INTEREST GROUPS IN DOMESTIC SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SANTA CRUZ DO SUL/RS

GRUPOS DE INTERESSE NA GESTÃO DE RESÍDUOS SÓLIDOS DOMÉSTICOS NO MUNICÍPIO DE SANTA CRUZ DO SUL/RS

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Abstract

O presente artigo analisou de que forma se constroem os diferentes grupos de interesses entre os agentes públicos e privados na gestão dos resíduos sólidos domésticos em Santa Cruz do Sul/RS. Procurou-se analisar como os grupos de interesse e os grupos de pressão interferem nas políticas ambientais, sobretudo no gerenciamento dos resíduos sólidos domésticos (RSD). Foram aplicadas entrevistas a diferentes atores envolvidos no tema, assim como a pesquisa bibliográfica, documental e a observação não participante. Encontraram-se evidências de que existem relações de grupos de interesses na gestão dos resíduos sólidos domésticos (RSD) do município com a administração pública em virtude dos altos valores pagos anualmente para as empresas licitadas e contratadas.


Abstract

This article analyzed how different interest groups are built between public and private agents in the management of domestic solid waste in Santa Cruz do Sul/RS. We tried to analyze how the interest groups and the pressure ones interfere in environmental policies, especially in the management of domestic solid waste (DSW). The interviews were applied to different performers involved in the theme, as well as bibliographic and documentary research and non-participant observation. We found evidence that there are relations between interest groups in the management of domestic solid waste (DSW) in the municipality and the public administration due to the high amounts paid annually to the companies that are bid and contracted.

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Introduction

The interdependence among unbridled production, consumerism and the excess of urban solid waste (USW) has caused great impacts on society, especially in cities. Even with the Declaration of Stockholm (1972), the Club of Rome (1972) and Eco-92, besides to other events of a global nature, it is still necessary for Western civilization to pay more attention to environmental concerns due to the felt consequences with the excess of the discarded waste in an inconsequential way. According to Carson (1962), the mankind is constantly concerned with several and different kinds of risks and dangers that can affect the sustainability and the environment. These risks were created and introduced on the planet as mankind has been evolving and developing your lifestyle. The environmental problems are diverse, including different ways of radiation, packaging and poisonous substances. The man, in this sense, as much as he likes to think or intend differently, cannot avoid responsibilities, because takes part of nature. This is affecting the Environment will also be affecting itself.

For Hawken (2007), the productivity of resources should not be limited to save more resources and monetary value, but also aimed the improving the quality of life. Not too far, corporations will inevitably redesign everything they do today to participate in a productivity transformation. When the countries met in Brazil at Eco 92 to discuss the environment and human development, some agreements and treaties showed to be controversial, because they gave the impression of doubts about the development capacity of non-industrialized countries.

From the second half of the 20th century, the environmental problems intensify and the concern to avoid misappropriation of resources and also to protect them became part of the list of governmental conversations, agendas, debates and social demands. However, the great difficulty is that the laws in force, the guidelines that enter the governmental agendas still have a little effect on what would be expected for environmental protection and care with the environment. The large corporations still dominate the world market and get to maintain and control their corporate interests, including forming interest groups in front of environmental public policies in all stages, from the agenda until to the implementation (CAVALCANTE, 2014).

On this point, this article aimed to analyze and understand how interest groups are formed in the municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS in the management of domestic solid waste and also how these groups act and articulate with each other and with other performers involved in the argument arenas. So, these interest groups act strategically to get more privileged and anticipated information on the formulation of public policies and obtain financial gains regarding the bid and public contracts in relation to the management of local domestic solid waste. For Regional Development, it is essential to understand how this phenomenon works, which causes a serious social problem, taking into account the high costs of environmental operations in the municipality and also because they are public financial resources. And also understand how articulations work in the argument arenas in order to obtain privileged information and power relations among different public, private and political performers to the interest groups.

