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Implementing co-creation in local public organizations to address Grand Challenges: an institutional work approach

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THÈSE DE DOCTORAT

Soutenue à Aix-Marseille Université
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Magdalena POTZ

Implementing co-creation in local public organizations to address Grand Challenges: an institutional work approach

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Affidavit

I, undersigned, Magdalena POTZ, hereby declare that the work presented in this manuscript is my own work, carried out under the scientific supervision of Professor Solange HERNANDEZ and Dr. Sarah SERVAL, in accordance with the principles of honesty, integrity and responsibility inherent to the research mission. The research work and the writing of this manuscript have been carried out in compliance with both the French national charter for Research Integrity and the Aix-Marseille University charter on the fight against plagiarism.

This work has not been submitted previously either in this country or in another country in the same or in a similar version to any other examination body.

Magdalena POTZ

Aix-en-Provence, February 12th, 2024



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List of publications and participation in conferences

1) List of publications realized during the PhD:

Potz, M., Serval, S. (2022): Co-creation for the Implementation of SDGs in a French Municipality. In: Leal Filho, W., Dinis, M.A.P., Moggi, S., Price, E., Hope, A. (eds.): *SDGs in the European Region. Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals – Regional Perspectives*. Springer, Cham.

Potz, M. (2022): La co-création, une innovation managériale pour faire face aux enjeux sociétaux. *Question(s) de Management - numéro 39 (juin 2022)*. Cahier spécial « *Le management public en question* ». Rubrique « *Regards croisés* » : « *Quels marqueurs de l'innovation managériale dans les organisations publiques ?* »

Potz, M., Serval, S., Saint Jonsson, A., & Tiberghien, B. (2022): Designing Local Public Organizations for the Introduction of an Institutional Logic of Co-creation. In *Academy of Management Proceedings*. Academy of Management. Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510.

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Serval, S., Potz, M., Hernandez, S.: The effects of the territory on the institutional work of implementing local policy co-creation [\[accepted in April 2024: Innovation: FNEGE 2, AJG 1\]](#)

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Potz, M., Serval, S. (2022). When co-creation does not match expectations: understanding co-destruction of public value. 38th EGOS Colloquium: Organizing: The Beauty of Imperfection. Vienna, 7-9 July.

Summer School "Local Government in Motion. Local Innovation in Changing Contexts", organized by TU Darmstadt & University of Athens, Chania, Crete, 13 – 15 September 2021.

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Potz, M., Serval, S., Saint Jonsson, A., Tiberghien, B. (2020). Identification of levers and barriers to introduce a new institutional logic of co-creation in a local public organization. *World Open Innovation Conference. Building Successful Ecosystems Through Open Innovation*. Eindhoven, 9-11 December.

Résumé

Cette thèse de doctorat explore la manière dont la co-création de politiques publiques est mise en œuvre dans les organisations publiques locales lorsqu'elles cherchent à relever les « *Grand Challenges* ». En effet, les « *Grand Challenges* » tels que le changement climatique et ses conséquences, la migration, la perte de biodiversité ou les problèmes de santé publique se manifestent au niveau local. Par conséquent, les organisations publiques locales sont tenues d'appliquer des approches nouvelles et innovantes telles que la co-création de politiques publiques pour résoudre ces problèmes complexes auxquels elles sont confrontées. Nous mobilisons le cadre théorique du travail institutionnel pour comprendre comment les acteurs hétérogènes impliqués dans la co-création façonnent sa mise en œuvre.

Pour répondre à cette question, nous examinons les pratiques du travail institutionnel des acteurs hétérogènes et leurs intentions visant à façonner la mise en œuvre de la co-création (*question de recherche 1*), les différents rôles institutionnels que ces acteurs assument lorsqu'ils s'engagent dans le travail institutionnel (*question de recherche 2*), ainsi que les formes organisationnelles que prend le travail institutionnel en fonction de ces pratiques et rôles (*question de recherche 3*). Pour étudier empiriquement ces questions, notre design de recherche est basé sur une étude qualitative, suivant une démarche abductive et une approche par étude de cas multiples. Deux organisations publiques locales, une en France et une en Autriche, mettant en œuvre la co-création pour atteindre localement les Objectifs de Développement Durable des Nations Unies, ont été étudiées. Nous avons collecté des données à travers des entretiens semi-directifs, des observations et des données secondaires.

Les résultats de notre étude contribuent à la recherche sur le travail institutionnel au niveau micro et soulignent la complexité du travail institutionnel des acteurs hétérogènes. Notre étude offre une compréhension nuancée des travailleurs institutionnels, de leurs pratiques et leurs rôles. Nous constatons que leurs pratiques et intentions liées au travail institutionnel sont variées, évolutives et interdépendantes, et que leurs rôles institutionnels sont dynamiques et dépendants du contexte. En proposant un modèle des formes organisationnelles du travail institutionnel, nous concilions les dynamiques institutionnelles aux niveaux micro et méso.

Mots clés : co-création de politiques publiques ; Grand Challenges ; management public local ; organisations publiques locales ; travail institutionnel.

Abstract

This doctoral thesis explores how policy co-creation is implemented in local public organizations as they seek to address Grand Challenges. As a matter of fact, global Grand Challenges such as climate change and its consequences, migration, loss of biodiversity, or public health issues concretize at the local level. Consequently, local public organizations are required to apply new and innovative approaches such as policy co-creation to address the complex problems they are confronted with. We mobilize the theoretical lens of institutional work to study how the heterogenous actors involved in co-creation shape its implementation.

To respond to this question, we investigate heterogenous actors' diverse institutional work practices and intentions aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation (*research question 1*), the various institutional roles these actors take on as they engage in institutional work (*research question 2*), as well as the organizational forms institutional work assumes depending on said practices and roles (*research question 3*). To empirically study these questions, our research design is based on a qualitative study following an abductive approach and building on a multiple-case study. Two local public organizations, one in France and one in Austria, implementing co-creation to locally achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have been studied. We collected data through semi-structured interviews, observations, and secondary data.

The findings of our study contribute to research on micro-level institutional work and emphasize the complexity of heterogenous actors' institutional work. Our study provides a nuanced understanding of institutional workers, their practices and roles. We find that their institutional work practices and intentions are varied, evolving, and interrelated, and their institutional roles dynamic and highly context-dependent. By proposing a model of the organizational forms of institutional work, we reconcile the micro- and meso-levels of institutional dynamics.

Keywords: Grand Challenges; institutional work; local public management; local public organizations; policy co-creation.

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Introduction

Global problems such as climate change and its consequences, migration, loss of biodiversity, or public health issues concretize at the local level. Consequently, local public organizations are required to apply new and innovative approaches to address the complex policy problems they are confronted with. In this doctoral thesis, we investigate how policy co-creation as one such approach is implemented in local public organizations. This introduction presents the research context in which our study is embedded (1), the object of research (2), as well as the structure of this thesis (3).

1. Research context

In 2015, the member states of the United Nations (UN) adopted the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. A total of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute this Agenda that provides a shared blueprint for all countries so that peace and prosperity for the people and the planet can be achieved². The “deadline” ? The year of 2030. One of the 2030 Agenda’s underlying assumptions is that the SDGs are interrelated, that is, they cannot be treated separately but all of them must be addressed to achieve the goals. Moreover, all countries, all sectors, and all levels of government are called to action in order to achieve the goals hand-in-hand.

At the local level, public organizations are confronted with these problems on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, the level of cities, towns, and villages is where global problems crystallize and where the population is directly affected by them in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, it is at local level that public authorities provide support for displaced people, cope with the consequences of climatic disasters, and assist citizens who are ill, disabled, or in precarious social situations.

Faced with these increasingly complex and urgent policy problems, i.e., “Grand Challenges” (George et al., 2016), local public organizations struggle to find effective responses within their repertoire of existing actions. As a matter of fact, traditional responses appear less and less suited to resolving these complex problems (Alford & Head, 2017). In order to respond effectively, public organizations are therefore required to adapt their ways of working, and change how they design their public policies and actions. Academic work emphasizes the absence of a single, standardized response due to the very nature of these problems that are caused by a large number of factors (Head & Alford, 2015).

² United Nations: The 17 Goals, see <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (consulted on 31.01.2024)

However, the involvement of a multitude of actors appears to be a driver of the development of suitable and innovative response strategies (Ferlie et al., 2011; Fung, 2015). With the participation of diverse public and private actors, local public organizations can access different types of knowledge, experiences, and resources, and can therefore better tailor local public policy to real societal needs that have been identified locally (Hillier et al., 2004). Thus, according to recent academic work, it seems that a participatory approach, open to innovations, taking into account the experiences of a multitude of local actors and including them in decision-making processes, could help provide local responses to complex global policy problems (Coblence & Pallez, 2015; Coblence & Vivant, 2017; Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, 2019).

In the field of public management, this corresponds to a co-creation approach. The latter is defined as the mobilization of experiences, resources and ideas of a plurality of public and private stakeholders to create solutions (Torfing et al., 2019). This openness gives access to more resources and knowledge in order to develop responses to Grand Challenges. It can take shape at every stage of the policymaking process, from the agenda setting and ideation phase to policy design, implementation and evaluation of outcomes (Nabatchi et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2016).

Co-creation is still an emerging approach in our field of public management, particularly at the local level. The implementation of policy co-creation represents an innovation, even a paradigmatic shift (Torfing et al., 2019, 2021) for public organizations that are most often shaped by a bureaucratic functioning. Indeed, entrenched procedures are based on a vertical powerline and a clear allocation of roles and responsibilities within the organization, while collaborative approaches open up decision-making processes to external actors and are more horizontal (cf. Osborne, 2006). Consequently, introducing a participatory co-creation approach in local public organizations is not a straightforward undertaking.

It thus becomes highly relevant for both practitioners and scholars in the field of public management to explore the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations as they seek to address the complex policy problems that Grand Challenges imply.

2. Object of research

The development and clarification of an object of research encourages to think about and respond to the question of “what am I looking for in this study?” (Allard-Poesi & Maréchal, 2014). In this sense, the object of research allows to formulate precise questions that articulate theoretical, empirical, or methodological objects in order to discover or create others, and ultimately explain or understand social reality (ibid.). Our object of research is about understanding the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations in a context of Grand Challenges. The construction of this object of research requires several precisions regarding the terms we use and the way in which we use them.

In this thesis, **Grand Challenges** present the context in which our object of research is inscribed; we do not study the problems that constitute Grand Challenges themselves, but rather the process through which local public organizations seek to develop responses to them. Grand Challenges can be defined as complex and uncertain problems (Ferraro et al., 2015) that “*can be plausibly addressed through coordinated and collaborative effort*” (George et al., 2016, p. 1880). They are interconnected and intertwined (Gümüşay et al., 2022), with unknown solutions (Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

The **co-creation of public policy** can be defined as “*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*” in order to “*transform the understanding of the problem or task at hand and lead to new ways of solving it*” (Torfing et al., 2019, p. 802). While the term co-creation has been used to describe many different ways of collaborative processes in the public sector, we employ it to refer to the process of designing public policy. Moreover, co-creation can span over the entire process of policymaking (Nabatchi et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2016). However, in this research, we use it to refer only to the initial stages of ideation and design of local public policy to address Grand Challenges.

Finally, since the introduction of co-creation practices in public organizations shaped by bureaucratic paradigms represents a major shift and transformation of the institutional foundations on which these organizations rest, we mobilize neo-institutional theory to understand how this change is implemented. More specifically, we refer to the **institutional work** perspective (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) to understand how the heterogenous actors involved in co-creation shape its implementation through their purposeful and reflexive practices.

The articulation of the above-mentioned key elements of our research object allows to formulate our main research question as follows: **How does heterogenous actors’ institutional work shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations facing Grand Challenges?**

Co-creation as the conceptual framework, and institutional work as the theoretical framework of this thesis, as well as the development of our three research questions and their articulation will be explained in the following section.

3. Thesis structure

This thesis is structured in two parts and five chapters. **Part 1**, consisting of two chapters, provides the conceptual (chapter 1) and theoretical frameworks (chapter 2). **Part 2**, consisting of three chapters, presents the design (chapter 3) as well as the findings of our empirical study (chapter 4) and discusses them with regard to our three research questions and prior literature (chapter 5).

Chapter 1 allows to set the stage for our study. It explains the setting in which our object of research is embedded: the context of Grand Challenges that shape public action all around the world and at all levels, from supra-national to local governments. In this sense, we address the challenges associated with defining the uncertain and complex problems that are Grand Challenges (Brammer et al., 2019), and with addressing them (Kuhlmann & Rip, 2018). This reveals that local public organizations in their current state are ill-equipped, yet at a particularly relevant level to address Grand Challenges (Ansell et al., 2021; Doh et al., 2019) that require innovation and collaboration at the local level.

Exploring the paradigms that shape the public sector, we find that the emerging New Public Governance paradigm (Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006) and its increasingly collaborative policymaking approaches seem to be most appropriate in a context of Grand Challenges. Co-creation of policy (Torfing et al., 2019, 2021) is identified as the most suitable approach for the development of the innovative responses these complex problems require. Consequently, we investigate the changes the implementation of co-creation entails for bureaucratically structured public organizations and argue that actors' reflexive efforts are required to enable this shift and accompany it.

In **chapter 2**, we develop the theoretical framework of our doctoral thesis. To do so, we first justify our neo-institutional approach (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977), explore its foundations, and retrace its development. While this theory allows us to study the diffusion of new practices in organizations (Greenwood et al., 2008), its capacity to explain actors' roles in institutional dynamics is limited (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). Consequently, we then introduce the institutional work perspective (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) as a recent branch of neo-institutional theory enabling us to study the purposeful work of actors aimed at establishing co-creation as new institutional arrangement or disrupting or maintaining existing ones. Since this perspective goes beyond the extensively studied notion of powerful institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and integrates the institutional work of diverse actors, it is highly relevant for the study of the implementation of co-creation since the latter per definition involves a plurality of actors.

While institutional work is process- rather than outcome-focused and therefore a practice-based perspective (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, Lawrence et al., 2011, 2013), a macro-approach has so far been prioritized, and little is known about the practices of individual institutional workers (Lawrence et al., 2011). Even less research has been conducted on the institutional work of heterogenous actors (Hampel et al., 2017). Our first research question is therefore about the institutional work of the heterogenous actors involved in co-creation. We seek to contribute to opening the black box of institutional work practices at the micro-level:

RQ 1: What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

Our study broadens the spectrum of institutional workers and looks beyond the heroic figure of the institutional entrepreneur (Lawrence et al., 2011). Therefore, we are interested in the institutional roles that actors in different social positions, with varying degrees of power and access to different resources can take on as they engage in institutional work. Emergent literature identifies broad categories of roles that are associated with the underlying intentions of institutional work, i.e., creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions (cf. Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Through our study, we seek to propose a more nuanced approach that accounts for the complexity that accompanies heterogeneous actors' institutional work. Consequently, the institutional roles of the actors involved in co-creation are studied through our second research question:

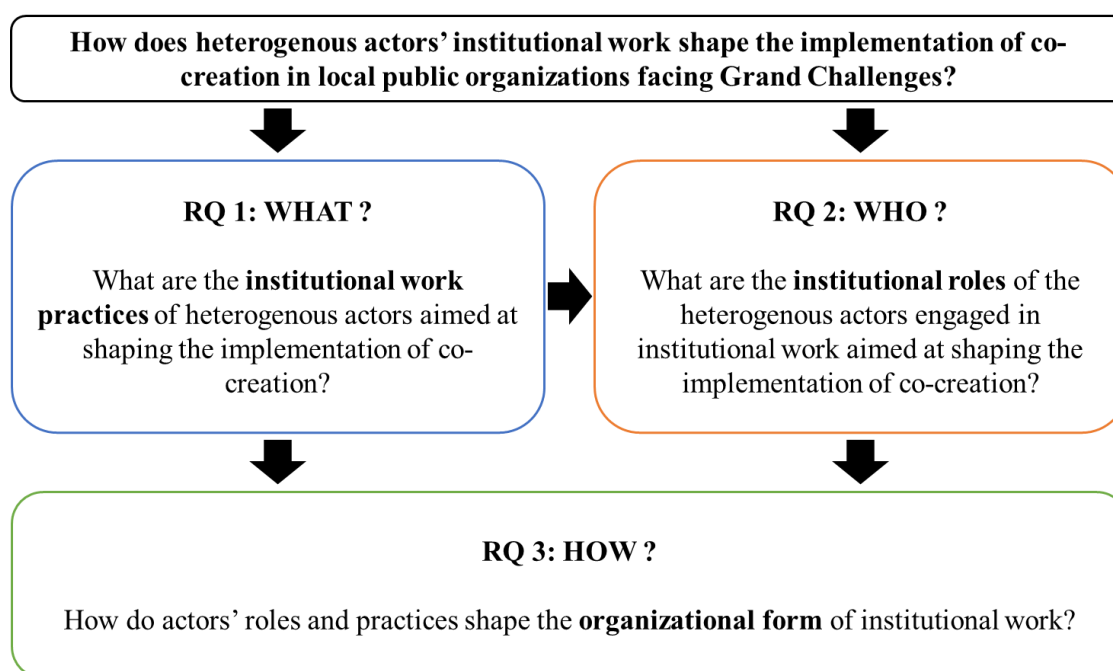
RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogeneous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

Based on our first two research questions about the institutional work practices of heterogeneous actors as well as their institutional roles, our third and final research question explores the organizational forms of institutional work. Prior literature, having focused mainly on the institutional work of institutional entrepreneurs, has neglected other forms in which institutional work can potentially manifest. However, depending on the configurations of actors and roles and the practices they engage in, institutional work is likely to come in different shapes. Therefore, to bring the threads of our reflection together and reconcile the micro-level (individual actors' practices and roles) and the meso-level (organizational forms of institutional work), we formulate the following third research question:

RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?

In sum, based on the context and conceptual framework laid out in chapter 1, in chapter 2 we decline our main research question in a set of three more concrete research questions that respectively investigate the "what?" (institutional work practices), the "who?" (institutional roles), and the "how?" (organizational forms) of institutional work in a context of the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. The articulation of our research questions is illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Research model



(Source: author)

Then, in **chapter 3**, we elaborate on the design of our empirical study. This includes our epistemological position and methodological choices. We begin by clarifying and justifying our constructivist epistemological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2011). Both theoretical considerations and personal influences that shape the choice of a constructivist approach are explained. We then provide insights into the choice of an abductive mode of reasoning that involves continuous back-and-forth between theory and field work (David, 1999). Our empirical study is based on a qualitative approach and more specifically a multiple case study design (Yin, 2011) consisting of two cases.

We explain the selection criteria for our two cases – a French and an Austrian local public organization implementing co-creation projects to locally achieve the SDGs – and the data collection methods. In this respect, we conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with 41 respondents, and observed 11 co-creation events across the two cases. Secondary data was used to corroborate the primary data we collected. We thematically analyzed (Bardin, 2013; Blanc et al., 2014) and coded our data using the NVivo 12 coding software. At the end of chapter 3, we elaborate on the criteria of scientificness used to ensure the validity and reliability of our qualitative study.

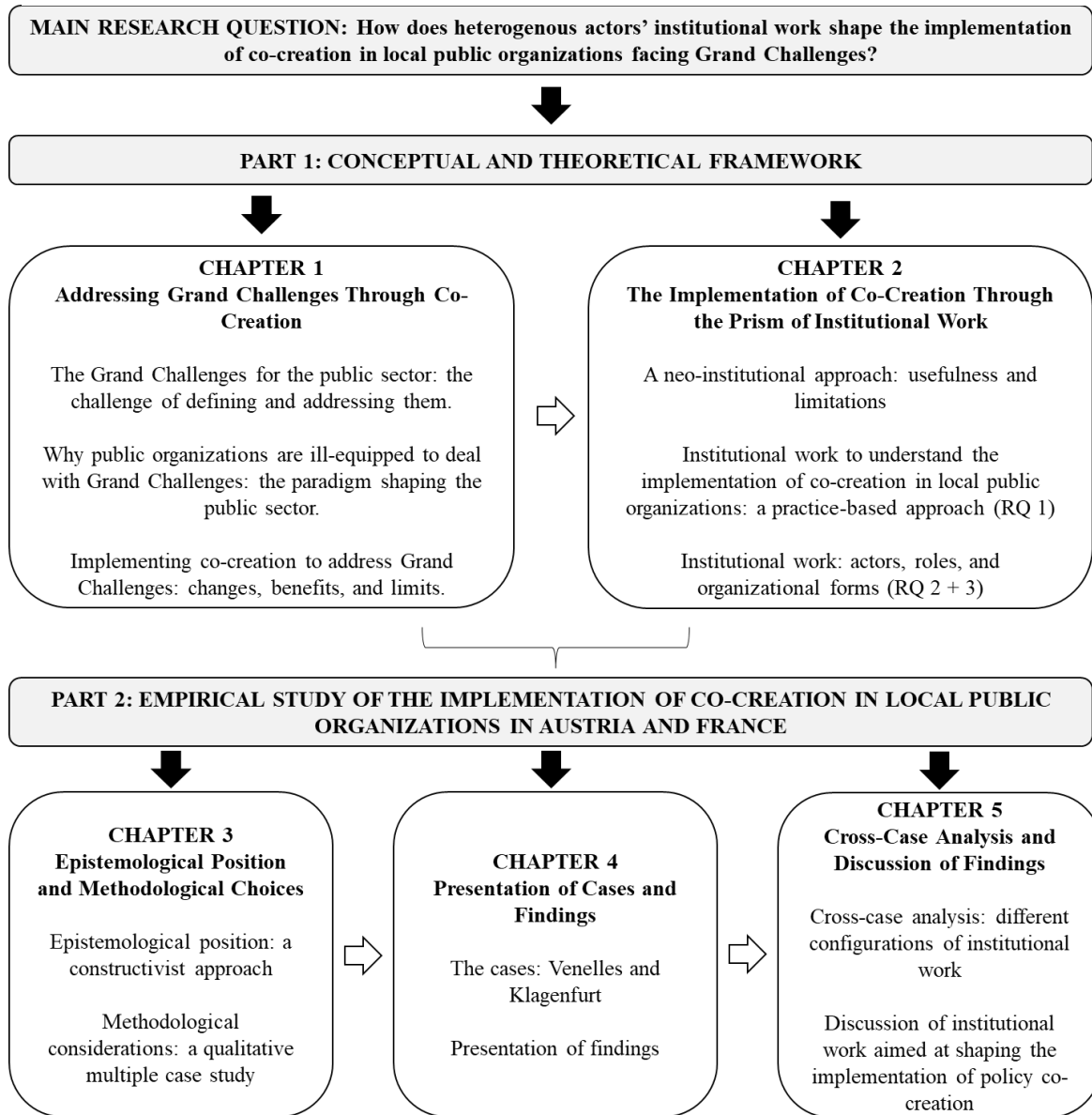
Chapter 4 presents the cases of our “two-case case study” (Yin, 2018) in more detail. Then, the findings for each case are presented in a narrative way. For the two cases, we present the institutional work practices and institutional roles we observed, as well as the organizational forms institutional work takes on based on practices and roles. The

research design based on two cases allows to explore the implementation of co-creation two different national, cultural, and administrative contexts, both marked by Grand Challenges.

Finally, **chapter 5** begins with a cross-case analysis of our findings. This allows to put them into perspective and to identify similarities and differences. Here, we provide responses to our three research questions about institutional work practices, institutional roles, and the organizational forms of institutional work. Then, our findings are discussed with regard to the literature review we conducted in chapters 1 and 2.

To facilitate the reading of our thesis, we begin each chapter and each section with an introduction presenting its content, and end with a conclusion. Introduction and conclusions moreover frame each of the two parts of this thesis. The structure of this doctoral thesis is illustrated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Thesis structure: two parts and five chapters



(Source: author)

PART 1. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this first part, we aim to develop the conceptual and theoretical framework to study the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations as they face Grand Challenges.

Part 1 is structured in two chapters:

To begin with, **chapter 1** allows us to set the stage for our research. In this chapter, we clarify the main concepts that we shall refer to in the remainder of this thesis. In this regard, we present the notion of Grand Challenges, which will act as the context in which we situate our research. The core features of these complex societal problems are explored, as well as the difficulties organizations face as they attempt to address them, and principles to be considered for treating them effectively. Zooming in on our discipline – public management – we then investigate the particularities of public organizations in this regard and explore the policymaking approaches that might facilitate the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges. Then, the concept of policy co-creation is explored as the most promising approach, and we argue for its potential in contexts marked by Grand Challenges.

In **chapter 2**, we develop the theoretical framework for our research. We mobilize a neo-institutional approach: this allows us to study the major institutional change the implementation of co-creation means for local public organizations. Indeed, this theory is useful to understand why and how practices are adopted and diffused in organizations. More specifically, we are interested in the role of actors in implementing these new co-creation practices. To explore this question, we mobilize the institutional work perspective as a branch of neo-institutional theory. This approach allows us to study the agency of the heterogeneous actors involved in the implementation of co-creation, their roles and practices in the process, as well as the organizational forms institutional work can take.

CHAPTER 1: Addressing Grand Challenges Through Co-Creation

This first chapter will help us set the stage for our research. We aim to specify the concepts that will be central in the remainder of our thesis. First, **Grand Challenges** – complex societal problems – provide the context in which we embed our research. Then, **co-creation**, where a variety of actors come together in policymaking, is suggested as a promising approach to address them. This chapter is structured in three sections:

In **section 1**, we clarify the context of our research. In this regard, the notion of Grand Challenges is mobilized to refer to the most pressing contemporary societal problems. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals provide a useful framework to both study and operationalize these Grand Challenges. In this section, we attempt to rise to the challenge of defining Grand Challenges, uncover the challenges related to resolving them, and identify innovation, collaboration, and local action as principles that can facilitate the development of responses.

Then, in **section 2**, we investigate the manifestation of Grand Challenges in the public sector. We show that public organizations in their current state are ill-equipped for dealing with Grand Challenges and argue that this is due to the impact of the paradigms shaping this sector. We briefly retrace the evolution of dominant paradigms from Public Administration to New Public Management and New Public Governance and show why collaborative governance as a branch of the latter is a suitable approach to policymaking in contexts marked by Grand Challenges. We identify several forms collaborative governance can take and make a case for policy co-creation as a promising tool for public organizations seeking to address Grand Challenges.

Finally, in **section 3**, we provide more detailed insights into the transformations that the implementation of co-creation sparks in public organizations. We identify three broad areas where changes are likely to occur and disrupt established procedures and patterns of behavior: organizational processes; involved actors, as well as their roles and skills; and the relationships between those actors. We moreover briefly investigate the outcomes, both positive and negative, co-creation can entail.

Section 1: The Grand Challenges for the public sector

The world is confronted with increasingly complex societal problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, migration, poverty, or inequality, to name some of the most pressing ones. A fast-developing stream of literature refers to these problems as “Grand Challenges” (Colquitt & George, 2011; Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). These large and complex issues have no easy solution, and since they are global in nature, they affect all geographical levels and sectors in some way (Berrone et al., 2016). Especially Grand Challenges related to the environment are so encompassing that they touch on virtually every social and ecological issue that organizations all over the world are faced with (Doh et al., 2019).

Grand Challenges are “*specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation*” (George et al., 2016, p. 1881). These problems are complex, uncertain (Ferraro et al., 2015), and intertwined, and potential solutions are uncertain, too (Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

Treating these problems becomes more and more urgent and not only big players such as national governments or corporations must act, but also other types of actors (Markman et al., 2019). In this sense, Ambos and Tatarinov (2023, p. 1) highlight that all kinds of organizations ought to act: “*private and public sector, profit and non-profit, local and international organizations are equally called to action*”. Due to the complex nature of Grand Challenges, tackling them is a challenge on its own since organizations, and especially so in the public sector, are ill-prepared for dealing with this type of problems. Their habitual approaches are not effective in a context of Grand Challenges (Berrone et al., 2023).

In this first section, we therefore provide insights into Grand Challenges as both a concept in management and organizational studies, and as actual policy problems for public organizations. To do so, we first attempt to answer the questions of what Grand Challenges are, and which shape they can take: we retrace the evolution of “lists” of contemporary Grand Challenges up until the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (**section 1.1.**). We then explore how the notion of Grand Challenges has been defined in existing literature over the past decade, their distinguishing features – how are they different from other types of societal problems? -, as well as the challenges their treatment entails and principles for the development of effective responses (**section 1.2.**).

1.1. The Grand Challenges of the 21st Century

While it is now a “hot topic” among scholars in many disciplines besides management and organizational studies, the term “Grand Challenge” has been coined by a mathematician. In 1900, David Hilbert has curated a list of important and at the time unresolved mathematical problems and presented these challenges at a conference in Paris. He thereby encouraged fellow scholars to engage in innovative research in the field in order to resolve these problems (Colquitt & George, 2011). At first, Grand Challenges thus referred to relatively precisely formulated scientific problems that were being addressed by experts in the domain and potentially solvable. Since their beginnings in mathematics and other “hard” sciences such as natural sciences, engineering, and medicine, Grand Challenges have spread to a variety of fields. Through their application in other disciplines such as social sciences, they have become more complex, more multidimensional, and less tractable – in a way, Grand Challenges have over time become “grandier” (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022).

In the field of management and organizational studies, the first reference to the term Grand Challenges dates to Colquitt and George’s 2011 Academy of Management Journal editorial. There, to delimit the notion of Grand Challenges, they state that the “*fundamental principles underlying a grand challenge are the pursuit of bold ideas and the adoption of less conventional approaches to tackling large, unresolved problems*” (Colquitt & George, 2011, p. 432). They perceive Grand Challenges as problems that are important at both a national and global scale, that affect many people including future generations, and that require big, courageous, and novel ideas. In this piece, they encourage fellow scholars in management and organizational studies to mobilize the notion of Grand Challenges to frame their research: explicating how a study contributes to tackling important societal problems can provide its “*raison d’être*” and infuse the research with meaning³.

Of course, while the use of the term Grand Challenges in management and organizational studies is relatively recent, scholars’ and practitioners’ interest in this type of problems is not; Grand Challenges exist, are being tackled and studied whether they are labelled as such or not. However, if scholars in this field “*are riding a wave of interest in grand challenges*” (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022, p. 280), it is because it has become evident that organizations of any kind are key actors in addressing and potentially resolving these problems, but also contribute to their emergence (Gümüşay et al., 2022). Consequently, since organizations everywhere are today confronted with complex problems, scholarly interest in understanding them and providing insights into potentially effective response strategies does not cease to increase. In addition, attempts

³ This approach to Grand Challenges where the notion sometimes seems to be included in studies for publishing or visibility reasons without it being essential or justified has since been heavily criticized. It implies the risk of turning it into an umbrella concept devoid of meaning (see for example Brammer et al., 2019; Carton et al., 2023; Seelos et al., 2023).

at providing “lists” of the most pressing contemporary Grand Challenges have multiplied over the past decades.

Aiming to provide some conceptual clarity, we explore these lists of Grand Challenges to uncover how these problems are understood and operationalized in practice (**section 1.1.1.**); we then move on to the literature in management and organizational studies as we seek to define the notion of Grand Challenges and its core features (**section 1.1.2.**) and attempt to distinguish them from other types of complex problems, paying particular attention to “wicked problems” (**section 1.1.3.**).

1.1.1. What are today’s Grand Challenges?

As explained above, the first enumeration of Grand Challenges can be situated in 1900 with Hilbert’s 23 mathematical problems. More relevant for scholars of management and organizational studies, several lists of societal Grand Challenges have since then been developed to operationalize the complex problems the world faces today and on which actors at all levels must act (see table 1 below for the challenges constituting each list). The paragraphs that follow provide some examples of lists of Grand Challenges that have been elaborated by different entities of the past decades, and that are relevant for our study, situated in the public sector.

If table 1 includes, among others, the International Development Goals of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC) of 1996, and the United Nations’ Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000, in this research, we adhere to one of the most recent “lists” or blueprints of Grand Challenges: the **United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

In 2015, the MDGs have been superseded by the SDGs. They include 17 goals which are declined into 169 targets. Among the 17 goals are the elimination of poverty and hunger, the reduction of inequality, and the improvement of access to and quality of education and health care. As George et al. (2016, p. 1881) point out, the SDGs are now “*perhaps the most universal and widely adopted grand challenges*”. As such, the SDGs represent “*a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future*” and are an urgent call for action for all countries⁴. The year 2030 has been set as the horizon for the achievement of the SDGs, and to succeed, all levels of government – from national to local - as well as non-governmental organizations, private sector companies, and other types of actors are encouraged to act, for instance through the development of so-called **2030 Agendas**, which are action plans for the implementation of the goals.

Regarding the question whether lists such as the SDGs ought to be used to qualify Grand Challenges in theory and practice, two visions co-exist. Some argue that “the grandest of challenges” were reflected in the MDGs (Colquitt & George, 2011), now superseded by the SDGs, and perceive them as “clear targets” to be achieved (George et al., 2016). At the same





⁴ United Nations: The 17 Goals, see <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (consulted on 05.07.2023)

time, others point out the impossibility of developing a definitive list of Grand Challenges, which seems to be the case of the SDGs (Gehman et al., 2022). With new challenges constantly emerging and existing ones changing, the idea of an exclusive list seems little reasonable to them (Howard-Grenville, 2021).

Concerning this question, we will argue later in this chapter how the treatment of Grand Challenges at the local level can help overcome this issue: while the SDGs may be used as a (more or less loose) framework guiding local public action and the development of responses, embedding these Grand Challenges in the local context helps make them more tangible and concrete. We therefore argue that the mobilization of the SDGs can act as a driver of local public action to address Grand Challenges, without being restrictive, and can be a useful tool for local public organizations to engage the public in a debate around these issues and how they manifest in daily local life.

In our understanding of Grand Challenges, we follow Brammer et al. (2019, p. 520) who observe that it is precisely the “*notable social issue or problem*’ sense of GC [that] reflects a sense of large, complex, intractable, and uncertain issues” which is how we perceive the SDGs. It is in this sense that we understand Grand Challenges in the context of this research. When seen in this way, effectively addressing Grand Challenges is likely to involve behavioral changes since they are societal issues (George et al., 2016). This is not necessarily true for problems that are more technical, requiring scientific solutions (as it is the case for the Gates Foundation’s Grand Challenges in the health sector, see table 1 below). This perception of Grand Challenges as societal rather than purely technical issues, as we will argue later, allows not only for experts to take part in the process of developing responses to Grand Challenges, but also enables “average” citizens, i.e., usually non-experts, to contribute. It moreover highlights the role of public organizations in addressing these issues: these organizations are able to bring together citizens, experts, and other actors to jointly develop responses to Grand Challenges.

Table 1. Examples of "lists" of Grand Challenges

Initiative and Entity	Goals and Challenges
Hilbert's Problems (David Hilbert, 1900)	23 (at the time) unresolved mathematical problems
International Development Goals (OECD Development Assistance Committee, 1996) 	Economic well-being Social development Environmental sustainability and regeneration
Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2000-2015) 	To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger To achieve universal primary education To promote gender equality and empower women To reduce child mortality To improve maternal health To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases To ensure environmental sustainability To develop a global partnership for development
Grand Challenges in Global Health Initiative (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003) 	Improve childhood vaccines Create new vaccines Control insects that transmit agents of disease Improve nutrition to promote health Improve drug treatment of infectious diseases Cure latent and chronic infections Measure disease and health status accurately and economically in developing countries
Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015-2030) 	No Poverty Zero Hunger Good Health and Well-being Quality Education Gender Equality Clean Water and Sanitation Affordable and Clean Energy Decent Work and Economic Growth Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Reduced Inequality Sustainable Cities and Communities Responsible Consumption and Production Climate Action Life below Water Life on Land Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions Partnerships for the Goals

(Source: author)

The Grand Challenges listed above make clear that a variety of actors must come together to resolve them. Goal 17 of the SDGs (“Partnerships for the Goals”) is centered precisely around the need for cooperation and coordination not only between the different member states of the UN, but also between sectors and stakeholder groups. In doing so, public organizations at all levels play a central role as most if not all of today’s most important Grand Challenges, as shown by the SDGs, are related to the public sphere in one way or another. Indeed, as Seelos et al. (2023) show in their review of Grand Challenges research in management scholarship, the most-studied Grand Challenges are associated with climate change, poverty, and health – all of which are issues that are clearly related to the public sector and on which public organizations are able to act.

More specifically, various manifestations of these most pressing Grand Challenges in the public sector have been studied in past research. Many studies have been concerned with **environmental Grand Challenges** (Doh et al., 2019), energy transition (Dodd & Nelson, 2019), climate change (Hofstad et al., 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2022; C. Wright & Nyberg, 2017), and more specifically their effects such as water health and supply (Couture et al., 2022) or causes of environmental damage like oil spills (Ansell et al., 2021). The Grand Challenge of social **inequality** (Mair et al., 2016) has also received a lot of attention: in this regard, urban mobility, poverty alleviation, and income inequality (van Wijk et al., 2019), displacement (Frey-Heger et al., 2022) and refugee crises (van der Giessen et al., 2021) have been studied, as well as related issues such as democracy crises and extremism (Gümüşay et al., 2020). Over the last years, a predominant topic in the Grand Challenges literature concerned with **public health** issues has of course been the COVID-19 pandemic (Ansell et al., 2021; Douillet, 2020; Gümüşay & Haack, 2020; Howard-Grenville, 2021; Moon, 2020).

This confirms that **the SDGs, encompassing all of these issues, provide a useful framework to study the Grand Challenges the public sector faces today**, and act as a call for action for governments at all levels (Berrone et al., 2023). The SDGs illustrate well that the Grand Challenges that are associated with the public sector are especially large in scope and affect different sectors, levels, and disciplines at the same time; they moreover have individual, governmental, as well as societal impacts; and they require innovation, novel approaches and ideas, and therefore significant shifts in the understanding of the roles of government and other public and private actors in this context (Gerton & Mitchell, 2019).

We have provided some examples of how Grand Challenges have been operationalized, and identified the SDGs as a useful framework, when used carefully, for addressing them. Now, we propose to investigate the evolution of the burgeoning Grand Challenges literature in the field of management and organizational studies, and to explore the definitions and characteristics that have been identified by scholars over the past decade of research.

1.1.2. The challenge of defining Grand Challenges

Not only is treating Grand Challenges a challenge on its own (Kuhlmann & Rip, 2018), but so is defining them since there is little consensus on the elements that constitute a Grand Challenge (Brammer et al., 2019). As a result, the definitions proposed by scholars in our field of management and organizational studies are relatively heterogenous. Moreover, even the terminology that is used remains somewhat unclear: as we will show in this section, several terms are often used interchangeably or overlap. Before we attempt to distinguish Grand Challenges from other types of complex societal problems, we take a closer look at the most common definitions and core features of Grand Challenges.

Gümüşay et al. (2022, p. 2) broadly state that “*societal grand challenges are all around us. These challenges are “societal” insofar as they affect members of society and their environments. They are “grand” insofar as their effects are large scale and potentially global*”. We can observe that Grand Challenges are **fundamental problems** of modern society (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022) that **affect everyone in some way** (Gümüşay et al., 2020).

Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 364) observe that Grand Challenges are complex, uncertain, and evaluative: “*First, grand challenges are complex, entailing many interactions and associations, emergent understandings, and nonlinear dynamics. Second, grand challenges confront organizations with radical uncertainty, by which we mean that actors cannot define the possible future states of the world, and therefore cannot forecast the consequences of their present actions, or whether future others will appreciate them. And third, grand challenges are evaluative, cutting across jurisdictional boundaries, implicating multiple criteria of worth, and revealing new concerns even as they are being tackled*”. Depending on the Grand Challenge, these features are more or less pronounced (Ritala, 2023).

As **complex** problems, Grand Challenges imply the co-existence of many interactions, associations, dynamics, and understandings. They are not linear or straightforward problems, but emerging (Ferraro et al., 2015). They are moreover **interconnected**: addressing one Grand Challenge might entail consequences – good or bad – for others, since Grand Challenges are not only individually complex, but also interwoven (Gümüşay et al., 2022). As **uncertain** problems, Grand Challenges are hard to predict and prepare for: one cannot know which shape the problem will take in the future, or how today’s actions will affect the future state of the Grand Challenge (Ferraro et al., 2015). As such, they are **fluid**: Grand Challenges are dynamic problems and one must therefore watch out for unintended developments and consequences (Gümüşay et al., 2022). As **evaluative** problems, new aspects of the Grand Challenge constantly emerge, even during the problem-solving process, since they extend beyond organizational, geographical, and temporal boundaries, and many different criteria and interpretations must be considered (Ferraro et al., 2015). In this sense, they are **paradoxical**: contradictory yet interrelated aspects and interests need to be addressed jointly, which might lead to tensions (Gümüşay et al., 2022; Jarzabkowski et al., 2019).

Consequently, what some might consider as a positive and valuable effort towards the resolution of the problem, others might perceive as negligible or negative (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022). In a context of Grand Challenges, these paradoxes are especially flagrant and problematic when actors who are not normally interdependent now are as they are confronted with the same Grand Challenge, but still pursue different goals and preferences (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019).

George et al. (2016) highlight the **global** nature of the problem as well as the **large number of people** it affects. At the same time, they point out that there is a possibility to treat the problem, and the necessity of coordination and collaboration in doing so. The potential **solvability** of Grand Challenges has also been highlighted by Eisenhardt et al. (2016). Since Grand Challenges are **intertwined and interconnected** (Eisenhardt et al. 2016) one cannot be completely separated from the others, and is likely to affect them in some way (Gümüşay et al., 2022). Therefore, the usefulness of isolated solutions is limited (Ritala, 2023) and it is necessary to see the bigger picture in order to develop effective responses. Thus, Grand Challenges are too **multifaceted** and too complex for one actor or one sector to address them alone (Gray et al., 2022). Since Grand Challenges **extend beyond communities** (Ambos & Tatarinov, 2023; Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016) they require “*working across disciplinary boundaries*” in order to be resolved (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1113).

In this sense, as Grand Challenges are per definition **resistant to easy solutions** due to their uniqueness and complexity (Martí, 2018), and therefore **persist** despite the technological, economic, and social progress that is made (George et al., 2016). Consequently, actors ought to be careful when developing solutions since the isolated treatment of a Grand Challenge might even make it worse, or lead to the emergence of other, related problems (Schad & Smith, 2019).

In sum, **Grand Challenges are global, complex, and uncertain societal problems that exceed boundaries. They are intertwined and multidimensional, and while they are potentially solvable, they resist easy solutions and are likely to change over time.**

1.1.3. Grand Challenges and “wicked problems”

Management and organizational scholars’ interest in complex societal problems shows in the burgeoning literature on this topic (see for example Seelos et al., 2023 for a recent review). It also shows in the range of terminology that is used to refer to these problems. To date, several terms co-exist: varying from one study to the next, they are used interchangeably, have different meanings, or overlap. While defining Grand Challenges is a challenge, meaningfully distinguishing them from other types of societal problems faced by organizations today is not an easy undertaking either.

This issue has been pointed out by numerous scholars who denounce the various names under which complex societal problems appear in the literature (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022; Klag & Langley, 2023; Seelos et al., 2023; van Wijk et al., 2019). Related

terms such as global/ social/ societal challenges are used somewhat interchangeably with Grand Challenges. For reasons of clarity, in this research we will assume that these types of challenges share a similar meaning and will continue to use the term Grand Challenges. An important issue that persists, however, is the difference between the two terms that have both developed into veritable literature streams: Grand Challenges, on the one hand, and **wicked problems** (Rittel & Webber, 1973), on the other. They are often closely associated, yet not fully equivalent (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022). The term has originally been coined by Rittel and Webber (1973) who understand wicked problems as ill-defined and without a definitive scientific solution but relying on political judgements.

Our definition of Grand Challenges conceives of them as potentially resolvable (Dodd & Nelson, 2019; Eisenhardt et al., 2016 George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022) while wicked problems are not. **A wicked problem approach is therefore not suitable if the development of effective solutions for a complex problem is at the center of attention** (Dodd & Nelson, 2019); in this case, mobilizing the Grand Challenges perspective seem more appropriate. As our thesis focuses on the search for solutions to these problems, we have chosen to retain the term "Grand Challenges" rather than "wicked problems". Indeed, while the aim of the thesis is to shed light on organizational processes and the responses developed by the involved actors, the object of our research is not the problems themselves, which is why we have chosen to move away from wicked problems, and to employ the term Grand Challenges.

1.2. The challenge of addressing Grand Challenges

The complexity of Grand Challenges entails a variety of obstacles for those who seek to address these problems. Organizing for Grand Challenges is therefore a complex undertaking in itself (George et al., 2023). Or, as Klag and Langley (2023, p. 39) put it, “*mobilization in messy issues will, in and of itself, be messy, with uncertain results*”. In this section, we therefore explore how the features of Grand Challenges we have uncovered above can present obstacles, and the potential issues they might entail (**section 1.2.1.**). Then, we go one step further and provide insights into the elements that are required for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges (**section 1.2.2.**).

1.2.1. Difficulties associated with addressing Grand Challenges

Following George et al. (2023) we regroup the problems related to resolving Grand Challenges as they have been identified in past literature into four broad groups: problems of knowing, problems of communication, problems of trust, and problems of access and reach.

1.2.1.1. Problems of knowing

Problems of knowing, as George et al. (2023), refer to the difficulties associated with understanding Grand Challenges. Understanding Grand Challenges is complicated as they involve “*known unknowns and unknown unknowns*” (George et al., 2021, p. 1005): elements that are not known but can be predicted or understood with some degree of certainty, and others that cannot. The problem of knowing and understanding moreover implies the complexity that lies in measuring the (potential or actual) social value or impact of actions taken to address the Grand Challenge, which they call the problem of valuation (George et al., 2023). We add to these points that the problem of knowing a Grand Challenge moreover includes the issues of how a problem becomes a Grand Challenge, and how the Grand Challenge is then formulated.

First, there is the question how a problem becomes a Grand Challenge because “*what one actor may see as ‘grand,’ others might consider trivial or meaningless. So how does one societal challenge become labeled ‘grand’ an ‘worthy of devoting significant resources’ while another does not?*” (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022, p. 290-291). Interestingly, while the complexity and multidimensionality of Grand Challenges have been widely discussed, this question has so far received little attention, as Howard-Grenville and Spengler (2022) point out. Brammer et al. (2019), identifying a set of seven amplifying factors for the emergence of Grand Challenges, imply that a certain degree of consensus as to how a Grand Challenge comes to be is possible – even required. These amplifying factors are anticipation (their identification by diverse actors), attributes (their multidisciplinary, multidimensional, multi-actor, and multi-level nature), actionability (the possibility for intervention), articulation (the building of a narrative), ambition (the attempt to “achieve

the unachievable”), advocacy (the mobilization of stakeholders), and assembly (the pooling of resources). This characterization of Grand Challenges and what it takes for them to emerge links back to the core features that define them and shows the complexity they entail.

1.2.1.2. Problems of communication

Problems of communication are the second group of issues identified by George et al. (2023). They include the issue of aligning stakeholder issues, as well as of coordination between them. An issue that occurs from the very beginning of the process of addressing Grand Challenges, as mentioned just above regarding problem formulation, the multiplicity of actors, goals, and preferences can pose an important challenge. We have established that Grand Challenges require stakeholder involvement in order to be resolved effectively. However, as Brown and Ashman (1996, p. 1475) point out, this increases the degree of complexity of the process of developing concrete actions or policy since “*high levels of participation are associated with moderate to intense conflict, and low levels of participation are associated with low conflict*” between the involved parties. The more different actors and societal groups are involved in the process, the greater the likelihood of diverging or even paradoxical interests, goals, and preferences (Ambos & Tatarinov, 2023). Consequently, the risk for conflict increases since a plurality of stakeholders, while necessary in contexts of Grand Challenges, is likely to create a divide (Schad & Smith, 2019). These conflicting goals and preferences, as stated above, might then complicate decision-making, thereby negatively affecting the effectiveness of the collaboration (Doh et al., 2019).

1.2.1.3. Problems of trust

Problems of trust arise when the involved actors are not able or willing to be vulnerable with one another, which inhibits their collaboration (George et al., 2023). These authors observe that when the basis of trust is missing, preventing opportunistic behavior becomes complicated and commitment to jointly desired outcomes hard to establish. This problem is especially visible in the public sector where citizens’ trust in government is declining (Schmidhuber et al., 2021). Engaging the public, whose participation in the development of responses to Grand Challenges is crucial, is therefore all the more challenging if basic trust in public institutions is low or missing.

1.2.1.4. Problems of access and reach

Finally, problems of access and reach refer to both “*access to people and access for people*” (George et al., 2021, p. 1006). The problem of having access *to* people in a context of Grand Challenges means that some groups of the population are hard to reach, and therefore do not have access to services that would increase their wellbeing with regard to the Grand Challenge (George et al., 2021, 2023). Reaching such marginalized and/or vulnerable groups requires additional efforts which might be costly (Brandsen, 2021). Access *for* people, on the other hand, refers to exclusion that is to a certain extent institutionalized and prohibits specific groups of people from benefitting from goods or services, for

example due to demographic characteristics (George et al., 2021). Despite the importance of these considerations, the question of whose interests and needs are represented, ignored, or misrepresented has received surprisingly little attention so far (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022)

To this category of problems associated with Grand Challenges, we add the imbalance of power that might arise between heterogeneous actors (Brown & Ashman, 1996; Gray et al., 2022). Here, power asymmetries can affect the process of addressing a Grand Challenge, as well as its outcomes and impacts (Gray et al., 2022). Consequences of this imbalance may be the exclusion of some actors from participating, or restricted participation. Some less powerful actors may be disadvantaged while benefits are created mainly for others. This relates to the problem of resource allocation: since Grand Challenges have neither a clear definition nor clear solutions, powerful actors will prioritize and attempt to address the aspect of the problem that is salient for them at the time where it becomes salient for them (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019). However, the prioritization and isolation of one aspect might provoke other problems (Schad & Smith, 2019). Thus, the implementation of seemingly “easy” solutions in a context of Grand Challenges might even worsen the problem, at least for some groups of actors (Martí, 2018).

In this sense, Gray et al. (2022, p. 3) observe that *“institutional processes are always embedded in power relations that promote certain actors’ interests and perspectives while neglecting or excluding others”*. Less powerful actors might therefore be pressured into conforming against their will or interest. While power inequalities are one facet of problems related to institutions, the failure of governmental or legal institutions when seeking to address Grand Challenges in another one (George et al., 2021, 2023). Weak institutions might reinforce negative externalities of Grand Challenges because they are based on structures that enhance disadvantage instead of alleviating it (George et al., 2023).

And finally, the Grand Challenge itself might be institutionalized (Mair et al., 2016): the problem to be addressed is often deeply engraved within the organization and its functioning, and the established way of doing things perceived as “normal” and accepted, which leads to a lack of motivation for change. When actors become conscious of the problem and attempt to address it, the responses they develop are thus often *“vulnerable, contested, and likely to fail”* (Mair et al., 2016, p. 2038). Scaffolding – a process through which resources are mobilized, emerging alternative patterns are stabilized, and goals undesired by those affected are concealed to institutionalize a new social order – is proposed by Mair et al. (2016) as a solution for this issue. However, since scaffolding preserves the separation between those implementing change and those concerned by it, we argue that other forms of collaboration, such as co-creation where this separation is less pronounced, might be more suitable in the context of Grand Challenges. We will get back to this question in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

1.2.2. Principles for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges

By now we have shown how Grand Challenges differ from other, more “tame” problems, and the specific challenges that come with their complexity. It is therefore evident that the type of responses that are developed through traditional problem-solving processes meant for “traditional” problems are most likely not effective for Grand Challenges. While due to the complexity and uncertainty of these problems, there is no definitive “best practice” for effectively addressing Grand Challenges, we identify a triptych of promising principles in past literature: the development of **innovative ideas**, **collaboration** across boundaries, and action at the **local level**. These three principles are explicated in the following paragraphs.

1.2.2.1. Innovation

We have established above that Grand Challenges are problems that are likely to change over time. New facets show as they evolve, altering the problem, the way in which it is perceived and understood, as well as its effects. The responses to Grand Challenges must be able to adapt to these constant changes. Therefore, **new problem-solving approaches that allow for the elaboration of novel ideas** are required (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Instead of resorting to conventional approaches, a more entrepreneurial way of addressing Grand Challenges can act as a driver for generating bold and innovative ideas (W. Boon & Edler, 2018; Colquitt & George, 2011). Conventional thinking, usually based on top-down decision-making, tends to have a narrow focus on those aspects of the problem that are most likely to occur, and those solutions that are most likely to be successful (Grimes & Vogus, 2021). However, while decision-makers might be able to make predictions with some certainty for more “tame” problems, this is not possible for Grand Challenges. This is true for organizations in both the private and the public sector.

Grand Challenges require something different - “*thinking ‘big’ and thinking ‘new’*” (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1119). Consequently, “*possibilistic thinking*” – the “*systematic deconstruction and interrogation of the assumptions upon which existing solutions are based as well as the subsequent development of new ‘worlds’*” (Grimes & Vogus, 2021, p. 2) – has been pointed out as a key principle for the treatment of Grand Challenges. In this understanding, existing practices and means, definitions and categories are not suitable for the resolution of Grand Challenges, and experimentation with new ones is necessary (Grimes & Vogus, 2021). Such innovative approaches are important to develop the long-term vision and resilience necessary to address Grand Challenges and adapt to them as they evolve (W. Boon & Edler, 2018; Doh et al., 2019).

1.2.2.2. Collaboration

Because Grand Challenges are complex and multidimensional and extend beyond geographical, disciplinary, sectoral, and organizational boundaries, they require collaboration among actors across these boundaries as well (Eisenhardt et al., 2016;

Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016, 2021). **Coordinated action of multiple and diverse actors** is therefore necessary to tackle Grand Challenges (George et al., 2016). Even if, as explicated above, gathering a variety of actors with different preferences and goals tends to make decision-making more complicated, it is a necessary element of effective problem-solving processes in contexts of Grand Challenges. Bringing together actors who perceive the Grand Challenge in different ways is important since they contribute not only different points of view, but also different types of expertise, which has been highlighted as crucial for the resolution of these complex problems (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Gray et al., 2022; Mair et al., 2016).

The wider the spectrum of actors – from governments to corporations, NGOs, scientists, and citizens – the broader the diversity of interests, identities, value perceptions, backgrounds, and resources that can be mobilized. Brown and Ashman (1996, p. 1467) point out the importance of the right set of actors being involved since “*problem-solving activities that do not mobilize the information and resources of the right set of actors may treat symptoms rather than causes or be frustrated by systemic forces that preserve the status quo*”. This reflection links back to the challenge of avoiding the exclusion of certain groups of marginalized or vulnerable actors. In this sense, the inclusion of various peripheral or central groups of actors can also increase the reach of the actions that are being developed: the participation of multiple communities means that support can be multiplied as different groups can be mobilized more easily (Grodal & O’Mahony, 2017).

A consciously designed **participatory architecture** (Ferraro et al., 2015) that allows for the collaboration of actors from different levels of society and of organizations (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022) is therefore a fundamental principle on which the treatment of Grand Challenges should ideally be based. In this regard, Gehman et al. (2022) highlight that it is important not to seek to *avoid* conflicts due to this pluralism of interests and goals, but to *manage* it via the right participatory architecture: instead of overcoming their differences, the involved actors should be encouraged to justify their positions and advance their interests, while at the same time accommodating others’ expectations as well. While it requires some effort to manage the variety of experiences, knowledge, and resources that the diversity of involved actors implies, this richness can act as a driver for the development of effective long-term responses to Grand Challenges (Brown & Ashman, 1996). And even before reaching the step of problem-solving, collaboration of diverse actors allows to define and formulate the Grand Challenge in a way that accommodates different perspectives (Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022). Thus, public participation must go beyond traditional methods such as elections or even citizen consultations, and take a more direct, expansive, and deliberative form if effective responses for Grand Challenges ought to be produced.

1.2.2.3. Local action

While the term “grand” in their name immediately evokes the large scale of Grand Challenges, they “*play out at multiple levels of scale, ranging from global to local*” (Dittrich, 2022, p. 190). Grand Challenges are nested in specific contexts and manifest in different

ways – they are “*locally embedded and globally intertwined*” (Ambos & Tatarinov, 2023, p. 1). Considering and reconciling the local and global contexts in which Grand Challenges arise is therefore important since they require both globally coordinated efforts and unique local solutions (George et al., 2016).

Mair et al. (2016) highlight that the local level does not take away from the “grandness” of Grand Challenges, and that, on the contrary, studying and addressing them locally allows to be attentive to contextual elements. Indeed, their **embeddedness** in the local institutional context can facilitate or hinder the treatment of Grand Challenges (Berrone et al., 2016). When Grand Challenges are addressed at this local level, deep engagement with the specific instantiation of the problem becomes possible (Mair et al., 2016), allowing to elaborate the most suitable response for the respective local conditions. Such an approach moreover allows to enhance the mobilization of local actors who might feel left out and powerless when global solutions are applied locally in a top-down manner (Dittrich, 2022). Including local actors in the process of developing responses to Grand Challenges may thus positively affect the legitimacy of the responses (W. Boon & Edler, 2018), and facilitate implementing the behavioral changes that might be necessary (George et al., 2016).

The local level is therefore key in addressing Grand Challenges (Gehman et al., 2022), and especially for those related to environmental issues (Hofstad et al., 2022) where the effects of global phenomena become visible at the local level: for example, climate change, a global problem, may manifest locally through a loss of biodiversity, or drought, flooding, and other extreme weather conditions. The local experience of Grand Challenges makes them more **tangible** and allows to break them down into operationalizable problems on which local actors can act (Grodal & O’Mahony, 2017). Thus, developing a local perspective of Grand Challenges allows to understand which solutions might work or not, and why, depending on the context, and how the problem can be communicated and made accessible for the local population (Ansell et al., 2022a). Since local governments tend to be subject to fewer restrictions and regulations than national ones (Sørensen & Torfing, 2022), the local level is particularly well suited for the development of responses to Grand challenges through **experimentation** based on participatory architecture (Gehman et al., 2022). Subsequently, these local experimentations might be “scaled up” and turn into larger-scale changes (Dittrich, 2022): thereby, instead of one global solution, many dispersed local responses, adapted to the respective context, might multiply.

Consequently, and while accounting for both the global and local scale of Grand Challenges may lead to paradoxical tensions, “zooming in” on local instantiations of Grand Challenges at a specific point in space and time is just as important as “zooming out” and understanding the interdependencies between these local manifestations and the “bigger picture”, the systemic nature of Grand Challenges (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019).

This is why, in our research context, the “**localization**” of **SDGs** seems essential. As explained above, the SDGs call actors at all levels to action. Therefore, public actors at the local level – i.e., local public organizations – are important partners for the achievement

of the SDGs. In this regard, different initiatives to stimulate the involvement of local actors in SDG action have emerged. An international example is “**Local2030: Localizing the SDGs**”, a network acting as a “*convergence point between local and regional governments and their associations, national governments, businesses, community-based organizations and other local actors, and the United Nations system*” that “*supports local leaders in collaboratively incubating and sharing solutions, unlocking bottlenecks and implementing strategies that advance the SDGs at the local level*”⁵. This UN-led initiative illustrates the important role that is ascribed to the local level in the achievement of the SDGs, and provides local actors with tools and resources to help them advance the goals.

As another example, the French national government explicitly encourages local governments to engage in actions to achieve the SDGs at their level⁶. In this roadmap, the issue of making “*citizen participation effective to achieve SDGs, and truly transform practices by increasing trial projects and local innovation*” is highlighted and based on several priorities: promoting local trial projects and innovations, reducing the territorial divide, and getting citizens involved in government action (Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition & Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2019). In this sense, several concrete tools have been introduced in France: examples are “*Action Coeur de Ville*” (aimed at revitalizing increasingly abandoned city centers of medium-sized cities to improve living conditions), or “*Territoire zéro chômeur de longue durée*” (aimed at alleviating unemployment in cities and involving affected people in the development of experiments to achieve this)⁷.

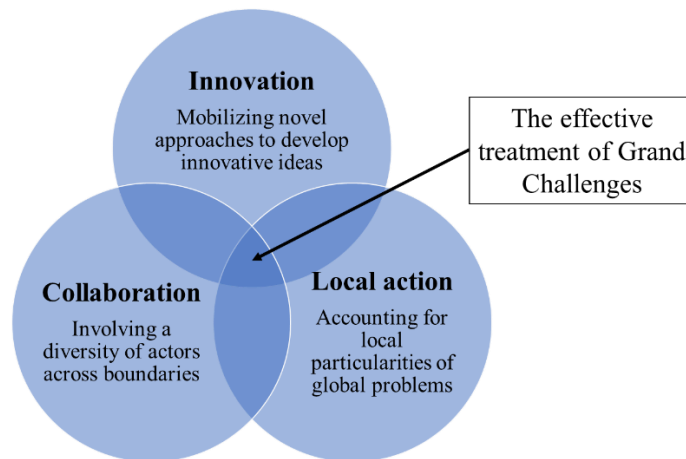
Thus, the fact that the **French “Roadmap for the 2030 Agenda”** makes both local innovation and citizen participation a priority perfectly illustrates the importance of combining the three principles mentioned in this section: innovation, collaboration, and local action. This example shows that in a context of Grand Challenges, the organizations faced with them are required to mobilize novel approaches in order to develop the innovative ideas that are necessary to effectively address these issues; they must ensure the collaboration of a diversity of actors across organizational, sectoral, and disciplinary boundaries; and since global problems are embedded in local conditions, acting at the local level seems appropriate so that the specific context can be taken into account. Figure 3 below illustrates these three principles.

⁵ See Local 2030. Localizing the SDGs, see <https://www.local2030.org/about-us.php> (consulted on 26.07.2023)

⁶ See Agenda 2030. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), see <https://www.agenda-2030.fr/en/> (consulted on 26.07.2023)

⁷ Ibid.

Figure 3. Principles for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges



(Source: author)

In this section, we clarified the context of Grand Challenges in which our research is embedded. We laid out the definition of the term Grand Challenges mobilized in this thesis, and explored why defining Grand Challenges is a challenge in itself. Then, the ways in which Grand Challenges concretize in the public sector were investigated, and the UN SDGs were identified as a useful approach, if used loosely, to frame contemporary Grand Challenges. We moreover explained why addressing Grand Challenges is challenging, and identified the main issues associated with the development of responses to Grand Challenges, as well as three broad principles that may contribute to finding effective responses: innovation, collaboration, and local action.

In the following section, we address the question why public organizations are ill-equipped to address Grand Challenges.

Section 2: How can public organizations address Grand Challenges?

In **section 1** of this chapter, we have highlighted the need for organizations to engage in innovation, collaboration, and local action in order to address Grand Challenges, and established that public organizations are among the key actors in this regard. While public organizations, despite shifts in the paradigms that structure their functioning, remain organized in a highly bureaucratic way with top-down decision-making by powerful professional policymakers, “*many present-day challenges (Grand or otherwise) are too complex to be addressed in versions of a ‘command and control’ mode*” (Kuhlmann & Rip, 2018, p. 449). They require innovative approaches and ideas, as well as the collaboration of groups of actors in addition to those traditionally involved in policymaking. Embedded in local contexts, novel ways of policymaking can act as drivers for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges.

