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*Analysis of the circulation of material flows on the territory of Grenoble Alpes
Métropole: the influence of power relations in the building sector*

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Based on the directives of its CODEC¹, the waste department of Grenoble Alpes Métropole has initiated an ambitious policy aiming to reappropriate waste deposits through the transformation of local production systems. Given the convergence of these territorial issues of governance and change in the industrial system with the global issues of resource scarcity and various forms of pollution, a collaboration has emerged as a CIFRE² thesis between Grenoble Alpes Métropole, the CREG laboratory and the STEEP research team. This research work in political economy allows an open disciplinary approach (Figuière et al., 2018) in order to analyze the waste management sectors in the metropolitan area from two complementary approaches: a functional approach that reveals the interdependent relationships between society and its environment through the analysis of flows, and a relational approach to integrate neo-Marxist interpretations of the structure of flows and reflect the historical and social processes responsible for the asymmetries of power (Herbelin, 2018).

The use of the metabolic approach in a previous work for the analysis of the bio-waste sector highlighted the loss of some flows from the territory to a private industrial deconditioning facility³ whose profitability is based on the concentration of many regional flows. The metabolic approach thus

¹ Wastes and Circular Economy Contract of Objectives.

² Industrial formation and research agreement.

³ A deconditioning facility is a piece of equipment that separates organic materials from the packaging that contains them, thus allowing waste producers to avoid the sorting gesture.

made it possible to reveal a deep contradiction between the willingness of the authority to valorize these wastes in an organic way and the implementation of a non-inclusive sorting obligation at the source. This contradiction is then responsible for the dependency of the territory on this infrastructure. Following the model of this contradiction, the government is currently developing creating a national recycling sector for construction materials that is not very coherent given the lack of infrastructure for the production materials from recycled sources. By ignoring the hierarchy of treatment methods (i.e. first reuse) which are generally supported by local structures, this strategy of concentration, based on an efficient management of flows and the free collection of waste, promotes the domination of private operators and runs against the challenge of territorialization of the stocks, the responsibility of waste producers and the transformation of the economic system.

This communication aims to provide answers to the following questions: How can the local authority integrate collective and local initiatives for the recovery of waste stocks of the building sector in a context of regulations that favor the logic of (inter)national circulation of flows? What governance should be put in place to encourage the emergence of small infrastructures and to promote their access to waste flows?

By anchoring the metabolic approach in the epistemological framework of political economy, this work aims, on the one hand, to report on the vulnerabilities of the construction waste sector, and on the other hand, to analyze the power relationships that structure this sector. This perspective is a useful addition to the quantitative approaches used in territorial ecology as it focuses on the needs of the stakeholders at the origin of the logic of material flows in a given territory (Bevione, 2021). This analysis of the territory and the interactions between its stakeholders thus questions the interactions between society and the biosphere and becomes part of a process of co-construction of the territory that goes beyond the management of material flows (Debuisson, 2014) in order to legitimize Grenoble Alpes Métropole in its public policy choices.

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