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## Title Page

### Article title :

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# Adapting public policy processes to sustainability transitions specificities : Lessons from French pesticide reduction plans

## Abstract

Sustainability transitions present specificities that call for an adaptation of public policies. So far, little research has focused on adapting policy processes, despite their importance in shaping policy instruments. To fill this gap, we analyzed the elaboration of the French pesticide reduction plans, which aimed at a 50% reduction over 10 years, without succeeding. We used the management situation concept and the transitions of sociotechnical systems framework to understand what limited the State's capacity to manage the creation of a transition plan. We show three sources of interdependent blockages: (i) Deficiencies in collective sensemaking processes; (ii) Non-systemic instruments definition approaches; (iii) Implementation based on delegations and fragmented action. We propose a framework for adapting policy processes to transitions characteristics and show its complementarity to *Transition Management*. We show that a pragmatist management approach allows to link transitions theories and operational action. We believe these results can provide inspiration for policy-makers.

**Keywords:** pesticide reduction; lock-in; policy process; transition management; management science; sociotechnical transitions

## 1. Introduction

In Europe, reducing environmental and health nuisances associated with the use of pesticides is now a public policy objective. European Directive 2009/128/EC thus requires Member States to adopt national plans aimed at reducing the "*risks and effects of pesticides on human health and the environment*" and at limiting dependence on pesticides. However, to date, the sale of pesticides has not decreased on the European continent (Möhring et al., 2020) and the reduction of pesticides appears to be a wicked problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Guichard et al., 2017). Developing public policies for the transition to reducing pesticides is indeed a complex objective because of the central place occupied by these technologies in European cropping systems (Butault et al., 2010; Kuokkanen et al., 2017; Möhring et al., 2020). In several countries, a lock-in phenomenon has been highlighted, that excludes breakthrough innovations that are not compatible with the sociotechnical system built around pesticides (Wilson and Tisdell, 2001; Vanloqueren and Baret, 2009; Lamine et al., 2010; Guichard et al., 2017; Kuokkanen et al., 2017; Magrini et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2018). This system is stabilized by the interdependencies among its components, the alignment of its standards and the difficulty of acting on material artifacts and networks (Geels, 2004; Belmin et al., 2018). Achieving significant reduction therefore requires collective action among the different actors of the system, in order to prevent the transformation of one part of the system from being blocked by another, and therefore to allow a radical redesign of production systems simultaneously at the level of farms, territories, sectors and markets.

44 This necessity need to overcome the lock-in is a specific feature of sustainability transitions  
45 policies that has been analyzed within the *Sustainability Transitions Studies* literature (Köhler et  
46 al., 2019). This literature invites us to take an interest in both policy mixes and policy processes,  
47 as policy processes influence the choice and content of instruments (Loorbach, 2010; Voss and  
48 Bornemann, 2011; Kivimaa and Kern, 2016; Rogge and Reichardt, 2016). To our knowledge,  
49 little research has focused on the improvement of the tools used by policy-makers to manage  
50 transition policy processes, especially around the issue of pesticide reduction. This paper  
51 therefore aims at filling this literature gap by identifying elements that limit a State's capacity to  
52 develop public policies adapted to the transition towards the reduction of pesticide use.

53  
54 To reflect on this question, it seemed crucial to us to start from a detailed study of current  
55 practices of policy makers. France, where the State is considered an important actor in the  
56 agricultural sector, constitutes a particularly heuristic case study. We analyzed the case of  
57 pesticide reduction policies in France: the Ecophyto plans. The first version, launched in 2008,  
58 aimed to reduce pesticides by 50% over 10 years, but did not allow the decrease of their use on  
59 the territory (Government of the French Republic, 2020). Several authors thus decried the  
60 unsuitability of the Ecophyto plans (Martin and Munier-Jolain, 2014; Ansaloni, 2017; Guichard et  
61 al., 2017), but no study focused on the policy processes that led to the definition of these plans.  
62 To analyze this case, we considered the development of the Ecophyto plans as a collective  
63 action that needed to be managed. We mobilized the framework of "management situations"  
64 proposed by Girin (2011), which puts forward criteria for defining a collective situation as  
65 *manageable*, and the framework of sociotechnical system transitions.

66  
67 In the rest of this article, we first present our theoretical framework (part 2) and our research  
68 design (part 3). Then we present our results on how the collective action was organized in  
69 Ecophyto (part 4). On this basis, in the findings and discussion part (part 5), we isolate the  
70 elements that limited the State's capacity to manage the creation of a transition plan (part 5.1).  
71 This allows us to formalize a framework for analyzing policy processes and their adaptation to  
72 transitions in the cross-sectional discussion (part 5.2) and conclude in part 6.

73

## 74 **2. Theoretical Framework**

75

### 76 **2.1. From Transition Management to management situations**

77

78 To build our theoretical framework, we started from an analysis of the Transition Management  
79 approach (TM) (Rotmans et al., 2001; Kemp et al., 2007; Loorbach, 2010). TM offers a  
80 prescriptive framework for policy-makers to shape sustainability transitions (Köhler et al., 2019).  
81 It is structured in four steps (Loorbach, 2010) :

- 82 (i) Creating a "Transition Arena": "*a small network of frontrunners with different*  
83 *backgrounds*" where their various perceptions of a problem are confronted in order to  
84 build a shared vision of the future;
- 85 (ii) Translating this vision into a "Transition Agenda" integrated into networks and  
86 organizations, which sets intermediary objectives;
- 87 (iii) Operationalizing these agendas through concrete actions and experimentation;

88 (iv) Monitoring and evaluating the transition process.  
89 TM offers an interesting perspective on possible ways to structure collective transition  
90 experiments and has been tested in several sectors (Vinnari and Vinnari, 2014; Kelly et al.,  
91 2018). Nonetheless, it has some limitations, which are underlined by Loorbach (2010): it has  
92 namely been conceptualized as a “*shadow track in which new visions, ideas, and agendas can*  
93 *be developed in a more innovative way than within the context of regular policy processes*”. It  
94 therefore does not question how to adapt institutionalized policy processes to transition  
95 specificities. It is structured more as a way to *influence* standard policy processes through  
96 exploration, experiments and learning than as an approach to *manage* them (Wittmayer et al.,  
97 2018). It does not give tools or criteria to ensure that a collective involved in policy-making will  
98 be able to coordinate action successfully and reach its goal (Dumez, 2014). This is why, in order  
99 to reflect on an institutionalized policy process elaborated to manage a transition, we felt the  
100 need to use a theoretical framework specifically designed to analyze a management process  
101 itself: the concept of “management situation” (Girin, 2011), which stems from a pragmatist  
102 approach (Aggeri, 2017).

103  
104 A management situation is a situation where collective action is made *manageable*. This  
105 concept was defined by Girin (2011) who presents it as a situation where “*participants are*  
106 *united and must accomplish, in a determined time, a collective action leading to a result*  
107 *submitted to an external evaluation*”. This definition calls for several comments:

- 108 • The participants in a situation are both active in achieving the result and affected by the  
109 external evaluation. Other actors can contribute to the situation without being affected  
110 by the evaluation, in which case they are not considered participants (Girin et al., 2016).
- 111 • The idea of “result” does not imply that there is collective adherence to the objective:  
112 each participant may have their own reasons for participating (obligation, opportunity,  
113 etc.), but the obligation or intent to achieve the result dominates and unites the actions  
114 of the collective (Piroux et al., 2005).
- 115 • The notion of evaluation highlights that achievement of the result is not defined by the  
116 collective itself but rather responds to external criteria.
- 117 • A management situation can be composed of several nested sub-situations. These are  
118 generally linked together by the creation of delegations.

