



**3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference  
on Public Policy (ICPP3)**

**June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore**

**Panel T07P08 Session 2**

*The Accountability and Legitimacy of Knowledge Expert in Policy  
Making*

**Title of the paper**

*The legitimacy of expert knowledge: the case of the Notre-Dame-Des-  
Landes airport project*

**Author(s)**

*Khallouki, Dounia, LAET-ENTPE, Lyon, France,  
dounia.khallouki@entpe.fr*

**Date of presentation**

*Friday, June 30th*

## **Abstract**

The case of the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport project in France is a relevant example of a particularly tensed infrastructure project: the conflict led to important delays, and the outcome of the project is still uncertain. In that case, lots of experts were mobilized, whether by French government or by opponents to the project. Expertise plays a key role: project owners tend to use it as an instrument of legitimation. But many opponents to the project questioned expert knowledge. They also resorted to counter-expertise, in order to fight on technical arguments, and later, to a kind of participative expertise. In this case, expertise has spread on both sides of the conflict, which led to a technical war, where the different actors use expertise as an argumentative weapon.

Our intention in this paper is to understand, by studying discourses, practices and argumentative strategies of the different actors, how the legitimacy of expert knowledge has changed over time and what the part of experts and expertise in such a conflict is. The use of expert knowledge in argumentative strategies through time is a key element of our analysis. We argue that the legitimacy of expert knowledge may be related to the different participative procedures that occurred. Indeed, participative procedures help shape the opposition, but also, those procedures point at technical aspects of the case that may not have appeared without it. As several actors support legitimacy of expert knowledge, other actors come to limit this legitimacy, which lead to the rise of new forms of expertise.

Keywords: expertise, expert knowledge, airport conflict, participative procedures, argumentative strategies

## Introduction

In the past few years, airport expansion or creation projects have led to conflicts and tensions with the local population, like for instance around London Heathrow airport or around the Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport. Airports conflicts have already been studied. Several works are remarkable, especially on the Heathrow airport (Griggs, Howarth, 2004), the Manchester airport (Griggs, Howarth, 2002), Paris Charles de Gaulle (Halpern, 2006; Subra 2004), Berlin-Schönefeld (Halpern, 2006), or Toulouse airport (Pistre, 2010).

In those cases, conflicts have not prevented the achievement of airport projects, but it seems that the trend is changing and that several projects end up being delayed or canceled. The case of the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport project is a relevant example of a particularly tensed situation: the conflict led to important delays, and the outcome of the project is still uncertain, despite the recent consultation that occurred in June 2016.

In this case, most of participative and legal procedures have occurred already, but did not succeed in putting an end to the conflict and could even have made the situation worse. In that case, lots of experts were mobilized, whether by French government, local authorities or by opponents. Expertise plays a key role: project owners tend to use it as an instrument of legitimation. But many opponents to the project questioned expert knowledge. They also resorted to counter-expertise, in order to fight on technical arguments, and later, to a kind of participative expertise. In this case, expertise has spread on both sides of the conflict, which led to a technical war, where the different actors use expertise as an argumentative weapon.

To define the expertise, we lean on a definition given by Philippe Roqueplot (Roqueplot, 1992): a scientific knowledge gets the statue of expertise when it is bounded to a decision process. This articulation between knowledge and decision is fundamental and can be different from one situation to another. But this definition is not enough to perfectly understand what is the expertise and who are the experts. Expertise is a complex social phenomenon that cannot be easily grasped (Trépos, 1996). Expertise can whether be defined through a particular skill, the existence of a demand, or by the inscription in the public space (Delmas, 2011). Though expertise is difficult to define, it is important to clarify what we will

call expertise, expert and expert knowledge in the rest of this paper. We consider an expert as an actor with specific skills and whom the work intends to participate to decision process.

But how actors on the field and specifically state actors perceive expertise? Governments whether think that expertise is biased and so political considerations should choose the official experts, or that expertise is some kind of superior knowledge. In her work, Sheila Jasanoff does not follow those views of expertise. She argues that expertise is a form of delegation of authority that citizens should monitor and not consider it as a “transcendental scientific authority”. The accountability both lies with peers and with the public (Jasanoff, 2003). Our work in this paper will show a relevant example of how the public get involved in the expertise and question the legitimacy of experts.

