

# **La gestion participative et territorialisée peut-elle changer l'action publique agricole ? Le cas de l'agroenvironnement dans deux régions françaises**

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## **Résumé**

L'Union européenne encourage ses États membres à construire leur politique agroenvironnementale selon une approche infranationale et participative. Cette idée repose sur l'hypothèse que des processus politiques plus ouverts conduiront à une légitimité et à une efficacité accrue des décisions collectives. De façon plus implicite, une autre hypothèse est aussi émise sous le couvert de l'injonction participative : l'activation d'acteurs locaux et environnementalistes serait propice pour déstabiliser la traditionnelle alliance corporatiste qui existe depuis les années 1960 entre les administrations et les organisations agricoles, et ainsi verdir davantage les mesures agroenvironnementales qui sont mises en œuvre. Au-delà des idéologies ou des stratégies politiques cependant, un style de gouvernance décentralisé et participatif permet-il véritablement de modifier l'action publique agroenvironnementale?

Les mesures agroenvironnementales territorialisées (MAET) créées en France en 2007 constituent un excellent cas d'étude pour contribuer à répondre à cette question. La gestion des MAET a en effet été déléguée à l'échelon régional au sein d'une instance intersectorielle et multi parties prenantes. Fondée sur une étude qualitative du pilotage des MAET dans deux régions françaises (Centre et Languedoc-Roussillon) de 2007 à 2013, cette communication répond à un double objectif : 1) examiner comment les changements institutionnels — c'est-à-dire la diversité des acteurs impliqués et le degré de décentralisation — se reflètent sur les MAET implantées; 2) étudier comment ces changements affectent, le cas échéant, la configuration corporatiste traditionnelle des processus politico-administratifs en agriculture.

\*\*\* Quoique le présent manuscrit soit rédigé en anglais, la présentation aura lieu en français.

## 1. Introduction

Is the activation of non-agricultural actors in decision-making processes a necessary condition to greening the agricultural policies? In light of the poor results of thirty years of agri-environmental schemes in the European Union (EU), many researchers as well as practitioners raise the question of the pertinence to let agri-environmental policy process in the hands of farmers' organizations and national agricultural departments.

It is a euphemism to say that farmers' organizations have been reluctant to the rise of environmental concerns in their sector. Studies show that farmers are attached to the productivist paradigm<sup>1</sup> and consider environmental regulation as a threat to economic growth (Berny 1999; Bourblanc 2011; Van Gossum et al. 2009; Ansaloni 2015). However, conform to the corporatist tradition in place since the 1950s (Benoit 2012; Coulomb et al. 1990; Halpin 2005), many member states have chosen to negotiate with their national agricultural lobby the formulation and implantation of agri-environmental schemes (AES). AES are incentive-based instruments that "provide payments to farmers for voluntary environmental commitments related to preserving and enhancing the environment and maintaining the cultural landscape" (Uthes and Matzdorf 2013, 251). Introduced by the EU in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1985, AES have become mandatory for all EU member states in 1992. However, member states retain flexibility in AES's implantation to address national policy priority, "resulting in patterns of implementation that are often highly coloured by the policy traditions and agri-political cultures of individual member states" (Juntti and Potter 2002, 216). This national and corporatist driven policy-making often leads to large-scale measures with low or medium level of requirements in order to join a broad number of farmers.

Despite decades of experience in the design and implementation of AESs and growing agri-environmental budget (the EU expenditures in agri-environment payments in 2013-2014 amounted to 2 937.2 million euros), governments still grapple with how to encourage farmers to shift to real ecological agricultural practices. A substantial body of work has become available in recent years in order to explain AES's success and failures. A large pool of literature use political economic theory and study economic efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme design, underlining transactions cost and opportunity costs that influence farmer decision to enroll in AES (Matzdorf and Lorenz 2010; Falconer 2000; Mettepenningen, Beckmann, and Eggers 2011). Another research domain addresses various cultural and social factors that retain farmer to engage in AES (Sutherland and Darnhofer 2012; Polman and Siangen 2008; Burton and Paragahawewa 2011; Beedell and Rehman 2000). While these works emphasize the role of individual variables, the influence of collective action and policy-process in the "ecologization" of agricultural policies has received a growing amount of attention in academic research as well as from policy practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of agricultural productivism is subject to much debate. We use the definition proposed by Fouilleux and Goulet (2012, 131-132), for whom the agricultural productivist paradigm refers "to a set of technical processes, organizational arrangements and beliefs engaging stakeholders around the requirement of production increasing and intensification". Three main dimensions form its core politico-economic frame: "the belief in the benefits of scientific and technical progress; the certainty that agriculture is a business of professionals and specialists; and that its mission is to feed the world while generating profits for industry players" (our translation).

Since the 1990s, the EU's regulations "have increasingly encouraged member states to design agri-environmental policy in a sub-national, decentralized and participatory way" (Beckmann, Eggers, and Mettepenningen 2009, 689). This multi-level and multi-actor governance trend is part of a broad participative turn in western public policies which aim to encourage community involvement and bottom-up, participatory approaches in decision-making (Prager et al. 2015, 120). In agri-environment, this desire to enhance rural participation has led to giving responsibilities to regional, river basins or sub-basin levels in implementing AESs, which generally remain funded by EU and central governments. As a result of these decentralized and multi stakeholders governance arrangements, the decision-making processes have opened to a wide range of participants, from traditional agricultural departments and farmers' group representatives to regional and local political entities and environmentalist organizations (Taylor and Lawrence 2012).

