

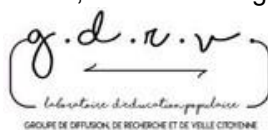
When Davids band together against Goliath

An overview of local struggles against unnecessary, imposed, and polluting projects in France.



Report presented to the public on November 17, 2021, in Paris.

Kevin Vacher, sociologist, popular education laboratory
“Citizen Outreach, Research, and Monitoring Group (GDRV)”



on behalf of the associations ZEA, Notre Affaire À Tous, and Terres de Luttés.



Illustrations: Alessandro Pignocchi

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments from the author

The research team

Coordinating and partner organizations

Note on the use of inclusive language

Introduction

Part 1: Experts in everyday life: who are the collectives and associations mobilized? 11

1. Against what, against whom? The scope of a conflict in the face of destruction and exploitation

2. The emergence of citizens and activists in the conflict

3. Collectives “affected” in various ways

Part 2: Facing the shadows of Goliath: local and democratic conflicts 35

1. A contingent offensive against life and spaces

2. Organizing to Win: Between Improvisation and the Accumulation of Experiences

Part 3: A Social Movement That No Longer Ignores Itself? 59

1. From Local to Global: Politicization Through Shifts in Scale

2. The Shaping of a Space Belonging to Mobilizations

Conclusion

Notes

Study - When Davids Band Together Against Goliath

Acknowledgments from the author

This report was written following a six-month investigation conducted with the collectives and associations themselves, and commissioned by the associations Terres de Luttès, Notre Affaire à Tous, and ZEA.

The people we talk about here were not mere “subjects” of the research; they participated in the process, in identifying the issues, and, in some cases, even in conducting the research and collecting data. This approach therefore takes a strong stance—one that has proven to be highly fruitful: building knowledge by combining scientific rigor with the co-construction of citizen expertise. I therefore hope that this report will contribute both to the environmental struggle as much as to sociological research. While it raises a number of ethical and political issues regarding its funding and working conditions, independent research has the merit of fostering this flexibility and methodological experimentation.

It is therefore with great pleasure that the “laboratory of popular education” G.D.R.V. and I would like to thank all the respondents to the interviews and questionnaire (more than 70 people) as well as the participants in the weekend gathering of local struggles for their fighting spirit and good humor, their songs (!) and their collective intelligence.

This report also owes much to the dedication and insightful judgment of the organizing team behind the two weekend gatherings held in 2020 and 2021, whose daily efforts and energy deserve recognition: Jean-Ronan Le Pen, Olivier Dubuquoy, Chloé Gerbier, Victor Vauquois, as well as Edouard Marchal and Marielle Lautrou. The scientific guidance provided by Léa Sébastien and Célia Lamblin was also of great importance throughout this study, as was the perspective offered by Laury-Anne Cholez. Finally, the team of volunteers who conducted this survey with us deserves special recognition for their dedication and the quality of their work: Nathalie Kamileris, Lola Orsoni, Clément Tremblay, Cécile Germain, and Florence Kongphengta. I hope this experience has been enriching for them.



Kevin Vacher

The Scientific Team

G.D.R.V. – Group for Dissemination, Research, and Citizen Monitoring

The Group for Dissemination, Research, and Citizen Monitoring (GDRV) is an independent, community-based research group based in Martigues (Bouches-du-Rhône), combining social science research and community education. Its team, drawing from these two traditions of knowledge production, supports citizen-led and democratic initiatives, particularly through training and collaborative research, at the intersection of experiential and academic knowledge.

Kevin Vacher, sociologist (G.D.R.V.)

His research career led him to first focus on community organizations in working-class neighborhoods, and subsequently to conduct research on localized collective action in Marseille and Naples, as well as on issues of local security and conflicts over the use of urban spaces. With a background in community education, he now works at the G.D.R.V. community research lab to develop collaborative and citizen-led research initiatives. He recently published the special issue “The Battles of Marseille’s City Center” (with François Valegeas and Camille François, *Métropolitiques*, 2021) and contributed to the book *Maudire la ville* (eds.: Cesare Mattina and Nicolas Maisetti, 2021).



The coordinating associations

Terres de lutttes

Terres de lutttes is an organization dedicated to supporting local struggles against polluting projects across France and fostering a collective movement through actions, training, and communications related to these struggles.

ZEA

ZEA is an environmental advocacy organization dedicated to stopping pollution and large- scale, unnecessary projects that impact the ocean and the climate. It is organizing weekend gatherings for local struggles.

Notre affaire à tous - Our Common Case

This organization seeks to have the most serious environmental crimes recognized under international criminal law. Rooted in the fight to protect nature, it works for climate justice, particularly by providing legal support to grassroots groups engaged in local struggles.

Partners

Partager c'est sympa

Launched in the spring of 2017 by Vincent Verzat, the idea behind our YouTube channel is simple: to get right in the thick of the action and inspire people to get involved! After realizing that activist movements and organizations don't always have the tools they need to communicate their campaigns to younger audiences, we decided to put internet culture to work for the activist community. Mission accomplished!



Reporterre's map of struggles

Reporterre

Reporterre is a media outlet that provides clear and relevant information on environmental issues in all their dimensions, as well as a forum for reflection and debate.

Note on the use of inclusive language*

**This report was originally written in French, NT*

This report has been written using “inclusive” language. This approach ensures that women are not overlooked in the account of the movements under study, as they have been particularly active in these struggles, acting as spokespersons, organizers, and volunteers. It also helps to further anonymize the data presented. By obscuring the specific projects in question, the names of individuals, collectives, or associations, as well as the cities, anonymization is standard practice in academic writing and helps direct the reader’s attention to the substance rather than the anecdotal. It also helps establish a framework of trust in interactions with the respondents.

To ensure the text remains accessible to readers unfamiliar with the subject matter, we have adopted the following writing guidelines:

- A balanced use of the mid-dot (·), limited almost exclusively to “·e” or “·es,” particularly to facilitate reading by screen-reading software for the visually impaired;
- The proximity agreement rule, where the adjective agrees with the nearest noun it modifies;
- The use of double inflection, using gender-specific forms instead of neologisms. E.g., acteurs and actrices rather than acteurices or acteur.trices;
- We encourage the use of gender-neutral terms whenever possible and appropriate. E.g., “people” instead of “men and women”;
- However, we have retained the binary nature of the terms used in the interview excerpts, reflecting the speech as it was spoken rather than how we would like to present it in writing.



Introduction

“Notre-Dame-Des-Landes,” “Larzac,” “Plogoff,” “Gonesse,” “Sivens,” “Montagne d’Or”...these names of places or projects have made headlines and are part of a collective imagination—that of environmental struggles.

These large-scale protests, which have contributed to define French political and social history, reveal beneath the surface the existence of thousands of smaller-scale conflicts—against the construction of an Amazon warehouse, a real estate development, a polluting factory, a private power plant, a quarry... Marked in turn—and sometimes simultaneously—by the stigma of violence, of the “filthy ZADist,” the “bougie,” the “protester,” or the “NIMBY—Not In My BackYard” approach, these localized mobilizations are the target of regular smear campaigns.

For decades, these local collectives and associations have been organizing to confront these campaigns, exchange best practices, show solidarity during major national events (Days against the re-poisoning of the world, Earth uprisings, solidarity events towards specific mobilizations), and even international ones (social forums or solidarity mobilizations), and to make themselves visible. Paradoxically, this increased solidarity and visibility themselves contribute to making these smear campaigns a must-do for developers and political and economic powers.

At the World Social Forum in Tunis (March 2013), representatives of these movements adopted a common label, thereby helping to strengthen their public presence and foster a sense of unity. At that time, these were referred to as local struggles “against Large, Unnecessary, and Imposed Projects (GPII in French),” as defined by the Tunis Charter. While academic research has regularly examined these movements, particularly with a view to deconstructing their “NIMBY” label (DECHEZELLES, OLIVE, 2016), few reports aimed at the general public have been produced to date. It is worth noting, however, the work of the scientific collective “Des Plumes Dans le Goudron¹” which, drawing on varied qualitative research conducted by its members as well as their activist experiences, revealed in April 2018 a coherence, a narrative, and a shared worldview and sense of the common good among these collectives.

We have drawn heavily on this prior work. We can also cite the analysis and regular monitoring carried out by the newspaper Reporterre, as well as the recommendations of the report “Modernization of ‘Participatory Democracy’. A Proposal for a Platform by Movements Opposing Large, Unnecessary, and Imposed Projects” (2015), which emerged from the National Council for Energy Transition’s consultation with certain collectives following the death of Rémi Fraisse in Sivens.

The organizations ZEA, Notre Affaire à Tous, and Terres de Luttés, which have been involved in supporting these movements, sought to shed light on the reality of these struggles, their strategies, their messaging, and the challenges they face. The independent research group GDRV (Groupe de Diffusion, de Recherche et de Veille citoyenne), positioned at the intersection of academic, civic, and activist knowledge, thus

supported these organizations and the collectives themselves, in order to assess the current state of these local mobilizations.

The study: an approach combining activist visibility and sociological reflexivity

In this study, conducted between May and November 2021, we sought to contribute to the activists' own reflections. Their primary need was, of course, to highlight the existence and the broader or national coherence of struggles that, by definition, remain relatively isolated at the local level. This narrative, far from seeking to construct complacent myths, was therefore approached from a political sociology perspective, focusing on who comprises these movements, how they emerge and act, and what these localized mobilizations say about the living world and spaces. Their second need regarded strategic support, with a view to establishing a network, a loose coalition, a more or less formalized coordination, and a rational support mechanism for these mobilizations. Following the example of what is available to the developers, institutions, and companies that these associations and collectives face, the goal here is therefore to build a rational and strategic "decision support" structure.

We therefore set out to investigate these needs and questions, formulating them in rigorous terms—those of social science research.

After a preliminary phase of problem-framing, conducted with the team commissioning this report, specialized journalists, and members of pre-existing collectives and networks, we assembled a team of eight volunteers for this study—trained in the social sciences for the occasion—and led by a sociologist.

The initial findings of this study were presented during the weekend gathering of local movements on October 2, 3, and 4 in Jambville, a few kilometers from a controversial quarry project in the Vexin region. They were thus the subject of discussions and enriched by participants' comments. The focus of this report—the scientific and strategic questions—was thus developed collaboratively, without sacrificing the necessary autonomy and rigor of the scientific approach.

The Study's Black Box

We began with four seemingly paradoxical problems that allowed us to examine the actions and discourses of the actors and actresses:

- Should the space of the mobilizations under study be considered a "social movement that is unaware of itself," to borrow the phrase from the collective Des Plumes dans le Goudron? By their very nature—local and scattered—these mobilizations produce a discourse that appears to be shared.

We will see, by focusing on the "universe of practices and meanings, relatively autonomous within the social world, in which protest mobilizations are united by bonds of interdependence," that they thus form a "space of mobilizations" (MATHIEU, 2012) whose coherence appears to be growing;

- bringing together diverse profiles of actors and actresses—from young climate activists to local residents who are simply and legitimately fed up with pollution and not very politicized—we will examine the construction of these seemingly counterintuitive coalitions of cause;
- while they often stem from spontaneous reactions to a nearby project, the duration of political and planning conflicts invites us to project ourselves into longer timeframes, a distance that generates internal difficulties, frustration, a certain time-consuming nature of the processes, and exhaustion—all of which we will examine as a major challenge of these mobilizations;
- finally, we will examine these protests that at first constitute local land-use conflicts but nevertheless show a form of coherence at the national level, focusing on the consistency of the conflicts' dynamics and the institutional or private strategies faced by the people mobilizing.

These questions served as the initial impetus for our research and ultimately led to the creation of a comprehensive overview of the current state of these movements, which we are now presenting not only to the general public and the media but also to the collectives and associations themselves, with a view to continuing these discussions and developing a shared analysis that will be useful to the environmental movement.

We conducted 41 semi-structured interviews, ranging in length from 1.5 to 2.5 hours, with an equal number of collectives, associations (local and, in some cases, national), and national networks. We supplemented these with a questionnaire distributed to 48 collectives and associations. By combining this data, we were able to compile a summary sheet for 68 mobilizations selected from the 370 listed on the interactive map of the newspaper Reporterre. Since not all questions received complete answers, the quantitative data presented ranges from 40 to 68 respondents. Approximately thirty more in-depth interviews are mentioned in this report, in accordance with standard data anonymization practices (city, project, and names). They are referenced through the following format (E0).

The sampling was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, meaning we sought to include a diverse range of struggles, taking into account their geographic location (in France—including overseas territories and Corsica, as well as rural, suburban, and urban areas), their current status (defeated, victorious, or still ongoing), and the type of project being contested. Given the resources at our disposal, we did not consider it feasible to attempt to create a representative sample. Indeed, based on the ongoing work of Léa Sébastien, who estimates that there were more than 2,000 land-use conflicts in the former Midi-Pyrénées region between 2000 and 2020, it does not seem possible, without archival research and a questionnaire, to account for the scale of these conflicts, which could be estimated at tens of thousands across France. We have therefore focused our attention on this prominent, nationally visible segment of the 370 collectives identified by Reporterre.

Presentation of the main findings

This report is divided into three parts, presenting, in turn, the general sociographic profile of the projects, collectives, and associations; how the conflict around a project is structured; and, finally, the

emerging coherence of a social movement, from the local to the global level. We can draw several key findings from this.

The contested projects are diverse but are characterized by:

- massive land development, urban sprawl, and an expansion logic of excessive consumerism;
- territorial competition and the logic of metropolization;
- the subordination of public institutions to the private sector, particularly multinational corporations.

Most collectives and associations emerge spontaneously against the excessive and deceptive nature of the project(s), drawing on pre-existing organizations or social histories. These are “citizen-led” and “democratic” movements in their methods of action and their discourse, bringing together those directly affected and gradually building civic expertise. Their core groups are very small and their local roots vary, but one of their great strengths lies in their ability to bring together very different strategic approaches and populations, far from the caricature of the “violent ZADist” or the “bougieecologist.”

The offensives led by developers and project holders have proven to be highly aggressive, consisting of both low-intensity repression and direct violence. Emerging from the shadows of these conflicts is the image of a local democracy that is circumvented, time-consuming, opaque, and even built on illegal operations carried out even by the institutions tasked with upholding it.

Activists respond by leveraging legal and regulatory frameworks and by creatively circumventing obstacles to accessing information and making their voices heard. These strategies regularly hit dead ends, leading to weariness and, at times, the radicalization of activist action. Their repertoire of actions is thus very broad, often humorous and artistic, preserving internal social bonds in the face of tensions and attrition, showcasing a “politics of joy.”

Through the spontaneous observation of similarities in conflicts across different regions, the politicization of these territories, the momentum generated by the Notre-Dame-Des- Landes struggle in the public imagination, the renewal of activism, and at the same time the global context, a sense of belonging to a global movement appears to be taking hold. It is, of course, built around political ecology and the defense of territories and heritage. These mobilizations also draw from what we might call a “heritage ecology” as the driving force behind a shared, citizen-centered discourse concerned with democratic, social, and economic issues. We are therefore witnessing a social movement that is becoming increasingly self-aware, offering a coherent, environmentalist, democratic, social, and economic counter-narrative in the face of a predatory capitalism that continues to expand.

Part 1

Everyday Experts: Who Are the Collectives and Associations mobilized ?



1. Against what, against whom?

The scale of a conflict in the face of destruction and predation

As we already stated, the scale of these mobilizations is difficult to quantify. We are dealing here with perhaps several thousands or tens of thousands of ongoing or recent conflicts. The map created by Reporterre, however, shows us their geographic scope: every region of France, including overseas territories, has one or several dozen land-use conflicts within its borders.

In this section, we will see that the sociography of conflicts we have established—which provides a general overview of the landscape of mobilizations against unnecessary, imposed, and polluting projects—reveals significant heterogeneity regarding the contested projects and their proponents. Across the board, the data reveals a certain political and economic coherence:

- their “public-private” nature, which particularly favors companies based outside the local areas, contrary to the myth of local development;
- the logic of competition among regions, accentuated by urbanization;
- the broader landscape of a form of capitalism that is destructive, polluting, and predatory toward the environment.

The sociography of the mobilizations themselves reveals three major recurring themes, common traits explained by the localized and democratic—often technical—nature shared by these struggles, as well as the overall coherence of the projects they are confronting:

- they are mobilizations that tend to be spontaneous in response to excess and deception, though this does not preclude the involvement of previously organized actors;
- they involve people who are most often directly affected, sometimes from working-class backgrounds, and build “citizen expertise” over time through individual involvement and alliances, though this is not without limits regarding the sociology of the members, which tends to concentrate the core groups around the middle classes and those with time on their hands;
- overall, they succeed in reconciling strategic choices with diverse populations, which gives them great strength in their actions.

A consumerist, destructive, and polluting approach to land use planning

Among the protests studied, the diversity of causes caught our attention. Categorized into some thirty types, the contested projects on Reporterre’s map already provide insight into this. In our study, a few types of projects stand out as particularly prominent: real estate projects (12%), recreational centers (12%), business, commercial, or logistics zones (14%), and roads and highways (6%). By recategorizing this data to make it more readable, a vision of land use planning also begins to take shape.

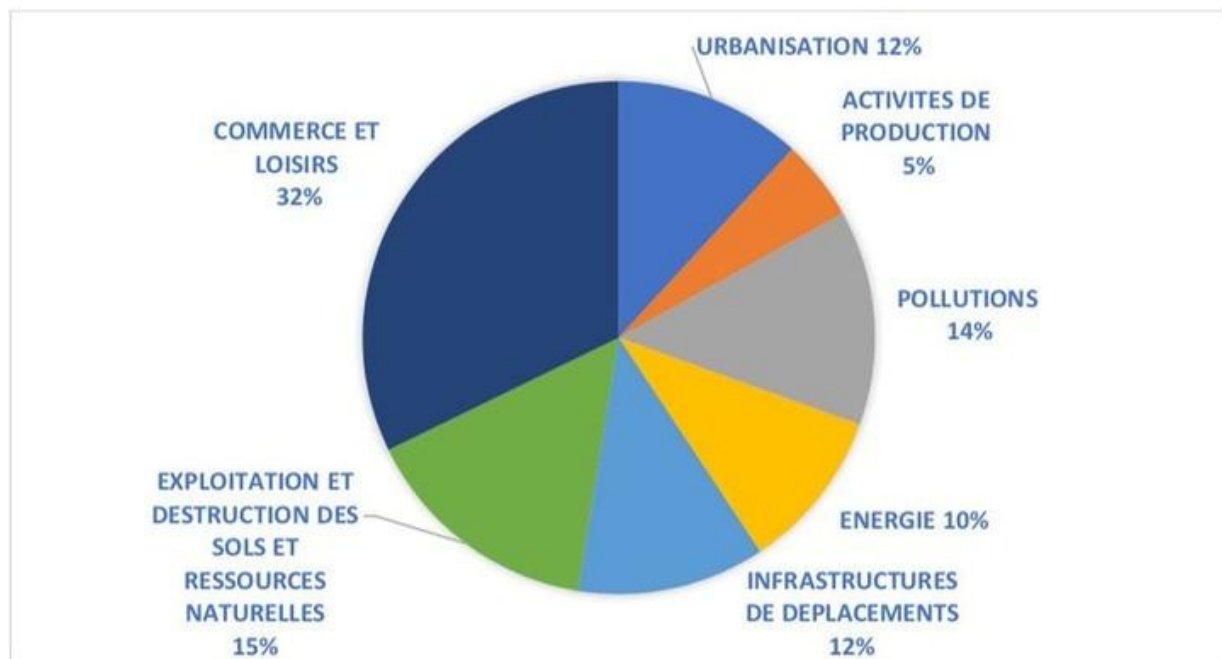


Fig. 1: Types of contested projects, based on the recategorization of questionnaire responses and interviews²

A first take, based on which projects are being challenged, reveals the rejection by collectives and associations of a form of capitalism geared toward mass consumption (32% of projects), which echoes the encroachment upon, exploitation, and even destruction of so-called “natural” spaces, extensive urbanization, thereby highlighting a fundamental critique of the human/nature conflict (15% and 12% = 27%).

This classification into seven broad, statistically relevant categories (which could be subject to political debate, as they are merely one possible approach among many) also provides an overview of the issues raised by land-use planning. The unnecessary, even obsolete, nature of these projects is a recurring theme in the arguments of stakeholders when they oppose commercial warehouses or the construction of new roads. We will return to this. Finally, one can also note the directly polluting projects (14%), which come in addition to indirect pollution or risks linked to production activities (5%), as well as a number of energy production projects (10%) that are also deemed of little or no use, or too polluting or risky.

A diverse range of contested projects with several key focal points

Among the reasons for the conflicts, we also note a series of significant, cross-cutting focal points regardless of the type of contested project.