Our intention in this paper is to understand, by studying discourses, practices and argumentative strategies of the different actors, how the legitimacy of expert knowledge has changed over time and what the part of experts and expertise in such a conflict is. The use of expert knowledge in argumentative strategies through time is a key element of our analysis.

We will focus on two time periods. The first one is from the end of the sixties to the end of the nineties at the beginning of the project, when expert knowledge was not questioned, and stayed in the hands of very few people. And then, a second period starts in 2000, when the first participative procedures were organized. We argue that the legitimacy of expert knowledge may be related to the different participative procedures that occurred. Indeed, participative procedures help shape the opposition, but also, those procedures point at technical aspects of the case that may not have appeared without it. As several actors support legitimacy of expert knowledge, other actors come to limit this legitimacy, which lead to the rise of new forms of expertise.

In a first part, we will pay attention to how projects owners used the expert knowledge as an instrument of legitimation of the project and how this legitimacy begins to change when the first participative procedures occurred. Then, in a second part, we will focus on the ways the opposition manages to question the expert knowledge by producing also a form of expertise.

## **Expert knowledge: instrument of legitimation for project owners**

The case we studied is an airport project situated nearby the city of Nantes, in west part of France. This airport project is an ancient one: it started at the end of the sixties, when the idea to move the Nantes Atlantique airport, the actual Nantes airport, to another location, in the north of Nantes agglomeration was first evoked. At that time, the idea of the project is part of a larger thinking to develop several metropolises in France in order to compensate the Parisian centralism. The Nantes Saint-Nazaire territory was one of these metropolises. The search of a site for the new airport is first handled by the French technical service of air bases in 1967<sup>1</sup>. First, eighteen sites are studied before the Notre Dame des Landes site was chosen. Notre Dame des Landes is a little town situated approximately twenty kilometers on the North of Nantes agglomeration. At that time, the French State decided to protect the area of the future airport from urbanization by creating a future development zone<sup>3</sup> in 1974. We will refer to this zone as the ZAD in the rest of the paper.

Then, the project was left in abeyance for almost 20 years, until the mid-nineties, and was officially put back on tracks again in 2000. In this first part, we intend to show that the expert knowledge, at first in the hands of a small group, is used in the argumentative strategies of actors to legitimize the project. We are then going to show that the legitimacy of expert knowledge began to change when the first participative procedures occurred in 2000 and after.

### **The use of expert knowledge in argumentative strategies**

As told earlier, the project was left in abeyance for almost 20 years, after the creation of the future development zone, the ZAD, on the Notre-Dame-des-Landes area. At that time, all the expertise was made by the technical services of the DGAC<sup>4</sup>, the General Direction of Civil aviation, which handled the search of a new site. In the nineties, one of the issues was, especially for the Loire-Atlantique local authority, to get advantage of the ZAD<sup>5</sup>, a huge land reserve acquired by the departmental council back in the seventies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Report n°50 STBA/DDE, January 22<sup>th</sup> 1968

<sup>3</sup> In french : zone d'aménagement différée (ZAD). We will refer to it as the ZAD later in this paper

<sup>4</sup> In french : Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile

<sup>5</sup> Interview with the former president of the Loire-Altantique department

In that case, project owners have used expert knowledge from the beginning to legitimize the airport transfer. It is used in the argumentative strategies of the actors as a key element of justification. To analyze these argumentative strategies, we resort to the work of Philippe Zittoun about the discursive analysis of policy making. Actors, in the nineties, tried to define the airport project as a solution to several problems, and especially to the Nantes Atlantique saturation problem. So, the argumentative strategies intend to define the Nantes Atlantique airport as a problem in order to present the Notre Dame des Landes as a solution to this problem.

In his work about public policy making, Phillippe Zittoun defines five stages of the definitional work that enables actors to turn a situation into a public problem. These five stages are: “Labelling a situation and qualifying it as a problem”, “Categorizing society by identifying a Public of victims”, “Designating causes, authorities, and the group of guilty”, “the making of an apocalyptic future” and “taking necessary immediate action” (Zittoun, 2014). To go further, the author also settles five stages of the definitional work of solutions to public problems<sup>6</sup>. Often considered as neutral objects in the literature, Philippe Zittoun considered that the definitional work around solutions to public problems also exists.

