PhD- FHSE-2024-021
The Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences

DISSERTATION

Defence held on 27/05/2024 in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg

to obtain the degree of

DOCTEUR DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DU LUXEMBOURG EN GÉOGRAPHIE

by

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COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL INNOVATION AS PATHWAYS TO SOCIO-TERRITORIAL TRANSFORMATION AND DEGROWTH

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“[…] Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now. […]”

—Excerpt from *Ithaka* by C.P. Cavafy, 1975

Acknowledgements

If, after a challenging start to my education as a child, someone had told me that I would one day be authoring a doctoral thesis, I would have starred in disbelief. Nothing in my early scholarly childhood seemed to destine me for a PhD, yet here I am today, writing these words of gratitude. It is thanks to my family, my teachers, my friends, and the people I have met along various paths of life that I have drawn inspiration and the desire to read and progress.

Writing is a painful process of translating ideas and thoughts into words. Since my childhood as a dyslexic individual, my intellectual development has been nurtured by many patient and empathetic individuals who recognized the potential in the rough ashlar that I am. This work is a testament of their investment in my developmental process and I cannot delve further into this dissertation without acknowledging their efforts.

My first appreciation goes to my father, Mister Eric Emmanuel Essuman, whose sacrifices, support, love, and guidance have been my compass from childhood to manhood. Thank you, Daddy! As promised, this achievement is for you.

I also extend my endless gratitude to Madam Catherine Essuman (née Taylor), who nurtured me as her own and guided me in finding my way in learning. In tough and turbulent times, you were always there to listen, advice and support no matter the obstacles and limitation. Thank you, Ma.

To my sister, Giselle, a heartfelt thank you for the numerous sacrifices and the support you provided, even amidst your own challenges.

Beyond the support of my immediate family, I was fortunate to have numerous tutors—in school, at home, and in the church—who mentored, educated, and corrected me with all the kindness they possessed. Their humanist values inspired me, and with these values, I stepped into the world as a human first, before any consideration of race, gender, or socio-economic status. A huge thank you to all these wonderful people; especially to the Coulon family, who embraced me as one of their own when I needed it most in a foreign land. Emilie, Dominique, Cathy, Mathilde; Merci!

To my supervisor, Prof. Christian Schulz, you granted me a golden opportunity, and I hope this work —to some extent— justifies the trust you placed in me. The advice you provided, along with your encouragements and dedication to this work, has truly inspired me and will guide me in my future endeavors, whether in academia or elsewhere.

To my PhD committee, Prof. Julia Affolderbach and Dr. Ottavia Cima, your honest feedback and encouragements were transformative, fostering my growth as a researcher. The finest metals are forged in fire, and for your support in this refining process, I am thankful.

Additionally, I am grateful to everyone I've met on this journey —those who inspired me (Elena, Ariane, Amalia, Mugdha, Tom Becker, Olivia, among many others!), those who corrected me, those who challenged me (especially my Brother Manfred Kofi Asuman), your existence and actions have made me a better person and pushed me to achieve levels I never imagined possible. Thank you.

To all who contributed to this project, from institutions like CISCA and IADT to individuals such as Nicolas, Geoffrey, Gilles L., Chloé, Mathilde A., Angèle, among many others; your knowledge, time, resources, and passion have been invaluable. This work is dedicated to you, in appreciation of your support and trust.

Lastly, to myself and the kindred spirits and guiding stars in my life, whose constant support has been unwavering, thank you for believing in my abilities and dreams. Your silent encouragement has been the cornerstone of my determination.

"Gye Nyame"

To my three mothers…

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of alternative economies in mitigating socio-economic and environmental shortcomings, such as inequality and environmental degradation, of conventional capitalism. It postulates that community-led initiatives, rooted in the frameworks of community economies and social innovation, are pivotal for engendering socio-territorial transformations and potentially fostering degrowth. Focusing on empirical evidence from France—particularly through "La Doume," a local currency project, and "Le Biau Jardin," an organic farm that promotes localized food supply chains in Clermont-Ferrand—the research investigates how these initiatives can stimulate socio-territorial transformation processes. In conjunction with other satellite projects within the so-called 'French Empty Diagonal,' results from these case studies challenge the notion of territorial emptiness, uncovering a landscape rich in social innovation and economic activities that bolster regional dynamism. Beyond this conceptual redefinition, the research further posits that these areas are fertile hubs for sustainable development with the potential to drive wider socio-economic changes. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, the study examines how these initiatives contribute to a degrowth strategy in a post-growth context. It advocates for a paradigm shift towards economic models that prioritize social justice, economic equity, and ecological sustainability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Overview

Discourses in economic geography have increasingly focused on the unsustainability and inequity embedded in our global economic model, highlighting a pressing need for a paradigm shift towards more sustainable and equitable practices (Béaur et al., 2011; Berberoglu, 2022; Gibson-Graham, 1997; Harvey, 1986). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these discussions, revealing not just the fragility of healthcare systems but also the deeper systemic flaws within our economic structures, characterized by unsustainability and inequity. This crisis, far from being an anomaly, acted as a magnifying glass, bringing into sharper focus the vulnerabilities of a capitalist system increasingly under scrutiny for its impact on both people and the planet (Spash, 2021).

The critique of capitalism, highlighting its exploitative and inequitable aspects, has a long history, tracing back to seminal works like the Limits to Growth report by the Club of Rome in 1972. This report warned of the dire consequences of a global economic system predicated on extractivism, consumerism, and capital accumulation, neglecting the sustainability of future livelihoods and the planet (Meadows et al., 1972). Over the years, a growing body of research and activism has built upon these early warnings, advocating for a shift away from unchecked capitalism(N. Klein, 2015; Piketty, 2014). Despite this, the advent of the pandemic underscored the persistent relevance of these debates, even as awareness of environmental issues and the search for alternatives have evolved.

Indeed, while the capitalist model has facilitated wealth accumulation and reduced poverty in some contexts, it has also led to increased social inequities and environmental degradation, challenging the notion of progress (Coates, 2014). These inherent contradictions have spurred a search for alternative economic systems that prioritize sustainability, social equity, and environmental justice (Stiglitz, 2019). This study examines how alternative approaches to the economy actively shape economic landscapes, underlining the need for a transformative approach to the mainstream capitalist system in light of current unsustainable and inequitable growth paradigms(Harvey, 1986; D. Massey, 2013; Pollack, 2005).

In response to the multifaceted crises emanating from the prevailing economic system, there is a global surge in community-led initiatives seeking to address systemic failures through innovative approaches to economic and social challenges (Chatterton, 2019). This dissertation explores the potential of such initiatives to act as catalysts for significant socio-economic transformations by addressing community needs and aspirations innovatively.

Aligning with recent advancements in economic geography that emphasize the importance of local and community-level actions in reshaping economic practices (Taylor Aiken, 2019; Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013b), this work aims to advance the discourse on the potential of community initiatives to foster socio-territorial transformation through social innovation.

Social innovation, as contemporary scholars on territorial development describe, involves developing solutions and mechanisms to address urgent socio-territorial needs (Duracka, 2016; Laville, 2014; Moulaert, 2010). Thus, community initiatives, through their practices—exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic by proposing novel and alternative solutions such as creating short food supply chain systems[1] due to market and shop closures imposed by social distancing measures across Europe—can be considered socially innovative[2] in addressing socio-economic needs.

This dissertation argues that by adopting approaches distinct from those of the mainstream economy, community initiatives innovate at various socio-spatial scales to meet the economic, social, and environmental needs of their constituents. This reflection draws on the works of economic geographers who suggest that community initiatives, through their practices and actions, often propose multi-scalar, innovative, and 'multi-tasking'

[1] At the peak of the pandemic, many local producers in the Auvergne region of France formed coalitions to develop food baskets, ensuring that the local population maintained continuous access to essential food items. This initiative provided solutions that government interventions could not directly address. An example of this is the *Chèvrerie des Oliviers*, which I interviewed during the pandemic. Their food baskets, containing vegetables, meat, cheese, and bread, were a notable success. Despite the inability of residents to shop at markets, these weekly baskets ensured consistent supply through a short food supply system orchestrated by a local coalition of producers. For further details, see this article that expounds on how these baskets helped resolve a potential food insecurity risk: Face au Covid-19, la vente directe se repense - LE SILLON (consulted on 20/03/2024).

[2] The definition based on the proposed example seems simplistic but chapter 5 provides a better conceptualization of social innovation as used in this work.

solutions that effectively address issues resulting from capitalism as an economic system (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2022; Gibson-Graham, 2008; S. Healy, 2020).

By examining community initiatives, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of their role in socio-territorial transformation processes, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between these initiatives and other actors within the regions where the initiatives are enacted (Besançon, 2014). France serves as the context for this exploration, offering a unique legislative and socio-economic environment that facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the transformative potential of community initiatives in addressing contemporary challenges.

1.2. Research Aims

Taking an approach that considers crisis as an opportunity for transformation of the capitalist-centered current global socio-economic system, this research aims to explore various socio-territorial transformation processes that aim to shift from the growth-fixated mainstream economic approach to alternative acceptations through an analysis of practices developed by community initiatives. These community initiatives that aim to transgress mainstream economic approaches (see capitalism) are framed as community economies by a school of economic geographers spearheaded by scholars such as Gibson-Graham.

Per the works of Gibson-Graham (and the Community Economies Research Network – CERN), community economies refer to a diverse array of economic practices that prioritize social justice, equity, and environmental sustainability over profit maximization. Contrarily to mainstream capitalist market approaches, these practices encompass various forms of economic interactions, including barter systems, cooperative enterprises, local currencies, and shared resources, all of which are grounded in principles of mutual aid and care for the community and the environment (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy et al., 2023). Aimed with a postcapitalist ambition, they aim to transform the [social] economy through their alternative and innovative practices (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2022; Healy, 2020; Kallis, 2018; Latouche, 2003).

The term 'postcapitalist' as used by authors such as Gibson-Graham, is defined as a move beyond traditional capitalist structures. It encompasses both the inclusion of more diverse, equitable, and sustainable economic practices and the transcendence of capitalist logics altogether. This implies not just an expansion of what is considered economic activity but a fundamental reimagining of economic relations to foster a more just and sustainable society (Gibson-Graham, 2006b).

Within this discourse on transitioning to a postcapitalist society, the concept of degrowth has emerged as a critical counter-narrative to conventional economic paradigms. Degrowth as defined by some of its proponents aims to challenge the relentless pursuit of GDP growth, advocating instead for a deliberate scaling down of production and consumption to address social inequality, environmental degradation, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. It posits that true economic well-being involves fostering social justice, equity, and environmental sustainability, thereby promoting a reduction in consumerism and the reorientation of economic activities to serve the collective good rather than the interests of a privileged few (Kallis, 2018; Latouche, 2003; Parrique, 2019).

To investigate these postcapitalist possibilities, this research focuses on Clermont-Ferrand, a city in central France distinguished by its unique socio-economic characteristics as detailed in Chapter 3 to investigate socio-territorial transformation processes. Socio-territorial transformation in this work refers to the process through which social and economic practices within a specific geographic area evolve in response to both internal dynamics and external pressures. This concept encompasses changes in the way communities organize, produce, and interact, often driven by efforts to address sustainability, equity, and resilience in the face of global economic challenges (Besançon, 2014; Duracka, 2016; Volat, 2021).

The choice of Clermont-Ferrand, a city located in the controversially framed notion of “empty diagonal[3]”, presents an opportunity to reimagine peripheries and isolated territories, particularly within the French context. Traditionally viewed as marginal in terms of

[3] See chapter 2

mainstream market operations and influences, this research redefines these areas as vibrant centers of experimentation and innovation. Drawing from the literature on social innovation and community economies, these areas are proposed as fertile grounds for pioneering novel economic approaches that diverge from conventional models. Clermont-Ferrand's industrial heritage, dominated by Michelin, combined with its array of alternative socio-economic practices, provides an interesting approach to investigate how community initiatives can catalyze significant socio-economic transformations.

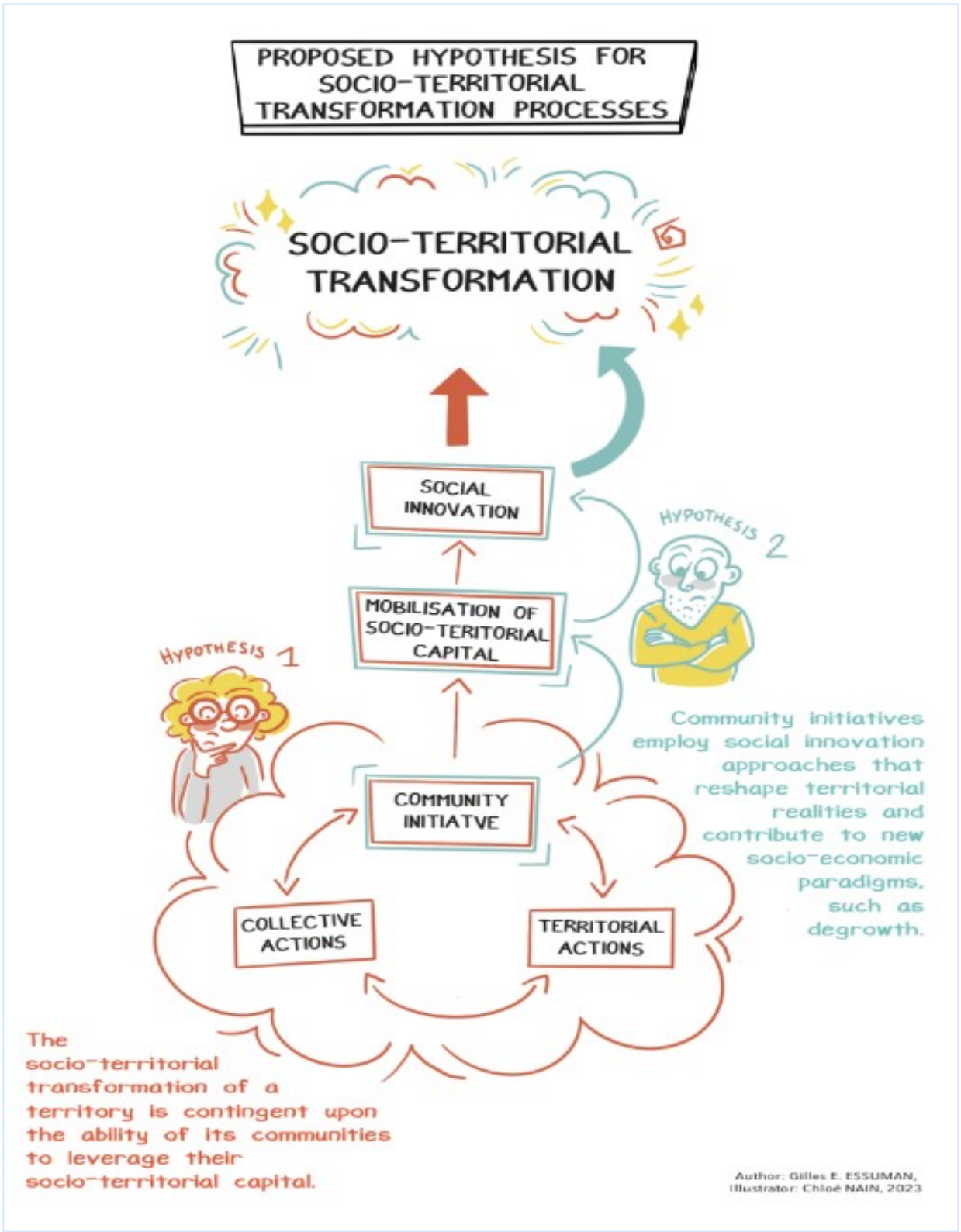
The literature review process on community economies, social innovation and territorial development coupled with readings on postcapitalist strategies helped derive two hypotheses on how community initiatives can contribute to socio-territorial transformation processes.

The first hypothesis argues that the socio-territorial transformation of a territory is fundamentally linked to the ability of its communities to effectively mobilize their socio-territorial capital (local knowledge, networks, and resources) beyond a simplistic top-down process. This implies that this process is significantly influenced by grassroots dynamics and the capacity of local actors to leverage their unique assets (Bourdieu, 2011; Camagni, 2017; Fontan et al., 2003; Fontan & Klein, 2004).

The second hypothesis propounds that community initiatives act as catalysts for socio-territorial transformation through socially innovative[4] practices. These initiatives foster the development of alternative socio-economic paradigms, such as degrowth, by prioritizing sustainability, social justice, and equity over conventional growth-centric models (Kallis, 2018; Latouche, 2015; Parrique, 2019).

[4] See concept of social innovation in the literature review chapter.

Figure 1: Territorial Transformation process according to the research hypotheses



1.3. Conceptual Framework Overview

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in the literature on community economies, which argues that grassroots-led initiatives can exert a substantial influence on socio-territorial landscapes (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013; Zademach & Hillebrand 2013; Zanoni 2020; Zanoni et al. 2017). By adopting a community economy perspective, territorial actors can synergize their efforts to create a "common," which manifests through collective actions (Boidin, 2015; Coriat, 2015; Ostrom, 1994; Ostrom & Baechler, 2010).

In the context of this work, the terms "community initiatives" and "community economies" are used interchangeably and are conceptualized within the framework of social and solidarity economies (Besançon, 2014; Duracka, 2016; Laville, 2013). These practices embed revolutionary paradigms and aim to challenge traditional economic approaches by advocating for anti-capitalist ideologies (Zanoni et al., 2017). Qualified as "green," "inclusive," and "sustainable (BEPA, 2010), these alternative economic approaches are said to use innovative approaches to propose solutions to problems evolving from mainstream economic approaches that are growth fixated (Healy, 2020; Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013). By prioritizing social welfare and environmental sustainability over mere GDP growth (McCarthy, 2006), initiatives embedded in these frameworks employ localized, bottom-up governance structures that aim for transformative socio-territorial changes (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2022; Schmid, 2021; Schulz et al., 2022).

Specifically, they are characterized by:

- **Community Ownership and Control**: Community members actively participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that initiatives are tailored to meet local needs (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).
- **Sustainability Focus:** A balanced approach to environmental protection and social welfare is maintained, aligning with broader sustainability goals (Healy, 2009; 2020).
- **Social Equity and Justice:** These initiatives aim to address systemic issues like poverty and inequality, thereby contributing to social equity (Aiken, 2017).

- **Innovation in Governance:** The organizational structures are flexible and adaptive, facilitating efficient problem-solving and making them effective agents of change (Moulaert, 2010).

Beyond the values elaborated above, most of the literature on community economies highlight their multipolar dimension in challenging the mainstream capitalistic socio-political systems (Besançon, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 1997; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Volat, 2021). However, these initiatives are not without challenges; they often encounter intricate socio-territorial dynamics, including legal and economic constraints. To circumvent these obstacles, they employ what is termed as "territorialized social innovation" (Moulaert, 2016), which entails collaborative endeavors and the mobilization of socio-territorial capital (Camagni, 2017; Fontan & Klein, 2004) to propel transformative initiatives.

1.4. About methodology

This research employed a multi-faceted methodological approach to uncover the complexities of socio-territorial transformations driven by community initiatives. It began with a systematic literature review of both academic and grey literature to identify key concepts and findings related to community economies. This was followed by exploratory fieldwork in the Clermont-Ferrand Metropolis to gain a nuanced understanding of local realities within community economies, adopting a participatory action research (PAR) approach for ethical and iterative engagement with local practitioners (Kindon et al., 2007; Klocker, 2012; Smith, 2021).

The fieldwork, extending over twenty-four months, combined ethnographic methods including participant observation, semi-directed interviews, and informal conversations to capture the lived experiences of community members. This approach enriched the initial literature review and ensured a deep, qualitative insight into community economy practices (Bryman, 2016; O'reilly, 2012).

The final stage of this study involved a critical analysis of the collected data, employing a triangulation approach to corroborate or challenge the initial hypotheses (Denzin, 2017). This triangulation combined qualitative data from interviews and observations with

quantitative data, where available, to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis. The interpretive process was guided by thematic analysis, facilitating the emergence of patterns and themes grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytical approach not only enhanced the validity of the findings but also facilitated a nuanced understanding of the socio-territorial transformation processes under study.

1.5. Dissertation structure

This research, driven by the ambition to provide a detailed exploration of how community initiatives can contribute to socio-territorial transformation processes amidst recent global socio-economic and ecological crises, adopts an ethnographic approach with a focus on community initiatives in France. Recognized for its supportive policy and legislation towards social and solidarity economy approaches, France serves as a promising context for this study. The dissertation unfolds in ten different chapters, each building upon the last, starting from a general introduction that sets the stage for the reader by outlining the scope and objectives of the research.

While the introduction aims to provide an understanding of the motivations for this research, chapter 2 and 3 aim to contextualize the research by examining the political and socio-economic factors that make France a suitable setting for this study. These two chapters delve into the unique characteristics of the French context and expounds on how these create an interesting background to explore postcapitalist economies and social innovation in socio-territorial transformation. It starts with a short overview of how French legislation has over the years impacted the development of community initiatives in a crisis resolution context and ends by providing details on a specific region in France whose development in recent years has arguably been impacted through these laws and the ensuing initiatives.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, the focus shifts to exploring the literature on postcapitalist economies and social innovation and how these could potentially be relativized from a French perspective. The aim of this part is to establish a theoretical framework that underpins the empirical investigation, bridging abstract concepts with the specificities of the French socio-economic landscape.

Chapter 7 begins with a comprehensive methodological exposition, guiding the reader through the empirical work conducted as part of this research. This section, crucial in detailing the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches, explains the operationalization process that facilitated the ethnographic research, laying the groundwork for the empirical insights that follow.

Chapter 8 presents the results of the fieldwork, offering an in-depth analysis of the practices studied among selected practitioners. Moving beyond prescriptive narratives, this section provides a rich, grounded account of the initiatives in action, illustrating their contributions and challenges within the French socio-territorial landscape.

Finally, Chapter 9 reflects on the fieldwork findings and discusses their implications in addressing the crises stemming from current capitalocentric[5] economic systems. It critically examines how the observed practices can inform and shape new paradigms in a postcapitalist approach. Then, the dissertation culminates with a conclusion (Chapter 10) that synthesizes the research findings, offering reflections on the entire project and proposing recommendations, thereby wrapping up the dissertation.

[5] This term is used mainly in the diverse economies' literature by its main proponents (Community Economies Network) to refer to the fixation of global economic decision makers on capitalism as a special and "amazing" economic approach for both socio-economic territorial development. This term referes to the representation attributed to the economic system and how this representation influences practices implemented therein. See http://www.communityeconomies.org/taxonomy/term/85. Consulted on 05/01/2024. For this work, I sometimes use *capital-centered* to refer to the same concept.

CHAPTER 2.
The genealogy of modern socio-economic laws and practices in France

A short introduction to the French context

France is often ascribed to be a bastion of resistance against governmental and socio-economic injustices due its distinguished history of strikes and demonstrations. According to various studies led between 2005 and 2016 by institutions such as the German Economic Institute and the Hans Böckler Foundation (Hagen, 2017; Schneidemesser & Kilroy, 2016), France leads the world as the country with most strikes and manifestations per year. This propensity for protest, deeply embedded in the national psyche (Goldstone & Aulagne, 1989; Vovelle, 2023), likely finds its roots in the French Revolution (Sirot, 2002, 2011), an epoch profoundly shaped by Enlightenment philosophies, particularly those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his "social contract[6]" theory (Rousseau, 1762). Today, based on evolutions from that era, France has laws[7] that favor manifestations and strikes as democratic means to ensure a political terrain where the voice of the masses can be heard, and promote a system where anyone could openly contribute to various reflections of national interest.

This first part of the dissertation aims to explore how France's socio-political dynamics offer a promising context for this research. In this chapter, I look at how France has evolved over the years to legally empower its citizens to take action and challenge existing norms and socio-political powers through democratic means. Starting from the fall of the Ancien Régime that led to the French revolution, this chapter reviews the different stages that contributed to the creation of a country whose values seem to favor social movements for change. It will end with a reflection on how the 2014 French law on *social and solidarity economy* (French Law No. 2014-856) strengthened the resolve of community initiatives in socio-territorial transformation processes.

This will pave way for the understanding of Chapter 3 where I delve more specifically into how this legal framework has contributed to the emergence of new socio-economic

[6] Rousseau argues that good social organization is based on a pact guaranteeing equality and freedom between citizens. This pact is entered into by all participants, i.e., all citizens.
[7] For instance, on October 27, 1946, the right to strike is fully recognized in the Constitution ("The right to strike is exercised within the framework of the laws which regulate it", paragraph 7 of the preamble to the 1946 Constitution).

realities at various socio-spatial scales in France. To do this, I look at the so-called concept of *diagonal du vide* (empty diagonal) in France and how this area due to its specific demographic realities contributes to the discourse on postcapitalist approaches to the economy.

As part of this process, I will present the context of Clermont-Ferrand, to showcase how places seen as isolated or rural can abound in opportunities for change and offer a reflection on a *new socio-economic regime*. This will help lay the foundation needed before I proceed to the next part where I will delve into the scientific theories and concepts that frame the reflections on alternative economies and their practices.

The Dawn of Socio-Economic Transformation in France

The contemporary landscape of social and solidarity economic practices finds its genesis in the late 18th century, marked by Enlightenment philosophers' aspirations for a "fraternal and egalitarian civility" amidst rising popular protests (Chanial & Laville, 2001). The French Revolution of 1789, signaling the end of the Ancien Régime[8], heralded the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, embodying fundamental rights and freedoms. However, while the French Revolution is often idealized by those who see in it the sacrosanct period of power of the people for the people, an analysis of this period contradicts this idealized vision. The democratic ideals were swiftly curtailed by the Le Chapelier Law of June 14, 1791[9], which prohibited organizations, associations, professional guilds, and peasant gatherings, thereby stifling popular aspirations and paving the way for a political economy predicated on individual interests (Laville, 2016; Volat, 2021).

This legislative shift led to the abolition of the right of association and ushered in an era dominated by market laws, free competition, and privatization (Groyer, 2015; Volat, 2021). Consequently, the French society underwent a significant transformation: the proliferation of manufactures and the migration of peasants to cities as industrial workers.

[8] The term "Ancien Régime" evokes the pre-revolutionary world of France, characterized by a rigid social hierarchy and political absolutism. This system, symbolically dismantled on August 4, 1789, by the newly created National Assembly (Vovelle, 2023), epitomized a society entrenched in birthright inequalities and privileges.

[9] The Le Chapelier law, promulgated in France on June 14, 1791, banned all professional groupings, whether of tradesmen, "masters", or their workers and apprentices. It was part of a drive to free the government from the pressure groups that corporations and guilds had become under the Ancien Régime.

This shift resulted in dire living and working conditions, eroding the fabric of conviviality, reciprocity, and popular solidarity, and entrenching working-class pauperism (Laville, 2016).

2.1. Associationism and the birth of a social economy framework in France

In the early 19th century, faced with the hardships and precariousness of proletarian life, workers began to organize solidarity systems to address their needs. These initiatives included mutual aid funds for health insurance, cooperative credit organizations for financial access, consumer cooperatives for essential goods procurement, and production cooperatives to reclaim control over production tools. These community-based initiatives were the embodiment of "workers' associationism" (Dreyfus, 2016).

Initially met with skepticism by the state, these initiatives gradually gained acceptance for their roles in social protection. Scholars like Chanial and Laville (2001) suggest that this tolerance by the state may have been influenced by France's prevailing Catholic religious values and philanthropic morality. Consequently, associationism came to be seen as an "alternative model of work organization, aimed at abolishing wage exploitation" (Alet-Ringenbach et Nahapétian, 2006), rather than a form of protest against the state pauperism (Laville, 2016).

By the mid-19th century, a faction of classical economists began to recognize the limitations of liberalism in addressing poverty and started to align with these movements. The period saw the emergence of diverse economic theories supporting these initiatives, from Charles Gide's cooperativism and Pierre Joseph Proudhon's liberal self-management collectivism to the utopian socialism of Saint Simon and Charles Fourier, and Frédéric Le Play's social Christianity (Gardin, 2010, 2013; Hiez & Lavillunière, 2013). It was Charles Dunoyer who, in his "Nouveau traité d'économie Sociale" (1830), first coined the term "économie sociale" ("social economy"). This concept was further popularized by Frédéric Le Play, who founded the Société d'économie sociale and its journal in 1856 (MES, 2017).

The latter half of the 19th century was pivotal in the gradual institutionalization of the social economy in France. The Ollivier Law of 1864 marked a significant departure from the

Le Chapelier Law of 1791 by abolishing the offense of coalition[10], thus legitimizing workers' associations (Dreyfus, 2016). This was followed by the law of July 24, 1867, which legally recognized and regulated cooperation, setting a precedent for the formal acknowledgment of cooperative structures (Seeberger, 2014). The trend continued into the early 20th century, culminating in the 1901 law "relative au contrat d'association[11]" a landmark legislation that formally recognized associative, cooperative, and mutualist entities (Volat, 2021). By the beginning of the 20th century, the social economy, endorsed by the state through various statutes, had become a cornerstone of the French economic and social model, effectively bridging the gap between the market and the social state (Chanial & Laville, 2001).

2.2. From a social economy to a social and solidarity economy

With the onset of global economic crises in the early 1970s, several movements emerged, focusing on ecology, feminism, education, and criticism of globalization. These movements revived transformative associationist principles, emphasizing the political dimension of an alternative economy. Initiatives such as *Systèmes d'Échanges Locaux*[12] began to be associated with the concept of the solidarity economy (Laville & Chanial, 2001). This solidarity approach was characterized by democratic values where social relationships based on solidarity took precedence over individual interest or material profit. As Laville explains, these initiatives offered an economic and political dual dimension, reintroducing aspects that had been somewhat overlooked in existing social economy approaches (Laville, 2013). By incorporating the notion of solidarity, these initiatives promoted principles of reciprocity, mutualization, and shared competence, fostering a transformative vibe in the socio-political economic system (Laville, 2016; Volat, 2021).

[10] It also recognized the right to strike in France for the first time.
[11] An association governed by the law of 1901 may or may not carry out commercial activities (this depends on the association's articles of association). In all cases, however, profits cannot be shared, which sets this form of organisation apart from other forms of enterprise, notably those known as "commercial".
[12] A local exchange system is a social organization that brings people together to exchange goods and services, without using the traditional monetary system. It requires the creation of a unit of account (time, for example). This "currency" therefore has only one value: reciprocal exchange.

In response to these grassroots evolutions, successive French governments reformed laws concerning these initiatives, both to expand their scope and, at times, to instrumentalize them for political gains. From 1981, presidential candidates began incorporating these initiatives into their political manifestos, often aligning them with the state's broader political agenda. For instance, Mitterrand's 1981 political program, for instance, promised a "social economy sector based on cooperation and mutuality"[13] to explore new forms of worker organization. While this led to the establishment of a secretariat for the social economy at the Ministry of Social Affairs by 1991, the secretariat's focus on enhancing the financial competitiveness of these initiatives arguably shifted them towards serving as instruments for state-led social inclusion strategies, potentially compromising their foundational principles. (Wilson-Courvoisier, 2012).

Under Chirac's presidency (1995-2007), the secretariat's relocation to the Ministry of Integration and Fight Against Social Exclusion, and later to the Ministry of Employment, signaled a shift towards not only preserving the social functions of these initiatives but also amplifying their economic dimensions. This period saw an emphasis on "social innovation[14]," with the introduction of the *Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif* (SCIC)[15] law, facilitating more inclusive cooperative models in terms of financing and governance. However, this inclusivity, allowing for multiple memberships (voluntary, public, private, etc.), also opened the door for a dilution of the cooperatives' original community-focused ethos and impacting their transformative potential (Besançon, 2013; Volat, 2021; Wilson-Courvoisier, 2012). For example, this dichotomy is evident in the emergence of cooperatives like the NEF (Nouvelle Economie Fraternelle)[16], a citizen-led bank financing projects based on ethical criteria aligned with social justice and environmental sustainability (Chauvin et al., 2010), and on the other hand, Crédit Agricole, a cooperative bank criticized for its

[13] Discours Mitterand, http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/083001601.html Consulted on 04/01/2024.
[14] The law makes use of the term *social innovation* without specifying clearly, what that concept refers to https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000216324 Consulted on 04/01/2024.
[15] A société coopérative d'intérêt collectif (SCIC) is a cooperative company with variable capital whose purpose, according to the SCIC Act of 2001, is "the production or supply of goods and services of collective interest which are of social utility". SCICs can be set up in any sector of activity, provided that the collective interest is justified by a regional or sectoral project involving a heterogeneous membership (multisociétariat), compliance with cooperative rules (1 person = 1 vote), and limited profitability (obligation to reinvest almost all surpluses in the business).
[16] https://www.lanef.com/qui-sommes-nous/ consulted on 05/01/2024

environmental impact (Poupin, 2022). The contrasting trajectories of these cooperatives illustrate the varied interpretations and applications of the cooperative model within the broader economic system and how the law despite its support for the establishment of such initiatives does not necessarily regulate their impact.

In 2012, President François Hollande's appointment of a Minister delegate for the Social Solidarity Economy, attached to the Ministry of the Economy, Finance, and Foreign Trade, underscored the SSE's role in job creation and its significance in the French economy. This new ministry saw the passing of the 2014 law on the social and solidarity economy[17], aiming to reconcile "economic performance and social utility," further legitimized these initiatives. Article 7 of this law provided a framework for French regions to develop their social and economic strategies in consultation with SSE organizations, enhancing their legitimacy not only as community-responsive entities but also as integral players in the state's territorial development strategy.

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As seen in this chapter, the journey of community initiatives in France, from their post-Revolution origins to their current manifestation within the social/solidarity economy framework, is marked by inconsistency and diversity. Initially emerging as a political response to the socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by the ancien régime, these initiatives faced significant setbacks, notably with the enactment of the Chapelier Law of 1791, which banned associations. In the subsequent era of economic liberalism under the Napoleonic, state, a cooperative and mutualist, social economy was gradually tolerated, albeit lacking the assertive spirit of the early associationist movement.

The resurgence of political activism for social transformation in the 20th century, particularly from the 1970s onwards, saw the emergence of new social movements such as ecologism, alter-globalism, feminism, and degrowth. Some of these movements gradually coalesced under the umbrella of the "solidarity economy." Over time, various laws were

[17] LOI n° 2014-856 du 31 juillet 2014 relative à l'économie sociale et solidaire available here : https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000029313296

enacted to regulate and, in some cases, co-opt these initiatives into the state's socio-economic strategies. This historical overview of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in France reveals that while the state has not fundamentally challenged the market economy, it has sought to integrate SSE practices into its legislative and governmental strategy.

Today, the French approach to the SSE encompasses a diverse array of structures. Some operate within the capitalist market, albeit with values that are often questioned, while others actively oppose capitalist market mechanisms, striving to transform the ecological, cultural, and economic fabric of their territories through political projects. This dichotomy creates a fascinating context for studying the transformative potential of these alternative practices within the capitalist system. The French SSE law, despite its seemingly ambiguous ambitions, provides a unique opportunity by offering legal, administrative, and financial support to various community and association-based projects with transformative ambitions. This framework presents a rich overview for exploring the potential of these initiatives to effect meaningful socio-economic change in France.

In the next chapter, to explore these initiatives from more rigorous stance, I will focus on a region in France with its own specific context and history and investigate how it has evolved over time, and how the enactment of the law on social and solidarity economies has impacted the work of community initiatives in socio-territorial transformation processes and perhaps, challenged capitalocentric approaches to the economy.

CHAPTER 3.
Alternative Economy approaches in France

As seen in the previous chapter, France serves as a compelling backdrop for this research on the role of community initiatives in socio-territorial transformation processes, particularly due to its legislative advancements in the domain of social and solidarity economies. The French Law No. 2014-856 of 31 July 2014[18] on Social and Solidarity Economy (Loi ESS), colloquially known as SSE[19] Law in English, has been a watershed moment. It provides a legal framework that recognizes and promotes the role of social enterprises, cooperatives, and associations in socio-economic development (Duracka, 2016; Volat, 2021).

This legislative milestone has profoundly impacted the socio-economic landscape of France. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) [20], as of 2019, the social and solidarity economy sector accounted for around 10% of French GDP and employed approximately 2.4 million people (INSEE, 2019). Furthermore, the sector has been growing at an average annual rate of 4%, outpacing the broader French economy (Le Labo de l'ESS, 2020).

The law has also catalyzed a range of innovative community initiatives aimed at community empowerment and territorial development. For instance, *"Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée"* (Territories with Zero Long-term Unemployment)[21], a national project initially discussed in 2011, was finally materialized in 2017. This was facilitated by the right to experimentation clause in the ESS Law, which enabled the planning and deployment of the project in ten French territories[22].

[18] Loi Économie Sociale et Solidaire, France : https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000029313296 consulted on 10/10/2023
[19] Social and Solidarity Economy
[20] The Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques has been responsible for producing, analysing and publishing official statistics in France since 1946. Website : https://www.insee.fr/fr/accueil consulted on 10/10/2023
[21] The "Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée" association was set up on 7 October 2016 to demonstrate that it is possible, on a small regional scale and at no significant extra cost to the community, to offer all people who have been out of work for a long time a permanent job on a voluntary basis, by developing useful activities to meet local needs. See https://www.tzcld.fr/decouvrir-le-projet/lassociation/ Consulted on 10/10/2023
[22] Law on right to experimentation : https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2016/2/29/ETSX1526062L/jo/texte consulted on 10/10/2023

Given this legislative context, France offers fertile ground for investigating how community initiatives can contribute to socio-territorial transformation processes. The ESS Law not only provides a supportive framework but also challenges community initiatives to innovate and collaborate with various stakeholders—from local governments to social enterprises and NGOs—in territorial development strategies. This is especially true in regions that seemed unattractive for socio-economic development in a *capitalocentric* narrative due to their demographic realities or territorial dynamics.

Indeed, while the legislative framework in France provides a conducive environment for various experimentations at community levels within the framework of social and solidarity economies, it is essential to delve deeper into specific geographical contexts. These offer particular opportunities and challenges for community initiatives. One such intriguing geographical concept is the "Diagonale du Vide," a term traditionally used to describe areas in France perceived as empty or less populated. Despite this perception, recent research shows that these areas abound in innovation and development, contrasting their so-called unattractiveness when compared to urban and developed areas, which are usually considered hubs of opportunity and innovation.

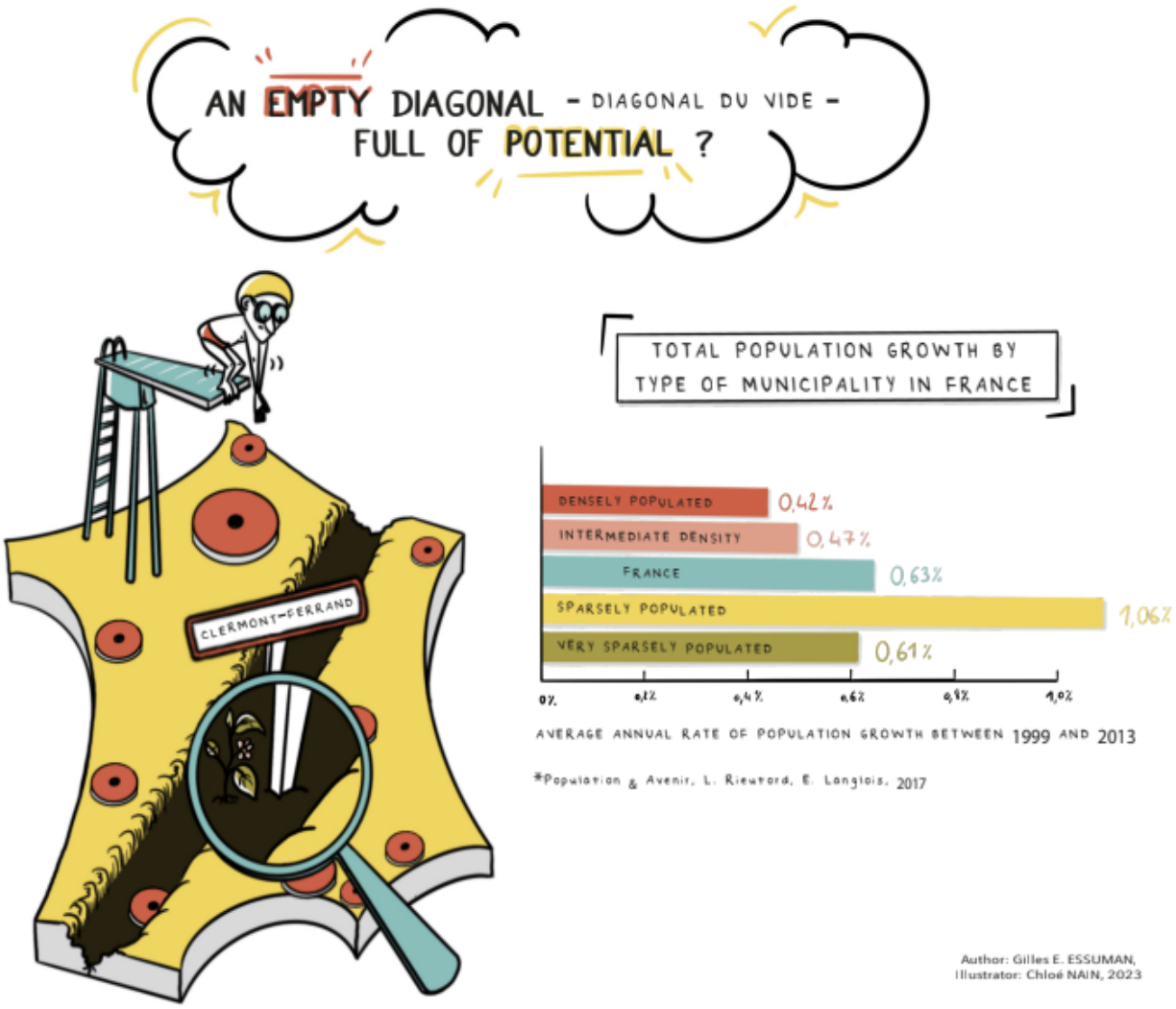
3.1. The "Diagonale du Vide": A Space of Untapped Potential

The term "Diagonale du Vide" refers to a swath of territory stretching from the Northeast to the Southwest of France, passing through the Massif Central (Oliveau & Doignon, 2016; Rieutort, 2017). Traditionally, this area has been characterized by low population density and a tendency towards depopulation. Such a description has often fueled an alarmist narrative, contrasting a supposedly prosperous and dynamic urban France against a neglected, impoverishing, and desertifying rural France. However, recent empirical data from INSEE (INSEE, 2021) and other studies challenge this narrative, revealing a more intricate picture of places situated in this so-called empty diagonal (Oliveau & Doignon, 2016; Rieutort, 2017; INSEE, 2021). Also, embedded in this region that is home to over 7 million people are prosperous cities such as Reims and the metropolis of Toulouse and this makes this appellation archaic and scientifically problematic (Essuman & Schulz, in preparation). Consequently, this work rejects this categorization and rather sides with a

number of French geographers who prefer the terminology of 'regions with low population density' (Devès, 2015; Fournier, 2008; Mialocq, 2020; Rieutort, 2012, 2019).

While it is true that areas within the "Diagonale du Vide" have historically experienced low population density and demographic decline, recent data in INSEE's 2018 report show that demographic growth in metropolitan France has been significant in low-density or intermediate-density municipalities, often ranging between 200 to 3,000 inhabitants (INSEE, 2021). This growth is not merely an extension of the peri-urban crowns of large agglomerations. Rather, it is a phenomenon that holds true even for municipalities distant from urban centers (Galland, 2020). To substantiate this claim, one could delve further into the evolution of the demography of various territories (urban, peri-urban, and rural) in Metropolitan France from 1999 to 2013 as illustrated in Figure 2 (Rieutort, 2017).

Figure 2: Empty diagonal & demographic growth according to municipalities in France



In-depth analysis of INSEE's data on France's demographic evolution between 2007-2017 (INSEE, 2018) reveals that in densely populated municipalities, population growth continued primarily due to a significantly higher number of births compared to deaths. However, these municipalities experienced a negative migration balance between 2007 and 2017, resulting in an annual population decline of -0.4% (Galland, 2020). Taking Paris as an example, the city lost inhabitants for the first time between 2011 and 2016, amounting to a loss of 60,000 residents. Despite a positive natural balance—where the birth rate (13.1‰) significantly exceeded the mortality rate (6.2‰)—the city lost inhabitants due to a negative balance of entries over exits. This trend was not exclusive to Paris; five out of seven

departments in Île-de-France lost more inhabitants than they attracted over the studied period (Galland, 2020).

In contrast, low-density areas situated in the so-called "empty diagonal" became increasingly attractive for various reasons. Economic factors such as lower land and housing costs played a role, as did "amenities" like quality of life and proximity to nature. This attractiveness extended beyond retirees to include a diverse range of sociological profiles, from young families to professionals enabled by teleworking and greater job flexibility (Oliveau & Doignon, 2016).