119  
120 At the start of a management situation, participants are faced with strong uncertainties about the  
121 actions to be taken. They initiate a “process of inquiry”, which is a sensemaking process (Weick,  
122 2005) aimed at creating knowledge to reduce uncertainties and create a “*coherent and*  
123 *meaningful*” understanding (Journé and Raulet-Croset, 2008). The inquiry does not correspond  
124 to a revelation of the attributes of a system but rather to the actors’ construction of their vision of  
125 this system and its means of management. The confrontation of the participants’ subjective  
126 interpretations allows progressive simplification of the problem, and *in fine* the emergence of  
127 interpretations that may differ but are compatible for collective action. This simplification allows  
128 the translation of the collective interpretation into actions (Journé and Raulet-Croset, 2008,  
129 2012; Charrier et al., 2020). The management situation concept makes it possible to draw a  
130 framework for analyzing the evolution of the constituent elements of a situation to be managed,  
131 in particular when the latter presents strong uncertainties (Journé and Raulet-Croset, 2008;

132 Charrier et al. 2020). It is particularly relevant in the case of the Ecophyto plans, as it was a  
133 situation in which the participants had to collectively define the means of achieving a pesticide  
134 reduction goal despite strong uncertainties on the levers to be activated for that purpose.  
135

## 136 **2.2. Socio-technical systems transitions as systemic management situations**

137  
138 To analyze the management of a transition towards sustainability, the *Sustainability Transitions*  
139 *Studies* literature highlights several specificities to be taken into account (Köhler et. al, 2019):

- 140 1) Transitions are a collective phenomenon by nature: they correspond to the  
141 transformation of a sociotechnical system, which can itself be defined as “*a collective of*  
142 *stakeholders, their networks, their practices and knowledge, the technologies they use,*  
143 *their collective representations, and the standards and rules they adopt*” (Meynard et al.,  
144 2017 – from Rip and Kemp, 1998).
- 145 2) Supporting a transition involves defining multi-dimensional actions on the scale of the  
146 sociotechnical system. This multi-dimensionality integrates the spatial dimension (from  
147 the local to the international level), the position in relation to the dominant system (niche,  
148 regime, landscape – Geels, 2002) and the various links in a system. In the agri-food  
149 sector, these links correspond to all human and non-human actors of the chain from the  
150 production of agricultural inputs, the agricultural production, to consumption and waste  
151 management.
- 152 3) The transformations of the different links must be done in such a way as to allow their  
153 co-evolution and avoid blockages of one part by another, linked to lock-in.
- 154 4) Transitions towards sustainability present a strong “normative directionality”: the targeted  
155 objective integrates by definition better health of the considered ecosystems.

156  
157 We will use the qualification of "systemic" to describe the elements (innovations, instruments,  
158 plans, actions, etc.) that integrate the multi-dimensionality of the sociotechnical systems and  
159 aim to act on these different dimensions to support the transition process.

160  
161 The framework of management situations is applicable to transitions of sociotechnical systems  
162 and sheds unique light on them, for three reasons. First of all, the collective dimension of  
163 transitions makes it relevant to analyze them using a framework that formalizes organized  
164 collective action. Secondly, the significance of the uncertainties and controversies around a  
165 transition makes it important to mobilize a management framework where the starting point is  
166 defined as an indeterminate situation, and where understanding of the actors is built as it goes.  
167 Finally, the normative objective of a transition (sustainability) echoes the notion of the result of a  
168 management situation: collective action is indeed directed toward a result that can be assessed.

## 169 170 **3. Methodology**

### 171 172 **3.1. Case study description**

173  
174 In 2007, France set an ambitious target of reducing the use of pesticides by 50% over 10 years,

175 embodied in the “Ecophyto Plans” (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2008; Ministry of  
176 Agriculture and Fisheries and Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, 2015;  
177 Government of the French Republic, 2019). Studying the design of these plans seemed to us to  
178 be heuristic because the State positioned itself as the manager of a collective action, leaving  
179 ample room for multi-actor processes. The plans consisted of a wide mix of public policy  
180 instruments, some binding, others aimed at training, research or support for the actors.  
181 However, despite several years of implementation, the use of pesticides increased in France by  
182 25% between the periods 2009-2011 and 2016-2018 (Government of the French Republic,  
183 2020 – Fig. 2). Thus, this case study provides a certain historical perspective on a process that  
184 evolved over several years and under different governments.

185

### 186 **3.2. Data collection**

187

188 We carried out semi-structured interviews with the actors involved in the construction of the  
189 Ecophyto plans. To identify the first informants, we combined an analysis of archives and  
190 articles and conducted several exploratory interviews. We then proceeded according to a  
191 snowball approach, with each actor indicating other actors to contact. We continued the  
192 interviews until no more new information emerged and we had saturated the diversity of actors  
193 involved. The differences in the number of interviews by category of actor mainly resulted from  
194 the variation in the size of the structures and the difference in the number of people in charge of  
195 the Ecophyto plans who have succeeded one another within the same structure. In total, 26  
196 semi-structured interviews, lasting a total of 37 hours and 20 minutes were conducted. Our work  
197 is based on these interviews (table 1) and a corpus of secondary data made up of written  
198 archives on the Ecophyto plans (table 2).

199

### 200 **3.3. Data analysis**

201

202 The interviews conducted were transcribed and the collected data analyzed according to the  
203 principles of Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). This method “*allows theory building*  
204 *from field data*” (Hannachi et al., 2019). The coding (Ayache and Dumez, 2012) was done with  
205 NVivo® software through a thematic analysis. In order to avoid memorization and social  
206 desirability biases (Butori and Parguel, 2010), we used the principle of data triangulation (Flick  
207 et al., 2004). The rest of the analysis consisted of using a narrative approach (Abell, 2004;  
208 Dumez and Jeunemaître, 2005) on the development of Ecophyto plans, highlighting the starting  
209 point of the dynamics, sequences with relatively homogeneous dynamics, and the tipping points  
210 that initiated transitions between sequences. This method enabled us to identify several  
211 constituent pillars of collective action organized for the development of the plans and to  
212 characterize their evolution. Finally, the narration was summarized and formalized in an  
213 illustrative narrative diagram (Fig. 1).

214

215

216

Type of actor	Number of people interviewed
Ministry in charge of agriculture	4
Ministry in charge of the environment	2
Research institutes and technical institutes	7
Agricultural advisory organizations	5
Environmental NGOs	2
Organizations representing agricultural companies (pesticides companies and cooperatives)	4
Agricultural union and political figures	2
Total	26

Table 1: Number of people interviewed according to the type of structure

Reference	Document type
French Republic, 2006. Interministerial Plan for the Reduction of Risks Related to Pesticides 2006-2009.	French government action plan on pesticides preceding the Ecophyto plans
Aubertot, J.-N., Barbier, J.M., Carpentier, A., Gril, J.J., Guichard, L., Lucas, P., Savary, S., Savini, I., Voltz, M., 2005. Pesticides, agriculture and environnement. Reducing pesticide use and limiting environmental impacts.	Expert report from the National Institute for Agronomic Research on pesticides
Paillotin, G., 2008. Final report of the Chairman of the "Ecophyto 2018" Operational Committee.	Provisional report of the 1st Ecophyto plan produced by the Paillotin Operational Committee bringing together the various stakeholders
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2008. Ecophyto 2018 plan to reduce pesticide use.	1st Ecophyto plan (2008-2018)