In the case of Notre Dame des Landes, the use of expert knowledge is really important when it comes to define the Nantes Atlantique airport as a problem that needs to be solved. Actors mobilized it at different stages of the problem definition. Indeed, to take advantage of the huge land reserve already acquired, local actors put in place argumentative strategies to enroll and to convince State actors to act on this project again: they tried to find a way to re legitimize the Nantes Atlantique transfer to the Notre Dame des Landes site. And one key element of this strategy was to define the Nantes Atlantique airport as a problem that needed to be handled.

To do so, local authorities asked for a study to a private consultant<sup>8</sup> about the creation of a new aeronautic platform in the western part of France. Local authorities and the Commerce and Industry chamber of Nantes financed this study. The study<sup>9</sup> evaluated the pertinence of the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes area, compared to the other eighteen sites previously considered

---

<sup>6</sup> The five stages of solutions definition: “Labelling solutions and owners’ titles”, “Identifying the consequences and the Public of beneficiaries”, “Coupling with a problem to resolve”, “Integration to a public policy that needs to be changed”, “The association to a referential framework and values to guide it”

<sup>8</sup> The private consultant: DG Conseil

<sup>9</sup> « Étude d’aide à la décision de la création d’un nouvel aéroport inter-régional dans l’ouest atlantique »

and also established a calendar for the realization of the new airport. The calendar especially set a dead line for the activation of the new platform. After this date, the transfer to the new site will be mandatory because of Nantes Atlantique saturation, according to the study<sup>10</sup>.

This study was mobilized first in the work of “Labelling a situation and qualifying as a problem” in the nineties: the administrator of Nantes Atlantique used it to point at the rise in traffic and the safety issues. Also, the actors used it to show “an apocalyptic future” to state actors, by enlightening the future saturation, and the dramatic siltation that will occur if nothing would be done soon. “The necessity to take immediate action” was also justified thanks to that study.

This debate around the necessity of the airport only occurred at first between local authorities, the airport administrator and state actors. Local actors tried to convince state actors to start the project in order to take advantage of the land reserve already acquired. To do so, they defined the Nantes Atlantique airport as a problem that needed to be solved. Expert knowledge was a key element of the argumentation, mainly through the private study asked by local authorities<sup>11</sup>. At that time, expert knowledge was not questioned by anyone and was not used by anybody. The beginning of public consultation will bring new actors into the debate.

### **The beginning of the public consultation: put the expertise in debate**

From the mid-eighties until the beginning of the nineties, many consultation procedures were created in France, especially concerning urban planning. The public debate procedure is one of them. It was created by the Barnier law in 1995<sup>12</sup>: the public debate is placed under the authority of the National Commission of public debate in charge of the respect of the public participation in the case of important urban planning or infrastructure projects with big impacts on the environment. This procedure is situated really at the beginning of projects, way before the decision is made, which made it really different from the public inquiry (Blatrix, 2012). The law of February 2002<sup>13</sup> extends the CNDP power, by changing it into an independent administrative authority. The CNDP gets more competences and also, its seizure becomes mandatory in several particular cases.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> « il y a eu à cette époque un travail entre collectivités pour relancer l’Etat, en disant voilà maintenant il va falloir commencer à élaborer un calendrier [...] et ce travail justement on avait commandé une étude qui s’appelle l’étude DG Conseil qu’on a du faire en 91 ou 92, une étude d’aide à la décision » PM

<sup>12</sup> Law n°95-101 of February 2<sup>d</sup> 1995, dealing with environment protection

<sup>13</sup> Law n°2002-276 of February 27<sup>th</sup> 2002, dealing with local democracy

In the case of Notre Dame des Landes, the first public debate occurred between 2002 and 2003. This debate is a very important moment in the history of this project for several reasons. First, it is a time where the opposition gets structured. Before the public debate, one association called the ADECA<sup>14</sup> mainly composed the opposition. This association was created by farm-workers in the seventies who wanted to protect their work tool. The public debate was the occasion for a broader opposition to get structured. Indeed, the ADICA<sup>15</sup> was created in 2000. It put together people who were not only farm-workers anymore, but also citizens eager to protect their environment. The public debate was the occasion for all the components of the opposition to get to identify each other and to start to work together. Indeed, one notable member of the ACIPA explains that the public debate made him understand that there was other “environmental associations that were preoccupied by the problem, and it was in 2004 that the association coordination was created”<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, this debate and the meetings it made possible led to a bigger cooperation between the different components of the anti-airport movement.