In this section, we aim to investigate the instantiations of Grand Challenges in the public sector more specifically (**section 2.1.**). Here, we argue that public organizations in their current state are not well-equipped to deal with Grand Challenges and elaborate on some of the reasons why this is as we retrace the paradigms that shape public organizations and their functioning.

We then briefly investigate the collaborative governance concept as one branch of the emerging New Public Governance paradigm, before dissecting it into more operational approaches that can be mobilized to address Grand Challenges (**section 2.2.**). In this regard, we explore the potential of public participation and co-production, before arguing for policy co-creation as the most suitable approach for public organizations seeking to tackle Grand Challenges.

2.1. Why public organizations are ill-equipped to deal with Grand Challenges

Considering the inherent features of Grand Challenges, and the challenges they entail, as well as the elements that are necessary for the development of effective responses, it appears that public organizations, in their current state, are ill equipped to deal with this type of complex policy problems (Ansell et al., 2021). As Doh et al. (2019, p. 454) point out, public organizations' capacity to develop responses to Grand Challenges is severely limited despite their potential because "*efforts are poorly coordinated, reactive, ad hoc, and managed at multiple levels of governance, complicating planning and implementation (Brooks & Adger, 2005)*". Deeply engraved conventional practices make public organizations slow and bureaucratic with a high degree of inertia (Doh et al., 2019), and little receptive for new and innovative approaches to policymaking, or for new actors in the policymaking arena.

Traditionally, the actors participating in the different stages of the policy cycle⁸ are professionals, i.e., elected politicians and civil servants. The actions of these policymakers who act within institutional frameworks and based on their beliefs determine policy outcomes. In this sense, Nakamura (1987, p. 144) points out that "*for bureaucrats and other organizational actors, the 'textbook' process fits well with both the historic rationalism of the administrative sciences--particularly public administration--and the power needs of bureaucrats. The notion that policymakers make policy, and bureaucrats create organizations and routines to carry them out, divides labor in the process, legitimates activities, and provides a framework of goals and organizational practices within which individual roles are given meaning in light of the requirements of a collective enterprise*". The role of citizens is not mentioned in this prevalent approach to policymaking. This understanding allows for elected politicians to perceive themselves as entitled to make decisions on behalf of the population, and delegate implementation to public managers and agents, while citizens remain passive at the receiving end of the process.

How the ideal-type policymaking process is understood depends on the predominant **paradigms** in the public sector. Over time, the schools of thought dominating and structuring the public sector tend to shift as societal and political trends and preferences at both a global and national scale evolve. These paradigms shape how the public sector and its organizations function, how policy is made, and how public services are produced and delivered. They define the roles of citizens and government in these processes, and the relationships between them (Meijer, 2016). Three broad paradigms can be identified

⁸ The notion of policy cycles provides a rough guiding principle to study how public policies come to be. In the vocabulary of both scholars and practitioners, a "textbook approach" dominates the understanding of the ideal-type policy process (Nakamura, 1987). It draws heavily on Lasswell's (1956) seminal conceptualization of a seven-stage policy cycle and condenses it into five (sometimes six) stages: (1) agenda setting, (2) policy formulation, (3) decision-making, (4) implementation, (5) evaluation, and sometimes (6) the choice to continue, replace, or end the policy. In this view, the policy cycle is sequential – one stage leads to the next -, functionally differentiated – each stage has a specific function and consists of specific activities - and cumulative – what is produced during one stage feeds into the next (Nakamura, 1987).

(Osborne, 2006): Public Administration (PA), dominating the public sector from the end of the 19th century until the late 1970s; New Public Management (NPM), popular from the early 1980s until the beginning of the 21st century during the peak of neo-liberalism; since then, post-NPM fashions emerge. One of the most popular approaches in the post-NPM literature is New Public Governance (NPG) (Guenoun & Matyjasik, 2019; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). While other approaches have been studied in the literature, following Osborne (2006) and others (see for example Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), we will refer to these three broad paradigms to retrace how the public sector has evolved, and how this affects its current capacity to face Grand Challenges.

Moreover, we must keep in mind that PA, NPM, and NPG do not replace one another but complexity in the public sector increases as they are layered one on top of the other(s) (Polzer et al., 2016). In this regard, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017, p. 7) describe public sector reform as “geological sedimentation”: *“new layers overlies but do not replace or completely wash away the previous layer, and older strata frequently poke through to the surface”*. Hence, how the public sector, the policymaking process, and each actor’s role are understood is not set in stone and determined once and for all but continues to evolve. Moreover, context – cultural, political, or temporal factors – such as the national administrative culture plays a role and affects the extent to which a paradigm spreads (Ongaro, 2013; Ongaro et al., 2021; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

The **Public Administration** paradigm emphasizes the rule of law, bureaucracy, and the role of professionals in policymaking (Osborne, 2006). The PA social contract involves citizens surrendering some freedom for the protection of their rights, and contributing through taxes and voting (Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006). Citizens play a passive role, while professionals are crucial in policymaking (Torfing et al., 2019). Criticisms of PA include its “dusty, technical, and legalistic” nature, resulting from a limited citizen-government relationship (Ferlie et al., 2020). PA struggles to address Grand Challenges due to the exclusion of ordinary citizens, reliance on experts, and a lack of consideration for local contexts (Osborne, 2006). The homogeneity of actors limits the diversity of inputs, hindering effective resolution of complex policy issues (Sørensen et al., 2021).

The **New Public Management** paradigm’s key features are: inspiration from private-sector management, performance focus, separation of policymaking and implementation, and encouragement of competition (Osborne, 2006). NPM’s social contract involves citizens accepting authority, paying for services, and viewing government outputs as legitimate if they are satisfied with these services (Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006). Citizens are active consumers in a “marketplace” facilitated by the government (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b; Pestoff, 2012; Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006). Administrative-political separation persists, with politicians making decisions and public servants acting as managers (Torfing & Ansell, 2017). NPM is criticized for organizational siloes and a fragmentation of the public sector (Bentzen, 2022) that poses challenges in coordination, accountability, and increased complexity (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Dunleavy et al., 2005). NPM is seen as creating a “hollowed-out state” with a transactional government role (Ferlie et al., 2020). Regarding NPM’s value for the resolution of Grand Challenges, citizens are active

consumers but their involvement in problem-solving is limited (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b). Specialization in public agencies moreover hinders collaboration needed for Grand Challenges (Osborne, 2006).

The **New Public Governance** paradigm, according to Osborne (2006), acknowledges a fragmented public sector dealing with uncertainty and emphasizes the interdependency of multiple actors in policymaking. NPG aims for inclusivity by involving relevant actors to enhance efficiency and legitimacy, adopting a "doing with" approach that transforms citizens into active co-producers (Guenoun & Matyjasik, 2019). Public managers act as mediators, and government serves as a facilitator, moving away from a central role (Sicilia et al., 2016; Torfing et al., 2019). In NPG, the policymaking process prioritizes horizontal collaboration, trust, and relationships, departing from the hierarchical and performance-centric focus of Public Administration (PA) and NPM (Ferlie et al., 2020). The paradigm focuses on long-term impacts and inclusivity (Guenoun & Matyjasik, 2019). However, scholars note challenges such as the actual inclusivity of NPG processes, control of power dynamics, and the risk of a "congested state" (Ferlie et al., 2020).

With regard to Grand Challenges, while PA and NPM are deemed insufficient, the horizontal orientation of NPG, with collaborative efforts, is seen as more suitable for addressing challenges requiring systemic changes and the involvement of relevant actors (Keast & Mandell, 2014). Consequently, NPG can be considered the most appropriate paradigm for public organizations facing Grand Challenges, emphasizing effective strategies and broad support through the engagement of diverse actors.

Table 2 below summarizes these key points and shows the inadequacy of both PA and NPM for effectively treating Grand Challenges. NPG, on the other hand, seems to provide the necessary conditions for public organizations to address these complex problems. Innovation and collaboration as well as local action for the development of responses to Grand Challenges are facilitated by NPG. However, NPG as a paradigm is very broad. It encompasses a variety of perspectives, approaches, tools, and mechanisms that share the same principles and acknowledge the necessity of including relevant and affected actors in policy processes (Sørensen et al., 2021). In both theory and practice, approaches multiply and include, among others, network governance, co-production, or co-creation, which can be subsumed under the umbrella term of **collaborative governance**.

Table 2. The three paradigms

		Public Administration	New Public Management	New Public Governance
Role of the State		Overloaded State	Hollowed-out State	Congested State
Actors	<i>Politicians</i>	Decision-makers	Decision-makers	Facilitators, no longer decide alone
	<i>Public managers</i>	Implementers (neutral)	Implementers (managers)	Mediators
	<i>Citizens</i>	Passive	Active consumers	Active co-producers
Process		Hierarchical, bureaucratic, and top-down	Competition between public service providers, focus on performance and quality	Horizontal and collaborative, focus on trust, inclusion, and impact
Criticisms		Inertia, ineffectiveness, inefficiency of legalistic and bureaucratic organizations; lack of consideration for citizens' needs	Result-orientation, standardization and bureaucratization, little proof of cost reduction or efficiency improvement; fragmentation and complexity	Question of inclusivity, who is/ remains excluded; public officials control power dynamics and the degree of openness of processes
Potential for treatment of Grand Challenges		Homogeneity of actors involved in processes, little space for contingency factors	Citizen involvement only sometimes and limited to public service delivery stage; silos	Horizontality, collaboration, and diversity of involved actors and available resources
		<i>Innovation</i>	-	+
		<i>Collaboration</i>	+/-	+
		<i>Local action</i>	+/-	+

(Source: author, based on Ferlie et al., 2020; Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006)

2.2. The need to resort to collaborative governance to address Grand Challenges

There is little consensus within the scientific community regarding what collaborative governance precisely is, how – and whether – it can be defined, and in what it differs from other policymaking approaches based on stakeholder participation (Amsler & O’Leary, 2017; Gash, 2016). Therefore, a variety of definitions exist, and collaborative governance is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as collaborative management or collaborative government, and intersects with others like network governance (Ansell, 2012), collaborative innovation, or co-production (Hofstad et al., 2022). Policy co-creation is, as we will lay out later in this section, also considered a type of collaborative governance (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a; Ongaro, Sancino, et al., 2021; Sørensen & Torfing, 2022).

Scholarly work on collaborative governance as well as its use by practitioners in public administrations have developed over the past three decades (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Just as the NPG paradigm has emerged as a response to the shortcomings of NPM, collaborative governance within this paradigm tends to be mobilized when all else fails and traditional policy responses are not effective (Ansell, 2012; Ansell & Gash, 2008). Around the 1970s, public administrations begin to realize that the increasingly complex policy problems they face cannot be solved by bureaucracies but require collaboration across agencies, and since then various forms of collaboration have emerged (Hofstad et al., 2021). As the instances where they find themselves confronted with these complex issues – Grand Challenges – multiply, collaborative governance is now becoming more than just the last resort when no other solutions work, and is an increasingly popular lever for change (Ansell et al., 2022b).

In this section, we propose to briefly explore the concept of collaborative governance (**section 2.1.1.**), and the more operational forms it can take, before we finally argue for co-creation as the most suitable approach in contexts marked by Grand Challenges (**section 2.1.2.**).

2.2.1. What is collaborative governance?

Collaborative governance has been defined by Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 544) as “*a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets*”.

It therefore describes a process in which government actors – i.e., actors who are traditionally involved in policy- and decision-making processes – share their power and responsibility with non-governmental actors who are not usually involved in these processes. These non-governmental actors might be stakeholders such as firms,

associations, or sometimes individuals. Collaborative governance, in this regard, *“rallies social and political actors around a particular problem or challenge, aligns their goals and ambitions, and makes use of their different experiences, competences, ideas, and resources when exploring possibilities for designing and implementing joint solutions to common problems”* (Ansell et al., 2022b, p. 27).

These governmental and non-governmental actors hence **share goals** they want to achieve, and therefore gather in a collaborative setting allowing them for deliberation in order to align their visions and desired outcomes. In this sense, collaborative governance is a *“strategy used in planning, regulation, policy-making, and public management to coordinate, adjudicate, and integrate the goals and interests of multiple stakeholders”* (Ansell, 2012, p. 1). This approach implies a shift away from tradition top-down governance where external stakeholders are largely excluded from decision-making, and towards more inclusive policymaking involving a wider range of actors from both the public and private sector.

The characteristics of collaborative governance pointed out in these definitions allow us to draw a more precise picture of the concept. Public organizations initiate collaborative governance, engage, and mobilize stakeholders. Collaborative governance is therefore somewhat centered on the state (Couture et al., 2022) and involves organized actors rather than individuals. However, since it is based on the needs and demand of the involved stakeholders, collaborative governance is less rigid and one-sided than traditional top-down policymaking (Gash, 2016). The process is consensus-oriented, with the goal of aligning the interests of different stakeholders through deliberation and negotiation (Amsler & O’Leary, 2017) in a formally created common forum (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Collaborative governance therefore prioritizes reaching an agreement on a solution over producing new and innovative ideas (Torfing et al., 2019). With deliberation and negotiation between participants being cornerstones of collaborative governance, which implies that “voice” not “exit” strategies are encouraged (Ansell, 2012). This means that participants in collaborative governance share their thoughts and potential dissatisfaction in a deliberative setting in order to find solutions that can reach consensus, instead of “exiting” and showing their dissatisfaction with the policy or public service by no longer consuming it or switching to a different service provider. Finally, these definitions also show that collaborative governance is meant to span the entire policymaking process and is therefore not limited to consultation but ideally, stakeholders participate in decision-making (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

The overall goal of collaborative governance is to **produce synergies** between its participants so as to find agreement on solutions to shared problems; it is supposed to be *“not just a meeting but a melding”* of minds (Gash, 2016, p. 465) in the sense that their interests and preferences should be combined as best as possible in order to obtain a solution that is acceptable for all. Therefore, collaborative governance can be useful for organizations as they seek to develop responses to Grand Challenges (Gash, 2016) by

building on a diversity of perspectives and resources. Indeed, as mentioned above, these uncertain and complex societal problems require the coordinated effort of a multiplicity of actors (Brammer et al., 2019; Ferraro et al., 2015). In terms of policy outcomes, the best response to the local manifestation of a Grand Challenge can be achieved through the consideration of a variety of perspectives and access to more diverse resources (Gash, 2016). Moreover, with each involved actor focusing on their field of expertise, collaborative governance can benefit from this diversity and draw on their knowledge. Consequently, redundancies can be reduced, and both efficiency and efficacy of the problem-solving process increased through this collaborative approach (Roberts, 2000).

2.2.2. Which forms can collaborative governance take?

This new collaborative paradigm can be operationalized by public organizations in different ways, depending on their context and the policy outcome they seek to achieve. In the following paragraphs, we explore the features of the different collaborative approaches that can be mobilized to address Grand Challenges. Since these terms are often used interchangeably (cf. Nabatchi et al., 2017), clarifying them seems critical.

In this regard, we first investigate public participation and co-production, before we turn to co-creation. In table 3 at the end of this section we summarize their main features and their potential for public organizations as they seek to address Grand Challenges.

2.2.2.1. Public participation

Public participation is “*an umbrella term that describes the activities by which people’s concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues*” (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015, p. 6). The increasing interest in the concept of public participation manifests in the publication of seminal work on the topic: particularly Sherry Arnstein’s 1969 “Ladder of Citizen Participation” is still to this day one of the most influential pieces in the field.

What started with the civil rights movement in the United States, and student protests in European countries such as France, has since expanded to virtually all matters covered by the public sector. At the beginning of the new millennium, public participation in different shapes and forms has become a routine and expected practice to some extent, as it has been implemented in many different policies and programs over the past fifty years (Roberts, 2004). Thus, public participation has been a part of both scholars’ and practitioners’ work for a relatively long period of time now (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a; Brandsen, 2021), but what, precisely, does it mean, and how – if at all – can we define it?

Existing literature spans over different fields and disciplines, is complex and sometimes unclear. Various definitions and interpretations have been developed, showing similarities but also diverging understandings of the concept. Terms such as inclusion or engagement are often blended in (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Participation is moreover related to concepts like involvement, empowerment, as well as co-production and co-

creation (Jo & Nabatchi, 2018; Strokosch & Osborne, 2018). Especially the difference between citizen participation and public participation is often unclear.

Citizen participation can be understood from multiple perspectives (Roberts, 2004): it can refer to citizenship as a legal concept where people have certain rights and obligations. From this point of view, it corresponds to the role that is ascribed to the people in the decision-making process. From a moral perspective, citizenship can be linked to principles of responsibility, community, and civic duty. In this regard, Roberts (2004, p. 320) defines citizen participation broadly as “*the process by which members of a society (those not holding office or administrative positions in government) share power with public officials in making substantive decisions and in taking actions related to the community*”. **Public participation** is a broader construct and refers to the “*direct involvement – or indirect involvement through representatives – of concerned stakeholders in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest*” (Quick & Bryson, 2016, p. 1). From this perspective, the core of public participation is the increased input from the public in decisions whether it be direct or indirect (Jo & Nabatchi, 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2016; Quick & Feldman, 2011). As opposed to citizen participation, public participation does not seem to be limited to the legal citizens of a population but open to those affected by or able to influence the policy issue in question. These non-governmental actors are then able to interact with governmental actors as they engage in a process of public participation (Quick & Bryson, 2016).

The form public participation takes depends on the context in which it occurs. Participation mechanisms vary, as does the constellation of participants themselves, the extent to which they are included in the decision-making process, and the scope of the policy issue at hand. Participation is often portrayed on a continuum, Arnstein’s (1969) ladder being the most cited example. She identifies eight levels of participation, ranking from manipulation and therapy at the very low end to citizen control at the very high end. In practice, a large variety of mechanisms are available to actors seeking to implement public participation in policymaking. Participation has traditionally been limited to indirect form, such as voting in elections (Nabatchi, 2012). There is however increasing interest in more direct forms of public participation. They may concern individual citizens, groups of them, or the collective level of society more broadly (Michels, 2011; Roberts, 2004). Which of the three levels is targeted also affects the participation mechanisms that are employed (Michels, 2011). Besides voting in elections, the more conventional ones can include methods such as citizen juries, advisory boards, public hearings, task forces, neighborhood groups, citizen panels, or surveys. What these more traditional forms of direct public participation have in common is a lack of deliberative arenas where participants can express their opinions, negotiate, and form a common vision of the policy problem and/or a potential solution.

Thus, to sum up, public participation does not necessarily imply deliberation (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Especially for complex problems, however, this would be desirable, as “*high-quality participation is deliberative*” (Halvorsen, 2003, p. 536). Moreover, while some of the mechanisms are designed for individual participation – for example

referendums that may be binding or not, and deliberative surveys where citizens are consulted (Michels, 2011) – public participation mostly occurs through the constitution of mini-publics. They are self-consciously organized public deliberations (Fung, 2003) where samples of citizens work on a specific issue (Herberg et al., 2020).

2.2.2.2. Co-production

A particular form of direct public participation that has become increasingly popular in the field of public management is co-production. The term has been coined by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues at the University of Indiana to help explain the role of citizens in the production of public services. Ostrom (1996, p. 1079) defines co-production as “*the potential relationships that could exist between the ‘regular’ producer (street-level police officers, schoolteachers, or health workers) and ‘clients’ who want to be transformed by the service into safer, better educated, or healthier persons*” and thereby as “*one way that synergy between what a government does and what citizens do can occur*”. In this regard, co-production is characterized by the presence of different types of public and private actors in the process of public service production or delivery. The actors participating in the production of a good or service are therefore not all part of the same organization but include both state and lay actors (Nabatchi et al., 2017).

Co-production refers to the interactions of paid employees of an organization, and citizens or groups of them, in situations where their contribution is required in order to provide a public service (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016). While it has therefore been deemed unavoidable and necessary in certain contexts (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013; Brandsen & Guenoun, 2019; Farr, 2016; Osborne & Stokosch, 2013) – for instance, a patient taking the medicine prescribed by their health care provider – co-production was initially mostly used to increase the productivity of public service provision. The democratic effects of this direct form of citizen participation remained a by-product (Hjortskov et al., 2018). While this approach has first emerged in the field of public administration and public management in the 1970s and 1980s, it has therefore regained popularity particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (Jukić et al., 2019) and in the context of the NPM paradigm more generally.

To sum up, co-production is focused on a specific stage of the policy process – the production and/or delivery of public service. It therefore involves citizens at an operational rather than a strategic level (McMullin, 2021). Thus, its underlying idea is to produce pre-determined public services with citizens.

Since its emergence in the field of public administration and public management, the notion of co-production has been explored from a variety of angles and a burgeoning literature now also explores other “co-” constructs that can span different stages of the policymaking process: they range from co-commissioning to co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment of public services (Loeffler, 2021). In the following section, we will hone in on yet another approach that encompasses these various stages and includes citizens at a more strategic level of policymaking: co-creation (Torfing et al., 2019).

2.2.2.3. Co-creation

The concept of co-creation has first emerged in the private sector based on the assumption that value is created through interactions between the firm and the consumer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The initial assumption is that co-creation contributes to better satisfying customers' needs and expectations through increased dialogue with them, and thereby creates additional economic value. Traditionally, customers are mainly involved in the last stage of value creation where transactions happen and generate positive or negative user experiences; in co-creation, however, they partake in the process at an earlier point and act as "joint problem solvers" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This implies a shift towards more horizontal and, most importantly, more open innovation processes as (future) users participate in the conception of the solution meant to satisfy their needs.

The concept has been coined in marketing and service research and since spread to various disciplines, among them public management (Lember et al., 2019). While the public sector has its particularities and co-creation looks different than in firms, policy co-creation is largely inspired by the underlying ideas of co-creation in private sector contexts (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a): a central assumption is that value is co-created and does not only lie in the final product (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Value creation – whether it is defined as economic and tangible, or public and intangible value (cf. Moore, 1995) – is therefore based on interactions with users and their experiences of these interactions. Moreover, understanding their needs is essential and contributes to the creation of additional value, since it is assumed that their needs can be better satisfied if they are involved in the process of generating a fitting solution.

Over the past 20 years, scholars in the fields of public administration and public management have increasingly focused on co-production and co-creation of public services (Branden et al., 2018; Voorberg et al., 2015). The rising academic interest in these approaches demonstrates the desire on the part of practitioners – public organizations at all levels – to include citizens in the conception, development, delivery, and assessment of public services and public policy (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Co-creation practices represent a major transformation for local public organizations; one which is described in literature as a paradigm shift and a new research agenda in public management (Torfing et al., 2021). In particular, co-creation practices are acclaimed by international regulatory bodies (Torfing et al., 2019) as being more effective and efficient in meeting societal needs, facilitating governance, stimulating innovation, and increasing democratic legitimacy (Ansell and Torfing, 2021).

However, as an emerging approach, there is no clear answer to the question what co-creation actually is, how it can be defined and conceptualized: as an umbrella term (Ongaro, Sancino, et al., 2021) it is applied to a variety of disciplines and contexts (Ferlie et al., 2020) and often used interchangeably with similar notions such as co-production.

While some scholars conceptually restrict *co-creation* to the initial stages of policymaking and understand it as having a planning component and perceive *co-production* to be limited to the delivery phase of public service provision (Brandsen & Honingh, 2018), we regard co-production to be a type of co-creation. The latter can take many different forms (Røiseland, 2022). In our understanding of co-creation, it does not only encompass co-production but also the other stages of the policymaking process: from joint agenda setting (co-commissioning) to joint development of new solutions (co-design) and their implementation (co-production or co-delivery), and the assessment of these policies (co-assessment or co-evaluation) (cf. Loeffler, 2021)⁹.

Therefore, we choose to follow the **definition of co-creation** put forward by Torfing and his co-authors (2019, p. 802) who understand it as “*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 that enhance the production of public value in terms of visions, plans, policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, or services, either through a continuous improvement of outputs or outcomes or through innovative step-changes that transform the understanding of the problem or task at hand and lead to new ways of solving it*”.

Several elements contained in this definition allow us to argue for the usefulness of co-creation in contexts of Grand Challenges: (1) the diversity of actors involved in co-creation, (2) its aim of generating innovative ideas, and (3) the fact that it can span the entire policymaking process from beginning to end, i.e., from the identification of a shared problem to the implementation and evaluation of solutions.

First, Grand Challenges require harnessing a **diversity of actors, identities, and interests** by bringing together experts and non-experts, powerful and less powerful actors, and acknowledging and managing this pluralism of interests instead of seeking to achieve consensus (Gehman et al., 2022). Rather than consulting only those actors who are usually involved in policymaking, it is essential to mobilize “*unusual stakeholders across unexpected bodies of expertise*” in order to resolve Grand Challenges (Brammer et al., 2019, p. 528-529), which co-creation, more than any of the other collaborative governance approaches explored above, allows to do since it involves a variety of organized and unorganized actors. By convening different public and private actors that are relevant for the respective Grand Challenge and affected by it, co-creation seeks to ensure diversity in the problem-solving process. Indeed, “*given that the most interesting disruptive innovations happen at the intersection of disciplines and sectors*” (Bogers et al., 2018, p. 10) tearing down the barriers between different types of actors and reuniting them in a co-creation process aimed at addressing Grand Challenges is essential.

Because of their complex, uncertain, and evaluative nature, Grand Challenges require socially **innovative solutions** (van Wijk et al., 2019) that fit the needs of those confronted

⁹ However, as mentioned in the introduction of our thesis, in this research, we focus on the phases of ideation and design of local public policy only.

with these problems in their daily lives. In order to develop these novel solutions, Grand Challenges can benefit from experimentation at a small scale, which allows to abandon failed ideas quickly, learn, and achieve small successes (Gehman et al., 2022). Addressing Grand Challenges locally and through distributed action (Brammer et al., 2019; Gehman et al., 2022) based on the input of relevant and affected local actors (Bentzen, 2022; Bentzen et al., 2020) is therefore beneficial for the development of both suitable, and innovative responses. Co-creation, since it is problem-driven, generative and based on learning, proactive and seeking new solutions (Ansell et al., 2022a; Hofstad et al., 2021, 2022), is better able to produce public innovation than the other forms of collaborative governance cited earlier in this section.

Finally, Grand Challenges require the mobilization and engagement of distributed actors over the **entire policymaking process**: *“from specifying the problems constituting the social challenge, to developing ideas, to testing and pivoting solutions, and to implementing, disseminating and potentially institutionalizing solutions”* (Mair et al., 2023, p. 2). In this regard, first and foremost it is important that the Grand Challenge be articulated and broken down in such a way that is accessible to the involved actors; then, relevant resources must be gathered; and finally, actors must be motivated and inspired over time to work on the Grand Challenge (Brammer et al., 2019). Co-creation convenes distributed actors to define common problems, design, and implement innovative solutions (Torfing et al., 2021). As opposed to other collaborative mechanisms, it therefore ideally spans the entire policymaking process from ideation to evaluation through the continuous involvement of relevant stakeholders (Bentzen, 2022) – it can however be limited to specific phases, too.

To sum up, based on existing research on the potential of collaborative strategies for the treatment of Grand Challenges, **we assume that co-creation is the best-suited approach among them for three main reasons**: the **diversity of involved actors** and therefore resources and knowledge; its focus on **innovativeness**; and **its scope** that covers the policymaking process from start to finish. Moreover, especially **local settings** are adequate for mobilizing co-creation to address Grand Challenges (Gehman et al., 2022). The local level – i.e., cities – is polycentric and composed of numerous organized and unorganized actors who are affected by the same Grand Challenges, but likely in different ways. Through a co-creation process, these diverse local actors are able to gather, and express their needs and respective experiences with the problem in order to develop the most suitable local response.

Table 3 below summarizes these examples of collaborative governance approaches and shows their potential in contexts marked by Grand Challenges. To understand which approach could be the most useful for local public organizations in such contexts, we refer to the three principles for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges identified in the literature and explicated above (**section 1.2.2.**). As argued in the preceding paragraphs, co-creation appears to be the most suitable approach in this regard due to the diversity of actors involved and the usually high degree of their collaboration, its aim to generate innovative policy, and the applicability in local settings.

Table 3. Collaborative governance approaches and their potential in contexts of Grand Challenges

	Public participation	Co-production	Co-creation	
Actors	Involves citizens in decision-making (varying degrees)	Participation of state actors and lay actors	Gathers a variety of actors from different organizations/ sectors/ fields	
Process	Can range from very minimal to high direct citizen participation	Usually limited to the joint production/ delivery of a good/ service	Can cover the entire policy process from ideation to evaluation	
Potential for treatment of Grand Challenges	Involvement of individual or organized citizens, but not always through deliberation; participation does not necessarily affect outcomes	Involvement of citizens but usually limited to the operational level	Involvement at various stages and often at both the operational and the strategic level	
	<i>Innovation</i>	+/-	-	+
	<i>Collaboration</i>	+/-	+/-	+
	<i>Local action</i>	+/-	+	+

(Source: author)

In this section, we explored why public organizations in their current state are rather ill-equipped to address the Grand Challenges they are confronted with. In this regard, we investigated the three broad paradigms that shape the public sector: Public Administration, New Public Management, and New Public Governance. Based on the key features of each paradigm, their suitability for the treatment of Grand Challenges was analyzed. Collaborative governance as a more operational branch of the New Public Governance paradigm was identified as an interesting approach for public organizations confronted with Grand Challenges. We then elaborated on various forms collaborative governance can concretize in: public participation, co-production, and co-creation. Finally, we came to the conclusion that policy co-creation is the most suitable approach for public organizations as they seek to develop policy responses in contexts of Grand Challenges.

In the following section, we explore the notion of policy co-creation, and the changes this new and innovative approach entails for public organizations.

Section 3: Implementing co-creation to address Grand Challenges

While its popularity does not cease to increase in both theory and practice, co-creation is still a relatively recent and emerging approach in today's public sector. As such, knowledge about its long-term effects remains scarce, as studies focusing on the outcomes and consequences – anticipated or not – of co-creation are rare (Bentzen, 2022; Jaspers & Steen, 2019; Jo & Nabatchi, 2021). Due to a lack of blueprints and best practices regarding the design and implementation of co-creation to address Grand Challenges, both scholars and practitioners make tentative assumptions about the benefits as well as the pitfalls co-creation might entail.

However, public leaders are more interested than ever in mobilizing co-creation. Ansell and Torfing (2021b) point out that besides the *policy problem* – public organizations face increasingly complex problems which cannot be treated through traditional policymaking – this is due to three other general problems shaping the public sector today. The *service problem* – increasing citizen demands must be reconciled with decreasing budgets; the *community problem* – communities are characterized by a decline of social capital and cohesion; and the *democratic problem* – political disenchantment and polarization mark the political sphere. Co-creation, these authors state, can provide additional resources, involve a variety of actors who can provide innovative ideas, and build bridges between groups of the population as well as between citizens and public organizations.

Co-creation tends to be presented as a magic remedy (Voorberg et al., 2015) for a public sector faced with increasingly complex challenges, but is still mostly used on an ad hoc and experimental basis (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a). It implies a “radical reinterpretation” of policymaking which is now seen as a negotiation rather than something that is being imposed on the people by public authorities and experts (Bovaird, 2007). In this regard, Ansell and Torfing (2021b, p. 9) observe that “*elevating the status of co-creation from a name to the active involvement of service users in public service production to the core principle for governing modern societies reconfigures the public sector and transforms our understanding of its role and nature*”.

The institutional foundations necessary for co-creation to become an established practice in public organizations have yet to be developed. While part of many public leaders' rhetorical toolbox (Leino & Puumala, 2021), and at a normative level undoubtedly essential for a well-functioning public sector (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020), in practice, entrenched bureaucratic structures slow down the diffusion of the co-creation paradigm. If co-creation is to spread in the public sector, it must be “*sustained by new institutional designs, new forms of public leadership, and a series of systemic changes*” (Torfing et al.,

2019, p. 796) since it transforms long-standing routines and procedures, and introduces new organizational processes, new actors, and new roles and responsibilities that require new skills. Not only the elected politicians and public managers working for the organization implementing co-creation, but also the citizens invited to participate in the co-creation process are concerned by these transformations (Røiseland, 2022): for all, the ways in which they are involved in policymaking change.

Making these changes is at the one hand a condition to be able to implement co-creation: they are a requirement to make co-creation happen in the first place. On the other hand, once co-creation is being implemented and increasingly used by the organization, it can profoundly its functioning. These transformations happen at multiple levels. In this section, we first briefly look at the potential benefits and issues associated with co-creation (**section 3.1.**). Then, we discuss changes in organizational processes (**section 3.2.**). Moreover, we observe shifts in the roles of the (new or established) actors involved in policymaking, as well as their perceptions of these roles, and the new skills that are required to fulfill them (**section 3.3.**). Finally, their relationships are transformed as co-creation requires them to work together in new ways (**section 3.4.**).

3.1. Benefits and limitations of co-creation

Co-creation in the public sector is frequently applauded for the numerous benefits it presumably entails. These benefits go beyond practical and mainly financial reasons where co-creation can be a desirable tool to deal with budget constraints since it allows to mobilize additional resources (Bentzen, 2022; Brix et al., 2020; Nabatchi et al., 2017). Presented as a “magic concept”, co-creation appears to be a solution for the complex problems public organizations face at a more strategic level, too (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b; Voorberg et al., 2015).

As Sørensen et al. (2021, p. 267) show, the expectations accompanying the introduction of co-creation are high: *“the key assumption is that the public sector can do more and better in terms of achieving important policy goals, such as prosperity, wellbeing, safety, equity and justice in society, if it joins forces with relevant and affected actors from businesses, non-profits and civil society, although doing so implies the negotiation of what counts as valuable for society and the public with those who contribute to the co-creation”*. In the literature, we have identified five broad groups of benefits co-creation can entail in the literature: enhancing legitimacy, improving democracy, increasing inclusivity, generating innovation, and educating citizens.

The first set of benefits co-creation can generate is directly related to **legitimacy**. Since it allows citizens who are increasingly eager to participate in more direct ways in policymaking to do so, implementing co-creation may improve the legitimacy of the public sector (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Fledderus, 2018; Røiseland, 2022; Torfing et al., 2019). By improving participatory and deliberative processes, co-creation is said to strengthen **democracy** (Brix et al., 2020; Osborne et al., 2016). Policy outcomes therefore tend to get citizens’ approval more easily than without their involvement in the process (Alves, 2013), and for the same reason, co-creation also fosters a feeling of joint ownership of solutions (Hofstad et al., 2021; Torfing et al., 2021). Overall, co-creation can thus have a “democratizing effect” (Torfing et al., 2019) on local politics. Then, the greater **inclusion** of citizens in the process of policymaking is one of the benefits pointed out by co-creation research (Brandsen, 2021; Verschuere et al., 2018). By gathering a diversity of actors, co-creation has the potential to generate the **innovative ideas** that are needed for local public organizations to effectively address Grand Challenges (Bentzen, 2022; Bentzen et al., 2020; Brix et al., 2020; Hofstad et al., 2021; Nabatchi et al., 2017; Torfing et al., 2019, 2021). Finally, co-creation does not only serve to develop policies that allow to address Grand Challenges but can also be useful at an individual level for those who participate. Indeed, the exchange of different types of knowledge that participants bring in leads to **mutual learning** (Torfing et al., 2021).

While, given the many positive effects co-creation can entail, it is often presented as such, it *“is not a normative good. It is as likely to have adverse effects (sometimes termed ‘co-destruction’, Echeverri and Skålén, 2011) as positive ones, depending upon how it is managed”* (Flemig & Osborne, 2019, p. 672). In addition the benefits discussed in the

previous section, co-creation hence also has a “**dark side**” (Steen et al., 2018): numerous barriers and challenges that are inherent in the public sector might complicate its implementation as well as entail negative outcomes.

First, the **fragmented nature of the public sector** is an important issue when it comes to policy co-creation. The public sector is marked by an increasing number of actors: organizations, agencies, and other individual or collective stakeholders share power and responsibilities (Bentzen et al., 2020; Hofstad et al., 2021; Sørensen et al., 2021). Due to the number of potentially involved actors, it might be unclear who is in charge. The confusing constellation of actors can then also raise the question of **accountability** and responsibility for the realization of co-created policy projects (Torfing et al., 2019). The multiplicity of actors associated with co-creation most likely entails a **plurality of interests**, motivations, and priorities to be taken into account. This might lead to serious political **conflicts** or conflicts among participants that could even become insurmountable and “paralyze” the policymaking process if no common ground is found (Gash, 2016; Sørensen & Torfing, 2022; Torfing et al., 2019). **Power imbalances and disparities** between central and peripheral actors might reinforce these tensions, if no attempt to re-examine and balance them out is made (Ansell, 2012; Bryson et al., 2013; Leino & Puumala, 2021).

An important challenge can be a **disconnection** of the co-creation process and policy outcomes: if participants do not see the outcomes of co-creation translated into policies, or if their input is not taken into consideration, it might be hard for the organization to sustain their engagement (Iusmen & Boswell, 2017). Moreover, a **participation bias** (Fung, 2006) persists: those participating in such processes tend to come from similar social classes: the highly-educated and relatively wealthy parts of the population (Meijer, 2016; Nabatchi, 2012; Torfing et al., 2019, 2021). Some segments of the population are almost always **excluded** from this type of processes (Brandsen, 2021).

3.2. Changes in organizational processes

Per definition, co-creation requires policymaking to be more open and include a larger variety of actors than the processes most public organizations are used to. It deeply transforms the nature of policy- and decision-making, and the way in which public organizations function. Embarking on the co-creation journey can therefore be highly disruptive for organizations that are dominated by a bureaucratic tradition. This long-standing culture, its structures and attitudes are not welcoming or supportive for the implementation of collaborative approaches such as co-creation. Consequently, they must be adapted in several ways to provide a fertile breeding ground for co-creation of policy in contexts marked by Grand Challenges. The main changes in organizational processes concern horizontal decision-making, the inclusion of different types of knowledge, a long-term orientation of policy, as well as the necessity of creating dedicated spaces for co-creation. They do not come without their challenges. Based on this review of prior research, table 4 at the end of this section summarizes these changes, as well as potential challenges and barriers.

3.2.1. Horizontal decision-making processes

Bureaucratically structured organizations tend to be highly hierarchical and marked by top-down decision-making (Meijer, 2016). A vertical power line extends downwards from political leaders to public managers and the population, whereby decisions are made by the political sphere, executed by the managerial sphere, and passively received by citizens (Sicilia et al., 2016). An underlying assumption in bureaucratic organizations is that professionals – i.e., politicians and public managers - “know best” since they possess expert knowledge, leaving citizens feeling powerless and subject to their decisions (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b; Torfing et al., 2019). With the introduction of co-creation to an organization characterized by this perspective, top-down decision-making is replaced by a focus on creating relationships between these actors and spheres, and developing shared visions (Keast & Mandell, 2014). Indeed, co-creation challenges these vertical power lines, and introduces a more balanced approach that disrupts these policymaking procedures. Through co-creation, decision-making becomes more **horizontal** as it includes a larger variety of actors representing different levels and spheres. Consequently, not everything can be fully controlled from above; therefore the implementation of co-creation requires public leaders to have more trust in other actors and their contributions (Ansell et al., 2021; Torfing et al., 2019).

3.2.2. Combination of different types of knowledge

The shift towards policymaking shaped by horizontal or even bottom-up dynamics illustrates the increasing acknowledgement of citizens’ knowledge (Torfing et al., 2019). Indeed, instead of valuing only the expertise of professional policymakers, co-creating rests on the inclusion of the **profane knowledge** (Lindblom, 1979) citizens have as they experience Grand Challenges in their daily lives. The challenge for public organizations,

in this regard, consists of opening up and integrating internal expertise with the knowledge and experiences of external co-creation participants such as citizens (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020). Hence, from a “closed” process reserved for professionals, decision-making is transformed into a more open one that includes the inputs of new types of actors from both inside and outside the organization (Edelmann & Mergel, 2021). This allows for the organization to access many different resources instead of only those they dispose of internally (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b) which is essential in contexts where Grand Challenges need to be addressed. Indeed, bureaucratic organizations relying only on internally available resources and knowledge are ill equipped to resolve these complex problems (Osborne, 2006). Citizens constitute an under-exploited resource that can be mobilized to produce highly valuable innovations for public service (Nabatchi et al., 2017) and particularly in a context of complex problems (Hartley et al., 2013).

3.2.3. Long-term orientation of policy

With the implementation of co-creation, the focus and orientation of the desired results of the policymaking process also shift. Public organizations currently tend to display a focus on efficiency and the achievement of short-term goals (Torfing et al., 2019) due to the influence of the business-like New Public Management paradigm where immediate user-satisfaction is prioritized (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006). By focusing on performance and results, public organizations with this short-term focus lose sight of more **long-term** outcomes that could be achieved through their policy. However, to tackle Grand Challenges, prioritizing the long-term effectiveness of policy outcomes is important. Co-creating these policy solutions with citizens can help enhance their legitimacy and acceptability (Sørensen et al., 2021) and moreover ensure their fit with the veritable needs of the local population, thereby creating valuable policy outcomes. Alongside this long-term focus required when co-creating responses for Grand Challenges comes a degree of risk that is inherent to Grand Challenges due to their uncertainty (Gehman et al., 2022). This implies the need for experimentation, and a shift away from the zero-error culture that characterizes bureaucratic organizations (Ansell et al., 2021). Indeed, co-creation in contexts marked by Grand Challenges implies becoming more accepting of trial-and-error approaches (Ansell et al., 2022a) since this is what allows to develop the innovative solutions that are required.

3.2.4. Spaces for interactive policymaking

Finally, the **institutional design** of public organizations implementing co-creation must be adapted to support this new approach and achieve the best possible outcomes (Jo & Nabatchi, 2021). When public organizations decide to co-create responses to complex policy problems, their siloed and hierarchical design is not suitable. To adapt more easily to ever-changing Grand Challenges and to the new demands this implies in terms of policymaking, flatter, more modular, and more flexible organizational structures are more suitable (Ansell et al., 2021). New institutional designs such as platforms and arenas – respectively understood as institutional opportunity structures, and temporary network

structures (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019) – facilitate the interactive policymaking process that is co-creation: “*instead of governing society and the economy through a hierarchical chain of delegation and control, the public sector must construct generative platforms and collaborative arenas that facilitate the co-creation of public solutions*” (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019, p. 1450).

Table 4. Changes in organizational processes

Current organizational processes in bureaucratic organizations	What changes with co-creation	Challenges and barriers
Top-down decision-making	Horizontal/ bottom-up decision-making	Resistance to change (Ansell and Torfing, 2021a, Ansell et al. 2022)
Expert knowledge	Reconciliation of different types of knowledge: expert and profane	Power disparities between actors, question of value of different types of knowledge experts (Brandsen, 2021; Bryson et al., 2013)
Short-term and efficiency focus	Long-term and effectiveness focus	Uncertainty of Grand Challenges (Gehman et al., 2022), risk-aversion (Torfing & Ansell, 2017), subject to political shifts (Gash, 2016)
Siloed and hierarchical institutional design	Platforms and arenas for interactive policymaking	Fragmented public sector (Bentzen et al., 2020; Hofstad et al., 2021), unfavorable existing institutional designs (Leino & Puumala, 2021)

(Source: author)

3.3. Changes in actors, roles, and skills

The problem-orientation of policy co-creation requires that all those actors who are affected by the respective policy issue and relevant for its resolution participate (Bentzen, 2022). It does not concern one particular group, but everybody who might be able to contribute to problem-solving should come together in co-creation. This includes actors from the public sector, the private for-profit or non-profit sectors, and from civil society (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b). Public actors are usually paid employees of a public organization (Brandsen, 2021): elected politicians, public managers, or public agents who are at the frontlines of daily operations. Private actors include companies or civil society organizations such as associations or other voluntary groups of citizens. Finally, individual citizens are an integral and, according to numerous researchers, mandatory part of co-creation (Bentzen, 2022; Brandsen et al., 2018; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015). While co-creation can also occur between organizations, in the context of this research we focus on co-creation that includes individual citizens and overall a larger variety of organized and unorganized stakeholders than other types of collaborative governance.

The question of who participates and why is essential (Bovaird, 2007). Besides this, since co-creation per definition involves a broader scope of actors than traditional policymaking processes, the habitual dynamics between these actors change. They take on new roles and are likely to perceive their own and others' roles and responsibilities differently. Moreover, the actors who, in one way or another, are involved in co-creation, must adapt their skill set to the requirements of this new policymaking approach. Table 5 at the end of this section summarizes these changes and the challenges they might entail, based on our review of this literature.

3.3.1. New actors

As opposed to decision-making processes in public organizations with a traditional bureaucratic functioning, reserved for experts, co-creation opens up these processes to entirely new sets of actors (Edelmann & Mergel, 2021). The involvement of new types of actors in policymaking first of all raises questions regarding the nature of their participation: who co-creates, and to what extent?

With regard to the **recruitment of co-creation participants**, Nabatchi (2012) identifies four main mechanisms that occur individually or in different combinations. Through (1) *voluntary self selection*, participants individually decide whether they wish to take part in co-creation or not. While this is the most common and simplest mechanism since it does not require much effort on the part of the organizers, voluntary self-selection also entails challenges: actors who are naturally inclined to participate tend to come from specific groups of the population. The other recruitment mechanisms identified by Nabatchi (2012) require more effort and resources: co-creation participants can be chosen through (2) *random selection* which is meant to improve inclusiveness by randomly picking from

a population; (3) *targeted demographic recruitment* where the sample of participants is representative of the population; and through (4) *incentives*, which can remove immediate participation barriers for instance by providing financial help, child care, or meals for participants.

Then, it varies how actively participants are involved in co-creation and at which stage of the policymaking process their **involvement** occurs. Their level of engagement can range from not at all to highly engaged, and be cognitive through the contribution of various resources, emotional by showing their willingness to engage, or behavioral when participants make changes to their behavior (Frow et al., 2015). Moreover, the more stages of the policymaking process are covered by co-creation, the more is at stake (Frow et al., 2015), but also the more fruitful co-creation can be: emerging research shows that continuous co-creation, i.e., such processes that are not limited to specific moments in the policymaking process, positively affect outcomes (Bentzen, 2022). Co-creation can therefore take different shapes depending on the moment of the decision-making process where it occurs: it can range from the formulation of the problem to the evaluation stage. Following Löffler (2021), four main phases can be identified: co-commission, co-design, co-delivery, and co-assessment. As a reminder, in the definition we retain, co-creation covers the entirety of these and other “co-“ terms and can therefore manifest in a variety of ways, depending on the stage at which it occurs.

3.3.2. New roles and role perceptions

Co-creation profoundly transforms the **roles of actors** involved in policymaking, as well as the perceptions they have of their own roles and those of others. In this sense, “*there is an urgent need to study the changing role perceptions of the elected politicians, public administrators, and citizens who are involved in interactive political leadership. The old roles and the traditional division of labour between these key actors are disrupted by the new practices, and it is not yet clear what the new roles and forms of interaction will entail*” (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019, p. 1460).

Traditionally, in bureaucratic contexts, policymaking and therefore public value creation happen inside of a public organization through the work of professionals and experts. Elected politicians and public managers have key roles in these decision-making processes that are largely based on internal capacities and resources (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020). In this understanding, experts produce public policy and public services, which are then consumed by citizens. However, with the introduction of co-creation approaches, the process of making policy and creating value changes and becomes more open as new actors are introduced.

Ansell and Torfing (2021b) describe what these role transformations would ideally look like. From sovereign decision-makers, elected politicians turn into interactive leaders. Usually seen as representing and governing “*through distant, insulated, unilateral policy decisions*” (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019, p. 1443), the new role of political leaders is defined by their proximity and interactions with other actors. Then, public managers no longer

only transmit information and manage processes, but act as veritable facilitators of co-creation. They are important mediators between politicians and the population (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020). Finally, citizens are at the core of co-creation. From passive recipients of public services in a bureaucratic perspective, and customers who must be satisfied in a NPM-perspective, they turn into veritable co-creators of public policy (Meijer, 2016; Sicilia et al., 2016).

3.3.3. New skills

Finally, both new actors and established actors with new roles and responsibilities must adapt to the requirements that come with co-creation. This also includes the sets of **competencies and resources** they dispose of: *“both regular producers and co-producers may need some skills in addition to their motivation to co-produce in the first place”* (Verschuere et al., 2012, p. 1090).

To begin with, **elected politicians** must adapt to co-creation and the particularities of this new approach to decision-making. While they are used to being sovereign decision-makers, co-creation requires them to exercise “soft power” rather than “hard power”; to do so, they must resort to charisma and persuasion rather than imposing decisions (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019). By doing so, they can attempt to mobilize and empower citizens and thereby motivate them to participate in co-creation. When mobilizing co-creation, politicians must more than before seek to balance the interests of all actors, not only those involved in the process (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017). They must skillfully use a variety of tools to ensure the democratic quality of the process as well as the consideration of all affected groups and avoid overlooking marginalized actors and their needs.

Then, *“public managers need access to a whole new set of skills and tools as the durable implementation of co-creation implies a strategic transformation of the way the organization works and therefore also the way its managers approach their profession”* (Potz & Serval, 2022, p. 1504). However, literature tends to pay more attention to the changing roles and skills of citizens as service users than of those designing and delivering these services (Mortensen et al., 2020). Acting as intermediaries, above all, **public managers** require the skills to enable and mobilize different groups of actors to participate in co-creation. In this sense, the skills they need are relational rather than technical, and aimed at facilitating co-creation rather than providing substantive knowledge on the policy issue (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). Their position close to both politicians and citizens provides them with insights into the thinking of both sides, allowing them to “translate” abstract political goals and make them accessible for citizens, as well as to ensure the fit between the potentially diverging interests of the two spheres (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). Active listening, empathy, and open-mindedness are therefore essential skills for public managers as they engage in co-creation and in dialogue with a multiplicity of actors spheres (Mortensen et al., 2020; Sicilia et al., 2016; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). In doing so, public managers ought to be as inclusive as possible and also keep in

mind the interests of those actors who tend to be marginalized. It is important that they identify and benefit from the assets of all co-creation participants, and mobilize their respective resources and knowledge to attain the most effective outcomes (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Sicilia et al., 2016).

Finally, “*all co-creation processes have in common that they demand considerable time and skills of citizens*” (De Jong et al., 2019, p. 2). Not only politicians and managers need to develop new skills as they engage in co-creation, but external participants, i.e., **citizens**, do too. Often, citizens’ lack of expertise, skill, and competence is mentioned as an obstacle to their involvement in policymaking (Yang & Callahan, 2007). While it is their profane knowledge of daily manifestations of policy issues that is important in co-creation, citizens still need certain competencies to effectively participate. In this regard, Voorberg and colleagues (2015) identify several important requirements. First and foremost, citizens must be aware of their own needs as well as those of others in order to advocate for them during co-creation. This requires a certain level of education and knowledge about the issue. Administrative skills that allow citizens to participate in a co-creation process are essential: basic understanding of political and administrative processes, what they look like and how they can be shaped is necessary. Moreover, citizens must feel capable of influencing the outcomes of the co-creation process, which is an important motivation to get involved. Overall, it is their social capital that enables them to effectively participate (Ostrom, 1996): a feeling of belonging to a community empowers citizens to stand up for their needs.

Table 5. Changes in actors, roles, and skills

Current organizational processes in bureaucratic organizations	What changes with co-creation	Challenges and barriers
Participation in policymaking is limited to experts	New types of actors involved in policymaking: public and private sector, organized and unorganized	Overcoming the participation bias that limits actors to “usual suspects” (Fung, 2006; Bryson et al., 2013)
Participation of external actors in policymaking is very limited	New types of actors involved at different stages of the policymaking process and ideally from start to finish	Co-creation is an emerging approach and bureaucratic organizations need time to adapt and increase the scope of co-creation (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a)
Traditional division of labor between politicians, managers, and citizens	New types of actors and roles shape policymaking processes	Entrenched roles and role perceptions, unsuitable institutional design (Sorensen et al., 2021; Sorensen and Torfing, 2019)
Skills traditionally associated with each actor’s role	New skills are necessary for all involved types of actors	Actors are ill-equipped for co-creation (van Gestel et al., 2019), requires developing new training and recruitment mechanisms (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012), and making efforts to include marginalized groups (Brandsen, 2021)

(Source: author)

3.4. Changes in relationships

As co-creation introduces new actors into the policymaking process and requires these actors to develop specific skill sets in order to co-create, the relationships between them are also subject to change. Hitherto largely separated from one another, the political, managerial, and civil society spheres converge (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020). Since co-creation requires the involvement of a variety of actors in the different stages of policymaking, it changes the way in which these actors interact. In this regard, not only the relationships between politicians and public managers of the respective public organization change, but also the way in which this organization relates to citizens. Moreover, co-creation is likely to affect the relationships among (different groups of) citizens depending on whether they are or are not actively involved in the co-creation process, or the extent of their participation. At the end of this section, we again provide a table (table 6) based on literature to summarize these changes, as well as potential challenges and barriers.

3.4.1. Relationships between elected politicians and public managers

Traditionally, in public organizations dominated by a bureaucratic perspective, the relationship between elected politicians and public managers belonging is clearly defined. More specifically, a dichotomy and divide between these two spheres, strengthened by the NPM-paradigm (Pasquier, 2017), can be observed (Torfing & Ansell, 2017). The reinforcement of silos and borders within the organization by NPM prioritizing specialization has contributed to increasing the division of labor and competencies between them. From this point of view, the relationship between politicians and managers is clear: the former represent and rule on behalf of the population, while the latter implement political decisions and oversee daily operations (Sørensen et al., 2021; Sørensen & Torfing, 2019; Torfing & Ansell, 2017). Ansell and Torfing (2021a, p. 216) sum up this perspective and state that *“some administrators clearly expect the politicians to define overall visions and goals that answer the ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions so that they can implement these visions and goals, effectively answering the ‘how’”*.

Co-creation is about breaking these silos. The new institutional designs that are necessary to introduce and sustain this approach include removing long-standing internal barriers and increasing interactions and collaboration between the political and managerial spheres (Torfing et al., 2019). Their relationship is hence redefined as they mobilize co-creation. Instead of being reserved for politicians, problems, goals, as well as solutions are now discussed in more open deliberative spaces with the participation of not only public managers but a variety of actors (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a). More horizontal relationships between these actors are at the core of this new paradigm (Osborne, 2006). Political leadership therefore ideally becomes increasingly “interactive” (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019) or “collective” (Ansell et al., 2021) as dialogue with employees of the organization

as well as other stakeholders is encouraged to obtain their inputs, instead of seeing politicians as sovereign leaders.

3.4.2. Relationships between citizens and the local government

As Pestoff (2012, p. 1103-1104) observes, “*the relationship between the state and citizens is continually changing (...) In the changing relations between the government and citizens the former sometimes attempt to involve the latter in the provision of goods and services*”. In this regard, the new approach of policy co-creation fundamentally transforms the relationships between local public organizations and the population (Brix et al., 2020). The long-standing convictions and values on which their relationship is based are disrupted (Meijer, 2016). In traditional bureaucratic organizations, the relationship between the organization and citizens is relatively one-directional and shaped by top-down decisions along a vertical power line (Brix et al., 2021; Sicilia et al., 2016; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). In this perspective, public services are provided by professionals, and received by citizens. Then, under the NPM-paradigm, a stronger focus on the satisfaction of service users’ needs, and the management and control of performance can be observed.

This approach to relationships between citizens and their local government does however not fit with co-creation or accommodate participatory policymaking. Thus, as co-creation is implemented in a given local context, these relationships change. They are increasingly shaped by collaboration, empowerment, and interdependence of the different spheres (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). Within this more balanced relationship, citizens are more and more active, assertive, critical, and empowered (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019). More than before, knowledge is shared between the political, managerial, and civil society spheres: knowledge is transferred from one group of actors to the others, different types of knowledge are recombined, or specialized knowledge can be created through their interactions (Brix et al., 2021). This indicates a shift from a “resistance democracy” to an “interactive democracy” (Bentzen et al., 2020): citizens’ relationship with public authorities no longer only consists of them criticizing public actors or decisions or opposing them, but it evolves into a dialogue which, ideally, is continuous over the policymaking process (Bentzen, 2022) so as to prevent conflicts before they arise. Consequently, co-creation brings citizens closer to their local government (Hjortskov et al., 2018). This is essential also in terms of legitimacy of local governments, which now largely depends on interactions with the population (Bekkers et al., 2011) and not only on concrete policy outputs and problem-solving capacity.

3.4.3. Relationships among citizens

One of the proclaimed benefits of co-creation is that it can lead to greater inclusion of citizens in policymaking processes (Brandsen, 2021; Brandsen et al., 2018), counter social exclusion (Lund, 2018), and increase social cohesion (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Torfing et al., 2019). It can hence affect relationships among citizens or groups of them in this –

positive – way. However, co-creation might also contribute to exacerbating inequality and exclusion (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2020). In a bureaucratic administrative system, inequality between citizens is reduced to a minimum since equal cases are meant to receive equal treatment from a neutral public organization (Osborne, 2006). In NPM-dominated systems, those citizens disposing of more financial resources can get access to better quality public services and might therefore be privileged (Meijer, 2016). Finally, co-creation might give rise to inequality since some might be more willing or able to participate than others (Meijer, 2016).

Access to the public sphere (Habermas, 1991) – the deliberative space of co-creation, in this sense – is not equal (Hartley et al., 2019) and might consequently affect relationships between individual citizens or groups of them. First, due to structural bias, those participating in co-creation processes have a tendency to come from the same or similar social groups. Mostly, these “usual suspects” (Bryson et al., 2013) are highly educated, financially well-off, and have an interest in the policy issue at hand (Ansell, 2012; Fung, 2006; Meijer, 2016; Nabatchi, 2012; Sørensen & Torfing, 2022; Torfing et al., 2019, 2021). Consequently, some groups of the population are almost always underrepresented: citizens who are vulnerable and therefore marginalized (Brandsen, 2021). Past research points out that these groups of citizens are typically excluded from participatory processes (Verba et al., 1995), which exacerbates inequality between the advantaged and less advantaged (Xu & Tang, 2020). This goes to show how co-creation can affect citizens’ relationships with one another in both positive and negative ways. At the same time, this raises the issue of accessibility of co-creation (Leino & Puumala, 2021), where citizens with the necessary resources are able to participate while others are not.

Table 6. Changes in relationships

Current relationships	What changes with co-creation	Challenges and barriers
Politicians – managers: separation and silos	Breaking the silos and division of labor, and installing more collective and interactive leadership styles	Negative/traditional perception of political leadership, concentration of political power, diverging expectations among politicians and administrators (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a; Bentzen et al., 2020)
Citizens – local government: vertical top-down power line	More horizontal processes and interactions between different spheres	Representative democratic system (Torfing & Ansell, 2017), democratic disenchantment, abstention, and rise of anti-politics (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b; Sørensen & Torfing, 2019)
Citizens – citizens: equal cases receive equal treatment from neutral bureaucracy	Inequality and exclusion can be reduced or exacerbated	Overcoming the participation bias that limits co-creation to the “usual suspects” (Fung, 2006; Bryson et al., 2013)

(Source: author)

In this section, we explored the notion of policy co-creation in more detail. The potential benefits and pitfalls of this approach were briefly explained. Then, we built on prior literature to uncover the changes the implementation of co-creation entails for public organizations. In this regard, changes in organizational processes, changes in actors, roles, and skills, and changes in relationships between actors were identified. These potential transformations invite to conceive of co-creation as a major institutional change for public organizations.

This closes chapter 1 of our literature review where the context and conceptual framework of our doctoral thesis were laid out. Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical framework for this research.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 1

The aim of our research is to study **how co-creation is implemented in local public organizations as they face Grand Challenges**. To do so, chapter 1 has allowed us to set the stage and clarify the context of this research and better comprehend both the Grand Challenges public organizations face today, as well as co-creation as a promising approach for the development of effective responses.

In **section 1**, we identified the most pressing contemporary Grand Challenges public organizations face. In particular, we have argued for the usefulness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a framework to operationalize and study these Grand Challenges and the development of responses to them. The challenges associated with Grand Challenges have been identified: the challenge of even defining the term itself; the challenge of distinguishing it from other types of complex problems; and the challenge of addressing Grand Challenges. Then, three main principles for the development of effective responses to Grand Challenges were identified in the literature: innovation, collaboration, and local action:

- **Innovation** in both the processes mobilized to develop responses to these problems, and in the responses themselves is necessary. Neither traditional policymaking processes nor traditional public action are effective in contexts where public organizations are confronted with Grand Challenges.
- **Collaboration** of different types of actors and across organizational, sectoral, and disciplinary boundaries is required in order to access the necessary resources, expertise, experiences, and ideas to generate ideas for the resolution of Grand Challenges.
- **Local action** in response to global problems might seem contradictory but is necessary since these global Grand Challenges are embedded in local context and manifest in different ways depending on the particular conditions under which they arise. Reconciling both local and global action for Grand Challenges is therefore another key element of effectively addressing them.

Given these principles, we have then argued that public organizations in their current state are ill equipped to address Grand Challenges. However, we have shown the shifts in the paradigms that shape the public sector, and identified the emerging New Public Governance paradigm as a promising evolution towards more open and inclusive policymaking.

Section 2 has allowed us to better comprehend the concept of collaborative governance as a branch of the New Public Governance paradigm. Collaborative governance in general, and policy co-creation in particular, are frequently presented as powerful remedies to these issues. We have argued that among the plethora of collaborative governance approaches, co-creation is the most suitable for local public organizations seeking to address Grand Challenges: its problem-orientation and aim to include a diversity of actors with different interests and ideas drive the development of innovative responses, and its

capacity to cover the entire policymaking process increases the likelihood of developing policies that fit local needs and conditions.

Finally, in **section 3**, we have briefly mentioned the outcomes of co-creation. Indeed, this is an aspect of the study of co-creation that has so far not received much scholarly attention (Jo & Nabatchi, 2021; Bentzen, 2022). While this is not what we investigate in this thesis, the study of the benefits and pitfalls of co-creation indeed presents an interesting avenue for further research.

We have then explored the changes co-creation entails for the public organizations that choose to implement this new policymaking approach. In this regard, we have identified three broad sets of changes in existing literature and also shown the barriers that might hamper the execution of these changes:

- **Changes in organizational processes** occur as co-creation is based on horizontal decision-making that allows to bring in new actors and their knowledge and resources; co-creation furthermore has a long-term orientation and is focused on generating value for society, and not only on immediately improving performance; and co-creation requires the development of spaces that allow for interactive policymaking.
- **Changes in actors, roles, and skills** take place when a public organization resorts to co-creation, since, per definition, it requires the involvement of a diversity of actors from different fields and sectors; it also implies that involved actors take on new responsibilities and consequently perceive their and others' roles in policymaking differently; these new constellations of actors with changing roles and responsibilities also requires the development of new skill sets that are adapted to this type of policymaking.
- **Changes in relationships** between the established and new actors involved in policymaking through co-creation are most likely to occur: in this regard, not only the way in which elected politicians relate to the public managers they work with and vice versa, but also the relationship between these two types of actors and the involved citizens are transformed as they engage in a co-creation process. Finally, relationships among citizens – for instance, between those who participate and those who do not – might also change because of co-creation.

