Civil society activism and waste management in Ireland: The Carranstown anti-incineration campaign

Anna R. Davies*

Department of Geography, School of Natural Sciences, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland

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Abstract

While policy statements and legislation clearly support public–private partnerships for waste management and householders are being actively encouraged to modify their waste management behaviour through state-sponsored waste awareness campaigns civil society actors remain on the periphery of waste policy development and implementation in Ireland. Drawing on conceptual and empirical developments in the analysis of civil society activism one case study in the Republic—the Carranstown anti-incineration campaign—is examined in an attempt to establish reasons for this on-going marginalisation. The findings indicate that while the Carranstown campaigners seek to make a contribution to waste management arenas in Ireland as agents of change, watchdogs and conduits of alternative information their influence is constrained by a combination of contingent conditions.

Keywords: Waste management; Ireland; Civil society; Governance; Incineration

Introduction

Waste management has received significant attention in Ireland since the mid 1990s when it became clear that strategies for collection and disposal were insufficient to deal with both increasing volumes of waste and tighter legislative demands for sustainable waste management emanating from the European Union (EU). Central Government introduced new planning mechanisms through the 1996 Waste Management Act (DoELG, 1996) to encourage greater diversion of waste from landfill and the adoption of municipal solid waste incineration was mooted for the first time as a central mechanism for complying with EU Directives and solving Ireland’s waste management problems. Since the introduction of the 1996 Act Government, at central and local level, has looked increasingly towards the private sector for delivery of waste management services by encouraging public–private partnerships and sub-contracting waste collection, recycling and disposal to private companies. It has recently been estimated that the private sector (predominantly large, and sometimes multinational, companies) controls 60% of the waste stream in Ireland (EPA, 2004). Local authorities were required by Central Government to use ‘waste experts’ to draft their waste plans and a private consultancy was appointed to produce each of the waste management plans produced across Ireland. Since 2003 a private consultancy has also delivered Ireland’s national waste awareness and education programme ‘Race Against Waste’. Together these factors ensure that the private sector is a powerful actor in Ireland’s waste management landscape.

As a result Governments (from the EU to the local) and the private sector have, in different ways, been pivotal in shaping Ireland’s current waste policy landscape, but what of civil society? In analyses of environmental governance, including waste (see Boyle, 2002; Davoudi, 2000; Bulkeley et al., 2005), it is the inter-relationship of three sectors of society—public, private and civil—that fundamentally shapes outcomes. However most attention to waste governance in Ireland has focused on scalar interactions within the public sector (Fagan et al., 2001; Boyle, 2002) rather than the intersections between different spheres of...
governance activity. Although there is an emerging body of literature on individual and household attitudes and actions in relation to waste (Davies et al., 2005), and some recent consideration of voluntary packaging agreements with industry (Cunningham and Clinch, 2005), attention to the role of civil society in waste management is absent from formal policy documents such as the 1996 Act (and its amendments) (DoELG, 1996), the 1998 Changing Our Ways policy statement (DoELG, 1998) and the Protection of the Environment Act (DoEHLG, 2003). Even when civil society actors do gain media or political attention they tend to be characterised simplistically as self-interested NIMBYs, anti-development luddites or political opportunists (Davies, 2003).

This apparent marginalisation of the civil sphere seems surprising given that there is already Government recognition that sustainable development (including waste management) requires the participation of all sections of society (DoELG, 1997; Comhar, 2002), the positive impact that civil society organisations have had on waste management overseas (Liss, 2001; Luckin and Sharp, 2003; ZeroWaste NZ, 2003) and the influence that civil society organisations have made in other areas of social life in Ireland (Connolly, 1997; O’Donovan and Ward, 1999). In addition there is also a wealth of academic argumentation—albeit contested—that civil society actions produce ‘benevolent effects’ for society (see Foley and Edwards, 1996) and for the environment (Luckin and Sharp, 2003).

In response this paper considers the form and functioning of one arena of waste-related civil society action—the Carranstown anti-incineration campaign—in order to better understand why this sphere of activity might be located on the periphery of waste management policy and the implications of this positioning. As such this work adds to recent debates concerning the intersection between governance and civil society (Swyngedouw, 2005; Geronetta et al., 2005) while expanding sectorally and spatially into the field of waste management in Ireland. However, before embarking on a critical analysis of the Carranstown case it is necessary to reflect on the relevant extant literature. First debates surrounding the notion and purpose of civil society organisations, such as the Carranstown campaign, are considered. This is followed by a brief review of the conceptual approaches that have been used to analyse civil society activism and incineration campaigns in particular. On the basis of these reflections a framework is developed to facilitate the analysis of the form, function and impact of the Carranstown Campaign. The final section reflects on the implications of a marginalised civil society for waste management in Ireland.