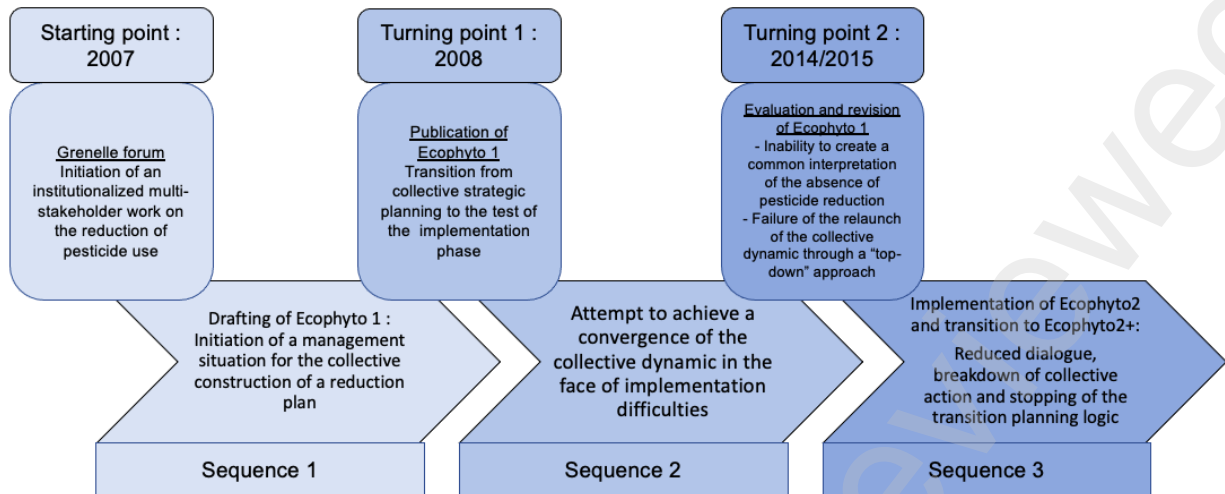


Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2009. Ecophyto Plan 2018 - Action sheets.	Sheets detailing the actions of the 1st Ecophyto plan, produced by the Agriculture Ministry's administration
Butault, J.-P., Dedryver, C.-A., Gary, C., Guichard, L., Jacquet, F., Meynard, J.-M., Nicot, P., Pitrat, M., Reau, R., Sauphanor, B., 2010. Summary of the Ecophyto R&D study report.	"Ecophyto R&D" report by the National Institute for Agronomic Research on pesticides to shed light on the feasibility of achieving the objective set by the 1st plan
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, 2015. Ecophyto 2 Plan.	Ecophyto 2 Plan (2015-2025)
Potier, D., 2014. Pesticides and agro-ecology, the fields of possibilities.	"Potier" report: evaluation report of the 1st Ecophyto plan
Government of the French Republic, 2018. Action plan on phytopharmaceutical products and agriculture less dependent on pesticides.	Pesticide use reduction plan drafted in 2018 following a multi-stakeholder conference organized by the State – subsequently integrated into the Ecophyto 2+ plan
Government of the French Republic, 2019. Ecophyto 2+ Plan.	Ecophyto 2+ Plan (2019-2025)
Court of Auditors, 2019. Summary procedure S2019-2659 - The results of the Ecophyto plans.	Summary evaluation of Ecophyto plans by the French Court of Auditors
Philippe, E., 2020. Response of the Prime Minister to the summary procedure of the Court of Auditors on the Ecophyto plans.	Response of the Prime Minister to the summary procedure of the French Court of Auditors on the Ecophyto plans.

Table 2: List of archives on Ecophyto plans analyzed

#### 4. Results

We present the results in the form of a narration. The overall dynamic of the Ecophyto plans is summarized in Fig. 1. For easier reading, table 3 presents a summary of the main instruments contained in the successive plans.



232  
233 **Fig. 1: Narrative diagram of the evolution of the management situation for the transition toward**  
234 **pesticide reduction**

235  
236  
237 **4.1. Analepsis: Increased focus on reducing overall pesticide use**

238  
239 Since the 1980s, the use of pesticides has faced increasing criticism for its environmental and  
240 health impacts, gradually leading to important controversies (Pellissier, 2021). In order to  
241 contribute to the debate, in 2005, the National Institute for Agronomic Research (Institut  
242 National de la Recherche Agronomique or INRA) produced a report on the impacts of pesticides  
243 (Aubertot et al., 2005), which defended the need and the technical feasibility to reduce the  
244 overall use of phytosanitary products. Far from ending the controversies, the publication of the  
245 report highlighted the differences of opinion between actors. On the one hand, professional  
246 agricultural organizations – technical institutes, majority unions, main advisory agent,  
247 cooperatives and industry representatives – opposed any significant reduction target and  
248 criticized the methods used in the study. On the other hand, environmental NGOs and actors in  
249 the Organic Agriculture sector, supported by several INRA researchers. Although these two  
250 groups were not completely homogeneous, this disagreement regarding the feasibility and  
251 desirability of an objective of global reduction of the use of pesticides constituted a dividing line  
252 which would be maintained over time.

253  
254 In an attempt to strengthen the arguments in favor of reducing pesticides, ministries  
255 commissioned a new report from the INRA in 2007, entitled “Ecophyto R&D” (Butault et al.,  
256 2010), with the objective of identifying the techniques available to enable farmers to ambitiously  
257 reduce the use of pesticides.

258  
259 **4.2. Starting point – The Grenelle Environment Forum: Initiation an**  
260 **institutionalized multi-stakeholder work on the reduction of pesticide use**

261  
262 In 2007, following pressure from civil society, the newly elected President, Nicolas Sarkozy,  
263 organized the Grenelle Environment Forum – a broad consultation process on environmental

264 issues (Boy et al., 2012). This culminated in setting an objective of "*reducing the use of*  
265 *pesticides by 50% over 10 years, if possible*". A 50% reduction was seen by the NGOs and  
266 INRA researchers as the approximate level where it becomes necessary to radically redesign  
267 farming systems, in a way that would also allow to meet other sustainability goals. The wording  
268 "*if possible*" was added following pressure from agricultural organizations (Guichard et al.,  
269 2017).

270

### 271 **4.3. Sequence 1 – The drafting of Ecophyto 1: Initiation of a management** 272 **situation for the collective construction of a reduction plan**

273

#### 274 4.3.1. A positive multi-actor dynamic in search of consensus

275

276 It was therefore in a context of actor division that the administrative departments of the Ministry  
277 of Agriculture had to ensure the drafting of a plan for the operationalization of the Grenelle  
278 Forum's objective. Anxious to preserve the multi-actor dynamic resulting from the Grenelle  
279 Forum, the Minister of Agriculture, Michel Barnier, launched an operational committee, called  
280 the "Paillotin Operational committee" after its chairman, which brought together all the  
281 stakeholders to collectively develop the national plan. The actors actively engaged in the  
282 Operational committee tasks, which was seen as a constructive place to work despite  
283 fundamental disagreements (table 4, verbatim 1)

284

#### 285 4.3.2. The attempt to create compatible interpretations through science and expertise

286

287 The departments of the Ministry of Agriculture organized working groups in such a way as to  
288 facilitate an exploration of the possible existing options. Researchers and experts were asked to  
289 present the state of the science. The orientations of the "Ecophyto R&D" study were adapted to  
290 shed light on the "possibility" and the conditions of achieving the Grenelle Forum's objective,  
291 and thus legitimize it (Aulagnier, 2021). However, this mode of exploration failed to convince the  
292 agricultural world, which did not accept the results of Ecophyto R&D (Butault et al., 2010). In  
293 their eyes, the report did not sufficiently detail the concrete implications of the objective of 50%  
294 reduction over 10 years for each link of the agri-food systems.

295

#### 296 4.3.3. A constrained and weakly generative process of translation of the objective into actions

297

298 The collective was not totally free in their choice of how to translate this exploration into  
299 concrete actions. As early as November 2007, when the Paillotin Operational committee's work  
300 had not yet started, the Minister of Agriculture had already mentioned the centrality of 3  
301 instruments: research and development, training for farmers, and strengthening the bio-  
302 aggressor surveillance networks (Aulagnier, 2021), hereby reusing old ideas of public action  
303 (table 4, verbatim 2). Within this limited universe, the stakeholders proposed ideas coming out  
304 of the working groups, or from work and ideas that emerged within their respective structures.

305

306 The plan proposed by the Paillotin Operational committee detailed and expanded on the  
307 elements proposed by the Minister and added a few aspects to it, such as the creation of  
monitoring indicators or a communication component.

308  
 309 One of the main instruments, the Plant Health Bulletin, a bulletin alerting farmers to  
 310 phytosanitary pressure in their regions (table 3) was a recycling of agricultural warnings, an  
 311 instrument that pre-existed the plan. The Bulletin was not designed for the Ecophyto plan, which  
 312 in fact constituted a funding opportunity for it (Guichard et al., 2017; Aulagnier, 2021;  
 313 Interviews).

