



HAL
open science

Towards a communicational engineering approach to the co-construction of public action? Pre-print of article published in *Communiquer*, 33 | -1, p. 84-103. Geoffrey Volat, *Vers une ingénierie communicationnelle pour penser la co-construction de l'action publique?*

Geoffrey Volat

► **To cite this version:**

Geoffrey Volat. Towards a communicational engineering approach to the co-construction of public action? Pre-print of article published in *Communiquer*, 33 | -1, p. 84-103. Geoffrey Volat, *Vers une ingénierie communicationnelle pour penser la co-construction de l'action publique?*. *Communiquer : Revue de communication sociale et publique*, 2021. hal-04478412

HAL Id: hal-04478412

<https://hal.science/hal-04478412>

Submitted on 26 Feb 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Towards a communicational engineering approach to the co-construction of public action?

Pre-print of article published in *Communiquer*, 33 | -1, p. 84-103.

Geoffrey Volat, *Vers une ingénierie communicationnelle pour penser la co-construction de l'action publique?*

Abstract

This text seeks to scientifically construct an approach to the co-construction processes of public action from a communicative perspective. To achieve this, the analysis is the result of action research and ethnographic investigation within a French local community. Specifically, we studied a policy on social and solidarity economy and social innovation aimed at democratizing public action. The thesis presented here argues that communication should be understood not from an intercomprehensive perspective but rather from an approach through incommunication. Consequently, the processes of co-construction of public action are subject to these incommunication phenomena and require the communicative intervention of an actor in a mediation posture to engage in dialogue between two perspectives. Firstly, the reduction of incommunication, and secondly, the construction of a shared perspective among actors with unique socio-cultural backgrounds.

Keywords

Incommunication – Mediation – Participatory democracy – Ethnography – Social innovation

Introduction

The co-construction of public action is a particular organizational form understood as "an established process of open and organized participation of a plurality of actors in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public action" (Fraisie 2018 p. 6). Involving a diversity of actors in a relationship of shared meaning construction, it has not yet been studied from a communicative perspective.

Our article reports on action research in the form of an ethnographic investigation (Cefaï 2003) conducted within the framework of a CIFRE thesis. This status allowed us to integrate into a French local community, Clermont Auvergne Metropolis, in 2017, with the mission of studying the communicative practices that permeate various attempts to co-construct metropolitan public action in social and solidarity economy (SSE). These dynamics, bringing together a heterogeneity of actors, appear particularly prone to incommunication phenomena, corresponding to the shared observation that we cannot fully understand each other (Dacheux 2016). Therefore, through this article, we aim to explain how an investigation in a mediation translation posture can facilitate the reduction of symbolic and linguistic distances between actors and the construction of shared meaning among socio-cultural spaces that are unfamiliar to each other. To achieve this, we will rely on two cases studied during our work. Firstly, the emergence in 2017 of an associative research and development center for social innovations: the Centre d'Innovations Sociales Clermont Auvergne¹ (CISCA), bringing together public authorities, researchers, and socio-economic actors from the metropolitan area. Secondly, the

¹ Research and Development Center for Social Innovation and Transfer

Cooperative Society of Collective Interest (SCIC) Epicentre, which operates an entrepreneurial third place in the city center and of which the Metropolis has been a member since 2017.

This text will be structured in four parts. First, we will specify the theoretical framework of the democratization of public action and political communication that leads to the mobilization of a theory of incommunication to consider the democratic co-construction of public action. Then, we will detail the research tools used in our investigation, and finally, we will specify the cases of co-construction studied.

In the second part, we will present the results of the investigation. Firstly, we will propose to understand the diversity of individuals' relationships by highlighting the existence of nine factors of professional, contextual, relational, and individual diversity. Then, we will focus on emphasizing how the actors in our investigation have struggled to co-construct based on the heterogeneity of their relationship to the world. This will lead us to introduce the concept of incommunication as an inevitable phenomenon in the dynamics of democratic co-construction of public action.

In the third part, through a pragmatic approach (in the sense of John Dewey, i.e., problem-solving through experience), we will attempt to propose an approach that makes incommunication the engine of collective action. In other words, collective action for the co-construction of public action—materialized in our investigation by the studied cases—would be conceivable only if we manage to develop communication practices that enhance our ability to democratically confront otherness. In this regard, we will particularly consider the mediation translation posture for its fruitful character in the process of constructing shared meaning.

Finally, we will revisit the results of the investigation to propose a communicative approach to renewed democratic co-construction through six engineering paths inherent in the mobilization of mediator translator actors. A renewed understanding of political communication, which we propose to call: instituting political communication.

1. Study framework, context and methodology

To conduct our investigation, we immersed ourselves in the Clermont Metropolis for three years to study its relationship with actors in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) within the dynamics of co-constructing its public action. Therefore, our goal was to conduct research in line with ethnographic inquiries guided by an engaged researcher stance. This investigation also embraces a normative ideal: the democratization of public action. In this sense, it mobilizes theoretical frameworks of participatory democracy, co-construction of public action, and political communication.

The ideal of democratizing public action...

The democratization of public action is traditionally associated with "participatory democracy" in the sense that it involves the participation of a multitude of actors in the development of public policy. These forms of participatory democracy are diverse, encompassing consultation, collaboration, co-production, and co-construction of public action, all progressively falling under the domain of citizen

participation (Vaillancourt 2016). However, from our perspective, the co-construction of public action is the most ambitious normative ideal concerning the democratization of public action. Specifically, we emphasize the normative ideal of democratic and citizen co-construction. In these often localized processes, public authorities strive to engage with actors present in the territory, allowing for "public and open deliberations" in which not only civil society actors but also actors from the public sector (elected officials, officials, researchers), the private sector (businesses), and social movements participate (Vaillancourt 2014, p. 14). Thus, the distinctive feature of pluralistic democratic co-construction lies in the legitimacy granted by elected officials to citizen deliberations and the legitimacy accorded to representative democracy to finalize a public decision through the actions of elected officials who deliberate within the legitimate body (municipal council, metropolitan council, etc.).