Civil society, social movements and scalar governance

Defining civil society

Although there are a multitude of studies that have produced a plethora of interpretations of civil society, as well as divergent conceptions regarding its nature and purpose (see for example Olson, 1982; Putnam, 1993; Commission on Global Governance, 1995; Gordenker and Weiss, 1996; Foster and Anand, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2005), there have been attempts to rationalise these debates to provide a general working definition (Walzer, 1992; Foley and Edwards, 1996). From these debates it seems reasonable to see civil society as the set of institutions, organisations and behaviour situated between the state, the business world and the family. Yet it is recognised that such a broad definition still leaves boundary issues that arise when considering elements of economic and political activity conducted by non-business or non-state associations. Associations apparently categorised as ‘civil’ can be political or become politicised with members seeking to become part of the state (perhaps through standing for election in local constituencies) in order to influence outcomes, as happened in Ireland during protests against the introduction of waste charges (Davies, 2007). Equally the machinations of the state can set criteria for the support of civil society activities that encourage the transition of those organisations from the civil sphere into the private sector. An example of this is the requirement for community-based recycling organisations to demonstrate economic viability before providing financial support from the state in Ireland (Davies, 2007). Nor does such a broad definition contain the attendant discussions regarding the role and purpose of civil society organisations and activities in governance systems. Obviously civil society is not a homogenous, or even necessarily unified, sphere of activity and different ‘cultures of action’ (Klawiter, 1999) exist amongst civil society associations shaped by diverse meanings, values, tacit knowledge and modes of behaviour. Foley and Edwards (1996) attempt to rationalise these discussions by grouping arguments about civil society into two main camps. The first emphasising the process and practice of (apolitical) associational life and its positive contribution to generating ‘patterns of civility’ amongst citizens in a democratic political environment (e.g. Putnam, 1993). The second sees civil society as independent of the state, but politicised, with the focus on acting as a counterweight to oppressive regimes and emphasising the conflictual capabilities of civil associations (see Schneider, 1995).

Yet there are examples of associations, such as grassroots environmental organisations like the Carranstown campaign, which might be placed in both of these camps through their twin aims of resisting state activities while proposing alternative visions for participatory waste management through zero waste strategies. Civil society activities could in this case be seen to both promote ‘the stability and effectiveness of the democratic polity through both the effects of association on citizens’ “habits of the heart” and the ability of associations to mobilise citizens of behalf of public causes’ (Foley and Edwards, 1996, p. 38). The organisation and impact of such community actions, or what might be called civil society activism, has been
analysed through a variety of theoretical approaches in the broad field of social movement studies. In particular resource mobilisation theories, political opportunism approaches and discourse framing techniques have been adopted to examine and explain both how and why associations function in the manner that they do. These main aspects of these approaches as they have been related to anti-incineration associations are reviewed briefly below.

Anti-incineration and social movement analyses

It is not feasible, or necessary, to discuss the intricacies of social movement theories in depth at this juncture as the field is already replete with such reflections (see Zald and McCarthy, 1987; Diani, 1992; Snow and Bedford, 1992; Tarrow, 1994; Sutton, 2000 for detailed and critical accounts of these theoretical approaches). However, it is useful to identify the developments in debates that might assist in the construction of an analytic framework for the consideration of the Carranstown case. In perhaps the most comprehensive empirical analysis of anti-incineration campaigns to date, Walsh et al. (1997) focus on the mobilisation of resources (such as scientific or political expertise, public support and financial backing) in their extensive analysis of grassroots challenges to waste incinerators. Taking a different approach Gerrard (1996) emphasises a direct connection between ideas of environmental justice and the siting of incineration facilities bringing questions about power and politics and particularly moments of political opportunity to the fore. Together resource mobilisation and political opportunity approaches such as those above aim to examine the internal and external capabilities of campaigns. Other studies have focused on developing a critical deconstruction of the NIMBYism (not in my backyard) concept that has dominated official (and industry) responses to community activism against incineration (Fischel, 2001; Luloff et al., 1998; Hunter and Leyden, 1995). Linked to the deconstruction of NIMBYism is the contextualisation of conflicts through discourse analysis, and specifically the collective framing of anti-incineration discourses by activists (Kubal, 1998). Frames in this context are used to refer to the ways in which claims about incineration are constructed and portrayed in debates in order to create meaning and shape understandings for participants and audiences. All actors in a conflict situation undertake a process of constructing arguments, or framing, and in this way the constructed frames themselves can become powerful mobilising resources both for and against incineration developments. Some analyses have attempted to draw together the benefits of all these approaches by examining resource mobilisation, political opportunities and practices of framing in a single research endeavour (see Leonard, 2005). Throughout these analyses, and perhaps because of the dominance of sociological traditions within this area, there has, however, been little explicit or detailed consideration of how spatial and scalar factors influence the trajectory of anti-incineration campaigns. As a result calls for more attention to the geography of incineration politics in order to reconnect such conflicts with wider debates about environmental governance are beginning to surface.

