutional theory. These orders have been variously called sectors (Scott and Meyer 1983), organizational fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), games (Scharpf 1997), fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), networks (Powell et al. 2005), and, in the case of government, policy domains (Laumann and Knoke 1987) and policy systems/subsystems (Sabatier 2007)".
environmental policies. This analysis of environmental policies has been based, firstly, on the identification of subsystems defined as groups of actors within territorial and functional boundaries \(^5\) and, secondly, by the analytical reconstitution of coalitions aggregating the actors of these subsystems around the defence of policy core beliefs. Implementation of a policy can thus be explained by the balance of power between the coalition partners around these opposing orientations (possibly including non-intervention), and the mobilization of diverse resources. Insofar as toxic pollution incidents and policy stances around responses to these are concerned, we find ourselves among subsystems that are not only nested at several territorial levels, but also overlap, since several sectors are concerned: agriculture, drinking water, environmental protection, and industry\(^6\).

There are several advantages to using this type of modelling: it provides both a global framework and a shared language, while allowing the addition of complementary theories\(^7\) that serve to enrich it, as we intend to do; it can be applied to diverse territorial configurations, from high-conflict situations involving coalitions, learning, and policy change to more collaborative settings; it allows integration to the analysis of both the role of scientific and technical actors involved in environmental policymaking, and the divergent positions of bureaucracies underlying frequent intra-state conflicts (Zafonte and Sabatier 1998; McAdam and Boudet 2012).

The second category of factors to be considered constitutes the question of the ‘resources’ on which the influential capacity of coalitions are based. This question is at the heart of policy change analysis in the ACF model, insofar as the ‘resources’ of coalitions are perceived as means to power and the foundation of their predominance. On the one hand, a coalition is considered dominant insofar as it is in possession of superior resources and

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\(^5\) (Weible Sabatier 2006: 126) : A policy subsystem is defined by its territorial boundary, a substantive topic, and by the hundreds of policy participants from all levels of government, multiple interest groups, the media, and research institutions

\(^6\) This type of assembly of functional subsystems interacting with one another at multiple levels is described as the “most complex of all”, and is found in many water management situations (Zafonte and Sabatier 1998: 474).

\(^7\) “ACF is best thought of as a framework supporting multiple, overlapping theoretical foci” (Sabatier and Weible 2014).
imposes its political orientations\textsuperscript{8}, and on the other, change happens when a redistribution of these resources alters the balance of power between coalitions. As the model’s authors admit, this pivotal notion of ‘resources’ does however have certain shortcomings: although they have produced an inventory\textsuperscript{9}, they do acknowledge the necessity of better defining its component parts, their ranking (all resources not being equal) and their impact (Weible and al. 2016: 261-262).

From our perspective, two main difficulties should be added. The resources cited are heterogeneous: some are actor attributes (legal authority, financial resources, entrepreneurial skills); others relate to context (public opinion, mobilizable supporters); still others are mixed in character (information as expertise mobilized - yet also referring to the uncertainty and complexity of the problem in question). Moreover, these resources occasionally overlap: financial resources enable the purchase of expertise and support, even public opinion; legal authority confers both access and greater authority to expertise, etc.

*Differentiating the resources of influence and comparing their impact*

With a view to rigorously making distinctions between these resources and becoming capable of assessing their specific impact by means of comparison, here we intend to distinguish between several types, using alternative bases. This list does not claim to be a systematic inventory, but is the product of observation of our cases and a selection through induction of those elements having the strongest impact on policy orientation. We list these elements briefly prior to describing them, and their objectification, at greater length below.

The first resource is specific to the coalitions observed and constituting the social capital at their disposal, in the sense of P. Bourdieu, that is: “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group » (...)” (Bourdieu 1986). Specific to actors within a coalition, this resource must lend itself to measurement by various means, which we will come back to.