It is necessary to understand these relations and dynamics of interests that take place in the local territory and in the arenas of power, aiming at financial gains for interest groups, and also understand how public policies serve as a base platform to the direct and indirect actions of these groups in order to get the auctions and public contracts that are paid with the public financial resources from civil society. The object of this article was Santa Cruz do Sul/RS city, located in the central region of the State of Rio Grande do Sul/RS 153 km far away from the capital Porto Alegre/RS. In its micro-region, it belongs to the Rio Pardo Valley, which consists of 23 municipalities, among which it has the largest economy and development. Its economy is based on national and international tobacco sector industries, trade, services and also has several logistics companies. The municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), has approximately 130,416 inhabitants (2020), an area of 733,473 km² and has the eighth GDP in the state.
The municipality approved its first Municipal Solid Waste Management Plan in 2013, just three years after the enactment of the 2010 National Solid Waste Policy. In 2018, the Plan was reformulated and launched again by the City Hall and the Department of the Environment, Sanitation and Sustainability (SMMASS). The municipality also has a Contextualization Manual on Urban Solid Waste Management (2017), that conceptualizes, in Law 12,305/2010 in its article 13, urban solid waste (USW) as coming from different sources, such as residues from industries, commerce, dangerous residues from chemical activities, residues from health areas, agricultural activities such as bottles of poisons and pesticides, and also domestic solid residues (DSR) from activities in urban and also from homes in the rural area (household waste), such as food waste, remains of many household items that are discarded, clothing, paper, fabrics, waste from sweeping, cleaning and also home pruning.

The municipality has three bid companies and contracted to carry out environmental operations regarding the management of urban solid waste, including solid household waste. In this aspect, the companies that carry out these operations have been operating for years in local operations.

**Interest groups and public policy**

Many business groups see public policy as a way to gain bid fairs and contracts, and in some cases interfere directly by supporting political groups through election campaign donations in order to receive further benefits. The interest groups act in territories and in public policy with their power strategies aimed at obtaining financial gains, and also how they interact with the other important performers involved in these scenarios. These games of power and privileged information cause a serious social problem, especially when public financial resources are destined to the privileges of private groups and companies. For Meier and Nedelman (1979), the function to be performed by different interest groups would not be clearly established. This factor would predominantly depend on the performers that define the interaction to be exercised (interest groups and the State) and also on the persuasion way by which many performers define the situation in which this interaction takes place.

Marques (2006) explains that the networks of interests aimed to public policy and remain in constant transformation and that their positions alternate according to their expectations, desires and alliances. In this aspect, three fundamental public performers emerge for such articulations and transformations, namely: the applicants public policy, politicians and private companies. As soon as the interest groups are constituted with a view to interests and gains through certain public policy, they align themselves with the politicians who hold institutional power and, together, articulate themselves in order to obtain more power and financial profits.

But it cannot be understood the mechanics and guidelines of interest or pressure groups without initially understanding the nature of their participants, government performers, high-ranking public officials, financial agents, lobbyists, entrepreneurs, etc. Several classic authors and thinkers on the subject, such as the pioneer Bentley (1908), believe that individuals and their individual interests bring about an approximation and affinities in groups. From these individual affinities that the collective interest is formed, because the central essence of the formation of interest and pressure groups is the result of these dynamics, interactions and their articulated processes. These groups work together with some strategic government sectors that often provide them with privileged information when forming public policy that they like or also vetoing when they don't like it.

In this context, for Brancaleon et al (2015), the public policy can be conceptually understood in an abstract way, because it requires a certain intellectual effort to make them concrete and palpable. The public policy take form through projects, public programs, laws, advertising campaigns, public clarifications, court decisions, direct public spending, technological innovations, administrative routines, among others. The public policy can be subdivided into: distributive, redistributive, regulatory and constitutive. Its process and cycle consists of five essential activities which are agenda setting, its formulation, decision making, effective implementation and final evaluation. The conceptions of the five phases do not always occur in a linear way, but often in a discrete way, so that certain interest groups can be articulated or not, and public managers can also reach certain objectives and goals.

