The Institutionalisation of Multi-level Changes: Sustainable Development, Values and Territory

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1. Introduction

There is a semantic ambiguity concerning 'local communities', which are both administrative organisations, such as firms, and territorial designations in its entire dimension – political, geographical, socio-demographical and economical. They do no rely on the same institutions and it remains fundamental to separate these two aspects of local communities. More annoying, the fuzziness of the term hides a reality. This reality impedes the way in which local communities are addressed here, as a multi-level governance issues in themselves: at the administrative organisation level, we would refer to them as local governments; and at the territorial level, we would pursue with the term 'local communities'.

The question raised in this paper deals with the institutional innovations with respect to local communities and local governments design when programmes of sustainable development are implemented, as well as the reasons that may explain the limitations of these innovations. Indeed, in this paper, we argue that the implementation of sustainable development requires organisational and institutional changes (Steele, 2011) that are eased, or made possible, by the adoption of new values (Argyris, 1993; Amis *et al.*, 2002).

Section 2 of this paper will provide context from the literature and the regulations to present the complexity of the institutional situation, and characterise the analytical problem that we face. By addressing this complexity and assuming that the changes, or the limitations of their effects, are questions of values, it is implied that the answers need to be found outside of standard economics (Vatn, 2005a). Therefore, we have used a value-institution-organisation theoretical framework, granting prominent care to situated institutions. Our question will be addressed in the case of the Nord-Pas de Calais region (Northern France), employing interviews conducted in almost 30 local communities that have been processed using the Alceste textual analysis method. In Section 3, Materials and Methods will be presented. Interpretations derived from the Alceste results suggest that there are no organisational changes *per se*. The main reason for this observation is that, facing institutional changes challenging the values underlying the production of the public service, actors within local communities and governments are demotivated; however, institutional innovations are established at the territorial level (Section 4). Lastly, conclusions are presented in Section 5.

2. The multi-level problem, complexity and institutions

The central aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the institutional issues that arise at the territorial level when local policymakers commit themselves to sustainability. The primary focus of the paper is on the difficulties that surface during the process of change; the problems arise in part because the policies that local communities implement have repercussions on the territory that they share (Burch *et al.*, 2005). From this point of view, they can be treated as individuals that adopt sustainable strategies. Furthermore, it is clear that local communities are also collective actors, and they will therefore be considered as collective units as well (Putnam, 1988). Thus, the local communities face multi-level organisational issues at the territorial level between local governments and at the administrative level by the way in which they are organised.

2.1. Multi-level governments and the sustainable governance of territories

Multi-level governance has become an increasingly important field of analysis since the notion was first advanced by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks in the early 1990s (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Although the main focus was initially the supranational level, in particular, within the institutional context of the European Union (Marks, 1993; Hogl, 2002; Burch *et al.*, 2005), studies on multi-level local governance have also been conducted (Gambert, 2010; Parra, 2010; Sellers and Kwak, 2011). These works often emphasise decisional processes and grant civil society, and participatory approaches in particular, important roles (Bache and Chapman, 2008; Biermann and Gupta, 2011). In these approaches, institutional issues are put to the fore in designing the most suitable and legitimate rules that would guarantee the participation of the civil society. However, works on governance typology have also stressed the importance of government institutions (Sellers and Kwak, 2011). Most of them place their analyses in a federal context (Possen and Slutski, 1991) or have a hierarchical understanding of the interactions between local governments operating at various levels (Nijkamp and Rietveld, 1981; Mazza and van Winden, 2008).

Focusing on the territorial and administrative institutional dimensions of multi-level organisations, in this paper, local government, irrespective of its territorial level, will be considered as a governance issue in itself. This means that the relationships between local governments will be assumed to be non-hierarchical – however, the relationships within local governments are mostly hierarchical. Given the literature, this assumption is rather daring because the non-hierarchical character of a multi-level organisation is almost always provided by the involvement of the civil society (Hogl, 2002). Instead, this paper assumes that a focus on territorial concerns is what defines the non-hierarchical dimension of the various local governments. As far as this paper is concerned, the multi-level governance perspective 'does not portray the levels of governments in a hierarchical order'. Policies tend to develop in a joint system of actors from different territorial levels, involving an interplay between these levels (Hogl, 2002, p.302). Moreover, as the notion of governance refers to non-hierarchical

interactions (Theys, 2003) from a territorial perspective, the interactions of local governments can be considered as a particular type of territorial governance. In this non-hierarchical sense, multi-level governance of territories can be related to works carried out on the multi-level governance of the environment (Monni and Raes, 2008; Blomquist, 2009). In this case, as non-market environmental goods are involved, the institutional dimension of multilevel issues appears as fundamental, in contrast to the 'natural' appearance of the usual markets (Searle, 2005).

In addition, we also consider the organisational challenges arising both at the territorial and administrative levels. In this domain, very little work has been carried out that conceives local communities as both individual actors and constituted collectives. Furthermore, the implementation of sustainable policies may challenge the way in which local governments are organised in a given administrative territory. Putnam, for instance, stressed that agreements between local governments follow a two-step procedure: heads of local governments bargain about an agreement, followed by bargaining within the administrations regarding whether to ratify the agreement (Putnam, 1988). Following this line of thinking, given the growing political interest in sustainability, it may be useful to focus on this question and the subsequent changes within territorial institutions. This focus seems all the more urgent because sustainability issues *per se* have never been studied from the multi-level local perspective.

2.2. How institutions frame complexity

As stressed earlier, institutions seem to be the cornerstone of multi-level governance. Conversely, institutions operate both at the collective – collective organisations may be seen as institutions – and individual level – in the sense that institutions may influence individuals in a non-coercive way. As a result, it seems essential, given the links existing between multilevel issues and the institutions framing the interactions between the various levels at stake, to specify our understanding of what an institution is, and consider the concept with regard to the multi-level issue addressed here – *i.e.* the organisational changes occurring between collective actors and within the collective itself.

