

‘URBAN GOVERNANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: AN IRISH CASE  
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Executive Summary

The new problematic of urban governance is finding dramatic manifestation in the issue of urban waste management. Popular resistance to the siting of waste incinerators in Ireland is leading to a grave legitimacy crisis for the government. The nation-state is caught in a crisis due to popular opposition to the plans and the need to meet more stringent European Union (EU) guidelines on sustainable waste management and recycling.

Keywords

Ireland, Dublin, waste, incinerators, protest, globalisation

## Summary

The new problematic of urban governance finds particularly dramatic expression around environmental issues that are, in a sense, non-negotiable. This article explores the general comparative issues arising in relation to urban environmental governance through a particular Irish case study. The particular issue was/is the siting of a waste incinerator in a working class suburb of Dublin and the popular campaign of resistance against it that emerged. Since then the Irish government has simply abolished the local level of government in relation to urban waste management and the politics of waste has become a sharply divisive issue. What we will do here is outline first the main parameters of the 'waste crisis' in Ireland and then examine how its governance was approached in the late 1990's. We then turn to a case study of a particular local urban campaign against incineration and its subsequent generalisation as waste became the main battle-ground in the contested terrain of urban governance in Ireland. Finally, some general implications of this study are drawn out.

## Urban Waste Governance

The contemporary city is increasingly subject to a regime of governance (see Massey et al, 1999). The recent debates on governance make it clear that it is the changing forms and functions of the state that have brought to the fore new forms of governance. Neo-liberalism has, as we know, at the core of its project the need to force a state 'retreat' from its traditional social and economic functions. But the market that the neo-liberalists push in its stead cannot run cities on its own.

Governance thus became a political catchword in the 1990's for a form of government without the state, at least in principle. It rested in part on the 'managerial revolution' brought about in public service delivery by the 'new public management' approach in most Western countries. Governance seeks to deal with the increasing social economic complexity of these societies in a more 'flexible' way than the traditional state. Above all we need to conceive of governance as a new process rather than an institution. As Pierre and Peter's put it "The conception of governance as 'steering' is at the heart of much of the current research in governance in different sub-fields of political science" (Pierre and Peters, 2000:231). So what does the 'governance' of urban waste imply in practice?

In Europe the process of governance is set within the parameters of the European Union (EU) and its 'directives' on particular issues. Since the Earth Summit of Rio in 1992 and the Kyoto Agreement of 1998 there has been increased attention to environmental concerns such as the global warming, pollution and waste management. Within the EU the Environmental Commission has been strengthening its ability to regulate the environmental policies of member-states. Its aim is to achieve sustainable governance of waste and to integrate environmental priorities to all other areas. The Commission sees the amount of waste we produce and the way we dispose of it as key indicators of a country's progress towards sustainable development. Disposal of waste through landfill or incineration is not seen as desirable in Europe's heavily urbanised societies. Instead the emphasis is placed on the reduction and then recycling of waste. The stated aim of the EU is not only to achieve greater resource-efficiency in production and consumption but to create

cleaner cities with a healthy lifestyle as part of a broader commitment to sustainable global governance.

The EU has built up a vast panoply of legislation around waste management and its implementation, this through 'Directives' on specific issues that member-states must implement although on how and when there is some discretion. The purpose of the Directives is to harmonise legislation and standards between nation-states and they are a good example of the regional moment of governance in the era of globalisation. Among a long list of Directives there are regulations on dangerous substances, waste oils, ground water, urban waste water, toxic waste and the disposal of animal waste. It was the 'foot and mouth' crisis in Ireland in 2001 (see Tovey, 2002) that focused attention the country's waste problem as the reality of having to dispose of more than 350,000 cattle carcasses caused logistical as well as political problems. These carcasses could not be disposed of to landfill (these were full and EU regulations would not allow it), they could not be exported and Ireland did not possess the necessary incineration option facilities.