Then, the public debate was also the occasion to enlighten several technical issues and it enables a part of non-aware citizens to get use to technical debates. According to an anti-airport militant, this debate was “something extremely technical” with “really expert people to lead the debate” but “he “gets use to it” thanks to this procedure”<sup>17</sup>.

Indeed, during the debate, state actors continued the definitional of the Nantes Atlantique problem: they tried to make the couple between the Notre Dame des Landes solution and the Nantes Atlantique problem stronger, by leaning on the contracting authority report made by the ministry of the equipment experts, especially the General direction of civil aviation. This report forecasted the technical saturation of the Nantes Atlantique infrastructure in 2010, when the traffic will be up to three million passengers per year. The traffic was then expected

---

<sup>14</sup> ADECA: the association of farm-workers concerned by the airport (in French: Association des Exploitants Concernés par l’aéroport)

<sup>15</sup> ACIPA: the Citizen intercommunal association of population concerned by the airport project at Notre-Dame-des-Landes (in French: l’association citoyenne intercommunale des populations concernées par le projet d’aéroport à Notre-Dame-Des-Landes)

<sup>16</sup> Personal translation. The whole extract in french: « à la sortie du débat public, on a constaté qu’il n’y avait pas que l’ACIPA, il n’y avait pas que l’ADECA, il y avait d’autres associations environnementales qui se préoccupaient du problème, il y avait des partis politiques et c’est là qu’en 2004 la coordination des associations fut créé. ». Interview with one of the leader of the ACIPA

<sup>17</sup> Personal translation. The whole extract in french: « Ce débat sur l’aéroport c’était quand même quelque chose d’extrêmement technique et aéronautique quoi. Débat d’experts et avec des tas de chiffres [...] il y avait toujours des gens très experts pour mener ce débats-là de façon très détailler, et qui ne t’invitait pas à rentrer dans le débat. [...] Mais on s’est habitué à ces choses-là, un peu au travers du débat public. ». Interview with an anti-airport militant



to reach four million passengers in 2020. State actors highlighted the gap between the problem and a normal situation: Nantes Atlantique has only one runway, whereas all airports in France, which need to manage a traffic exceeding four million passengers, have at least two runways<sup>18</sup>.

The report also pointed at the many flights above Nantes agglomeration and forecasted that, if the traffic kept expanding, there would have more and more people exposed to noise pollution. This is another stage of problem definition: “Categorizing society by identifying a Public of victims”. The report identified a public of victims, which are the people exposed to noise pollution that need to be rescued.

Moreover, air traffic kept going up, which led the state actors to picture again “an apocalyptic future”: the infrastructure capacity will eventually be limited. And because of the proximity of Nantes agglomeration, it will be almost impossible to expand the platform, which is the main cause of the problem. So, when the traffic rise will be effective, the situation will deteriorate fast: it will be impossible to insure service quality, and to protect people leaving nearby from noise pollution.

So, the public debate was the occasion for projects owners to continue the definitional work of the Nantes Atlantique problem and to make the couple with the transfer solution stronger. But unlike the previous period of the nineties, local population and the ongoing structured opposition put the expertise in debate and the legitimacy of expert knowledge began to be question.

First, it can be noticed that the public debate initiated an initial mistrust from the opposition regarding participative procedures. One of the main points that crystalized this mistrust was the fact that projects owners only suggested one site to transfer the airport. Despite the fact that other sites were considered before, the public debate did not put the choice of the site in debate. From what it can be read in the press or in our interviews, associations and several of the local elected representatives perceived it as if the decision had already been made<sup>19</sup>. For them, the public debate was nothing but a simple audit of a project already on the tracks<sup>20</sup>.

Also, from the very beginning of the project, participative procedures were already questioned. The public debate was qualified as a “masquerade” by the ACIPA president in

---

<sup>18</sup> Contracting authority report for the 2002-2003 public debate

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a former local elected representative

<sup>20</sup> Statement from the former ACIPA president in January 2003

2003. He also declared that this public debate was worse than no consultation of the public, and that caused some kind of “frustration” and “humiliation”<sup>21</sup>. In a communiqué made by several associations opposed to the project in April 2003, the “limits of the public consultation” were pointed at.