Institutions are commonly understood either in terms of organisation or rules (North, 1994; North, 2005)[1]. However, as this paper has adopted a multi-level perspective, it requires going past this distinction. Our main claim is that organised actors are constituted by individuals who have to agree on various types of rules (*i.e.* institutions) for the collective to function: constitutive and regulative rules (Cherry, 1973) specifying the fundamental purpose of the organisation and the way in which the organisation works, respectively; implicit rules of equity (if individuals are not fairly treated by the collective, defection may occur); and rules of enforcement (someone has to be in charge of the enforcement of the rules). However, the last point is not necessarily required (*e.g.* see Aoki, 2001). In this respect, organisations are a set-up of institutional rules. As a result, the distinction is now grounded on a typology of rules,

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[1] On this distinction, see Vatn (2005b).

because most individuals follow rules in non-collective contexts, but organised collective are made up of several types of rules.

This adds to the complexity of our problematic issue: complex framework where institutions are actors as well as frame interactions; complex system of interactions between every territorial level and within the constituted collectives; complex interdependencies of organisational effects occurring both at the territorial, political and administrative levels; and complex paradigm of action, because bringing sustainability into play implies referring to socioenvironmental uncertainties as a constitutive element of decision-making.

While institutional economics has many ways of regarding uncertainties (see Dequech, 2006, concerning the New Institutional Economics), *i.e.* there are many ways for institutions to frame the complexities of a given situation, it can be stressed that institutions are broadly meant to reduce uncertainties by providing stability in the process of decision-making. A key question for institutions in producing stability relies on the capacity of institutions to appear as trustworthy and legitimate (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). As a result, institutions do not provide stability *de facto*, which emphasises the importance of individuals – or collectives, assessments and beliefs over the trustworthiness of institutions, which has to occur at every level (Wang and Gordon, 2011).

Moreover, actors have power over the collective beliefs in the trustworthiness of institutions (Boulding, 1956). Indeed, stability does not occur automatically and there are many reasons why the legitimacy of institutions may be challenged: by the rise of controversial knowledge; because ideologically supported values are criticised, which is the case presented here based on the adoption of sustainable development programmes (Söderbaum, 1999); because of organisational malfunctioning (*e.g.* lack of efficiency or equity); or, more rarely, because a systemic crisis brings them down. The possibility and variety of these patterns re-create complexity.

Facing this institutional complexity, individuals, or collectives, tend to resort to less tangible forms of institutions (Aoki, 2001): habits, by definition, recreates stability between actors and within their organisation (Vromen, 2010); actions granted on moral or ethical values eliminate equivocation; and as stressed by Keynes, stability can also result from imitation processes (Keynes, 1936). Finally, decision-making faces uncertainties with regard to accounting for the knowledge or assessment that individuals, or collectives, have with respect to the ins and outs of the situation, including the assessments or beliefs regarding others on the trustworthiness of institutions.

2.3. Territory, environment and rationality

As stressed by Steele (2011), when confronted with an analysis of the complexities that sustainability presents, the institutional researcher is more of a 'reflexive bricoleur' than a cold analyst. We would have to agree with this position, in particular, because we consider the problem as constructed by the actors themselves. This explains why we do not attempt to define what sustainable development is (or should be): It is elaborated by actors within the

course of their decisions and actions (Bromley, 2008). This leads us to resort to the institutional understanding described earlier to address the problem.

In brief, the problem is twofold. The issue of decision interdependency, which is not only a matter of local/global consistency (Plumecocq, 2010), but micro/macro articulation (Wang and Gordon, 2011), is increased by the relationships between collective choice (within local governments) and commitment of the various local authorities to reach the selected goals (Putnam, 1988), *i.e.* to move towards sustainability. Standard economics have failed to provide a proper understanding of these issues, particularly when the environment is brought into play. Its functional complexity leads to a radical uncertainty regarding action capabilities. Moreover, as sustainability concerns natural resources, which are public goods, it leads to challenging Bayesian rationality and considering its collective, and moreover institutional, dimension (Sen, 1995; North, 2005; Vatn, 2005b; Vatn, 2009).

These two aspects of environmental issues (complexity and public goods) fit within the notion of 'territory'. This neither means that territory exhausts the notion of environment, nor is the reverse true, but implies that they both share these characteristics. On the one hand, we have to assume that in this context, decision-making entities account for the spatial/institutional complexity and public goods aspects of territories when making their choices. This requires adopting a situated conception of rationality (Lawson, 1997; Steele, 2011). On the other hand, the beliefs or expectations that actors (individual or collective) have about the situation in which they are a part of are crucial, particularly in situations driven by complexities and uncertainties (Keynes, 1936). A situation can be defined as a configuration of objects and persons, wherein the way in which they are disposed and placed relative to one another can be meaningful. Moreover, these configurations of persons and objects may be connected to supporting institutions: modes of organisation, rules, norms, habits, convention, etc. The practical knowledge (once again individual or collective) that actors have and/or share is a key variable for an understanding of the way in which they build their beliefs and expectations on their possibility to commit to collective actions (Dupuy, 1989). This knowledge is at the foundation of the representations (Boulding, 1956 termed it as an 'image') that actors form on the institutional functioning of the multi-level situation. Images obviously include their values, forming reasonable sensible system of beliefs across situations. These values and beliefs that define different types of organisations (Jorna, 2006), make institutional innovation processes easier.

Bringing images into play require using an *ad hoc* scientific methodology and adjusting our conception of rationality. As what matters is not only the truth of knowledge, but the trustworthiness and legitimacy of institutions, we can add a discursive dimension of rationality to the situated one: someone is rational as long as he/she provides acceptable justifications of his/her choices (Habermas, 1981). Moreover, it is widely admitted that collective discussion makes it possible to address complexity and uncertainty (Vatn, 2009). It also constitutes a means of expressing and confronting beliefs and expectations, both about the way in which situations and institutions are perceived by the actors and about individual values. Within the

processes of justification arising from discussion or conflicts, images are then confronted or hybridised giving rise to more and more general level of trust, or mistrust, in institutions.

3. Materials and Methods

One of the main contributions of this paper is to develop a methodology capable of revealing the images that actors form on the institutional functioning of the multi-level territorial governance, to highlight the institutional changes occurring or the source of their limits. Focusing on experiences gained in communities of the Nord-Pas de Calais region (in Northern France), we will start by picturing the institutional devices framing the territorial interactions. Subsequently, sample of interview will be presented, along with the method of textual analysis (Alceste). Finally, preliminary results will be provided.