An underlying assumption of these policies is that a high level of local stakeholders' involvement will bring further legitimacy and efficiency to the AESs. Moreover, this general willingness to participative and decentralized policy processes conveys another more subtle assumption: the presence of non-agricultural groups would undermine the traditional alliance between agricultural administration and agricultural associations in a way to "greening" the design of AESs. In France, the midterm evaluations of the national rural development program for the 2000-2006 and the 2007-2013 programming period have both recommended to "now invite new players around the table" (Milot and Villien 2012, 3) and to transfer the management of the AES at local and regional levels, where the "environmental stakeholders are better represented and organized" (Barbut and Baschet 2005, 47). If France remains in a more centralist tradition than other European countries, the French Agriculture Department has followed this advice in the 2007-2013 period by delegating key responsibilities to regional level and by establishing a multi-stakeholder committee to manage one of the AESs implantation. How this sub-national, decentralized and participatory governance style has been put in place (or has not)? Is the participation of local and environmental actors actually changes the measures implemented?

Despite this increasing complexity of institutional organization in AES, its influence on agri-environmental policy and results is still not well understood. This paper has a twofold objective: 1) it examines how the changes in the institutional implementation of AES, namely the diversity of actors involved and the degree of administrative decentralization, affect (or not) the "greening" of AESs implemented; and 2) how these changes affect (or not) the traditional corporatist policy-making style in which the agricultural administration and agricultural organizations are the most influential groups in terms of the design of AESs.

In this paper we report on results from a qualitative multiple case study analysis of the AES's implementation in two French regions, Languedoc Roussillon and Centre. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 covers the theoretical background, outlines the two main ideas of agricultural corporatist traditional policy-making style and the shift to decentralized and multi-actor governance. Section 3 describes our cases and method. We then present our findings (section 4) and discuss their implications on the power relations characterizing the agri-environmental governance and the AES's policy design and results (section 5).

## **2. Shifting from an agricultural corporatist traditional policy-making style to decentralized and multi-actor governance?**

After the Second World War, many western states have established corporatist partnership with large national corporations to reinforce reconstruction efforts and economic growth (Halpin 2005, 1). The presumed effectiveness of the corporatist governance lays on the state capacity to obtain support “for the enactment and implementation of its policies by granting privileged participation to a sectoral interest group sufficiently powerful to deliver the support of its benefiting constituency” (Chubb 1983, 26).

This State-Group partnership worked particularly well in post-war agricultural modernization. The “Green Revolution” implied major changes, first of all a drastic decrease of the farmer’s population in order to move toward a peasant and family model to an industrial and productive agricultural sector. By granting a deliberate representational monopoly and giving up part of their decision-making authority to pro-modernization agricultural organizations, western states have managed to develop an agribusiness sector which participated actively to national growth.

Conform to corporatist theory, every partner has advantage to participate to this alliance. The value of such group to the state reside in his national coverage, capacity to maintain a stable socio-political order by exerting control on his members’ demands, ability to undertake governance functions and to generate independent information gathering and analysis capacities (Halpin 2005; Schmitter 1974; Lehmbruch 1979; Cawson 1985; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). Meanwhile, the group gets representational monopoly and institutionalized status in the public sphere, providing him financial resources, administrative stability, strategic autonomy and privileged governmental contacts (Streeck and Kenworthy 2005; Schmitter 1985; Benoit 2012).

Over the years, the corporatist partnership has become an institutional feature of agricultural policy-making in many countries. According to several authors, this would explain the resistance to change observed in agricultural policies despite the growing environmental concerns (Jokinen 1997; Potter and Tilzey 2005; Carter 2007). At the heart of the corporatist alliance lays the idea that agriculture is a matter of professionals and specialists, not of environmentalists and non-agricultural actors (Fouilleux and Goulet 2012, 131-132). The policy-making structure institutionalized this idea in twofold ways.

On the one hand, the agricultural ministry has a special commitment to his “administrative constituency” : “a relation of mutual dependence develops [between them], so that the agent organization must defend its constituency and conversely” (Selznick 1980, 145). Therefore, agricultural department tends to stick up for his partner’s interest and to reject competing claims made by other actors. Similarly, in his book *The Politics of the Environment*, Neil Carter argues that the fragmentation of governments into sectoral departments (transport, agriculture, energy, and so forth) leads to an approach of public policy “in which each ministry tends to act as a sponsor for the key groups of producers or professionals within its policy sphere. Agriculture ministers typically see themselves as speaking on behalf of farmers, rather than acting to protect consumer interests or the environment” (Carter 2007, 186).

On the other hand, the very structure of corporatist political processes prevents the expression of divergent interests to those institutionalized. Indeed, the corporatist policy-making is usually

characterized by strict state control of the participants admitted to the policy (Muller and Saez 1985), by explicit exclusion of certain groups (Granados and Knoke 2005), and by holding informal and secret meetings to avoid as much as possible outside pressure (Schmitter 1985). Thus, agricultural policy communities have managed to keep new issues off the policy agenda and to limit the debates to technical and economic aspects of agriculture (Skogstad 2008; Ansaloni and Fouilleux 2008; Benoit 2012).

That said, agricultural policy communities have become increasingly unstable in recent years. Several researchers note a widespread tendency over the past two decades in industrialized countries to an opening of policy processes. This phenomenon occurs both by the insertion of agriculture into more cross-cutting themes (health, environment, international trade, rurality, and so forth) and by the activation of new interests, such as environmental groups, consumer organizations and stakeholders in the food sector (Coleman, Skogstad, and Atkinson 1996; Halpin 2005; Potter and Tilzey 2005), as well as government representatives of various ministries such as Finance, Trade and Industry, Health and Environment (Coleman, Grant, and Josling 2004; Skogstad 2008). In these enlarged and intersectoral policy-making processes, agri-environment and reform supporters have found fertile ground for their claim and some authors consider this new actors' activation as a key variable for policy changes to happen in this sector (Coleman and Skogstad 1995; Potter and Tilzey 2007).