314  
 315 The DEPHY network of innovative farms (table 3) constitutes an exception in the way it was  
 316 designed and is therefore considered by many actors to be the major innovation of the Ecophyto  
 317 plan (Barbier, 2017). The DEPHY network was the result of a long design process by the INRA  
 318 researchers, commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture (Butault et al. 2010). Nevertheless, the  
 319 temporal objective (achieving a 50% reduction over 10 years) was not sufficiently taken into  
 320 account into the design process : the designers of DEPHY tried to develop an instrument that  
 321 could support pesticide reduction, without assessing the time it would take to reach its goal and  
 322 adapting the instrument with this temporal constraint in mind (table 4, verbatim 3).

323

324 4.3.4. A consensual plan, but weakly binding and not systemic

325

326 The instruments proposed by the Paillotin Operational committee mainly targeted farmers and  
 327 their advisers (Guichard et al., 2017). They did not take into account the effects of their  
 328 practices' interdependence with other links in the sociotechnical system, such as cooperatives,  
 329 agro-industries or even consumers (table 3).

330

331 Despite the extensive divisions within the group, the plan was validated by all the actors.  
 332 Indeed, the very numerous proposals seemed to go in the right direction for the NGOs (table 4,  
 333 verbatim 4). The proposals were mostly non-binding, and some represented significant funding  
 334 opportunities for agricultural organizations, encouraging them to stay in the discussion  
 335 (Aulagnier, 2021). Thus, the actors managed to agree on proposals for strategic actions without  
 336 agreeing on the final targeted results.

337

338

Main instruments	Description	Method of delegation
<b><i>Ecophyto 1</i></b>		
DEPHY farm network	Network of pilot farms accompanied by a technical adviser, with the aim of reducing the use of pesticides and developing new technical references	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic steering committee made up of representatives of the actors involved in Ecophyto</li> <li>- Operational steering committee hosted mainly within a public organization representing and advising farmers (Chambers of</li> </ul>

		Agriculture France)
"Certiphytos" phytosanitary certificates	Training allowing the obtaining of an individual certificate, compulsory for all professionals using, advising or marketing pesticides	- The training courses were delivered by competing private organizations. Programs were defined by regulation, and could be controlled by the administration (Ansaloni, 2017)
Plant Health Bulletin	Free information bulletin on phytosanitary pressure around a crop in a given region, based on a network of observations, and aimed at avoiding phytosanitary treatments not justified by the presence of pests.	- Creation of a regional committee for epidemio-surveillance, chaired by the president of the regional chamber of agriculture and bringing together agricultural organizations and the State administration - The regional State administration verified that the decisions taken were in conformity with those taken at the national level. - The data was collected and analyzed by various agricultural organizations (Aulagnier, 2021)
Fee for Diffuse Pollution	Levy on the sale of pesticides used to finance the actions of the Ecophyto plans	- Levies were taken by the agency in charge of biodiversity and managed via the Water Agencies. - The allocation of funding within the Ecophyto plans was validated by the stakeholders, grouped within the Advisory Governance Committee - which would be abolished in 2016
<b><i>Ecophyto 2 (additions compared to Ecophyto 1)</i></b>		

Pesticide Saving Certificates	Certificates aimed at obligating distributors of pesticides to promote the implementation, on farms, of actions recognized as enabling the reduced use of pesticides. Each practice is linked to a quantified level of product savings, and distributors must achieve a certain level of savings defined at the national level. The financial penalty originally provided for was subsequently removed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The recognized actions were defined by a committee of technical experts led by the National Institute of Agronomic Research, on the basis of proposals that could come from the actors</li> <li>- The distributor obligation levels were defined by agents from the Ministry of Agriculture (Aulagnier, 2021)</li> </ul>
<b><i>Ecophyto 2+ (additions compared to Ecophyto 2)</i></b>		
Advising/sales separation	Prohibition for organizations providing advisory services to farmers from selling pesticides, and vice versa	N/A

339

340

Table 3: Main instruments of Ecophyto 1, 2 and 2+ plans and their terms of delegation

341

(excluding substance prohibition) These instruments were deemed to be central to the

342

Ecophyto plans on the basis of (i) the extent of their financing relative to the total financing of

343

the plans or (ii) the importance given by the actors during the interviews or within the gray

344

literature

345

346

347

#### **4.4. Turning Point 1 - Publication of the Ecophyto 1 plan: The implementation test**

348

349

The Ecophyto 1 plan was published in 2008 and largely incorporated the Paillotin Operational committee proposals. The first years were dedicated to operational implementation of the plan.

350

351

352

#### **4.5. Sequence 2 - Search for consensus in the face of implementation difficulties**

353

354

##### 4.5.1. Lack of emergence of compatible interpretations

355

356

The ministry set up numerous working groups to monitor the plan components and discuss the

357

points of disagreement that persisted, in particular on the most controversial aspects: the

358

possibility and desirability of reducing the use of products, and the definition of appropriate

359

monitoring indicators (Aulagnier, 2021). These working groups were appreciated by the various

360

actors for their ability to provide spaces for discussion and mutual acquaintance for people who

361

did not normally work together (agricultural and environmental actors in particular) (table 4,

362

verbatim 5). However, little by little, the limits of collective action started appearing. Despite the

363

density of the discussion arenas, the actors failed to find common ground. The slowness of this

364

process weakened certain actors' confidence in collective action (table 4, verbatim 6)

365

366 4.5.2 Implementation fragmentation

367

368 Moreover, the richness of the discussion spaces also made them difficult to follow. Certain  
369 actors, especially NGOs, lacked the resources to be present in all of the working groups.  
370 Indeed, the “Ecophyto system” gradually became more and more complex. The Ministry of  
371 Agriculture, due to insufficient dedicated human resources and a desire to involve stakeholders,  
372 delegated a large part of the implementation to different actors (table 3). For each important  
373 instrument, groups of varying composition made operational decisions impacting the functioning  
374 of the instruments themselves. Full monitoring of implementation was almost impossible (table  
375 4, verbatim 7). Therefore, the fragmented aspect of the plans was reinforced. There were few  
376 links between the different instrument management groups, which could then evolve over the  
377 course of the discussions without necessarily seeking convergence with the others (table 4,  
378 verbatim 8).

379

380 Moreover, these delegations had another effect: the ministries sought to use this mode of  
381 operation to enlist the actors from the dominant system in the dynamics, and facilitate their  
382 adhesion (table 4, verbatim 9). In France, agricultural organizations have an important influence  
383 and agricultural policies have historically been carried out on a “co-management” model  
384 (Aulagnier, 2021). This structuring allowed the delegated actors to acquire a certain power over  
385 the shaping of the instruments for which they were responsible. They were thus sometimes able  
386 to attenuate the objectives set out in the plan. Ansaloni (2017) shows, for example, that the  
387 private actors in charge of training sometimes redefined the content of Certiphyto phytosanitary  
388 certificates (table 3) to avoid presenting alternative techniques to pesticides.

389

390 4.5.3. The impossibility of creating compatible interpretations for the lack of reduced pesticide  
391 use

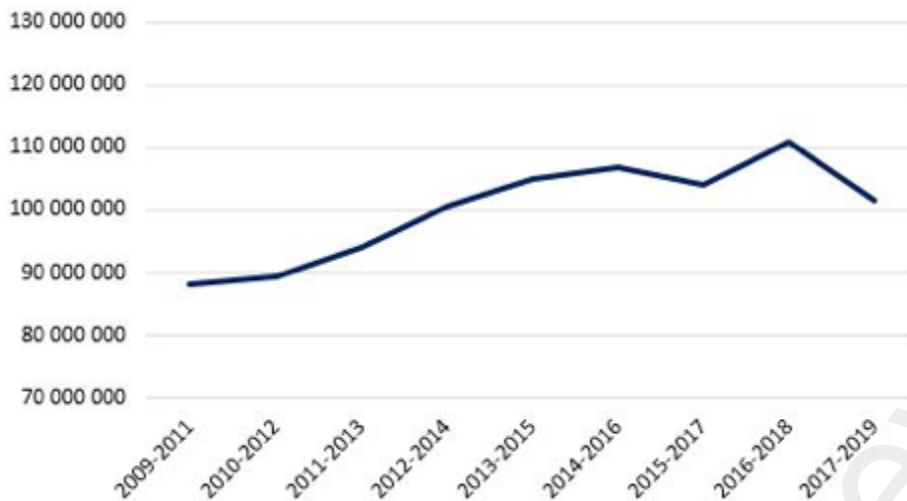
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393 As the implementation of the actions started, which sometimes took several years, it became  
394 apparent that the 50% reduction goal would not be achieved as rapidly as had been hoped. The  
395 expected reductions failed to materialize (Fig. 2).