Table 1 Different forms of participation in public action (source: author)

	Temporality of participation	Format of participation	
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream, during and downstream of public action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No participation 	No participation
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream of public action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation by providing information for decision-making. 	Symbolic cooperation ²
Concertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream of public action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation consists of making proposals without any guarantee that they will be fully taken into consideration. 	
Co-production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the public action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in the implementation of public action. Distribution of roles and responsibilities defined by the logic pursued (neoliberal conception = principal; democratic conception = deliberation) 	Real distribution of powers in the conduct of public action
Democratic co-construction³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream, during and downstream of public action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public action. Democratic deliberations defining shared roles and responsibilities. 	

...Explored through a renewed approach to political communication

Political science or sociology mainly analyze the co-construction of public action through mechanisms and practices, notably the intensity of participation. In this regard, the frameworks deployed by Laurent Fraise and Yves Vaillancourt primarily focus on normative studies of co-construction frameworks but do not seek to analyze the relational challenges inherent in democratic co-construction of public action. The originality of our approach lies in bridging the gap between studies on co-construction of public action and those on democratic communication.

Democracy implies freedom and equality for individuals, thereby revealing the extent of individual aspirations and interpretations. In other words, it is because we live in a democracy that we have the freedom to experience singular cultural, social, and professional phenomena and to materialize them into individual or collective initiatives. This freedom nurtures our diversity and our relationship with the world. Consequently, when we communicate, we encounter what Éric Dacheux qualifies as an "anthropological given": the misalignment between the sender's and the receiver's worldview. Negotiation becomes necessary to find common ground and build shared meaning. This communication approach thus places particular importance on intersubjective relations. From this perspective, various studies focus on phenomena of incommunication, defined as the ontological inability of individuals to "be on the same wavelength." Incommunication can therefore be defined as a process of sense-making between equal and free alterities resulting in the "shared feeling of not being able to understand each other (dissatisfaction) or the belief that one has understood each other when it is not the case (misunderstanding)" (Dacheux 2016, p. 89).

In this sense, to consider the democratic co-construction of public action from a communicative approach, we align with Dominique Wolton's call to "revalorize the concept of communication" within a democratic perspective that prioritizes "the question of the relationship with the other who is not necessarily in agreement with the sender" (Wolton 2017, p. 14). Incommunication thus proposes a Copernican revolution: what if the norm were misunderstanding rather than mutual understanding? Consequently, this approach through incommunication is rooted in the ideal of a humanistic political communication that recognizes the diversity of individuals' relationships with the world, their freedom of action, and their autonomy of interpretation, both constructed through individuals' experiences in the world. As we interpret our surroundings with our own socio-cultural and sensitive framework, our investigation seemed to uncover the difficulty of actors in co-constructing based on the heterogeneity of their relationship with the world. Therefore, it is essential to understand incommunication not as a pathology but as the driving force behind collective dynamics of constructing shared meaning. In this perspective, the challenge of democratic co-construction must embrace the complexity of human relationships in sense-making, to propose a communicative engineering of public action co-construction, centrally positioning the concept of mediation translation, in its symbolic and operational dimensions. This is the aim of our field investigation project.

An ethnographic field investigation led by an actor-researcher

Ethnographic research examines the organization of social groups, giving central importance to observation and the description of situations that form the basis of analyses (Marchive 2012; Cefai 2003). Our field investigation took place from June 2017 to March 2020, with three days per week of "immersion" as a CIFRE doctoral student employed by the Metropolis. We conducted multiple observations, more or less participatory depending on the context. We distinguish between participatory observations, which we used when we did not have the legitimacy to fully intervene in the observed situation, and participant observations, which we practiced when active participation was expected, especially in the context of our operational missions. We emphasize that phases of participant observation were particularly useful for building a relationship of shared trust conducive to information gathering, confidential exchanges, and dialogue. These ethnographic observations led us to maintain a journal that gathered two types of materials: notes from participatory observations, mostly taken in real-time, and notes written retrospectively from participant observations to capture

the reality perceived during these phases as an actor-researcher driven by operational necessity. This tool proved valuable for preserving written records of our observations and gaining perspective on our research field.

To complement our research methodology, we conducted two series of semi-structured interviews (end of 2018 and end of 2019) with individuals-actors involved in the processes of co-constructing the studied public action. We chose to use this tool to access the narrative produced by the actors on the theme of our research. Thus, by capturing the actors' narratives (and therefore their interpretation of the world), comparing them to the perspectives of other studied actors and our observations, we obtained data to question communication practices in the dynamics of co-construction of the studied public action.

Table 2: Survey methodology

	To whom?	Where?	When?
Semi-directive interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The director of Epicentre - The director of CISCA - The mission officer for Social and Solidarity Economy (ESS) - The director of Innovation - The deputy general director for Economic Dynamics - The general services director - The elected representative in charge of ESS - The deputy chief of staff to the president - The president of Clermont Metropole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Random locations according to the individuals interviewed (at home, office spaces, coffee bar, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - September to December 2018 for the first series - September to December 2019 for the second series
Participant observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SCIC Epicentre - CISCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 boards of directors of SCIC Epicentre out of the 18 held during the survey - 3 steering committees for the CISCA prefiguration study - 2 CISCA study feedback meetings - 9 CISCA board meetings out of the 10 held during the survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - June 2017 to November 2019 for Epicentre Boards of Directors - March, May and June 2018 for CISCA steering committees - July and September 2018 for CISCA study presentations - October 2018 to February 2020 for CISCA board meetings
Observant participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clermont Auvergne Metropole - CISCA - SCIC Epicentre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 days a week at Clermont Auvergne Metropole offices - At every meeting or informal discussion with stakeholders (CISCA, Epicentre) or in-house (elected officials, agents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From May 2017 to March 2020 - More than 200 observant participation situations described in a multimedia logbook

Analysis of two cases: the Cooperative Society of Collective Interest (SCIC) Epicentre and the Social Innovations Center Clermont Auvergne

To analyze the communicative dynamics at play in the democratic co-construction process of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) public action in Clermont Auvergne Metropolis, we examined two cases. Firstly, there is the cooperative Epicentre, a third place dedicated to the creation of economic activities, consisting of a coworking space, a social enterprise incubator, and a neighborhood revitalization association. It is built on the desire to develop collaborative practices and a framework for collective experiments. Epicentre operates under the status of a Cooperative Society of Collective Interest (SCIC), of which Clermont Auvergne Metropolis has been a member since 2016. For the SSE mission manager at the Metropolis, "the challenge was to lay the first stone [for its public policy] to stimulate debate: what is SSE? How can a local authority evolve its relationships with private socio-economic actors?"