\textsuperscript{8} (Sabatier and Weible 2014): “subsystems exhibit a ‘dominant’ coalition that largely controls (most likely through resource superiority) subsystem politics and policy and either a ‘minority’ coalition vying for influence or the absence of any coordinated opposition” (our emphasis)

\textsuperscript{9} “These resources include formal legal authority to make policy decisions, public opinion, information, mobilizable supporters, financial resources, and skilful leadership” (Sabatier and Weible 2014 : 198)
Next, we make a distinction between several types of element more properly belonging to the territorial context, yet which are likely to act as resources by building the chances of a coalition’s success in favour of a particular policy orientation. These elements mainly target the following realities: degree of uncertainty of the expertise produced and of knowledge about the problem to be dealt with; civic pressure, aggregating various indicators of social mobilizations and the state of public opinion; the ecological and social value of the natural environment or of the resource (which brings us back to the economic interests attached to its conservation); the perceived socioeconomic weight of the actors at the pollution source, and the socioeconomic characteristics of populations potentially concerned across the territory.

On this basis, the approach suggested here entails integrating these characterizations of coalitions and contextual resources within a system of hypotheses, prior to testing them within a rigorous comparative framework. More precisely, explaining variations in infra-national policy regarding toxic pollution incidents is a matter of comparing the coalitions present in different fields and understanding their impact on public decision-making in the light of other elements of the situation studied: which resource and contextual conditions mean that a coalition succeeds in preventing or limiting the state’s enforcement capacity? Conversely, which conditions mean that a mobilization in favour of an environment will result in strong public intervention on toxic pollution? The comparison allows verification of whether the presence of a dominant coalition from the social capital perspective is enough of a condition, in and of itself, to ensure a public policy prevails, or whether other conditions are also necessary.

The numerous applications of the ACF framework have never included an a priori comparative design (that is, on the basis of a single, detailed survey protocol) but rather have been subject to meta-analysis of cases, a posteriori. At best, separate surveys have been conducted within a very general framework (Weible and al. 2016). As the authors have admitted, this is not without its difficulties - mainly relating to the heterogeneity of empirical sources and the types of data collected. Reports and diagnoses produced by proponents of the ACF approach (Weible 2011: 356) therefore stress the necessity of making comparisons between studies of subsystems both within a single type of government (between public intervention sectors) and between levels of government (national, local, regional).
In response to these shortcomings, we suggest the adoption of a mixed research design through the addition of an ad hoc Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method (De Meur et al. 2002; Rihoux and Ragin 2009). There are two benefits to this. First, an inductive approach is enabled, anchored in field observation that allows the most relevant variables to be isolated, and the profusion of explanatory factors to be filtered down. In-depth knowledge of the case reduces complexity by tailoring the questioning to both the problem and the targeted situations. Second, QCA relies on a multiple causalities model that takes account of several factors (or conditions, to use QCA terminology) and articulates them in “causal recipes”, to explain an outcome (in our case, the existence of a public intervention) as parsimoniously as possible.

Diagram 1 below sums up the whole approach to, and objectives of, the QCA - which should allow determination of the conditions leading to a specific type of public policy. This is defined as the existence of collective regulation for the problem identified (by such a regulatory decision as a prefet’s administrative authorization order, a management plan, or an investment made under public pressure). An absence of intervention is defined either by the non-existence of a public policy, or by solutions that amount to getting around the identified problem without resolving it (symbolic treatment, ban on use, or one-off corrective response consisting, for example, of changing the source used for drinking water in the event of pollution).
Diagram 1: Summary presentation of the causal relations explored (the area underlined shows a “causal recipe” connecting three conditions always associated with a specific regulatory public policy, as observed in a series of cases)

The comparison of cases allows a distinction to be drawn between the conditions necessary to achieving a given result (present in all cases in which this is observed) and conditions that are sufficient (present in certain cases and able to be substituted or combined). Drawing on our empirical knowledge of situations, hypotheses issuing from the literature and initial field observations, we have selected a limited series of conditions (n = 6, cf. table in appendix 1) that are compliant with QCA’s own methodological standards (recommended ratio between number of conditions and number of cases studied).

Comparing coalitions, contexts and resources

Constraints specific to the comparative exercise across a number of important cases have led to a rethink of some of the conceptual tools relating not just to coalitions and the criteria that allow their delimitation, but also to resources that are either specific to, or arise out of,
the context upon which their influence is founded. Our methodological reflection will be
developed around these two questions.