According to Tronco (2018), the public policy have four important initial phases that are divided into policy, plans, programs and projects. The policy is the main and conceptual idea that
will support the planning process. The policy makes sense and born in the social sphere when a certain government announces that it will act or intervene on a certain social issue, proposing actions, objectives, budgets and strategies that are specified in plans. The plan is the result and consequence of studies and negotiations, that is, documents and reports are created that contain the strategies to achieve the goals of public policy. It usually involves the diagnosis based on the main information, the current status and intervention proposals with the main objective, secondary objectives, strategies to achieve the goals and programs to be implemented. The program is the data set and information about how public policy will work and will be operationalized. All programs contain costing budgets, goals, objectives and indicators to track their implementation. Finally, the project that contains specific solutions to a particular problem, often called a product. Every project has an action plan, date to end, that is, it is observed how the product is generated and constituted. If it is a continuity project, that extends, it is called an activity.

Secchi (2014) says that the public policy is made up of different performers who can act for the common interests of a particular group or in an isolation way. The arenas of dispute are scenarios of constant decision-making activities and also of many conflicts. The politicians are performers in this process of formulating and deciding on public policy, being able to articulate defense or coalition strategies in positions invested in the Legislative or Executive. So, their actions have legality and legitimacy to make them fulfill their social function. And they still have several phases, among them, the agenda that represents the initial part, in which the topics will be brought up and debated in the public sphere in front of different performers and pressure groups. Subsequently, there is the period for formulating the strategies, and soon after, the implementation takes place, in which public policy are put into practice and directed to a target audience, in the social context, in order to ensure the well-being of society. Finally, the evaluation, period in which the results of the implementation will be analyzed and verified in comparison with the formulations specified at the beginning of their strategic planning process (LOTTA, 2008).

The management of domestic solid waste in the municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS

For Barbieri (2011), the human being and society extract resources from the environment for their livelihood, but return only the remains in an irresponsibly way. In nature, the remains of living organisms decompose and are absorbed by other living beings, lossless where everything is transformed and everything is reused. However, the same is not true for human activities, where the result of their activities is degradation and pollution. In this aspect, to pollute is to dirty, to contaminate, to degrade, to destroy and corrupt, and the pollutant can be any form of energy or materials that impact the environment and cause changes in its physico-chemical properties. Many countries that boast a quality of life based on purchasing power and extreme consumption, living with high rates of family purchases, depending on resources from other poorer countries to nourish this chain. As a result of this relation and the difference between the standards of living, many socio-environmental problems have been generated over the decades, in an increasingly evident way. The families with medium and high purchasing power consume more compared to poorer families, and as a result, disposal also occurs in large volumes, that is, generating domestic solid waste.

The disposal of domestic solid waste (DSW) has increased a lot over the years, especially, the manufactured products started to be found more and more in families’ garbage. The mindset has been created that many products are easier to discard than fix. The union and combination of society's difficulty in repairing objects and thus disposing them more easily, makes the garbage full of perfectly useful things and objects that with a little effort could be again come into working and not necessarily be discarded (LEONARD, 2011).

Some discarded materials are more dangerous and toxic, such as aerosol vials of insect poisons, cells, batteries, medicine remains, fluorescent lamps, paints and solvents, oils, among others. In this aspect, the PNRS brings together a set of actions, guidelines, regulations and responsibilities regarding the subject. Domestic solid waste is generated in large volumes in urban spaces and on these should be encouraged to reduce excess consumption, reuse, recycling, correct sorting, effective treatment of solid waste and the correct final disposal of waste in licensed landfills (BARTHOLOMEU and CAIXETA-FILHO, 2011).

In this sense, Leite (2009, p. 50), portrays the direct and reverse post-consumption distribution channels, where the different operations and possible different destinations that waste are subjected to in relation to recycling, reusing, reuse can be seen remanufacturing, incineration, final disposal, etc.
The municipality object of the research, Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, presents several problems as it was verified in the answers of the applied interviews and also according to the non-participant observation of the researcher. These various problems were also noticed in the document analysis regarding local environmental contracts, in bid and in the applicable law about the subject. In the management of urban solid waste and, in this context, as a natural consequence, domestic solid waste is also included. The most expressive problems found in the answers to the interviews, in the non-participant observation and in the document analysis deal with the high values that are destined to the operations of solid waste management in the municipality, the green containers that are distributed on the streets by a contracted company, in order to receiving organic waste, due to the lack of more environmental awareness of the population at the moment.