This increasingly competitive policy processes can indeed lead to decisions that contrast with the usual outcomes of the agricultural corporatist style. As Ansaloni and Fouilleux (2008) notice in the case of the *Grenelle de l'environnement* forum held in France in 2007, holding debates in a broader arena forced the agricultural administration and the main farmers' organization to agree to some reform proposals. Similarly, Ansaloni (2012: 155-157) reports that in the United Kingdom, the Blair government has rejected the traditional corporatist agricultural policy-making style in the late 1990s by dismissing the National Farmers Union of the policy elaboration, which greatly influenced his subsequent reformist content. Moreover, in this country the department responsible for agriculture is now entitled *Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* and no longer contains the word agriculture in its name.

In fact, all Western countries move towards an integration of environmental concerns into their agricultural policies (Vojtech 2010) and many consider this agri-environmental and sustainable development turn as one of the defining trends of recent decades in this sector policies (Muller 2010; Potter and Tilzey 2005). This "substantive" change also go along with "procedural" changes (Howlett 2001), since sustainable development paradigm is closely intertwined with a "new governance" discourse (Glasbergen 2011; Combe 2010; Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008; Rumpala 2008). This discourse claims that better environmental decision-making will be achieved through inclusive processes wherein public administration operates less hierarchically and more collaboratively with complex networks of public and private actors (Salamon 2002; Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008). In order to get legitimacy and efficiency gains, the previous "top-down", centralized and "command-and-control" management must give way to more "bottom-up", decentralized, multi-stakeholder and horizontal policy processes (McCauley 2008; Dinnie, Fischer, and Huband 2015).

This decentralization and collaborative trend in environmental and rural management is observed in many European countries (Prager and Freese 2009; Dinnie, Fischer, and Huband 2015; Emery

and Franks 2012; McCauley 2008; Dwyer et al. 2007; Termeer 2009) as well as Anglo-Saxon states (Metze 2011; Taylor and Van Grieken 2015; Lurie and Hibbard 2008; Morrison 2007). Despite this growing popularity, the recent agri-environmental measures literature review carried out by Uthes and Matzdorf (2013) shows that the participatory and decentralized governance arrangements and their effects on the measures implemented have remained under-researched. Moreover, while public authorities increasingly prescribe this new governance style in agri-environment schemes (ECA 2011; Millot and Villien 2012; Barbut and Baschet 2005), some researchers have underlined a gap between prescription and practice. Even in a decentralized and participatory process, agricultural administration and associations remain the most influential groups and their presence can have an intimidating impact on non-agricultural groups; therefore their effective participation is thwarted (Delorme 2004; Gafsi et al. 2006; Léger, Vollet, and Urbano 2006; Prager and Nagel 2008). Furthermore, the involvement of farmer groups in the AES implementation and their potential grip on local collectivity can result in program objectives being distorted or substantially re-interpreted in order to be more consistent with traditional agricultural interests (Gafsi et al. 2006; Bourblanc 2011; Brun 2006; Busca 2003; Taylor and Lawrence 2012; Trouvé and Berriet-Sollic 2010). This paper thus intends to shed light on this gap between prescription and practice by exploring the impacts of the new governance arrangement on the “greening” process of agricultural public policy as well as on the traditional corporatist policy-making in this sector.

### **3. Cases and Method**

The agricultural sector in France is well-known as a typical case of corporatist policy-making (Jobert and Muller 1987). Since the 1960s, the agricultural administration has developed a strong partnership with the main farmers’ association, the *Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles* (FNSEA). Both have generally been reluctant to the growing importance of the agri-environmental schemes promoted by European Union and have, over the years, joined forces to restrict their scope. In addition to the relatively weak position of the French environmental administration into the government (McCauley 2008), these lead to “broad and shallow” agri-environmental schemes, in which relatively simple management contracts are offered to large numbers of farmers (Ansaloni 2015).

This “broad and shallow” approach has, however, been the subject of growing criticism in recent years. Its effectiveness is questioned both by the European Court of Auditors (ECA 2011) and by French agricultural administration (Millot and Villien 2012; Barbut and Baschet 2005; Villien and Clauquin 2012). In this context, for the 2007-2013 French agri-environmental program, the agricultural department has created complementary Territorialized agri-environmental schemes (TAES), designed to bring farmers into more ambitious contracts aimed at effecting changes to farming effects on biodiversity and water management. Besides being more demanding, these schemes are accompanied by a new decentralized and collaborative mode of governance, through the creation in each French region of a Regional agri-environmental commission (RAEC) charged of their implementation. Under the leadership of the regionalized agricultural state service (DRAAF), the RAEC is a multi-stakeholder committee which brings together representatives of the regionalized environmental state service, water public agencies, departmental state services, local political authorities, agricultural groups and environmental associations.

In order to understand the impacts of these new governance arrangements on both the “greening” process of agricultural public policy and the traditional corporatist policy-making in agriculture, we conducted a qualitative multiple case study analysis of two French regions, Languedoc Roussillon and Centre. In each region, we conducted three-month intensive field research. The research was carried out in fall 2012 in Languedoc-Roussillon and in spring 2013 in Centre. Primary original data for the research come from 46 face-to-face interviews conducted with key players in each regional RAEC. Individuals interviewed were mainly state and regional agricultural and environmental public administrators, local authorities, and representatives of agricultural groups and environmental associations (national level = 11, Languedoc-Roussillon = 19, Centre = 16). We identified these key players on the basis of RAEC minutes and official notices of meetings, which allowed us to contact stakeholders as well as groups who were invited to the RAEC but did not attend. On average, the interviews lasted between 60 and 75 minutes and followed a guided discussion format, focusing broadly on the challenges of TAES implementation, the functioning of the RAEC, and the evolution of relationships between different stakeholders since 2007. These interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants and transcribed. In addition to these primary interview materials, other data sources include RAEC minutes, official documents distributed during meetings, administrative data and reports, and evidences from evaluation and research studies. The analysis consisted of coding the data so as to first form descriptive categories of new governance arrangements, interactions between “new” and “traditional” stakeholders, territorialized agri-environmental schemes’ design and implementation, and then proceeded to explore the effects of this decentralized and collaborative institutional setting on the “greening” of schemes implemented and on the traditional corporatist policy-making style.