For instance, a report published in August 2023 by *France Stratégies*[23] elucidated that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a demographic shift. Individuals increasingly sought to relocate to less densely populated areas offering better quality of life and safety. Urban centers like Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse lost an average of -0.95% of enrollments in primary education between the pre-COVID and post-COVID periods, while rural municipalities saw an increase of +1.34% in primary school enrollments.

On the real estate front, prices decreased in various urban and rural settings. However, rural spaces near large municipalities or those with strong amenities, as well as small and medium-sized towns and peri-urban areas, all experienced an increase in their already positive migration balance between 2018 and 2021. For example, rural municipalities saw an increase of +2.3%, and towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants experienced an increase of +2.4% (Charon, 2022). A study by the *POPSU Territoires*[24] program revealed that more than half of the French population (58%) expressed a desire to reside in less densely populated areas, reinforcing the notion that various societal crises contribute to reflections on new ways of living, such as the quest for greener spaces and a more balanced and healthy life.

[23] Le réel impact du Covid sur les territoires ruraux, http://laterredecheznous.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/8710/Le_r_E9el_impact_du_Covid_sur_les_territoires_ruraux.html Consulted on 10/10/2023

[24] Study by POPSU de Territoires, www.urbanisme-puca.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/popsuterritoires-exodeurbain_v12.pdf Consulted on 10/10/2023

Table 1: Evolution trends in metropolitan France territories during COVID-19

Category	Territory Type	Demographic Trend	Educational Enrollment Change (Pre-COVID vs Post-COVID)	Real Estate Price Change	Migration Balance (2018-2021)
Urban Centers	Paris	Declining	-0.95%	-3.13%	-6%
	Other Major Metropolises (e.g., Lyon, Toulouse)	Declining	-0.95%	-1.90%	-1%
Empty Diagonal Territories	Small Towns & Rural Areas Combined	Growing	+1.34%	Avg: -1.28%	Avg: +2.35%

Source: Adapted from the works of France Stratégies, 2023 and Charon, 2022

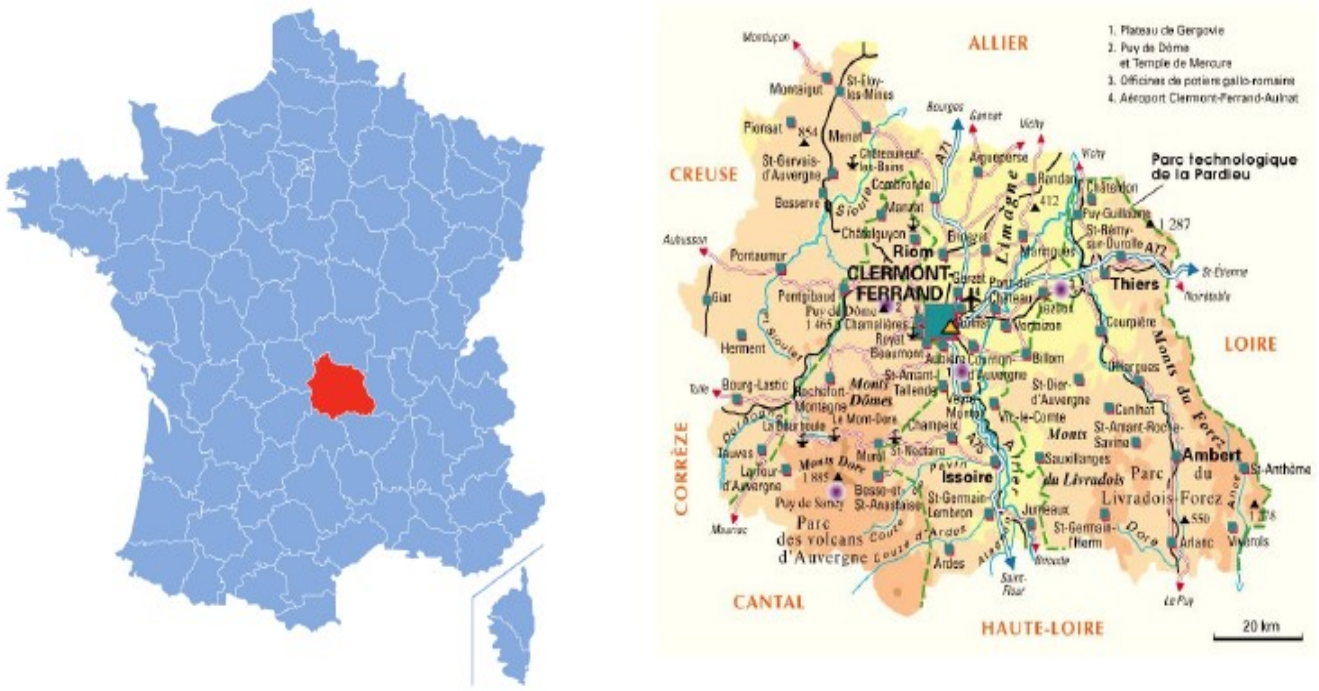
Beyond mere reflections on how socio-economic, ecological, and health crises have instigated a redefinition of places within France's so-called "Empty Diagonal," this research advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the processes contributing to the socio-territorial transformations of such areas. To achieve this, the study employs the lens of *socio-territorial capital*, suggesting that territories possess an amalgam of economic, social, cultural, and environmental assets that can be mobilized for development (Camagni, 2017; Fontan & Klein, 2004).

For the "Empty Diagonal" in France, this research aims to challenge conventional geographical narratives that depict these areas as vacuous. Instead, it re-theorizes the "Empty Diagonal" as a landscape brimming with untapped potential. The proposed argument posits that the recently renewed attractiveness of territories situated in the diagonal is due to the ability of communities therein to seize their socio-territorial capital and deploy it to transform their spaces in accordance with their visions.

However, arriving at such a conclusion without an empirical study based on in-depth investigation would compromise academic rigor. Therefore, it is imperative to contextualize these claims through case studies that delve into the role of community economies—or initiatives—in effecting socio-territorial transformations. To that end, the focus is laid upon

the Auvergne Region in France, and more specifically, the Puy de Dôme department, whose capital is Clermont-Ferrand—a city in the so-called empty diagonal.

Figure 3: Map of Clermont-Ferrand Metropolis in the Puy de Dôme department



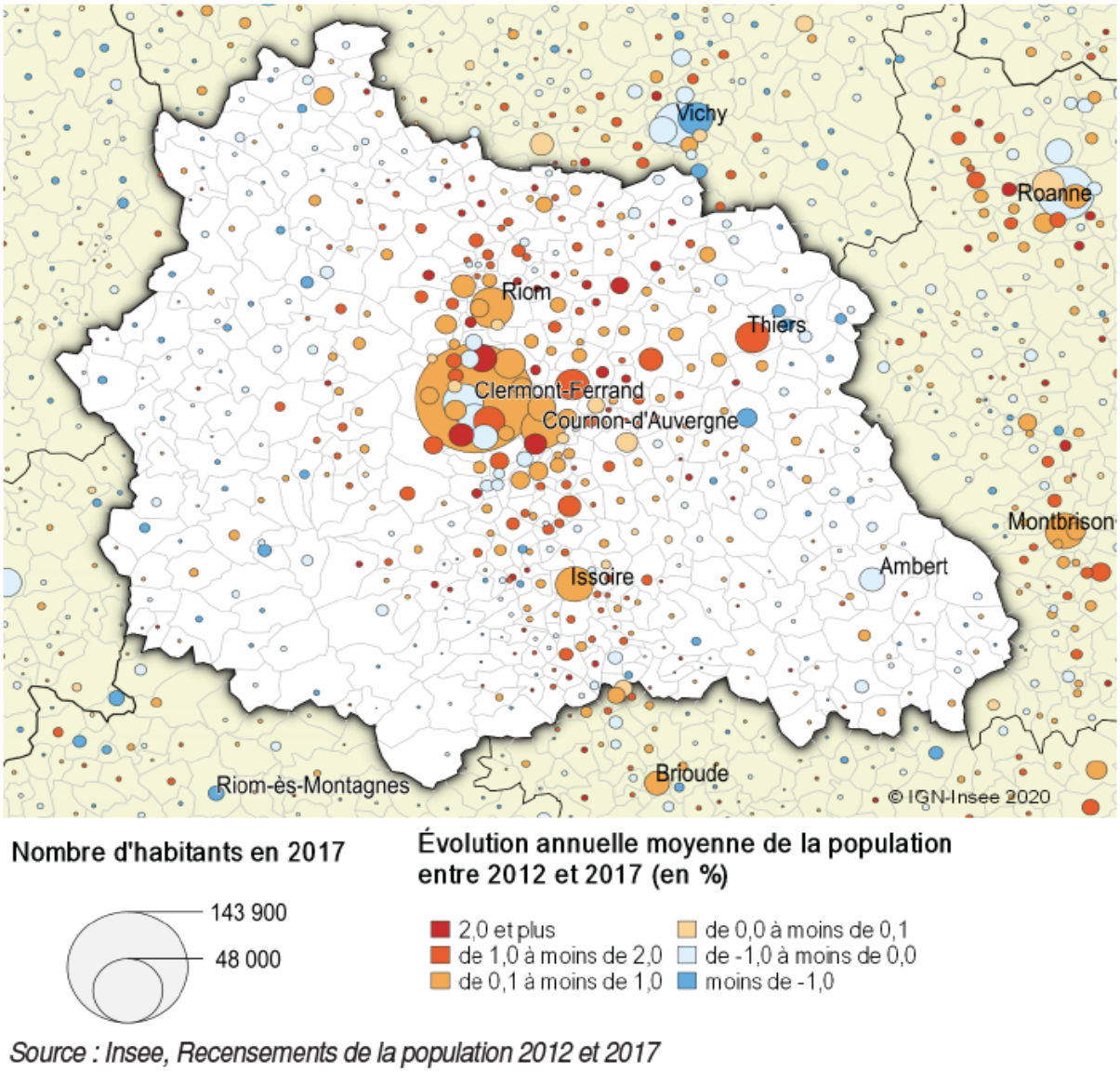
Source: Département du Puy de Dôme

3.2. The Puy-de-Dôme and Socio-Territorial Transformation

The Puy-de-Dôme department has experienced a resurgence in its attractiveness since the early 2000s, following a period of population stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s (INSEE, 2021). The department's population grew at a rate of +0.5% per year from 2012 to 2017, outpacing both metropolitan France and neighboring departments. This growth is partly attributed to the youthful demographic in the Clermont-Ferrand metropolitan area, where young people aged 15 to 29 constitute 24% of the population, compared to 14% in the rest of the department. With 268,700 inhabitants out of 653,700, Clermont-Ferrand stands as the department's largest city. Over 40,000 of the city's population are students,

making the area a fertile ground for analyzing how socio-territorial dynamics contribute to transformations.

Figure 4: Map of Puy de Dôme showing the population density of de department and the dominance of Clermont-Ferrand



Source : Insee, Recensements de la population 2012 et 2017

3.3. Michelin's historical Influence on Clermont-Ferrand's Territorial dynamics

Even though Figure 4 (above) shows that Clermont-Ferrand's demography has evolved over the years—potentially contributing to renewed socio-territorial development—this process has been a long and complex journey that spans over a century. Before Michelin's establishment in 1889, Clermont-Ferrand was largely an agrarian

economy, isolated from the main industrial hubs of France. The city was primarily known for its agricultural products, such as semolina and pasta, and had a limited industrial workforce (Zanetti, 2010).

However, the last decade of the 19th century saw a shift in Clermont-Ferrand's economic landscape, partly due to crises in traditional sectors like viticulture. Michelin[25] seized this opportunity, attracting a workforce from the surrounding rural areas and thereby capitalizing on the now abundant workforce in search of new opportunities.

From a mere 62 employees at its inception in 1889, the company expanded to 18,000 by 1927. By the 1920s, Clermont-Ferrand had become France's primary center for rubber manufacturing, closely linked to the burgeoning automobile industry. A significant portion of the local population was employed in this sector, attracting additional businesses to the city (Dumond, 1993; Moulin, 1997; Zanetti, 2010).

This industrial boom further attracted new immigrants to the region; however, this rapid industrialization posed several challenges. The city's population swelled from 46,718 in 1886 to 111,710 in 1926, primarily due to internal migration (Moulin, 1997). This sudden demographic surge exposed the inadequacies of the city's urban infrastructure, which was ill-equipped to handle such rapid economic growth.

Issues ranged from housing shortages and poor sanitation to inadequate water supply, further exposing the local government's incapacity to resolve these issues since it had limited social welfare measures in place (Zanetti, 2010).

Recognizing these challenges, Michelin took it upon itself to address the social issues arising from its presence in the city (Védrine, 2014). The company embarked on a comprehensive social welfare program, often described as paternalistic, rooted in the theories of Frédéric Le Play (Dumond, 1993; Play, 1864; Zanetti, 2010). This program aimed to establish a "voluntary bond of interest and affection" between the employer and employees, replacing traditional forms of community support that had eroded due to

[25] Michelin is a multinational tyre manufacturing company established and based in Clermont-Ferrand. It is the second biggest company in the world that specializes in that industry.

industrialization. Drawing on the American approach of welfare capitalism (Zahavi, 1983), the paternalistic approach aimed to replicate a family metaphor at the workplace, designating the business owner as the father of his employees. Therefore, despite the employees having to work and generate benefits for the company, the company owed them social welfare. In this sense, Michelle Perot (1979) would describe paternalism as "one of the most important systems of social relations at work" (Gacon & Jarrige, 2014; Perrot, 1983). How this concept relates to contemporary literature on feminist economies will be explored in the next section, but at this stage, it is important to highlight how this strategy fit Michelin's ambitions to develop an internal system that aimed to recruit, retain, adapt, train, and reproduce their workforce and expand their company.

Michelin's paternalist interventions

To retain a workforce constrained by an overcrowded urban space, Michelin invested heavily in housing. Founded in 1909, the Michelin Affordable Housing Society quickly offered unprecedented comfort in Clermont-Ferrand. Between 1909 and 1930, Michelin built 3,500 rental homes, while the municipality only produced 200 (Zanetti, 2010). With La Plaine estate built over 45 hectares, Michelin facilitated the housing of 6,000 residents. The estate had all the necessary communal facilities to "orchestrate its profitability through housing in the industrial city" (Jean-Pierre FREY, 1995). From housing, Michelin extended to providing schools for the employees and their children. These schools were established in the company's estates from 1916 to instill a corporate spirit that "provides employees with the reasons for their commitment and loyalty to the company" (Védrine, 2014). Eventually, children trained in these schools would later continue in the Michelin system as employees, thereby replicating the system. By 1920, Michelin's paternalistic social system was completed with the construction of a maternity hospital, a sanatorium, and a clinic. The workforce was thus attracted, retained, reproduced, raised, and ultimately subjugated (Rudelle, 1986) within the framework of social relations defined by the company. This total control extended to all sectors of workers' lives (Noiriel, 1988), aiming to produce well in the face of an initially rural and unstable workforce.

Consequently, in 1927, Michelin families made up nearly 30% of the total population of Clermont-Ferrand. The company also contributed to two-thirds of the local demographic growth between 1900 and 1930 (Dumond, 1993). The company not only contributed to initial urban sanitation but also managed the production of an industrial city and its housing. This led to the nickname "Michelin City" for Clermont-Ferrand (Zanetti, 2010). In fact, as of 2023, Michelin's global headquarters, as well as a dedicated museum, are housed in Clermont-Ferrand.

However, this approach raises questions about power dynamics and dependency. When a single corporation holds significant sway over a city's development, it can lead to an imbalance of power, where the corporation's interests might overshadow those of the community (Dworkin, 2020). The city becomes reliant on the company's continued success and goodwill, potentially sidelining broader community interests (Shiffrin, 2000).

This context makes the study of community initiatives even more critical. If a corporation like Michelin can have such a profound impact on a city, what potential lies in community-driven efforts? Especially when these initiatives are rooted in feminist and community economy frameworks that prioritize people-centered, fair, equitable, and ecologically responsible practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Zademach et al, 2013; Aiken, 2019).

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Feminist economies provide a compelling framework for understanding the transformative potential of community initiatives**.** Rooted in principles of inclusivity, equity, and sustainability, feminist economic theories challenge traditional power structures and advocate for a more holistic approach to development. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and valuing unpaid labor, often carried out by women, and promote economic systems that are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of all community members, not just a privileged few (Ferber & Nelson, 2009).

Community initiatives, informed by feminist economies, inherently adopt a bottom-up and participatory approach. They emerge organically from the community's needs and

desires, ensuring that solutions are tailored to local contexts and are sustainable in the long-term community initiatives, informed by feminist economies, inherently adopt a bottom-up and participatory approach. They emerge organically from the community's needs and desires, ensuring that solutions are tailored to local contexts and are sustainable in the long term (Feinberg, 1987). Such initiatives also emphasize inclusivity, aiming to distribute the benefits of development more equitably among all community members, thereby challenging and reshaping traditional power dynamics (Pogge, 2008). Such initiatives also emphasize inclusivity, aiming to distribute the benefits of development more equitably among all community members, thereby challenging and reshaping traditional power dynamics (Pogge, 2008).

3.4. Clermont-Ferrand and its community initiatives

Given the historical influence of Michelin on Clermont-Ferrand, it becomes evident that the city has always been open to new approaches and initiatives. As discussed in the previous section, the city's developmental trajectory has been shaped by the significant influence of Michelin. However, the city's receptivity to new approaches and ideas extends beyond this corporate legacy. The municipality's proactive stance towards social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives is a testament to its commitment to evolving beyond a Michelin-centric identity and seeking new socio-economic opportunities for its residents.

In 2014, a pivotal moment marked the city's dedication to SSE. Following the enactment of the law on social and solidarity in France, Olivier Bianchi, the mayor of Clermont-Ferrand, took the step of appointing a deputy mayor specifically in charge of SSE. This move was not merely symbolic; it was a clear indication of the municipality's ambitions in this domain. To further these efforts, a project manager specializing in social innovation and SSE was recruited. Their primary mandate was to craft a long-term strategy that would both protect the local heritage and propose innovative socio-economic avenues for the community.

Recognizing the importance of community involvement in this endeavor, the municipality embarked on an extensive consultation process. Over six months, a dedicated committee engaged with local communities in Clermont-Ferrand through citizen forums and

co-construction meetings. This collaborative approach culminated in the approval of a strategic and operational plan in October 2016, set to guide the city's initiatives for the 2016-2020 period.

This ambitious project identified five main challenges, each paired with a series of actions. At the heart of this project was a vision to rejuvenate the territory's appeal by placing people at the core of its plans and drive socio-economic and ecological development in a manner that was inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of the community's aspirations.

Table 2: A synthesis of the plan of the Clermont-Auvergne Metropolis

Challenges	Actions
Challenge 1: **"Affirm the Social Solidarity Economy and social innovation as a political priority".**	Strengthen the SSE and social innovation dimension in the strategic document of the future Urban Community.
	Create a network of local and/or community councilors dedicated to the SSE and designate an elected representative for the SSE.
	Strengthen administrative and financial resources in line with the strategic and operational project.
Challenge 2: **"Support social innovation and social economy enterprises".**	Strengthen the network of players involved in supporting the creation, transfer, takeover and development of businesses
	Setting up dedicated contacts in each catchment area of the future Urban Community.
	Opening up subsidy policies to SSE players and taking stakes in SCICs.
	Supporting the project to create a centre for economic and social innovation led by the Chambre Régionale de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire (CRESS).
Challenge 3: **"Structure the SSE in the community's areas of competence by sector of activity".**	Carry out a shared diagnosis of priority sectors and propose a redeployment of human and financial resources.
	Set up a contact person/leader/referent for each sector.
Challenge 4: **"Communicate to raise awareness of the SSE".**	Initiate an annual meeting of all SSE stakeholders.
	Implement an internal and external communication plan dedicated to the SSE.
	Develop an SSE awareness and training plan.

Challenge 5: **"Co-manage local SSE policy between elected representatives, citizens and users".**	Use existing consultation forums to involve local residents in projects that concern them and in defining and assessing economic development.
	Create a body to monitor, evaluate and make proposals on SSE policy.

Source: Clermont Auvergne Metropole, 2016[26]

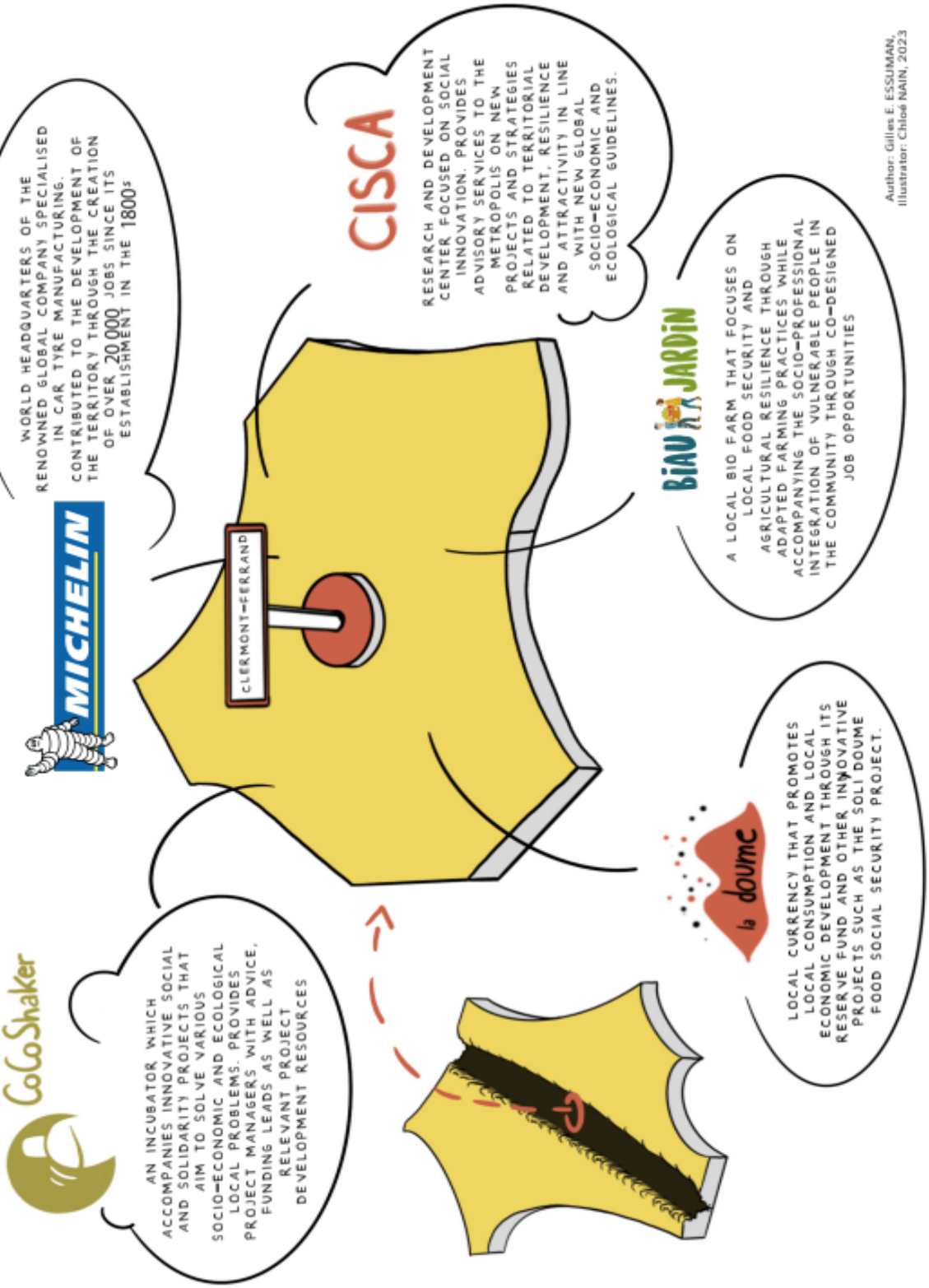
Following the implementation of the plan, some of the actions that were proposed have already been implemented. For instance, social and solidarity economy incubators like Cocoshaker[27] have been established to nurture locally innovative projects that empower the *Clermontois*[28]. Additionally, in line with the proposed actions in Challenge 2 of the city's plan (see Table 2), a research and development centre, CISCA (Centre d'Innovations Sociales Clermont-Auvergne)[29], has been created to focus on territorial development through social innovation. Through regular workshops co-facilitated with the municipality and other local stakeholders (APR - A*teliers Pour la Resilience*)[30], the CISCA has been instrumental in providing research-backed advice and action plans to the municipality and other territorial stakeholders. Arguably, this bolstered the city's ambitions and contributed to the various socio-political reflections and budgetary investment from the municipality in to social and solidarity economy initiatives. In recognition of these efforts, Clermont-Ferrand was awarded the *Ecosystème d'Innovation*[31] label in 2019 through the *French Impact*[32] program by France's Ministry of Ecology.

In choosing Clermont-Ferrand as the focal point of this research, one is not only examining a city with a rich historical tapestry but also a locale that is actively charting a course for its future. The city's endeavors in the realm of SSE, coupled with its willingness to

[26] Availabale here: https://www.rtes.fr/clermont-auvergne-metropole Consulted on 02/01/2024
[27] Incubator for local projects of impact https://www.cocoshaker.fr/ (consulted on 11-06-2023)
[28] Name for people from Clermont-Ferrand
[29] Center for Social Innovation Clermont-Auvergne (cisca.fr) - (consulted on 11-06-2023)
[30] Citizens' Workshops that unites social innovation practicians, researchers and local political leaders to discuss alternative approaches and ideas to tackle socio-economic problems.
[31] Clermont-Ferrand as an ecosystem for innovation— the strategy: https://www.investinclermont.eu/innovations/ecosysteme_innovation/ Consulted on 10/10/2023
[32] French Impact is a support programme for social innovation projects run by the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Solidarity. The metropolis of Clermont-Ferrand was awarded the label in 2019. The city's actions in connection with this label are available here: https://www.le-frenchimpact.fr/Labellisation/clermont-ferrand Consulted on 10/10/2023)

engage in participatory planning, make it an exemplary site for studying the transformative potential of community initiatives in a post-growth context.

Figure 5: Example of inspiring projects in Clermont-Ferrand



CHAPTER 4:
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This part of the dissertation seeks to outline the academic literature and the specific conceptual reflections that accompany my research journey on investigating how community initiatives can contribute to socio-territorial transformation processes. Starting by first looking at what exactly socio-territorial transformation means in Economic Geography, I proceed to look at how community initiatives have over the years contributed to territorial transformation processes before adding the layer of social innovation as an approach that holds the potential to not only strengthen the collective action of community initiatives in satisfying their direct needs but also, contribute perhaps serendipitously to the attainment of degrowth orientations.

4.1. Understanding the complexity of socio-territorial transformation processes

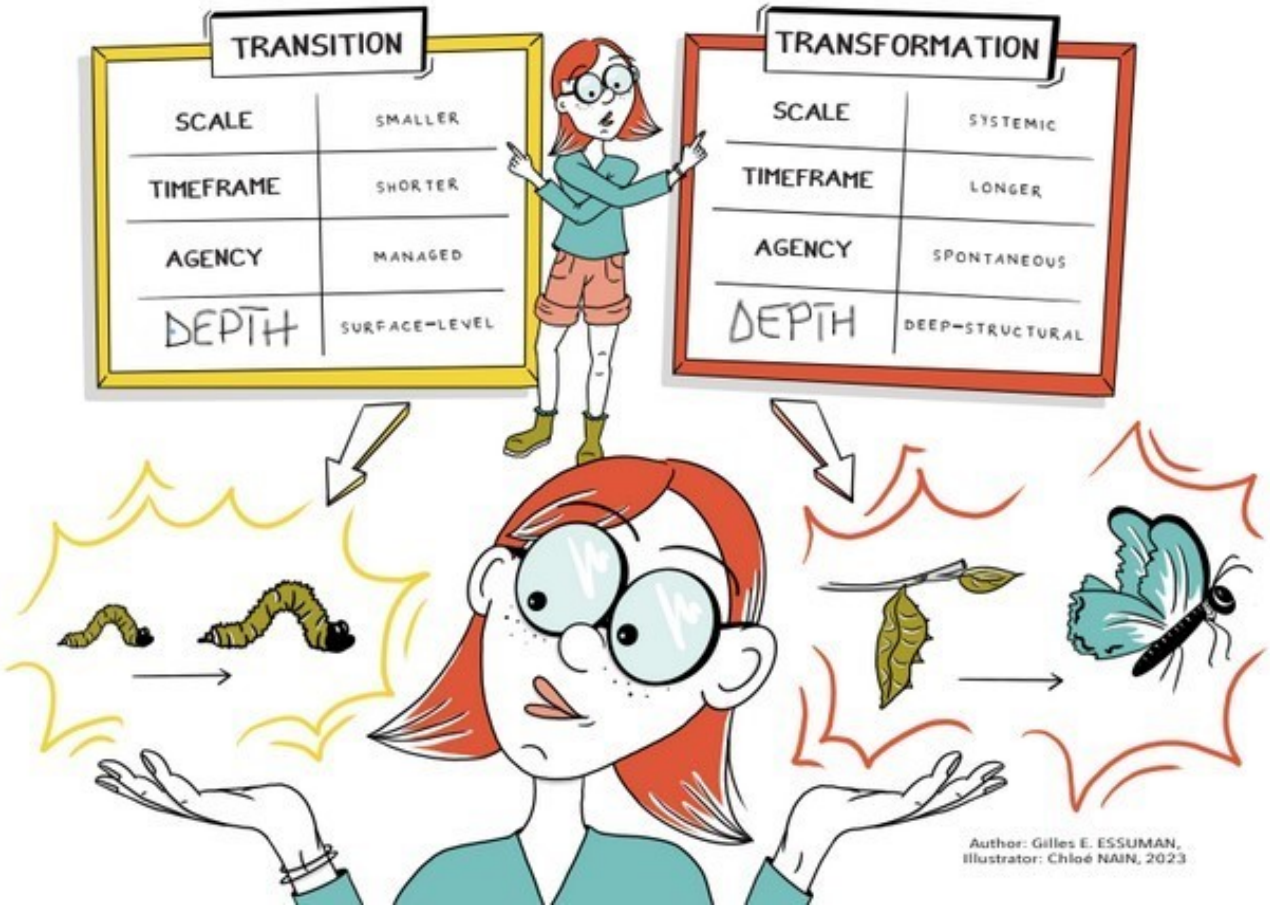
In the disciplines of economic geography, territorial development, and related fields, the terms "transition" and "transformation" are often used to describe change in communities. Both terms share the prefix "trans," which originates from the Latin root meaning "movement." However, these terms bear distinct connotations and implications. While "transition" may be succinctly encapsulated as the process of moving from one state to another, typically with a specific objective, "transformation" does not necessarily adhere to a predetermined goal (Schmid, 2021).

Some scholars argue that transformations are not instantaneous but are marked by a series of transitions, indicating a temporal and processual relationship between the two concepts (Hölscher et al., 2018; Padoan, 2016). Hölscher et al. (2018) further differentiate these terms by scale: transitions are typically associated with changes in sub-systems like energy or mobility (Loorbach et al., 2017), whereas transformations imply large-scale changes across entire societies, involving complex interactions between human and biophysical systems (Brand, 2014; Folke et al., 2010).

An illustrative example is the transition to sustainable agricultural practices, such as short-food supply chains, food baskets, and organized community farming. These practices

can lead to a transformation of the community food system by promoting ecological diversity, food security, and ensuring socio-economic justice. This example shows that while transition provides a clear direction and a set of goals to work towards, transformation allows for innovation and creativity by opening up possibilities for new ways of thinking and doing. Thus, the actions that take place within the framework of the transition are part of a logic transformation (Courtemanche et al., 2022).

Figure 6: Nuance between transition and transformation



Based on the previous differentiation, territorial transformation can be understood as a multi-dimensional process involving a complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors. It transcends mere changes in the physical or economic landscape, encompassing shifts in social relations, power dynamics, and cultural norms (Massey, 2005).

This conceptualization underscores the importance of viewing territorial changes not just as physical or economic shifts but as holistic transformations that reshape the very fabric of communities.

4.2. From territorial development to territorial transformation: a conceptual framework

Territorial development traditionally refers to the planned and organic growth of geographical areas, integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions to improve the well-being of populations within specific territories (Barca, 2009). Historically rooted in local-scale initiatives (Pike et al., 2016), this concept has evolved to embrace a more holistic, territorial approach, acknowledging the interconnectedness of local, regional, and global scales (L. Horlings et al., 2018; Pike et al., 2016; Tomaney, 2014). Influenced by the rise of bottom-up developmental policies and a shift towards decentralized governance, scholars like Eckersley (2021) and Hölscher et al. (2018) have begun to explore the notion of territorial transformation. This concept represents a paradigmatic shift, necessitating a reevaluation of existing theories and methodologies (Eckersley, 2021; Hölscher et al., 2018; Lam et al., 2020).

Territorial transformation, unlike development, which often focuses on utilitarian objectives, encompasses broader social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Castells, 2012; Sheppard, 2019). This shift requires a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from sociology, anthropology, and environmental science (Bailey et al., 2020; Brenner, 2004; Pollack, 2005), to capture the complex interplay of factors influencing territorial change. Consequently, this research adopts a multidisciplinary approach to investigate how territorial transformation can be manifested. To do this, this work adopt the lens of actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2007) to capture the diverse range of actors, both human and non-human to grasp the various interconnections that stimulate change over space and time.

ANT's relevance in studying territorial transformation lies in its ability to deconstruct the hierarchical distinction between human and non-human actors, viewing them as equally influential in shaping territorial dynamics (Latour, 2007; Murdoch, 2006). This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how various elements within a territory

interact and co-produce the transformation process. For instance, in the context of sustainable agriculture, ANT helps to elucidate how human actors (farmers, policymakers, consumers) and non-human actors (land, technology, climate) collectively contribute to the transformation of agricultural practices and landscapes (Law, 2008; Whatmore, 2002).

Beyond the ANT approach, territorial transformation can be understood through longitudinal studies and historical analyses since the transformation process is not static but continually evolving, influenced by past events and decisions (Healey, 2012; Pierson, 2011). This understanding underscores the fact territorial transformation represents a paradigm shift from the traditional focus on development to a more dynamic, complex understanding of change within territories. Unlike territorial development, which often aims for a specific, predetermined state of well-being, territorial transformation is an ongoing process that does not necessarily adhere to a fixed end goal (Padoan, 2016; Schmid, 2021).

For the purpose of this work, territorial transformation is conceptualized as a space enriched by new resources and initiatives evolving from collective action. These dynamics emerge through interactions between actors on the territory and existing resources (Iceri & Lardon, 2022). As these interactions evolve, new imaginaries based on new interests are developed, providing new trajectories for the territories.

4.3. Incorporating the notion of "social" in territorial transformation

Understanding territorial transformation necessitates a deep engagement with the intricate interplay between social structures and spatial configurations. This approach aligns with Soja's (1989) and Lefebvre's (1991) perspectives, which emphasize the inseparability of the social and the spatial in territorial dynamics (Lefebvre, 2014; Soja, 1989). By integrating the notion of "social" into the conceptualization of territorial transformation, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various movements and interactions within a territory.

Reconceptualizing territorial transformation as socio-territorial transformation broadens the analytical scope. It moves beyond merely examining the 'what' and 'where' of territorial change to delve into the 'how' and 'why.' This expanded lens brings into focus the

mechanisms, processes, and driving forces underpinning transformation, offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play (Jackson, 1986; Thrift, 2007). Such an approach recognizes that territorial change is not just a physical or economic phenomenon but is deeply rooted in social processes and relationships.

This multi-dimensional approach is encapsulated in a framework that considers the capacity of actors and the mastery of dynamics facilitating the understanding of the transformational process. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital and Putnam's (2000) work on community dynamics, this framework acknowledges the importance of social networks, collective action, and shared norms in shaping territorial transformation (Bourdieu, 2011; Putnam, 2000). It also allows for a more nuanced analysis that transcends static indicators, capturing the dynamic processes of change, adaptation, and innovation (Jessop, 2020; Pike et al., 2019).

Incorporating the social dimension into the study of territorial transformation thus provides a richer, more complex picture of how territories evolve. It acknowledges that territorial change is not merely a result of economic or environmental factors but is deeply influenced by social interactions, power relations, and cultural shifts. This perspective is crucial for not only understanding the transformational process of a territory but also to develop strategies and policies that are responsive to the multifaceted nature of territorial transformation (Besançon, 2014; Volat, 2021).

4.4. The Role of Capital in Socio-Territorial Transformation Processes

Territorial transformation, as previously discussed, is a dynamic process rather than a static end state. The shift towards understanding this transformation as "socio-territorial" offers a more intricate perspective that encompasses both spatial factors and the myriad of social interactions that shape and influence these spaces over time. The socio-territorial concept, therefore, integrates not only the tangible and intangible attributes of a territory but also the roles, activities, and spatial elements of the actors within it. This holistic approach provides a deeper insight into how these attributes are mobilized, interacted with, and transformed over (Banos et al., 2023; Pachoud et al., 2022).

To further elucidate this, an analytical framework centered on the "capacity of actors/mastery of dynamics" is proposed. This framework intersects the tangible and intangible dimensions of socio-territorial transformation and is further enhanced by considering the material, ideal, and organizational dimensions that contribute to socio-spatial changes within a territory (Di Méo, 1991). Di Méo's work emphasizes the intricate relationship between actors within a territory and how their interactions with space shape and influence territorial outcomes. This perspective prompts a deeper reflection on the elements that can serve as catalysts or facilitators for these interactions.

Building on this, the concept of "socio-territorial capital" emerges as a pivotal analytical entry point. Socio-territorial capital encompasses the collective resources, both tangible and intangible, that actors within a territory can mobilize and leverage for transformation. This capital is not static; it evolves as actors interact with and shape their territorial environment. Recognizing and understanding the mobilization of socio-territorial capital by various actors provides a robust framework for analyzing the complexities of territorial transformation processes (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000).

4.5. Socio-Territorial Capital in socio-territorial transformation

The concept of socio-territorial capital in this work is an extension of the notion of social capital, as articulated by Fontan and Klein (Fontan & Klein, 2004), with an added territorial dimension. They define social capital as the aggregate of networks, experiences, and influence that various territorial actors possess, which can be mobilized to shape the developmental trajectory of a given territory. This work augments this definition by conceptualizing territory not merely as a passive space but as an active agent that influences processes within its boundaries (Di Méo, 1991; Iceri & Lardon, 2022). Thus, socio-territorial capital encompasses elements of the broader socio-spatial structure of a territory, transitioning from a collectively acknowledged reality to the realm of imagination and aspirations of its actors.

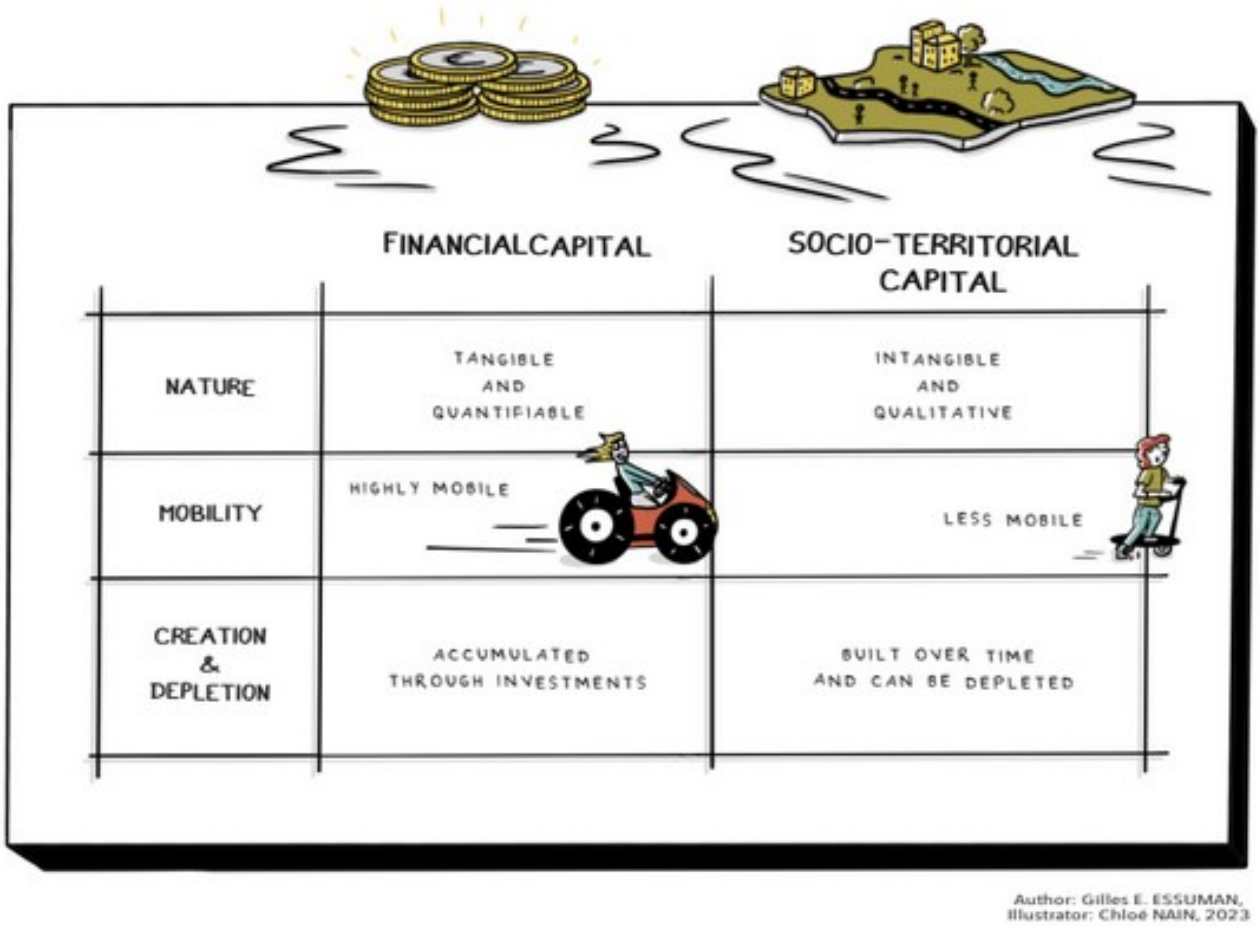
The concept of socio-territorial capital reveals both the organizational and ideational facets of a territory, orchestrating what is termed as socio-spatial organizations. These organizations are spatial forms shaped by a group's historical, economic, cultural, and social

practices (Angeon & Callois, 2005). This framework is scalable and offers nuanced insights into various domains, including the organization of community initiatives for change.

Examining the configurations of socio-territorial capital allows for a characterization of the social and spatial dynamics that constitute territories (Iceri & Lardon, 2018). It formalizes the spatial relations maintained by actors and their coordinated collective actions rooted in the territory, thereby providing avenues for integrated territorial planning and development (Benoît et al., 2006).

The capacity of territorial actors to mobilize their socio-territorial capital is crucial for addressing societal challenges such as natural resource preservation and cultural richness. This analytical approach goes beyond a superficial examination by recognizing the territory as an active participant in its own transformation. It invites a comprehensive exploration that considers not just static spatial attributes but also the dynamic interactions among actors and objects within a territory as expressed in the works of various geographers who focus on territorial development dynamics (Benoît et al., 2006; Deffontaines et al., 2001; Lardon, 2015).

Figure 7: Difference between financial capital and socio-territorial capital[33]



4.6. Analyzing socio-territorial transformation processes through community initiatives

The genesis of transformative community initiatives dates back to the 1960s and was *"indelibly marked by a counter-institutional ethos"* (Laville, 2014). Originating as a defection from traditional capitalist structures (Hirschman, 1995), these initiatives initially faced numerous challenges such as resource scarcity, isolation, and volunteer shortages. *"The high attrition rate of these early endeavors was largely due to the unsustainable nature of their radical objectives"* (Laville, 1990). Over time, these initiatives evolved, retaining their transformative ethos while adopting a more pragmatic approach, thereby establishing themselves as *"collective agents of change"* (Eme & Laville, 1994). For example, the

[33] I do acknowledge the existence of other forms of capital, but this illustration seeks to highlight my focus on financial and socio-territorial capital. Whereas there is existing literature on additional forms of capital such as natural capital (for e.g.).

Transition Towns movement in the UK demonstrates how community initiatives have evolved to address sustainability challenges (Hopkins, 2014). This evolution aligns with the broader discourse on community economies, which encompasses both political and economic dimensions (Gibson-Graham, 1998).

Combing the literature, two main dimensions emerge on how community economies have over the years positioned themselves as alternative approaches that aim to transgress and challenge the mainstream economic system. These dimensions are political and economical (Besançon, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 1997; Hillier et al., 2004; Logan & Molotch, 1987).

