

 **O.56 - Rising concerns over the impact of pesticides: an analysis of the public controversies about pesticides**

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Our objective, in RA3.5, was to consider the state of the public debate. What are the issues at stake? By whom were they supported? What were the main evolutions of the debate? Pesticides have long been a matter of discussion in a professional forum which brings together farmers, public institutions and the pesticides industry with no room for the lay people because they lacked the technical knowledge that would have made them able to participate in the debate. Some NGOs have acquired this knowledge and, referring to the notion of “framing”, we analyse the evolution of the public debate both at EU and National levels. The NGOs have first focused their action on the environmental impacts of pesticide use while lobbying public institutions for changes in the pesticide regulation and supporting alternative forms of agriculture. Their positions have evolved and public debate is now constructed by the opposition between the actors of the agribusiness which target risk reduction without questioning the organisation of agriculture and NGOs which claim changes in the very conception of agriculture. Since 2004, recently formed NGOs specializing in Public Health issues reinforce the environmental NGOs’ position by raising controversies on the cumulative impacts of pesticides on human health. These evolutions are expressed in numerous sub controversies that we will describe. By suggesting that the long term impact of pesticide use might be as negative for human beings as it might be for soil or birds, NGOs break the line that usually separates Man and Nature with the practical consequence that pressure on policy makers increases: they have to take responsibility for the not-yet-demonstrated consequences of agricultural practices on public health.