Overall, chapter 1 has allowed us to study co-creation of policy as a potentially effective way of developing responses to Grand Challenges. While co-creation is therefore increasingly implemented in public organizations, it remains an emerging approach. As such, its use is still mostly limited to projects at an *ad hoc* basis (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a). To be fully integrated in established organizational practices and routines, co-creation must acquire stable institutional foundations that support its implementation. The core features of co-creation are likely to be conflicting with those that have been established in the organization for a long time. Introducing co-creation in a predominantly bureaucratic public organization therefore most certainly leads to organizational

complexity as new and existing elements collide (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010).

This is because co-creation practices represent a major transformation for local authorities, which the literature describes as a paradigm shift (Torfing et al., 2021). Thus, co-creation practices lead to a new management model based on more democratic governance for more participatory decision-making, covering all stages of the policymaking process (Nabatchi et al., 2017). Whatever the degree of openness, the political-administrative structure, and the agents in charge of public services see their autonomy and responsibility reinforced (Pots & Serval, 2022). These elements disrupt the traditional functioning of local public organizations.

The co-existence of conflicting approaches within an organization is likely to generate tension. However, work on individual responses to the organizational complexity that comes with the introduction of such new approaches remains rare (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016). Studying how actors deal with the parallel existence of two largely different approaches to policymaking is even more relevant if we consider that intentional action on the part of those who seek to implement co-creation is required. The changes that accompany the introduction of co-creation concern long-standing and taken-for-granted procedures and routines that shape bureaucratic organizations and the behavior of the actors associated with these organizations. Therefore, deploying co-creation requires the involved actors to make efforts to shape their institutional environment so that it matches, frames, and supports co-creation practices. However, these efforts take place in a context of institutional contradictions between the current arrangement and the one necessary to implement co-creation (Seo & Creed, 2002). In this sense, actors make efforts aimed at changing the rules of the game, and therefore the institutions that shape the functioning of the organization (North, 1990). **To understand these dynamics, in chapter 2, we therefore propose to mobilize a neo-institutional perspective to study the institutional work of actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation.**

CHAPTER 2: The Implementation of Co-Creation Through the Prism of Institutional Work

In this chapter, we develop the theoretical framework of our research. We inscribe this doctoral thesis in neo-institutional theory, and more specifically mobilize the institutional work perspective to explore the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations facing Grand Challenges.

Literature on Grand Challenges and public organizations' strategies to address them, and on policy co-creation as one of these approaches (**chapter 1**) points out the necessity of finding new ways to develop responses to complex societal problems, and the need for these new approaches to develop legitimacy in a public sector marked by bureaucratic structures and procedures. The shift induced by the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations affects the institutional arrangements shaping the functioning of these organizations. As a new paradigm for public policymaking (Torfing et al., 2021), co-creation alters the higher-order ideas, entrenched routines, and mindsets which have provided the foundations for public organizations for a long time. Co-creation transforms the structure of public organizations as it introduces new approaches to agenda-setting and decision-making, flattens the hierarchy, dissolves silos, changes relationships between elected politicians, public managers, and citizens, and bridges the gap between these spheres.

Co-creation thus necessarily entails agency on the part of public actors seeking to change the "rules of the game" and thereby the institutions, understood as the set of norms, rules, and values which shape behavior (Fligstein, 2001; Scott, 2013). To study actors' efforts at implementing co-creation and legitimizing the changes it implies for bureaucratically functioning organizations, we mobilize a **neo-institutional approach**. Neo-institutional theory can help understand how institutions shape the behavior of actors and has thus been applied in a variety of contexts to study how practices spread within organizational fields (Greenwood et al., 2008).

Our research object, however, directly relates to more recent literature within neo-institutional scholarship, where the agency of actors and their ability to shape their institutional environment are explored (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). From this research has emerged the **institutional work** perspective, which refers to "*the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). In this regard, the institutional work perspective allows to nourish our research and enables us to study how public actors engage in co-

creation and how they deploy these practices to respond to Grand Challenges in their local contexts. More specifically, the institutional work of a dispersed set of actors is studied in this research, since co-creation per definition involves a wide spectrum of actors with different interests and intentions.

This chapter is structured in three sections.

In **section 1**, we first propose to investigate the theoretical foundations of neo-institutionalism: we will explore its main pillars, clarify important notions, and retrace the evolution this theory has undergone since its emergence in the 1980s. We show why traditional neo-institutional theory is unable to explain the complex dynamics of institutional change. We then argue that the focus on agency, which has developed more recently in neo-institutional theory, will be useful to study our research object.

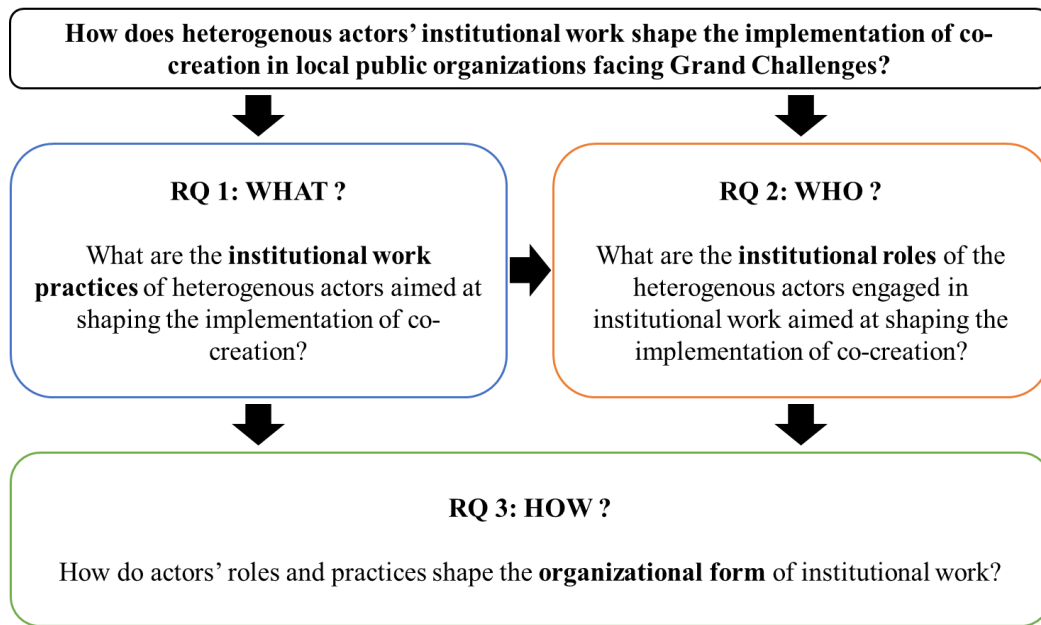
Then, in **section 2**, we zoom in on the study of institutional work, a subfield of neo-institutional theory which lets us study actors' ability to shape their institutional environment. We inscribe institutional work in a broader "turn to work" in the field of management and organizational studies. The foundations and underlying ideas of institutional work are explored in this chapter, whereby we insist on its process-focus and the importance of actors' intentionality. Given our research object of co-creation which implies the involvement of a variety of actors, we moreover emphasize the dispersed character of institutional work and highlight the lack of acknowledgement of this side of institutional work in existing literature. Therefore, we propose to direct our attention to the diverse actors who might engage in institutional work. In this regard, we first investigate the vast literature on the practices institutional workers might engage in, and develop our first research question.

Then, we study the actors themselves, starting with the enabling conditions that can contribute to them becoming institutional workers. We explore existing literature on the institutional roles actors can take on as they engage in institutional work and study how their roles shape their practices and intentions. This allows us to formulate our second research question.

Finally, in **section 3**, based on our exploration of the involved actors, their roles as well as institutional work practices, we finally study the organizational forms institutional work can take. In this regard, we investigate different organizational forms identified in prior literature.

The three research questions and their articulation are shown in the research model below (figure 4).

Figure 4. Articulation of the three research questions



(Source: author)

Section 1: A neo-institutional approach

In this first section, we aim to provide the theoretical bases as we inscribe our research in neo-institutional theory. Building on the work of Weber, neo-institutional scholarship develops in the 1970s and is marked by Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), as well as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who point out that organizations tend to resemble one another, and study why that is. Neo-institutional theory has then been widely used to understand the adoption and diffusion of practices within organizations (Greenwood et al., 2008). In this regard, neo-institutional theory seems particularly appropriate to study the diffusion of new co-creation practices in local public organizations, and more broadly understand this new approach to policymaking.

Moreover, this research is embedded in a context marked by Grand Challenges, which implies a high degree of uncertainty and a need for innovation. Hence, if co-creation seems to be a promising approach to respond to these challenges, it remains a new and emerging paradigm with practices and organizational foundations that are not yet established or formalized. The innovative nature of co-creation thus adds another layer of uncertainty in an already uncertain and unstable context of Grand Challenges. Consequently, the uncertainty which public organizations face is twofold: on the one hand, it stems from the environment marked by Grand Challenges and their complexity, and on the other hand, it is organizational and due to the innovative nature of the co-creation approach that is implemented to address these challenges. From this it follows that, in addition to understanding the diffusion of these new policymaking practices, we seek to investigate how actors appropriate co-creation practices and how they shape and adapt them to the local context in which they are deployed.

To do so, we first explore the foundations of neo-institutional theory, clarify main terms and notions (**section 1.1.**) to provide a base for our subsequent exploration of a more specific branch of this theory. We then retrace the main stages of its evolution (**section 1.2.**). Here, we also discuss the weaknesses of traditional neo-institutional theory and show how they have paved the way for new developments. These recent subfields of neo-institutional research include a stronger focus on agency and nourish our study since they allow to study how a diversity affect the dynamics of institutions. In this sense, adopting a neo-institutional approach in our research provides us with the theoretical “lenses” to understand how local public actors shape co-creation practices to develop responses to Grand Challenges in their local context.

1.1. The foundations of neo-institutional theory in management and organizational studies

Naturally, the notion of institutions is a central construct in institutional theory. Since this theory has evolved to become dominant in the field of organizational studies over the past decades (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019), a burgeoning literature has developed around institutions. It has been applied to various fields, including management and organizational studies, political science, and economics. Today, institutional theory¹⁰ has become an “umbrella concept” encompassing a multiplicity and diversity of subfields, theoretical and empirical approaches, and definitions of central terms (Glynn & D’Aunno, 2023).

Consequently, as perspectives and definitions accumulate, understandings of what institutions are, what they do and how they function differ. While some emphasize their cognitive, normative, and regulative elements (Scott, 2013), others focus on the ways in which behavior and social relationships are affected by taken-for-granted rules (Fligstein, 2001), or understand institutions as belief systems shaping material activities (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). In short, “*there is seldom any clear hint about what is meant by institution*” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019). The underlying idea that connects this variety of perspectives is the role of norms and expectations in shaping organizational structures, actions, and outcomes (David et al., 2019).

This notion of institutions as stable elements affecting how actors behave (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) has been applied to a variety of types of institutions, and multiple levels. In this first section, we aim to clarify the term institutions. To do so, we first clarify the vocabulary surrounding institutions and organizations and provide elements that allow to delimit and define what institutions are (**section 1.1.1**). We then distinguish between formal and informal institutions (**section 1.1.2**). Then, we point out how institutions have mostly been considered as stable elements that shape behavior, but more recently also as something that can be shaped by actors (**section 1.1.3**). Finally, we explain why we mobilize Scott’s “three pillar” framework of institutions in this research (**section 1.1.4**).

1.1.1. Institutions and organizations: what are we talking about?

In institutional literature, a **plethora of terms** are often used interchangeably (Fleetwood, 2008, cited by Glynn & D’Aunno, 2023): social structure, habits, habitus, rules, conventions, norms, values, roles, customs, laws, regulations, practices, routines, procedures and precedents, mores, scripts, obligations, rituals, codes, and agreements – scholars employ these notions in one way or another to refer to aspects of institutions,

¹⁰ We use the terms “institutional theory”, “institutionalism”, and “institutional scholarship” interchangeably.

meaning the enduring elements shaping social life (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Many of these terms can be found in definitions of institutions (see table 7 below for selected definitions); we, too, will refer to them to designate elements of institutions.

In colloquial, **everyday language**, an institution could be understood relatively broadly as “*a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture*”¹¹. In this sense, an institution can be thought of as a set of established rules, practices, and traditions that guide interactions with individuals and other institutions, and behavior within a particular context. It is a structured organization or establishment that serves a particular purpose or function within a society. An institution may have a hierarchy, a specific physical location, and roles and responsibilities for its members. They can have both positive and negative impacts on people's lives: a well-functioning healthcare institution can help people stay healthy and save lives, while a corrupt political institution can lead to inequality and social injustice.

A university can be considered an institution because it has established rules and practices that guide the behavior of students, faculty, and administrators. Similarly, a bank can be considered an institution because it operates within a framework of legal and regulatory rules that govern its behavior. Just like the institution of marriage, to give another example, these constructs have been relatively stable and reliable over time, providing a framework of social norms and prescriptions that define the scope of action for actors as they engage with one of these institutions.

The notion of institutions, in common speech, is often used interchangeably with **organizations**. Yet, the difference between them, as we will show more extensively in this chapter, is important: institutions can be understood as the level above organizations. While organizations pursue specific goals, institutions impose a broad set of prescriptions and norms, thereby shaping the behavior of organizations and the people they are composed of. Organizations are therefore embedded in an institutional environment that includes specific pressures and forces, rules and expectations for them to adapt to (J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Despite turnover within organizations, institutions remain stable, and resilient to evolving and diverging demands (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Institutions are therefore “*external to – and analytically distinct from – organizations*” (Micelotta et al., 2017, p. 10). Or, as put by North (1993, p. 4): “*Institutions are the rules of the game and organizations are the players*”.

After having gained a better understanding of what institutions are in everyday, non-scientific language and how they differ from organizations, it is necessary to provide an academic definition of the term and have a look at existing work on institutional theory in the field of management and organizational studies.

Institutional literature having exploded over the past decades, it has now become so vast that the meaning of its core constructs - such as the term “institution” itself - has become

¹¹ “Institution”. In: Merriam-Webster.com dictionary, see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/institution> (consulted on 14.02.2023)

increasingly diluted (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019). While at first, DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p. 1) observed that it was “*often easier to gain agreement about what (an institution) is not than what it is*”, five decades of rapid developments in institutional have made it equally difficult to define what an institution is not: the idea of the institution has since been applied to a plethora of fields and research questions, and it appears that almost everything can be understood as an institution. Institutional theory is frequently criticized for its incapability to provide a clearly delimited definition of what institutions are and what they are not (Abdelnour et al., 2017).

It therefore seems necessary to provide an overview of scholars’ often diverging accounts of institutions. Table 7 below includes some of the most popular definitions of institutions in management and organizational studies since the early stages of institutionalism. This allows us to point out the different dimensions of institutions scholars emphasize. While stable practices infused with value are central at first (Selznick, 1949, 1957), their social construction is emphasized later (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) before neo-institutional theory focuses on the ways in which institutions, due to their persistence over time, shape actors’ behavior and provide meaning (J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2013; Zucker, 1977).

Below, we will explicate Scott’s (2013) definition of institutions, which we choose to follow in the remainder of this research. His “three pillar” approach to institutions will allow us to mobilize different angles to study institutions and how they change as co-creation is implemented in public organizations.

Table 7. Definitions of institutions

Author(s)	Definition
Selznick (1949)	Institutions are systems of authoritative prescriptions that embody the norms, values, and beliefs of a social system.
Berger and Luckmann (1967)	Shared meanings, understandings of routine patterns of behavior (including language, symbols) that individuals come to experience as having a reality that is external to them and is a 'coercive fact'
Meyer and Rowan (1977)	Institutions are organizations with legitimacy in a given environment.
Zucker (1977)	Institutions are recognized patterns of social behavior that provide stability in complex social situations.
Giddens (1984)	The more enduring features of social life... giving solidity across space and time
North (1990)	The rules of the game in a society... Humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws and property rights)
Barley and Tolbert (1997)	Shared rules and typifications that identify categories of social actors and their appropriate activities or relationships
Hoffman (1999)	Rules, norms, and beliefs that describe reality for the organization, explaining what is and is not, what can be acted upon and what cannot
Fligstein (2001)	Rules and shared meanings ... that define social relationships, help define who occupies what position in those relationships and guide interaction by giving actors cognitive frames or sets of meanings to interpret the behaviour of others.
Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)	Enduring elements in social life that have a profound effect on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors
Battilana and Leca (2009)	Institutions are patterns of action or organization that eventually become taken for granted in a given field of activity
Scott (1995/2013)	Institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.

(Source: author)

1.1.2. Formal and informal institutions

North (1990) famously argues that institutions can be broadly classified into two categories: formal and informal ones. **Formal institutions** refer to the formal rules, laws, contracts, and regulations that are created and enforced by governments and other formalized organizations. They set the rules of the game by establishing a predictable framework for activity. Since they are stable over time, they reduce uncertainty. **Informal**

institutions, on the other hand, refer to the unwritten norms, customs, and traditions that govern social and economic behavior. These institutions include cultural values, social norms, or informal networks, among others. Informal institutions can be thought of as somewhat “softer” rules that guide behavior, influencing the decisions of individuals and groups.

North emphasizes that both formal and informal institutions play a crucial role in shaping behavior and outcomes. While formal institutions provide a legal and regulatory framework, informal institutions help understand in a more nuanced way how people behave and make decisions. Moreover, the two might interact: informal norms and customs can sometimes override formal laws and regulations, or on the contrary, they might have to adapt to changes in the formal institutional context. Informal institutions can also show how actors respond to and interpret formal ones.

In public organizations, formal and informal institutions can take various forms depending on the context and nature of the organization. For instance, public organizations are subject to a range of laws and regulations that dictate how they should operate: environmental protection regulations may require public organizations to implement specific measures to reduce their carbon footprint. Public organizations moreover have formal policies and procedures that govern how they conduct their operations, for example the process for hiring new employees. These are some examples for formal institutions that reign public organizations.

Informal institutions can take the form of unwritten norms and values that guide the behavior of individuals within an organization. For example, a norm might be to work late to meet a deadline, or a value might be to prioritize public service over personal gain. Moreover, informal networks and relationships can be a powerful force that shapes behavior and decision-making. Finally, the culture of a public organization, including its shared beliefs and attitudes, can be an informal institution that influences the behavior of its employees. For example, a culture that emphasizes innovation and risk-taking may lead employees to feel more comfortable taking on new projects and proposing creative solutions.

1.1.3. Institutions are stable and shape behavior... and can be shaped by actors

Others shed light on the ways in which institutions are able to structure actors' behavior by providing rules and norms that specify “*what should be done and how to do it*” (Leblebici et al., 1991, p. 336). This set of definitions focuses on the structural dimension of institutions and their ability to provide stable patterns representing a framework within which people act (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Fligstein, 2001; Hoffman, 1999; North, 1990). In this perspective, institutions set expectations for behavior and thereby take on a stabilizing role that help manage complex and uncertain situations in social life (Zucker, 1977). This understanding of institutions emphasizing

formal structures can be found in the pathbreaking papers that marked the rise of institutional theory since the 1970s (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). They position institutions as enduring elements in social life that are stable over time, and that affect how actors behave. As habitualized action (Tolbert & Zucker, 1999), institutions guide and give meaning to social behavior, and are reproduced through this behavior (Greenwood et al., 2008).

In this sense, the role of actors in shaping their institutional environment is highly limited, as they are considered to be subordinate to institutions (Abdelnour et al., 2017). Over time, the understanding of institutions becomes more encompassing as scholars are increasingly interested in the notion of agency, and its role in institutional processes: a burgeoning literature on institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work attests to this development (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

In this sense, Scott (2013, p. 58) argues that while they affect behavior, “*institutions also support and empower activities and actors. Institutions provide stimulus, guidelines, and resources for acting as well as prohibitions and constraints on action*”. It is through Giddens’ concept of structuration that the role of agency is studied in institutional theory where literature on institutional work aims to reconcile institutions and agency (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Institutions, in this view, while stable and resistant, are not fixed, and may be changed through the actions of interested actors (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004).

1.1.4. “Three Pillars” of institutions

An analytically relatively flexible (Abdelnour et al., 2017) understanding of institutions has been developed by Scott (2013) who proposes three pillars as the foundations of institutions. This encompassing approach allows to apply the notion of institutions to a variety of situations. Scott (2013, p. 56-57) provides an “omnibus” definition in which he famously introduces the “three pillars” that act as building blocks of institutions: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements are the “*elastic fibers that guide behavior and resist change*”. With this approach, Scott seeks to study the question why individual or collective actors comply with rules: is it because they are rewarded for doing so, because they believe that they have a moral obligation to do so, or because they are following their conception of what reasonable others would do in the situation? Developed in his seminal 1995 book “Institutions and Organizations”, Scott’s “three pillars” framework shows how institutions are composed of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements.

The **regulative** pillar involves formal rules and norms that define and constrain behavior. This includes laws, regulations, contracts, and other formal constraints that are created and enforced by external authorities.

The **normative** pillar concerns informal rules, values, and expectations that guide behavior. It is based on norms of behavior that are accepted and expected within a

particular context, such as codes of conduct and social conventions. Already Selznick's (1949, 1957) earlier work features the normative elements of institutions by focusing on prescriptions around values. From his point of view, institutions arise as leading individuals within organizations infuse them with value (Glynn & D'Aunno, 2023). They give sense to their practices by connecting them to values and identities, thereby constructing a shared meaning system among the members of the organization. Thus, in Selznick's definition, institutions correspond to organizations in which practices have been infused with value (David et al., 2019).

Finally, the **cultural-cognitive** pillar of institutions encompasses beliefs and shared understandings that shape people's perceptions and preferences. It includes shared values, attitudes, and assumptions that influence how people interpret the world and act in it (e.g., language, religion, and cultural practices).

The three pillars each provide a different type of foundation to uphold an institutional arrangement. While the framework presents them in a way that may appear simple, in reality, the pillars are hardly isolated from one another but often found in different combinations; moreover, they may evolve over time as institutions evolve (Scott, 2014). By interacting to shape behavior, these three pillars create a mix of rules, norms, and beliefs that guide people's actions and decisions. The interactions between the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of institutions can be quite complex.

To come back to the object of our research, local public organizations are shaped by all three of these pillars. Formal rules and regulations prescribe who can be involved in decision-making processes and who cannot; for reasons of secrecy, for example, some actors are excluded. In the same vein, formalized roles give responsibility and power to some but not to others. Informal norms and expectations further shape behavior; for instance, as the organization strives for efficiency and the creation of specialized knowledge, silos emerge and the political and administrative spheres, as well as departments within these spheres are separated from one another. Finally, a deeply bureaucratic mindset might reinforce resistance towards change and make the implementation of new institutional arrangements such as co-creation difficult. This mindset can in turn shape how both formal and informal rules and norms evolve, whether they are contested and changed, or maintained.

Scott (2013) argues that those are the central features of institutions, each one with a specific function, but that associated activities and material resources are also needed. He thereby leaves space for agency of actors as they intervene in producing and reproducing the institutions they are embedded in. Seeing institutions as "passive" would be a mistake as Scott (2013, p. 57) considers that these "*rules, norms, and meanings arise in interaction, and they are preserved and modified by human behavior*". In other words, the actions that bring institutions to life and might transform them must not be neglected. Hence, in his understanding of institutions, not only their stabilizing role is important, but also the change they might undergo: therefore, he argues, processes of institutional change, of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization (Oliver, 1992; Tolbert & Zucker, 1999)

need to have their place in institutional theory. He views institutions as both formal and informal, enabling and constraining (Battilana et al., 2009), conscious and unconscious. We thus mobilize this broad understanding of institutions for this research and consider institutions to contain regulative, normative, as well as cultural-cognitive elements, which will allow us to investigate from multiple angles how the implementation of co-creation shapes and is shaped by the institutional foundations of local public organizations, and the behavior of involved actors.

1.2. Overcoming the limitations of neo-institutional theory: a turn towards agency

Section 1.1. has allowed us to pave the ground for the following sections of this chapter and to lay out the main terms and ideas of neo-institutional theory. The definition of institutions we choose to use for this research has been explained, as well as the key ideas we will come back to over the course of this and subsequent chapters. The objective for this second **section 1.2.** is now to zoom in on more specific aspects of neo-institutional theory which will nourish our own research. As we will show in this section, we shift away from tradition neo-institutional ideas of institutions shaping passive actors' behavior, and adopt a more dynamic approach that allows to account for the role of both structure and agency: we will argue that while institutions shape actors and how they behave, these actors also have the ability to alter their institutional environment and, in our case, shape the implementation of new institutional arrangements such as co-creation.

We begin by briefly retracing the evolution of institutional theory and clarifying the cornerstones and main ideas of this literature (**section 1.2.1.**). Subsequently, we point out the weaknesses of neo-institutional theory with regard to our research object, the co-creation of in a context of Grand Challenges (**section 1.2.2.**). We then show how more recent neo-institutional scholarship increasingly accounts for agency (**section 1.2.3.**) in an attempt to overcome these limitations, and how this approach can be useful in our research. The shift towards agency shows in a burgeoning literature on institutional entrepreneurship, which allows to focus on specific actors' capacity to shape institutions, but also comes with its limitations especially in a research context like ours that includes a diversity of actors; these elements are explored in the final section (**section 1.2.4.**).

1.2.1. From “old” to “new” institutionalism

Institutional theory is rooted in the work of economic sociologists who studied the role of norms and values in economic and social systems. In management and organizational studies, institutional theory has seen considerable transformations over the past decades as it has evolved from the early, “old” institutionalism to “new” or neo-institutionalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Still today, this theory is far from being static: new subfields emerge as scholars' focus shifts.

The emergence of institutional theory in organizational studies can be traced back to scholars like Selznick (1949, 1957) or Berger and Luckmann (1967), who laid the groundwork for understanding how values, identities, and ideas shape organizations' institutionalization processes. This **early or “old” institutionalism** is dominated by the idea that the rationality of organizations is limited by institutionalization as it limits their options. Selznick (1949, 1957) emphasizes the importance of values and leaves more space for the agency of actors as he considers them to be drivers of institutionalization. Shifting away from Selznick's view of the role of individuals and coalitions within organizations, their power and agency, Berger and Luckmann (1967) understand the

institutionalization process as something where routinized interactions allow for the emergence of institutions and the production of a shared meaning system that is ultimately objectified and taken for granted. The role of agency is implicit, as actors may or may not decide to act in their habitual roles.

With their seminal 1977 article, Meyer and Rowan lay the foundations for a new generation of institutional scholarship. They study institutionalization at the field level and thereby shed light on the macro-foundations of institutions, pointing out the importance of the institutional environment, its formal structures and “rationalized myths” that define what is seen as desirable and acceptable in a certain environment. These myths are taken for granted, that is, they are entrenched in actors’ worldviews, and therefore seen as “true” and legitimate. Consequently, by providing conventions and rules, they structure how actors behave in a certain institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). At the same time, Zucker (1977), on the other hand, highlights the individual level and thereby the micro-foundations of institutions. While at the macro-level, the conformity of *organizational* action with the institutional context is studied, the micro-level focuses on the ways in which institutions shapes *individual* action. In this sense, the taken-for-granted beliefs individuals hold are the driving forces of institutionalization processes.

In line with numerous scholars, we subsequently employ the term “**neo-institutional theory**” to emphasize these developments in institutionalism and demarcate this more recent stream of literature from “old institutionalism” (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). It is with DiMaggio and Powell’s article “The Iron Cage Revisited: Isomorphism in Organizational Fields” published in 1983 that neo-institutional theory definitely makes its entrance in the field of organizational studies. The pressure for organizations to conform to taken-for-granted assumptions is at the origin of the question that guides neo-institutional research: what makes organizations so similar? (Glynn & D’Aunno, 2023). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) provide an explanation by highlighting the impact of field level pressures for homogeneity, and the taken-for-grantedness of practices.

Taken-for-granted practices are those that are deeply ingrained and value-laden (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016). Over time, they turn into “facts” that condition actions and behavior within a field, and affect the decisions actors make as they encounter specific situations (Phillips et al., 2004), as well as the way in which these situations are perceived. Taken-for-granted institutional arrangements are somewhat “*objectivated’ as existing apart from and beyond the people who embody them*” (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p. 186); actors are not consciously aware of the way in which these elements shape their behavior. They are accepted as “normal”, and their legitimacy is no longer questioned by the actors enacting them (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009).

Taken-for-granted rules have more weight than individual interests that might be conflicting with them (Beckert, 1999); the pressure for **conformity** is therefore high. These pressures to conform with widely accepted rules are **exogenous** and stem from the field the organization is embedded in (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983): to acquire the

legitimacy they need to survive, the organizations in a field tend to resemble one another, and the field becomes **homogenous** as they converge. Neo-institutionalism is thereby able to study how variety is reduced while similarity is produced, how organizational choices are limited and constrained, and practices and rules stabilized in a given field (De Holan & Phillips, 2002).

The notion of the **organizational field** is one of the central ideas in neo-institutional theory. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 148) define them as *“those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of life”*. An organizational field is therefore a set of organizations that share similar practices, technologies, and social and cultural characteristics. Its boundaries are defined by these shared norms that are taken for granted by the members of the organizations within the field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) point out that organizational fields are characterized by strong institutional pressures to conform to dominant institutional prescriptions. They label these pressures as **isomorphism**: a *“constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions”* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149).

These authors identify three mechanisms of isomorphism. First, **coercive isomorphism** *“results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function”* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150). Legal requirements, political decisions, or standardized and legitimated procedures and structures may act as forces driving organizations to act in a corresponding manner. It is for example the way in which a local public organization responds to regulations imposed by the national government.

Then, **mimetic isomorphism** refers to the pressure for organizations to *“model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful”*, especially in contexts of uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). An example of mimetic isomorphism in public organizations is the adoption of performance management practices.

The third form is **normative isomorphism**. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 152) define normative pressures as *“the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control ‘the production of producers’ (Larson, 1977:49-52), and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy”*. Normative pressures arise from professionalization and the collective effort to define acceptable practices within a field. In public organizations, normative isomorphism may take the form of accreditation standards. For instance, a public hospital may seek accreditation to demonstrate its commitment to quality care and patient safety, and to gain social acceptance.

Overall, neo-institutional theory provides insights into the institutional pressures that affect organizations, leading to conformity and homogeneity within fields. It helps us

understand why organizations exhibit similar behaviors, structures, and practices, and how these dynamics shape their interactions with their environment. Despite its influence and success in management and organizational studies and beyond over the past decades, neo-institutional theory has also faced criticism for its limitations in explaining key aspects of organizational behavior. Scholars have pointed out that neo-institutional theory often neglects the role of agency, or the capacity of individuals and groups to act independently, in shaping organizational outcomes (Battilana, 2006). Moreover, the theory's focus on stability, conformity, and isomorphism leads to a lack of consideration of the emergence or change of institutions (Greenwood et al., 2002; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009), or the conflict and resistance this may entail (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008).

1.2.2. The limitations of neo-institutional theory: what it does not explain

Consequently, more recent research has emphasized several main shortcomings of neo-institutional theory: its static view of institutional which limits the theory's ability to account for institutional change, particularly change that is not exogenously induced; indeed, a lack of endogenous factors for institutional change, and especially of agency must be pointed out.

Some scholars argue that neo-institutional theory has limited explanatory power because of its **static view of institutions**: it tends to pay attention to the mechanisms through which institutions are adopted and reproduced, rather than the outcomes that institutions produce, or the ways in which institutional change occurs. This focus generates a static view of institutions (Gawer & Phillips, 2013) that limits the scope of situations and dynamics neo-institutional theory is able to explain. What it knows to explain is the persistence of institutions and their stability, as well as the effect they have on organizations that become relatively homogenous as they adapt to pressures in their field. This however leads to an "over-emphasis" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009), an "exaggeration" (Dacin et al., 2002; Delbridge & Edwards, 2008) of the steady nature and taken-for-grantedness of institutional arrangements¹². Consequently, building on this understanding of institutions, this theory does not really account for other dynamics such as the emergence of new institutions, or the creation of new practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007).

More generally, the dynamics of institutional change are neglected in neo-institutional theory since it mainly sheds light on institutionalization processes that occur because of

¹² The distinction between institutions and institutional arrangements is often implicit (cf. North, 1990, 1993) and changes from one scholar to the next. North notes that institutional arrangements are "the various organizations and structures that have evolved to carry out and enforce the rules of the game" (North, 1990, p. 4); institutional arrangements are this the specific structures and mechanisms that have been established to implement and enforce institutions. Others argue that institutional arrangements are more specific and may concern only particular actors (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006). Many scholars seem to use the two terms of institutions and institutional arrangements interchangeably (e.g. Garud et al., 2007). Hereafter, due to the lack of a clear distinction between the two, we too opt to use them interchangeably.

the isomorphic pressures organizations are subject to. Hence, when neo-institutional theory does explain change, it is considered to come from “above” as organizations adapt to these exogenous pressures (Battilana & Leca, 2009).

This understanding of institutions as stable elements that are continuously reproduced indeed limits our ability to investigate how local public organizations implement new practices such as co-creation as they face complex and uncertain policy problems. Since these Grand Challenges require organizations to transform their policymaking process and generate innovative responses, however, it is necessary to also look at the institutional foundations and how they, too, might be required to change (see **chapter 1**). Traditional neo-institutional theory, with its focus on the persistence of institutions, does not leave much space to do so. The role of actors in the process of implementing new institutional arrangements, and altering existing ones, can hardly be accounted for.

Indeed, the **agentic behavior of actors** does not have a central place in neo-institutional theory. According to the foundational texts of this theory, organizational behavior is determined by actors’ need to be seen as legitimate in their institutional context (cf. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). This implies that actors conform with the pressures the field exerts on them. Hence, little space is given to the notion of agency in this conception of institutions (Battilana, 2006). Critics suggest that the theory overemphasizes the role of institutional prescriptions guiding actors’ actions, and fails to give sufficient attention to the ways in which individuals and groups within organizations can actively shape institutional arrangements (Thornton, 2004). Neo-institutional theory, some argue, has lost sight of the lived experiences of organizational actors (Lawrence et al., 2011), neglecting this micro-level of analysis where agency plays out and can shape institutions, instead prioritizing the organizational and field levels (Battilana, 2006). These levels cannot, however, be separated from one another as they are interrelated, which is why studying the role of actors seems crucial to provide a more complete picture of institutional processes.

In our research context, where local public organizations implement new co-creation practices to respond to the Grand Challenges they face, it is clearly visible that not only environmental factors – the obvious urgency to act and develop responses to the most pressing issues such as climate change related policy problems – drive organizational change. The desire to transform established practices can also arise within the organization itself and be driven by the actors that constitute the organization. For different reasons, elected politicians, public managers, or citizens might seek to change the functioning of the organization, and therefore affect its very foundations. In the case of our research object, the introduction of co-creation, whichever shape it takes, is most likely to alter the entrenched practices, norms, and assumptions the organization is based on; the role of actors in this process must not be neglected.

Therefore, neo-institutional scholars are increasingly interested in the construct of agency as they acknowledge that the reproduction of institutions as well as processes of institutional change require actors’ intentional action (Dacin et al., 2010). A notable shift

in neo-institutional theory has therefore taken place over the past two decades, and agency now occupies a central position in this literature (Battilana, 2006; Scott, 2013). This renewed interest in agency – we must remember that already in 1967, Berger and Luckmann have provided the conceptual foundations that support the use of this notion in institutional theory – has led to the development of several subfields of this theory. Among them can be found literature on institutional entrepreneurship as well as institutional work, where the idea of purposeful agency is central.

It therefore seems necessary to clarify what “agency” refers to before looking into the issue that is the reconciliation of structure – i.e., institutions – and agency. As argued in chapter 1, the development of policy responses in contexts marked by Grand Challenges requires innovative approaches, which are most likely to disrupt institutionalized practices and norms. Our research object, an exploration of the ways in which local public actors introduce co-creation in such contexts, is therefore directly related to the need for an acknowledgment of agency in neo-institutional scholarship.

1.2.3. Agency in neo-institutional theory

Agency can broadly be understood as “*actors’ ability to operate somewhat independently of the determining constraints of social structure*” (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009, p. 45) and is often related to notions like motivation, will, intentionality, interest, choice, or autonomy. It therefore appears obvious that agency is more or less opposed to the central postulates of traditional neo-institutional theory, and that it might even seem contradictory to incorporate the idea of actor-induced institutional change into a theory based on the assumption that institutions shape actors’ behavior (Gawer & Phillips, 2013).

Neo-institutional research interested in agency most often draws on a multidimensional view, where three main forms of agency have been identified (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In this regard, agency is temporally embedded and can be informed by the past, the present, or the future. When agency is oriented towards the past, it is **iterative**: actors reactivate past patterns of thought and action, whereby established institutional arrangements can be reproduced and maintained. Here, agency is habitual and based on familiar routines. Agency that is oriented towards the future is **projective**, as actors project their interests onto future outcomes, imagine possible trajectories, and pursue institutional change to achieve their desired goals. In these situations, agency is strategic as it is associated with the achievement of interests and objectives. Finally, agency can be **practical-evaluative** when it is oriented towards the present. In this case, agency is about getting things done in the here and now to resolve dilemmas in complex or uncertain situations; practical and normative judgements are to about alternatives. Here, agency is linked to sensemaking activities as it allows to comprehend and address emerging issues in the present moment.

Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998), we observe that when agency occurs in contexts marked by the complexity of **Grand Challenges**, and the agentic behavior of actors is

concerned with developing responses to these problems, their agency is most likely to be both projective and practical-evaluative. Iterative agency – concerned with institutional maintenance rather than change – is likely to be secondary in such contexts that require thinking - and acting - “outside of the box”. *Projective agency* may occur in contexts of Grand Challenges where institutional change is required to achieve the desired outcomes and pursue actors’ goals and interests. This type of agency relates to the long-term orientation of Grand Challenges that tend to evolve over time, and the innovative and visionary responses they require (Boon & Edler, 2018; Doh et al., 2019). Co-creation as a policymaking approach that prioritizes long-term effectiveness of policy outcomes over the achievement of short-term goals (Torfing et al., 2019) moreover facilitates this type of agency.

Then, by embedding these co-created practices in their institutional environment, actors purposefully shape the latter and adapt it to match the future they envision for the organization (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). *Practical-evaluative agency*, on the other hand, is concerned with the present. It is applicable in contexts of Grand Challenges since these problems are urgent, even more so when they are what has been called “super-wicked” problems (Levin et al., 2012) which concern above all the climate change related issues public organizations are confronted with. Practical and immediate responses are required to deal with these problems that cannot wait. Therefore, this type of agency is most likely to occur in contexts where local public organizations deal with Grand Challenges and can “no longer fall back on previous, known practices” but must identify the most viable alternative (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013, p. 1299). Here, co-creation and the diversity of its participants can facilitate the quick development of policy responses because it allows the organization to access a broad variety of resources and alternative ideas. The involvement of actors with different interests and needs can help choose the most suitable option for the respective context.

When seeking to include the idea of agency in neo-institutional theory, we are confronted with the challenge of reconciling two perspectives that seem to be very different. Neo-institutional theory typically insists on the **superiority of institutions and structure over agency**. Its main postulate is that actors align their behavior with the dominant institutional arrangements that structure the field they are embedded in. This conception of institutions is static and focused on reproduction of established patterns, thereby “voiding agency and creativity from humans” (Garud et al., 2007, p. 961). An agentic perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes the ways in which actors are able to actively and consciously challenge and shape their institutional environment and long-standing institutional arrangements (De Holan & Phillips, 2002).

Taking different shapes in the various streams of literature in the social sciences, in neo-institutional theory, this issue has become known as the **paradox of embedded agency** (Seo & Creed, 2002). The question how actors can “change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institution they wish to change” is what Holm (1995, p. 398) considers to be “the fundamental paradox of new institutional theories of organization”. This puzzle regarding the reconciliation of institutions and

human agency is better known as the paradox of embedded agency among neo-institutionalist scholars (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009).

To resolve this puzzle, both sides must be considered (Battilana, 2006): on the one hand, the importance of institutional structures in shaping social life, and on the other, the agency that constitutes, creates, and changes institutions. In most neo-institutional theory, this two-way relationship between agency and institutions has been secondary (Lawrence et al., 2011), and actors' embeddedness has been used as an explanation for their limited ability to shape institutions and see beyond existing arrangements (Battilana & Leca, 2009). More recent literature points out the conditions that enable actors to take action. With scholars increasingly recognizing that "*institutional change is emergent, resulting from the interests of multiple actors embedded in the new institutional arrangements*" (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 32-33), the ways in which actors' will and creativity, resources and opportunities affect their ability to shape institutions (Dorado, 2005) have become of interest in the 1990s. This has been qualified as the "**agentic turn**" in institutionalism (Abdelnour et al., 2017; Micelotta et al., 2017).

In line with these developments of the "agentic turn", two subfields emerge in neo-institutional scholarship: **institutional entrepreneurship**, on the one hand, and **institutional work**, on the other. The construct of "the actor" and their ability to shape institutions are central to both subfields as they "*focus on change and the purposeful practices of actors in the change process*" (Alvarez et al., 2015, p. 97). However, they approach the question of agency somewhat differently: while mostly the agency of single actors is studied in institutional entrepreneurship literature, its collective aspect is emphasized in the institutional work perspective (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). After a brief exploration of institutional entrepreneurship, we will argue for the mobilization of an institutional work approach in our research context, where the agency of a diversity of actors contributes to the development of responses to Grand Challenges and the transformation of the institutional environment they are embedded in.

1.2.4. The rise and fall of institutional entrepreneurs

The notion of the institutional entrepreneur has been introduced in neo-institutionalism as an attempt to better comprehend the multiple dimensions of change in fields, and is now an established stream of literature (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Through the addition of this new point of view – one where institutional change is endogenous, i.e., triggered by processes inside of organizations (Battilana & Leca, 2009) – a more complete and nuanced perspective of institutional dynamics can be provided. The central issue in this stream of literature is the study of the relationships between **interest, agency, and institutions** (Maguire et al., 2004). In doing so, the notion of institutional entrepreneurship confronts two ideas in a way that might appear somewhat paradoxical (Tiberius et al., 2020); even the term itself, composed of both the concept of institutions – stable and resistant – and entrepreneurship – aiming for change and introducing novelty – can seem like an oxymoron.

Institutional entrepreneurship finds its way into neo-institutional theory in the late 1990s, when criticism around its negligence of the role of actors in affecting institutional dynamics becomes loud. It is DiMaggio, having himself largely participated in shaping the evolution of this theory, who adds a new dimension to the study of the creation of institutions, as he states that “*new institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly*” (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). Institutional entrepreneurs have been portrayed as ideological activists (Rao, 1998), as champions (Garud et al., 2002), and, more generally, as interested actors (Battilana, 2006; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire et al., 2004). Some scholars even go so far as to refer to Machiavelli to describe the institutional entrepreneur as a “Modern Prince” (Pacheco et al., 2010), highlighting the strategic aspect of their behavior, and the power position these actors are in, differentiating them from others within the organization. While these definitions seem to depict institutional entrepreneurs as a very particular “breed” of actors that almost appear to have **superpowers** unavailable to “regular” people, other scholars take a more moderate stance and point out that rather, institutional entrepreneurs are unreflective actors that, at some point, become aware of the institutional arrangements they are embedded in, and follow their urge to change them to better fit their interests (Seo & Creed, 2002).

What distinguishes them from other actors is therefore their development of **projective capacities** (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) that enable them to visualize potential alternatives to established institutions and new ways of doing things, and act accordingly (Battilana & Leca, 2009). They show active and interest-driven strategic behavior (Oliver, 1991) as they pursue their goals and seek to adapt their institutional environment to their own purposes (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). As change agents, they “*combine hitherto unconnected beliefs and norms into an organizational solution to a problem*” (Rao, 1998, p. 916) and “*actively define, justify, and push the theory and values underpinning a new [organizational] form*” (Rao et al., 2003, p. 243). This indicates how institutional entrepreneurs can both disrupt and transform existing institutions, or create new ones (Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004); in doing so, they constantly engage in a reciprocal relationship with the institutional structures their activities are embedded in.

In a nutshell, institutional entrepreneurs actively work to implement change in stable and well-established institutional contexts (Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Hjorth & Reay, 2022) and seek to modify entrenched social structures that are hard to change (Tiberius et al., 2020). They “*seek to rebuild the iron cage*” of practices, prescriptions, and logics surrounding and affecting them, as they aim to legitimize new institutional arrangements that favor their interests (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 145). Hence, with the notion of institutional entrepreneurship, agency is re-introduced into neo-institutional theory. It adds essential dimensions to this theory, allowing to better comprehend institutional fields, the dynamics that shape them and the behavior of the organizations that constitute them. However, despite these merits, this approach has been heavily criticized by institutional scholars for its simplified view of institutional change (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008).

While it does provide a more inclusive account of institutional processes and goes beyond isomorphism to explain institutional change, institutional entrepreneurship still tends to neglect its complexity (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007).

The critiques surrounding institutional entrepreneurship have been summarized by Staggs and colleagues (2022) who identify four main shortcomings: the focus on actors who are presented as “heroic” change agents; the fact that these institutional entrepreneurs seem to be capable of challenging stable institutions; the failure to address the paradox of embedded agency; and the lack of acknowledgement of the complexity and messiness that is inherent to institutional change.

While before, the lack of neo-institutional theory’s recognition for agency has been criticized, institutional entrepreneurship is itself accused of neglecting the institutional context all actors, including entrepreneurs, are embedded in. In other words, actors went from being “cultural dopes” to “**hypermuscular**” **institutional entrepreneurs** (Lawrence et al., 2009). Instead of their behavior being shaped and constrained by institutional forces coming from the field, they are now depicted as “heroic actors” (Hardy & Maguire, 2017) that seem to stand above the institutional arrangements that surround them. This image is however misleading as it ignores their embeddedness in an institutional context. The process of implementing institutional change in an organization cannot be separated from its institutional context, however: actors seeking to introduce new practices – policy co-creation, in the case of our research – must account for the current institutional environment in order to implement and legitimize their change project, since familiarity with established institutional arrangements facilitates the acceptance of new ones (Svensson et al., 2022). Even the most powerful institutional entrepreneurs must consider their institutional environment.

To come back to our research object, co-creation practices cannot be effectively introduced in a bureaucratic organization without consideration for current institutional arrangements. While the latter may be somewhat contradictory with the underlying ideas of co-creation (see **chapter 1**), actors are required to introduce and frame this new approach in a way that allows to reconcile the two and reduce resistance. Institutional entrepreneurship’s focus on the actor and negligence of their institutional environment has thus been pointed out as an important weakness of this perspective.

As a consequence of institutional entrepreneurs being hero-like change agents, the “**patchwork nature**” of **institutional processes** is neglected in this perspective (Staggs et al., 2022): it fails to provide accounts of the diversity of actors, organizations, fields, scattered across societies and places, that are involved in institutional change, and make it inherently messy and complex. Institutional entrepreneurs, some denounce, are frequently described as “*unusually creative, charismatic, and enlightened*” actors equipped with skills allowing them to address complex social problems on their own (van Wijk et al., 2019, p. 892). However, by portraying institutional entrepreneurs in such a way, and focusing attention on powerful, visible actors, the true complexity of institutional change dynamics is overlooked (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007;

Maguire et al., 2004). This becomes especially evident in contexts where the involvement of a diversity of actors is at the core of the change project itself: in the case of the implementation of co-creation to respond to Grand Challenges, a non-negligible aspect of the project is the inclusion of actors that are not usually part of decision-making processes in bureaucratic public organizations. The question then is, how can the transformation of institutionalized practices be performed by a single actor or a small set of similar actors, if co-creation itself is a collective undertaking gathering a variety of actors, interests, and goals? Thus, we observe that the usefulness of the institutional entrepreneurship approach in contexts where a multiplicity of actors is involved in institutional change is limited and does not allow to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of change taking place within the organization.

By concentrating attention only on the most powerful actors, the more “mundane” actions of other actors tend to be overlooked, even though they contribute to the transformation of existing institutional arrangements in one way or another. What institutional entrepreneurship literature, by focusing on actors that single-handedly change institutions, cannot explain, are the *“myriad, day-to-day equivocal instances of agency that, although aimed at affecting the institutional order, represent a complex mélange of forms of agency - successful and not, simultaneously radical and conservative, strategic and emotional, full of compromises, and rife with unintended consequences”* (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 52-53).

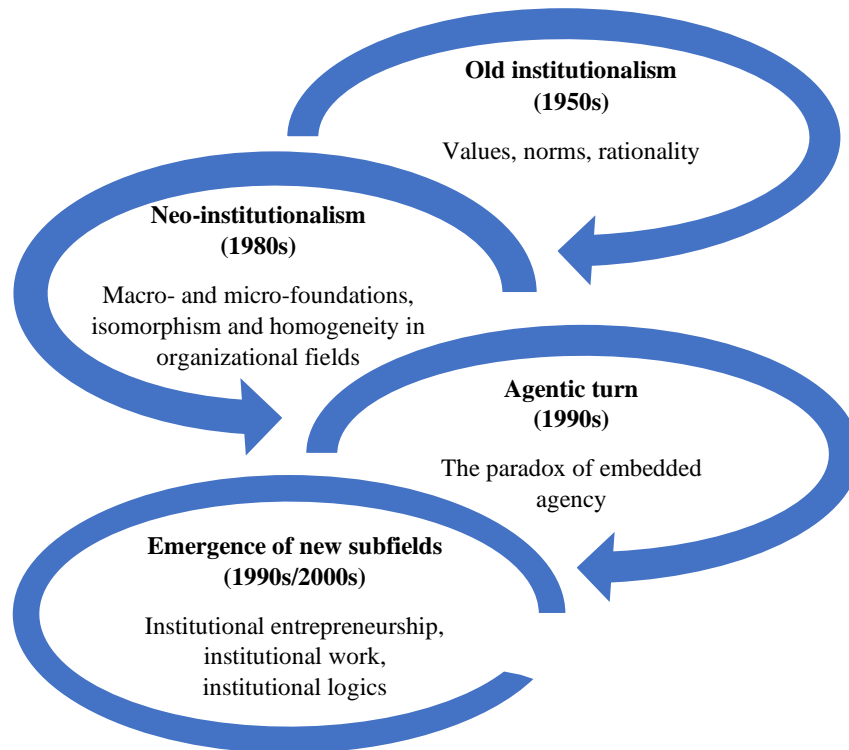
The **heterogeneity of actors**, the diversity of their interests and resources, and the complexity of their interactions as they engage in institutional entrepreneurship would add another dimension to the study of institutional change, and yet, in this stream of literature, do not receive much attention. Moreover, with its focus on success stories and heroic lead characters, institutional entrepreneurship does not account for **unintended consequences**, unforeseeable turns, and failed attempts at institutional change, either (Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Micelotta et al., 2017).

Despite the many enriching aspects it brings to the table, institutional entrepreneurship literature most often neglects the two-way relationship between institutions and agency, and consequently, the paradox of embedded agency persists (Staggs et al., 2022). A more process-based approach to the role of agency in institutional dynamics is **institutional work**. This perspective has been introduced in 2006 by Lawrence and Suddaby to address precisely these issues, as well as provide a more nuanced approach in which both the stability of institutions and the ability of actors to shape them are considered. Sections 2 and 3 of this chapter will be dedicated to an exploration of this subfield of neo-institutional scholarship, and will allow us argue for its usefulness in our research context where we explore how actors shape the implementation of the new institutional arrangement of co-creation in a local public organization.

Before we move on to a deeper investigation of this approach, figure 5 below summarizes the evolution of institutional theory that has been retraced in this first section of chapter 2. The big shifts that have occurred within this theory over the past decades – from “old”

to “new” institutionalism, to the agentic turn, and the development of new subfields – are shown in this figure and provide the base for yet another, more recent development, that has taken place with the emergence and proliferation of the institutional work perspective.

Figure 5. The evolution of institutional theory



(Source: author)

In this section, we explored the foundations of the theoretical framework of this thesis: neo-institutional theory. We began by clarifying the outlines of this theory as well as central constructs. The most popular definitions and dimensions of institutions were explored, and we justified the definition we retain for this thesis. Then, we briefly retraced the evolution of neo-institutional theory and pointed out both its value and main shortcomings with regard to our object of research. Finally, we emphasized neo-institutional theory’s recent “agentic turn” which gave rise to the notion of the institutional entrepreneur.

In the following section, we will elaborate on another branch of neo-institutional theory that has emerged more recently due to this increasing interest in actors’ ability to shape institutions: the institutional work perspective.

Section 2: Institutional work to understand the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations

Institutional work seeks to fill the gap left by the institutional entrepreneurship approach by taking into account a wider variety of actors and their role in institutional change, because, as Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013, p. 1304) observe, “*most individuals are not grand entrepreneurs, but practical people doing practical work to get a job done*”. The institutional work perspective acknowledges the complexity of institutional change processes beyond the actions of institutional entrepreneurs. As we will show, it thereby provides a more distributed perspective of institutional change (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Cloutier et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2013), allowing to acknowledge the purposive action of a variety of dispersed actors.

One core premise is thus the inclusion of a multiplicity of people, their actions and interactions, and the ways in which, through their institutional work, they are able to shape their environment and construct meaning and identities (Empson et al., 2013). The notion of institutional work, in an attempt to overcome the weaknesses of institutional entrepreneurship, seeks to develop a better understanding of actors’ lived experiences (Lawrence et al., 2011) and to explain what it actually is they do. Since the object of our study is to investigate how actors shape the implementation of co-creation in a local public organization, the institutional work perspective will allow us to account for the motivations and actions of actors that go beyond the most powerful ones. The roles of a wider variety of actors in the process of implementing the new institutional arrangement of co-creation can be studied through this lens.

Before we provide a more detailed account of the types of actors and their roles, practices, as well as the organizational forms their institutional work can take (**section 3**), we will now retrace the emergence of the institutional work perspective in neo-institutional theory that can be understood in the context of a broader “turn to work” in organization and management studies (**section 2.1.**). Then, we propose to zoom in on the specific type of “work” we are interested in – institutional work – to clarify the key elements that constitute this perspective, as well as its underlying ideas (**section 2.2.**). Finally, we investigate the diversity of institutional work practices that actors can engage in (**section 2.3.**).

2.1. The emergence of the institutional work perspective

The development of a rapidly evolving body of literature around the notion of agency and, more specifically, institutional entrepreneurship, demonstrates the change taking place in neo-institutional theory: individuals are making a comeback in institutional theory (Lawrence et al., 2011). As noted above, this shows in the burgeoning institutional entrepreneurship literature which, however, comes with several weaknesses. Institutional entrepreneurs are often portrayed as heroic figures who transform long-standing institutional arrangements. However, what they actually *do* in this respect is unclear (Perkmann & Spicer, 2007). How do they go about changing institutions and institutionalizing new organizational forms or routines? Because of this focus on *actors*, the *process* of institutional change receives less attention.

Yet, as we will go on to show in this section, neo-institutional scholarship is becoming increasingly interested in the process-aspect of institutional change, and a broader “turn to work” can be observed (**section 2.1.1.**). A variety of forms of “work” have thus been identified in this literature over the past two decades and have recently been subsumed under the term social-symbolic work, directed at social-symbolic objects (**section 2.1.2.**). We will explore institutional work as a form of social-symbolic work in the next section.

2.1.1. The “turn to work” in management and organizational studies

This recent focus on the process-aspect of institutional change can be understood in the broader context of a more general “**turn to work**” in the field of organization and management theories (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). Already in 1996, Barley pointed out the importance of understanding changes in the work people do within organizations to understand how organizations and organizing change, too, as they adapt to an ever-evolving environmental context: “*without answers to questions about what is done, how knowledge is distributed, and how exigencies of work and relations of production are structured, organizational theorists risk telling incomplete and even inaccurate stories about these choices and how and why organizations should change*” (Barley, 1996, p. 408).

While early studies of organizations focused heavily on work – Taylor’s scientific management approach, or Weber’s studies of bureaucracy are both based on observations of work -, organizational scholars then turned their back on this notion (Barley & Kunda, 2001). In this regard, the call for research that reintroduces work back into organizational studies became louder. It was argued that people’s actions as they react to their environment determine the structure of organizations; the reintegration of work is therefore important as actors’ actions and the social structure they are embedded in are inextricably bound (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

Consequently, the “turn to work” in organizational studies emphasizes the relationship between structure and agency, between actors and their institutional environment which they are able to shape through their activities. In this sense, to better understand organizations and organizing, studying dynamics rather than only stable and powerful structures seems crucial, as it is the purposeful work of actors that can affect how their environment evolves.

It is however not traditional forms of work such as those studied by Taylor or Weber in their respective observations of work that neo-institutional scholars focus on as they increasingly turn towards studying this construct. Rather, they are interested in agency, actors’ reflexive work that may lead to institutional change, and therefore look for “*new forms of work that involve individuals and organizations purposefully and strategically expending effort to affect their social-symbolic context*” (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 223).

The notions of **effort** as well as the **intention** behind it (Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011) allow to distinguish this specific type of work. In this regard, not only successful attempts to change institutional arrangements, but the intentional effort to do so qualify actors’ purposeful activities as work. This effort comes in different forms (Ben Slimane & Leca, 2010). It is cognitive, meaning actors are thereby able to break out of their routines and institutionalized practices, as they are able to step back and become aware of taken-for-granted arrangements. Effort in this context can moreover be political since the actors that act as change agents attempt to convince others to provide support. In this new understanding of work, actors’ efforts can be targeted at a diversity of objects.

This shift in organization and management theories in general, and institutional scholarship more specifically, has led to the emergence of studies on a variety of types of work: boundary work, identity work, emotion work, or institutional work, to name a few (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). The multiplicity of forms of “**X work**” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) - the “X” is to be replaced by the specific object targeted by actors - shows the increasing interest of neo-institutionalism in agency and the work people engage in. Studying work, in this regard, raises numerous new questions, as it “*leads us to consider what organizational actors are doing, why they are doing it and with what consequences*” (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 228). A diversification of research topics is implied and enabled by organization and management theory’s “turn to work”.

What these forms of work have in common is the acknowledgement of actors’ engagement in purposeful efforts to change elements of their social context – i.e., boundaries in studies of boundary work, identities in identity work, or institutions in institutional work, and so on -, and that thereby, actors’ role in the social construction of organizations is highlighted (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). Before, affecting their environment to such an extent was considered beyond their power and control. In the context of this new interest in work, identities, boundaries, or institutions, among others (cf. Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 44-45 for a list of 20 new forms of work) are conceptualized as **social-symbolic objects** that actors can shape through purposeful and reflexive work, or more precisely, through **social-symbolic work** (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

2.1.2. The social-symbolic work perspective

The “new forms of work” identified by Lawrence and Phillips in their 2019 book are subsumed by these authors under the notion of social-symbolic work. Social-symbolic objects, the targets of such work, are combinations of “*discursive, relational, and material elements that constitute a meaningful pattern in a social system*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 24). As such, social-symbolic objects are integrative parts of daily life, which is why they are usually taken for granted. A certain degree of reflexivity is therefore required from actors in order to shape these objects.

2.1.2.1. Institutions as social-symbolic objects

In the context of this research, the social-symbolic objects we focus on are institutions. As social-symbolic objects, institutions can be understood not as practices, rules or prescriptions themselves, but as the shared social understandings of them (Phillips & Malhotra, 2008, cited by Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). They are patterns that are infused with sense and meaning in a specific social environment, which also encourages conformity with these institutions. In this sense, institutions are self-policing (Phillips et al., 2004): non-conformity comes with costs. Institutions therefore differ from other patterns of social action because they put pressure on people to act a certain way. Institutions, in this understanding, are considered as objects that can be altered, rather than as a level of analysis. In this sense, the institutional arrangements shaping the functioning of local public organizations today are associated with the Public Administration paradigm that dominates the public sector (see **chapter 1, sections 2 and 3**). The underlying principles of this paradigm are bureaucratic and imply a siloed and hierarchical institutional design with top-down decision-making, the separation of the political, managerial, and societal spheres, as well as the prioritization of expert knowledge and the exclusion of non-expert actors from internal decision-making processes (Meijer, 2016; Osborne, 2006; Torfing et al., 2019).

At the same time, such institutions, from a social-symbolic perspective, do not only shape and constrain actors, their behavior and decisions, but actors are also capable of taking conscious action and, in turn, shape institutions. A conception of institutions where their stability and taken-for-grantedness is combined and reconciled with actors’ agency allows to account for a broader range of dynamics regarding not only institutional change, but also institutional creation and maintenance. Understanding the relationship between institutions and agency as reciprocal instead of one-sided moreover enables us to address the paradox of embedded agency that persists in neo-institutional theory (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Institutions as social-symbolic objects provide space for people’s agency through different forms of action and practice. This allows to overcome the gap between structure and agency and bridge the two by acknowledging the strength durability of institutions, yet also actors’ ability to intentionally shape them by engaging in purposeful and reflexive work. Indeed, in chapter 1, we have shown the changes the implementation of co-creation entails in public organizations that are structured along the lines of a

bureaucratic paradigm. The **social-symbolic work** perspective allows us to study how actors can shape these institutional arrangements.

2.1.2.2. Social-symbolic work: towards a triptych of agency, actors, and practice

Social-symbolic work requires “*effort, reflexivity, and skill, and will sometimes involve significant contestation*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 26). It is defined as the “*purposeful, reflexive efforts of individuals, collective actors, and networks of actors to shape social-symbolic objects*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 31).

As such, social-symbolic work builds on the notions of agency, as well as human action and practice. First, different forms of agency can enable social-symbolic work which may thus be oriented towards the past, present, or future, and thereby be informed by “*habit, imagination, and judgment*” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). Then, in social-symbolic work, a broad conception of agency allows to account for a “softer” and more nuanced version of agency than that displayed in institutional entrepreneurship literature: while at times, actors are able to engage in conscious efforts aimed at changing institutions, there are also periods where they do not. Their social-symbolic work is not sustained over time but actors have the capability to move back and forth between modes of action that are more or less purposeful and reflexive (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Finally, the sociological notion of practice is essential in this conception of social-symbolic work. In this sense, the strategies actors mobilize to do social-symbolic work are drawn from a set of available and legitimate roles and resources that existing in a specific community (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Actors’ action is therefore not independent from their context and environment but situated in it. This understanding of the use of practice to shape structures once more contributes to addressing the paradox of embedded agency.

Institutional work is a form of social-symbolic work. In institutional work, the social-symbolic object actors seek to shape is – unsurprisingly – an institution, which, as a reminder, refers to regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life (Scott, 2013). The social-symbolic work perspective, and more specifically institutional work nourishes our research object concerned with the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations because it allows us to study how divers actors purposefully shape their institutional environment in order to introduce these new practices. We will provide more details on the foundations of institutional work, its underlying ideas, and its usefulness in the context of our research in the following section.

2.2. Mobilizing the institutional work perspective to understand how actors shape institutions

Institutional work, alongside institutional entrepreneurship and institutional logics is one of the subfields that have emerged in neo-institutional theory as its focus increasingly shifts towards the notion of agency and the role actors play in institutional change (Glynn & D'Aunno, 2023). These developments share an emphasis on the ways in which actors are able to shape the institutional environment they are embedded in. Here, social contexts no longer only constrain action by providing established patterns and meaning systems, but also leave space for actors to shape these structures through negotiation (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994) – institutional environments become arenas for purposeful action (De Holan & Phillips, 2002).