The second case studied is the emergence of a Research and Development Center and Transfer in Social Innovations: the Social Innovations Center Clermont Auvergne (CISCA). This dynamic aligns with a shared, public, and citizen desire to foster relationships among economic actors, public entities, and research actors for the development of social innovation practices in the metropolitan area. Specifically, CISCA was initiated by a group of young researchers from Clermont representing different disciplines with the common aspiration to align their work with the concerns of socio-economic actors, putting it at the service of territorial development.

2. Incommunication at the heart of co-construction processes of public action

Within these processes of co-constructing public action, our investigation has allowed us to glimpse phenomena of incommunication. The interpretation of our data has led us to identify factors that heterogenize the relationship to the world of the individuals studied. Indeed, it seems that it is within this diversity that the phenomena of incommunication are rooted.

From the diversity of individuals' relationship to the world to inevitable situations of incommunication

Research in communication sciences has particularly focused on factors that fuel interpretative activity (Hall and Hall 1994; Boudon 1989; Lepastier 2013; Boutaud 2015). In his analyses of dysfunctions in French state policies, Arnaud Mercier (Mercier 2001) considers that "actors involved in addressing a social issue are all inserted into a system of constraints (institutional, relational, economic, cultural, etc.) that leads them to appreciate and treat differently the information circulating and defend divergent points of view" (Mercier 2001, p. 176).

Therefore, both the relationship to action and our interpretative capacity in reception are constructed based on "different apparatuses" (Ravault 1986) or, in other words, based on different diversity factors. Our investigation seemed to specifically bring forth four categories of factors: organizational factors (professional constraints, organizational culture), contextual factors (personal context, societal context), relational factors (past experiences, daily practices, social relationships), and individual factors (relationship to emotions, personality).

Figure 1: Factors shaping the relationship to action identified during the survey
(source : author)

Factors shaping the relationship to action identified during the survey								
Organizational factors		Contextual factors		Relational factors			Individual factors	
Missions and professional constraints	Organizational culture (private, public, associative, etc.)	Social context	Personal context	Lived experiences	Social relations	Daily practices	Personality	Relationship to sensibility

These nine factors are interconnected and interact to shape individuals' relationship to the world. It is a subjective (Flusser 1978) and social (Watzlawick 1988) construction that is neither deterministic (society imposes itself on individuals) nor individualistic (the individual self-determines) but rather the result of a multifactorial relational (Corcuff 2011) and dialogical dynamic. The relationship to the world is indeed the result of an individual and social construction through which individuals interpret the world and guide their actions and aspirations. Additionally, as we have explained, professional constraints and contextual effects must be added, influencing the course of co-construction. Individuals and organizations are driven by a willingness to interact and cooperate, but the diversity of factors shaping their relationship to the world complicates the construction of shared meaning in the processes of co-constructing public action.

Specifically, our field investigation suggests that the horizon of intercomprehension recedes as the socio-cultural distance between co-construction actors increases. However, if communication is democratic, then it is experienced in "a voluntary human relationship (it is the result of the will of the protagonists) for the sharing of meaning [...] between radical equal and free otherness" (Dacheux 2015, p. 268). In these conditions, the relationship appears conducive to incommunication. Social actors, being free and equal, enter into a relationship to build shared meaning, better understand each other, and project common actions. But, caught in the diversity of their revealed relationship to the world, they then realize collectively that they cannot fully understand each other. This is, at least, what the investigation seems to demonstrate, approaching incommunication as a fundamental anthropological data.

Incommunication, a central factor in the co-construction of public action

We must now account for situations of incommunication that appear in our study of the two cases of co-construction of public action. Beyond our observations during the investigation, these incommunication phenomena were highlighted by the actors themselves in the two series of interviews we conducted in September 2018 and September 2019. For didactic purposes, we will rely more on the actors' feelings here.

Firstly, based on her experience, the elected official for SSE at the Metropolis noted in our first interview: "We don't understand the constraints of others, in addition to not understanding the language. Like me, I don't necessarily understand the constraints of researchers..." The co-construction project of CISCA confirmed this feeling: "We have different cultures, when we see researchers, we realize that we are still 12,000 kilometers away," before adding, "I didn't understand what [the CISCA project leader] was telling me!" in reference to their first meeting. This cultural gap is also experienced by the elected official with her services at the Metropolis: "when we argue with [Antoine] and he talks to me about administrative stuff from the Metropolis [...] we are completely foreign, I say to myself, what is he talking about?"

On the other hand, an agent from the Metropolis assigned to monitor the CISCA project noted, in our first interview, that the involved actors: "all have their own vision" based on their activity, whether they are actors "from the classical economic world, from the SSE, or... academics" and that in this sense, "all of them were in a position on their own vision of... what social innovation should be."

For other actors, incommunication is approached in a positive way. In her approach to the co-construction processes, the director of the SCIC Epicentre illustrated this perspective in our second interview: "I find the most interesting times are the times of... tension. Oh, I find that great. The moments when we don't understand each other, when we argue, so we have to go ten times to explain the thing..." Regarding the construction of the Epicentre project, she assured: "the first thing that saved us is not being understood initially, and having to craft this discourse, craft this anchoring, craft this action, show this action." Thus, she considers that it's the initial lack of understanding that pushed her cooperative to reformulate and argue. Incommunication is then a driving force : it's because one wants to understand and cannot that one continues to try (Dacheux 2015).