Each European nation-state has to carry out a 'translation' of EU policy into its own particular circumstances and 'marry' it to national legislation. In this respect, member state governments are afforded a certain degree of flexibility in adopting the appropriate strategies for the purpose of meeting European Commission waste diversion targets. European principles of sustainability, which are enshrined in the EU 'waste hierarchy', give effect to 'preferred' – but not legally sanctioned - options on waste management. For instance, beginning with the least favoured method of waste disposal (landfill), there is then 'energy recovery' (which includes incineration),

followed by recycling, waste minimisation, and finally the most favoured option, waste prevention.<sup>1</sup> Member state governments are encouraged by the Commission to employ an ‘integrated’ approach to waste management, whereby a number of methods or options are used simultaneously in order to meet waste reduction/diversion targets. The integrated approach also aims to move the overall emphasis of waste management policy from a reliance on landfill (the least favoured/sustainable option) to the most preferred option, which is waste prevention.

In ‘Changing Our Ways’ (1998), the then Environment Minister Noel Dempsey outlined a number of different policy options in order to meet the EU waste targets. These included disincentives for using landfill by increasing ‘gate’ fees, increasing the separation of waste streams in order to facilitate more recycling, composting and the anaerobic digestion of organic waste, ‘Waste to Energy’ incineration, as well as the use of thermolysis, primarily through gasification and pyrolysis. However, transnational Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have long advocated an integrated waste strategy that, they claim, can significantly reduce waste stream levels – but without recourse to incineration. For instance, the ‘Waste Working Group’, a coalition of Irish and transnational environmental NGOs, published a report entitled ‘Sustainable Waste-Resource Management – A Guide for Local Authorities’ (2001). This report, funded by the Department of the Environment, proposed a ‘zero waste’ approach to waste management. Zero waste is a strategy that seeks to radically reduce waste levels by focusing on the more preferred options on the EU’s waste hierarchy such as prevention, minimisation, reuse and recycling. The report made reference to case

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<sup>1</sup> EU waste policy is governed by four central Principles – the Prevention Principle, the Producer

studies including Canberra, Australia, New Zealand, Nova Scotia in Canada and Alameda county in California, where the zero waste strategy has been successfully adopted. However, the Department of the Environment has consistently rejected the concept of zero waste as a viable waste management strategy.

While it would appear that the Irish government does indeed enjoy a certain leeway on policy, officials from both the Department of the Environment and Dublin City Council would argue that the reality is somewhat different. They point out that incineration is the only feasible policy option open to them if EU targets on waste diversion are to be met within the timeframe as set out in the Directives. Mindful that failure to comply with EU targets opens the authorities up to the possibility of legal sanction, one Dublin City Council official stated – ‘...its kind of frustrating in a way because they’re [the EU] saying ... ‘ its entirely up to you guys but if you don’t meet the other objectives in relation to diversion from landfill, we’re going to take you to court.’’ (Murray, 2003)

Ireland began to comply with EU policy with the 1996 Act that incorporated the EU ‘waste hierarchy’ into Irish law. It set out regulatory powers for the Minister of the Environment in relation to the prevention, minimisation and recovery/recycling of waste. It also committed Ireland to creating a ‘comprehensive and modern’ regulatory framework to achieve higher environmental standards. While it was hoped that the ‘private sector’ would contribute to and benefit from waste management in practice state regulation (especially through the Environmental Protection Agency) was crucial to the development of an integrated waste management strategy. This

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responsibility and polluter pays Principle, the Precautionary Principle and the Proximity Principle.

shows clearly to what extent the 'market' cannot do certain things, contrary to neo-liberal fundamentalist beliefs. In relation to public participation in the waste management process the act called for 'a formal procedure for public consultation and input to national and local waste management plans' (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1998 : p4). Public consultation was also to be a central feature in relation to the granting of licences for running waste facilities such as incinerators.