In search of a minimalist definition

The main requirement associated with comparative work that multiplies levels of
investigation is that of being equipped with a definition that can be rendered operational at a
low cost. This methodological constraint forces us to explore a pathway that is at once
alternative and divergent in relation to the tendency to prefer tools that, while sophisticated,
are also complex to implement in the monographic studies that are typical of ACF literature
(for example, on the Lake Tahoe or San Francisco Bay Area cases: Zafonte and Sabatier 1998;
more recently: Ingold 2011). Avoiding the opposite trap of an use of the ACF that scarcely
scratches the surface, the comparative framework does encourage a certain economy in
terms of research resources that imposes a recourse to the qualitative approaches of this type
of network. This dictates the choices of simple identification criteria and characterization of
internal links within coalitions.

We therefore define a coalition on the basis of similarity of policy stance in reference to
the terminology developed by Bourdieu for his research on public policy (Bourdieu 2005 : 89-
125). This shared stance is either publicly expressed or collected in the course of a research
interview. It is directly related to the problem and its definition (level of endorsement or
doubt expressed in the face of expert statements and the causalities, gravity and type of
problem they point to) as well as to the measures under debate or in competition in the group
of specialized actors.

10 Some authors are aware of this limitation. See for example (Ingold 2011: 452) : “The disadvantage, however,
of such a method combination [ACF and the structural analysis of networks] is that researchers have to limit
themselves to a case study level as studying actors’ preferences in-depth is a time- and resource-consuming
procedure”. (our emphasis).
11 “ACF is often applied in a rather loose way, often without adopting the methods recommended by its main
authors” (Cairney 2015: 491)
12 Bourdieu (2005 : 94) defines public policy as “the provisional objectivization of a particular
state of the structural relation of force between the different agents or institutions concerned that are acting to
maintain or transform the status quo in this regard”. Divisions between actors pertain as much to public policy
measures as to the nature of the problem posed: budgetary deficit and necessary rationalization (reduction) of
costs for the state; shortcomings in the social policy regarding access to social housing. For a commentary, see
also (Dubois 2014).
We follow here broadly the ACF literature since we see coalitions as based on a shared system of policy beliefs. However, our research retains its focus only on policy core beliefs, without taking into account other distinctions (deep core beliefs, secondary aspects) which add a series of hypotheses that are too complex to be taken account of in a comparative research design\textsuperscript{13}. Our approach also tends to evacuate the persistent question in ACF circles around what constitutes the ‘glue’ in coalitions, and hence their delimitation\textsuperscript{14}. This debate seems prone to recurring and remains live, especially around the belief homophily hypothesis that is central to the early versions of ACF. Yet this initial axiom is undermined by the recognition that other factors, besides shared beliefs, influence the formation and maintenance of coalitions: imposed interdependencies (natural or legal/institutional; Zafonte, Sabatier, 1998); perception of the resources and influences of other actors; interests and trust; common opposition (despite differences) to the other side, etc. This plurality points towards a variety of cohesion principles, highlighting the usefulness of a rudimentary tool that aims uniquely to classifying local actors into clusters, held together by strong or weak ties.

Concern for representativeness in the selection of cases has also led to the integration of ordinary low-conflict situations in parallel with situations more often explored in the literature (yet occurring more rarely) in which actual conflicts exist, alongside a crystallization of oppositions\textsuperscript{15}. The real world prevalence of non-mobilization situations in which there is an absence of conflict has been highlighted in recent works on local mobilizations (Mcadam, Boudet 2012). These authors call into question a form of selection bias in most monographies, which focus on the most visible conflictual areas, even though the

\textsuperscript{13} We are using the following definition of policy core beliefs (Sabatier Weible 2014): “[they] are bound by scope and topic to the policy subsystem and thus have territorial and topical components. Policy core beliefs can be normative and empirical. Normatively, policy core beliefs may reflect basic orientation and value priorities for the policy systems or whose welfare in the policy subsystem is of utmost concern. Empirically, policy core beliefs include overall assessments of the seriousness of the problem, its basic causes, and preferred solutions for addressing it (called policy core policy preferences).” Secondary aspects are linked to instrumental means, whereas the ‘deep core’ concerns ontology and fundamental values that are not specific to any subsystem.

\textsuperscript{14} See (Bergeron and al. 1998 : 207) : “One of the methodological problems Sabatier found himself up against was that of the precise identification of individuals or organizations capable of being considered part of this or that coalition”. This questioning interacts with that regarding the breakdown criteria for a subsystem and authors’ addition of hypotheses to distinguish between ‘regular’, ‘periodic’ (or ‘subsetters’) actors in the face of overlapping subsystems (Sabatier 1998 : 115).