The political dimension of the initiatives

The political aspect of community initiatives can be understood by looking at how their action actively engage in various socio-political debates as "public space" that serve as platforms for mediation, negotiation, and public debate (Alcolea-Bureth, 2004; Fraisse, 2003). By conceptualizing community initiatives as public spaces, one can derive various political roles that community initiatives play in the discourse of alternative approaches to the mainstream socio-economic system:

- They bridge the gap between private and public spheres, addressing social needs that have transitioned from the domestic to the public domain.
- They offer a governance model for "social" enterprises, incorporating diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes
- They foster public discussions on project challenges and successes, promoting knowledge exchange and collective learning
- They act as local regulatory spaces, challenging segmented public policies and championing a more inclusive economic model (Fraisse, 2003, p. 141).

For instance, the rise of community gardens in urban areas, such as New York City's GreenThumb[34] initiative, showcases how community initiatives serve as public spaces for local residents to engage in sustainable practices, advocate for green spaces, and foster community bonding.

These public spaces operate at various scales, mirroring societal shifts and democratization dynamics that impact organizational governance, socio-economic activities, and broader territorial development. Thus, community economies emerge as potent voices for change.

Hirschman delineates "voice" from "exit" as two distinct responses to dissatisfaction—either in consumption or organizational membership (Hirschman, 1995, 2014). While "exit" entails withdrawal, "voice" involves active engagement aimed at internal change (Hirschman, 1995, p. 65). This form of expression acts as a catalyst for modifying practices and orientations within organizations (Ibid., p. 54). Drawing from real-life examples, movements like Fair Trade[35] exemplify the "voice" approach, advocating for equitable trade practices and challenging the inadequacies of the global trade system. Hence, community initiatives embody resilience, voicing out system inadequacies. They stand as manifestations of "voice," expressing discontent with both market economies and welfare state structures, while also suggesting alternatives that illuminate potential solutions to these concerns.

The economic dimension of the initiatives

The economic dimension of community initiatives is not an isolated construct but is fundamentally interlinked with their political dimension. This interrelationship is pivotal in understanding the transformative potential of community initiatives.

[34] GreenThumb emerged in response to the city's fiscal crisis in the 1970s when residents began taking over vacant lots to create community gardens. Over the years, GreenThumb has played a pivotal role in the urban agriculture movement, transforming vacant lots into vibrant community spaces. For more, see: https://www.nycgovparks.org/greenthumb consulted on 10/10/2023

[35] The Fair Trade initiative refers to a global movement that advocates for better working conditions, fair prices, and sustainable practices for farmers and workers in developing countries. Fair Trade products are certified and carry a label that ensures that they meet specific social, economic, and environmental standards.

The social and solidarity economy literature identify various types of economic principles and approaches that community initiatives utilize (see Table 3 below). This conceptualization draws heavily from the works of Gibson-Graham (1998, 2008, 2013), Polanyi (1975, 2011) and Mauss (2012), who have been further interpreted and applied by scholars like Alcolea-Bureth (2004), Enjolras (2002), Laville (2007) and Besançon (2014).

Table 3: Key Economic Principles and Their Manifestations in Community Initiatives

Economic Principle	Definition	Manifestation in Community Initiatives
Reciprocity	Based on the gift as a basic social fact, involving both obligation and freedom	Local food-sharing programs, time banks.
Redistribution	Requires a central authority for collection and distribution	Local currencies that help finance new projects with zero interest loans
Exchange	Bidirectional movement of goods in a market system	Local markets, barter systems.
Domestic Administration	Producing for one's own use	Community gardens, DIY workshops.

To ground the theoretical discussion, it is essential to bring in empirical examples. For instance, local food-sharing programs and ROSCAs (rotating savings and credit associations)[36] serve as practical manifestations of the principle of reciprocity. However, to avoid confusions, it is important to note that in the literature on social and solidarity economies, reciprocity is not merely a transactional concept but serves as a modality of political action. It contributes to the plural economic model of initiatives by fostering a relationship of equality in public space (Laville, 2003b; Besançon, 2014; Duracka, 2016). This principle is pivotal in "living together" and manifests as economic activity, thereby serving as a cornerstone for community initiatives. Also, through a redefinition of economic practices to include more social and solidarity values, community initiatives aim for the political redefinition of the economy. They seek to inscribe market activities within a set of socially and politically deliberated rules (Laville, 2003b; Gardin, 2006) that seeks to include

[36] ROSCAs are informal financial institutions created by certain local communities to save and borrow together in order to finance their projects without the profiteering mentality of the usual capitalistic banks (Anderson & Baland, 2002; Ardener, 2014; Von Pischke, 2019)

dimensions that go beyond market profiteering to include human-centred and socio-ecological values (Granovetter, 2008; Gardin, 2006; Laville, 2013).

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As I transition from discussing the dual dimensions of community initiatives, it becomes evident that these dimensions are interconnected. They both serve as modalities of political action and as essential economic resources. This interconnection has significant implications for socio-territorial transformations, as it underpins the dynamics of socio-economic change that these initiatives carry. However, the question remains on how community initiatives materialize their actions and imaginaries whether politically, economically. The next section looks at the concepts of commons and emotional energy as mobilized by various economic geographers to offer an explanation to how community initiatives develop collective actions for change.

4.7. Understanding Collective Action in Community Initiatives through commons and emotional energy

Collective action is a multifaceted concept, interpreted differently across disciplines. Sociologists may focus on social movements as groups advocating for common interests (Chazel & Touraine, 1993; Mayer, 2023), while others emphasize the activities that bind individuals together (Durkheim, 1894; Pailhé, 1984; Weber, 2003).

For this work, collective action is defined as the coordinated practices of a group defending its values and interests in a given space (Akoun & Ansart, 1999). This coordination can manifest through various modes such as efficiency calculations, shared values, traditions, or spatial interactions. The focus is not on disciplinary silos but on the empirical object and actual coordination relationships (Mormont, 2014)

Di Méo (2014) defines a collective as a group comprising of actors or "actants" (see ANT by Latour) capable of taking action (Di Méo, 2014). Ostrom's theory of the *commons* is pivotal here, as it serves as the catalyst for collective action. The theory of commons deals with stakeholders' ability to address territorial issues through collective action aimed at mobilizing resources for territorial transformation (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom & Baechler,

2010). It merges the management of territorial resources with the creation of innovative socio-spatial relationships, enabling territories to tackle specific challenges. For instance, the concept of "common-pool resources" in Ostrom's theory has been applied to community forestry initiatives[37], demonstrating its practical relevance (Ostrom, 2009).

Moreover, the commons theory extends to alternative organizational models that could transcend capitalism, particularly in the context of ecological and political crises (Laval & Dardot, 2014). Thus, the 'commons' becomes a foundational principle for collective action in the process of territorial transformation. This is because the concept englobes issues not only related to resource management but also serves as a catalyst for innovative socio-spatial relationships.

Another interesting approach related to the process of building commons for socio-territorial transformation is that of *emotional energy*. Emotional energy results from the collective experience of emotions in response to a common stimulus, which can be due to emotional contagion or adherence to group social norms. Collective emotions refer to the synchronized convergence of affective responses among individuals in response to a specific event or object (von Scheve & Ismer, 2013). They can also be viewed as common feelings shared by members of a social unit resulting from shared experiences (Lawler et al., 2014). For example, the degradation of a local ecosystem, such as pollution of a nearby pond, can lead to water scarcity, which can unite the community in resolving the situation.

This implies that for collective action to be sustained through emotional energy, there's the need for constant interaction (Collins, 2014). This can be achieved through maintained communication and collaboration among members, as well as fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the collective action. The 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement[38] provides a relevant example of sustained emotional energy and engagement among participants. During the protests, activists used various techniques to maintain emotional energy, such as creating a sense of community and shared purpose through rituals

[37] An example is the research "Determinants of success of community forestry: Empirical evidence from Ethiopia" by (Gebreegziabher et al., 2021)
[38] Occupy Wallstreet Movement: http://occupywallst.org/about/ consulted on March 13, 2023

like the daily General Assemblies. Here, protesters were given a voice and the opportunity to participate in decision-making and strategizing. Additionally, the movement relied heavily on social media to communicate with supporters and to share stories of progress and success. These interactions fueled the emotional energy and created persistence in the actions of the protesters calling for change. This reflection proves that sustained interactions among members of a community can contribute to the education, empowerment, and emancipation of individuals, leading to the co-construction of action through the alliance of efforts and resources in response to shared community goals.

However, as previously mentioned, these initiatives, no matter how ambitious or resilient they are vis-à-vis resolving their societal problems cannot thrive in a system or institution that frames their actions to a large extent. As Healy states, because these initiatives are still embedded in a mainstream socio-economic and political dispensation, they need to innovate in order to test alternative approaches and solutions that can best respond to their needs (Healy, 2020). Also, mobilizing socio-territorial capital or assembling various actors in a quest to solve "wicked" societal problems is not a linear path. In that sense, I tackle the investigation of how community initiatives can contribute to socio-territorial transformation through the lens of social innovation.

The next chapter seeks to understand the various strands of literature on social innovation and provide some leads on how social innovation can be viewed as a transformative force for community initiatives.

CHAPTER 5:
Social Innovation and Community Initiatives

The contemporary discourse on socio-economic development is increasingly gravitating towards paradigms that are inclusive, sustainable, and community centric. Within this framework, social innovation stands as a pivotal mechanism for engendering socio-territorial transformation and fortifying an equitable socio-economic fabric within communities. According to Moulaert et al. (2013), social innovation serves as a transformative force that transcends traditional economic models and fosters new pathways for community engagement and socio-economic resilience. This section aims to explore the symbiotic relationship between community economies and social innovation, and how this nexus can be leveraged to catalyze socio-territorial transformation.

5.1. Defining social innovation through its various approaches

Social innovation is a complex construct that has been interpreted through various lenses, including societal transformation, organizational management, social entrepreneurship, product development, and governance models (Nicholls & Murdock, 2012). A review of the literature reveals multiple approaches to understanding social innovation.

The first approach, as articulated by Porter and Kramer (2011), positions social innovation as a mechanism for societal transformation. This perspective encompasses the role of civil society, the social economy, and social entrepreneurs in fostering economic growth and social inclusion. It also includes the role of business in social change, ranging from corporate social responsibility to driving innovation in social sectors like education and healthcare. This approach bases on redefining corporate goals around "shared value," focusing on broader social and environmental needs alongside profits (Kramer & Porter, 2011).

The second approach, as elaborated by Phills et al. (2008), focuses on organizational innovation in terms of internal management. In this context, social innovation is seen as a business strategy that leads to organizational efficiency and competitiveness through changes in human, institutional, and social capitals (Phills et al., 2008). This perspective has

also influenced literature on non-profit management, emphasizing leadership skills and innovative grant-giving methods to improve organizational sustainability (Davies et al., 2012).

A third approach in the literature centers on social entrepreneurship, highlighting the innovative methods employed by social enterprises and civic entrepreneurs (Dees, 1998; Drayton, 2002). This perspective emphasizes the role of individuals in developing innovative solutions to complex social challenges. It is rooted in commercial entrepreneurship theories, focusing on the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities to meet social needs.

The fourth approach views social innovation as the practical development and implementation of new products, services, and programs that address social needs (Moulaert et al., 2005). This perspective is gaining prominence due to current austerity measures and the retrenchment of the welfare state, emphasizing the role of public sector innovation and service provision by social enterprises and civil society organizations.

Finally, social innovation is also defined as a process that explores governance, empowerment, and capacity-building dynamics (Moulaert et al., 2013). This approach examines the interplay between various actors and emphasizes the skills, competencies, and social capital developed in the implementation of programs and strategies for territorial development.

Table 4: Different approaches to social innovation according to the literature

Approach	Focus Areas	Key Literature References
Societal Transformation	Role of civil society, social economy, and social entrepreneurs in economic growth and social inclusion. Redefining corporate goals around "shared value."	Porter & Kramer, 2011; Young Foundation, 2012
Organizational Innovation	Business strategy leading to organizational efficiency and competitiveness. Focus on human, institutional, and social capitals.	Phills et al., 2008; Nicholls & Murdock, 2012

Social Entrepreneurship	Role of individuals in developing innovative solutions to complex social challenges. Rooted in commercial entrepreneurship theories.	Dees, 1998; Drayton, 2002; Hoogendoorn, Pennings & Thurik, 2010
Product Development	Development and implementation of new products, services, and programs that address social needs.	Moulaert et al., 2005; Moulaert et al., 2013
Governance and Process	Focus on governance, empowerment, and capacity-building dynamics. Examines interplay between various actors.	Moulaert et al., 2013; Bouchard, 2011; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012

For the purposes of this work, ***social innovation*** is defined as a process that encompasses various initiatives and approaches aimed at addressing urgent socio-territorial needs through collective action. This definition aligns with the work of CRISES[39] (Canada) and Institut Godin[40] (France), who conceptualize social innovation as an intervention initiated by social actors to transform social relations and propose new orientations (Besançon, 2014). Basing on this definition, social innovation can be understood as an approach that underscores the desire for social transformation affecting various social relations, including those of production, consumption, gender, and class (Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). However, how does this transformation happen?

5.2. Community initiatives as social innovation laboratories

Social innovation is often attributed to individuals or groups who deviate from established norms to challenge or transgress them (Alter, 2002, 2010; Callon, 2007). However, it is crucial to differentiate such innovation from deliberate actions undertaken by civil society organizations, particularly community initiatives within the framework of social and solidarity economy approaches. This approach is grounded in legal statutes of cooperatives, mutuals, and associations (Desroche, 1982), values of service to members and the community (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010), and rules linking economic activity to an association of persons (Vienney, 1994a). It also incorporates the hybridization of various

[39] Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (Centre for Research on Social Innovations)
[40] Research and Development Center in France whose work focus on social innovation practices and their diffusion to other territories.

economic principles such as market, redistribution, and reciprocity (M. J. Bouchard, 2021; Eme & Laville, 1994).

This framework allows us to comprehend the less "radical" posture of community initiatives that aim to create alternative economic approaches to the mainstream capitalocentric economic value system. In that sense, these community initiatives are seen as "spaces of experimentation" that can modify capitalism and public space towards greater democratization (D. Bouchard et al., 2015). Social innovation in this context aims for social change through a series of experiments, acknowledging the sector's variable engagement in either a neoliberal or solidarity-based development model that aims to *slowly* reform the current economic system and over time transform it. This reflection aligns with the works of Institut Godin and Nicholas Duracka (2016) who derive two approaches of social innovation from the works of Jean Louis-Laville (Laville, 2014). According to this school of thought, social innovation can be reformative or transformative.

Reformative in the sense that it seeks to rethink existing socio-economic approaches by proposing added socio-economic and ecological values for all and transformative in the sense that social innovation aims to trigger a radical shift from the mainstream system and break to a new dispensation that is more sustainable and equitable both socio-economically and ecologically (Laville, 2014; Besançon, 2014; Duracka, 2016).

Regardless of the sub-school of thought in which an initiative can be categorized, its modus operandi which is certainly oriented towards answering a specific community need proposes the related collective action as a laboratory for experimentation since the resolution of the problem itself means the discovery of a new reality that in itself redefines the community and its territory’s dynamics.

In that sense, the context of the territory where the collective action is deployed is an important factor in studying the transformational processes of the initiatives. Important because the interactions of the various actors on the territory influence how an emotional energy can be gathered among the community to build a common imaginary but also how these actors mobilize themselves for action based on their individual and collective interests.

As various social innovation scholars argue, this process of socio-territorial capital mobilization (Fontan & Klein, 2004) is a crucial part of socio-territorial transformation since the mobilization process is in itself a social innovation that seeks to align various actors with different postures, imaginaries and realities on the same line in order to satisfy a common interest (Duracka, 2016; Volat, 2021).

In the next section, the objective is to delve further into how socio-territorial capital mobilization is in itself a social innovation that can challenge existing territorial dynamics.

5.3. Socio-Territorial Capital in the Context of Social Innovation

In Chapter 4 of this dissertation (see sub-section 4.5), I expounded on the importance of socio-territorial capital in the transformation process of a community. In this section, I delve further to add the layer of social innovation to explore how these two concepts interlink and how they can enrich our understanding on socio-territorial transformation processes from the prism of community initiatives.

In the framework of social innovation, socio-territorial capital serves dual roles: as a resource and as an objective (Davister, 2004; Laville et al., 2002). This dual role is indicative of the complex interplay between social and territorial capital which varies across different socio-territorial contexts (Coppin, 2002; Healy et al., 2001). Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between the mobilization of socio-territorial capital as a production factor and as an organizing factor (Alcolea-Bureth, 2004; Argoud, 2004; Laville et al., 2002).

Production in the sense that it facilitates the creation and co-construction of new solutions and realities. Organizing factor in the sense that to co-produce with different actors on a territory, there's an inherent obligation to govern and organize the process based on the different roles and positions of the various socio-territorial actors. Adopting a democratic and participatory approach that seeks to include all concerned community actors consequently leads to the path of social innovation.

Drawing upon a range of studies (Bellemare & Klein, 2011; Cloutier, 2003; Klein et al., 2009; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012), several recurring themes structure the social innovation process through the mobilization of socio-territorial capital. These elements are:

- **Territory**: The spatial dimension where social innovation occurs, influenced by the availability and mobilization of social capital.
- **Economic Model**: The financial and operational framework within which social innovation initiative is situated, often challenging traditional capitalist models.
- **Governance**: The systems and structures that guide decision-making and coordination among various actors in the collective action process.
- **Empowerment**: The process by which individuals and communities gain control over their lives, often facilitated by their collective action.

By delving into these four elements, there is an opportunity to investigate the multiplicity of actors and elements that intervene in the processualization of the initiatives as part of their collective action. However, it is important to note that the development of these concepts is not in any way exhaustive as they are all context sensitive and multifaceted. The focus will therefore be on understanding how various authors approach them and conceptualize them in the social innovation literature in the framework of socio-territorial development narratives.

Territory

According to several writers, a key attribute of social innovation is its territorial nature (Bellemare & Klein, 2011; Besançon, 2013; Hakmi & Zaoual, 2008; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). This is because the materialization process of a collective action depends largely on the collaboration of various local stakeholders for the purpose of a common project. According to Richez-Battesti, the social aspect of innovation is characterized by its relational nature, which is influenced by the level of interactions and the extent of social networks involved (Richez-Battesti, 2008).

Three forms of proximity facilitate these connections: geographical, organizational, and institutional (Hakmi & Zaoual, 2008; Pecqueur & Zimmermann, 2004). Geographical proximity enhances interaction likelihood, organizational proximity coordinates collective action through rule implementation, and institutional proximity unites individuals through shared values and ideals. As highlighted by Battesti and Zaoual (2008; 2008), these different

registers of proximity play a significant role in the integration of innovation within a socio-spatial context, as stated by Fontan (2011). As he argues, the social dimension of innovation, in contrast to its social purpose, encompasses the various individual and collective, organizational and institutional actions that are undertaken or challenged during the development of the social utilization of a novelty (Fontan, 2011).

Based on the previous, I can derive that social innovation strategy is based on the integration of different components both abstract and concrete (socio-spatial) that can foster a collective production of an innovation. As Besançon (2014) frames it, social innovation indirectly demands a socio-technical network of innovation that highlights the heterogeneous nature of the various local actors who interact (companies, the State and community projects centres, etc.) over space and time (Lévesque, 2007; Richez- Battesti, 2008; Besançon, 2014).

As Di Méo posits, the territory is not a static entity but a dynamic process that serves as more than just a backdrop for social innovation since it actively contributes to the process and is also shaped by it (Di Méo, 1991, 2014). This dual role highlights the concept of 'socio-territorial capital' as an organizing factor that aims to transform the territory through its related actors and resources.

The economic model

Proceeding from the notion of territory, one can now look at the heterogeneity of actors involved in social innovation and how that has repercussions for the economic model. Through its process, social innovation fosters a plural economy in terms of actors involved, the resources needed for the collective action process and the nature of these very resources (market, non-market and non-monetary) (J.-L. Klein et al., 2009). This hybridization[41] of resources is therefore an important feature of social innovation (Richez-Battesti, 2008) since it is the result of a cooperation between actors with complementary resources that help generate common interests for the community.

[41] Hybridization in this context refers to community initiatives and alternative practices approaches that adopt a plurality of modes of coordination, forms of exchange and organisation, without ranking them in a hierarchy but recognizing the worth and value in the various differences (Alcolea- Bureth, 2004)

According to Hillier et al (2004), "a certain number [of] needs are not met by the market and fall either within the scope of solidarity provided by the state, or else within the scope of more flexible organizations, involving the state, private actors and civil society, which attempt to meet these needs through mechanisms of solidarity and reciprocity at local level (Hillier et al., 2004). For this approach, the hybridization of resources arises from the market's inability to satisfy social needs at local level. Non-market relationships are then formed in order to implement a satisfactory response. Here, I find a certain hierarchization of economic mechanisms, which momentarily obscures the political significance of the place of non-market mechanisms in these initiatives.

The presence of these hybrid resources may in fact be evidence of a co-construction that presupposes the constitution of mini-public spaces and gives a glimpse of the political dimension of social innovations (D. Bouchard et al., 2015; Dacheux & Goujon, 2015; Eme & Laville, 1994). This dimension is embodied in flexible and responsive forms of local governance, which make it possible to identify needs and to mobilize the various forms of capital required for the collective action. In that sense, the social innovation processes can be conceived as a result of this governance which aims to be democratic and inclusive in order to facilitate the pooling of socio-territorial capital for project implementation (Hillier et al., 2004).

Governance

Hillier et al. (2004) argue that social innovation particularly involves changes in social relations, especially in governance. Emerging collective dynamics in local spaces are fostering new, inclusive, and participatory governance models. These models are built on partnerships between public and private stakeholders (Richez-Battesti, 2008; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). Thus, social innovation supports a more expansive governance framework that includes territorial networks, users, and organizational collaborators (Cloutier, 2003).

Zaoual (2008) describes this participatory nature as "situated innovation," which is deeply rooted in stakeholder involvement. This engagement manifests in project governance, emphasizing a dual process of co-construction and co-production (Di Méo,

2004; Vaillancourt, 2019) that seeks to englobe the opinions and values of all concerned actors.

By cooperation and shared governance, the notions of co-construction and co-production emerge to strengthen the democratic and participatory values embedded in the social innovation projects as they open themselves to the influence and imaginaries of the various actors involved in its collective action. As Gaudin (2002) frames it, governance is a kind of collective production, more or less coordinated and sometimes "cacophonous" that sometimes leads to new approaches and new solutions and therefore ends up being socially innovative (Gaudin, 2002).

Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of acquiring power and the ability to exercise it autonomously (Candipan, 2019; Cantelli, 2013; Speer & Hughey, 1995). It seeks to support individuals and communities in their efforts to gain the power they need to effect change. One of the most renowned approaches to empowerment was the conscientizaçao[42] process initiated by Paulo Freire in Brazil (Freire, 1963, 2018; W. A. Smith, 1976). This involved the oppressed collectively analyzing their living conditions, becoming aware of the oppression they suffered, and organizing themselves to change the structures that created this oppression.

The concept of empowerment is based on the idea that individuals and communities have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. It combines a sense of personal power with the ability to change one's own behaviour or to influence the behaviour of others. Community empowerment therefore refers to the process through which a community increases its collective power (Bacqué & Biewener, 2013; Cantelli, 2013; Speer & Hughey, 1995).

According to Dandurand (2005), social innovation often originates from citizen initiatives striving to address social problems or pursue a social ideal (Dandurand, 2005). As

[42] The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.

articulated by Cloutier (2003, p. 4), "Social innovation would therefore be the initiative of individuals and groups who are experiencing the problem or aiming for a social ideal for themselves. This underpins a "bottom-up" impetus (Hillier et al., 2004), reflective of an empowerment process, arising from institutional inadequacies in meeting needs within a specific contextual framework (Dandurand, 2005; J.-L. Klein et al., 2009).

Jouve sheds light on the territorial dimension of the empowerment process, emphasizing that the social movements driving empowerment are fundamentally territorial (Jouve, 2006). Through their actions, they challenge the pre-existing institutional frameworks that traditionally organized relations between the State and civil society. This territorial aspect underscores the deep-rooted interconnectedness between the social fabric and the spatial-geographical domain, shedding light on how territorial dynamics can either foster or impede empowerment processes.

The discourse on empowerment reveals different interpretations, one of which accentuates the ability of public policies to evolve, especially hinged on social movements. This optimistic perspective views empowerment as a political endeavor, taking form in collective action and democratic vocalization by citizens, catalyzing a transformation of citizenship regimes and institutional access mechanisms.

However, empowerment in social innovation transcends merely citizen-led initiatives addressing social problems. It extends to the inclusion of users or marginalized groups in the process, fostering a collaborative environment conducive for innovation (Chambon et al., 1982; Cloutier, 2003; Hillier et al., 2004; Richez-Battesti, 2008). For instance, community-driven initiatives aiming at sustainable urban development or local food systems could serve as exemplars illustrating empowerment's pivotal role in social innovation.

5.4. The transformative potential of social innovation in community –social and solidarity–economy initiatives

In discussions about social innovation, taking a transformative perspective often uncovers new methods, products, or services. While much of the literature focuses on the process, it sometimes overlooks describing the outcomes, which usually reflect the goals of

social innovation. According to Richez-Battesti (2008), these goals ambitiously aim to improve the well-being of individuals and communities by combining results with intentionally positive effects. This naturally involves enhancing living and working conditions through two main steps:

- **Promoting Non-Market and Non-State Activities:** By encouraging activities outside traditional markets or government control, these initiatives address shared concerns and meet unmet social needs.
- **Empowering Marginalized Groups:** By helping individuals and groups struggling with social and professional integration, they strengthen economic and social unity within the region.

Emphasizing empowerment and local dynamics highlights a subtle interplay between the process and the outcome. Building on this idea, this research suggests that the tangible products or services emerging from social innovation—fueled by collective action—symbolize social and territorial transformation. Such transformation could rejuvenate socio-economic relationships and systems specific to certain areas, especially amid global socio-economic and ecological crises.

To explore this potential, the literature review identifies practices and approaches that aim to change current social and territorial dynamics through alternative community economy models.

In recent years, many grassroots and local initiatives have appeared. These initiatives seek meaningful engagement and personal involvement, aiming to move beyond mere production and endless growth towards true socio-economic transformation (Lallement, 2015).

This shift exposes a growing tension against dominant production systems, particularly large capitalist enterprises. This pattern is especially relevant as it brings changes in practices, organizational structures, and management styles, even questioning traditional ownership forms. Current practices in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) feature social and organizational innovations that critique and aim to transform dominant organizational models (Demoustier, 2002; Frère, 2017). Rooted in values like solidarity,

participation, and collaboration, these initiatives differ from traditional capitalist practices and are driven by "societies of persons" rather than capital.

Thinking about this new way of working "together" leads us to explore how these initiatives act as small-scale alternatives to traditional, productivity-focused organizations that emerge from the edges of capitalism. To uncover these subtleties, I propose examining examples of different governance methods used in alternative community—social and solidarity—economy practices, as well as new ways of engaging in the market and creating value and impact. These approaches aim to transform mainstream socio-economic models, leading to social and territorial change.

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Sociocracy: An Alternative Governance Approach in the Social and Solidarity Economy

As discussed in Chapter 2, democracy is central to the community economy practices and Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) projects—not just as a legal requirement but also as a set of practices and an objective. It influences how organizations are governed, affecting decision-making processes and the distribution of responsibilities. Historically, SSE practices are based on ideals of sharing power, property, and knowledge, with goals of achieving equality, social justice, and economic citizenship (Endenburg & Pearson, 1998; King & Griffin, 2024; Rau & Koch-Gonzalez, 2018). Notably, the French SSE law of July 31, 2014, establishes democratic governance as the second pillar of the Social and Solidarity Economy. This pillar encourages all SSE organizations, both statutory ones and commercial entities wishing to join the SSE, to enhance the democratic nature of their governance. Article 1 (point 2) mandates:

"*Democratic governance, defined and organized by the statutes, ensuring information and participation, whose expression is not solely linked to their capital contribution or the amount of their financial contribution, involving associates, employees, and stakeholders in the achievements of the company.*"[43]

[43] Translated by author from original version available here: Article 1 - LOI n° 2014-856 du 31 juillet 2014 relative à l'économie sociale et solidaire (1) - Légifrance, consulted on 11/10/2024

Within organizations, democratic governance relies on:

- **Formalized rules:** Statutes, ethical charters, internal regulations, and similar documents.
- **Practices reflecting democratic values:** Interactions among members, meeting methods, information flow, and other cultural aspects of the organization.

Driven by a clear desire to conduct business "differently," SSE initiatives and organizations innovate in various ways. One approach they adopt is sociocracy, a governance model that values individuals invested in a community. This model seeks to move away from traditional hierarchical management, where executives make all decisions and others merely follow orders. Based on systems theory, this participatory management model was developed by Gérard Endenburg and Kees Boeke (Endenburg & Pearson, 1998). Its goal is to share power among members according to the principle of equivalence, aiming to strengthen the sense of belonging. In practice, sociocracy leverages collective intelligence and is based on four key principles (King & Griffin, 2024):

1. **Circle Organization:** Opposing hierarchical structures, this principle involves organizing members in circles, emphasizing turn-taking in decision-making processes.
2. **Decision-Making by Consent:** Decisions are made through a specific, codified process based on the "no objection" of all circle members, rather than full consensus.
3. **Election Without Candidates:** Aimed at including all individuals, especially those who don't typically seek power, this method promotes people the group trusts—even if they don't put themselves forward. Precise protocols are in place to prevent power grabs.
4. **Double Linking:** In organizations with multiple governance levels (circles), at least two people connect each circle to prevent the reinforcement of intermediary roles.

While these principles might seem a bit complex in theory, understanding them in practice seems to provide more insights on how their operationalization could contribute to a transformation of governance approaches in organisations. Real-world examples of sociocracy include organizations across various sectors that have effectively implemented its principles to enhance collaboration, inclusivity, and efficiency (Ridley-Duff & Southcombe, 2012):

- **Endenburg Elektrotechniek:** This Dutch electrical engineering company is where Gerard Endenburg developed the modern sociocratic method in the 1970s. By applying sociocracy,

Endenburg Elektrotechniek transitioned to a governance structure where employees at all levels participate in decision-making. This shift led to increased job satisfaction and improved organizational performance (Endenburg & Pearson, 1998).

- **Eco-Villages and Intentional Communities:** Communities like the *Findhorn Foundation*[44] in Scotland and *N Street Cohousing*[45] in California have adopted sociocratic governance to manage communal affairs. By organizing members into circles and making decisions by consent, these communities ensure that all voices are heard, fostering stronger bonds and more effective management of shared resources (Buck & Villines, 2007). Another example of intentional communities using sociocracy are *local currencies* such as *La Doume*, one of the case studies for this research. More insights on how La Doume uses sociocracy is expounded in Chapter 8 (section 8.2).
- **Sociocracy for All[46] (SoFA)**: As a global non-profit organization, SoFA not only promotes sociocracy but also operates using its principles. They provide resources, training, and support to other organizations looking to implement sociocratic governance, exemplifying its practical application in their operations.
- **Cooperatives and Small Businesses**: Various cooperatives and small businesses worldwide have embraced sociocracy to create more inclusive and dynamic organizational structures. For example, the *Lost Valley Education Center* in Oregon uses sociocracy[47] to involve all members in governance, leading to more effective and cohesive management.

These real-world examples highlight that sociocracy is not just an abstract theory but a practical governance model that organizations across various sectors have successfully implemented. Observing how sociocracy functions in different contexts provides valuable insights into its operationalization and its potential to transform traditional organizational structures. The practical application of sociocratic principles in these organizations demonstrates how collective intelligence, consent-based decision-making, and equitable power distribution can lead to more inclusive and effective governance.

However, the implementation of sociocracy as a governance approach is not without its own hurdles, the literature and observation from different case studies (Antoniuk &

[44] Read more about the foundation's approach here: Community Tools: Transparency, Equivalence, and Effectiveness - Global Ecovillage Network. Consulted on 18/10/2024
[45] C N St Cons Method Consulted on 18/10/2024
[46] Learn and Share Sociocracy with the World - Sociocracy For All Consulted on 18/10/2024
[47] Lost Valley Educational Center Consulted on 18/10/2024

Iliopoulos, 2023) showcase that this innovative governance approach englobes a number of issues.

First, one of the main criticisms is its scalability. As organizations grow in size and complexity, the circle-based decision-making process can become cumbersome and slow, potentially hindering responsiveness and agility. The need for consent in decision-making can lead to lengthy discussions where reaching agreement requires significant time and effort. Buck and Villines (2007) note that while sociocracy fosters inclusive decision-making, the process can be time-consuming and may not suit fast-paced environments where quick decisions are essential.

Second, adopting sociocracy demands a significant shift in organizational culture and mindset. It requires ongoing training and a deep understanding of its principles by all members, which can be resource-intensive. Rau and Koch-Gonzalez (2018) point out that transitioning to a sociocratic model involves considerable initial and ongoing investment in education and skill development. This might not be feasible for all organizations, especially smaller ones or those with limited resources (Rau & Koch-Gonzalez, 2018).

Third, although sociocracy aims to distribute power more equitably and enhance democratic participation, its ability to fundamentally alter existing power structures is debatable. Power dynamics ingrained in societal and organizational cultures can undermine the principles of sociocracy. Freeman (1972) observes that in groups lacking formal structures, informal hierarchies often emerge, with certain individuals exerting more influence due to factors like personality, experience, or social capital. This can lead to domination by a few, even within a system designed for equality (J. Freeman, 1972).

Finally, the practical application of sociocracy principles—such as election without candidates and double linking—can be susceptible to manipulation. Without careful implementation and vigilance, organizations might inadvertently perpetuate traditional forms of leadership and control under the guise of participatory governance. Without clear checks and balances, there's a risk that sociocratic processes can be co-opted by those seeking to maintain or enhance their power within the organization (King & Griffin, 2024).

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Despite the challenges associated with implementing sociocracy, it offers significant benefit as a governance innovation in socio-territorial transformation. Acknowledging its shortfalls allows for a deeper appreciation of the strengths it brings to organizations seeking alternative governance models. By fostering shared leadership and collective decision-making, sociocracy provides an effective alternative to traditional hierarchical structures, empowering individuals and promoting equality within organizations (Buck & Villines, 2007).

Sociocracy emphasis on consent and equivalence encourages active participation and harnesses collective intelligence, leading to more inclusive and adaptive practices. This approach aligns closely with the principles of social and solidarity-oriented community economies by supporting social justice and community resilience (Rau & Koch-Gonzalez, 2018). By promoting non-hierarchical decision-making and distributing power equitably among all members, sociocracy helps its adopting organizations foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation—a crucial factor in a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, sociocracy can catalyze a radical shift in organizational values from competition to collaboration, facilitating transformative change both within organizations and in the broader community. Its innovative approach to governance holds the potential to reshape socio-economic relationships and contribute significantly to sustainable socio-territorial development (Laloux, 2014). This interconnectedness prevents information silos and power imbalances that often undermine organizational goals in traditional governance structures.

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Cooperatives: catalysts for socio-territorial transformation through Social Innovation

A cooperative is an independent association of individuals who unite to meet common needs through a democratically owned and controlled enterprise[48]. In a social innovation perspective, cooperatives stand out due to the status of their members and the types of activities they undertake, incorporating both a political role in social transformation and an economic role in production and exchange (Vienney, 1994). This model is based on specific principles, including the democratic rule of one member, one vote during general assemblies, collective ownership of capital, an indivisible reserve, and limited returns on capital (Lamarche & Richez-Battesti, 2023).

Recently, cooperatives have evolved as alternatives to the excesses of financial capitalism, offering a democratic approach to business. Historically rooted in the economic sphere, they fit into a framework defined by Georges Fauquet (1942), where the use and value of capital occur under cooperative governance. In France in 2024, cooperatives accounted for 12.4% of employment within the SSE, which itself represents just over 10% of total employment[49].

Analyzing current cooperative practices globally and in France highlights several key dimensions. First, there is a political aspect (Draperi, 2013), which is evident not just in statements but also in actions that bring about change. Engaged individuals, often called "actor-authors", help create representations and narratives that legitimize the cooperative model, often rooted in collective struggles. Second, there is an economic dimension seen in the various activities these organizations undertake to meet specific socio-economic needs in their regions, involving multiple stakeholders (Lamarche & Richez-Battesti, 2023).

For example, the Mondragon cooperative group in Spain's Basque Country shows how cooperatives can blend economic performance with social commitment. Founded in 1956, Mondragon is now one of the world's largest cooperatives, with over 80,000 worker-owners (Whyte & Whyte, 2014). It has created an alternative economic model based on democratic

[48] Definition from Alliance Coopérative Internationale, available here: Identité, valeurs et principes coopératifs | ICA, consulted on 30/10/2024

[49] Data from Avise based on INSEE reports. Available here : Chiffres clés de l'ESS en France | Avise, consulted on 30/10/2024

participation, solidarity, and strong local ties, contributing to the socio-economic development of its region.

In France, the Cooperative of Activity and Employment (CAE) Coopaname is another notable example. Established in 2004, Coopaname allows entrepreneurs to develop their businesses within a cooperative framework, sharing risks and resources (Brulé-Josso & Liberos, 2019). This innovative form of cooperative encourages collective entrepreneurship and secures career paths while promoting values of solidarity and economic democracy.

To understand the potential of cooperatives in transforming society and territories, we need to consider their unique production dynamics, organizational structures, and effects on work relationships. While cooperatives are full-fledged businesses operating in the market, they challenge traditional notions of ownership. Unlike corporations pressured by shareholders, cooperatives often lack such pressure because committed and united members drive them, not financial market values.

The innovative potential of cooperatives in socio-territorial transformation lies in their ability to promote an "enterprise in common and in responsibility for the common good" (Filippi, 2022). They aim to create projects that meet local needs without necessarily seeking expansion. By fostering non-financialized businesses with governance focused on local or social commons, they contribute to a shift away from a finance-driven regime (Defalvard, 2023). This transition, though normatively charged, can be also seen as a political extension within cooperatives and broader citizen and environmental activism, aiding socio-territorial change.

In France, new cooperative forms like SCICs (Cooperative Societies of Collective Interest)[50] have emerged, showing a territorial reconfiguration. These entities strengthen the link between cooperatives and their regions, symbolizing a renewal in cooperative practices, especially through their ownership structures. SCICs extend the notion of collective interest to include both their members and the territory. They play a crucial role in building shared resources, especially as public services decline. Governed by a

[50] In French: Sociétés coopératives d'intérêt collectif

"deliberative policy," SCICs facilitate stakeholders in co-defining the collective interest (Draperi & Margado, 2016). An example is the SCIC *Tiers-Lieu Les Usines Nouvelles* in Ligugé near Poitiers[51], which transformed an old industrial site into a shared space for artisans, artists, and social innovation (Boespflug & Lethielleux, 2019). By involving users, employees, local authorities, and private partners, this SCIC boosts local development and social cohesion.

SCICs operate in various sectors, contributing to projects of collective interest and revitalizing territories. They aim to move beyond traditional production and consumption categories while aligning with public service principles. By matching their social objectives with collective interests, they redefine corporate governance boundaries. As mechanisms for territorial regulation, SCICs address ecological transition challenges by focusing on creating desirable futures through activities like renewable energy, local organic farming, and community services (Lamarche & Richez-Battesti, 2023).

A standout example in direct-sale organic agriculture is the SCIC *Alter-Conso* in Lyon. Founded in 2006, Alter-Conso organizes the distribution of organic and local product baskets through short supply chains, directly connecting producers and consumers. This cooperative brings together producers, consumers, employees, and partners under democratic governance to promote sustainable food and support the local economy[52].

Alter-Conso illustrates how a SCIC can drive socio-territorial transformation by localizing economic interactions. By promoting short supply chains, it reduces environmental impacts from transporting goods and supports eco-friendly farming practices. Involving consumers in governance strengthens social bonds and mutual understanding between producers and consumers, creating a community united by shared values.

Another example is the SCIC *Les Jardins de Cocagne*[53], a national network of organic gardens focused on social inclusion. While many are structured as associations, some

[51] History of this third space can be found on their website: Le projet - LES USINES, consulted on 30/10/2024
[52] AlterConso des paniers paysans et bio dans mon quartier., consulted on 30/10/2024
[53] Accueil - Réseau Cocagne, consulted on 30/10/2024

gardens have adopted SCIC status to expand their membership and deepen local roots[54]. These gardens produce organic vegetable baskets sold directly while providing jobs and support to people facing hardship. Their dual economic and social mission shows SCICs' potential to tackle environmental, economic, and social issues simultaneously.

The transformative efforts of SCICs lead to innovative products, often with ecological benefits and close community relationships. For instance, Alter-Conso actively participates in the food transition by offering alternatives to traditional distribution channels and supporting local organic farmers. Similarly, Les Jardins de Cocagne provide spaces that promote social and professional inclusion while meeting the growing demand for local organic products. By linking with local authorities, these cooperatives also access public funding due to the social value of their activities.

By revising their practices, two common scenarios emerge from SCIC practices: co-construction among stakeholders and co-construction around specific sectors. In that innovative approach, the territory becomes an aggregator, embodying the building of collective heritage (Defalvard, 2023; Draperi & Margado, 2016; Lamarche & Richez-Battesti, 2023). By redefining the relationship between their social mission and associated individuals, cooperatives align territorial projects with business objectives. Thus, SCICs and other cooperatives become spaces for democratic debate and experimentation in production and work methods. While SCIC/cooperative status does not always guarantee democratic practices favoring ecological and social transitions, many are committed to this path, highlighting their potential as agents of socio-territorial transformation. Their ability to combine economic efficiency, democratic participation, and social commitment positions them as key players in addressing today's economic, social, and environmental challenges.

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[54] In chapter 8, I look at how the Jardins de Cocagne in a “diffusion” approach helped start Le Biau Jardin (another SCIC), one of the case studies for this research.

Local Currencies: Social Innovations to transform the economy?

Emerging in Europe in the early 2000s, complementary local currencies (Monnaies Locales Complémentaires-MLC) made their debut in France in 2010, in Lot et Garonne with the "Abeille"[55]. As of 2023, France stands as the European nation with the highest number of circulating local currencies, boasting 82 such currencies[56]. Notably, France was the first European country to provide an explicit legal framework for complementary local currencies with the ESS law of July 2014[57]. This Monetary and Financial Code allowed local currencies to establish themselves within the social and solidarity economy (ESS). ESS initiatives, also theorized as community economies in this work, are perceived as genuine opportunities for socio-economic and territorial transformation. However, before diving into these transformational potentials, it is crucial to grasp the modus operandi of a local currency. This understanding begins by distinguishing between the concepts of "money" and "currency."

The term " Currency " (of sharing) versus " Money " (of exchange)

The semantic distinction between "currency" and "money" frames the political discourse on local currencies. Indeed, the ideal of a society without money does not imply the illusion of a society without currency. People have been transacting since time immemorial and that even before the printing of paper monies. In Africa for instance, people used to transact with cowries (Johnson, 1970). Salt also used to be a currency back in the days (Pankhurst, 1962). In the context of local currencies, the political project, initiated by citizen collectives, aims to "*put the economy in its place*." This discourse paves the way for shared solidarity. In today's capitalist economic dispensation, where market focus lies in profit accumulation, money has become trivialized. This trivialization obscures the fact that currency primarily serves as a bond uniting individuals within a living environment. In a solidarity-based system that prioritizes human values over capital-centric commerce, the goal is to strengthen this bond through exchanges that benefit the entire community. By

[55] Abeille, Monnaie locale complémentaire : https://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2010/01/20/758943-villeneuve-les-abeilles-arrivent-dans-les-porte-monnaie.html Consulted on 21/09/2023
[56] Les monnaies Locales en France : https://www.lefigaro.fr/voyages/et-si-cet-ete-en-france-on-payait-en-monnaies-locales-20230627 Consulted on 21/09/2023
[57] ESS Law in France : https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGISCTA000029314877 Consulted on 21/09/2023

invigorating the local economy, these currencies prioritize use-value over exchange value. A complementary local currency in that sense fosters community within a territory delineated by the directory of recruited service providers, as defined in its charter. Its ability to shield the local economy aids in preserving and enhancing a portion of the social fabric, with the relationships between actors establishing a circuit.

The "Local" Currency

As I embark on exploring local currencies project contribute to transforming a territory's socio-economic and ecological dynamics, it is pertinent to question if the relocalization brought about by a complementary local currency is sufficient to imbue it with meaning. For this endeavor, it is essential to recognize that the currency operates within a specific local territory.

As previously highlighted in Chapter 3, a territory is a socio-spatial system comprised of actors interconnected through social relations, dynamic relations that evolve over time based on the interactions established among them (Courlet and Pecqueur 2013). In this sense, the territory is activated and unveiled by actors cooperating in search of solutions and by deduction, some solutions to urgent socio-territorial issues, lie in the territorialization process that is triggered through the collective action of actors on the territory. This collective creation of territory can give rise to experiments, exemplified by complementary local currencies in France and globally.