396

397 The explanations for this absence of reduction differed among the participants. The  
398 environmental actors saw it as a lack of will on the part of the agricultural profession and a proof  
399 of the need to take more drastic actions. The agricultural organizations saw in it the illustration  
400 that they were expecting that the objectives set were unattainable and should be modified. The  
401 latter also defended the significant efforts made by farmers, and believed that the plan's  
402 indicators did not give a realistic view of the changes under way. Indeed, there were no  
403 indicators or processes developed to create adequate knowledge allowing actors to explain the  
404 evolution in the use of pesticides (table 4, verbatim 10). This lack of compatible interpretation  
405 had the effect of reinforcing the existing divisions within the collective.

406



407  
 408 Fig. 2: Evolution of pesticide use in the agriculture sector in France (NODU in ha - three-year  
 409 average). Source: French Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2021  
 410 NODU is the indicator created to monitor the Ecophyto plans. It is calculated from sales data of  
 411 pesticide distributors and shows the evolution of the average number of annual applications. It  
 412 corresponds to the surface that would be treated yearly with pesticides at the maximum  
 413 approved doses.

414  
 415 4.5.4. Relaunch of the inquiry process through the mobilization of expertise  
 416

417 The dynamic around Ecophyto then continued to deteriorate little by little, but the actors  
 418 remained involved. In 2012, following the election of President François Hollande, a new  
 419 minister, Stéphane Le Foll, took over as head of the Ministry of Agriculture. He claimed to want  
 420 to “*launch a new phase*” (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, 2012) and started a new  
 421 exploratory dynamic to identify new possible policy instruments. This dynamic was based on the  
 422 commissioning of several reports, in particular on agricultural extension, taxation or Pesticide  
 423 Saving Certificates (table 3).  
 424

425 **4.6. Turning Point 2 - Evaluation and revision of the Ecophyto 1 plan: Failure to**  
 426 **relaunch momentum through “top-down” management**  
 427

428 4.6.1. An inquiry process far from stakeholders  
 429

430 In 2014, an overall evaluation of the Ecophyto 1 plan was launched. To give it political weight,  
 431 the administration asked a deputy to take charge of the work. Rather than conduct a collective  
 432 dialogue like in the first Ecophyto working groups, the deputy consulted with all the stakeholders  
 433 separately, conducted field visits and consulted the expert reports previously commissioned. He  
 434 also assumed the political dimension of his work (table 4, verbatim 11).  
 435

436 Based on this work, he wrote a report with several recommendations (Potier, 2014). This report  
 437 would serve as a basis for officials from the Ministries of Agriculture and the Environment, who



438 joined the management of the plan, to revise the first plan and draft an initial version of the  
439 Ecophyto 2 plan. Nevertheless, the departments of the ministries were constrained by the  
440 financing already committed for Ecophyto 1. It seemed difficult to stop financing the positions  
441 and major actions of the first plan (table 4, verbatim 12). They then consulted the stakeholders  
442 again.

443  
444 We witness here a shift in the design process of the new Ecophyto 2 plan. The ministries  
445 adopted a more “top-down” approach of consultation and drafting within the administrations.  
446 The inquiry process was no longer entirely carried out by the actors in the management  
447 situation, but was taken over by the administration.

#### 448 449 4.6.2. A marginal modification of the plan

450  
451 In terms of policy instruments, the deputy concluded that the first plan had failed. Nevertheless  
452 he proposed to maintain its main instruments while strengthening certain targeted aspects  
453 (Potier, 2014):

- 454 ● Reinforce the consideration of human health protection aspects (protection of users,  
455 local residents, consumers...);
- 456 ● Act at the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) level to ensure that it supports Ecophyto  
457 objectives;
- 458 ● Better take into account sectoral and territorial specificities within the plan;
- 459 ● Reinforce constraints on actors of the value chain others than farmers. To this end, he  
460 supported a proposal initially coming from an INRA report (Guillou et al., 2013): the  
461 Pesticide Saving Certificates (table 3). Those initially aimed to financially compel the  
462 distributors of pesticides to support alternative solutions;
- 463 ● Increase significantly the taxation of pesticides.

464  
465 These proposals highlight two notable dynamics. First, a desire to display greater political  
466 voluntarism by mobilizing instruments that are both symbolic and economically structuring  
467 (taxation and CAP), and activating binding instruments (Product Savings Certificates).  
468 Secondly, the greater consideration given to human health protection aspects shows a desire to  
469 broaden the plan, despite the criticisms made that it was already excessively large and weakly  
470 prioritized. One can see this as a loss of sight of the initial objective of the plan : the redesign of  
471 cropping systems was initially seen as the direct technical translation of the 50% reduction  
472 objective. In this report, it became one lever among others. Indeed, it emerged from our  
473 interviews that several actors, especially certain administrative agents or members of  
474 professional agricultural organizations, had analyzed Ecophyto 1 as a failure of the vision of  
475 change through the profound redesign of cropping systems. This gave more weight to their  
476 vision of a need for an incremental transformation based on risk reduction and improved product  
477 use efficiency, without radical change in practices.

478  
479 Most of the recommendations in the report were taken up by the ministries, with the exception of  
480 the most divisive points, the CAP and taxation, and this despite the strong expectations of  
481 “alternative actors” on those two points.

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#### 4.6.3. A failure to relaunch the collective dynamic

These choices, as well as the top-down procedure implemented, prevented relaunching the collective dynamic. Although the actors saluted the work of the deputy and the balance in consulting the various stakeholders, it did not make it possible to draw a shared interpretation of the sources of the failure, nor to identify consensus-generating ways to move forward. Moreover, his report constituted an ambiguous conclusion that satisfied no one. Indeed, the "alternative" actors were in search of in-depth transformations of the plans faced with the acknowledgment of failure, actions on the CAP and relaunch of ambition. The actors of the dominant system were still opposed to the objective of reduction and put off by the introduction of financial constraints through the Pesticide Saving Certificates.

The attempt to establish Pesticide Saving Certificates also reflected a desire to extend the targets of public action to actors other than farmers and their advisers, in order to establish a broader movement within the sociotechnical system. Nonetheless, this argument was still not pushed as far as it could have gone. By being limited to cooperatives, many actors of the system and components of the lock-in were still not taken into account – whether upstream or downstream, such as the processing industries or consumers for example.

### **4.7. Sequence 3 - Implementation of Ecophyto 2 and transition to Ecophyto 2+: breakdown of collective action**

#### 4.7.1. A change in governance that confirmed the deterioration of the collective dynamic

The dynamic was further weakened by the elimination of several bodies of governance, which the administrations considered to be ineffective. This was the case, for example, of the steering committees of each axis of the plan, or of the governance advisory committee, whose purpose was to have Ecophyto expenses collectively approved. This transformation was experienced as a reduction in transparency by all the participants and a deterioration in the collective work (table 4, verbatim 13 and 14).

In 2019, the government published a new version of the plan, the Ecophyto2+ plan. Administrative management was further extended by integrating the Ministries in charge of health and research, which, for the stakeholders, further burdened the organization of meetings and degraded governance by increasing the number of actors and ministers to coordinate.

#### 4.7.2. A change in the use of Ecophyto spaces

Little by little, the action of the collective was transformed by the simultaneous reduction of workspaces and the increase in the usage of binding instruments. While Ecophyto meetings were not neglected, they were no longer considered spaces for dialogue. Some agricultural organizations stepped up their action to oppose attempts at coercion. For example, they asked the Council of State, the French supreme court for administrative justice, to cancel the Pesticide Saving Certificates in 2015 (petitions nos. 394696 and 395225 of December 28, 2016 to the

523 Council of State). In an almost symmetrical mechanism, in 2018, NGOs did the same for  
524 decisions deemed too unambitious on the creation of non-treatment zones near homes (Council  
525 of State, 2019). The importance of bilateral meetings between stakeholders and the  
526 administration was reinforced (table 4, verbatim 15). After the election of President Macron in  
527 2017, the movement away from Ecophyto working groups was reinforced. The executive branch  
528 made numerous important decisions, such as the ban on glyphosate, a decision made in 2017  
529 by the President (Macron, 2017), or the ban for companies to offer both the sale of pesticides  
530 and advisory services on plant protection strategies, which constituted an election promise.