The institutional work perspective in particular seeks to highlight and understand “*how, why, and when actors work to shape sets of institutions, the factors that affect their ability to do so, and the experience of these efforts for those involved*” (Hampel et al., 2017, p. 2). A core assumption is the idea that reality is socially constructed by actors who are aware of the institutional arrangements that shape their behavior and guide their decisions. Since they are conscious of their institutional environment, these actors have the capacity to act and thereby alter it (Hampel et al., 2017). In this sense, institutional work is the “*knowledgeable, creative and practical work of individual and collective actors aimed at creating, maintaining and transforming institutions*” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 219). This conception of efforts aimed at altering institutional arrangements rests upon a practice perspective and puts actors’ intentions of shaping institutions at its core; what their work ultimately results in is secondary, and unintended outcomes are likely to occur (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

This section is dedicated to an exploration of the institutional work perspective. To do so, we study its foundations and the contribution of prior literature to the development of institutional work in the field of public management (**section 2.2.1**). Then, we investigate its dimensions and underlying ideas (**section 2.2.2**).

2.2.1. The foundations of institutional work

The notion of institutional work – the “*purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 215) - has first been introduced by Lawrence and Suddaby in their seminal chapter on “Institutions and Institutional Work”. Alongside institutional entrepreneurship, it has since become a popular subfield of neo-institutionalism allowing to study agency and the complex relationship between action and institutions (Gawer & Phillips, 2013). As opposed to institutional entrepreneurship, however, the actors involved in institutional work are less “heroic”, their actions more “mundane”, allowing for both a more extensive and more nuanced account of institutional dynamics (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

These dynamics may consist of creation of new institutional arrangements, or the maintenance or disruption of existing ones (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In this sense, institutional work seeks to understand how individual and collective actors “*cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play, and which give them their roles, relationships, resources, and routines*” (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 53). By including this wide range of dynamics, institutional work, unlike institutional entrepreneurship, does not only highlight intentional actions that are highly visible and somewhat dramatic, but also those that are nearly invisible as they happen through everyday interactions, adjustments, adaptations, or compromises (Lawrence et al., 2009). The practices that can be studied as institutional work therefore extend beyond those of institutional entrepreneurs, since a variety of more or less radical activities aimed at transforming the institutional environment are possible.

By pointing out that both individuals and groups of actors can do institutional work, this approach highlights the interactive and collective dimension of institutions and institutional change (Helfen & Sydow, 2013; Michel, 2020). This implies that a diversity of actors with potentially diverging motivations and interests can participate in institutional work. This aspect of institutional work done by heterogenous and dispersed actors remains neglected in most existing research which prioritizes homogenous groups of institutional workers (Hampel et al., 2017). Yet, later in this chapter we will attempt to lay out how essential it is to consider and acknowledge the heterogeneity of actors and activities involved in institutional work, especially when the emerging institutional arrangement – i.e., co-creation of public policy in our research context – per definition brings together actors that are dispersed in a field, and not used to formally working together (Schüssler et al., 2014).

As pointed out above, the notion of **agency** is one of the pillars of institutional work. As a second foundation, the sociological notion of **practice** (Giddens, 1984) is an essential building block of the concept of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) (we have retraced the introduction and diffusion of the notion of agency in institutionalism in **section 1.2.3.** above). Institutional work emphasises the reflexivity of actors as they become aware of and seek to alter institutional arrangements (Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011). In this sense, it refers to practices – individual or collective – through which these actors aim to change these institutions, maintaining them, or creating new ones.

The emergence and development of the institutional work perspective can thus be considered a result of a broader “practice turn” management and organizational studies (Whittington, 2006). Practices – “*arrays of activity*” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 12) - and the processes they constitute, rather than outcomes, are at the core of institutional work. A practice-approach calls to explore “*how people engage in ‘doing’ their work and how, in so doing, they experience and shape the social structures that have traditionally preoccupied institutional theorists*” (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015, p. 10). It thereby directly stresses the micro-level of institutional dynamics, taking institutional *work* literally by studying what individuals actually do. The notion of practice in institutional work perspective

allows to address the relationship that exists between people's reflexive and purposive actions, and the institutions which may be the targets of these efforts, and provide the context in which actors are embedded (Lawrence et al., 2011): "*concrete instances of institutional work are simultaneously practices – embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity – that are organized around institutions and people's intentions to shape those institutions*" (Hampel et al., 2017, p. 5).

By insisting on the importance of both agency and institutions, institutional work seeks the middle ground between the traditional institution-focused approach, and the heroic institutional entrepreneurship perspective (Suddaby et al., 2013). Connecting institutional work to practice allows to account for actors' lived experiences and daily activities. It thereby emphasizes that "*most individuals are not grand entrepreneurs, but practical people doing practical work to get a job done*" (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013, p. 1304). In this sense, institutional change occurs through the daily work of ordinary actors, instead of institutional entrepreneurs' dramatic interventions (Smets et al., 2012).

Besides its foundations of agency and practice, several assumptions provide the basis for the study of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006): the reflexivity of actors, the social construction of institutions, and the embeddedness of agency in institutional contexts.

First, institutional work emphasizes competent and creative actors' **awareness, skill and reflexivity**. As opposed to earlier institutionalist research, the institutional work perspective attributes a central place to actors, and ascribes them a certain degree of power over institutional structures. This perspective acknowledges their capabilities, goal-orientation, and ability to reflect on the environment they are embedded, and puts actors and their practices at the center of dynamics that create, maintain, or disrupt institutions (Lawrence et al., 2013). Unlike institutional entrepreneurship, institutional work stresses this reflexive agency without portraying actors as superhuman champions or heroes.

Then, **institutions are seen as socially constructed** through these more or less conscious actions of individual or collective actors. Institutions are the result of people's reflexive action (Gawer & Phillips, 2013), but through re-enactment of routines and practices, action can also strengthen and maintain existing institutions, or transform them (Currie et al., 2012).

Finally, institutional work does not occur independently from institutional structures, but is **situated** in institutionalized settings where actors must deal with established prescriptions and rules. Context necessarily affects the opportunities that arise for institutional work, as well as the form it can take, and the strategies actors can employ (Helfen & Sydow, 2013). Institutions thereby serve as templates which actors are able to affect and shape (Lawrence et al., 2009). The embeddedness of institutional work in specific institutional contexts justifies and even requires studying how new institutional arrangements – in our case, co-creation – are implemented in local settings. Rather than

investigating the level of the organizational field, our research concerns selected local public organizations and therefore the specific local contexts in which actors do institutional work. Indeed, the local level ideally lends itself for identifying actors' roles and practices and the form their institutional work takes, since it allows to account for local specificities, drivers and obstacles, and other contextual factors that we would be able to treat in a broader study of the field. The following paragraphs illustrate the array of contexts in which past research has studied institutional work.

2.2.1.1. The study of institutional work: state of the art and contributions to the field of public management

Institutional work can occur at different levels, from the field to the organizational and individual levels: it is not limited to dynamics and changes within organizations but may concern the institutional field and relationships between actors that are part of this field (Gawer & Phillips, 2013). However, the bulk of publications focuses on the field and organizational levels (Hampel et al., 2017; Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015). To date, studies on the micro-level of individuals (Tracey, 2016) and the community (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Mair et al., 2012), or on broader societal institutions (Dacin et al., 2010; Wijen & Ansari, 2007) remain scarce.

At the level of organizations and the field, institutional work has so far been studied in a large variety of **sectors** relevant for scholars in public management. They include institutional work in the health-care sector (Cloutier et al., 2016; Currie et al., 2012; Kellogg, 2019; Maguire et al., 2004; Reay & Hinings, 2005; Valsecchi et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2021), in non-profit and non-governmental organizations (Coule & Patmore, 2013; Ko & Liu, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2002; Rao, 1998), in the world of art (Rodner et al., 2020) and music (Blanc & Huault, 2010), urban planning (Bisschops & Beunen, 2019) or accountancy (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Moreover, the ways in which organizations develop responses to address societal problems such as housing (Lawrence & Dover, 2015), climate change (Wijen & Ansari, 2007), and new consumption practices that support local agriculture (Lanciano & Saleilles, 2011; Michel, 2020; Ouahab & Maclouf, 2019) have recently been the subject of study in this field. Institutional work in the education sector has also been the object of multiple research endeavours (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016; Raynard et al., 2021). Recently, the smart city has also been studied from an institutional work perspective (Broccardo et al., 2019; Guenduez et al., 2024). Institutional work at the micro-level of individuals remains relatively scarce despite their potential and importance for understanding the dynamics of institutional change (Hampel et al., 2017; Heaphy, 2013). Exceptions such as the identity work of LGBT ministers (Creed et al., 2010), micro-level processes in evangelizing movements (Tracey, 2016) or feminist movements (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022) provide first insights into the microfoundations of institutional work and institutional change.

Institutional work has so far been studied primarily regarding its content, and a variety of **types** of institutional work have thereby been identified (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019): in prior literature, authors mainly study the discursive aspects of institutional work

(Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Its material and relational dimensions, while they would allow to provide a more complete picture of institutional work dynamics, have not been treated as extensively. However, emerging research shows increasing interest in these aspects and highlights for instance its emotional dimension (Fan & Zietsma, 2017; Farny et al., 2019; Voronov & Vince, 2012). Moreover, recent research has been dedicated to studying temporality (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016) or place (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Lawrence & Dover, 2015) and the ways in which these more material elements affect and are affected by institutional work. We further elaborate on the discursive, relational, and material dimensions of institutional work in the following section.

This past research has enriched the study of institutional work in the field of **local public management** in different ways. Studies focusing on the role of place, space, and the territory (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Rodner et al., 2020; Tissone et al., 2019) show how the local level and its specificities affect actors' institutional work: while Lawrence and Dover (2015) find that place can contain, mediate, and complicate institutional work, Arnaud and Serval (2020) observe that the territory can also act as an "end" of institutional work. Tissone et al. (2019) investigate how "place work" as a form of institutional work shapes boundaries. And Rodner et al. (2020) show how the multiple intertwined dimensions of space are strategically used in institutional work as actors pursue different goals. The particularities of public organizations with regard to institutional change become evident in the study of Cloutier et al. (2016). They show how local public actors engage in institutional work as they implement reform in the health sector and point out that a combination of different forms of institutional work is required to do so.

The interplay of diverse actors engaging in institutional work with sometimes conflicting goals is also illustrated by Raynard et al. (2021), as they show the complexity of institutional work in the field of higher education where the State is required to deal with a number of other powerful actors. Overall, however, past research on local public organizations, that is, local governments, remains scarce, and we aim to contribute to filling this gap with our study as we seek to investigate how dispersed local actors engage in institutional work. The idea of institutions as "**inhabited**" emphasizes that institutions are made up of the individuals who participate in them and infuse them with meaning (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). This perspective allows us to argue that institutional work is not necessarily a harmonious undertaking but that different actors are likely to have different visions of institutional change.

2.2.1.2. Institutions are inhabited by a diversity of actors

Inhabited institutions are shaped and maintained by human interactions, and they affect individuals and society as a whole. Their norms are internalized by their members, and they provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identity. Taking into account this duality, inhabited institutionalism examines the recursive relationships that exist between institutions, organizations, and the interactions of actors (Hallett & Hawbaker,

2019; Hoffman, 1999). In this sense, interactions rather than the individualism prevalent in other subfields of neo-institutional scholarship – i.e., institutional entrepreneurship – are central, and constitute institutions as social constructs.

Hallett and Ventresca (2006) identify three building blocks that characterize inhabited institutions. First, the **connection between the micro and the macro-levels**. This embeddedness of institutions and interactions allows to study both external pressures, and their internal manifestations (Hallett, 2010). Second, from this perspective, meanings are **local and immediate**, but also **broad and public**. Through this holistic approach to institutions, it is possible to account for the ways in which institutional structures shape a field and its members, but “going local” also allows to explore how these institutional dynamics play out and are enacted by actors in specific contexts. The specific form institutions take and the meanings they carry always depend on the actors who inhabit them and the question “*who is present, for how long, and when*” (Hallett, 2010, p. 56). Third, they argue that it is critical to account for the **complexity** of the dynamics taking place within organizations that might not correspond to our assumptions about them.

The question of how the interactions of those who inhabit an institution shape the latter and the meanings it carries is central in this perspective. Due to the plurality of actors inhabiting an institution, these meanings are likely to be contested: Hallett (2010, p. 68), describing meaning as a “battleground”, points out that in an understanding of institutions as inhabited, conflicts are not only about resources or interests, as it is the case in a more “politicized” approach to micro-institutional dynamics. Conflicts among actors also concern the meaning that is associated with an institution. When confronted with changes in their institutional environment, actors, seeking to make sense of the change and infuse it with meaning, are likely to develop divergent interpretations of new arrangements. These actors’ interactions frequently turn into “interpretive struggles” (Ben Slimane, 2012) whereby they use discourse as a strategic lever to influence their institutional environment.

Organizational fields have therefore been described as **battlefields** where actors “fight” to influence institutions in such a way that best suits their interests (DiMaggio, 1988). From this perspective, institutional change occurs when actors with diverging interests engage in “**institutional wars**” (Hoffman, 1999). Political agendas, their relationships, and respective interests shape institutions, which in turn shape organizational behavior. Divergent interests meet, and challengers – those who contest established institutional arrangements and wish to change them – and incumbents – those who benefit from current institutions and wish to maintain them – confront each other (Micelotta et al., 2017). In addition to these two categories of actors, others may exist, and for example support either the incumbents’ or the challengers’ efforts (Ben Slimane, 2012) (in **section 3.2.** of this chapter we will elaborate in more detail on the different roles actors can take on in institutional work). The implication of a variety of actors is a foundational assumption of institutional work and allows to go beyond “heroic” institutional entrepreneurs. Surprisingly, studies on this side of institutional work where a multiplicity and diversity of actors are involved remain scarce (Hampel et al., 2017): their conflicts

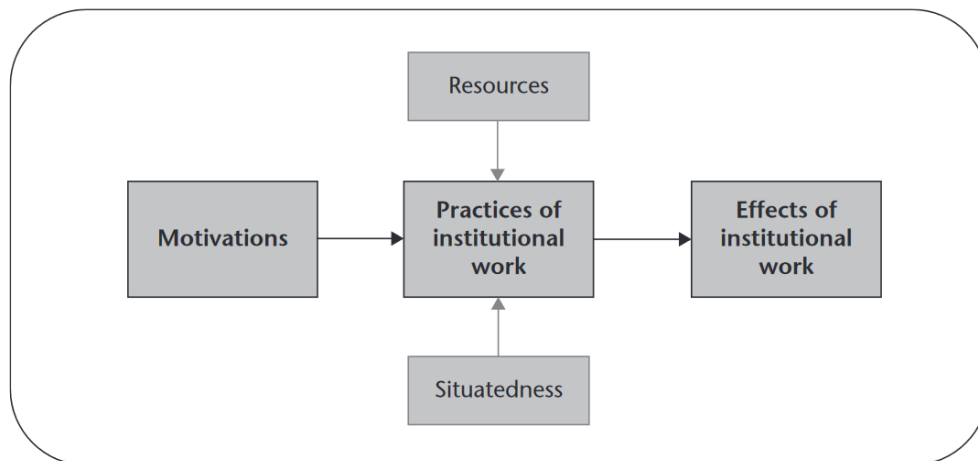
are hardly ever displayed in existing research, as the groups of actors doing institutional work together are usually relatively homogenous. Indeed, when institutional work is performed by a collective of actors, Hampel et al. (2017) observe that they tend to belong either to the same organization (see for example Jarzabkowski et al., 2009; Lok & de Rond, 2013) or the same field (see for example Currie et al., 2012; Empson et al., 2013; Micelotta & Washington, 2013), and share similar interests. Their institutional work is therefore usually portrayed as a relatively harmonious process.

In our research, to contribute to filling this gap, we insist on the “**dispersed**” nature of institutional work, especially in settings that naturally include a diversity of actors and interests. This is the case in our study of co-creation where conflicts between heterogenous actors are frequent. In this regard, public management research proposes to develop “arenas of co-creation” (Torfing et al., 2019) to account for this conflictual dimension inherent to the agora that surrounds and supports this new approach to policymaking. Few have explicitly studied institutional work from this angle: it remains unclear how institutional work plays out when it is performed by heterogenous actors. Only recently have emerging studies provided first insights into the dispersed nature of boundary work (Glimmerveen et al., 2020), or dispersed institutional entrepreneurship (Szkudlarek & Romani, 2016); yet, there remains a gap around dispersed *institutional work* more specifically.

2.2.2. The underlying ideas of institutional work

While institutional work includes a wide variety of actors and actions and can take place in a diversity of contexts, it “*in no way includes all action that affects institutions, since that would include all human behavior*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 209). Lawrence and Phillips (2019) propose a process model of institutional work that includes the elements that allow to delimit the perimeter of what is and is not institutional work (see figure 6 below). This model, which they adapt to any form of “X work”, consists of motivations, practices, and effects of institutional work. In the following paragraphs, we will look into each of them in order to develop a better understanding of what it is that distinguishes institutional work from other perspectives, and especially institutional entrepreneurship. We will thus elaborate on the multidimensionality of institutional work practices, its process-focus, as well as the importance of intentionality and the question of unintended consequences.

Figure 6. A model of institutional work



(Source: Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 232)

2.2.2.1. Institutional work is multi-dimensional

The variety of research contexts and levels of analysis described above has allowed to study the broad variety of forms and types of institutional work in past research – to the detriment of the question how institutional work is done in practice. The discursive, relational, and material dimensions that shape the process are, however, present in any instance of institutional work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Yet, less attention has been paid to these aspects than to the identification of forms of work.

Most institutional work research highlights its **discursive** dimension (Hampel et al., 2017). This perspective points out the socially constructed side of institutions and institutionalization, in which discursive processes play an essential role: they are used to constitute shared perceptions of reality, and therefore important for the creation, maintenance, as well as the disruption of said institutions (Phillips et al., 2004). A variety of strategies and tactics, as well as combinations of them, can be used to achieve these institutional ends through discourse (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Discourses can be understood as structured collections of meaningful texts; these texts come in different shapes and forms – written or not – but must be material to be accessible to others (Phillips et al., 2004). From this point of view, institutions are often conceptualized as “textual affairs” (Munir and Phillips, 2005, cited by Zilber, 2007) based on discourse. The discursive dimension of institutions cannot be studied directly but through texts only, as discourse requires a medium to be transmitted to others (Phillips et al., 2004). In this sense, a diversity of media as carriers of discourse to have been studied in relation to institutional work: rhetoric (Waldron et al., 2015), myths and stories (Zilber, 2007), history (Suddaby et al., 2022), popular culture discourse (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004), or more specific texts such as books (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), among others, are essential instruments of discursive institutional work. Actors can mobilize

these and other discursive tools to alter parts of their institutional environment or strengthen and reinforce existing institutional arrangements (Blanc & Huault, 2010).

The **relational** dimension of institutional work explores how actors seek to affect institutions through their interactions with others (Hampel et al., 2017). Thereby, it is central to the social-symbolic work perspective in general, and as such, also to institutional work. Yet, research on the roles relationships play in institutional work remains scarce and only relatively recently, studies that specifically explore this aspect begin to emerge (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). This might be due to institutional work's focus on homogenous sets of actors that engage in such processes (Hampel et al., 2017): in most studies the people doing institutional work come from the same field or organization, and they therefore most likely have similar interest and motivations, which reduces the complexity of their relationship, and the potential for conflict (Currie et al., 2012). Hence, much work remains to be done on the relationships of dispersed actors as they engage in institutional work, and the effects this has on them and their practices.

Interactions between actors that are actively involved in institutional work, or those that play more peripheral roles, can contribute to gaining support for the change project, and to achieving the aims of institutional work through collaboration. The relational dimension makes institutional work complex: the interactions of a potentially heterogeneous set of actors is likely to change the course of institutional work, and lead to unintended outcomes (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). It is therefore important to consider this social context of relationships in which institutional work is embedded, as it can alter the process and its consequences, depending on the involved actors and their relationships with one another. This is an important aspect of our research object which, because of its local dimension, naturally leads to an in-depth study of the relational dimension of institutional work. Indeed, local public management is particularly marked by a diversity of actors and divergent interests that shape the content and organization of local projects along the way (Hernandez, 2008, 2017).

Questions of dominance and power (Currie et al., 2012), or international political cooperation (Wijen & Ansari, 2007), as well as the role of (collective) emotions (Farny et al., 2019; Voronov & Vince, 2012) begin to be explored in institutional work literature as scholars increasingly acknowledge its relational dimension.

Finally, the **material** dimension of institutional work constitutes an obviously important yet overlooked aspect of institutional dynamics (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Therefore, recent work calls for an exploration of these aspects of institutional work and the way in which materiality may affect actors' efforts aimed at shaping institutions (de Vaujany et al., 2019; Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). De Vaujany and his co-authors (2019) establish four only broadly defined and not clearly distinguishable types of materiality: artefacts and objects, digitality and information, space and time, and body and embodiment. In this sense, materiality can concern tangible as well as intangible objects. While this conception of materiality remains vague, it allows to gain insights into what materiality in institutional work might look like.

Certain material objects used in the context of institutional work might seem banal – e-mails, sheets of paper, the design of offices, or buildings (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) – but can have an important impact on institutional dynamics and arrangements. The use of materiality can make elaborate concepts and ideas more intelligible (Boxenbaum et al., 2018). By giving them a concrete form, it “*anchors new ideas in the 'here and now'*” (Meyer et al., 2018). According to Lawrence and Phillips (2019), two understandings of the material dimension of institutional work are possible. First, material elements may *result* from institutional work when individuals use them to carry out their daily lives and infuse them with ideas and meaning. On the other hand, when actors employ materiality and the assumptions and ideas ingrained in it to modify other beliefs, it can be used as a *tool* to perform institutional work.

Digital photography (Munir & Phillips, 2005), awards and prizes (Monteiro & Nicolini, 2015), place and space (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Rodner et al., 2020; Tissone et al., 2019), time (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016), artefacts in the music industry (Blanc & Huault, 2014) or the body (Lawrence et al., 2023) are material objects that have recently been studied in institutional work contexts. A “material turn” in the social sciences (Boxenbaum et al., 2018) stimulates the emergence of research in the field of institutional work where its material dimension is highlighted and studied from different angles.

2.2.2.2. Institutional work is process-oriented

One of the most central underlying ideas of institutional work is implied by the term itself: institutional *work*. It prioritizes the process and the work actors do as they seek to achieve certain goals, and the final results of this work are secondary (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Not only the name of this approach is meaningful, but so are the terms used to define it: in the definition of institutional work, the present continuous tense is used to talk about creating, maintaining, and disrupting. This verb form is used “*for actions or events that are happening or developing now*”¹³ whereby it refers to an ongoing process. Hence, the definition of institutional work refers to activities. Employing nouns instead of verbs – i.e., creation, not creating – would imply an achievement – i.e., the actual and successful creation of a new institution; this, however, is not what institutional work seeks to stress (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Interested in what actors do, why and how they do it (Hampel et al., 2017), the process itself is at the core of this perspective, rather than actors’ actual achievements. Of course, successful instances of institutional work that produce the initially desired outcomes are included; they are, however, merely one dimension among many in the institutional work perspective and not a condition for actors’ purposeful and reflexive work to count as such (Lawrence et al., 2009). Actors’ success in achieving the desired ends is not what makes them institutional workers, but the fact that they tried and made an effort to engage in reflexive and purposeful action does (Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009). By rejecting

¹³ “The present continuous tense”. In: Cambridge Dictionary, see <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/present-continuous> (consulted on 16.03.2023)

the idea that only successful institutional change should count as agency (Lawrence et al., 2011), the institutional work approach widens the spectrum of actors and practices that can be included, moving away from the narrower institutional entrepreneurship understanding of agency. In this sense, it can be understood as an “*effort expended to achieve a result*” (Lawrence & Dover, 2015, p. 5) without being limited to the actual achievement of this result.

This process- instead of outcome-oriented approach to agency and institutional change is related to the complexity of institutional work. Outcomes are secondary also because the process of institutional work, due to the diversity of actors and practices that can be included, is likely highly intricate (Ben Slimane & Leca, 2010). As actors may need to mobilize a variety of forms of institutional work to attain the desired outcome (Hampel et al., 2017), and unintended consequences potentially occur, linking practices to specific results seems difficult. Institutional work is therefore conceptualized as a set of practices rather than as a part of a linear process that follows a sequence of steps towards institutional change.

While other streams of neo-institutionalism focus more on processes themselves (institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, for instance, are studied to explore how a set of events leads to specific outcomes), the institutional work perspective allows to study the work actors engage in *within* these processes. Thereby, their agency is highlighted, while other approaches tend to stress the notion of institutions and how they are affected. Hence, a shift from a more macro-view of institutional dynamics that prioritizes the field, to a more micro-level where practices underpin what happens to institutions can be observed (Hampel et al., 2017). In short, practices are at the core of institutional work scholarship (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) (see **section 2.3.** for a more detailed account of institutional work practices).

Emphasizing the process of institutional work rather than its outcomes also helps to define what is not institutional work and delimit its perimeter. A recurring critique regarding the institutional work perspective is that all human action affects institutions to a certain extent and can therefore count as institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). This would be true if institutional work were defined by its outcomes, and not the process and its aims (Lawrence & Dover, 2015). The importance of considering the aims rather than the actual effects – which might be produced consciously or not - of institutional work therefore links back to another central idea of this concept: the reflexivity of actors, and the intentionality of their actions.

Concentrating attention on the process and intentions of institutional work rather than its effects is essential with regard to our research object. The introduction of the institutional arrangement of co-creation is indeed shaped by the sometimes diverging aims of the diversity of involved actors. Mobilizing an institutional work approach allows us to study these intentions and the practices actors engage in to pursue them, rather than attempting to observe the actual outcomes of their institutional work. Especially in a context where co-creation, a long-term oriented approach, is mobilized to develop

responses to Grand Challenges, ever-evolving complex problems, studying effects is nearly impossible. Investigating the process, however, allows us to better understand the complex interplay of the institutional work practices of heterogenous and dispersed actors.

2.2.2.3. Institutional work is intentional

We have shown how institutional work's neglect of the final outcomes of actors' efforts aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions allows at the same time to account for a diversity of institutional change dynamics, and define the scope of the notion of institutional work. The second key element, which is also included in the initial definition of institutional work, further helps clarify what is and is not institutional work: intentionality of actions is implied by the "purposive action" that is institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Intentionality means that what characterizes institutional work is its need for a purpose that infuses action with meaning (Raviola & Norbäck, 2013). Actors' intentions and aims, as well as their practices are essential, and less so the effects of their efforts which may or may not be successful; therefore, "*without intentionality, actions may have profound institutional effects but still not be institutional work*" (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 13). As they engage in institutional work and pursue institutional change, maintenance, or creation, actors must be aware that their actions might potentially lead to institutional change (Linneberg et al., 2021).

Others argue that intentionality evolves over the course of a process of institutional change, and that certain actors, while they initiate change through their actions, do not do so intentionally (Battilana et al., 2009). In this perspective, when active agency produces visible effects on institutional arrangements, there is institutional work – here, the importance of outcomes is more pronounced. To reconcile these conflicting visions of the relationship between institutional work, intentionality, and outcomes, intentionality can be understood as performative and "*constituted through action rather than being brought into the action by the actor*" (Dittrich & Seidl, 2017, p. 5). In this perspective, intentionality is emerging rather than given; it does not only drive change but can also emerge in change. Therefore, intentions might be more dynamic and flexible than what most literature suggests (Dittrich & Seidl, 2017) – they are not set in stone. Especially when the set of actors involved in institutional work is heterogenous, initial motivations are likely to differ; moreover, intentions may change and evolve over time, and finally, actors do not always act according to their displayed intentions (Creed et al., 2010). Thus, the intentions behind institutional work are probably messier and more complex than portrayed in past research. This is particularly true when institutional work is performed by dispersed actors as it is the case with policy co-creation in response to Grand Challenges.

Just like there are various forms of institutional work and practices that actors can engage in, there is a diversity of types of intentionality that can motivate their efforts (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Since institutional work is most often associated with institutional

change, a “projective” type of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and intentionality is ascribed to many instances of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011), and especially so in contexts like ours where institutional work concerns Grand Challenges. While it is often seen as future-oriented and transformative and therefore associated with creating or disrupting institutions, institutional work and the intentions behind it can also be habitual or practical (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998): institutional maintenance is most likely to happen through people’s everyday work (A. L. Wright et al., 2021) and therefore not always immediately associated with intentionality. Yet, maintenance work can be intentional and involve conscious action and reflection (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009), efforts to resist or counter change, or to defend or repair a threatened institution (Blanc & Huault, 2010, 2014; Currie et al., 2012; Dacin et al., 2010; Lok & de Rond, 2013; Raynard et al., 2021; Seremani et al., 2022).

2.3. Institutional work: a diversity of practices

Practices constitute the “*internal life of process*” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 218): more open-ended and future-oriented (Hjorth & Reay, 2022), “process” lends itself to exploring a sequence of events towards a desired outcome, whereas “practice” refers to the purposeful activities that take place within this series of events and can that affect both the events and the outcome (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The institutional work perspective is thus primarily concerned with the actions and interactions of individual and collective actors aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions, thereby paying attention to their practices, and less so the outcomes. In this regard, institutional work, and social-symbolic work more generally, refer to “*programs of action over extended periods of time*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 30) which are constituted by actors’ practices.

Yet, research explicitly concerned with the study of this aspect remains relatively rare: we know much less about the institutional work practices of individuals than about institutional change happening at the organizational or field levels (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015). Exploring these dynamics would however contribute to better understanding institutional complexity in its entirety, and the role of people’s purposeful work in shaping their institutional context. The lack of research situated at the micro-level of individual actors (Schilke, 2018; Zucker & Schilke, 2019) indicates that institutional work perspective has to a certain extent neglected the practice tradition it claims as one of its foundations: “*to fully realize its promise of providing ‘a broader vision of agency in relationship to institutions’ (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca 2009b: 1), institutional work should take work more seriously and more fully engage the practice-theoretical legacy it claims*” (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015, p. 288).

By exploring the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors, we aim to contribute to filling this gap and highlight the practice dimension of institutional work, and the heterogeneity of actors mobilizing these practices. In line with Zucker and Schilke (2019, p. 372) we assume that “*only through studying microinstitutional phenomena can we grasp the mechanisms involved in the creation, modification, and transmission of institutions*”, and therefore focus on the micro-level¹⁴ throughout this study.

Institutional work practices can be divided into three broad categories: the initial triptych of institutional work consists of activities aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). To achieve these aims, actors rely on a diversity of more specific practices. These can be investigated from different angles: their goal (do actors seek to create, maintain, or disrupt an institution?) (**section 2.3.1.**), the types of practices (the structural, conceptual, operational, or relational aspects of institutional

¹⁴ While we agree that micro-level dynamics are not limited to individual actors’ actions and interactions (see Hallett & Hawbaker, 2019), in this research, we mobilize a micro-level approach to explore individuals’ institutional work to provide insights into what it is they really do (Lawrence et al., 2011) and how they interact in institutional work processes.

work) (**section 2.3.2.**), or the target (is institutional work aimed at institutional arrangements that dominate within an organization, or within the field?) (**section 2.3.3.**).

We propose to open up the black box of individual actors' institutional work practices (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Zucker & Schilke, 2019) through our first research question:

RQ 1: What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

2.3.1. The institutional work triptych: creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions

In their seminal definition of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) state that the aims of institutional work can be threefold: through their purposeful and reflexive work, actors seek to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions. Understanding these three forms of institutional work¹⁵ is crucial as they provide a lens through which to analyze the actions of actors and the impact of those practices on institutional structures and routines. The three types and the more specific practices associated with each of them are summarized in table 8.

Each form of institutional work reflects a different set of actions that actors can take to shape the institutional environment of their organization. Berthod et al. (2018, p. 323) point out that *“these three concepts do not represent the universe of institutional work as such, but are central categories that distinguish specific forms of institutional work from others, depending on the analytical goal”*. While many of them rest on Lawrence and Suddaby's conceptualization, a variety of practices of institutional work have been studied in different institutional contexts over the past two decades.

2.3.1.1. Creating

In institutional scholarship, the institutional entrepreneurship perspective is prevalent when studying how new structures and arrangements emerge through actors' agency (Lawrence et al., 2013). The study of institutional work rests on this literature, whose shortcomings it attempts to overcome by no longer positioning the institutional entrepreneur as a heroic figure single-handedly transforming institutions. The efforts of a larger panel of individual and collective change agents are taken into consideration in the study of institutional work.

In institutional entrepreneurship, scholars have mainly been interested in enabling conditions as well as in the characteristics of these change agents (Battilana et al., 2009),

¹⁵ The categories and forms of institutional work mentioned in this section are based on Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), unless indicated otherwise.

and have shown the successful results of their institutional work which most often concerns the creation of new institutions. What it is that they actually do – the practices they engage in to achieve these institutional outcomes – is less central in the institutional entrepreneurship perspective (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The creation-aspect of institutional work therefore aims to study this practical dimension of the formation of new institutions.

In this regard, nine types of institutional creation work have been identified and regrouped into three broad categories (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These categories are political work, the reconfiguration of belief systems, and the transformation of categorizations and of the boundaries of meaning systems.

Political work consists of reconstructing the rules, rights, and boundaries granting access to resources. Three forms of creation work constitute this category: advocacy, defining, and vesting.

Advocacy refers to actors' practices through which they seek to mobilize political or regulatory support by directly or indirectly attempting to persuade others. Advocacy is essential for the representation of the interests of groups of actors such as associations as they seek to affect institutional arrangements, and to acquire the legitimacy they need to do so. Lobbying activities can therefore be closely related to advocacy work. *Defining* means constructing new rule systems through which status or identity are attributed, or boundaries or hierarchies defined. This form of creation work includes the definition of rules of membership and the perimeter of new institutional arrangements. It thereby constructs the framework within which these new arrangements can be created and exist. Finally, *vesting* consists of creating new rule structures through which rights are conferred. For this, negotiating and bargaining are likely to take place between those who are in the position to confer these rights, and those who are interested in obtaining them. Vesting thereby modifies the equilibrium in a field as it changes the relationships associated with the newly created institutional arrangements.

They are mutually reinforcing: advocacy provides a base for vesting work, which in turn defines the actors that can engage in advocacy work. The change these forms of institutional creation work induce is likely to be radical rather than incremental, since whole new institutions may be constructed, modifying the established order in the field. While Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) call this category political work, it is not necessarily political in the literal sense of the word: rather, this term refers to powerful actors in a field that possess the authority to be able to engage in this type of institutional creation work. Regarding our research object, where the political, managerial, and civil society spheres of a specific local context interact, political work may indeed be performed by elected politicians, but also public managers in powerful positions might engage in this type of work.

Then, the **reconfiguration of belief systems** is the second category these authors identify. It refers to the creation of new normative foundations of institutions and

concerns the relationships between actors, norms, and the field in different ways. Three forms of institutional work of creation fall in this category: constructing identities, changing norms, and constructing networks. These practices aim to develop attachment to the institution, and have been referred to as cultural work linking the institution to broader societal discourse (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008; Silvola & Vinnari, 2021).

First, *constructing identities* refers to the relationship between an actor and the field. As the dominant institutional arrangements in a field are replaced by new ones, the identities of actors embedded in this field change with them, and new identities are created for them. The development of new professions as they emerge or are drastically changed is an example of this normative type of institutional work. In a context of the construction of new identities through institutional work, actors identify themselves in new ways that fit with the emerging institution. Institutional work through the construction of new identities supports the creation of new institutions as actors adapt the way in which they identify themselves to these new arrangements, infusing them with legitimacy. As they implement co-creation in a public organization, both political and managerial actors take on new roles and responsibilities which shape how they perceive their professional identity, and how they use this identity to perform their tasks (see **section 3 of chapter 1** for the transformations the implementation of co-creation entails in this regard).

Then, *changing normative associations* describes how connections between practices and their moral and cultural foundations are re-constructed. It thereby refers to the relationships between certain norms and the field. The transformation of normative associations does not necessarily have a direct impact on existing institutions but might create new institutions that exist in parallel or that complement long-standing ones. These new institutions might however change the way people think about entrenched ideas and assumptions and lead them to challenge and question them. Bureaucratic norms in public organizations are, for example, challenged as co-creation is introduced.

Finally, *constructing normative networks* is a form of work aimed at creating institutions through the reconfiguration of belief systems. Normative networks refer to the connections among organizations in a field which reinforce and sanction practices. These connections among actors may even give rise to a proto-institution¹⁶ supporting their activities.

The third category of institutional work that is aimed at creating institutions concern its cognitive aspects and the **changes in categorizations and boundaries of meaning systems**. The three forms of work subsumed in this category are mimicry, theorizing, and educating. They are associated with the more technical work of constructing and diffusing the patterns of interaction that underpin new institutional arrangements (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008; Silvola & Vinnari, 2021).

¹⁶ Proto-institutions are “new practices, rules, and technologies” which “may become new institutions if they diffuse sufficiently (Lawrence, Hardy & Phillips, 2002: 281)” (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 8).

Mimicry means the association of new practices with established ones. Thereby, to facilitate the acceptability and adoption of new and emerging institutions, they are linked to familiar and accepted practices, procedures, or prescriptions. Referring to familiar frames of reference helps reduce the uncertainty that comes with novelty. This makes them easier to grasp and understand while at the same time allowing to direct attention to potential shortcomings of the existing and taken-for-granted institutions.

Theorizing as an institutional work practice consists of naming and abstracting new arrangements and structures and provide explanations of cause and effect for them to build foundations that support the new institution. Developing them into abstract categories contributes to incorporating new concepts in the field. The narrative dimension of institutional work – telling convincing stories about these new institutions – plays an important role in this regard.

And finally, *educating* actors and providing them with the competences and the knowledge that are required to support new institutional arrangements is the third practice of this category of institutional creation work. With new institutions come new practices and control mechanisms, and actors must be able to comprehend them, which requires education and explanations. Indeed, in contexts where co-creation is implemented for the first time, participants must first of all be able to understand these new practices and their objectives, and develop the competencies required to fully participate (see **section 3.3.3. of chapter 1** for insights on the new skills required for policy co-creation).

2.3.1.2. Maintaining

The second form of institutional work is aimed at maintaining institutions. Maintenance work has so far received considerably less attention than the creation and the disruption of institutions through institutional work (Berthod et al., 2018). Traditionally, neo-institutional theory assumes that institutions are stable structures that persist over time (Scott, 2013); from this point of view, actively working to maintain and reproduce them seems relatively unnecessary. Yet, institutional reproduction cannot be taken for granted without agency as very few institutions require no maintenance work at all: “*even the most highly institutionalized technologies, structures, practices and rules require the active involvement of individuals and organizations in order to maintain them over time (Lawrence et al., 2001)*” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 217).

In this regard, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) develop a set of six practices aimed at maintaining institutions, which they regroup in two broad categories: maintenance through adherence to rule systems, and the reproduction of existing norms and belief systems.

The first category which rests on the **adherence to rule systems** contains three maintenance practices: enabling, policing, and deterring. Together, these rule-based forms of institutional work “*make real the coercive underpinnings of an institution: without such work, the coercive foundations for institutions are likely to crumble, becoming empty*

threats or promises rather than self-activating means of institutional control" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 232).

First, *enabling* refers to institutional work practices aimed at creating rules to facilitate, supplement, and support existing institutions. For instance, this includes the creation of organizational routines or roles that carry certain institutional arrangements and are meant to ensure their survival. *Policing* practices are enforcement, auditing, and monitoring strategies to ensure compliance with institutional arrangements. Policing can be based on sanctions or inducements, and thereby be relatively visible, or it can be done less openly through monitoring of actors' behavior. Finally, *deterrence* is about establishing coercive barriers to institutional change. Through tactics such as threats or sanctions that discourage from institutional change, actors seek to maintain existing institutional arrangements.

Secondly, maintenance work can be based on the **reproduction of existing norms and belief systems**, and therefore be much less directly visible than the above-mentioned practices. This category also includes a set of three forms of institutional work: valorizing and demonizing, mythologizing, embedding and routinizing.

Valorizing and demonizing refer to practices through which extreme examples illustrating the normative foundations of institutions are communicated to the public. These examples can be both extremely positive, or negative, and might for example consist of public recognition or, on the contrary, ridiculing, and are used to maintain the power of the established institution by targeting the cognitive aspect of institutionalization. Then, practices of *mythologizing* can be mobilized to maintain institutions by attempting to preserve the normative foundations of institutional arrangements through the creation and communication of myths and stories about its history. Here, institutional work seeks to convey the importance of the existing institutions, and therefore the need for it to persist. Finally, *embedding and routinizing* refer to the active inclusion of an institution's normative underpinnings into people's daily lives. Embedding and repeating practices and routines is meant to have a stabilizing influence on the institutions actors seek to maintain.

Beyond these two broad categories, emerging literature on the maintenance of institutions through institutional work practices have identified multiple other mechanisms actors can mobilize. For instance, institutions can be maintained relatively *automatically* through rituals (Dacin et al., 2010) or different forms of social controls (Heaphy, 2013; Lok & de Rond, 2013; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015). Depending on the level of disruption the institution faces, the extent of maintenance work varies, and can reach from containment when divergence is minor to restoration when faced with major disruption (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Actors can moreover attempt to *defend* established institutions and engage in defensive institutional work to preserve their privileged positions (Blanc & Huault, 2010; Currie et al., 2012) or normative values (Wright et al., 2021). Sometimes, in order to preserve their institutions, actors must adapt to new practices and incorporate them (Currie et al., 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013). Institutional

work aimed at reversing institutional disruption to *repair* former institutional arrangements (Micelotta & Washington, 2013) is another type of practice through which maintenance can take place.

Institutional work aimed at maintaining institutions can therefore be understood as a “*continuum of mechanisms—from unconscious reproduction through day-to-day “custodial” work to more active reparative processes—that maintain the status quo and/or restore threatened interests and arrangements*” which is “*motivated by inequalities of privilege and enabled by the relative capability of ‘institutional defenders’ to rebuff challengers that champion rival symbolic orders*” (Raynard et al., 2021, p. 9). From small, everyday actions which reproduce established institutions to more radical ones when the survival of an institution is threatened, maintenance, just like creation and disruption, requires actors’ purposive and reflexive practices. In local public organizations, as we have established in **chapter 1 (section 2.1.)** institutional arrangements associated with a bureaucratic understanding of the public sector are so entrenched and maintained through big or small and more or less conscious practices that the introduction of new approaches such as co-creation is a difficult undertaking, as institutional creation work is confronted with a strong desire to maintain existing institutions.

2.3.1.3. Disrupting

The idea that established institutions can be disrupted is not new. Oliver (1992), in her study of deinstitutionalization, points out that organizations can fail to reproduce and sustain legitimacy for actions that have previously been taken-for-granted. In this understanding, deinstitutionalization means the “*delegitimation of an established organizational practice or procedure*” (Oliver, 1992, p. 564) due to challenges the organization is faced with. This account of organizational disruption is not specifically focused on agency, but the underlying idea can be found in institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions. Actors’ “rejection of institutions”, as Oliver (1992) calls it in the context of deinstitutionalization, refers to actors tearing down institutions or making them ineffectual.

Having been neglected by earlier neo-institutional scholarship, this idea of institutions being rejected or attacked in certain ways by actors can be found in institutional work which, in its disruptive dimension, refers to actors undermining the mechanisms that support compliance with existing institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Disruptive institutional work is necessary because the meanings of institutionalized structures and practices are taken-for-granted and therefore hard to change – thus, they must be actively questioned and undermined by reflexive actors to become deinstitutionalized (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify three forms of institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions, which can be performed by actors whose interests are not served by existing institutional arrangements. They are disconnecting sanctions, disassociating moral foundations, and undermining assumptions and beliefs.

In the first category, **disconnecting sanctions**, the state or other regulative authorities are essential as it is them who define the rewards and sanctions associated with certain sets of practices. These actors are thereby able to reproduce, but on the other hand also disrupt institutions by disconnecting them. By defining standards, rules, and the benefits or costs associated with them, actors engaging in this type of disruptive work are able to threaten and tear down the foundations of institutionalized concepts.

Then, **disassociating moral foundations** is another category of disruptive institutional work which consists of separating practices or rules from their moral foundations which give them legitimacy in a certain social context. Usually, this occurs in an indirect rather than a direct manner and the normative building blocks of institutions are attacked gradually rather than drastically transformed. Once again, powerful actors are most likely to have the resources necessary to perform this type of institutional work and disrupt institutional arrangements.

Undermining assumptions and beliefs is the final category Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify. This refers to practices aimed at decreasing the perceived risks of institutional change by undermining its core underlying ideas. By removing (some of) the costs associated with innovation, such activities seek to facilitate the implementation of new practices and structures and reduce the risks others might associate with these changes.

Institutional work aimed at disrupting institutional arrangements through these and other practices is likely to encounter resistance: it might be met with defensive institutional work performed by actors who seek to keep existing structures and practices in place (Rodner et al., 2020).

In the past, research on disruptive institutional work has shown for example the role space can play in such contexts (Rodner et al., 2020), or how other material objects such as concrete texts can be mobilized in the disruption and deinstitutionalization of long-standing practices (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). For our research object, we assume that the disruption of longstanding bureaucratic structures takes place as actors increasingly question their usefulness and suitability in a context marked by Grand Challenges that require public organizations to be flexible and open, and therefore change their habitual practices and approaches to policymaking.

Table 8. The three types of institutional work

Creating	Maintaining	Disrupting
Political work: Advocacy Defining Vesting	Adherence to rule systems: Enabling Policing Deterring	Disconnecting sanctions
Reconfiguration of belief systems: Constructing identities Changing normative associations Constructing normative networks	Reproduction of existing norms and belief systems: Valorizing and demonizing Mythologizing Embedding and routinizing	Disassociating moral foundations
Changes in categorizations and boundaries of meaning systems: Mimicry Theorizing Educating		Undermining assumptions and beliefs

(Source: adapted from Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006)

2.3.1.4. A life cycle of creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions?

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) propose that together, the three categories of creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions roughly form a life cycle of institutional work, modelling the life cycle of institutions (Scott, 2013). Here, the formation, maintenance, and eventual destruction of institutions, as well as the transformations they might undergo, are pictured as a somewhat linear and seemingly structured sequence of events that institutions are faced with at one point or another. In line with their work, others have subsequently developed models of the phases of institutional work. In this regard, Ben Slimane and Leca (2014), based on Battilana and colleagues' (2009) work on institutional entrepreneurship, distinguish four phases of institutional work. For each stage, the authors point out that certain resources and competences can facilitate institutional work. According to Ben Slimane and Leca (2014) these four stages look as such:

First, the actors engaged in institutional work must **understand their environment** and take a step back to be able to even envision alternative arrangements. Actors must distance themselves from entrenched institutional arrangements to perceive them more clearly. Once they have identified an alternative to the existing institution, actors are required to **develop a justification** for their change project to convince others. Here,

extensive knowledge about existing belief systems is helpful, as well as proximity to the targets of the message regarding the change project: this helps convey the message. The third stage identified by Ben Slimane and Leca (2014) is the **mobilization of support**. Here, the central actors that can garner broad support from others for the change project need to be convinced of its sense and importance. The final stage is about **controlling access to essential resources** in the field. These resources can be material and immaterial and can be used to gain support for the new institutional arrangement. Here, actors must be able to establish clear criteria for resource allocation, and to create a feeling of equity among actors regarding the distribution of these resources.

While useful to better understand what institutional work can consist of, this perspective based on distinct phases that occur one after the other implies that institutional work resembles a relatively linear process. The reality of organizations, however, is probably messier and more complex than suggested by these linear understandings of institutional work (Empson et al., 2013). Rather than following a more or less established order, the different practices of institutional work that pursue different goals are likely to occur simultaneously, due to the *“sedimented nature of institutional change”* (Empson et al., 2013, p. 834). Especially in a public sector context where a multiplicity of spheres naturally interact and where divergent interests clash, accounting for the complexity and messiness of institutional work seems essential. Even more so, co-creation precisely seeks to confront actors with different visions; not acknowledging the fact that this most likely also entails a variety of types of institutional work based on divergent intentions would mean that we neglect the diversity that is at the core of the co-creation approach.

The co-existence of different types of institutional work pursuing different intentions is especially likely when the actors performing institutional work have diverging perceptions of the institutional change and therefore respond differently when opportunities for institutional work arise (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009). However, even when this is not the case and actors have a shared vision of the institutional outcome they wish to achieve – the creation, maintenance, or disruption of an institution – they might have to mobilize not only one but multiple institutional work practices – creating, maintaining, and/or disrupting, as well as the more precise practices associated with them – to reach this goal (Hampel et al., 2017).

Practices aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting might therefore occur in parallel as actors *“try to discredit prior institutional templates, create and promote their own, and develop the means to diffuse and maintain their preferred templates at the same time”* (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 4). For instance, creating institutions often implies tearing down existing ones to make space; in the same vein, the disruption of long-standing arrangements might encounter resistance and trigger maintenance work. Moreover, the type of institutional work actors engage in tends to change over time: once a new institution has been created, it must be maintained. In this regard, both the practices and roles of actors are subject to change. What institutional work can look like in such transitions and how it shifts has however received little scholarly attention (Mena & Suddaby, 2016).

This perspective makes the reality of institutional work less of a structured and predictable undertaking, and more complex and emerging than suggested in most literature. We argue that especially in a public sector setting, and even more so with regard to our research object of co-creation, it is essential to adopt a more nuanced view of institutional work. A linear approach where institutional work occurs in more or less distinguishable and clear stages does not seem suitable given the characteristics of public organizations, and the key features of policy co-creation.

2.3.2. The structural, conceptual, operational, and relational aspects of institutional work

As opposed to the more linear vision of the institutional work life cycle described by Ben Slimane and Leca (2014), a different approach proposed by Cloutier and colleagues (2016) comprises four types of institutional work actors seeking to implement new institutional arrangements can perform: structural, conceptual, operational, and relational work. Inscribed in a process-logic, these types of work are understood in an interdependent, dynamic, and non-linear manner (Arnaud & Serval, 2020). While this perspective applies mostly to institutional work aimed at creating institutions, it highlights the complex and interrelated nature of institutional work practices. As such, it nourishes our research as it allows to account for the non-linearity and complexity of institutional work that occurs in a context of implementing policy co-creation where a diversity of actors and practices are involved.

2.3.2.1. Structural work

Actors engage in structural institutional work seeking to “*establish formalized roles, rule systems, organizing principles, and resource allocation models that support a new policy framework*” (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 269). It is precursive in that it is required to establish the foundations of a new institutional arrangement before being able to change anything else. In this sense, attributing roles and responsibilities, and defining rules is an essential first step in institutional work processes. Structural work is also recursive since former structures can be more or less constraining for new ones, and disruptive: it represents a shift away from existing organizational designs.

2.3.2.2. Conceptual work

Conceptual work refers to practices through which actors aim to “*establish new belief systems, norms, and interpretive schemes consistent with the new policy*” (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 269). This form of work is specialized: it is done by specific actors – those who have the necessary competences and time. This does not only include people from within the organization, but external actors can engage in conceptual work as well. These actors can act as experts and help explain and clarify the new institutional arrangement. Moreover, conceptual work is detached from operations as it mainly occurs through discourse and at a more abstract level. Therefore, the outcomes of this type of institutional work might be relatively hard to grasp. Conceptual work is repetitive in order to alleviate

the ambiguities that are associated with the introduction of new institutions. Through constant repetition and reformulation, the new concepts and ideas that constitute change can become more accessible and digestible.

2.3.2.3. Operational work

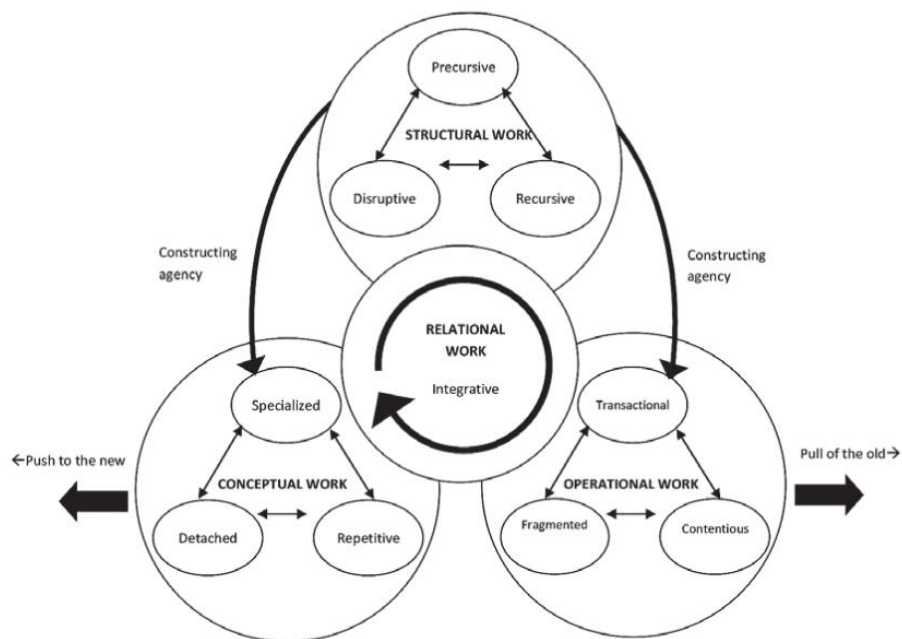
Operational work is more practical. It includes actors' activities through which they seek to *"implement concrete actions affecting the everyday behaviors of frontline professionals that are directly linked with the new policy"* (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 269). It is fragmented since it is usually targeted at very specific procedures. Operational work is contentious and likely to encounter resistance from powerful actors, since the new institutional arrangements are likely to be conflicting with the power relations, values, and interests associated with former institutions. Finally, it is transactional and as such based on the interests of individual actors they seek to achieve through broader institutional change.

2.3.2.4. Relational work

The fourth type of institutional work identified by Cloutier and colleagues is relational work, which refers to *"building linkages, trust, and collaboration between people involved in reform implementation"* (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 269). It is integrative and underpins the other forms of institutional work. It underpins structural work since it is a collective task to interpret new roles and rules, get used to them, and build the new relationships necessary to support them. It also underpins conceptual work and helps make new concepts more accessible and less detached from actors' reality. Lastly, relational work underpins operational work as it is necessary and helpful to establish links and relationships between actors in order to effectively complete the specific tasks related with the new institutional arrangement.

Figure 7 sums up the characteristics of each one of the four types of institutional work as identified by Cloutier and colleagues (2016), as well as their interactions with one another.

Figure 7. How structural, conceptual, operational, and relational work interact



(Source: Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 268)

This dynamic, non-linear approach to institutional work seems particularly relevant to our research object, which aims to understand how local actors shape co-creation practices. Indeed, given a pluralist organization in which spheres of power can carry internal conflicts and oppose each other (political sphere, administrative sphere, civil society sphere), it seems difficult to envision a linear institutional process. The dynamic, interdependent perspective of institutional work practices is much better suited to our study context, which is marked by the complexity and divergence of interests. Moreover, it should be noted that the above-cited findings by Cloutier and her co-authors stems from research on local public action in the context of the deployment of a reform, which reinforces the relevance of this analytical framework to our own research object.

2.3.3. Internally and externally directed institutional work

So far, we have shown that intentions – creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions – as well as the practices associated with them vary. Actors mobilize a diversity of practices as they attempt to shape their institutional environment and do so in a less linear manner than what is often suggested in literature. This institutional work, as we will discuss now, can be directed at both external and internal actors: it can concern the organization and its internal practices, and the broader institutional field. Gawer and Phillips (2013) point out that these forms of internally and externally oriented institutional work cannot be separated from one another and are to be performed at the same time to be able to change the targeted institutional arrangements.

2.3.3.1. Internally directed institutional work

In their study of institutional change at Intel, Gawer and Phillips (2013) find that two types of institutional work are carried out within organizations: they call them internal practice work, and internal identity work. These types of practices are associated with the need for the organization to develop new roles, practices, and logics that are aligned with new practices in their field (Hampel et al., 2017).

Internal practice work is understood as the internal innovation of new practices as a reaction to new institutional arrangements. This aims to make the organization's members adhere to new institutional elements. To achieve this, related institutional work practices are innovating new practices internally, enrolling members of the organizations in them, and managing the internal tensions this might cause.

Then, **identity work** refers to organizational efforts to “*reduce the tensions internally between its organizational identity and the new practices*” associated with change at field level (Gawer & Phillips, 2013, p. 23). In this regard, identity work is concerned with the alignment of organizational and individual identities. Therefore, the institutional work practices mobilized in this context are associated with the organization's attempt to make sense of tensions between its identity and new practices, and also developing new elements of its identity that correspond to these new practices that are introduced in the field.

2.3.3.2. Externally directed institutional work

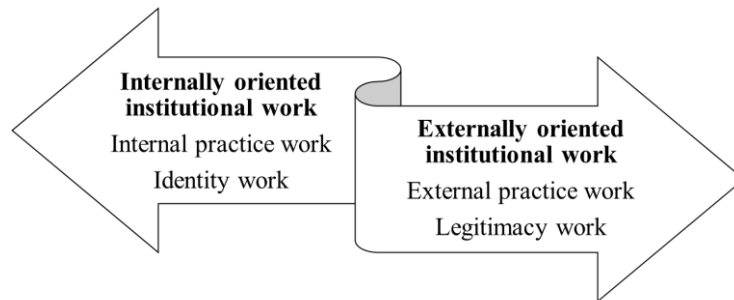
In the same vein, Gawer and Phillips (2013) identify two types of external institutional work: external practice work, and legitimacy work. Externally directed work is intended to engage other organizations within the institutional field, to introduce them and their members to new practices developed by the organization, and to influence the external acceptance of an organization's new identity. Here, the organization attempts to acquire or sustain legitimacy for the field, its boundaries, and its relations to other fields in order to obtain other actors' support (Hampel et al., 2017).

Through **external practice work**, an organization “*creates and disseminates new practices to other organizations in the field*” (Gawer & Phillips, 2013, p. 13) seeking to shape the dominant institutions in the field. External practice work concerns the creation of new practices that can be performed outside of the organization, and that reconfigure the field. More precisely, in this form of work, actors may engage in a set of practices, including innovating new practices externally, enrolling members of the field in them, and managing the external tensions this might cause.

Legitimacy work refers to an organization's attempt to “*influence the collective identities legitimately associated with a new logic, as well as influence external acceptance of its legitimate membership in one of the new collective identities*” at the level of the field (Gawer & Phillips, 2013, p. 17). Aimed at diffusing new practices in the field, this form of external institutional work includes activities such as shaping a shared understanding of new

collective identities among members of the field and working towards the acceptance of the new position of the organization in the field.

Figure 8. Internally and externally oriented institutional work



(Source: adapted from Gawer and Phillips, 2013)

With regard to our research object, we assume that both internally and externally oriented institutional work are essential. Per definition, policy co-creation involves participants that are part of the organization (elected politicians, public managers, public service agents) as well as actors that are external to the organization (individual or organized citizens, other organizations, companies). Only targeting one side would not be enough to effectively introduce new co-creation practices since the adhesion of all involved actors is required. We therefore suppose that in the context of introducing co-creation in a local public organization, it is equally important to diffuse the new practices within the organization and reduce the tensions surrounding the change, as it is to spread the practices to other members of the field and increase their legitimacy and acceptance.

In this section, we retraced the emergence of the institutional work perspective as a recent branch of neo-institutional theory. We began by exploring the broader “turn to work” in management and organizational studies, as well as the social-symbolic work perspective in which institutional work is embedded. Then, we focused on institutional work and its foundations: it is multi-dimensional with discursive, relational, and material dimensions; process- rather than outcome-focused; and centered around actors’ intentions regarding the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions. As a practice-based approach, institutional work focuses on actors’ actions aimed at shaping institutional arrangements. However, we found that most existing literature mobilizes a macro-approach and does not account for individual actors’ practices. Consequently, we formulated our first research question about actors’ institutional work practices aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation.

In the following section, we explore the potential roles of institutional workers as well as organizational forms of institutional work.

Section 3: Institutional work: of actors, roles, and organizational forms

The question of who the actors doing institutional work actually are has so far received relatively little attention in institutional work literature (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). With the study of institutional work being focused mainly on the levels of the field and the organization, the micro-level where individual actors are located has not been studied as extensively (Tracey, 2016). From a micro-institutional perspective, we are therefore interested in those dynamics that “*operate below the organization’s institutional context, including (but not limited to) intraorganizational phenomena, groups, and yes, to be absolutely clear, individuals and their interactions*” (Zucker & Schilke, 2019, p. 372).

Especially since the construct of the “actor” has become a central notion in current neo-institutional theory marked by an agentic turn (Abdelnour et al., 2017), it seems necessary to undertake a more in-depth exploration of the actors involved in institutional work. While much work has discussed the practices of institutional entrepreneurs in institutional change, as well as the ways in which strong institutions shape passive actors’ behavior, less is known about other types of change agents who are neither “heroic actors” nor “cultural dopes” (Powell & Colyvas, 2008) – we refer to them as institutional workers. Consequently, the spectrum of actors between these two extremes remains to be explored (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Little research has discussed the institutional work of those “ordinary” actors who are neither involved in dramatic institutional change like institutional entrepreneurs, nor passive and merely applying the institutional patterns provided by their institutional environment. In the same vein, there is little conceptual clarity regarding the various roles they take on in institutional change and the ways in which these roles shape their institutional work practices (Hwang & Colyvas, 2020). We therefore propose to investigate these issues in more detail in our second research question:

RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogeneous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

Moreover, depending on the actors that are involved in institutional work, the form the latter takes in the organizational context might vary, and range from more top-down institutional work of institutional entrepreneurs to institutional work that is performed by collective and homogenous, or by heterogeneous and dispersed actors. Institutional work performed by institutional entrepreneurs or groups of similar, usually powerful and successful actors has received much attention, while other forms and more particularly institutional work of heterogeneous actors has been somewhat neglected (Hampel et al.,

2017). In our third research question, we seek to broaden the spectrum of institutional work, and explore the organizational forms it can take:

RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?

This section is structured as follows. To begin with, we propose to explore the conditions and necessary competencies and resources that can contribute to actors becoming institutional workers (**section 3.1.**). Then, we investigate the multiplicity of institutional roles these actors may take on in institutional work (**section 3.2.**). Finally, we discuss the different organizational forms that the institutional work of these heterogenous actors can take in the context of the implementation of policy co-creation (**section 3.3.**). We thereby aim to provide a reading grid allowing us to study not only the institutional work practices identified in the preceding section, but also the diversity of institutional workers themselves as well as their roles, and the organizational forms of institutional work. Doing so allows us to provide a more nuanced account of institutional work, acknowledging that the dynamics of institutional change are not linear but can be messy and complex.