3.1. The institutional context of multi-level complex interdependencies

A focus on sub-regional levels demands an understanding of the rules framing the organisation of local governments. This is all the more complex, given the overlapping structure of the French administrative zoning, which emphasises the need to clearly expose the actors' images (Boulding, 1956). Three characteristics can be combined to explain the complexity of this decisional context (Plumecocq, 2010)[2]:

- First, France is one of the few European countries to have a four-level territorial structure (including the state level); the others being Spain, Italy, Ireland and Germany (at least for some *Länder*).
- Second, at the lower end of the territorial scale, the municipal level, the administrative fragmentation in many areas of France is frequently highlighted by actors. France contains more than 36,500 'communes' (compared with 8000 each for Spain and Italy).
- Third, the procedures by which cities are grouped together differ from those of the rest of Europe, and in particular, those of the United Kingdom and some German *Länder* (*Samtgemeinden*). The main difference is that when a city joins a grouping, it continues to exist, and a new territorial level appears. Moreover, French law confers 'local community' status on municipal groupings.

All of these elements contribute to the complexity of this decisional situation, which makes the institutionalisation of organisational issues more intricate, particularly from an evolutionary perspective. Moreover, the situation becomes more complex when addressing sustainability issues. These features fit into the legal institutional framework that organises the relationships between the various local communities. Under French law, three institutional principles can be drawn, which shape the relationships between them:

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[2] Figures used in this paragraph were provided by the 'Ministère de l'Intérieur' (http://www.dgcl.interieur.gouv.fr/).

6

- The division of jurisdiction legally defines areas of public policy that are devolved for the communities. Some of these jurisdictions correspond to historical transfers of power from the central government to local governments. They can be thematic (*e.g.* security to cities, waste collection to groups of municipalities, social policies to departments, training to regions) or shared jurisdictional groups (*e.g.* in education, high schools are devolved to regions, junior high-schools to departments and primary schools to communes).
- The 'freedom of administration' principle establishes the rights that every local community has over the administration of its own territory – of course, within the scope of the law and their jurisdiction. Reciprocally, it defines an obligation of non-intervention in the business of other communities.
- The subsidiarity principle states that the most decentralised, competent level of government (including the citizens) should handle a particular issue. Although this principle has constitutional value, it remains a weak principle of action at the national-regional levels, and is only used as a general justification for the division of some of the jurisdictional powers.

All of the above-mentioned rules have an equal status under French law, being inscribed in the Constitution of 1958. As a result, none of them should be favoured over the others. In most cases, these three principles are combined without creating conflicts. We claim that as far as territorial issues are concerned, which is the case when local communities adopt sustainable development programmes, or more generally, when local actors place themselves in the line with sustainability (Parra, 2010), these rules are inoperative. First, when it comes to environmental issues – and to their social consequences – the space of the problem is not necessarily encompassed within the space of regulation. Second, sustainability does not resort to a particular jurisdiction, but rather to a general principle of jurisdiction set forth in the jurisprudence, the 'clause of general jurisdiction' providing justification for the idea that a local authority is founded to protect the interests of its own territory. Third, as decisions made with regard to sustainability have territorial effects, including geographical, political (or administrative) and social effects (Torre and Zuindeau, 2009; Oakerson and Parks, 2011), and as local communities are embedded, unwanted institutional change may occur at other territorial scales. As a result, none of the most institutionalised rules in force at the local level are relevant in the case of sustainability. Moreover, the institutional adaptation sustainability required at the territorial level also has implications at the local governments' level.

3.2. Sample description

The aim of this paper is to assess the extent to which local communities develop institutional innovations to address the question of sustainability, and the difficulties that they face in designing new institutions. To this end, semi-directive interviews were carried out with individuals in charge of local communities' sustainability agendas. Owing to the analytical

tool being used, there was no precise interview structure[3]. Therefore, interviews consisted of open discussions regarding the local community's sustainability agenda, projects, achievements, failures, conceptions and relationships. Whenever possible, several interviews were conducted in the same community to obtain the points of view of both the elected representative in charge of sustainability policy and the civil servant responsible for implementing it.

Table 1. Sample Composition

		Local Communities		Actors within	
		Visited	Sample structure	Actors interviewed	Sample structure
Local communities	Region	1	4.8%	3	10.7%
	Department	2	9.5%	2	7.1%
	Municipal groups	4	19.0%	6	21.5%
	Municipalities	8	38.1%	11	39.3%
Others institutions	Decentralised agencies of the State	3	14.3%	3	10.7%
	Gathering of villages	2	9.5%	2	7.1%
	Public Interest Group	1	4.8%	1	3.6%
	Total	21	100%	28	100%

The term 'Municipalities' can be defined as follows: major cities were visited (38.1% of the institutions visited), within which 11 actors were interviewed (39.3% of the actors interviewed were municipal employees or elected representatives). This means that two or more actors in no more than three cities were interviewed.

The interview sample covered all of the French territorial levels (Region, Departments, Municipal groupings and Municipalities). Given their prominent role in promoting cooperation on sustainable behaviour, other institutions acting in the interests of sustainability were considered (Decentralised agencies of the State, which are mainly local intermediaries of the central State, Groupings of villages and a Public Interest Group). The interviews were fully transcribed so that they can be processed using the Alceste method. The main interests of this method are to give objective results from the interviews as well as to provide illustrations of the extent to which various types of actors share beliefs, expectations, representations or images. Both these interests make the interpretation of the interviews and reconstruction of their meaning easier. And more fundamentally, they ensure that the results are reproducible.

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[3] Alceste returns the structure of a textual corpus. Therefore, if interviews are too well-constructed, the classification of words will reflect the interview plan.

The methodology consisted of two steps: in the first, we provided a commentary on the semantic classification to describe the various aspects of the sustainable policies implemented in the communities of the sample; and the second step relied on a factor analysis obtained from coding the data according to the amount of time since the communities implemented their sustainability programmes.