531 The Ecophyto2+ plan mainly aimed at integrating decisions that were not formally included in  
532 the Ecophyto dynamic. More than a place of strategic thinking and planning, “Ecophyto”  
533 became a tool for gathering actions taken on pesticides independently from one another, and  
534 kept losing legitimacy.  
535

#### 536 **4.8. Epilogue: Blocking and abandonment of collective transition management**

537 This led to a situation where collective action was blocked. Even though the Ecophyto plans and  
538 the societal dynamics since 2007 made it possible for the discussions to progress, and only a  
539 few actors were now opposed to the idea of a need to reduce the use of pesticides, the gap  
540 between positions had widened. Agricultural organizations sought to build an image of actors  
541 driving a “pragmatic” transition. However, they were still opposed to a significant reduction  
542 objective, in-depth modification of cultivation systems, or the use of binding public action  
543 instruments. Environmental NGOs were becoming more radical and tending more and more  
544 towards demands for a pure and simple ban on the use of pesticides (table 4, verbatim 16):

545 The use of these products has still not reduced significantly (Fig. 2).

546

	<b>Illustrative verbatim</b>	<b>Type of actor</b>
1	“I remember that it was [...] a very positive and very mobilizing way of working that was trying to attract people no matter what. [...] no one had left, no one had slammed the door.”	Representative from an environmental NGO
2	“to make an action plan to reduce the use of pesticides, [...] there will be a training component, a research component, and a monitoring or experimentation component [...] it's not completely revolutionary either, it's something that comes to mind quite quickly. [...] in all the plans that I know of, [...] there is always a training component and a research component.”	Policy-maker from the Ministry of Agriculture
3	“Are we going to be able to get there in ten years, is that enough, shouldn't we act somewhere else? We didn't discuss all that in part 2 [of the Ecophyto R&D report, which proposed a structuring of the DEPHY instrument].”	Researcher who participated in the writing of the Ecophyto R&D report
4	“And we discussed a lot of things, point-by-point where everyone gave their opinion [...], so that interesting things and ideas on what to work on came out of it. [...] there were really only a few things in the end on which we did not agree at all.	Representative of an environmental NGO
5	“At the beginning of Ecophyto [...] I saw the meetings, the rooms full of people to discuss the allocation of funding. So there was truly a discussion with the stakeholders. In their diversity, which is normal. [...] I spoke a lot at the time with [an environmental NGO] and other actors...”	Representative of an agricultural union
6	“[The objective of agricultural organizations opposed to the 50% reduction objective] is always to try to demonstrate that doing without chemical compounds is not possible today [...] But although it is acceptable at the very beginning of the process, it is less so [after 13 years]”	Representative of an environmental NGO
7	“The system was absurdly complex. There were a lot of groups that were created as a result for implementing the Ecophyto plan. We were a small team, so we couldn't be everywhere.”	Representative of an environmental NGO
8	“In fact, that was really the teaching of Ecophyto 1, an operation without any transversality in fact: each component led its own life, and there were meetings of deputy directors once or twice a year to say what they had done in each axis of the plan.”	Policy-maker from the Ministry of the Environment
9	“The option [taken] was to say: we are going to ask the agricultural world to take charge and get themselves moving. [...] And so it was - finance the chambers of agriculture so that the chambers of agriculture would carry the Ecophyto policy.”	Policy-maker from the Ministry of the Environment

10	“The agricultural profession really had changed its practices in terms of the use of phyto products in recent years. And it did not understand that just that could not affect the [plan indicator]. And in terms of the explanations that the Ministry of Agriculture could provide, it was a bit of a disappearing act, because we didn't really have an explanation for the increase [in the indicator].”	Employee of an organization representing agricultural businesses
11	“What must be remembered is that politics takes control of the report, and of the methodology. [...] Should we go see the ladybug manufacturers, or rather a potato field in Pas-de-Calais region [...] there is a political dimension [...] We have not been in the most resistant regions, but instead we have been to see pioneers [...]”	Deputy in charge of evaluation
12	“We were very constrained by the fact that we were structurally financing a number of positions, and that Ecophyto 2 was neither an opportunity nor an excuse to eliminate positions that were financed via the regional chamber of agriculture, for example. Since we would lose the support of the [national assembly of chambers of agriculture] for the plan.”	Policy-maker from the Ministry of Agriculture
13	“We no longer had the impression of being involved. We were consulted, of course, we were continually consulted. But there was no longer any impression of working together, of working with the other actors”	Representative of an environmental NGO
14	“We had moved a long way from an enrichment of public policy by the stakeholders. [...]the absence of discussion meetings also meant that we could drift apart in terms of points of view [...]. So it was gradually the administration alone that made its choices...”	Employee of an agricultural union
15	“Everything happens in bilateral exchange, [...] there is no longer a common space where we can discuss this all together [...] if I compare the part of my position that is to support elected officials on these subjects, before I accompanied them a lot more at collective meetings than at bilateral ones.”	Employee of an organization representing agricultural companies
16	“After ten years, we haven't seen the results of the Ecophyto plan, so... [...] the position is no longer -50, it's zero phyto: we have to go toward the complete cessation of using pesticides. [...] the positioning is radicalized completely”	Representative of an environmental NGO

Table 4 : Illustrative verbatim from interviewed stakeholders

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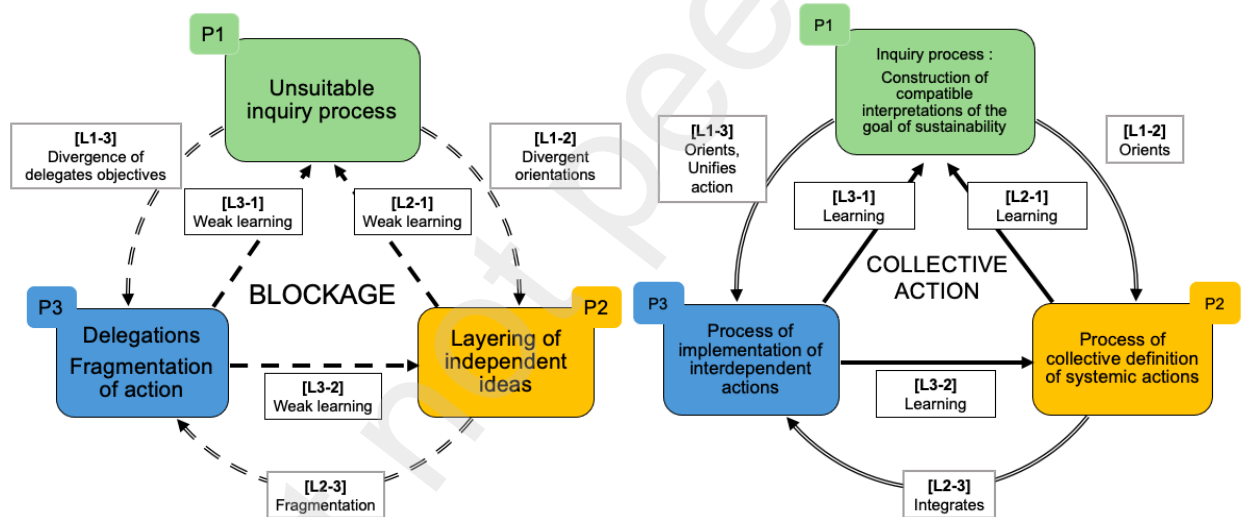
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## 5. Findings and discussion

### 5.1. How to explain the failure of the State's management of the transition policy process?

The analysis of Ecophyto's history reveals that three types of interdependent processes disrupted the collective development and implementation of the transition policy (Fig. 3-A):

- 1) The processes of inquiry, which did not allow collective sensemaking and the construction of compatible interpretations of the goal of sustainability ([P1]);
- 2) The processes of collective definition of actions, which did not take into account the lock-in and the systemic dimension of a transition ([P2]);
- 3) The action implementation processes, fragmented and poorly interconnected, which hampered the possibilities of mutual adaptation between instruments ([P3]);



3-A : Central pillars of collective action in Ecophyto

3-B : Central pillars of collective action for transitions

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Fig. 3: Central pillars of collective action in Ecophyto (left) compared to collective action for transitions (right)

[Left] Diagram A - describes the blocking elements for each of the pillars of collective action in the Ecophyto processes (P1, P2 and P3) and their interconnections (L).

