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## Legitimizing confrontational discourses by local environmental groups: The case of air quality monitoring in a Spanish industrial area

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### Introduction

The escalating role of the firm at the expense of the public authorities' function as guarantors of citizens' rights may have helped drive the increased political authority of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>1</sup> as representatives of civil society (Hahn and Pinkse 2014). In the business and society literature, there is a growing body of research on firm–NGO relationships (Dahan et al. 2010; Kourola and Laasonen 2010). Studies exploring the firm's new political role – influenced by developments in political theory, particularly Habermas's concept of “deliberative democracy” – place participation and consensus at the heart of the governance discourse and identify collaboration between firms, governments, and civil society as the way forward (Baur and Palazzo 2011; Laasonen et al. 2012). The dominant articulation in the business and society discourse on firm–NGO relationships revolves around collaboration, and systematically undervalues the constructive role that confrontation and conflict can play (Laasonen et al. 2012).

One stream in the literature on business–NGO interaction is concerned with large multinational corporations that operate in multiple locations and generate negative externalities on a global scale (e.g., de Lange et al. 2016). However, a great deal of activism takes place at the local level, particularly on environmental

issues. As Grant and Vasi (2017, 100) point out, “the strong local orientation of many activists reflects the specific environmental damages that companies cause to specific geographical areas in the form of toxic dumping, destruction of lands and resources, and air pollution.” Many local environmental NGOs, with limited resources and a focus on a specific geographical area, share characteristics with grassroots activist movements and are more likely to be confrontational than cooperative (Leon-Zchout and Tal 2017). These local NGOs often find it difficult to legitimize their activities; their work is frequently challenged by political and business powers, and even by many citizens, on the grounds that they are raising barriers to the economic development of the region.<sup>2</sup> Legitimizing their strategy is therefore a key factor in their survival.

In a context in which cooperation among actors is the dominant articulation, our study goes some way to responding to calls from authors such as Laasonen et al. (2012) for further research favoring greater recognition of the constructive role confrontational strategies can have. The need for a better understanding of how NGOs construct their discourses and manage their adversarial relationships, and for analysis of the conditions under which confrontation can lead to the most favorable solutions are research questions also raised in the work of Baur and Palazzo (2011). Specifically, the present chapter draws on a case study in a Spanish industrial region to analyze how a local environmental group articulates and legitimizes a confrontational strategy based on a scientific study instigated by the group, in collaboration with local town councils, and carried out by independent experts. We also assess industry and regional government responses to this strategy, particularly the extent to which it is bringing about improvements in responsible industry behavior and making advances that may favor the health of the local communities affected by the industrial activity. The question of regional government response is especially relevant, since public bodies are often perceived as being aligned with industry interests by local communities (Espluga et al. 2010).

This chapter contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it highlights the value of the confrontation strategy, while identifying the key elements that have favored the group’s legitimacy and the effectiveness of its actions: a strategy based on scientific knowledge and acceptance of the industry’s role in contributing to the development of the region. Second, it shows how a strategy based on confrontation does not necessarily exclude dialogue or, more specifically in this case, the possibility of actively participating in a multi-stakeholder deliberative process.

## NGO–business relations

Like any other organization, NGOs develop strategies with which to achieve their objectives. In their efforts to improve issues of public health and the environment, they face the dilemma of either challenging the status quo or working within the frame of conventional channels to achieve improvements (Dalton et al. 2003). At a conceptual level, many authors classify NGOs into two main groups according to whether their strategies follow a conflictive or a consensual line (Michaelson 1994; Dryzek et al. 2003). Conflict NGOs are usually characterized by some level of activism that challenges the status quo, whereas consensus NGOs are more collaborative and acknowledge the legitimacy of the establishment (Leon-Zchout and Tal 2017). Although these strategies are posed generically, environmental groups operate under the restrictions and opportunities found in the political context in which they operate (Kadirbeyoglu et al. 2017). Thus, NGOs in advanced industrial democracies –the context in which our research takes place – must consider the question of adopting strategies of confrontation or collaboration, taking into account that both options are accepted within the limits established by the democratic framework. However, in unconsolidated or consolidating democracies, where dissent is not generally accepted, the most confrontational movements are usually restricted (Dalton 2005).

These two logics of confrontation and cooperation may also coexist in what Covey and Brown (2001), for example, define as *critical cooperation*. Indeed, the same organization may follow confrontational or cooperative strategies in different circumstances, and it is the frequency and intensity with which they use these tactics that define their strategic orientation (Leon-Zchout and Tal 2017).