#### **4. Results**

In this part, we show that the territorialized agri-environmental schemes (TAES) introduced in France in 2007 and their new mechanisms and processes have failed to transform the traditional agricultural governance. To explain this fact, our analysis focuses on five elements: 1) the fragmentation of the green movement and their weak integration in the processes, 2) an enlargement of processes to political bodies which has failed to make emerge a general interest 3) the ambiguity of schemes proposed by the reform, 4) the maintenance of a strong corporatism among all the agriculture players 5) the determinant skills of the agricultural organizations and professionals and consequently their preeminent role in the TAES implementation.

##### *4.1 A weakness and fragmentation of the green movements and a different integration to the new processes*

According to its formal ambitions, the RAEC can be seen as a space of consultation and negotiation that brings together actors with different interests to decide on how to implement agri-environmental measures. However, in practice, according to reports of meetings, agricultural organizations (i.e. representatives of farmers’ groups and chambers of agriculture, and different civil servants in regional and departmental agricultural administrations) are still the most present and active participants in the RAEC. In other words, new processes have not changed the farmers’ traditional dominance in the field. A first explanation for this outcome is high distrust among participants, which exacerbates traditional confrontational dynamics between environmental groups and agricultural organizations and undermines the collaboration that

participation requires. A member of a chamber of agriculture in Languedoc-Roussillon testified to the difficulties both parties face in saying “the ecologists are sometimes too radical in demanding immediate environmental results, while tangible outcomes of change in practice take time”<sup>2</sup>. A farmer’s representative in an agricultural union stated “relationships with environmental groups are not good, and are even worse today than in the past”, describing the environmentalists as “purists utterly bereft of any knowledge of economics or agronomy”<sup>3</sup>.

This distrust was also very palpable among the green groups. First of all, the administrators responsible for managing the RAEC belong to the Ministry of Agriculture, so for environmental groups the process was biased from the outset. This concern is increased by the fact that while the relationship between agricultural bureaucrats and agricultural groups remained strong, environmental associations had not been able to develop similar relationships with environmental bureaucrats<sup>4</sup>. As such there was no green alliance to counterbalance the historical collaborative association between agricultural actors. The green stakeholders thus had confidence neither in administrative representatives nor in the TAES itself: “Yes, it is interesting to talk about agri-environment at the RAEC, but if there are neither explicit results nor precise targets, what interest do we have in participating?”<sup>5</sup>.

Consequently, in Centre as well as in Languedoc Roussillon, some environmental groups have practiced a form of auto-exclusion by refusing to participate in the RAEC. Explanations for this vary by groups. A first group underlined that it has chosen to forego participation because its members perceived the weight of lobbies to be predominant and they felt it was not possible to express their claims<sup>6</sup>. Another group justified its low attendance at the RAEC by pointing to the fact that its members were not admitted to other agricultural bodies in which they wished to participate<sup>7</sup>. Participating in the RAEC would mean legitimizing it and playing the game of dominant actors, who confine environmental groups’ participation to very specific bodies outside the general political process. For environmental groups, boycotting the RAEC was a strategic response to more general exclusive processes or conflicts.

This strategy has divided the green actors; other actors in the environmental field were willing to increase their participation in the agricultural public policies and saw the TAES as a means to achieve their objective. The naturalist organizations, namely regional natural parks and natural species conservatories, have become an active stakeholder in the implementation of TAES. Their integration has benefited from their past participation in the management of agricultural territories, in which they offered financial subsidies to farmers willing to engage in agri-environmental practices. In this context, the TAES was just an additional instrument to further promote their goal. There were still tensions between farmers’ groups and naturalist organizations however, but their less militant conception of ecology and their defence of a mixed agricultural and ecological landscape uses<sup>8</sup> helped to a better collaboration among them.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview, Agricultural Chamber, Languedoc-Roussillon, fall 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Professional Agricultural Organization, Languedoc-Roussillon, fall 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, French Ministry of Environment, Paris, Spring 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, Environmental Association, Centre, Spring 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, Environmental Association, Languedoc-Roussillon, fall 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Environmental Association, Centre, spring 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, agent, Conservatory of regional natural landscapes, Centre, 13th June 2013.



For the regional environmental state administrations (DREAL), the TAES have constituted the principal means to be involved in the agricultural sector<sup>9</sup>. In charge of regional funds allocated to Natura 2000 (a European program to promote biodiversity), the DREAL have become a financial backer in the TAES processes as the DRAAF and the water agencies. This new status has triggered a change in the attention DREAL receive from agricultural players<sup>10</sup>. Despite antagonistic relationships between DREAL and the chambers of agriculture, the latter are now more receptive to the biodiversity concerns since their funding is subjected to the will of the DREAL. This financial leverage was thus an asset to create a new dialogue between the actors<sup>11</sup> and to facilitate the consideration of environmental dimension in TAES.

#### *4.2 The ambiguous enlargement of participation to political bodies: between withdrawing and corporatism*

The TAES initially aimed to enlarge the participation to new political actors, such as departmental and regional councils, urban and municipal political bodies (all made up of elected territorial representatives), in order to favour the expression of territorial interest over traditional sectoral interest. However, in practice, the results were falling short.

A first reason has resided in the withdrawal of the departmental and regional councils. Not only do the regional and departmental councils not finance substantially the TAES, but they do not participate in the RAEC, either. For example, in Languedoc Roussillon, the minutes of the 12 meetings held during 2008 and 2014 show that the different political territorial councils were each present only between one and six times. To justify this lesser interest, the actors underline that the TAESs are not a tool falling under their jurisdiction. According to an officer from another departmental council, in fact, the TAES is a creature and concern of the “big players”<sup>12</sup> (DRAAF, DREAL, water agency), which limit its use to certain territories and specific issues on which the council does not really hold.