3.3. The Alceste textual data treatment method

Alceste is a method that allows for systematised treatment of textual data. It leads to a classification of words into semantic groups. This method, originally developed by Reinert (2003), assumes that the meaning of a word is not given a priori, but considers it to rather come from its context. Therefore, the text is approached as a semantic unit. Alceste brings specific dimensions out of it. For that purpose, it uses a process of successive 'top-down hierarchical classifications' to divide the text. First, the analyst divides the text into 'initial contextual units' (ICU), assuming that this classification refers to a common unit of meaning. This allows the data to be encoded using variables according to the type of community or duration of its sustainability programme. Second, Alceste arbitrarily divides the data into smaller segments called 'elementary contextual units' (ECU). Their sizes (the number of words) are homogeneous, although Alceste also takes punctuation into consideration. Third, the software combines the ECU with one another, and identifies the words inside the ECU that are the most significantly associated with one another (the significance is assessed using a chi-squared test[4]). When Alceste has finished testing all of the possible ECU associations and groupings, it presents the most significant classification. Fourth, steps two and three are repeated with a different ECU size to eliminate arbitrary effects due to the arbitrary selection of the ECU size. Ultimately, the final classification only retains those elements that are common between these two 'simple' classifications.

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[4] The meaning of chi-squared is slightly different from the usual. It assesses the chance that a word is associated with a class accidentally. With a chi-squared value of 3.84, there is one chance in 1,000 that this association is random.

Figure 1. The four aspects of sustainable development community discourses

Class 1: Common Sense		Class 2: Political Orientations		Class 3: Regional Governance		Class 4: Administrative Organization	
Form	Chi 2	Form	Chi 2	Form	Chi 2	Form	Chi 2
thing	140,2	social	356,1	State	266,2	community	848,7
people	115,0	economy	340,7	Region	251,8	urban	340,3
do	113,9	sustainable	252,0	Put	111,4	town	294,7
come	82,3	energy	244,2	agenda_21	110,1	Vice-president	257,5
it	60,3	water	175,3	Regional	108,1	president	227,9
say	58,9	resource	126,1	National	99,9	planning	225,3
time	50,2	consummation	122,5	Contract	99,3	delegation	137,8
itself	49,9	environmental	119,9	CERDD	95,4	city	125,4
not	45,5	renew	90,9	Action	93,5	in charge	103,0
see	44,0	employment	86,4	Committee	91,6	director	98,0
succeed	42,7	eco	83,0	Strategy	85,1	mayor	77,1
have to	41,3	management	87,8	Country	74,3	responsible	75,8
go	39,1	bind	74,8	Project	73,8	Lille	68,7
world	39,0	development	73,3	Tool	63,6	territory	67,0
you	35,7	town-planning	73,0	Different	63,4	competent	61,6
take	33,9	question	68,6	Territorial	63,0	direction	59,5
that	33,2	transport	66,0	Direction	61,9	elected	58,7
moment	31,8	need	61,2	Operation	61,3	mission	46,2

The work of the analyst consists of interpreting the meaning of each of the semantic classes. In our case, the results provided by Alceste present a four-part classification[5]. Therefore, in the first part of the methodology, we identified these four aspects of the sustainability policies implemented by communities of the Nord-Pas de Calais. The first class is composed of common-sense vocabulary (*thing*, *people*, *it*)[6] used in discourse to convince people and other communities that sustainable development can be beneficial by providing information about it and showing what is actually done (verbs are significantly present in this class). The second class focuses on the needs of the populations, emphasising the various domains of public policy, in particular, the environmental and sustainability domains, as seen through the integration principle (*social*, *economy* and *environmental*). The other two classes directly concern organisational issues, although they present different perspectives. The third class refers to organisational issues between communities and the *tools* (*Agenda 21*, *contract*,

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[5] As the interviews were conducted in French, the results produced by Alceste were translated afterwards.
[6] For the remainder of the paper, words in italics will refer to the vocabulary highlighted by Alceste.

project) mediating these relationships. The fourth class relies on a lower territorial scale (*commune*, *city* and *town*), referring to organisational issues within communities.

3.4. Changes in organisational concerns

In the second step of the methodology, we attempted to analyse the discourses according to the duration of their sustainability programmes by means of a factor analysis. This allowed the unobserved variables determined by the chosen one (*i.e.* the long implementation of sustainability) to be revealed. The four dimensions identified in the previous methodological step helped to provide an interpretation of what these hidden variables are. These implicit variables are represented in a graph through the labelled axes (cf. Annex). As a result, we could make the most of both the types of variables to highlight the dynamics of sustainable local policies in the Nord-Pas de Calais region.

The postulate made here is that communities that developed sustainable approaches early have better practices and understandings of the risks of implementing sustainable programmes, due to learning effects (Lafferty, 2001; Steele, 2011). Therefore, we encoded the data according to the date when a community adopted a sustainable approach. This date may not be the official one, because some communities launched programmes long before adopting Local Agenda 21. Four groups were identified: no approach declared, a group of leaders having implemented sustainable approaches early (before 2000), a 'medium approach' group of followers (implementation between 2000 and 2005) and a followers of followers group that adopted sustainable approaches most recently (since 2005). Following the results of the factor analysis (presented in Annex), Table 2 represents the position of actors with the vocabulary most closely related to them. In this way, it is possible to understand and outline changes in organisational concerns according to how early communities began implementing sustainability policies.

Based on the interpretations derived from Figure 1, we suggest that

- the horizontal axis represents the technical-political dimension upon which local communities' organisations are grounded. If the political aspects are visible for Class No. 2, then they are less obvious for Class No. 1. They are nevertheless present in the rhetorical dimension of the interviews, which consists of showing exemplary sustainable policies, projects and achievements. On the other hand, both Classes No. 3 and 4 represent the technical dimension of the sustainability policies, which relies on specific technical tools to be implemented, which challenge the pre-existing ones.