Waste governance and the importance of scale

In Ireland Boyle (2002) made the first step towards constructing a scalar sensitive analysis of waste management and similar work emerged in the UK around the same time (Davoudi, 2000; Davoudi and Evans, 2003; Bulkeley et al., 2005). He calls for an investigation of ‘the power to define the scalar scaffold against which solutions to ecological problems are framed’ and he suggests that ‘key to answering this question must be an investigation of the power of the developmental state to junk, rejig, recalibrate, modify, and transform the existing scale division of the state in defence of the chosen accumulation strategy’ (Boyle, 2002, p. 191). Boyle concludes that it is the scalar strategies of national government (to encourage regionalisation in waste management planning for example) that shapes waste policy, facilitating certain forms of problem resolution (e.g. incineration) while reducing the potential of alternative solutions (e.g. decentralised recycling centres). Yet this study did not consider in detail the other actors, such as the Carranstown campaigners, who were also seeking to influence the shape of waste policy. Where more detailed examination of civil society organisation strategies has been conducted the results indicate that activists themselves adopt their own complex scalar strategies, which are not simply a reaction to state moves but also pro-active attempts to affect outcomes (Davies, 2005). This is particularly the case with respect to the engagement of external expertise and information resources through networking, which has been proposed as affording activists the opportunity to ‘scale-up’ their political voices and bridge spatial distances in order to build more cohesive resistance positions.

Constructing a conceptual framework for Carranstown

The challenge in this paper then is to develop, from this area of contested concepts, some useful means through which to analyse the form, function and influence of one set of civil society associations that constitute the Carranstown campaign. It seems clear that in any study of anti-incineration campaigning there needs to be attention to the resources that have been mobilised by the campaigners and the opportunities that the campaigners had to bring those resources into the public arena. It is also argued that central to these mobilisations is the ability to construct

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1It may be contended that campaigns such as Carranstown might not constitute a ‘movement’ because of their focus on a specific development related to a specific set of policies, nonetheless this is the main lens through which such campaigns have been examined and as such it is this literature that is reviewed here.
arguments to persuade key audiences of the salience of their positions through a process of framing that takes account of scalar interactions between actors involved in anti-incineration campaigns. One approach that may provide added value to the examination of anti-incineration campaigns is what Klawiter (1999) has termed ‘cultures of action’. The cultures of action analyses seek to incorporate cognitive, emotional and physical considerations into the study of social movements in recognition of the view that they are ‘sites where new cultural resources, such as identities and ideologies, are most frequently formulated’ (Swidler, 1995, p. 30). The emphasis on cultures in this approach is based on the view that social movements often lack formal political power so it is through attention to cultural codings that they may actually be able to create influence in policy circles. This is articulated not as simply attending to the thoughts, ideas and worldviews of individual activists but recognising that culture is also formed and reformed by socially organised practices and performances (see also Fine, 1995; Lofland, 1995). In the spirit of Klawiter (1999) the following analysis seeks to combine attention to culture, feelings and practices as well as resources, political opportunities, frames and scale.

This research endeavour requires attention to methodological considerations, particularly given it is an area of considerable social and political conflict. The research began with a basic content analysis of national and local media coverage of the proposal to build an incinerator in Carranstown as a means of initially identifying key issues and stakeholders in the case. Articles containing relevant keywords including ‘Carranstown’, ‘incineration’ and ‘Indaver’ were retrieved over a four-year period from the date of the proposal for the incinerator up until 2004 when the research was initiated. Along with an examination of transcripts of Dáil (Government) debates and a consideration of planning and waste licence applications this provided the basis for identifying key actors involved in the Carranstown campaign. These included local residents, politicians, community activists and representatives from national organisations who participated in and supported the anti-incineration position as well as supporters of incineration such as the developer and the consultants involved in the preparation of the North-East plan. While useful as a means of providing a structure for the research the media coverage and documents lacked specific attention to the form, function and influence of the Carranstown campaign. As a result contact was made with the key actors and they were invited to participate in an interview to discuss these issues. In this case the researcher was not allied to any grouping within the conflict and not active as either a pro- or anti-incineration supporter. Nonetheless the challenge remained to attain access to key participants on all sides of debates in a manner that facilitated open and frank discussion, particularly when the aim is to move beyond simple description of actions and incorporate more sensitive issues of feelings. The neutral positioning of the researcher facilitated access, but it is recognised that the lack of previous relationship with the interviewees may have subsequently limited the extent to which participants were willing to discuss their emotions. Twelve key actors in the case, including local residents who had never participated in protests before, community activists, politicians, concerned environmentalists, representatives of the incineration industry and environmental consultants were interviewed during 2004 and the interviews taped, transcribed and coded. Where useful and possible, due to length constraints, extracts from these interviews are included to illustrate the ways in which actors articulated their cultures of action and expressed their evaluations of the Carranstown campaign. The names of the interviewees are removed to ensure anonymity.