Complementary Nature of the Currency

Proceeding with the nature of complementary local currencies, it is of import to precise that the complementary nature of local currencies implies that they do not seek to categorically replace the dominant capitalist currency but rather, to address its shortcomings, aiming to modify and transform its use for territorial utility. One of the arguments championing the transformative capacity of local currencies lies in their very nature as a currency. They prompt reflections on our society's current value system, fostering new ways of thinking and acting that nurture conditions for potential change.

Drawing from the reflections on diverse and community economies, which aim to deconstruct the current economy for redefinition, it is vital to mentally deconstruct the notion of complementary local currencies. It is therefore essential to acknowledge that these local currencies are complementary, not competitors, to the dominant currency within a given territory. Thus, the term "Complementary Local Citizen Currency" (*Monnaie Locale Complémentaire Citoyenne, MLCC*) symbolically differentiates the citizen dimension of this local complementary currency (bottom-up), created by and for citizens based on their ideals and needs, as opposed to a decision stemming from political institutions, be they national or local (top-down). This approach heralds the advent of a new realm of citizenship wherein individuals can achieve economic emancipation and contribute to the development of their territories.

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Local currencies are closely linked to the concept of community economies. They are not just replacements for national money but are powerful political tools that can change how people engage in the economy and strengthen regional resilience, as discussed by Gibson-Graham (1998) in their work on community economies as agents of change. Notably, the literature on local currencies offers three main approaches on the role of local currencies in socio-territorial transformation processes: (1) the contribution to the territorial economic development, (2) the creation of social network and a community of exchange and, (3) the transformation of practices and representations.

The contribution to territorial economic development (1) is assigned to their capacity to "limit" the use of the money as an instrument. This constraint on the possibilities of using the means of payment makes it possible to localize exchanges and privilege the local use of income derived from production that is itself local, by creating a circuit that is more or less autonomous from the outside world (Fare, 2016). For example, the Bristol Pound [58]in the UK

[58] Launched in 2012, the Bristol Pound was a local currency designed to support independent businesses in Bristol, UK. It aimed to keep money circulating within the local economy and could be used in both paper and electronic forms. The currency was backed by sterling on a one-to-one basis. Although it ceased operation in 2020, it provided valuable insights into how local currencies can impact community economies. More information can be found on the archived official website: Bristol Pound Legacy homepage, consulted on 11/10/2024

encouraged residents to shop at local businesses, keeping money circulating within the city and strengthening local supply chains. Based on this example, one can understand that local currencies help to reorganize local supplier networks and value chains by promoting short circuits and local exchanges (Blanc & Fare, 2018; Dittmer, 2013). A qualitative study on how businesses accepting local currencies "make" market (Degens, 2016) showed that businesses on the receiving end of the currencies tend to look for partners with whom they can in turn spend the currency they receive from their customers. This process if successful, contributes to the localization of supply and transactions and consequently contributes to a multiplicator effect since if demand from member organizations increases as a result of their use of the local currency, they can grow their business and contribute to the boosting of local demand (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023). This boosting of local demand through the use of the local currency also leads to an economic resilience since new approached to the market are created and enforced through the boundaries created by the local currency (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023; Michel & Hudon, 2015; Zeller, 2020).

The potential to create social network and community of exchanges (2) is argued as a quest for the "re-immersion" (in the Polanyian sense) of human relations in market transactions order to give them a meaning (Blanc, 2007). In this case, local currencies are argued to over time enable the development of a mutual trust relationship between the different market constituents since it is bounded by a territory and, transactions occurring over space and time [repetitively] leads to the establishment of as mutual trust (Degens, 2016; Vallat, 2016). This can lead to the creation of communities of support through the use of the local currency (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2022). Since local currencies are built and managed based on certain rules and values that must be respected in order to participate (Blanc & Fare, 2022), the various participants usually adhere to the community, not only for monetary exchanges, but also around shared and displayed values (Fare, 2012). For instance, the WIR Bank [59]in Switzerland operates a mutual credit system that has built a robust network of businesses supporting each other, enhancing solidarity and cooperation

[59] Established in 1934, the WIR Bank in Switzerland operates a complementary currency system called the WIR Franc. It is a mutual credit system that enables businesses to trade goods and services without using Swiss francs, enhancing liquidity and fostering economic stability

Then, the transformation of practices and representations (3) is argued through the prism that local currencies are usually established following the questioning of values promoted by the capitalist system (Blanc & Fare, 2022; Lafuente-Sampietro, 2022; Vallat & Ferraton, 2012). For example, the Chiemgauer[60] in Germany encourages sustainable consumption by allowing users to support local charities and businesses, shifting perceptions about value and economic exchange. Based on this example among many others, one can argue that local currencies are therefore developed as an alternative unit of measurement of value where participants are offered the chance to collectively decide on the source of the value of a good or service and its expression in exchange for their community. This alternative approach showcases a critique of traditional capitalist monetary systems and usually offers radical projects that may develop a clearly anti-capitalist, degrowth message as part of their modus operandi (Fare, 2016; Longhurst et al., 2016; Vallat & Ferraton, 2012).

among its members. The WIR Bank has played a significant role in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in Switzerland. More information is available on Une monnaie fédératrice | CHW et CHF | Banque WIR - Bank WIR , consulted on 11/10/2024

[60] Introduced in 2003 in the Chiemgau region of Germany, the Chiemgauer is a regional currency aimed at promoting local businesses, sustainable practices, and supporting non-profit organizations. Users can exchange euros for Chiemgauer at a one-to-one rate, and a percentage goes to local charities. The currency encourages rapid circulation due to a demurrage fee, which discourages hoarding. More details can be found on the Chiemgauer's official website: Chiemgauer Regiogeld , consulted on 11/10/2024

CHAPTER 6:
Degrowth as an alternative economy approach

As elaborated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the traditional pursuit of economic growth has been increasingly associated with detrimental externalities like environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities. These issues have led to a questioning of alternative approaches to economic practices. Degrowth, as an economic theory and model, offers a different perspective by incorporating ecological limits and social justice—issues often sidelined by capitalist frameworks (Harvey, 2005).

Alternative economic models, as defined in academic literature, aim to mitigate the negative impacts of the prevailing economic system (Gibson-Graham, 2008). They strive for ecological sustainability while ensuring social justice and economic welfare for all. These models reject power dynamics that disproportionately benefit an elite group within the traditional capitalist system. In that sense, degrowth as an economic approach aligns with the objectives of alternative economies as it advocates for responsible economic practices centered on reducing ecological footprints and promoting socio-economic justice.

Table 5: Comparison of Growth, Sustainable Development, and Degrowth

Criteria	Growth	Sustainable Development	Degrowth
Focus	Economic Expansion	Balanced Economic, Social, and Environmental Goals	Reduction in Consumption and Production
Ecological Consideration	Low	Moderate	High
Social Justice	Low	Moderate	High

Source: Author

6.1. Definition and historical context

Degrowth is a political, economic, and social school of thoughts that aims for a reduction in resource consumption, ecological footprint, and economic growth. It is rooted in the understanding that the current global economic system, based on unlimited growth, is unsustainable and leads to social inequality and ecological degradation (Kallis et al., 2014).

The term "degrowth" was first coined by André Gorz in 1972 and originates from the French word "décroissance," meaning reduction (Robra & Heikkurinen, 2020). However, it's crucial to distinguish degrowth from the mere reduction of growth. Degrowth is a multidisciplinary concept that goes beyond a decline in GDP and is aligned with a critical tradition developed since the 1960s (Slim, 2015). Serge Latouche describes degrowth as a "flash word" or "performative slogan" that opens up avenues for thought and action (Latouche, 2022).

It is important to note that the concept of degrowth is not a recent invention but has historical roots. Economists like Thomas Malthus warned about the limits of growth as early as the 19th century. In the 1970s, the Club of Rome's publication "The Limits to Growth" brought the issue into the mainstream, leading to a surge in academic interest (Meadows et al., 1972).

6.2. Different schools of thought on degrowth

Degrowth is not a monolithic concept, but a heterogeneous collective thought supported by various disciplines and communities globally. For this work, degrowth is ambitiously categorized in four main school of thoughts (Slim, 2015) that somehow encompass the main approaches identified in the literature:

- **(1) Anthropological Critique:** Inspired by Marx, Engels, and Baudrillard, this school criticizes consumerism and calls for a "decolonization of imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997; Latouche, 2003). Imaginaries here refer to the various values, institutions, and symbols through which people imagine their social whole (Castoriadis, 1997; Gezerlis, 2001; Latouche, 2015; Thompson, 1982). This decolonization process of imaginaries is about changing the views that people usually have about growth and what is actually

considered growth, prosperity and welfare. In that sense, there is the need to go beyond the notion of mere financial abundance and accumulation of financial capital that the current economic system fixates on.

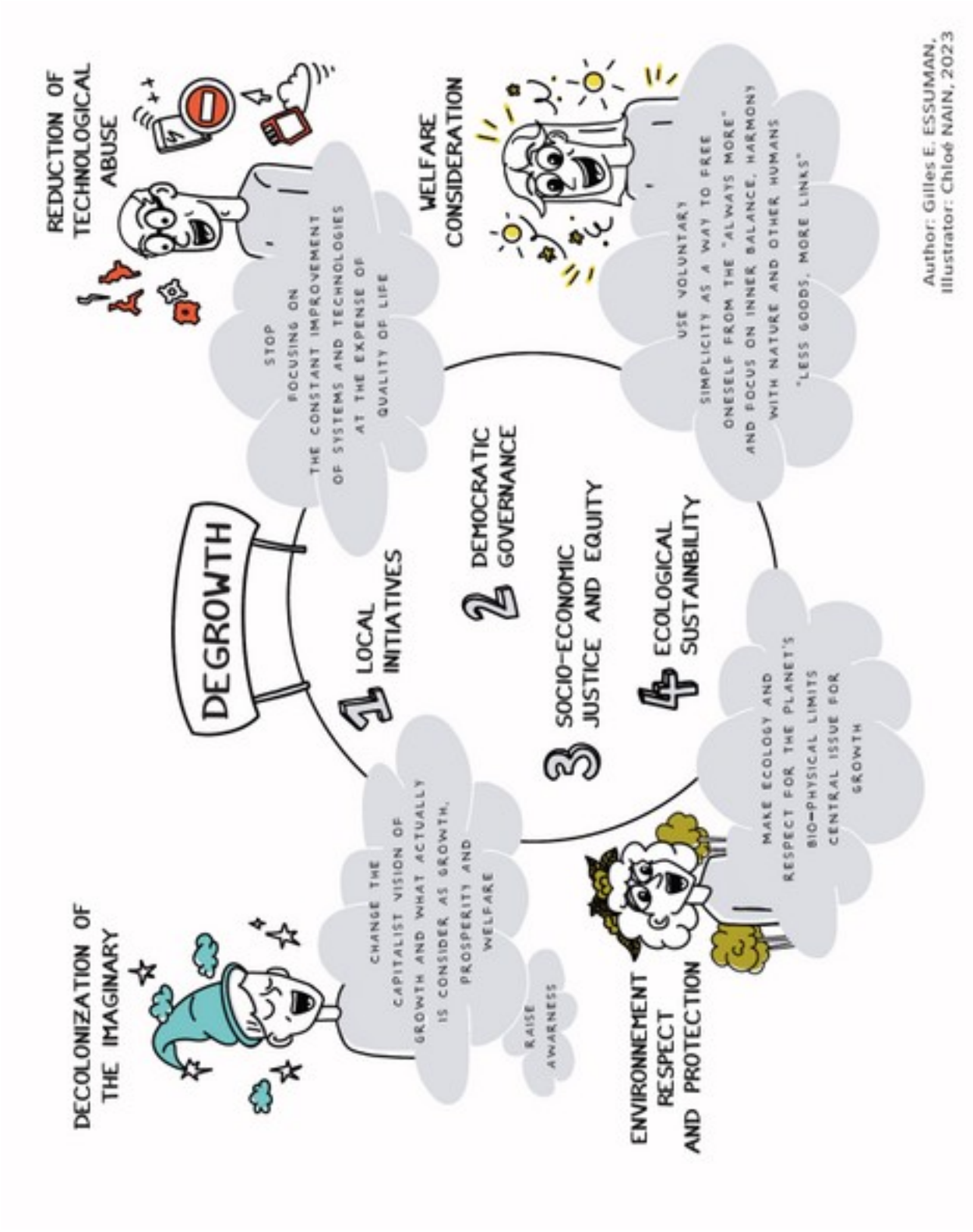
- **(2) Technician Society Critique:** Stemming from the works of André Gorz and Ivan Illich, this school critiques the relentless pursuit of technological efficiency (Gorz, 1968; Pansera & Fressoli, 2021). It posits that technical progress is responsible for a degradation of our way of life, inequalities and exclusions (Gollain, 2016; Gorz, 1968, 2011; Kerschner et al., 2018; Pansera & Fressoli, 2021). They advocate for a systematic change and approach to work, production in general and how we relate to technological breakthroughs.
- **(3) Environmental Focus:** This school emphasizes the ecological consequences of growth and introduces concepts like 'ecological debt' and 'climate justice' (Martinez-Alier, 2011). It highlights contemporary environmental issues that emanate from a capitalocentric system and the incompatibility between current growth paradigms and respect for bio-physical limits.
- **(4) Search for Meaning:** This school focuses on the quality of life and relational goods, advocating for "happy sobriety" and "voluntary simplicity" (Rabhi, 2010; Ridoux, 2006). As Ridoux argues: "human progress is never about the abundant supply of material things, but about the abundance of relational goods" [Ridoux N. (2006), p. 26].

Table 6: Summary of Degrowth Schools of Thought based on the literature

School of Thought	Core Ideas
Anthropological Critique	Decolonization of imaginaries, critique of consumerism
Technician Society Critique	Critique of technological efficiency

Environmental Focus	Ecological debt, climate justice
Search for Meaning	Happy sobriety, voluntary simplicity

Figure 8: Degrowth as a transformative ideology



6.3. Critiques of degrowth

While degrowth presents a compelling argument against the mainstream growth-centric economic model, it is not without its criticisms. One of the main critiques is its perceived impracticality. The transition from a growth-oriented society to a degrowth model involves complex systemic changes that are difficult to implement (Jackson, 2016). Moreover, the concept of degrowth is often accused of being overly idealistic, lacking a clear roadmap for achieving its objectives (Fournier, 2008).

Another critical argument against degrowth is the potential for social and economic disruption. A sudden shift to degrowth could lead to job losses and economic instability, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Smith, 2021). For instance, the notion of voluntary sobriety, as highlighted in the fourth school of thought implies that developing countries, primarily located in the Global South, would have to accept stagnant GDP per capita. Conversely, countries in the Global North would need to scale down their lifestyles, a proposition that Duval argues is far from feasible (Duval et al., 2020).

Consumerism has evolved into a social and cultural phenomenon, making the task of re-educating people on consumption patterns appear utopian (Slim, 2015). Kallis et al. (2015) call for more research to understand how nations could cope with economic stagnation to avert climate catastrophes. Also, the current economic system is deeply rooted, and many of its actors have vested interests in maintaining it (Kallis, 2018; Komatsu & Rappleye, 2024). Overcoming this requires degrowth scholars to present a more lucrative offer than the current gains of these stakeholders. Media and advertising industries further complicate matters by promoting consumerism as a means of achieving happiness and social acceptance (Dauvergne & Lister, 2012).

Another issue is the role of governments and policymakers in implementing degrowth. Krausmann et al. (2018) and Latouche (2009) emphasize the need for supportive policies aligned with degrowth principles. However, implementing such policies is challenging due to resistance from vested interests and the complexity of shifting towards a more sustainable model (Krausmann et al., 2018; Latouche, 2022). Policies must be context-specific and consider factors like political will, institutional capacity, and stakeholder

engagement. This demands some form of innovation and capacity that is usually hard to implement due to the rigidity of laws governing the capitalocentric market sphere.

How then can degrowth be praticalised? Based on previous discussions in this dissertation, I posit that community economies can be avenues towards degrowth through social innovation practices.

6.4. Practicalising degrowth through social innovation

Social innovation, as defined by Richez-Battesti (2008), is pivotal in addressing unmet social needs, transcending traditional market and state mechanisms. This approach dovetails with the principles of degrowth, an economic model that challenges the growth-centric paradigm by advocating for a sustainable, equitable socio-economic system (Jackson, 2009; Fournier, 2008). Degrowth, as conceptualized by Latouche (2010), not only critiques the unsustainable nature of continuous economic growth but also proposes a radical rethinking of economic priorities, emphasizing well-being, sustainability, and community resilience. Degrowth emphasizes decentralized economic structures and local empowerment, resonating with the ethos of social innovation (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The confluence of these two concepts offers a promising avenue for socio-territorial transformations that are both economically viable and ecologically sustainable, particularly within regions like France's so-called empty diagonal.

A symbiotic relationship

In a capitalist framework, community initiatives often face challenges, constrained by a system that inherently favors large-scale, market-driven operations. However, as highlighted in the chapter on social innovation, leveraging socio-territorial capital across different socio-spatial contexts can establish a foundation for collective action (Camagni, 2017; Fontan & Klein, 2004). This is particularly relevant in the context of degrowth, where the focus shifts from economic expansion to enhancing social capital and community well-being (Escobar, 2015). This collective action, rooted in shared socio-territorial realities and imaginaries, is pivotal in the practical application of degrowth.

Community initiatives, through co-construction methods, facilitate collaboration among diverse territorial actors, enabling the co-production of solutions tailored to local needs (Vaillancourt, 2019; Volat, 2021). Such strategies are instrumental in developing resilient, sustainable local socio-economic models that embody degrowth principles (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Moreover, these initiatives often employ innovative approaches to resource management and consumption, aligning with degrowth's emphasis on ecological sustainability and reduced material throughput (Kerschner et al., 2018; Parrique et al., 2019).

The symbiotic relationship between social innovation and degrowth is evident in their shared objectives: reorienting socio-economic systems towards greater equity, sustainability, and community empowerment. This interconnection is substantiated by empirical studies demonstrating how community-led initiatives, underpinned by social innovation, effectively challenge and reshape economic paradigms, aligning with degrowth's focus on ecological balance and social well-being (Bauwens & Kostakis, 2014). For instance, Cattaneo and Gavaldà (2010) demonstrate this relationship in their study of urban squats in Barcelona, where alternative living and economic practices align with degrowth principles (Cattaneo & Gavalda, 2010). These practices, which include shared resource use and community governance, exemplify the practical application of degrowth in urban settings (Martinez-Alier, 2011).

Through initiatives such as Local agricultural cooperatives, community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes, and local currency systems, social innovation can be defined as a disruptive approach that aims to foster sustainable local economies that align with degrowth principles. These initiatives not only challenge the conventional economic model but also create spaces for alternative value systems and social relations to emerge (Gibson-Graham, 2008a; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

In a socio-territorial transformation approach, by harnessing the power of social innovation, communities can effectively challenge and reshape existing economic paradigms, steering towards a degrowth model that prioritizes ecological balance and social well-being over mere economic growth. In France's empty diagonal, for instance,

characterized by low population density and economic activity, the principles of degrowth are particularly relevant since traditional economic development models have often overlooked such areas, leading to socio-economic stagnation and ecological degradation. This observation aligns with the broader critique of growth-centric models in peripheral regions which emphasizes the need for alternative development strategies in less dense areas (Boonstra & Joosse, 2013; Xu et al., 2013)

In such regions, by liaising and merging resources, experiences, and emotional energy, community initiatives could innovate through the mobilization of socio-territorial capital to challenge the status quo and forge towards new ideals (Duracka, 2018; Moulaert, 2016). For instance, the implementation of cooperative banks or local currencies in grassroot contexts can foster sustainable local economies that align with degrowth principles (Richez-Battesti, 2008). These initiatives not only provide socio-economic revitalization opportunities but factor a human-centered approach to territorial development since their practices aim to strengthen social ties, enhance local resilience, and reduce ecological footprints just as proponents of degrowth advocate (Gerber et al., 2020; Latouche, 2003). Indeed, if degrowth as a concept seems utopian, the prism of community initiatives and social innovation offers an interesting pathway to observe how its values can be practicalised in a socio-economic transformation process of different territories.

In the next part, the focus is to explore these practicalizations through an empirical study using the context of France, which, as seen in previous chapters, arguably has a legal framework that is acceptive of *transformative* community initiatives. However, to conduct a proper investigation, the process should start by developing a coherent methodological approach (Bryman, 2016; Denzin, 2017) that can help grasp the nuances of the various practices embedded in social and solidarity community initiatives in the context of France. This process, followed by an operationalization strategy merging theory with practice, will then facilitate field exploration of the local realities of the chosen communities, ensuring academic rigor befitting a doctoral dissertation.

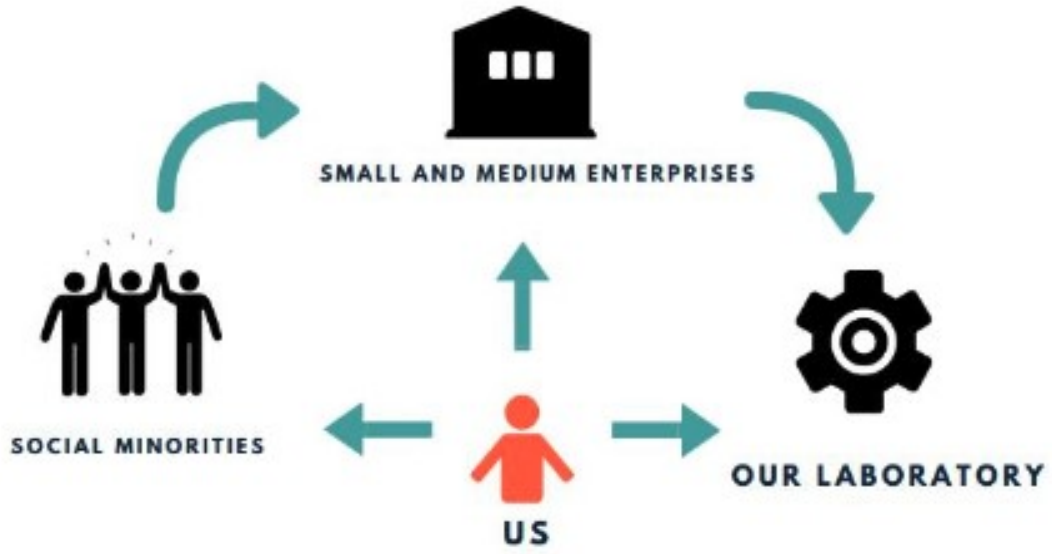
CHAPTER 7:
Methodology

This part delineates the methodological underpinnings of my research journey, which commenced from my engagement as a community initiatives actor to my current role as an academic researcher. The chapter is structured to first elucidate my background and how it influenced my research approach. It then elaborates on the methodological frameworks employed; the rationale behind the selection of case studies and concludes with a reflection on the limitations of these choices.

7.1. From a community actor to an academic researcher

In 2017, while pursuing a master's degree in Territorial Management and Local Development at the Université Clermont Auvergne[61], I co-founded a project, Récyclage Solidaire et Participatif (RESOPA), aimed at addressing socio-economic and ecological challenges through social innovation and circular economy principles. This project served as a precursor to my academic research, offering me a unique vantage point to understand the complexities of community economies.

Figure 9: RESOPA Project by Gilles ESSUMAN and Assane Diallo (2017)



[61] IADT – UCA https://shorturl.at/buvwN (consulted on 11-06-2023)

Despite initial accolades, including a nomination for the 2018 European Social Innovation Prize[62], the project faced funding challenges, leading to its evolution into Réseau Solidaire et Participatif. Regardless, this experience not only enriched my social capital but also provided a practical foundation for my academic research, aligning with the concept of "practiced place" in economic geography (D. Massey, 1995, 2008).

7.2. Research Design and Study Approach

The central focus of this research project lies in elucidating the role and impact of community initiatives [economies] in socio-territorial transformations and their subsequent alignment with the principles of degrowth. In this quest, I employ an interdisciplinary lens, integrating elements of geography, economics, and political science within the broader context of economic geography. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for capturing the multifaceted nature of socio-territorial transformations (D. Massey, 1995). Given that socio-territorial transformation is understood as a process and not a state, and that I was seeking to 'better understand' the relationships and transformations between actors-initiatives-spaces in a territory, I had to grasp the subtleties of collective experiences and gain access to the realities, imaginaries, and utopias of the communities that I sought to study. To do this, I opted for an ethnographic research approach.

Utilizing an ethnographic approach

As Marchive succinctly elucidates, an ethnographic research approach allows for an in-depth examination of the formation, organisation, and coexistence of diverse communities, as they navigate towards the realization of their constantly evolving collective aspirations amidst an array of challenges and lived realities (Marchive, 2012). This echoes the concept of 'relational geography,' which emphasizes the interconnectedness of places, scales, and networks in understanding socio-spatial practices (Jones, 2009). In that sense, this study harnesses the power of ethnography to illuminate the intricate processes that

[62] The project gor nominared for the got nominated for the 2018 European Social Innovation Prize of the European Commission (30 semi-finalists from over 720 projects in Europe) https://eusic-2018.challenges.org/ (consulted on 11-06-2023)

underpin the establishment of community economies practices, ensuring to consider their contextual existential realities (Bryman, 2016; O'reilly, 2012).

An effective ethnography requires the researcher to scrutinize all material gathered as data instead of just accepting them at face value (Lune & Berg, 2017). This is in line with the concept of 'reflexivity' in qualitative research, where the researcher is aware of their role in the construction and interpretation of knowledge (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Aligning myself with this reflection, I embarked on the tedious task of "reading" the "full picture" of community economies' practices in the Puy de Dôme through the mobilization of various sources of data. From combing through materials such as meeting minutes, archives gathered from the initiatives, published visuals as well as audiovisual materials, I furthered my investigation process with the planning of a number of interviews as well as my participation in a number of events in order to observe things happen "in-situ", take notes and then reflect on these materials. This multi-method approach enhances the triangulation of data, thereby increasing the validity of the research findings (Denzin, 2017).

Going beyond attempting an understanding of the role of community initiatives in a territory that I had much emotional connection with, I also had an intricate desire to tell the stories of these initiatives as a testament to their active role in shaping the new reality that diverse economies advocated for. This narrative approach aligns with the 'storytelling' methodology in qualitative research, which values the stories of participants as a form of data that can offer rich, contextual insights (Czarniawska, 2004). To do this, it was of import for me to consider balancing my attention to detail with proper documentation of what I was observing on the field through a writing style that was rigorous for academic and scientific standards yet accessible for the community initiatives that constituted the [new] diverse economies paradigm that was taking an active role in the transformation of their territories.

In penning this doctoral thesis, which I affectionately refer to as a "mémoire," I decided to adopt a style that faithfully narrates my experiences during the research project while upholding theoretical and academic rigour. This decision was then influenced by reflection on a key concern that comes with the writing of an ethnographic work: that of my "self" with personal values and perceptions which preceded my work as a researcher.

Gray suggests that incorporating the 'self' into research might pollute the narrative or corrupt it (Gray, 2021). This concern is addressed in the literature on 'positionality,' which discusses the importance of acknowledging the researcher's position in relation to the research context and participants (Rose, 1997). Consequently, I decided to focus on capturing the stories from my fieldwork judiciously without personal bias and influence. To do this, I made use of a notepad and rigorous notetaking during my fieldwork in order to properly record my observations so as to not blur the narrative with subjective personal sentiments.

Reflexivity in ethnography

In ethnographic research, the role of 'self' holds substantial significance. It bears implications for objectivity and bias in the study. Sluka articulates that objectivity does not equate to neutrality, freedom from values, or a certain emotional detachment. This necessitates not only intellectual rigor but also moral readiness to acknowledge, record, and report the truth manifested by the evidence, irrespective of personal wishes or societal expectations (Robben & Sluka, 2012; Sluka, 1990).

Burawoy further argues that a researcher embarking on exploratory fieldwork is not a "tabula rasa[63]" (Burawoy, 2003). This assertion implies the necessity for researchers to be cognizant of their inherent normative ideas and continuously reflect on them throughout the fieldwork. Such reflexivity facilitates the assessment of opinions, ideas, and theories, leading to their validation or challenge. This interaction with the field enriches existing theories and may even give birth to new ones, augmenting the conceptual framework that buttresses the research project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Gray posits that instead of aiming to neutralize the influence of the researcher or pursuing an illusory neutrality, it is critical for the researcher to understand and articulate their own standing within the field (Gray, 2021). Pretending to maintain a certain absolute objectivity restricts the researcher from examining their personal assumptions, experiences,

[63] In Locke's philosophy, tabula rasa was the theory that at birth the (human) mind is a "blank slate" without rules for processing data, and that data is added and rules for processing are formed solely by one's sensory experiences

and beliefs that inevitably mold their work (Shaffir, 1999). Furthermore, an increasing number of ethnographic scholars explain that the emotional or moral involvement with research field does not compromise their objectivity, as long as objectivity is not misunderstood as an absolute one bereft of emotional investment (Kataeva & DeYoung, 2018).

In my work's context, reflexivity entailed a meticulous observation of the environment, context, and history. It also required understanding how these intricate information elements and realities related to my role as an action researcher investigating the realities of selected communities. To do this, I had to design a context sensitive methodology.

Designing a methodology for an ethnographic fieldwork

The methodological journey of this research commenced with an extensive reading phase, serving as the conceptual bedrock upon which the study was built. This initial step guided the operationalization of research objectives and questions into actionable fieldwork tasks. The culmination of this preparatory work led to the selection of specific research methods aligned with the ethnographic framework of the study. This chapter delineates this multi-step process, elaborating on the chosen methods of participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Each method was selected for its capacity to contribute to a 'thick description' of community economies, capturing their complexities and nuances (M. Freeman, 2014; Geertz, 2008).

Reading to Prepare for the Task Ahead

Embarking on an ambitious doctoral research project necessitated a foundational phase of extensive reading. Gibson-Graham posits that reading serves as a tool for making sense of empirical material within theoretical frameworks (Gibson-Graham et al., 2020). My reading spanned diverse economies literature and historical practices in France, aiming to identify gaps and opportunities for scholarly contribution. This led me to identify relevant research opportunities such as the empty diagonal in France as well as the contributions of organizations such as Michelin in the re-dynamization process of the Clermont-Auvergne

Metropolis. This literature review, initiated in December 2019, was comprehensive rather than selective, challenging my assumptions and linking theory to practice (Berland et al., 2013).

7.3. Operationalization of the research project

The study of socio-territorial transformation processes, as elucidated in Chapter 4, is inherently complex. This complexity arises from the need to translate theoretical concepts into practical, observable phenomena. In the introduction, I highlighted how literature characterizes alternative initiatives to the capitalist model, emphasizing values such as *Community Ownership and Control* (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013), *Sustainability Focus* (Healy, 2009; 2020), *Social Equity and Justice* (Aiken, 2017; Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013), and *Innovation in Governance* (Moulaert, 2010).

Building on this foundation, Chapter 5, section 5.3, delved into the values associated with transformative potential in the context of social innovation, drawing from the work of scholars in the field (Bellemare & Klein, 2011; Cloutier, 2003; J.-L. Klein et al., 2009; Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). These values include *Territorial Anchorage*, the *Appropriateness of the Economic Model* with a post-capitalist approach, *Democratic Governance* promoting stakeholder coordination in co-construction processes, and *Empowerment*, focusing on how community stakeholders regain control of their local realities.

Having identified the values that these community initiatives could embody in a transformative approach, it was necessary to consider how these concepts could be translated into practice. For instance, sustainability is difficult to observe directly. Yet, specific practices can showcase sustainability, which are part of the broader approach that the organization or community takes in their work. Consequently, I linked these values to the research questions to find how they correlate and how they could be practicalized.

To do this, I adopted a visual and iterative process, using tools like notepads and whiteboards to structure my thoughts. This served as a bridge between abstract concepts and concrete fieldwork actions. This visualization process led to the merging of redundant or incomplete questions, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Visualization process for research operationalization

This iterative and reflective process helped me to identify different "*areas of focus*" that I could observe in the field. There are six of them, corresponding to the s*ocio-economic context*, the *relevance of the project to the territory*, the *type of resources* needed and how they are mobilized, the mode of *governance*, the approach in *collaboration*, and the logic of (social) *innovation*.

Understanding the areas of focus

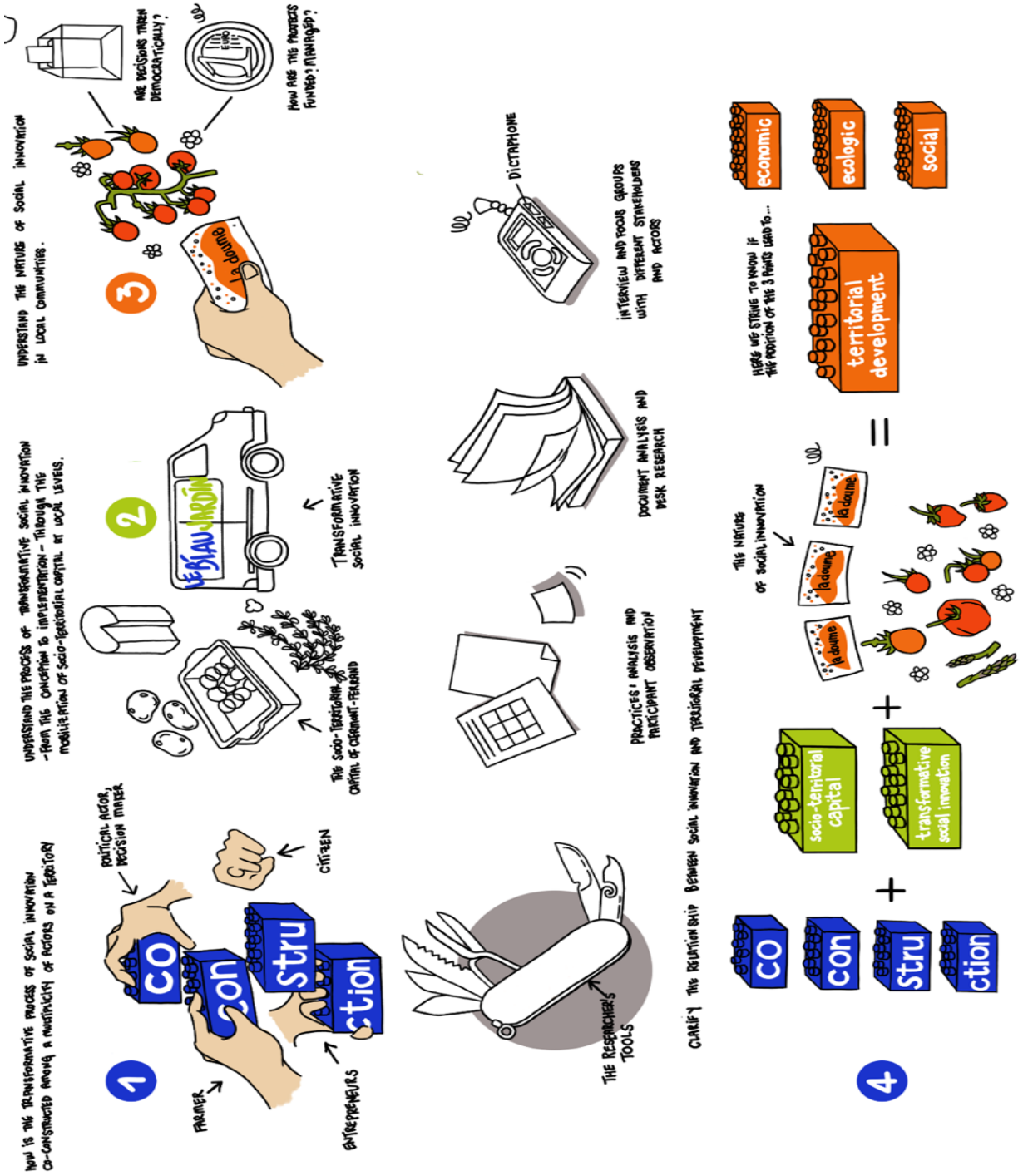
- ***Socio-Economic Context:*** This refers to the socio-economic and ecological factors that led to the genesis of the initiative. It includes examining how community initiatives respond to and are shaped by local socio-economic conditions, exploring the impact of legal frameworks such as the social and solidarity law in France, existing market dynamics, and environmental contexts.
- ***Territorial Relevance:*** Analyzing the alignment of projects with territorial needs and priorities involves exploring how initiatives address specific local challenges and contribute to resolving context-specific socio-economic and ecological issues. This area of focus also aimed to delve into the relevance of the project to various local stakeholders, their sustainability approach, and the political and economic principles embedded in the alternative approaches of transformative community initiatives as explained in Chapter 4, Section 4.6.
- ***Resource Mobilization:*** This area focuses on investigating the types and sources of resources utilized by community initiatives, including financial, human, and natural resources, and how these are mobilized and managed. This helps understand the importance of socio-territorial capital in the implementation process of the initiatives.
- ***Governance Mode:*** This about scrutinizing the governance structures of community initiatives, focusing on decision-making processes, stakeholder involvement, and the distribution of power and responsibilities. It aims to observe the values of democracy, reciprocity, and proximity as discussed in Section 5.3.
- ***Collaboration and Co-construction Approach:*** Examining the nature of collaborations within the initiatives as a way to empower the community members to contribute to the

common imaginary but, also, understand how the community initiative relates to other community initiatives, local government and other community groups through certain partnerships and certain values.

- ***Innovation Logic:*** This variable is about understanding how all the other different variables coherently relate in the deployment of the initiative's strategy but also aims to explore the innovative aspects of community initiatives, particularly how they introduce new ideas and practices to address socio-territorial challenges. This helps understand how the initiatives can be considered as social innovation laboratories (See section 5.2).

These areas of focus, coupled with my research objectives were translated into a visual that I would use to explain my research to potential interviewees and research collaborators as a dissemination approach imbedded in my participatory action research choices (see research methods section).

Figure 11: Illustration to explain research objectives to the community actors



Having laid the groundwork through extensive reading and meticulous operationalization, the next logical step was to focus on the selection of case studies that would serve as the empirical foundation of this research. As a reminder, the introduction of

this dissertation mentioned the reasons to focus on France and more specifically the empty diagonal area. To further in that direction, I needed to choose case studies that had the potential to richly inform the research objectives while aligning with the ethnographic framework that guides this study. In that sense, the next section will elaborate on the case study selection process before proceeding to a chapter that will delve into the specifics of the research methods employed—namely, participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. These methods will be elucidated in terms of their contributions to a comprehensive understanding of community economies as laboratories for social innovation in socio-territorial transformational processes.

7.4. Case studies selection process

After operationalizing my research question into empirical fieldwork actions, the subsequent stage involved initial exploratory fieldwork. Key contacts in the Puy de Dôme area, particularly the Centre d'Innovation Sociales Clermont-Auvergne (CISCA), played a pivotal role in this phase. My existing relationships with Nicolas Duracka and Geoffrey Volat, both affiliated with CISCA, helped me mobilise them as valuable advisors in selecting my case studies.

CISCA's role on the territory

CISCA originated in 2017 as a collaborative effort between researchers and regional socio-economic actors. Its primary objective is to act as an intermediary, fostering social innovation approaches for socio-territorial transformation. The organization launched a regional R&D program, "Transitions and Resilience," aimed at accelerating transformational practices and has monthly workshop where different socio-political actors meet to discuss various urgent territorial issues. The sessions usually end with a proposed strategy of action that is then deployed on the related socio-spatial context through a working group.

CISCA's role in case study selection

As an active CISCA member, I had privileged access to its resources and network. This facilitated the selection of case studies that aligned with my research objectives. The criteria

for case study selection were collaboratively developed and are summarized in the table below:

Table 7: Criteria for case study selection

Criteria	Description
1. Local Organization	Co-constructed by multiple actors using a bottom-up approach to address socio-economic or ecological issues.
2. Operational Strategies	Actions respond to various societal problems through social innovation.
3. Empirical Accessibikity	The impact can be pragmatically studied, evaluated, or observed through my research.

After establishing the criteria for case study selection, the next step was to apply these criteria to potential candidates. A list of possible case studies was generated through consultations with CISCA, and my own knowledge of the community economies landscape in the Clermont-Auvergne region. However, in the selection process, a review of the literature brought up two additional criteria that I had overlooked in creating the table:

- **A political dimension**: Either in the initiative's governance structure or in their broader societal impact, in a way that it created a certain space for political debate among various socio-territorial actors.
- **An economic dimension:** which impacted on different socio-cultural group and hence inherently contributed to direct local socio-political discourse.

These criteria evolve from the works of different community economies scholars who propose that community economies position themselves as alternative approaches that aim to challenge the mainstream economic system through a political message of change (Gibson-Graham, 1998; Laville, 2010; Besançon, 2014; Volat, 2021).

After a rigorous evaluation against the established criteria, Le Biau Jardin and La Doume emerged as the case studies that most comprehensively met all the criteria. These choices were further validated through discussions with my dissertation committee. The final selection was also influenced by the depth of information available for these initiatives and their willingness to participate in the study.

Table 8: Comprehensive Evaluation of Case Studies for Selection

Case Study Candidates	Criteria 1: Local Organization	Criteria 2: Multi-problem Strategy	Criteria 3: Empirical Study	Political Dimension	Multiplicity of Actors
Le Biau Jardin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
La Doume	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Café les Augustes	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Lieu'topie	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Aperetik	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Jeunes Engagés (JEPE63)	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Cocoshaker	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Plan B	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Ferme des Lambres	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓

Satelitte Case Studies

While Le Biau Jardin and La Doume were selected as the primary case studies, other initiatives like Café les Augustes, Lieu'topie, Aperetik, etc., served as satellite case studies. These were valuable for providing additional context and for triangulating findings. Each of these satellite case studies offered unique insights but did not fully meet the criteria and additional factors considered essential for the primary case studies.

Proceeding from the case studies selection stage, CISCA served as a "reflexivity tool," aiding in question formulation and providing key contacts and introductions. Their credibility enhanced my own, facilitating my interactions with local stakeholders.

This initial stage can be termed as "building street credibility" (Knox, 2001). My dual identity—as a former community project manager and a doctoral researcher—facilitated interactions with local stakeholders. This mutual exchange of knowledge created a collaborative co-learning environment, aligning with our shared goals of territorial transformation.

7.5. Presenting the case studies

Le Biau Jardin

Situated in Gerzat in the Clermont-Auvergne Metropolis, le Biau Jardin is a bio farm which doubles as a reinsertion enterprise. Legally registered as a Cooperative Entity of Collective Interest (Société Coopérative à Intérêt Collectif - SCIC)[64], it incorporates various stakeholders, including employees, consumers, communities, and associations that ensure it governance and strategic plans for the project's development as well as its socio-economic and ecologic impacts on the territory.

It is recognized as a "Solidarity Company of Social Utility", offering employment opportunities to individuals facing employment difficulties (mostly undergoing a reinsertion process) to support them in building their professional projects. The accompaniment of the people in reinsertion is done through a pool of volunteers of the project willing to transmit valuable skills through active practice with the people in quest for them.

The produce from Biau Jardin is sold in food baskets delivered to over fifty collection points in the Puy de Dôme. Sold at a fair price for both the consumer and producer, the profits are reinvested in the development of programmes and projects to support the farm as well as the professional development and training of the people working there as part of their reinsertion process.

[64] SCIC – What's a SCIC? https://www.joursavenir.org/about/scic (consulted on 11-06-2023)

The selection for this project is justified by their governance structure which permits a co-construction process vis-à-vis the organization's activities and projects. Currently, it has over thousand (1000) food basket subscribers out of which two hundred (200) are share-holders who do not actually get any financial benefits but are informed of all the doings and financial status of the project while having the power to contribute, vote and take active part in the decision-making process of the project and its lifepath on the territory.

Figure 12: Visual representation of Biau Jardin's activities and values

La Doume

La Doume refers to the local currency of Puy-de-Dôme, established in 2015 and affiliated with the Citizen's Local Complementary Currencies of France (Monnaies Locales Complémentaires Citoyennes, MLCC)[65]. The currency, coexisting with the euro, functions as a local level experimental tool, facilitating local business growth and promoting the notion of solidarity.

The currency was introduced by the Association for the Development of Local Currencies in Puy-de-Dôme, which operates as a collective of volunteers with a one-year elected collegial term. While all members can contribute to monthly meetings, the association also employs two permanent staff members and hosts interns and Civic Service volunteers. The project manager is Angèle Dransart[66] who coordinates most of the communication and campaign activities for the local currency. Her work mainly consists of organizing events to sensitize the local population about the currency, meet local producers and ensure that the money is being sustained through the conjoined efforts of producers, consumers and volunteers.

The currency's impact within the Puy-de-Dôme territory is hyper-localised. "Local groups", who are constituted of volunteers (producers and consumers) living in the territory are formed based on the living areas within the territory. They are responsible for maintaining the presence and operation of the currency, its exchanges, and circulation within the region. They are also tasked with monitoring how the money is utilized and how the local producers respect the charter that governs the currency.