The role of NGOs has traditionally been associated with pressurizing companies to meet their responsibilities and respond to social and environmental problems. Contributions from stakeholder theory have considered NGOs as key stakeholders in influencing organizational behavior (van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010; Sprengel and Busch 2011). Social movement theory has also been applied in the organizational field to analyze how activist movements determine corporate changes (den Hond and de Bakker 2007; King 2008; Gómez-Carrasco and Michelon 2017).

Yet recent developments in the business and society literature have emphasized partnerships between companies and NGOs, in pursuit of collaboration and consensus (van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010; Baur and Palazzo 2011; Laasonen et al. 2012; Hahn and Pinkse 2014). According to Laasonen et al. (2012, 537–538),

business and society discourse interacts with social movements discourse and governance discourse in the following ways: it attempts to (1) co-opt social movements through partnership and collaborative articulations, (2) suppress those accounts of social movements theory that are still focused on adversarial relationships, and (3) place business at the center of governance discourse notably through articulations that draw on “deliberative democracy” and the “post-political” perspective.

This trend toward greater collaboration is justified as a consequence of the increasing complexity of the problems facing society, and the search for “win–win” solutions for all parties<sup>3</sup> (Olk 2013; Bitzer and Glasbergen 2015). The interconnections between social, economic, political, and ecological factors require interaction, stable continuous relationships, and dialogue among all agents in order to reduce tensions and reach agreements that benefit society. By participating in these partnerships, companies and NGOs come to know each other’s views of the problem in question, smoothing the way for responses to present and future social and environmental challenges. Collaboration can grant legitimacy to participating NGOs, since firms and public authorities recognize their ability to contribute constructively to social change (Macdonald and Chrisp 2005).

Such partnerships are not, however, without their problems. Bonds are often forged in these relationships that engulf the NGOs in an institutional logic that favors the industry and contributes to slowing down social and environmental changes. On numerous occasions, firms use dialogue and cooperation to avoid criticism and gain social legitimacy, but without actually pursuing changes in their key processes (Burchell and Cook 2011). NGO co-optation through corporate partnerships may seriously undermine NGOs’ credibility, since independence is crucial to their legitimacy (Baur and Schmitz 2012).

The constitution of firm–NGO collaboration as the dominant articulation in the business and society discourse can contribute to suppressing the narratives that continue to focus on relationships between adversaries, and largely ignores the role of NGOs that follow a non-collaboration strategy. Consigning non-cooperative relationships to the past is problematic because it ignores the fact that legitimate disagreement can be understood as a commitment to improving social problems (Laasonen et al. 2012). However, engaging in an adversarial relationship does not necessarily exclude dialogue. As we noted above, the literature has pointed out the coexistence, or alternative use, of confrontational and collaborative strategies (Covey and Brown 2001; Arenas et al. 2013; Kadirbeyoglu et al. 2017). Indeed, dialogue can transform manifestly hostile relationships into less conflictive forms of interaction without erasing the condition of adversaries underlying the relationship between the parties.

We focus our attention on the case of a local grassroots environmental group that adopts a confrontational strategy. These groups, as we noted in the introductory section, have problems of legitimacy, to the extent that they are questioned by the industry and public institutions – and possibly by a part of the local community – insofar as they may be holding back the economic growth of the region. As Berry points out (2003, 7), taking as reference the work of Kroll-Smith and Couch (1991), “corporations, industry groups, or government agencies often characterize grassroots activists or community groups that complain about contaminants and environmental risks as irrational or hysterical.” In this context, the key issue is how the local environmental group articulates and legitimizes a confrontational strategy which opens the way to solutions that allow progress in solving environmental problems.

## Case study

In this chapter, we refer to a case study to illustrate how a local environmental group articulates a confrontational strategy, and to analyze industry and regional government responses. Using a single case is a common method in qualitative research traditions (Alvesson and Deetz 2000), with the advantage that it allows the phenomenon of interest to be studied in depth. The data was gathered from various documentary sources. The process began with a thorough analysis of the websites of both the environmental group and Repsol, the main company involved. Newspaper, radio, and television interviews with the primary agents were also assessed. Other sources analyzed were documents from the working sessions of the deliberative platform set up by the regional government to find a solution to the controversy, and the technical reports from the air quality studies. Finally, we examined newspaper articles (from June 2014 when the environmental group presented the first study, up to August 2017) using the Factiva database to search for the name of the local environmental group. We concentrated on publicly available information because the justification and legitimization of the actors involved took place in the public sphere.