First and foremost, we note the impact on so-called natural areas, relentless urban sprawl, and, more broadly, land conversion, which consistently comes at the expense of wetlands and agricultural land. In 73% of the cases studied, these projects will result in land conversion on a scale that varies widely (Fig. 2).

The consequences identified by interview respondents thus raise four main issues:

- the destruction or pollution of natural areas (quarries, landscapes, forests, river diversions, etc.)
- the loss of farmland and agricultural jobs

- the risks and dangers associated with the loss of wetlands that facilitate natural water retention • the futility of such projects given the expected economic impact (several respondents frame their arguments in terms of risks versus benefits)

In the case of urban expansion (business parks, real estate projects, etc.), we also see at work the logic of territorial competition, where elected officials “want to outdo Disneyland by urbanizing at any cost” (E14)

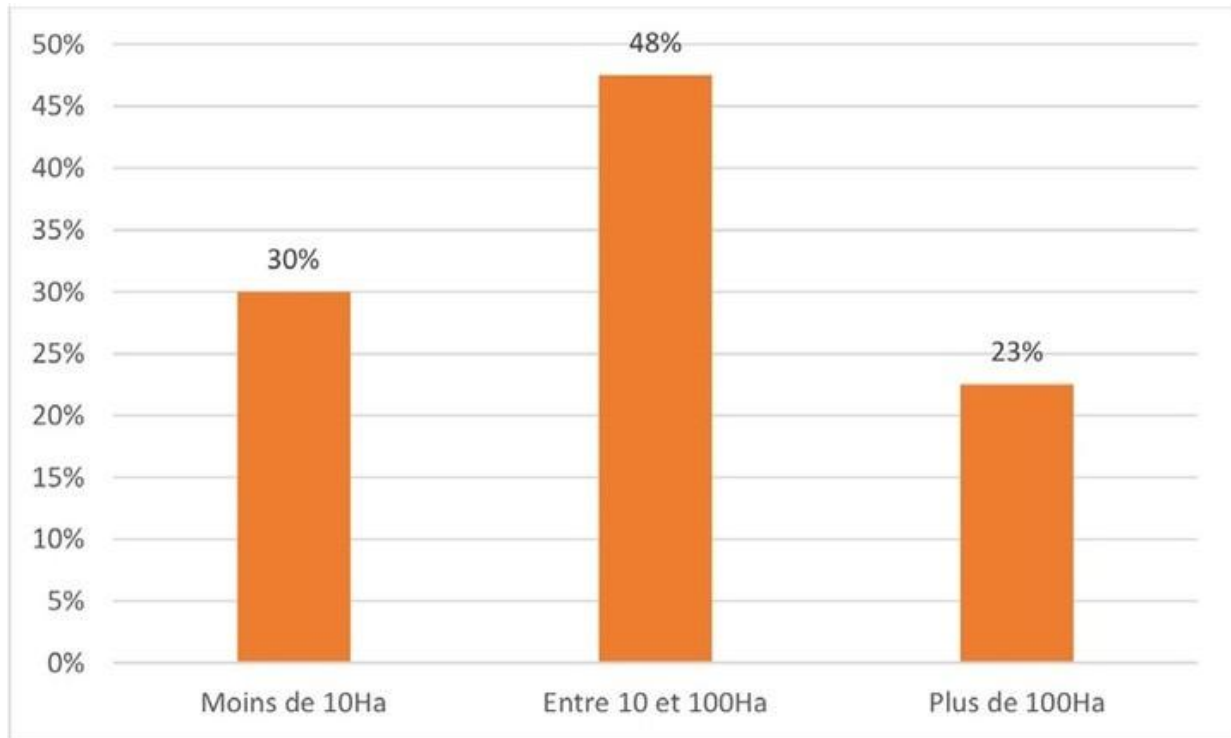


Fig. 2: Areas affected by the controversial project (in hectares)

While the preservation of open spaces is an important reason for action among community groups and associations, it does not fully capture their motivations or the impact of the projects. Respondents almost universally point out the proximity of the project sites to residential areas or schools. Whether in working-class neighborhoods, suburban areas, or even indigenous villages in French Guiana, the consequences are pollution (air, noise, etc.) but also the risks posed to local populations, with one respondent recalling the AZF disaster from which no lessons seem to have been learned:

“That’s why I say we need to avoid building an AZF facility here, because the eco-neighborhood is right on the edge of the zone. We’re in the city. To come and put that there... After the AZF incident, the parliamentary report stated that you can’t build in a danger zone; similarly, you can’t bring danger into a residential area. Several hundred homes would be put in dire straits.” (E16)

While opposition to the project does not always stem from a fear of being directly affected, community groups and organizations also highlight this risk as a way to rally their neighbors:

“In terms of climate impact, we calculated with experts that this would have resulted in an additional 15 million tons of CO2 per year—the equivalent of the heating emissions of 24 million French people. On the one hand, we’re putting pressure on

citizens to make an effort, talking about undersized investments, and on the other hand, the government is supporting this type of project that emits extremely high levels of greenhouse gases. And it also has very significant impacts on local residents. Noise is often talked about as a nuisance, but beyond that, we're losing three years of healthy life: impacts on sleep, cardiovascular disease, and also on children's learning—it goes beyond health.” (E20)

Finally, major environmental issues—such as climate change, biodiversity, and ecosystems—are, of course, central to the motivations of these activists. This observation is particularly significant when examining the backgrounds of those who have become involved: some met at a climate camp organized by Alternatiba (E6), others at a climate march (E1, E34), while still others are affiliated with the League for the Protection of Birds (LPO) (E4), or had previously wanted to get involved in climate action (E20) or even to preserve biodiversity in the impacted area itself (E13).

However, these reasons do not appear in the initial arguments put forward publicly by the stakeholders interviewed. Often, they constitute more of an “alternative argument” (E25) or an argument swept under the rug in favor of issues that more directly affect local residents, as in the interview cited above, where the respondent explicitly mentions the need to approach neighbors with an argument other than climate change (health and pollution in this case). While these discourses are not central to the public statements of the activists and citizens involved, they place them in a broader perspective, proof if ever there was any of the spontaneity of the sense of belonging to a struggle that transcends the local.

The champions of controversial projects: a sociographic portrait revealing a “publicprivate” conflict

Who, then, is behind such a project of systematic land destruction, with its well-known climate impacts and risks? The diversity of the project's backers reveals the involvement of actors at all levels of political and economic power (Fig. 3), where city halls (in 35% of cases), metropolitan areas or intermunicipal bodies (41%), the state (33%), and multinational corporations (33%) emerge as the main actors in the conflict according to respondents.

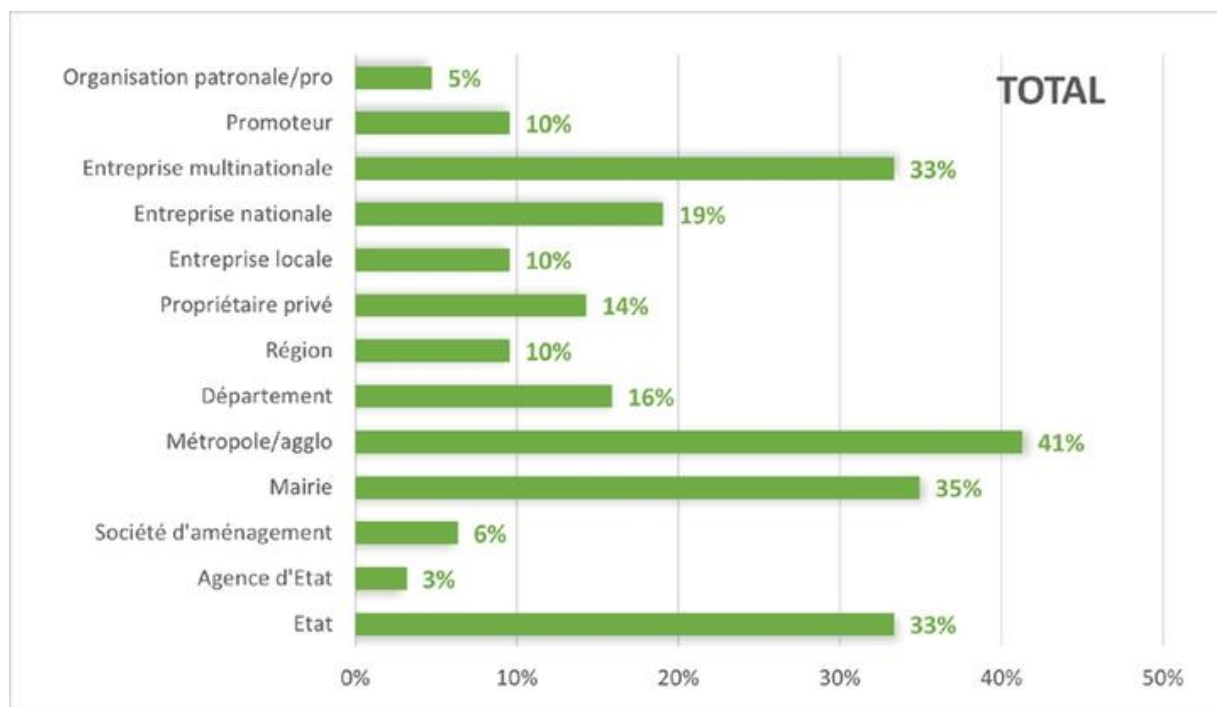
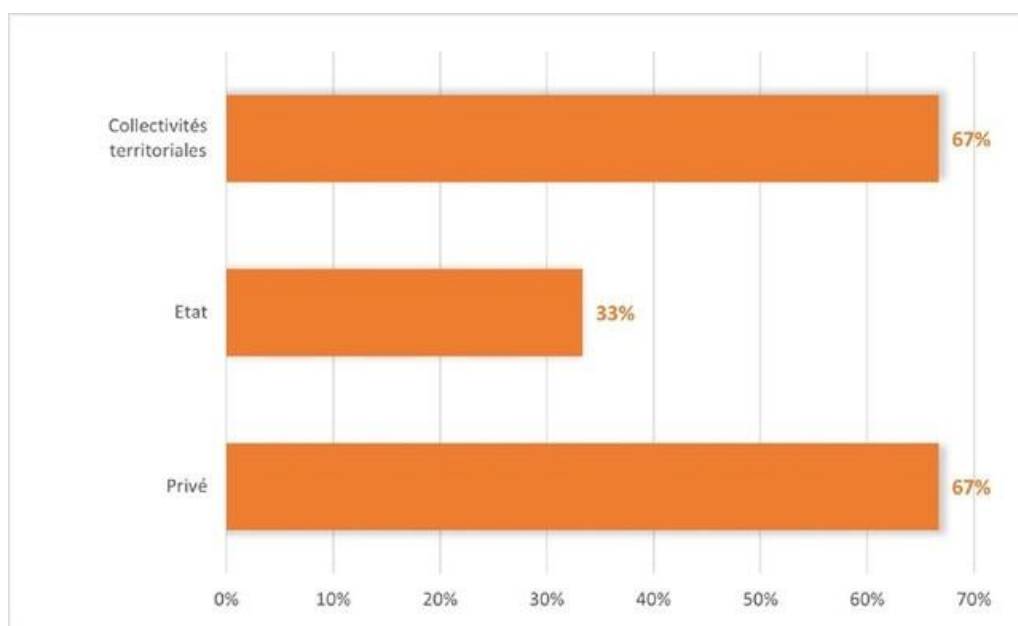


Fig. 3: Contested project backers (all regions)



Note: We grouped all cases where at least one of the local authorities “Region, Department, Metropolis/ Agglomeration, City Hall” was mentioned into the “Local Authorities” category. If multiple were

mentioned, n=1.

Fig. 4: Contested project sponsors sorted by aggregated categories

The proportion of private actors and local authorities (67% in both cases) identified as parties to the conflict reveals an alliance in which the local level acts in service of the private sector, particularly multinational companies (33%, whereas local businesses and private owners/individuals are involved in only 10% and 14% of cases, respectively, with a notable exception in peri-urban areas, see Fig. 5-B). This does not, however, detract from the relative discretion of these companies, as described to us during the interviews (we will return to this). Almost without exception, as one respondent noted, public works companies will also benefit from any type of project, whether to carry out the construction itself or, at a minimum, the infrastructure necessary for its operation. Contrary, therefore, to the myth of these projects’ profitability for the local economy, it is primarily companies —most of the time based

far from the project sites—that benefit from this land-use planning, a situation that is not without social consequences:

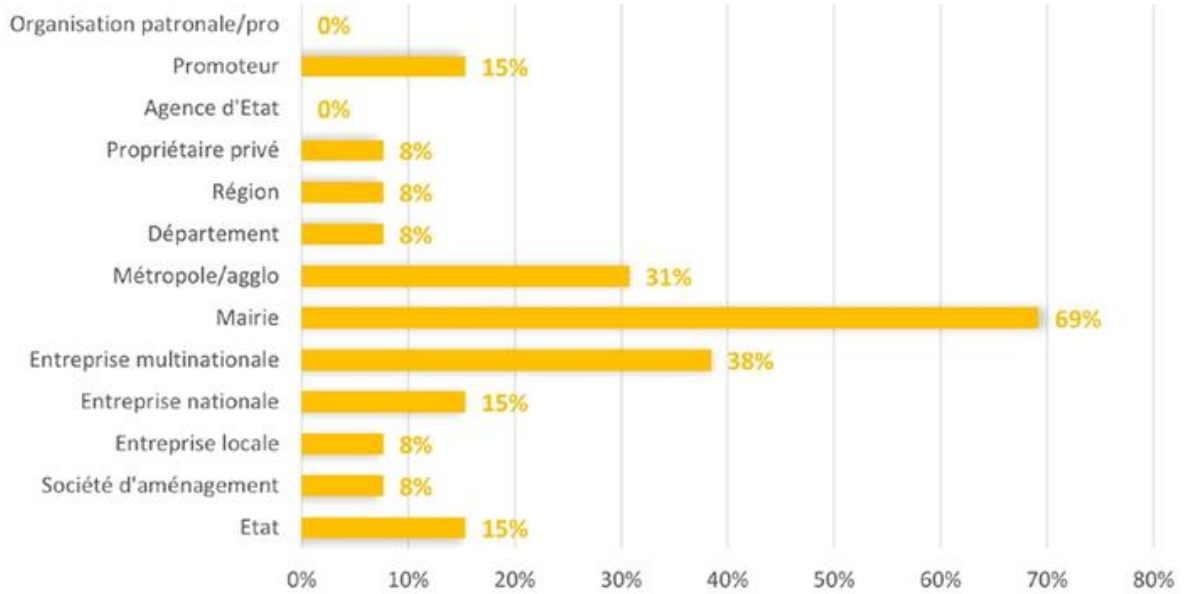
“Management positions are never filled locally. Entry-level jobs, yes. But not management roles, because you don’t manage people you know—to avoid empathy. So 30 or 40 jobs for [local] people, but what kind of jobs? Part-time, low-paying, night shifts, a high incidence of occupational illnesses, work-related health issues, unfitness for work, layoffs, and resignations.” (E24)

On the public sector side, local governments appear highly mobilized, due to their shared responsibilities regarding land use planning and road infrastructure (region, metropolitan area, department, and intermunicipal bodies), their decisions regarding urban planning (most city halls having retained their authority over the Local Urban Plan, at a minimum through their votes within intermunicipal bodies), or simply the commitment of elected officials to bring a project to fruition. The State, while its presence is fairly significant (33% of cases), nevertheless appears overall to play a secondary role in planning, particularly due to its powers regarding building permits, financial support, and the actions of ministries. That said, this observation must be qualified, as responses and the initiation of conflict against a target actor also depend on the strategies and perceptions of the groups, which can evolve over time, as we will see later.

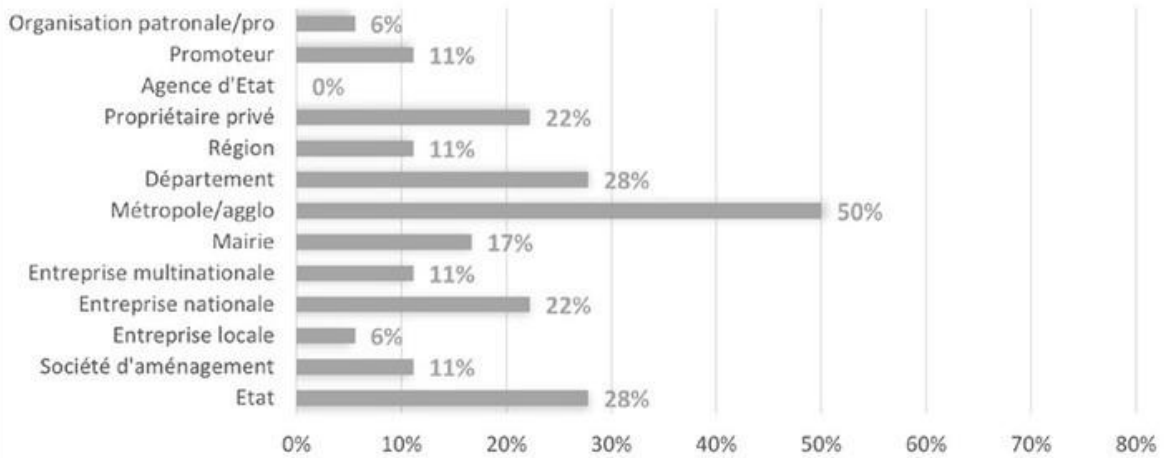
By focusing on urban areas, a relatively different picture emerges (Fig. 5-A). Quite clearly, opposition to the state is declining, to the benefit of multinationals and city governments; this can be explained by the establishment of corporate headquarters in cities as well as the persistence of a desire among certain mayors to be recognized as “builders.” The further one moves away from cities, the greater the state’s involvement becomes (28% in suburban areas, then 33% in rural areas). State agencies (ADEME, parks, ONF, etc.) intervene only in rural areas, acting as supplementary agents in the administration of these spaces.

This demonstrates that while cities have autonomy over their local planning and attract economic power through their development policies—within the context of global competition—it is often up to the state to encourage or support rural areas in joining this competition. It is also worth noting the very strong presence of metropolitan areas and intermunicipal communities in periurban zones (50%), highlighting their role in facilitating urban expansion for the benefit of central cities—a phenomenon that can once again be interpreted as a result of competition among regions and is also observed, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, in rural areas (41%).

A. URBAIN



B. PÉRI-URBAIN



C. RURAL

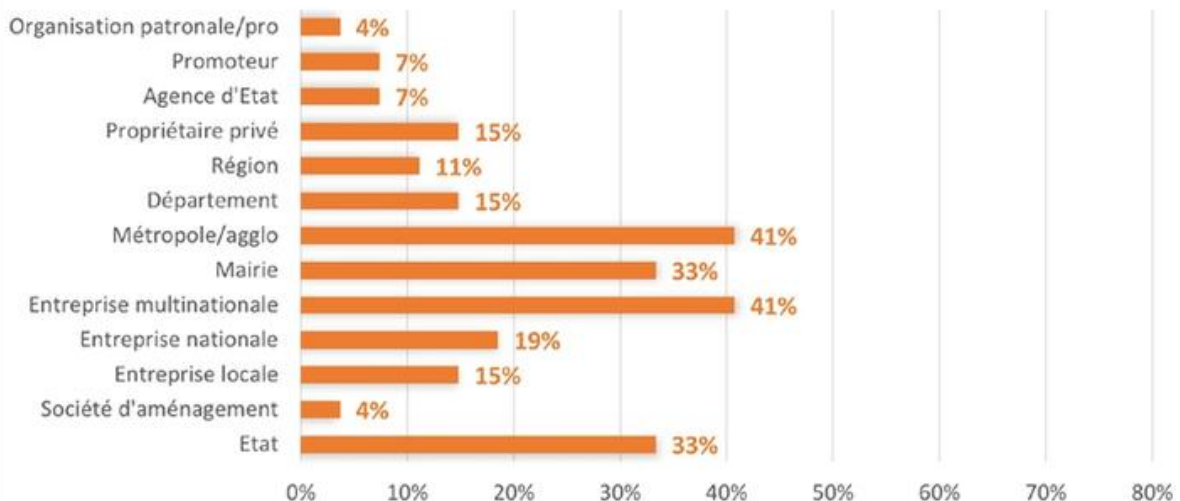


Fig. 5 (a, b, c): Focus on contested projects' developers, broken down by geographic area

Finally, it should be noted that while rural areas are particularly targeted by these development projects—even disproportionately so relative to the proportion of the population living there—suburban and urban areas are also heavily affected (Fig. 6). This thus supports both our observation regarding the predominance of projects leading to land artificialization and our observation regarding the apparent heterogeneity of the mobilizations studied.