- the vertical axis represents the micro-mesoeconomic dimension of sustainability policies, which suggests that local communities are concerned with both microeconomic concerns, in terms of political (Class No. 2) and technical (Class No. 4) internal administrative organisation, and mesoeconomic (territorial) issues. We had already emphasised the territorial dimension of Class No. 3. This dimension manifests itself in Class No. 1, as rhetoric is mainly directed outside of the local community that practises it. Even when this rhetorical aspect of

11

sustainability policies is mobilised to ease changes within the micro dimension, such as changing the ways in which administrative work is performed, it always relies on successful examples taken from outside of the local community in question. This micro-mesoeconomic dimension is fundamental to our purpose. It claims that the problem we address, *i.e.* the problem of institutional innovations implied by the adoption of sustainability, must be addressed under a multi-level perspective. This requires considering institutions operating both at the microeconomic level (within the local governments) and mesoeconomic level (territorial perspective).

Table 2. Typology of the changes in organisational concerns

	Technical Dimension (Doing)	Political Dimension (Designing)
Microeconomic Dimension (within communities)	FOLLOWERS OF FOLLOWERS *administrative, transversal, bureaucrat, coordination*	LEADERS *sustainable, equilibrium, true change, environmental*
Mesoeconomic Dimension (territorial dimension)	FOLLOWERS *to discuss, to share, to spread, to lead*	NO APPROACH *problem, example, to study, to learn*

Note: According to the factor analysis (see Annex), words in italics are significantly related to each type of actors.

Table 2 suggests that there is an evolution in the organisational concerns of local communities according to the durations of their sustainable approaches. Communities that recently launched sustainability programme – the followers of followers – are primarily concerned with administrative organisational adaptation (*bureaucrat, administrative*), and in particular, with the adoption of *transversal* ways of organising work. Those that adopted a sustainable approach between 2000 and 2005 – the followers – were primarily focused on issues of territorial cooperation. The table suggests that these communities had committed themselves to a wider process of exchange (*to discuss*, *to share, to spread, to lead*), overcoming the limits of their own internal organisations. Finally, the early approaches – leaders' approaches – refer to integrated policy (*social*, *economy* and *environment*) as a *true change*, *i.e.* a change within political practices, thinking in integrated terms from the conceptions of the political agendas. Approaching the situation in this way supposes that the situation described here is the result of a diffusion of knowledge, where the leader communities share experiences and information with the followers (Gibney, 2011).

4. Interpretations: A limited institutional process of organisational change

In the previous section, it was suggested that there is a process of change resulting from sustainability. In fact, it was established that the leading communities initiated their approaches immediately through a micro-political start (*i.e.* within the communities and politically driven), because their political heads had the authority and will to do so[7]. However, the followers (between 2000 and 2005) generally tackled sustainability with institutional concerns regarding their internal organisation, as the followers of followers (after 2005) do at present. As a result, the process of organisational change and innovations appears relatively limited.

4.1. How the public service is produced: Institutional rules of organisation and supported values

The results suggest that the main reason why sustainability creates very limited organisational and institutional changes lies on the beliefs that civil servants and elected representatives form the ways in which local governments and territorial administrations function. From the interviews, we can underline three types of institutions in the sense of regulation, organising the way in which local communities function in developing their policies: the norms or rules by which public services are supplied, the administrative organisation and the means of selection for bureaucratic and political capabilities.

     - At the supply level, the production of public service in France is framed by the 'Loi de Rolland' that establishes the three general principles of public action: a mutability principle, stating that the public service must be adjusted to the *population's needs* and follow its evolution; an equality principle, according to which two persons in the same situation should be treated equally and a continuity principle, ensuring that public services must always be provided to users. This set of principles has emerged from a long history of case law and its strength is now recognised in the form of constitutional rules. These rules cannot be separated from one another. As a result, the 'Loi de Rolland' guarantees both efficiency in service provision (*efficient*, *productive*, *innovation*), and equity and fairness for their users (*equality*, *fair*, *help*, *solidarity*).
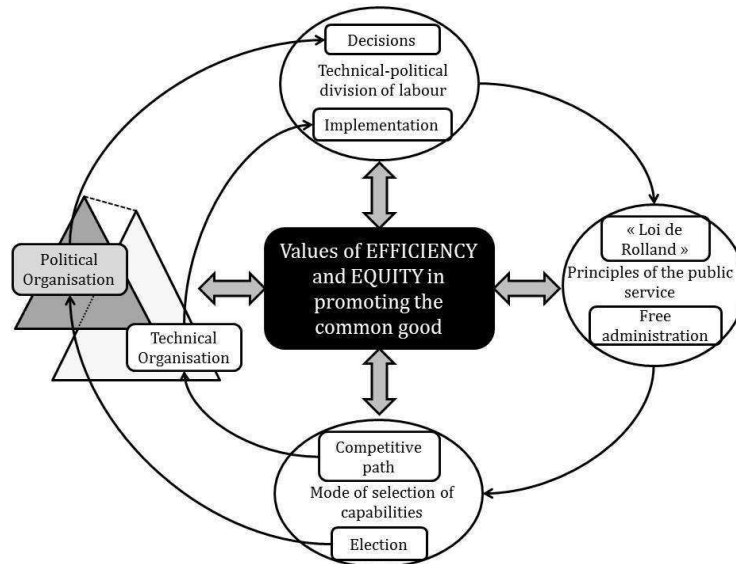
     - At the *administrative* organisation level, as in every representative democracy, labour is divided between the *elected representative* responsible for the decisions and the *civil servant* responsible for the implementation of political decisions. These jurisdictions are not separate; rather, they overlap. Moreover, the local governments producing public services are highly *compartmentalised* on both their political and technical dimensions, according to political priorities and the (legally defined) administrative *jurisdictions* of various local communities. This ensures that every local issue is treated by the most able decision-maker and technical expert (value of *efficiency*). *Equity* values also prevail because all of the staffs

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[7] Most of the leader's communities adopted their approach as a result of the election of an environmentalist.

are included on an administrative scale that ensures that everyone is treated equally (particularly in terms of salary) according to their situations.