The unique structure and hyper-local impact of La Doume made it an ideal case study for this research as it embodies a thriving example of a localized economic alternative tackling social and economic issues. Through their reserve fund, they finance new initiatives with zero interest loans to the producers who in turn develop their businesses and refund

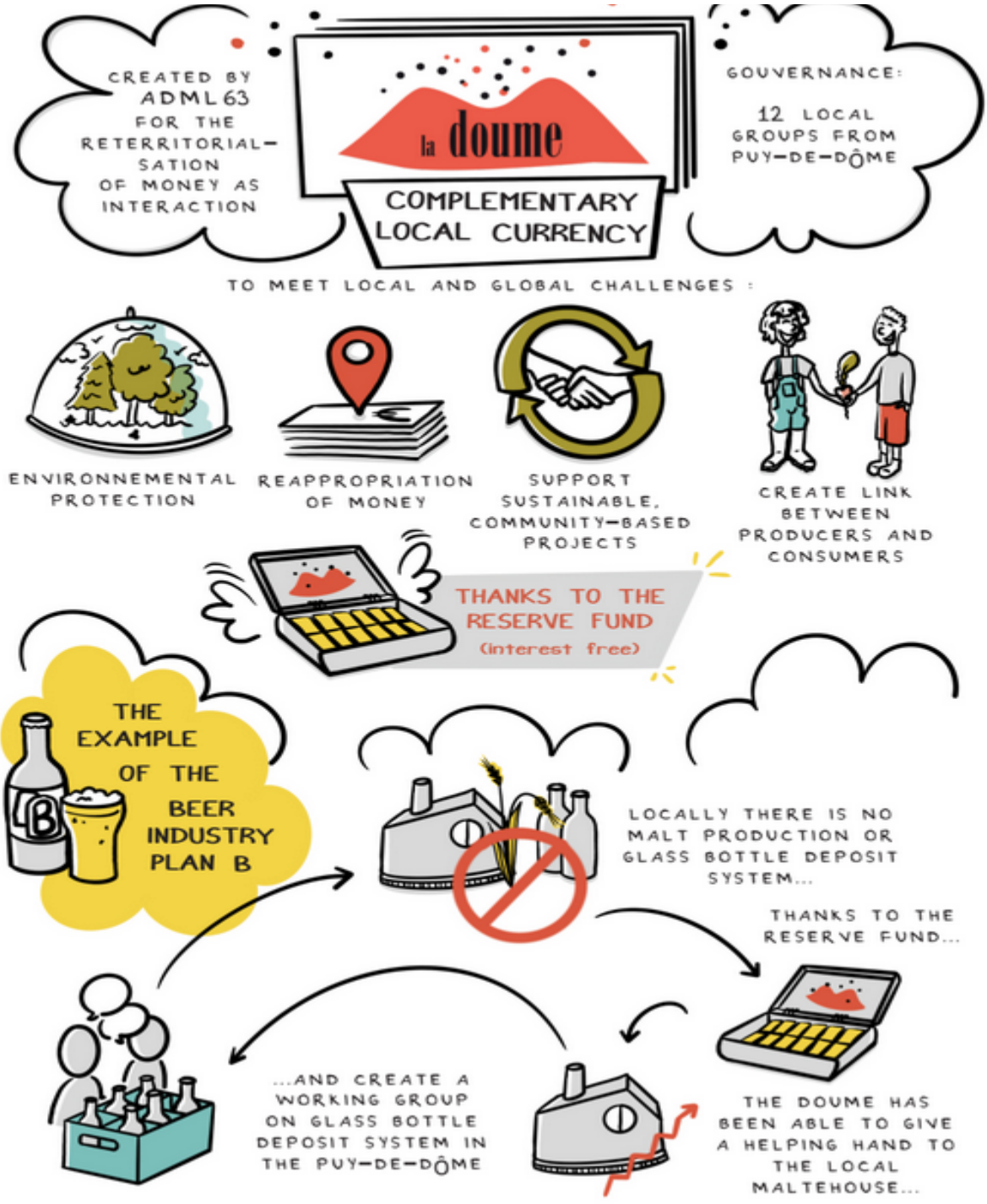
[65] https://monnaie-locale-complementaire-citoyenne.net/doume/

[66] Angüle is the only full-time employee of La Doume. Her work consists of coordinating the implementation of the collective's vision through various workshops and events aimed at not only promoting the currency but also, ensuring that the various projects of the collective are implemented in line with the values of the currency.

the money to keep the money going. An example is Plan B, a local brewery which was funded through the money reserve of the currency during the harsh realities of COVID-19. This financial help was interest-free and was only conditioned with the need of Plan B owners to adapt ecological approaches (bio products only for the production of the beer), direct or semi-direct sale to the consumers, as well as transact in La Doume in their shop while accepting to tutor new project managers interested in similar ventures. It was also conditioned with the need of Plan B actioners to accept transacting and offering priority to local suppliers who are also members of La Doume.

This operation style of La Doume could be likened to the ROSCAS approach even though here things are much more formalized, and the governance system uses an interesting sociocracy approach to ensure the inclusive and respective participation of all people part of the decision-making processes of the currency. I will detail the operative approach of this method in the analysis part of this thesis.

Figure 13: La Doume and its modus operandi.



7.6. Research Methods

After expounding on how I progressed from building a research design all the way to my case studies selection, this chapter delves into the research methods that facilitated the operationalization of my research questions. The chapter starts by delineating the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed, ensuring the study's academic rigor and validity. Then, it ends by discussing the ethical considerations and limitations inherent in the research process.

Participant observation

A key approach for my investigation of the selected case studies was participant observation. Florence Kluckhohn defines participant observation as a "conscious and systematic sharing, as far as circumstances allow, of the life activities and sometimes the interests of a group of people" (Kluckhohn, 1940). In the context of community economies, where local context and culture are not just backdrops but active participants in shaping economic practices, a certain depth of understanding is not just beneficial but essential in exploring the evolution of the various socio-spatial dynamics of a territory. To do this, the researcher needs to fully immerse themselves in the group, a complex process of blending in which the researcher constantly negotiates their position to minimize disruption or undue influence on group activities (Kluckhohn, 1940).

A conscious choice for this approach evolved from reflections on the works of Gibson-Graham on community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006b) and the literature on social innovation (Moulaert et al, 2013) that emphasize how community economies are inherently dynamic, continuously evolving through interactions among various stakeholders. Being social innovation and hotbeds for experimentation, community economies offer an opportunity to examine transformational processes but since these processes are always in the process of "becoming", any methodological approach that aims to explore them must be capable of capturing this fluidity. It is in that sense that, an insider knowledge is needed to study and analyse the evolution of the projects over space and time in order to coherently tell the stories of the initiatives and understand their impact over the territory.

In my case, this approach proved to be opportune due to my long-standing personal history and familiarity with the Clermont-Auvergne region. This pre-existing relationship facilitated my immersion into the chosen case studies and provided me with background knowledge about the various socio-territorial dynamics at play. Malinowski's work on ethnographic methods underscores the value of this insider perspective for understanding the intricacies of community life (Malinowski, 1922).

Also, due to the interdisciplinarity of my work and the various academic disciplines needed to explore the research questions properly, the participant observation method helped framed abstract ideas into observable practices on the field. Kawulich discusses how participant observation can serve as a bridge between different academic disciplines, allowing for a more holistic understanding of complex phenomena (Kawulich, 2012; Kawulich, 2005)

Finally, due to my personal values and direct past engagement in the studied communities and case studies, I couldn't overlook the ethical implications that came with researching them. Instead of just restraining myself to study the cases from a distant perspective, I rather took the ethical approach of engaging directly with the communities in order to reflect with them on my research, their projects as well as how we could mutually enrich our works both academically and practically. By doing so, I indirectly established a more equitable relationship between myself (the researcher) and the community (Denzin, 2017).

"Yo-yo fieldwork"

To operationalize the participant observation approach, I employed a 'yo-yo fieldwork' strategy, as termed by Wulff (Wulff, 2002), allowing me to oscillate between Luxembourg and Clermont-Ferrand. This method is particularly useful for researchers who have multiple commitments or are studying translocal phenomena and allows for a nuanced understanding of the field, as the researcher is not continuously immersed but returns to the field multiple times, each time with a fresh perspective (Wulff, 2002). In my case, visits varied in duration and occurred at intervals of three to six weeks. Also, given my pre-existing connections in Clermont-Auvergne, complete immersion was not required. However, I

needed to properly introduce myself to the various potential interlocutors and communities needed in the investigation phase of this work. To do that I needed to strategize properly and delve upon a number of resources; both material and human in order to efficiently navigate the intricacies of an ethnographic field work.

Data Collection during participant observation

To optimize data collection, I arranged a series of pre-scheduled and impromptu meetings, conversations, and interviews. The flexibility in scheduling allowed me to adapt to the rhythms of the community, thereby capturing data that are more representative of the community's natural state. These provided rich opportunities for data collection, which I processed and conceptualized upon returning to Luxembourg. The act of leaving and returning to the field provided a valuable opportunity for reflexive practice, allowing me to reconsider initial interpretations and explore emerging themes in subsequent visits (Pink, 2015).

On the field, I would attend a number of meetings and events, both formal and informal to either interact with local stakeholders or just participate in events that could enrich my perspective about my primary case studies or how the practices of these case studies had repercussions on the territory. It is in that sense that during my visits, I would sometimes attend Ateliers pour la Resilience (APR) workshops organized by the CISCA to understand how the local community in Clermont-Ferrand understood *La Doume*'s local currency project or go to Friday solidarity lunch meetings organized by *Le Biau Jardin* in order to speak to volunteers, consumers and even project beneficiaries. Beyond the initiative that directly featured my primary case studies, I would also attend other workshops, seminars, and informal events organized by private and public organizations to meet relevant local stakeholders, beneficiaries or just network through snowball effect in order to inform myself on new developments on the metropolis. It is in that dimension that I would have an informal interaction with a deputy mayor of Clermont-Ferrand where I would find out about the city's plans to set up a citizen's commission to evaluate the 2016-2020 developmental plan on social and solidarity economy that was voted in October 2016 (see introduction chapter on Clermont-Ferrand's transformational action plan).

Beyond the implementation of my research strategy with regards to participant observation, it is important to mention the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on my work. The pandemic necessitated shifts in community meetings from in-person to virtual formats. Despite this, I continued to attend events and meetings virtually when possible. During the pandemic, the shift to virtual meetings presented both challenges and opportunities. While the lack of physical presence might have limited the richness of data collected, the virtual format also allowed for a broader range of participants, thereby potentially diversifying the data and facilitating interactions that would otherwise be difficult to materialize physically (Markham, 2020; Markham et al., 2018).

Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of this methodological approach was to delve deeper than what was observed during my exploratory fieldwork and what I had gleaned from various content materials read prior to the fieldwork. By interviewing various stakeholders in the territory, I sought to understand their interpretations of community economies, their projects, their aspirations, their understanding of social innovation and, their contributions to socio-territorial transformation processes.

To attain this purpose, I made use of semi-structured interviews in order to explore key concepts of my research while permitting myself occasional deviations towards participant-led interactions. This method was chosen for its flexibility, allowing for a balance between structured questioning and open-ended dialogue, thereby facilitating the emergence of participants' rich narratives without obstructing new directions or reducing context (O'reilly, 2012).

To translate my research objectives into actionable questions, I designed an interview grid (Table 10). The grid was carefully constructed to align with the research questions while also allowing space for unexpected themes to emerge. This is in line with the interpretive paradigm of the research, which acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participant (Kvale, 1996).

Table 9: Interview Grid for fieldwork

Theme 1: Role as an actor in community economies	The name of the initiative Your role in the initiative
Theme 2: Vision of social innovation and diverse economies	1- What is your vision of social innovation, transformative innovations? 2- What is your opinion/approach on co-construction with regards to: a. Your initiative and its various actions and actors (internally?) b. Various actors and stakeholders (externally?) c. What's the co-construction process of your initiative and its actions? i. What are the various steps inked in the process (from idea to today's actions?) ii. What resources did you mobilise? (Could be social, territorial, human) iii. How did you fund it? iv. How do you manage it now? (Governance— how do you take decisions and how does it affect your actions and expected outputs?)
Theme 3: Role as an initiative on the territory	What do you think is the role of your initiative on the territory now? Do you think you solve some key problems on the territory independent of your direct work as an initiative? What do you think are your contributions to the local economy? To the environment and social equity on the territory? Do you think you have somehow contributed to territorial development?
Theme 4: Degrowth and socio-territorial transformation	1- Based on your previous answers, do you think your actions are contributing to degrowth on the territory? (Assuming the definition to degrowth is a desired direction in which our societies use natural resources minimally and organise themselves in a simpler, convivial manner and in common social structures of coexistence where there is equity and justice Sekulova et al. (2013) 2- Can you identify concrete actions within your initiative that directly fit in the degrowth pillars? (Economic, ecologic, social)

Interview process during fieldwork

Before formally starting the interview, I engaged in casual conversation to understand the interviewee's background. This 'warm-up' phase was crucial for establishing rapport and sometimes yielded important contextual information that helped inform the subsequent interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This was followed by questions from the interview grid, and the session concluded with any final remarks from the interviewee that could enrich my research.

Initiating an interview often began with scheduling an appointment, usually arranged through various communication channels such as telephone calls, emails, and social media platforms like LinkedIn and WhatsApp. The choice of communication channel was often influenced by the target respondent's preferred mode of communication, ensuring a higher likelihood of securing an interview (Bryman, 2016).

While most interviews were successfully arranged, there were instances of non-responsiveness or outright rejection, particularly from political actors. These rejections were not merely logistical hurdles but also presented interpretive challenges. They raised questions about the politics of access in research (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015) and a reflection on the perceptions of these political actors on the potential impact of the research and perhaps, their desire to control the narrative around the subject being studied (Chadwick, 2021; Mason, 2023). This aligns with observations of some social scientists who note that access to information and individuals is often a reflection of power dynamics and political interests within a given field of study (Fritz & Binder, 2020).

In my case, researching community initiatives that pushed a political and economic message of change meant that interrogating some political and economic actors put them in a delicate situation where they felt their opinions could be analyzed in a way to either push criticism on their stance, or sometimes, even be assigned ally duties that they didn't necessarily want to involve in (Atcheson, 2018). Sometimes, the tone or content of the rejection hinted at underlying issues, such as skepticism about the value of the project or distrust of my research intentions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for a nuanced interpretation of the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Overall fieldwork strategy and timeline

Starting from March 2020, I embarked on an exploratory phase involving a series of informal interactions and events to engage with the territory for the purposes of my research. By the end of my official fieldwork that ended in April 2023, I had conducted eighteen (18) formal interviews, each lasting between one to two hours (See Table 10).

Table 10: List of organizations and my interactions with them during fieldwork

Case Studies/Organizations	Type of Interview	Number of interactions
1. La Doume	Semi-structured + Informal conversation	3 (includes 1 informal)
2. Le Biau Jardin	Semi-structured + Informal conversation	5 (1 informal)
3. Café les Augustes	Informal conversation	1
4. Lieutopie	Informal conversation	1
5. CISCA	Semi-structured + Informal conversation	5 (2 informal)
6. Aperitik	Informal conversation	1
7. JEPE63	Informal conversation	2
8. Cocoshaker	Informal conversation	1
9. Plan B	Semi-structured	1
10. Ville de Gerzat	Semi-structured + Informal conversation	4 (2 informal)
11. Metropole de Clermont-Ferrand	Semi-structured	4
12. Les 2 ailes	Semi-structured	1
13. Ferme des Lambres	Informal conversation	1
14. CPME63	Semi-structured	1
15. Brasserie du Sancy	Informal conversation	1

During the fieldwork period, to deepen my understanding of community economies practices, I attended various events and training sessions that aligned with my research objectives. One notable workshop was organized by the RIUESS[67] (Réseau Inter-

[67] Created in 2000, the Réseau Inter-Universitaire de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire (RIUESS) includes more than thirty universities and regularly organises meetings, debates and training courses for social and solidarity economy players in order to participate fully in current collective debates on the role of diverse economies in socio-economic transitions. https://riuess.org/

universitaire de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire) in May 2021. The goal was to bring together local actors in community economies to discuss research-backed action plans for community empowerment. Additionally, I participated in four workshops—two facilitated by the CISCA and two by Le Biau Jardin. An example of the topics tackled during the workshops is "*Food security and resilience in times of crises*[68] "where different socio-economic local actors met to discuss strategies and ideas to collaborate in order to support vulnerable people during the socio-economic trials that were reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To deepen my understanding of diverse economies, I attended various events and training sessions that aligned with my research objectives. One notable workshop was organized by the RIUESS[69] (Réseau Inter-universitaire de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire) in May 2021. The goal was to bring together local actors in community economies to discuss research-backed action plans for community empowerment.

Another enriching experience was a summer school in Trondheim, Norway, organized by the Community Economies Institute. During this ten-day program, I had the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogues with Katherine Gibson, a leading figure in the field. I also interacted with researchers like Elizabeth Barron, Stephen Healy, and Jenny Cameron, whose work significantly influenced the theoretical framework of my research. These interactions not only enriched my academic perspective but also fortified my commitment to contributing to socio-economic transformations research.

7.7. Data Analysis

After almost two years of cumulative fieldwork that included exploratory phases and formal immersion moments, I had gathered a wealth of data through the interviews and various local engagements that I had on the territory. In that sense, the next stage was to organize the data and make sense of them to then distill meaningful insights that address the research questions posed at the outset of this study.

[68] Workshop was facilitated by the CISCA in partnership with La Doume as part of La Doume's lunch of their Soli'Doume project.
[69] Created in 2000, the Réseau Inter-Universitaire de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire (RIUESS) includes more than thirty universities and regularly organises meetings, debates and training courses for social and solidarity economy players in order to participate fully in current collective debates on the role of diverse economies in socio-economic transitions. https://riuess.org/

Table 11: Fieldwork methods and deriving data

Type of Data Gathered	Deriving Materials
Transcripts of Interviews	- Recorded interviews were later transcribed in order to mobilise them for data analysis in line with the theoretical and conceptual groundings of the study.
Detailed Fieldnotes	- During the interviews, beyond recording I would usually write relevant information or anecdotes from interviewees in my personal diary. This would later help me contextualize or verify information during the transcription process. - Also, right after or during informal conversations, I would write important information in the *Notes* application of my phone in order to refer to it as and when needed during my analysis process.
Insights and reflections from Personal Diaries	- During events and workshops, I would usually take notes of various details ranging from format of the event to the content.
Documents and Images	- I gathered a number of documents from my interviewees that helped enrich and contextualize the information that we discussed in line with their projects. - Pictures were also taken to enrich the presentation of fieldwork perspectives.

My data analysis process involved an iterative approach between the field and my office where I would either review the gathered data, transcribe interview or review the literature related to a recently observed concept on the field. As Bryman expounds, data analysis as part of a qualitative ethnographic work often embodies an iterative process, characterized by a dynamic interplay between data and theoretical frameworks (Bryman,

2016). In my case, this process started right from the exploratory fieldwork and would perdue till the very end of the writing process of this dissertation. My analysis process involved three main stages.

The initial phase involved an initial immersion stage into the data in order to make a first impression and sense of it. This deep engagement stage, often referred to as "open coding," allowed for the identification of preliminary themes and patterns (Charmaz, 2006). Engaging extensively with large data segments is crucial as it facilitates a reconnection with the emotional undertones and interpersonal dynamics inherent in the data (Denzin, 2017). My engagement spanned across interview transcripts, detailed fieldnotes, and personal diaries. Additionally, sensory recollections, such as photographs, played a pivotal role in evoking the emotional essence of the data, a sentiment echoed by Pink (2015) in her work on sensory ethnography.

The next stage involved a more focused and intensive coding process. This "axial coding" phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), sought to identify relationships between open codes and categorize them. The objective was to discern connections, parallels, overlaps, and contrasts among the established codes and categories. The approach I used in my coding process as part of my data analysis journey is illustrated in Table 12.

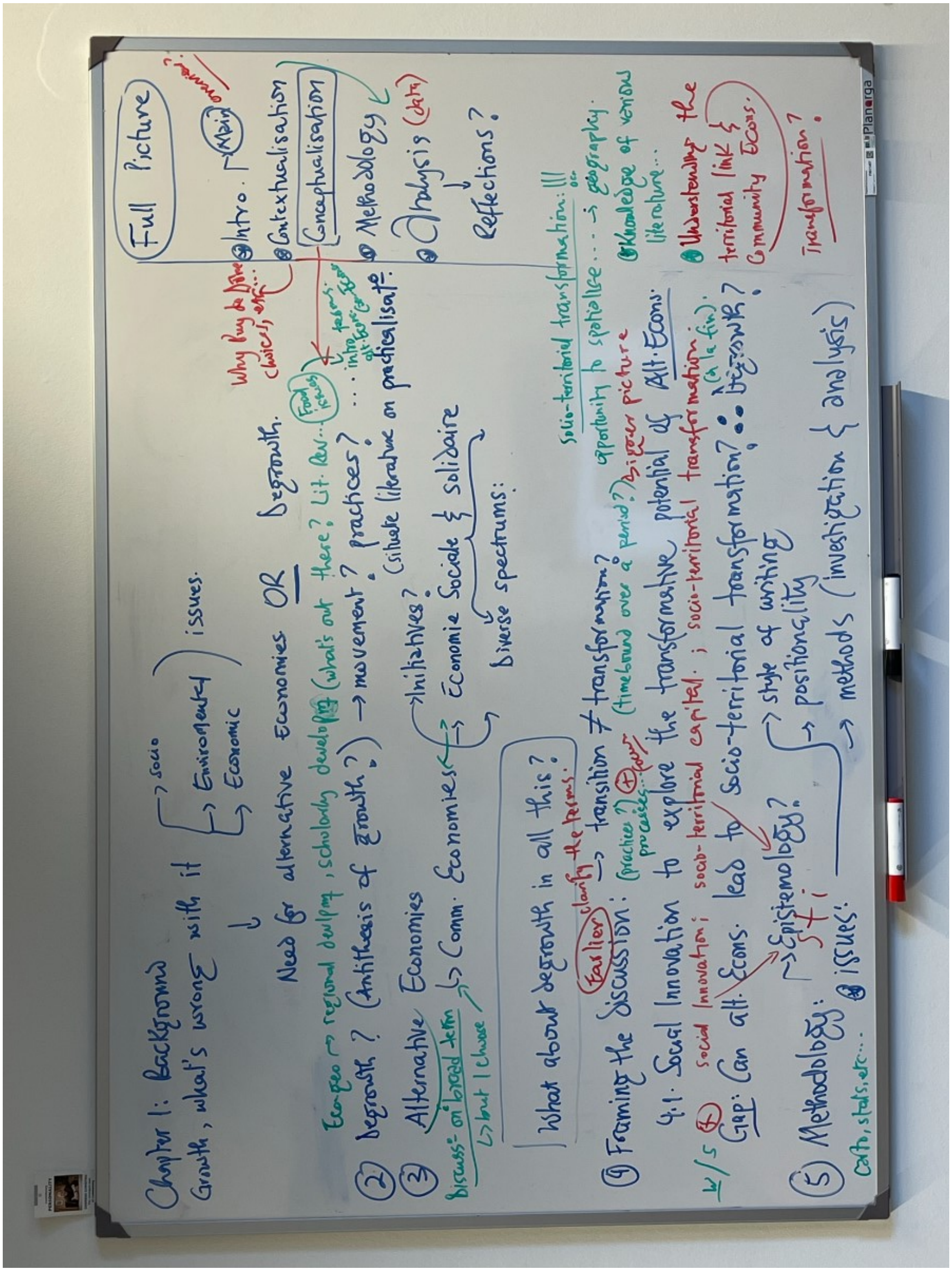
Table 12: Coding by themses based on research objectives

Research Objective	***Main Theme/Code***	***Sub-Codes***
Investigate the co-construction process of transformative social innovation, with regards to the multiplicity of actors involved and their contributions.	Co-construction Process	- Collaborative methods - Participatory methods
	Actors Involved	- Local Government - NGOs - Community Leaders - General Public - Experts/Consultants
	Contributions	- Financial Contribution - Knowledge/Expertise - Manpower/Workforce - Material Resources
Explore the process of transformative social innovation — from conception to implementation — through the mobilization of socio-territorial capital at local levels.	Innovation Process Stages	- Idea/Conception - Planning- Execution/Implementation - Monitoring/Evaluation - Scaling/Expansion
	Mobilization of Socio-territorial Capital	- Use of Local Resources - Community Engagement - Leverage of Cultural/Traditional Practices - Spatial/Geographic Utilization
Clarify the relationship between community economies, their social innovation approaches, and socio-territorial transformation.	Community Economies	- Economic Activities- Economic Challenges- Economic Opportunities
	Social Innovation Approaches	- Collaborative Models - Use of Technology - Training/Education Programs - Financial Models/Structures
	Socio-territorial Transformation	- Social Cohesion/Integration - Landscape/Infrastructure Changes - Cultural Revival or Shifts - Economic Impacts on Territory

The last and final stage of this analytical journey was the discussion phase. Here, the findings from the coding process were woven together with the conceptual frameworks established earlier in the research. This synthesis aimed to coherently address the research objectives. For the coding, I employed MaxQDA, a tool that streamlined the categorization of

sub-codes and main themes. Additionally, I often turned to visual aids like post-its and my office whiteboard. These visual representations, as seen in Figures 1; 8 or 11, not only clarified concepts for me but also facilitated discussions with research collaborators and interviewees, ensuring a shared understanding of the concepts at hand.

Figure 14: Visual organisation of a chapter of this work before writing process



7.8. Fieldwork reflections and ethical concerns

Using the participatory research approach for my ethnographic work was a complex path despite the clear advantages that this choice provided for my work. Indeed, using this approach helped me heighten the involvement of my research participants in my research since they felt useful and "subjectivized" (Gibson-Graham, 2008) to own their work and transmit their work to a researcher curious about their practices. Positioned as experts, these community project actors comfortably shared their knowledge while providing direct feedback on their work and practices. In return, I used this rather safe space (co-constructed by my participants and myself) to share feedback from my work while clarifying the definition of certain concepts that initially seemed alien or distanced from their work (at least semantically).

As a rather positive surprise, I was elated to notice that most of the initiatives recognized themselves in the scientific definitions and theories that I explained to them during our interactions. Many felt empowered and reinforced with the realization that they were actually part of a global movement of changemakers —a community of people— reflecting on how a capitalocentric economy could be rethought and recaptured through their local efforts and initiatives.

The iterative, participatory approach also mitigated the risk of extractivist research by fostering a collaborative environment, preventing any feelings of exploitation. There were instances when my inquiries or remarks prompted initiatives to explore collaborations with others present at the same event. These moments brought me great satisfaction, as I witnessed how my research was shaping their work and enhancing cohesion among diverse economy actors within the metropolis.

However, these collaborative dynamics did pose challenges. There were expectations for me to advise on complex internal matters related to some projects. I sometimes had to review grants and project documents due to my experience with procedural matters relating to European funds for community projects. These tasks were often time-consuming and energy-draining. Juggling these demands with my regular office work, heavily disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, meant constant changes in pace.

The slow, contemplative rhythm of reading, post-fieldwork reflection, and research planning stood in stark contrast to the fast-paced fieldwork where time was of the essence. Managing my community engagement work, fieldwork objectives, necessary downtime for reflection, rest, and recharging to maintain a healthy routine was a daunting task. The pressure of limited resources, particularly time, was occasionally overwhelming. In response, I occasionally allowed myself 'lazy' days, engaging in recreational activities to rest and maintain my mental well-being. Even on those days, I would find myself making quick notes on my phone or exploring ideas to clarify something I had encountered in the field.

About Ethics

Ethics was a crucial consideration during this research. In my first year, I enrolled in a course on research ethics for doctoral researchers at the University of Luxembourg. This equipped me with an understanding of data management, fieldwork etiquette, and my responsibilities as a researcher venturing into a territory to gather data.

To that end, I prepared a consent form (see annexes), which detailed my research aims, methodology, and how the collected data would be used. This form was presented to all formal interviewees for signature. I also asked respondents if they wished to be informed about the results of my work. For those in sensitive positions, such as elected political officials, I queried whether they preferred to remain anonymous in my writings. Interestingly, all were content to have their real names used, though I ensured that I would send a draft of the selected quotes for their review and approval before the final thesis publication. The consent form also highlighted that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

Beyond the formalities of interviews, I sometimes faced challenges in pressing on with questions that I deemed essential for my research. There was a delicate balance to maintain during the discussions as I didn't want to appear overly aggressive or rude when I felt my interlocutors were evasive on some questions. For instance, when I queried some political actors about concrete ways they'd facilitated community initiatives implementation

processes, they would sometimes resort to vague discussions about policies and what they had in the pipeline. In those moments, I would sometimes find myself being pushy and perhaps being too focused on getting them to drop their performative[70] masks and tell me more about how they were performing[71] as engaged political actors with regard to the community initiatives. This attempt to drive my interviewees to a critical reflection on their role in shaping the realities of their communities was sometimes seen as intrusive but I usually managed to frame my persistence as harmless curiosity through an approach that I refer to as the "naïve perspective".

The naïve perspective, as I define it, involves entering the interview space as an outsider seeking to explore their interlocutor's world with an open mind. This perspective empowers the respondent as an expert, educating an eager learner[72]. This approach does not imply that I play the role of a complete novice. Rather, I adopt an open-minded stance that encourages the interviewee to impart their knowledge.

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Following extensive observation and fieldwork wherein a variety of tools and approaches were employed to investigate the processual itinerary of community economies in the Puy de Dôme region, the next chapters will focus on interpreting and analysing the amassed data. This endeavour aims to make sense of the information gathered, juxtaposing it with the scholarly literature established in my conceptual framework in order to reflect rigorously on the field observations with an academic researcher's necessary analysis.

[70] Performative here refers to faking an act or pretending to do something.

[71] Performing here should be understood in the context of diverse economies literature where performing should be taking action by recognizing one's role as a subject of change in a specific context (Gibson-Graham, 2008)

[72] In extending the application of the 'naive perspective' from research to everyday social interactions, I can conceptualise this approach as a 'conscious ignorance'. This is not about feigning lack of knowledge or understanding but rather a strategic positioning of oneself as a 'tabula rasa' or a blank slate. This involves the intentional minimisation of one's preconceptions, judgements, or assumptions during social interactions to create a more open space for understanding and learning. It encourages a posture of attentive listening and open curiosity, fostering a context where information exchange is maximised and understanding is deepened. This perspective allows for the reduction of barriers that expertise or authority might build, inviting a more mutual exchange of ideas and experiences. It elevates the other person as the 'expert' of their own experiences and promotes an understanding of their perspectives from their standpoint, not coloured by the 'learner's' pre-existing knowledge or opinions. The key is not in being a blank slate but in adopting the behaviours of one - demonstrating humility, curiosity, and openness.

CHAPTER 8:
Community initiatives and social innovation in Clermont-Ferrand

This section delineates the empirical findings derived from the methodologies expounded in the preceding chapters as well as the theoretical considerations that facilitate the understanding of the role and impact of community economy practices on their respective territories. The crux of this research revolves around the following central question: *How do community economy practices contribute to socio-territorial transformations and potentially to degrowth through social innovation?*

Two hypotheses underlie this enquiry. The first posits that practitioners within community economies have the ability to orchestrate their initiatives by leveraging socio-territorial capital. The second hypothesis extrapolates that by navigating the complexities generated by traditional economic approaches built into a capitalocentric dispensation, community economy practitioners are likely to adopt pathways of social innovation, thereby altering socio-territorial dynamics and contributing to degrowth.

To unravel these complexities, it is imperative to first comprehend the genealogies of community economy initiatives and their practitioners. This sets the stage for decoding how the social innovation process unfolds through the mobilisation of socio-territorial capital, ultimately catalysing socio-territorial and economic transformations.

In this chapter, I begin by elucidating the genealogies and developmental trajectories of the two selected case studies by tracing their evolution from conceptual imaginaries to tangible territorial projects. I then follow through with an analysis of their action to verify how these actions affirm the values set by the projects at the creation stage. Through this process, I delve into the various approaches and tools that they mobilize to materialize their ideals and imaginaries. Categorised as social innovations, I finally examine how the interactions between the communities spearheading the projects and the territory contribute to a re-dynamization of the territory and its transformation towards new socio-economic and ecological ideals.

8.1. Le Biau Jardin's genealogy and modus operandi

Initial encounter

My initial encounter with Le Biau Jardin occurred in April 2018. At that time, I was completing my master's studies in development studies and had embarked on a Service Civique[73] role with Concordia[74] Auvergne. My responsibility was to facilitate workcamp projects in two neighborhoods of Clermont. The first one in Pont-du-Château[75] and the second in Davayat[76].

The first project was particularly notable: it involved the renovation of an ancient volcanic wall of the castle that houses the townhall in Pont-du-Chateau. Leading a diverse group of 18 individuals from various countries, my role extended beyond the mere completion of the Western wall renovation in the *Côte de la Mine* garden within the three-week timeframe agreed upon with the municipality. It was equally crucial to foster group cohesion and ensure the safety of the participants, as we were camping in a field and sleeping under tents. Operating with a weekly budget of 1500€ to provide three meals a day for 18 people (including cultural visits and other daily expenses), my co-facilitator and I strategized to minimize food costs. We reached out to local producers to collect their unsold vegetables and produce. This initiative led me to Le Biau Jardin, thanks to a recommendation from my previous project facilitators who had benefited from their benevolence and an extra guidance from Dominique, my grandfather who volunteered on the Biau Jardin project as an IT specialist. After a few discussions with Gilles Lèbre, the director of Le Biau Jardin, I found myself loading baskets of donated food into my minivan. The agreement was simple yet impactful: they would supply us weekly with food baskets at no cost, under the condition that we utilized the food efficiently and without waste. These baskets, brimming with

[73] Civic Service : It is a French scheme designed to encourage and support public commitment to citizenship. It aims to strengthen national cohesion and promote social diversity, and offers young people aged 16 to 25 the opportunity to commit themselves for a period of 6 to 12 months to a mission of general interest. See https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/comprendre-le-service-civique/en-bref Consulted on 03/01/2024

[74] Non-profit organisation established in 1950 after the Second World War to promote citizen inclusion through international voluntary service projects such as workcamps and citizen participation events related to territorial development, peacebuilding and inclusion. See https://www.concordia.fr/who-are-we/ 03/01/2024

[75] Pont-du-Château is a French commune in the Puy-de-Dôme department in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. It is in the Clermont-Auvergne Metropolis and has about 12 324 based in INSEE data from 2020

[76] With 500 people (INSEE, 2015), this little village in Clermont-Auvergne Metropolis is a bit isolated and lives mainly on cultural heritage sites and little wine productions.

carrots, potatoes, green beans, zucchinis, cucumbers, and other staples, allowed us to reallocate our budget towards other essentials like proteins, drinks, and local tourism. This support was instrumental in completing the project within budget, much to the satisfaction of the participants and the municipality.

This experience was replicated in my subsequent workcamp in Davayat, where we renovated the village's old artisan limekilns. The continued support from Le Biau Jardin enabled not just the feeding of our group but also the organization of an international mini buffet. This event, which showcased various cultures, fostered engagement with the local community. These initial projects in 2018 marked the beginning of my deep involvement with Le Biau Jardin as a volunteer on different events. These events included help in harvesting crops when hands were needed or just taking my students or workshop participants from other community events to visit the farm and promote the project and its values to them as a way to introduce them to alternative economic and farming practices.

Figure 15: Visit Biau Jardin with young people from one of my projects

Source: Author

A community project to promote solidarity and sustainability?

Reflecting on the timeline of this research project and the time when I engaged with them, it's evident that my work's focus on Le Biau Jardin was not predestined but rather influenced by my firsthand experiences with their actions. Their commitment to food production and surplus redistribution resonated with the principles of community economies, which emphasize values of reciprocity, redistribution, and sharing. This alignment is supported by literature on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Miller, 2013) where the surplus of labor was to be redistributed to the community as way of perpetuating the values of solidarity and empathy. Accepting to donate unsold food rather than discarding it exemplified their dedication to a social and solidarity economy, effectively aligning their actions with their values.

After my summer visits to the farm, I decided to engage more closely with the project. This involvement led me to participate in general assembly meetings, local events, and core team discussions among board members. This inside perspective was invaluable for my understanding of their operational model, beyond mere assumptions. Concurrently, as mentioned in the methodological chapter, I was initially developing my RESOPA project, which aimed at waste recycling and socio-cultural minority inclusion, mirroring Le Biau Jardin's initiatives through farming. Observing, learning, and understanding the successes and challenges of their model was therefore crucial for my project. However, at the time, being a solopreneur[77] after the departure of my project counterpart to Canada, I had to reflect on how to manage my project. To do this, I delved into an enquiry about the story of this project. The next section will briefly enunciate the Le Biau Jardin project's trajectory before I proceed to scrutinize the details of their actions and projects.

Genealogy of the project

This section delves into the genealogy of the Biau Jardin to gain insights into the circumstances that birthed the project's idea and how time and space contributed to its evolution into a collective action. To gain these insights, I relied mainly on informal

[77] Jargon expression refering to an entrepreneur working alone on a project.

interactions with participants, document analysis of archives kept by the project's board, and formal interviews to contextualize information encountered in documents or conversations. This triangulation approach provided a broader yet clearer picture of the project's evolution and how its actions align with its initial ambitions or imaginaries.

Humble yet bold beginnings

Le Biau Jardin was born in 1997 in Clermont-Ferrand, a city that was, at the time, renowned for its abysmal vegetable self-sufficiency rate. Given the city's high-quality land, located in central France's Limagne region—a sedimentary plain boasting over 110,000 ha of some of Europe's most fertile lands[78]—a group of local farmers led by an agronomist, Gilles Lèbre, aspired to redefine local food and agricultural production. They established a small association to strategize on alternative food production approaches that would not only satisfy local consumption needs but also offer a space for social interaction and promote socio-professional empowerment in local communities through farming.

Speaking to one of the founding members, I learned that the coalition envisioned the project as an opportunity to rethink food production and security issues, and to reimagine life and work in a society returning to basics. Here, 'basics' included satisfying fundamental needs such as food and good health and earning the capacity to fulfill other immediate personal needs through ethical jobs that respected both the planet and its inhabitants. This vision aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly the foundational aspects of physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943). The project's approach reflects a shift towards addressing these basic needs in a sustainable and community-centric manner.

"*Farming is about giving meaning, a deep meaning to your work [...] it's about reconnecting with nature and our origins by focusing on what's essential for our survival [...]*

[78] Selon le Centre des Ressources regionales de la Region Auvergne Rhône Alpes : La terre de Limagne est réputée pour être une des « meilleures terres agricoles d'Europe », http://www.paysages.auvergne-rhone-alpes.gouv.fr/6-01-grande-limagne-et-plaines-des-varennes-a511.html . Voir aussi l'étude par la chambre d'agriculture du Puy de Dôme qui détails les résultats de l'analyse des sols de la région AURA : https://aura.chambres-agriculture.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/National/FAL_commun/publications/Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes/63_Atlas_des_sols63_2020.pdf

For the Biau Jardin, the economy is not the primary marker but rather, the social and ecological utility."[79]

—Board Member and Founding Partner of Biau Jardin,

Motivated by this reflection, the coalition embarked on a farming project as a starting point, with hopes of gradually adding other activities that would fulfill their broader ambitions of socio-professional opportunities for inclusion and participation in the local community. Despite their farming skills and expertise, they recognized the need for a structured approach to implement their idea. The reintegration workcamp organized in spring 1997 in Riom[80] by the Jardins de Cocagne[81] served as a great inspiration. By adopting the Jardins de Cocagne approach of using local workcamps to introduce people to farming on a small scale and benefit from the farm's produce, the project team saw an opportunity to adapt and replicate this model in line with their vision. With support from the city of Riom, the group obtained a 2.5-hectare plot to start vegetable production, aiming to redistribute the produce to the local community through food basket subscriptions. Starting with 12 part-time employees guided by a professional farmer, they merged food production with apprenticeship. The initial stages, though exploratory, promised a bright future for the project. However, a catastrophic storm in 1999 necessitated the project's relocation.

Engaging with various local stakeholders, including the municipalities of Riom and Gerzat, as well as registered food basket subscribers, the coalition garnered enough interest to forge ahead. They built on this emotional energy to apply for European subsidies, supplementing their already raised local funds, for a relocation to new land. The process was challenging but fruitful; in early 2000, they acquired a 2.6-hectare market-gardening estate, a 250-square-meter building, and a 22-ares glass greenhouse in Gerzat. This relocation stabilized their operations and led to the scaling of their work from an NGO to a reinsertion

[79] For ease of reading, all quotes from fieldwork were translated by me and are available as raw French transcripts in the annexes.
[80] City in the Puy de Dôme, situated in the Clermont-Ferrand agglomeration
[81] Jardin de Cocagne is a French Cooperative, which started in 1978 by a group of people looking for alternative food production and consumption approaches against the mainstream capitalistic approach that they considered socio-ecologically expensive and low in nutritional value due to the amount of pesticides and chemicals used in the large scale food production systems. See more here: https://cocagne.ch/c58/lacooperative/buts-and-valeurs 10/10/2023

enterprise (*Entreprise d'Insertion*), reflecting the growing number of people benefiting from the farming and project management skills offered by the project. As a local consumer informally mentioned, this status was also achieved because the farm space was open to everyone willing to contribute their expertise. The initial core team succeeded in branding the project's venue as an inclusive space through weekly free meals made from unsold perishable goods, informal capacity-building workshops for job-seeking youth, and various local campaigns and events on food security and bio consumption in response to urgent climate change issues. By 2005, the Biau Jardin had diversified their food basket offerings to include other organic products such as fruits, bread, and eggs. To accommodate the increasing number of consumers and the need for proper produce storage, a shop was opened on the farm's premises, allowing for the storage of surplus produce not going into the food baskets and providing an opportunity for other consumers to purchase fresh produce on the spot.

Understanding then functioning of a SCIC

In 2007, due to the interest generated in the project from various socio-political actors on the territory, the project team and various stakeholders voted to change their legal status from that of an NGO doing farming and professional reinsertion to that of a Cooperative Society with Collective Interest (*Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif—SCIC*). The aim was to include all interested parties in the daily management and development of the project. As a founding member of Biau Jardin informed me during an informal conversation, the aim was to create a democratic space where everyone (individuals as much as institutions) could share their opinions and ideas while actively contributing to the framing of the project through their decisions, actions, and engagements in whatever form they deemed fit, based on their capacities[82].

[82] When Biau Jardin took the decision to become a SCIC in 2007, it was one of the first 100 SCICs set up in France. There are now 1,200 of them. According to the 2022 report from the General Confederation SCICs in France (Rapport CGSCIC, 2022). SCICs employ over 13,000 people and have 95,000 members. Their survival rate is 77% after 5 years of existence (compared with 61% for all businesses combined). Since 2017, there's been an incredible growth in SCICs in France (+88% in 2022).

The notion of a cooperative in the French context and most specifically based on the SCIC law established in 2001[83] seemed rather complex to me. I therefore delved into desk research to understand the concept from a theoretical perspective before linking my readings to what I observed as practice in the Biau Jardin project. In essence, in a SCIC, the governance takes a “multi-party" governance (employees / customers / local authorities / associations, etc.) approach and permits all stakeholders to sit around the table, within the same company to take important decisions on the company’s project - a rare occurrence in the traditional capitalist economy. For example, in a SCIC, consumers have to agree selling prices with producers, on the principle of "one man, one vote".

In the case of the Biau Jardin, this is reflected in the voting on the price of the weekly food baskets during a general assembly meeting where all consumers are invited by email and provided detailed information about “current” production costs, fair wage structure calculations and all running operations. This is done to provide a transparent and fair opinion to the consumers who can then vote on the proposed prices of the produce they consume from the Biau Jardin. To become a member of the Biau Jardin cooperative, one would need to fill a form (called *bulletin d’inscription de parts sociales*) to purchase shares in the cooperative and therefore become a stakeholder. This form is available online[84] or at the Biau Jardin’s office for anyone who cares to subscribe. By subscribing, one agrees to not receive any financial dividends but rather become part of a community project where the focus is on reinvesting the yields on the project to develop it so that it benefits more people in the community rather than an individual. The aim is therefore to help build a viable economy based on solidarity, rather than to increase their capital at the expense of the ecology or human welfare.

Interestingly, this is well articulated in the preamble of Le Biau jardin’s statutes[85]. Their organizational structure was crafted to underscore the "preeminence of the human

[83] Loi no 2001-624 du 17 juillet 2001 portant sur les SCIC en France. Consulted on 10/10/2023
[84] How do adhere or cooperate on the Biau Jardin’s project: https://www.lebiaujardin.org/cooperer Consulted on 10/10/2023
[85] Statuts SCIC Biau Jardin: https://www.lebiaujardin.org/sites/default/files/images/documents/statuts_scic_biau_jardin_14.06.2019.pdf

person, democracy, and solidarity". This commitment profoundly echoes the ethos of community economies, where values centered on humanity eclipse mere profit-driven motives (Gibson-Graham, 2006). As the charter elucidates: *" The choice of the cooperative form represents an adherence to the fundamental cooperative values that make up its identity: [...] social, economic and cultural integration; a multi-partnership whose aim is to achieve the collective interest above and beyond individual interests".*

This holistic perspective challenges the siloed nature of mainstream economies, championing a more cohesive and inclusive economic paradigm (Miller, 2005) that prioritizes individual empowerment for communal advancement. By maintaining the value of shares and reinvesting profits into the cooperative, Le Biau Jardin seems to emphasize its commitment to community welfare over individual gain, a principle that is antithetical to speculative capitalist ventures (Laville & Nyssens, 2001).