So, from the very beginning of the consultation, a mistrust regarding state actors and the participative procedures they organized was already present. This initial lack of confidence regarding public actors, mainly because only one site was proposed, did not fade after the public debate, but kept running and grew bigger in the other participative procedures that occurred later. This mistrust regarding the participative procedures led the opposition to resort to counter expertise, in order to put in doubt the discourse of the “legitimate experts”.

Yannick Barthe tries to explain two very different ways to conceive the discussion of technical choices. First, for project owners, the public debate is seen as a way to explain the project and its technical aspects: conflicts around planning projects are only due to a misunderstanding or a lack of information. That is a conception widely spread through the Notre Dame des Landes projects owners. But this view of public debate faces many critics especially what Yannick Barthe called an “intern” critic toward the pedagogic view of public debate, coming from concerned citizens. That can lead to the emergence of a “scientific militancy” that aims at questioning the already existing expertise (Barthe, 2005). This difference between two views of the public debate can cause mistrust and defiance within the population; because of the gap between the initial goals of projects and population expectancies. That is exactly what happened in that case. The mistrust provoked by the public debate led the opposition go deep down the technical aspects and to resort first to counter expertise, and then to a militant expertise.

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview with an anti-airport militant

## Questioning the expert knowledge

After the public debate, the tensions keep getting stronger and stronger between opponents and proponents to the project. In October 2003, the Minister of Equipment and Transport launched the effective studies of the project: they established three different scenarios for the future airport, mainly regarding runway orientations. The choice between these three scenarios was made by the steering committee of the project in March 2005, and field tests started the same year. However, during those tests, farmers who refused such measures confronted the Ministry services. Besides demonstrations and other peaceful activities, the refusal of soil samples marked a real tension between farmers and state services.

Another event marked the growing tensions between the opposition and the project leaders: the public inquiry preceding the public utility declaration, which took place from October 18<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006. This inquiry was indeed disrupted by opponents who blocked access to Notre-Dame-des-Landes municipality. Like the public debate used to be, the public inquiry was also qualified as just “another formality”<sup>22</sup> by the opponents.

Still, the public inquiry came to an end, and the commission issued on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007 a favorable opinion to the project, but coupled with hesitations. Similarly, the State Council gave a favorable opinion in January 2008, and on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the public utility decree authorizing the construction of the airport was published in the Official Journal.

In the first part, we show how project owners used expert knowledge as an instrument of legitimation in their argumentative strategies. We also point at the fact that the participative procedures seemed to have played a key role in the questioning of expert knowledge. Indeed, by helping shaping the opposition and by pointed at technical issues, those disposals enabled the actors of the opposition to appropriate those points. Moreover, the mistrust toward these procedures also encouraged them to act differently.

So in this part, we intend to show how the opposition managed to adapt and to question the expert knowledge by producing also a form of expertise and to use it as a weapon in their argumentative strategies.

---

<sup>22</sup> Opponents coordination, AFP April 13<sup>th</sup> 2007

## Resorting to counter-expertise

In that case, independent cabinets have made two major counter expertise starting 2011. This kind of action against the Notre Dame des Landes project has mainly been handled by local elected representatives opposed to the project. It is, at first, a specificity of the actions that local elected representatives resort to. Counter expertise is a new form of action used by the opposition that began to use their production of knowledge.

Indeed, in 2009, local politicians and especially the Notre-Dame-des-Landes mayor created a collective of opposed local elected representatives<sup>23</sup>. At the beginning, this collective gathered around 300 elected representatives<sup>24</sup>. In 2011, the collective was turned into an association in order to have a legal statue and to be able to resort to justice in the name of this organization. Now, there are currently more than 1200 people in this organization<sup>25</sup>. More than a half of them are local elected representatives, coming mainly from the geographic area of the Loire-Atlantique department. This collective, and then association, is called the CÉDPA<sup>26</sup>, which is the Collective of Elected Representatives doubting about the pertinence of the airport. In French, this name could also mean “do not give in”<sup>27</sup> when it is pronounced. This choice is part of the argumentative strategy of the representatives, by labelling them as people that would not give in.