Thus, the co-construction processes seem subject to situations of incommunication, which we do not approach as a pathology but rather as the normal result of interaction between free and equal otherness with a heterogeneous relationship to the world. Therefore, if incommunication is inherent in social relations, how can it be apprehended from the perspective of democratic communication that would feed into the co-construction of public action?

3. Embracing incommunication through democratic communication: the challenge of translation mediation

Starting from the difficulties of communication in achieving intercomprehension, the incommunication approach suggests reversing the logic: in a communication situation, the receiver is never entirely in line with the sender (Wolton 2018). Reception is even considered "a complex activity of recreating the message. [...] There is incommunication because production and reception are two different instances of creating meaning" (Ravault in Dacheux 2019, p. 40). Therefore, situations of incommunication would emerge from an ontological (subjectivity of the relationship to the world) and anthropological substrate: "most often, people do not fully understand each other" (Dacheux 2019, p. 42-43).

However, if this incommunication can lead to the rejection of the other, it can also lead to initiating a negotiation aimed not at absolute understanding but at reasoned coexistence (Wolton 2009). Thus, the

challenge lies in the actors' ability to work in otherness, not pursuing consensus but constantly seeking acceptance of conflicting visions. The communicative challenge of co-construction processes is to turn this incommunication into a phenomenon that drives actors to democratically co-construct public action.

In this regard, by acknowledging that communication is not a process that easily achieves its goals, various works on political communication emphasize the importance of adopting a distance from the Habermasian intercomprehensive ideal of communicative action (Habermas 1987) to foster shared meaning through the construction of fruitful disagreements (Viveret 2006, Dacheux 2019, Garlot 2020).

Other works highlight the limits of the discursive dimension of political communication and see collective action as the cornerstone of constructing shared meaning (Quéré 1991, Duracka 2016). Louis Quéré calls this approach the "praxeological model," defining communication as "a process of organizing shared perspectives, without which no action, no interaction is possible" (Quéré 1991, p. 76). Communication is thus part of the "mutual shaping of a common world through concerted action" (Varela 1988 in Quéré 1991, p. 76).

Our investigation seems to confirm the importance of these political communication practices renewed by the recognition of incommunication phenomena. The study even more distinctly emphasizes the importance of a praxeological communication that promotes the construction of trust and conviviality. In an interview with a key member of the organization central to our investigation, the importance of conviviality in the co-construction relationship is highlighted: "what, in my opinion, is the major factor, is the pleasure of being together... beyond the object itself, I mean the fact that you enjoy being with the other... in my opinion, that's the determining factor." This is also the case with a SSE actor from one of the studied cases, who specifically emphasizes the need for a "stronger bond of trust" linked to his experience: "when we go to the SCIC Tétris, spend time together, have a laugh, you see, it's something that creates closeness, which made our relationship cross a threshold at one point, but which should have been reproduced, or which should be reproduced to imagine that at some point, these times allow [Amandine] to say 'I trust him as a human being.'"

However, what appears central in our investigation is the challenge of communicative facilitation, which is at the intersection of what Louis Quéré would call a symbolizing third party, i.e., a symbolic medium involved in social interaction, positioned as a reference for the interlocutors, or, in other words, "otherness that allows communication between social subjects" (Quéré 1982, p. 116); or what Dominique Wolton would call an intermediary, namely an individual with "professional competence and [the] ability to organize cohabitation between different points of view" (ibid. p. 97). The intermediary actor thus contributes to "a minimum of intercomprehension by facilitating negotiation between cultural spaces that ignore each other" (ibid., p. 137). Thus, our investigation particularly questions the challenge of translation mediation to embrace incommunication in a communicative engineering of the co-construction of public action.

Intervention through translation mediation : between facilitator and trusted third party

Faced with the identified situations of incommunication, the investigation suggests that the previously mentioned political communication practices are necessary but insufficient if not accompanied by mediation capable of mobilizing them for the democratic co-construction of public action.

The term "mediation" is rooted in two Latin etymological origins. It is, on the one hand, from the word "medius," indicating "being in the middle, being 'between,'" and, on the other hand, from the word "mediare," which refers to "division, or even separation between two parties" (Liquète 2019, p. 19). Vincent Liquète's work specifies that a more contemporary understanding of mediation emerged in the 1970s, defining it as "a generalized mode of managing social life, seeking to anticipate the risks of conflict or even rupture through the intervention of third parties gradually becoming mediation professionals" (Ibid., p. 20). Therefore, mediation has been extensively studied by various disciplines, presenting itself as "a set of practices that develop in different institutional domains. It gives a predominant place to mediators present in numerous organizations" (Gadras 2010, p. 2).

During the investigation, the importance of the role of a mediator-translator emerged frequently in the discourse of the actors, with various approaches such as "facilitator" for some, "mediator," "hybrid person," or "developer" for others.

Firstly, the actors' commitment to facilitating the construction of shared meaning is evident in their discourse, with specific terminology but always marked by a reflective approach to their role in co-construction dynamics. This commitment is found in the statements of the mission manager at the Metropolis responsible for monitoring CISCA and SCIC Epicentre. During our 2019 interview, he shared his vision of mediation in his professional practice: "it's an exercise... it's a job, I believe, it's a job. [...] I think that the first quality of a job like mine is this, is to bring people... how do you make sure, you facilitate, and you... yeah, you participate in the co-construction of the thing." He then specifies the term "developer" that he attributes to his role: "[they are] people who are capable of making this connection, this relationship between... between citizens, public policies, etc. [...] I think the art of developer professions is this quality... [...] That's my job, that's what I do, that's what I believe I know how to do a bit..."

Regarding the CISCA project leader, he mainly emphasizes the role of the trusted third party in co-construction dynamics: "The main lever that really worked is this mediation function... I tell myself, in fact, all the lace consists of finding opinion leaders, trusted third parties." He then clarifies what he means by a "trusted third party," namely an actor "that allows triggering the relationship" because he observes that "otherwise it doesn't happen by itself." The trusted third party is thus "a mediating translating third party who has the ability to speak the same languages and who has roughly shared trust from the actors to do the job."