The Carranstown case

The Carranstown campaign emerged after the enactment of the 1996 Waste Management Bill that required local authorities in Ireland to produce waste management plans and to consider municipal solid waste incineration as part of an integrated waste management strategy. City or county councils (of which there are 34 in Ireland) were identified as the responsible bodies for the production of waste management plans although the Government encouraged these local authorities to join together with neighbours to form regional plans. All counties bar three (Kildare, Wicklow and Donegal) followed Government guidance and regionalised (see Table 1) including County Meath which formed part of the North-East Waste Management Planning Region along with Louth, Cavan and Monaghan (see Fig. 1). Private consultants were employed by the local authorities to draft plans that were subsequently put on public display for comment and it was at this stage that communities became alerted to the possibility of incineration facilities being located in their areas.

Table 1
Waste management plans in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>County councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Cavan, Louth, Meath and Monaghan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin and Dublin City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Laois, Longford, Offaly, North Tipperary and Westmeath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connaught</td>
<td>Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Galway City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick/Clare</td>
<td>Clare, Kerry, Limerick and Limerick City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Cork, Cork City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>Cork, Cork City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford and Waterford City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>Wicklow County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>Kildare County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>Donegal County Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The public consultation phase of the draft North-East Waste Management Strategy took place between 1998 and 1999 through a series of open days. Directly following this period of consultation a group of concerned citizens formed the Louth People Against Incineration (LPAI) who campaigned against the incineration component of the plan even though there was no specific site for an incinerator identified at this stage. After the statutory period of consultation and following a review of the comments provided by participants, including submissions by LPAI, the locally elected councillors of each county voted separately on whether to adopt the plan as proposed. By July 2000 three of the counties—Meath, Monaghen and Cavan—had accepted the plan, but a year later it was still not adopted because Louth councillors had voted against the plan. The LPAI were pivotal to this decision by the councillors to reject the plan and as the regional waste planning system requires adoption by all participating counties or cities in a plan the North-East planning process was effectively stalled. The North-East plan was not alone in this regard, three other local authorities had rejected the draft plans placed before them and there was increasing frustration in Central Government and concern that the EU might begin non-compliance proceedings against Ireland if plans were not adopted (Davies, 2003). In July 2001 the Minster for the Environment announced his decision to amend the 1996 Act and remove the power to adopt a plan from local councillors and place it in the hands of the City or County Manager, a civil service position appointed by Central Government. Although controversial the amendment was passed and by August 2001 the North-East plan was adopted and all counties throughout Ireland had ratified plans by the end of the year. It was against this background that the Carranstown proposal emerged and the ensuing conflict developed. The main dimensions of these events are detailed below and summarised in Table 2.

The Carranstown proposal

In 2000, even before the North-East plan was adopted, Indaver Ireland had lodged an application requesting planning permission to build an incinerator with 150,000 tonnes capacity on the Carranstown site in County Meath. This stimulated the formation of the No Incineration Alliance (NIA), a grassroots group which brought together a number of community and environmental organisations along with concerned individuals opposed to the incinerator. Campaigners from the successful LPAI campaign were also involved in the formation of the alliance. As a loose alliance rather than a formal membership group it is difficult to establish exact numbers of people involved in the campaign. Some of the interviewees claimed that all those people who signed petitions were members of NIA, others talked about the people who came to meetings as the core of the group, while still others identified the committee of NIA (between 30 and 50 people) as the main driving force. The developers, however, suggested that only a handful of people drove the anti-incineration case forward. Nonetheless the campaign generated the collection of more than 27,000 signatures from communities close to the proposed incinerator, facilitated public meetings and stimulated over 5000 individual letters of objection to planning permission for the proposed development. Local councillors were lobbied to oppose the incinerator and the campaign generated significant support from opposition councillors in the area as well as TDs (elected members of parliament).

Table 2
Timeline for Carranstown incinerator case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Planning permission granted for incinerator and oral hearing set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Planning inspector recommends refusal of planning permission. Planning board rejects inspectors decision and grants planning permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NIA appeal planning permission to High Court. Draft waste licenses provided by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Final waste licenses awarded by EPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Indaver announce decision to extend application for Carranstown incinerator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the breadth of opposition Meath County Council granted permission, subject to certain conditions, for the incinerator in 2002. In the same year An Bord Pleanála set up an oral hearing to assess the application. After consideration of arguments both for and against the proposal the planning inspector recommended that permission for the incinerator be refused. Despite this in 2003 the planning board went against the inspector’s recommendation and granted permission. This decision was appealed to the High Court by NIA in 2004 where the judge referred the case to the Supreme Court for final determination. The NIA had wanted the case passed on to the European Court of Justice, but this was rejected. The ongoing case for the Supreme Court is based on a judicial review challenge that the EC Directive (EC 85/337) on Environmental Impact Assessment has not been adequately transposed into Irish Law because of the separation between responsibilities for permitting construction (An Bord Pleanála) and monitoring activity (EPA). This separation, the NIA assert, fails to adhere to the requirement for ‘integrated’ assessment as defined in the Directive. At the same time as these planning issues were being processed through the courts waste licences from the EPA were being sought. Draft waste licences were provided in 2004 and the final licence delivered in November 2005.