\textsuperscript{15} There are also situations of active cooperation between actors mobilizing around a common cause, such as the ‘collaborative’ partnerships studied by scholars of the ACF approach. Like conflict situations, however, such configurations remain relatively few in number.
predominant situation in the real world is the opposite. Several cases thus identified in our research likewise concern sets of actors formed around an emerging issue (pollution to a drinking water intake, discovery of an industrial nuisance, etc.) underlying low-noise exchanges. Because of this, one of the criteria sometimes evoked at the foundation of coalitions is not always present: an opposition between sides, and its rootedness in time. The “devil shift” phenomena conceptualized by Sabatier and his colleagues were not systematically observed where local situations were not structured into opposing camps. Some configurations observed in our research are closer of nascent subsystems (and associated coalitions), identified by the ACF model with the emergence (at regional or local level) of an issue already covered nationally but not yet foundational at this level. This is the case, for example, of the various local policy activations for the protection of drinking water intake prior to, and in the wake of the “Grenelle Environment Caucus” - a national mechanism launched in France in 2009. Yet these cases are as worthy of attention as those places where the liveliness of the controversy and debate has hardened both antagonisms and group identities. For this reason, we are adopting a definition that is inclusive of the possibility of low- (or non-) mobilization coalitions, corresponding to clusters of actors that do not have a long history (less than a decade). Such groups complement the more politicized situations anticipated by the ACF model, which are also included in our sample.

**Coalition-owned resources and contextual resources**

The question of resources mobilized by coalitions is central to thinking about policy change as it is conducted by researchers of the ACF school. The list of these resources, their prioritization in terms of impact, their redistribution in response to events that are external to the subsystems, and their contribution to change or to the status quo are part of recurrent investigations in the literature (Nohrstedt Weible 2010; Weible and al 2011: 357). The comparative design of our survey allow us to analyse the role simultaneously played by the various efficient resources in a given situation, though on condition, as we have noted, of distinguishing between them. We are thus well placed to address these resources in their reciprocal relationships within conditions configurations that ultimately affect public policy. Our approach to coalitions is from a configurational perspective, in the sense that we consider the influence of a coalition on the public policy process to be the outcome of a combination of
its degree of predominance and other conditions that may be favourable or unfavourable\textsuperscript{16}. In other words, the differential in relational resources (extension and coordination) that form part of a coalition’s social capital cannot fully explain a public policy outcome. It may bring about different effects, depending on values of the other conditions. The essence of the QCA process consists precisely of producing an explanatory model founded on these sets of combinations, by spelling out the combinations of conditions resulting in a specific public policy outcome.

The choice of resources taken into account in the analysis was made at the intersection between theoretical hypotheses issuing from the literature and an inductive process based on field knowledge gained prior to, and in the course of, the survey. We will be developing these different forms of resources by distinguishing between those which can be directly attached to a coalition (social capital) and thus underpin the predominance of a network of actors, and those which arise out of an intervention context, operating as a series of local situation supports and assets, of which the coalitions present take advantage.

The first resource identified is the social capital of coalition members - an asset shown to be crucial in all our cases. In a sense of this term borrowed from P. Bourdieu and centring on mobilizable connections \textsuperscript{17} (see below), we propose to measure this variable by evaluating the extension of coalition in both dimensions: horizontal (across social fields) and vertical (between levels of government). Our hypothesis is that the more a coalition comprises members from diverse social universes and straddles different government levels, the more potential it will have for influencing public policy. Horizontally, the qualitative measure of this scope entails identifying the presence of connections between various stakeholder types. We observed a large range of extensions across the cases studied: from the simple coalition between two actors (typically the state’ pollution control services interacting closely with an industrial actor in a sort of bureaucratic capture), to broad coalitions where social mobilization is strong and connect multiple actors (journalists, experts, national ministries officials, etc.).

\textsuperscript{16} For a configurational approach of the same type, criticizing the aporia of a search for a single causality (socio-economic context) in terms of the localization of polluting activities, see (Grant and al. 2010).