       - Regarding the selection for capabilities, mechanisms are established to ensure that the two previous levels meet the values requirements. The mechanisms consist of tests designed to prove that the people providing the public service are *capable* of promoting the values of *efficiency* and *equity*: the test in which community servants are considered suitable for the production of public service is an administrative path that guarantees that everyone is treated *equally* and that the best (most *efficient*) candidates are retained; the elected representatives also pass through an electoral test by which they are chosen to fulfil the *general interest*, and in the organisational system, they are in charge of a political section or included in thematic commissions that they are capable of handling (*efficient*).

Figure 2. The organisation of institutional system providing public services

Typically, in France, the production of public services (see Figure 2) relies on values of efficiency and equity (Thévenot, 2001; Plumecocq, 2010). These values are supported by very strong institutions, making the values that are salient when French people refer to the public service or public policies both obvious and unequivocal (for instance see Gadrey, 1996). Moreover, the production of public service forms a system where each part is a separate and consistent whole – consistent with the system of values – and is dependent on all of the other parts. The system is locked, because the output (the service provided) depends on the input (the way in which capable people are selected); the reverse also holds true. Moreover, the way in which local communities are organised relies on very old and stable institutions, which leave very little room for radical innovations. Part of the system's strength comes from the

values that the communities promote when delivering the public service and to which French people are culturally attached.

4.2. Incremental process of institutionalisation

The institutional strength and systemic consistency explain why sustainability cannot radically challenge the ways in which local governments address sustainability in this region. Although its industrial history suggests an avant-gardist awareness of sustainability issues that may legitimise organisational changes, very limited radical innovations and organisational change occur, and is rather supported by incremental process of institutionalisation. Factor analysis representing the correlation of words suggests that three forms of institutionalised, incremental organisational innovations are present (cf. Figure 3):
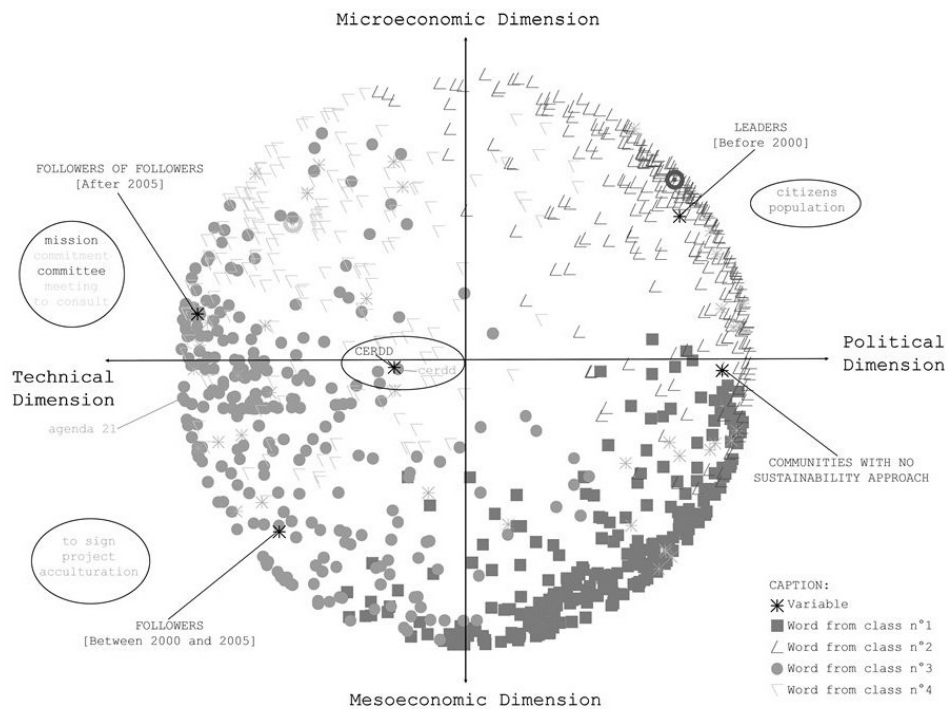
- At the level of the organisation within local governments, political concerns focus on integrating policies. As represented in Figure 3, integration aims at considering the *needs* of *populations* in terms of *sustainability* as the decision is made, within the process of designing the political agenda. In some local governments, integration is carried out by entrusting the chiefs of the staff of the head of the local government with the responsibility of sustainable development. In this way, not only are sustainability concerns taken into account at the political level, but they are more efficiently communicated to various services affected by sustainability issues. It has been suggested earlier that micro-political concerns are the final step of the process of organisational changes. In fact, the historical rise of sustainability in the region suggests that it first spread within the early adopter communities – the leaders, at the political level.

- At the level of technical organisation within local governments, *transversality* is primarily implemented through the creation of *ad hoc* services or missions (in general, their main task is to design the Local Agenda 21 for the community) that aim to promote the sustainability goals that were already defined at the political level. Transversality may interfere in the relationships between an elected representative responsible for a given political axis and the *service in charge of* implementing it. It therefore needs to be recognised and accepted, which depends on the political support that it gets from the head of the local government. Generally, it is not in charge of political programmes, but aims at promoting sustainable habits in administrative work by increasing the knowledge and awareness of civil servants, and by making them responsible for this aspect of policy (typically, there is no political deputy in charge of sustainability alone; transversal *missions* are rather created for this purpose).

- At the level of territorial technical organisation, cooperation occurs by means of territorial *projects*. They are conducted within the framework of the usual tools and documents: the Local Urbanisation Plan, Urban Transport Plan, Regional Pattern for Land Planning, Planning Contract between the State and the Region, among the others; however, there is absolutely no novelty in any of these, and at the most, sustainability objectives are added to the documents. On the other hand, territory is taken into account through the design of intermunicipal governments. However, this institutional procedure of grouping does not

necessarily imply that these new organisations commit themselves to sustainable approaches. It is acknowledged by actors that implementing this territorial concern through sustainability would require a drastic shift in the territorial culture of the civil servant and the elected representatives (see the use of the word *acculturation* in Figure 3).