In January 2006 Indaver announced their decision to apply for an extra 50,000 tonnes capacity for the incineration plant, increasing its size from 35 to 45 m² and the stack height from 45 to 65 m which will require planning consent and a review of its waste licence from the EPA. The NIA then declared their intention to appeal any application made by Indaver to extend the incineration facility to An Bord Pleanála and beyond. To date while an application to extend the incinerator facility has been lodged with the relevant authorities no further decision has yet been made.

While the preceding description of the evolution of the incinerator proposal and the procedures that have been implemented provides an overview it does little more than outline the skeletal features of the Carranstown case. The following section brings more richness to the events by using insights from campaigners about the form, function and influence of their activities. Essentially it provides more attention to the geography of cultures of action in the Carranstown campaign.

**The Carranstown campaign**

Using the cultures of action approach (Klawiter, 1999) the form and functioning of the Carranstown campaign can be deciphered by analysing the structure of the organisation and the modes of behaviour adopted by campaigners based on their accounts of their values, actions and tacit knowledges. In this section consideration is particularly given to the structure of the organisation, the messages constructed and the dissemination methods adopted to convey the campaigners concerns.

As suggested in the previous section the exact size of the Carranstown campaign is hard to define because of contested notions of ‘membership’ or support for the campaign’s activities held by proponents and opponents of incineration. However, in terms of structure the campaign is characterised by a loose affiliation of diverse volunteers that included experienced community campaigners and environmentalists as well as residents who had never been involved in protest movements previously. While the interviewees predominantly considered themselves as ‘locals’ in terms of their proximity to the site of the incinerator a number also came from wider Meath and Louth areas and from national environmental organisations such as VOICE and Friends of the Earth Ireland. The level of involvement of participants in the campaign ebbed and flowed through the campaign with only a small core of committed campaigners consistently active from the beginning of the protest. Such flux in participation is unsurprising given that the campaigners were operating on a purely voluntary basis in addition to the demands of their daily work and personal lives and it is a pattern of participation replicated in other anti-incineration actions in Ireland (Davies, 2005). Nonetheless it was recognised by interviewees that the ebb and flow of participation is a condition that creates problems in terms of sustaining momentum and continuity within campaigns and allowed critics to suggest that public support for an anti-incineration stance is weak.

Within the Carranstown campaign there was a reliance on traditional communication mechanisms, such as telephones, newsletters and meetings, to organise the majority of campaigning events. While the NIA did create a webpage and certain NIA activists were connected to e-mail list groups for anti-incineration groups such as the Global Anti-Incineration Alliance (GAIA) and the Zero Waste Alliance (ZWA) (see [http://www.noincineration.com](http://www.noincineration.com)) the adoption of technology was generally used as an extension of traditional campaigning mechanisms for information dissemination rather than in any more radical empowering sense. The creation and maintenance of the site required expertise that few of the campaigners held and concern was expressed about the sustainability of such technological tools given the fluid nature of participation in the campaign. As Pickerill (2003) has noted there needs to be caution when considering the emancipatory power of information and communication technologies, such as the internet, for community movements when there remains a ‘digital divide’ amongst the population with only a small proportion having the skills and resources to participate actively in the arena.

In terms of the messages that were communicated to target audiences (councillors, communities and the media) the campaigners initially focused on issues of risk and need; that is the potential (and uncertain) impact they asserted incineration would have on health and environments on the one hand and the existence of more benign alternative procedures, such as recycling, that they felt negated the
need for incineration on the other.² The interviewees were concordant in their view that the elucidation of alternatives to incineration was a crucial element of the Carranstown campaign in order to counter charges of NIMBYism levied by developers and pro-incineration politicians. So while anti-incinerator campaigners were reacting to the proposal for an incinerator they were very keen to demonstrate that they were also providing pro-active solutions to the waste challenges:

what we try to do is not only oppose incineration, but support the alternatives. I think that’s the key here—what we’re saying as a collective body is not in anyone’s backyard.

The Carranstown campaigners as an association chose to adopt a predominantly non-confrontational mode of action for their campaign. Petitions and documents detailing alternative strategies for waste management, public meetings and calls to residents to participate in the formal channels for participation in the planning process were encouraged rather than civil disobedience or direct action that has typified other areas of civil society activism in Ireland (Maguire, 2000; Connolly and Lynch, 2005; Davies, 2007). The desire to be seen as legitimate opponents in the debates working within established systems was clear and forms of civil disobedience were seen as being counter-productive to this goal. As one campaigner from the NIA put it:

we’re the democratic side of it...We’re not a lunatic fringe, we’re reasonably opposed to incineration, but we’re there to be convinced at the same time. We’re a challenge to them to prove that their box of tricks is 100% safe.

