

**GOOD JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

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CITATION

« Intermediaries are more necessary than ever and will continue to play the role of 'gardener' of social innovations »

TOWARDS LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY: HOW INTERMEDIATION FOSTERS SOCIAL INNOVATION**Context****The Role of Intermediaries in Scaling Territorial Social Innovation.**

In recent years, social innovation has gained traction among policymakers, researchers, and local actors for its potential to address complex societal and environmental challenges. While many initiatives have emerged globally, including France's "Start-Up de Territoire" (SUT), the mechanisms for scaling these innovations remain under-explored. Scholars and practitioners are increasingly aware that social innovation is deeply territorial and requires coordinated efforts. A key but under-theorized actor in this ecosystem is the social innovation intermediary, who bridges diverse stakeholders to foster sustainable, systemic change.

Objectives**Analyzing How Intermediation Supports the Scaling of Social Innovation.**

This article aims to understand how the function of intermediation is built over and how they contribute to scaling local initiatives. Using the 'Start Up de Territoire' (SUT) program as a case study, we identify the underlying processes in this dynamic. We combine two theoretical frameworks—Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Creative Ecology Theory—to provide a coherent analytical framework for examining the dissemination of SI through intermediation.

Méthodology**A Longitudinal Single Case Study.**

The research is based on a single, longitudinal case study of the SUT initiative, launched in 2016 by the Archer Group in Romans-sur-Isère, which is the culmination of the group's long-term social innovation initiative.

It draws on over 50 hours of interviews with various stakeholders (elected officials, project leaders, Archer members, citizens), participatory and non-participatory observations, and a life history of its CEO Christophe Chevalier. Data were coded and analyzed using qualitative tools (Atlas.ti) in an abductive approach, iterating between theory and fieldwork.

Résultats**The Gradual Construction of the Intermediation Function**

The study highlights the gradual development of IS's intermediation function, which has evolved over time. Three main phases are identified: the creation of the Archer group in 1987 as a player in the social and solidarity economy, its structuring as a PTCE (territorial economic cooperation partnership) from 2007 onwards, and its transition to a regional coordinator role with SUT from 2016 onwards.

The study then identifies three key intermediation processes that enable the scaling of social innovation.

Chaire ETI Entrepreneuriat Territoire Innovation

The ETI Chair seeks to understand the levers for creating economic, social, and environmental value in regions.

To do this, it analyzes the impact of technological, ecological, and societal changes on regions: how can we understand urban change? How can we create entrepreneurship and innovation in different types of regions (metropolises, peripheral areas, medium-sized cities, declining regions)? Finally, what are the new regions, players, and practices in entrepreneurship and innovation?

(1) Building a shared territorial vision: The Archer Group, through figures like Christophe Chevalier, gradually constructed a unifying narrative to mobilize diverse stakeholders around a shared ambition for local transformation. This process evolved from emergency employment responses to systemic ecological and social development goals. Places like the “Cité de la Chaussure” and “104” in Valence served as symbolic and practical hubs.

(2) Expanding the network across the territory: The network grew from social economy actors and public services to include private SMEs and local governments. Strategic alliances, especially with Agglo Valence-Romans, were key. These collaborations led to the recognition of SUT under the national TIGA program, securing €23 million in public funding.

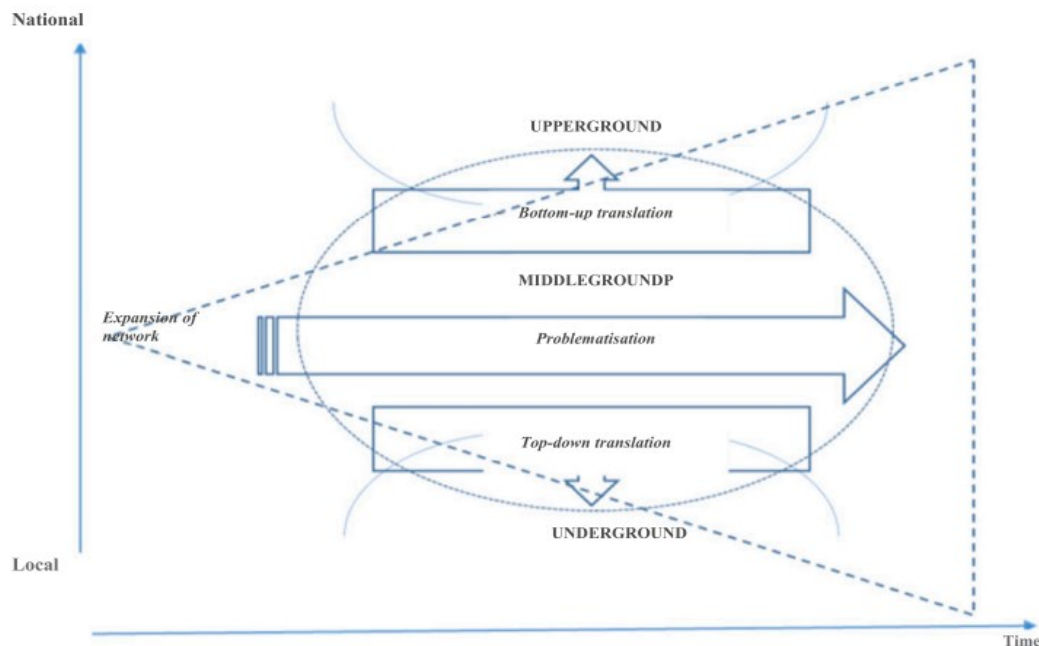
(3) Connecting the upperground, middleground, and underground levels (translation): Intermediation involved dual translation efforts: top-down between middleground and local entrepreneurs (making tools and narratives accessible to them) and bottom-up (elevating local voices to regional and national agendas). The creation of support tools (e.g., “La Boussole”) and initiatives like the Territorial Entrepreneurship School were instrumental in bridging these levels.

These intermediation processes not only enabled local initiatives to scale but also helped reconfigure the local innovation ecosystem. The SUT model is now replicated in 16 French territories and has influenced policy discussions on social innovation at the European level.

Finally, these interdependent processes exemplify how the intermediary acts as both a coordinator and catalyst, enabling social innovation to grow, adapt, and

Synthesis

The Social Innovation Intermediation Processes



Références citées :

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- Sarazin, B., Cohendet, P., Simon, L. (2017). *Les communautés d'innovation : De la liberté créatrice à l'innovation organisée*. Editions EMS, Caen