This refuse also echoes the traditional competition in France between the political and the administrative bodies. The latter are increasingly assertive of their prerogatives. This competition was furthermore intensified by the potential attribution to the regions by French government of the management of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This delegation worried both the departmental councils and the agricultural actors (administrations and farmers’ groups) and increased the climate of deep mutual distrust among the stakeholders. Consequently, any collaboration seemed very difficult.

In contrast to the departmental and regional councils, the municipal players (municipalities and municipalities’ communities) have generally accepted to participate in the TAES implementation. Nevertheless their participation has generated mitigated results about the emergence of greener practices.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Languedoc-Roussillon, 28th November 2012 and Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st may 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of Agriculture in Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th november 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st may 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, agent, Departmental Council, Languedoc-Roussillon, 20th June 2013.

On the one hand, the mobilization of these new actors is considered like “a success for the TAESs. Before the TAESs, these people were not participating in the agri-environmental policies, but they have understood that these were as well a territorial issue, so that they were totally legitimate to participate to their implementation. Moreover, in the long term they would have to address this issue, so it would be better to proactively begin to show interest rather than waiting for the situation becomes too degraded”<sup>13</sup>. The involvement of these territorial political bodies has allowed the acquisition of an environmental knowledge: some of them have created jobs totally or partially dedicated to environmental issues to manage the TAESs.

On the other hand, these new political actors have not renounced to their political territorial strategies. In other words, for some of them, the objective was more to defend the interest of potential electors than to protect environment. For a lot of interviewed representatives, the priority is to maintain the agricultural farms on their territory. For example, a agri-environmental project manager within a local authority explained to us that “the goal, the leitmotif, the keyword is to balance socio-economic activities with biodiversity conservation.” Another considered that TAES must be analysed with an economic perspective: the farms’ installation and maintenance must have priority over environmental objectives insofar as the disappearance of family farms is synonymous with a narrowing of rural and environmental concerns to purely economic and industrial vision.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the enlargement of processes to new political actors has not produced the anticipated results. If some new alliances and knowledge have emerged, they were not able to create an expansion of green practices.

#### *4.3 The ambiguity of objectives and the downward levelling of green ambitions*

The TAESs present an initial ambiguity in their objectives that allows the actors to read into the objectives of the reform according to their own interests. On the one hand, the agri-environmental schemes were framed to the EU and the citizens as a means to maintain “good agricultural practices”. On the other hand, the French dominant agricultural group has interpreted it as a tool to distribute funds to the least favoured livestock farmers in terms of Common Agricultural Policy expenditures (Ansaloni 2015). Although the French political leaders and civil servants saw the TAES like a privileged tool to a deeper agri-environmental approach (Villien and Claquin 2012), these schemes remained embodied in this initial ambiguity. An agent of a departmental agricultural chamber said to us: “the TAES, for some people, it’s a contract, for others, it’s a bonus, or it’s a redistribution of money from the CAP, or it’s an obligation of result, or it’s an obligation of means. When you mix all that, it’s impossible to know in what policy area you are”<sup>15</sup>. These different visions have led to very varied implementation of TAES according to the territories. And finally, this lack of coherence in the standard application of TAES has impelled to a race to the bottom in the agri-environmental contracts<sup>16</sup> – each region not seeing why it should constraint itself to more obligations than its neighbour. In this regard, the political actors

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, agent, Ministry de l’Agriculture, de l’Agroalimentaire et de la Forêt, Paris, 15 mai 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, agent, Conseil départemental, Centre, 10 juin 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture d’agriculture départementale, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th November 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th November 2012.

are not the only responsible party. Even the administrative leadership have interpreted the criteria with its own way marked by the domination of financial criteria over an environmental perspective. The first objective of the state administrations and more particularly of the departmental administrations was always to maintain a balance in the funds distributed to the different departments. The realization of an equitable distribution is more important than the ecological dimension of TAES.

The ambiguity of TAES has also another perverse effect: the actors do not know whether they should finance the changes of agricultural practices or the (already) good practices. In other words, should they continue to distribute funds to farmers with virtuous environmental practices or only to valorise those who have to change their practices to reach out the new standards (with the risk to privilege environmental slow learners)<sup>17</sup>? The same debate has also concerned the renewal of TAES when they come due at the end of a five-year contract. Initially, the TAES were thought of as a launching pad and after five years, practices were seen as perpetuating themselves<sup>18</sup>. However, the authorities have feared that the end of funds means the end of the best practices. Yet, the administrators have not distinguished between changes in the practices and maintenance of practices.

Within such a system, the tendency is thus not to appreciate the enhancement of green practices but only to be satisfied with basic reforms. The application of the Natura 2000 program testifies this point. The administration has asserted a large definition of contractualizing which recognizes minimal ecological practices<sup>19</sup>. The 2007-2013 program results are unequivocal in this regard: in Languedoc Roussillon as well as in Centre, the TAES about biodiversity have been much more popular than the TAES about water (the latter requiring more important change in the practices)<sup>20</sup>.

The farmers use the ambiguity of laws and program to defend their interest. Their objective is not to limit the scope of the TAES by principle but to maintain the financial outcomes it provide. In this perspective, the TAES are considered as an opportunity or a dead weight effect; in any case, a support for the exploitation<sup>21</sup>. Some agri-environmental agents have confided to us that the decision to contractualize a TAES is often based on a calculation to obtain the best balance between the financial compensations and the required environmental standards<sup>22</sup>. The ease of implemented measure and the potentiality of an inspection are also elements considered: the farmers prefer a minimal contract because the chances of being controlled are limited.<sup>23</sup>

This strategic logic of action has the side effect of reducing the degree of requirements and thus the environmental efficiency of TAESs. Both agricultural and environmental civil servants have testified some worries about this fact.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, they have tolerated these behaviours because they have dreaded either the farmers refuse to contract the TAESs, either they adopt

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, agent, DRAAF, Languedoc-Roussillon, 28 November 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, agent, Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-Food, Fishing and Forestry, Paris, 15th May 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Languedoc-Roussillon, 28th november 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, agent, Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-Food, Fishing and Forestry, Paris, 15th May 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, agent, Centre, 31st Mai 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, agent, local collectivity Languedoc-Roussillon, 15th November 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th november 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st May 2013.

counter choices which will have pernicious effects on the environmental and economic policies (for example, the adoption of worst environmental practices so that the regular and basic practices get a financial support, the end of practices as soon as the financial support is over).