\textsuperscript{17} “The volume of social capital owned by a particular agent thus depends on the scope of the network of connections it is capable of mobilizing and the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) owned individually be each of those to whom it is linked.” (Bourdieu 1980 ; our emphasis).
The second resource we have integrated to our analytical model concerns a territory’s own civic pressure, from which a pro-environmental coalitions may benefit. To a certain extent, this resource returns to what Sabatier’s inventory of resources calls “public opinion” and “mobilizable supports”. It does however also include other indicators that rely on observations made in the literature relating to citizen mobilizations (McAdam Boudet 2012) as well as on the role played by the media in the construction of public problems and their recognition in the public arena, and lastly on the effects of mobilizations in the judicial order. We therefore measure a series of variables regarding these phenomena: extent of media coverage of the problem and circulation of expert reports highlighting the publicization of a local problem; existence of civic capacity and local mobilization, measured by diverse correlated indicators (educational level, density of associative network, etc.) and the presence of earlier mobilizations and lastly, usage (or not) of judicial channels (civil/penal, etc.).

The third resource integrated to the model concerns the socioeconomic power of the polluter. Our hypothesis is that a polluting company highlighting the risk of lost jobs and/or wealth production can exercise considerable influence in the local context (Grant et al., 2010). The state’s local decision makers (préfets) tend to be susceptible to this type of economic argument, because they generally prioritize growth and employment objectives - as do local politicians, subject as they are to electoral processes. The gross volume of actors’ financial means is mentioned as a pivotal coalition resource in the literature, yet it is not among the indicators we selected, any more than is the gross volume of economic capital or the number of jobs. Indeed, this indicator does not systematically correlate to the empirically observed influence capacity of economic actors. This is true, for instance, of the agricultural sector - which in France turns to means of exerting pressure more effective than “employment blackmail” (for example, violent demonstrations against the local government); or to polluting industries having low numbers of employees yet disproportionate social standing as subsidiaries of well-known “national champions”.

We will be relatively brief in addressing the other three contextual elements selected as capable of acting as resources for coalitions in presence. One of these attempts to measure the ecological and social value attached to the natural milieu and to the aquatic resource affected. This condition aims to evaluate the issues and economic interests associated with the preservation of a natural milieu, from the charm of a place to the usage of a rarefied
resource. Here, the hypothesis is that territorial contexts also stand out for the biophysical characteristics of the milieu and the usages made of these: a high-ecological-quality river, source of multiple usages, some of which are monetized, is better-defended than a long-degraded milieu with social usages that are few - or even monopolized by the polluter. We have used a variety of indicators to measure this dimension, including data from the administrative inventory on waterways, fishing grade of the milieu, number of hotel nights and rates of secondary homes in the neighbouring territory (as a proxy for touristic or recreational usages).

Another condition relates to the degree of uncertainty attached to expert knowledge produced and the state of controversies on the natural world, the responsibilities and hazardousness of the toxic pollutions targeted. Our hypothesis here is that the bigger the controversy around these issues, the fewer expert knowledge resources are available to support a pro-environmental coalition. Lastly, we selected an overall socioeconomic characterization (median income level) for the populations concerned, with an eye to checking the hypotheses of unequal distribution of sources of pollution to the detriment of the most disadvantaged areas, and conversely, increasing requirements regarding the public response in the case of high-income populations and territories.

The fact that other types of resources signalled by the ACF model are absent from this list does not mean that they are non-existent in our cases. But usage of the QCA forces us to limit the number of variables taken into consideration, selecting those that are most determinant on the basis of knowledge of the realities observed. This same detailed approach to the field will allow us, once the QCA analysis has been drawn up, to complete this list by adding other elements of the contextual framework, capable of explaining the contradictions that are apparent in the analysis results.

How should coalitions be investigated? Elements of operationalization

Identifying clusters of actors on the basis of their stances

As noted, the empirical identification of condition is based on reported similar stances among the actors questioned, relative to the problems and to local public policy options. The
first element collected by the field study thus concerns the opinions of actors in the field regarding identification of the problem to be addressed and preferred forms of action. This first criterion is deducted from the study of documents (administrative archives, press articles) and interviews mainly concerning: problem definition, type of policy and intervention mechanisms considered best suited to the problem in hand; actors with whom there is privileged collaboration aimed at influencing implementation of a public policy measure, and the existing type of coordination.

