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# THE MORE THE MESSIER? UNDERSTANDING HETEROGENOUS ACTORS' INSTITUTIONAL WORK

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## CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Context of the study: **policy co-creation** to locally address the UN SDGs

Co-creation: “a process through which two or more public and private actors attempt to solve a shared problem, challenge, or task through a constructive exchange of different kinds of knowledge, resources, competences, and ideas” (Torfing et al., 2019, p. 802)

**Institutional work perspective** (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) to understand how the heterogenous actors involved in co-creation shape its implementation

Little attention has been paid to the institutional work of **heterogenous actors** with potentially conflicting intentions (Hampel et al., 2017)

*How does the institutional work of heterogenous actors play out?*

## RESEARCH DESIGN

**Qualitative study of two cases** implementing co-creation to locally address the SDGs :

- Venelles (France): co-creating a local 2030 Agenda with the population
- Klagenfurt (Austria): enriching the existing Smart City and Climate Strategy with local high school students

Triangulation of data collection methods:

- Semi-structured **interviews** with 41 respondents
- Non-participant **observation** of 11 co-creation events
- Analysis of **secondary data**

Data analysis in two phases:

- Phase 1: coding for institutional work **practices and intentions** of involved actors
- Phase 2: based on phase 1, identifying the **form of institutional work**  
→ two forms emerge: dispersed and centralized institutional work



## MAIN FINDINGS



### VENELLES

#### 1 – Launch and deployment

Institutional work emanates mainly from the mayor; his team adheres to his vision; citizens mostly « do as they are told ».

→ Institutional work is rather **centralized**.

#### 2 – Finalization and extension

Citizens' institutional work leads to more extensive co-creation than planned; they take ownership of the project.

→ Institutional work becomes **dispersed**.

### KLAGENFURT



#### 1 – Negotiation

Institutional work is immediately operational; actors with divergent intentions must find compromises, diluting co-creation.

→ Institutional work is initially **dispersed**.

#### 2 – Implementation

Actors are more numerous but remain rather passive; most institutional work emanates from the consultant.

→ Institutional work becomes **centralized**.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Fine-grained analysis of **heterogenous actors' institutional work** (cf. Hampel et al., 2017):

- Various intentions and practices co-exist, shape one another and the institutional change
- Institutional work is dynamic and complex

**Two forms of institutional work** emerge: centralized and dispersed institutional work:

- **Centralized** institutional work resembles institutional entrepreneurship, but crucial role of supporting actors
- **Dispersed** institutional work involves diverse actors, intentions, and practices, is messy, and based on negotiation, compromise, experimentation
  - Can be defined as the purposive and reflexive action of dispersed and heterogenous actors aimed at building legitimacy for new, existing, or changed institutional arrangements in an anarchic way
  - **Involvement of heterogenous actors does not automatically mean dispersed institutional work**

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