Finally, the director of the Epicentre cooperative also addresses the facilitation challenge, which she seems to experience after a year of intense co-construction dynamics with a diversity of actors, highlighting the difficulties in constructing shared meaning. She laments the "lack of facilitators" and emphasizes "this need for facilitation... as soon as... the group is heterogeneous and not necessarily used to going to meet otherness." She particularly mentions "the number of meetings we have that are useless because, in the end, there's everything and no facilitation," emphasizing that "when there's

too much diversity, it's complicated to do without [facilitation]." She also seems to highlight the professional competence required for such a role, stating that with "people from very different cultures, different abilities to speak... you have to be able to understand this difference in perspective. And I think the facilitator can do that; it's their role, it's their job."

The importance of the mediator's role, as a facilitator of co-construction, a trusted third party, was often emphasized in the experiences of the actors involved in the studied cases of co-construction of public action during this investigation. It is frequently contextualized in light of the previously discussed difficulties in constructing shared meaning, fueling the challenge of approaching the democratic co-construction of public action through the theory of incommunication.

Intervention through translation mediation: facilitating the transition from one linguistic universe to another

Another aspect of the challenge of communicative facilitation emerging from the investigation corresponds to translation practices. This aspect gradually appeared in the discourse of the actors under different terminologies, but always with the same idea of an intervention that facilitates the democratic co-construction relationship. It involves more precisely a task of intralingual translation mobilized by the mediator-actor to move from one linguistic system to another (Oustinoff 2012).

During our initial interview, as the CISCA association was about to be created, the project leader noted: "90% of my time will be allocated to see so-and-so to tell him, 'but listen, understand that, this vision, here, look, it would be good, read this, if I give you a summary, about this, about that, and everything, you still understand that there are other ways to see..." He seems to be aware of the importance of such communicative facilitation and considers it one of his missions to bring the common project to life. He also speaks about the role of translation itself: "this famous translator, I think the future of... for many, it's going to be, in a world as heterogeneous, as complex as ours, it's going to explode the number of translators, of these intermediaries, people who are going to do this lacework." One year later, during our second interview, he demonstrates a more advanced awareness: "for me, it's the future, it's translators, mediators, third parties, people who will find themselves like we can do, in the middle, with the ability to have shared languages to reformulate and, and put something that is about constructing common sense in the middle, without letting the actors just gratuitously bicker..."

Throughout our investigation, the elected representative for SSE at the Metropolis also seemed sensitive to the challenge of interacting with individuals who master the technique of translation between different cultural and linguistic universes. Thus, in a preliminary interview conducted at the end of 2017, when we discussed the relationship between the Metropolis and SSE actors, she already expressed an approach incorporating this challenge: "SSE and social innovation actors with whom I aspire to co-construct often do not have all the codes of local authorities, be it vocabulary, understanding of constraints, internal functioning... But to co-construct, you have to know others... And we can see that those who have assimilated the codes more are the ones who are doing the best in their relationship with the local authority, whether it's Epicentre or LieU'topie."

Then, during the first interview in 2018, the SSE elected representative at the Metropolis highlighted the presence of a "hybrid" actor as a lever for the co-construction of public action due to their ability

to transition from one cultural and linguistic universe to another: "We see it with the transfer center; I think that with [the co-president]... it's someone who manages to speak everyone's language... You need to find the hybrid person who can manage all languages... how to approach the subject and what are each other's constraints."

Finally, we note that after an interview with the Director-General of Clermont Auvergne Metropolis, a discussion based on our work ensued. The conversation then shifted to the mediation and translation issues that seemed to emerge in our investigation. This excerpt from our field notes recounts the exchange we had on this topic and confirms the interest shown by the actors in the challenges of translation in co-construction dynamics. The actor here seems to embrace the role of a translator between the elected officials of the Metropolis and SSE actors:

Excerpt 1: Field notes from the Investigation²

**30 août 2019 : Discussion concept de thèse avec [un directeur général]
communication interpersonnelle - médiation - incommunication**

Remarques suite à mon doc de présentation :

[...]

Traduction médiation : pour moi c'est traduction / médiation / traduction. Je suis absolument d'accord sur le fait qu'il faut traduire l'objectif des élus, de l'association, qu'il faut les traduire pour qu'ils soient compréhensibles de tous, ça permet le débat (médiation). Après y'a des décisions, et il faut les retraduire et vérifier.

This intralingual translation work, between distant cultural and linguistic systems, seems to provide answers to situations of misunderstanding in co-construction dynamics. In this regard, although some actors feel they can fulfill this role, the investigation nevertheless seems to emphasize that this skill is not acquired by all actors involved in co-construction, sometimes justifying the intervention of a third party.

4. Discussion of survey results: from incommunication to democratic co-construction of public action: the challenge of communication engineering through translation mediation

What should be highlighted from the survey? Firstly, the diversity of individuals' relationships with the world - for which we propose nine factors revealed by the survey - seems to justify reconsidering an intercomprehensive approach to communication. Actors involved in the studied co-construction cases

² Translation : « August 30, 2019 - Discussing thesis concepts with a managing director.
interpersonal communication - mediation - incommunication

Remarks following my presentation document :

[...] Translation / mediation: for me, it's translation / mediation / translation. I absolutely agree that we need to translate the objectives of elected representatives, of the association, that we need to translate them so that they can be understood by everyone, that allows for debate (mediation). Afterwards, there are decisions to be made and they have to be translated... [...] »

faced difficulties in building shared meaning, accepting their radical subjectivity. Therefore, the approach through the theory of incommunication, as proposed by us, integrates these situations of misunderstanding and tension into the reflection on democratic co-construction situations. Furthermore, by considering incommunication as an unavoidable anthropological given, such an approach emphasizes the importance of turning incommunication into a driving force for democratic co-construction.