### *The industrial area*

Tarragona (Spain) is the place of one of the largest petrochemical complexes in southern Europe. The complex is located on two sites 10 kilometers apart: the Southern Industrial Complex and the Northern Industrial Complex. Both sites occupy more than 1,400 hectares devoted to the chemical industry and generate approximately 10,000 direct jobs (6,000 generated by the companies of the

AEQT – Chemical Industry Association of Tarragona – and 4,000 generated by the companies of the AEST<sup>4</sup>) and over 30,000 induced jobs (AEQT 2013). To date, the local environmental group has centered its activities on the Northern Industrial Complex, where companies such as Repsol and Dow Chemical are located. As Espluga et al. (2014) note, the few citizen protests that have taken place in the area have essentially been in the form of legal actions filed in the courts against episodes of accidental pollution, although they have had little collective impact.

### *The local environmental group and the scientific study on air quality*

The local environmental group “Cel Net” was formed at the end of 2008 to campaign for improvements in air quality for residents as a consequence of petrochemical industry activity. However, in 2014 the group gained influence after publishing the results of a scientific study (carried out between the end of 2012 and May 2014) into air quality in the area of the Northern Industrial Complex. This study forms the cornerstone of the case described in the present research, in that it generated some disruption of the established social order and, at the same time, provided the foundations for the local environmental group’s confrontational strategy. According to statements from the group, the study arose from the situation of uncertainty about the air quality in the area. In this context, a proposal was made to the five local councils in the towns adjoining the northern complex with a request for funding to undertake an independent scientific study of the air quality. Four of these councils (El Morell, Constantí, Villalonga del Camp, and Perafort-Puigdelí) gave their support to the proposal, while one (La Pobla de Mafumet) declined to participate. The study was carried out by the Environment Center Laboratory (Laboratori del Centre de Medi Ambient, LCMA) at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC). Members of the local environmental group and volunteers from the four municipalities involved participated in the social and chemical control activities of the study.

The study identified more than 200 compounds. Abnormally high values were found for some pollutants such as benzene and 1,3-butadiene – both compounds are included in group 1 of carcinogens of the IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) (IARC 2018). The methodology used in the study not only identified the components but also traced their path – the source of their emission. These findings generated considerable social debate on air quality in the area. A further two studies were subsequently carried out, the results of which were presented in November 2015 and February 2017. These studies were carried out in only one of the four municipalities (El Morell); in the

latter study only 1,3-butadiene was analyzed, the pollutant that seems to have triggered the greatest social concern because of its toxicity and the high levels detected in the initial study. The platform attributes the lack of involvement in the follow-up studies by the other town councils to political and business pressure. In general terms, these later studies found lower emission levels of the pollutants than those detected in the first study.

### *The local environmental group's strategy and industry and regional government responses*

As highlighted above, the study's results generated public controversy over the nature of the problem, its causes and its possible solutions. In what follows, we describe the response and the actions of the environmental group, which to a certain extent define its strategic orientation, and also the responses from the industry and the regional government.

For the environmental group, the study brought to light the problem of air quality that hitherto had remained hidden. The problem was attributed to insufficient efforts by the companies on environmental issues and to the limitations of the air quality monitoring network. As a result, the group made public demands for industry interventions to improve their environmental performance, together with stricter regulations and enhanced controls from the regional government. Both these demands align with what den Hond and de Bakker (2007) identify as the two complementary routes followed by activist groups to bring about change: regulatory modifications and changes in organizational behavior.

In the assessment of the study's results, published on its website (<http://platformacelnet.blogspot.com.es>), the group explicitly stated its wish that the results would be a starting point for a commitment to a common objective by all parties involved: to improve the conditions of the lives, health, and work of the populations in the vicinity of the petrochemical complex. But at the same time, the results provided the keystone for the design of a confrontational strategy. A manifesto was drawn up specifying the group's demands, and they instigated a protest campaign titled "*Saps què respires?*" (Do you know what you are breathing?) (Figure 8.1). The results of the study were widely disseminated through presentations in the affected towns (with the collaboration of the scientists responsible for the study from the LCMA at the UPC) and through social media. A considerable effort was made to democratize the air quality information generated by the scientific studies. All these endeavors were designed to capture the attention of the mass media, raise the movement's public profile, and increase public pressure.