Ireland subsequently was always lagging in terms of compliance with EU Directives and targets on waste management and recycling. The European context was a constant driver of the Irish State's environmental policies but it also provided an opportunity for environmental activists. Thus one environmental scientist we interviewed argued that:

In the old days what drove waste management was very simply, cost. Every local authority wanted the cheapest possible solution to dump waste. That's why they bought the cheapest land in the most convenient place near the town. Then waste management began to be driven more and more by the EU. The EU demanded that we manage our land fill sites better, demanded an end to pollution....I think that, at the moment, what's pushing waste management decisions is to some extent the EU are pushing Ireland'. (Murray, 2003:160)

There is a widespread perception that European waste management policies are more firmly based on principles of sustainability and that the Irish state has simply gone from burying waste in the ground (landfills) to the least good option incinerators that have an even worse health impact on urban dwellers.

A key element in both the EU and the Irish government's waste policy is to increase the participation of the private sector in its management by seeking to make it profitable (see Fagan *et al.*, 1999). Where as once capitalist firms conceived of the environment as a cost free waste disposal facility they now have to view sustainable development as a business opportunity. The EU legislation focuses as much on 'market mechanisms' and the need for profitability as it does on sustainability. Robin Murray has gone furthest in analysing the economic potential of waste management no longer viewed as 'a cost and an economic drain on economic resources- but, rather, as 'a source of innovation' (Murray 1999:22). In practice, however, it is not the community that is benefiting from the creative potential of recycling and innovative waste management but, rather, big business. That is because, apart from anything else, waste management infrastructure requires massive investment. With a medium-sized incinerator costing some two hundred million euros and a typical waste management contract running for over twenty years it is not surprising that multinationals like the Belgian corporation Indaver dominate the Irish market as elsewhere.

The governance of urban waste has ultimately to deal with the location of its 'facilities', the landfills, incinerators or recycling plants. That is where the environment becomes more clearly situated in the domain of power and contestation. Invariably it is poorer or less powerful urban communities and localities that are chosen as the site for these often harmful waste apparatuses. Maher found that the location of toxic waste facilities in the US had a clear racial/class pattern:

'A part of the unwritten public policy concerning toxics seems to have been that you dump in someone else's backyard – but not anyone's backyard.



Toxic waste facilities have been regularly located in areas populated by African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, or Asian Americans. Environmental racism is a very insidious form of discrimination, sometimes destroying whole communities, other times harming people in ways that will not appear for decades (ie. cancer)'. (Maher, 1998: 357-8)

For the governance of urban waste these are deemed 'sacrifice zones' to be doomed for the general good. In Ireland, our case study focuses on a class based 'sacrifice zone', namely the traditional working class suburb of Ringsend (see Popular Resistance below). The focus on the social aspects of environmental policy and conflict is, one must say, somewhat neglected in sociology of the environment literature (see Spaargarten *et al.*, 2000 for example) and this contribution could be seen as a useful supplement or corrective.

### The Waste Crisis

In the mid 1990's the Republic of Ireland found itself in the midst of a genuine waste crisis.<sup>2</sup> It lacked the infrastructure and the policy to deal with the increasing waste created by the economic boom of the 1990's. It was not only a material crisis, but also a political crisis insofar as Ireland was simply unable to meet EU regulations in waste management within a sustainable environmental philosophy and practice.

Following a belated recognition of the growing material waste problem by environmental authorities in the late 1990's (see Dempsey, 1998) seven regional waste plans were developed across the Republic. The aim of the plans was to reduce the 90 per cent of waste going to landfill and to increase recycling from 8 per cent to 35 per cent over a 15 year period, so as to meet the targets set by the EU. Crucially,

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Ireland's waste crisis, see Fagan et al.(2001), Boyle (2002), Fagan (2003), Murray (2003) & Fagan (2004).

at the heart of the new strategy was a set of six large incinerators in Dublin, the South-East, Galway, Limerick, the Midlands and the North-East. It was this turn towards incineration as a favoured waste 'management' strategy that was to politicise the waste issue in the towns and villages near where they were to be sited.