[Right]: Diagram B - describes the central pillars of collective action for transitions.

The arrows representing the links (L) are numbered to match the numbers of the pillars to which they are connected (e.g : L3-2 connects pillar P3 to P2).

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#### 5.1.1. An unsuitable inquiry process ([P1])

578

##### 5.1.1.1. Insufficient attention to constructing compatible interpretations

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580  
581 In Ecophyto, the inquiry process operated two main levers: collective discussion within the  
582 working groups, to which researchers and experts were invited, and expert support through the  
583 production of reports. These levers did not allow the creation of compatible interpretations of the  
584 situation between participants. Two specific features of the inquiry process explain this: (i) The  
585 main tool for exploring the implications of the objective set was the technical-economic modeling  
586 of the Ecophyto R&D report (Butault et al., 2010), which induced a form of technicization of the  
587 debates. More political questions (Under what conditions is it desirable to reduce pesticides?  
588 For whom? etc.) were not made sufficiently explicit and debated. (ii) While there were  
589 discussions on the most appropriate monitoring indicators, there was no exploration of tools for  
590 analyzing the *causes* of the persistence of pesticide use that could have contributed to the  
591 construction of compatible interpretations of the situation (see section 4.5.3.). The differences of  
592 interpretation on the developments under way in the agricultural world therefore persisted. It  
593 was difficult to consolidate lessons learned from implementation, which limited feedback and  
594 potential learning (Fig. 3-A L3-1). Even though the State tried to create a collective interpretation  
595 within the group, its problem was rather a difficulty in identifying appropriate tools and processes  
596 for sensemaking: it confined itself to its usual practices of mobilizing science and expertise.

#### 597 598 *5.1.1.2. Lack of exploration at the sociotechnical system level*

599  
600 Failure to explore the implications of the goal of sustainability, coupled with an absence of  
601 consideration of the systemic aspect of the transition, limited the collective's ability to redefine  
602 the problem in the inquiry process. The notion of lock-in was present from the beginning of  
603 Ecophyto: it was presented in the Ecophyto R&D report (Butault et al., Volume VII, p. 38).  
604 Nevertheless, the 1<sup>st</sup> plan favored the "cropping system" concept, relatively isolated from the  
605 sociotechnical system into which it was integrated. This lack can be explained in two ways. First  
606 of all, it appears that the "forgotten" links of the system were mainly those presenting the  
607 strongest political stakes (the CAP) or concentrating the most power (agro-industries). But it is  
608 also possible that the idea of systemic transition had not yet gained enough importance in  
609 collective discussions to take a central place in the construction of meaning.

#### 610 611 *5.1.1.3. Gradual abandonment of spaces for dialogue*

612  
613 Faced with the difficulties of the 1<sup>st</sup> plan, the ministries gradually turned to "top-down"  
614 management (see sections 4.6. and 4.7.). To define the actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> plan, they favored  
615 consultation over co-construction, while seeking to increase the constraint on the agricultural  
616 actors, without success. This top-down management did not make the actors' claims disappear,  
617 but rather led them to use other arenas: bilateral discussions with people at high hierarchical  
618 levels within the ministries, or recourses to legal authorities such as the Council of State. This  
619 resulted in blockage of the management situation. This shift was perceived negatively by the  
620 participants, who all regretted the disappearance of the possibilities of direct dialogue. Thus, by  
621 wanting to stop the collective construction process, the State did not manage to achieve its  
622 objective, but prevented the sharing and learning that could have nourished the construction of  
623 compatible interpretations and relaunched a dynamic (Fig. 3-A – L2-1 and L3-1).

624

625 5.1.2. From the inquiry to the definition of actions: layering of independent ideas and lack of  
626 creativity ([P2])

627

628 The actions to be undertaken were determined in several ways: recycling and adaptation of  
629 already existing instruments or public action logic, group discussions between stakeholders,  
630 expert reports or proposals from working groups, stakeholders' consultation. Within these  
631 processes, the definition of actions adapted to the objectives collided against two elements: (i)  
632 the weakness of the inquiry process and (ii) the absence of a creative process.

633

634 *5.1.2.1. Loose link between objective and actions*

635

636 In the absence of a collective interpretation and re-problematization of the objective with a  
637 system perspective, the actors proposed actions relatively independently, leading to a form of  
638 layering of ideas. This process led to proposals relatively disconnected from the objective (Fig.  
639 3-A - L1-2):

640

- 641 • The instruments were not really defined according to the expected results of the  
642 management situation. Similar instruments could have been proposed if the objectives  
643 consisted in lower reduction targets or aimed at a reduction over a longer periods of time  
(see sections 4.3.3 and 4.6.1.);
- 644 • Some instruments had no direct link with the reduction of pesticides, such as actions  
645 aimed at protecting the health of users (see section 4.6.2.)
- 646 • The instruments did not make it possible to mobilize the various reduction levers at  
647 different levels of the sociotechnical system. The 1<sup>st</sup> plan was mainly focused on farmers  
648 and their advisers (Guichard et al, 2017). The 2<sup>nd</sup> plan tried to open up the targets of  
649 public action but limited itself to integrating distributors and not the other actors of the  
650 sociotechnical system (see sections 4.3.4. and 4.6.3.).

651

652 *5.1.2.2. Absence of creative process and recycling of old arguments*

653

654 According to the data collected, the processes described did not make it possible to get out of  
655 pre-constructed ideas or explore new approaches. The framework given for Ecophyto 1 by the  
656 Minister of Agriculture was explicitly based on old public action logic without having verified that  
657 it was still suited to the problem. Some instruments corresponded to recycled pre-existing  
658 instruments, such as the Plant Health Bulletin (see section 4.3.3.).

659

660 5.1.3. Delegation of implementation and division of action ([P3])

661

662 Implementation was delegated to collectives of actors, which led, as we have seen (see section  
663 4.5.2.), to a fragmentation of the action and left to certain actors in charge of delegations the  
664 possibility to redirect or attenuate the content of certain instruments. In Ecophyto, using  
665 delegations as an enrollment tool constituted a significant risk because the delegates had  
666 divergent objectives (Fig. 3-A L1-3). Even if the delegations created a link of accountability  
667 between the delegates and the ministries (through contractual obligations, decrees, etc.), this



668 accountability concerned the implementation of the instruments, and not the achievement of the  
669 plan's objective. Since each instrument was not intended on its own to allow the 50% reduction,  
670 it was difficult to judge the success of the delegations, and therefore, for the ministries to guide  
671 with finesse the action of the delegates.

672

673 In addition, the development of Ecophyto plans from a layering of proposals, coupled with a  
674 compartmentalized governance system, led to a fragmentation of implementation (Fig. 3-A L2-  
675 3). As we said in section 4.5.2., there were few links between the management groups of the  
676 different instruments, preventing any overall perspective. In turn, this limited the contribution of  
677 the implementation phase to the construction of compatible interpretations of the situation.  
678 Indeed, each stakeholder had a good understanding of only one part of the public policy and  
679 very few individuals had access to a global vision (Fig. 3-A L3-1).

680

#### 681 5.1.4. Disconnection of the three pillars and weak learning

682

683 Finally, the narration shows the weakness of the links between the three pillars and that the  
684 learning processes were not sufficiently integrated into management of the collective action.  
685 The inquiry process did not make it possible to orient the definition of actions (Fig. 3-A L1-2) and  
686 to guide the implementation (L1-3). The tools for obtaining feedback from the action mainly took  
687 the form of indicators and evaluation reports. They were therefore primarily based on a  
688 contribution of expertise where the conclusions were constructed outside the collective, which  
689 did not make it possible to build a shared understanding (L3-1 ; L3-2). The gradual  
690 disappearance of spaces for dialogue, coupled with the multiplicity of working groups and the  
691 fragmentation of the implementation, did not enable the collective to reap lessons from the  
692 definition of actions (L2-1) and their implementation (L3-1 ; L3-2).