The campaigners felt strongly that their position (and opposition) in the democratic process was significant, they saw themselves as watchdogs of both state and developer activities with the goal of ensuring that due process was being upheld as well as providing pro-active suggestions for alternative ways of managing waste. This ability to be independent from the state and therefore able to energise resistance or challenge to the dominant regime is what Foley and Edwards (1996) identify as the second dimension of civil society after developing patterns of civility within a democratic polity. The patterns of civility within the Carranstown case included the campaigners attempts to build associations and networks of civic engagement (through public meetings, open-days, information events and newsletters) around the issue of incineration by drawing in expertise and resources from local and non-local sources who co-operated for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993). Interviewees were quick to emphasise the extent of support they received from both the local community and non-local organisations. This non-local support, such as that provided by the international anti-incineration expert Paul Connett and through the transnational advocacy network Global Anti-Incineration Alliance (GAIA), was seen as important to demonstrate the existence of resistance beyond the immediate geographical community of Carranstown and to incorporate the skills of anti-incineration campaigners involved with other campaigns around the world thereby expanding their spaces of engagement beyond the immediate site of conflict or what Cox (1998, p. 2) would term the ‘site of dependence’.

The Carranstown anti-incineration campaigners have facilitated discussion, in the media and local communities at least, of alternative visions for legislative arrangements and waste service provision. They have formally challenged planning decisions where they have felt procedures for evaluating proposed developments have been subverted, they have provided information for communities about the current waste situation in Ireland and the EU and have presented material on alternatives to incineration that had not been incorporated into government policy discussion documents. The activities of the campaign have given people more awareness of the mechanisms of government that they reside under and have, through non-confrontational means, demonstrated the legitimacy of challenging government policy. In sum the Carranstown campaign acted in three main ways: as both a pro-active and reactive agent of change offering alternatives and innovative solutions to waste problems on the one hand and challenging government policy and decision-making on the other; as watchdogs of public and private activities monitoring legislative practices at a range of scales; and as conduits of information for local communities and other community groups. So the evidence provided by interviewees suggests that the Carranstown anti-incineration campaign should have provided a ‘pivotal terrain from which socially transformative and innovative action emerges and where social power relations are contested and struggled over’ (Swyngedouw, 2005, p. 1996).

However, while the campaigners have exerted their right to contest decisions their influence over the outcomes of these procedures and also in terms of affecting overarching policy appears to be limited. Despite the large numbers of supporting signatures on petitions and the high number of objections that were lodged against the planning and waste licence applications, the state is still backing incineration and supporting the development of the incinerator.

Constraining the Carranstown campaign

When asked to consider the role and impact on the Carranstown campaign interviewees raised a number of points that provide insights into their position with respect to the Carranstown case and to wider waste governance issues. They identified three main and inter-related
challenges—a lack of funding and finance, a pro-development Government and weak national organisation—which combined to constrain the Carranstown campaign in policy making circles.

Anti-incineration campaigners acknowledged that both human and financial resource shortages were a particularly restrictive force on their operations. At a basic level the problem was seen as one of a lack of funding or financial support either from the state, the private sector or charitable organisations, but it was also attributed to the reduction in numbers of people willing or able to volunteer their time over long periods to participate in campaigns such as Carranstown that roll out over years:

We don’t have any resources. On the other side [pro incineration] experts are employed by the company and they’ve endless pockets. Our people get exhausted, they get burnt out and it’s very difficult, hard work, people are working and at the end of their working day they go to meetings, get on the internet, travel somewhere, collect more information.

The David and Goliath metaphor, inferred above, was raised by a number of interviewees in different contexts, but it was predominantly the mismatch in financial resources that was of most concern. The Carranstown campaigner below highlights the difficulties civil society groups face in terms of financing campaigns that oppose the activities of large companies when the legislative environment also demands financial contributions in order to participate:

It’s stacked against you. The recent introduction of fees for submissions, observations and objections either to the council, the board or the EPA is just another indication of the lack of democracy. Now you can only really object if you have the money and that’s wrong...we’re fighting organisations with bottomless pockets of money.

Related to concerns about an unequal power balance between the developer and the Carranstown campaigners in terms of resources there was a sense in which anti-incineration actors felt generally excluded from waste policy debates. While the private sector through the consultancy sector was central to forming plans, and policy debates was in part due to a weak national anti-incineration stance had created distributional inequalities for some areas including Carranstown. While the developers were clear that any location they proposed would have created opposition they did acknowledge that the site was selected in part because of the adjacent large cement factory and the nearby national roadway. Anti-incineration campaigners saw such decision making as flawed logic leading to distributional injustice:

...we feel that the whole of East Meath is being turned into an industrial zone willy nilly and the cement works is already there, now we would argue very strongly that because the environment has been degraded to a certain extent, it’s no reason to add to the degradation.