In the case of the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport project, the CEDPA is a real driving force in mobilizing technical resources. Indeed, the CEDPA asked for two second opinions during the project life, in order to counter technical arguments of state services and to question the legitimacy of experts of the state, especially the DGAC experts. These studies focus on maintaining the Nantes Atlantique exploitation, as an alternative to the Notre Dame des Landes construction.

Those technical arguments provided by those studies are a main element of the argumentative strategy of elected representatives. They use it during public meetings, and also when they are confronted to projects owners, in order to compete on the technical plan, and so to ground their legitimacy in contesting the project.

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes mayor

<sup>24</sup> <http://aerportnddl.fr/>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> In French : Collective des élus doutant de la pertinence de l’aéroport.

<sup>27</sup> In French : Cédéz-pas.

The first study was made in 2011 by the Dutch consultant called CE Delft. This study intends to compare the cost-benefit analysis of the airport project presented during the public inquiry in 2006 to what it would take to keep using the actual Nantes-Atlantique airport. The report concludes that the Nantes-Atlantique optimization would be more benefit than the Notre Dame des Landes construction<sup>28</sup>. One of the CEDPA responsible was in relation with CE Delft. She is the one who led the study and also helped the translation.

Adecs Airinfra, also a Dutch airport consultant, has made the second one in 2013. The study was also asked by the CEDPA in order to reevaluate the Noise Exposure Plan of Nantes Atlantique. A noise exposure plan is an urban planning document that intends to rule the use of the lands exposed to airport pollution<sup>29</sup>. This document forecasts the airport development in the next fifteen to twenty years and settles noise zones. These zones suppose urban constraints more or less strict depending on the noise level exposition of the area. The idea was to make the argument of Nantes Atlantique stronger by showing that the future noise exposition around this airport could be managed. By showing that it would not be so bad to keep the Nantes Atlantique airport running, local elected representative tried to deconstruct what projects owners showed as an apocalyptic future.

Widely, the counter expertise is part of a strategy that consists in reinforcing a specific alternative to the Notre Dame des Landes construction: the optimization of Nantes Atlantique airport. The expert knowledge is first used by the CEDPA to build a discursive coalition (Zittoun, 2014) around this alternative. Indeed, by the past, other alternatives to the construction of the airport have been suggested. For instance, during the public debate in 2002, the idea to network all the airports of the west part of France was evoked. The opposition also suggested to re build the Nantes Atlantique runway in an Est-West orientation in order to solve the urban planning issues. But all those solutions did not gather enough support to survive through time: the Nantes Atlantique optimization is the one actors decided to construct by using different argumentative strategies where the use of expert knowledge is particularly important.

---

<sup>28</sup> CE Delft report, October 2011

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.acnusa.fr/fr/le-bruit-et-la-cartographie/la-cartographie/peb-plan-dexposition-au-bruit/14>

### **Militant expertise: The citizen workshop**

This discursive coalition progressively gathers new actors. Local elected representatives remain at the center of this coalition and play a key role in enrolling new protagonists. This coalition gets stronger by the building of a form of militant expertise, through the construction of what it is called the Citizen Workshop. It is a new step of questioning the legitimacy of expert knowledge

First, it is important to mention that the tension between the opposition and the project leaders continued to increase through the history of the project. Starting 2009, the ZAD area began to be occupied by anti-airports militants, as a new form of action against the project. The occupation progressively got permanent. The ZAD occupants renamed by it the “Zone to Defend”<sup>30</sup>. In November 2012, an evacuation operation of those installed on the ZAD was performed. In both sides, form of radicalization appeared. More than 500 policemen were mobilized during this operation, called the Caesar Operation. For most of the actors of the mobilization, the operation was a real shock, and started a durable breakup between both sides.

The beginning of the Citizen workshop is mainly due to the initiative of a Parisian architect. He studied at the Nantes School of architecture and now works in Paris. The 2012 events were some kind of a trigger for him<sup>31</sup>. After these events, the architect had an exchange with an engineer from SNC Lavalin, a Canadian engineering and construction group. This group participated to the call for bids for the Notre Dame des Landes project in 2008 but it was the firm Vinci that was finally chosen to build the airport. This engineer was indeed aware of the case. They met because they were both part of an association called the ICBE<sup>32</sup>, the Institute for the Eco responsible conception of buildings. Their discussion was about the actual location of the Nantes Atlantique airport, which was, according to the engineer, in the middle of the Nantes city center, that is why it was not for him a credible alternative to the construction of the Notre Dame des Landes airport<sup>33</sup>. This discussion provoked the reaction of the architect who started questioning himself about the communication about the Nantes Atlantique renovation. That is how the idea to work on Nantes Atlantique came to him. As a former student of the Nantes School of architecture, he had a particular attachment to this territory. He used his network and got in touch with a Nantes architect, who was a former