3.1. How to become an institutional worker

The extent to which actors are capable of influencing their institutional environment through their agency depends on a variety of elements such as the way in which they relate to the field they are embedded in (Heaphy, 2013). Their competencies and access to different resources determine the degree of power they have, and the actions they can take to alter institutional arrangements. To identify the factors that allow for a person to become an institutional worker, we resort to research on institutional entrepreneurship. More than institutional work literature, this stream has been concerned with studying enabling conditions for individual actors.

Since we assume that institutional entrepreneurs are a category of actors performing institutional work (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009), these insights can apply to our research context as well; yet, there are particularities depending on the type of institutional worker. Whether actors engage in institutional work depends on both "*their willingness to act as such and of their ability to do so*" (Battilana, 2006, p. 659), and yet the individuals who have so far been studied in this regard are mostly those institutional entrepreneurs who have access to resources, power, and control (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Heaphy, 2013). Hence the elements affecting their ability to engage in institutional work rather than their willingness to do so seem to be of interest, since marginalized and peripheral actors would often have more interest in changing institutional arrangements than privileged and central actors do (Currie et al., 2012). And yet, we know much less about the ways in which these types of actors can become change agents and perform institutional work.

With this in mind, we look into institutional entrepreneurship literature which identifies enabling conditions at the levels of the field, the organization, and of individuals (Battilana et al., 2009). While distancing ourselves from the "heroic" vision of the isolated institutional entrepreneur, we seek to better understand who the actors in institutional work are, and which favorable conditions have been identified in prior literature on institutional entrepreneurship. For each of these levels (field, organization, and individual), we identify the competencies and resources that can facilitate actors' involvement in institutional work (**sections 3.1.1. to 3.1.3.**).

3.1.1. Field level conditions

At the level of the institutional field, four main conditions that can facilitate the emergence of institutional entrepreneurs have been studied. As this concerns a macro-level, the enabling field conditions are less about the competencies actors hold and resources they can access, and more about larger external influences. They are events and crises, the heterogeneity of the field, its degree of institutionalization, as well as debates and social pressures.

First, efforts aimed at changing an institutional environment can stem from and be encouraged by specific **events**: jolts (Greenwood et al., 2002), and crises (Battilana et al.,

2009) that disrupt established practices. They make the obsolescence of the current organizational structure visible and reinforce the need for change. Complex problems such as environmental issues can also act as a trigger for institutional work (Leca et al., 2008). Recent crises – the COVID-19 pandemic – or increasingly urgent Grand Challenges – climate change – act as catalysts for public organizations at different geopolitical levels to add novel practices such as open innovation and hackathons (Bertello et al., 2021) to their established processes and routines.

Then, an organizational field is likely to be structured by **multiple diverging logics**. It is therefore likely to be heterogenous, presenting a fertile breeding ground to initiate change (Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009), as there is not one unique logic that all actors adhere to without fail. Change agents can benefit from these incongruencies. In this sense, contradictions between the paradigms structuring the public sector today – the Public Administration paradigm, New Public Management, and New Public Governance – can also be exploited (Coule & Patmore, 2013).

The **degree of institutionalization** of a field can also enable institutional work (Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009). Numerous studies on this concept have been conducted in emerging fields (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004) where the degree of uncertainty about institutional arrangements is high, as institutionalization is still low. Institutional entrepreneurs have the chance to shape the field from the beginning and strategically advocate for their interests. Different strategies might have to be used for institutional work in highly institutionalized environments as dynamics are different (Maguire et al., 2004a). Even if institutional work is possible in mature environments, as shown by Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) for instance, strategies must be adapted accordingly (Battilana et al., 2009; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007). Public sector reform, for instance, is likely to be conflicting with the established rules and practices in a highly institutionalized context, as Cloutier et al. (2016) show in their study of the Canadian health care sector.

Finally, **social pressures** (Oliver, 1992) can trigger institutional work. When finding themselves in social groups with different belief systems, actors are likely to question existing institutional patterns. Furthermore, a culture of social groups with high diversity among members can facilitate performing institutional work, since they are likely to adhere to different logics, leading to incongruences which entrepreneurs can benefit from.

3.1.2. Organizational level conditions

The status of an organization in the field, as well as contradictions between logics can be elements at the organizational level that contribute to the emergence of institutional workers. Elements at the level of organizations affect how their members behave and can enable or constrain their pursuit of altering institutional arrangements shaping their organization.

Whether actors are part of high- or low **status** organizations can affect their capacity for institutional work. However, the question whether a high or a low status of the organization in its field is more conducive to change remains difficult to answer; Battilana et al. (2009) propose that this is context-dependent and specific to the respective organizational field. Phillips and his co-authors (2000) state that, while low-status organizations tend to be more enthusiastic about changing institutional patterns than high-status organizations which usually content with the status quo – in this regard, it is also easier for smaller, local public organizations to implement new practices than it is for larger and more central ones -, this does not always have to be the case. Occupying a central position in the field, however, facilitates the dissemination of novel ideas through discourse (Phillips et al., 2004) which can positively affect their institutionalization.

Then, an organization situated at the **intersection of fields** where diverging institutional referents can be observed (Dorado, 2005) might present actors with more opportunities for institutional work (Battilana et al., 2009). Multiple institutional logics are likely to collide where fields overlap, leading to incompatibilities and incongruencies that institutional workers can point out. The creation of new organizational forms and practices is facilitated where institutional logics collide (Creed et al., 2002).

In addition, actors' ability to implement institutional change does not only depend on the existence of conflicting logics, but also on the extent to which other members of the organization adhere to existing institutions (Battilana, 2006). This has been called the **organizational pattern of value commitments** (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). While this pattern varies from one organization to the other, Greenwood and Hinings (1996) have identified four broad patterns: *status quo commitment*, where all groups within the organization are committed to the existing arrangements; *indifferent commitment*, where groups are neither committed nor opposed to them; *competitive commitment*, where some are opposed and prefer an alternative, and others support the existing arrangements; and *reformative commitment*, where all organizational groups are opposed to the status quo. When all groups within the organization are committed to the status quo, institutional workers are likely to have difficulties achieving support for their change project; when some or all groups are opposed, however, implementing institutional change becomes easier (Battilana, 2006). In this regard, the diversity of actors involved in the implementation of co-creation in a public organization is likely to entail different levels of commitment to current arrangements, and therefore presents an opportunity for change.

3.1.3. Individual level conditions

Finally, several elements at the level of individuals can enhance their chances of engaging in institutional work. Actors' reflexivity is crucial in institutional work and based on two essential notions: their social position, and social skill. Moreover, their adherence to and experience with multiple institutional logics and fields can affect their capacity to engage in institutional work aimed at shaping their own institutional environment.

Actors' **reflexivity** is a foundational aspect of institutional work and is what differentiates institutional workers from "ordinary" change agents (Battilana et al., 2009). Their capacity to see beyond and rise above existing institutions and the cognitive constraints they impose is a core feature of institutional workers. Unequally distributed among actors (Hwang & Colyvas, 2020), reflexivity endows them with the capacity to overcome institutional constraints and engage in institutional work. Defining reflexivity, Suddaby and his co-authors (2016, p. 227) point out that "*individual reflexivity – or the ability to overcome the reified, rule-like, taken-for-granted quality of social life – arises from the interaction of two key elements of human experience; social position and social skill*". We propose to explore these two central notions of social position and social skill in the following paragraphs.

First, an actor's **social position** within the organization can facilitate their change projects (Battilana, 2006). Within an institutional field, only a limited number of high-rank positions that give the actor occupying it power, opportunities, and resources allowing them to act according to their interests and pursue change in the organization are available. These positions are "*socially constructed and legitimated identities available to actors in the field*" (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 658). Occupying such a social position is likely to equip the actor with the resources necessary to introduce change - a primordial condition for institutional work, especially from an institutional entrepreneurship lens (Battilana, 2006): the importance of disposing of sufficient resources has been pointed out in the seminal definition of institutional entrepreneurs proposed by DiMaggio (1988).

Mobilizing the financial resources necessary to implement their change project, but also other types of resources such as formal authority or social capital play a key role and can help institutional workers persuade others to support the change (Battilana et al., 2009). Social capital refers to actors' position in a network of social relations which enables them to access information and support. In this regard, occupying central positions in a field has proven to be beneficial for actors and their institutional work (Battilana et al., 2009). In this sense, seniority in tenure and in position within the organization (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006) have been pointed out as important drivers regarding the implementation of novel institutional arrangements. Gaining the support of senior political or managerial actors within the organization could thus be beneficial in the institutional work process.

Other work, however, shows that "outsiders", actors that occupy peripheral, less powerful positions, can be valuable for institutional work as well (Coule & Patmore, 2013; Garud et al., 2002; Leca et al., 2008; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Established institutional arrangements are less likely to fit their interest and needs, inciting these actors to change the status quo (Currie et al., 2012). In this case, when it is not their own social position that endows institutional workers with the power, authority, or access to resources they require, they might try to convince other actors occupying more favorable positions to endorse their project and provide these resources (Battilana et al., 2009). In the public sector, lobbies or other pressure groups in the civil society sphere could therefore still play an important role in institutional work.

Then, their skillful use rules and resources, enables actors to perform institutional work. Different types of **skills** are required depending on the type of institutional work, the desired institutional outcomes, and the stage of the process (Slager et al., 2012).

Social skill (Fligstein, 1997, 2001) is based on the extent to which actors are conscious of their institutional environment that both enables and constrains their behavior (Suddaby et al., 2016). Socially skilled actors are those who have more specialized knowledge or expertise about the institutional environment in which they operate and therefore hold worldviews which allow them to develop a broader conception of this environment (Fligstein, 1997). Since labor is often divided within an organization, the specialized knowledge actors acquire is usually related to their field of activity. Consequently, the institutional work actors engage in might not be the same depending on their knowledge and the daily work they do within the organization (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008).

Especially when studying the institutional work of heterogenous and dispersed actors within an organization or a field, this notion of varied and specialized type of institutional work is something to keep in mind. Having extensive technical knowledge about the institutions is not enough, however; to create change, institutional workers must be able to put their knowledge to use and convey their views to others to achieve legitimacy for the change – they do so by mobilizing their social skill (Suddaby et al., 2016). Thereby, they are able to frame the change in such a way that persuades others (Battilana et al., 2009). Thus, the notion of social skill is composed of two important elements: awareness and understanding of institutional structures, and the ability to induce change by initiating cooperation with others.

A second type of skills is *political skill* which “*may include strong-arm tactics used to sustain cooperation within a coalition and to keep members with private interests from diverging from the common meanings and identities that the sponsor had established earlier*” (Garud et al., 2002, p. 208). Using political skill, actors aim to alleviate contradictions in the coalition while simultaneously increasing contradictions among their opponents by pointing out the shortcomings of established institutional arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009). This includes building relationships with key stakeholders, identifying potential allies and opponents, and negotiating with powerful actors. In addition, institutional workers need to be able to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to opposition and resistance. This is especially important in contexts marked by emergent practices as well as uncertain and evolving problems, as it is the case with our research object.

To put these skills to use, institutional workers must be able to convey their ideas for institutional change to other actors. This requires *discursive skills*. Through the right discursive strategies, these change agents can communicate their project to people in their environment in order to increase its legitimacy (Battilana et al., 2009). To do so, they are required to choose the right words: the use of more or less elaborate vocabulary, adapted to the issue and the proposed alternative, as well as the audience (Alt & Craig, 2016), can facilitate their institutional work. Discursive skills include framing and

theorization. By resorting to framing, institutional workers use different frames depending on their audience's interests to "*define, justify, and push the theory and values that underpin their institutional change project, and to convince others that what will happen is in their best interests*" (Battilana & Leca, 2009, p. 265). Theorization consists of the specification of the shortcomings of existing institutional arrangements, on the one hand, and the justification of the need for new ones, on the other hand (Battilana & Leca, 2009). Theorization of new practices and roles occurs as they are being specified and abstracted in the context of the new institutional arrangements (Mena & Suddaby, 2016). Both framing and theorization require social skills and resources which can in turn be mobilized through the skillful use of discourse.

In line with Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) institutional work practices associated with creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions, where a variety of practices are required to achieve the desired institutional outcomes, a variety of skills must be mobilized simultaneously to perform institutional work. Social, political, and other types of skills contribute to actors' efforts aimed at legitimating their change projects. However, these sets of skills may be contradictory and therefore hard to reconcile (Slager et al., 2012). For instance, "*whereas social skills represent an actor's ability to motivate cooperation in other actors by providing them with common meanings and identities, political skills represent its ability to sustain cooperation when private interests force divergence from these common meanings and identities*" (Garud et al., 2002, p. 209-210). Hence, institutional workers who, firstly, possess these skill sets and, secondly, can combine them, have an advantage to perform institutional work.

Just like the organization's position at the intersection of fields can be conducive for institutional work, an **actor's embeddedness** in more than one field can be, too (Battilana et al., 2009). Being acquainted with different practices, mindsets, and logics – for example, working in a public organization after a career in the private sector -, actors are able to introduce change more easily as they are not used to only one way of thinking or doing. Hence, individuals carrying multiple institutional identities (Delmestri, 2006) can use those for purposive, reflective action, and are able to take a more insightful posture because of the different institutional influences they have been exposed to. Finally, the interrelatedness (Battilana et al., 2009) and confluence (Wijen & Ansari, 2007) of these factors and conditions must be pointed out. Different combinations of the above-mentioned field-level, organizational, and individual factors can generate different enabling or constraining conditions for institutional work. The facilitating elements at the level of the field, the organization, and the individual are summarized in table 9 below.

Figure 9. Enabling conditions for institutional work

Field-level factors	Organization-level factors	Individual-level factors
Events (Greenwood et al., 2002), crises (Battilana et al., 2009)	Status of the organization (Phillips et al. 2000; Battilana et al., 2009)	Reflexivity (Battilana et al., 2009)
Diverging logics (Battilana 2006; Battilana et al., 2009)	Situation at the intersection of fields (Battilana et al, 2009)	Social position (Battilana, 2006)
Degree of institutionalization (Battilana 2006; Greenwood et al., 2006; Battilana et al., 2009)	Organizational pattern of value commitments (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996)	Skills: social (Fligstein, 1997, 2001), political (Garud et al., 2002; Battilana et al., 2009), discursive (Battilana et al., 2009)
Social pressures (Oliver, 1992)		Embeddedness in multiple fields (Battilana et al., 2009)

(Source: author)

3.2. Actors and their institutional roles

Reflexive actors are at the core of the concept of institutional work. While a central assumption of institutionalism is that actors are shaped by institutions, the study of institutional work rests on the notion of agentic actors that are able to do purposeful and reflexive work and thereby shape institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). They look beyond institutional structures and overcome these constraints to think about and propose alternative arrangements: their reflexivity (Suddaby et al., 2016) allows them to free themselves from these structural limitations and resist, question, or challenge them as they decide which alternative is desirable (Lawrence et al., 2011). It is their reflexivity that, on the one hand, turns individuals into actors in institutional work, and that, on the other hand, ascribes them certain roles (Hwang & Colyvas, 2020). Institutions help them understand their roles in relation to others (Heaphy, 2013). We thus propose to explore in more depth the notion of **institutional roles** to better comprehend the range of actors, practices, and goals that can be involved in institutional work processes.

Institutional roles are more than descriptive labels, they are “*public identities that people take on, that shape their behavior, and that shape the responses of others to that behavior*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 213). These authors stress the importance of studying the roles of institutional workers rather than reducing their whole identity to the institutional work they do or the intentions they pursue: “*focusing on the idea of a role is helpful because it provides a way of locating the concept outside of identity, but also distinct from simply a set of activities or intentions*” (ibid., p. 209). Roles help actors make sense of the institutional environment they are embedded in, as well as of their actions, their interactions, and relations with others, and determine their access to resources and control (Heaphy, 2013). Roles also determine the range of agency with regard to the institutions that surround them: in this sense, Lawrence and Phillips (2019, p. 213) state that “*different people in communities and societies interact with institutions in different ways, with different resources and responsibilities, and different appreciations of the degree to which they can and should influence those institutions*”.

Hence, roles define certain activities and interpretations that are appropriate for certain categories of actors. When actors reliably enact their institutionalized roles, they contribute to the maintenance of their institutional environment. When they do not, opportunities for institutional change might arise - especially when actors “*disagree with, resist, or contest the attributes of the position they occupy*” (Heaphy, 2013, p. 3). This might act as a lever for individuals’ institutional work aimed at altering their institutional environment.

While institutional roles can be used to understand the positions actors occupy in institutional work processes, they are not stable characteristics. Institutional roles depend on the context actors find themselves in: they are temporally and spatially bound (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). This means that even if an actor acts as an institutional entrepreneur in one institutional work process and thereby engages in efforts aimed at

creating institutions, the same actor can also perform institutional work aimed at maintaining institutions in a different context. Or one and the same actor might play different roles in the same context: different forms of institutional work – creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions – can occur in parallel since they might be required to achieve the desired institutional outcomes. Moreover, actors might not always know how to enact their role when they are new to it, or dislike the role they play in a particular institutional context (Heaphy, 2013). It is therefore interesting for us to study institutional work in a specific and circumscribed local context to identify the institutional roles heterogeneous actors take on. We are aware of only a few recent studies that cross the notion of co-creation with institutional work, and mention actors' roles; however, they only briefly touch on the latter without explicitly studying them (see for example Bisschops & Beunen, 2019).

In the study of institutional work, emerging work has explored the institutional roles of individual actors (Ben Slimane, 2012; Delbridge & Edwards, 2008; Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Gluch & Svensson, 2018; Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Numerous roles with varying characteristics have been developed. Lawrence and Phillips (2019) propose three broad categories of institutional workers' roles – institutional entrepreneurs, institutional caretakers, and institutional troublemakers - whereby each category is associated with a dominant intention, i.e., institutional work is mostly aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions. It is most often their social position that is used to describe actors' roles in institutional work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). However, a lack of clarity and visibility persists, and there is need for a more fine-grained approach to actors' institutional roles and the associated institutional work practices and intentions.

Consequently, the need to develop a framework of actors and their roles in institutional work has been pointed out (Hwang & Colyvas, 2020). In this section, we will provide an overview of the institutional roles that scholars have explored in the institutional work literature. We aim to contribute to more conceptual clarity and suggest a framework to study actors' roles in institutional work. In this sense, we develop our second research question:

RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogeneous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

Based on past literature, we identify a set of six institutional roles that actors can take on in institutional work processes: they can be institutional entrepreneurs, opportunity creators, supporters, opponents, maintainers, and consumers. For each role, we identify main characteristics and associated institutional work practices (**sections 3.2.1. to 3.2.6.**). These six institutional roles actors can take on in institutional work are represented in table 9 below.

Table 9. Institutional roles, resources, and competencies

	INSTITUTIONAL WORK			RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES				
	Creation	Maintenance	Disruption	Power	Relations with actors within the field	Relations with actors outside the field	Discursive strategies	Leading role in institutional work
Institutional entrepreneurs	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
Opportunity creators	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-
Supporters	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-
Opponents	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Maintainers	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
Consumers	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-

(Source: author)

3.2.1. Institutional entrepreneurs

Since it is through the notion of institutional entrepreneurs that actors and agency have become central constructs in neo-institutionalism, this is the role that has so far received the most attention (we have retraced the development of the literature stream around institutional entrepreneurship in **section 1.2.4.**).

The actors occupying the role of institutional entrepreneurs are usually portrayed as **creative and inventive**, with a sense of opportunism that allows them to initiate institutional change that fits their interests (van Wijk et al., 2019). Their actions aimed at changing their institutional environment are usually successful and “**grand**” – actors taking on the role of institutional entrepreneurs engage in “dramatic battles” (Raynard et al., 2021), and not small or mundane changes (Lawrence et al., 2011). From a more moderate point of view, institutional entrepreneurs are actors who step into their role of change agents with **awareness and reflexivity** (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) as they become conscious of the institutions they are embedded in and seek to adapt their environment to fit their interests.

Consequently, they dispose of **projective capacities** that allow them to envision potential alternatives to existing institutional arrangements (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). To act accordingly and realize their vision, they require skills, resources, and power (Battilana & Leca, 2009), to which the central positions institutional entrepreneurs usually occupy give them access (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Using their **position** and their access to resources, they are then able to mobilize other actors for change by giving meaning to new institutional arrangements and connecting them to existing and therefore familiar ones (Battilana et al., 2009).

Institutional entrepreneurs are those actors who are interested in specific institutional arrangements and able to **mobilize resources** to create new ones or transform existing ones. Consequently, their role is usually associated with practices related to the creation of new institutions, as highlighted in the initial definition by DiMaggio (1988). To do so, institutional entrepreneurs resort to techniques such as framing, lobbying, or allying: they engage in “*efforts to identify political opportunities, frame issues and problems, and mobilize constituencies. By doing so, they spearhead collective attempts to infuse new beliefs, norms, and values into social structures*” (Rao et al., 2000, p. 240). Thereby, they seek to “*actively define, justify, and push the theory and values underpinning a new form*” (Rao et al., 2000, p. 243). To gain other actors’ support for the proposed institutional change, institutional entrepreneurs might also engage in political deals, or work with activist groups or other collectives of stakeholders (Maguire et al., 2004). Ultimately, through their activities, institutional entrepreneurs seek to convince others that the new institutional arrangement they propose is “appropriate and right” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 648) and should be endowed with legitimacy (Alvarez et al., 2015).

While their practices are mostly associated with institutional work aimed at creating institutions, and related activities (cf. Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) – political work, the

reconfiguration of belief systems, and changes in categorizations and boundaries of meaning systems - institutional entrepreneurs can also engage in institutional work through disruption, or in the maintenance of established institutional arrangements (Helfen & Sydow, 2013). Whether it be institutional work aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions, institutional entrepreneurs are likely to play a central role since it is often them who initiate and consequently lead – or block - institutional change (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008).

3.2.2. Opportunity creators

The opportunities institutional workers can seize to induce change are not predetermined (Alvarez et al., 2015). How do they arise? While opportunities for institutional work might be provoked by exogenous elements such as crises or jolts (Battilana et al., 2009; Greenwood et al., 2002), actors can also play a role in their emergence. Certain actors can take on the role of opportunity creators in institutional work, and thereby enable institutional entrepreneurs' undertakings. In this sense, opportunities emerge through actors' purposeful and reflexive work (Alvarez et al., 2015).

Opportunity creation hence involves actors who are **not leading institutional change** themselves; they may not even have an interest in transformational change (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). Through their actions, however, they **generate the necessary conditions** for change to occur through other actors' institutional work. Actors occupying the role of opportunity creators therefore intervene in the very early stages of the processes. These beginning stages of institutional work have yet to be studied extensively since existing literature tends to focus on the diffusion and legitimation of new institutional arrangements, and less so on the creation or detection of opportunities, or the emergence of ideas (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007).

While their role has therefore been somewhat neglected (Alvarez et al., 2015), opportunity creators play an essential part in institutional work since they provide its foundations: by pointing out the shortcomings of existing institutional arrangements and depicting change as inevitable, natural, and important (Ben Slimane, 2012), they seek to destabilize institutions. To do so, they **create a negative narrative** around these institutions and the actors associated with them and promote the emergence of new arrangements and actors (Ben Slimane, 2012). They undermine the privileged positions of dominant actors and at the same time facilitate the ascendance of new ones by creating positive scenarios around institutional change (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). To do so, opportunity creators focus on details and elements that their audience can relate to as they seek to **infuse the opportunity with meaning** (Alvarez et al., 2015).

Opportunity creators therefore mobilize discursive techniques to attempt to make space and liberate resources for the emergence of new institutions. They need to have social relations with both a large number of actors in the field to mobilize the broader public, and with specific key persons whose support is required to enable institutional change. This is important as they seek to convince a range of actors of the opportunity (Alvarez et

al., 2015). Since the practices of opportunity creators are mostly associated with delegitimizing existing institutions to make space for the emergence of new ones, and the liberation of the resources required to do so, they are most likely to engage in institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions (Ben Slimane, 2012). Then, institutional entrepreneurs or other change agents can do their work and seize the opportunities created for them to alter institutions.

3.2.3. Supporters

An important assumption of the institutional work perspective is that does not depend on only one category of actors, as it has been portrayed in institutional entrepreneurship literature before. Not only actors who initiate and lead institutional change must be considered, but also those who support them and facilitate their change project are important (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). By **providing legitimacy** for newly created organizational forms, such actors, also called subsidiary actors (DiMaggio, 1988), who can themselves benefit from the institutional entrepreneurs' change project, contribute to their institutional work.

Supporters are actors in the institutional entrepreneurs' environment that **advocate for or sympathize with the content of the institutional change** that they propose (Creed et al., 2002). Different strategies are used by institutional entrepreneurs to gain the support of allies: they might be rewarded for their support by institutional entrepreneurs, or be themselves responsible for rewarding conformity, or punishing non-conformity with the new institutional arrangement. In this regard, the important role of legal or professional authorities such as the state or professional associations is pointed out (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). For actors occupying the role of supporters in institutional work, a set of skills and resources is necessary. Having strong connections and social relations allows them to affect other actors' perception of the new institutional arrangements. When supporting actors are responsible for rewarding or sanctioning other actors' (non-) conformity with institutions, they must moreover be in a position that provides them with the necessary power and authority (Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

Support can be simple and consist of providing legitimacy for a new institutional arrangement, or more active when it takes the form of collaboration between supporters and the leaders of the institutional change. Acting as brokers (Delacour & Leca, 2017), the main active practices of supporting actors in institutional work are related to establishing connections between actors and bringing people together by highlighting shared values and perceptions through the selection of the right frames. Their institutional work moreover includes **mobilizing actors** and persuading them of the proposed institutional change. To do so, supporters benefit from being in **central positions**, since connecting and mobilizing others is harder for actors who are peripheral and therefore more isolated (Delacour & Leca, 2017). More generally, supporters seem to mobilize practices that are similar to those of institutional entrepreneurs as they seek to support them in their efforts aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

However, actors in a supporting role do not necessarily have to support the efforts of institutional entrepreneurs: in a broader understanding, they can support those who want institutional change, as well as those who do not want institutional change (Ben Slimane, 2012).

3.2.4. Opponents

Alongside those institutional workers who enable, lead, and support institutional change, are those who are in opposition. As institutional entrepreneurs seize the opportunity they detect, other actors are likely to enter the field, seeking to **undermine** the change (Alvarez et al., 2015). These actors are either not interested in the change project, it might not satisfy their needs, they might prefer to do it differently, or simply not agree with it.

Opponents, “malcontents” (Dover & Lawrence, 2010) or “antagonists” (Creed et al., 2002), might seek to delegitimize the institutional change by denying the need for change in general or more specifically for the change proposed by other actors, and highlighting its shortcomings. To discredit both the project and the involved actors, opponents develop counter-narratives to those promoted by its supporters (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

Since they object the content of the institutional change, and the goals and values it includes (Creed et al., 2002), opponents mobilize various practices of institutional work to inhibit or shape it. Just like opportunity creators seek to **delegitimize** existing institutional arrangements by engaging in negative storytelling to undermine the beliefs and ideas associated with them, opponents do so with regard to the proposed new institutions. Instead of creating an opportunity for institutional change, they seek to **alter this opportunity** to change the course of other institutional workers’ efforts (Ben Slimane, 2012). They might moreover propose an alternative that better suits their own interests, presenting their own change project as preferable to respond to issues with existing institutions (Ben Slimane, 2012). To do so, actors in the role of opponents can benefit from good relations with actors both inside and outside of the field whose support they need.

In a broader sense, actors opposed to institutions, whether they be long-standing or emerging, can be “institutional troublemakers” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) and seek to disrupt these institutions. Thereby, they are likely to “*find themselves in considerable conflict with other actors who have an interest in maintaining the status quo and who respond by undermining and even punishing actors who threaten it*” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 211). From this point of view, their role is not as much a reaction to the institutional work of others, but rather an institutional work process on its own, aimed at disrupting institutions. The resistance they face is more or less strong depending on the degree of institutionalization of the environment in which these actors operate.

3.2.5. Maintainers

Then, there are those actors who simply wish to **keep up the status quo**, and do not desire to make any changes to established institutions. These maintainers, “custodians” (Montgomery & Dacin, 2020) or “institutional caretakers” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) engage in institutional work to counter the efforts of others who seek to implement change. As opposed to the opponents described above who might want the change to take a different form, maintainers are against institutional change simply because they prefer the status quo.

While purposeful and reflexive efforts related to the maintenance of institutions have not received as much attention as the other forms of institutional work, they are just as important since not even the strongest institutions are reproduced automatically (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In this sense, the role of maintainers is not only relevant when institutions are actively threatened, but also for day-to-day maintenance to prevent disruption rather than defend institutions once disruption has occurred. It also needs *“careful effort to ensure that institutions endure, function, and live up to expectations”* which is *“much less dramatic and less obviously rewarded”* than the more visible work of institutional entrepreneurs (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 210). Actors performing this type of maintenance work have been called “janitors” or “mechanics” (Dover & Lawrence, 2010); their main occupation is to guarantee the functioning and preservation of institutions, and consequently, their intentions differ from those of other institutional workers (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

In addition to this work related to the daily maintenance of institutions, the institutional work of actors occupying the role of maintainers can take a **variety of forms** when they react to institutional change. When the status quo they wish to preserve is threatened by the institutional work of others, maintainers might seek to defend these institutional arrangements and the values, beliefs, and positions that are associated with them (Currie et al., 2012; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Wright et al., 2021). When institutional disruption has occurred, maintainers might engage in institutional work aimed at repairing arrangements that have been changed (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Raynard et al., 2021).

As they do institutional work aimed at maintaining institutions, these actors seek to **counteract opportunities for institutional change** and inhibit it (Ben Slimane, 2012). They do so by downplaying the need for institutional change and might present it as unnecessary or even dangerous. These actors can moreover resort to sanctioning actions that are not conform with existing norms and prescriptions, if they have the authority to do so (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). More subtly, they can simply monitor other actors' behavior regarding the institution in question (Dacin et al., 2010) before they decide whether more active sanctioning or reinforcement is necessary. Montgomery and Dacin (2020), highlighting the heterogeneity of institutional maintainers, observe a variety of practices these actors engage in: some might seek to spark interest in the existing institution, gather resources, and promote the arrangements they wish to maintain.

Maintainers need to mobilize internal support as they work to keep up the status quo and reinforce existing identities and beliefs by creating a positive narrative around them (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). They therefore require a social network with strong relations within their field since they seek to gain broad support for their institutional maintenance work (Ben Slimane, 2012). Insider knowledge about the institution moreover seems to be essential in order to promote its values and highlight its importance and utility (Montgomery & Dacin, 2020). Consequently, the actors that have been studied from this perspective are mostly professionals that are embedded in a field (Montgomery & Dacin, 2020), and much less so distributed and heterogenous actors in different and potentially more peripheral positions.

3.2.6. Consumers

The final institutional role we identify in the literature is that of the consumers of institutional change. This role is unlike the others mentioned above. While these actors do not actively participate in institutional change, consumers are still an essential part of the institutional work process since their adherence is important to endow new institutions with legitimacy.

Consumers provide the “**market**” for the outcomes of institutional change (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). As such, they are the “audience” targeted by institutional entrepreneurs’ efforts – however, they might not share the same interests (Creed et al., 2002). Should they not be satisfied with the new institutional arrangements, they might not accept and legitimize them. Their adherence **enables and facilitates the implementation of institutional change** initiated by the institutional work of other actors. Actors occupying this role have been depicted as “regulatees” (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018) such as public organizations affected by the decision of public authorities acting as “regulators”. While it is not them leading institutional change, they play a role in it and can constantly affect and shape the form it takes through their feedback and mobilization. By conforming or opposing, accepting or challenging the outcomes of the institutional work of others, consumers have a say in the process.

To make their voice heard, consumers can mobilize into powerful groups (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018): professional or citizen associations, or other forms of collectives such as movements can alter the course of public authorities’ institutional work by showing their approval or objection. They could engage in lobbying activities to influence decisions (Micelotta & Washington, 2013), and organize events that allow them to acquire and share knowledge about the institutional change among consumers to make informed decisions and reduce fragmentation within this group (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018). This is important since consumers might be peripheral and/or marginalized actors and might therefore neither be automatically considered in decisions (Marti & Mair, 2009) nor benefit from the outcomes of institutional work. Collective action can help to ensure that their interests are taken into account since it puts these actors in a more powerful position (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006).

3.3. Organizational forms of institutional work

We have so far discussed the diversity of actors that can be involved in institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation in a public organization which is faced with Grand Challenges. Their practices and different institutional roles have been laid out in the preceding sections, where we have developed a framework allowing us to better identify actors and roles in institutional work processes.

This wide range of actors, roles, and practices that have the potential to shape institutional dynamics leads us to question the organizational forms in which institutional work can manifest within a public organization. How does institutional work present itself at the organizational level? That is, how do the practices and roles of heterogenous institutional workers at the micro-level play together and shape the meso-level configuration of institutional work?

A form of institutional work that has been studied extensively is that performed by central and powerful actors, which is best illustrated in the institutional entrepreneurship literature (Alvarez et al., 2015). Moreover, institutional work can be performed by peripheral and marginalized actors (Creed et al., 2010), which corresponds to a more bottom-up perspective. Collective institutional work involving a set of actors with the same interests has also been the object of studies (Battilana et al., 2009). Finally, institutional work takes yet another organizational form when it includes heterogenous and distributed actors (Michel, 2020; Wijen & Ansari, 2007). We assume that in the context of co-creation, due to the plural nature of the involved actors, both collective and dispersed institutional work are most likely to occur.

In the following paragraphs, we explore these four organizational forms of institutional work roughly identified in prior institutional work literature. For each organizational form, we include characteristics of the actors performing this type of work, their respective roles, and the practices they are likely to mobilize (**sections 3.3.1. to 3.3.4.**). We moreover discuss how each organizational form of institutional work could manifest in the context of implementing co-creation in public organizations. In this sense, we develop our third research question:

RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?
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3.3.1. Central actors' institutional work

It has been explored extensively how actors in central and powerful positions within organizations perform institutional work (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018). This understanding of institutional work is associated with the notion of institutional entrepreneurship. **Institutional entrepreneurs** are frequently portrayed as actors who occupy central and

powerful positions in a field (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). As such, they have “*social influence and power to flag a potential problem, intensify interest, and catapult it to prominence*” (Ansari et al., 2013, p. 1032). Using their position, they are then able to mobilize other actors for change by infusing the institutional arrangement they propose with meaning and connecting it to existing and therefore familiar ones (Battilana et al., 2009). Moreover, they can decide – at least to a certain extent - which projects they wish to allocate resources to, and therefore prioritize those that correspond to their interests. What distinguishes these actors from others is therefore their development of projective capacities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) that enable them to visualize potential alternatives to established institutions and new ways of doing things, and act accordingly (Battilana & Leca, 2009). In contexts marked by uncertain and complex Grand Challenges, this ability is essential for institutional work.

With regard to our research context that is concerned with local public organizations, public managers (Cloutier et al., 2016) or local elected politicians are examples of this type of actors. These actors occupy central and powerful roles and are therefore able to access the resources necessary for institutional change. Generally, this form of institutional work is performed by such authorities that are “regulators” (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018). Their institutional work is most likely related to the planning or design of processes and institutional arrangements, or the communication about them. Since they find themselves having to handle institutional contradictions between established and emerging arrangements (Seo & Creed, 2002), as well as between the different actors involved in the process, central and powerful actors can mobilize a variety of institutional work practices in the process of creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions.

For the implementation of co-creation in a public organization, it is thus mainly the institutional work of central actors such as **public managers and elected politicians** that is relevant from this perspective. At the intersection of the political and operational spheres, public managers dispose of a certain amount of power regarding the implementation of new institutional arrangements but are at the same time limited by regulations and instructions coming from “above” (Cloutier et al., 2016). They are therefore not “omnipotent” institutional entrepreneurs. At the intersection of multiple social systems, should they have made different professional experiences in the past, managers are able to develop reflexivity (Delmestri, 2006). Thereby, managers are able to become aware of the institutions that affect them, and they can attempt to shape them in turn. Then, the leadership of local elected politicians is essential in the implementation of the emerging institutional arrangement of co-creation. Because of the authority that comes with their position, they are able to mobilize other actors and justify the need for institutional change. Local political leaders can use their power to push the implementation of new institutional arrangements even if resistance should arise. Often skilled communicators, they may be able to build legitimacy for their institutional project through framing, reconfiguring belief systems, or creating positive narratives around the change. However, they can also use their position to forcefully implement the new

institutional arrangements by rewarding conformity with it, and sanctioning non-conformity (Hardy & Maguire, 2017).

A perspective of institutional work focused on central actors is somewhat limited because of **sheds light on elite actors only**. This might not be sufficient to explain the institutional dynamics that occur when co-creation is implemented since the latter per definition includes other actors, too. The institutional work of supporting actors or peripheral groups of people must not be neglected since it is an integral part of co-creation which seeks to include a diversity of stakeholders (Torfing et al., 2019). Moreover, their inclusion is even more important when seeking to develop responses to Grand Challenges. This type of policy problems cannot be addressed through expert knowledge only but requires also the consideration of citizens' "profane" knowledge (Lindblom, 1959) of the problems they encounter in their daily lives. Assuming that the institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation in a public organization takes this organizational form therefore seems too reductive.

Widening the scope of the organizational form institutional work takes when mobilized to implement co-creation to respond to Grand Challenges seems important for two reasons. First, the development of responses to these complex problems requires the inclusion of a variety of ideas, experiences, and types of knowledge, and therefore of a variety of actors (George et al., 2016). Reducing institutional work to central actors or institutional entrepreneurs would therefore highly limit the organization's ability to effectively address Grand Challenges. Second, when institutional change, i.e., the implementation of co-creation, is performed by institutional entrepreneurs only, and this in an environment that is already lacking legitimacy like the public sector does (Gourbier et al., 2022), how can legitimacy and acceptability be built for both the actors and their actions? Since organizations face conflicting logics, needs, and demands when tackling Grand Challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015), and the solutions to these problems often require changes in actors' behavior (George et al., 2016), their presence during the process of response development through institutional work seems crucial.

The first organizational form of institutional work we have identified in literature is thus performed by actors in central and powerful positions.

3.3.2. Bottom-up institutional work

Research on those central actors performing institutional work has also provided insights into the actions through which other, more **peripheral actors** attempt to counter their efforts (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018). But studies concerned explicitly with the institutional work of less powerful, and/or marginalized actors remain limited. When peripheral actors' institutional work is studied, it is most often portrayed as a reaction to institutional work "done to them" by others, and therefore as defensive and aggressive (Marti & Mair, 2009). For instance, research has recently observed the defensive institutional work of former elite actors who have become displaced, and seek to disrupt the new institutions that have taken away their privileged position (Rodner et al., 2020).

Apart from studies on this relatively aggressive type of institutional work, *“little empirical research in organizational institutional theory has looked at the role of poorly resourced, less powerful, and peripheral actors, who are usually labeled as marginal actors”* (Marti & Mair, 2009, p. 96). However, the practices of actors other than institutional entrepreneurs and authorities can also be purposeful and reflexive when they are not purely reactive. Through more mundane and day-to-day actions, these actors might be able to also create new institutional arrangements (Lawrence et al., 2009). Hence, from a bottom-up perspective, institutional work directs attention to the agency of “ordinary” people and their efforts aimed at achieving certain institutional outcomes, whether it be disruption, maintenance, or creation. Agency, in this regard, is understood as *“fragmented and distributed across multiple actors and levels”* (Svensson et al., 2022, p. 3) instead of being limited to a very specific type of actors and their practices.

This widens the scope of potential “institutional workers” who can shape institutions through a variety of activities. Peripheral and/or marginalized actors **usually lack power and have only limited access to resources**. Therefore, this organizational form of institutional work differs from that of elite actors in that these actors perceive and do things differently (Marti & Mair, 2009). Their perceptions and position affect the type of activities they engage in. Instead of being limited to aggressive institutional work as a reaction to threats, the institutional work of these actors is more subtle and can take different forms. It is moreover likely to be less visible than the dramatic institutional work institutional entrepreneurs often perform.

These practices, somewhat different than those of more powerful actors, show that bottom-up institutional work done by peripheral actors is very specific, and at the same time it remains understudied. In co-creation contexts, however, these actors who are not usually at the center of policymaking and decision-processes are essential. The participation of individual or collective actors such as citizens or associations is a key component of co-creation and of the institutional work done to implement co-creation. They can play an important role in shaping both the process of implementing co-creation and the form it takes, as well as the tangible results of co-creation. It is therefore essential to understand how legitimacy and meaning ascribed to new institutional arrangements emerge bottom-up (Gray et al., 2015). Past work on the particular case of non-profit organizations has highlighted that the legitimacy of an organization which is perceived as effective in tackling Grand Challenges is likely to increase (Greve & Rao, 2012).

Hence, it is through the inclusion of these groups of the population that effectiveness regarding the treatment of Grand Challenges can be achieved (George et al., 2016), and legitimacy is ascribed to the organization and its actions regarding these issues. Since the legitimacy of both public action and authorities is precisely what poses a fundamental problem in the public sector today, it is important for public organizations not to neglect the bottom-up form of institutional work. Especially in situations where co-creation is mobilized to address Grand Challenges, the inclusion of this point-of-view is contexts since these problems are multidimensional, and the responses must be too (Marti & Mair, 2009). Incorporating this organizational form of institutional work in research on such

situations is therefore necessary, since the institutional work of peripheral actors who might not adhere to the same worldviews as central actors is key to effectively addressing Grand Challenges. Indeed, it has been pointed out that peripheral and disadvantaged local communities “*play a central role in enabling organizations (...) to address complex social problems effectively*” (Berrone et al., 2016, p. 1941) because they are directly touched by these problems. Yet, responses cannot be developed by peripheral actors alone; it requires a broader perspective of institutional work that allows to include different types of actors with different degrees of power, access to resources, and skills. The ability to respond to Grand Challenges largely depends on these elements (Berrone et al., 2016), which peripheral actors frequently do not possess, or only to a limited extent.

The second organizational form of institutional work we have identified in literature is thus performed by peripheral actors (often marginalized and/or vulnerable parts of the population) in a bottom-up manner.

3.3.3. Collective institutional work

Scholars increasingly highlight the need for coordination and collaboration of actors in the mobilization for and legitimation of institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009). In this perspective, institutional change does not rest on the work of a single institutional entrepreneur but requires collective action in the form of, for instance, collaboration, partnerships, alliances, or coalitions (Hardy & Maguire, 2013). The formation of sets of actors, such as in coalitions, facilitates the diffusion of new institutional arrangements since numerous actors were involved in its creation and the development of the meaning system associated with it (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009).

Collective institutional work is done by groups of individual or organizational actors (Maguire et al., 2004), usually from the same organization of field, who share **similar interests and/or goals**. Important for the constitution of such collectives is actors’ physical **proximity** (Farny et al., 2019), which is a reason why they tend to come from the same institutional environment. Consequently, collective institutional work is collaborative in so far as the actors involved in it are relatively **homogenous** (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). While they might have different perceptions of the ends of their institutional work or the means to achieve them, this homogeneity reduces the likelihood of conflict and disagreement within the group. This is due to them sharing an overall vision for institutional change and having “*a common logic informing their respective actions*” (Silvola & Vinnari, 2021, p. 21).

The underlying assumption of collective institutional work of homogenous actors is that actors who possess different skills perform institutional work in parallel (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008). Thereby, “*numerous, diverse, typically non-elite individuals working together to construct shared understandings, aims, and practices to execute new work routines in uncertain, ambiguous, or otherwise problematic institutional contexts*” (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016, p. 184-185). Collective institutional work is therefore usually done by actors who would not have access to power and the necessary resources to do institutional work on

their own, and therefore come together in groups so that their voice and work have more weight. While these collectives of homogenous institutional workers are not necessarily stable and might shift over time as perceptions shift (Raynard et al., 2021), its members usually form unified bodies, and their institutional work is aimed at the same desired institutional outcomes. By **joining forces**, these actors are able to use their respective positions and resources to adapt institutional arrangements to fit their interests (Hampel et al., 2017).

More specifically, the institutional work practices which these collectives of homogenous actors engage in usually include the framing of ideas to generate shared interpretations and mobilize support; the convening of other actors since they are likely not to possess all the skills required to perform the institutional change they desire and resolve the institutional problem they have identified; and the management of this multi-actor process of collaboration (Montgomery et al., 2012). Shared templates for institutional arrangements then emerge from this institutional work based on negotiation and search of compromise (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009).

The collaboration of actors in collective institutional work highlights the importance of the development of shared solutions and the generation of innovation through the combination of different sets of skills and resources (Farny et al., 2019). Consequently, collaborative strategies have been identified as necessary and efficient for the treatment of complex policy problems (Roberts, 2000). Therefore, in contexts where co-creation is implemented in an organization facing Grand Challenges, the mobilization of this type of institutional work seems essential. Since the *“social problems do not exist in any objective sense but rather are ‘named’ as a result of the collective practices that create meaning for them”* (Ansari et al., 2013, p. 1017), the collective institutional work of homogenous actors where through negotiation, problems are defined and institutional arrangements adapted to them, is an important part of responding to Grand Challenges through co-creation. It allows to account for the coalitions that form in a co-creation process to defend particular interests and goals, whether they consist of external co-creation participants like citizens or associations, or members of the organization like public managers, agents, or politicians. However, since co-creation brings together a variety of actors who do not usually collaborate in a formal manner (Schüssler et al., 2014), we suppose that rather than forming a unified body, their institutional work is naturally more dispersed and messier than depicted in research on collective institutional work (Empson et al., 2013). However, the citizens participating in co-creation might engage in collective institutional work in order to pursue their shared interests despite less favorable social positions. The power of the collective could motivate, facilitate, and sustain their institutional work (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022).

The third organizational form of institutional work we have identified in literature is thus collective and performed by homogenous actors (who pursue similar interests and are often from the same organization or field).

3.3.4. Heterogenous actors' institutional work

It is not always the case that the actors involved in a process of institutional change share similar interests: potentially, groups of individual or organizational actors with divergent motivations and perceptions collide in institutional work. Institutional work performed by such heterogenous actors has however not been studied extensively. Consequently, what is lacking in current research on institutional work is a more nuanced and complete understanding of processes where actors with divergent interests come together since we know “*very little about the tensions and difficulties to agree regarding the micro interactions with different worldviews, languages, and priorities*” (Michel, 2020, p. 317). Research on heterogenous actors' institutional work and the ways in which it shapes both the process and its outcomes is scarce since the bulk of research focuses on homogenous institutional workers (Hampel et al., 2017).

It appears that rather than naturally occurring in harmonious and organized ways as depicted by research on collective institutional work, multiple actors' efforts aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions tend to be **little coordinated and highly distributed** (Boon et al., 2019). In this sense, “*the evolution of the field is steered by emergent processes: field members meet, converse, negotiate, explore joint actions, and develop projects. They do not exercise influence as a collective body, but as a set of overlapping circles, cliques, and groups*” (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1028). Hence, rather than consisting of one clearly defined form of institutional work aimed at one clearly defined desired institutional outcome, the institutional work of heterogenous actors is “*iterative, messy and non-linear*” (Staggs et al., 2022, p. 271).

Indeed, the “patchwork” nature of institutions and institutional dynamics (Staggs et al., 2022) where diverse actors come together, each engaging in a form of institutional work, remains a black box for institutional researchers today. How these institutional workers compete for legitimacy as they promote the institutions that best fit their respective interests, and how their interactions shape the institutional work process and its outcomes, is still unclear. Paying attention to the interactions of the various types of actors that are confronted with one another in policymaking and policy implementation – public authorities, professionals, citizens, and other stakeholders – would however be useful for scholars seeking to explain these processes and their outcomes (Pemer & Skjølvik, 2018).

Institutional work of heterogenous actors is hence based on the co-existence of actors with **different perceptions** of the institutional change they desire. These actors are often **dispersed** - geographically, socially, and temporally – and their efforts are therefore distributed and independent (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016). Consequently, they do not all have the same goals, and some might support the institutional change project while others might seek to hinder or modify it (Ben Slimane, 2012). While it has been acknowledged that the legitimacy of new institutional arrangements is “*defined during a conflictual process as diverse actors vie for power*” (Silvola & Vinnari, 2021, p. 21), existing research frequently does not account for this diversity of institutional work within one and the

same process. And in studies that do explore such dispersed institutional work, the groups of actors whose effort are successful are usually those who are at the center of attention, and the failed or less successful side of institutional work is secondary (Hampel et al., 2017). When the institutional work of dispersed actors was studied, it occurred in settings that did not require them to collaborate for the implementation of institutional change (Wijen & Ansari, 2007).

However, some emerging work provides a more inclusive account of institutional work and the diversity of actors that can be involved. In this regard, Michel (2020), in her study of the development of a local alternative response to the global food system, has explored dispersed institutional work of actors including farmers, social entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations, citizens, experts, or politicians. Glimmerveen and colleagues (2020) have studied a specific form of work – boundary work – in the case of citizen engagement in a professional care facility where institutional work was performed by organizational employees and leaders, citizens, and other local actors. Investigating maintenance work in the context of French business schools' recruitment system, Raynard and her co-authors (2021) have found that a multiplicity of actors do institutional work aimed at maintaining the existing arrangement, but with different interests and goals: they include chambers of commerce, associations, the schools themselves, the ministry, the national council for higher education, other state actors, prep schools, and the wider public - alumni, political leaders, students, media, student associations. Wijen and Ansari (2007) study how dispersed actors, despite divergent interests, engage in collective institutional work with regard to global climate policy.

These studies all show that a single process of institutional work can contain a multiplicity of **actors who engage in different forms of institutional work in parallel**. They almost certainly pursue different intentions and therefore mobilize different practices of institutional work to attain their desired institutional outcomes. Therefore, different institutional workers or groups of them probably engage in different forms of institutional work in parallel as they compete for legitimacy for the institutional outcomes they desire. These actors probably promote different institutional arrangements, which might also be provisional institutions or proto-institutions meant to serve their interests for a determined period of time (Marti & Mair, 2009). Institutional work aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions hence frequently happens at the same time or during overlapping time periods (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009).

Instead of occurring in clearly distinguishable and linear phases as initially suggested by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), heterogenous actors' institutional work and the practices that constitute it includes "*multiple iterations of institutional development until a common template becomes diffused*" (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 4). As these actors negotiate, experiment, compete, and learn, they might over time develop shared understandings of both policy problems and potential solutions. However, since the institutional work of heterogenous actors tends to be marked by "**erratic dynamics**" (Boon et al., 2019), unforeseen turns are likely to occur and to lead to unintended consequences. It is therefore important to leave space for surprises and emergent events that frequently

occur in any type of institutional work, and especially so in institutional work involving heterogenous actors (Slager et al., 2012).

More so than in the other organizational forms of institutional work, the institutional work of heterogenous actors is marked by legitimacy battles. *“Efforts at shaping institutions will not go uncontested, and, therefore, these attempts can easily go awry”* (Garud et al., 2007, p. 962) because the diverse types of actors that come together – especially in a co-creation setting – do not necessarily have the same perception of what is valuable and interesting to them. Moreover, misunderstandings, conflicts, and power struggles frequently happen when heterogenous actors are confronted with one another but do not have the same background, vision, or vocabulary (Brown & Ashman, 1996). When a diversity of actors performs institutional work without an institutional entrepreneur leading the change, it might be complicated to manage and motivate them (van Wijk et al., 2013), or to keep the process going when nobody volunteers to take the lead (Wijen & Ansari, 2007).

The fourth organizational form of institutional work we have identified in literature is thus performed by heterogenous actors who pursue divergent, maybe even conflicting interests and engage in a variety of practices.

In a co-creation context, especially one that addresses Grand Challenges, we suppose that institutional work is likely to take on a dispersed form and be performed by a heterogeneity of institutional workers. It has been suggested that a shared experience of environmental threats – i.e., of Grand Challenges that affect everybody in one way or another – can spark coordinated and collective action (Haşim & Soppe, 2023). Reacting to such threats and designing and implementing long-term responses that change existing institutions moreover requires the joint action of different types of actors (Brown & Ashman, 1996) like those mentioned above.

However, in a co-creation context that is characterized by emergent events and unforeseen turns as well as a diversity of heterogenous public and private actors who do not typically collaborate, institutional work seems to be dispersed rather than performed by a unified body of coordinated actors. While it comes with challenges, dispersed institutional work done by heterogenous actors can be beneficial for the development of responses to Grand Challenges through co-creation. The collaboration of these actors can lead to novel ideas and generate unforeseen solutions (Schüssler et al., 2014), and therefore be a driver of public innovation – important to resolve Grand Challenges (Bertello et al., 2021). Moreover, since a multiplicity of actors is involved in the policymaking process, the chances of both the process and its outcomes being acceptable and legitimate in the eyes of the wider public increase (van Wijk et al., 2019).

We therefore suppose that in a context of co-creation, institutional work is most likely to take this organizational form. Institutional entrepreneurs, powerful as well as peripheral actors, homogenous and heterogenous groups of institutional workers can co-exist in one and the same institutional work process, each mobilizing a variety of practices as they

pursue their goals. Considering this diversity of institutional workers in co-creation, it is important to keep in mind the following questions when studying the form of their institutional work: “*Where are the definitions debated and decided upon? Who is able or allowed to take part in these discussions? What are the means by which voices are heard or not heard in these interactive spaces? How does power influence negotiations in interactive spaces?*” (van Wijk et al., 2019, p. 905). These questions encompass research questions 1 and 2, respectively investigating institutional work practices and the actors performing them and allow to identify the organizational form institutional work takes in our particular research context.

In this section, we continued our exploration of institutional work literature. We focused on the institutional roles actors involved in institutional work can take on as well as the conditions that can facilitate their institutional work. In this regard, most prior literature focuses on the central and powerful institutional entrepreneur seeking to create institutions while other roles and intentions are neglected. Aiming to provide a more nuanced account of institutional roles, we therefore formulated our second research question about actors’ institutional roles in the implementation of co-creation. Finally, we identified several organizational forms institutional work can take on depending on the configuration of actors, their roles and practices. We again found that most past research tends to focus on institutional work performed by central actors, and therefore formulated our third research question about the organizational forms of institutional work to better understand how it might concretize in a context of co-creation to address Grand Challenges.

This section closes chapter 2 as well as part 1 of this thesis. In the following chapter, we present the design of our empirical study.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 2

The aim of our research is to understand **how co-creation is implemented in local public organizations as they face Grand Challenges**. In this chapter, we have developed the theoretical framework to pursue this question and explore the institutional work of the heterogenous actors involved in implementing co-creation.

In **section 1**, we set the stage as we explored the bases of neo-institutional theory and retraced its evolution. It has been clarified how institutions as the “rules of the game” shape actors’ behavior, and we have distinguished between formal and informal institutions. The three pillars of institutions (Scott, 2013) that represent their different foundations have been retained as our definition of institutions. Then, we observed that institutional scholarship has over the years shifted away from a narrow vision of institutions as the rules and structures shaping actors’ behavior, and towards a more nuanced understanding of institutional dynamics. More recent neo-institutional theory allows to account for actors and their ability to shape the institutional environment they are embedded in. In this first section, the limitations of traditional neo-institutional theory with regard to our research object have thus been highlighted, before our subsequent argument for a focus on agency as much more suitable in the context of our research on the introduction of new co-creation practices.

In **section 2**, we proposed to zoom in on one of the subfields of neo-institutional theory that provide such a focus on agency: institutional work. We retraced how this perspective has emerged to address this theory’s shortcomings regarding the consideration of agency, as well as the limitations of institutional entrepreneurship, another agency-based neo-institutional approach. Indeed, we showed how institutional work pays particular attention to the process of shaping institutions of focusing on outcomes or specific “heroic” agents, which, in our research context, allows us to account for the diversity of involved actors and their institutional work. In this section, we have clarified the foundations and underlying ideas of institutional work: its relational, discursive, and material dimensions; its process-focus; and the importance it ascribes to actors’ intentions and reflexivity. This will be useful in our study of the implementation of co-creation through the institutional work of heterogenous actors as it will help us to identify why and how they engage in specific institutional work practices. In this regard, we have explored the diversity of institutional work practices that have been identified in prior literature, noticed a lack of work on micro-level dynamics involving heterogenous actors, and formulated our first research question:

RQ 1: What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

Finally, in **section 3**, we paid particular attention to the actors doing institutional work. If the diversity of institutional work practices they engage in has been the topic of the preceding section as well as of our first research question, in this section, we shifted our focus towards the diversity of actors. Indeed, we have emphasized that a variety of

heterogenous and dispersed actors are per definition involved in policy co-creation and the implementation of these new practices in a local public organization. In this regard, we have investigated the different institutional roles these actors can take on as they perform institutional work in such contexts, as well as their underlying intentions as they do so. Six roles – institutional entrepreneurs, opportunity creators, supporters, opponents, maintainers, and consumers – have been identified in prior literature and applied to our context of policy co-creation in response to Grand Challenges. Our second research question has emerged as we seek to provide a more complete and nuanced account of the institutional roles of actors involved in co-creation:

RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogenous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?

The diverse practices, actors, and roles provide the base to study the organizational forms institutional work can take as it is performed to implement co-creation practices in local public organizations. Indeed, depending on the involved actors, their intentions and subsequently their institutional work practices, institutional work can take different shapes. We have identified four organizational forms in past research: institutional work of central actors, bottom-up institutional work, collective institutional work, and institutional work of heterogenous actors. For each one of these organizational forms, we have discussed its applicability to our research object. Consequently, we have formulated our third research question to reconcile the micro- and meso-levels of institutional work and study how different configurations of roles and practices play together:

RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?

Chapter 3 will address the design of our empirical study.

CONCLUSION OF PART 1

As a reminder, in this research, we seek to understand **how heterogenous actors' institutional work shapes the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations facing Grand Challenges**. Part 1 has allowed us, first of all, to provide contextual elements, to clarify main concepts and ideas, and develop the theoretical framework in which we inscribe our study. This part is structured in two chapters.

In **chapter 1**, we have set the stage and explored the notion of Grand Challenges that represent the uncertain environment in which public organizations operate today. Based on the burgeoning literature, we have identified the challenges associated with resolving Grand Challenges and provided a set of principles for the development of effective policies. However, we have also observed that public organizations are ill-equipped for dealing with Grand Challenges, and investigated why that is, and which policymaking approaches could be beneficial to overcome these shortcomings. Co-creation of policy has emerged as the approach that appears to be the most suitable for local public organizations confronted with Grand Challenges, and we have thus dedicated the remainder of chapter 1 to a discussion of this emerging concept, its benefits and limitations, and the changes it entails.

The we argued that institutional change takes place in public organizations that seek to implement co-creation as it represents a set of new institutional arrangements. To study these dynamics of institutional change, we have chosen to mobilize neo-institutional theory as our theoretical framework. In this regard, **chapter 2** has allowed us to argue for the usefulness of neo-institutional theory and more specifically the institutional work perspective for our research. By mobilizing this framework, we aim to understand how heterogenous actors shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations as they are faced with Grand Challenges.

A thorough investigation of prior literature on these aspects of institutional work has led us to the observation that little is known about the institutional work of dispersed heterogenous actors, which is, we assume, what occurs in contexts like ours since co-creation implies the involvement of a diversity of actors. Hence, we aim to gain a better understanding of heterogenous actors' institutional work, the practices they engage in, the institutional roles they take on, and how this affects the organizational form in which institutional work manifests. Therefore, we have developed a set of three research questions in order to find answers to our main research object which is to understand study how dispersed public actors engage in co-creation and how they deploy these practices to respond to Grand Challenges in their local contexts.

To sum up, this first part has allowed us to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework to study how heterogenous actors shape the implementation of co-creation practices in local public organizations as they are faced with Grand Challenges. Part 2 concerns the empirical study of this question.

PART 2. EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CO-CREATION IN LOCAL PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN AUSTRIA AND FRANCE

In this second part of our thesis, we present the empirical study we have conducted to explore how policy co-creation is implemented in local public organizations as they are confronted with Grand Challenges.

Part 2 is structured in three chapters:

In **chapter 3**, we present the design of our research. In this regard, we explain our constructivist epistemological position and abductive mode of reasoning, as well as the choice of a multiple case study consisting of two cases. We moreover justify our methodological choices in terms of data collection and analysis, as well as the criteria used for case selection, and to ensure the scientificness of our study.

Then, **chapter 4** is dedicated to the presentation of our findings. We first present the cases we have investigated for this thesis: two local public organizations, respectively located in Austria and France, have been studied and allowed us to understand the implementation of co-creation practices in different national, administrative, and cultural contexts. Then, a section is dedicated to each of the cases to present our findings. By telling the story of the case and retracing the implementation of co-creation, we address the three research questions in parallel. Actors, their institutional roles and institutional work practices are presented throughout the section as they make their appearance, which allows to indicate the organizational forms of institutional work. This chapter is focused on the descriptive dimension of the findings, and our narrative stays close to the observed events and discourse of respondents. In doing so, we aim to increase transparency and give the reader the opportunity to challenge our analysis of findings by referring to different descriptions.

The final chapter, **chapter 5**, begins with a cross-case analysis of findings for each research question. Here, we provide an analytical and comparative presentation of similarities and differences observed across the two cases. We then propose a discussion of these findings with regard to existing literature. There, we argue how our study of institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation in contexts of Grand Challenges enriches prior literature by emphasizing our contributions at the micro-level of institutional work.

CHAPTER 3: Epistemological Position and Methodological Choices

In chapters 1 and 2, we have developed the conceptual and theoretical framework for our doctoral thesis. Now, in chapter 3, we propose to elaborate the methodological framework. We retrace how knowledge has been produced in this thesis through an empirical study of the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. This chapter allows us to clarify our posture as a researcher, explain and justify methodological choices as well as the criteria of scientificness of our research.

This chapter is structured in two sections:

Section 1 consists of a presentation and justification of our epistemological position and our mode of reasoning. Indeed, for this research, we adopt a constructivist epistemological approach, and in this first section, we present the reasons why. To do so, we first provide a brief overview of the main epistemological paradigms in management and organizational studies, as well as the issues associated with finding one's epistemological position as a junior researcher, before we explicate the constructivist paradigm which we adhere to. Then, we elaborate on the logic we have adopted to conduct this doctoral research: an abductive approach has been mobilized to carry out this qualitative study. We explain how abduction has allowed us to circumscribe our research object and identify how we would be able to enrich past research on both co-creation and institutional work. A qualitative approach, as we will show, has enabled us to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon we study in this research.

Then, in **section 2**, we describe the choices we have made from a methodological perspective. In this regard, we first provide details on our choice of a case study approach and explain what this approach consists of in the context of this particular research. The selection criteria for the two cases studied in this doctoral thesis will be laid out as well. We more specifically describe how data has been collected through a triangulation of qualitative methods. Then, we explain how we have proceeded to analyze this data through thematic content analysis. We provide details on the coding process, main codes and how they are mobilized to study our research object, as well as our coding table. Finally, we elaborate on the criteria used to ensure validity and reliability of our findings.