In this context, political communication practices (deliberative and praxeological) were tested by the actors with varying degrees of success. Deliberative phases mostly struggled with the gap between the normative assumptions of the involved actors, ultimately facing significant challenges in constructing shared meaning in a situation that focuses communication on its discursive dimension. As for praxeological communication situations, they frequently generated shared trust-building, relaxed, convivial situations, more conducive to discovering otherness, while surpassing the discursive limits of deliberative communication. However, the praxeological dimension of communication does not seem to be naturally mobilized by the actors, especially institutional ones, who tend to favor communication practices limited to their discursive dimension (steering committees, technical committees, board of directors, etc.).

Consequently, the survey seems to underline the interest of intervention through translation mediation practices in the dynamics of democratic co-construction. This issue of translation mediation in response to experienced incommunication situations is evident in the discourse of the actors. In this regard, the challenges of shared trust, a friendly interpersonal relationship, and respect for the integrity of each interlocutor appear central in the discourse collected during the survey.

This role of translation mediation could be likened to the approach of Paul Rasse, who sees mediation as a practice aiming to foster "a negotiation process based on what each person is, their cognitive abilities, their culture, aspirations, anxieties, and social status" (Rasse 2014 p. 48-49).

Therefore, this mediation approach seems to require a reflection on translation approaches, as specified by Dominique Wolton and Michael Oustinoff. Based on his reflections on incommunication, Dominique Wolton (2010) explored the challenges of translation in a global context of globalization that revealed "the extent of cultural distances." According to Wolton, the communicational challenge of translation lies in seeking a "reasonable cohabitation" in a context that requires "accepting time to move from one cultural system to another" (*ibid.*, p. 12). In light of the survey, the cultural diversity of the studied actors - although they share the same territory and language - seems to reveal situations of incommunication, justifying the mobilization of a translation approach. These actors use the same language, indeed, but their representations and relationship with the world appear sufficiently distant to reveal their socio-cultural distances (technical language, jargon, corporate culture, daily practices, etc.), giving rise to incommunications. Through intralingual translation, which consists of "the interpretation of linguistic signs through other signs of the same language" (Oustinoff 2012, p. 66), the mediator-actor will then attempt to reduce linguistic distances between the actors. Oustinoff thus considers that the primary function of translation is to be "the great mediator of diversity" (*ibid.*, p. 124).

Therefore, we propose to reflect on the implementation of communication engineering that does not aim to eliminate incommunication, does not seek an illusory perfect intercomprehension, does not make incommunication a risk-free situation; but aims to favor the relationship, shared experience, to ensure that incommunication remains in a fertile framework and becomes a driving force for the collective action of democratic co-construction of public action. To achieve this, we propose six avenues to deploy a mediation-translation engineering within the processes of democratic co-construction of public action.

1. Mediation-translation engineering is part of an approach to democratic political communication. As we presented at the beginning of the article, and to quote Dominique Wolton, "the great philosophical and political value of the concept of communication in democracy" comes from its foundations that "recognize that there can be multiple protagonists, points of view, values, which do not prevent dialogue" (Wolton 2019, p. 202). Democratic communication is, therefore, the unavoidable recognition of otherness in its capacity and legitimacy to communicate. Each participant must then accept that the construction of shared meaning involves confronting the Other in its complexity and relationship with the world.
2. Secondly, it is about recognizing the subjectivity of our interlocutors in their relationship with the world and, therefore, the horizon of incommunication that looms over communication. Communicating means accepting that what we express will never be completely interpreted with the same meaning. These situations of incommunication are mischievously expressed by the writer Bernard Werber: "Between what I think, what I want to say, what I believe I am saying, what I say, what you want to hear, what you hear, what you think you understand, what you want to understand, and what you understand, there are at least nine possibilities of not understanding each other" (Werber 2011). Therefore, rather than trying to make incommunication disappear, it seems anthropologically more coherent to apprehend it, not as a pathology but as the normal consequence of a relationship that confronts singular ontologies - individual relationships with the world. Especially, as Eric Dacheux emphasizes, incommunication can be understood as the spice of communication: it is because we do not fully understand each other that we continue to interact to build shared meaning. However, be cautious of acommunication situations, which at first glance resemble communication since it involves a voluntary human relationship between radical otherness, but deviates from it due to the inequality (order, prohibition) of participants or the insincerity (manipulation) of one of the participants (Dacheux 2015). Incommunication can thus lead to this type of relationship that does not align with the previously mentioned democratic prerequisite. Therefore, a communicational engineering of democratic communication should lead the mediator-actor-translator to promote fruitful incommunications.
3. The deliberative dimension of communication should not be dismissed, but it needs to be updated in light of the Copernican revolution induced by the theory of incommunication. The political model of communicative action proposed by Habermas revolved around the theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981). Such an intercomprehensive approach apprehended social actors through the prism of their rationality, leading them to build consensuses. In the approach we propose, distancing from such an approach becomes necessary. In this regard, the works of Eric Dacheux, which approach deliberative communication through integrative conflict (Dacheux 2016), are constructive once again. Deliberative communication would then aim at "the construction of a civic

culture through the confrontation of different perspectives brought by equal actors in law" (ibid., p. 106). This common culture must emerge by creating "integrative conflict" (ibid. p. 88), meaning basing deliberation on the construction of disagreements (Viveret 2006). This should lead to the identification of "points that form consensus and points that are debated" (Dacheux 2016, p. 105). The mediator-actor-translator would have a role as a facilitator here, aiming to animate debates (circulation of speech, updating of everyone's representations, etc.).