---

<sup>30</sup> In French : Zone a défendre

<sup>31</sup> Interview with the architect

<sup>32</sup> Institut pour la conception écoresponsable du bâti

<sup>33</sup> Extract from interviews

schoolfellow. He enrolled him into this idea of working about Nantes Atlantique. Together, they identified two major actors of the opposition to the airport project: a former local elected representative who is one of the main characters of the opposition, and a farm-worker and leader of the ACIPA, also known to play a key role in the conflict. By this move, they progressively join the already existing discursive coalition around Nantes Atlantique optimization.

This meeting with two major leaders of the anti-airport movement is a key moment in the construction of this militant expertise. The former local elected representative led the two architects to a report of the DGAC experts made in 2013 about the renovation of Nantes Atlantique<sup>34</sup> and suggested they could work on it. From the opposition, there was clearly a questioning of the legitimacy of expert knowledge, and especially the knowledge produced by the DGAC, which independency is questioned by the opposition.

This first work prefigured what will be called later the Citizen Workshop. These are the two architects that took the initiative of its creation. They particularly worked on the airport air terminal, but they were not the only experts working on the subject of the Nantes Atlantique renovation. A pilot group already existed at that time and worked on trajectories and landing approaches. An Air France pilot based at the Nantes airport in 2007 during the public inquiry created this group. They were also a group inside the CEDPA already on the air terminal. But it is the association between the architects and the pilots that mainly shaped the citizen workshop<sup>35</sup>.

The idea of the two architects was first to put together forces of expertise already existing, like the pilots or them, to work on the Nantes Atlantique renovation. And then, this initiative aims at opening the expertise to anybody who could and wanted to participate to the elaboration of an alternative to Notre Dame des Landes, through the work around the Nantes Atlantique renovation<sup>36</sup>. The Citizen Workshop was officially launched at the end of November 2014. The idea was also to give back some kind of legitimacy and power to the

---

<sup>34</sup> « Etude du réaménagement de Nantes Atlantique dans un scénario de maintien de l'activité », DGAC, STAC, novembre 2013

<sup>35</sup> Citation in french: « Il y a eu un recrutement direct en s'adressant aux pilotes parce que on pensait que c'était vraiment cette association architecte pilote qui pouvait en fait produire quelque chose ». Interview with one of the architect.

<sup>36</sup> Citation in french: « On ouvre l'expertise à tous les gens qui peuvent apporter quelque chose sur cet aéroport ». Interview with one of the architect.

citizen participation by making them produced knowledge<sup>37</sup>, which is not the case in most of participative procedures that already occurred around this project.

The promoters of the Citizen workshop tried to place themselves and this initiative in the continuity of what has already been made in term of counter expertise. In their initial call, they reminded about the previous studies that have been made, especially the one about the economic aspects and the one about the noise exposure plan<sup>38</sup>.

The apparition of the Citizen Workshop shows that the opposition also produces a form of expert knowledge on its own. But project owners try to invalidate this form of expertise by challenging the expert nature of this knowledge. They question the legitimacy of such militant experts, compared to the “well-known skills” of the DGAC experts. There is, above the technical arguments themselves, a battle around the very nature of the experts and the expertise.

---

<sup>37</sup> Citation in french: « Le seul problème c’est lorsque c’est porté par des politiques ou des pouvoirs, la concertation citoyenne est toujours un peu bridé, on écoute beaucoup les gens mais on les fait pas produire » Interview with one of the architect.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.ateliercitoyen.org/index.php/2016/02/28/appele-citoyen/>



## Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that the legitimacy of expert knowledge changed though time mainly because the impact of the participative procedures. Indeed, we show that a limited group of people who were state actors and in charge local authorities first handled the expert knowledge. They used this expertise in their argumentative strategies to legitimize the project. But when the first public debate occurred, this legitimacy began to be question. Indeed, this procedure has two important roles. First, it helped shaping the opposition, by putting in contact people that did not know each other before, and who began to work together after it. Then, this debate enlightened several technical aspects of the case and made people aware of it. Even if they did not necessarily adapt to it at first, they get used to it and try to appropriate it after.