Section 1: Epistemological considerations

Epistemology concerns the very foundations of science: as such, it invites to think about the way in which knowledge is produced and justified. Epistemology can therefore be considered the study of the constitution of valid knowledge (Piaget, 1967). It determines the “*criteria by which we can know what does and does not constitute warranted, or scientific knowledge*” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 3). In this sense, epistemology defines the perimeter of the validity of a study.

In this section, we aim to clarify our own epistemological position for this research. Our epistemological considerations for this doctoral thesis consist of both epistemic reflections about the nature of the knowledge that is produced, as well as methodological reflections about the way in which this knowledge is produced and justified. In this section we therefore first propose a brief overview of the main epistemological paradigms mobilized by management and organization scholars: positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism. Then, with regard to our research object, we justify the choice of a constructivist approach for this research (**section 1.1.**). Finally, we elaborate on the methodological dimension of our epistemological considerations and present how the process of knowledge creation was based on an abductive and qualitative approach (**section 1.2.**).

1.1. Epistemology in management and organizational studies, and the choice of a constructivist position

When we create knowledge through research, we automatically make assumptions about the nature of knowledge and of reality itself (Sandberg, 2005). While ontology refers to the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the question of the nature of knowledge. As such, it invites us to critically reflect on our research practices, question the assumptions we as researchers hold about the notions of knowledge and reality, and to justify our choices as we seek to produce new knowledge (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

In this sense, epistemology as the theory of knowledge refers to three main questions (Sandberg, 2005, p. 48): “*First, how can individuals achieve meaning and thereby knowledge about the reality in which they live? Second, how is this knowledge constituted? Third, under what conditions can the knowledge achieved be claimed as true?* “. As we will show in the following paragraphs, the main epistemological paradigms¹⁷ answer these questions very differently. In this section, we first briefly present the three paradigms that are frequently considered to be the main epistemological approaches in management and organizational studies (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014): positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism (**section 1.1.1.**). Then, we justify our choice of a constructivist epistemological position with regard to our research object (**section 1.1.2.**).

1.1.1. The main epistemological paradigms in management and organizational studies

As Van de Ven (2007, p. 36) observes, “*many of us are practitioners – not philosophers – of science*”. Consequently, ontological and epistemological considerations, he continues, tend to be neglected, even though they are present in all research, either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, “*management research can never be isolated from epistemological commitments whose diversity lead to different possible ways of approaching and engaging with any substantive area*” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. vi). We therefore now present the three main paradigms in management and organizational studies: positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism.

1.1.1.1. Positivism

Despite the emergence of a variety of epistemological paradigms in the field of management and organizational studies, positivism is frequently presented as the dominant approach (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). Initially developed in natural sciences, positivist epistemology has since spilled over to other disciplines, in many of which it remains the dominant paradigm (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

¹⁷ Following Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) we use the term “epistemological paradigm” to refer to an epistemological framework accepted by certain research communities and consisting of foundational hypotheses and principles of the construction and justification of knowledge.

Positivist approaches are based on **objectivism and dualism**: here, it is assumed that objective reality exists independently of our knowledge about it, and the goal of science is to discover this reality behind the phenomena we can observe (Le Moigne, 1990, in David, 1999). Ideally, from a positivist point of view, knowledge corresponds to the uncovering of “laws”, independent from the context, interactions, and actors. It is moreover possible to proceed to an exhaustive description of reality. The object, i.e., reality, and subject, i.e., the observer of reality, are independent from one another (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). In this sense, the researcher is assumed to be able to investigate the research object without influencing it or being influenced by it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In this sense, following Popper, the **methods** mobilized in research based on a positivist epistemological paradigm must ensure this independence between object and subject and limit the researcher’s interference to avoid altering the nature of the object (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). Preferred methods therefore tend to be based on quantification, experiments, and statistical approaches rather than qualitative research designs, and a deductive approach aiming to falsify hypotheses is more common than an inductive one building on empirical observations (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

The **reliability** of research inscribed in a positivist epistemological paradigm is based on the repeated measurement of a phenomenon: if the same phenomenon is measured several times with the same instrument, one must obtain the same results. Moreover, it rests on the replicability of the research protocol (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). Allard-Poesi and Perret (2014) identify three **validity** criteria for positivist research: the criterion of *verifiability* means that statements, to be considered true, must be based on empirical evidence; the criterion of *conformability* is based on the assumption that a statement cannot be universally true, but only probable. The criterion of *refutability* refers to the idea that a thesis cannot be confirmed, i.e., it cannot be verified, but it can be falsified, i.e., refuted.

1.1.1.2. Interpretivism

In the field of management and organizational studies as well as in the social sciences in general, interpretivism as an epistemological paradigm has remained in the shadow of positivist research for a long time, before becoming more popular only relatively recently (Sandberg, 2005). Scholars increasingly acknowledge the value of interpretivist positions since they allow to address questions that could not adequately be answered by using traditional, i.e., positivist, approaches, and grasp them in all their complexity (Prasad & Prasad, 2002).

Interpretivist approaches “*reject the existence of an objective knowable reality*” and assume that “*knowledge is constituted through lived experience of reality*” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43). Hence, instead of striving for objective description of reality, what interpretivism is interested in are **actors’ lived experiences** of their reality. Object and subject are not seen as independent from one another, since “*within interpretive approaches, the human*

world is never a world in itself; it is always an experienced world, that is, a world that is always related to a conscious subject” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 43).

In this sense, interpretivism as an epistemological paradigm highlights the intentionality of human action, as well as the interactive, discursive, and processual nature of social practices (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). Thus, the spectrum of **methods** used in interpretivist research is broader than that of positivism and “*contemporary interpretive research refuses to play by the rules of positivism, or to be confined, policed, and disciplined by outdated notions of its limits*” (Prasad & Prasad, 2002, p. 6). Indeed, research inscribed in an interpretivist epistemological paradigm tends to mobilize more comprehensive methodological approaches aiming to understand rather than to describe reality (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). As such, “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) are frequently prioritized in interpretivist research as they are helpful in developing an understanding of actors’ reality and local meanings (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

How can interpretivist researchers justify the knowledge they claim to be true if they deny the idea of objective truth, and the criteria used in positivist research do not apply? Sandberg (2005) identifies three categories of **validity** criteria for interpretivism. *Communicative validity* can be developed through the creation of a “community of interpretation” where both sides, i.e., the researcher and study participants, are clear about their purpose and roles in the study; through dialogue in order to understand how study participants define the terms they use; through coherent interpretations of the data where “*parts (...) must fit the whole and the whole must fit the parts*” (Sandberg, 2005, p. 55); and through the discussion of findings with other researchers. *Pragmatic validity* implies testing knowledge to reduce the potential discrepancy between what people say they do and what they actually do, for example through participant observation. *Transgressive validity* means that it is essential for researchers to become aware of their taken-for-granted assumptions about their findings, which might lead them to overlook their complexity; in this sense, it is important to actively search for differences and contradictions.

These criteria show that for this epistemological paradigm, ensuring internal (rigor of the research process) rather than external validity (validity of results beyond the specific research context) is important (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). In terms of **reliability** of findings, then, researchers’ interpretive awareness is an important criterion and refers to their subjectivity in the research process, which they must consciously deal with (Sandberg, 2005).

1.1.1.3. Constructivism

The number of studies in the field of management and organizational studies adopting a constructivist epistemological position has seen a considerable rise over the years (Avenier, 2011). Striving to understand complex organizational phenomena and processes, researchers increasingly resort to constructivist approaches (Chanal et al., 2015). In this regard, constructivism resembles interpretivism, but is different in that it

emphasizes the **transformative** dimension of research and represents a shift towards action: the researcher, interacting with respondents, participates in the creation of their reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2011).

Constructivism postulates the **social construction of reality** (Berger & Luckmann, 1967): “*realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (...), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110-111). In this sense, social reality is subjective and created through social practices, actions, and interpretations. Actors’ interactions, embedded in particular social contexts and based on their respective intentions, give rise to such interpretations which may be shared and generate consensus among a group (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014); however, these social constructions are not absolutely “true” but can only be more or less informed or sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Proposing a radical approach to constructivism, Von Glasersfeld (2001) even speaks of the “invention of reality” which only exists through actors and their actions.

If positivism is marked by an objectivist and dualist (subject and object are independent) worldview, the opposite can be said about constructivism: here, a **transactional and subjectivist** understanding of reality and of knowledge creation can be observed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Independence of subject and object is impossible; this is due to the fact that reality is constructed through the actions of those experiencing it (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). Consequently, from a constructivist point of view, object and subject are interactively linked and findings are created as the research process takes place (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge therefore does not exist *a priori* but is created; following Piaget, knowledge can therefore be understood as a process and a result at the same time (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

In research mobilizing a constructivist epistemological approach, knowledge is created through the interactions of the researcher and respondents. Therefore, the **methods** used in constructivist studies must be adapted to this postulate. Overall, the constructivist paradigm is based on hermeneutic and dialectic methodological approaches that allow to reconstruct and understand actors’ realities: in this regard, constructivism invites to apply methodological approaches allowing for deep interaction between the researcher and the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A wide array of both quantitative and qualitative methods can be mobilized (Avenier, 2011): action research (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014) in particular emphasizes the transformative nature of research which is a foundational assumption of constructivism.

Regarding **validity** criteria, Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1994) identify two sets of criteria. *Trustworthiness* criteria (resembling the validity criteria used in positivism), judging the rigor of the research, can be declined into credibility (resembling internal validity), transferability (resembling external validity), dependability (resembling reliability), and conformability (resembling objectivity); and *authenticity* criteria, judging the process and outcomes of research, include fairness, as well as ontological (broadens personal

constructions), educational (enhances understanding of the constructions of others), catalytic (motivates to act), and tactical authenticity (empowers action). Moreover, the *actionability* of knowledge has been suggested as a criterion (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014) and in this sense, following Von Glasersfeld (2001), knowledge is valid if it corresponds to a given situation. Finally, the *teachability* of knowledge where the researcher must make the created knowledge accessible to others and be careful to explain in detail the ends to which this knowledge has been created (Le Moigne, 1995, in Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014).

1.1.2. The choice of a constructivist epistemological position

Among the three main epistemological paradigms in management and organizational study, we adopt a constructivist approach in this doctoral research. Indeed, we assume that **reality is socially constructed**. In this regard, we adhere to a **non-essentialist** point of view, rejecting the idea that reality exists independently, and take a **relativist** stance, whereby knowledge is perceived as relative and never absolutely true (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). We understand that the social context in which reality is constructed and knowledge created plays an important role in the research process. To account for contextual elements, we mobilize a qualitative methodological approach, as we argue later in this chapter (**section 2**). First, in this section, we elaborate on the personal and theoretical elements that motivated the choice of a constructivist approach.

1.1.2.1. Personal sources of influence

Asking how a young researcher's epistemological position emerges, Baumard (1997) identifies three sources of influence: (1) the epistemological paradigm established in the research **field**; (2) the personality and epistemological position of the **supervisor**; (3) and the interactions within the scientific **community** in which the research is conducted. In the same vein, Carmouze (2020) stresses the collective nature of a young researcher's epistemological position.

We inscribe our research, as stated previously, in the **field** of management and organizational studies, but more specifically also in the field of public management and public administration. In management and organizational studies, as we have shown in the first section of this chapter, a paradigm shift from positivism towards interpretivism and constructivism has been observed over the past decades. Epistemological paradigms rejecting objectivism and essentialism are thus increasingly acknowledged and mobilized by researchers in this field, making them veritable alternatives to positivism (Avenier, 2010). The field of public management and public administration, however, seems to move in a different direction. Quantitative methods and mathematical modeling – approaches resembling those used in natural sciences – are increasingly applied by scholars in this field as they seek to enhance its scientificness (Raadschelders, 2011). Yet, several important considerations invite to mobilize interpretivist or constructivist approaches in studies in this field (Raadschelders, 2011): first, public management

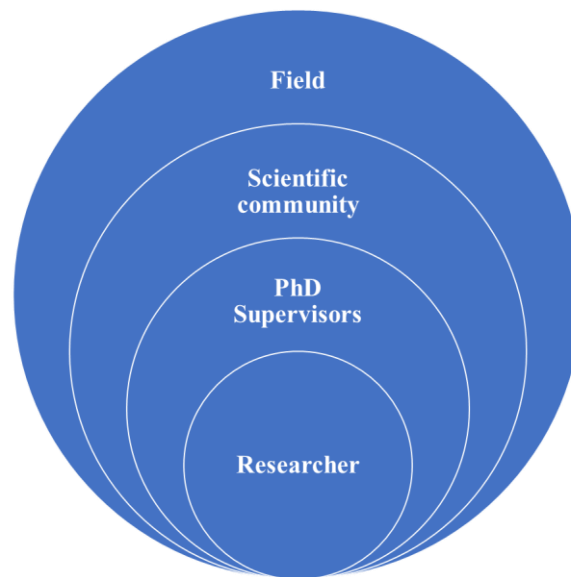
research is usually embedded in a specific national and/or local context, which scholars must account for. Then, as it is the case in our own research, public organizations are increasingly confronted with complex problems – Grand Challenges – that are unique and unpredictable, and therefore require to be studied in all their complexity, instead of being simplified or quantified. Moreover, the link between theory and practice, emphasized by the transformative nature of constructivism, is especially flagrant in this field where research frequently emerges from practitioners' demand and concrete policy problems. In sum, the fields we inscribe our research in are marked by the parallel existence of a variety of epistemological paradigms, with constructivism being an increasingly acknowledged possibility, especially in complex research contexts requiring comprehensive approaches.

Then, our own epistemological choices are most certainly affected by those of the more experienced researchers we work with, and especially our **supervisors**. In this regard, our supervisors Solange Hernandez and Sarah Serval respectively adhere to a moderate positivist (Hernandez, 2006), and an interpretivist approach (Serval, 2015), which gave us the opportunity to discover and consider different approaches for our own research. Provided with the liberty to choose the epistemological approach that best suited our mode of reasoning, and with regard to both our research object and personal preferences, we chose to adhere to a constructivist worldview for our doctoral research.

Finally, the interactions with the scientific **community** our research is embedded in also shape our position. This community, at the most "local" and immediate level, consists of fellow researchers and PhD candidates at the Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance (IMPGT) who we interact with at a regular basis. At IMPGT, the spectrum of epistemological positions is broad and covers amended/moderate positivism, pragmatism following Dewey, as well as interpretivism and constructivism. The same can be said about our broader academic environment including the CERGAM research center which we as a member of the public management axis are part of. Once more, this variety of epistemological positions comforted us in the choice of our own.

While these three sources of influence (represented in figure 11 below) have certainly had an impact on the choice of the epistemological paradigm mobilized in this doctoral research, we have also shown in these paragraphs that our environment did not constrain us in our choice or provide a clear line to follow. As we will show in the following paragraphs, our conceptual and theoretical framework provided the necessary arguments to comfort us in the choice of our own epistemological position.

Figure 10. Sources of influence affecting the researcher's epistemological position



(Source: author, adapted from Baumard, 1997)

1.1.2.2. Conceptual and theoretical considerations

Constructivism rejects the essentialist idea of reality existing independently. Rather, from a constructivist point-of view, social reality is specific and contingent, depending on temporally and spatially embedded norms, values, and conventions (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). In this sense, three dimensions characterize the constructivist worldview: it consists of **intentional, signifying, and symbolic dimensions**. Allard-Poesi and Perret (2014) explain that while the intentional dimension emphasizes that human behavior is guided by awareness and reflexivity, the signifying and symbolic dimensions are associated with the role representations and language play in the construction of meaning. Together, the three dimensions invite us to “*give an essential place to the subjectivity of actors, by focusing on the meaning that individuals attach to actions and situations. In this sense, social reality is contingent on the representations actors make of it, and on the language they use to express and share these representations*” (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014, p. 25). We will show in this section how these underlying ideas resemble those of neo-institutional theory and especially the institutional work perspective, and how the choice of a constructivist epistemology has thus come naturally to us from a conceptual and theoretical point of view.

We follow Suddaby et al. (2013, p. 338) and assume that “*the central objects of our research—institutions and organizations—are social constructions*”. In this sense, social constructivism and its underlying ideas constitute one of the foundations of recent neo-institutional theory in general (Suddaby et al., 2013), and of the institutional work perspective more specifically (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Indeed, Suddaby et al. (2013,

2016) argue that the pillars on which recent subfields of neo-institutional theory rest are also those on which Berger and Luckmann (1967) have founded their notion of the social construction of reality: in this sense, *“social order (i.e. institutions) emerges from the processes by which individuals interact, assign meaning to those interactions and then share those meanings collectively as “typical” categories of action (Berger & Luckman, 1967)”* (Suddaby et al., 2016, p. 227).

In neo-institutional theory, these ideas - the focus on “what actors do”, their shared cognitions, and the role of language in creating shared meanings - manifest as follows, according to Suddaby et al. (2013). “What actors do” refers to the recent neo-institutional focus on **behavioral processes**, not outcomes. This is especially evident in the study of institutional work, where institutions are seen as contingent structures that are emergent and shaped through the various institutional work practices of actors. The focus is here clearly on actors, their intentions, and the practices they engage in to pursue their intentions, rather than on the actual outcomes of their actions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Then, both social constructivism and neo-institutional theory pay particular attention to **individual level cognition and emotions**, not macro-level expectations. How actors develop meaning around something, and how this meaning can come to be shared among members of a group, are central issues. By zooming in on actors, their institutional roles and institutional work practices, we seek to study precisely this in our own research. Finally, the **role of language** in constructing shared meanings and thereby constructing organizational reality. This assumption builds on the idea that *“agreements about truth may be the subject of community negotiations regarding what will be accepted as truth”* (Lincoln and Guba, 2011, p. 177). In neo-institutional theory, the role of language has been studied from different angles: research has investigated how rhetorical strategies are used to legitimize or contest new organizational forms (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), or how texts are mobilized to disrupt taken-for-granted practices (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). In this sense, rules, knowledge structures, and institutions are constituted by language; it does not only reflect, but shape reality (Suddaby et al., 2013).

Considering these elements allows to show the usefulness of adopting a constructivist approach to study institutional dynamics and especially the role of actors in this regard. Our choice of a constructivist approach is reinforced by its **democratic ambition** (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). In a constructivist understanding, research can and should be used to emancipate, empower, and include those who tend to be marginalized and excluded (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). By studying the institutional work practices not only of central and powerful, but also peripheral, marginalized and/or vulnerable actors, and thereby accounting for the heterogenous and distributed nature of institutional work, we seek to do precisely that in this doctoral thesis. We propose that developing a more nuanced understanding of institutional work would not only further research on institutional work which has so far neglected its dispersed dimension (Hampel et al., 2017). But it could also provide practitioners with clues for enhancing the inclusiveness of co-creation processes as they widen the spectrum of participants.

In this regard, we fully adhere to the **transformative vision** of the constructivist epistemological paradigm which prioritizes strong links between theory and practice, between the researcher and respondents, and assumes that the researcher affects the research object, merely because of their presence and interactions with actors in the field (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2011). As Dover and Lawrence (2010, p. 313) point out, only *stating* that institutional work is interested in actors and their lived experiences is not enough, but the researcher must actually “*get up close and personal*’, to *observe and engage with the day-to-day realities of individuals and organizations to understand how patterns of thinking and acting are created, maintained and disrupted*”. They moreover insist of “*the importance of tacit, local knowledge, the coupledness of action and insight, and the role of research in social change*” (ibid.). Through extensive observation periods consisting mainly of non-participant, but partially also of participant observation, we have attempted to do that and get “*up close and personal*” in order to develop an understanding of both the respective local context where co-creation took place, and the involved actors and their institutional work practices. By doing so, we hope to generate research that has an actual impact on the community in both a local and a broader, an operational and an academic sense. The following sections of this chapter will allow us to further elaborate on our methodological approach and the choices that have enabled us to delve deep into the local contexts of the co-creation processes we studied.

1.2. Abductive reasoning and a qualitative research approach

If the preceding section was concerned with questions about the nature of knowledge – how can knowledge be achieved, how is it constituted, and when can it be considered true? (Sandberg, 2005) – this section is dedicated to the methodological aspect of knowledge creation. After having clarified our epistemological position, the question treated in this section concerns the nature of the research process. Charreire-Petit and Durieux (2014) distinguish two paths leading to knowledge creation: testing and exploring. According to these authors, testing consists of providing explanations through the evaluation of the pertinence of a hypothesis or a model. In other words, testing confronts *a priori* assumptions with reality. Exploring, on the other hand, is aimed at generating new knowledge by making new theoretical connections or introducing new concepts. Consequently, exploration is associated with inductive or abductive modes of reasoning, while testing is based on deduction (Charreire Petit & Durieux, 2014).

Studying policy co-creation, an emerging approach in the public sector where strong theoretical foundations and empirical evidence have yet to be produced (Ansell & Torfing, 2021b; Jo & Nabatchi, 2021; Nabatchi et al., 2017), the path we take in this doctoral thesis is **exploration**. In this regard, we argue in this section why we adopt an abductive mode of reasoning (**section 1.2.1.**), and explain our choice of a qualitative approach, given our epistemological considerations (**section 1.2.2.**).

1.2.1. An abductive mode of reasoning

We have stated that the path of knowledge creation we follow in our research is exploratory since the phenomenon we investigate is relatively new and not yet mainstream in the public sector (Ansell & Torfing, 2021a). As it is impossible to base our research on prior theoretical knowledge only, we have “*initially mobilized concepts and integrated the literature concerning [our] research object*”, drawing “*on this knowledge to give meaning to [our] empirical observations, by frequently going back and forth between the empirical material gathered and the theory*” (Charreire Petit & Durieux, 2014, p. 93).

Consisting of this constant back-and-forth between observations and theoretical knowledge throughout the entire research process, our exploration can be considered **hybrid** (Charreire Petit & Durieux, 2014). As such, it allows to enrich knowledge produced through past research, and enables the researcher to “ground” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) their theoretical considerations in the collected data, and to be rigorous “*without sacrificing the creative process of novel theorizing*” (Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2021, p. 20).

In this case, the mode of reasoning is **abductive** (David, 1999). Besides deduction and induction, abduction is one the modes of reasoning that can guide research designs (Charreire Petit & Durieux, 2014). These three modes of reasoning differ in their

understanding of the order in which rules, cases, and consequences interact and lead to the production of scientific knowledge. David (1999, p. 3) explains: “*Deduction (ABC) consists in drawing a consequence (C) from a general rule (A) and an empirical observation (B). Induction corresponds to the permutation BCA: it consists in finding a general rule that could account for the consequence if the empirical observation were true. Abduction corresponds to the ACB permutation: it consists in developing an empirical observation that links a general rule to a consequence, i.e. that allows us to find the consequence if the general rule is true*”. Thus, deduction seeks to generate consequences, while induction and abduction respectively seek to develop general rules, and hypotheses (David, 1999). As mentioned above, our mode of reasoning in this doctoral research is abductive.

Abduction is a frequently used mode of reasoning in our field of management and organizational studies, as Charreire Petit and Durieux (2014, p. 80) observe: “*The management researcher most often proceeds by abduction or adduction. In fact, the researcher often explores a complex context, full of numerous observations of various kinds, which are at first glance ambiguous. They will then attempt to structure their system of observations to produce meaning. In the social sciences, the aim is not really to produce universal laws, but rather to propose new, valid, and robust theoretical conceptualizations, rigorously elaborated. The researcher then proceeds by abduction (a term used by Eco, 1990) or adduction (a term used by Blaug, 1982)*”. David (1999), following Peirce, emphasizes that abduction is the only mode of reasoning that has the ability to generate new ideas, and thereby create new knowledge. As such, abduction merely points to new possibilities: “*Deduction proves that something must be; Induction shows that something actually is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something may be*” (Peirce, 1931, cited by Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2021, p. 3).

An abductive research design consists in “*drawing conclusions from observation, which must then be tested and discussed*” (Koenig, 1993: 7)” (Charreire Petit & Durieux, 2014, p. 81). To this end, the researcher proceeds in **successive loops** between empirical observations in the field and theory; through this constant back-and-forth that spans over the entire research process, new theoretical frameworks can be introduced, or existing ones completed and advanced (Dumez, 2012).

As Kistruck and Slade Shantz (2021, p. 3) point out, abduction can be especially interesting for researchers studying Grand Challenges since it “*allows for greater creativity and imagination in the generation of ‘hunches’ from a body of incomplete knowledge*”. Knowledge about Grand Challenges, as we have established in chapter 1, is always incomplete. Abduction allows to uncover the particularities of a Grand Challenge over time and adapt as it evolves. By constantly confronting data with theory and alternating between existing research and empirical observations, researchers can both better understand the Grand Challenge in itself, and the practices actors engage in to address it. In this sense, “*given that the ‘solutions’ or ‘ideas’ needed to solve grand challenges remain largely unknown at the present time, abduction offers an imaginative and iterative approach to inquiry whereby promising paths can become clearer through each incremental action and reflection on beliefs*” (Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2021, p. 4). Thus,

we argue, abduction is a valuable approach not only for researchers studying Grand Challenges in themselves, but also for researchers like ourselves who study how actors tackle these problems and implement novel approaches to do so.

As established above, in abductive research, knowledge creation cannot be separated from the research process itself; it is therefore all the more important to be able to retrace this process and the emergence of findings (Avenier & Cajaiba, 2012). The following vignette¹⁸ as well as figure 11 briefly retrace our own abductive research process and illustrate the loops and back-and-forth between theory (*represented in the figure by yellow squares*) and field work (*represented in the figure by blue squares*). Laying out this **personal journey** allows to show the abductive mode of reasoning adopted for this doctoral research, and to critically reflect on this process. It also shows the development of our research object (*represented in the figure by green circles*) which, typical for constructivist research, “forms progressively step by step during data collection and analysis” (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014b, p. 186).

*As shown in the timeline below, the abductive process guiding our doctoral research has started well **before the PhD** journey. For my Master’s thesis at IMPGT in 2019/2020, I decided to work on citizen participation in local public organizations. Sarah Serval, my supervisor for my **Master’s thesis**, offered me an internship with the French team working on the **WP04 of the H2020 COGOV project**¹⁹, which she and other colleagues of IMPGT were a part of. Thus, in February of 2020, I started working on the French case for the COGOV project and was able to mobilize this data for my Master’s thesis as well. My participation in this research project allowed me to discover the concept of co-creation from a theoretical perspective through a first exploration of this literature, and in practice, through the co-creation experiment conducted with the town of Vitrolles. While the actual co-creation workshops had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to conduct several interviews with local actors in early 2020, which provided first insights and the data for my Master’s thesis. After defending my Master’s thesis in July 2020 (title: “Co-construction of public services as a form of local public innovation. An exploratory study on drivers and barriers of the adoption process”), I decided to pursue a PhD at IMPGT to further study citizen participation in local public organizations. With my supervisors – Solange Hernandez and Sarah Serval – we began working on the initial research question (version 1 – July 2020): *How are policy co-construction practices, aimed at resolving wicked problems, implemented by local public organizations?**

*The **first year of my PhD** mainly consisted of an exploration of the literature surrounding these notions, which has ultimately led me to modifying the concepts and theoretical*

¹⁸ Since these paragraphs contain the researcher’s personal background and story, we have decided to visually separate it from the remainder of this section through a vignette.

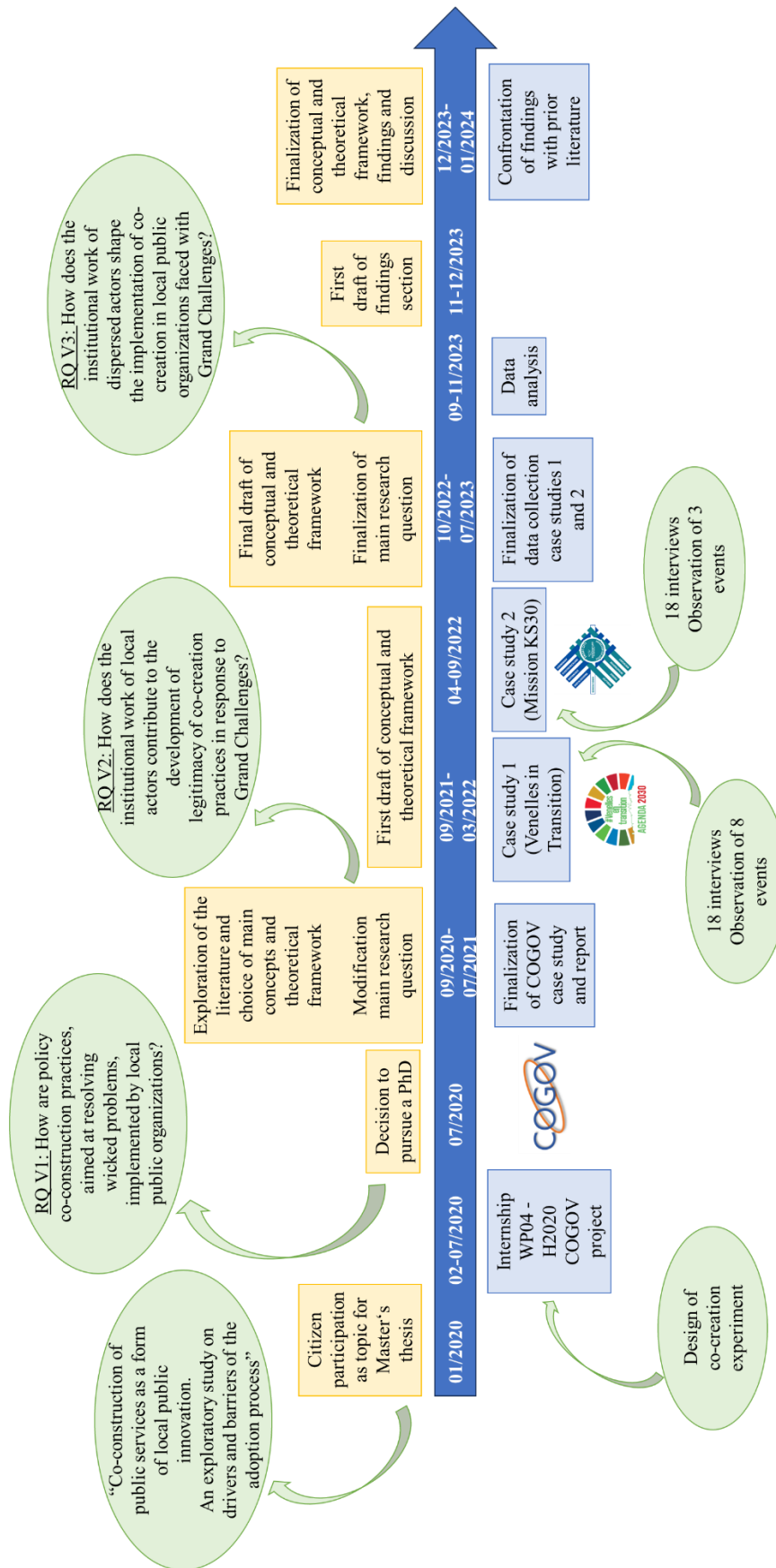
¹⁹ The COGOV project (2018-2022) researched the transformation of European public administrations into open, innovative and collaborative spaces. WP04 more specifically studied the strategic transformation of local governments and other public agencies into arenas for co-creation. The project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770591. For more information on the project, deliverables, and related publications see <http://cogov.eu/>

frameworks guiding my doctoral research (co-creation rather than co-construction; institutional work rather than institutional entrepreneurship) and consequently the main research question (version 2 – July 2021): How does the institutional work of local actors contribute to the development of legitimacy of co-creation practices in response to Grand Challenges? At the same time, we were able to wrap up the COGOV case study and case study report, which has provided further insights for my own research.

*After a first year dedicated to a review of the literature, the beginning of the **second year of my PhD** was marked by field work: the co-creation project “Venelles in Transition” was launched in September 2021 and became our first case study. Data collection took place mainly until the end of 2021, which allowed me to delve back into a literature review until the start of the second case study “Mission KS30” in the spring of 2022. Data collection for both case studies was finalized in the fall of 2022, and I returned to the literature to work on the final draft of the conceptual and theoretical framework of my doctoral thesis during the **third year of my PhD**. At this point, mobilizing both our theoretical perspective and the collected data in several **papers and publications** has allowed me to familiarize myself with the data, and develop first insights into potential findings. By the summer of 2023, the main research question (version 3 – July 2023) was modified again to fit the revised research object that was now stabilized after several loops between literature and field work: How does the institutional work of heterogenous actors shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations faced with Grand Challenges? The **fourth and final year of my PhD** journey began with the development of a coding table to analyze the data and produce first insights into my findings. After a confrontation of these findings with my conceptual and theoretical framework, I finalized both the theoretical and empirical parts of my doctoral thesis in early 2024.*

This process is illustrated in figure 11 below with the yellow cases representing work on our conceptual and theoretical framework, and the blue cases representing field work. The timeline shows the multiple loops between literature and data collection that have occurred between 2020 and 2024, and that have allowed us to stabilize our research object over time by constantly building on theoretical and empirical insights.

Figure 11. Abductive research process



(Source: author)

1.2.2. A qualitative approach

We have so far established our epistemological position, where we opt for a constructivist approach, and argued for abduction as our mode of reasoning in this doctoral research; how we perceive knowledge creation and how we access this process to generate findings has thereby been clarified. Now, we are confronted with the empirical dimension of our study, and the question of data collection and analysis. In this regard, we are presented with the choice between a quantitative and a qualitative research design (Baumard & Ibert, 2014). Given the nature of our research object that seeks to understand how actors shape the implementation of co-creation in their local settings, the choice of a **qualitative approach** seems evident.

Generally, the “omnibus term” qualitative research refers to research designs that consist of non-quantitative – that is, non-statistical – data collection and analysis methods (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). Consequently, qualitative research is suitable for research that aims to “*study a real-world setting, discover how people cope and thrive in that setting—and capture the contextual richness of people’s everyday lives*” (Yin, 2011, p. 3-4) since it allows to “*conduct in-depth studies about a broad array of topics*” (ibid., p. 6). While it usually does not allow for generalization of findings, qualitative research rather aims to construct new notions or develop and enrich existing ones by applying them to new contexts (Baumard & Ibert, 2014).

If we consider the features of qualitative research identified by Yin (2011), we can observe that this approach perfectly aligns with our research object and the aims of our study. These features are the ability to study the **meaning** of actors’ lives; the ability to represent **different actors’ views**; the ability to account for **contextual factors**; the development of insights into **emerging theoretical or conceptual notions**; and the use of **multiple data sources**. In this sense, a qualitative approach fits our constructivist epistemological position since it gives us the opportunity to uncover multiple realities and interact with the different actors involved in the phenomenon we study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). More than a quantitative approach, it is compatible with a certain degree of involvement and subjectivity of the researcher (Baumard & Ibert, 2014), which is inherent to a constructivist position.

Importantly, the flexibility of a qualitative research design as opposed to a quantitative one (Baumard & Ibert, 2014) allows to continuously adapt to unexpected events and to integrate surprising insights and alternative explanations. Especially in a research context like ours, which is marked by the uncertainty of Grand Challenges and depending on individual perceptions and interpretations of these issues, the ability to modify the research design to fit the situation is essential (Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2021).

However, and despite these merits, qualitative research is frequently criticized for its supposed incapability to provide extensive evidence for its assertions (see for example Bryman, 1988). Since qualitative approaches become somewhat “mainstream” in management and organizational studies today, strategies to justify the rigor and validity

of such studies have been suggested (Yin, 2011). We propose to come back to this issue at the end of this chapter where we provide the set of criteria used to ensure the validity and reliability of our own study (**section 2.4.**). First, we will elaborate on the methods mobilized to collect and subsequently analyse the data for our study.

In this section, we justified the choice of our epistemological position: constructivism. Both personal sources of influence and theoretical considerations were explained. Then, we presented abduction as the mode of reasoning we followed in this research as we went back and forth between literature and field work. Our own abductive journey throughout our doctorate and before was retraced. Finally, we explained why we chose to conduct a qualitative empirical study.

In the following section, we present our methodological approach.

Section 2: Methodological considerations

From a methodological point of view, a qualitative approach is more heuristic than a quantitative one and allows for the researcher to choose among a wide variety of methods. Ranging from action research (Lewin, 1946), to ethnography (Geertz, 1973), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), phenomenological studies (Van Manen, 2016), or case studies (Yin, 2009a), the spectrum of qualitative methods is broad. Consequently, we deem it necessary to clarify our own approach and provide details on our choice of data collection and data analysis methods.

We begin this section by explaining our choice of a case study approach (**section 2.1.**). Here, we argue for the usefulness of this method for our study and clarify the form it takes with regard to our research object, and the criteria used to select our two cases. Then, we provide details on the data collection methods used in this doctoral research (**section 2.2.**). Through a triangulation of multiple qualitative methods – interviews, observation, and the analysis of secondary data – we aimed to understand the implementation of co-creation practices in local public organizations. We moreover explain the techniques used to assemble the sample of respondents who represented the variety of actors involved in each co-creation project. After explaining data collection methods, we move on to data analysis and explain the methods we resorted to in this regard (**section 2.3.**). Here, we elaborate on the content analysis process as well as the coding techniques applied to do so. Finally, given our previous epistemological considerations, the set of criteria used to ensure the scientificness of our findings are presented (**section 2.4.**).

2.1. A case study approach to understand the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations

Among the many possibilities that are available to qualitative researchers, we made the choice to conduct a case study to better understand our research object. After explaining the principles of the case study approach as well as its usefulness for our research (**section 2.1.1.**), we elaborate on the form it takes in this study: a holistic multiple case study has been designed to address our research object (**section 2.1.2.**). Finally, we elaborate on the way in which our two cases have been selected and the criteria that have been applied to do so (**section 2.1.3.**).

2.1.1. The choice of a case study approach

As Stake (2000, p. 345) points out, “*case studies have become one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry*”. Case studies are “*rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon*” and usually based on multiple data sources (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). They are used in a variety of disciplines in the social sciences and beyond, and mobilized to study all kinds of different situations (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). While the application of this method might therefore vary from one study to the next, what they share is the “*desire to understand complex social phenomena*” (Yin, 2009a, p. 4).

To begin with, it seems necessary to clarify what we mean by the “case” that is studied through a case study. A **case** or unit of analysis is an integrated and bounded system (Stake, 1995, 2000): it has boundaries, working parts, and purposes. As such, can be a person, a group, an organization, a relationship, an event, a process, a problem or any other entity (Langley & Royer, 2006). A case study approach allows to pay attention to the details of the case, and the context in which it is situated. Case studies can consist of one or more cases, as well as multiple levels of analysis; moreover, case studies can be embedded, meaning that multiple levels of analysis can exist within a single study (Yin, 2009a).

The choice of a case study approach is aligned with our **constructivist epistemological position** where we seek to understand actors’ construction and perception of reality in their particular local context. Indeed, conducting a case study allows us to do so since it is “*a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings*” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). As such, case studies are idiographic (Langley & Royer, 2006) in that they are aimed at an in-depth analysis of the particularities of the selected case(s). They allow to grasp the complexity of each case and take into consideration the variety of elements that shape the phenomenon in its local context. Also in line with a constructivist perspective that assumes interaction between the object and subject of research, a case study “*is a product that emerges from the interaction between a*

researcher and a research site” (Langley & Royer, 2006, p. 86), and can therefore not be separated from the researcher conducting the study. Finally, case studies can be used to pursue different aims. Besides building (Eisenhardt, 1989) or testing (Yin, 2009a) theory, case studies can be aimed at describing a phenomenon in a specific setting and understanding multiple social realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Again, given our constructivist approach, we pursue this last aim, as we seek to understand the realities of the actors involved in each case.

In this sense, it has been pointed out that case study research is valuable for studies asking “**why**” or “**how**” a phenomenon occurs, especially in unexplored areas (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) and to understand said phenomenon in depth by accounting for all its complexity (Yin, 2009a). Indeed, through our exploratory study, we seek to understand how heterogeneous actors shape the implementation of co-creation in their local public organizations – in this regard, a case study approach seems more than relevant to address our research object since “*a well-known use of the case study is to conduct an exploratory inquiry*” (Yin, 1992, p. 124). Moreover, case study research has the advantage of being **flexible**: the research design can be adapted as the phenomenon evolves (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is especially important in contexts marked by uncertainty, as it is the case with our research revolving around Grand Challenges and the emerging practices of co-creation.

Finally, we want to address some of the **criticisms** case study research is frequently confronted with. First, the question of the lack of rigor which case studies are often criticized for (Yin, 2009a) will be addressed at the end of this chapter (**section 2.4.**) where we explain the set of criteria used to evaluate the scientificness of our findings generated through a case study. By doing so, we aim to show that a case study can produce valid and scientifically sound results, if conducted with the necessary rigor. Then, another critique that is often pronounced with regard to a case study approach is the assumed lack of generalizability – a criticism qualitative research in general tends to receive (Gioia et al., 2013). Yet, as Eisenhardt (1989) and others argue, case studies do lend themselves to the development of theories, and findings can be generalized in this way. Gioia et al. (2013, p. 24) even state that it is “of course” possible to generalize from case studies “*if the case generates concepts or principles with obvious relevance to some other domain*”. Regarding this point, we emphasize that in a constructivist manner, we do not seek to provide general assumptions or universal “laws” but to develop hypotheses as we advance in our abductive research process. Studying an emerging concept – co-creation – we adopt an exploratory stance, as argued in **section 1.2.** of this chapter and seek to understand the intricacies of this notion rather than developing generalizations.

2.1.2. The design of a holistic multiple case study

Not all case studies are created equal – the researcher mobilizing such an approach is confronted with several decisions to make regarding the research design of the case study. Case studies can pursue different aims, and be designed in different ways to best

achieve these aims and address the respective research object. The following paragraphs will help us explain the research design adopted for our doctoral thesis where we mobilize a **holistic multiple case study**.

2.1.2.1. A multiple case study to investigate two co-creation projects in different national contexts

Case study research includes studies of single as well as of multiple cases. Case studies can indeed “*cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of ‘cross-case’ conclusions*” (Yin, 2009a, p. 20). Different approaches exist regarding the number of cases that make up a case study: while Stake (2000) proposes the intrinsic single-case study, Eisenhardt (1989) argues for the use of multiple cases to build theory, and Yin (2009a, 2011), as mentioned above, presents us with different possibilities. Both longitudinal single-case studies and multiple case studies seeking to explain phenomena are frequently used in the field of management and organizational studies (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014b).

The first choice to be made is between a single and a multiple case research design. To investigate the implementation of co-creation practices in local public organizations embedded in different national contexts, we opted for the latter and conducted a **multiple case study**. For each case we study, we also take into account the particular context it occurs in. The cases or units of analysis in our research are clearly delimited co-creation projects conducted by local public organizations and aimed at developing policy to address the Grand Challenges the local population faces.

According to Yin (2018), the ideal number of cases to be included in such a research design depends on the research objective, as well as the desired degree of certainty and the complexity of the theory: if the theory is simple and the research objective does not require a high degree of certainty, Yin deems two or three cases to be sufficient (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a). To be able to study the selected cases in depth, in line with our constructivist approach, we chose to include two cases in our doctoral research where both time and available resources to conduct field work were limited. Moreover, our research being exploratory and concerned with the emerging concept of policy co-creation, we deemed it necessary to provide detailed accounts of fewer cases and the contexts they are embedded in, rather than including more cases and dedicating less time to each one of them. In this sense, we “*made trade-offs that favored exploration over confirmation*” (Lawrence & Dover, 2015, p. 376).

Yet, studying a single case would have limited our capacity to understand this phenomenon; consequently, we tried to find a middle ground and opted for a multiple case study building on two cases – a “**two-case case study**” as Yin (2018) calls it. Indeed, the added strength and value of a multiple-case study consisting of two cases, compared to single-case studies, has been pointed out: a second case allows to illustrate contrasting findings, and to fill the gaps that might be left by the first case (Yin, 2009, 2018). While multiple-case studies consisting of two cases, a middle-ground between single cases and a large number of cases, remain relatively rare in our field, they have substantial

advantages. In this sense, in their two-case case study of the role of “place” in institutional work, Lawrence and Dover (2015, p. 376) state that “*exploring a small number of cases in depth opens up the potential for a broader range of insights than would a single case study but allows the researchers and readers to gain a deeper understanding of each case than is possible with a larger set of cases*”.

We consider each case of the multiple case study as a case study in itself; this means that “*each case serves as a distinct experiment that stands on its own as an analytic unit*” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). To generate the findings and conclusions of our study, we then seek evidence both for each case (see **chapter 4**) and across cases (see **chapter 5**). Adopting such an approach also means that a discovery in one case can lead to the “redesign” of elements of the research protocol before proceeding with the investigation of the next case (Yin, 2018). Our abductive mode of reasoning allows and encourages us to do so. Being able to “redesign” allows to reconsider previous theoretical propositions to avoid distorting them, or make empirical observations fit preconceived theoretical ideas.

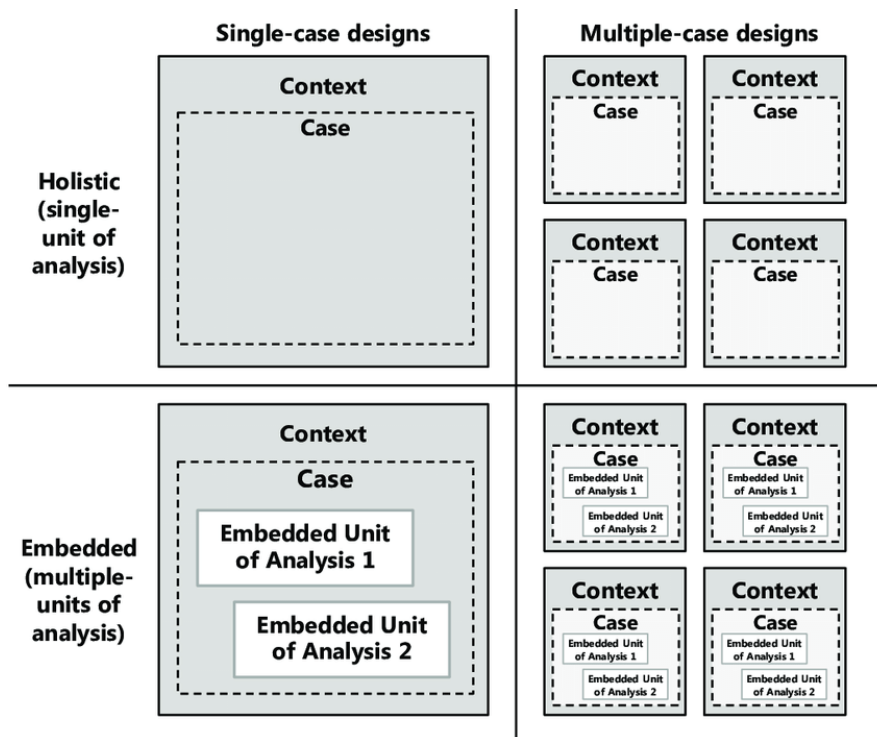
2.1.2.2. A holistic approach to provide in-depth accounts of each case

A multiple case study can be designed in different ways depending on the treatment of the cases it includes. In this regard, Yin (2018) proposes four types of case study research designs, presented in figure 12 in a 2x2 matrix: holistic or embedded single case designs, and, more relevant for us, holistic or embedded multiple case designs. In an embedded multiple cases study, each individual case includes several sub-cases; in a holistic multiple case study, this is not the case. A holistic multiple case study is suitable when there are no clear subunits to be detected, or when it is not relevant to isolate and study them one by one (Yin, 2018).

For this research we mobilize a **holistic** approach (illustrated in the upper right quadrant of the matrix) and therefore study each of our cases as one single unit embedded in its particular context. Indeed, a holistic case study research design allows us to develop a deep understanding of each case and the actors that are involved in each co-creation project. Conducting a “two-case case study” allowed us to divide our time between “only” two cases and thereby delve deep into each local setting to uncover the shaping of the co-creation practices as they were implemented in the respective public organization.

While we understand the often-pronounced criticism that a single case study, or a case study consisting of only a few cases does not allow to generalize and is not representative of other cases, we also agree with Stake’s (1995, p. 4) observation that “*case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to study other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case*”. For our study of two co-creation projects, this is precisely what a holistic approach allows us to do.

Figure 12. Four types of case study designs



(Source: Yin, 2011)

2.1.3. The selection of two empirical cases

Naturally, case selection is a core aspect of research based on case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, “choosing good cases for extremely small samples is a challenging endeavor” (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 294). Besides practical reasons, we therefore mobilized a set of methodological and theoretical criteria to select the two cases for our doctoral research and ensure their fit with our research objective. These criteria are explained in the following paragraphs and summarized in table 10 at the end of this section.

Our choice of cases was based on a **non-probabilistic** approach: frequently mobilized in qualitative research, case selection is here guided by the judgement of the researcher (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014). Cases are selected to fit the criteria established by the researcher for this particular study. Non-probabilistic case selection does not resort to a predefined range of cases from which one can pick and choose; indeed, when investigating organizational phenomena, this is rarely possible (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014).

In multiple case studies, the selection of cases can be guided by “*theoretical reasons such as replication, extension of theory, contrary replication, and elimination of alternative explanations* (Yin, 1994)” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27). To select the cases included in our study, we resorted to a logic of replication. More specifically, our case selection is based on **literal replication** (Yin, 2018): the selection process was shaped by

the idea of choosing similar cases that are likely to generate similar results. Here, case selection is not random but done purposefully to enrich knowledge about the relatively new concept of co-creation. The cases are thus selected with the intention of them corroborating each other and providing empirical support for theoretical assumptions about emerging practices in local public organizations. Indeed, we believe them to be “*particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic*” among the constructs mobilized in our study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27).

2.1.3.1. Practical considerations

After having established the foundations for case selection – a “two-case case study” based on a non-probabilistic approach and literal replication – we are confronted with several **practical considerations** such as access, time, and resources (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In this regard, “*a first difficulty to be overcome is to obtain authorization to collect data, and the second is to continue to develop and maintain good relationships with the people researched*” (Langley & Royer, 2006, p. 88). In case study research, **access** to data, both primary and secondary, is a common concern. It was therefore essential to identify cases where continuous access to data through interviews, observations, as well as documents analysis would be possible. The consent and continued support of key actors involved in the case is essential in this regard since “*if we can, we need to pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry*” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). If the researcher is not welcome in the field, conducting an in-depth study is a complex undertaking. We therefore had to ensure the **commitment** of those organizing the co-creation projects we wanted to include in our case study, to avoid losing access to the field during the data collection process. Other pragmatic considerations we had to reflect on were the **timing** of the co-creation process – since this is a doctoral thesis, time is limited, and we needed to ensure that the entire co-creation processes of the cases we included in the study occurred in a certain time period, namely between 2021 and 2022 –, and **geographical proximity** between our home and the city in which the case was located – we wanted to be able to conduct most interviews in person as well as directly observe most co-creation events.

Another partially pragmatic selection criterion is the **country** where the case ought to be located. Partially pragmatic because, to ensure familiarity with country’s cultural and administrative context as well as to be able to communicate in the official language of the respective country, we limited the spectrum of countries to English-, French- or German-speaking ones. We selected cases in France (the “Venelles in Transition” co-creation project in the town of Venelles) and Austria (the “Mission KS30” co-creation project in the city of Klagenfurt). These are geographical areas and languages we are familiar with since we have spent the majority of our life there (Austria) or are currently living in the country (France). In this sense, case selection was to a certain extent guided by methodical opportunism which allowed us to “*seize the occasions to go faster*” when conditions allow it (Girin, 1989, p. 1). Indeed, not having to familiarize ourselves with entirely new administrative systems and cultural backgrounds, and being able to speak and understand the spoken language was an advantage.

While these practical considerations are important to ensure the feasibility of our study, at the same time, we follow Yin's advice to still select "**special cases**" that are "*as important, interesting, or significant (...) as possible*" (Yin, 2009b, p. 256). Indeed, we assume that the two cases we have selected satisfy these criteria and do not merely present "mundane" everyday phenomena. While we will present our cases in more detail in the following chapter (**chapter 4, section 1.1.**), it is important to briefly elaborate on these elements here as well to justify case selection. In this regard, the French case – the "Venelles in Transition" co-creation project – is special indeed since it represents one of only a handful of co-creation projects aimed at the development of a local 2030 Agenda in France. Indeed, Venelles was the first municipality of the region (Région Sud – Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) to initiate the co-creation of a local 2030 Agenda (see Commune de Venelles, 2023). The Austrian case – the "Mission KS 30" co-creation project – on the other hand is a one-of-a-kind undertaking since it is one of the first "foresight" co-creation processes²⁰ conducted with teenagers in Austria²¹. The "remarkable circumstances" (Yin, 2009b) that make each of the two cases special are, we believe, evident.

These considerations, while important to ensure the feasibility of our study and argue for the relevance of the two cases, "*do not provide a methodological justification for why case A might be preferred over case B*" (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 295). Below, we therefore provide the theoretical and methodological reflections that guided us in the case selection process.

2.1.3.2. Theoretical and methodological considerations

Since our doctoral thesis is inscribed in the field of public management, the case had to be associated with the public sector, and we decided to select cases where the co-creation process was initiated and led by a public organization. More specifically, a **local public organization in a small or medium-sized city**: the geopolitical level at which we decided to conduct our empirical research for this doctoral thesis is the local level. Indeed, we are interested in the implementation of co-creation practices in local public organizations, that is, in the governments of towns and cities. This level is where practices of public innovation in general, and co-creation in particular, are most accessible since less rules and constraints than at the national level apply (Sørensen & Torfing, 2022). Weller and Pallez (2017) observe that while the majority of public innovation projects are realized at the local level, these organizations remain understudied. At the same time,

²⁰ "*Foresight is a conceptual framework as well as a process of prospective analysis and informed decision-making that includes long to mid-term considerations of likely, possible, or even just thinkable futures (Miles, 2008). It joins experts and decision makers from different sectors such as politics, economy, research and civil society to create channels for communication and to develop a sufficient basis for shaping a desired or avoiding an undesirable future (Könnölä, Scapolo, Desruelle, & Mu, 2011). To this end, participants arrive at a deeper and shared understanding of impact factors, drivers and their dynamics influencing the future (Amanatidou & Guy 2008; Da Costa, Warnke, Cagnin, & Scapolo, 2008). Foresight is about anticipating change and transformation in whatever realm considered (e.g., technological, social, socio-economical, ecological, or political) and outcomes of foresight are expected to deserve the label of innovative quality*" (Dinges et al., 2018, p. 35).

²¹ "MISSION KS 30 - Mission Klagenfurt klimaneutral und smart bis 2030", see <https://nachhaltigwirtschaften.at/de/sdz/projekte/mission-ks30.php> (consulted on 26.09.2023)

Grand Challenges – especially those related to the environment - crystallize at the local level as this is where both citizens and public organizations are confronted with them at a daily basis, and where immediate responses are required (Hofstad et al., 2022).

Moreover, Bamberger and Pratt (2010) emphasize that for management scholars, some of the most interesting research contexts are those closest to our daily lives; we do not necessarily have to go above and beyond to find the most exotic cases but be attentive to what happens “in our own backyard”. These are often the cases that are the most lucrative for researchers since they tend to be unexploited: participants who are not used to being at the center of attention may be “honored” to be asked to take part in the study and therefore motivated to do so, and are often interested in its findings, which can in turn increase the impact of the. Indeed, we found this to be the case in the local settings where we conducted our case study. Respondents were positively surprised by our interest in their projects and therefore mostly happy to share their experiences with us as we interviewed them, or during the co-creation events we observed. In this regard, peripheral stakeholders – “invisible”, vulnerable, and/or marginalized groups – are an important data source (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010). By conducting our research at the local level, we are able to access public organizations that do not tend to be at the center of mediatic or academic attention, as well as to connect with participants that often remain invisible, thereby broadening the spectrum of actors and perceptions included in our study.

Regarding the **co-creation process** itself, we have established several criteria as well that guided us through the case selection process. First, to ensure a certain homogeneity among cases, we chose to study those in which the co-creation process was **initiated and led by a local public organization**. Moreover, as we have shown in **chapter 1**, co-creation goes beyond mere citizen consultation or the implication of citizens in operational aspects of policy implementation or public service delivery: in co-creation, citizens are involved at a more strategic level and participate in policy development (McMullin, 2022). We were therefore careful to select cases where **citizens had the possibility to take part in strategic reflections** to a certain extent. Finally, another criterion regarding the selected co-creation cases was the ability for the researcher to **study the entire process**. Past literature has pointed out that the continuous involvement of citizens is important to ensure a positive perception of the co-creation process and its outcomes (Bentzen, 2022). Therefore, ideally, we were looking to include cases where continuous co-creation was planned, and wanted to be able to follow the entire process from start to finish²². Thus, the timing of the selected co-creation project had to match the timing of our doctorate; that is, co-creation needed to take place between 2021 and 2022.




²² As mentioned before, in this thesis, the phases of co-creation we study go from ideation to the design of policy. These are therefore the phases we wanted to be able to observe. Subsequent phases, i.e., implementation of co-created policy and evaluation of outcomes, were not included.

Finally, regarding the **content of the co-creation processes** selected for our study, we chose cases where **policy co-creation was related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals** in some way. As established in chapter 1, the SGDs represent today's Grand Challenges. They provide a blueprint that can be adapted by public organizations to fit their respective national context and local needs. The two cases selected for this study are therefore related to the SGDs: "Venelles in Transition" aims to develop a local 2030 Agenda through co-creation in order to achieve the SDGs at the local level, and "Mission KS 30" project was initiated in the context of the city's application as one of the EU's "100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030"²³. At the same time, the city wanted to update their existing smart city strategy through co-creation and include a focus on sustainable development based on the SGDs.

Methodical opportunism characterized not only the identification of the countries in which the cases should be located, but also the **identification of the final cases**, that is, of local public organizations conducting co-creation projects. In this sense, it refers to "*the way of intelligently seizing the opportunities for observation offered by circumstances*", while being "*scrupulously methodical*" (Girin, 1989, p. 1). This is what we did to identify the two co-creation projects that would become the two cases of our study. For the French case, we found out through one of our supervisors that Venelles, a small town nearby Aix-en-Provence where our university is located, was about to launch a co-creation process – "Venelles in Transition" – in the late summer of 2021. The public managers responsible for the implementation of this co-creation process as well as the town's mayor were happy to participate in our study, and within a week, we were able to start data collection for this case. The second case was identified a few months later in early 2022. An Austrian family member was about to participate in a co-creation project in the city of Klagenfurt – "Mission KS 30" – and informed us that the organizers would be willing to take part in our study. In the same vein as for the French case, we were able to start data collection soon after as we quickly obtained the organizer's consent to proceed with our study.

²³ In April 2022, the European Commission announced the 112 cities selected to participate in the EU Mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 (The Cities Mission). The cities will receive advice and support from the Mission Platform, managed by NetZeroCities, to become climate-neutral by 2030 and inspire other cities to follow suit by 2050. Klagenfurt has been selected as one of these cities (see <https://netzerocities.eu/mission-cities/>, consulted on 26.09.2023)

Table 10. Case selection criteria

“Two-case case study” (Yin, 2018)	Holistic multiple case study of two cases
Non-probabilistic case selection (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014)	Based on the researcher’s judgement
Literal replication (Yin, 2018)	Similar cases to obtain similar results and develop a deeper understanding of an emerging notion
Practical considerations (Seawright & Gerring, 2008)	Access (approval and commitment of organizers); Timing (entire policy co-creation process to take place between 2021 and 2022); Geographical proximity (ability to attend most co-creation events in person)
Country	English-, French-, or German-speaking European country (familiarity with context and ability to understand and speak the language)
Type of organization	Public organization
Geopolitical level	Local level
Size of municipality	Small or medium-sized city
Co-creation process	Process initiated and led by a local public organization; Citizen involvement not limited to operational aspects but in policy development; Ability to study the entire process
Content of co-creation process	Related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
	
 Venelles in Transition (Venelles, France)	 Mission KS 30 (Klagenfurt, Austria)

(Source: author)

2.2. Data collection

In a case study, different data sources – from interviews and observations to ethnography, survey data, or documents – are frequently combined (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This is considered one of the strengths of case study research (Yin, 2009a) where researchers often resort to triangulation. Triangulation refers to “*the goal of seeking at least three ways of verifying or corroborating a particular event, description, or fact being reported by a study*” (Yin, 2011, p. 81). Rather than relying on one single data source, the combination of several ones allows to provide stronger support for findings.

This is especially true for our research context which is marked by the uncertainty of Grand Challenges. As we have established in **chapter 1**, how a Grand Challenge is perceived and defined can vary from one actor to another. Mobilizing different data sources to provide a more complete picture of the Grand Challenge and how it is interpreted and addressed is therefore essential, as Kistruck and Slade Shantz (2021, p. 15) emphasize: “*the study of complex phenomena such as grand challenges is well suited to the rigour and richness afforded by collecting multiple types of data*”.

Aiming to account for the institutional work practices of a variety of actors as they participate in the implementation of co-creation in a context of Grand Challenges, we therefore resort to a triangulation of qualitative data collection methods. We assume that “*valid knowledge is best acquired through direct contact, proximity, detail, and specificity. Thus, the knowledge acquired about particular people and situations is deeper and more sensitive than in a survey for example*” (Langley & Royer, 2006, p. 90). While this allowed for a deep understanding of each case, it also meant that our study would be limited to certain phases of co-creation, i.e., from agenda-setting to the design of policy solutions, since the duration of our doctorate would not have allowed to study all phases of co-creation, as identified by Nabatchi (2012), *in situ*.

Consequently, interviews with involved actors (**section 2.2.1.**) as well as direct observation of relevant events (**section 2.2.2.**) – both of which are core elements of case study research (Yin, 2009) – are at the heart of our research design and complemented by the analysis of secondary data (**section 2.2.3.**) that is mainly used to provide context and corroborate the findings stemming from the two other data sources.

2.2.1. Interviews

Like the observations on which we will elaborate in the following section, interviews are **primary data**, that is, first-hand data collected by the researcher for this study (Baumard et al., 2014). Besides observations, semi-structured interviews are the main source of data for our study. Indeed, in case studies, “*interviews often become the primary data source*” since they are “*a highly efficient way to gather rich, empirical data, especially when the phenomenon of interest is highly episodic and infrequent*” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 28). Given the importance of interviews for our study, the following paragraphs

are dedicated to an explanation of their usefulness, the specific form they took in this study, and finally we provide details about the sample of respondents.

2.2.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

In order to access actors' conscious or unconscious mental representations and help them overcome their usual defense mechanisms that might prevent them from fully expressing themselves, conducting interviews is an invaluable data collection method (Baumard et al., 2014). Thereby, the researcher, in their role of the interviewer, is able to collect responses that, once analyzed, help them address their research object.

While interviews always suppose interaction between the researcher and the respondent, there are different forms of interviews in qualitative studies. Usually, three broad categories are identified: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. While structured interviews are carefully scripted with the researcher formally adopting the role of an interviewer and relying on the same list of questions with every respondent (Yin, 2011), the role of the researcher when conducting unstructured interviews is limited to that of a guide or facilitator proposing a general topic and avoiding to interfere with the respondent's discourse (Baumard et al., 2014).