Some interviewers suggested that their exclusion from policy debates was in part due to a weak national anti-incineration lobby in a strongly centralised political system. This would support the findings of other studies that while community-based campaigns have generated significant media and political attention in Ireland (see Allen, 2004) they have tended to be isolated reactions to specific developments that have not developed into broader or enduring movements:

I think what we’re lacking is a national environmental movement, a strong body like a good Greenpeace or a good Friends of the Earth that’s well funded...we’re quite strong with regards incineration but it’s purely based on localised issues that’s why there’s pockets of protest all over the place.
As a result, campaigners involved in these events have not generally been incorporated into long-term pro-active policy discussions. Not all campaigners wanted to see a strong national lobby characterised by big environmental organisations, however. While most interviewees did recognise the benefits of an influential national voice for anti-incineration, and indeed environment issues generally, the international focus of the transnational environmental organisations, such as Greenpeace, was perceived by some to be inappropriate in an Irish context where local struggles against development have predominated (Tovey, 1993; Allen, 2004). The anti-incineration campaigners then were struggling with the need for a broader and louder voice in the corridors of power to combat accusations of NIMBYism without wanting to deny the localness of the campaign or the significance of the local community support base.

To summarise, the challenges of finding resources to fund campaigns particularly in the face of an unsympathetic state means it is difficult for such groups to organise at anything other than a local level. This in turn is problematic when policy making is heavily centralised and civil society groups have limited access to or influence in national policy communities. The problems together do not prevent civil society activism, as Carranstown clearly demonstrates, but they do conspire to marginalise such activity.

Discussion: the marginalisation of civil society activism

The Carranstown case illustrates why locally based initiatives stimulated by community activism can find it extremely difficult to ‘accumulate significant power to alter the dominant governance cultures in which they find themselves’ (González and Healey, 2005, p. 2066). This raises an important point with respect to the cultures of action approach adopted in this context. For while it is possible to analyse civil society activity through a cultures of action lens those cultures of action are not formed, and do not function, in a vacuum. They sit alongside and within a myriad of other cultures of action operating at a variety of scales (from the individual to the global) and respond to other cultures of action that can be found in public, private and civil spheres of society. Nonetheless within analyses of civil society action this lack of influence is predominantly (although not uncritically) perceived as problematic and the Carranstown campaigners were concerned and frustrated by their apparent lack of influence in waste management debates. The concerns revolve around the view that a marginalised civil society can act to discourage the development of new civil associations and may lead to the dissipation of existing associations contributing to a democratic polity, which might subsequently mean policy making and decision taking proceeds without challenge (Foley and Edwards, 1996). González and Healey (2005) suggest that in such cases organisations need to search for cultures of action that keep immediate targets in focus while simultaneously adopting strategic mechanisms to affect wider governance culture. This is particularly important given the particular dynamics of waste management in Ireland shaped by supra-national Directives from the EU and centralised policy making structures. It is possible, with commitment and resources, that campaigners could build a national base for their activities, but they would also need to develop alliances and draw influence from other areas of civil society in Ireland creating a pincer movement that links exogenous forces with local initiatives in order to combat the contrasting cultures of action inhering in the developmental state (Boyle, 2002) that emphasise economic development and private sector solutions rather than environmental concerns or community empowerment. Even though the chances for success when civil society organisations mobilise against dominant economic interests and mainstream political parties may be slim (Fainstein and Hirst, 1995) there remain spaces for resistance, or what Amin and Thrift (2002) see as possibilities for alternative practices to become insurgent forces at a variety of scales.

Anti-incineration campaigners could also reflect on the possibility for modifying or developing alternative cultures of action. To date the campaign has focused on traditional methods of communicating concerns about the proposed incinerator such as creating petitions, holding meetings and encouraging public participation in planning processes. Other areas of civil society activism have begun to adopt direct action tactics and even civil disobedience in their campaigns to generate political and media attention (Maguire, 2000; Connolly and Lynch, 2005). Although it is difficult to measure the impact that such overt confrontation has on policy making it certainly has placed Government policies and practices under greater public scrutiny. However such tactics are not without their dangers as the Irish state also has a tendency to react strongly when faced with dissent from civil society organisations. In 2003 protests against the introduction of local authority waste charges resulted in 22 individuals being jailed for contempt of court because of their unwillingness to confirm that they would not participate in any further civilly disobedient acts that would prevent household waste being collected (Maguire, 2000; Davies, 2007). In 2005 five farmers were also jailed for protesting against the Corrib Gas pipeline in County Mayo (Connolly and Lynch, 2005). Such state response to resistance has been linked by some commentators to the effects of corporatist social partnership that evolved in Ireland during times of economic hardship in 1980s and 1990s, which it is suggested led to the co-option of civil society groupings and fostered an intolerance towards dissent in the dominant political culture (Teague and Donaghey, 2004; Cox and Mullan, 2005). It is argued by these commentators that in the drive for economic development the partnership model in Ireland accepts only civil society actions
that conform to the dominant economic perspective. As in the work of Olson (1982) opponents see civil society groupings that are challenging dominant economic perspectives as a threat to the efficient functioning of the state and markets.