The Irish government's policy statement on waste *Changing Our Ways* had called for 'constructive cooperation with local communities and neighbouring local authorities' (Dempsey, 1998: 7) in developing a 'new' approach to waste management planning. For the waste management strategy to work it was necessary to have, argued the Minister of the Environment, 'effective public consultation and participation' (Dempsey, 1998: 7). And yet even at that preparatory stage, the Minister acknowledged that new waste initiatives are usually met with 'vigorous local opposition' (Dempsey, 1998: 19). Certainly knowledge about the health impact of incinerators was widespread and ecological disasters from Sevesco to Bhopal, from Chernobyl to the Love Canal incident in the US were still fresh in the popular consciousness. So the Irish government was caught in a dilemma, with pressure from the EU mounting for a 'practical' solution to the growing waste problem, and pressure from local urban communities to not go down the incinerator route.

To square the circle the government proposed to adopt a 'policy of transparency' in regards to waste management planning, in keeping with the language and ethos of good governance. To combat public opposition to new waste initiatives the government proposed a vigorous programme of 'public education'. Careful site selection was also advocated presumably to avoid locations where public opposition was predictable and likely to generate wider social or political support. Now 'public

education' by the government on the relative safety of modern incineration methods was simply not effective compared to the information provided by environmental groups and scientists, often backed up by the international information and campaigning networks. Transparency was not something that in practice worked because public hearings generated public opposition and if this opposition was then ignored it deepened the feeling of resentment. In fact as the original feasibility study for the Dublin region waste plan acknowledges, 'public opposition is likely to develop...once a site has been identified'. The politics of place come into play and communities were galvanised into action.

Public opposition to the government's waste plans was concentrated around the issue of the regional incinerators and 'super-dumps'. There was also, particularly in the Dublin city area, growing community opposition to waste charges, through which the government sought to defray some of the costs of meeting EU targets. By the end of 2000 there were at least 15 different waste and anti-dump groups campaigning in Ireland; with over 20 co-existing in 2001 to oppose the government's Waste Management Act (see below). In Cork City a recognised 'waste disposal crisis' emerged early as local opposition to a regional 'super-dump' sharpened. The existing waste dump was already two years past its recommended lifespan and the new 250 acre site designated for its replacement was fiercely opposed by the local urban and rural communities. Increasingly it seemed that the government's waste plans would have to be postponed with the prospect of Ireland facing legal action by the EU for failure to comply with the Waste Management Directives.

Inevitably the waste issue, and controversy around it, would feed into party politics. Before the 2002 General Election waste was, on the whole, avoided or ignored by political parties. However, during the election campaign – mainly due to lobbying and protesting by local anti-incinerator movements- the issue of waste management came to the fore. *Fianna Fáil*, in its policy document *Blueprint for a Cleaner Ireland* had, perhaps wisely, not mentioned incinerators at all. The Progressive Democrats unashamedly backed incineration. On the other hand, Labour, *Sinn Féin* and the Green Party all strenuously opposed incinerators. More surprisingly, *Fine Gael* adopted a zero-waste policy and absolutely ruled out the use of incineration. Its spokesperson Deirdre Clune declared that: ‘Public concerns regarding incineration are based on real fears relating to dioxins and particulate matter emissions’ (Irish Times, 3/4/02). Thus waste management came to be a dividing and divisive issue in Irish party politics as well as within society at large.

While the crisis of legitimacy around the waste issue deepened as a material crisis it also needed to be resolved. In 2002 the government faced a year of court actions brought by the EU’s Environment Commission around a number of environmental issues, including waste management. Increasing waste, decreasing numbers of landfill sites, inadequate recycling infrastructures and local opposition to incineration and ‘super-dumps’ meant that Ireland was ‘on the brink of its biggest ever environmental problem’ (Sunday Tribune, 30/01/00). The government responded to this crisis in a report by *Forfás* (the national policy and advisory board for enterprise, trade science, technology and innovation) that advocated setting up a National Waste Authority (*Forfás*, 2001:10) to deal with the crisis. In the meantime it advocated a bland ‘building of consensus’ through a process of ‘consultation’ with communities

affected by the waste management plans. Recognising that ‘progress on waste management is now becoming most critical’ (*Forfás*, 2001:iii) it argued somewhat optimistically that the primary public need was for more ‘information’ and called for an ‘expert’ information group to be set up.