"For us, it's crucial to operate this way because we didn't want people investing in the enterprise for financial reasons; otherwise, it becomes capitalist." – Board Member of Le Biau Jardin

This choice seemed to be justified in the attitude of registered shareholders of the project. When, I spoke to Eliane, a *consom'acteur*[86], she stated: *"I could have just bought baskets, but it's more profound than that. I want to participate in various activities, volunteer to assist the project, and contribute beyond merely purchasing baskets".*

This reflection reinforced the perception that some form of engagement was expected from both the subscriber to the project but also the project's consortium in order to perpetuate their values. As of May 2023, 200 out of the 983 food basket subscribers were also partners, holding the project's capital collectively. This diverse group of stakeholders, including employees, consumers, local authorities, and associations, is central to the cooperative's decision-making process, embodying the principle of community ownership and control (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

[86] Name given to someone who subscribes in the project but also acts as a volunteer and invested person in the project through various events, community education outings as well as decision making sessions.

On governance and daily management

Despite the enticing details about the functioning of a SCIC per French legislation, the governance model at the Biau Jardin initially seemed confusing, although it appeared clear on paper. To understand their operational approach better, I embarked on numerous visits to the farm, sometimes alone and other times with groups of youth involved in personal community engagement projects, to get initiated into their modus operandi.

At the Biau Jardin premises, everyone first appeared as a laborer before any administrative or hierarchical responsibilities were evident. I would almost always find everyone in farming gear, clothes stained with soil. Over time, I understood that anyone recruited at the farm started by working in the fields. This practice helped them understand the demanding nature of farm work and assess their personal values against the farm's ethos. Elise, the communication officer of the cooperative, shared that she began her journey on the farm, then worked in the vegetable shop, and gradually transitioned to her current role in communications, always aware that she might be needed in the fields when extra hands were required.

In essence, everyone starts from the "bottom," i.e., the fields, to connect with the earth before evolving into other roles. They then progress to roles such as team leader, project manager, or departmental manager. Through my observations and informal conversations with various project members, I learned that a team leader typically oversees work on a specific crop or land parcel. They work with their team to cultivate, harvest, stock, and pack produce for distribution. A project manager ("chef de projet") handles specific tasks, which can range from minor responsibilities like watering crops to more significant projects like negotiating land purchases or managing the warehouse. This position seemed to not be hierarchical but rather based on a person's ability to take responsibility on a certain matter or simply a question of experience or expertise. Selection for these roles consequently depended on departmental managers' assessment of responsibilities and experience. I identified five department on the farm project:

1. *Direction and Administration:* This department is headed by the general director, accompanied by the personnel in charge of administration, accounting, pay, client relations, and development. They ensure that the project remains on course and in line with its initial ambitions.
2. *Agriculture and Production:* This department is more of the operational wing of the project. It includes the different *chef d'équipes* (team leaders), "*chefs de culture*" (culture heads in charge of selecting the crops and seeds to plant according to the season and, "*tractoristes*" responsible for cultivation and tractor operations.
3. *Sales and Communication:* the work of the direction and the operational team would not be complete without this team which ensures that the different produce is fairly sold and redistributed on the market per agreed prices with the consumers[87]. This team takes care of responsibilities for the *boutique* (shop), *demi-gros* (semi-wholesale of food baskets to consumers), and communication both internally and externally.
4. *Training and Education:* In line with the project's ambition to train and promote the values of sustainable farming practices at a small-scale level, this team is in charge of recruiting new profiles and raining people in a socio-professional reinsertion process. They design the programme for the registered staff and people while focusing on Coordination of actions and training with a focus on knowledge sharing and skill development, especially for new employees, people in socio-professional reinsertion as well as community education.
5. *Maintenance:* This team mainly focuses on the upkeep of facilities and equipment on the farm. While there is a chef d'équipe, people in the farm are all responsible for the maintenance of the machinery and the farm's assets and values.

Beyond these departments and this organization of work to ensure coherence and alignment between the farm's mission statement and practices, I identified a certain

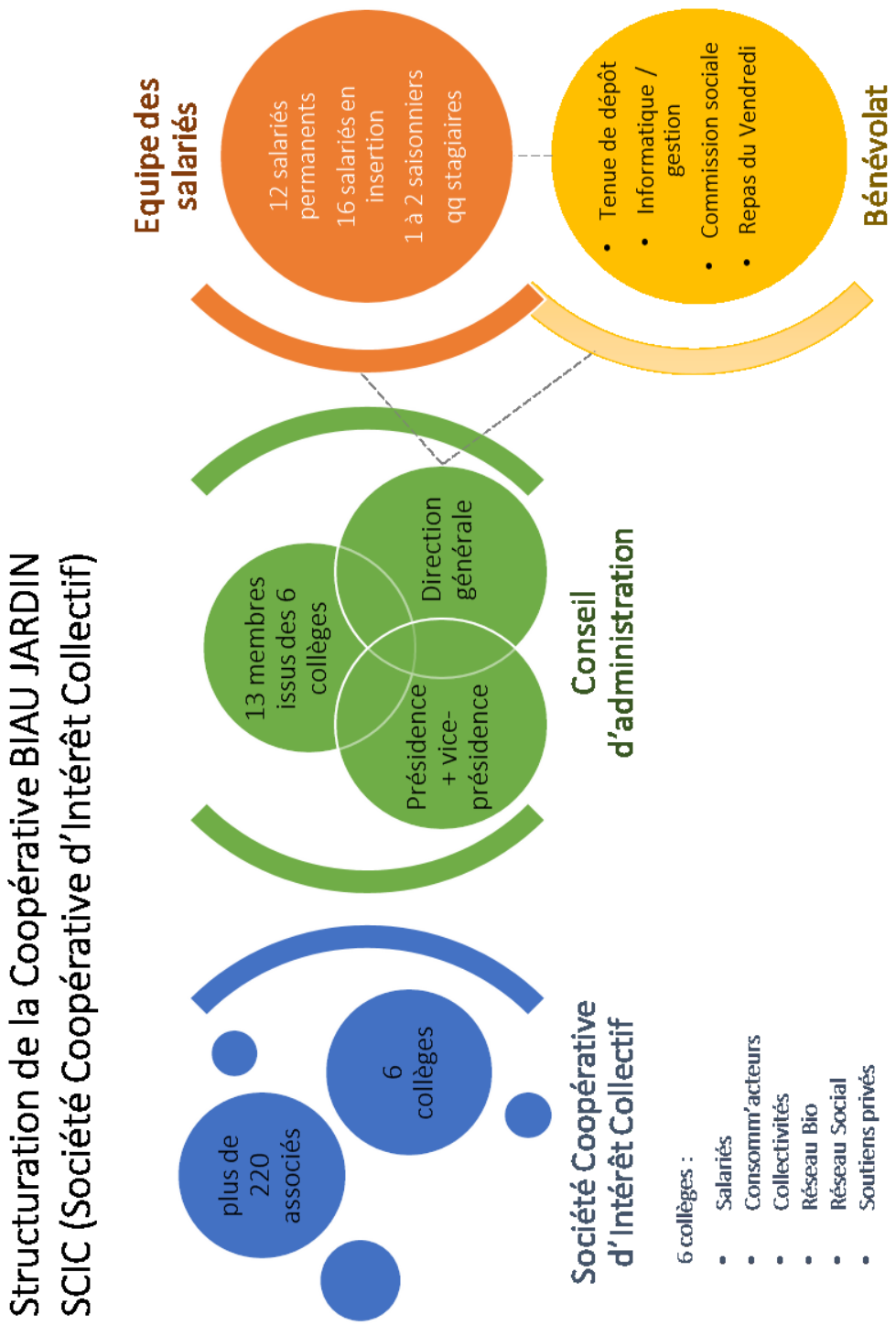
[87] Prices are set through consultations with the consumer's college that is beforehand informed through a newsletter on the reasons informing the new price increment or changes. They then approve this decision by a college meeting and their reps communicate this information to the board for the decision to be ratified. An example of this process is explained in the next section.

hierarchical structure even though the statutes of a SCIC promote a largely horizontal structure. I divided these roles in different management categories or project levels.

1. *Top Management:* Director and the various chefs d'équipe (team leader roles).
2. *Middle Management:* Roles such as chef de culture, responsible for specific areas like greenhouse cultivation.
3. *Operational Staff:* Tractoristes, maintenance, and sales personnel.
4. *Support Staff:* Roles in administration, accounting, and client relations.
5. *Entry-Level and Learning Positions:* Apprentices and individuals in insertion, who could be considered novel and now learning how the project functioned.

Regardless of their positions in the hierarchical structure of the project, there seemed to be a very democratic and fluid governance structure that facilitated the integration of all and their consequent participation in the various instances of the project's daily life. During a meeting with two board members part of the top management and direction of the project, I got access to the full board structure and how the governance of the project was operationalized.

Figure 16: Board Structure and composition of the Biau Jardin



Source: Biau Jardin, Statutes, 2022

Decision-making process

The board of Le Biau Jardin comprises 13 members, representing six colleges that reflect the diverse stakeholder categories involved in the project. These colleges are: (1) the Employees' College, (2) the Consom'acteurs College, (3) the Collectivities College, (4) the Bio Network, (5) the Social Network, and (6) the Private Support College. To ensure equitable representation in decision-making, the Employees and Consom'acteurs Colleges have five and four representatives on the board, respectively, while the other colleges each have one representative.

The Employees College includes all individuals working on the project, whether as full-time employees or under a socio-professional reinsertion contract, and interns. As of May 2023, the project had 12 permanent employees and 16 individuals in socio-professional reinsertion. This college convenes approximately every two months to discuss their needs, with their main concerns and suggestions being relayed to the board by their representatives.

The Consom'acteur College, due to its large size of over 200 people, primarily communicates through a newsletter. Annually, at the general assembly, this college elects representatives to attend the six board meetings held each year. These representatives are tasked with disseminating important information among the consom'acteurs and presenting urgent issues to the board.

The Collectivities College represents local or regional authorities with interests in the project. In the case of Le Biau Jardin, this representative is appointed by the Ville de Gerzat, acknowledging the city's contribution to maintaining the farm's infrastructure and operations through annual subsidies.

The Bio Network College includes organizations like Nature et Progrès Auvergne[88] and FRAB[89], representing bio producers and farming coalitions in the region. This college plays a crucial role in ensuring the farm's adherence to regional bio standards and labels.

The Social Network College encompasses social organizations such as PLIE[90], focusing on the project's social impact. The Private Support College comprises volunteers and private individuals who contribute their time, energy, and resources to the project without financial expectations.

The board's 13 members also include a President and Vice-President, chosen to represent the cooperative in legal matters and as signatories. Additionally, a Director General, who should be an employee of the project, is appointed to oversee the daily operations. This structure ensures direct representation of day-to-day affairs and operational challenges within the project.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in France in 2020, the project saw a surge in food basket subscription requests, increasing from 984 to 1099 weekly. While accommodating these new requests was logical, it posed significant operational challenges for the production team. Through the college representation system, this issue was brought to the board, resulting in a decision to cap subscriptions at 1100 food baskets to maintain work-life balance for the production team and prevent overconsumption or production driven by financial profit. This decision led to the creation of a waiting list.

Furthermore, in an extraordinary general assembly meeting held in July 2020, the board, after consultations with various colleges, decided to increase the weekly food basket price from €14.75 to €15.50. Below is an extract from the text published in July newsletter of Le Biau Jardin[91]:

[88] Federation of bio producers in the region that confers the label to ethical and bio farms that respect the planet in their farming processes.
[89] Fédération Régionale de l'Agriculture Biologique (regional federation of biological agriculture)
[90] Plan Local d'inserttion et d'Emploi (Local Plan for Insertion and Employment), organization that aims to promote reinsertion through partnership with different local projects as a means to find opportunities for people in insertion.
[91] Newsletter of the Biau Jardin and translation from French is by author

"Since September 2017, the price of the vegetable basket has remained stable (€39/month for the half or €9.75/week and €59/month for the whole or €14.75/week). This is lower than the prices charged for direct sales of organic vegetables in the department.

Demand for organic vegetables is growing. At Biau Jardin, we've added to our team of permanent and temporary employees, but that doesn't mean we're reducing the volume of work, because our growing methods are labour-intensive.

In order to improve working conditions, both in terms of cultivation and logistics, we are obliged to make substantial investments: new tools for market gardening to reduce drudgery and, above all, another larger and more functional building for logistics, basket packaging, new cold chambers, etc.

Le Biau Jardin is currently in a healthy financial position, and the indicators (number of baskets distributed, gross margin, etc.) show that it is now possible to make these essential investments to improve working conditions for all concerned. This should make it easier to negotiate with the local authorities and organizations that will be subsidizing the projects, as well as with the banks that will be offering loans.

From 2020, the first studies will be carried out and the first equipment purchased, while still retaining some room for manoeuvre in the event of any hard times (climate change, drought, parasites, etc.) that could have a major impact on market garden production (...).

After three years of identical prices, the cooperative's Board of Directors has decided that from 1 September 2020 the prices will be as follows:

- the full basket of vegetables will rise from €59 per month to €62, i.e. €15.50 per week
- the half vegetable basket: €39 monthly to €42, i.e. €10.50/week
- Bread: €20 per month to €22, i.e. €5.50 per week
- The fruit and egg portions remain unchanged."

Implications of the cooperative's management approach

Adopting this governance approach in its daily management, Le Biau Jardin has stimulated a spirit of democracy where all interested groups, including employees,

consumers (consom'acteurs), local authorities, and others, have a voice in the decision-making process. This democratic approach not only fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among all members but also leads to more engaged and committed participation. The diversity of stakeholder profiles engaged in the project makes it more inclusive and benefits from a plethora of ideas that enrich both its daily management and decision-making processes. Such diversity and inclusivity are key drivers of innovation in cooperative models (Murray, 2017).

Perpetuating these values of inclusivity and community results in more transparency and trust, thereby facilitating communication among the various stakeholders. This ensures a fair and transparent resolution of issues that may arise from the daily management of the farm's projects. For instance, on training needs for the production team or the adaptation of working ours for some field staff due to a hot summer season in 2020 was expedited to the management through informal communications and decisions without waiting for an official communiqué from the board. This accessible communication structure at Le Biau Jardin, reflects a high level of organizational coherence and mutual support, a characteristic often found in human-centered cooperatives (Hansmann, 1996).

Moreover, the practice of everyone starting as a laborer and learning fieldwork on the farm ensures the constant availability of support and labor force for various tasks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the farm was overwhelmed with food basket requests, everyone, from the director to the newest apprentice, joined hands in harvesting, packing, and distributing the food baskets. Volunteers, who play a significant role in the project, also joined in to ensure smooth operations. Despite not being paid or direct beneficiaries of the project, the volunteer group, through their representation on the board and their actions, constitutes a core part of the project. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the resilience and solidarity of Le Biau Jardin's community. My presence in Gerzat during the pandemic allowed me to witness firsthand the support provided by this volunteering community. They rallied together, manufacturing facemasks, redistributing food baskets, and ensuring that those undergoing socio-professional reinsertion remained connected and supported, embodying the ethos of cooperative associations (Restakis, 2010). Furthermore, the

involvement of a medical professional shareholder in testing the production team and developing health protocols exemplifies the cooperative's innovative governance and its capacity to mobilize diverse expertise in times of crisis (Pestoff, 2012).

During my visits and interactions at Le Biau Jardin, I observed the diversity of approaches that volunteers employed to support the project. A few notable contributions include:

1. *Technical Expertise:* The project benefits significantly from two volunteers with backgrounds in mechanical engineering. One specializes in repairing production tractors and vehicles, thereby enhancing the farm's operational efficiency. The other volunteer focuses on improving machine automation and electrical systems, crucial for modernizing farm operations.
2. *Community Meals:* Every Friday, a rotating team of five volunteers prepares a communal meal for the employees, priced at a nominal €1 or €2. These meals are crafted from farm produce that might not meet aesthetic standards for sale, serving a dual purpose: reducing food waste and fostering camaraderie among the team. My experience attending these meals revealed a consistently convivial and welcoming atmosphere, highlighting the initiative's commitment to community building and environmental sustainability.
3. *Skill Development and Integration:* The project also focuses on socio-professional reinsertion, with numerous volunteers assisting in this regard. They provide valuable services such as teaching French to non-native speakers and imparting a range of soft and hard skills. For example, one partner offers accounting classes to volunteers, broadening their skill sets and enhancing their employability.

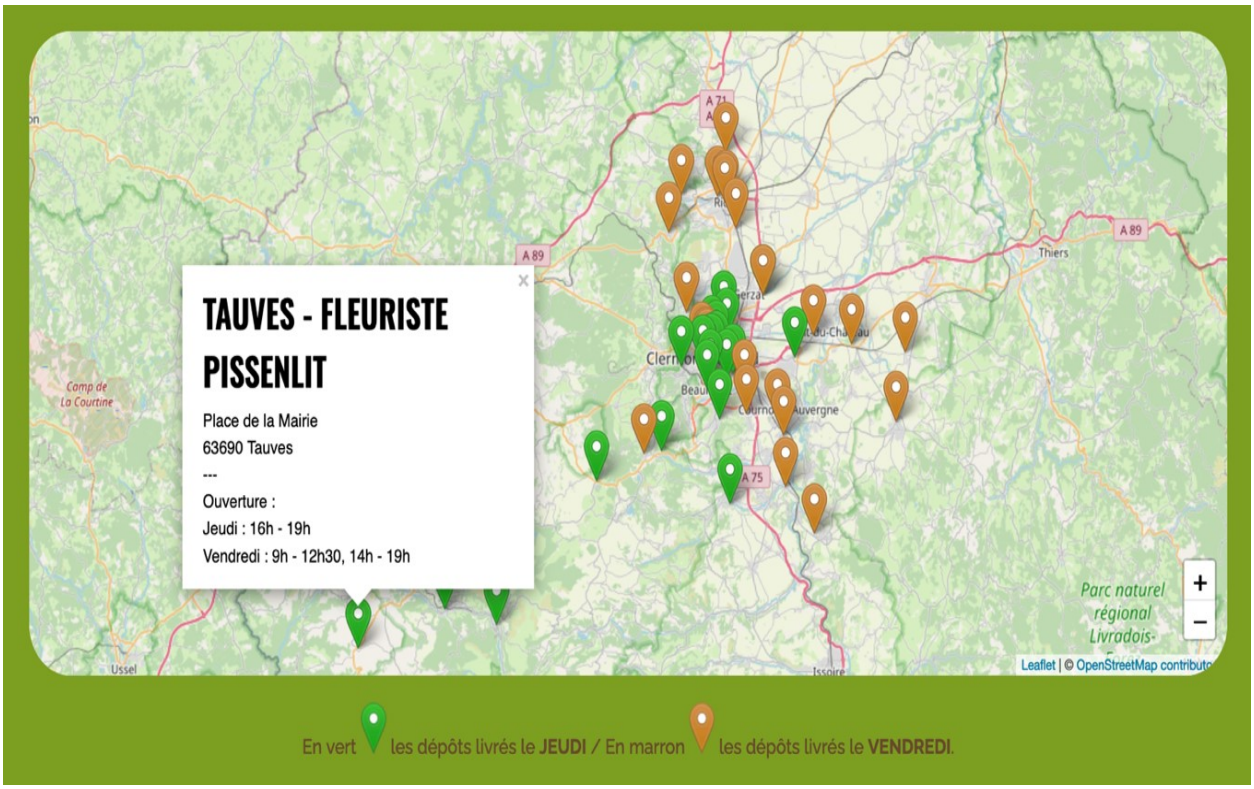
Figure 17: Dominique, a board member and volunteer holding a stand for Biau Jardin at an event, June 2022.

Source: Author

Beyond these points, I realized during an interview the significant economic impact of the volunteer force. Many of the food basket collection points in the neighborhood are offered freely by volunteering partners and shops that align with the project's values. In addition to the farm's storage room, this network of volunteers provides over 50 collection points across the metropolis, ensuring easy access to weekly food baskets for consumers. This system not only guarantees freshness but also fosters community engagement. The Biau Jardin website's digital interface further simplifies locating the nearest collection point. In 2022, the project estimated savings from this collaboration to be around €48,000. This is in stark contrast to another farmer in southern France who, lacking a robust volunteer network, incurred a distribution cost of €1 per food basket. A member of the operations team at Le Biau Jardin highlighted this difference, noting: *"There's a wholesaler in Perpignan who*

tried to launch baskets all over France. It didn't work because their drop-off points were charging €1 per week per basket. For us, that would have meant an additional €48,000 a year in costs."

Figure 18: Mapping of collection points of food baskets of Biau Jardin



Source: Biau Jardin, https://www.lebiaujardin.org/

Some considerations on Le Biau Jardin's governance and decision-making approach

The adoption of a transparent and democratic approach, aimed at incorporating the participation and input of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, is commendable for its innovation and alignment with the initiative's human-centered and non-profit-oriented ethos. However, the practical challenges of such an approach became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when swift action was paramount. The pandemic underscored the necessity for prompt responses to the emergent challenges, including the rapid increase

in demand for food baskets from the farm and the logistical complications arising from lockdown measures and the subsequent closure of shops and distribution points.

The cooperative's decision-making framework, characterized by thorough consultation across various collegial bodies, was ill-suited for the urgent nature of these challenges. This process, typically extending over weeks or months, hindered the ability to respond swiftly to the immediate demands of the crisis. The production team, already under pressure from increased demand, found itself in a position where expedited action was necessary. In response, Gilles Lèbre, the Director General and a member of the production team, assumed a central role in decision-making to ensure operational continuity. This move highlighted the project's capacity for adaptability and the reliance on internal expertise in times of crisis.

Nevertheless, this adaptation also prompted a reevaluation of the resilience of the cooperative's participatory decision-making model during emergencies. While the existing trust within the team facilitated the acceptance of Lèbre's interim leadership, the shift towards a more centralized governance structure introduced potential risks. Notably, the concentration of decision-making authority in a single individual could pave the way for autocratic governance, particularly if the individual in power were to pursue self-interested or overly ambitious objectives.

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The complexities of participatory decision-making at Le Biau Jardin illustrate a critical paradox in cooperative governance. These democratic processes, essential for ensuring community alignment and collective decision-making, can also introduce procedural delays and inefficiencies, particularly in crisis situations. Balancing democratic ideals with the need for timely and effective action is a significant challenge, as seen during the pandemic. This tension between inclusivity and agility is a common issue in participatory systems (Ostrom, 1990; Baland & Platteau, 1996). In the case of Le Biau Jardin, following standard procedure would have meant waiting from March 2020 (when the food baskets subscriptions skyrocketed) till middle of July 2020 when an official board decision following a consultative extraordinary general assembly was held to decide on the maximum number of food baskets

that could be supplied based on the production's team capacity. This wait could have led to the production team working extra shifts, resulting in fatigue and exhaustion due to the governance model's inability to facilitate rapid decision-making. This would have been reminiscent of capital-oriented ventures, where financial gain often takes precedence over workforce welfare (Gibson-Graham & Miller, 2015; Cameron & Gibson, 2005). In light of these challenges, it becomes evident that while participatory governance models like that of Le Biau Jardin are commendable for their democratic ethos, they must also incorporate mechanisms for rapid decision-making in crisis situations. This balance is crucial for maintaining both the democratic integrity and operational efficiency of such initiatives.

A humanist approach through sustainable farming?

Having understood the governance approach and how the project was run on a day-to-day basis, it was now of import for me to focus on the values promoted by their initiative in order to reflect on how these values related to the community economies and social and solidarity economies literature. Returning to their official statutes as SCIC and continuing my immersion on the project through my various trips to the farm, I got to understand their work as a farm aiming to resolve food production issues through their cooperative model, but also decipher the different values embedded in their notion of a cooperative.

The statutes[92] of Le Biau Jardin suggest verbatim that their organization structure as a SCIC (cooperative) was crafted to underscore the "*preeminence of the human person, democracy, and solidarity*"[93]. This commitment profoundly echoes the ethos of community economies, where values centered on humanity eclipse mere profit-driven motives (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In this vein, the objective section of the cooperative's charter elucidates their ambition to foster employment opportunities for individuals facing challenges, integrating them through fixed-term contracts. Rooted in the principles of social and solidarity economies, this facilitates interactions among individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, fostering collaboration and socio-cultural exchanges for communal benefit.

[92] Statuts SCIC Biau Jardin: https://www.lebiaujardin.org/sites/default/files/images/documents/statuts_scic_biau_jardin_14.06.2019.pdf
[93] Verbatim from French charter reads: *prééminence de la personne humaine, de la démocratie, de la solidarité.*

As they frame it: *" The choice of the cooperative form represents an adherence to the fundamental cooperative values that make up its identity: [...] social, economic and cultural integration; a multi-partnership whose aim is to achieve the collective interest above and beyond individual interests".* This holistic perspective challenges the siloed nature of mainstream economies, championing a more cohesive and inclusive economic paradigm (Miller, 2005) that prioritizes individual empowerment for communal advancement.

To operationalize these values, the Biau Jardin through its farming activities recruits people in socio-professional reinsertion. To showcase the importance of this value to their project, Le Biau Jardin has Anne Pages, a dedicated socio-professional support worker whose job is mainly to recruit, supervise and train people in a socio-professional process at le Biau Jardin. A person who wants to undergo a socio-professional reinsertion process has a unique type of contract. These contracts, known as fixed-term integration contracts (CDDI) are negotiated with the government to facilitate both employment and support for individuals as part of their reinsertion process. Accredited by the Ministry of labor through the PLIE (see note 18), the Biau Jardin develops tailored trainings and events to ensure that these recruited staff not only contribute to the livelihood of the project but also develop skills relevant to their personal socio-professional ambitions.

Anne emphasizes that while individuals may come to Le Biau Jardin with an interest in agriculture, the skills they acquire are transferable, enabling them to transition to other professions. She states : *" The person who comes to the garden is not necessarily destined to work in agriculture. They come to the garden and the organic garden tool will enable them to move on to something else at the end of their work contract. The aim is to learn about agriculture and acquire skills that can be transferred to other jobs."*

Consequently, the work trajectory of someone recruited on a CDDI contract at le Biau Jardin is crafted as below:

Table 13: Career path of someone in integration at Biau Jardin

Before the contract	During the contract	After Biau Jardin
OBJECTIVE: Recruit in accordance with the needs of the Biau Jardin: ACTIONS ○ Diffuse the offer with local partners who are directly in touch with potential candidates. ○ Organise the recruitment process with partners such as Pôle Emploi, Mission Locale, PLIE (Plan local pour l' Insertion et l'Emploi).	OBJECTIVE: To help employees progress by providing them with the means to enter the job market with a job placement or qualification. ACTIONS ○ Induction and job training process ○ Presentation and signing of the induction booklet by the manager ○ Socio-professional assessment of the employee ○ Definition of support objectives based on the obstacles to be handled ○ Monthly follow-up interviews ○ Setting the employee on a career path (health, mobility, financial and administrative emergencies, work experience in companies, validation of projects, etc.). ○ Depending on the employee's needs, there's a referral to external services (social worker, French classes, etc.). ○ Support from a network of volunteers to train them on various skills ○ HR management by team leaders and management (absences, late arrivals, leave, advance payments, etc.) ○ Ongoing training by centre managers and team leaders in the following trades: warehousing assistant, semi-wholesale order picker, sales assistant, building maintenance worker, etc.	OBJECTIVE: Ensure the person sticks to the process of reintegration. ACTIONS ○ Monthly calls to both new employer and beneficiary to follow-up on individual for a minimum of 3 months up to 6 months after their contracts ended. Could be more if the people choose to keep in touch.

After their contact at Le Biau Jardin, the coaching and tutoring provided by the project is continued through new means. As Anne explained to me during our interview: *" The aim is not for people to come and go after their contracts, but for them to be followed up so as to have a better impact for them. I try to call them from time to time to see how things are going. Sometimes I also call their employers to see how things are going. It doesn't necessarily work with everyone. Some leave, others stay in touch and even come back to Le Biau Jardin to continue the adventure with us."*

Interpretatively, the philosophy of the Biau Jardin seems to not to only be about getting people to assist the realization of the farm's objective but also ensuring the long-term well-being of the various project partakers even after they've fulfilled their time as staff under temporary reinsertion contract with the farm. To understand this process in a more detailed approach, I scheduled an interview with an alumnus of Le Biau Jardin's reinsertion programme, Elise Wable who at the time of the interview had been recruited permanently as the bio shop manager also doubling as communication officer of the cooperative.

The story of Elise was insightful as she came from a background unrelated to farming but eventually found a place of comfort and relevance to invest her skills and passion in the project. Initially joining with a background in social and cultural activities, Elise transitioned from gardening to sales, gaining comprehensive insight into the cooperative's operations. Despite a brief stint elsewhere, she returned to Le Biau Jardin, drawn back by the alignment of her personal values with the cooperative's ethos. Her experience underscores the importance of meaningful work that resonates with one's values and the cooperative's role in nurturing this alignment.

Elise's narrative offered me a profound insight into the transformative potential of Biau Jardin's approach. Her journey from a background in social and cultural activities to becoming the bio shop manager and communication officer of the cooperative is emblematic of the opportunities Biau Jardin provides to its members. The cooperative's ethos, which prioritises human values and community well-being, resonates deeply with Elise, as evidenced by her decision to return to Biau Jardin after a brief stint elsewhere. Her experience underscores the importance of aligning personal values with professional aspirations, a sentiment that is echoed by many others who have been part of Biau Jardin's reinsertion programme.

After Elise, I met three other people undergoing reinsertion process. They admitted enjoying learning new things even though the work is difficult and time consuming. However, they enjoyed the process since they all had their personal socio-professional projects, and their work duties were scheduled around that to include their training and

progress evaluation. Speaking to a team leader part of the production team of the project, he stated:

"Our growing methods are labour-intensive. These people [people in socio-professional reinsertion] help us in our work, but we also take the time to support them in their social and professional careers."— Production Team member of Biau Jardin

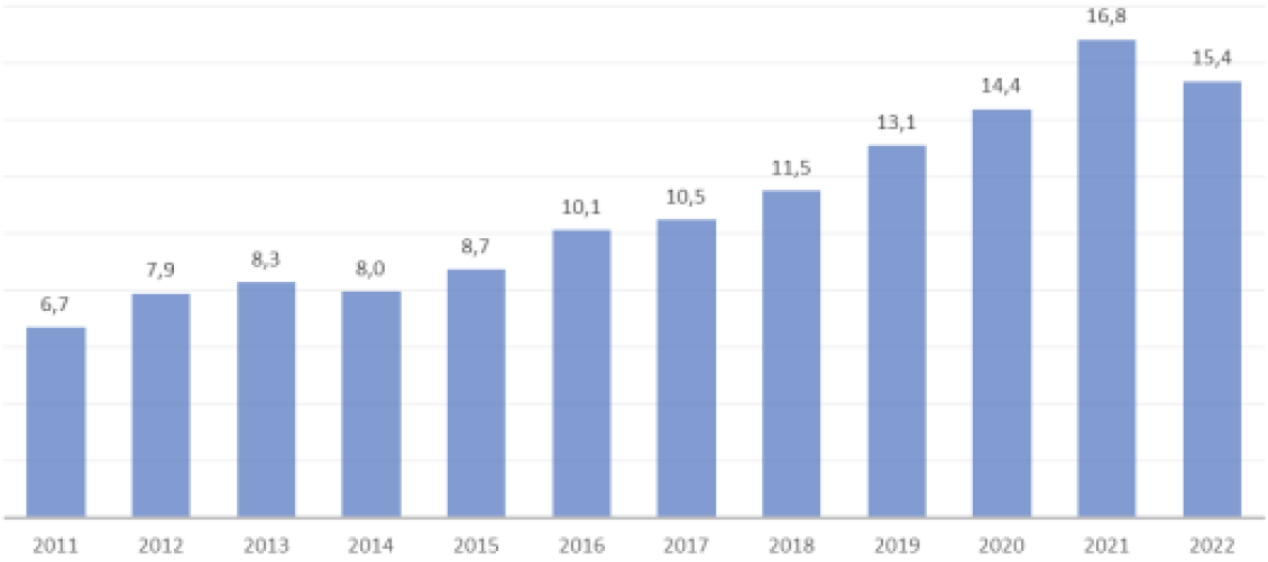
This reflection emphasized the project's focus on ensuring the productivity of their initiative while ensuring the welfare of its various partakers in line with the values of practices in the framework of social and solidarity economies, which prioritize human development alongside economic objectives (Laville & Nyssens, 2001).

Figure 19: Some people in socio-professional reinsertion contract with Biau Jardin, July 2023

Source: Author *(From right to left: Delia from Serbia, Issouf for Mayotte, and Albert from Guinea who is preparing a Master 2 QSE (quality, safety and environment) and is having a 3-month training with le Biau Jardin.)*

As of 2022, Biau Jardin's total workforce was 31 people with working contracts. 15.4 of them were in a full-time professional reinsertion contract. The table below shows the evolution of number of people in reinsertion contracts who have worked at Biau Jardin from 2011 to 2022.

Figure 20: Evolution in the number of full-time jobs at Le Biau Jardin



Source: Biau Jardin and author, 2022.

The graph above (Figure 20) provides a clear trajectory of Biau Jardin's commitment to socio-professional reinsertion. The steady increase in the number of people in reinsertion contracts over the years is a testament to the cooperative's dedication to its social mission. This growth not only signifies the success of the reinsertion programme but also underscores the cooperative's role in fostering sustainable livelihoods and promoting social inclusion.

In essence, Biau Jardin's model is not just about organic farming or selling bio products; it is about creating a space where individuals can rediscover their potential, align their values with their work, and contribute meaningfully to the community. The cooperative's success in this endeavour is evident in the stories of individuals like Elise and

the many others who have found a sense of purpose and belonging at Biau Jardin. Beyond the integration working contracts, Le Biau Jardin puts in place different programmes and tools to accompany their team to acquire relevant transferable skills. Through exchanges with Anne Pages, I was informed on the various opportunities and tools. These include:

- *Skill Assessment and Career Exploration:*
    - PARCOUREO: An online introspection tool for aligning personal aptitudes, personality, and interests with potential careers, requiring proficiency in French.
- *Training and Skill Development:*
    - Short Introductory Courses: Targeted skill enhancement courses, including:
        - Kitchen Technical Training: A weeklong course for kitchen assistants at the Institut des Métiers.
        - Driving Lessons: A 4-hour refresher course.
        - French Language Course: A 70-hour course over three months, offered in collaboration with SAMA association, integrating practical tasks with language learning, supported by a yearlong online platform.
- *Practical Work Experience:*
    - Immersion periods in various professions for hands-on experience and career validation, with placements in restaurants, legal firms, CHU laundry, local authorities, industries, market gardening, etc., in collaboration with MIFE and DEMAIN 63.
- *Addressing Peripheral Challenges:*
    - Holistic support including social support, housing assistance through SIAO, mental health and trauma support with ESSOR 63, and legal/administrative aid for residence permit renewals and other procedures.

How about the food-production process and its results?

To comprehend the local production and supply process at Le Biau Jardin, I conducted interviews[94] with various department members and participated in field visits. These visits, although not involving direct labor, allowed me to observe and occasionally assist in tasks like transporting produce to the storage room or onsite shop. For instance, I observed the delivery teams packing freshly harvested produce into baskets and loading them into minivans for distribution to various pick-up points. At times, I assisted in weeding on the farm (see Figure 21). These experiences deepened my understanding of the project's operations and helped correlate their practices with the focus areas identified in Section 6.3.

Figure 21: Author working on the fields, clearing bad weed

Before exploring how the farm implements its local production and supply strategy, it is important to note that, in alignment with the proximity values discussed in Section 4.3, Le Biau Jardin's local food supply approach, as I observed and understood from discussions

[94] 5 interviews added to a number of informal interactions that occurred during my various visits to the farm.

with project members, involves supplying food products through channels that ensure daily availability near consumers' workplaces, residences, or daily routes.

Echoing Zaoual's (2008) work on proximity, this strategy aims not only to conveniently supply consumers with food produce but also to foster a sense of community through regular interactions (Zaoual, 2008). This approach represents an ideological shift from a capitalocentric economic model (Bognon, 2014).

During one informal interview during a solidarity lunch that I attended on Le Biau Jardin's premises, a *consom'acteur* highlighted in our discussions that a significant portion of the food consumed in Clermont-Ferrand, including fruits and vegetables, was imported from southern France or Spain. This was despite the fertile lands of the Limagne region, where the Clermont metropolis is located. This dependency on external food sources not only undermines local agriculture but also exposes the community to heightened risks during global crises (Clapp, 2017).

Contrary to a capitalist perspective, which might exploit this demand by supplying goods at minimal costs for higher profits, the collective behind Le Biau Jardin envisioned an alternative. They saw an opportunity to reconnect with the land, promote locally produced food consumption, and nurture a community where high-quality, locally sourced food is accessible at reasonable prices to everyone, regardless of economic status.

The role of local partners in the local food supply system

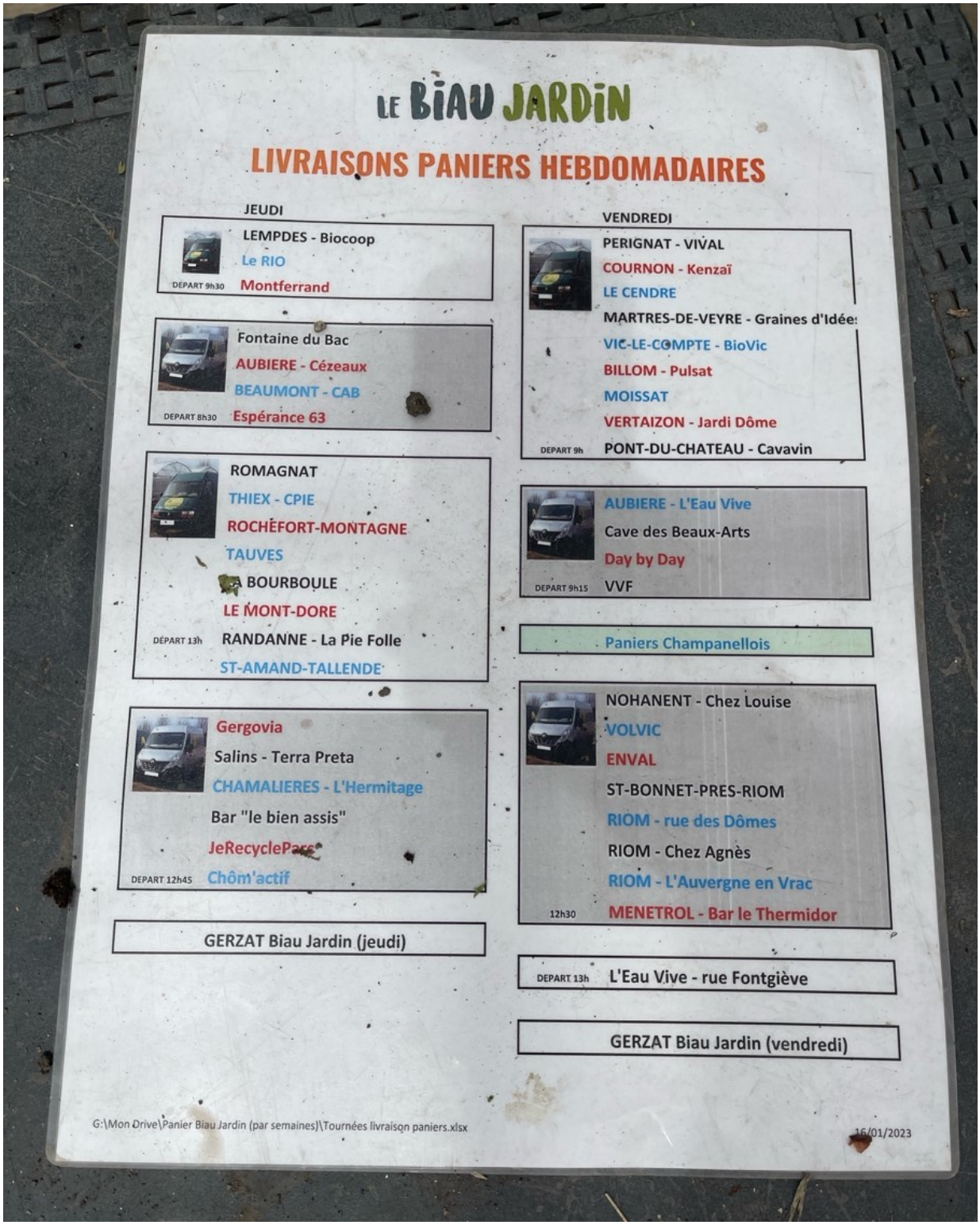
To embody the values of proximity, Le Biau Jardin heavily depends on the support of its consom'acteurs and other collaborators represented on its board. As a SCIC (Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif), the project integrates various partners into its daily management. Through regular newsletters, they invite interested parties to host and distribute food baskets at their premises. Willing partners contact the board, and a delivery plan and strategy are established as part of a mutually beneficial partnership between the parties. Consequently, while Le Biau Jardin would deliver and stock its produce for free at the various pick-up locations, the other party gets to either supply the Biau Jardin with some

of their produce for sale in the onsite bio shop. Sometimes, the other party if an association with no services or products to market, they just leave their flyers or get to promote their activities to the large pool of members of Le Biau Jardin (mobilized through the collective's newsletter). While hinting to values of reciprocity in this local ecosystem, this strategy, as discussed in Section 8.1, proves to be beneficial to the Biau Jardin's operations. This resource provided by partners not only facilitates food distribution within the Clermont-Ferrand Metropolis but also offers cost savings compared to a traditional capitalist model, which would require payment for such distribution services.

The delivery process of the food baskets is intricate yet efficient. After harvest, the produce is sorted in Le Biau Jardin's storage room by type, size, and quality. This sorting ensures that the best quality produce is packaged in food baskets according to consumer preferences. Produce that is less aesthetically appealing, but still consumable, is donated to volunteers and local groups in need. Some products are also sold directly at the farm's onsite shop. Once the baskets are prepared, a delivery team transports them to established pick-up points, including associations and shops (refer to Figure 24). Consumers are informed about the pick-up locations and times through Le Biau Jardin's website[95] where they can register to receive the food baskets but also conveniently subscribe as shareholders of the project — giving them the opportunity to get engaged further in the project's management and strategic development.

[95] https://www.lebiaujardin.org/depots consulted on 28/01/2024.

Figure 22: Weekly delivery plan of baskets



Source: Biau Jardin (Photo by author)

In exploring the motivations of local shops and partners in participating in this distribution network, I engaged with Lieu'topie[96], a student association located approximately 10km from Le Biau Jardin. Situated near the Université Clermont-Auvergne's faculty of humanities, Lieu'topie aims to foster a space for student interaction and engagement in alternative socio-cultural activities. In recent years, especially during the COVID-19 era, due to a growing number of students unable to access quality food for a fair price[97], they established a student canteen to provide healthy meals using unsold groceries from local producers. For Lieu'topie, hosting these food baskets aligns with their sustainability goals and offers students access to quality food without the need to travel far. This partnership exemplifies the value of reciprocity: in return for facilitating consumer access to these baskets, Lieu'topie receives quality produce from Le Biau Jardin for their solidarity meals.

Beyond Lieu'topie, I spoke to other pick-up location managers, and they echoed similar sentiments of solidarity, sustainability, and reciprocity as arguments for their collaboration with the Biau Jardin's projects and other local producers who contribute to enrich the pool of bio food local producers in the region.

[96] Lieu'topie (a French name combining lieu which means place in English and topie, short form of utopie from utopia to wit place of utopias).
[97] In 2023, 54% of the students skipped meals for financial compared with 43% in 2022. Also, on average, students in France have 2 or 3 euros a day to feed themselves (Linkee, 2023)

Figure 23: Example of food "baskets"

Source: Lieu'topie 2023

How about environmental protection?

Proceeding from exploring the meaning of local production and supply in Le Biau Jardin's project, it was implicit for me to review their practices in line with their message of ecological sustainability promoted in their statutes and recurrently mentioned in their various communications. Beyond observing their practices through my field visits to the farm, I also needed to engage with proper metrics ascertaining their engagements with ethos of environmental sustainability. Luckily, for me, the collective has a working group tasked to

keep records of the impact of their actions on their immediate environment as well as how these practices contribute to the attainment of SDGs.

The dual benefit of relocalisation

As seen in the previous section on the strategy deployed to supply their produce to their consumers, this process, perhaps innovative due to its ability to combine efficiency with economic benefits (in terms of financial savings to the tune of 48,000€ for the project) hid another characteristic.