In preference to a questionnaire-based survey, we selected a qualitative and interactive data collection strategy, which consisted of asking actors to reconstitute the chronological narrative of the pollution problem and its local management. Using this type of qualitative narrative (multiplied by the number of actors) allowed us to: recover information in order to reduce potential bias; build familiarity with the field and create connection with certain stakeholders, so as to obtain more detailed information - not only on what makes the coalitions tick but also on the context of the action, and get beyond the known problems of interpretation of questions asked by surveys as well as other bias specific to this method (lapses of attention while filling out questionnaires, etc.). Proceeding through the use of interviews, field visits and other qualitative methods also allowed us to build trusting relationships with key informants (for example, local civil servants working at water agencies), greatly improving our chances of gaining access not only to certain information but also to certain respondents reluctant to participate in the survey.

The policy core beliefs around which the range of local stances are structured are relatively limited in the sectoral fields considered, and are generally organized around three priorities: development of policies targeting the direct cause of pollution by means of a constraining or strongly incentive action (i.e. a change to agricultural and industrial practices, preventive actions); development of “end-of-pipe” policies (financing and implementation of curative technical mechanisms that get around the original problem rather than solving it); absence of intervention on the grounds that it is by nature either a low-priority or a minor problem. Interviewee stance was tested using statements issuing from the field or expert summaries setting out the problem. In contrast to the ACF model, which distinguishes between stances on governmental instruments and on policy content and values, our
questions concerned policy tools themselves considered laden with policy values and choices (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005).

A structural and relational approach to the power of coalitions

Coalitions analysis conducted within this study starts out from the structural hypothesis according to which groups of actors oppose one another around divergent policy options within social fields, namely local political-administrative arenas (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Bourdieu 2005). This relational approach to coalitions directs our research process. It entails reconstituting the state of the balance of power in terms of social capital between diverse actor networks. The description of coalitions in presence remains the first step of the analysis, yet is incomplete without the calculation of an influence differential between at least two coalitions offering alternative options. Within the comparative framework adopted (20 case studies), the need for feasibility dictates a limitation to a set of simple, standardized indicators, applicable to each coalition, yet remaining representative of their levels of social resources. Three easily-observed coalition parameters were thus selected: horizontal extension, vertical extension and degree of cohesion.

Horizontal extension designates a coalition’s ability to include diverse categories of actors in its composition. As suggested by analyses centred on coalitions, these last comprise a variety of actors who combine central political power, local authorities (including interest groups) and bureaucracy. Six actor categories were selected: NGOs (environmental and other); states and agencies (including judicial actors); economic actors; producers of expert knowledge; politicians and elected representatives; media actors. We contend that the scope of this horizontal extension serves as a multiplier of the resources (legitimacy, information, relational, economic, and expertise) that build a coalition’s ability to influence. Several researches point toward this hypothesis. Sandström and Carlsson, in particular, note that “The level of network heterogeneity (i.e., the level of diversity among actors and the extent to which these are involved in cross-boundary interactions) affects the performance of policy networks” (2008: 516). This diversity serves to build a network’s ability to mobilize resources.

Vertical extension designates a coalition’s ability to cover several levels of public policy, from local to national and even supra-national (European, international). Here, we postulate that the connections built between actors at multiple levels provide a coalition with specific
resources that differ from those that are locally based: legal authority issuing from the 
support of national legislators or regulatory actors; access to pooled resources at supra-local 
level (in terms of personnel or mobilized activists, or economic, in terms of budget); scientific 
credibility thanks to the support of national or international expert bodies, officially approved 
by the state or by supra-national authorities, etc. This hypothesis is supported by certain 
traditional approaches to coalitions of actors, such as ACF, whose proponents stress that 
“most policy subsystems, and the coalitions within them, include actors from multiple levels of government” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 215). The authors cited also remark that 
enlisting actors from a high level could be an effective strategy for minority coalitions in 
advancing their cause (op. cit: 217), which also supports the contention that the more a 
coalition grows its vertical extension, the more effective it will be (for a study specifically 
supporting this observation: Sabatier and Brasher 1993 ; see also Rootes 2013). In France, 
some high-conflict cases do present this configuration, with the involvement of national and 
European echelons (e.g. cases of algal bloom and nitrate pollution in Brittany or recurrent 
“red sludge” industrial pollution in Provence). In practice, hybrid situations are often observed 
with extensions that are differentiated across the vertical and horizontal dimensions: local 
and national media can, for example, be mobilized without any observable connection 
between local and national actors in the state sphere or among experts.

