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The "Grenelle de l'environnement": actors, speech, effects

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Abstract: This project addresses the link between the “Grenelle de l’environnement” and restructuring forms of decision-making in the French environmental policy field. This participatory device, which was introduced between July and December 2007 on an ad hoc basis in order to enlighten governmental activity, has two major features. Firstly, it is an instrumental innovation that combines classical forms of participatory processes with more innovative features, aiming at broadening the scope of interests’ representation on a territorial a thematic basis. Secondly, it is a political process in its own right, since its design and implementation were structured by specific politisation logics closely linked to national politics. Yet this participatory device has been surrounded from its very inception by strong scepticism. To what extent did the « Grenelle » fostered participation, and not mere consultation? How did politisation logics structure both its design and its implementation? Is it at all possible to identify and to measure the various impacts of such a device on forms of decision making in the environmental policy field? In order to address these questions, this participatory device, the role it exerted on political and governmental activity, as well as its limitations, will be critically and systematically analysed from three different perspectives: firstly, a qualitative and a quantitative sociological analysis of the various actors, which participated to the « Grenelle »; secondly, an analysis of the various discourses, which were produced during and around this participatory device; and thirdly, a policy analysis aiming at identifying its outcomes both on specific sub-policy areas and on forms of decision-making in the environmental policy field. The combination of three different scales of analysis allows to better address the relationship between participatory devices and public decision-making in the environmental policy field.

Keywords: participatory devices, instrumental innovation, environmental policy, public decision making, participatory democracy, representative democracy, public action.