The waste crisis in Ireland has generated a new urban politics that we examine in the next section. We need to understand cities such as Dublin and Cork as contested terrains of trans-national flows and struggles. They must be seen as trans-national sites as much as London or New York in the sense that they are ‘a disjointed terrain of global media flows...state-centred actors that side with and oppose global actors, local and global growth machines and green movements, multi-locational entrepreneurs and multilateral political institutions, all colluding and colliding with each other *ad infinitum* (Smith, 2001:70-1). All these intersecting and interweaving trans-national (EU), national and local flows and practices go to make up the complex waste crisis affecting Ireland’s cities. The urban future is far less certain in this trans-national decentred scenario than it was in the past. What is certain is that –against any structuralist interpretation- the issue of human agency is crucial as we shall now see.

### Popular Resistance

Waste is a global and national problem for sustainable development but popular resistance to government waste strategies tends to invariably be local. As Amin and Thrift put it: ‘The result is a new localism that is full of policy promise...There are new powers to be had from building local community’ (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 55).

It is now widely accepted that global domination produces local resistance. However, people in these local communities make sense of their world fully cognisant of the global, macro-regional and national terrain of debate. In relation to waste we found in our study that local residents were well aware of issues such as ‘global warming’, were completely ‘tuned in’ to European debates on sustainable waste management and engage fully with the national debates on a waste management strategy (Fagan et al 2001). That means we must reject a conception of place ‘understood as the site of cohesive community formations existing outside the logic of globalisation’ (Smith 2001, 106). The local of our case study - Ringsend Community in Dublin- is thus situated within complex global flows of power, information and identity formation.

There was a hidden history of popular protest against the siting of waste facilities going back to the mid-1970’s (see Allen and Jones, 1990). At that time there had been a number of community protests against toxic waste facilities especially in the Cork area. There had been a community campaign against a proposed toxic waste dump at Finglas in County Dublin in the late 1970’s. At that time economic development held undisputed sway in the national consciousness and the protestors were easily isolated. A united front of the state, the employers, local elites, the trade unions and even ‘public opinion’ served to thwart any protest on the ‘downside’ of intensive industrialisation. Two things were different by the late 1990’s. For one a sustained economic boom had made Ireland a ‘comfortable’ country and the imperative of economic growth was no longer urgent. And yet by then many people- lower down in the social scale- had not received many benefits from the ‘Celtic Tiger’. The other main shift in the 20 intervening years was the blossoming of the international environmental movement (see Mc Cormack, 1995) and the emergence of

a widespread popular and even governmental consensus that sustainable development was a *sine qua non* of human progress.

When the Irish government decided in 1999 to set up its major regional incinerators at Poolbeg in the Ringsend district of Dublin to burn most of the city's commercial and domestic refuse it was clearly going to be met with local opposition. Even the planning report had acknowledged 'perceptions' of risk to health and the environment, if not the reality of this risk, if not the reality of this risk attendant on the construction of a large waste incinerator. There was even an admission of 'lack of trust' in the regulatory agencies to monitor and control emissions. The local community should, it was recommended, not only be 'consulted', but engaged in an interactive relationship designed to result in consensus. Presumably the intention was to isolate those who it was perceived would habitually oppose the government's waste disposal solutions such as the Green Party. Yet local reaction was scathing. As one resident declared:

Sure the whole waste management plan is done with the minimum of everything, the minimum of costs, the minimum of standards, everything is minimum, minimum this, minimum that, that's how bad we are, everything is done to minimum standards....I mean, everything in this country is done by industry and big business and it has nothing to do with communities, it has nothing to do with governance. It has to do with who's paying the piper and who's putting what money into what party...simple as that. I mean the whole system's goddamn corrupt and I have no hesitation in saying that whatsoever.

