

ANTOINE ROBICHON (CITEO): "CITEO WILL ALWAYS NEED THE CNE TO ADDRESS WITH NUANCE THE DIFFERENT ISSUES THAT PACKAGING STAKEHOLDERS MAY HAVE"

What made CITEO get involved in the creation of the CNE in 1997?

Twenty-five or thirty years ago, one of the major concerns about packaging was end-of-life. In fact, this was the main purpose of Eco-Emballages, which was created in 1992 and became [CITEO](#) in 2017, following the merger with Ecofolio.

The CNE had - and still has - a broader vision than CITEO: "the reason why" behind the packaging. Therefore, in 1997, it became clear that we should create a closer link with the upstream part of the value chain.

This explains why CITEO is one of the historical members of the CNE. We believe there is a need to create a link with the entire packaging ecosystem via a neutral structure such as the CNE - because it is a real platform for exchange.

Where do the CNE's and CITEO's activities complement each other?

We are not similar structures. The CNE is an association that brings together a wide range of stakeholders in the field of packaging: from machine manufacturers to marketers to local authorities and consumer associations. Its role is to get everyone to agree on common visions for packaging. But also, to point out some truths!

CITEO is a commercial structure, which recently became a company with a specific role in the circularity of packaging. In the 30 years of its existence, after focusing on collection and recycling, we have gained expertise in packaging design since it also defines its end of life; and have intervened further up the value chain. Packaging-use and how the consumer perceives and uses it is also a new field of investigation.

Our two structures are complementary because they both perform different tasks, yet with similar stakeholders. CITEO will always need a platform such as the CNE to address, with nuance, the various issues that packaging stakeholders may have.

You are about to celebrate your 30th anniversary, an opportunity to look to the future – how does it look like?

The 30 years we have just lived are those of a construction – but not only! - of a collection and recycling system that is part of the circular economy and that is reaching a form of maturity. We can be proud of the work we have accomplished, the system is running daily, and the economic players who need the material we collect with the local authorities can count on the efficiency of the sector.

The upcoming 30 years will define how we will go one step further to reduce the environmental impact of packaging. Because indeed, packaging has an impact on the environment. In this context, we will need the CNE more than ever to remind us of the usefulness of packaging and to spread our messages in terms of circularity. Let's not forget that we commonly think in terms of "packaging" but we should rather think in terms of "product-and-packaging" pair or even "use-product-packaging."

We must also not forget to address the environmental footprint of packaging. The upcoming decades will need to ensure it becomes as small as possible. We need to collect more, of course, but also find systems more closely related to recycling: reuse, bulk when necessary, etc.

We should think: what, on a case-by-case basis, has the least impact?

While collection will remain key to maintaining control and circularity of this resource, it will also be necessary to adapt to ever-changing patterns of consumption and use.

In terms of circularity, is there still work to be done?

Yes, globally, in terms of the weight of the material, we have a 70-75% recycling rate, which slightly increases each year. The last 25-30% are more difficult to achieve, but this average hides differences between materials, particularly the circularity of plastics, which remains challenging because of the rate itself and to avoid leakage into the natural environment. While much has already been done, there is still progress to be made, and that's good.

We know that the last steps are the most challenging: individual behaviors, sizes of packaging to be captured, quality of material... But these challenges are exciting, and we will have to use all our collective intelligence to track down these last points of circularity.

I would add that in addition to circularity, we also need to look at the carbon footprint, at the biodiversity, at the end of life, but also at the beginning of the life cycle. I am thinking here, for example, of the origin of resources and of their extraction. The fields are opening up, and we are dealing with more complexity, but that is where we need to look. This is our mission.

Alongside the CNE?

Yes, because the CNE is this "platform" with which we can exchange on all these aspects while reminding the role of packaging.

You know, we like to say: "The best waste material is the one we don't produce." When we think of packaging as waste, this analogy makes sense. But this is not how we should consider it because packaging has countless valuable functions that are especially useful for the environment. The purpose of the CNE is to remind people that this analogy is wrong because there will always be a need for packaging. Packaging protects products as it has done for centuries and will continue to do so. Let us never forget that waste is worse than anything else.

But because packaging has nowadays taken on a symbolic role, there is little or no distinction between the two. It is quite unfortunate because we need it to respond to the urgency and complexity of the challenges of circularity and climate. The CNE is there to provide this nuance by reminding us of the positive role of packaging!