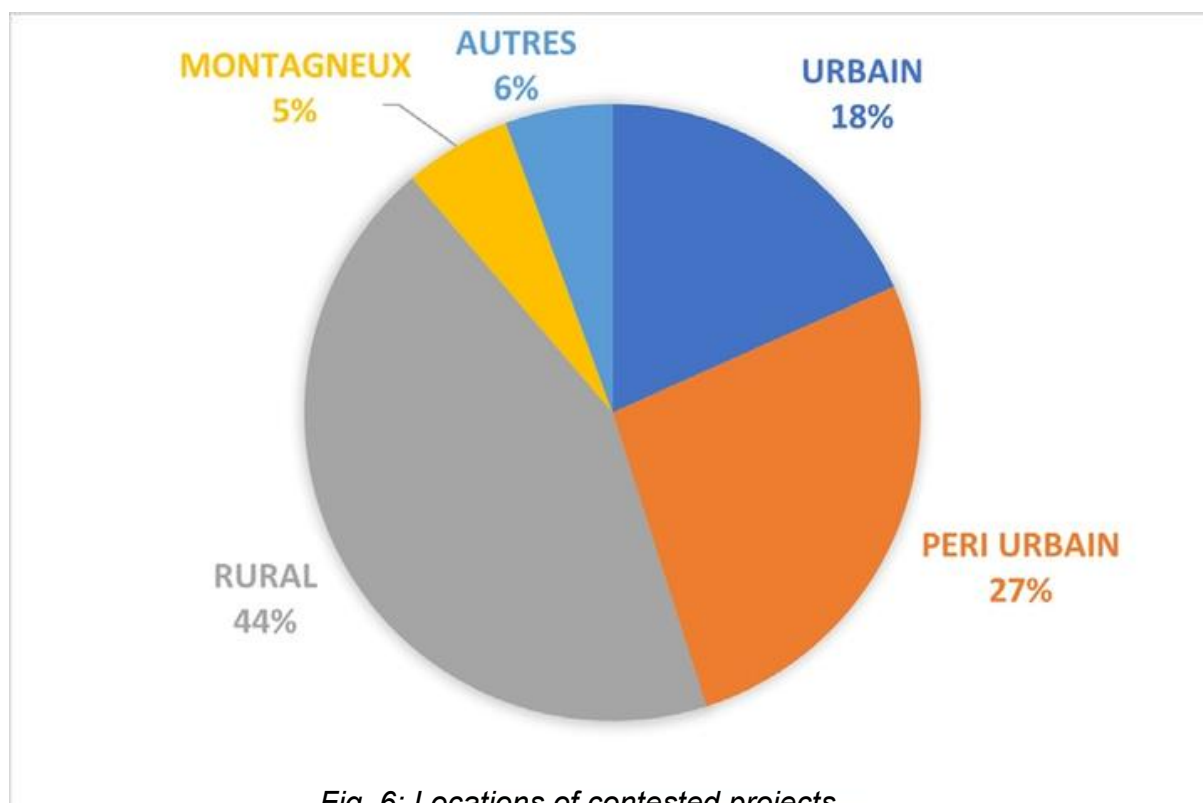


Fig. 6: Locations of contested projects

In this overview of climate-wreaking, destructive, land-devouring land-use planning, there is nevertheless no reason to despair. As we will see later in this report (and attempt to explain), these conflicts regularly achieve victories. While our sample includes 52% of “ongoing” conflicts—due to the greater ease of studying current mobilizations—it should also be noted that 10% of them achieved a total victory and 28% achieved a partial victory. Reporterre’s mapping, meanwhile, counts 37 total or partial victories (10%).

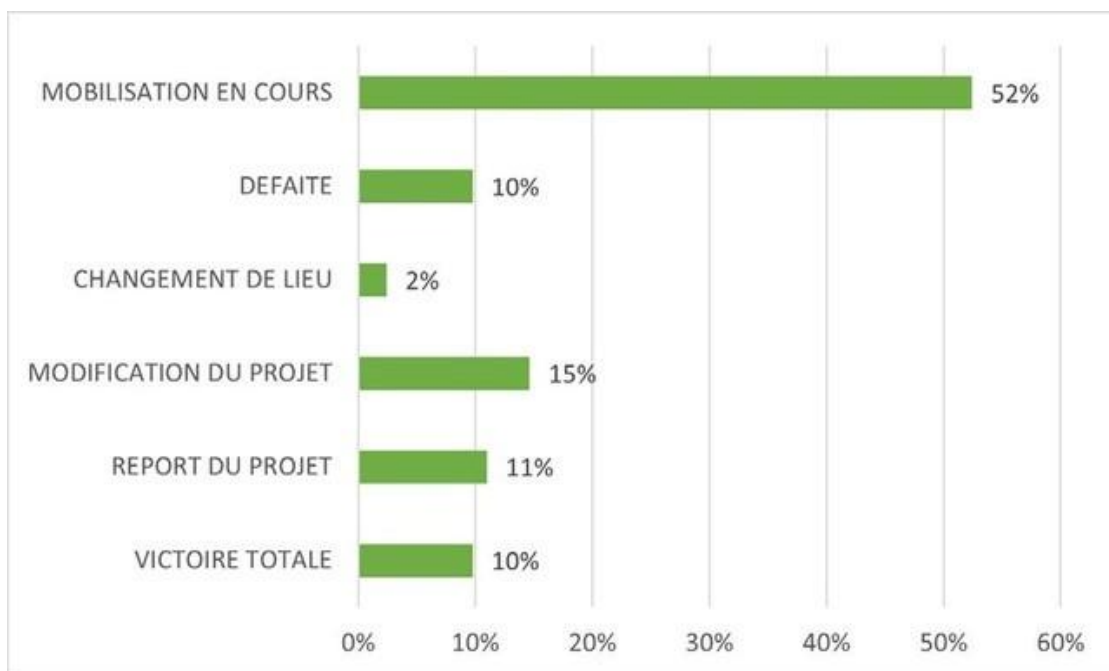


Fig. 7: Current status of the studied conflicts



2. Emergent civic and activist engagement

The people mobilizing against these unnecessary and imposed projects are, above all, local residents and people living in the immediate vicinity. That is how they describe themselves when asked. Their drive and determination likely stem largely from this fact. Because they are often directly affected, they

see their health, their lives, their heritage, and their immediate environments threatened, and in turn devote all the more energy to their cause. Recognizing this in no way diminishes the fundamentally political and activist nature of their struggle, the local social history from which they emerge—sometimes without realizing it—nor the importance of whistleblowers, who are sometimes professionals or lone warriors, even if it means being exhausted by the role and feeling a strong sense of loneliness when others “rely on [them]” (E37). It is at the intersection of these dynamics and their interplay that we will examine how the conflict emerges through civic and activist engagement.

Collectives tend to form spontaneously in response to excessive projects and the denial of democracy

Perhaps the most fundamental factor explaining the emergence of a local conflict is the feeling that one’s democratic rights are being trampled upon by an excessive project. While this was not identified as central in the arguments presented to us by the respondents, the “imposed,” even deceptive, and often excessive nature of the projects is surely the primary explanation that must be highlighted to account for the spontaneity of the mobilizations studied. It is upon the start of construction, a leak revealing the scale of the project, or the reading of a public inquiry that these citizens and local residents spontaneously become aware of the challenges they will face.

“I served two terms as a municipal and community elected official; at the time, it didn’t bother me because we were trying to create jobs. We began to realize the scale of the project in 2018 during the public inquiry: a massive project on farmland that has been in use since the Gauls—we conducted excavations! There are 6,000 square meters of wetlands. There is wildlife and vegetation on the plain. They decided to build a 100,000-square-meter warehouse. That’s 16 soccer fields—it’s the length of the Eiffel Tower, 150 meters wide. Apparently, the bigger it is, the more economies of scale you get...” (E8)

“Imagine an octopus reaching out in every direction” (E3)

“Activists really get worn down from opposing something monstrous; it’s David versus Goliath, with corrupt elected officials who don’t tell the truth— we don’t know which way to turn.” (E6)

As the last excerpt highlights, this excessive nature of the projects (nearly a quarter of which in our sample exceed 100 hectares, see Fig. 2) is coupled with the horror of lies on the part of local elected officials. The terms “corruption,” “lie,” and “secret” are thus among the most frequently used terms we collected during our interviews, sometimes reflecting spontaneous anger but also actual strategies employed by elected officials and project leaders, which we will examine in the second part.

This spontaneous anger, while it may sometimes lead to reaching out to an organization or a neighbor in order to mobilize, is not enough on its own. The second key factor in building a movement lies with the “whistleblowers,” as some describe themselves (E40, E36, E16), who are sometimes introduced to the issue at hand through their professional experience (E2, an agricultural engineer, for example, or E16, an executive in the energy sector), or simply by noticing a building permit or a notice in the local gazette. Sometimes, the process of becoming involved takes some time and involves a combination of

different factors, as in this case where a local resident's painstaking efforts and doubts intersect with neighborhood discussions and reports in the local press, in the face of a mayor determined to keep the matter under wraps:

"In 2011, I worked on the PLU (Local Urban Development Plan) for [the city] and the surrounding area. I had asked the mayor about the air quality in Rochefort, because I'd seen a line in the PLU that had caught my attention—it mentioned incineration. Just one line! So I asked the mayor for more details, to find out where things stood and how it was being monitored. The Mayor replied, 'Ah, air quality is my business; you don't need to worry about it.' At the time, I was very naive; I was surprised by his reaction, but I put it in the back of my mind. Two years later, I met some people at the market in the neighboring town who stopped me and said, 'Do you know there's an incinerator here?' And that's when it hit me! And I replied that I thought so, and they told me, 'They want to expand it and turn it into a regional incinerator; there's going to be a constant stream of trucks coming in and out, they're going to increase its capacity, and it's going to cause problems with public health and air quality.' And then I asked them how they found out. They'd seen a small line in the local paper, and they were worried." (E18)

When the local press fails to fulfill this role of providing information, national newspapers also step in to sound the alarm, notably Reporterre—which was mentioned several times in our interviews—or independent journalists committed to informing their neighbors directly (E6). The press thus plays a crucial role in ensuring that people can stay informed and, consequently, take action. In this regard, we should highlight the initiative taken in June 2020 by nearly 500 journalists and media professionals, supported by unions, associations, and collectives, who sounded the alarm through an open letter "calling for respect for the freedom to report on the agri-food industry in Brittany and elsewhere."

An association of journalists³ was thus formed. Its purpose is to produce journalistic investigations in the public interest in Brittany and around the world, in both French and Breton. We can also mention the website Médiacités, dedicated to this type of investigative journalism, as well as a number of other local investigative newspapers that have emerged in recent years.

Paradoxically, mechanisms for public consultation or local democracy—even if they are systematically deemed insufficient or even "sham"—also provide opportunities to access information and take action. Even when very discreet (information regarding public hearings, the minutes of a city council meeting, the posting of a building permit), when seized upon by residents acting as vigilant watchdogs, these become catalysts for mobilization and can even backfire on developers.

"The industrial company then began consulting with residents because they realized that times have changed and they can no longer do as they please. That's when they made the 'mistake' of inviting the association on May 5, 2014, for a project presentation. It was immediately clear that the presentation was biased. [...] We dug deeper and discovered that the factory was polluting terribly without informing the public, with exemptions allowing it to emit dust, heavy metals... and a few formal notices for exceeding limits. A toxicologist examined this data and demonstrated the impact on health." (E2)

This limited impact of legal notification procedures, combined with the constant vigilance of certain neighbors, thus partly explains the spontaneity already noted among collectives and associations. 44% of them are formed in the very same year as the official announcement, the first leak to the press, or the first debate at the city council, and 25% are created within the following 3 years (which is sometimes too late, as many people affected by these situations point out). In 10% of cases, mobilization begins even before the first public announcement, due to heightened vigilance, often within the framework of associations already established locally.

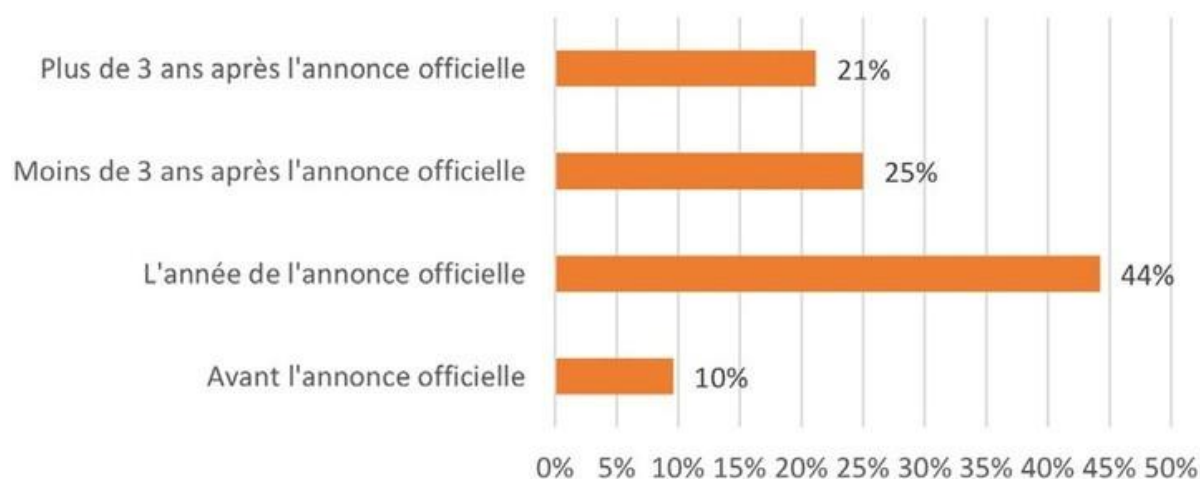


Fig. 8: Gap between the start of mobilization and the official announcement (or other public information)

The involvement of activists and elected officials

The second set of explanations for how responsive mobilizations are relates to activist activity preceding the implementation or announcement of projects. We can identify three types of activities rooted in social and political history that appear to be decisive in about half of the cases studied: the context of national mobilization, the presence of allied elected officials, and that of pre-existing associations, whether local or national.

As we briefly mentioned earlier, climate camps, climate marches, and all the mass mobilizations we've seen in recent years have, in some cases, served as meeting places for networks of neighbors who didn't know each other before. The "Days Against the Re-Poisoning of the World" were also cited twice as the starting point for local mobilization, as were solidarity actions in Notre-Dame-DesLandes, the Atomic Tour, and the Guinea Pig March.

In 8 of the cases studied, respondents also highlighted the importance of political parties or local elected officials. While they most often join the mobilization along the way (E2 – 200 elected officials changed their positions, for example), they can also be driving forces and initiators, either formally or informally:

"The elected officials weren't really there in their official capacities. It didn't happen during those meetings [after the climate marches]; at first, it was outside over a drink after the meetings—they'd ask us if we were aware of what was going on; it was all done informally." (E34)

Not surprisingly, we find a result similar to previous observations when we examine the overall components of the protests, as identified in the questionnaire responses and during the interviews (Fig. 9). In addition to local elected officials, mayors are directly involved in the mobilization in 18 cases, and local chapters of left-wing or environmentalist parties in 28 cases (primarily La France Insoumise and Europe-Ecologie-Les-Verts, and in a few cases, elected officials from the Socialist Party, Cap Écologie, and the French Communist Party—sometimes at the cost of internal conflicts with their regional or national leaderships), and in two cases, right-wing parties are also present (MoDem and Debout la France). In two cases, the National Rally (formerly the National Front) was cited as having attempted to opportunistically approach these mobilizations but was rejected by the activists. A significant number (14 cases) of parliamentarians (senators, deputies, and MEPs, and even a parliamentary inquiry commission in one case) also participate, playing a key role in bringing the cause to the national level and in exerting pressure on prefectures and other local institutions, despite certain shifts in position observed during negotiations (E3).

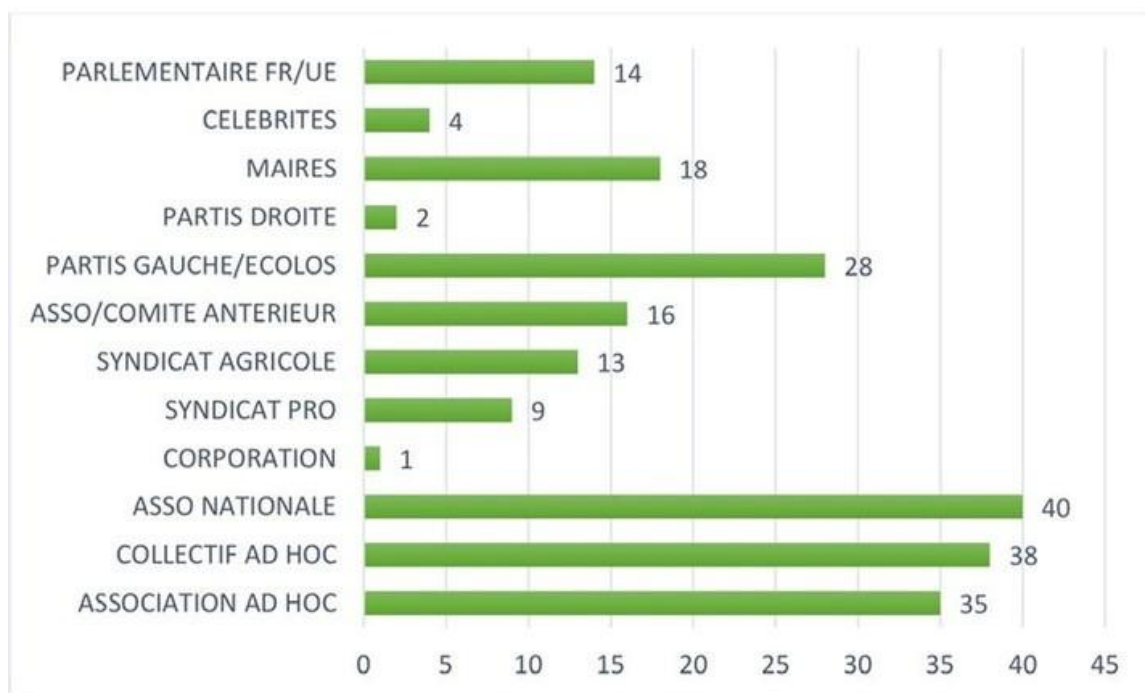


Fig. 9: Participation of identified entities in the protests

Ultimately, these spontaneous mobilizations are nonetheless part of a history that precedes them and of the broader organizational framework of the environmental movement. This is evidenced by the presence of national organizations such as Friends of the Earth, Alternatiba, Notre Affaire à Tous, Greenpeace, the FNE, etc. (40 cases mentioned, and a supportive presence in nearly all cases), as well as 16 cases where a residents' committee or a pre-existing local association participates in the mobilization. We can also cite cases of associations reactivated for the occasion, hosting an ad hoc collective within their ranks; a mobilization in a neighboring area that spurs the formation of a local collective; and another mobilization that has helped build networks of mutual support or create new associations, etc.

Operating models that prioritize horizontal structures

Finally, it should be noted that these movements tend to favor horizontal structures in their operations. Even when, particularly for the sake of having a "legal arm for the armed struggle," as one respondent

(E13) ironically puts it, the association is registered with the prefecture, its modes of operation remain highly horizontal (with 18 co-presidents, for example, E1).

This approach allows for great flexibility in an initiative that, while driven by small but highly active core groups—as we will see below—is largely aimed at people who have often never been politically active in their lives:

“We’re not an association, but a collective of people with a shared interest. We’re not an association because we wanted to maintain the freedom of horizontal, shared governance—the freedom to come and go, and the freedom for people to join us occasionally, to participate in our activities or not, without judgment.” (E6)

This flexibility in how members are integrated—the ability to “come and go”—is therefore highly valued by those involved, particularly because it allows tasks to be shared, a wide range of skills to be coordinated, and sometimes provides support during times of exhaustion:

“There are around 30 of us in the collective, sometimes more. It’s very fluid— people leave because they’re tired, and others join...”
“The strength of this group is that everyone contributes something. Some have extensive experience with organizing. As for me, I focus on technical issues. Others handle communication work or the website. We share our skills, and together we’re more creative.”

This flexibility can also take the form of two distinct groups fighting against the same project, often one operating as an association within a more formal legal framework, and the other as a more activist and informal group. Half of the organizational forms identified are, in fact, informal collectives, and the other half are associations registered with the prefecture, evidence of a mix in the organizational choices made during mobilizations and the coexistence of different visions of collective organization. Alongside this horizontal structure, those mobilized also express a strong desire to remain independent locally, sometimes speaking of a fear of national “supervision” (E36) when we discuss with them the possibility of forming a network. They thus mention the “fear of becoming too formalized, which would take away the spontaneity to react. We need to find a middle ground, not over-theorize either. We must continue to maintain connections between local and national associations and show that these pockets of resistance are dynamic and that we communicate” (E6)

That said, this approach is not without its limitations, as it favors those with greater financial resources, or those who, because they are retired or can afford to take a sabbatical, are able to devote themselves entirely to the cause (E20).