This tolerance of administrative actors reveals the power of farmers in the system and this power also reflects both privileged relationships between administrative organizations and farmers and the crucial role of farmers in the implementation of TAESs.

#### *4.4 The corporatist alliance among the agricultural players takes precedence over the alliance among the administrative players*

The case of the Centre Region is a very meaningful example here. Since 2010, the implementation of TAES has involved a more restricted call for projects, which has limited the issues and the geographical areas opened for contracting. The initial idea emanated from the DRAAF before a budgetary envelope that could not cover all the totality of the program. However, the restriction was approved and adopted by all the administrative actors (DRAAF, DREAL and water agencies)<sup>25</sup>. This new logic of the program was poorly received among the farmers' organizations, which claimed larger criteria in order to increase the number of farmers eligible to the funds. Conversely, the administrations wished to shrink the protective area to the territories marked by the most prominent agri-environmental issues. Both sides were sticking to their positions for 2 years from 2010 to 2012<sup>26</sup>. Faced with this deadlock, the DRAAF unilaterally decided in favour of the farmers by withdrawing the restrictive criteria for the application of TAES in the sector of water and without even consulting the DREAL and the water agency<sup>27</sup>. This event has not to be considered as a single fact, it is more revealing of a pattern. The water agency has related as well then when it refuses a project which does not echo the environmental standards, the DRAAF regularly decides to use its own budget to finance the same project<sup>28</sup>.

These examples show the influence that agricultural organizations retain in the policy making processes. The long tradition of joint management, over several decades, between the agricultural organizations and the agricultural state agencies even supersedes the principles of collaboration among the administrative actors and the principle of policy coherence. Beyond, as at the national level, this alliance between the administrative actors and the agricultural organizations is not counterbalanced by a similar alliance in the green sector. The environmental administrations (DREAL and water agencies) are accustomed to work in silos, each one on their respective issues. Although they recognize the expertise of naturalist organizations, they do elaborate commune orientations neither with them, neither with environmental associations.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st May 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st May 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, agent, DREAL, Centre, 31st May 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, agent, Water Agency, Centre, 4th June 2013.

#### *4.5 The crucial role of the agricultural organizations in the implementation and the success of TAES*

Another reason to explain the influence of agricultural organizations in the TAES is their crucial role in their implementation. Although local authorities are often the operators in charge of TAES implementation, they usually contact the chamber of agriculture of their territory so that it helps for installing the schemes and contact farmers. The local authorities are somehow dependent on agricultural chambers because of their lack of knowledge and skills in the field, and they ask to the agricultural organizations to support them to develop the projects (“which farmers, how many surface, how much cost projected, and so forth”)<sup>29</sup>. This dependence on agricultural expertise creates a balance of power in favour of chambers of agriculture.

The chamber of agriculture becomes a key actor in the process and intends to maintain this crucial role even when the local authorities wish to deploy their own competences. The TAESs have been an opportunity for some local authorities particularly involved to engage new people to lead and facilitate the agri-environmental projects. These bodies were thus able to manage by themselves the TAES without any collaboration with the agricultural organizations. However an interviewee working in a departmental agricultural administration has noticed that when municipal communities<sup>30</sup> or urban communities try to unfold the TAESs by themselves, without cooperating with the Chambers of agriculture, it often fails. Although the project was accepted in the RAEC and adopted by the administration, no farmer has contracted.<sup>31</sup> This testimony was confirmed by the representatives in two local bodies who have resorted to their own professionals to manage the TAESs<sup>32</sup>. We suppose the chambers of agriculture sought to maintain their leading role of intermediary and they reacted to what was perceived as a passively or actively incursion in their turf by encouraging their members not to participate in these projects.

However, this strategy has not always worked. A project manager for a local community told us that despite a particularly difficult relationship with the chamber of agriculture of its territory, not only he succeeded in recruiting farmers, but farmers and some agricultural cooperatives directly contacted him to participate in the TAES, seeing it as a way to enhance their production<sup>33</sup>. These examples show the considerable influence of the farming profession in the success or failure of the agri-environmental policy. Nevertheless, they also underline that the arrival of new territorial actors can undermine this crucial role by bypassing the traditional farmers’ organizations to be in direct contact with individual farmers.

The dependence on the agricultural expertise can also influence the contents and the level of basic standards required by the TAES. The asymmetric expertise in favour of the chambers of agriculture is reinforced by the absence of qualified employees in the monitoring of TAESs. The principal reason is that no budget is dedicated to follow up with farmers who have committed, and neither for monitoring the effective scheme implementation. The farmer who signs a TAES

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<sup>29</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th November 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Regrouping of municipalities with jurisdiction on certain matters

<sup>31</sup> Interview, agent, Departmental Direction of territories, Languedoc-Roussillon, 29 November 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, agent, Local collectivity, Centre, 7th June 2013 and Interview, agent, Locale collectivity, Languedoc-Roussillon, 15th November 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, agent, Local collectivity, Languedoc-Roussillon, 11th December 2012.

may thus not see his operator during the five years of his contract. The consequence of this uncertain monitoring is the huge difference among TAESs even when environmental issues and geographical areas are similar. In addition, the lack of monitoring and expertise of multiple stakeholders allows widespread contractualization of basic measures, or even absurd measures such as “nutrient management scheme in pastoral livestock production, but no one has ever seen someone fertilize a route”<sup>34</sup>.