On the basis of this generalised mistrust of the authorities opposition mounted at every step of the way, even (or even increasingly) when the government sought to engage in 'consultation' exercises. Thus in early 2003 when Dublin City Council held an 'Open Day' in Ringsend in order to outline its plans for the incinerator, the event was picketed by members of the local community. At the same time the anti-

incineration group announced that it would be taking the fight to the European Union level. Dublin City Council have no intention of backing off from their plan to set up a massive incinerator at Poolbeg but, its attempts to generate 'consensus' have failed abysmally. Nor was the announced policy of 'transparency' and sharing of 'information' what the residents perceived. For them:

...we're classed as an under-privileged area, so I mean, who are we? Like they'll put an incinerator in...this is 'sure, they wont mind', who are we? We're just living here, we have no say whatsoever and I mean, I've said this to people who represent us, they don't bring you up to date with what's happening in your area unless you get out and do it yourself.

This view was also held by another resident, who felt that officials only imparted the information or knowledge that they judged to be appropriate:

Anytime I've tried to acquire information, I've felt dismissed a little bit, or felt you asked a question that you're too big in your boots. And, it wouldn't be a personal thing, but I just felt that they would give you the information that they wanted to give you and you don't ask any questions.

Another complained about the production of unequal power relationship by officials in their interactions with them:

...they consistently talk down to you to the point where they can be quite insulting and degrading, even in their attitude to you. And the whole attitude is 'we know what's good for you, do what you're told'... You're not treated as an equal, and that's from past experience, whether you're talking to an engineer from Dublin Corporation. If you question what they're doing, he'll turn around and say 'have you got a Degree in Engineering?'...if you're reading out something you'll be asked 'have you got a Degree in English?'. That's it, they're pompous...and its very 'old Ireland', it's a very dinosaur attitude...

Access to knowledge is a key element in people's mobilisation and the state's capacity to exercise power. As one resident of Ringsend pointed out:



‘If you don’t know what it is you’re fighting, they can tell you anything because you don’t have the resources and the knowledge to say ‘that is bullshit’. That’s why they take advantage of a huge amount of people...’

This point was also made by a local TD, who compared the issues of information (or knowledge) in the context of the relationship between officials and Ringsend residents to the British civil service model employed in India:

...whereby knowledge was power, you kept the knowledge inside the system. You didn’t give away anything to the local community because that might usurp your own powers or threaten your own position of power.

We thus see that the mobilisation against the government’s plan to site an incinerator in a Dublin working-class suburb has at least reproduced if not produced by its own attempts to generate ‘consensus’ through ‘consultation’. While government officials saw consultation as a *façade*, or cover for a decision already taken, a representative of a trans-national environmental NGO who participated in the campaign explained that:

...real consultation is about empowerment, about empowering communities, about giving decisions over to the community and getting feedback... and taking that truthfully. Even if it isn’t a view they need or want, it should be incorporated into the reports. This is not happening.

The reality was that Poolbeg/Ringsend was interpreted as a ‘sacrifice site’ (Maher 1998) where the community’s socio-economic status and clustering of heavy industry in the area meant it was an ‘ideal’ site for an incinerator. In 1994 the community had already fought a successful campaign to have an incinerator closed down. The proposed incinerator will bring a lot more traffic into an already congested and polluted area where:

‘...if you go to the local surgeries around here, they’ll tell you one in three children have asthma... I mean, the people around here are dying regardless of whether it’s an incinerator or not. There’s questions asked about brain damage and brain tumours and high asthma rates.’

Our relatively small-scale example of popular resistance around environmental issues forms part, of course, of a broader international environmental movement (See McCormick, 1995). One could even say that the global is only constituted at the local ‘level’ of human activity. Political activism in the deprived Ringsend community was often generated by a perceived threat to the quality of everyday life. For one resident it was something far removed from the ‘ozone layer’ or the ‘global warming’ that motivated her engagement with the anti-incineration campaign. Rather, she originally got motivated with the campaign because of ‘small things, like footpaths or something that did not work’ (Murray, 2003:233). It was not ‘globalisation’ that was being confronted by these residents who felt dis-empowered much more by local economic, social and political power structures. And yet Dublin is a trans-national city and the site, inevitably, of struggles over the future of globalisation, whether it will be geared purely to the market and private gain or be conscious of the broader social interest.