The group's strategy was clearly to put pressure on the industry through its demands for more responsibility and higher investment. As the platform's



8.1 Campaign image “Saps què respres?” Source: <http://plataformacelnet.blogspot.com.es/>.

spokesperson stated in a newspaper interview (Diari de Tarragona 2016), “The petrochemical [industry] is not transparent if it does not feel pressure from the community. Social media and the mass media also have a role to play. So the consequences for a brand’s image can be very damaging.” Social media was also used as a space in which to share information and audiovisual documentation reporting the incidents taking place in the industrial complex. The importance of social media in articulating social movements’ confrontational strategies, helping to spread information at a relatively low cost, has been highlighted in the literature (Daubanes and Rochet 2016; Dahlberg-Grundberg and Örestig 2017). As examples of this, we reproduce two messages from the group’s Facebook page, published after specific incidents that illustrate its critical orientation:

Repsol invents the future. Its own future. A future in which polluting will be synonymous with benefit. In which sponsorship will be synonymous with public support. Meanwhile, the present is a reality punished to benefit the industry and cheated by its sponsorships. (April 18, 2017)

The freedom to pollute is a condition granted by the passivity of the political class. (April 26, 2017)

However, in developing its confrontational strategy the group was fully aware of the industry’s importance to the economic development of the region, and



in parallel it continued to use the conventional channels of communication and dialogue, one example being its participation in Repsol's public panel.

The strategy of pressure also sought to bring about changes to air quality policies at regional government level. The results of the study openly challenged the legitimacy of the current public model for monitoring air quality. In fact, the experts responsible for the study from the LCMA at the UPC questioned the efficiency of the evaluation model used.

Local environmental groups are frequently small organizations with few resources and sometimes very little social credibility. Consequently, as described in the introduction, they find it difficult to legitimize their actions. In our case study, by instigating an independent scientific study – the results of which defined subsequent actions – the group gained a certain legitimacy. In parallel, support for the study from the local town councils probably also contributed to raising the group's credibility in the eyes of the public.

The relevance of the scientific study in legitimizing the group's strategy of confrontation is reaffirmed by the two subsequent studies referred to above. In a radio interview (Catalunya Radio 2015), the group's spokesperson described how these additional studies not only aimed to monitor levels of the pollutants identified in the first study and therefore assess whether any corrective measures had been implemented, but were also conceived to continue the pressure on the industry and the regional government. On the same lines, in collaboration with other environmental groups in the area, the group initiated a campaign in mid-2015 calling for an air quality study in the Southern Industrial Complex.

### *The industry response*

The only firm considered in our analysis was Repsol, whose plant was identified as the origin of the most problematic toxic substances in the first study. The firm's discursive response in the public arena was scarce, and, when it did appear, was a combination of skepticism about the study's results and a message conveying its good intentions. The firm claimed the results did not coincide with its own internal measures, and suggested that there could be some confusion over the measurement parameters. Company representatives stated that although it is not required by European regulations, "in the plant we do control this parameter; if the exposure limit is 4.5 micrograms per cubic metre, our workers register between 0 and 4% of the maximum dose" (El Mundo 2015).

In the same newspaper article the company also acknowledged "a feeling in the area that there was a problem with air quality," and expressed its willingness to intensify efforts to reduce emissions of carcinogenic volatile organic com-

pounds such as benzene or 1,3-butadiene. It also called for greater clarity from the regional government on the regulation of 1,3-butadiene, in order to avoid subjectivity and specify the circumstances for action when appropriate measures are taken. The company also expressed its willingness to assess the results of the study with members from the local environmental group, with whom they held a meeting at the firm's request. In line with their policy to keep channels of dialogue open, the group attended the meeting, where they called on the company to provide tangible and measurable facts.

With regard to the firm's statements on its willingness to intensify efforts to reduce emissions, the subsequent studies promoted by the environmental group, which to a certain extent can be considered as a base for control, in general terms found improvements in the air quality results. The local environmental group claimed this improvement was due to a process of self-control by the industry stemming from the higher levels of external control to which it was subjected. Indeed, some studies, such as Daubanes and Rochet (2016), have shown that opposition from NGOs can stimulate firms to implement self-regulation processes.

Companies' discursive responses become increasingly responsible, the more their legitimacy is threatened (Ählström 2010). In this vein, Repsol has introduced new environmental targets in its sustainability reports for the Tarragona plant. Its sustainability plan for 2015 introduced, for the first time, an air quality protection objective. In the frame of this objective, the sustainability plan for 2016 included specific studies for the compounds identified in the study instigated by the local environmental group: benzene and 1,3-butadiene. However, such behavior does not align with the postulates of what is known as "political corporate social responsibility" (Scherer and Palazzo 2011; Scherer et al. 2016), which hold that actions implemented by firms should be proactive. Repsol's reaction appears to be a response to social pressure in a specific location, since the new air quality objectives introduced in the Tarragona plant sustainability report are not included in reports for its other sites (with the exception of Puertollano). In turn, the firm's call for greater regulatory clarity from the regional government may simply indicate a desire for a reference framework within which to determine the scope of their investments.