Collectives and associations are aware of these limitations. The interview respondents— often the most politically engaged and those with the time and energy to speak with us— sometimes point this out themselves and do not shy away from the tensions or problematic gender dynamics they observe within their organizations:

“For a year, the collective was driven by women—lots of women. I was working part-time, moving between jobs and unemployment. Since the occupation [of the space], it’s become increasingly male-dominated, and that’s also a problem because the space, which used to be welcoming to many women, is becoming harsher. We don’t feel as comfortable there as women anymore. ” (E15)

This phenomenon of “masculinization” in activist relationships is obviously not unique to environmental movements. It has always been present in social and labor movements. In half of the cases where respondents spontaneously mentioned it to us, this problem arises during a strategic shift—often an occupation or a ZAD—that brings in new people from outside the original group. Those involved respond in various ways, such as by training in meeting facilitation (E34), or, in the case mentioned, by organizing eco-feminist conferences.

3. Collectives “concerned” in various respects

We will conclude this section by describing the internal composition of collectives and associations. Overall, a typical composition emerges based on three principles:

- a “difficulty” in mobilizing neighbors, as mentioned, which must be qualified given the scale of certain successful digital mobilizations and the regular participation of workingclass people through alliances or because they are directly affected by the projects;
- the central role of citizen expertise within the core groups of collectives and associations, often through the application of professional skills to activist work;
- an ability to bring together different strategic options and social groups—sometimes divergent—whose success varies

Proximity to projects and the role of the working class

As we have noted, the geographical proximity of residential areas and the risks posed by the projects are among the main drivers of mobilization. We also find a similar pattern when examining the arguments and worldviews expressed by the respondents. Some embody this directly through their personal struggles, such as having asthma and fearing for their own health (E16), but also through stories of heritage.

“[This place], I used to swim there when I was a kid. [...] I love swimming, and today, the fact that I can’t do it anymore is a fundamental right that’s been taken away from me. We’re at risk of neurological disorders, pesticide poisoning, etc.— we’re close to the sewers. [...] Many new rural residents take the area as it is; they haven’t seen the river before, they have no attachment to it, unlike me, who learned to swim in the river. The river is called the Mignon. The older folks remember the trout; it affects them more. The new rural residents don’t have that openness to nature. ” (E3)

This observation aligns with numerous studies, including our own, on local mobilizations of all kinds (in our case, from a previous study on mobilizations for safety in working-class neighborhoods). Sometimes, it even leads to absurd situations where the landscape heritage is touted by local municipalities, which seek to obtain certifications to protect it while simultaneously promoting projects that destroy that very landscape (E19).

This attachment to heritage—to one's own history, which has been disrupted by the implementation of these projects—is also found in urban contexts, extending beyond mere admiration for natural spaces, and resonates with discourses on social justice:

[My city] is very low-rise architecturally, except for a few Haussmann-style buildings in the center and then low-rise single-family homes “like in villages”: people are attached to this and don’t want tall high-rises. They block the sky. They’ll increase traffic in the area and gentrify these neighborhoods, which are still fairly diverse. [...] The city voted to exempt the tower from social housing requirements... so it really is an unfair project. (E25)

This attachment to heritage, along with health risks, are thus among the key points of connection between different social groups:

“And then we discovered, when we talked about concrete with the public, that people said they were fed up with concrete—we don’t want a pool, we want greenery.”

Question: Does that debunk the stereotype about working-class neighborhoods?

Absolutely. I had that preconceived notion myself. I went door-to-door at the auto parts shops along the highway—you wouldn’t expect them to care about the environment—and people said, “You don’t need a degree to know that without trees, you ruin the quality of life.” (E15)

Contrary to the dismissive rhetoric about the “bougie” background of those involved, this direct connection, this sense of attachment, and the fact that they are directly affected by the economic or environmental consequences of the contested projects regularly encourage working-class people to join collectives and associations. While they do not constitute a majority, there is a significant number of farmers, or their families (small-scale, but sometimes large-scale, including members of the FNSEA, which typically supports the projects), who risk being expropriated.

These individuals play a crucial role in certain mobilizations, serving as informants and relaying letters, buyout offers, and leaked information to the core groups of the movement. This is also the case for certain retired or active union members who have become aware of the environmental dangers posed by the contested factories.

This observation therefore qualifies the prevailing view among respondents regarding the “difficulty” of mobilizing working-class people, even though the majority of collectives and associations appear to be composed of members of the middle class, cultural professionals, or those in managerial positions (public sector or administrative executives, teachers, social workers, engineers, etc.)⁴. During the weekend gathering of local movements, one participant also pointed out that the historic decline in the number of farmers in France partly explained their low turnout, quite simply. Several respondents also mentioned the difficulty of keeping certain groups active within their collectives due to lack of time, the barrier to entry involved in understanding technical documents, or lockdown measures, which particularly alienate older people from internal discussions that now take place online.

This pessimism is also partly contradicted by certain successful mobilizations, which one activist compares, for example, to the number of demonstrators in May 1968—a figure that has since been surpassed (E14)—as well as the strong ties forged with unions and neighborhood associations (E1, E2, E3, and E20 in particular) and certain accounts of outreach efforts:

“If you take five minutes to talk to people, you can convince them. You just need the chance to have a conversation. We organized a march recently that brought together over 250 people. There are a lot of people who aren’t very well-informed and who tend to just accept what elected officials tell them. But once they’re informed, it’s very likely they’ll change their minds. I see this when I’m at the markets handing out flyers. People were generally in favor, mostly because of the jobs—since we keep telling them it creates jobs.” (E17)

The responses to the questionnaire regarding the size of mobilized groups also provide some encouraging figures: out of 47 responses to this question, 12 mention mobilizations of more than 500 people (which, in rural areas, is often considered a success) and 21 mention mobilizations of between 100 and 500 people. (Fig. 10)

Finally, while the situation may seem unique in terms of the sociology of the region, the mobilization in French Guiana against the Montagne d’Or project provides a wonderful example of success in building cross-social and cross-ethnic bonds (see box).

Box 1: The exceptional and inspiring alliance against Montagne d’Or

“In late 2017, the announcement of the public hearing marked a turning point in the mobilization against the Montagne d’Or project. When the announcement of the public hearing was made, many journalists began to take an interest in our cause. Among those involved were the citizen collective Or de question, in which I am active, and environmental organizations, GNE (FNE) and WWF. We each carried out our own actions, which allowed us to multiply our strength. On certain issues, we created common strategies, for instance with our case against the first mining permit (Boeuf Mort) granted to the company Montagne d’or. We won in February 2019.

Or de question was contacted by the 500 Brothers, the collective advocating for the demands that emerged from the social movement of March-April 2017. They wanted to get involved in the mobilization, and we formed an alliance. Within the Or de question collective, there are many “métro” (non-Créole) but also central figures of Créole ecology movement, so the connection with the 500 Brothers, who are predominantly Créole, formed quite naturally. Our struggle got richer through this encounter between different experiences, political visions and histories. Whether we are talking about nature, corruption, jobs, security, stopping multinational companies, we complement each other in our practices.

On August 9, 2017, for the International Day of Indigenous People, representatives of the six Amerindian nations of French Guiana gathered near Cayenne, in the village of Sainte Rose de Lima. The traditional chiefs discussed the Montagne d’or project. Thirteen chiefs stated their total opposition, while two abstained from giving an opinion, asking for more information on the issue.

This decision was significant because their opinion carries great weight. At that moment, a bond was forged between the traditional chiefs, the Indigenous Youth Movement of French Guiana, and the Or de Question collective.

The public debate began on April 3, 2018, with a large march organized in Saint Laurent du Maroni. We gathered there, the 500 Brothers dressed in black, wearing balaclavas and combat boots; us in our “Or de question” T-shirts; and the Amerindian representatives, adorned in their traditional attire, jewelry, and body paint.

We marched together to make our voices heard and present our various arguments against Montagne d’Or. The highlight of the evening was a speech by the spokesperson of the Autonomous Youth of Guyana

with a speech both merciless and moving, calling for the leaders of Montagne d'Or to abandon the project, respect nature and the rights of the first people of Guyana. It was a night of magnificent mobilization.

This marks the beginning of an adventure made of four months of public debate. At every meeting, the rooms were packed, with many residents coming out to participate. At the end of the public debate process, in July 2018, WWF commissioned a poll that showed that 70% of people in Guyana were against the project. This was a huge win for our mobilisation and all the collectives, associations and citizens involved in the struggle. In May 2019, Emmanuel Macron announced that the project was to be abandoned "as it stands"... "

“Expert” groups in the making

When we look more closely at the “core groups” of these organizations and the individuals cited as crucial to their mobilization efforts, expertise emerges as one of the key characteristics of their composition.

These core groups are primarily the result of significant activity carried out by a small number of people: 32 out of 47 responses estimate the number of people in this inner circle at fewer than 10, while 14 estimate it at between 10 and 30 people (Fig. 10).

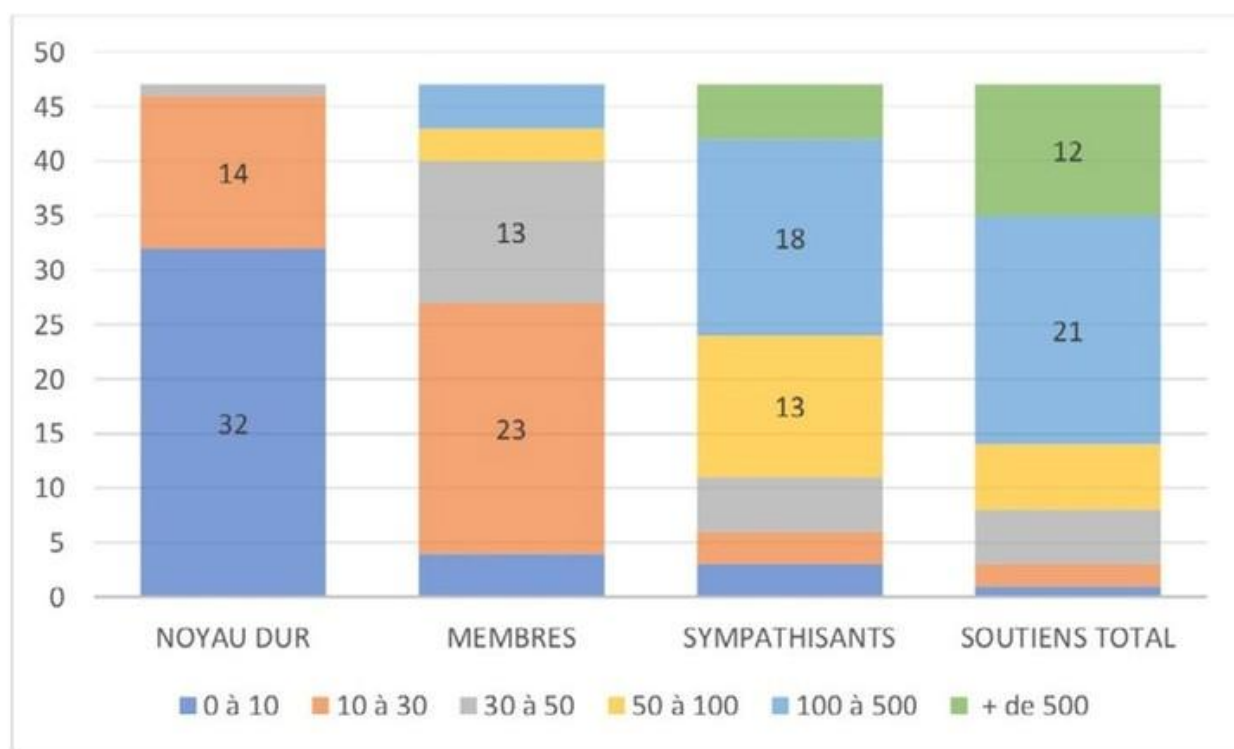


Fig. 10: Size of circles of active members and supporters

The interviews conducted reveal a more socially selective composition of these core groups, compared to the alliances mentioned above or the circles of less active members—an observation that is also found in other types of mobilizations. Of course, these groups include seasoned environmental activists, but also a large number of professionals from the scientific and expert fields: geologists, Polytechnique graduates specializing in road infrastructure, former ONF employees “angry at the ONF” (E34), lawyers, doctors, epidemiologists, as well as professionals whose skills are “useful” during a mobilization: graphic designers, journalists, communicators, videographers, freelance entertainment workers... To this must be added the regular call for specialists to come and give lectures or conduct assessments: questionnaire respondents thus describe the use of expertise as “crucial” in 26% of cases and as “important and regular” in 36% (Fig. 12, Part 2-2-a).

Sometimes, however, some people view this small, activist-driven structure as a strategic necessity linked to a certain pragmatism regarding available resources:

“We didn’t set up an organization that could accommodate a lot of volunteers; we did everything with two, three, or four people. Depending on the action, we brought in expertise—from Greenpeace folks we knew, or activist networks that

came to help us on an ad hoc basis. We never gave ourselves the resources to have a big organization with lots of activists; we didn't have time to mobilize activists. Often in organizations there are people paid to do that—it's a job.

We pull off commando-style stunts; we're super agile. As soon as we have an idea, we'll organize an action or a concert, we go all out, and then we move on to something else.” (E32)

However, this role of expertise or activism should not be mistaken for a clear-cut socio- professional selection process. In the majority of interviews, respondents described the gradual development of citizen expertise and a learning-as-you-go process. Whether it involves long-term citizen monitoring of city council meetings to identify problematic new projects (E6), spontaneously tracking logical inconsistencies in a report (E7), or understanding legal texts and impact studies, collectives and associations thus serve as spaces for “skill development ” (E2), without neglecting the search for external and professional support, sometimes with a certain pride:

“We had studied all possible alternatives (door-to-door collection, digestate, compost, anaerobic digestion, the recycling sector, the importance of public management, other sorting collections, etc.).

Question: It takes quite a bit of expertise to come up with all that...

Yeah, we were a whole bunch of us, a bunch of crazy people. We put our hearts into it, spent hours and hours on it, and back then we were at the cutting edge. We educated ourselves and basically did the work that elected officials should have done. We knew everything—operating permits and so on. We knew that what Vinci was going to build for us wasn't earthquakeresistant, and so on.

We weren't experts, but we quickly learned the ropes! That said, we have our limits, and we know that sometimes you have to team up with people who are more knowledgeable—which is exactly what we did with the collective. We teamed up with lawyers, the France Nature Environnement (FNE) association, and a wildlife specialist with expertise in impact studies on flora and fauna; we consulted with doctors and reached out to well-established figures like professors.” (E18)

Coexistence within social movements: from the “NIMBY” movement to the “ZADist” movement?

The spontaneity and involvement of directly affected individuals alongside experts and environmental activists, as described in the first part of this report, thus reveal a highly heterogeneous composition of the collectives and associations studied. This is not without its challenges. Thus, the coexistence of people with such diverse levels of political engagement, social backgrounds, and political views appears to be one of the major organizational challenges for the future of these movements.

At the two opposite ends of this coexistence, the extreme and caricatured figure of the “conservative, reactionary, racist” riverbank residents and that of the “ZADists” seem to be two mutually repulsive categories. In some cases, the associations fully embrace their dissociation from both groups, as in the

wake of the repression of a ZAD (E38 and E30). Beyond these cases, daily life seems to involve a difficult balance to maintain when the situation arises, but one that rarely seems unattainable:

“Another group of people from the neighborhood with more ‘activist’ stances joined the fight, but they didn’t want to talk to elected officials or the press. They made ‘appearances’ and we complemented each other, so we got along well.”
(E25)

In a more complicated case, a respondent also explains how a “particular ecosystem” is taking shape, within which she plays the role of a mediator recognized by her peers:

“In fact, there are two very different types of people in the movement: on one hand, highly political individuals, and on the other, local residents with very different political views who aren’t used to taking to the streets. There’s no homogeneity at all. The residents’ motivations are: ‘no Arabs in front of my house’ / ‘there aren’t enough parking spots in the neighborhood’ / ‘that’s where I walk my dog,’ but also, after 13 months, ‘I’ve had a good time, my kids have built treehouses, and I’ve grown attached to the place.’”

People need each other—everyone understands this, so they put up with one another and don’t stick to their usual roles. For example, the “anti-Arab” crowd gives money and insults the cops, while the leftists can get onto the balcony, and so on. It’s a very unique ecosystem.

It’s particularly difficult in a democratic system because it becomes hard to agree, or even to respect one another. For example: talking to the mayor is “a sign of weakness” for some and “a sign of intelligence” for others—it’s difficult. I personally don’t like it when people fight, so I learned pretty quickly to coordinate, take notes, write up reports and send them out, and follow up. I was told (between moments of discouragement) that it was very helpful”
(E13)

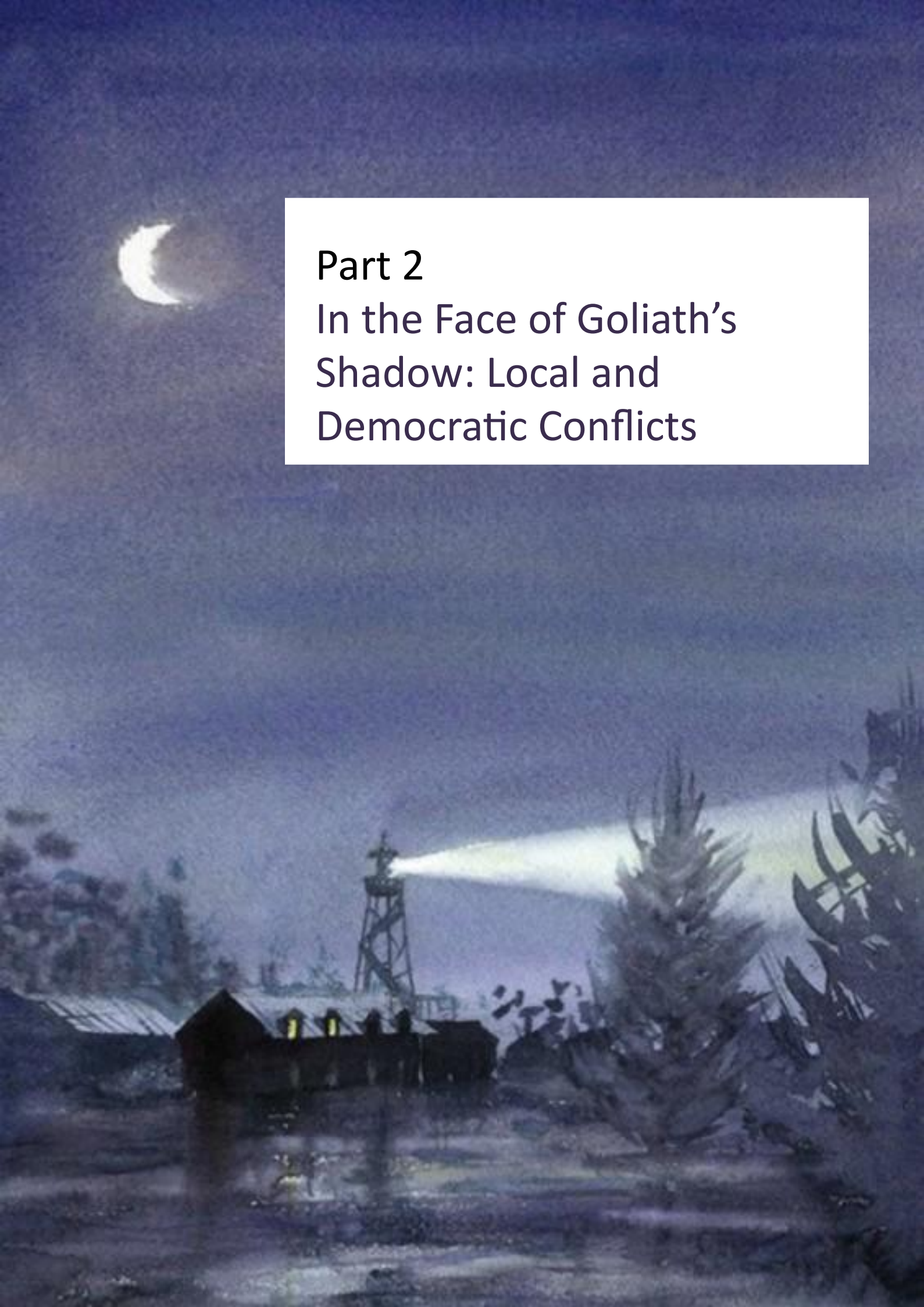
This excerpt naturally prompts us to reflect on mutual respect between two seemingly very different groups, but it also calls for a more in-depth analysis of so-called “NIMBY” positions, which are often caricatured and dismissed by seasoned activists in an effort to deny their political nature (DECHEZELLES and OLIVE, 2016).