However, the expertise of chambers of agriculture can also be used in order to reconcile agricultural needs and environmental requirements. The trust relationship established between these organizations and the farmers allows the former to negotiate more easily win-win contracts<sup>35</sup>. For example, some projects include a demanding measure on a percentage of the land and another, less demanding, on the rest of the contractualized scheme. This type of informal practice was relayed to the Ministry of Agriculture by several decentralized administrative actors, who considered such a scheme model should be institutionalized in the next programming<sup>36</sup>. This negotiated approach of TAES, based on both ecological requirements and economic aids, demonstrates the weight of farmer in the success or failure of agri-environmental schemes.

This dependence of all stakeholders to farmers’ willingness thus leads to strategic negotiations that alter or even neutralize the expected environmental effects of TAES<sup>37</sup>. This reorientation is all the more tolerated as administrative authorities have to meet quantitative success requirements of TAES. The TAES therefore find themselves in the heart of perpetual strategic arrangements where both individual and collective pressures of recipient-farmers and the imperatives of administrative efficiency conduct to a lessening of their environmental dimension.

## 5. Discussion

The previous section points several challenges encountered during the 2007-2013 TAESs’ implementation in Centre and Languedoc Roussillon French regions. In this section we consider what these observations mean for the two central themes of the paper: (1) how new institutional arrangements shape TAES scope and content; and (2) how these arrangements intersect with traditional corporatist policy-making. These reflections participate to the current academic and practitioners’ debates about how decentralized and multi-stakeholders governance can influence the “ecologization” of agricultural policies.

### 5.1 *Non-agricultural actors’ presence does not lead to “greener” AESs*

Evidences from our two cases studies indicate that the presumption that non-agricultural stakeholders would automatically be environmentalist supporters should be revised. Firstly, this presumption gives them influence and political leverage they clearly do not have. Faced to highly organized and specialized agricultural actors, environmentalist groups and local collectivities arrive in the agricultural politics with relatively few resources, legitimacy and expertise on farming issues. Therefore, these new players are trying to position themselves strategically in the

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<sup>34</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th November 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Centre, 4th June 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, agent, Departmental Direction of territories, Languedoc-Roussillon, 29th November 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, agent, Chamber of departmental agriculture, Languedoc-Roussillon, 26th November 2012.

agricultural policy field; in doing so, they are pursuing their own political agenda where greener AESs are not necessarily a priority, even in the case of environmentalist groups.

Indeed, we observed that environmentalist actors (associations and administrations) have adopted different strategies in the TAES policy process. For them, agri-environment problems are just one issue among many others they are working on, such as urban planning, energy, climate change and global warming, and so forth. In light of their limited resources and these multiple issues, some groups consider their participation in the TAES' implementation does not have the intended impact and opt for a strategic withdrawal on other scales of action judged more promising. For others, their defection is explained by the broader political game in the agricultural sector. True, they are invited to participate to the RAEC, but other important agricultural policy arenas remain inaccessible to them. For this reason, some decide to exclude themselves from the process, refusing to ratify by their presence an opening that is considered more of a farce than a genuine desire for incorporating environmental considerations.

Some choose the path of cooperation with the agricultural stakeholders, accepting several compromise to their original positions so that, slowly but surely, agricultural policies moving towards greener practices. Environmental administrations seem particularly willing to such negotiation. Previously generally excluded from agricultural political processes, they try "to earn a spot" in this new intervention field by collaborating with corporatist stakeholders. This behavior refers to what Spanou (1991, 259) call "captive administrations", that is to say, administrations too weak to fully defend their claims and obligated by default to adopt a collaborative strategy with their opponents to avoid prejudicial conflicts. Notwithstanding the multi stakeholders' governance arrangements, we observed that the ultimate decision-making power still remains to agricultural administrations, which do not hesitate when necessary to bypass the positions of their environmental counterparts to privileged farmers' interest.

As for local authorities, our two research cases show that they partly integrate the agri-environmental politics only to reproduce traditional corporatist dynamics by pursuing a clientelist agenda. Winning the agricultural organizations favour and farmers votes seem more profitable to local elected than to push enhanced agri-environmental action. Furthermore, in the two French regions studied, agriculture is still an economic driving force and contributes to preserving other economic activities in rural areas. In this context, maintaining a prosperous agriculture although a bit polluting, seems a good deal for a lot of people.

In fact, what is immediately striking is that even within the context of debate about environmental impacts of farming, agricultural organizations manage to convince other stakeholders of the merits of their politico-economic frame. Many environmental actors as well as local authorities endorse the farming groups' rationale which states that the (economic) sustainability of the farming community across the territory has to be the political priority of agri-environmental schemes, although this should happen at the cost of some environmental concessions. The consequences of this assumption are twofold. On the one hand, the agri-environmental schemes must not be too restrictive not to threatening the economic viability of farms; on the other hand, some agricultural productions that are not ecologically harmful could benefit from public support to remain in operation. So while the explicit aim of agri-environmental schemes is to improve the ecological results of agricultural practices, the implicit goal fostered by several stakeholders is to channel funds into disadvantaged rural areas or into

less subsidized agricultural production. This echoes observations made in Australia where decentralized agri-environmental schemes implementation leads to the buffering of “the culturally and politically unpalatable aspects of the scheme and [to the increasing of] the financial and cultural gains for farmers” (Taylor and Van Grieken 2015, 10). Similarly, Juntti and Potter notice among local agri-environmental administrators and advisers in England and Finland a willingness to defend the farmer’s politico-economic frame, which translated into a view of agri-environmental schemes “as foremost an income support measure with secondary environmental benefits” (Juntti and Potter 2002, 228-229).

In all cases, these various strategies adopted by non-agricultural actors lead to a renegotiation of lower requirements for agri-environmental schemes rather than strengthening them and, in doing so, have neutralized the reformist effect that their presence should theoretically have brought to agri-environmental policy.