Figure 3. Incremental and radical institutionalisation

In this respect, territorial cooperation proceeds from a logic extended from *transversality*. The novelty comes from the configuration of Local *Agenda 21*, the place of which in the discourses suggests that they link the micro and meso aspects of the technical dimensions of local communities (see Figure 3). As a public tool designed to promote *transversality*, Local *Agenda 21* is exploited to export and exchange with other local communities on the overall conception, in terms of objectives, methodology, projects and/or conceptualisation. Discussing about the difficulties that they may face in implementing *transversality*, they share knowledge on their projects of public policy, which may encourage and facilitate territorial cooperation. As a result, if Local *Agenda 21* cannot be considered as a radical institutional innovation, it seems to play a significant role in shaping the images that local governments form on the way in which sustainability should be handled, bridging every level considered here (territorial and within local governments).

4.3. A general crisis of values

It is important to note that while France underwent a reform that devolved powers to the regions and created territorial differences, the rules described earlier remain the common basis for the territorial administration of the French communities (Négrier, 2006). The same goes with the other European countries, where this type of reform has been applied since the 2000s – 1999, devolution in the UK; 2001, reinforcement of regional powers in Italy; 2002, increased financial powers for the autonomous regions in Spain and 2002 and 2003, jurisdictional modifications and financial reform of the Länder in Germany. This trend suggests that territorial administrations are under tremendous institutional changes.

This is particularly true in the French case, where these reforms are in line with the political disengagement of the State (increase in public-private partnerships, diminishment of civil servant of the State and delegation of public service production to the private sector or independent public agencies). It is also consistent with reforms aiming at controlling and evaluating the efficiency in producing public services. These reforms, by modifying the institutional system of public production in linking public funding profitability, undermine the values of efficiency and equity, because henceforth competition prevails (Ogien and Laugier, 2010). In the German case, Schmidt (2009) suggested that regional planning tools, that were usually designed to promote territorial equity, now strive for competitiveness between the German regions. It seems that all over Europe, the British model of public service production grounded in market elements prevails (Bell and Birkinshaw, 2001; Thévenot, 2001; Schmidt, 2009; Ogien and Laugier, 2010; Pemberton and Lloyd, 2011), which does not mean that they all address sustainability in the same way (Lafferty, 2001). For instance, Emelianoff (2003) suggested that in the Anglo-Saxon case, sustainability is handled to a greater extent by communities out of the public power. The German model relies on devices such as eco-label or eco-budget to direct decisions to a more sustainable management (*e.g.* volitional planning). The Scandinavian model is built on civic institutions to give a sense of responsibility as well as to educate the youngest to sustainability. In Italy, sustainability is addressed with regard to the cultural and historical patrimony.

As a result, we can see that the way in which the local governments and communities are organised in producing public services into a system with regard to values is not specific to the French case. Moreover, the relationship between institutions and the values that they support is fundamental in designing institutional innovations. It may help understanding the limits of institutional changes. For instance, Ogien and Laugier (2010) observed that as the change towards market values violently impacts the previous system, civil servants do not recognise their own values in the public service. As a result, they increasingly disobey – for instance, in breaking the rule according to which the political staffs decide, while the technical staffs implement and cling to the old system. In taking a more important share of responsibility in the decision-making process, civil servants act consistently with the sustainable principle of participation. Though these behaviours are not institutionalised, they are consistent with sustainable values. Textual analysis revealed that when it comes to sustainability, actors invoke values such as *efficiency* (*eco-efficiency*, *energetic efficiency*, *waste re-use*) and *equity*

(*inter* and *intergenerational equity*, *territorial equity*, *solidarity*) that are consistent with those carried by the institutions of the French public service. As a result, the limitations in policies of sustainable development do not come from contrasts in values, but rather from the fact that the organisations of local governments do not allow them to fully address sustainability.

4.4. The design of new institutions as a foundation for a sustainable territory

If the rules of organisation do not provide such basis for more sustainable practices within local governments, at the territorial level, sustainability opens onto the design of new innovative institutions – in the sense of organised actor. The most emblematic one is the CERDD (Resource Centre for Sustainable Development), created by the communities that launched their sustainability programmes before 2000 – the leaders and the French government. Its aim is twofold: on the one hand, it promotes sustainability by convincing local governments (as well as every other type of actor) that sustainability is worth undertaking; on the other hand, it provides resources (in terms of knowledge, methodology and conceptualisation) to those putting sustainability into place.

The interesting features of Figure 3 lie in the ways in which the CERDD is represented in the diagram, *i.e.* the beliefs that actors share on its role. The CERDD is represented both by the star, which indicates the location of the CERDD's discourse, and by the circle point (*cerdd*), which denotes the ways in which the entire set of people interviewed make use of this word. The first proceeds from the interview conducted at the CERDD was encoded during the treatment of the data in the same way as that followed for the durations of the sustainable development approaches. The second refers to the local communities mentioning the CERDD as a part of their overall beliefs about local sustainable development policies.

The first thing to notice is that the two points are very close to each other, which indicates that the perception that the local communities have about the role of the institution is close to what it actually does. In this respect, there is almost no gap between beliefs and actions. This feeling has been reinforced by the institutional status that the CERDD has acquired. Indeed, in 2006, the CERDD was transformed from an association of local governments (in which the French government was involved) into a Public Interest Group, bringing it closer to the values carried by the French public service. It undoubtedly helped when the CERDD was identified by the local authorities as a credible representative in the process of implementing sustainability in their communities. Moreover, the choice of locating the CERDD on a former industrial site within the mining infrastructure, outside of the large cities of the region, is also a meaningful element. This shows, consistent with the aspects of the sustainability discourses in the first class of Figure 3, that the industrial history of the region can be overcome through sustainability projects that are deeply anchored within the territory.