As we mentioned earlier, a sense of connection to specific projects is a fundamental factor in becoming politically active; this in no way hinders the expansion of causes, their politicization, or the defense of the public interest. Furthermore, we have observed in previous research that seemingly contradictory cognitive frameworks of analysis and worldviews, as well as interpretive frameworks (GAMSON, MODIGLIANI, 1989; COMBY, GROSSETETE, 2013) related to ecology, the ethnicization of social relations, security, and social issues, could very well coexist within the discourses and perceptions of a single individual. This, however, stems from the complexity of the socialization of actors and their ability to blend, receive, and appropriate seemingly contradictory public discourses (VACHER, 2021), leading them to not want “Arabs living next door” while wishing for peaceful coexistence with their neighbors, challenging the state and economic power, or living in a healthy environment (VACHER, 2016a).

Ultimately, this coexistence does not depend solely on the efforts of one group (since it is often women) or on the necessary alliances of interest between two groups. One of the fundamental debates regarding the ZADist occupation strategy also concerns the social relationships among the people involved. Thus, regarding a mobilization to defend an allotment garden, one respondent shared their perspective on the fears surrounding the establishment of a ZAD:

“People are afraid of vandalism, and partly for good reason. Every time, it’s just some idiot—or maybe one or two people—who’ve picked strawberries from a garden plot. It causes stress for the gardeners. A guy who wrote a dissertation on community gardens told me there’s a tendency to shut things off from the outside world. It also needs to be seen in the context of working-class life; gardens are the place where they’re left in peace. So this influx of outsiders—more educated, sometimes looking like outsiders themselves— isn’t easy to deal with. There are practical issues to manage, like whether to let dogs in. That’s often the crux of the mobilization. [...] After all, the people from the ZAD also brought experience in communal living, in the discipline of running general assemblies, in managing daily life—it’s not just the women who cook” (E15)

If such alliances are sometimes difficult but possible, it is ultimately because the range of meanings embodied by these movements is itself diverse, spanning from a commitment to local heritage to the fight against predatory capitalism, including issues such as public health. In this sense, we agree with Jacques Ion’s observation: “the movements in question bring into play multiple frames of reference that precisely allow a wide variety of actors to find something of value in them.” (ION, 2017).

A painting of a night scene. In the upper left, a bright crescent moon hangs in a dark, textured sky. Below it, a lighthouse on a tall, dark, skeletal tower emits a powerful, wide beam of light that stretches across the middle of the image. In the foreground, a small, dark building with a gabled roof and a few glowing windows sits on a dark, reflective surface. To the right of the building, a large, dark, spiky plant, possibly a cactus or a large pine, stands prominently. The overall mood is mysterious and somber, with a focus on light and shadow.

Part 2

In the Face of Goliath's Shadow: Local and Democratic Conflicts

Whether we are talking about movements for the right to the city, protests against the GPIIs examined here, or associations in working-class neighborhoods, many conflicts over the definition, preservation, and occupation of spaces reveal striking similarities. Almost systematically, these conflicts point, on the one hand, to divergent worldviews and conceptions of the public interest and, on the other hand, to challenges to the very frameworks of the conflict, whether legal, technical, or more broadly democratic. Like conflicts over space in working-class neighborhoods, they are subject within this conflict to both low-intensity repression and more direct repression [TALPIN, 2020; VACHER, 2017b].

In this second part, we will therefore examine how the conflict takes shape and is structured by first analyzing the actions of urban planners and public authorities, which, while not strictly coordinated, appear to be contingent; we will then explore the “universe of practices” [MATHIEU, 2012]⁵ within which collectives and associations organize themselves, also in the face of the difficulties encountered. We will highlight the scale and radical nature of a contingent offensive waged by project developers across the country, which collectives and associations are confronting through the use of the law and citizen-led, democratic mobilizations.

1.A contingent offensive against life and spaces

While we will not be treating the actions of mayors, metropolitan authorities, prefects, and local, national, or multinational companies (etc.) as intentionally coordinated, the testimonies gathered reveal the recurrence of certain practices aimed at imposing controversial projects. Other accounts, outside the scope of this study, also mention the role of institutions that train state elites (such as the former ENA). We could also consider the hypothesis of a shared mindset among elites and a profound lack of understanding regarding these land-use conflicts, or we could refer to existing literature on public land-use policies.

Public authority at the service of the private sector

As mentioned above (see Figs. 3 and 4), the conflicts identified by the activists are primarily directed against public authorities, and more specifically local governments. These authorities act in several legal or customary capacities within the framework of local democratic governance:

- as direct planners, for example by declaring and organizing the establishment of a business park;
- by organizing public hearings on land-use plans and projects (such as Local Urban Development Plans or Declarations of Public Utility);
- as political figures to whom citizens spontaneously turn in their protests, sometimes beyond their actual powers, referring to the mayor’s role as a local leader and point of reference for political authority;
- or as key players in public debates, particularly during election campaigns—a scenario cited repeatedly as causing citizens to “react strongly” following the “betrayal of an election promise” (E4)

In addition to the classic reasons for this centrality in the conflict, we have identified a series of new or more complex roles.

Competition among territories

First, these local governments are now caught up in a logic of territorial competition. Beyond “territorial marketing” and attracting tourists—factors cited in all cases involving the establishment of recreational centers— this competition also forces local elected officials to participate in projects aimed at being absorbed by central cities, at the cost of sometimes obsessive urban expansion that leads them to systematically respond positively to calls for proposals for urbanization projects (E15). The urban as a way of life and spatial organization described by Henri Lefebvre [LEFEBVRE, 1968] thus appears to be spreading through the imaginations of local elites. The case of projects linked closely or distantly, directly or indirectly, to Greater Paris (whether involving facilities for the Olympic Games or the need to avoid being relegated to the periphery of this economic hub) provides an example. In this case, one notes a certain effectiveness in the coordination of some struggles in the Île-de- France region (such as the rallies regarding the Gonesse Triangle or, more recently, in defense of the Aubervilliers gardens), while acknowledging the difficulty of coordinating sustainably in a highly politicized space (E36), which confronts actors with conflicts regarding the political stance to take toward the Olympics and Greater Paris.

This difficulty in taking a stance affects not only collectives and associations but also elected officials themselves. For a local authority with limited involvement, such as a Region, the political climate can sometimes shift with elections, when the Presidency or simply the vice-president in charge changes (without the majority necessarily switching sides—E3) or in response to mobilizations, creating an electoral cost that is too high for the incumbent elected officials (E25, E14). Local elected officials may also be persuaded by citizen expertise that they eventually come to recognize, sometimes compensating for their own lack of information on the subject, or following an initiative led by local residents, combining national advocacy, lobbying campaigns, and civil disobedience (see Box 2). Their role is therefore not uniform, nor are their positions set in stone, as activist action has very real effects on the stances they take.

Box 2: Shifting Elected Officials’ Stances Through Pressure and Scaling Up

“There are two camps: the municipalities surrounding the project were in favor of it because they benefit directly from the jobs, while those further away are generally opposed, in a caricatured way. What tipped the scales was the commitment of one elected official who reached out to other elected officials, and this was before the municipal elections.

One day, we hijacked a meeting of the developer—that was the collective’s birth. We barged into the public meeting they were holding.

We chartered buses and brought in hundreds of people. They panicked; they tried to limit the number of people when they saw us signing up.

The prefect was there. We quickly realized that we didn’t stand a chance with the developer, so we had to go to the state—that is, the prefect. We unfurled banners, gave a speech, and handed over a letter addressed to the government, signed by 18 associations. By that point, we had already brought in the media. There were plenty of elected officials there. We called on everyone opposed to the project to come out. A lot of people eventually came out. Some had to take a stand because they were in the room that day, so the tide turned at that moment. After that, we launched a full-scale campaign. There was a letter signed by 100 local elected officials, mainly mayors, opposing the project. That carried a lot of weight. What was interesting is that they were elected officials from all sides of the political spectrum, from La France Insoumise to Debout La France.”



Finally, this logic of competition among regions can also precede projects and the protests against them. As funding becomes scarcer—a situation that could worsen given the elimination of local revenue sources such as the housing tax—the pursuit of grants by municipalities can lead to unintended consequences:

“The argument is that we’re a tourist region, and that we get so many visitors — so many people—there’s so much trash that we need a bigger incinerator! But that wasn’t true. We proved that the projections presented were completely wrong.

At that time, municipalities were inflating tourist population figures to secure more subsidies. This completely skewed the basis for calculations, so we relied on INSEE data to demonstrate this. The municipalities commissioned research firms to conduct studies—firms that would inflate the numbers. The firm did inflate the numbers to make it look plausible. Vinci pays, the municipalities pay; there’s no reason to go against it. That’s what happened here; we demonstrated it using INSEE projections” (E18)

“The Supporting State”

The State in its various forms (ministries, legislators, state agencies, decentralized services, etc.) also plays a significant role in supporting projects. Its powers (legal oversight, public inquiries, etc.) are binding, and in rural areas (with a significant urban-rural divide), it emerges as a central actor. In cases where mobilizations lead to broader thinking about land use planning—often over the long period spent studying these issues—a more complex and assertive view of its centrality emerges, distinguishing the role of the planner (private, local, etc.) from the political role of the State:

“The enemy is the water cooperative—no, let me correct that: the adversary is the cooperative, and the enemy is the government. It’s now clear that the push

to expand this type of project nationwide over the past four years has come from the government. We've had four ministers of agriculture, and not a single minister of ecology has asked the fundamental questions about these projects, while the ministers of agriculture support them tooth and nail. Denormandie (current minister of agriculture, ed.) is leading the agricultural summit on water and adaptation to climate change. These are big events with all the lobbyists and a small number of nature conservation groups invited, who ended up boycotting them.” (E3)

In another mobilization led by highly politicized activists and closely supported by national associations, criticism of the government and the state is also a strategic issue:

“[Two organizations] have direct access to the minister, which elevates the struggle to a national level. We also sent a formal inquiry directly to Macron by mail [...] We're dealing with an issue of national importance, so it's easy for me to say this, but I think nationalizing the debate is important for all struggles, like Europa City, because political pressure plays out at the national level—by mobilizing the national media, by putting pressure on national politicians, even in the Tarn valley. That's the advice I gave to the people from the farmers' conference who contacted me: “You have to target the real pillar, which isn't necessarily the one you start with.” Here, the key is the government, which holds the decision-making power. You have to identify who the decision-maker is [not just the executor]; we're taking on the state.” (E20)

“The State,” however, is not a monolithic entity. A comprehensive study—one that has yet to be conducted—could shed light on what is happening within decentralized agencies or public development corporations of national interest (for example, in an urban context: BESCHON, 2021). State agencies or similar bodies thus find themselves in ambiguous positions due to their autonomy to act. Examples include the Regional Health Agency, which sometimes issues opinions favorable to protests (E4), or national park directors who struggle to take a stance and are viewed as “reluctant” (E24).

Private actors, often discreet but active

Except in rare cases (such as tax benefits whose medium- and long-term impact is debatable), public authorities are not the primary beneficiaries of these projects. Close ties with private actors and the involvement of government agencies and elected officials in supporting these projects thus go hand in hand with relative discretion on the part of companies—or even total silence (E5) or the concealment of their existence (this is the case with warehouse projects or business parks, where the names of companies are almost always hidden from local residents), particularly when they are not based in the region. Discretion does not, however, mean that they are not taking action, for example through assertive lobbying and counter-information campaigns, through advertising in the local press (E11, E19), or through the presentation of biased and appealing projects:

“We’re told that the fumes will be treated, that the air coming out will be even cleaner than the outside air. And there’s no way to verify that. They make the elected officials believe that—it’s very well done. When Vinci makes a proposal and presents a projection of how it will be, the elected officials jump on board; they don’t have the knowledge of what might happen in the future, they just know that everything used to be landfilled, that now landfilling is going to cost money, and that incineration ‘purifies’ it. So they believe it, they sign on, and commit the community to years of incineration” (E18)

More directly, private companies can also actively engage in the conflict without communicating publicly, which is particularly possible in small local communities, such as when the manager of a store owned by a national company instructs their employees to give a favorable opinion during a public hearing (E4), or when a local developer attempts to intervene during the general meeting of a mobilized collective (E13), or when their personal relationships with mayors grant them certain advantages, regularly leading to elected officials being labeled “corrupt” by mobilized residents.

Finally, we must also question the direct economic benefits that accrue to a select few— sometimes local residents. In virtually all cases involving agricultural land, the Chambers of Agriculture and/or the FNSEA and their members are thus active players in the conflict. Due to the structure of the chambers and cooperatives, their representation appears to overshadow that of environmental associations, and they further benefit from the support of institutional allies within the government, owing to their national influence. In several of the cases mentioned, their presence within the impacted communities themselves also allows them to wield significant influence, or even resort to violent action (of a “militia-like” nature, according to one witness; we will return to this—E22).

The Dark Side of Developers and Public Authorities

The stubborn persistence in maintaining certain projects

Just as with certain overlaps between the private and public sectors mentioned here, the spaces where decision-making happens also gives rise to what might be described as obsessive tendencies, as in the case already mentioned in the Île-de-France region. But these obsessions do not concern only local elected officials. On the contrary, in three cases that are particularly significant due to the scale of the contested projects, these dynamics play out within government agencies or the executive branch.

This is the case, for example, with a rail infrastructure project that has been contested for 30 years within the state apparatus itself, based on various impact studies conducted by senior officials, and stubbornly supported by national political figures with local ties (former members of Congress or ministers) and who always end up prevailing with the Presidents of the Republic against all other stakeholders, including political and institutional actors (E37). Local political opposition is also insufficient to derail certain projects:

"Almost all elected officials in the region and surrounding municipalities are against the project; even local members of parliament have drafted a report in

support of the alternative proposal and have put significant pressure on the government. The Alsace municipality has even offered to take on the project management for the alternative proposal, and three companies are reportedly interested. But the government is blocking it. It would cost between 300 and 400 million euros—it's not that much—but we've long suspected they don't want it to not uncover scandals buried at this site.” (E21)

Apart from this case, where there is suspicion of a deliberate cover-up, instances of circumventing the law—or even illegal actions or omissions—are all too common. In this same case, the collective notes, for example, that in 2002, a fire (on the same site) led to severe pollution, against which unions and local residents took action. In the years that followed, as the project continued, fatal accidents also occurred due to soil instability. During this period, other legal battles also took place against illegal waste storage. Thus, for this collective, the 2010s were marked by a long battle to ensure compliance with the law and address the dangers this posed, without, however, being able to prevent the implementation of the contested project. Despite a history of convictions, some contractors continue to work on other projects (E9), sparking understandable mistrust among local residents.

Forced Implementation

Another recurring issue is the “fait accompli” strategy, where construction begins without permits being issued (E15) or procedures being followed. This tactic, which is shocking to local residents and provokes outrage, also triggers unexpected reactions that benefit the community groups:

“Residents climbed onto the excavators to block them. Only municipal police were on site, because what the mayor did was illegal —it was done without following procedure. The next day, people from all over came to restore the site. The mayor didn't realize it, but this event brought the collective widespread attention and a strong momentum” (E11)

The lockdown and the increased opportunities to restrict information (such as the possibility of conducting public hearings exclusively online) also provided an opportunity for certain developers to push through their plans by force, as in this case, which combines trickery, illegality, and lies:

“When the lockdown was reimposed in the spring, the public developer began construction work without a building permit. They started trying to tear down the shacks, but we needed them for housing. They wanted to uproot certain trees. We mobilized and realized they were dismantling the huts using asbestoscontaining materials without taking precautions, so we called the labor inspectorate and they stopped it. The developer knew this: at a public meeting, they had told my husband that it wasn't safe, etc., so at first it was an argument for not taking them down, and then they forgot about it.”

Organized opacity

More specifically, obstacles are also common when it comes to accessing information. Some municipalities and metropolitan areas do not hesitate to “hide entire paragraphs” (E7) from project evaluations, which in this case were obtained following a referral to the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CADA). This lack of transparency is cited by the vast majority of respondents in our interviews as one of the most debilitating obstruction strategies. While a full investigation would require directly examining studies, public inquiries, court rulings (etc.) to quantify the extent of this phenomenon and obtain data free of subjective bias, it is notable that respondents substantiated this organized opacity based on their own analyses— often highly detailed—in more than half of the interviews conducted. It plays out at various levels (the following list is not intended to be exhaustive):

- the organization of complex documents (local urban planning documents, highly technical and lengthy impact studies, the projects themselves, etc.)
- a significant amount of strategic, crucial information related to risks or health that has been “overlooked” or not made available to the public...
- biased or outdated calculations, for example regarding tourist numbers or road traffic
- exclusive reliance on the internet during lockdown
- the concealment of certain information, such as changes to a PLUI buried in the mass of documents made public without any effort at synthesis or simplification.

This organized opacity is, of course, intended to prevent counter-analyses and the counterinformation efforts of collectives and associations. It also aims to diminish the symbolic impact of projects, as in several cases involving the construction of Amazon warehouses where the company’s name is not disclosed, forcing local residents to deduce its identity from certain details (project size, planned jobs, etc.).

Finally, it should be noted that some developers invest enormous amounts of money and time in legal proceedings, which leads to the exhaustion of the mobilized local residents. However, this strategic use of time can also backfire, for example when the project’s construction is tied to the saturation of another polluting storage site, or when it gradually drives away investors who are frustrated by the prolonged delays. Some collectives do not hesitate to use time as their own weapon, particularly convinced that changing attitudes and case law will work in their favor (E11).

Strategies ranging from disqualification to the exercise of (il)legitimate violence

Finally, the project proponents’ confrontational strategies also involve various forms of repression, whether low-intensity and euphemized—aiming, for example, to discredit mobilized residents—or direct. We have categorized them into three types:

- disparaging rhetoric,
- clientelist operations,
- militant or intra-community repression

Low-intensity strategies

As Julien Talpin and others have observed, for example, in protests in working-class neighborhoods, these demonstrations are subject to forms of low-intensity repression, whether carried out after the fact or in anticipation of the events.

These primarily take the form of disparaging or denigrating remarks, which just under half of the respondents mention when they are in conflict (though it is safe to assume they apply to a greater number of cases), most often directed at close acquaintances, neighbors, their mayors, farmers who support the project, or the local press. This rhetoric comes as no surprise; some of it echoes familiar stereotypes: that of the “bougie” environmentalist—middle-class and from outside the region—or the “filthy” or “violent” ZADist—and also from outside the area—when a ZAD is being set up (the possible start of a ZAD is also a recurring question posed by journalists, sometimes in comparison with a neighboring area that is more appealing in terms of “sensational” media coverage - E37) . While these labels are often a pure product of imagination (particularly regarding the activists’ alleged lack of ties to the local area, which is sometimes highly relative or false) or stem from hypocritical judgment—especially when critics possess far greater economic or political capital than those opposing the projects— they also simply boil down to the accusation of being “troublemakers,” always “opposed to.”

Sometimes aware of how deeply rooted these labels are in certain realities, collectives and associations respond by redoubling their efforts to inform the public or by asserting their status as concerned residents (“We have a bit of a reputation for being like the Gauls who prevent City Hall from doing what it wants. I’ve lived in the neighborhood for 20 years; I’ve always opposed the absurd projects they wanted to carry out here, ensuring that nature is respected” E17). Some also act as spokespersons for working-class communities directly threatened by developers with the loss of their rights, as in this case of defending an allotment garden, where the developer is targeting first and foremost the new plots allocated to new residents (precarious middle-class and intellectual professions) and raising the threat that other plots may be affected:

“We’re labeled as ‘bougies’ by the people who support the project, especially those backed by the right-wing city government. The gardeners, generally speaking (and I was the association’s treasurer), are people over 60, at least half of whom are non-native French speakers, with a typical mix of geographic origins, North Africans, Portuguese Kabyles, Eastern Europeans, and few Asians and few people from Sub-Saharan Africa [...]. These are people who worked in factories; I don’t know their exact occupations: workers at Renault, many in construction, and cleaning ladies.

Among young people—people like me—we’re a subgroup that’s interested in eco-friendly gardening. There are people from the middle class—neither bluecollar workers nor white-collar professionals—who are often immigrants. A few people like me, with degrees, a few teachers. In fact, in the [garden management] association’s office, there are a lot of teachers, so in the leadership there’s a hierarchy based on educational qualifications. In the [garden defense] collective—which is separate from the association— we generally have the same demographic makeup as the garden association’s office.