In this research, we used the third form – **semi-structured interviews** – to gain insights about actors' perceptions of the co-creation process, and the roles and practices they engaged in to shape this process. Semi-structured interviews – or “qualitative interviews”, (Yin, 2011) – follow similar principles, that is, the researcher remains open and adapts to the respondent's discourse; however, they rely on a loose interview guide providing a list of topics to be treated (Baumard et al., 2014). This guide can however be adapted over the course of the interview to fit the respondent, the setting, and the flow of the conversation. Indeed, a semi-structured interview is meant to resemble a conversation rather than a questionnaire: the interview is less scripted and the relationship between interviewer and respondent less formalized than in structured interviews (Yin, 2011). Consequently, the flow of the interview and the questions asked vary from one respondent to the next since the researcher is able to adapt the set of questions and the way in which they are formulated. Questions tend to be open-ended rather than closed, as it is the case in structured interviews (Yin, 2011). Follow-up questions are typically asked to zoom in on particularly interesting or relevant elements because “*when doing qualitative interviews, a researcher tries to understand a participant's world*” (Yin, 2011, p. 135) and to “*learn from people' rather than study them*” (p. 136).

In this regard, several elements must be considered when conducting semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2011). First, the researcher must let the respondent express themselves and keep the conversation going by using probes and follow-up questions. Then, the respondent must be able to vocalize their priorities without being directed or steered in one direction or the other by the researcher. This implies that the researcher is to be as neutral as possible and must avoid showing their own preferences. Finally, it is important

to maintain a pleasant atmosphere, since interview situations, as natural as the researcher tries to make them feel, put respondents in a vulnerable position (Langley & Royer, 2006).

A limit of using interview data is that it is reduced to “*interactions with a set of participants and their self-reported behavior, beliefs, and perceptions*” (Yin, 2011, p. 132). One possibility to limit the bias of data collected through interviews is “*using numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomena from diverse perspectives*” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 28). By conducting interviews with diverse – yet, of course, relevant – respondents, a multiplicity of opinions and perceptions can be collected and confronted to enrich the findings that emerge. In general, as mentioned above, triangulation of methods is important to limit bias throughout data collection. Even though we adopt a constructivist position and do not seek to unveil any objective “truth”, completing what emerges from interviews with other data sources is invaluable since it allows us to include insights into our findings that otherwise would have been neglected.

2.2.1.2. Interview protocol

Across the two cases, we account for **36 interviews with a total of 41 respondents**. All respondents agreed to let us record our conversations, and thereby, **over 44 hours** of material have been generated and manually transcribed. We organized as many interviews as possible in person. This was easier in the case of Venelles where only two of 18 interviews were realized via Zoom. In the case of Klagenfurt, given the geographical distance, more interviews were organized via Zoom: we account for 10 online, and eight in-person interviews. While it would have been more comfortable for the researcher as well as the respondents to be able to meet in person, Zoom allowed us to replicate an in-person interview setting as much as possible and we did not find online interviews to be less fruitful than in-person interviews.

Our sample of respondents (we will provide more details on the sampling process as well as the interviews in each case in the next section) represented the diversity of actors involved in the co-creation project of each case. While slight differences between the cases can be observed, they can be regrouped into the following categories (see table 11 below): public managers (14 respondents), elected politicians (3 respondents), experts (4 respondents), members of associations (7 respondents), and citizens (13 respondents).

Table 11. Distribution of respondents across cases

Type of actor	Number of respondents		
	Venelles	Klagenfurt	Total
Public managers	4	10	14
Local elected politicians	3	-	3
Experts	3	1	4
Members of associations	7	-	7
Citizens	5	8	13
Total	22	19	41

(Source: author)

Given the different types of actors we interviewed, we developed a general interview guide which was then adapted to the different groups of actors. Consequently, the guides used for interviews with actors organizing the co-creation project (public managers, elected politicians, and experts/consultants), and external participants (citizens and members of associations) differed slightly. The interview guide for external participants revolved around the same topics but included less technical aspects regarding the design of the co-creation project and its background and was rather focusing on actors' perceptions of the implementation of the process.

The general interview guide (see table 12 below) was built around the following themes; specific questions were adapted to the respective type of actor: 1) a **characterization** of the town, the public organization, and its potential past experiences with participatory processes: here, we were interested in the characteristics of the town and the "average" inhabitant, as well as the organization's receptivity for co-creation; 2) the **emergence and evolution of the co-creation project**, potential difficulties, mistakes and learnings, but also successes, as well as first results. Here, what we wanted to know about was the motivation to co-create and where it came from, the steps and objectives of the co-creation process, and the involved internal and external actors as well as the way in which they collaborated on the project; and 3) perceptions of the respondent's own **role and practices** in the co-creation process as well as of the roles and practices of other involved actors. Here, we asked about the practices our respondents engaged in to shape the different stages of the co-creation process, from ideation to the development of more concrete policy propositions. We were also interested in their perception of their ability to veritably affect the process.

Since the interviews took place in French and German, the interview guides were translated as well. We include only the English version in this appendix to match the language of the remainder of our thesis. The complete interview guides are provided in Appendix A.

Table 12. Topics of the interview guide

Themes	Topics of questions	Link to conceptual and theoretical framework
1/ Characterization of the town and the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Characteristics of the town and inhabitants, receptivity for citizen participation -Characteristics of the organization -The organization's potential past experiences with and receptivity for citizen participation 	Contextual elements and conditions affecting both the co-creation process and how it is implemented (<i>chapter 1, section 3</i>), and the institutional work of involved actors (<i>chapter 2, section 3.1.</i>)
2/ Emergence and evolution of the co-creation project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Motivation for and initiation of the project -Steps and objectives of the co-creation process -Involved internal and external actors and their collaboration -Mistakes and successes, difficulties and learnings 	<p>The implementation of co-creation and potential drivers and barriers (<i>chapter 1, sections 2 and 3</i>)</p> <p>Organizational form of institutional work based on the type of actors involved in co-creation (<i>chapter 2, section 3.3.</i>)</p> <p>Actors' institutional work practices (<i>chapter 2, section 2.3.</i>)</p>
3/ Actors' roles and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Engagement in practices aimed at shaping the different stages of the co-creation process -Perception of own and other actors' roles -Perception of own and other actors' ability to shape the co-creation process and its outcomes 	<p>Actors' institutional work practices (<i>chapter 2, section 2.3.</i>)</p> <p>Institutional roles of actors engaged in institutional work (<i>chapter 2, section 3.2.</i>)</p> <p>Co-creation process (<i>chapter 1, section 3</i>)</p>

(Source: author)

Finally, it was valuable for us to conduct interviews throughout the entire co-creation process as well as after the completion of the project. Doing so allowed us to collect actors' perceptions at different points in the co-creation process. By including both early-stage and late-stage responses, we were able to generate important insights into the trajectory and evolution of the co-creation process and the implementation of these practices in the respective local public organization (cf. Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2021). Since our research object addresses the way in which actors shape the introduction of co-creation, it was

important to us to develop an understanding of the entire process to be able to retrace actors' practices and lived experiences in this regard.

2.2.1.3. Sample of respondents

The idea of co-creation implies the participation of a **diversity** of actors. This principle has guided the construction of the sample of respondents with whom we conducted our interviews. Our research object concerns the question how these different actors shape the way in which co-creation is implemented through the diverse practices they engage in and roles they take on. For us, it was therefore essential that our sample of interview respondents illustrated this diversity.

However, ensuring **representativeness** of the sample is an issue with which positivist rather than constructivist research is concerned (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a). Indeed, we neither aim to objectively describe a population, nor to generalize our findings. Whether or not our sample is representative of all involved actors is therefore not a core issue for our research; rather, we are interested in *understanding* the perceptions of the different involved actors in their local context. Yet, in both cases, we were able to conduct interviews with actors from all involved groups, which allows us to depict their respective points of view and perceptions of the implementation of the co-creation process.

In this sense, our sample of respondents is not based on probabilistic sampling whereby specific techniques are employed to ensure representativeness, but on the **judgement** of the researcher (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a). Thereby, our sample is constructed based on theoretical considerations: as mentioned above, it was of the utmost importance for us to represent the diversity of actors, since this is the essence of co-creation. Only by including all different categories of actors in our sample of interview respondents can we account for their different perceptions and understand why and how they engage in different institutional work practices, and take on different institutional roles.

Regarding the **size of the sample**, the decision was also guided by the nature of the cases: we had to adapt our expectations regarding the ideal number of respondents to the size of the respective co-creation project and the number of involved actors. When studying a relatively small project, naturally, the number of potential respondents is limited. We also follow Glaser and Strauss (1967) for whom the size of the sample in qualitative studies is not determined by its degree of representativeness but by theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is reached when additional data does not lead to new discoveries. In this sense, the number of respondents to be interviewed cannot be determined *a priori* but it becomes evident during the data collection process whether supplemental interviews are required to address our research question. Hence, the final number of respondents emerged during the data collection process, and so did the final sample of respondents. The process of constructing our sample for our interviews was **iterative** (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a). Indeed, the respondents constituting the sample were selected one by one throughout the process until theoretical saturation was reached.

The constitution of the sample of respondents was therefore determined by both the number of involved actors - potential respondents -, and the point at which no new insights would be generated through the collection of additional data. Once again, the decision whether or not more interviews are required depends on the judgement of the researcher since we can say with certainty that no new insights would emerge if we continued data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the case of **Venelles**, we were confronted with a co-creation project initiated in a small town of approximately 9,000 inhabitants, and an equally small local government. While according to the organizers²⁴, over 600 inhabitants used the various participation methods to express their opinions and ideas, the number of those who actually took part in the co-creation events was much smaller and revolved around 20 to 30 participants at each workshop. Moreover, many participants returned and attended not one but multiple workshops²⁵. As for internal actors, we found that the number of involved elected politicians was limited to three important actors (the mayor and two municipal councillors), while there were a few more public managers involved. Finally, two members of an external consulting agency were in charge of organizing and facilitating the co-creation workshops and as such, they were important respondents for us. Given the small number of actors involved in the Venelles in Transition project, we found that theoretical saturation was reached after interviewing about 20 respondents, and that hardly any new or surprising elements were mentioned in the interviews. Since we assumed that the perceptions of citizens in particular could still strongly differ, we decided to organize two more interviews with citizens having participated in the co-creation project before we stopped the data collection process in this case.

In Venelles, we have conducted **18 interviews with a total of 22 respondents** (see table 13 below); we have interviewed two respondents twice (M1-V and M3-V) and conducted four of the interviews with multiple respondents at once²⁶. We were able to interview three elected politicians (the mayor and two municipal councillors), four involved public managers from different departments, seven members of three local associations, the two consultants hired to conceive the co-creation project and one expert for environmental issues who has worked with the municipality in the past as well as for this project, and five individual citizens who have participated in the co-creation project. The duration of the shortest interview in the Venelles case was 35 minutes and the longest lasted for 1 hour and 37 minutes; the average duration of interviews in this case was 68 minutes. In total, we account for **over 27 hours of interviews** with actors involved in the Venelles in Transition co-creation project.

²⁴ Town of Venelles (2022): Agenda 2030.

²⁵ Source: observations O1-V to O5-V

²⁶ For reasons of clarity during coding, analysis, and presentation of findings, as well as to account for the discourse of each respondent, we attribute a separate interview number to each person, even if multiple respondents have participated in the same interview or have been interviewed twice.

Table 13. List of respondents "Venelles in Transition"

VENELLES IN TRANSITION			
No.	Resp.	Description of Respondent	Duration
1	P1-V	Municipal councillor (sustainable development)	1h15min
2	M1-V	Public manager (sustainable development and citizen participation)	1h10min
3	M2-V	Public manager (sustainable development and citizen participation)	1h10min
4	A1-V	Local association A - member 1 (popular education)	1h10min
5	A2-V	Local association A - member 2 (popular education)	1h10min
6	A3-V	Local association A - member 3 (popular education)	1h10min
7	M3-V	Public manager (general services director)	1h
8	M4-V	Public manager (finances and legal affaires)	55min
9	E1-V	Expert (consultant for collective intelligence methods)	57min
10	E2-V	Expert (consultant for collective intelligence methods)	1h
11	P2-V	Municipal councillor (circular economy, zero waste, humanitarian affairs)	57min
12	A4-V	Local association B - member 1 (shared gardening)	1h28min
13	A5-V	Local association B - member 2 (shared gardening)	1h28min
14	A6-V	Local association B - member 3 (shared gardening)	1h28min
15	A7-V	Local association C (recycling)	1h37min
16	C1-V	Citizen (member of COPIL)	1h10min
17	P3-V	Mayor	1h10min
18	M1-V	Public manager (sustainable development and citizen participation)	1h10min
19	C2-V	Citizen (member of COPIL, member of consultation committee for environmental issues)	45min
20	E3-V	Expert (air quality)	1h15min
21	C3-V	Citizen (member of COPIL)	35min
22	C4-V	Citizen (member of COPIL, member of consultation committee for environmental issues)	1h05min
23	M3-V	Public manager (general services director)	50min
24	C5-V	Citizen (member of consultation committee for environmental issues)	1h22min

(Source: author)

The second case, the Mission KS 30 project in the city of **Klagenfurt**, was organized differently, and the same actors were present throughout the entire co-creation process, which made the definition of the sample of respondents somewhat easier for us. A particularity was the lack of political actors in this co-creation process: it was initiated and conducted independently from the local political sphere. Once the city's environment department had obtained the mayor's consent, they planned and realized the project without any political interference or contribution²⁷. Thus, no interviews with political actors were conducted in this case. Another particularity of this co-creation process was the predefined sample of participants: the project was targeted at a specific group of the population, namely high school students. Therefore, two classes of two local high schools were selected to participate in Mission KS 30. While the number of attendees varied slightly at each workshop, a total of 20 to 25 students and two or three teachers from each school participated in the project, making for around 40 to 45 external participants at each co-creation workshop²⁸. The aim of this co-creation process was to create interaction between internal actors – due to the absence of political actors, this category consisted only of public managers – and citizens, i.e., mainly local high school students and their teachers, as well as a handful of other actors from the local university and a local association that joined some workshops. Therefore, numerous public managers from different departments were present at each workshop. The final set of involved actors consists of the two workshop organizers and facilitators who, as in the first case, came from an external consulting agency. As for the first case, we found that after talking to 19 respondents, which represented all categories of involved actors, hardly any new insights were generated, and we decided to end the data collection process.

Thus, in the case of Klagenfurt, we have conducted **18 interviews with 19 respondents** (see table 14 below), whereby we have interviewed one respondent twice (C3-K) and conducted one interview with two respondents at the same time (M6-K and M7-K). We interviewed 10 public managers from different departments, one expert (the consultant in charge of the co-creation project) and eight citizens (two high school students, four high school teachers, two faculty members of the local university). The shortest interview in the Klagenfurt case lasted for 25 minutes while the duration of the longest interview was 1 hour and 50 minutes; the average duration of interviews in this case was 53 minutes. In total, we account for **17 hours of interviews** with the different actors participating in the Mission KS 30 project in Klagenfurt.

²⁷ Had our research object also concerned the stage following the co-creation project and the actual implementation of the ideas developed through co-creation, it would have been relevant to include political actors in our sample of respondents since it is them who decide about future projects and the allocation of resources to realized them. However, we were interested in the process of co-creation itself and the practices and roles of involved actors; it therefore did not seem indispensable to interview actors from the political sphere since they were not present in the process.

²⁸ Source: observations O1-K and O2-K

Table 14. List of respondents "Mission KS 30"

MISSION KS 30			
No.	Resp.	Description of Respondent	Duration
1	C1-K	Citizen (faculty at local university)	1h10min
2	C2-K	Citizen (faculty at local university)	58min
3	M1-K	Public manager (environment, internship for Mission KS 30)	1h20min
4	M2-K	Public manager (environment, responsible for Mission KS 30)	1h25min
5	C3-K	Citizen (high school teacher)	53min
6	M3-K	Public manager (internship, environment)	1h10min
7	C4-K	Citizen (high school student)	1h05min
8	C5-K	Citizen (high school student)	50min
9	M4-K	Public manager (internship, environment)	1h50min
10	M5-K	Public manager (statistics)	40min
11	M6-K	Public manager (environment)	1h05min
12	M7-K	Public manager (environment)	1h05min
13	M8-K	Public manager (citizen service)	50min
14	E1-K	Expert (consultant, responsible for planning the co-creation project)	1h15min
15	C3-K	Citizen (high school teacher)	25min
16	C6-K	Citizen (high school teacher)	55min
17	C7-K	Citizen (high school teacher)	1h10min
18	C8-K	Citizen (high school teacher)	55min
19	M9-K	Public manager (head of environment department)	1h05min

(Source: author)

2.2.2. Observation

Data from interviews and from observations is complementary since the data stemming from observations is based on occurrences that can be accounted for with relative certainty, while the verbal and more subjective data collected through interviews must be treated with some caution (Baumard et al., 2014). Indeed, observing is an *"invaluable way of collecting data because what you see with your own eyes and perceive with your own senses is not filtered by what others might have (self-) reported to you or what the author of some document might have seen"* (Yin, 2011, p. 143).

When conducting observations, the researcher can adopt different postures and mobilize multiple observation techniques. Baumard et al. (2014) identify four postures that go beyond the duality of participant and non-participant observations: the researcher can be a complete participant, a participant-observer, an observer-participant, and a complete observer. They explain that as a *complete participant*, the researcher does not reveal that

they participate as a researcher whereas they limit their presence to pure observation as a *complete observer*; as a *participant-observer*, the researcher is usually a member of the organization which might lead to role conflicts and tensions as they conduct their research; as an *observer-participant*, the researcher is present in the field primarily in their role of a researcher, participating only marginally, which might entail resistance and skepticism from observed actors.

Except for two occasions where **participant observation** occurred in the case of Venelles²⁹ (labeled as PO1-V and PO2-V), the observations included in the data for our study fall in the category of **non-participant observation** whereby we adopted as posture as an **observer-participant**. Indeed, while we wanted to interfere as little as possible with the co-creation process and the interactions among participants, it was impossible to remain completely isolated. This was due to the nature of co-creation where all present actors are encouraged to participate. When we were asked to take part in discussions or activities, we declined, but when participants interacted with us during co-creation workshops by asking our opinion or including us in conversations, we could not remain silent. In these cases, we tried to limit our participation to a minimum by reminding participants of our role as a researcher and the aim of our study which was to understand *their* practices and *their* interactions.

The strategy we adopted to conduct our observations resembled what Evrard et al. (2009) call “floating observation”. Choosing a **loose and unsystematic observation approach** (Yin, 2011) allowed us to easily adapt to the co-creation process. This was important since in both cases, this was a first experience with co-creation and therefore, the processes were themselves sometimes unsystematic, emergent, and marked by last-minute changes and surprises to which the involved actors as well as we as researchers had to adapt. While we therefore did not work with a strict observation protocol, we still had multiple categories in mind which we wanted to be attentive to: the general atmosphere, the physical environment, the organization, timing, and flow of the workshop, and more particularly the characteristics and behavior of participants, the nature of their interactions, as well as other verbal and non-verbal elements that seemed relevant (Yin, 2011). In this sense, observation is selective (Miles & Huberman, 1994) since the researcher continuously decided whether or not to include observed elements.

Based on this approach, we took notes during the co-creation events we attended. We decided to take notes using our smartphone rather than our computer or pen and paper, so as to avoid attracting participants’ attention and distracting them from the actual activity, or provoking questions about or reactions to our presence. Immediately after each observed event, we compiled these notes in a document on our computer. Thereby, we account for 33 pages of observation notes in the case of Venelles, and 18 pages in the case of Klagenfurt, making for a total of **51 pages of notes** taken during non-participant

²⁹ At these two occasions, one of the supervisors was present as a resident of the town and fully engaged in the proposed co-creation activities. After her participation, notes have been taken during our conversations about them.

observations at 11 events. In addition to these notes, we were able to take **photos** during the co-creation events. By doing so, we were not obliged to write down or memorize every detail regarding the physical environment but were able to come back to our photos to recall the details of each co-creation event.

Besides interviews, observation turned out to be an invaluable method to collect data for this study. Since co-creation is a new and unfamiliar notion for the actors involved in both cases, talking about the co-creation process and the practices and roles they adopted throughout this process was not easy for them. Through our presence, we were able to observe their actions and interactions, and corroborate the more subjective data collected through interviews (Yin, 2011). Especially in a study of institutional work, observing events in real time rather than in retrospective is essential so as not to perceive the process and outcomes as inevitable (Garud et al., 2010). By “*analyzing moving pictures rather than taking a snapshot view*” of institutional work (Bisschops & Beunen, 2019, p. 85) we aim to provide an *in situ* study of institutional work, a lack of which has been pointed out by Zarpelon et al. (2019).

In the case of **Venelles**, we were able to attend all co-creation events from the beginning of the project until the end. We account for a total of **eight observed events** (see table 15 below) and **27 hours of observation** (both participant and non-participant).

Table 15. List of observations of “Venelles in Transition”

VENELLES IN TRANSITION				
No.	Obs.	Description of Observation	Time and Place	Duration
1	PO1-V	First presentation of Venelles in Transition	Saturday morning, outdoors	2h
2	PO2-V	Co-creation workshop 1	Saturday morning, outdoors	2h
3	O1-V	Co-creation workshop 1	Saturday morning, outdoors	3h
4	O2-V	Co-creation workshop 2	Weeknight, indoors	2h
5	O3-V	Venelles Quiz	Weeknight, indoors	2h
6	O4-V	Co-creation workshop 3	Saturday morning, indoors	3h
7	O5-V	Co-creation workshop 4	Weeknight, indoors	3h
8	O6-V	Presentation of preliminary results	Weeknight, online	2h
9	O7-V	Presentations of results	Saturday, indoors	8h
				Total: 27h

(Source: author)

Regarding the case of **Klagenfurt**, we were unable to observe the first co-creation event which had occurred before we learned about the project and decided to include it in our doctoral thesis. However, we observed all other co-creation events (a total of **three observed events**): while less workshops were organized than in the case of Venelles, most of the workshops lasted all day and we therefore account for **19 hours of observation** (see table 16 below).

Table 16. List of observations of "Mission KS 30"

MISSION KS 30				
No.	Obs.	Description of Observation	Time and Place	Duration
1	O1-K	"Vision forum"	Weekday, classroom in one of the participating schools	8h
2	O2-K	"Roadmap forum"	Weekday, classroom in one of the participating schools	8h
3	O3-K	"Future dialogue"	Weekday, science center at local university	3h
				Total: 19h

(Source: author)

2.2.3. Secondary data

The third and final data source mobilized for this doctoral research is secondary data. As opposed to primary data that is collected by the researcher, secondary data is data that already exists (Baumard et al., 2014). Compiling and analyzing secondary data such as documents, artifacts, or archival records related to the research object can produce a variety of additional data that complements the material collected through other methods such as interviews or observations (Yin, 2011).

Including secondary data such as documents can be useful for various reasons. They might include details such as names, dates, or mission statements and slogans, among others. Treating such data before or after conducting interviews or observations can help the researcher better understand the information provided by respondents or the observed events, without having to ask questions about such details (Yin, 2011). However, like all data sources, secondary data has its limits which the researcher must be aware of: for example, *"newspaper articles can be very helpful, but you should know something about the newspaper's reputation or political stance (...). 'Official' government reports may exclude unwanted information (...). Worse, blogs and personal postings can be*

entirely biased in their selection of the material to be available and their intended slant. Finally, press releases and other forms of overt publicity usually have some underlying motive that you must take into account before citing” (Yin, 2011, p. 149-150).

When treated with some caution, secondary data can be a rich data source and provide important material. Secondary data can be both internal and external (Baumard et al., 2014). **Internal secondary data** has been produced by the organization and can consist of archives, reports, notes, internal documents, or written rules and procedures, among others. Mobilizing this type of secondary data is highly interesting since it allows to retrace events that might have affected the phenomenon studied in our research. As such, internal secondary data provides information that allows to better understand the evolution of the phenomenon. For us, the internal secondary data mobilized consists of a variety of documents: strategy documents, press releases, newsletters and magazines published by the respective local public organization, the documents produced for the organization of co-creation events, and other internal documents provided by the organization.

External secondary data is data that has not been produced by the organization. As such, it can consist of newspaper articles or scientific articles, studies and reports published by other organizations, statistics, the content of websites, among others. For us, newspaper articles have been the main source of external secondary data since they have helped us provide context for the respective co-creation project and understand how it was perceived outside of the organization. Strategic documents such as “roadmaps” for the achievement of the SDGs released by national governments or other types of public organizations were essential to better understand the external influences that shaped the content and form of the co-creation processes. Finally, when it seemed relevant to our object of study, we also chose to include transcripts of videos as a slightly different source of external secondary data; for instance, these videos included interviews with actors involved in the co-creation processes where they shared about the project.

In total, the secondary data collected for this study contains **188 documents**; 101 documents have been included for the case of Venelles, and 87 for the case of Klagenfurt. The language of the documents for the Venelles case is mostly French, with only a few documents in English; the language of the documents for the Klagenfurt case is mostly German with a few documents in English³⁰. The table below (table 17) provides more detailed information about the secondary data used in our study³¹.

³⁰ Since our native language is German and we also speak English and French fluently, we were able to treat all documents in their original version.

³¹ Internal secondary data is distinguished from external secondary data through the gray background.

Table 17. List of documents collected as secondary data for the cases of Venelles and Klagenfurt

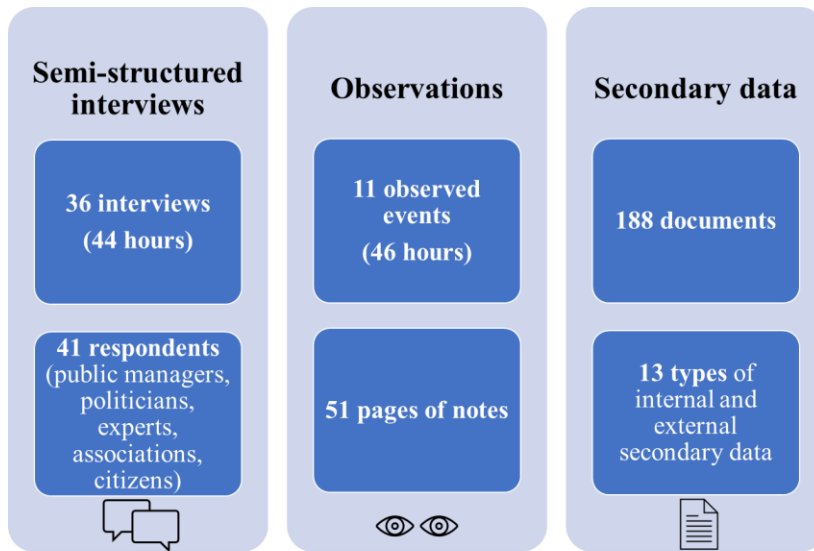
Type of Document	Number of Documents		
	Venelles	Klagenfurt	Total
Co-creation process documents	20	17	37
Reports	4	4	8
Internal strategy documents	-	16	16
Political programs	1	-	1
Minutes of municipal council meetings	5	-	5
Press releases	10	9	19
Newsletters and magazines	9	3	12
Other internal secondary data	-	2	2
Newspaper articles	34	11	45
Press releases	-	5	5
External strategy documents	6	12	18
Documentation of involved actors' participation in relevant external events	7	5	12
Other external secondary data	5	2	7
Total	101	87	188

(Source: author)

In this section 2.2., we have provided details on the process of collecting data for this doctoral thesis. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and secondary data have been identified as important and complementary data sources, and the data collection process for each source has been explained. As shown in figure 13 below, across the two cases, the material collected to address our research object consists of **36 semi-structured interviews with 41 respondents, 51 pages of notes taken during 46 hours of observation, as well as 188 documents**. A triangulation of the data stemming from these different sources allows us to provide an in-depth analysis of each case by taking into consideration the perceptions of a diversity of actors, the particularities of the respective co-creation project, and the context in which it occurred.

In the following section, we will elaborate on process of coding and analyzing this data.

Figure 13. Summary of collected data and sources



(Source: author)

2.3. Data analysis

The data we analyzed is qualitative and based on texts, collected through interviews, observations, and documents. We therefore performed content analysis to analyse this data (**section 2.3.1.**). Such data is usually not immediately accessible for analysis but must be treated beforehand: interviews must be transcribed, the notes taken during observation must be corrected and formatted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of analysing our data thus consists of several stages - from the preparation of raw data to the treatment of findings - which we will retrace here. Then, we explain our units of analysis (**section 2.3.2.**). We elaborate on the types of codes used to develop a semi-structured coding table, and their characteristics (**section 2.3.3.**).

2.3.1. The cyclical and interactive process of thematic content analysis

The process of data analysis aims to identify themes in the material collected for this study through the methods presented above. The collected data consists of different types of texts, stemming from different sources, and representing different types of actors; to be able to identify and analyse the elements that are relevant to our research object, these texts must be broken down and structured. **Content analysis** as a way of analysing the content of a communication allows us to do, as it is a suitable approach especially when unstructured or semi-structured data collection methods such as interviews or document analysis have been mobilized (Bardin, 2013; Blanc et al., 2014). Content analysis is the “*analysis of texts within their context of communication*” (Mayring, 2000, p. 1). With regard to the theoretical framework of this doctoral thesis, i.e., the institutional work perspective, content analysis is a frequently used technique for the treatment of findings (see for example Empson et al., 2013; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Content analysis can be used in quantitative analyses to identify dominant themes by highlighting the repetition and frequency of certain words or groups of words (i.e., the units of analysis, cf. **section 2.3.2.**). When mobilizing a more qualitative perspective, as it is our case, it enables us to account for the value and the importance of certain themes and interpret them in the context in which they occur (Blanc et al., 2014): indeed, here, an inference is based on the *presence* of the cue (for instance a word, theme, etc.) rather than the *frequency* of its appearance (Bardin, 2013)³². The type of content analysis we mobilize is therefore **qualitative and thematic**: it consists of identifying themes - “nodes of meaning” - that are significant for the research object (Bardin, 2013).

³² In chapter 5, section 1.1. (cross-case analysis of findings regarding RQ 1), we refer to the frequency of sub-codes related to institutional work practices. We do so once and for purely illustrative purposes to emphasize the differences we observed between the two cases in terms of mobilized practices. This approach seemed relevant for this particular research question. Apart from this exception, our thematic content analysis is qualitative as we focus on the presence of themes and the meaning behind them rather than the number of occurrences.

To identify these themes, the collected material must be treated – coded – which involves a transformation of the raw data into a representation of its content to provide insights that are relevant with regard to the research object (Bardin, 2013). According to Miles and Hubermann (1994), this treatment of qualitative data consists of three interrelated and iterative components: the reduction of data, the display of data, and the drawing and verification of conclusions.

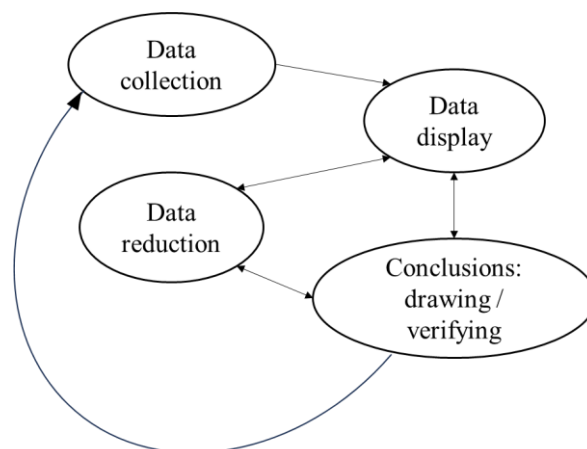
The **reduction** of data refers to the selection, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw data. This is done continuously throughout the data collection process and even before: the researcher decides which data they want to collect with regard to the concepts they mobilize, the research questions they seek to answer, the field in which they operate, or the data collection methods they use (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this sense, analytical choices about relevant data are made throughout the entire research process. Indeed, our abductive mode of reasoning pushed us to continuously reflect on potential links between the theoretical framework and what we found in the field and guided the selection of the data we collected. This shaped the development of our interview guide, and how we took notes during observations. In turn, the collected data also shaped the conceptual and theoretical framework we applied as we quickly discovered whether our assumptions based on literature matched the reality we observed. Since our data collection phase was stretched out over a relatively long period of time (approximately a year for the two cases), we were able to reflect on the relevance of the collected data with regard to the literature and vice versa, and to make modifications to both data collection methods and the theoretical framework when necessary. This was further explained in **section 1.2.** of this chapter where we elaborated on our abductive approach.

The **display** of data implies organizing the collected material in a way that allows to draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In studies based on qualitative data, interesting and relevant information tends to be dispersed since the texts we analyse are usually long and bulky, and often relatively unstructured. Structuring the collected material so that it makes sense with regard to the research object and the questions we seek to answer is therefore an essential step in the analysis process. It aims to reduce and simplify the data and make it more accessible and “digestible”. We have done so by creating codes and arranging the collected material for both cases in these codes (cf. **section 2.3.3.**).

Then, the third step of the data analysis process consists of the **drawing and verification of conclusions**. Throughout the research process, the researcher is likely to observe patterns or regularities, possible explanations and causal relationships. While “hints” of possible conclusions can often be sensed early in the research process, final conclusions can only be drawn when all data has been collected and data analysis takes place (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is moreover important to verify these conclusions and show their validity – as we will explain below (**section 2.4.**) a variety of criteria can be applied to ensure the scientificness and validity of qualitative data.

While these three components of qualitative data analysis have been presented separately and in what can resemble a chronological order, they are interrelated and cannot be completely separated from one another. Rather, the process is **cyclical and interactive** (see figure 14 below) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Especially in abductive studies, the researcher is likely to go back and forth between the different parts of data analysis – and data collection – several times before final conclusions can be drawn; this was also the case for us when collecting and analysing the material for this doctoral thesis. Since this process of both data collection and analysis tends to be somewhat long in qualitative studies, and frequently stretches over months – as it was the case for us -, the researcher is likely to be exposed to a multitude of experiences during this process, which in turn affects how they think about the analyzed data (Yin, 2011). For us, studying two cases moreover affected how we collected, treated and thought about the data, and led us to challenge the assumptions we made.

Figure 14. Data analysis: an interactive model



(Source: adapted from Miles & Hubermann, 1994, p. 12)

Content analysis can be operationalized through coding. Coding consists of "*breaking down data (direct observation, discourse, texts, images) into units for analysis, defining the categories that will accommodate them, and then placing (arranging or categorizing) the units into these categories*" (Grawitz, 1996). This is one of the possible ways in which the researcher transforms the raw, disordered empirical world of experience into an organized world of ideas and concepts" (Allard-Poesi, 2003, p. 245). In this regard, before we elaborate in more detail on the coding process and the coding table, we developed to treat our data (**section 2.3.3.**), we explain the units of analysis used in our study.

2.3.2. The units of analysis

Especially in studies where qualitative data is collected, the researcher is likely to find themselves confronted with a vast amount of data. To analyse the collected material, it must be broken down into more digestible units. In this regard, and depending on the research question as well as the nature of the collected material, **units of analysis** must be defined (Angot et al., 2014). Allard-Poesi (2003, p. 249) explains that “*the unit of analysis is the element (the criterion, the dimension) on the basis of which the researcher will break down the data and extract units that will then be classified into the chosen categories*”. Two main types of units of analysis can be distinguished (Allard-Poesi, 2003): “physical” or natural units that correspond to units of text, to places or times, and those that refer to a “unit of meaning”.

Physical units of analysis are studied through their form or the way in which they are expressed. They may consist of a word, a line of a text, or be larger and correspond to entire sentences, paragraphs, or documents.

Units of meaning, which studies in our field of management and organizational scholarship are most often interested in, refer to the sense that is given to the units of text we study. Indeed, since humans tend to “*go on for several sentences, put forward several ideas in the same sentence, interrupt an activity to resume it later, or even carry out several activities at once*”, analyzing only the form a textual unit takes would seem reductive when studying complex phenomena, interactions, or actors’ practices (Allard-Poesi, 2003, p. 250). In discursive data (collected for example through interviews), units of meaning can consist of the meaning behind a word (or a group of words), behind beliefs about causal relationships, or behind paragraphs that refer to a particular event. In any case, the unit of meaning does not refer to the textual unit (words, groups of word) itself but to the meaning behind it.

In our study, we seek to understand the meaning actors ascribe to the practices they engage to shape the implementation of co-creation in their local setting. Since our research objective can therefore be characterized as “**thematic**” (Bardin, 2013; Blanc et al., 2014) – aiming to discover, analyze, and characterize phenomena or processes –, the units of analysis we refer to are indeed units of meaning rather than physical units (Allard-Poesi, 2003). In this sense, we aim to identify themes in the collected data. Themes are affirmations about a subject (Bardin, 2013). As such, themes as units of analysis vary in size as not the linguistic form but the meaning behind it matters and is analyzed: a single affirmation can constitute a theme, and in turn, a theme can also be developed in multiple affirmations; a textual unit can moreover refer to multiple themes at once (Bardin, 2013). Thus, the size of the themes is defined in parallel with the **codes** in which they are subsequently placed (Allard-Poesi, 2003).

Let us use the following phrase from an interview conducted in Venelles as an example: “*The gold standard of the technician doing their own thing, that’s over. We’re not on our own anymore, and also, it doesn’t work. It creates misunderstandings and problems. It’s*

better to work with others. Especially when you're in public service" (M1-V). While this phrase consists of multiple sentences, it represents one unit of analysis. We coded it under the first-level code "institutional work practices", and more specifically the second-level code "disrupting", and the third-level code "highlighting the shortcomings of bureaucratic practice". This example illustrates how a unit of analysis can consist not only of multiple words but of multiple sentences.

The following section will retrace the coding process in more detail.

2.3.3. The semi-structured coding table and the codes it contains

Miles and Hubermann (1994) understand a **code** as a category label. More specifically, in qualitative studies, a code is most often a word or phrase that symbolically assigns an attribute to a portion of data: it is "*a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes*" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). Coding, then is "*a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or 'families' because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern*" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 9).

Miles and Hubermann (1994) distinguish between descriptive and interpretive codes. **Descriptive codes** are very close to the original raw data; indeed, the label as such frequently comes from the original data. To generate **interpretive codes**, the researcher goes one step further and makes inferences or interprets the data in some way. Interpretive codes can be created *a priori* or inductively: *a priori* interpretive codes are based on the conceptual and theoretical framework mobilized in the study and therefore created prior to the coding process; inductive interpretive codes emerge from the data during coding. Codes can thus be defined at different moments of the research process (Allard-Poesi, 2003): they can be determined *a priori* before starting the coding process and be based on theoretical assumptions stemming from prior research; they can be determined *a posteriori* and as such emerge during the coding process; or the definition of codes can be a mix of both approaches. In this case, Allard-Poesi (2003) refers to ***a prio-steriori*** coding.

We applied this *a prio-steriori* approach to our own research through the development of a **semi-structured coding table**. In this regard, we started the coding process with a set of predefined broad codes based on our research questions and the conceptual and theoretical framework of our study (the first-level codes as well as most second-level codes; they are presented below in the final paragraphs of this section), while leaving space for modifications, adjustments, and emerging codes (some second-level codes as well as most third-level codes). Indeed, going back and forth between theory and field work due to our abductive approach, our coding table was created, refined, and stabilized over time.

First-level codes are for instance the codes “institutional work practices” or “institutional roles”. The second-level codes they subsume contain both *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes. An example for an *a priori* second-level code is the sub-code “structural institutional work”, associated with first-level code “institutional work practices” and identified as such in past literature. An example for an *a posteriori* second-level code is “opportunists”, associated with first-level code “institutional roles”; this sub-code emerged from the data. Finally, third-level codes are more precise and emerged from the data. The sub-sub-code “highlighting the shortcomings of bureaucratic practices”, explained in the previous section, is an example for an *a posteriori* third-level code.

In this study, from an *a priori* perspective, predefined codes were included in the coding table: based on prior assumptions and the conceptual and theoretical framework of this research, they were subsequently modified and adapted to fit our data. Other codes emerged *a posteriori* during the coding process: first, these codes were rather descriptive and as we moved on in the data analysis process, more interpretive codes were created as descriptive codes were adjusted. The identification of patterns and themes within and across cases allowed us to refine the codes we had created (cf. Miles & Hubermann, 1994).

We used the **NVivo 12** software as a tool for coding electronically; this and similar tools are increasingly used for data analysis in case study research (Langley & Royer, 2006). While it is highly useful to simplify the coding process and especially so when confronted with a large quantity of data, NVivo “*does not actually code the data for you; that task is still the responsibility of the researcher. The software efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures your data to enable human analytic reflection*” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 28). The researcher still has to instruct the software and do the analytical thinking (Yin, 2011).

The table below presents the codes that structure the first level of our coding table, how they relate to the conceptual and theoretical framework we mobilize and elaborate on the sub-codes within each main code. We have determined these main codes *a priori* to address our research object and more specifically our three research questions. These codes have been used to code both cases separately:

- Overall, we seek to develop an understanding of the contextual factors shaping the two cases and the context of Grand Challenges in which they are situated more generally. The **code “1. context”** has been created in this regard, and contains sub-codes “1.1. local public organization” (declined into “1.1.1. political sphere”, “1.1.2. administrative sphere”, and “1.1.3. societal sphere”), “1.2. territory” (declined into “1.2.1. geographic characteristics” and “1.2.2. demographic characteristics”), and “1.3. Grand Challenges”.
- A second code not directly related to the research questions is the **code “2. co-creation”**, declined into “2.1. benefits”, “2.2. issues”, and “2.3. changes” for each case (chapter 1, section 3 of our conceptual framework provides the base for this code). This code allows to better understand the features of the respective co-

creation process and to enrich the presentation of the cases as well as of the findings directly related to our research questions.

- RQ 1 concerns the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of policy co-creation. The **code “3. institutional work practices”** refers to this question (it relates to the literature explored in chapter 2, section 2.3.). This code contains several a priori sub-codes based on prior literature: “3.1. creating”, “3.2. disrupting”, and “3.3. maintaining”; as well as “3.4. structural”, “3.5. conceptual”, “3.6. operational”, and “3.7. relational”.
- RQ 2 concerns the **actors** involved in the process of implementing co-creation and the roles they take on. The **code “4. institutional roles”** has been created in this regard (it relates to the literature explored in chapter 2, section 3.2.). It contains sub-codes representing the institutional roles identified in past literature: “4.1. institutional entrepreneurs”, “4.2. opportunity creators”, “4.3. supporters”, “4.4. opponents”, “4.5. maintainers”, and “4.6. consumers”. Other sub-codes emerged *a posteriori* during coding, and not all of the sub-codes identified *a priori* applied to our cases.
- Finally, RQ 3 concerns the **organizational form** the institutional work practices of these actors takes. The **code “5. organizational form”** refers to this research question (it relates to the literature explored in chapter 2, section 3.3.). It has been declined into several sub-codes that refer to the organizational forms of institutional work we have observed in our literature review: “5.1. central actors’ institutional work”, “5.2. bottom-up institutional work”, “5.3. collective institutional work”, and “5.4. heterogenous actors’ institutional work”. As for the previous code, not all of these *a priori* sub-codes applied to the cases we studied.

The complete coding table including *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes is provided in Appendix B.

2.4. Criteria for evaluation

Once data collection and analysis have been completed, another question arises: how do we evaluate the merit of the work (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)? In other words, how do we ensure and prove that the research corresponds to criteria of scientificness? The quest for validity and reliability is a guiding principle in all scientific research. Yet, the criteria of internal and external validity are often questioned in qualitative research (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). We are well aware of the debate that surrounds the issue of evaluating the scientific merits of qualitative studies in general and case studies in particular (cf. Langley & Royer, 2006); however, the purpose of this section is not to discuss *whether* they should be evaluated, but *how*. Here, we follow Yin (1992, p. 124) who emphasizes that case studies ought to be treated as any other quantitative or qualitative empirical method, and that “*the rigour of case studies should therefore be judged by the same criteria of internal validity, external validity, construct validity, and reliability*”.

In this section, we therefore propose to apply these four criteria to our own research while acknowledging the different treatment a qualitative case study requires in this regard and demonstrate how we sought to ensure the scientificness of our study by strengthening its validity (**section 2.4.1.**) and reliability (**section 2.4.2.**). Indeed, while in quantitative research, these aspects can be tested, in qualitative research, it is usually not possible to carry out such tests; rather precautions are taken to improve validity or reliability of findings (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014).

2.4.1. Validity

For Yin (2011, p. 78) “*a valid study is one that has properly collected and interpreted its data, so that the conclusions accurately reflect and represent the real world (or laboratory) that was studied*”. We can identify two main concerns in terms of validity: ensuring the relevance and rigor of the results (**internal validity**) and assessing the level of generalizability of these results (**external validity**). A third type, **construct validity**, specific to the field of social sciences, is relevant for research objects like ours where abstract concepts are not always directly observable.

2.4.1.1. Internal validity

Internal validity involves ensuring the **relevance and internal consistency** of the findings generated by the study; the researcher must question how accurate the inferences they make are, and whether there are any alternative explanatory elements or alternative causal relationships (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014; Royer & Zarlowski, 2014b). The internal validity of qualitative research conducted within the constructivist epistemological paradigm depends on the quality of the inferences made: not to establish similarities and regularities, but to identify plausible causes or understandings of the phenomenon (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). Questions of internal validity must be considered at the research design stage, and then constantly throughout the study.

Yin (2011, p. 80) suggests maintaining “*a continual sense of skepticism*” throughout the research process to identify “rivals” or alternative explanations that might challenge the assumptions we make, because “*if one of the rivals turns out to be more plausible than your original interpretation, you would have to reject your original interpretation*”. Indeed, remaining skeptical about our findings and interpretations constantly pushes us to question and challenge our own data, and dig deeper when an explanation does not seem solid enough to withstand alternatives. For instance, asking follow-up questions to obtain the most candid responses during interviews, or corroborating interview findings with observations and secondary data helped us understand the data and strengthen its validity. Indeed, we sometimes found that respondents’ behavior during co-creation events did not match their discourse during our interviews; therefore, it was valuable to be able to triangulate data from both interviews and observations to obtain the most complete picture possible. Moreover, studying two cases pushed us to constantly question our assumptions about one case when we observed differences with the second case.

As a matter of fact, a general recommendation is to multiply data sources through triangulation (Yin, 2011), and in particular to collect both primary and secondary data (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). For our study, our data collection was indeed based on three sources that covered both primary data (interviews and observations) and secondary data (multiple types of documents). Moreover, being as transparent as possible about the data collection and analysis process, and aiming for field saturation (i.e., continuing data collection until additional data no longer provides any new information) are important elements to ensure the solidity of the collected material (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a). These techniques help limit the bias related to the researcher’s interpretations and ensure that these interpretations remain as close as possible to the original data. We aimed to do so by asking follow-up questions during interviews to confirm our understanding and interpretation of our respondents’ discourse; in addition to this, we were careful to transcribe the entire interviews and not only the sections that seemed relevant to our research object at first glance. Observations and elements stemming from secondary data corroborated the interview data and provided context for these findings.

Moreover, the internal validity of our study was strengthened through constant exchanges with our thesis supervisors and other members of our immediate environment (i.e., our department and research center) as well as the broader scientific community (i.e., through presentations at international conferences in the field of management and organizational studies as well as public management, and the participation at international PhD seminars). A first publication (Potz & Serval, 2022) where the data collected for our doctoral thesis was mobilized has moreover helped familiarize ourselves with this data, its strengths and weaknesses, and identify where the internal validity of the study could be improved.

2.4.1.2. External validity

The external validity of research concerns the possibilities for **generalizing and re-appropriating the findings** of a study and applying them to cases where conditions are different (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014; Royer & Zarlowski, 2014b). To identify the degree of external validity, the researcher must first examine the extent to which the findings for a particular sample can be extended and applied to the entire relevant population (generalization); then, the researcher assesses the extent to which these results can be transferred to other fields (transferability) (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014).

While the question of internal validity is central to all research, that of external validity is less relevant for research associated with interpretivist and constructivist epistemological paradigms (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). Indeed, the question of **generalization** seems more relevant for researchers adhering to a positivist paradigm and/or conducting quantitative studies; in qualitative studies, generalization is most often not what researchers seek to achieve. However, this concern should not escape the qualitative researcher, either. Indeed, whether or not the case studies conducted as a part of qualitative studies are representative of the entire relevant population is sometimes not stated explicitly (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). Thus, in both quantitative and qualitative research, the sample and the population must be specified to determine the scope of generalization of results. To this end, quantitative research relies on a statistical generalization procedure, while qualitative research relies on an **analytical generalization** procedure (Yin, 2011): it depends above all on the reproducibility of the research method. The more precisely it is described, the more likely the same method is to lead to similar results when the research is reproduced in another context. We aimed to be as explicit as possible in this regard and have dedicated an entire chapter of this doctoral thesis (**chapter 3**) to our methodological reflections and the process of data collection and analysis.

The question of **transferability** of results relates to the extension of the research to other fields. Here, the researcher must pay attention to the potential problem of contextual dependence of findings (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014): are findings related to the explanatory variables, or rather to the context in which the phenomenon is embedded? When findings are highly context-dependent, this must be considered for their transferability. This problem of transferability is frequently addressed when judging the external validity of qualitative research, where results are derived from the analysis of a single or very small number of cases. Qualitative research is often criticized for being too context-dependent (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). As we adhere to a constructivist epistemological paradigm, developing a deep understanding of the context in which the phenomenon is embedded is essential (see **section 1.1.** of this chapter). However, by studying two cases where the same phenomenon (i.e., policy co-creation in a local public organization confronted with Grand Challenges) occurs in different national, cultural, and institutional contexts (see **section 2.1.** of this chapter) we aimed to extend the scope of this research. While the inclusion of more cases in our multiple case study would have been beneficial for the generalizability of findings (Royer & Zarlowski, 2014a), this was

not our goal; still, we aimed to ensure some degree of external validity by studying these two cases embedded in different contexts. We moreover studied the context of each case in a systematic manner (see **chapter 4, section 1**) to ensure comparability of the cases while highlighting their particularities.

2.4.1.3. Construct validity

Concepts are the cornerstones of assumptions used to describe, explain, or predict organizational phenomena. They are abstract forms that can have different meanings; it is therefore important that the researcher establishes a precise understanding of the concepts used in their research (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). This is done through development of **operationalizable concepts**. When considering construct validity, it is important to ensure that the operationalized concept reflects the theoretical concept (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014): construct validity therefore refers to the degree to which an operationalization measures the concept it is supposed to represent.

When operationalizing a concept, observable or measurable indicators are attributed to an otherwise abstract notion. It is this operationalized concept that we refer to as the research construct. Thus, when we look at construct validity, we are not concerned with the process of *constructing* the object of research, but with the process of *operationalizing* the object of research (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014).

It is therefore essential, before starting to collect data, to ensure that the unit of analysis and type of measurement chosen provide the necessary information: what is to be observed, how and why? To do so, the researcher must specify the central concepts of the study as well as their main dimensions, and the theories they draw on. In this regard, in our research, we were careful to develop the main dimensions of our central concept (i.e., co-creation) as well as of the theory we mobilize (i.e., the institutional work perspective) in chapters 1 and 2. By doing so, we were able to develop an interview guide that covers the main topics of our study, and we knew what to look for when conducting observations in the field. In this respect, we explained the aim of each section of the research guide and the dimensions our questions sought to explore (see **section 2.2.1.2** of this chapter, table 12 “Topics of the interview guide”). Moreover, the abductive approach we adhere to guarantees a back-and-forth between theory and field work. This ensured the continuous adaptation of our research object and research questions to both operational needs observed in the field and concepts developed in the literature. The operationalization of our research object moreover shows in the coding table we have developed and where codes at different levels mirror the main dimensions of our conceptual and theoretical framework. In the description of our main codes (see **section 2.3.3.** of this chapter) we explicated how the codes relate to the research questions and the literature we mobilized. Finally, to ensure transparency of our research process, we made sure to provide details on all steps from the development of our research object and research question to data collection and analysis and the presentation of findings and contributions.

2.4.2. Reliability

Assessing the reliability of research involves ensuring that the various research operations can be **repeated with the same results** by different researchers and/or at different times (Avenier & Thomas, 2012; Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). As such, reliability concerns both quantitative and qualitative research, and all stages of the research process from data collection to the presentation of findings (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014).

Indeed, after data collection, the principle of reliability demands that the researcher enables any reader of their study to follow their cognitive path. To do so, the empirical material must be made accessible to the reader, and the details of collecting and analysing this data must be explained (Avenier & Thomas, 2012). In short, the design of the research must be described in detail to ensure reliability of the study and its findings. Transparency is therefore a key principle of reliability. Indeed, it is important to be able to convey information about the methodological procedure that has been applied. In qualitative studies, reliability is mostly based on the researcher's ability to describe the entire research process in very concrete terms – especially the phases where data is condensed and analyzed – and their honesty as they do so (Drucker-Godard et al., 2014). In this regard, this chapter 3 of our doctoral thesis provides details about both our epistemological and methodological decisions to ensure a high degree of transparency and reflexivity and strengthen reliability. We provide both the interview guide used to conduct our semi-structured interviews, as well as details about the coding process and codes to be as transparent as possible about the phases of collecting and analyzing data³³. Finally, figure 11 (“Abductive research process”, **chapter 3, section 1.2.1.**) allows to retrace all phases of the research process as well as the evolution of our main research question.

In this section, we explained and justified our methodological choices. We elaborated on our multiple-case study consisting of two cases, as well as the selection criteria for these cases. We then explained the triangulation of data collection methods, i.e., semi-structured interviews, observation, and secondary data. Finally, the data analysis methods were clarified and the criteria for evaluating the scientificness of our qualitative study explored.

In the following chapter, we present the findings of our empirical study.

³³ The interview guides and the coding table are provided in the Appendix.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, we have developed the **methodological framework** to empirically study the question how policy co-creation is implemented in local public organizations through the institutional work of heterogenous actors. Indeed, we have structured this chapter in two sections that respectively retrace and justify our epistemological position and mode of reasoning (**section 1**) and methodological choices as well as criteria of scientificness (**section 2**). These elements of our **research design** are summarized in table 18 below.

Table 18. Research design

Research object	<i>How does heterogenous actors' institutional work shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations facing Grand Challenges?</i>
Research questions	<i>RQ 1: What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation? RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogenous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation? RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?</i>
Conceptual and theoretical framework <i>(chapters 1 and 2)</i>	<i>Context: Grand Challenges Main concept: policy co-creation Main theory: neo-institutional theory/ institutional work perspective</i>
Epistemological position <i>(chapter 3, section 1.1.)</i>	Constructivism
Mode of reasoning <i>(chapter 3, section 1.2.)</i>	Abduction
Empirical approach <i>(chapter 3, sections 1.2. and 2.1.)</i>	Qualitative approach "Two-case case study" of the implementation of policy co-creation in a French (town of Venelles) and an Austrian (city of Klagenfurt) local public organization
Data collection <i>(chapter 3, section 2.2.)</i>	Triangulation of primary and secondary data: Semi-structured interviews Participant and non-participant observations Analysis of secondary data (documents)
Data analysis <i>(chapter 3, section 2.3.)</i>	Thematic content analysis Qualitative analysis through coding (use of NVivo 12)
Criteria for evaluation <i>(chapter 3, section 2.4.)</i>	Internal validity External validity Construct validity Reliability

(Source: author)

CHAPTER 4: Presentation of Cases and Findings

In this doctoral research, we investigate **how the implementation of policy co-creation in local public organizations is shaped by actors' institutional work**. In this chapter, we present the two cases as well as the findings of our empirical study. As a reminder, we explore the institutional roles of actors involved in the respective co-creation process (RQ 1), their institutional work practices (RQ 2), and the organizational form institutional work takes based on these roles and practices (RQ 3).

We choose to present the findings for our three research question in one section for each of the cases. By presenting our findings in this narrative way and telling the story of each case, we are able to look at both the big picture and the context-related particularities that make the cases unique. This is especially interesting when studying different cultural contexts (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). Each section includes elements allowing us to respond to our three research questions. This chapter is focused on the descriptive dimension of the findings, and our narrative stays close to the observed events and discourse of respondents. The following chapter proposes an analytical and comparative presentation of the findings through a cross-case analysis where we discuss similarities and differences across cases (**chapter 5, section 1**). We structure the presentation and discussion of findings in this way to increase transparency and give the reader the opportunity to challenge our analysis of findings by referring to different descriptions.

This chapter contains three sections, and is structured as follows:

We begin this chapter by presenting the two cases in **section 1**. Both the French case of "Venelles in Transition", and the Austrian case of "Mission KS 30" will be introduced along the three following dimensions. Given the importance of the institutional environment in which institutional work takes places, the institutional features shaping the respective administrative system will be presented. Then, we shed light on the two towns and their characteristics, and finally on the co-creation projects studied for this research.

Section 2 contains the presentation of findings for the Venelles in Transition case. By retracing the evolution of the co-creation project and its implementation in Venelles, we provide elements of response to the three research questions.

Finally, **section 3** contains the presentation of findings for the Mission KS 30 project and as for the presentation of findings for the French case, we recount the story of implementing co-creation in Klagenfurt to respond to our three research questions.

Section 1: Presenting the cases: policy co-creation in French and Austrian local public organizations

We have justified our case selection in the preceding chapter and explained some aspects of each case; we now propose to begin this chapter with a brief presentation of the “Venelles in Transition” and “Mission KS 30” co-creation projects that have been investigated for the empirical part of our thesis. Following Kuhlmann and Bouckaert (2016, p. 7), we consider the “*institutional ‘starting conditions’ and ‘contexts’*” as important factors that shape the implementation of new practices in local public organizations, as they can have a “*promoting or blocking effect*” on institutional change. Indeed, as we have shown in **chapter 2 (section 1.1.)**, we build on neo-institutional theory to study how policy co-creation is implemented in local public organizations through the institutional work of heterogeneous actors. While the institutional work perspective allows to account for actors’ capacity to shape institutions, it still builds on the postulates of traditional neo-institutional theory and assumes that institutions shape actors’ behavior, too (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Consequently, and in line with our constructivist epistemological approach that invites to pay particular attention to the context in which the phenomenon we study is embedded, we present the two cases and their respective contexts, before analyzing actors’ practices and their roles as well as the organizational forms of their institutional work in the following sections. To do so, the respective project, its evolution and involved actors will be presented. Moreover, we will elaborate on the institutional features that, according to Kuhlmann and Bouckaert (2016) are most likely to affect how change is implemented in local public organizations: they include state structure and type of government, administrative culture and tradition, functional responsibilities and autonomy of local governments, territorial structures, and local democracy. These dimensions will be presented in this section for the case of Venelles (**section 1.1.**) and the case of Klagenfurt (**section 1.2.**) to develop a better understanding of the environments in which co-creation was implemented.

1.1. “Venelles in Transition

We begin by presenting the French case: the town of Venelles and its “Venelles in Transition” co-creation project. To do so, we propose to briefly introduce the institutional features which are likely to shape the implementation of institutional change in French local public organizations (**section 1.1.1.**), before a short characterization of the town of Venelles (**section 1.1.2.**). Finally, and most interestingly for our study, the “Venelles in Transition” project will be presented (**section 1.1.3.**).

1.1.1. Institutional features: the Continental European Napoleonic tradition

Among the six clusters of administrative traditions identified by Kuhlmann and Bouckaert (2016), the **Continental European Napoleonic** type best describes the French administrative system. It is based on the conception of the public sector developed by Napoleon I, and while it has spread throughout Europe, France veritably embodies this model (Peters, 2008).

In countries marked by the Continental European Napoleonic tradition, the highly **centralized State** is strong and endowed with importance competencies (Bezes, 2001). This implies a state-centric conception of governance whereby power is inherent in the state, while citizens and civil society more generally are less autonomous and active (Bezes, 2001): the State is in charge of defining and pursuing the **public interest**. Indeed, the notion of this “*intérêt general*” is particularly important in France. A perception of the State as a “*means of integrating society, and subsuming social difference in the general entity that is the overarching source of governance*” (Peters, 2008, p. 121) prevails: rather than explicitly addressing differences and inequalities among groups of the population, a universalistic understanding of citizenship tends to hide them. In this sense, the development of French public institutions has been shaped by the guiding principles of unity and indivisibility of the Republic, and the sovereignty of the State (Chevalier, 2006).

Indeed, France, a **unitary state**, has been considered one of the most centralized administrative systems in Europe for a long time (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). This tradition of a powerful central government can be traced back to the “*Ancien Régime*” (Chevalier, 2006) and has more recently undergone transformations with several waves of **decentralization** since the 1980s (Bezes, 2001; Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). However, a vertical line of power still descends from Paris to local public administrations, and therefore, **subsidiarity at local level is underdeveloped** (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). Local governments thus remain administratively and functionally relatively weak (Turc et al., 2016) and a high number of locally operating entities of the central government can be observed (Kuhlmann & Bouckaert, 2016). However, citizens are able

to directly **elect the municipal council and mayor** of their municipality, which indicates a strong political-democratic status of the local level (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019).

Local governments in France are legal entities governed by public law, distinct from the State, and as such enjoy legal and financial autonomy. There are three levels of local government: municipalities, departments, and regions. Local governments have administrative powers, which preclude them from exercising state powers. Over the past years, and especially since the 2015 territorial re-organization, municipalities have been ascribed **new competencies**, and are now able to make autonomous decisions regarding urban planning, housing, environment, management of pre-elementary and elementary schools, and share competencies with regions and departments for issues such as sport, tourism, culture, the promotion of regional languages, and popular education³⁴. More recently, the “3DS” law, i.e., “differentiation, decentralization, deconcentration, and simplification”, of 2022 widens the margin of maneuver of local authorities and intends to simplify local public action³⁵.

1.1.1. The town of Venelles³⁶

Venelles is a municipality located in the southern region of France known as Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, and it falls under the jurisdiction of the Aix-Marseille Metropolis. As of the year 2020, Venelles was home to approximately 8.500 residents residing in an area spanning 20,5 km². Consequently, it is recognized as a relatively densely populated community, with a population density of 410,5 inhabitants/ km².

³⁴ Vie Publique (2023): La repartition des compétences après la loi NOTRé, see <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/20112-la-repartition-des-competences-entre-collectivites-apres-la-loi-notre> (consulted on 10.10.2023)

³⁵ Vie Publique (2022): Loi du 21 février 2022 relative à la différenciation, la décentralisation, la déconcentration et portant diverses mesures de simplification de l'action publique locale, see <https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/279815-loi-3ds-decentralisation-deconcentration-collectivites-locales> (consulted on 10.10.2023)

³⁶ The data used in this section stems from the most recent census published by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) in 2023, see <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=COM-13113> (consulted on 09.10.2023)

Figure 15. Map of Venelles



(Source: Cartes France)

Based on the 2020 census data, Venelles displays distinctive **demographic and socioeconomic features**. Indeed, Venelles is home to an aging and relatively wealthy population. Approximately one-third of its residents are aged over 60 (31,3%) and retired (31,7%). Within the working population, a third is involved in executive and higher intellectual professions (19,3%) or intermediary professions (14,2%). Moreover, over a third of Venelles' residents hold a university diploma, a significantly higher percentage than the metropolis' average. These sociodemographic characteristics can be partially explained by the geographical proximity to big employers such as Airbus Helicopters as well as the CEA and ITER research centers that attract a highly qualified segment of the population. Moreover, the town boasts a substantially lower unemployment rate than the Aix-Marseille metropolis average. These statistics, shown in table 19 below, highlight Venelles' higher average household income and living standards in comparison to other municipalities in the Aix-Marseille metropolis.