693

#### 694 5.2. Cross-sectional discussion

695

696 Within the Sustainability Transitions literature, several approaches provide a critical analysis of  
697 policy processes. Most adopt a governance perspective, analyzing policy processes through the  
698 lens of the dynamic relationships between actors, power plays and their influence on decision-  
699 making (Stegmaier et al., 2014 ; Stegmaier et al., 2021; Levain et al., 2015; Hoffmann et al.,  
700 2017; etc.). By adopting a pragmatist management perspective, we shed light on the concrete  
701 interplay between the actors' visions, ideas and positions and the operational management  
702 processes. It allows us to show that the plan's failure was already scripted in Ecophyto's  
703 elaboration process itself.

704

705 Based on our results, we built a framework for analyzing transitions policy processes and  
706 guiding policy-makers in their definition, presented Fig. 3-B. We defined three central pillars for  
707 the management of collective policy processes and its adaptation to the specificities of  
708 sustainability transitions. This framework was built to allow for the correction of the  
709 shortcomings synthesized in Fig. 3-A. To specify the characteristics of the pillars, we reflected  
710 on our results in the light of the TM framework (Rotmans et al., 2001; Loorbach et al. 2008;  
711 Loorbach, 2010 ; Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010; Loorbach et al., 2015) :

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- **Supporting an inquiry process allowing the construction of compatible interpretations of the goal of sustainability** (Fig. 3-B – P1): By using the management situation concept, we show the importance of equipping the creation of compatible interpretations through the process of inquiry. Loorbach (like many others; e.g.: Geels and Schot, 2007), also emphasizes the importance of creating a compatible interpretation of the problem for the actors involved. Nonetheless, Loorbach's framework does not seek to specify the principles or tools needed to succeed. By highlighting the fact that the ministries tried, in Ecophyto, to mobilize science and expertise to support collective sensemaking, without success, our analysis shows that public actors did not fail because they did not try to create compatible interpretations, but because they did not know how to concretely do so and did not have the appropriate tools to build compatible interpretations of the goal of sustainability. It would therefore be appropriate to concentrate research efforts on those tools, building on the rich existing literature (e.g. Matti and de Vicente, 2016; Turnheim and Nykvist, 2019; Barrios et al., 2020, etc.), and reflecting on their adaptation to the issues noted in this paper.
- **Equipping the process of collective definition of systemic actions** (Fig. 3-B – P2): Loorbach (2010) believes that one of the conditions for selecting actors to participate in a Transition Management process lies in their ability to translate a transition vision into concrete actions, as if it were a personal skill. Nonetheless, institutionalized policy process can rarely select participants based on their personal abilities. In addition, we show that this translation process is a central element of the management of transitions that is not self-evident. Despite the diversity of the actors mobilized in the Ecophyto, their proposals did not really make it possible to escape old action logics or to innovate. Thus, it seems crucial to us to define operational tools and processes of collective definition of systemic actions. These processes need to help actors so that this translation can be done in an appropriate way. Indeed, unlike many innovation actors, public authorities do not always have specific co-design tools, and are poorly equipped for systemic thinking. These tools should make it possible to reap the knowledge provided by the variety of stakeholders involved. They should also allow actor to collectively build the structure of the implementation methods as an integral element of the design process (L2-3).
- **Designing a process of implementation adapted to the interdependency of the actions** (Fig. 3-B - P 3) : Our pragmatist perspective allowed us to consider the implementation phase as a constitutive part of the policy process. We showed that the implementation systems need to be designed in a way that limits the ability of dominant actors to transform the instruments and ensures interconnections between interdependent actions to facilitate co-evolution and learning. While Loorbach (2010) takes a more global approach that does not question those micro-level operations, we highlight that this phase is a crucial step that should not be overlooked by policy-makers.
- **The three pillars need to be interlinked** so that the inquiry process orients actions definition (L1-2) and implementation (L1-3), and that those can feed the collective learning process and improve collective sensemaking (L2-1; L3-2; L3-1).

By highlighting the specific needs of institutionalized policy processes, these elements show the

756 complementarity of our work to the TM framework, which was built as a mode of governance of  
757 informal networks, only indirectly influencing public policy processes (Loorbach, 2010;  
758 Wittmayer et al., 2018).

759  
760 Finally, these elements highlight another contribution, which is of a methodological nature. The  
761 mobilization of a dynamic and procedural approach via the management situation concept has  
762 proved to be particularly fruitful. It has enabled us to develop an analytical framework  
763 highlighting key elements needed to ensure collective action is *manageable*, even in the  
764 presence of strong uncertainties (Girin, 2011). While this concept has been used to study the  
765 management of environmental issues (Barbier et al., 2020), to our knowledge this is the first  
766 article using this concept to study state-level policy processes. The combination of the  
767 management situation framework with the framework of sociotechnical system transitions  
768 proved to be particularly interesting. Indeed, it allowed us to insist on the need for collective  
769 action and to reflect on the tools needed to equip it in order to explore the systemic aspect of  
770 transitions. Above all, it highlighted the usefulness to question the very definition of  
771 *management* in order to support policy-making for transitions.

772  
773 Despite these contributions, our research has some limitations. Our analysis is based on a  
774 single case study. The relevance of the deployed framework to manage systemic transitions will  
775 have to be verified by analyzing other public policies – whether agricultural or not – to ensure its  
776 genericity and to validate, amend or enrich the conclusions. Testing our analytical framework in  
777 a diversity of contrasting cases would reinforce the validity of our contributions.

778  
779 It will also be necessary to test its usefulness for the development of transition policies,  
780 supplementing it by mobilizing or defining concrete tools for each of the recommendations. We  
781 thus believe that our research makes it possible to point to a promising research-action  
782 perspective for the State's management of sustainability transitions, which would focus on the  
783 development and experimentation of new concrete methods for co-designing systemic public  
784 policies.

785

## 786 **6. Conclusion**

787

788 Proposing tools and frameworks for managing the transitions of sociotechnical systems for  
789 public policies is a subject of growing interest. This approach is particularly relevant for the  
790 question of reducing pesticides, as agri-food systems present strong lock-in around this  
791 technology. This article has sought to contribute to this field of research, starting from the  
792 analysis of French public policies. We looked at the question of what had limited the State's  
793 capacity to organize collective action to develop public policies adapted to the reduction of  
794 pesticides.

795

796 Our results make it possible to formalize a framework for analyzing public policy construction  
797 processes for systemic transitions, considering them as a situation to be *managed*. We highlight  
798 the importance of the three interconnected processes: the process of inquiry, to create  
799 compatible interpretations of the goal of sustainability; the processes of collective definition of

800 systemic actions; and the processes of implementation of interdependent actions. In our case-  
801 study, processes to create compatible interpretations were not absent, but were ill-adapted to  
802 the diversity of actors and their issues. They did not allow the actors to grasp the importance of  
803 adopting a systemic perspective. Without a collective interpretation of the objective and a  
804 system vision, actions were defined by layering various proposals, without making any real link  
805 with the objectives to be achieved. The absence of a creative process forced the collective to  
806 repeat old public action logic. The implementation processes, based on delegations, largely  
807 collided with the diversity of actors' visions. The interconnections between the instruments were  
808 too weak to allow mutual readjustments and collective learning. Finally, the State's attempt to  
809 turn to a "top-down" management resulted in a blockage of the management situation. These  
810 results allowed us to propose a framework for analyzing transitions policy processes and  
811 consolidating the management of future transition policy processes.

812  
813 Our analysis does not pretend to provide miracle solutions to manage transitions. We believe,  
814 however, that it can help guide future research aimed at proposing new methods for the  
815 collective design of plans for systemic transitions towards sustainability, by urging the managers  
816 of this design, and in particular the policy-makers, to pay close attention to the three processes  
817 identified.

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