### *The regional government response*

The regional government's discursive response to the study and to the local environmental group's actions was more visible than that of the company. Although they strongly defended the public air quality monitoring network, they also accepted that some of the problems were due to the lack of suitable regulation

for certain components, and also referred to inherent problems in appropriate communication of information and risks to the public.

The regional government's response to the controversy was conditioned by a resolution on the matter approved by the Catalan Parliament on March 25, 2015. This led to the creation in July of the same year of the multi-stakeholder deliberative platform on air quality with the participation of the main agents involved. The merit for the creation of the platform, explicitly recognized in its first working session, is largely attributable to the local environmental group, since the above-mentioned resolution<sup>5</sup> leading to its constitution corresponds almost entirely to the request made by the group through certain political parties. The deliberative platform was constituted with 52 members, including representatives from regional government, social organizations (including the local environmental group), the AEQT (Chemical Industrial Association of Tarragona), and other economic sectors and business associations. According to the deliberative platform website, its objective is "to exchange information about air quality and the effects of emissions from the chemical industry on people's health, to ensure the appropriate monitoring and research into the effects of the main pollutants from the petrochemical industry on human health, and to improve transparency" (TQACT 2018).

One of the deliberative platform's most significant initiatives, announced in the second working session, was to create three working groups to: (1) analyze legislation in other countries and examine the measures adopted in areas with similar characteristics; (2) analyze the studies carried out to date, both in terms of pollutants and of population health, in order to assess the data and draw up a projection of specific measures to adopt; (3) establish a communication plan for the data on air quality monitoring and data produced by the platform to improve communication with the public and enhance data dissemination.

Although the local environmental group participates in the deliberative platform and has positively evaluated its constitution, in which the group played a decisive role, the relationship has not been without its conflicts. One example was the group's decision not to attend the third working session on the grounds that it was held in the town that did not support the initial study. Instead, the group organized a protest outside the building used for the session. The second example is the decision by the LCMA of the UPC to leave the platform after the second session; the experts issued a public statement explaining that their decision was due to the lack of real "will" on the part of the regional government to improve environmental quality in the area. Over time, although the group positively values the efforts of the working groups, they have criticized the essence of the platform. The group's spokesperson stated that although they participate in the platform, because it "does not meet all our demands, we will continue to

use all the options open to us” (Diari de Tarragona 2016). More specifically, in the public assessment of the results from the third study, and in reference to the lack of specific outcomes from the deliberative platform, the group criticized the platform, stating that,

it is now an ineffectual body, marked by its lack of commitment and will, that only serves to evade the responsibilities of both the local governments and the government of Catalonia, and prolong the problem. It is unacceptable that, once again, we have to resort to the media and social networks to put pressure on them to convene the working groups; to ensure the governments do their job, assume their responsibilities and work towards solving this problem in favour of the people they represent.

As well as from the deliberative platform, other actions put in place by the regional government following the first study are also of note. Specifically, the number of air pollution monitoring stations increased to 13 from 10 stations in 2014 when the results of the first study were published. Similarly, as the general director of environmental quality explained in the third working session of the deliberative platform, the number of volatile organic compounds analyzed rose from 24 to 89 in the second half of 2016. Moreover, in February 2017 the Catalan Parliament approved a comprehensive study of air quality for the whole region. Although the regional government will undertake this study, consensus must first be reached on which methodology to use, an issue to be discussed in the deliberative platform’s working groups. An additional complication is the political situation in Catalonia that arose in the last quarter of 2017, with the activity of many institutions being put on hold, and which may affect the pace at which this project is carried out.

## Conclusion

This study is part of ongoing research into the problem of air quality in a Spanish petrochemical industrial area and the interactions between the actors involved. The preliminary findings from our case study suggest that although the business and society discourse considers cooperation and consensus between actors as the dominant logic in resolving social and environmental problems, significant advances can be made in spaces where confrontation prevails.