People support the cause but are pessimistic, especially those of modest means, but when you dig deeper, these are people who may have been activists in the

past, who have experienced strikes and protests—like someone from Renault who lived through the factory’s heyday and union struggles, or people from Eastern Europe who are political refugees. If you dig deeper, you realize it’s not resignation.” (E15)

More explicitly, this low-intensity repression also involves the use of power networks, such as when pressure is exerted on the public treasury to prevent a protest group from being recognized as serving the public interest. More typically, some respondents explain the reluctance of their neighboring business owners by their fear of getting involved in a local controversy, or that of local associations by their fear of losing their grants. This low-key repression can also go further in mobilizing local clientele:

“When petitions were circulated, city staff (who are influential in this town) were kept under close watch. They were told, ‘This will be reported up the chain.’ There’s constant pressure from the mayor. During the public debate, the mayor had the youth city council (high school students) speak; they said exactly what they’d been told to say. One day, he felt cornered, and that was the only time he dared to organize a demonstration [in support of the project] on the [project site].

We sent observers, but we were careful not to go into the area. We have photos; the only adults there were city council members and young people from the housing project—all boys, with almost no girls. He used a social integration organization; the city had prepared signs, but the young people wouldn’t take them. They were just extras; some said there were €50 bills being passed around. It’s deplorable for an elected official and former teacher to manipulate the young people he brought along. They even went so far as to say there would be riots if we abandoned [the project], like the riots of 2005.”

Direct Repression

Finally, it is also important to highlight 10 cases involving direct repression, which can be divided into three categories:

- administrative and legal repression (bans on demonstrating or moving about on public roads (E14), legal intimidation through “procedural” tactics (E4), by filing defamation suits (E19) or abusive appeals, and by blocking the issuance of a building permit to an activist (E18)...)
- police repression (primarily but not exclusively in the case of ZADs) militia-style
- organizations

While the first two cases are well-known, they have significant consequences for activists, both in their actions and on their morale:

“So that incident was really traumatic for us. I ended up in a depression for several months afterward because the media portrayed us as the violent ones, even though we were the ones who were attacked. At one point, there were scuffles, and we didn’t back down—we couldn’t let them destroy our equipment or hurt us. There were blows, and the friends who took them didn’t want to file a complaint, because in activist circles, we don’t really like dealing with the police.

It was very upsetting because it ended up isolating us from the local community. The legal aid organization, with which we’d had a good relationship before, directly denounced us in the press, putting us on the same level as the militiamen and claiming we were violent. Even though they weren’t even there that day, they didn’t bother to call us to hear our side of the story. Out of fear of what the local population might say, they reacted very quickly with a press release. We took that very hard.” (E22)

It should be noted here that in two other cases, this opportunity to distance oneself from solidarity with a more radical group was also confirmed to us by the more moderate organizations themselves, evidence of how police repression exacerbates tensions.

The interviewee cited here also mentions the presence of “militiamen” during the police crackdown. Although this was mentioned to us only three times, it nonetheless deserves to be highlighted as a form of intra-community repression reminiscent of the militant organization of vigilantism around the world, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries:

“My father filed a complaint; hay was stolen from him several times, there were numerous intrusions on the farm, and there was even an arson attempt on the farm. My father managed to drive them away. At the farm of someone who supports the struggle, a Molotov cocktail was thrown, and 30 tons of hay were set on fire near his house, with several fires breaking out. These practices are becoming increasingly widespread, fueled by a sense of impunity. There is clearly complicity on the part of the authorities in these matters.”

While scientific explanations for the resurgence of these practices are still in their infancy in France (FAVAREL-GARRIGUES, GAYER, 2016) and the data available to us in this study (without direct observations) is insufficient to deepen the analysis, this testimony confirms the observation already made in other social contexts of tacit or direct support for these violent actions by the police or the gendarmerie.

In all three cases, the respondents described the “militiamen” either as “fascists” or as “people in black shirts close to the farmer [who supports the project].” Our hypothesis here (which aligns with our work in Italy), given the small number of cases mentioned and the apparently weak organization of these actions, is that these represent a transformation of historical neighborhood surveillance and intra-community repression practices into violent actions within the context of an escalating conflict, presumably a consequence of militant involvement by far-right individuals.



2. Organizing to Win: Between Improvisation and Accumulation of Experience

Faced with this destructive machine we have described—characterized by opacity, circumvention or bstruction of the law, repression, and denigration—ocollectives and associations are redoubling their efforts to organize. Here, we will highlight their selflessness, their ingenuity, and their use of humor and joy as inspiring strategies to win their battles.

It is worth noting the radical nature of their opposition to these projects. In response to the projects we have described, the overwhelming majority of the movements studied call for their complete abandonment (69%, Fig. 11). This is followed by criticism regarding the project's location (10%), often regarding the need to avoid developing agricultural land or to keep them away from residential areas, or regarding a specific part of the project (12%)—for instance, when the project includes a justification for its implementation alongside an element deemed unnecessary (such as equal access to a swimming pool that is combined with a luxury recreation center, E15). Governance, while part of the problem to be unraveled, appears only rarely in the objectives set by the mobilizations (15% in total), thus revealing the democratic problem as reinforcing the need to act (indignation), an obstacle to be overcome (compliance with the law on public consultation), or a means of mobilizing—as we will see below—but not as an end in itself.

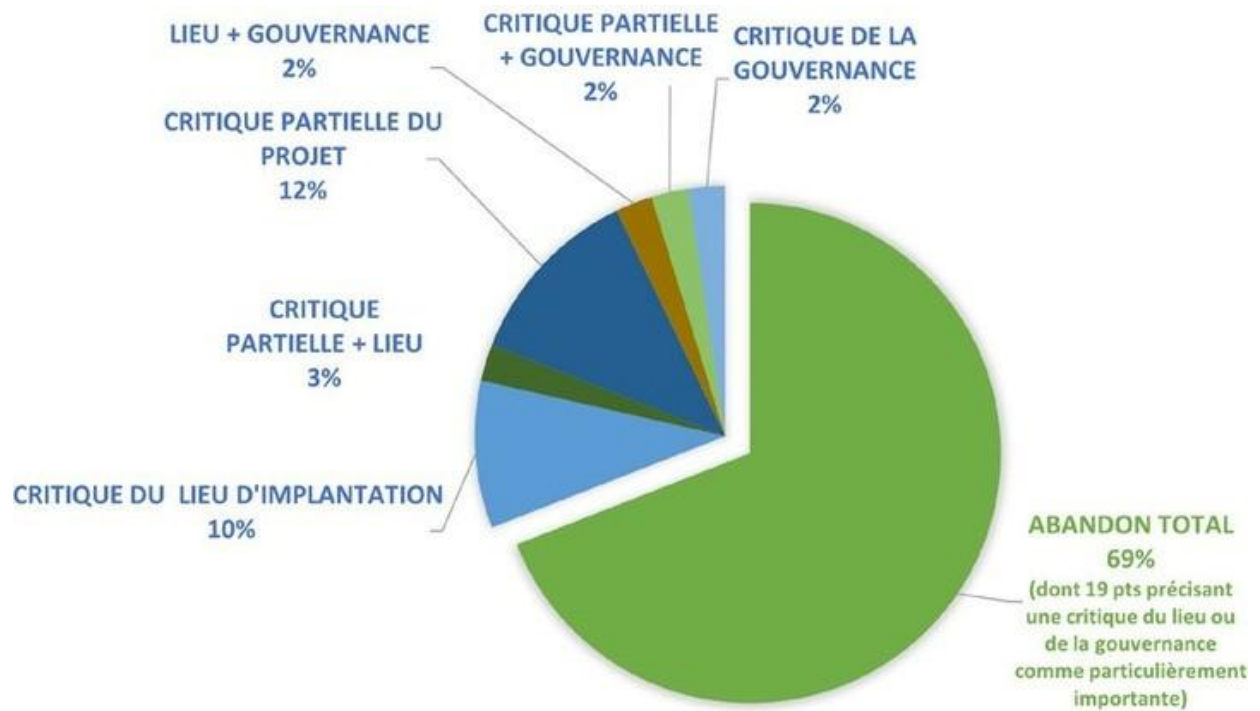


Fig. 11: Objectives of the Mobilizations

Here we will see that collectives and associations appear above all as “citizens” both in terms of their composition and self-identification, but also because of their initial strategies, which mobilize existing democratic frameworks and the legal means at their disposal. We will, of course, examine the limits of this approach and the strategic shifts that have taken place, whether through the development of new tools or their radicalization.

Collectives Confronting Legal Frameworks: Democratic and Legal Strategies of Action by Collectives

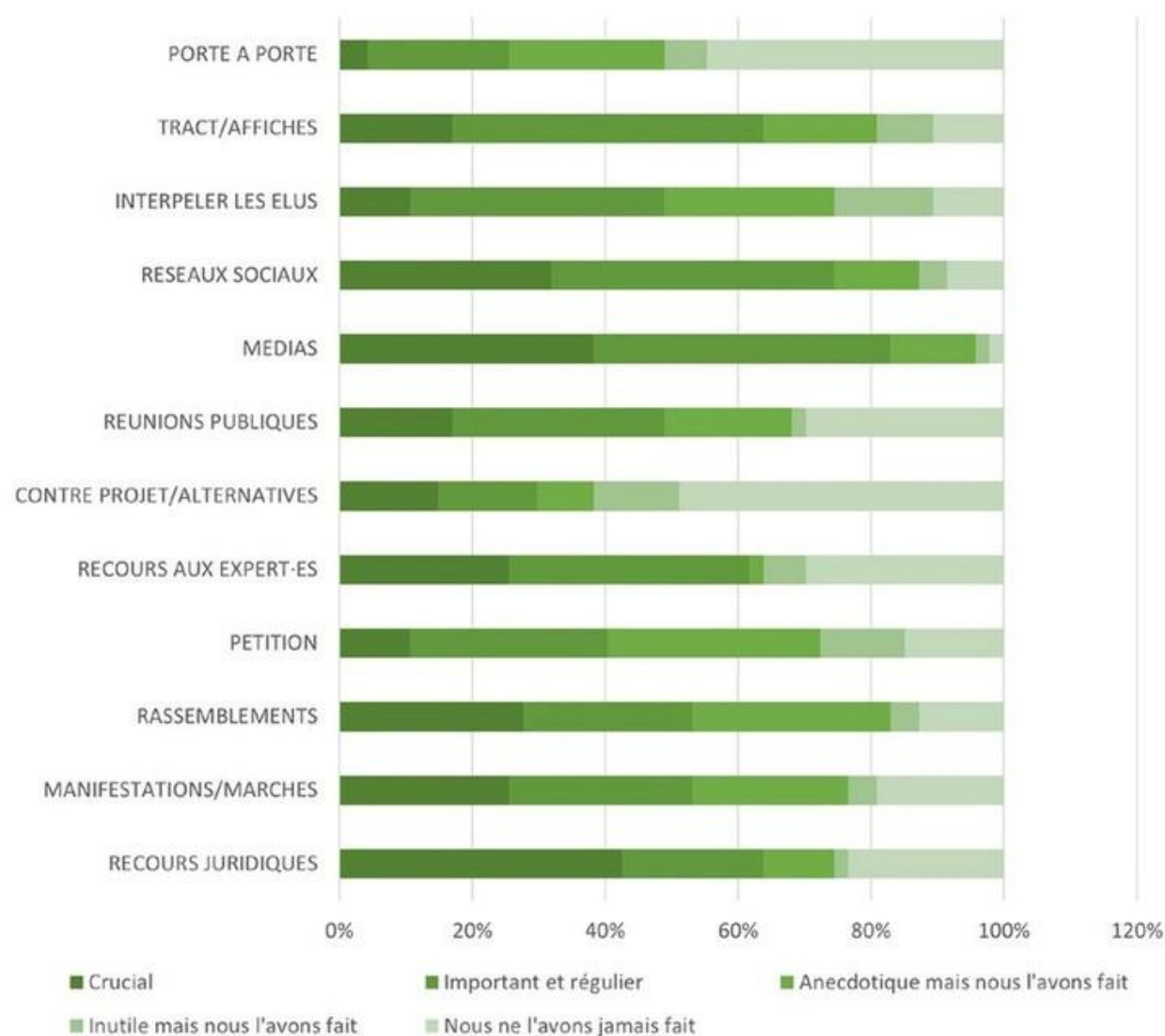


Fig. 11: Importance of courses of action according to respondents

The central role of legal action, difficult but often crucial

While legal action is not the most common form of action (used in 77% of cases, behind the media, informational tools, marches, or petitions, for example), it is the form of action considered the most “crucial” by the collectives and associations studied (43%, ahead of the media – 38%) and as “important and regular” by 21% of respondents (total = 64%) and one of those considered the least “anecdotal” (11%). As a result, it proves to be central to the repertoire of actions in protests against projects that have been shown to be imposed or even partially illegal.

This legal action may prove successful, at least partially (this is the case for most respondents who said that appeals were “crucial”), but it is also exhausting. Most of the time, they prove impossible in practice, due to past public hearings that were botched but against which few appeals stand a chance of success, or because they are time-consuming and costly (in the data collected, the highest amount of legal fees reached €65,000, which appears to be below the maximum that has ever been reached). This is one of the main needs raised by the collectives: access to funds, which could, for example, be

pooled, thereby allowing autonomy from large national associations—which are sometimes perceived as overbearing but which can provide financial resources and allow donations to be tax-deductible.

Legal action also faces a lack of experience when the group is in its early stages and lacks legal contacts specializing in environmental or land-use planning issues (of whom there are few in France), leading to errors in legal arguments or procedures that can sometimes prove fatal. The work of major national associations such as Notre Affaire à Tous or France Nature Environnement and their local chapters—and their heightened responsiveness due to the resources specifically allocated for these situations—is particularly noteworthy, as it facilitates the sharing of experience, the training of activists, and the provision of advice that is sometimes crucial.

Among the innovative strategies observed, one example is the invocation of European law, which may take precedence over French environmental law and be accompanied by European petitions leading to their review by a European Parliament committee (E3). The time saved by certain suspensive appeals is also mentioned, sometimes allowing “project proponents to throw in the towel” (E1); conversely, however, the non-suspensive nature of certain appeals sometimes leads to absurd situations where a legal victory is obtained just as the work is nearing completion.⁶

Thanks to their determination and through self-taught analysis of the projects—which they transformed into legal arguments—some significant victories can be achieved:

“At the same time, while reviewing the building permit and the entire file, we realized that seismic standards were not being met. Whereas here, to build a house, one must comply with seismic standards, for an incinerator, this was not required.

Ségolène Royal’s (then minister, ed.) technical advisor at the time was receptive to this, but it wasn’t enough to be taken into account in the initial legal decisions. We filed appeals against the operating permit; in June 2015, we filed for expert reviews; we never stopped trying everything. We only succeeded in stopping the project in May 2021. The Bordeaux Administrative Court of Appeal finally ruled in our favor on this point. Today, the incinerator cannot use gray bins to make compost.

Question: Is this a victory?

Yes, and we helped ensure that this type of technology is permanently banned for all incinerators to be built. It set a legal precedent, allowing us to ban the use of this technology even for incinerators that have already been built” (E18)

Constant lobbying of elected officials: an insufficient but necessary strategy

In highly localized conflicts, it is not surprising to see appeals to elected officials emerge as a nearsystematic practice (89% of cases). However, it is also one of the most criticized (anecdotal + useless = 31%), much like the petitions that are mostly addressed to them (anecdotal + useless = 45% but used in 85% of cases). These petitions can, in fact, “sway” elected officials, even convincing them to personally deliver the signatures to the National Assembly (E2).

They also help establish a presence in the region, both through the neighborhood interactions they facilitate and the legitimacy they confer on the mobilized activists:

“The first thing people said to us was that we weren’t necessarily from the area, which was held against us (the activists live in neighboring towns, ed.). So we launched a petition among the residents to find out what they thought.”

The first campaign took place in April 2011 to collect signatures for the petition at [the local shopping center in town]. There, as well as in other towns, we offered the petition in public spaces. We collected signatures all day long, and fewer than 10 people who stopped refused to sign the petition. They didn’t understand; they thought it was about [another project]; they thought we were too late, that it had already started. They weren’t informed about [the project being challenged by the petition].

They didn’t understand this proliferation of shopping malls and, like us, saw the value in preserving farmland—though not as strongly as we did—but the idea stuck. After fifteen minutes, I knew the battle had begun, even if it would be a long one. Since 2011, there has always been very strong support. We sensed the residents’ reactions becoming increasingly hostile toward the mayor; he’s having a harder and harder time getting re-elected.” (E14)

This advocacy work, while it involves collecting signatures here, is also carried out through letters (mostly ignored) as well as through a physical and continuous presence in all available spaces:

We’re holding a protest at the entrance to a community of municipalities meeting; there are 50 people with banners. [The elected officials] were surprised because that doesn’t happen much in rural areas. They’re getting used to it; we try to be present at municipal and community council meetings—not so much in person but live, by making our presence known on social media. They’re getting used to our presence now.” (E24)

While this approach—which can sometimes take the form of full-fledged lobbying—is particularly favored by groups that strictly adhere to the legal framework, it is also seen as valuable by more “radical” groups (as observed at the weekend gathering of local activist groups), who view it as a way to develop a more comprehensive range of actions.

When election time rolls around—especially for municipal elections—many groups find themselves wondering how they should participate, whether individually or collectively. This can lead to the election of city council members who emerged from these movements, who then serve as representatives of the groups and as sources of information (E7, E17, E34), but sometimes also to groups running collectively in the elections.

Even with a group politically very diverse, all of its members can decide, for example, to field candidates, like in the most recent departmental elections (E13). Even though urban planning does not fall under the direct jurisdiction of the departments, they still managed to bring the issue to the forefront of the election campaign and thus break through a kind of glass ceiling that had been imposed on them. Their very respectable result (15% in the canton) reached 25% in the two polling stations closest to the site of the protest.

In another case, the local coalition managed to secure higher vote shares in the first round (ranging from 15% to 25% across the department's 17 cantons, allowing it to advance to the second round in 7 cantons) and views it as a victory that "citizen coalitions went after the parties, telling them to stop their nonsense!" (E3) (the list brought together the entire left and local environmentalists, with the exception of the Socialist Party)

Faced with the limits of the law, what can be done? The "ZAD" option

These strategies are, of course, limited, given that they are hampered by the existing legal framework and by counterattacks that are sometimes fierce. Collectives and associations are generally aware of this. Faced with the strategic dead ends they encounter, citizens sometimes redouble their inventiveness by organizing happenings (distributing tomato seedlings, staging "parking lot" protests...), humorous actions, or even carnival-like events when they satirize project proponents on social media. Civil disobedience or, at times, direct action—sometimes at the borders of, or peacefully breaking, the law—have become the preferred modes of action for the environmental movement, driven by certain local or national organizations such as Alternatiba/ANV-COP21 or Extinction Rebellion. The recent dismantling actions by the Bassines Non Merci collective or the takeover of the tarmac at Roissy Airport are well-known, recent examples. They complement other ephemeral modes of occupying public spaces, such as marches (sometimes massive) and rallies, classic forms of social activism that appear to persist but which we might hypothesize have also become quite routine, given the scarcity of interviews in which activists have chosen to discuss these actions (with the notable exception of Box 1).

On a regular basis (6 interviews in which the topic was spontaneously brought up by respondents), activist groups end up "radicalizing" their methods of action. Some, however, are initially very lawabiding but state that "if the justice system doesn't work, we're ready to set up a ZAD even if we have no idea how to do it. Two years ago we had the debate, and the answer was no, but now things are changing" (E9). Contrary to the image of precarious and marginalized youth, this other respondent describes the shift toward ZAD-style action within their association:

"We followed the rules. At the start of the association, the majority were teachers, very concerned with respecting the law and doing things by the book. We drafted a petition, submitted it to the appropriate authorities, filed an informal appeal, then a formal appeal, and we waited. We were sure we would win, because we knew we were right. But no, that's not how it works... [...]"

At the height of the protests, nothing was moving forward; the appeals weren't getting anywhere. There was massive discontent among the members; no one was listening to us. It was in response to this inaction that, in December 2014, a ZAD was established [...]. It was a very powerful experience. The ZAD was supported by the local community, who provided food for the young people.