The second important thing to note is that these two points (the star and the circle) appear at the centre of the diagram. This suggests that not only the role of the CERDD is close to what local governments perceive it to be, but that the CERDD is actually situated where it should be, given its public mission. On the one hand, it is an institution aimed at providing support and assistance to local communities willing to implement sustainability, which

justifies its position on the technical side. However, it also has a political role when it attempts to convince those not willing to launch a sustainable approach to do so. On the other hand, as a territorial institution, it plays an important part in the regional governance of sustainability (the mesoeconomic side of the graph), in particular, by structuring and leading a network of local communities (in which firms, associations and experts are also involved) for the whole region. Furthermore, it is also situated in the microeconomic part of the graph, as it provides technical and political support within the local governments.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, sustainability has not caused drastic organisational changes in the local governments, mainly because of the stability of the French public service system, and because they evolve in a context of institutional change that deeply challenges the values of the public service. A solution relies on the focus at the territorial level, where original institutions with extended missions (particularly in political terms) are built. The values of sustainability therefore appear as more legitimate in the territorial context than in the modes of production of the public service. One explanation may be that the rules organising the relationships between local governments sharing the same territory increase the capacity of actors to cooperate (increase in negative liberty), while those organising the functioning of local governments reduce the possibility for actor to cooperate outside those rules (decrease in positive liberty)[8]. Therefore, the implementation of sustainability on a multi-level scale seems hard to set up. Still, there are two windows of opportunity for local political impulse to sustainability: first, it relies on changing the ways in which local governments are organised, which, in my view, is a dead end; the second one is the adoption of a territorial approach to sustainability. This study is undoubtedly more promising, because sustainable territorial development is not only a new challenge for equity and efficiency, as described by Zuindeau (2006), but is also an opportunity for a sustainably efficient and fair institutional design, grounded in values held at the local level by local communities, in the broader sense of the term.

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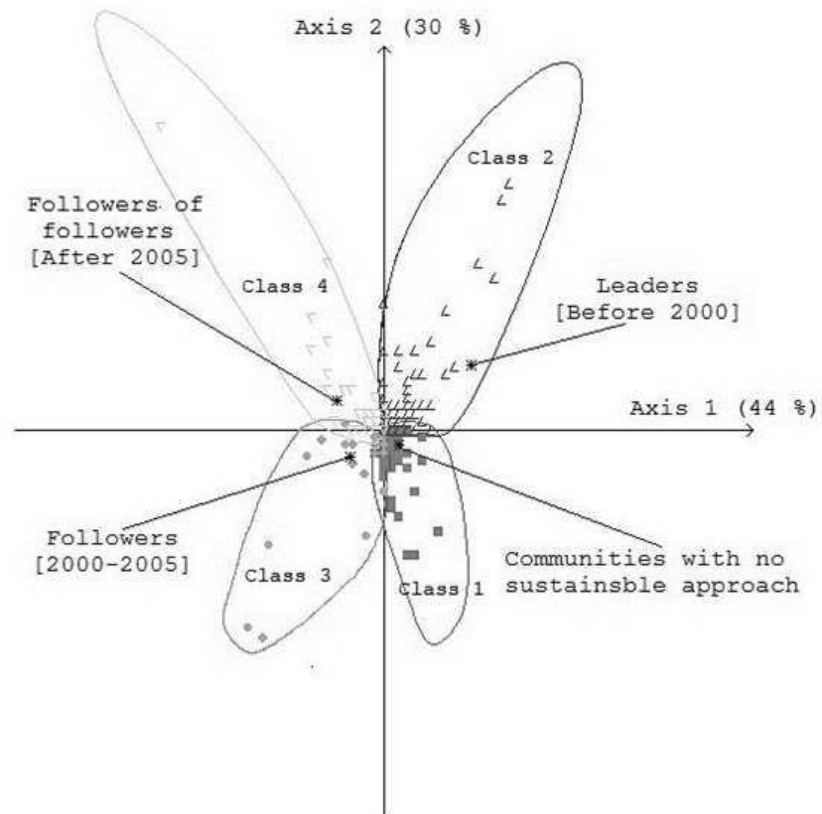
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[8] On the distinction between positive and negative liberty, see BERLIN, I. (1969).

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Annex: Factor analysis of Axes 1 and 2: Contribution of the semantic classes to the weights of the axes.

Each point represents a word (only the most significant are pictured here), each circle represents a semantic class, and each star represents the place occupied by actors. Their position on the graph represents their contribution to the weight of the axes. As a result, we can say that 74% of the explanation driven from the factor analysis holds in this graph.

Short abstract: This article addresses the institutional changes that local communities face when implementing sustainable development policies. Analyses suggest that because of the strength of the territorial institutions, most institutionalisation and innovation are incremental and create marginal organisational changes, in particular, within local governments. However, some institutions are designed to improve the territorial consistency of public sustainability decisions.

Extended abstract: This article addresses the institutional changes that local communities face when implementing sustainable development policies. It considers how the various sustainable political agendas and projects introduced affect the institutional complexities framing the production of the public service both at the territorial level and within local governments. As far as sustainable development agendas are considered, we emphasize the need to tackle the institutional changes required both at the administrative and territorial levels. Considering the multilevel dimension of the problem of diffusion of sustainable strategies, we discuss the ways in which institutions – and especially values, frame complexity in providing a basis for collective decisions. Territories and values imply to adopt a situated and discursive approach of rationality.

We then address the question of the institutional changes occurring when local governments adopt sustainable development agendas in a case study. To this end, we have studied the case of the Nord Pas de Calais local communities (North France), from interviews of public servants and elected representatives. The interviews were processed using the Alceste method of textual data treatment. The method enables highlighting the salient aspect of discourses. It provides a powerful tool to analyse interviews and provides scientific basis for qualitative evidences. The results show that four semantic aspects are at stake here: a common sense vocabulary aiming at rhetorical purposes; a class of vocabulary referring to political orientations; a lexical field concerning the territorial governance; and finally a set of words regarding the administrative difficulties. We then conducted a factor analysis on the various sets of vocabularies and related it to key variables: the period of adoption of sustainable agendas. In line with the usual way in which public service is provided in France, we find that given the date of adoption, local communities are not concerned with the same dimensions of territorial institutions: leaders are struggling with micro-political dimensions while the two others are focusing on solving technical problems (first at the administrative level, then at the territorial level).

Finally, we discuss the results by suggesting that given the strength of the territorial institutions, most institutionalisation and innovation are incremental and create marginal organisational changes, in particular, within local governments. In particular the values promoted by sustainable development confront to the ones that support the production of the public service in France. Unfortunately, the formers are not strong enough to deeply challenge the latters. However, some institutions are designed to improve the territorial consistency of public sustainability decisions.

Keywords: Institutional change, Multi-level governance, Sustainable development, Textual analysis, Public service production, Values.