The final parameter we intend to take into account is the degree of integration of a 
coalition defending a public policy optio. At a basic level, any particular coordination is 
observed, the actors concerned agree about a common stance on a basis of convergent 
preferences without much exchanges. At a higher level, they interact more often and benefit 
from a degree of cognitive integration. At the highest degree of integration, they are able to 
formally coordinate, developing their argumentation, coming together to act as one (writing 
communiqués, sharing pooled resources, etc.)18

18 These criteria are close to those established by Zafonte and Sabatier (1998: 480) distinguishing two forms of 
coordination between allies within coalitions. “Strong coordination” is founded on the joint development of a 
plan of action, its dissemination and its implementation by the parties. « Weak coordination » is based on 
knowledge of other actors’ actions and strategies, and adaptation of each person’s behaviour in order to achieve 
shared goals - for example, through reciprocal delegation of power between coalised actors (depending on the 
issue at stake), or unilateral support for a dominant actor (“follow the leader”). The second, less intense and less 
planned forms are often most frequent between members of a cause-based coalition.
These three indicators - horizontal extension, vertical extension and integration - describe a coalition’s own ability to mobilize supports, activating a network, contacts, connections and personal acquaintances. For the afore-stated reasons of economy of means and operationalization of a broad comparative framework, our methodology does not seek to measure specific resources actor-by-actor (such as the level of qualification, hierarchical status, specific technical skills, social trajectory, economic influence, etc.) in the way that a detailed network analysis would.

Conclusion

The ACF and the conception of coalitions it works with were essentially designed within the context of monographic surveys, and have been subject to few transfers to comparative research designs. In this communication, we have proposed a mixed method combining a quali-comparative approach (QCA) with elements borrowed from ACF and suited to this usage, in particular by offering a revised vision of coalitions. This methodological framework has been applied within the field of policies aimed at combating toxic pollution incidents, which are characterized by their dependency on local situations, the importance of procedural tools in relations between government levels and the shift in public decision-making to local level.

Our understanding of the notion of coalition meets the constraints for conducting a comparison between the multiple cases included in our research at local subsystem level. This led to a series of adjustments: a simplified definition and operationalization of the concept; a distinction between resources exclusively attached to coalition members (social capital) and those specific to the local situation; the taking into consideration of coalitions displaying diverse degrees of consolidation and institutionalization in nascent or mature subsystems.

The methodological benefits of the approach adopted seem to us to be of several orders. It offers elements of response to certain shortcomings diagnosed in the ACF literature concerning the lack of compared studies and the inadequate characterization (review, typology, prioritization) of resources explaining the change in public policy or the status quo. It also provides a means of better understanding the differential activation of environmental policies on the basis of an explicit, transposable methodological framework based on
refutable hypotheses relating to the articulation between resources that are better distinguished conceptually. In so doing, it opens up a pathway to: more systematic comparisons between more numerous cases of mobilization of these resources by coalitions; an empirically-based evaluation of the influence of each resource considered, and the possibility of revealing which resources are influential in which contexts. Lastly, it fulfils requirements for the ongoing renewal of implementation studies (Winter, 2009) which entails greater emphasis of comparativism, recourse to a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, and the explanation of public policy output variations.

References


Knoepfel P., 2007, *Environmental policy analyses: learning from the past for the future: 25 years of research*, Berlin : Springer Verlag


Rootes C. (2013) From local conflict to national issue: when and how environmental campaigns succeed in transcending the local, *Environmental Politics*, 22:1, 95-114,


### Appendix 1 - Table of conditions selected for quali-comparative analysis (QCA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTPUT CONDITIONS</th>
<th>EXPLANATORY CONDITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REG_PB/Type of collective regulation of a problem identified by an expert report</td>
<td>Nature of the policy ultimately implemented (non-existent or symbolic; incentive or by non compulsory (voluntary) agreement; regulatory or constraining by direct intervention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REG_TEMPS/Time necessary to implement regulation after the problem is identified</td>
<td>Time elapsed between observation of the problem (initial expert report) and measures implemented</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPLANATORY CONDITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COAL_PRED/Predominant coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESS_CIV/Civic pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAL_PAT/Ecological and social value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POIDS_ECO/Economic power of the polluter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCERT_EXPERT/Uncertainty regarding the expert report produced on the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO_SOCIO_ECO/Socio-economic profile of the territory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>