I told you that the people who were in the association at the beginning were very respectful of the law, etc., but we realized we'd been duped, completely duped, because we were so well-behaved.” (E18)

Sometimes, it is also in response to the press's relentless questioning on the subject that the collective eventually raises this possibility, and then, a few years later, begins to take this option seriously (E14). Although it may be a source of debate, or even a point of contention as mentioned above, this mode of action does not, therefore, fit the caricature regularly presented in the media of a mode of action inextricably linked to a lifestyle oriented toward violence and the deliberate and intentional obstruction of the law. In reality, France has, in fact, experienced several dozen occupations of this type over the past decade, sometimes of short duration (a few days) and with little media visibility. Domestic intelligence agencies, for example, have recorded around fifty such incidents, though there is sometimes some confusion with other forms of action against GPIIs, and certain local mobilizations that received little media coverage and/or national attention are often overlooked.

It is also interesting to note that even when actors and actresses support this approach in principle, their strategic pragmatism or complicated activist relationships lead them to question the conditions for its implementation and its relevance given the local context:

“One of the unique aspects of the [department near Nantes] is that the ZAD at Notre-Dame-Des-Landes really left a lasting impression—in a negative way.

Around Nantes, St. Nazaire, and the northern part of the 44 department, quite a few activists have settled in the countryside. We [here] are a bit on the outskirts, but we're lucky to have people from other parts of the 44 department who can come to our aid.

“[Here], it's historically a reactionary, highly conservative area; all the town halls have been run by the right for a long time.

I expected that having NDDL nearby would be more of an asset in the region?

No, it's actually sometimes a hindrance. Because they capture all the attention in the 44, a lot of the local energy, funds, equipment, and presence.

Because, as everyone knows, they have a lot of clout in the media. As a result, that really pushes us into the background. And since they don't like us, and we don't like them, they've always boycotted whatever was happening on our side. When they were ready to get involved, we quickly regretted it and put a stop to it. They wanted to impose themselves very quickly, saying they knew how to do it, that they had actions to propose to us, that they were going to come right away—it was really authoritarian. Even though they knew nothing about the struggle; they had never come before.

That's not how we operate, so we said stop. It's a somewhat unique and complicated situation.” (E22 and another very similar case, E37)

Breaking Through Deadlocks: Innovating and Expanding Our Reach?

Beyond these cases that operate on the fringes of the law or beyond it, collectives and associations are redoubling their efforts to reinvent their methods of action, build networks, establish a local presence, and even propose alternatives in the form of counter-projects (not without difficulties).

Confronting pessimism

None of the respondents mentioned a situation in which a protest led to widespread involvement by neighbors. While we have already qualified this observation above, it should not be underestimated either. It points, on the one hand, to the relatively small size of the core activist groups, as we have seen, and to local histories sometimes marked by industrial paternalism and deindustrialization (legitimizing the employment argument in support of projects) or by reactionary ideas, but also to a pessimistic subjective perception of one's own neighborhood (based on the principle that "the grass is greener on the other side" when respondents compare themselves to a neighboring area).

In response to this, few new strategies have been developed beyond market appearances, leafleting, and poster campaigns (64% consider these crucial or important), apart from public information meetings (49% of respondents rated them as "crucial" or "important"), which allow for the participation of experts and are often successful in terms of recruitment.

It may thus be curious to observe, from the perspective of other activist traditions more accustomed to this mode of action, that door-to-door canvassing is a practice that has virtually disappeared (only 25% of cases where it is deemed crucial or important) from the standard repertoire of collectives and associations. It is sometimes delegated to other associations, historically rooted in communist circles (E20) and which remain accustomed to it.

This is indeed very time-consuming and energy-intensive, especially in rural areas where town centers are becoming increasingly depopulated as people move to remote single-family homes.

During the lockdown, a group happily experimented with a different approach—hosting gatherings in their apartment (E5)—which proved to be a success. Indeed, as local shops and public services have gradually disappeared, the concentration of social interactions within the home and among friends has been observed as a major trend in rural and post-industrial areas (COQUARD, 2019).

Never giving up, collectives and associations overcome this prevailing pessimism through a "politics of joy," a theme that stood out strongly during the discussions at last October's weekend gathering of local movements.

"We make a big fuss in a comical and joyful way, while contesting the project itself: we hand out golden turnips and golden chicory to the city's executives, we organize a Saint John's Fire with the symbolic creation of a temporary ZAD, a citizens' gathering... Right now, we're working on a film."
(E8)

These moments of humor and shared camaraderie are a recurring theme in our survey; some participants emphasized this point at the end of their interviews, wanting to share these moments beyond their own circles. These practices stem not only from a desire to spend time with fellow activists;

they are also rooted in local traditions and spaces, such as the use of a community oven for baking bread and pizzas (E34), which also turns these activities into opportunities to share with neighbors. While fighting with joy seems essential, given the current crises and the anxiety they provoke, this may well be one of the major challenges of the coming years—whether in relation to the mobilizations examined here or to social movements in general:

“We’ve maintained really good relationships with one another. We’ve all become friends, which is really, really nice. As we talk, we realize that almost everyone, in the wake of the crisis, is facing the same issues of activist burnout—that we’ve lost a lot of people and that we’re now running the collective with just 5 or 6 people, when we used to be about thirty. This is a common observation among all the collectives around us, and it’s raising almost existential questions because we’re not quite sure how to re-motivate people, how to inspire them to take action without scaring them off—but without being naive, because there’s a harsh reality out there.” (E6)

Winning the Information War

Caught between the opacity orchestrated by project leaders and a sense of relative isolation within their local communities, information proves to be a focal point that is both strategic and central to the groups’ subjective concerns.

In 75% and 83% of responses, respectively, social media and the media are thus considered “crucial” and “important,” with very few groups neglecting this task.

Access to local media is not always straightforward, however, as many collectives report that their local newspapers have close ties to public authorities or private companies, going so far as to purchase full-page advertisements (E11, E19) or having “double-page spreads to present their detailed perspective” (E21).

The two circumvention strategies (besides patience and persistence) that we identified involve either “going over” (national media) or “bypassing” them, through independent media, created for example by the Yellow Vests (E5) or via social media (sometimes with the support of organizations such as Alternatiba or by using local WhatsApp groups that are very popular and fluid in overseas territories). Primarily, it is Facebook pages (rather than groups, unlike the Yellow Vests, for example) that enable the local population to be informed (261 Facebook pages, compared to just 21 Twitter pages, are listed on the map compiled by Reporterre). However, these rarely reach very large numbers of followers (a thousand at most in most cases, with exceptions being the most nationally visible struggles, where one can assume that followers are located throughout France). Only a few collectives are active on Twitter. Some also produce documentaries or educational videos showcasing their mobilizations or host documentary filmmakers from outside the region. The use of petitions as an informational tool, however, appears underutilized. While most online petition platforms (such as Change.org) are designed to facilitate the organization of communities to mobilize, only one collective mentioned collecting email addresses through this channel as a tool that helped spark the mobilization (E41). Finally, it should be noted that many collectives responded spontaneously to Reporterre’s participatory survey or expressed their satisfaction at having been included in it at the end of the interview. Sometimes, collectives spontaneously develop genuine strategies combining these two methods of circumventing restrictions:

“At the markets, people ask them, ‘Why aren’t we being kept in the loop?’ It’s because the local media—the public broadcasters that hold a monopoly— support [the project] and don’t cover it. And when they do talk about it, the reporting is so biased that it makes you want to hate the opponents. In January, during the news, they aired a two-minute video of [the public developer] (with the logo removed) defending the project, without any opposing views.

A representative [of the developer] also had 10 minutes of airtime on the radio; it was a complete farce. The journalist asked her why they were building in a flood zone. Her response: “It’s not flood-prone—there’s an embankment,” but if there’s an embankment, it’s obviously flood-prone!

During those 10 minutes, there were so many absurdities that the collective could make use of them, issuing three press releases, and managing to get people talking about them; the representative was banned from the air by [the developer].

“We’ve spoken to Médiapart, Euractiv, Aj+, Reporterre, ... we’re trying to bypass the [local] media because they don’t cover it at all or do so poorly. Unfortunately, the majority of the [local] population gets their news from these media outlets” (E16)

Some ingredients for victory, according to the collectives themselves

After identifying the strategic limitations and strengths of the mobilizations, we would like to conclude this section by presenting, as they told us, some of the key “ingredients” of victory in the eyes of the collectives. Based on our investigation, we largely agree with these observations. It is by no means our intention here to reveal a standard “recipe” for getting a useless and imposed project canceled, as this depends just as much on the local socio- historical context, the aggressiveness of the “opposing side,” the political and social climate of the moment, and the resources available to the mobilized actors. Nevertheless, they can be summarized into four main approaches ⁸:

- a fine blend of strategy and sociology: use every means at your disposal, all available resources; don’t hesitate to “be serious” in your arguments, to be radical, legally sound, to find allied and feisty elected officials if possible, to maintain the unity of the movement, and at the same time always keep...
- ... a pinch of joy, humor, and meals shared among activists; you’ll last longer, and it will “change [your] life”
- try to frame the conflict in national terms whenever possible—of course, even if it’s not always easy—and target the real decision-makers: the state and the government. Do this not just to get on TV, but also to hold them accountable and find new allies

- and as with any good cooking: the right timing (and good lawyers—but not the kind you eat), depending on the context, key moments, and sometimes patience.



Il a dit qu'il
allait "contempler

Part 3

A social movement that
is no longer unaware of
its own existence?

non,
plus person
ces expr

Je t'assure, je
l'ai entendu.

Je vais le
défoncer.

In 2018, the academic collective “Des Plumes Dans le Goudron” observed that “[these opposition movements against the GPII] have undergone a shift in both scale and nature over the past decade, and now constitute a decentralized social movement in the process of organizing itself” (p. 18) and one that “is gradually becoming self-aware” (p.154). More specifically, the authors noted that “the ‘unity’ of the movement can be found in a shared interpretation of ‘who the enemy is’ and a more or less shared vision of the world that should be built, rather than in the construction of an organizational structure or a common program.”

We took this thesis as our starting point in order to expand upon it, update it, and challenge it in light of this study—the first, to our knowledge, to systematically collect qualitative data through interviews with a significant sample of cases. With the growth of the environmental movement and its ideas, three years after the victory against the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport and amid an ecological (but also social, democratic, and economic) crisis, where does this “social movement that doesn’t know it is one” stand?

To answer our question, we will draw on the concept of the “space of mobilizations” (MATHIEU, 2012), which allows us to identify the autonomy of a space of conscious or unconscious relationships and interactions between groups, composed of shared universes of meaning, actions, and practices. Seeking to move beyond the study of local, urbanized case studies, we will conclude this report by detailing some of the elements that seem to define this space and by bringing to light a framework of thought, a discourse, common to these mobilizations. We will therefore begin by focusing on the coherence of discourses and the process of politicization. Of course, this ideal-typical approach will inevitably overlook certain particularities, which must be kept in mind. It should therefore not be taken at face value and cannot be said to summarize the substance of the discourses of all the mobilized actors and actresses. After “analyzing the analysis” of the mobilizations to see how they shift in scale and become politicized, we will finally see that the progressively stronger organizational ties forming between these collectives and associations reveal a social movement that is becoming increasingly aware of itself.



Study - The Davids Band Together Against Goliath

1.From the Local to the Global: Politicization Through Changes in Scale

We will therefore see—and this will complement the observations made in Part 1 regarding the emergence of social movements—that the local roots of collectives and associations are by no means an obstacle to the politicization of the conflict. On the contrary, it must be emphasized once again that “the local roots of a movement help overcome NIMBYism: by reclaiming their territories, actors open themselves up to similar issues elsewhere. A local attachment can lead to global attachments; indeed, it is the driving force behind them” (DPDG, 2018).

We would add that environmental grounding—which we will briefly define here as the spatial, territorial, and local grounding of political ecology—enables the development of a clear vision of economic, democratic, and social justice. This proves to be far more profound than the discourses seeking to dismiss these struggles would have us believe, whether in the critique of projects or in the formulation of alternatives. Here again, we could say that “it is even the driving force behind it.”

Collectives committed to their territories and local economies

The Local and the Tangible vs. Excess

As we have noted, particularly in reference to the vast areas affected by contested projects as well as the recurring consequences in terms of land development, the shock of excess is often one of the primary drivers of spontaneous mobilization. This anger, indignation, or sense of subjugation among stakeholders applies to all types of projects. It may involve a multinational corporation seeking to increase its already enormous profits (a McDonald's or a Burger King, for example, despite very small footprints), revealing an “octopus” (E3) spreading its tentacles. It can also involve quantified data uncovered while reviewing the project's technical documents, which then become a political argument in the stakeholders' discourse:

“What made us react was the sheer scale of the project: it's 67,000 m² of retail space. That's our main argument: a study of commercial areas in [our region] showed that the national average was 930 m² per 1,000 inhabitants, but [here] it was 1,170 m², or 20 to 25% higher.”

Endless consumerism therefore leaves a lasting impression and enables activists to rally people around them and against a tangible, external, and out-of-control enemy embodied by these figures. More fundamentally, it is also the residents' knowledge of the area and its issues that allows them to stand up against projects that pollute and exploit local environmental resources:

This is a massive waste of drinking water. Given that we're in an area subject to drought orders, the fact that we're going to approve an artificial wave pool for tourists is completely absurd. We're in an area that's the most vulnerable to drought risk in France in the coming years. Especially since we aren't supplied by true groundwater aquifers; we rely on the [river's] groundwater to supply the entire department with water, including the town where the [water park] project was located. Last year, we came within 15 days of a drinking water shortage in the department.

By mobilizing local knowledge and referencing a water shortage situation known to the entire neighborhood, by contrasting the local with excess, this collective implements a discursive strategy that draws on the local context to develop a broader narrative, one that looks ahead to “the years to come,” thereby naturally echoing climate concerns. In doing so, they engage in politicization, in the sense of an action to rally around a conflict, leading to the sharing of a worldview that contradicts that of the “enemy.” (HAMIDI, 2006) This use of excess as an argument—and no longer merely as an initial driver of engagement—is also theorized as a strategic tool:

“The guiding principle [of our work] is always a powerful image, a strong theme, and a collective goal. We target the largest ‘basin.’ The term itself is misleading—we started calling them that 15 years ago to convey that they’re artificial, but it doesn’t convey the scale of the structure. When you drive by, you see small structures; we need to show their true scale. For example, [in such-and-such a village], it’s a square with 400-meter sides. So to make it visible, we want to form a human chain around it. So we need 1,500 people. Symbolically, it’s like trench warfare; we did this on November 11th and ended up with 1,700 people in the rain—the prefects were put on alert. So we pulled it off, and everyone agreed it was colossal. That sheer scale conveys the immensity and the unacceptability of the project” (E3)

Democratic mobilization against unnecessary and imposed projects

This use of local concerns as an argument also highlights the undemocratic nature of these projects and the response they have elicited. In addition to the falsehoods and even illegalities already mentioned above, democratic mobilization is thus directed against projects that can be described as unnecessary and imposed, as exemplified by the proposal from the Tunis Social Forum.

That said, it should be noted here that the slogan “GPII – Grands Projets Inutiles et Imposés” (Major Useless and Imposed Projects), proposed by the 2014 WSF, is mentioned in only two of our interviews, and thus does not (or no longer) contribute to the creation of a common label as intended by its initiators. While this imposed and anti-democratic nature is indeed present, both in the obstacles faced and in the reasons for getting involved, it does not, however, play a central role, as evidenced by the fact that only 14% of questionnaire respondents cite a change in governance as the objective of the mobilization (including those who include it in a demand for total abandonment) (see Fig. 11). Very often, this is an argument raised during the early stages of the mobilization:

“What arguments are you putting forward?”

At first, the outrage stemmed mainly from not having been kept in the loop, from finding out about it in Cannes, and from the imposition of the project. A handful of organizations had been invited to the preparatory meetings and had signed an urban master plan after three years of consultation—but it hadn't included a skyscraper at all, just small office buildings. So the failure to follow this procedure was a key factor.” (E25)

Here too, democratic action becomes a strategic issue theorized by the activists mobilized in the early stages of a movement, thereby creating an initial identity for the collectives that is fundamentally civic:

“So for us, the first priority was to get people to participate in the public hearing, so we made flyers saying, ‘Go check out the file at your town hall and submit your comments.’ That was our first success. We ended up with 600 written submissions at the town halls and 400 online. A lot of useless projects get approved because we don't see them coming, but this time we were ready. What the public hearing made possible was that you had access to other people's arguments. There were 80% unfavorable submissions, with different reasons: the frogs, the water, public funds... When you look at the profile of those who contributed, they were the [affected farmers] and their families. The first scandal is that the report by the investigating commissioners gives an unqualified favorable opinion. So there's an initial sense of a denial of democracy” (E3)

By mobilizing the public in this way through a simple proposal, this collective has organized itself around the theme of “denial of democracy,” bringing together diverse personal causes (frogs, water, public finances) and uniting their neighbors within a single, locally rooted movement centered on a common point of contention. In the wake of “localism,” local democracy—its practice and its defense—thus becomes the driving force behind a common cause that is forged and developed, expanding from the local level to a broader scale.

The territory as an economic space to be preserved

Building on this local focus, collectives and associations are also developing economic and social arguments—or using economic arguments to underscore environmental and ecological concerns. Here again, a deeper understanding of the local area than their opponents have is a key argument when criticizing the return of industrial jobs, which they view as illusory and without a future. It is also a matter of starting from the daily reality of local workers: “When we started seeing errors like ‘you can't be exposed to chromium for more than 16 hours a day,’ and since residents leave the neighborhood for 8 hours a day to go to work, the 16-hour limit is actually being met! It's absurd!” (E7)

It is therefore through the perspectives of neighbors involved in the project, as well as through the personal accounts of local workers, that these narratives can be brought to life. The relationship to the space can thus be both that of a resident, tied to the preservation of heritage, and at the same time a relationship linked to professional life:

“What the core group [behind the mobilization] had in common was that we were boatmen; we used to ferry tourists. I’m from somewhere else; I came to the Marais this way. My parents bought a second home, I met friends while working there, we went to college, and pretty quickly we wanted to stay there—to live in the Marais, of the Marais, for the Marais.”

A participant in the meeting on local struggles pointed out that the current mobilizations likely shared a “conservative” commonality. This term should not be taken pejoratively here. Indeed, in the sense that they aim to preserve intact spaces, they can be described as such. This observation also applies to the preservation of a local economic fabric and local know-how. Regularly, the statements of these actors highlight the preservation of agricultural jobs in the face of agribusiness, the disappearance of, or pollution of, arable land:

“There’s a lot of job-related blackmail going on. They say we need to create skilled jobs in renewable energy to revitalize the region, using wellworn talking points (creating jobs, jobs for young people). The collective still managed to ‘shut them down’ by pointing out that farmers are always the last to be considered, the adjustment variable of economic policies.”
(E10)

Rare counter-proposals that envision the preservation of a sustainable job market

This interplay of scales—from the local level to the aggregation of individual causes, from environmental to economic issues—aligns with the initial grievances described in Part 1 and thus enables broader political mobilization. This becomes even more evident when collectives and associations attempt to engage in “alternative” or “counter-projects.” Despite the commitment these actions require, it is worth noting that a slim majority (51%, Fig. 12) of questionnaire respondents have implemented them, even though only 15% of respondents consider this a “crucial” action. In a dozen interviews conducted, this formulation of counterproposals proves to be a significant vehicle for politicization, outlining elements of a “common program” that go beyond local and legitimate criticism of projects and give substance to more comprehensive and holistic political visions.

The possibility of developing an alternative

These dynamics, however, are only possible under two conditions that are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- to have the resources or a strong commitment (and the corresponding number of available activists) to launch them. This is the case, for example, when an architect, an engineer, an urban planner, or a landscape architect steps forward to champion the cause, or when activists from a local association or Alternatiba (one of whose original activities was to highlight existing alternatives and which still regularly proposes or even implements alternatives) commit to this path, for example by launching community gardening initiatives on the land to be preserved;

- or when an institutional initiative creates an opportunity for them, such as a call for proposals (E14), the creation of a development council (E3, E41), or participation in an election that provides an opportunity to put forward more political proposals (E3).