The data collection to answer the research problem was based on the application of 16 structured questionnaires in the form of application for different interviewed that represent the municipal government, among which are former mayors, councilors of the situation and opposition to the municipal government, Department of Environment, Sanitation and Sustainability (SMMASS), the municipality's attorney, municipal servants involved in solid waste management functions, contracts, bid, private companies contracted and bid, among others. The criterion adopted in the questions on the application involved questions made specifically for each function exercised in public administration or for entrepreneurs who have contracts/bids with the municipality. The questions elaborated involved an analysis and the interviewed perception about the current situation of environmental management in the municipality, strengths and weaknesses in the processes of current environmental legislation and local environmental operations.

There were a review and analysis of documents, bid contracts and Laws, provided by the City Council and by the companies that hold the bid contracts to provide services of environmental
management of domestic solid waste to the municipality. It was analyzed the National Solid Waste Policy (NSWP), the City Statute and the two Municipal Solid Waste Management Plans in order to understand the dynamics and legislation relevant to the researched topic. Also, through a visit and application of a questionnaire, we wanted to understand how the routine of screening of cooperative members works, other operations, transshipment flows of waste and the responsibilities of the Cooperative of Collectors and Recyclers (COOMCAT) - an important tool in the municipality in order to collaborate in the management of urban solid waste.

It was also analyzed how function the management and the managing of solid waste in the municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, questioning the operations with the sorting plant, the relation with collectors' cooperatives, the final disposal of waste in licensed landfills, understanding the most critical levels in relation to the topic, what the opportunities for improvement are involved and how the implementation of the Municipal Plan for Integrated Solid Waste Management works (whose first version is from 2013 and the latest from 2018) in relation to outsourced companies and the creation of interest groups, since the largest amounts invested in solving the problem in question are given off by the portfolios of the Municipal Department of Environment.

The documents researched were acquired from the municipal government through the City Council Department, the Municipal Attorney General, the Environment Department, Sanitation and Sustainability (SEMASS), from the bid companies that showed their respective contracts. The federal government website was used as a source to research the Federal Constitution, the City Statute, the National Solid Waste Policy (NSWP), while the State Government website was used to research the Rio Grande do Sul State Solid Waste Plan 2015-2034 (PERS/RS).

The Municipal Solid Waste Management Plans (PMRGS/SCS) were searched on the website of the Municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, and the first plan was created in 2013 (currently it only has a physical copy, because it was updated to the most recent version in the year 2018). All the documents researched for the thesis were accessed between the periods of July 2019 and June 2020.

On the website of the Court of Accounts of the State of Rio Grande do Sul/RS, it was possible to consult the Technical Guidance Manual for Solid Waste Collection Services, which contains the design, contracting and inspection rules issued in 2019 for the bid companies to follow. The terms of bid contracts of the three companies that currently operate in the municipal solid waste management were also analyzed. These terms have similar structures, because they follow an adopted model by the municipality to suit the requirements of Federal Law No. 8,666, that is, they show the necessary information that is public, obeying the criteria of transparency and also inspection by the Federal Court of Accounts.

The interviews were carried out between the months of April and May 2020, with 16 strategic performers in the researched topic. For the selected sample, the criterion that was used were interviewing political performers present in the current and past context, that is, political performers who worked in the period of approval of some bid, laws and projects, municipal servants who were present in the bid approvals and participated in the approvals of the two Municipal Solid Waste Management Plans. It also was interviewed the responsible (president) of the municipality's Cooperative of Collectors and Recyclers (COOMCAT), a specialist and researcher about the respective Cooperative, the municipality's attorney and employees of the three companies that are currently bid and hold the management operations of the municipal contracts of solid waste.

**Conclusions**

One of the main problems found was related to the administration of operations of the green containers that are located on the city's streets. In addition to the waste that is thrown outside by clandestine scavengers that the public authority has no control, there is still the bad smell that stands in the streets, generating complaints from the population in general. As a large part of the population does not make the correct use of containers to deposit organic waste and put other recyclable waste inside, clandestine scavengers end up in the containers to make a dangerous separation. By doing this without due care and equipment protection, they are susceptible to many pathogens, gas inhalation, etc.