The literature on sustainable food systems proposes the argument that the concept of relocalisation proposes a strategic pivot towards sustainability, where the proximity of producer and consumer becomes a catalyst for environmental stewardship and social cohesion. The relocalisation in this context is consequently not merely a logistical reconfiguration but a reimagining of food sovereignty, where communities reclaim agency over their food systems, fostering resilience against the volatility of global markets (Wittman et al., 2010).

By adopting this local food supply chain system approach, the Biau Jardin in its approach implicitly contributes to carbon footprint reduction. As understood in the literature, localizing production cuts the long-haul transport of goods, significantly lowering greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to climate change mitigation (Peters et al., 2009). This further leads to a reflection on how these mutualized delivery at pickup points close to the consumers residences helps to mitigate pollution (Hillman & Ramaswami, 2010). Whereas in other contexts, these consumers would have had to regularly drive to the farm to obtain their products, they could do optimize this process by sticking to a daily commute on which they could make a quick stop and pick up their goods.

As at May 2023, le Biau Jardin was providing weekly food baskets to 983 subscribers in the Clermont-Auvergne metropolis. These baskets, available for 48 weeks a year, are priced at 16,25€ for a larger size and 11€ for a smaller one. They are filled with a variety of locally produced organic vegetables such as as salads, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, parsley, garlic, spinach, etc.

Figure 24: Food basket offer by Biau Jardin

Source: Biau Jardin, 2023

Beyond optimizing the supply process through their pool of partners and volunteers, the project also has an internal climate change adaptation strategy to respond to the various consequences of climate change on the farm. As a farm, it is undeniable that water is an indispensable resource for their operations (Gosling & Arnell, 2016). However, at Le Biau Jardin, climate change has led to rising temperatures coupled with wind and falling air humidity which results in increased evaporation of water. Consequently, they adopted innovative approaches to water management.

Adaptation to climate change: the internal strategy of Le Biau Jardin

Through my interactions with *different Chef d'Equipes* and agronomists at the Biau Jardin, I would discover a number of solutions adopted as an adaptation approach to climate change, and especially, to save water.

First, to reduce wind speed and create microclimates, they planted hedges (see Figure 24). These hedges as I was told help protect the crops from the wind, create a microclimate, create protection against neighboring crops with possible treatments as well as feed birds and other beneficiaries.

Figure 25: Hedges on le Biau Jardin, February 2023

Source: Author

Secondly, I was informed that due to this fluctuation in weather, they started adjusting sowing dates and methods to make the best out of the weather. Beyond, limiting the production of water-hungry summer crops such as lettuces, radishes, etc., they created a new planting timetable based on actively monitored weather forecasts. For instance, if the farm's

initial plan was to beets in May, they would sow it in July. When I asked about the impact of these changes, I was told its highly dependent on the crops and the weather conditions needed for the variety. About 2022's production, I was told:

"*…temperatures remained very high in September. This event was rather favorable for autumn vegetables, except for spinach, which suffered heavy cryptogamic attacks… We sowed carrots in the field in October for harvest at the end of April; this crop was 50% successful in 2022 and 90% in 2023. This was previously only possible in the south of France. We've been planting sweet potatoes for around 5 years now, and they mature every year.*"[98]

— *A Chef d'Equipe*, Biau Jardin

However, even if these adaptations seemed successful, there were moments of surprise where they had to adjust their plans as things evolved. For instance, in summer 2022, heatwaves accelerated the maturation of potatoes produced on the farm and consequently the produce had to be harvested earlier than scheduled. To avert the reoccurrence of such situations, they painted the roofs of the greenhouses to reduce the temperature through to the albedo effect (light reflection).

More innovatively, to save water, they started planting some crops such as tomatoes in an inflated double-walled greenhouse. This helps collects the water gotten from evapotranspiration resulting from the heat then they re-utilize it to water the plants.

[98] Translation by author.

Figure 26: Double walled greenhouse at Biau Jardin

Source: Author

8.2. La Doume: insights on the operations of a local currency

The first time I heard of *La Doume* was in 2017 when I was a master student in territorial development at the Université Clermont-Auvergne. Angèle Dransart, the project manager had come to present the project and invite more volunteers to join the collective. Albeit initially confusing, I would later understand to the notion of local currency[99] and its potential for the clermontois economy. Years later, the inspiring approaches of the La Doume would prove to be interesting for a study on how community initiatives can drive socio-territorial change through social innovation. I have already expounded in section 5.4, the innovative approach of local currencies as well as their transformative potential. In this

[99] Notably through a literature review, available in section 5.4 of this manuscript.

section, I will therefore dive into the genealogy of La Doume as well as its role in the Clermontois economy.

The genealogy of La Doume

In 2009, the global community convened for the COP in Copenhagen with the aim of addressing the pressing ecological and climate crisis. Regrettably, the summit ended in a stalemate, with governments failing to reach a consensus. This impasse catalyzed a sense of civic responsibility among the attendees. Activists from Attac- Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l'action citoyenne *(*Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen's Action) in Clermont-Ferrand took the initiative to establish UCJS- *Urgence Climatique, Justice Sociale* (Climate Urgency, Social Justice). Their mission was twofold: to tackle climate change and to enhance the well-being of citizens.

After the Copenhagen summit, an annual forum was institutionalized in Puy-de-Dôme. These "alternative forums" served as platforms for intellectual discourse on urgent societal challenges and the exploration of viable alternatives. The objective was to engage individuals who were spearheading innovative initiatives, thereby fostering dialogues on actionable solutions for urgent socio-economic and ecological transformations.

During the third alternative forum, a guest speaker from Toulouse was invited to discuss their recently launched local currency, Sol-Violette. This presentation served as a catalyst for the collective, inspiring them to conceptualize their own local currency. In May 2013, another forum was exclusively dedicated to this subject, featuring representatives from various local currencies across France to share insights and best practices.

Following extensive deliberations, an informal group comprising activists from diverse backgrounds was formed. This group embarked on a meticulous planning phase, which included discussions, workshops, and consultations. On January 17, 2015, "La Doume" was officially launched under the aegis of ADML63 (Association for the Development of Local Currencies in Puy-de-Dôme) which would be tasked to manage the currency as well as its related intricacies.

Nurturing imaginaries of economic transformation

The objectives associated with the creation of La Doume put forward, on the one hand, an abstract discourse, focused on ideas: *"a citizen's tool at the service of the common good, social justice and respect for living beings*" (Statuts ADML 63, article 2, 2018)[100], a "*non-speculative alternative economy"* and, on the other hand, a concrete discourse, based on the search for results: "*Encourage the relocation of production and services*", "*Support solidarity projects and investments*", "*Make quality [products] available to as many people as possible*" (Statuts ADML 63, article 2, 2018).

As seen previously in the genealogy of La Doume, their initiative was right from the beginning a citizens' initiative associated with ecological and societal ideals that aimed to question the dominant monetary exchange system.

As one of my interview respondants and founding member of La Doume, Géneviève Binet said: "*We were part of a collective movement to tackle climate change and social justice, following the failure of the Copenhagen conference* [...] w*e were against speculation*".

Indeed, by looking at these statements, it is obvious that a change of the socio-economic and ecological model of society was a very important issue for the people behind the creation of La Doume. By aiming to make currency a citizen tool in the service of the common good, social justice, and respect for the living, their project echoes the sentiments of North (2010) who posits that alternative currencies can be a means to challenge the hegemony of mainstream financial systems and foster local economic resilience. The next section will explore their practices more keenly to unveil the intricacies of their operations.

Understanding the social innovation approach of La Doume

To transact in La Doume's local currency, one must have a membership in the ADML63, the association that governs the currency's issuance and circulation. Once a member, individuals can exchange a specified amount of euros for an equivalent amount in

[100] Translated verbatim from the statutes of ADML which is available here: https://adml63.org/statuts/

Doume, maintaining a one-to-one parity: one unit of La Doume always equates to one euro. This exchange is operationalized either through designated "change counters" within the professional network or via the digital platform of La Doume. Then, members can transact within a network of professionals who have pledged allegiance to a charter of socio-economic principles that prioritize community welfare and sustainability.

Figure 27: Mapping of producers accepting La Doume

Source: adml63.org (screenshot by Author on 22/09/2023)

The euros exchanged for Doumes are deposited by ADML63 in financial institutions that are selected based on their ethical investment policies and practices, which should align with the values of social and environmental responsibility. This deposit creates a "guarantee fund" that not only ensures the currency's convertibility but also its legal and ethical integrity. Furthermore, this fund serves as a financial reservoir for community reinvestment, channeling capital into local projects that enhance the socio-economic fabric of the territory. In this way, La Doume transcends its role as a medium of exchange, becoming a tool for civic engagement and a catalyst for reimagining the role of money as a conduit for communal development and not merely a means of transaction.

This civic engagement process usually start with a conscientization (Freire, 1963, 2018) on the economy from a macro to a micro scale in order to grasp its intricacies. Grasping the essence of currency is pivotal for fostering an economy that is ecologically sound, inclusive, and rooted in solidarity (Lietaer et al., 2012). Local currencies, epitomized by La Doume, are instrumental in this educational process, offering citizens the opportunity to deepen their comprehension of economic and financial principles (North, 2010). They prompt a reevaluation of the concept of wealth, positioning money not just as a means of exchange but also as a tool for societal transformation. In line with this educational mission, the ADML 63, the association behind La Doume, actively conducts public meetings and educational activities. These initiatives are designed to enhance public literacy on monetary systems and their broader economic and financial implications, thereby empowering citizens to make informed decisions that align with sustainable and equitable economic practices (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013).

The purpose of these public discussions and debates is to demonstrate that the topic is not only economic but also democratic. Local currencies prove that issues previously deemed too "technical" for non-expert citizens could be grasped. They effectively dismantle the feeling of powerlessness that a number of people may feel regarding their inability to influence or even understand money and the economy. According to a 2017 survey[101] by French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP- *Institut français d'opinion publique*), while 66% of French people are interested in economic issues, only 46% feel comfortable with general economic topics such as GDP, debt, minimum wage, unemployment rate, etc. Thus, through non formal education campaigns by local currency associations like *La Doume*, the local population can enhance their knowledge on these subjects and evolve their practices concerning currency.

[101] Survey on French people's knowledge on economic affairs: https://www.ifop.com/publication/les-connaissances-des-francais-en-matiere-economique Consulted on 22/09/23

Figure 28: Mini workshop session by La Doume to talk about Soli'Doume

Source: ADML 63, 2022

A good example is Thomas, who has been living in Clermont-Ferrand for almost three years. As he confessed to me, he discovered La Doume at a public event and, through the group's interventions, grasped the significance of currency. Today, he is actively involved in a local group of the association, contributing to reflection on strategies to promote the currency and its benefits to a younger audience seemingly detached from these realities. Indeed, if local currency users are sensitive to different aspects of the transition, they develop a critical mindset. This awareness of the systemic nature of the challenges our society faces reinforces the need to act on all their facets (economic, social, environmental, etc.).

How about democracy?

The literature as explored earlier in this section expounds that at the heart of a local currency, one often finds a collective of citizens eager to reclaim the monetary tool by reinventing it "*from the bottom up*" through the collaborative participation of all interested parties. These citizens collaboratively reflect on the meaning of the currency they wish to create the values it should convey, and its objectives. The new currency must consequently

be molded in the image of the economy that stakeholders envision for their territory. To do this, an operational charter must be designed to govern the operations of the local currency. Exploring the context that led to the creation of La Doume and how its charter was created, my respondents emphasized on the significant challenges that they faced while deciding on "*how decisions will be made*" and "*who will decide*."

Geneviève, one of the currency's founding members, informed me during an interview that the currency's circulation took time (from 2013 to 2015) because the collective needed to listen, work together, and incorporate everyone's aspirations and ideas in the currency's development. They also had to draft the charter.

As she states: "*It took time to draft the charter. We had to define what we truly wanted and what we absolutely did not want. We needed a charter that was somewhat restrictive, so that not just anyone could join... We did not want large corporations immediately asking to join. So, we really had to restrict access to this network. The charter had to encapsulate important values... They were social, ecological, and environmental. We discussed local activities, jobs, and productions. We tried to emphasize the local aspect, the nature-friendly side, and also, though it's harder to verify, good working relationships. Relationships that aren't somewhat exploitative or anything like that...*"

When asked how the initial collective managed conflicts and decision-making, Geneviève spoke of sociocracy, which promotes decision-making by consent. "*During all meetings (Ordinary or Extraordinary General Assemblies, Collectives, working groups, local groups...), the expression and discussion of different points of view, including in writing, are encouraged before decisions are made. Decisions are made through a consent-seeking process. Consent is reached when the proposal no longer faces radical opposition, especially thanks to the enrichment of the initial proposal. If this isn't the case, the proposal is either abandoned or reworked for a subsequent meeting.*"

In practice, when someone disagrees and there is no consent to move forward, the collective forms a working group composed of the dissenting individuals to rework the

proposal. This approach ensures everyone becomes an important decision-maker who is included in the project management process. Jokingly, she added, "*sometimes it's easy to complain, but when one has to act, the posture changes.*" Thus, participants learn to accept divergent viewpoints, and this collaborative effort allows the group to remain functional and productive. Partially witnessing the evolution and the eventual creation of the *Soli'Doume* programme of La Doume, I witnessed a few moments of tension of the decision on how the programme could be managed, how the resources could be efficiently pooled and used so that it does not become instrumentalized by profiteers but truly benefit the intended target group. Different propositions emerged and sometimes while not similar in approach, they usually were fundamentally coherent with the values of the initiative and the consent approach helped create working groups to fine-tune the details of the platform's implementation. Indeed, working together and co-constructing is not always instinctive, but cooperation can be learned. The collective intelligence that develops during these [sometimes dense and lengthy] work meetings allow them to overcome potential conflicts.

About empowerment

Beyond creating a space for economic democracy by offering everyone the opportunity to participate in collective decisions, La Doume provides its members with volunteering opportunities. As Géneviève pointed out, "*we rely heavily on volunteers, and we only have one part-time employee. When La Doume was being established, we had numerous working groups. Some worked on the name, others on the graphic charter, and some distributed mail... everyone was a volunteer.*"

In its management and governance strategy, ADML 63 established fifteen Local Groups across the Puy de Dôme territory. The Local Groups (GL) are crucial due to their on-the-ground presence, directly connecting with consumers and providers. Each local group consists of two to three individuals. The two main roles are the *manager* (the local banker whose job is to organize the circulation of paper doumes between counters and the deposit of euros at the bank) and the *contact* (whose job is to promote it to new producers or consumers).

The GLs are responsible for establishing a strategy to develop and manage the use of the doume on the territory. They play a crucial role in identifying and approaching providers and users. Even if often time-consuming and exhausting, these commitments allow individuals to engage more concretely in their territories. As one respondent states: *"I've identified many [people] among my suppliers, but it takes time to explain how it works, a whole pedagogical effort [...] it adds to my workload, on top of my regular job"* *-GL.*

Regardless of these tedious engagements, the volunteers relish these engagements as they through them do not only become useful to their communities and local territories but also develop project management, coordination, and many other skills necessary for the project's operation. I would like to highlight the example of a volunteer intern in the project who confirmed having developed skills in graphic illustration and public speaking through the project. "*I was very shy, but with the workshops, stands, and all that, I got more used to it. For the illustrations, I had fun and discovered my creative side*."

Solidarity interventions and contributions of La Doume to the local economy

Over the years since its implementation, the ADML 63 has implemented several strategies to assist local producers in their ventures:

- Offering Cash Advances: Cash advances, capped at 4,000 euros for businesses that had been in the network for at least a year.
- Launching the "Solidarités Pros" Operation: This was targeted at professional members facing difficulties in paying their bills. It consisted in sending one or more checks in euros to the association. The amount was then converted into digital doumes and credited to the beneficiary's account. The checks were cashed later, with the beneficiary's agreement, according to the repayment schedule they had established with ADML 63.
- Supporting Virtuous Projects: Since 2016, ADML 63 has established a financial support mechanism for local actors. By providing interest free loans to producers or acquiring shares in ethical businesses, the local currency has contributed to the subsistence of different local projects. Below is a table of some projects that La Doume has helped finance or support through their funding over the years.

Table 14: Examples of financial support offered by ADML63

Date	Kind of Support	Who	Purpose	Amount
2016	Acquisition of shares	Terre de Liens	Help finance 2 organic farms in the Puy-de-Dôme region (EARL des Rôlles and Verger de l'Étoile). Installation of solar panels	2,120€
2016	Acquisition of shares	Combrailles Durables	Installation of solar panels	2,000€
2016	Zero Interest Loan	Ressourcerie du Pays d'Issoire	Opening of the ressourcerie	1,000€
2018	Acquisition of shares	Terre de Liens	6,000€ for l'EARL des Rôlles, 2,000€ for le Verger de l'Étoile	7,866€
2018	Zero Interest Loan	La Petite Réserve	Craft displays and dehumidifier	1,000€
2018	Zero Interest Loan	Malterie des Volcans	Roaster and heating battery	1,000€
2019	Contribution in associative funds with right of takeover	Coop des Domes	Finalisation of the installations	3,000€
2020	Acquisition of shares	Toi&Toits	Installation of solar panels	2,000€

Source: ADML63

Beyond its support to local professionals, La Doume has initiated a ***social bonus conversion program*** (*Bonus Social à la Conversion*) tailored for individuals facing economic challenges in order to promote local and responsible consumption. Beneficiaries can avail a 50% bonus on their euro-to-doume conversions. To reach the target audience, ADML 63 activated its network, collaborating with associations like Chôm'actif and LieUtopie, eventually reaching 80 beneficiaries. LieUtopie, a student association, addresses unmet social, cultural, and economic needs, offering affordable organic baskets and cultural programs from local food basket producers such as Biau Jardin. Chôm'actif, on the other hand, aids job seekers, defending the rights of the unemployed.

In 2022, the the collective ADML63 introduced the ***Soli'Doume*** food security system to support people living in precarious conditions. The mechanism is straightforward: participants contribute based on their income, with amounts ranging from 20 to 60 euros, as decided by the collective. These contributions are pooled into the ADML63 account. An automated operation calculates the average, which is then equally distributed among participants in the programme. This is to encourage local consumption while fostering socio-economic integration.

Also, the redistributive effect of Soli'doume is to ensure access to quality, seasonal, and organic products for the most vulnerable. The use of La Doume further cements food practices within the local economy, ensuring fair pricing for both consumers and producers. The universal redistribution process ensures non-discrimination, allowing even the poorest to make purchases without prejudice.

As one Doume representative, who worked on this initiative, shared with me, the goal is to expand this system to encompass individuals from all social classes. Clermont-Ferrand, being a significant student city sees many students grappling with financial challenges: "*We have a large audience which is somehow precarious... now we need to bring in the middle class and the wealthy to balance things out... a local currency is excellent, and one unit equals 1€, which is good, but it doesn't solve the problem for those without euros; they don't have more Doume and still can't consume. That's why we wanted to create Soli'Doume with this idea of food social security to promote solidarity among people*."

The strategy of La Doume, with its multifaceted approach, seems to yield significant social advantages. Purportedly, based on initial insights gathered from initial observations and interactions, La Doume contributes to:

- Enhanced Social Welfare: Transactions in Doume contribute to the alleviation of poverty and precarious living conditions, offering a more inclusive economic model.
- Inclusive Participation: By engaging a diverse demographic, the local currency extends its reach beyond the initial circle of advocates, fostering a wider community engagement.

- Nutritional Accessibility: La Doume facilitates access to healthy, locally sourced food, supporting nutritional well-being across socio-economic strata.
- Dignity and Integration: The use of Doume by recipients of social aid combats the stigma often associated with welfare, integrating them into the local economic fabric.

This approach not only steers vulnerable populations towards sustainable consumption but also educates them on pressing societal challenges. It empowers them with the knowledge that their choices and actions are integral to societal transformation (Lietaer & Rogers, 2012).

Exploring the ecological values of the local currency

Based on the values expounded in La Doume's charter, and within the framework of local currencies, a plausible argument deriving from adhering to the use of a local currency is that once inherently subscribes to a mode of consumption and living that is local, sustainable, and socio-economically just.

As Michèle, a Doume user, shared with me, *"When one becomes aware of local production, consumption, and economy, one begins to use their money to support these values. That's how La Doume supports ecological transitions. By purchasing from local organic and ecological producers, we minimize the ecological impact of our consumption, buying organic, pesticide-free, and without plastic packaging."*– Michèle

It's worth noting that La Doume's charter explicitly outlines the values that producers must adhere to before accepting the currency. As a Doume representative pointed out, "*Not all businesses can use La Doume. For instance, large supermarkets like Auchan cannot use La Doume due to the non-traceability of their food products and the opacity of their market values, which are often capitalistic*." This underscores the importance of responsible and ecological production, necessitating professionals who prioritize environmental sustainability throughout their product or service lifecycle. This encompasses everything from product design to waste management and supplier selection.

During an interview with Plan B, an organic local brewery in Clermont-Ferrand, the founder, Jean-Baptiste highlighted the challenges of sourcing local malt and glass due to the absence of local suppliers and the often-higher costs of French malts compared to foreign ones. This is where La Doume stepped in. As Angèle Dransart, the project manager of La Doume explains:

"*At La Doume, we have several microbreweries. They accumulate a significant amount of doumes as bars, restaurants, and organic stores return them. We noticed their high conversion rate and inquired about their needs. They expressed a demand for local malt and a facility to wash their glass bottles for reuse. Coincidentally, a malt house was being established in the department, which we then incorporated into our network. However, there was no facility for washing glass containers. A group of Doume volunteers took the initiative, commissioning a feasibility study from students. The study garnered attention from professionals and local authorities interested in the reuse of containers. The project snowballed, eventually leading to the establishment of a cooperative, in which we invested to support upcoming ventures*"[102]

– Angèle Dransart, ADML63

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The narrative surrounding the transformative potential of local currencies such as La Doume is often positive, highlighting their role in influencing local production and distribution practices. Indeed, the adoption of La Doume by local professionals can catalyze new collaborative networks within the territory and prompt a reevaluation of supply chains to align with shared socio-economic and ecological values. However, this optimistic perspective warrants a critical examination.

While local currencies aim to bolster regional economies and foster sustainable practices, their actual impact on systemic economic change remains a subject of debate. Critics argue that local currencies, by their very nature, have limited reach and are often

[102] Translation by author.

adopted by those already predisposed to ecological and social values, thus preaching to the choir rather than converting the uninitiated (North, 2010). Furthermore, the effectiveness of local currencies in transforming supply chains may be overstated, as larger systemic barriers to change remain entrenched (Lietaer & Rogers, 2012).

Moreover, the assumption that collaboration within the network of a local currency automatically leads to the adoption of sustainable practices requires scrutiny. The mere presence of a local currency does not guarantee that all participants will prioritize or have the capacity for ecological and socio-economic considerations over market competitiveness (Seyfang & Longhurst, 2013).

In the following chapter, I will delve deeper into a critical analysis of La Doume and Le Biau Jardin. This critique will explore the extent to which community initiatives contribute to socio-territorial transformations, examining both the successes and limitations of these models in achieving broader systemic change. The aim is not to diminish the value of such initiatives but to provide a balanced academic perspective that recognizes the complexities and challenges inherent in scaling community-based economic models to catalyze socio-territorial transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

CHAPTER 9:
Understanding the socio-territorial transformation potential of the initiatives

This section aims to develop the reflection on the transformation potential of the initiatives by sorting their practices according to the areas of focus in order to propose a discussion on their contribution to socio-territorial transformation processes. The areas of focus are: (1) socio-economic context, (2) relevance of the project to the territory, (3) type of resources, (4) governance, (5) collaboration, (6) social innovation logic.

9.1. The socio-economic context of the initiatives

Le Biau Jardin and La Doume, though distinct in their approaches, both emerged from a shared socio-territorial backdrop characterized by the need for sustainable and equitable economic practices. Le Biau Jardin, as detailed in section 8.1, was conceived to address the paradox of Clermont-Ferrand's location in the fertile Limagne plains and its struggle with sustainable local food supply. The project's inception was a direct response to the challenges of globalized food systems, emphasizing local, bio-agricultural alternatives. This initiative was not merely about relocalizing food production but also about fostering a community-centric approach, integrating quality, environmental stewardship, and social welfare. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of such territorial independence and resilience in food supply, aligning with broader research on food reterritorialization and its role in sustainable development (Chiffoleau & Prevost, 2012; Deverre & Lamine, 2010; Duram & Oberholtzer, 2010).

In parallel, La Doume's emergence, as expounded in section 8.2, was propelled by a number of factors related to socio-economic and ecological crises. Already, with Clermont-Ferrand being considered as a territory with low density (and sometimes stereotypically assigned the notion of low potential), the 2008 crisis added to the failure of the 2009 COP as explained in 8.2 paved the way for a certain transformation-oriented wave. Perhaps, the presence of Michelin and its [paternalistic] social policies contributed to setting a precedence on how social and solidarity practices embedded in a specific community (Michelin employee circles) could contribute to individual and citizen empowerment. This reflection, resonating with Polanyi's concept of 'embedded economies' (Polanyi, 1944)

propounds that the establishment of a local currency seemed opportune to reterritorialize the economy through local market transactions aimed at empowering local businesses against global speculations. Then, the city's youthful and diverse demographic, particularly its student population, brought dynamism and a propensity for activism and social innovation, crucial for socio-economic transformations (Florida, 2002). Interestingly, during the various ATTAC working groups (see 8.2) that led to the creation of the local currency, a great number of students contributed to the elaboration of the charter as well as the reflections that framed the constitutional foundations of the project[103]. Finally, by 2014, the election of a socialist leaning mayor, Oliver Bianchi, proved interesting for alternative community economy practices in the metropolis as this led to the appointment of a deputy mayor for social and solidarity economy and the formation of a working group tasked with designing a plan for social and solidarity economy and social innovation. The Auvergne Métropole's strategic and operational plan for the development of SSE and Social Innovation, adopted in October 2016, underscores this ambition. Challenge 2 of the plan explicitly aims to "support social innovation and accompany SSE companies" (Auvergne Métropole, 2016, Table 2). These developments collectively created a conducive environment for disruptive projects like La Doume and Le Biau Jardin to challenge mainstream capitalocentric paradigms by offering alternative approaches to the economy in the face of persistent socio-economic crises.

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The development trajectories of the projects under scrutiny reveal that the genesis of any initiative is contingent upon the formation of a collective. This formation is not merely the convergence of actors within a community but the establishment of a coordinated effort capable of collective action. The inception of La Doume, for instance, was preceded by the collaborative efforts of the ATTAC group and the UCJS, culminating in the Alternative Forums and the eventual establishment of ADML63, the managing association of La Doume. This

[103] I was informed during an interview with a founding member of how, notably, a student from Toulouse inspired the collective by mentioning the example of Sol'Violette in Toulouse and how this led to the collective inviting a key member of the project to Clermont-Ferrand in order to lead a workshop on local currencies and their transformational potential.

illustrates that coordination is not a singular event but a continuum, a tapestry woven over time, engaging with the individuals and elements within it.

The case studies reveal that collectives coalesce around a shared objective, typically aimed at enhancing living conditions. This may manifest as a redefinition of local food systems or the creation of a local currency to relocalize economic activities (North, 2010). A catalyst, often in the form of a crisis, is sometimes necessary to galvanize coordination. The post-Copenhagen COP developments served as such a catalyst for La Doume, while for Le Biau Jardin, the impetus was not a crisis per se but a reflection on food security and resilience, prompting local producers to envisage a more equitable and sustainable food supply chain (Horlings & Marsden, 2011).

9.2. From imaginaries to action: exploring the territorial relevance of the projects

Looking at the developmental process of the two main case studies of this project, it can be understood that a number of actors gravitated around the projects in order to materialize core ideas. A striking characteristic among the analyzed collective actions is the non-homogeneity of the actors involved. Indeed, the grouping of actors working together in both case studies shows that these actors have different roles and postures in their daily operations. These can sometimes be conflicting, but in the case of these projects, they contribute to the strengthening of the collective. To clarify the difference in actors in the two case studies, below are the key actors in both projects and their roles:

Case Study	Stakeholders	Role
Le Biau Jardin	Employees	Employed to coordinate production of bio food, distribution, and overall functioning of the project.
	Shareholders	Own shares of the project; also, consumers who purchase the weekly food baskets.
	Consumers	People on the territory who subscribe to the food baskets; not all are shareholders.
	Local Authorities	Officials ensuring adherence to bio etiquettes and regulations; support the project through grants and funding.

	People in Reinsertion	Individuals seeking socio-professional reconversion; benefit from the project's support.
	Local Producers of Bio products	Collaborate to meet food quota; regulate bio food production standards through the Auvabio syndicate.
	Volunteers	Support in tutoring, food basket redistribution, and promotion during events.
La Doume	Local Professionals	Local producers and service providers who accept La Doume as currency after meeting the charter's criteria.
	Local Groups	Members of ADML63 ensuring governance, strategy, legal issues, and overall coordination of the currency.
	General members and users	People subscribing to La Doume to support the local economy through daily transactions.
	Local Authorities	Municipality of Clermont-Ferrand overseeing the currency as it's a legal tender hinged on the Euro.
	Banks (La NEF)	Ethical bank where ADML63 saves their euros; offers financial help and advice to La Doume for assessments and solidary programmes.

In understanding the territorial relevance of the case studies, one can see that by mobilizing a heterogenous number of actors comprising of *consom'acteurs* (as in the case of Biau Jardin), local political leaders and other bio producers, the two case studies reflect the desire to promote values of proximity between their projects and the clermontois's territory. For instance, with the Biau Jardin, while the consom'acteurs by their desire to source themselves through locally produced and supplied produce adhere to the cooperative and own shares for which they expect no financial remuneration, the volunteering pool through their commitment to socio-economic justice and equity provide tutorship to the different laborers as part of the Entreprise d'Insertion's approach for socio-professional reinsertion of vulnerable people in the collective. Hence, in carrying out the project, the collective goes beyond their role as food producers to meet consumers and share their practices and products (reciprocity) during informal lunches (repas solidaires) and other workshops where they promote the project's values to the public open sessions at events.

For Le Biau Jardin, one can notice that a number of consom'acteurs are not only registered as stakeholders to benefit for the produce or own shares to support the collective but also are volunteers who keep stands during events, cook during the shared meals,

provide tutorship to some of the people in reinsertion and even assist with the daily management of the project without any expected remuneration or compensation. With La Doume, except the one employee who manages the administrative parts of the project, the collective's action is mainly volunteering based and this displays a certain need to engage in the development of community projects that embody a certain set of values that are ethically virtuous towards the environment and the inhabitants of the territory. These reflections lead to an understanding that the initiatives create a territorialized hub of socio-economic interactions where the various individuals and stakeholders gravitating around it derive a social benefit through their involvement in the project. This approach evolves beyond a capitalistic approach that usually measures profit in terms of capital or money. In this case, this creates a certain community bond where different members of the initiatives find a place for engagement, and value for their daily socio-economic needs. By promoting sustainable approaches to the economy (and the environment), the initiative contributes to a redefinition of the local socio-territorial realities.

9.3. Collaboration and co-construction of a new territory through the initiatives

The recognition of key actors by the collective reveals a dialectical relationship. Firstly, the collective unveils the actor, then the collective benefits from the actor's individual's capacity, and finally, this capacity is recognized by the entire group of actors. This is a chain of interaction between elements (the actors) of a collective action that loops back on themselves. This idea aligns with the reflections developed by Moine (2006) on the geography of the complexity of territories viewed systemically. This author places the system of actors "in front of the scene" (*devant la scene*) to understand the spatial dynamics of actors in the evolution of spaces.

The discussion on the dialectic between actors also shows that it is not always a vertical power relationship between actors, as in the case of entrepreneurs (Schumpeter, 1911), nor a leadership authority (Bergeron, 1979), despite the voluntary nature of the latter that aligns with the profile of key actors. Key actors partly align with the concept of a

strategic actor (Ostrom, 1990; Crozier and Friedberg, 1992) as they show a propensity to respond to an external stimulus (e.g., a crisis) in a reactive manner. However, the presented research suggests that some key actors find themselves in this "key" status not by reaction, but by a function, they establish discreetly, even informally, but which will be collectively recognized later on. This is the case with the volunteers' partners of Le Biau Jardin who agree to store and redistribute the organic baskets free, saving the project €48,000 annually. The same can be said for volunteers or companies that agree to mentor or host individuals in reintegration free of charge. In a capitalist dispensation, Le Biau Jardin would have to pay a provider for this professional mentoring, but in this case, this is done in full solidarity.

Political actors, even if their presence in the projects often appears vague or ambiguous, contribute significantly to the project's existence. Without their legal and political approval, the projects would find themselves in a precarious situation. This was confirmed in my interview with Gregory Bernard, a counselor in the municipality of Clermont-Ferrand, who informed me of the municipality's vote to allow a portion of the councilors' remuneration to be paid in Doume to provide moral and political support to the currency in the region.

Indeed, since the municipal council meeting of March 10, 2023, a convention was signed between the municipality of Clermont-Ferrand, represented by the Mayor, Mr. Olivier Bianchi, and ADML63 to adopt the proposal. Through internal lobbying and mobilization among councilors, the vote resulted in 47 councilors consenting against 7 for the project's validation (see annexes). The outcome of this adoption is significant for this local currency, which is in full swing. As Genevieve Binet pointed out to me, "*Once a municipality or city joins, it means they recognize its usefulness for their economy, and that's important. It's a political act that gives a boost [to our project] and lets the population know that the local economy is important.*" - *G.B.*

The example of the mobilization of certain elected officials from the municipality of Clermont-Ferrand in the validation of La Doume demonstrates how actors engaged in the implementation process of an initiative accumulate relationships with their network of

actors and put them at the service of the collective. This process also proves the symbiosis between the collective and individual [sectoral] actors, in the idea of a system that loops back on itself since a constructed object is a producer of the subject that produces it. As presented by Morin and Le Moigne (1999), collective action produces key actors who, in turn, produce their own collective action.

For Le Biau Jardin, the municipality of Gerzat's involvement in the project is not only evidenced by the presence of a representative on the board but also by their willingness to support the project through financial subsidies. These subsidies are aimed at infrastructure improvements such as rebuilding the road leading to the farm and expanding the farm's storage capacity by acquiring neighboring houses. This multifaceted support reflects a broader trend in local government participation in community economy projects (Bennett & Sellgren, 2022). Furthermore, speaking to a representative of the municipality who is also a registered consom'acteur deeply engaged in the project's governance and management workshops, revealed that the municipality regularly purchases produce from the project for local schools in Gerzat to not only supports Le Biau Jardin but also serve as a political statement on the municipality's desire to officially endorse values of local production and support for local initiatives. This form of political stakeholder engagement is crucial for the success of grassroots community initiatives, as highlighted by recent studies on the impact of local political stakeholders engagement in the "*success*" of community-led projects (Arkorful et al., 2022).

In the food baskets supplied by Le Biau Jardin, a variety of products are included alongside the farm's own vegetables and fruits to provide a balanced diet to consumers. These additional items, such as eggs and cheese, are sourced locally, following an internal analysis by the farm to understand the consumption needs of the local community. For instance, I spoke with Ludivine from *Les Plumes des 2 L*, an egg supplier who had previously interned and worked at Le Biau Jardin before starting her own poultry production farm. This conversation, and others with Le Biau Jardin, revealed that several products like honey, eggs, and meat, not produced directly by Le Biau Jardin, are obtained from local producers who share a consensual approach to food production and distribution.

Ludivine, a producer located about 30 minutes from the project, is part of a network of producers who collaborate to efficiently meet local consumption needs. They pool their produce and coordinate delivery schedules to the Biau Jardin or the metropolis, with one producer collecting and transporting the collective produce to minimize travel. This system of pooling resources, as Ludivine confirmed, is a strategy to efficiently respond to local consumption needs, fostering values of reciprocity and solidarity over competition.

My interview with Ludivine in the summer of 2022 highlighted how this collaborative approach created economic resilience for farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also ensured stability in meeting the consumption needs of the local population during a period when lockdowns restricted easy access to food products and other socio-economic amenities. This exploration into the cooperative network revealed a gradual shift towards a spirit of mutual aid and collaboration, marking a significant evolution from traditional competitive practices in agriculture.

Based on the involvement of the local producers in the supply chain system of Le Biau Jardin’s project, one can understand that the beneficiaries of Le Biau Jardin's efforts extend beyond local consumers and individuals with reinsertion backgrounds to include local producers, who benefit from the cooperative's respectful commercial practices. As understood with exchanges with other local producers, Le Biau Jardin does not engage in aggressive price negotiations with them. Instead, the cooperative seeks to understand the composition of their prices and is even open to analyzing the structure of costs with them in order to ensure fair pricing both for the cooperative and consumers. Furthermore, Le Biau Jardin respects the producers' operational rhythms by not imposing incompatible delivery deadlines. The presence of these interconnected networks is a testament to the creation of a reciprocal space that unites diverse economic players. Each contributes in their unique way to the democratic co-construction and co-production of the Le Biau Jardin project. Additionally, the deliberate choice of local suppliers and beneficiaries not only strengthens the cooperative's territorial roots but also fosters shared knowledge and lasting solidarity links among local actors. This approach emphasizes the importance of proximity in building a resilient and supportive community network.

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In concluding this section, it can be deduced that the collaboration among the various actors of the community initiatives can be understood in different ways. Using the example of Le Biau Jardin for instance, one can see that the internal organizational arrangement and decision-making process is an enabling structure for transformative approach to organizational management. Through the various colleges represented on the board but also daily consultation among employees, the democratic ethos of the collective is highlighted. Also, the collective adapts the work time of its employees to ensure a work-life balance that ensures the welfare of employees and collaborators. Working hours are adapted to personal circumstances, for example in the case of a single-parent household or for medical reasons. During my visits, I was informed of an employee who upon returning from maternity leave works part-time but can also manage her working hours based on her family and private priorities as far as the work gets done without targeted objectives and deadlines.

Beyond this, the salaries at Biau Jardin are capped at a 1.7 difference. Meaning from the managing director to the "lowest" ranking employee in socio-professional reinsertion, the salary gap is not that big. This promotes a stance of equity and justice among all collaborators and avoid resentments among the team towards a structural hierarchy which is more administrative than operational. People in socio-professional reinsertion also benefit from different training opportunities and workshops (see results chapter on Biau Jardin) which are tailored to their needs and professional objectives. These trainings are factored as part of their working hours and therefore paid so the participants do not feel they are missing out on work or financial remuneration because of their personal development which is in this case seen as part of the collective's duty towards the individual and not only as an individual benefit to the beneficiary.

In terms of collaboration and co-construction, the collective's strategy adopts a multiplicity of approaches to ensure that its work has a societal relevance to its community. From a social point of view, the democratic participation of local stakeholders, including local residents and consumers, and the use of local suppliers, creates interesting reciprocal local links, which are reflected in the meetings between producers and consumers. Direct links

are also created between the consom'acteurs, between retired people and young people (intergenerational links), between executives and young people in difficulty (social mix), through shared solidary meals (repas solidaires), and public events where the collective presents its work to the general public. As seen through the practices of the Biau Jardin, the initiative can be understood as an "integral" one in the metropolis as it contributes to the integration of vulnerable people via the socio-professional integration workshops but also the creation of spaces of interaction among various socio-economic actors that gravitate around the project.

9.4. Alternative and innovative approaches to project management

As seen from previous chapters on community initiatives, fostering solidarity and local ties is instrumental in developing close relationships and creating a vibrant local public space. This environment facilitates learning about citizenship in its various forms: political, economic, social, and environmental. The goal is to encourage citizens to engage in their local communities beyond just voting. Project ownership by citizens, whether through organic and local consumption or the adoption of a local currency, asserts new forms of active citizenship (Arendt, 1961). Economic choices thus become part of the democratic decision-making space, where there is a constitution of spaces for debate and co-construction of choices, or even intermediation (Dacheux, 2008).

For instance, with La Doume, integrating money into the democratic sphere allows for the determination of pursued objectives. This deliberative space is crucial for identifying needs and establishing conditions for citizen appropriation of the currency. The creation of these public spaces leads to the development of democratic rules designed to encourage individual expression and establish participative governance arrangements. These arrangements invite stakeholders to actively participate in the democratic process. For example, the service provider approval committee of ADML63, the issuing association for La Doume, includes all scheme stakeholders (consumers, producers, financiers, elected representatives, and founders), making decisions based on consensus or consent (i.e., the absence of objections).

This inclusive approach is mirrored in local initiatives like Le Biau Jardin, which operates with a board represented by different colleges. These colleges form working groups to foster stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, aligning with a democratic approach that prioritizes reciprocity and proximity as core values (see section on the territorial relevance of the project). Internal workshops organized by the colleges lead to significant discussion topics for major collective events, such as the yearly General Assembly. This approach was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and in decisions regarding price adjustments and production quantities.

Beyond these important collective events, the various colleges meet monthly to discuss trending issues relevant to their college and make a report to the board which is then circulated in the newsletter to all stakeholders. This permits the collection of feedback from the various entities part of the project. While the board and the colleges steer the strategic development of the project, daily operational decisions are taken by employees on site since they are in the core of action and understand the nitty gritty of the work done on the farm from production to supply.

This discussion leads back to the pivotal issues surrounding the development of local democracy through the inclusion of all territorial players, including citizens, producers, and elected representatives. This inclusion raises questions about the management of the system, encompassing decision-making procedures and participatory methods, as well as the legal status of community initiatives and how their legal frameworks contribute to more democratic and inclusive governance. Typically, these initiatives take the form of associations under the 1901 law or cooperatives established as SCICs, like Le Biau Jardin (Fare, 2016).

In the community initiative experiments studied in this research and others (Besançon 2014; Fare, 2016; Volat, 2021), the issues of governance and stakeholder participation in defining objectives, operations, and then control and regulation of the system are crucial. It's about building shared trust and ensuring consistency between the project's aims and its actual outcomes. The activation of local relations in various forms and the fostering of citizenship within these initiatives thus support the process of

territorialization. This process redefines our understanding of the territory as a place to live, produce, and consume, fundamentally reconceptualizing it as a space for exercising citizenship.

9.5. About resources: the mobilization of socio-territorial capital

The aim of this thesis is to understand how community initiatives contribute to socio-territorial transformation in a *capitalocentric* context. My hypothesis 1 posits that the socio-territorial transformation of a territory is orchestrated by the community initiative's ability to mobilize the necessary socio-territorial capital for the project's realization. Mobilization, in this context, is defined as the process by which community initiatives actively engage and coordinate the various socio-territorial capital elements—comprising local knowledge, networks, resources, and the collaborative capacities of different territorial actors—to achieve specific transformational objectives.

The notion of socio-territorial capital as proposed by Fontan and Klein (2004) explains how the mobilization of the territory's socio-spatial resources is crucial in the transformation process. As part of this process, a significant consideration is the *collaborative capacity* of the territory's various actors to achieve the project's objectives. The first hypothesis of this dissertation complements this reflection by considering the significant role played by the collaboration of the territory's various actors in this process. Through various interactions between territorial actors and their different spheres of influence, a collective action can be initiated in this socio-territorial transformation process. The empirical work done on Le Biau Jardin and La Doume showcase the plurality of resources mobilized in the initiatives.

For instance, for le Biau Jardin, its inception hinged not only on shared values and intentions but also on the availability of fertile land to grow their produce—a crucial form of spatial capital in the context of their project. By leveraging on internal funds from its *consom'acteurs* and financial grants from the municipality and the state, they could secure

the fertile lands needed for their project following a solidarity framed workcamp organised by Jardin Cocagne[104] that helped train the first volunteers of the project.

A closer look at their operational resources revealed that a significant portion of their income (60-70%) is derived from the sale of food products, including food baskets and sales from the onsite store, as well as contributions from consom'acteurs. In addition to these market-based revenues, they also receive non-market resources, such as subsidies from the Metropolis. These subsidies are often part of various programs aligned with political agendas. For example, the Territoire Zéro Chomeur program, supported by the municipality of Gerzat where the farm is located, provides subsidies that assist the collective in their socio-economic reinsertion efforts for community members.

However, about 10% of their total resources, come from the participation of volunteers. These volunteers contribute their time and skills to various aspects of the collective's operations. This includes involvement in the development of the collective's implementation strategy, with monthly reflection meetings, and governance workshops aimed at enhancing the management board's efficiency, especially in handling decision-making processes during crises, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteer activities also extend to the preparation of solidarity meals on Friday afternoons, support in managing IT data to optimize accounting documents and customer follow-ups, assistance to vulnerable members of the reinsertion program, drafting the impact assessment plan of the collective's farming practices, providing innovative ideas, and even managing electrical maintenance. In a spirit of reciprocity, supported by a group of volunteering local producers who had embraced the project, the initial workers on the farms benefitted extensively from the transmission of knowledge of these farmers as the project evolved over time. In turn and over time, these volunteers also continued with the transmission of knowledge to the newcomers and people in socio-professional integration. In that journey, values of solidarity superseded the capitalocentric mainstream values that could have impeded on the project's ideals. Instead of focusing on what each actor could gain, the initiative through the notion of

[104] See Biau Jardin's Genealogy

commons managed to rally a diversity of actors to embark on their socio-territorial transformational adventure through the bio farm.