4. The second aspect of democratic political communication corresponds to what Louis Quéré calls praxeological communication. It then falls to the mediator-actor to foster collective experience and action that pragmatically reveals points of agreement and disagreement among actors that may have emerged discursively in a deliberative communication phase. Praxeological communication indeed engages in an organizing social practice that tends to build collective will "together to build the common place from which they will momentarily relate to each other, relate to the world, and organize their reciprocal actions" (Quéré 1991, p. 76). The praxeological dimension of communication can also provoke human relationships, moments of life, favoring the establishment of a convivial relationship between participants. Moreover, it allows actions to be taken based on words, thoughts, and relationships with the world. The challenge of praxeological communication for the mediator-actor lies both in its ability to consolidate the collective project, the common reference, through its materialization; but also in the elaboration of a context that fosters the emergence of relationships based on trust, conviviality, and esteem for the other.
5. We attach paramount importance to the interpersonal relationship (translation, tension reduction, etc.) that the mediator-actor-translator must develop with other actors in the co-construction of public action. In this regard, the survey highlights that building an interpersonal relationship was greatly facilitated as a shared trust relationship developed with the co-construction actors. It appears that common practices are particularly beneficial for building shared trust - involving an actor-researcher role. Here, we refer to the work of Florine Garlot (2020), which develops an inquiry-based approach (in the sense of John Dewey) to interpersonal relationships. In this perspective, "if incommunication is this gap between what we perceive and social evidence, then it is incommunication that generates the investigation" (Garlot 2020, p. 327). In other words, if the mediator-actor accepts being subject to situations of incommunication, then it is indeed "amazement, paradox, and incomprehension that invite to conduct the investigation, to engage in reflective thinking" (ibid., p. 327). The translation mediation posture could, therefore, resemble an inquiry posture that aims to identify the communicational levers for the co-construction of public action, relying on the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the reflectivity required by such a posture.
6. Finally, the practice of translation mediation identifies a last challenge, that of the symbolic dimension of communication, and more specifically shared symbolic mediums, namely places, individuals, events that bring us together and contribute to building shared meaning. Indeed, any social exchange is always already mediated by the symbolic (Quéré 1982; Mucchielli & Paillé 2012). A symbol, "is what an object, a person, an event represents in resonance with the experience that a subject has of it, in the socio-cultural context that is his own. The symbol arises from the meaning constructed in experience" (Paillé et Mucchielli 2012, p. 62). This symbolic dimension, therefore, concerns the representations that guide the interpretation of realities experienced by the actors.

Pragmatically, it involves first identifying individuals called "trusted third parties," i.e., the actors who will, depending on the situation, promote the construction of shared meaning through symbols, i.e., the representations they embody. The president of CISCA is enlightening in this regard when addressing her role during the first year of construction: "I brought everyone together because people generally trust me when I ask them to be there, they usually come." The initial CISCA bearer confirmed this observation at the end of the first year of existence of his structure: "we can see it well, since [the new president] took a bit of the reins on the socio-economic side for the creation of the R&D center, it's accelerating a lot because she is the symbol of a form of social innovation." This reflection on the symbolic dimension of communication also concerns the places of co-construction to think about "intermediate spaces of socialization, [...] where representations can be deconstructed and reconstructed" (Tourrilhes 2008, p. 119). Thus, when the CISCA bearer mentions one of the particularly successful co-construction phases, he declares: "people came to [this] place because it is symbolically charged." The SSE elected representative of the Metropolis extends this idea and considers that "disinstitutionalizing meeting moments," i.e., making "moments more informal, where we talk more informally," favors the construction of shared meaning. She notably refers to the emergence of CISCA and specifies: "changing places... yeah, changing the context, I think it promotes interpersonal relationships and therefore understanding the other." Therefore, the mediator-actor-translator must integrate into his practice a reflection on the choice of communication spaces and the role of participating actors because both have symbolic significance and therefore influence the process of building shared meaning in the dynamics of co-construction of public action. Finally, a reflection on the semantic universe deployed by the engaged actors should lead the mediator-actor-translator to master the symbolic dimension of language through a practice of intralingual translation, transitioning from one language system to another.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that this text sheds new light on the communicative processes of co-construction of public action, approached from the theoretical perspective of incommunication, within an ethnographic framework justifying our intervention, materialized through a mediation-translation posture. Thus, this survey highlights the existence of incommunication phenomena in co-construction processes and reveals their nature. Consequently, we aimed to highlight the complexity of building shared meaning among actors from heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we approached communication as a relationship for constructing meaning, which frequently leads to the shared realization of an imperfect understanding of otherness. Incommunication and communication, therefore, are two sides of the same coin. Incommunication is an unavoidable anthropological given that needs to be made fruitful. Our work has highlighted the challenge of communicational engineering, which involves intervention in a translation and mediation posture within democratic co-construction processes of public action. We have uncovered communicative practices - deliberative, praxeological, and relational - embraced by a mediation-translation posture. This communicational engineering could be described as "institutional political communication," meaning democratic political communication that fosters instituting collective actions and, consequently, social change. Thus, such a proposition is rooted in the Copernican revolution of an approach through incommunication, suggesting a dialogue between incommunication and democratic

co-construction. In the end, it is because democratic communication is complex that democratic co-construction of public action cannot do without such a communicational engineering embodied in a mediation-translation action.

References

BOUDON R., (1989), « Petite sociologie de l'incommunication », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 4, p. 53-66.

BOUTAUD J.-J., (2015), *Sensible et communication*, Sciences cognitives édition., Londres, ISTE Editions, 250 p.

CALLON M., (2006), « Sociologie de l'acteur réseau » dans *Sociologie de la traduction : Textes fondateurs*, Presses des Mines., Paris, p. 267-276.

CALLON M., (1986), « Eléments pour une analyse sociologique de la traduction. La domestication des coquilles Saint Jacques et des marins pêcheurs dans la baie de Saint Brieuç. », *L'année sociologique*, n° 36, p. 169-208.

CAUNE J., (2010), « Les territoires et les cartes de la médiation ou la médiation mise à nu par ses commentateurs », *Les Enjeux de l'information et de la communication*, Dossier 2010, n° 2, p. 1-11.

CEFAÏ D., (2003), *L'enquête de terrain*, Paris, France: La Découverte, 615 p.

CEFAÏ D., CARREL M., TALPIN J., ELIASOPH N. et LICHTERMAN P., (2012), « Ethnographies de la participation », *Participations*, Vol. 4, n° 3, p. 7-48.