### Aftermath

In the aftermath of the anti-incinerator campaign by the residents of Ringsend described above the Irish government made a decisive move towards centralising decision-making in regards to urban waste management planning. An unintended consequence was a broadening of social and political opposition to government waste management strategies as we shall describe below. First we have to understand how by 2001 waste management had become one of the ‘hottest’ political issues following

Dublin City Council's refusal to adopt a budget that would incorporate the higher waste disposal charges demanded by central government. The City Council in Dublin – that is to say local government – was prepared to face dissolution rather than implement changes that were bound to be opposed by urban residents. By the end of 2001 Dublin City Council had issued over 70,000 warnings to urban households that had not paid their waste charges. Three other local authorities – Galway, Longford and Louth were also not fulfilling their obligation to adopt a waste management plan and central government had to respond.

The government responded to the growing waste crisis (both material and political) by the 2001 amendment to the 1996 Waste Management Act. According to the Department of the Environment and Local Government itself the purpose of this amendment was to 'provide a legal mechanism by which the current long running waste management planning process can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion' (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2001). Clearly what was 'satisfactory' to government would not be satisfactory to local residents acutely concerned by government plans to site waste incinerators or other such 'facilities' in their areas. But the government was quite explicit on the remedy it sought to override this opposition and effectively 'fast track' planning permission for incinerators. The Department briefing cited above went on to say that 'the making of a waste management plan will become an executive function'. Effectively from now on decision-making regarding waste management would be taken out of the hands of elected local councillors and vested with City or Council Managers responsible to the executive branch of government. The Minister stated quite unambiguously that the

planning process was ‘over-democratised’ and that he did not believe it was ‘adding anything to it by having so many layers involved’ (Irish Times, 12/09/02).

In terms of urban governance the 2001 Amendment to the Waste Management Act was a decisive watershed. In many ways it demonstrated how fragile and politically dependent governance discourse actually is, especially when it clashes with the power requirements of the state. While earlier government statements on waste policy had waxed lyrical on the needs for popular consultation and participation in the interests of sustainable development the new tone was decidedly more ‘*dirigiste*’. There would be no consultation, just an imposition of waste management plans. As one commentator noted at the time - ‘Transferring authority from councils to managers will not make the existing [waste management] strategies any more appropriate and it is likely to further infuriate an already disillusioned public’ (Sunday Business Post, 12/08/01). The government argued that the legislation was imperative if Ireland was to meet EU regulations on sustainable waste policy. Having deepened the ‘democratic deficit’ with the 2001 Amendment, the government approved a new Protecting the Environment Act in 2003 whereby ‘local authorities are being given explicit power to discontinue the collection of domestic waste in the event of non-payment of charges’ (Department of the Environment, press release).

With their new powers in place and with central government now forcefully involved, urban local authorities in Dublin now began to sanction those households that would not (or could not) pay increased waste disposal charges. From mid-2003 onwards opposition to the waste disposal charged had mounted in a number of Dublin districts. This opposition was based on the widespread perception that the changes amounted to

‘double taxation’ insofar as this public service was already paid for in employment-based taxation. There was a further fear that the charges were a prelude to a widespread privatisation of public services. Thus one local campaign group Fingal Anti-Bin Tax Campaign argued that: ‘Where the bin tax is implemented the service is generally then privatised and the charges rise to astronomical levels’

([www.nobintax.info](http://www.nobintax.info)) and examples were given from across the country. A third strand generating wide social opposition was more directly political. Many local campaigners referred to the undemocratic nature of the whole process whereby, as we saw above, un-elected council members were given the power to implement waste management policy at local level, ‘over the heads’ of elected representatives.