Concerning La Doume, as seen in their genealogy section, the process of starting the currency took almost two years after the decision to start the currency in 2013. Materializing the project required legal support but also the commitment of a group of volunteers both local and from other areas who had already experimented with a local currency to commit to the project and perdure in the process by investing their emotional energy and expertise in elaborating the implementation strategy. Beyond the official launch of the currency, as seen in the results chapter, the currency still depends largely on its pool of volunteers to run its workshops, working groups and implement their various social welfare projects such as *soli'doume.*

While the resource hybridization approaches from La Doume and Le Biau Jardin offer interesting insights on how socio-economic approaches can be redefined at community levels through innovative approaches, it also raises some questions. For instance, both La Doume and Le Biau Jardin rely heavily on their volunteer networks and this could raise questions about the sustainability of such commitment over time. For Le Biau Jardin, the reported savings of 48,000€ annually through volunteer support reflect a significant economic impact but also highlight a potential over-reliance on unpaid labor. This reliance on unpaid labor raises ethical concerns reminiscent of capitalocentric exploitation, especially if it encroaches upon the welfare of the volunteers (Peredo and McLean, 2006). The balance between communal engagement and individual well-being must be carefully managed to prevent the overextension of volunteer labor (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014).

In the case of La Doume, the local groups constitute a major point of the project but these groups are entirely made up of volunteers. Being the core point that links service providers and users, it is important for the members to remain engaged and motivated to ensure that the system works. However, I was reliably informed by a volunteer that the energy seems to be burning out as there's not real influx of volunteers and once a person leaves the collective it is sometimes hard to replace them. It can therefore be observed that minus an emotional gratification from mainly initial adopters who seem to have an activist

stance to the economy, in terms of financial benefits there's not much in terms of direct benefits for the service providers who consequently hesitate to commit extra hours to contribute to the functioning of the currency.

As a producer states: *"La Doume didn't bring us any new customers, except for niche users who already knew about its economic advantages for the territory [...] for us, continuing to use it means that from an accounting point of view, you add a currency, you have to create a specialized account, it's complicated to manage*" – Local Producer.

This reflection showcases that while the currency seems to serve a purpose of a certain community's ideals, propagating it beyond the initial collective's boundaries could be complex due to managerial constraints and lack of fully dedicated individuals who can disseminate its values to the community. This requirement of an injection of new human resources seems tedious yet not impossible. As a local group member argues, there's a new generation of professionals settled in rural areas, who undoubtedly have new approaches to contribute to the propagation of the currency to the new users.

He states: *"the project benefits from new energy through the mix between natives and newcomers like me. We want to develop the territory towards a project that benefits us all"*

–Local Group member.

9.6 The social innovation logic of the initiatives

In the theoretical chapter, I defined social innovation as a collective action approach developed by a community to challenge the values of a system that fails to meet their socio-economic and ecological needs (Alter, 2000; Alter, 2002; Callon, 2007). To achieve this, the community taps into its actor network and mobilizes socio-territorial resources to devise solutions better suited to its realities. These socio-territorial resources are theorized as socio-territorial capital following the works of Fontan and Klein (2004).

Biau Jardin's innovative approach is characterized by several key factors. Firstly, there is the collaboration with local stakeholders who democratically co-construct and co-produce the project, embodying community empowerment. This collaborative activity not only

maintains but also strengthens local ties (proximity, reciprocity) through various actions and practices. These include organized meetings, employment initiatives, the welcoming of vulnerable groups, educational activities, and more.

The structure's innovation also lies in its management of an agri-food project through participatory governance workshops. This participative, open, and horizontal management style, which actively involves employees, contributes to improved social relations both within the organization and in its external interactions. New relationships are forged with other local organizations, associations, or individuals through informal events or interactions initiated by members of the collective. For instance, a member of Biau Jardin, who is also a member of La Doume, leverages this network to establish a pickup point for Le Biau Jardin in a company that accepts La Doume.

Concerning La Doume, the economic support provided to local businesses in the form of zero interest loans or even the food social security system that helps make quality food produce accessible to all pool members of the scheme makes it a social innovation that not only embodies strong values that align with the ideals of community economies in a postgrowth world but also positions the currency as a strong political pillar that contributes to the public discussions on the economic realities of the territory. The adhesion of the Clermont-Ferrand’s municipality to the ADML63 highlights the political recognition accorded to the currency with regards to its potential in transforming the reflections related to the socio-economic realities of the territory.

As understood, the territorialization of the initiative’s activities, coupled with their participative governance models, leads to a hybrid mode of resource utilization. This approach is augmented by the mutualization of practices (see Biau Jardin), which notably help to reduce the environmental impact of agrofood production through alternative approaches.

Social innovation within the projects is further characterized by efforts to enhance accessibility (justice) related to employment (combating exclusion) and addressing social needs such as food and health, all while contributing to sustainable development (well-being). For instance, Biau Jardin fosters conditions for sustainable, organic, and/or local food

production and consumption without intermediaries (short supply chains). While La Doume advocates for a change in the financial appropriation of money as a tool for community empowerment through its reterritorialization. These elements collectively define the innovation logic of the initiatives, which can be described as social, given its role in creating economic activity within a territory based on an integrative and reciprocal logic.

Also, in terms of social innovation, one can observe the strong nature of collaboration and co-construction that exists among the initiatives. Co-construction is a continuous process aimed at fostering change. Transpiring from the results sections above, one can understand that the initiatives through their practices, not only strive to create a relationship between their project and other potential actors on the territory but also maintain these relationships through diverse actions.

By generating organizational proximity (organized collective action, contribution of complementary resources) and institutional proximity (uniting players around a shared objective), they seem to be able to reinforce their actions on the territory and recruit new allies who contribute to the sustaining of their practices. This underlines the aspiration of community initiatives to contribute to the democratization of the economy through citizen involvement (Laville, 2003). In this sense, community initiatives represent spaces for social mediation between civil society, the state and the mainstream economic system to create new spaces where it is possible to recognize new democratic and civic modes of regulation of socio-economic activities (Fraisse, 2003).

CHAPTER 10: Reassessing the transformative claims of community economy initiatives and degrowth: an exploration of ambivalences

In Chapter 4 (Section 4.1), I discussed the differences between transition and transformation, concluding that socio-territorial transformation must proceed through various steps embedded within a transition movement (Courtemanche et al., 2022; Loorbach et al., 2017; Schmid, 2021). The results presented in Chapter 8 and the subsequent analysis in Chapter 9 highlighted that the initiatives examined in this research engage in various projects with visions of change. These visions, often outlined in their charters or working documents, frequently use the word *transition* to emphasize their ideas and ambitions. This emphasis is reinforced through interactions and interviews with different stakeholders involved in these projects. For these advocates of change, mainstream economic approaches have failed to meet many socio-economic and ecological needs. Therefore, they see a need to innovate and test new solutions that promise to better address these needs.

In the literature review, I considered how these community economies view themselves as social innovation laboratories (Besançon, 2013; Duracka, 2016; Moulaert, 2016; Volat, 2021), enacting and implementing practices that embody social, solidarity, and ecological values (Healy et al., 2023). These values, when put into action, could lead to new socio-economic systems (Bouchard et al., 2015; Brand, 2014; Pachoud et al., 2022). By proposing new ways of "doing" and "being" within the social economy, they could bring about socio-territorial transformation.

However, it is necessary to assess the contributions of these "grassroots" community economy initiatives within the framework of capitalism, which operates on a larger scale and dictates market rules and operations. What is their actual transformative power? This question is valid because, while many initiatives position themselves as solutions to various socio-economic and ecological problems, it is relatively straightforward to understand their origins and motivations. However, it is much harder to predict their outcomes, as transformation can lead to unpredictable results and is influenced by factors beyond the control of these initiatives.

To address this question, I aim to assess the alternatives these initiatives offer, how they position themselves within the economy, and the leverage their actions might have in advancing a transformative agenda.

10.1. The Alternativity of Community Economy Practices: A Reflection

In the literature rewiew sections of this work, it has been established that capitalocentric approaches to the economy often neglect fundamental community needs and aspirations, leading to widespread discontent across various socio-spatial spheres (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This discontent has spurred the emergence of community economy initiatives aimed at addressing these shortcomings by fostering local engagement and social cohesion (Leyshon, 2003). Some of these initiatives strive not merely to remediate but to disrupt mainstream economic frameworks, seeking to assert alternative economic practices and "take back the economy," as articulated by Gibson-Graham et al. (2013).

These diverse economies have been extensively researched by economic geographers, who have highlighted their significant socio-economic and territorial impacts, especially amidst global socio-economic crises (Gritzas & Kavoulakos, 2016). The proliferation of such initiatives underscores the potential of grassroots movements to effect substantial changes in economic practices and policies (North, 2010). However, in many countries—particularly France, which is the focus of this research—these practices have been co-opted by the state and institutionalized. This co-optation may serve to enhance the visibility of these practices or to outsource state responsibilities in various social domains (Chanial & Laville, 2001).

In Chapter 2.1, we reviewed the history of associationism in France and how, since the early 19th century, the state has developed policies to encompass community initiatives and their related practices. Laville (2014) provides an in-depth exploration of this instrumentalization through a historical analysis of the social and solidarity economy in France. He demonstrates how successive French governments have reformed legislation and established governmental structures to embed and control such practices, often diluting their transformative potential.

This institutionalization raises critical questions about the true alternativity of community economy practices. Are these initiatives genuinely challenging the dominant capitalist paradigms, or are they being subsumed into the very systems they aim to transform? The ambivalence of their alternativity necessitates a closer examination of how these practices interact with state structures and whether they retain their capacity for socio-territorial transformation towards degrowth, as suggested by Kallis et al. (2012).

Using the French setting as a background

In France, since 2014, there has been the formalization of the Social and Solidarity Economy law whose first article defines it as *"a means of undertaking and economic development suited to all areas of human activity,"* [105] where the main objective is not financial profit but social utility, with democratic governance. However, despite these ambitious goals, discrepancies arise between the founding principles of the social, solidarity community economies, and their practical implementation. This raises questions about their ability to serve as genuine alternatives to the capitalist system.

One major issue is the tension between social usefulness and economic viability. Organizations within the SSE and community economies often operate in competitive markets where the pursuit of profitability can conflict with social objectives. For example, Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) aim to help individuals distant from employment by providing work and social support. Yet, to remain economically viable, these enterprises may need to cut costs, leading to low wages and precarious working conditions for their employees (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). This situation limits the positive impact on beneficiaries and challenges the ability of these economies to offer quality jobs. For instance, at Le Biau Jardin, based on legal frameworks, there is a cap on the length of employment that can be offered to individuals undergoing socio-professional reintegration within their organization. This is limited to 24 months[106], and if the person does not manage to secure another job in the mainstream market—and if Le Biau Jardin does not secure additional

[105] LOI n° 2014-856 du 31 juillet 2014 relative à l'économie sociale et solidaire (1) - Légifrance consulted on 11/10/2024
[106] Duration of such contracts is 24 months based on the law on insertion contracts. Available here: Qu'est-ce qu'un CDD d'insertion (CDDI) ? | Service-Public.fr consulted on 11/10/2024

subsidies to formally employ the person as full-time staff—they have to let the person go. Although they maintain regular communication and try to include the person as a volunteer or resource within the community, this does not ensure the sustainability of their reintegration process, which may have been curtailed by financial and legal constraints

This brings to the second reflection on the financing of these initiatives. Financial difficulties present another significant hurdle for these community initiatives since they in practice rely mostly on public subsidies and external funding. This dependence makes these organizations vulnerable to economic instability, potentially compromising their social missions. For example, an association focused on community education might face reduced subsidies due to government budget cuts, forcing it to scale back activities or raise service fees, thereby becoming less accessible to vulnerable groups (Lohmann, 2007). The example from Biau Jardin in the previous argument further displays similar occurrence in their cooperative.

Another consideration is that of governance. While many proponents of community economies praise the inclusivity derived from the democratic governance approach of these initiatives, this very process—intended as the cornerstone of such initiatives—can be challenging. Issues such as "participation fatigue" (Attree et al., 2011; Lamarche & Richez-Battesti, 2023; Miessen, 2010) and "passive-aggressive" conflicts arising from governance approaches based on consensus-seeking (e.g., sociocracy) raise concerns. There is also the issue of time management. Participation itself is time-demanding, and decision-making processes sometimes require not only the availability of participants but also expertise on the subject matter and context-sensitive insights that cannot be compensated for by motivation and willingness to participate alone (Boehm & Staples, 2004). This makes participation in democratic governance sometimes more symbolic than substantive, especially since critical moments in the organization demand fast decision-making and implementation (McLaverty, 2017). Consequently, it is not uncommon to notice that a small group of leaders makes strategic decisions while most members remain uninvolved. This concentration of power can perpetuate internal inequalities and dilute the democratic principle intended to differentiate these initiatives from mainstream governance

approaches in traditional capitalism. In Le Biau Jardin, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted this flaw in the decision-making process[107].

Trickling down from this reflection on participation, another issue in such community initiative in working conditions. Despite their social missions, employees may face low wages and heavy workloads. For instance, social workers employed by charitable associations might experience burnout due to overwork and insufficient institutional support (Baines, 2004). Lack of resources as previously argued in the first point also means that many of the people engaged in the community project do it in a voluntary "unpaid" capacity and this sometimes rejoins capitalistic approaches of enjoying labor without fair and adequate remuneration from work produced. It is not rare in France to witness people recruit volunteers for tasks on which they should have full time employees who have actual expertise to fulfil specific tasks oriented towards specific objectives[108]. This could result in work that is either poorly done, unfinished or not well suited for the situation at hand.

Last but not the least, an exploration of community economy initiatives in France showcase that they are mainly grassroots led and localized (D. Bouchard et al., 2015; Fraisse et al., 2016). While this provides strong arguments for the maximization of their impact due to their direct connection with the territory through the mobilization of socio-territorial capital (Fontan & Klein, 2004; Klein, 2014; Parajuá Carpintero, 2023), it also poses the question of their capacity to challenge global norms that have been entrenched over centuries (Gibson-Graham, 2008). In addition, the desire to operate 'differently' is not enough to escape the structural mechanisms of the market. Without a systemic transformation and an overall political project aimed at rethinking the foundations of the economy, the community economy initiatives will remain confined to isolated and fragmented initiatives (niche sectors[109]) at local levels, incapable of challenging the deep-rooted structures of capitalism.

[107] See section 8.1 on decision-making process to understand how the cooperative navigated this hurdle during the pandemic.
[108] This article from European Civic Forum delves into such complexities in France. Voluntary Services in France, Challenges and Tendencies - European Civic Forum Consulted on 11/10/2024
[109] Niche sectors in this context refer to small-scale economic domains such as sustainable agriculture, localized arts, and community-based services. These areas, while valuable for community resilience and sustainability, often lack the structural influence to impact or disrupt

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Despite the aforementioned challenges and limitations, it is essential to acknowledge that Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) and community economy initiatives in France also embody significant transformative potential. Based on the case studies conducted for this research, the next section will illustrate how certain organizations navigate structural constraints and implement innovative practices that contribute to meaningful social and economic change. By examining these examples, we can better understand how SSE and community economies can serve as catalysts for transformation, offering viable alternatives that challenge traditional capitalist paradigms.

10.2. Little steps towards bigger milestones? Insights from La Doume and Le Biau jardin in France

This section delves into the operational and developmental aspects of Le Biau Jardin and La Doume, along with their satellite initiatives, to assess their potential in driving socio-territorial transformation. The exploration moves beyond mere operational details, offering a nuanced perspective on their realistic contributions to societal change.

Based on the modus operandi of the initiatives explored in chapter 7, one can identify two key stages in the developmental process of these initiatives. The first, crucial to these projects, involves defining the objectives (imaginaries). This stage is pivotal in shaping the values that unite the community in a collective action towards a desired societal reality. By examining the purpose of the initiatives, the project team, the project beneficiaries as well as how the initiatives are implemented, one can observe a difference between the strategies adopted by these initiatives and traditional ones embedded in a pure capitalist approach.

By providing bio food distributed through a short supply system coupled with socio-professional reinsertion schemes (Biau Jardin) and through a local currency comprising of solidary interventions (La Doume), the community initiatives seem to propose alternative economic approaches that advocate for sustainable, local, and fair-trade consumption.

the broader capitalist system (Schot & Geels, 2013). They remain relevant primarily within specific localities rather than scalable models capable of altering global economic paradigms.

Through their practices, they offer an alternative definition of market operations where financial transactions evolve into socio-economic interactions, emphasizing human-centric values over traditional capitalist norms. This political reappropriation and redefinition of the economy are central to societal transition and transformation (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

In the second stage, proceeding from mere ideological reflections to practical considerations, these community initiatives adopt an ethical and inclusive approach to democratize access to power and knowledge by creating spaces for civic education and engagement as part of their initiative's realization. This aspect aligns with the broader goal of establishing a new relationship with the economy, fostering a more inclusive and participatory model. This democratization process, through the mobilization of different community actors (social capital) promotes the participation of both project beneficiaries and developers in such a way that the process is tailored to the specific needs of the community in an essentialist[110] sense that goes beyond traditional [capitalist] product development approaches, which are usually financial profit oriented.

Through a co-constructed approach, the projects developed in the initiatives embody not only the ideals and imaginaries of the community (as a whole) but also, the expertise of the various actors and stakeholders of the community in designing and materializing them. This approach, as seen through the case studies, despite its complexities (both in terms of participation of all community stakeholders and implementation strategy), proves to be efficient in solving pressing community needs and concerns while at the same time proposing new ways of doing that are more inclusive, fair and sustainable.

This goes beyond the traditional market approach and aligns with Polanyi's proposition of a "substantive" definition of the economy to rethink economic activities such a way that they address issues like wealth distribution inequalities and environmental limits (Bernard, 1997; Kindleberger, 1974; Polanyi, 2002). Doing this involves the developing of

[110] In this context, "essentialist" is used to describe an approach that focuses on the inherent needs and characteristics of a community, as opposed to superficial or externally imposed requirements. This perspective seeks to identify and address what is fundamentally necessary and valuable for the community's welfare, emphasizing interventions that are intrinsically important rather than those driven by external profit motives.

new imaginaries of a social economy that propose new geographical and political spaces that harmonize economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Bollier, 2014; Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2022; Fare, 2016).

The creation of such new imaginaries is seen in the case studies through practices that seem to reform the economy through alternative approaches with hopes of transforming them[111]. For example, La Doume's local currency project, with its charter founded on ethical values like fair trade, represents a critique of conventional trade by promoting exchanges that challenge and exist within the market (Le Velly, 2006). Similarly, Le Biau Jardin's food basket system contributes to redefining food production, supply, and consumption through sustainable bio-farming and fair-trade practices.

The task of drawing up the statutes or charter, which defines these criteria, consequently, represents an essential moment in the concrete implementation of the transformational political message of the initiatives. While these charters vary depending on the focus of each initiative, they commonly embrace a progressive approach that integrates social, democratic, and environmental criteria. This approach aims to establish a new system that distances itself from traditional capitalist market practices and values.

For example, the criteria for a service provider's participation in La Doume are contingent on adherence to specific values, such as ecological sustainability of products and fair-trade practices. These practices should be evident both internally, in the relationship between employer and employees, and externally, in the product pricing strategies for the market.

Beyond the contribution of the initiatives to a redefinition of market practices, they also contribute to the re-assessment of the notion of value in transactional exchanges. Wealth should not be exclusively measured through monetary transactions, as is typically done with indicators like GDP, productivity, or profitability. Community initiatives often function as spaces that recognize and value activities with ecological and social benefits, such

[111] See reformative and transformative social innovation chapter 4.4.

as eco-friendly behaviors. These initiatives are intrinsically linked to the development of new wealth indicators (Gadrey & Jany-Catrice, 2012).

Systems that evaluate exchanges in terms of time challenge traditional evaluation methods and introduce new practices. They modify the rules of the conventional economy and acknowledge activities and skills overlooked by it, such as domestic tasks or volunteer work (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Roelvink et al., 2015). This approach fosters values like equality and solidarity, reconsiders the value of work, and expands the understanding of wealth and needs. It encourages ways of satisfying these needs that de-emphasize materialistic values (Perret, 2011).

Thus, community initiatives pave the way for redefining the framework for valuing wealth. They offer members the opportunity to move away from materialistic self-assessment, contributing to the transformation of societal perceptions by building a new framework centered on social and environmental interactions and interdependencies.

Can community initiatives be qualified as spaces of experimentation for new socio-economic approaches?

In the evolution of practices within community initiatives, three key factors stand out. Firstly, initiatives like Le Biau Jardin and La Doume in Clermont-Ferrand prompt a reevaluation of the framework governing individual consumption practices. These initiatives are predicated on shifting consumption habits towards responsible consumption (local, ecologically and economically responsible and sustainable). However, this shift necessitates a radical change in economic culture, moving from individual consumer motivations to collective or community-oriented motivations. Community initiatives employ non-formal education approaches to equip individuals with the skills necessary to understand mainstream market operations and to mobilize them in the operationalization of alternative practices aimed at transformation (see La Doume's community events in 8.2). They advocate for a multi-stakeholder, citizen-based expertise, embedding value-oriented market practices within a non-market coordination framework. Through social innovation, especially in organizational aspects like partnership and participatory governance, these initiatives highlight the political nature of market interactions, reorienting them towards social and

environmental values. This reimagining of the economy and market exchanges facilitates a shift in individual practices, challenging the autonomous nature of the market and reinforcing new social representations in the construction and implementation of a new socio-economic system.

The second factor involves integrating social and environmental values into both market and non-market exchanges. Community initiatives, often positioned in opposition to the dominant economic model (Zademach & Hillebrand, 2013a; Zanoni et al., 2017), incorporate these values at the core of their operations. This integration varies in intensity, from incorporating values into market links and production, as seen with local currencies, to a complete disengagement from market mechanisms, as in some local exchange trading systems[112]. These initiatives also aim to foster new relationships between various territorial stakeholders, emphasizing the creation of interpersonal links through exchange (Lafuente-Sampietro, 2023). Unlike current market exchanges where payment extinguishes the debt, ending the relationship between the parties involved (Fare, 2016), community initiatives establish enduring relationships within the payment community. The exchange is not terminated by payment but is extended over time, increasing the likelihood of future interactions (Blanc & Fare, 2022). In essence, by centering solidarity, social relations, and customer ties in the economy, community initiatives explore new forms of solidarity-based coordination in economic initiatives (Eme & Laville, 1994, 2004).

Last but not least, these alternative community initiatives enable the sharing of goods thereby reducing individual material consumption. This approach emphasizes the pooling of resources and the invention of new cooperative social relationships (Klagge & Meister, 2018), while also aiming to decouple well-being from material abundance (Parrique et al., 2019). Such sharing may include tools, knowledge, or cultural goods, which not only limits material production but also reduces waste generation. This mutualization is exemplified by the creation of collective services within the community initiative, through various means

[112] Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) are locally organized, economic organizations that facilitate the exchange of goods and services among group members. These systems operate using a locally created unit of value as currency, which can be traded or bartered in exchange for goods or services. They usually function as a type of bartering system within local communities where participants engage in reciprocal exchanges without relying on traditional currency

such as non-formal education, training, or workshops, as practiced by Le Biau Jardin for socio-professional reintegration or the Soli'Doume project by La Doume (Besançon, 2014; Fare, 2016).

The development of these exchange types can lead to a *demarketization* of need satisfaction, promoting a transition from market exchange to a generalized social exchange. This broader exchange integrates various forms of monetary and non-monetary transactions, including symbolic ones (Perret, 2011; Zahavi, 1983). This is particularly evident in personal services like tutoring, housework, gardening, DIY, or meal preparation, which are fulfilled through interaction (Max-Neef, 1992). Such a shift in the logic of need satisfaction is crucial as it enables the decoupling of improved well-being from consumption. This shift impacts social representations, challenging the value of work by valorizing non-work activities. This approach to evaluating initiatives based on non-economic criteria allows for the deconstruction of income hierarchies between skilled and unskilled labor, or between manual and intellectual work (Gibson-Graham et al., 2020; Videira et al., 2014). Community initiatives, such as Le Biau Jardin with its minimal pay gap (capped at a maximum gap of 1.7% difference between the "*highest*" paid employee and the "*lowest*" paid), promote alternative values based on equality, solidarity, and interdependence, principles central to the concept of reciprocity (Bernard, 1997; Degens, 2016).

Exchanges within community initiatives aim to foster a sense of solidarity and reciprocity. By highlighting people's productive capacities, often undervalued in traditional employment contexts, these initiatives seek to transform individual statuses. They bring forth new practices and behaviors that recognize generally unpaid activities, linking the application of these skills to the ability to consume (Besançon, 2014; Blanc & Fare, 2022; Volat, 2021).

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The exploration of Le Biau Jardin and La Doume within the Clermont-Ferrand context has offered a profound insight into the transformative capacity of community initiatives in driving socio-territorial changes. These initiatives, emerging as responses to specific socio-economic and ecological challenges, seem to embody the principles of resilience,

sustainability, and participatory governance. Their evolution since their inception therefore presents a compelling narrative on the potential of community-led initiatives to effectuate significant socio-economic and ecological shifts.

However, it is important to highlight that the adaptability of Le Biau Jardin and La Doume to their local contexts and evolving socio-economic and political trends plays an important role in their success in terms of implementation. Their strategic alignment with territorial needs and priorities, stemming from a profound understanding of local realities, ensures their strategies and actions directly contribute to addressing context-specific challenges. This embeddedness within the Clermont-Ferrand metropolis highlights the necessity for community initiatives to be deeply interwoven with the socio-economic and ecological fabric of their operational territories, ensuring their relevance and efficacy.

Also, central to these initiatives' operational success is the adoption of inclusive governance structures and participatory processes. By engaging a diverse array of stakeholders in decision-making, these initiatives cultivate a sense of collective responsibility and ownership among community members. This inclusive approach not only bolsters the legitimacy and sustainability of the initiatives but also exemplifies a model for fostering active citizenship and empowerment within communities. Such democratic governance and participatory engagement are pivotal in creating an environment where community members feel invested in the initiative's outcomes, thereby enhancing its impact and durability.

Moreover, the strategic mobilization of local resources (see socio-territorial capital), including human, financial, and natural assets, coupled with the ethos of collaboration that underpins these initiatives, amplifies their capacity to effect change. Collaborative relationships with public authorities, local businesses, and other community groups extend the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives, enabling them to leverage additional resources and expertise in pursuit of their goals. This synergy between strategic resource mobilization and collaborative partnerships underscores the initiatives' ability to navigate and mitigate local socio-economic and ecological challenges effectively.

However, the replication and adaptation of such community-driven models to other contexts necessitate a careful consideration of various factors. As seen in the earlier chapters and understood in the results sections, France as a country has a strong history of associations and even a law on social and solidarity economy which seems to facilitate the mobilization of political support for the initiatives– strengthening their legitimacy. This implies that the success of community initiatives is intrinsically linked to their ability to resonate with and adapt to the unique characteristics of their operational areas. As such, efforts to replicate these models must be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the target context's socio-economic, ecological, and cultural dynamics. This contextual sensitivity is paramount in ensuring that the adapted initiatives are relevant and effective to the region where they are implemented.

Then, challenges related to scalability and modifiability also emerge as critical considerations. The question of how these participatory and locally focused initiatives can maintain their essence while expanding to broader or more populous regions is complex. Creating a local currency only makes sense if it's delimited to a territory. The same applies to the short food supply chain system deployed by Le Biau Jardin. This implies that beyond a certain scale, the initiatives lose their essence and impact (see the notion of proximity in chapter 5.3)[113].

Furthermore, as seen earlier, the socio-political environment plays a crucial role in either facilitating or hindering the success of community initiatives. Replication efforts must, therefore, navigate existing legal frameworks, power dynamics, and potential resistance from entrenched interests to foster conditions conducive to community-led transformations. The Clermont-Ferrand metropolis' approach to adopt social and solidarity economy values (exemplified through the charter designed in 2016) shows the willingness of the political stakeholders to support the initiatives of the territory in their endeavors. One can only wonder what would be the fate of these initiatives if the political atmosphere was different.

[113] During one of my interviews with Le Biau Jardin, I asked the board members if they would be interested in scaling up if they had the chance. They told me this would be counterproductive to their ambitions as they want to reterritorialize the food system and cater to specific local needs. They affirmed to be happy to disseminate their approaches and values to other communities and regions but not expand beyond certain territorial limits or create franchises as this will be akin to traditional capital approaches which are more profit oriented.

Even with a seemingly conducive political environment in Clermont-Ferrand, the results chapters showcase a constant strive by the initiatives to involve different socio-economic and political actors of the territory in order to secure a supportive environment for the growth and sustainability of their initiatives.

Lastly, the replication of community initiatives is contingent upon the presence of strong social and cultural capital within the target community. Building trust, cooperation, and shared values among community members is foundational to the successful collective action. This investment in cultivating social and cultural capital lays the groundwork for community initiatives to thrive, embodying the collective ethos and democratic principles that drive their transformative potential. If Le Biau Jardin and La Doume rely heavily on their local networks to ensure the smooth run of their operations, these very networks seem to be also enriched and strengthened as the various stakeholders and territorial actors seem to find a place of essence and purpose within the initiatives. This in turn leads to the creation of new ways of doing, transforming the socio-economic and political fabric.

10.3. Contributioms to degrowth

In this section, following an investigation of the practices and values of the case studies selected for this dissertation, I ambition to explore how these community initiatives show elements of degrowth in their modus operandi and how the perpetuation of their actions can be pathways to degrowth as part of their socio-territorial transformation process agenda.

To do this, I use the four schools of through of degrowth presented in Chapter 6 as an inspiration to categorize their practices and analyze how these initiatives embody some of the values predicated by the degrowth movement.

Decolonization of Imaginaries and Human-Centric Values

Le Biau Jardin's commitment to the "preeminence of the human person, democracy, and solidarity" resonates deeply with the first school of thought on degrowth, which emphasizes the decolonization of imaginaries. By prioritizing human values over profit-driven motives, Le Biau Jardin exemplifies the shift from financial abundance to a more

holistic understanding of growth and prosperity. Their focus on individual empowerment for communal advancement challenges the mainstream economic paradigm, aligning with the critiques of consumerism and productivism (Latouche, 2004; Kallis et al., 2015).

In addition to these aspects, Le Biau Jardin and La Doume's approach can be further understood through the lens of "autonomy" as conceptualized by Illich (1973). This concept emphasizes the importance of community-led initiatives and self-sufficiency, challenging the conventional economic systems that often undermine local autonomy. By fostering a sense of independence and self-reliance within the community, Le Biau Jardin not only adheres to the principles of degrowth but also actively participates in the reshaping of local economic narratives. This process of redefining growth and success in economic terms aligns closely with the degrowth agenda of moving away from a one-dimensional focus on GDP and material wealth towards a more diversified and inclusive understanding of prosperity.

This approach of autonomy is also reflected in the practices of La Doume who uses the local currency to solidify their community of ethical and ecosocially responsible producers and consumers who utilise money not only as a transaction tool but an interaction tool to amplify their values and their ambitions to prioritise the welfare of people in the communities by using their monies as tokens of support for ethical businesses while investing in different programmes such as *Soli'Doume*, *Bonus Social*, to support vulnerable people in the community. In a capitalocentric dispensation, these occurrences would have seemed far-fetched but in this context, the communities involved seem conscious and full engaged in the transformation process of the economy towards one that is reflective of degrowth values,

Furthermore, the practices of Le Biau Jardin and La Doume in community engagement and decision-making reflect a significant shift from hierarchical economic models to more democratic and inclusive structures. This shift is crucial in the context of degrowth, as it embodies the transition towards economies that are more participatory and responsive to local needs and aspirations. The role of both initiatives in promoting democratic participation and inclusive governance echoes the broader degrowth discourse on the importance of decentralization and empowerment at the local level.

Critique of the Technician Society and Emphasis on Local Development

Both Le Biau Jardin and La Doume challenge the technician society's obsession with efficiency and growth. Le Biau Jardin's commitment to local development and environmental protection, especially in preserving the green belt of the Clermont-Ferrand metropolis, is a direct response to the challenges posed by unchecked urbanization and global warming. Similarly, La Doume's emphasis on local short circuits and the relocation of production and services offers a practical alternative to the dominant monetary exchange system, echoing the sentiments of Escobar (2015) and North (2010).

Incorporating the concept of *'appropriate technology'* as advocated by Schumacher (1973), both initiatives demonstrate a responsible use of technology that prioritizes inclusion and participation over mere performance. This approach is a stark contrast to the growth-oriented model where technology is often used to maximize efficiency and profit. In the case of Le Biau Jardin, technology is employed to enhance sustainable agricultural practices and community engagement, rather than to intensify production at the expense of environmental and social values. By using simple machinery that facilitate water distribution, recollection from rain or diffusion to the farm and the greenhouses, the farm helps reduce water waste and improve on their production in a responsible approach that is not wasteful but rather reasonable and ethical. Similarly, La Doume, through their *e-doume* platform where people can convert and exchange money directly from their bank accounts to e-doumes, they facilitate the exchange of currency and transaction between producers and consumers. Whereas they'd have had to do this physically all the time and move from one place to the other to engage in physical transactions, consumers can do this anytime, anywhere and also pay producers without the burden of finding an exchange counter of La Doume before adhering and using the currency. This consequently helps increase the adoption of the currency by different demographics and strengthen community bonds, showcasing how technology can be harnessed to support local economies and foster social cohesion.

Furthermore, through the use of technology in an ethical way, the socio-economic impacts of these initiatives on their communities offer a compelling narrative against the

technician society. Drawing on concepts from Gibson-Graham's (2008) work on diverse economies, Le Biau Jardin and La Doume contribute to local economic resilience by diversifying economic practices and emphasizing local needs and resources. This approach not only challenges the conventional economic model but also demonstrates the viability of alternative economic structures that are more equitable, sustainable, and community-oriented since they are territorialized and not aiming to overscale through the use of technology that is not regulated or ethical from a socio-economic and ecological perspective. By re-using existing technological resources (like installing apps on mobile phones that users of La Doume already have, or converting old machinery into water diffusers or receptacles as per the case of Le Biau Jardin), one can notice the innovation approach that emphasizes on adapting technology for local use in the framework of social innovation for socio-territorial development instead of chasing new groundbreaking technology that do not necessarily provide solutions to existing needs but rather superficially created needs.

Ecological Responsibility and Respect for Bio-Physical Limits

The third school of degrowth thought, focusing on environmental issues, finds resonance in both case studies. Le Biau Jardin's dedication to sustainable agricultural practices and water conservation is a testament to their commitment to ecological sustainability. La Doume, with its roots in a collective movement addressing climate change and social justice, underscores the urgency of ecological responsibility. Their initiatives not only challenge the dominant economic model but also offer practical solutions to the pressing environmental challenges of our times. This approach is in line with the concept of 'sustainable degrowth,' as articulated by Schneider, Kallis, and Martinez-Alier (2010), which advocates for a reduction in consumption and production that aligns with ecological limits.

Building upon Daly's (1996) concept of ecological economics, Le Biau Jardin and La Doume's practices can be examined through the principles of scale, distribution, and efficient allocation. These principles advocate for maintaining economic activities within ecological limits, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and optimizing resource use for the greater good. Le Biau Jardin's sustainable agricultural methods align with the principle of scale, as they operate within the carrying capacity of the local ecosystem, avoiding over-exploitation

of natural resources. Similarly, La Doume's focus on local short circuits and community-based economic systems reflects the principle of distribution, ensuring that resources and benefits are equitably shared within the community.

Furthermore, the efficient allocation of resources is evident in both initiatives. Le Biau Jardin's water conservation efforts and La Doume's promotion of local production and consumption cycles demonstrate an efficient and responsible use of resources, minimizing waste and environmental impact. This approach is in stark contrast to the traditional economic model that often prioritizes short-term gains over long-term ecological sustainability.

Additionally, integrating insights from Martinez-Alier (2002) on environmental justice, both initiatives can be seen as embodying a commitment to addressing ecological concerns in a socially equitable manner. Le Biau Jardin's and La Doume's practices not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also ensure that the benefits of these practices are accessible to all members of the community, particularly those who are often marginalized in traditional economic systems. This aspect of their work highlights the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice, a key tenet of ecological economics and the degrowth movement.

Search for Meaning, Happiness, and Relational Goods:

The fourth school of degrowth, centered on the search for meaning and happiness, is embodied in the ethos of both community initiatives. La Doume's vision of currency as a “citizen's tool at the service of the common good, social justice, and respect for living beings" aligns with the principles of "happy sobriety" and "voluntary simplicity" as advocated by Rabhi (2011). Their focus on fostering community ties and promoting local economic resilience is a testament to the value they place on relational goods over material abundance.

Drawing on Kasser's (2009) work on the high price of materialism, the initiatives of La Doume and Le Biau Jardin can be seen as counteracting the psychological and social impacts of a materialistically driven society. By prioritizing relational goods and community well-being over material wealth, these initiatives contribute to the psychological well-being

of their members. This shift from materialism to a focus on relational values and community ties is crucial in fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and happiness among individuals, which is central to the degrowth narrative.

Furthermore, the concept of "conviviality" as articulated by Illich (1973) is highly relevant in understanding how these initiatives foster a culture of cooperation and mutual aid. Conviviality, in this context, refers to the creation of societal conditions where individuals can interact harmoniously and engage in meaningful activities together. Both La Doume and Le Biau Jardin exemplify this through their emphasis on community engagement, participatory decision-making, and collective action. For instance, Le Biau Jardin, through their solidary Friday lunches or their workshop sessions for the people in socio-professional reinsertion showcases how they put an emphasis on human relations, happiness among community members no matter the size of everyone's contributions and/or ambitions. La Doume through its *Soli'Doume* project, pools funds from various members of the community and redistributes it equally to everyone in order to help those in vulnerability situation. These practices not only enhance social cohesion but also contribute to the creation of a supportive and nurturing community environment, which is essential for the pursuit of happiness and well-being in a degrowth society.

General Conclusion

This dissertation has embarked on an exploratory journey to understand the complex dynamics of socio-territorial transformation, with Clermont-Ferrand serving as a critical case study. The research has been guided by two fundamental hypotheses: first, the transformation of a territory hinges on the community's ability to harness socio-territorial capital, and second, community initiatives employ social innovation as a tool to reshape territorial realities, thus contributing to the emergence of new socio-economic paradigms like degrowth.

The findings from Clermont-Ferrand illustrate a vibrant tapestry of community-driven efforts, demonstrating an innovative blend of socio-economic and ecological values praticalized through innovative projects such as Le Biau Jardin and la Doume, among many others. Evolving from the analysis of the practices of these initiatives, one can notice the positive impact yielded by the initiatives as part of their ambitions to redefine local socio-economic realities. This impact, majorly assigned to the capacity of the initiatives to mobilize their socio-territorial capital, confirms the initial hypothesis of this study and promotes the concept of social innovation as a viable pathway to socio-territorial transformation.

Through this investigation, this dissertation contributes significantly to the redefinition of so-called rural areas, particularly in France's "diagonale du vide," challenging the notion that these areas are devoid of opportunities and lacking in socio-economic vitality. Instead, it posits these regions as fertile grounds for innovation and the deployment of new approaches to territorial development and potential transformation. The small scale of these areas offers a unique advantage, allowing for quicker corrections and tests due to the proximity of actors and a more uniform set of territorial imaginaries, despite the heterogeneity of the actors involved. France presents a special case where policy enables these initiatives, providing not only legal and financial support but also opportunities for mobilizing various types of resources to complement local ones.

Furthermore, this research underscores the understanding that transformation can often take small-scale approaches that leverage socio-territorial capitals, which are sometimes independent or largely complementary to financial capital. This challenges the

capitalist fixation on monetary value and financial transactions as fallacious and perhaps overly simplistic, as other forms of capital are crucial in the development and long-term transformation of territories.

Moreover, the concept of degrowth, despite its abstract nature from a theoretical perspective, is shown to be operationalizable through community practices. These practices focus on the primary needs of communities, translating into initiatives centered on the urgent and primary needs of these communities. This operationalization of degrowth through social innovation and community initiatives underscores the potential for socio-economic paradigms to evolve in ways that prioritize sustainability, equity, and well-being over traditional economic growth metrics.

In sum, through the cases of Le Biau Jardin and La Doume (enriched by their satellite case studies and projects), this dissertation proposes the argument that community-led initiatives can contribute to the reformation of socio-economic practices at local levels and with the participation of all territorial stakeholders, transform these realities over time. This transformation, through values of social justice, equity, economic and environmental sustainability can contribute to the attainment of postcapitalist imaginaries like as degrowth.

Contributions

This research, employing an ethnographic approach within the framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR), makes significant conceptual and empirical contributions to the understanding of community initiatives in socio-territorial transformation processes. Focusing on Clermont-Ferrand, located in France's "empty diagonal," this study challenges the conventional perception of isolated regions as devoid of development or innovation. Instead, it posits these areas as fertile grounds for innovative socio-economic practices. By adopting an economic geography lens, this research aligns with scholars like Barca et al. (Barca et al., 2012), advocating for place-based strategies that capitalize on local assets and capabilities to foster regional development. The initiatives in the Puy de Dôme area exemplify how community-driven projects can rejuvenate local economies and redefine territorial identity, resonating with transformative place-making processes (Andersson, 2010; Ellery et al., 2021; Strydom, 2014).

The second major contribution is the understanding that the selected case studies provide in line with the operationalization of degrowth ideas. Degrowth, often critiqued for its utopian ideals and perceived impracticality (Kallis, 2011; Latouche, 2009), faces challenges in its application within entrenched capitalist systems (Alexander, 2012; Trainer, 2010). However, this research proposes that community initiatives can serve as a pragmatic medium for actualizing degrowth principles. Through localized, grassroots actions, these initiatives demonstrate how alternative economic practices and social innovation can contribute to the operationalization of degrowth. They exemplify a paradigm shift from traditional capitalist market models, resonating with degrowth principles of ecological sustainability and social equity. This aligns with the sentiments of degrowth's proponents (Demaria & Latouche, 2019; Latouche, 2022; Parrique, 2022) on the potential of grassroots innovations in contributing to macro-level change, offering a tangible pathway to navigate the utopian critique of degrowth.

Finally, this dissertation seeks to enrich the practice of community initiatives through an iterative action research approach. It aims to facilitate a knowledge exchange between researchers and practitioners, integrating field expertise into the scientific discourse on community economies. This non-extractive research approach strives to bridge the gap between academia and industry, resonating with the collaborative methodologies advocated by Reason and Bradbury (Bradbury, 2015; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In doing so, it contributes to a more engaged and reciprocal form of scholarship that not only studies but also actively supports the advancement of community economies.

Limitations

In undertaking this research project, which delves into the transformative potential of community initiatives, it is crucial to recognize that the theories and explanations derived from this specific study are inherently context specific. To address this limitation, future research could benefit from a comparative approach, examining similar community initiatives across diverse socio-economic and legislative landscapes. Such an approach would enrich our understanding of these initiatives' variability and adaptability in different regions (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The primary empirical focus of this study is the Puy de Dôme area,

particularly Clermont-Ferrand, within France's 'empty diagonal'. While this geographic specificity facilitates a detailed ethnographic exploration, it also anchors the findings within the unique socio-economic and legislative context of France. Consequently, the applicability of these findings to other geographical settings should be approached with caution, considering the contextual differences (Brenner, 2004; D. Massey, 2013; Phillips, 2010).

Furthermore, the research was conducted over a specific period, marked by unique socio-economic and ecological conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This temporal framing limits the study's ability to account for the long-term sustainability and evolution of the community initiatives examined. Therefore, while the Clermont-Ferrand case studies provide valuable insights, they cannot fully capture the temporal complexity inherent in socio-territorial transformation processes (Pierson, 2004; Streeck, 2020).

Additionally, this study focuses on a selection of community initiatives, which, while illustrative, do not represent the entire spectrum of alternative economic practices. The transformative potential and challenges of other initiatives may vary significantly, suggesting that the conclusions drawn here may not be universally applicable to all forms of community initiatives, even within the realm of diverse economic practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy, 2020).

Methodologically, this research employs an ethnographic approach, which, while providing rich, detailed insights, is inherently qualitative and interpretive. The findings are thus influenced by the researcher's perspective, interactions, and the subjective experiences of participants. This approach could introduce biases in data analysis and the interpretation of the implications of the studied practices (Emerson et al., 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Lastly, while the findings and contributions of this study aim to enrich the understanding and practice of community initiatives within economic geography, their application to policy-making and broader socio-economic reforms remains aspirational. This study does not offer a direct roadmap for such applications, and its insights should be viewed as contributions to ongoing discussions rather than definitive solutions. Future research should seek to address these limitations by exploring a wider range of geographical contexts,

employing mixed-methods approaches, and longitudinally tracking the impact of community initiatives on socio-territorial transformation and degrowth (Schandl et al., 2020; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Wang et al., 2020; Yin, 2009).

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