CORCUFF P., (2011), *Les nouvelles sociologies: Sociologies contemporaines*, 3e édition., Paris, Armand Colin, 128 p.

DACHEUX É., (2019), « Deux sources cosmopolites des réflexions sur l'incommunication : Vilem Flusser et Rene-Jean Ravault », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 84, p. 38-44

DACHEUX É., (2016), « Du consentement à la délibération : une critique communicationnelle du marketing politique », *Communiquer. Revue de communication sociale et publique*, n° 16, p. 85-110.

DACHEUX É., (2015), « L'incommunication, sel de la communication. », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 71, p. 266-271.

DEWEY J., (2010), *Le public et ses problèmes*, Paris, Gallimard (coll. « Folio Essais »), 336 p.

DURACKA N., (2016), *L'innovation sociale chez les acteurs de l'économie sociale et solidaire en Auvergne : Une approche communicationnelle*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Clermont Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, 649 p.

FLUSSER V., (1978), « Le phénomène surprenant de la communication », *Communication & Langages*, vol. 37, n° 1, p. 27-32.

FRAISSE L., (2018), *La co-construction de l'action publique : définition, enjeux, discours et pratiques*, Paris, France, Fondation maison des sciences de l'homme. 69 p.

FRAISSE L., (2016), « Co-construire l'action publique : Apports et limites des politiques locales de l'Economie sociale et solidaire en France », Communication présentée à la Conférence européenne EMES-Polanyi International Seminar, Paris, CNAM, France. 13 p.

- GADRAS S., (2010), « La médiation politique comme cadre d'analyse de l'évolution des pratiques de communication au sein de l'espace public local », *Les Enjeux de l'information et de la communication*, Dossier 2010, n° 2, p. 12-25.
- GARLOT F., (2020), *(Re)penser la communication des associations de solidarité internationale françaises*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Clermont Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, 408 p.
- GROSSETTI M., (2019), « Réseaux sociaux et ressources de médiation » dans *Médiations*, Paris, CNRS Éditions (coll. « Les essentiels d'Hermès »), p. 103-120.
- HABERMAS J., (1987), *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel. Tome 1. Rationalité de l'agir et rationalisation de la société*, Fayard, Paris, 450 p.
- HALL E-T. et HALL M.R., (1994), *Comprendre les Japonais*, Paris, Seuil, 217 p.
- LEPASTIER S., (2013), *L'incommunication dans tous ses états*, Paris, CNRS Editions (coll. « Les Essentiels d'Hermès »), 213 p.
- LIQUÈTE V., (2019), *Médiations*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 178 p.
- MARCHIVE A., (2012), « Introduction. Les pratiques de l'enquête ethnographique », *Les Sciences de l'éducation - Pour l'Ere nouvelle*, Vol. 45, n° 4, p. 7-14.
- MERCIER A., (2001), « Amiante, sida, caulerpa taxifolia. L'apport d'une sociologie de l'incommunication à la compréhension des dysfonctionnements des politiques publiques. » dans *Les effets d'information en politique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, p. 175-192.
- MICHELAT G., (1975), « Sur l'utilisation de l'entretien non directif en sociologie », *Revue Française de Sociologie*, vol. 16, n° 2, p. 229-247
- OUSTINOFF M., (2012), *La traduction*, 4. éd., Paris, France : Presses Universitaires de France, 127 p.
- PAILLÉ P. et MUCCHIELLI A., (2012), *L'analyse qualitative en sciences humaines et sociales*, Paris, Armand Colin, 423 p.
- QUÉRÉ L., (1991), « D'un modèle épistémologique de la communication à un modèle praxéologique », *La communication : une interrogation philosophique*, Vol. 9, n° 46-47, p. 69-90.
- QUÉRÉ L., (1982), *Des miroirs équivoques : aux origines de la communication moderne*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 214 p.
- RASSE P., (2014), « La médiation, de l'utopie à la transformation sociale », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 71, p. 46-49.
- RAVAULT R-J., (1986), « Colonialisme culturel et « coerséductions » autochtones », *Communication. Information Médias Théories*, vol. 8, n° 1, p. 54-106.
- ROBERT P., (2005), « De la communication à l'incommunication ? », *Communication & langages*, n° 146, p. 3-18.
- SIX J-F., (1990), *Le temps des médiateurs*, Paris, Seuil, 282 p.
- TOURRILHES C., 2008, « La médiation, innovation sociale ou nouveau mode de régulation ? Vers des espaces tiers de socialisation », *Pensée plurielle*, n° 18, n° 2, p. 109-120.
- VAILLANCOURT Y., (2019), « De la co-construction des connaissances et des politiques publiques », *SociologieS, Dossiers : Savoirs savants, savoirs d'action et politiques publiques* (en ligne).

VAILLANCOURT Y., (2016), « *La co-construction des politiques publiques* », Communication présentée à la Conférence européenne EMES-Polanyi International Seminar, Paris, CNAM, France, 23 p.

VAILLANCOURT Y., (2014), *Note de recherche sur l'apport de l'économie sociale et solidaire dans la co-construction démocratique des politiques publiques : réflexions ancrées dans des expériences canadiennes, québécoises et latinoaméricaines*, CRISES & LAREPPS, UQAM, Montréal, 69 p.

VIVERET P., (2006), « Qualité démocratique et construction des désaccords » dans *Quelle démocratie voulons-nous ?*, Paris, La Découverte, p. 32-34.

WATZLAWICK P., (1988), *L'invention de la réalité. Comment savons-nous ce que nous croyons savoir?* Contributions au constructivisme, Editions du Seuil., Paris, 374 p.

WOLTON D., (2019), « Communication, incommunication et acommunication », *Hermès, La Revue*, n°84, p. 200-205

WOLTON D., (2017), « Avant-propos », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 77, p. 13-18.

WOLTON D., (2010), « La traduction, passeport pour accéder à l'autre », *Hermès, La Revue*, n° 56, p. 9-12.

WOLTON D., (2009), *Informers n'est pas communiquer*, Paris, France : CNRS éditions, 147 p.