The campaign against increased waste disposal charges – the Anti Bin Tax Campaign – centred around blockading the waste disposal vehicles from either leaving the local council depots or from leaving the housing estates after they had refused to empty waste disposal bins at non-tax paying households. This led to confrontations with the police and many arrests. Dublin City Council had also threatened to impose fines of up to 1,900 euros on those households that left uncollected rubbish outside their houses. Nevertheless within a few months the campaign had escalated to such a pitch that Fingal County Council – the first Dublin local council to implement the new waste charges policy – was forced to abandon collections in a number of high-profile districts. As a direct result of the protests it was also reported that three of the four Dublin local authorities were, by the end of 2003, actively considering the privatisation of waste collection and disposal services. The Dublin City Manager could claim that ‘protestors are playing in to the hands of privatisation... If bin collectors can’t do their jobs it makes sense that we would look at discontinuing our

service and passing it on to private operators' (stated in Sunday Business Post, 14/09/03).

In October 2003 the conflict between the Anti Bin Tax Campaign and the local authorities climaxed with the jailing of twelve campaigners and the City Councils launching of High Court proceedings against protestors blockading the waste disposal vehicles. Two Socialist Party politicians, a local councillor and the party leader, were jailed, thus leading to strong media interest in the dispute. While the authorities claimed that this move to 'criminalise' the waste campaign had been successful by the end of the year the media reported that there were still 50,000 households in Dublin where rubbish was not collected due to the protest. While inevitably the campaign waned the issues would not go away and the waste management issue had firmly entered the political process as a key and divisive issue.

From the Ringsend campaign against the siting of a waste incinerator through to the wider Dublin city anti-waste disposal charge campaign we see a steady politicisation of the urban waste issue. The nation-state was caught between pressure from above – in the shape of European 'Directives' to move to a more sustainable waste policy – and pressure from below – in the shape of popular resistance to bearing the cost of 'cleaning up' Ireland. The economic boom of the 1990's (see O' Hearn, 1998) had generated a huge extra amount of waste flows. The state wished to pass on the cost to the citizen and, if that failed, to privatise the waste industry through making it profitable. Waste was a global, European, and a local issue. People within deprived communities saw waste disposal as an issue around which they could and should mobilise. In reacting against these campaigns in a heavy handed way the Irish state

exposed to what extent urban waste policy was dictated by the needs of neo-liberalism and not those of sustainable urban development.

### Conclusions

The contemporary city exists within a complex set of global, economic, political, social and cultural flows (see Eade, 1997). However, we can only understand life in the city from a local, grounded perspective. The case study of popular resistance to the siting of a waste incinerator in Dublin provides ample evidence for this point.

Global and national environmental governance comes face-to-face with a very local sense of community. These local cultural and political meanings and identities are framed within the global restructuring of space and society, and generate significant 'glocal' social movements. That means we need to refuse binary oppositions between a 'global' and a 'local' framework of analysis that privileges one or the other scale of action and meaning formation. Nor should we neglect the often-missing dimension of the 'regional' because as we have seen, it is the European waste management legislation that has provided the spur for national action on waste and a powerful legitimising force for local communities concerned with sustainability and the very 'liveability' (see Evans, 2001) of their habitat.

On the problematic of urban governance the research points to a certain continuity with old state regimes rather than a radical new paradigm. The local state has certainly been restructured and the market has come to the fore as we saw with the waste issue. However, the identified shift to a 'lighter touch' governance modality does not mean that the state has gone away or even that its powers have been

diminished. When popular resistance to the Irish government's waste management strategy – based on incinerators- escalated and generalised, the Irish state simply and effectively abolished local democracy. Consultation and participation, (the watchwords of the 'new governance'), was replaced by management from above.

While contestation of capitalism centred in the Nineteenth Century around the domain of production, in the mid Twentieth Century it shifted to the realm of consumption.

Will waste be a new terrain of struggle for urban residents in the Twenty-First Century?



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