It may also be argued that the values of the campaigners, central to a cultures of action analysis, articulated through their personal and social commitment to a form of global environmentalism does not engage the sensibilities of other social associations within Ireland sufficiently. The few studies that have been conducted of environmentalism and environmental movements in Ireland (see Tovey, 1993; Allen, 2004) identify a perception that those who are overt in their concern to protect the environment tend to be middle-class and urban and interestingly without a strong connection (practically and historically) with the land and rural issues. While much work has been conducted on issues of national identity, post-colonialism and culture generally (see Nash, 2001) and in Ireland (see Howe, 2000), little attention has been devoted to understanding how such factors might affect attitudes and behaviour towards environmental issues and patterns of organisation around those issues and this is an area worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion

The Carranstown campaign certainly highlighted to Government a significant degree of opposition to the development of the incinerator in local communities and non-local environmental organisations even if it has so far failed in its attempt to prevent the planning of the incinerator. In terms of civil society characteristics the campaign generated new associational linkages between people, what Foley and Edwards (1996) would call fostering patterns of civility in the actions of citizens. The campaign acts as a counterweight, energising resistance against the dominant regime (Central Government and the private waste industry) that supports incineration through the collection and dissemination of oppositional information. It has attempted to foster good practice in governing waste by monitoring policy procedures and practices and calls for greater accountability and transparency in decision making. Yet it has found its activities constrained by limited resources and a lack of influence in policy and decision making.

While some of these constraints are due to external forces which may not support the facilitation of critical civil society activities there are a number of ways in which civil society organisations might act to create influence in waste governance on their own terms. The first is to seek a greater constituency of support amongst a wider range of communities (both geographical and interest-based) through national networking and organisation to scale up the strength of the civil society voice in policy debates. For instance actors in the waste sector could work with other civil society groups where their concerns about justice, democracy, community capacity building and empowerment overlap. Building constituencies and partnerships with other strong civil society groups would enable the waste-related organisations to see what mechanisms work well in terms of gaining status and influence in policy circles. Of course civil society groups interested in waste are in an historically different position in Ireland compared to groups concerned with for example health or poverty which have much longer and stronger relationships with Catholic Church which has traditionally been a pivotal locus of power outside the state and markets (CORI Justice Commission, 2005). Of course it is acknowledged that civil society is not a homogeneous entity, nor should it be expected that the organisations within it would be, or want to be, unified as ‘the ability to act in the public sphere is distributed unevenly among different segments of the overall civil society’ (Gerometta et al., 2005, p. 2018). However, influence may be extended if the different qualities among and between groups can be harnessed, what Putnam (1993) called the importance of bonding or bridging social capital. Similarly civil society groups might look to successful waste related initiatives overseas (Walsh et al., 1997; Luckin and Sharp, 2003) in order to identify the kinds of mechanisms that supported the expansion of the sector in those environments.

Equally the preceding discussion is not to suggest that a broader incorporation of civil society into policy debates, or a greater recognition and support for their activities, will somehow miraculously solve existing waste problems, or even reduce conflict in Ireland’s waste management environment. Indeed conflict can be seen as a component part of a functioning democracy containing actors with diverse values and interests (Dryzek, 1996). Nonetheless civil society actors do potentially add a valuable richness to waste debates by providing alternative perspectives on both waste problems and solutions that may help to generate more defensible and sustainable waste management practices in a country experiencing significant challenges in the waste arena. The existence of an active civil society that is engaged with waste planning matters might also help to build structures of trust between local authorities and communities.

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Appendix A. Additional methodological information

Interviews with key actors were taped and transcribed. The duration of interviews was between 1 and 2 h and the transcripts varied in length from 8 to 21 pages (average 15 pages). Precise interview questions changed slightly according to the actors being interviewed although the overall structure of interviews remained the same. The interview approach was semi-structured in order to allow for questioning to probe and clarify the responses of interviewees.

Example interview schedule: anti-incineration campaigners

A. Organisational structure and function

- When was the campaign established?
- What were the aims of the campaign?
  - In what way have these aims changed over the course of the campaign?
  - What activities were undertaken to achieve these aims?
  - How were these activities resourced?
- What kinds of arguments were used to make the case against the building of the incinerator?
  - What sources were used to help justify the arguments made?
- How has the campaign interacted with other actors in the debate and the wider community?
  - What means of communication were used (e.g. the Internet, mailing)?
  - Why were these means adopted?
  - How effective were they?
- Has the campaign linked up with other organisations involved in anti-incineration campaigns in other locations?
  - If so, how were these linkages formed?
  - How did these linkages influence the campaign?

B. Participation in Carranstown campaign

- What was your role in the campaign?
  - What motivated you to get involved?
- Are you/have you been involved in other community activities/issues?
  - If so, can you tell me a bit about them?
- Who else has been involved in the campaign?
  - How many people were involved?
  - What roles did these participants play?
  - What do you think motivated their participation?

C. Impact of campaign

- What influence do you think the campaign had/is having on the Carranstown case?
  - What factors do you think affected that level of influence?
- What alternative approaches would you adopt if given the opportunity to begin the campaign again?
- How are you planning to take the campaign forward from this point?

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