In our case study, the actions of a local environmental group, based mainly on confrontation, have to date helped to bring about some advances: the increased number of measurement stations, monitoring of a wider range of pollutants, and an apparent self-control by the industry (based on the results of studies instigated by the local environmental group). Other issues, such as advances

in the regulatory measures or the study to evaluate air quality across the entire petrochemical area, should be dealt with in the future, taking into account the conclusions of the deliberative platform's working groups. A longer time horizon is therefore needed in order to judge the real extent of the achievements.

As well as shedding light on the value of confrontation, our study also contributes to the literature by identifying two key elements that have favored the group's legitimacy and the effectiveness of its actions:

1. *Strategy based on scientific knowledge.* The literature highlights the tensions produced between the perceptions of local communities, generally based on experience, and those of corporations, grounded on scientific knowledge that supposedly determines their behavior (Idemunia 2017). In our case, the group's strategy of confrontation was based on a series of independent scientific air quality studies, which gave it credibility in the eyes of the public. The group's efforts to democratize this knowledge among the population also contributed to building its legitimacy. In addition, the support of town councils in the first study, apart from the financial resources to fund it, may also have contributed to the recognition of the group's activity, by taking it out of the marginal situation where such small-sized local movements are frequently found.
2. *Acceptance of the industry in its role in contributing to the development of the region.* Although the petrochemical industry faces pressure to improve its environmental behavior, its crucial role in the economic development of the region is acknowledged. Under this premise, as noted in the previous section, confrontation was articulated from a stance that is reformist, pursuing changes in corporate behavior, rather than a radical/destructive position. As den Hond and de Bakker (2007, 903) observe, "reformative groups are taken to believe that although companies are part of the problem, they can also be part of the solution." This approach favors the acceptance of the group and its strategy in an area where the jobs of many local citizens depend on the petrochemical industry, but where the community also aspires to achieving satisfactory environmental conditions.

Over time, the group's activities have not been exclusively confrontational, as reflected in its participation in the multi-stakeholder deliberative platform, or in the determination to maintain spaces for dialogue with the industry in an attempt to influence its behavior through conventional channels (by taking part in public panel discussions, for example). However, the group's primary strategic orientation is confrontational. According to the literature, organizations may develop a variety of tactics, but it is the frequency and intensity with which

they are used that determines the nature of their strategy (Leon-Zchout and Tal 2017). Dialogue with the industry may ameliorate the level of conflict in a relationship, but not necessarily remove the parties' condition as adversaries, nor confer the condition of partners. Although we understand the main orientation of the group to be confrontational, this confrontation is not grounded on radical actions that seek to destroy the adversary by, for example, closing down the industry. The group acknowledges the economic importance of the industry and its campaigns are designed to bring pressure on firms, through a critical narrative, to improve their environmental behaviors.

The way in which the confrontation strategy has been constructed – on the basis of scientific knowledge and industry acceptance – may indeed have contributed to the creation of the multi-stakeholder deliberative platform, largely attributable to the local environmental group pressure, and especially the group's inclusion in it. However, although the group participates in this deliberative platform, its critical attitude toward its institutional role – not so much toward the dynamics of the working groups – has also had a prominent role. There appears to be a suspicion that the platform can be used as an instrument to draw out the problem, causing it to dissipate over time. Indeed, the group does not limit its efforts to the deliberative platform arena, maintaining spaces for confrontation and limiting the chances of being co-opted by more powerful participants such as the industry or the regional government. In sum, the group's activities are firmly grounded on confrontation, and over time have been supplemented, not substituted, by participative actions in a multi-stakeholder deliberative process.

## Notes

- 1 NGOs have been defined broadly as non-state, non-firm actors, and include environmental groups, human rights organizations, labor unions, consumer groups, and many others (Dahan et al. 2010).
- 2 Economic and environmental factors are dimensions that interact in citizens' evaluations of an industry's activity (López-Navarro et al. 2016, 2018).
- 3 In spite of this dominant articulation in the business and society discourse, signified in the research of Laasonen et al. (2012), confrontational relationships continue to play a prominent role in today's world. These confrontations range from actions to pressurize companies into improving their behavior on behalf of the interests the NGO defends, to movements that oppose the implementation of technologies such as fracking or new infrastructure projects (nuclear power plants, landfills, etc.) in their immediate environment.
- 4 The Association of Service Companies of Tarragona (AEST) integrates companies

providing industrial maintenance services. These companies are certified by an independent entity to carry out their activity in AEQT firms.

- 5 This resolution also urged the regional government to implement the necessary actions to reduce levels of 1,3-butadiene and benzene, site 1,3-butadiene control points in two of the towns where the study took place, and start the process that would allow legislation existing in other EU countries to be applied in Catalonia.

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