

NOËL MANGIN (REVIPAC): “THE FRENCH PACKAGING COUNCIL (CNE) WAS FOUNDED DURING A TIME OF INTENSE DEBATE ON PACKAGING ISSUES.”

Noël Mangin was one of the founding members of the CNE in 1997. In this interview, he recalls the expectations and context prevailing at the time.

What was the prevailing context when the CNE got founded?

The CNE was founded in a particular context – during the implementation of the “Eco-Emballages” system in 1992 – a similar EPR system for household packaging. As a result, several stakeholders in the value chain worked together to build this system; and all partners agreed that there was a need for a dedicated organization for all packaging-related issues.

In 1994, the [European Directive on packaging and packaging waste](#) completed the legal framework, intending to prevent and reduce the impact of packaging and packaging waste on the environment.

The CNE was established when packaging issues were – in every sense – the subject of much debate. Packaging was much questioned at that time. There was a strong need for explanations. That's when we realized how important it was to work towards a better understanding of packaging and its relationship with the environment.

Why a CNE designed with NGOs?

At first, we held discussions about: Who should we involve? Which stakeholders should be included? How can we make everyone work together? What are the common actions to be defined?

There were 'expected' stakeholders who could be clients or suppliers from a rather classical perspective: commercial and technical.

We introduced the issues related to the environment, i.e. general questions, and general objectives to be defined. We raised these issues with all parties seated around the table, including the environmental associations, which we considered very important, alongside the consumer associations.

After a while, some of them, who co-signed our views, withdrew because their activists did not appreciate this collaboration. Today, I pay tribute to [PikPik Environnement](#), which has remained faithful to its initial commitments.



Is it all about pressure?

Clearly, yes, and it is still there! Sometimes we struggle to understand.

People think they are victims of "horrible people" and that packaging is useless, forgetting that it is a part of the product. There would be no packaging if there was no product.

Of course, marketers would prefer not to use packaging, as it would cost them much less. But they know they cannot do without it and look for solutions to optimize its use. Information, marketing, etc. are all part of this.

The CNE's role includes all this, and the idea is to have an objective approach to packaging. We must admit that, in some cases, there can be less in the logic of optimizing packaging: we need to have “just the right amount of packaging”; to work on eco-design, on recycling; and to work on the notion of “fair packaging”, that includes eco-design.

What about the name CNE?

It was a serious debate! What should the CNE be? We chose the term "council", a sort of high authority, an idea that I pushed for, with a view to issuing consensual opinions for all the stakeholders, hence my attachment to having them all around the table. Because having them all face to face enabled us to discuss all the issues, to share an objective reflection and to produce a consensual opinion or advice.

Do you feel you have progressed in the past 25 years?

What we have done has been far from useless! Together with all the stakeholders, we have been “forced” to exchange ideas and play a positive role.

Did all the pressures disappear? No, and we need to continue to work on the issues. It is essential that each position taken is measured, objective and consensual. The CNE needs to assess if each position is sensible, freeing itself from short-term interests.

I personally really appreciated the set-up of the Committee on Environmental Claims, as the council's role is to intervene in claims that involve environmental claims. Presenting the benefits of the products based on sound reasoning and analysis required a lot of development and rigor so that the claims were robust. But, in the end, the claims proved to be effective.

What about in 10 years?

I would like to see this demanding logic maintained. The notion of the circular economy, which is becoming more and more common, requires us to work in synergy to obtain effective results. I am deeply convinced that we need to focus on interdependencies and not think in silos.

Packaging is an integral part of the circular economy, and the various stakeholders involved work together to increase the efficiency of the packaging system.

As a whole, the entire packaging chain needs to work collectively to determine the required improvements.

Packaging is one of the only products that positively impact the environment. Although it holds some negative impacts too, packaging properties prevent other negative impacts by protecting the product.