The City Hall explained that it has 320 containers spread across the central area and that will have inspections in these places by servers from the Department of Transport, Urban Mobility and the Municipal Guard in late-night rounds. The containers must only be used for organic waste and non-recyclable rejects, such as foods scraps, fruit peels, yerba mate, disposable diapers, toilet paper,
absorbents, among others. The population must never put glass, cans, cardboard, paper, building rejects, poison bottles, among others in these places.

The municipality's Collectors and Recyclers Cooperative (COOMCAT) explained that they are responsible for solidary collection in the central area and in some neighborhoods, but warned that in the city, there are many recycler, clandestine collectors, who collect only what interests them to market. In most of the cases, they rip the bags and leave the rest spread on the floor as shown in the images in figures 02 and 03 below.

**Figure 02:** Waste disposal outside organic waste collection containers

![Figure 02: Waste disposal outside organic waste collection containers](source: Authors Register (2020))

**Figure 03:** Waste disposal outside organic waste collection containers

![Figure 03: Waste disposal outside organic waste collection containers](source: Authors Register (2020))

Another problem that refers to the lack of inspection concerns the civil engineering sector and the problems that the municipality has in its permissive Master Plan and a few environmental responsibilities, because the municipality's green belt areas are decreasing more and more. The inspection is carried out through a report, when there is, or through an appeal or news by social networks, according to the city councilors who were interviewed replied.

The interviews surprised by the fact that the great majority of political interviewed mentioned that there is no practically dialogue with the local government about public policy issues that result in social and environmental good. In this way, it is possible to infer that both sides live isolated, often without agreeing in regard to important issues in the municipality, among them, the demands on the environment. According to the performed interviews and the non-participant observation, it is clear that interest networks need privileged information that prior to bid or contract and that results in financial gains and power. In this aspect, the offices serve in many cases for political and business articulation, as many of these local private companies also help financially in election campaigns.

According to the responses to the interviews and visits made, we noticed that interest groups work more intensely in administrative offices with political agents and that there is evidence that they have links with private companies before the contracts and bidding contests. In relation to the research problem that questions how the different interest groups are built and articulated between public and private agents in the management of domestic solid waste in the municipality, the
evidence found also points to the high amounts of urban solid waste that are sent daily to the landfill, the annual costs of environmental operations, while the municipality’s Cooperative of Collectors and Recyclers (COOMCAT) is underutilized.

The term "underutilized" in this aspect refers to the Cooperative's own screening power, because it needs more attention from the local government operating in a place with restricted space that hinders its performance, annual financial resources are low compared to what is invested in contracts and bid private companies and also in relation to one of the most important factors, that is, the Cooperative itself qualifying even more to train and take environmental information about the correct selective collection in all the neighborhoods in order to reduce the mix of domestic solid waste. Once such a feat is achieved, by a natural consequence, it increases the waste sorting power, reduces its contamination by the incorrect mixture that occurs in the homes and thus smaller amounts of waste will be transported to the sanitary landfill, reducing the annual environmental costs.

In 2017, the municipality spent around R$8,957,309.88 on all urban solid waste management operations and in 2019, around R$10,204,306.74 were spent. It is then noticed a growing financial liability in relation to municipal expenses with the management of urban solid waste and which are the result of the increase the waste generation that is sent to final destination, especially domestic solid waste. Another important point is that comparing the annual expenses mentioned above with the investment that is aimed to the Cooperative of Collectors and Recyclers (COOMCAT), around R$51,055.35 monthly, it becomes another evidence that the relation with the Cooperative needs improvements and great investments.

The biggest expenses are with private companies and contracted/bid, when we should have great investments in the local Cooperative, in order to have greater screening power, generating more jobs, more income for cooperative members and they should also act more closely in the community with environmental education and awareness programs. The PNRS itself allows the Cooperatives to have more participation in the processes of recycling, reuse of waste and in issues of environmental education, so greater investments are needed in this place, giving more attributions and responsibilities to professionals, with regard to environmental topics. This action should generate more social integration, more jobs for new members and more income for the families of collectors and recyclers. In this way, they could do more active work in the neighborhoods, promoting more information together with the families, from door to door, guiding and passing on information about the different classes of waste and what the correct final destinations for each class are.

References


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