### *5.2 The dominance of sectoral and corporatist policy-making style over the territorial modes of policy implementation*

Our case studies underline an overlooked dimension of the TAES governance design, namely how the traditional corporatist and sectoral institutional arrangements would interact with the newest decentralized dynamics. It appears from our observations that the dominant players are not keen about these ongoing changes and seek to maintain their positions of power, while territorial actors undertake lukewarmly their new role in this field. This political predisposition of each side is further amplified by the fact that the TAES’ territorialization occurred by a process of administrative devolution rather than political decentralization, which paves the way to a simple reproduction of national corporatism at the territorial level.

It comes as no surprise that agricultural administrations and farmers’ organizations defend the sectoral and corporatist policy-making style, which has proved to be both effective and beneficial for them in the last decades. There are indeed obvious risks for these two actors in the emergence of alternative modes of policy implementation. The administrations’ risk losing their leading role in the conduct of policies, and therefore the resources associated with it (human, material, financial, symbolic). As for the farmers’ groups, as highlighted by Taylor and Lawrence in an Australian regionalized program, new governance arrangements can “altering their access to funds, their corporatist status with governments and their own internal sectoral politics and practices of representation” (Taylor and Lawrence 2012, 338).

In contrast, there is evidence of significant co-benefits to both actors to pursue the traditional corporatist policy-making style in the TAES implementation. In a broader context of neoliberalism and public deficits, the administrations are pressured to be efficient by meeting performance targets, which are still mainly measured in quantitative terms of the number of enrolments in the schemes and of the use of all planned budgets. In this respect, administrations benefit from the capacity of farmers’ organizations and their networks to deliver the goods by translating policy generic goals into specific agri-environmental contracts suited to farming practices and cultural framework. This “broad and shallow” agri-environmental approach, in which relatively simple management contracts are offered to large numbers of farmers, constitutes a win-win bargain for agricultural corporatist actors. Agricultural administrations and groups remain the most influential groups in the sectoral policies formulation and



implementation; administrations meet the performance targets of their bureaucratic agenda and groups' leaders give their members a redistribution of public support that is not too ecologically demanding, or even that do not change any of their usual practices.

The strength the corporatist alliance still derives from the special commitment between agricultural department and his “administrative constituency” (Selznick 1980, 145) as well as from the fragmentation of government into sectoral administrations (Carter 2007, 186) is evident in our two case studies. Practically, this leads to TAESs which owes more to administrative targets and traditional agricultural allegiances than environmental concern. Politically, this means the unchanged dominance of sectoral and corporatist policy-making style over the territorial modes of policy implementation. In spite of the new decentralized governance prescribed, the ongoing alliance observed between agricultural stakeholders has not been counterbalanced, at least in the 2007-2013 period, by a similar alliance between the territorial political authorities. We have observed instead a lack of interest in TAES from regional and departmental councils or a clientelist behavior of some communities. There was no real dialogue engaged between actors of the territory on a common vision of the place of agriculture in rural landscape development, environmental preservation and general interest of the rural population.

Our analysis underlines a path dependency phenomenon in agricultural policies, which gives grounds for reflection especially in the context of the actual French rural program 2014-2020. The French government has officially transferred responsibility to regions for managing the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), while in the same time proceeding to a significant territorial reform which has led to the creation of thirteen regions (instead of the twenty-two that existed until then). To our knowledge, many regional councils have opted so far for a co-governance with regional agricultural departments in the agri-environmental schemes implementation, at least for a while. In light of our results, this could lead to a “business as usual” corporatist policy style. Nonetheless, some of our evidences point out that the opportunities created by the new governance arrangements have sometimes been taken by local authorities to invest the agricultural policy field. Now that regions have the official responsibility in EAFRD management, this could encourage changes in power relations in this sector. In fact, as Taylor and Lawrence notice in Australia, this could incite some farmers “to exploit new alliances that are less reliant on, and aligned with, the traditional hierarchical representative structures of their own” agricultural organizations (2012, 353). This shift of allegiance, from a sectoral and professional one to a rural and territorial one, could be an important factor of change for this policy sector.

## **6. Conclusion**

The objective of this paper is to assess the assumption made by both practitioners and researchers that the presence of non-agricultural actors in agricultural decision-making processes would favor the greening of agri-environmental policies. Even though our study is limited at two cases, our analysis tends to confirm that the agri-environmental policy process (the policy procedure) affects the content of the measures implemented (the policy substance). However, this link does not follow the expected logic: it is the traditional corporatist policy-making style that influences downwardly the ecological content of agri-environmental schemes. The opening of political arenas to non-agricultural actors did not fundamentally challenge the political-economic dominant position of agricultural administrations and farmers' groups. For different strategic

reasons, environmental actors and territorial political authorities have preferred not to invest this policy process or to comply with the corporatist logic already in place.

Even though a path dependency principle seems to apply in French agri-environmental policies, two politico-institutional changes could alter this situation in future. First, the individual and collective power of farmers observed in the policy implementation derives a lot of the voluntary nature of the agri-environmental schemes. Without their enrolment, the schemes are a failure, which leads many actors to conclude that negotiations of their level of environmental requirements are necessary to at least ensure a minimal contracting performance. Because imposing mandatory measures is not a popular option among politicians, several stakeholders we interviewed argue for schemes including both a “broad and shallow” and a more ambitious commitments. This way, the compromise between corporatist and environmental concerns would be easier to reach and to implement concretely.

Second, the ongoing transfer of EAFRD management responsibility to French regions is unquestionably a factor to monitor. In this regard, each of the thirteen regions represents a proper case study to conduct further research about how the passage of an administrative authority to a decentralized political authority may affect the conduct and implementation of agri-environmental policies. A comparative approach between these regions could authorize to identify explaining variables of policy change in this sector. More generally, the agri-environment schemes appear as a promising area to study the regionalization phenomenon increasingly present in various European countries.

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