In addition to both these conditions missing, half of the collectives and associations remain hesitant about embarking on such ventures—or at least not alone—for two other identified reasons:

- a sense of illegitimacy or criticism of the division of tasks with institutions:

“Our initial approach was to challenge the project before making any proposals, because we didn’t feel we had the authority to do so. Then it was up to City Hall and the technical staff to conduct studies to determine the most useful course of action; we didn’t want to impose our ideas, we wanted to share some of them, but without research or evidence to back up our proposals, we preferred to let the municipality come up with concrete proposals. We were there to dismantle the [project’s] argument and use this building for something that would serve the city.” (E34)

“We’re calling for the factory to be repurposed. We’ve often been asked what alternatives we have to the quarry; we worked on a project involving a solar power plant, but it didn’t come to fruition because I don’t think it’s our job to come up with alternatives. There are also farmers here who make their living from the land, so maintaining agricultural activity is essential. We’ve formed a coalition with other local organizations to organize collective actions in the valley with a development council.” E2

- or the strategic need to prioritize our efforts, even if it means setting aside certain members who wish to get involved in this issue:

“We met with [two organizations] and an urban planner; we’re considering a project with an agricultural focus. We want to propose cost-effective solutions: vocational training, providing an educational plot to an agricultural school in [the major city], a production and processing facility for all the school cafeterias in [the major city]... But for now, what matters is stopping this XXL platform project” (E8)

While some are content to organize public meetings on existing alternatives (E5), others also focus a large part of their outreach to the public on these alternatives, sometimes with outright “success” (E10) or full-fledged campaigns centered on this topic:

“What we did, for example, was propose an entire alternative project—one we had designed and explained—which, at the planning stage, hadn’t been costed but was viable in terms of a circular economy. It would have allowed us to contribute to the local economy while having a positive environmental impact. Proposing [Alterprojet] was a great intellectual exercise for the collective—saying we don’t

want the [contested project] and here's what we could propose instead. If elected officials were willing to listen to us and follow our lead, we could propose something economically viable that wouldn't destroy the environment.

"To develop [the Alterprojet], we went to the markets to gather information on the needs of the people in this area. People shared their needs, and that's where the collective thinking behind [the Alterprojet] began—a project that would also address environmental needs and create a global virtuous cycle."

Economic and Social Counter-Proposals

As seen in the last four interview excerpts, the economic issue appears at the heart of the alternative proposals put forward. It thus responds to the critique of a capitalism that breeds precariousness, promising more jobs than will actually materialize—the vast majority of which are precarious and not necessarily local.

The projects are also criticized on their economic viability, calling into question both the shortterm liberal vision and a certain degree of absurdity in the contested proposals:

"We're going to build a replica of a medieval town right next to an actual medieval town—it makes no sense. The project isn't aimed at tourists seeking authenticity, but rather at parents looking to keep their kids entertained for half a day. They'll go home without ever exploring the surrounding towns." There will be restaurants on the site, so people won't even need to go into town to eat. [...] It's an unreliable economic model that regularly goes bankrupt after two or three years—for example, at Mirapolis, Achéodrome, and Vulcania, where local governments have invested several million euros. We'll end up with a wasteland; we'll have rezoned part of the city" (E17)

A consciousness that is global, but not very anchored nationally?

This politicization of discourse ultimately involves linking it to the global level. "Act local, think global"—the founding slogan of the anti-globalization movement—is thus another maxim that seems relevant when observing these mobilizations.

What kind of global belonging?

In the context of a strong climate movement that appears primarily urban, we must first put into perspective the recurrence of "the climate issue" as such (mentioned in only about ten interviews). This context seems instead to have indirect effects, for example by facilitating the formation of an initial core group that will later become a collective (E6) or in terms of inspiring activism:

"This series of events helped us: the climate march, seeing various victories through the YouTube channel Partager C'est Sympa or the 'map of struggles,' and having national support—for example, Extinction Rebellion (XR), which organized

both nationwide campaigns on an unprecedented scale and very concrete actions. Even though we weren't part of it, we felt inspired; it was also the time of Greta Thunberg and everything that was happening internationally —there was a huge momentum, and it materialized in the municipal elections [with the victory of the left-wing and environmentalist slate].” (E34)

As we can see here, it is both a sense of global belonging and activist contributions (Extinction Rebellion, Partager C'est Sympa...) that shape this global sense of belonging, rather than the “climate issue” itself. Zooming out, the collectives themselves, aware that they are part of dynamics larger than themselves, are also conscious of being intermediaries of political ecology when asked the question:

“Question: Have environmentalist ideas made progress?

There has been progress, though not everywhere. Our job is to inform the public so they can judge for themselves. There are people who are getting involved. More and more people are joining the collective. Every time we host a meeting, there are new faces. The important thing is to inform people to mobilize them. It's encouraging.” (E17)

“Question: Have people become aware of environmental issues? Absolutely. Among the resistant local residents, there was more defeatism than outright opposition. A clear indicator: we doubled the Greens' vote share in the departmental and regional elections, and the joint left-wing and Green list won 35% in Marquillies, a traditionally right-wing village.” (E8)

Rather than in terms of causes, with clearly similar objectives or shared policy proposals, we must therefore view the overall coherence of the mobilization narratives through:

- a critique of a destructive, predatory, and excessive form of capitalism, which we discussed in detail in Part 1;
- a politicization of territory as an object, space, and method of mobilization, in response to shifts in scale;
- a sense of “community” belonging to a broad environmentalist movement;
- the economic and social response of “preserving know-how” and ensuring job stability provided by the collectives.

The near-total neglect of land-use planning and of the national scale

Finally, it is quite surprising how little attention has been paid to land-use planning as a specific, nationally recognized issue in the conflict. In fact, it was mentioned in only seven interviews, and always in a vague manner, without being presented as a national public policy against which it would be necessary to organize. Of course, we have already noted that certain groups—particularly the most politicized ones—develop more detailed arguments regarding the government's role and its determination to push through certain projects; yet, even though France has a dedicated ministry (now known as the “Ministry of Territorial Cohesion”), this ministry does not appear to be a target identified by the mobilizations. Thus, while local causes may be nationalized during large rallies or media campaigns, no national cause in and of itself emerges within this space of mobilization or from the local struggles themselves.

Two cases can nevertheless be cited as examples of the development of national causes, which stem not from strategies spontaneously developed by local groups but from their coordination. Organized respectively by Alternatiba/Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, the networks opposing airports (about ten protests) and Amazon warehouses (about a dozen protests) are recent and ongoing initiatives that will require a collective assessment in the coming years. Within these two networks, which we will revisit, discourses on social and climate justice are being advanced in coordination with unions (CGT, FSU, Solidaires, notably through the “Plus Jamais ça” collective) or professional organizations (retailers or airline pilots).

Seizing the opportunity presented by the debate surrounding the climate law, these networks have thus brought legislative causes to the fore, calling for moratoriums on the construction of ecommerce warehouses and the expansion of airports.

2. The shaping of a space belonging to mobilizations

We will conclude this report by noting that beyond converging discourses and processes of politicization, another element appears to have contributed to the gradual coordination of this space for mobilization: the sometimes spontaneous, sometimes organized networking of collectives with one another. This observation leads us to propose defining it as a decentralized social movement tacitly organized by a sum of regional, thematic, and interpersonal interactions.

Recurring regional or thematic alliances

The first form of networking—and surely the most natural or spontaneous—is the kind that takes place at the local level. Whether in a county, a group of towns, a historical region, or a broader area, groups and organizations quite naturally seek out their peers and neighbors to build connections.

While this may occur through personal connections, membership in organizations, or a combination of both (a husband who is an activist with the League for the Protection of Birds, for example, E4), it can also be driven by the need to develop a shared, alternative narrative (E18) on a broader scale (such as the metropolitan area) or around a common local issue (E1) in response to public authorities. Finally, it may also involve building a regional advocacy effort by building on pre-existing struggles (E9) or establishing a multi-thematic “alert network” (E18, comprising some fifty partner associations).

Conversely, it is also this networking that enables the strengthening of interpersonal bonds:

“Another thing—and this is what Amazon taught us most—is how to collaborate across groups, to work together. There’s a wonderful sense of camaraderie; in the end, we all came out of it with friendships. Friends from [the next town over] or [another town] have become real friends. We’ve moved beyond mere activism. I

think this foundation of interpersonal connection is incredibly important.” (E6) The vast majority of collectives thus spontaneously mention the existence of these types of local ties during the interviews. The lockdown also allowed some to expand, or even further develop, their mobilization and its structure:

“We organized this coordination through video conferences, where we planned the press conference, designed a logo and banners, and launched a crowdfunding campaign.

This allowed us to expand across several departments. Even though the struggle is over here, the connections are still there and can be reactivated and expanded” (E5)

In one situation, we even see the collective itself, much like the “octopus” it is up against, that seeks to expand by creating local chapters in neighboring departments (E3). When these ties are already established and woven, they create a favorable environment for sparking new mobilizations, which, from the moment they emerge, become part of an associative ecosystem with existing experience and contacts:

“Once we realized what was going to happen, the community and activist groups sprang into action. The meeting announcement was sent out to all our contacts. Over 100 people showed up. [...] We were a bit surprised to see that this project mobilized so many people. We reached out through each of our networks, and everyone said yes and came. It was a great meeting; even people who didn’t know us had heard about it.” (E24)

To these networks, we can also add the recurring (though not majority) existence of ties forged with professional unions (at least 12 cases) or agricultural unions (the Confédération Paysanne or local agricultural organizations, at least 15 cases). In four cases, the Yellow Vests were also cited as allies of the mobilization. Since 2018 and the start of the youth climate marches, new ties have also been forged, often when local groups of organizations such as Extinction Rebellion formed and sought to show solidarity with local struggles, bringing a “new, youthful energy” that was received very positively.

Through these local connections—whether by collaborating with other environmental or social causes—a broader space for political engagement is once again emerging for these collectives. Finally, and Reporterre’s mapping likely facilitates this, the collectives and associations also spontaneously mention their efforts to research similar cases—on the same topic, for example—“to draw parallels between absurd projects” (E1)

National events or organizations that enable the development of a social movement beyond the sum of individual struggles.

Beyond these “spontaneous” cases, this networking is also due to the active work carried out by national organizations.

These organizations primarily ensure the sharing of experience. France Nature Environnement, for example, is the most frequently cited organization (in about twenty interviews) due to its legal support,

as are Greenpeace and Alternatiba. In two cases, however, respondents noted that they felt their struggles were proving too “small” to benefit from such support. Virtually all collectives and associations cite at least one national association or NGO (Fig. 9). This ubiquity thus facilitates the exchange of experiences and activist knowledge, as well as providing significant financial support for legal actions. However, it also raises questions about the development of stronger, more direct links between mobilizations through these organizations. It is in this vein that Greenpeace, as part of its “Greenvoice” initiative, now seeks to participate in building communities of mobilization, notably by hiring a staff member dedicated to this activity.

In the cases of the networks opposing Amazon and the airport expansions already mentioned, funding for campaign staff also helps forge connections—sometimes top-down (training, legal support), bottom-up (joint advocacy), or horizontal (through the organization of regular inter-group meetings). One of these staff members is, in fact, very directly involved in a struggle in their department, and the airport network is now attempting to organize itself autonomously by establishing a rotating secretariat within the collectives themselves. In the case of the Amazon network, it is at the intersection of the development of independent local struggles across the country, the pre-existing campaign against overproduction, and the debate on the climate law that Friends of the Earth and the collectives ended up focusing their efforts on Amazon. This approach subsequently gained momentum all the while getting shaped by the public debate surrounding online consumption during the lockdown.

Other national thematic networks or campaigns could also be mentioned: L214’s campaign against factory farms or the network for forestry alternatives, for example. Les Soulèvements de la Terre and the “Act Against the Re-intoxication of the World” movement, meanwhile, seek to develop a more comprehensive and political discourse by encouraging the coordination of local actions around the same national dates. These actions help bring visibility to a highly politicized critique and a radical fringe of collectives and associations, but in some of the cases cited, they also serve as catalysts for the public emergence of certain mobilizations. This mode of action, which appears to be new, remains both flexible and coordinated, thereby avoiding the pitfall of a paternalistic structure that many actors seem to fear (likely the vast majority, given how frequently this issue arises whenever the idea of a network is discussed and in light of the criticism leveled against certain NGOs and national associations).

The creation of the website *luttres-locales.fr* and the organization of the weekend gathering were also the subject of discussions among their organizers. However, they did not draw such criticism, likely due to the flexibility and welcoming atmosphere that were built into their design. Overall, it therefore seems that when one or more recognized actors attempt to provide technical and material support for a collaborative, grassroots initiative that benefits everyone, such initiatives can be well received.

One year after the Lubrizol disaster in Rouen, it was during a meeting at a partisan political event that the Notre Maison Brûle network was formed around an original idea, with the aim of addressing the lack of responsiveness and information regarding industrial risks. The principle developed—drawing particularly on the professional expertise of the activists—is to maintain active vigilance and to document all situations involving industrial risks through mapping and a review of national and regional press coverage.

Finally, the latest wave of experiences at the national level is more nuanced and interpersonal, but we believe this aspect to be crucial. This concerns the effects, three years later, of the “victory” against the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport. While this victory did not trigger a massive replication of the “ZAD” mode of action, as we have seen, it contributes to a structuring imaginary. If only because this event—which can be described as historic—is cited by most collectives and associations (positively in most cases, with mistrust or distancing at times), it can be considered a referential object that structures this decentralized social movement. In half a dozen cited cases (and surely many others given the personal trajectories of the activists we know from elsewhere), it is also through the movement of “NDDL veterans” across the territory within autonomous, libertarian or anarchist networks, but also at the invitation of collectives composed of older and more moderate members (E9), that these activists serve as vectors for transmitting narratives and experiences.

These diverse forms of coordination thus affirm the existence of a social movement which, while not unified (nor does it necessarily need to be) under the label “GPII” or within a single formal space, generates self-developing entities within itself, thereby demonstrating its capacity to function as an entity that transcends the sum of local struggles.

While we cannot assess the current and past qualitative scope of land-use conflicts (which, according to our hypothesis and given their spontaneous and “local” nature of these conflicts, have likely always existed on a significant scale), it is therefore the maturity of this social movement’s internal organization and the profound convergence of its discourses that we will highlight here.

Conclusion: Food for Thought on a Social Movement Worth Celebrating

Finally, this report itself and the two “meetings of local struggles” associated with it are in themselves ways of making visible, and helping maturing and consolidating the existence of this social movement which, while no longer fully unaware of itself, will continue to benefit from getting to know itself better, expanding the reach of its network, and achieving new victories.

We are pleased to contribute this to both the activist memory and scientific research to be debated, challenged, amended, and explored further. Its conclusions stem from a systematic investigation that did not aim to be exhaustive. While this method, unlike monographs and their accumulation, may sometimes smooth over certain particularities, we hope that activists and involved citizens will find themselves in it. In this regard, scientific research could, in our view, contribute to the collective effort in three ways:

by continuing to produce more case studies and organizing their compilation and a synthesis, either through dedicated research initiatives or by developing comprehensive state-of-the-art analysis; by participating, as many researchers already do, in the strategic planning of collectives and associations, and in particular by offering comparisons with other types of conflicts; by conducting—which, of course, requires adequate resources—a comprehensive survey of land-use conflicts across

France, using press archives. This would make it possible to quantify the scale of this opposition, down to the least politicized and visible local conflicts.

We have shown that this decentralized social movement possesses major strengths in terms of its inventiveness, its networks, its strategic and sociological diversity, and the depth of its discourse on social, democratic, economic, and ecological issues. This movement would likely benefit from being further developed and refined, in ways that are beyond the scope of this discussion.

While we have no advice to offer here to collectives that increasingly have spaces for reflection, meetings, and a maturity that has fueled our enthusiasm for this study, a few avenues for reflection can be outlined by way of conclusion.

First, it is necessary to take into account the needs expressed by the communities and associations themselves in the final question of our interview guide. These fall into three categories:

- to use networking to increase the visibility of local struggles, in order to reach a larger number of potential supporters, to strengthen actions in support of specific struggles, but also to break the sense of isolation that can sometimes be inherent to any activist action in a world that seems hostile to us;
- exchanging advice and experiences, for example by creating a directory of key contacts, as was discussed during the recent weekend gathering of local struggles. This could help us move beyond “the trial-and-error approach”(E2) through a form of support to be determined. This obviously concerns legal action, a crucial issue from the very start of mobilizations and one that, in the absence of pre- existing contacts, can sometimes “nip certain struggles in the bud.” It could also concern the entire range of mobilization tactics (communication, strategy, internal organization, and the sharing of talking points are thus cited by respondents). The recent launch of the website luttres-locales.fr could be a significant step forward in this regard. Following the example of the Notre Maison Brûle network, one could finally envision a systematic monitoring of projects to be challenged, made available to collectives, based on official gazette announcements, for example;
- providing resources, particularly financial ones, to offset the often very substantial costs incurred. This could apply equally to communication, for example, as well as to other areas of expenditure, by establishing a system for pooling funds.

As we have mentioned, there are significant parallels worth highlighting with other movements focused on public spaces—particularly those concerning the right to the city or working-class neighborhoods—which were the author’s initial areas of social activism and research. Attachment to heritage, the specific dynamics of a local conflict, the forms that low-intensity repression can take in small communities, and the democratic and localized driving force behind the emergence of a mobilization are all examples worth discussing. As a strategic contribution, identifying these commonalities more broadly— within struggles that are often fragmented (as scientific research itself is)—could be a direction worth exploring further. While the goal of “convergence” among these struggles could be proposed, it seems to us that, at the very least, the exchange of knowledge between these struggles would allow us to take a step back, while deepening everyone’s reflections.

Another challenge potentially lies in the nationalization of certain causes and advocacy efforts. As we have seen, local associations and collectives sometimes succeed in nationalizing their own local causes, and new national initiatives emerge on certain issues. It will be necessary to assess this situation, focusing on two questions in particular: first, do these networks manage to avoid the pitfall of top-down structures? And second, do they ultimately achieve significant victories (whether regarding the

cancellation of projects, legislative measures, or simply in terms of strengthening mobilization efforts)? Cross-cutting questions could equally be raised regarding common legislative or political causes at the national level—a politically unavoidable level in a country where the political landscape is still strongly marked by centralism. In that sense we have, of course, mentioned land-use planning, but we can also refer to this proposal by a collective to fight “at the same time against the prefects, who are machines for issuing building permits” (E16).

In the face of the anxiety caused by the health, social, and climate crises, it is also important to maintain the spontaneity of this “politics of joy” that we have described and, more broadly, to spread practices of care and collective time management. While certain methods are beginning to be known in activist circles, this is not necessarily the case in struggles that were initially not very politicized and have not yet been networked. In particular, it is important to ensure that these tasks are not assigned exclusively to women (or to younger generations in some cases). The same applies if the social movement we have studied here comes to professionalize at certain points, regarding respect for the rights and working conditions (job insecurity, wages, etc.) of employees, which obviously requires complex and considerable efforts in terms of in-depth research. Celebrating these victories is also crucial in the face of the pessimism and burnout that can sometimes set in.⁹

Finally, perhaps the most significant strength we have observed—and one that helps define this social movement—lies in the various forms of coexistence that must be maintained and nurtured: generational, political, strategic, and sociological. On this last point, as with all new social movements, significant efforts remain to be made to enable the widespread involvement of everyone. As Frédéric Lordon, Aurélie Trouvé, Fatima Ouassak, and Juliette Rousseau each point out in their own way, it seems that this willing, inclusive, asserted, and preserved plurality is today one of the central challenges facing all social movements.

Footnotes

¹ The collective Des plumes dans le goudron consists of four researchers: Anahita Grisoni, a sociologist, has worked on the resistance movement against the Lyon-Turin high-speed rail line ; Julien Milanesi, an economist and co-director of the documentary *L'intérêt général et moi*; Jérôme Pelenc, geographer, involved in the struggle against the Haren megaprison in Brussels; and Léa Sébastien, geographer, involved in the struggle against the campaign against a landfill in Essonne

² URBANIZATION: Parking, Real Estate; PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES: Port, Fishing, Factory ; POLLUTION: Incinerators, Landfills, Toxic waste ; ENERGY: Biogas plants, Power plants, Wind farms, Highvoltage power lines ; TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE : Roads, Airport, Highway ; EXPLOITATION AND DESTRUCTION OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES : Mine, Dam, Basin, Quarry, Forest ; SHOPPING AND RECREATION : Shopping Center, Mall, Skiing, Amazon, Shopping District,

Recreation, Warehouse (excluding Amazon) ³

splann.org

⁴ It should be noted here that only direct observations or a large-scale questionnaire survey sent directly to members of collectives and associations would yield precise results. The data at our disposal, which may be biased by indirect observation via the actors themselves, suggests the presence of these socio-professional categories among the most active, while the broader circles are more socially heterogeneous.

⁵ It is worth noting here the thought-provoking typology established by the collective Des Plumes Dans le Goudron in the context of the struggles against the GPII: growth vs. satiety, globalization vs. relocalization, compensation vs. conservation, technophilia vs. technocriticism

⁶ reporterre.net/A-Strasbourg-la-justice-donne-raison-aux-opposants-alors-que-l-autoroute-est-quasi-finie

⁸ Joke aside, all of these ingredients were presented to us at the end of the interview as a wonderful collaborative “grandmother’s recipe”! ⁹ On this subject, Laury-Anne Cholez’s article is worth noting: <https://reporterre.net/La-lutte-paiemine-de-rien-les-ecologistes-remportent-de-nombreuses-victoires>

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