Then, we show that questioning expert knowledge was part of the argumentative strategies of the actors of the opposition. Especially, the local elected representatives were a driving force in the establishment of counter expertise. Those expertise focuses on working on the optimization of the Nantes Atlantique. With those, starts a discursive coalition around the Nantes Atlantique alternative to the Notre Dame des Landes project. This coalition was later joined by two architects that start the Citizen Workshop, which is a form of militant expertise, where any citizen willing to bring something can do so. Producing knowledge became a key element in the argumentation of the opposition.

With those counter expertise and the creation of the Citizen Workshop, the expert knowledge produced by state services is put in question. The legitimacy of it changed over time: at first, this legitimacy was not put in question. But we argue that the participative procedures contribute to put the expertise in debate, by informing and challenging the actors of the opposition. And in the more recent years, especially with the counter expertise and the Citizen Workshop, questioning expert knowledge came from both sides. Project owners also question and put in debate the legitimacy of the militant expertise they face. The rise of new forms of expertise and the battle that occurred around a form of “legitimate expert knowledge” opens new questions and new perspectives.

## Bibliography

- Barthe, Yannick (2005) “ Discuter des choix techniques”, *Revue Projet*, 284,(1), 80-84.
- Blatrix, Cécile (2000) “La ‘démocratie participative’, de mai 68 aux mobilisations anti-TGV. Processus de consolidation d’institutions sociales émergentes.” Phdthesis, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne - Paris I.
- Blatrix, Cécile (2012) “Chapitre 8 / Concertation et débat public” in dans *Politiques publiques 2. Changer la société*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.), « Académique », pp. 213-242. Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.).
- Blondiaux, Loïc (2008) “Démocratie délibérative vs. démocratie agonistique ?” *Raisons politiques*, no. 30 (June): 131–47.
- Blondiaux, Loïc, and Jean-Michel Fourniau (2011) “Un bilan des recherches sur la participation du public en démocratie : beaucoup de bruit pour rien ?, Abstract.” *Participations*, no. 1 (October): 8–35.
- Fortin, Marie-José, and Yann Fournis (2016). “Une participation conflictuelle : la trajectoire territoriale des mobilisations contre le gaz de schiste au Québec.” *Participations*, no. 13 (January): 119– 44.
- Griggs, Steven, and David Howarth (2002). “An Alliance of Interest and Identity? Explaining The Campaign Against Manchester Airport’s Second Runway.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7 (1): 43–58.
- (2004) “A Transformative Political Campaign? The New Rhetoric of Protest against Airport Expansion in the UK.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9 (2): 181–201.
- Halpern, Charlotte (2007) “Le transport aérien à l’épreuve de ses conflits : les effets de la transformation du rapport public-privé sur les formes d’élaboration et de légitimation des choix aéroportuaires nationaux en France et en Allemagne.” *Politiques et management public* 25 (3): 169–84.
- Henry Emmanuel, Gilbert Claude, Jouzel Jean-Noël *et al* (2015) *Dictionnaire critique de l’expertise. Santé, travail, environnement*, Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.), « Références », 376 pp.
- Jasanoff, S. (2003), “ (No) Accounting for Expertise? ”, *Science and Public Policy*, 30(3):157-62.
- Mermet, Laurent (2010) *Épilogue. Débattre sans savoir pourquoi : la polychrésie du débat public appelle le pluralisme théorique de la part des chercheurs*. La Découverte.
- Neveu, Erik (2015) *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*. Vol. 6e éd. Repères. Paris: La Découverte.
- Pistre, Pierre (2011) “Mobilisation dans les campagnes toulousaines : conflit d’aménagement et tensions locales.” *Espaces et sociétés*, no. 143 (March): 151–69.
- Subra, Philippe (2004) “Roissy et le troisième aéroport : réalités économiques et manipulation géopolitique.” *Hérodote*, no. 114: 122–80.
- Zittoun, Philippe (2013) *La fabrique politique des politiques publiques. Une approche pragmatique de l’action publique*. Académique. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po (P.F.N.S.P.).