Table 19. Venelles and Aix-Marseille Metropolis: comparison of socioeconomic features

	Venelles	Aix-Marseille Metropolis
Executive/ higher intellectual and intermediary professions	33,5%	25%
Unemployed	5,6%	9,6%
Retired	31,7%	25,3%
University diploma (Bachelor's and/or Master's degree)	37,8%	23,7%

(Source: INSEE, 2023)

As a relatively wealthy town, Venelles has been able to invest in extensive **infrastructure projects**³⁷. In this regard, one of Venelles' flagship projects is a large sports park covering 22 hectares, including over 40 sports facilities as well as a leisure center for children. This major project has been developed during the current mayor's first term in office and continued during his second term. More recently, another major infrastructure project has been finished: in 2023, a modern media library has been inaugurated.

The **mayor** of Venelles, politically affiliated with a center-right party, has been successfully re-elected in 2020 after taking office for the first time in 2015. He obtained more than 76% of votes at the 2020 municipal elections; however, at 37,9%, turnout was low. In addition to being mayor, he also occupies political positions as a departmental councillor at the Bouches-du-Rhône department, and as delegate for the "Digital Metropolis", Public Data Policy, Innovation and User Experience at the Metropolis of Aix-Marseille. At the level of the municipality, the mayor's re-election campaign was based on three pillars³⁸: (1) the protection of the environment and biodiversity, (2) sustainable urban development, and (3) citizen participation. The "Venelles in Transition" project has been initiated to address these three pillars in parallel, and to do so soon after his successful re-election.

1.1.2. The "Venelles in Transition" project

Indeed, these three campaign promises have been united in one major project, launched internally just a few months after the re-election in 2020: "Venelles in Transition". The aim is ambitious: to **co-create a local 2030 Agenda** with the population. In doing so and initiating a co-creation project aimed at the local implementation of the UN SDGs, Venelles is a precursor among French municipalities where only a handful of similar participatory projects have been initiated. Indeed, Venelles was the first municipality of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region to initiate the co-creation of a local 2030 Agenda (cf. Commune de Venelles, 2023). While the French national government has presented a roadmap for achieving the SDGs in 2019, inviting local public organizations to develop their own 2030 Agendas, for the time being, local initiatives to co-create these Agendas with the population remain scarce. Venelles in Transition is therefore a rare and particularly ambitious project, considering that it takes place in a small town with limited resources, that explicitly confronts itself with local instances of Grand Challenges for the first time.

This co-creation project was led by a small **internal team** made up of the mayor, two municipal councillors involved in sustainable development issues, and two local public managers who form the Sustainable Development and Citizen Participation department. This department has been created only recently – in 2020 -, but its two agents have been working for the organization before, in the communications and urban planning departments respectively. The local government of Venelles had never engaged in

³⁷ Ville de Venelles (2023) : Les grands projets, see <https://venelles.fr/votre-mairie/les-projets/> (consulted on 10.10.2023)

³⁸ Venelles pour Vous (2020)

extensive citizen participation projects before. Thus, due to their lack of experience with co-creation, the internal team chose to work with an **external consulting agency** to conceive of and organize the participatory process. After meetings with several candidates, an agency based in Marseille and specialized in collective intelligence methods has been selected despite their lack of experience in the organization of such processes related to the SDGs. Subsequently, two consultants supported the town of Venelles throughout the entire Venelles in Transition project.

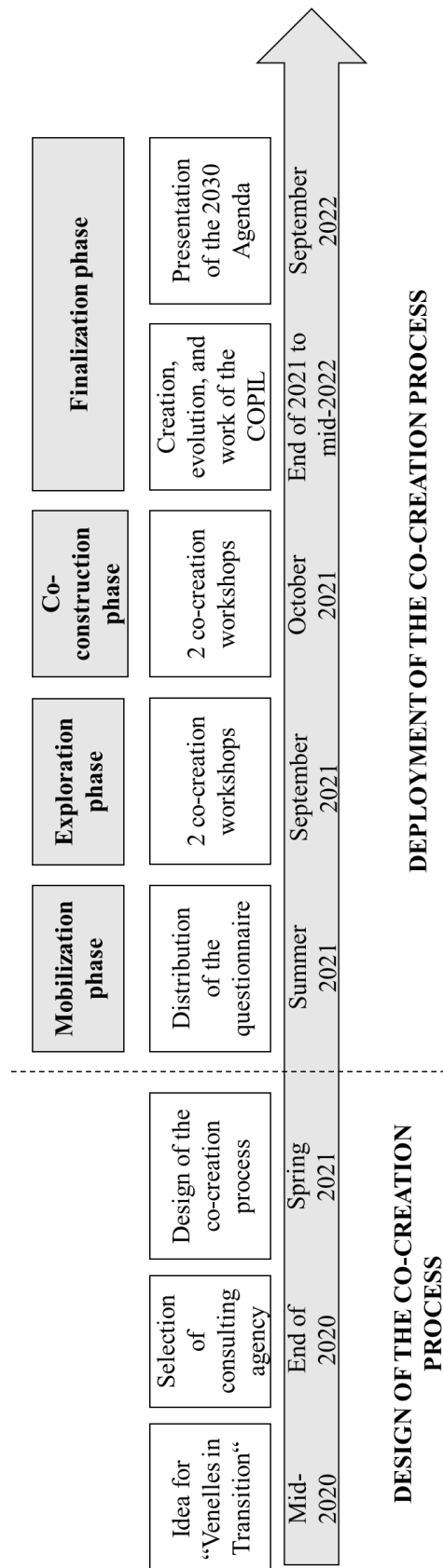
With them, four participatory phases with citizens and civil society were planned: mobilization, exploration, co-construction and finalization of the 2030 Agenda. During these workshops, on which we elaborate below, participants were mainly members of local associations, politically committed citizens and/or those aware of sustainable development, and local public managers from various departments.

The co-creation process of Venelles in Transition is illustrated in figure 16 below: it shows the four phases of co-creation as well as the events taking place in each phase. We will elaborate on each of these phases in the following paragraphs. The photos below have been taken during the various co-creation workshops in Venelles in 2021.



Photos of co-creation workshops in Venelles (source: author)

Figure 16. Timeline of the Venelles in Transition co-creation process



(Source: Serval et al. 2022)

1.1.2.1. Phase 1: Mobilization

To begin with, in the summer of 2021, citizens were given the opportunity to express their expectations via a widely distributed **questionnaire** (accessible online and as a printed version distributed to each household); this also gave the municipality the opportunity to promote the upcoming co-creation workshops. The questionnaire was structured to find out more about people's habits in terms of sustainable development, their level of knowledge of the actions undertaken by the municipality, and to identify the key points for a successful social, environmental, and economic transition in Venelles. The questionnaire was administered by the consultants, modified by the municipality, and collected a total of 424 responses over a two-month period. The priorities identified by respondents revolved around the preservation of biodiversity, public transportation, and responsible urban planning.

1.1.2.2. Phase 2: Exploration

During this phase (September 2021), **two co-creation workshops** were organized. The first took the form of a brainstorming session on the problems and initial ideas for solutions related to the SDGs. It took place on a Saturday morning in the center of the town in front of the town hall and right next to the busy Saturday farmers market. Several tables with flashcards presenting both the SDGs and actions underway in the municipality related to these SDGs were had been prepared. At each table, participants could choose an SDG to work on. With participants constantly coming and going, a definite number of participants cannot be provided, but according to the organizers, around 100 inhabitants participated in one way or another, either by engaging in discussions at tables, or through more informal conversations. At the end of the first workshop, public managers and consultants realized that the participants had had difficulties grasping the SDGs, which seemed too abstract and therefore difficult to understand. Consequently, the content of the second workshop of this phase was modified at the last minute: participants would work on local objectives, translating the SDGs into elements of quality of life in Venelles, rather than on the SDGs themselves.

This second workshop was therefore organized around four major themes structuring the pre-identified problems and solutions in direct relation to the town of Venelles. These themes also corresponded to the main themes of the mayor's re-election program: preserving biodiversity, ensuring health and well-being, developing local employment and responsible consumption, and involving residents in the success of the transition. For each theme, priorities, conditions for success and risks were identified by the participants. This second workshop took place on a weeknight, and indoors: a room in the leisure center within the local sports park had been prepared in a similar way to the first workshop outdoors. Around 20 to 25 participants attended this workshop.

To also include the younger population in Venelles in Transition, a **quiz night** was planned at the end of phase 2. The aim was to raise their awareness for sustainable development issues in a fun way, and to capture their expectations and needs while

encouraging them to take action. Although a lot of work had gone into organizing this event, attendance was very low.

1.1.2.3. Phase 3: Co-construction

During this phase (October 2021), **two more co-creation workshops** were organized. Both workshops followed the same structure and were replicated to cover all themes. Environmental transition themes (waste management, mobility, urban planning and major risks, energy, pollution, biodiversity) were addressed in the first workshop, and social and economic transition themes (employment and the economy, agriculture and food, health, sport and autonomy, social cohesion and citizenship, consumption practices, housing and demographics) in the second. Like the second workshop of phase 1, both workshops took place at the local leisure center; one was held on a weeknight and the other on a Saturday morning. About 20 to 25 participants attended each workshop, whereby many of them returned and participated in multiple workshops.

The format of the two workshops was designed to prioritize issues and then give concrete form to solutions by developing action sheets. To prioritize the issues, a system of stickers was used, color-coded (red, orange and green) from lowest to highest priority. As for the action sheets, they had to include a description of the action, conditions for implementation, objectives, success indicators, potential risks, involved people and/or organizations, and required resources. Each participant was given the opportunity to indicate their contact details, should they wish to be involved in the implementation of the respective action. At each table, participants were accompanied by experts who led discussions and answered technical questions to help draw up the action sheets.

1.1.2.4. Phase 4: Finalizing the 2030 Agenda

This phase (February-December 2022) revolved around the drafting of the 2030 Agenda and the feedback of the results of the co-creation process. During this phase, a steering committee was set up to draw up the final Agenda 2030 for Venelles. Indeed, this **steering committee, called COPIL** (*“comité de pilotage”*), was not planned and emerged when co-creation participants demanded to be included in the final phase of the project as well. Consequently, a COPIL consisting of voluntary inhabitants, as well as municipal councillors and public managers was created. At first, the COPIL’s role was intended to be limited to the supervision of the finalization phase where internal actors – public managers, agents, and municipal councillors – would select and prioritize the ideas to be included in the 2030 Agenda. However, the involved inhabitants demanded to be included in this process and therefore, the COPIL’s role evolved: it turned into a veritable decision-making instrument whereby citizens, public managers, and municipal councillors from both the mayor’s list and the opposition collaborated to develop the 2030 Agenda. To do so, the COPIL met several times (in person and online, depending on the sanitary context) to prioritize the propositions that have emerged during the co-creation workshops.

A few months after the end of phase 3, an online public presentation of the results of the co-creation process was organized, attracting some 50 participants. On this occasion, the

COPIL was presented, and citizens were able to ask questions and share their opinions. Months later, a preliminary version of **the 2030 Agenda was presented at a local event during the European Week for Sustainable Development** in September 2022. Due to bad weather conditions, this event was organized indoors, at the local leisure center where co-creation workshops were held as well; initially, it was to take place outside in the center of Venelles, hoping to attract passers-by. At this occasion, round tables on topics of the 2030 Agenda were organized and public managers, elected representatives from the local as well as the national level, and citizens who had been members of the COPIL participated in these discussions.

Venelles' final 2030 Agenda consists of three main axes – environmental, social, and economic issues – and is declined into **13 challenges, 31 objectives, and 140 concrete actions**.³⁹

³⁹ The complete version of Venelles' 2030 Agenda is available online (in French only): <https://venelles.fr/ville-en-transition/agenda-2030/> (consulted on 04.02.2024)

1.2. “Mission KS 30”

In this second section we introduce the Austrian case: the city of Klagenfurt and its “Mission KS 30” co-creation project. After a brief look at the institutional features shaping local public organizations and their functioning (**section 1.2.1.**), we propose to present the city of Klagenfurt itself (**section 1.2.2.**). Then, the “Mission KS 30” project, its features and modalities will be presented (**section 1.2.3.**).

1.2.1. Institutional features: the Continental European Federal tradition

Among the six clusters of administrative traditions, the **Continental European Federal** type best describes the Austrian administrative system. As such, Austria shares a strong legalistic orientation and rule-of-law with Napoleonic countries such as France. What distinguishes federal countries from Napoleonic ones, however, is the high degree of **decentralization and subsidiarity** (Kuhlmann & Bouckaert, 2016).

Indeed, the federal state of Austria is formed by nine **provinces** (“*Bundesländer*”). Each province has their **own provincial constitution** in addition to the national constitution. In contrast to a centrally organized state, in a federal state legislation and enforcement are divided between the federal government and the provinces. Provincial laws and municipal laws are passed by the provincial parliaments. Provincial governments are responsible for provincial administration. In this sense, they dispose of a high degree of administrative autonomy, and are ascribed an important number of competencies, defined in the constitution (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019): for instance, regarding their own provincial constitution, protection of minors, protection of the environment, urban planning, construction laws, waste management, tourism, or primary schools.

However, they are also responsible for the enforcement of many federal laws in the respective province. This means that they also perform tasks for the federal government; they are however able to shape how these laws are implemented at provincial level. Although it is stipulated in the constitution that all competences not explicitly attributed to the Austrian federal government are the responsibility of the provinces, many very important competences are explicitly assigned to the federal government. Compared to other federally organized states, such as Germany or the United States, however, **Austrian federalism proves to be relatively underdeveloped**. This shows in the role of the “*Bundesrat*”, the second parliamentary chamber in which the provinces are represented, but which only has a suspensive veto right.

This **vertical fragmentation** (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019) increases the **complexity** of the administrative system in countries such as Austria shaped by the Continental European Federal type. At the same time, high degrees of decentralization and autonomy granted to sub-national entities, this administrative model preserves **cultural and**

regional identities within the federal country. Indeed, policies and decisions can be adapted to local circumstances.

1.2.2. The city of Klagenfurt

The capital of the province of Carinthia, the city of Klagenfurt is located in the South of Austria. With a population of 104.333 inhabitants as of January 2023, it is the sixth-largest city in the country⁴⁰. The surface of the city of Klagenfurt covers an area of around 120 km², which makes it a densely populated area with a population density of around 840 inhabitants/km². The **demographic characteristics** of the population of Klagenfurt correspond to those of the Austrian population in that most inhabitants of the city (61,1%) are between 20 and 64 years old.

Figure 17. Map of Klagenfurt



(Source: Orange Smile)

Near the borders with Italy and Slovenia, surrounded by lakes, hills, and mountains, and connected to other European cities via the Klagenfurt airport, the city is located within an area where **tourism** is an important pillar of the local economy. Numerous cultural and sports events are organized on a regular basis. Besides being attractive for tourists, Klagenfurt is also home to a **university** and other higher education facilities, as well as numerous **companies** from different sectors: for instance, Infineon and other companies, most of them from the technology sector, can be found in the Lakeside Science and Technology Park situated near the university campus.

⁴⁰ The data used in this section stems from the most recent census published by Austria's Federal Statistical Office (Statistik Austria) in 2023, see <https://www.statistik.at/blickgem/gemDetail.do?gemnr=20101> (consulted on 18.10.2023)

While these elements show the city's focus on technological innovation, the **protection of the environment** has been an important issue for the city of Klagenfurt for many years. Indeed, numerous projects and initiatives have been implemented in this regard – for instance, the design of a smart city district, or the “GREENsChOOLENERGY” project where the roof of a local secondary school was covered with solar panels to produce energy⁴¹. Besides these projects, a comprehensive **Smart City climate strategy** has been developed over the past years⁴². Reconciling technological innovation and environmental protection, this strategy allows to pursue both of the city's important aims in parallel. It has been adopted by the city council in 2018 and is a constantly evolving strategic “living paper” that is continuously adapted to incorporate experience from completed projects, as well as current developments.

Until the beginning of 2022, the general goal of Klagenfurt's Smart City strategy was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030 and by 90% by 2040, based on the baseline year 2011. In April of 2022, the city has been selected as the only representative of Austria to participate in **the EU mission "100 climate-neutral and Smart Cities"**⁴³. The goal is now to achieve climate neutrality as early as 2030. At the same time, the good quality of life for the population and future generations is to be further improved and sustainably secured, taking into account the 17 SDGs. To prepare their application to the "100 climate-neutral and Smart Cities" program and further develop the Smart City strategy, in 2021, Klagenfurt has launched the participatory “Mission KS 30” project.

1.2.3. The “Mission KS 30” project

The Mission KS 30 project was launched mid-2021 by Klagenfurt's Climate and Environment Protection department; the initiative for the project came from the department, rather than from the local political sphere. Indeed, as we will show below, Mission KS 30 has been initiated to apply for national and European funding. Internally, a varying number of employees of the city's **Sustainable Development department** (between 4 and 7: less during the preparation phase and more during the deployment phase), including the director, were working on this project, and an intern has been recruited specifically for this project to support them. Except from approving of the project and attending the final event, **local politicians remained absent** throughout the entire project, which was initiated and led autonomously by the responsible department.

Just like Klagenfurt's Smart City climate strategy, the name of the Mission KS 30 project once more highlights the desire to reconcile technological progress and the protection of the environment: indeed, KS 30 is an acronym for “*klimateutral und smart bis 2030*”

⁴¹ City of Klagenfurt (2023): Climate and Environment see, <https://www.klagenfurt.at/stadtservice/klima-umwelt> (consulted on 19.10.2023)

⁴² City of Klagenfurt (2023): Smart City Strategy, see <https://www.klagenfurt.at/stadtservice/klima-umwelt/smart-city-strategie> (consulted on 19.10.2023)

⁴³ European Commission (2023): EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, see https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en (consulted on 19.10.2023)

(“climate-neutral and smart until 2030”)⁴⁴. This project has been initiated through Klagenfurt’s participation in the “**Fit4Urban Mission**” project, funded by the Austrian Ministry for Climate Protection and the Austrian research funding agency (FFG). Klagenfurt was selected as one of nine Austrian cities to participate in the Fit4Urban Mission which was intended to prepare their application to the European Commission’s “100 climate-neutral and smart cities” program⁴⁵. Indeed, the aim of Klagenfurt’s Mission KS 30 was to carry out adaptations and optimizations in the smart city strategy to qualify for participation in the EU-Cities Mission. In April 2022, the city has indeed been selected as one of the 100 cities, and is the only Austrian city included in the Cities Mission.

One of the requirements to obtain funding through the Fit4Urban Mission was to incorporate a participatory process in the proposed project⁴⁶. Indeed, the call for applications specified that phase 1 of the project had to be based on the **co-creation of a climate-city contract and a roadmap** for carbon-neutrality by 2030 with local stakeholders. The team of the Sustainable Development department (the initiator and leader of the Mission KS 30 project) decided to work with an external partner on this aspect of the project. A senior expert of a leading Austrian research center has therefore been invited to participate in the Mission KS 30 project and contribute their expertise. Consequently, this consultant was the person leading and organizing this specific work-package of the project.

Her proposition for the participatory aspect of the Mission KS 30 project was the design of a co-creation process following the “**Foresight**” approach and targeting a specific part of the population: the local youth, that is, residents between 16 and 18 years old. It has thus been decided to work with two local high schools, and more specifically with one class of each of the schools. A total of around 50 **high school students** in this age range, together with a handful of high school teachers, have therefore been invited to participate in the Mission KS 30 project. A particularity of this approach, making Mission KS 30 unique, is the fact that this was the first Foresight process conducted with participants from this specific age group in Austria⁴⁷.

The Foresight methodology refers to “*a conceptual-framework as well as a process of prospective analysis and informed decision-making that includes long- to mid-term considerations of likely, possible, or even just thinkable futures*” (Wilhelmer, 2016, p. 53). As such, it is said to facilitate the acceleration of change beyond short-term horizons, the widening of traditional planning limits, the coordination of action, and the integration of diverse perspectives through stakeholder participation (Wilhelmer, 2016). A Foresight process consists of three stages: the pre-, the main-, and the post-Foresight (Popper,

⁴⁴ Nachhaltig Wirtschaften (2021): Wie können wir mutig von Altem loslassen und uns auf die Mission unserer Zeit vorbereiten?, see https://nachhaltigwirtschaften.at/resources/sdz_pdf/fit4urbanmission/211223_Stadtportrait_Klagenfurt_pdf?m=1649166992& (consulted on 19.10.2023)

⁴⁵ Austrian Ministry for Climate Protection (2021): press brief

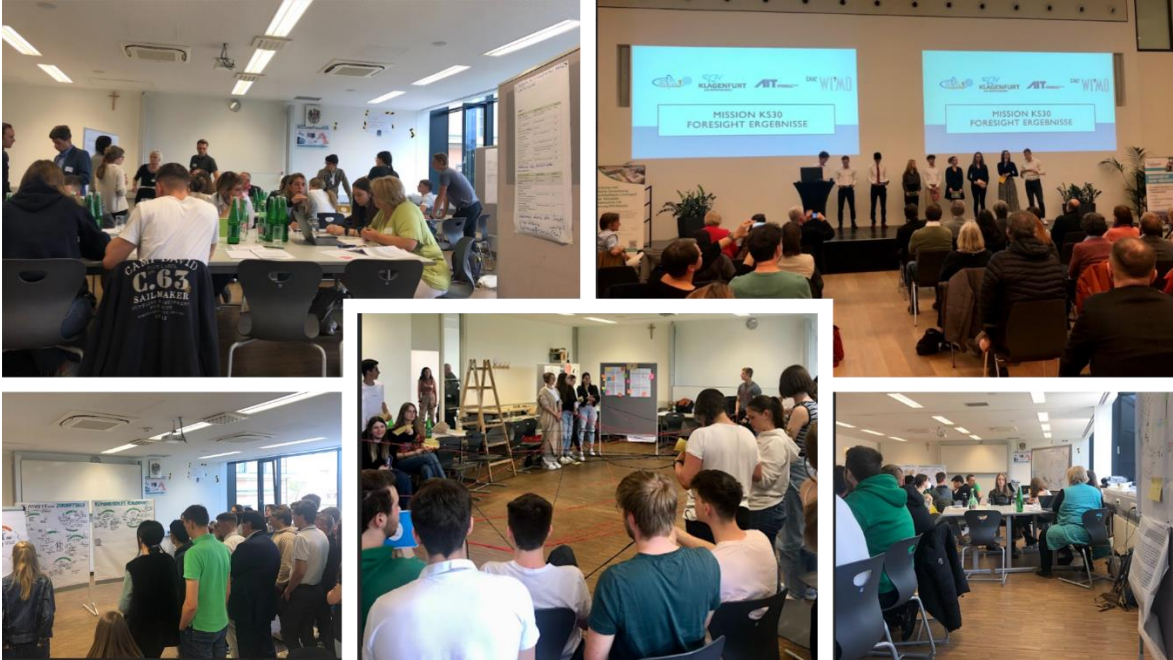
⁴⁶ Austrian Ministry for Climate Protection (2020): Stadt der Zukunft, 8. Ausschreibung

⁴⁷ “MISSION KS 30 - Mission Klagenfurt klimaneutral und smart bis 2030”, see <https://nachhaltigwirtschaften.at/de/sdz/projekte/mission-ks30.php> (consulted on 26.09.2023)

2008), whereby the Mission KS 30 co-creation process encompassed the main-Foresight. As such, the co-creation process consisted of **three steps**: the development of scenarios, the development of visions, and the development of a roadmap. In each phase, a co-creation workshop was held. These three steps were preceded by a workshop dedicated to the analysis of trends and drivers affecting the achievement of carbon-neutrality by 2030, and a closing event was organized to present the results of the co-creation process to other stakeholders and discuss them in an open forum.

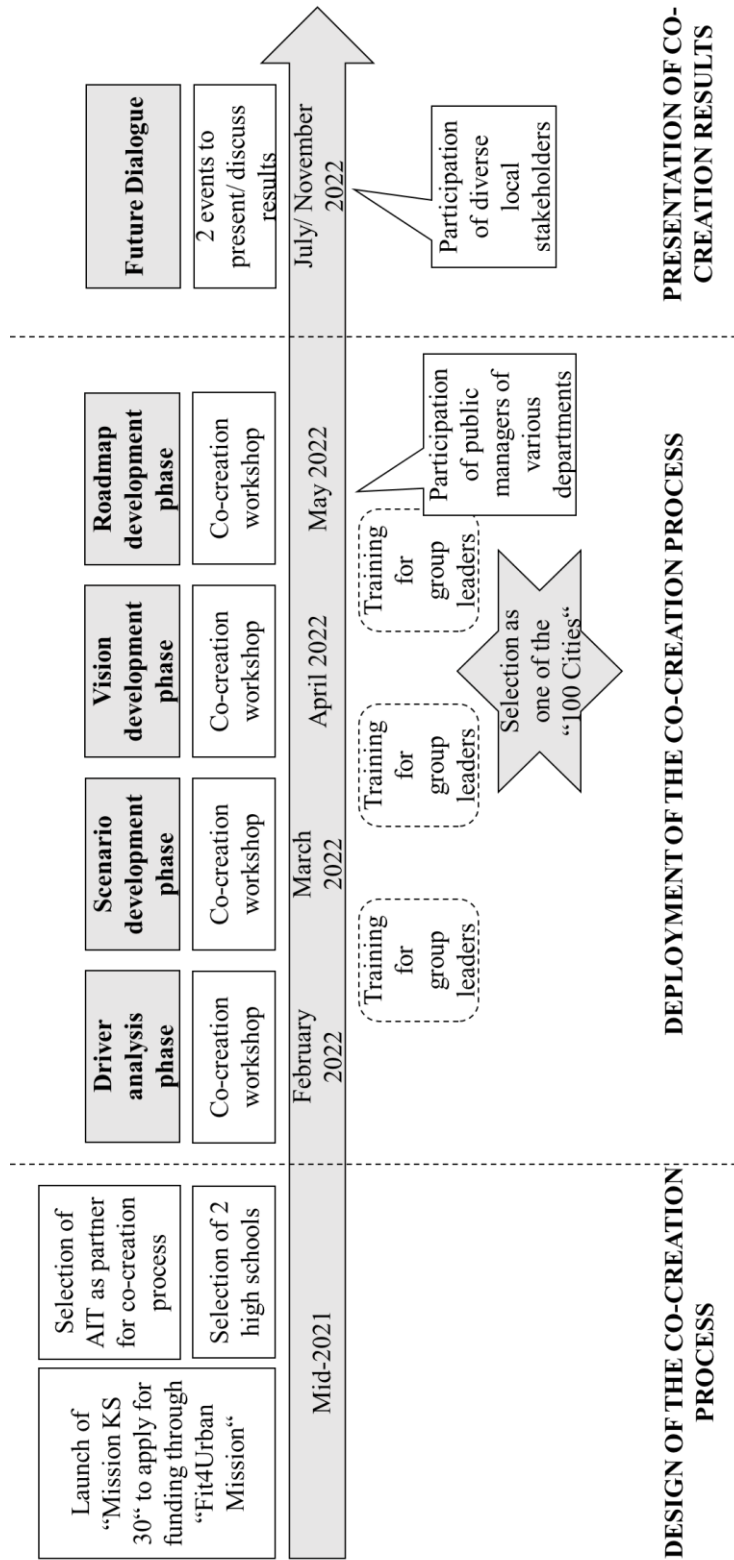
Each one of the workshops took place at one of the participating schools, and lasted for an entire day. Every time, students and teachers, faculty of the local university and members the local “Fridays for Future” association, as well as the consultant and her assistant were present. Representatives of the Sustainable Development department attended all workshops, and public managers from various other departments joined the co-creation workshop in phase 4; the final event was open to a broader array of selected stakeholders such as local elected politicians and local companies.

The Mission KS 30 co-creation process is illustrated in figure 18 below. This figure shows the five phases described in this section, as well as the involved actors in each phase. These phases will be explained in the following paragraphs. The photos below have been taken during the co-creation workshops in Klagenfurt in 2022.



Photos of co-creation workshops in Klagenfurt (source: author)

Figure 18. Timeline of the Mission KS 30 co-creation process



(Source: author)

1.2.3.1. Phase 1: Driver analysis

In this first phase, the aim was to familiarize participants with the megatrends and drivers that affect the fields of action on which the city's Smart City climate strategy is based. These **nine fields of action** are: mobility, energy, infrastructure, economy, nature & habitat, urban development, governance, digitalization, and generations. They stem from the (at the time) most recent version of the city's Smart City climate strategy (version 6.0), where they had been declined into over 180 concrete measures. Some of these measures were already under way or completed, while others were earlier-stage ideas for action.

This first workshop took place in February 2022, and was also used to present the Foresight methodology and the organization of the co-creation process to participants. Then, they were asked to **form groups** and pick the field of action on which they would work over the course of the co-creation process. A team of "**Foresight leaders**" (high school students only) was formed, too: each "leader" or "student mediator" was attributed a group and one of the nine fields of action for which they would be the spokesperson. They would receive special online training sessions in-between co-creation workshops in order to be prepared to lead their groups and relay information regarding the content and goals of each workshop to them.

1.2.3.2. Phase 2: Scenario development

The second co-creation workshop took place in March 2022. This phase, aimed at developing "best-case", "worst-case", and "business-as-usual" scenarios, was based on the key drivers that had been identified beforehand. Participants were asked to develop **scenarios and storylines** referring to these drivers. These scenarios represented initial "snapshots" of the local quality of life in relation to the fields of action in 2050. The subsequent translation of the scenarios into everyday life took place via a description of a possible life of "**personas**". Then, each group was to present the three types of scenarios and personas they had developed for their respective field of action. These scenarios were then treated by the consultant and merged into one coherent story, which would be the base to work on during the next co-creation workshop.

1.2.3.3. Phase 3: Vision development

The third phase, with a workshop taking place in April 2022, was dedicated to the development of a vision for the city of Klagenfurt in 2050. Here, the participants developed the desirable future of the city from their point of view based on the previously developed scenarios: to do so, they first gathered their own wishes and needs for each field of action, before transforming them into **drawings**. Then, each group had the possibility to wander around the room to look at, describe, and interpret the drawings and their core messages. Thereby, visions for each field of action were elaborated, and then merged into an integrative vision with the help of **graphic facilitation**. Central guiding themes were derived from this drawing.

Moreover, each group was asked to create a **persona**, a “heroic” change agent who would help make their vision a reality. Then, one member of each group had to represent this persona and give a **speech**, explaining why and how they had improved the quality of life in Klagenfurt by 2050.

1.2.3.4. Phase 4: Roadmap development

In May 2022, the co-creation workshop of phase 4 was held. Public managers representing a **variety of departments** – from statistics to urban planning and mobility, among others – attended this workshop to provide inputs and contribute their expertise as employees of the municipality.

The workshop started with a recap of the visions developed during the previous workshop, and feedback on the way in which they had been reformulated by the consultant. Then, bigger groups were formed, each including two fields of action: the aim was to identify connections between the fields that would act as drivers to implement new measures. Moreover, participants were asked to find **connections** between the ideas developed over the co-creation process and those already included in the Smart City climate strategy. To do so, posters with the contents of both the Smart City climate strategy and the participants’ visions had been put up and were presented respectively by public managers and students. Among these propositions, each group had to select two measures for which they were asked to develop more concrete and operationalizable action plans and timelines, based on a canvas provided by the consultant.

At the end of this workshop, connections between these action plans had to be found. To do so, participants were asked to sit in a circle, with each person representing a specific objective. A red thread was passed on among participants to visually show the connections between their objectives.

1.2.3.5. Phase 5: Future dialogue

The final phase of the Mission KS 30 process consisted of **two “Future Dialogue” events**, respectively held in July and November 2022 and both taking place at the Lakeside Science and Technology Park near the university campus. The first one was organized during the last week before the summer holidays, where students were engaged in other activities and therefore could not attend the event. Only one high school teacher was present, alongside representatives of the city of Klagenfurt, including the mayor, and public managers of various departments, as well as other local stakeholders from various companies and local public institutions, and the consultant. The aim of this event was to present and discuss the students’ propositions for the renewed Smart City climate strategy. To do so, a field of action had been attributed to each table where participants were able to discuss the ideas that had emerged during the co-creation process. The intention was to select a set of measures, to develop indicators for them, and to **formulate recommendations for action**. The final report of the Mission KS 30 co-creation project

contains **eight fields of action, 36 goals and 106 concrete proposals for action to be included in the city's existing Smart City Climate Strategy**⁴⁸.

The closing event of the Mission KS 30 co-creation process had initially been planned to take place in September and was eventually postponed, taking place in November 2022 because of schedule difficulties. This second "Future Dialogue" gathered the participants of the co-creation process as well as other **local stakeholders**: besides public managers from different departments, representatives of the local political sphere, including the mayor, and of local companies were invited to attend this event. A local news anchor acted as the host for the event, and a well-known Austrian meteorologist had been invited to give a keynote. Each group of students presented the field of action they had worked on, as well as their ideas and propositions.

In this section, we presented the two cases of our empirical study: Venelles, France, and Klagenfurt, Austria. These cases were presented along three dimensions: the institutional features, the characteristics of the respective town, and the specific co-creation project we studied.

In the following sections, we present the findings of our empirical study.

⁴⁸ The most recent version of Klagenfurt's Smart City Climate Strategy (version 7.0) is available online (in English): https://www.klagenfurt.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Stadt_Klagenfurt/01-StadtSERVICE/Klima-Umwelt/Smart_City_Strategie/2023-Smart_City_Strategy_6.1-ENG.pdf (consulted on 04.02.2024). Which contributions are based on the co-creation process is however not visible in this document.

Section 2: Presenting the findings: of heterogenous actors, plural practices, and dispersed institutional work in Venelles

This section tells the story of Venelles in Transition. It consists of two parts representing two distinct phases of the project. We indeed observed a tipping point in the co-creation process that changed the form of institutional work, as well as the roles and practices of the actors shaping the implementation of co-creation. While a top-down form of institutional work dominated the beginning stages of Venelles in Transition (**section 2.1.**), it seemed to have evolved into a more dispersed form during its later stages (**section 2.2.**). In this sense, we observe the emergent nature of institutional work as top-down and dispersed forms of institutional work merged and shaped the trajectory of the implementation of co-creation in unexpected ways.

Each section contains subsections that explain the institutional roles we observe as they enter the scene, as well as their institutional work practices. Vignettes are provided to characterize these roles and explore the resources and competencies they mobilize to perform institutional work and pursue their intentions. This structure allows to provide context for more analytical aspects, and to understand how institutional roles and institutional work practices emerge and ultimately lead to specific organizational forms of institutional work. Figures representing the configurations of involved actors, and tables summarizing their institutional work practices and intentions are provided at the end of each section⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ To help the reader easily identify them, the broad types of institutional work (structural, conceptual, operational, and relational institutional work) are printed in **bold letters** throughout the presentation of our findings, and the more specific practices are underlined.

2.1. Launching “Venelles in Transition”: predominantly top-down institutional work

Retracing the story of Venelles in Transition, we observe that especially its first phase – from the idea and the design to the first public co-creation workshops – was strongly marked by one institutional worker: the mayor. The inputs of internal and external actors other than the mayor were relatively linear and guided by his practices and intentions. This first phase of Venelles in Transition therefore displayed many characteristics of a predominantly **top-down form of institutional work**. Three subphases can be identified within the first phase: agenda setting (**section 2.1.1.**), design (**section 2.1.2.**), and deployment of co-creation (**section 2.2.3.**).

2.1.1. Putting co-creation on the agenda

The emergence of Venelles in Transition seemed to be marked by the bureaucratic functioning of the local public organization that initiated the project. Indeed, the co-creation project was put on Venelles’ political agenda by one single powerful actor: the mayor. Acting as the catalyst behind Venelles in Transition, he decided that it was time to let citizens in and provided the conditions for the implementation of co-creation through structural and conceptual institutional work aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement.

2.1.1.1. The mayor’s structural and conceptual institutional work sets the stage for co-creation

In his campaign for the 2020 municipal elections, by promising to focus on both the environment and citizen participation during his second term in office⁵⁰, the mayor had paved the ground for the “*encompassing project*” (M1-V) he wanted to implement right away. Venelles in Transition was intended to be a big “catch-all” project to realize his campaign promises based on three axes: “*axis number 1 was biodiversity, the environment and so on. Axis number 2, environmental planning, urban planning and so on. And number 3 was citizen participation (...)* The elections are over, and then it's time to implement what we've committed ourselves to. And then comes the 2030 Agenda, so the basis is the 2030 Agenda.” (P1-V). Thus, Venelles in Transition was meant to be a framework that would shape local public action for the next six years and allow to introduce co-creation as a way to tackle sustainable development issues.

Starting with the campaign, the mayor had engaged in **conceptual institutional work** and carefully developed a narrative about the importance of co-creation, repeatedly insisting on its benefits (O2-V to O7-V). A central element in the discourse around co-creation was the wish to initiate long-term change. Creating a movement rather than a stand-alone project with an expiration date was indeed the mayor’s proclaimed ambition.

⁵⁰ “Venelles pour Vous” (the mayor’s list) election campaign, 2020

Already before the launch of Venelles in Transition, the mayor had performed preparatory **structural work** and decided to create citizen consultation groups around several topics such as security, the environment, or mobility. In 2020, the municipality had thus started to convene these groups of voluntary citizens to inform them about public action regarding the respective topic and discuss current issues with them. He now wished to go further and create new participation spaces that would persist over time, thereby integrating co-creation in the organization's working methods: *"more participation, more contribution, that was really the aim. Really to create momentum in the population with Venelles in Transition. Not just consult"* (P3-V).

To implement these ambitious changes, the mayor however needed to revise the structure of the organization. In doing so, his **structural** institutional work prepared the ground for the implementation of co-creation. Indeed, until 2020, there was no dedicated department for sustainable development. Right after his re-election, however, he created the Sustainable Development and Citizen Participation department: *"in my division [finance and legal affairs], we've attached the sustainable development department, which didn't exist, but which they've created. There was a real desire to identify it (...) So it was really a political decision to put resources into this area and to launch the Venelles in Transition initiative"* (M4-V). The mayor also decided to slightly modify the organization's structure for it to match projects such as Venelles in Transition, without the change being too radical for the bureaucratic public organization: *"the organization chart has been modified and is now structured by division precisely to improve cross-functionality (...) we're not structured by project. Rather, we're organized by profession"* (P3-V). The revised organization now allowed to realize projects across departments more easily, while still resembling the former structure.

"These were strong choices", M2-V emphasized. These choices were made by the mayor himself before his team of municipal councillors and public managers got involved. The mayor decided that it was necessary to adopt such an approach in order to set things in motion. He observed that other local actors who would be able to initiate projects – i.e., local associations – did not seem willing to do so and propose ambitious ideas: *"if the political ambition is to go further, you have to initiate it!"* (P3-V). Venelles in Transition was therefore born as the mayor's project to avoid waiting for citizens to act: *"I don't want to wait. I want to initiate it and I want to get citizens involved, and I want it to be called Venelles in Transition"*, M2-V retraced the mayor's justification to launch the project by himself. It was also him who decided to use "Venelles in Transition" as a name for the project, despite potential conflicts with the Transition Towns movement⁵¹: *"this name is not easy, but the mayor absolutely wanted to keep it. It was non-negotiable"* (M3-V); *"there was a huge internal argument at one point during the meetings: the mayor absolutely wants to call it Venelles in Transition"* (P1-V).

⁵¹ Created in 2006 by the Rob Hopkins, the Transition Towns movement refers to an approach initiated and led by citizens, sometimes in collaboration with local public authorities, aimed at raising awareness for climate change and its consequences, setting up concrete solutions, and strengthening relationships between local actors. See <https://transitionnetwork.org/>

Even though a Transition Town project is usually initiated by citizens, the mayor wanted to begin his second term in office with the launch of a big participatory project around environmental issues and did not want to wait for the population to make a move: “*some critics say, yes, but transition starts with the citizen. But what if it doesn't? What am I supposed to do, just sit back, and wait? Yes, it was starting a bit here and there. But if the political ambition is to go further, we're obliged to initiate it*”; “*there are some who say that what you're doing isn't 'Transition'. It's not a Transition Town because it doesn't come from citizens, there's no citizens' committee*” (P3-V). Indeed, a Transition Town approach is usually initiated “*bottom-up, and we're more of a top-down approach. So, it's really different*” (P1-V). A bottom-up approach was not what the mayor had in mind for launching the development of the 2030 Agenda. Aware of these differences, he remained determined to pursue the project in the way he had envisioned. An approach usually initiated and led by groups of citizens was thus put on the agenda by a public organization, without involving individual citizens or association in the process: “*we have not been associated at all*” (A3-V). The mayor's team also had to adapt to his vision which he defended even though they tried to challenge it: “*they already had the name, and we had to build an approach that already had a name, so it was a bit strange*” (E2-V).

The mayor was also the one deciding to use the UN SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as a base for the project. In doing so, he relied on a globally recognized framework to frame the co-creation process and its scope. After having developed and implemented an Agenda 21, he now knew he wanted to go further and work on another widely legitimized document, this time with the population: “*the mayor's request was, I want to write a 2030 Agenda with the citizens. And that was it*” (E1-V). Using this frame of reference, familiar to most, as a guideline for the project did not only increase media coverage and visibility, but also provided additional legitimacy to the municipality's first co-creation process as it was inscribed in a global dynamic. The local achievement of the SDGs was also a declared goal of the French national government who encouraged a variety of stakeholders – among them local governments – to develop 2030 Agendas⁵². Moreover, Venelles' Agenda 21 was often referenced, associating the current project with familiar and successful ones from the past: “*for Agenda 21, there was no longer a national label (...) so we wanted to take a different approach, and the logical step for us was to create a 2030 Agenda*” (M2-V). Having organized a dozen public meetings where citizens could share their ideas for the local Agenda 21⁵³, the municipality had already engaged in citizen consultation years prior, even if to a lesser extent.

⁵² French Government (2023): 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs). Mobilized Stakeholders, see <https://www.agenda-2030.fr/en/agenda-2030/france/article/mobilized-stakeholders> (consulted on 30.12.2023)

⁵³ Ville de Venelles (2023) : De l'Agenda 21 à l'Agenda 2030..., see <https://venelles.fr/ville-en-transition/venelles-en-transition-demarche-inedite-ville/> (consulted on 13.12.2023)

THE MAYOR AS THE CATALYST

ROLE: “The Catalyst”

INTENTION: Implementing co-creation to spark a movement

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: central position and access to power and resources; support from key internal actors and external consultants; forward-thinking; proactive; relying on a globally accepted program to frame co-creation.

The mayor (P3-V) was the central actor driving the Venelles in Transition project: *“it’s a project that is very much led by the mayor”* (E2-V). The mayor therefore was the catalyst for the implementation of co-creation in Venelles. His intention: *“really creating a movement”* (P3-V).

His objective for his second term in office was to *“implement a city project based on concertation”* with concertation as the “pillar” of his political program⁵⁴. These promises allowed him to then launch the Venelles in Transition project soon after his re-election. Thus, instead of waiting for the perfect time or for citizens to make a move, the mayor decided to create – and seize – the opportunity for Venelles in Transition himself: *“he wanted this to be an occasion for citizens and associations to get moving on certain objectives”* (E1-V). By creating the conditions for co-creation within a bureaucratic organization, the mayor showed his capacity to envision alternatives and future scenarios: *“he was very forward-thinking and dynamic”* (E1-V); *“the idea was to start right away [after the elections] with a major structuring project, because it’s important, and our aim is to write the policy for the next 10 years together”* (P1-V).

In this sense, the mayor initiated and led the co-creation project, especially in its beginning stages, while later in the process, he left the more operational aspects of implementing co-creation to his team: *“it’s the mayor’s initiative and it’s a big project, I’m a young elected official (...) So it’s rather the mayor who has the initial lead on the project (...) later, the mayor is less present, also because I better understand the project”* (P1-V). Other members of his team highlighted his central role in the emergence of the project: *“he was like, I want to initiate it and I want to involve citizens, and I want it to be called Venelles in Transition”* (M2-V).

For support in creating the opportunity for the introduction of co-creation in Venelles, he heavily relied on his relationships with key actors within the organization. His general services director, for instance, was able to connect him with a consulting agency to learn more about the shape this co-creation process could take: *“I told the mayor that maybe the notion of Transition Towns could be a tool to reach our objectives (...) I invited this person I knew to talk with the mayor, to explain what this approach consisted of, to see whether it would match what the mayor wanted”* (M3-V). In this regard, making sure that public managers, especially those at the top of the hierarchy, were on the same page as him was

⁵⁴ “Venelles pour Vous” (the mayor’s list) election campaign, 2020

an important part of the mayor's efforts to create a fertile environment in which co-creation could unfold. The support from the consultants hired to organize Venelles in Transition was another key resource he relied on.

Not only had the mayor created and seized the opportunity to initiate the co-creation project, but he continued to oversee and steer it throughout the entire process. He demanded to be consulted at every stage of the process: *"we made proposals, but everything was validated [by the mayor] before we sent it. He was present"* (E2-V). He decided on the broad outlines of the project, thereby determining the shape it would take and imposing several constraints on his team. They would follow his instructions for both the overall design of the project – *"we had to take into account the mayor's various wishes to join the Transition Towns movement, but at the initiative of the municipality"* (M2-V) – and the workshops themselves – *"something he insisted on was to invite and mix inhabitants, associations, and experts during co-construction workshops. This was a thing he really insisted on"* (E1-V). Yet, he stayed in the background during the deployment of co-creation and did not engage in the practical and concrete implementation of co-creation: while he was present at the co-creation events, he did not formally intervene or participate.

Given his position at the top of the hierarchy, the mayor was able to make important decisions about the co-creation project, even when his team did not agree (for instance with the name or the timing). Respondents agreed that they encountered less opposition because the project was led by the mayor himself: *"globally, there were no major difficulties or constraints. But because there was a political will behind it. And not just from any elected official, but from the mayor"* (E2-V); *"everyone was happy to go along. Also, because the mayor had put it on the agenda, and when the boss decides, everyone follows"* (P1-V). His position also enabled him to allocate the necessary resources and for instance hire consultants to help with the execution of the project: *"we've invested the resources; we're supported by an expert consulting agency which is really an asset"* (P3-V).

Vignette 1. The institutional role of the catalyst.

The mayor put Venelles in Transition on the agenda even though the timing was not in his favor: mid-2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was far from being over, and the municipality had to deal with the constraints it entailed for the organization of co-creation events: *"in terms of timing, Covid disrupted our schedule, and we were unable to launch it and create a real dynamic with the workshops and the questionnaire"* (E1-V). In addition to these conditions, the launch of the project happened soon after the election of the new municipal council, leaving newly elected members only little time to grow into their new roles and prepare for the ambitious new project: *"in fact, the timing of Venelles in Transition was almost too short. I think I would have handled it better if it had happened a year later"* (P1-V); *"internally it wasn't great timing (...) Even if there's a sense of urgency, and we're under a bit of pressure from our superiors (...) I think we should give ourselves that time"* (M4-V).

Despite these unfavorable conditions pointed out by members of his team, the project had been put on the agenda by the mayor. He was convinced that the introduction of new approaches such as co-creation had to be initiated by someone in a position at the top of the hierarchy anyway: “*transversality has to come from the top - the municipal councillors have to be very involved, the [director of general services] has to be very involved, they have to bring credibility, and then it facilitates transversality within an organization*” (P3-V).

Table 20 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in this initial phase of Venelles in Transition as well as their underlying intentions.

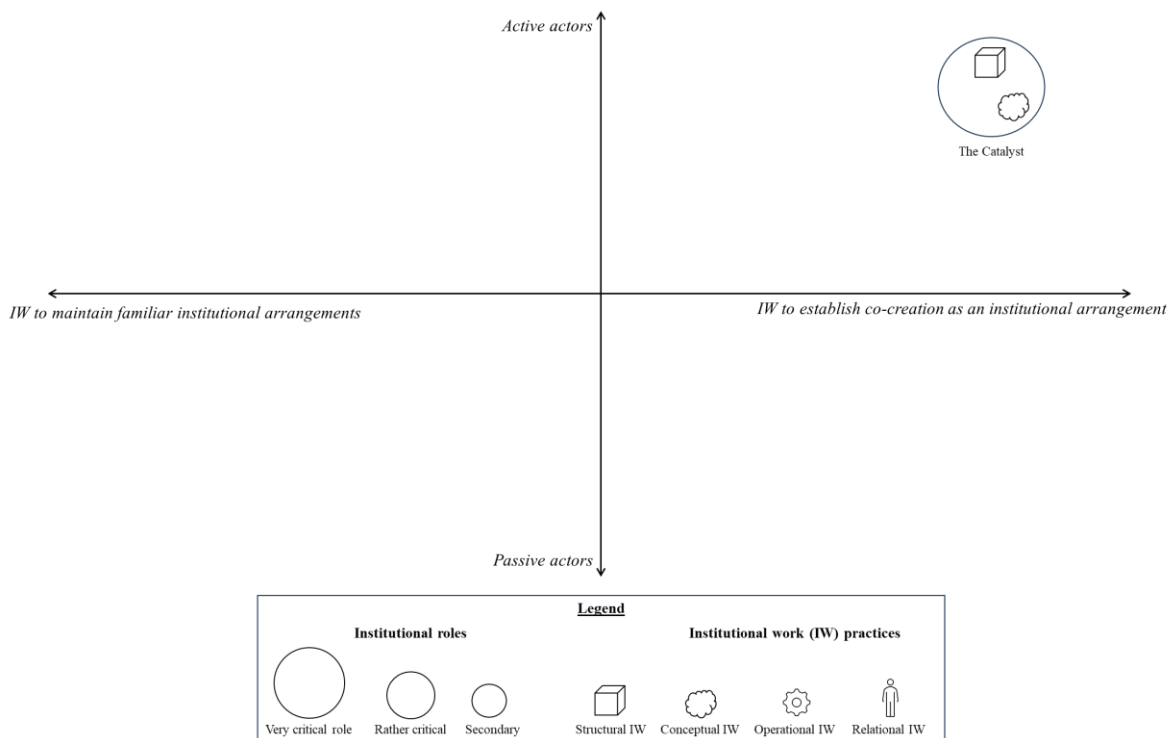
Table 20. Institutional work practices during the agenda setting phase of Venelles in Transition

	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW	Political program focusing on sustainable development and participation (<i>catalyst</i>); Creating citizen groups (<i>catalyst</i>); Creating a dedicated department and adapting the organizational structure (<i>catalyst</i>); Launching an encompassing co-creation project (<i>catalyst</i>)		
Conceptual IW	Developing a narrative about the importance of co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>); Drawing on a globally accepted framework and successful past experiences (<i>catalyst</i>)		
Operational IW			
Relational IW			

(Source: author)

The first phase of Venelles in Transition where the project was put on the agenda shows clear features of top-down institutional work (mainly structural and conceptual) effected by a central and powerful actor: the mayor in his role of the catalyst. Figure 19 below illustrates this role and salient institutional work practices.

Figure 19. Configuration of roles and practices during agenda setting



(Source: author)

2.1.2. Designing “Venelles in Transition”

While it was put on the agenda by the mayor alone, he needed support with the design and deployment of Venelles in Transition. Consequently, in this second stage associated with the preparation of the co-creation project, new actors made an appearance: organization-internal actors (the municipal councillors and public managers with agendas related to sustainable development) and external consultants. With the increasing number of actors and institutional roles, the observed institutional work practices multiplied as well: practices related to conceptual, operational, and relational work can be identified, and are mostly associated with the intention of establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement.

2.1.2.1. Consultants take charge of the operationalization of Venelles in Transition

The mayor had specific requirements for the consulting agency he wanted to work with: after discussions with consultants collaborating with municipalities associated with the “Transition Towns” movement, he decided that a less restrictive approach was needed for his project. This agency had been hired precisely because they seemed to be capable of managing the contradiction implied by a top-down Transition Town approach: *“we had to take into account the mayor’s various wishes to join the Transition Towns movement, but at*

*the initiative of the municipality. And this agency seemed rather open to this approach” (M2-V). Given that Venelles in Transition was the municipality’s first experience with co-creation, being able to mobilize the competencies of a specialized agency reduced their fears around co-creation. Since they had never organized a participatory process, the agency’s contribution was important: “[the workshops] *really had to be hosted in a different way, based on collective intelligence, that’s why we got the support of a consulting agency, to facilitate these meetings in a different way*” (P3-V); “*the quality of the work and the seriousness of the agency we chose was a real bonus. They listened, supported us, and reassured us*” (M2-V).*

The modalities for the Venelles in Transition project were defined by said consulting agency in accordance with the mayor and his team of municipal councillors and public managers. Many meetings took place, during which the form and extent, the breadth and depth of co-creation were decided on. This is where the consultants as co-creation experts played an important role. Their institutional work was predominantly **conceptual** at first and revolved around clarifying the outlines of co-creation and its underlying ideas: how did the municipality interpret “co-creation” and what did “transition” mean to them? “*I remember, at one of the first meetings, we let them talk, and the idea was that, little by little, they would realize themselves that they were talking about the three dimensions, the pillars of sustainable development*”; “*we have a lot of meetings, at the beginning it [co-creation] is rather vague for us, it is rather vague because we have never done it before*” (P1-V). While it took a lot of meetings and “*maieutic*” (E3-V) to get there, the consultants were able to develop a common understanding of these terms over time. They observed that their conceptual work did bear fruits when the involved municipal councillors increasingly understood how co-creation worked: “*we saw him [P1-V] progress*” (E1-V); “*we saw the municipal councillors develop new skills (...) we saw a progression in their attitude too, in their posture as politicians, which is pretty cool*” (E2-V).

Once a common understanding of key terms had been established, the institutional work in which the consultants engaged was increasingly **operational**. They were in charge of designing and implementing the project’s specificities. The design stage was based on a constant back-and-forth between the consultants and the municipal councillors and managers in charge of Venelles in Transition. In this sense, the co-creation project was co-created by the consultants and the internal team: “*what’s nice is that there’s real trust and our proposals are discussed, amended perhaps, but it works well. It’s not just us who propose them. We propose them within an in a dialogue setting*” (E1-V).

This goes to show that the consultants also engaged in **relational** institutional work as they made intentional efforts to gain the municipality’s trust at the beginning of the project to facilitate collaboration. The mayor, too, engaged in efforts to build relationships at this point, but with the local population. These efforts were aimed at promoting the co-creation workshops – “*we’d had a bit of a chat [with the mayor], and he told me they were working on these issues*” (C3-V) – and thereby securing people’s participation in Venelles in Transition.

CONSULTANTS AS THE EXPERTS

ROLE: “The Experts”

INTENTION: Accompanying the municipality in the implementation of co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Technical expertise; experience; the municipality’s trust; adaptability; proactive.

The agency that had been selected was specialized in working with collective intelligence methods. They had, however, never organized a participatory process on the SDGs specifically. Their input was therefore intended to focus on the method rather than the content of the project: *“we chose an agency specializing in citizen participation. We could have chosen one that does 2030 Agendas. No, it was really - the support was really about that”* (M1-V). Thus, the agency was present in their role as the experts, aiming to put – and keep – Venelles in Transition on the right track and accompany them towards their desired destination: a co-created 2030 Agenda.

They were expected to be proactive since the municipality depended on their expertise: *“we had to tell them, we’d like to hold exploratory and co-construction workshops, we can set up a questionnaire... we came up with proposals for methods we felt were appropriate”* (E1-V). Supporting the municipality in ensuring the approach suited the local context was an important part of their role, since co-creation needed to obtain acceptability: *“we need to set up systems, produce reports, publish them, and make an assessment, and then the municipality has to justify the choices it makes, if it doesn’t keep all the actions... all these principles are important to make the approach legitimate”* (E1-V). At the same time, they had to reassure the municipality by constantly communicating their plans and their reasons for choosing the methods they had decided to mobilize: *“we always tried to reassure them, planning a few weeks in advance to send a good framework document with the objectives of the phase, how we would get there, what we would do with it, the method, the final deliverable (...) It’s phase by phase. And then there are always small adjustments”* (E2-V). Proving their expertise and professionalism, they soon acquired the municipality’s trust, an essential resource for the efficient design and implementation of the co-creation project: *“it’s a very pleasant working environment we have with the municipality. Not least because there’s trust in what we do, and trust in the quality of what citizen dialogue can lead to”* (E1-V).

The consultants also looked beyond the public co-creation phase of Venelles in Transition: since it was the mayor’s announced goal to create a movement, they suggested ways to ensure the longevity of co-creation in Venelles, and helped the municipality implement these tools: *“we now have the e-mail addresses of people who are sensitive to the subject, and we can contact them again for workshops two or six months later. We know that these are people who are sensitive to these issues. This can be capitalized on”; “I’ll be pushing the municipality to really keep the residents informed”* (E1-V).

Vignette 2. The institutional role of the experts.

2.1.2.2. The Sustainable Development department as the cornerstone of Venelles in Transition

The newly created Sustainable Development department also played a key role at this stage. They participated in the design and planning of the co-creation process and in the organization of the workshops. Its two managers played a crucial role as they engaged in **operational** work and were involved in designing the operational aspects of the project: “regarding the form of the workshops, the organization, [the consultants] worked rather with the technicians, with [names of M1-V and M2-V] » (M4-V). The department head also performed **relational** work and a lot of networking efforts prior to Venelles in Transition: “[name of M1-V] did a phenomenal job in approaching other local authorities, the biodiversity agency, and the Ministry of Ecological Transition” (E2-V). As a result of this work, Venelles in Transition was awarded the “France in Transition” label⁵⁵, including them in a set of French municipalities selected by the Ministry of Ecological Transition because of the exceptional nature of their projects aimed at locally achieving the SDGs.

At the same time, the Sustainable Development department as the engine behind the project performed **conceptual** work and insisted on the importance of shifting away from established bureaucratic patterns. They repeatedly pointed out that it was necessary to adopt new ways of working internally and with citizens, insisting on the shortcomings of established bureaucratic processes: “the gold standard of the technician doing their own thing, that’s over. We’re not on our own anymore, and also, it doesn’t work. It creates misunderstandings and problems. It’s better to work with others. Especially when you’re in public service” (M1-V). Designing and implementing policy without associating relevant stakeholders was depicted as a thing of the past and not adapted to the complex problems public organizations deal with today. The issues with such restrictive approaches as well as the benefits of adopting more open ones were repeatedly highlighted, and established ways of working presented as something long gone: “we’re no doing what technicians and civil servants did before, coming with something ready-made... you couldn’t discuss with them because they thought they were all-knowing. Now it’s more enjoyable to discuss, we get around a table, we listen...” (M1-V).

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AS THE ENGINE

ROLE: “The Engine”

INTENTION: Operationalizing co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Support from key internal actors and external consultants; collaboration with other public organizations in their network; technical expertise; commitment.

⁵⁵ Ville de Venelles (2021): Press release, « Nouvel élan pour la transition à Venelles : imaginons une ville durable ! », 25.08.2021

The two employees making up the Sustainable Development and Citizen Participation department – the department head and a second public manager – have turned out to be more than just supporters of the mayor’s institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation. Their role in the process was essential: they acted as the “engine” behind Venelles in Transition. Indeed, *“the sustainable development department, which is the driving force behind the project, is necessarily very involved and invested...”* (P2-V). Their role was therefore mainly associated with the operationalization of co-creation.

While these two public managers did not initiate or lead the institutional change project, they were highly invested in its implementation. Both M1-V and M2-V *“poured their heart and soul into it”* (M4-V). The project was made possible through the creation of this department because it was *“necessary that the team be reinforced. Otherwise, we would not have been able to do it. This is undeniable”* (M2-V). It was up to them to bring Venelles in Transition to life: they were responsible for the operational aspects of the project, from planning co-creation events to hosting workshops, promoting the project in Venelles and beyond, and finally organizing the process of drafting the 2030 Agenda once the public co-creation workshops were over. They had great trust in the consultants all throughout this process: *“the real plus was the quality of the work and the seriousness of the agency we had chosen. They listened to us, supported us and reassured us”* (M2-V). At all stages of the project, the department also relied on their wider network: *“they enjoy working in collaboration with other institutions (...) their approach is to work with other people”* (E2-V). While the department - newly created and small - was not in a powerful position within the organization, the project was supported by the mayor and public managers in higher positions, and therefore their actions were, too.

Even if Venelles in Transition was not “their” project but initiated by the mayor, the department seemed to have made it their own. They pointed out that they *“gave everything”*, because they found it *“motivating”* (M1-V) to work on a project that infused their jobs with new meaning. Indeed, the principles of co-creation appealed to them, and the urgency of the SDGs added to their commitment to the project: *“we’re committed to it. Like, we have a project that concerns the future of everyone in fact. It’s really motivating”* (M2-V). Thus, given all the work they had poured into Venelles in Transition, they were somewhat disappointed by the little resonance it found, and the low participation in the workshops: *“we put a lot of effort into it. It’s true that we would have liked it to have been more successful than it was”* (M1-V). However, they remained motivated to implement more projects of this kind and would like to do so autonomously: *“we want to do better, to progress”; “we’d like to be trained. To be autonomous afterwards. Of course, if we were to do something on a larger scale, we’d need help. But to keep the process going, we need to be trained in these techniques”* (M2-V).

Their central role as the “engine” behind Venelles in Transition did not go unnoticed and was acknowledged by other involved actors: *“the two of them, they are great (...) she has an idea, I have one, it’s like bam, bam, bam, it’s a blast”* (A7-V); *“I would like to thank the Sustainable Development department who did a lot of work for this project”* (P1-V). It was

also noticed that the department was more competent than other internal actors on certain technical questions regarding the co-creation process: *“I’ll let [name of M1-V] respond from a technical point of view because she’s a lot better than me”* (P1-V); *“thankfully [names of M1-V and M2-V] who have experience with the subject were present for the workshops”* (M4-V).

Vignette 3. The institutional role of the engine.

2.1.2.3. The mayor’s team of supporters takes over

The mayor was no longer the only actor participating in the design of the project: he now had the support of the consultants as well as of his internal team. He remained involved, however, making propositions regarding the co-creation method and tools to use, and decisions had to be run by him: *“we often saw him around the tables, when we were presenting the method... he followed all the... anyway, he had to approve everything”* (E2-V); *“it hasn’t been decided yet (...) it’s up to the mayor to decide”* (P2-V); *“the mayor has the idea of the questionnaire, to say that the first phase, one of the most important ones, is mobilization”* (P1-V).

While the mayor as the catalyst continued to oversee the design of Venelles in Transition, his team of supporters consisting of municipal councillors and public managers with agendas related to sustainable development took over most of the **operational** work. They participated in many meetings during the early stages of the project where they helped the mayor decide on the outlines of the project: *“we spent two to three months fine-tuning the specifications with the team, whether it was the mayor, the municipal councillor, the general services director”* (M4-V).

These operational aspects of the implementation of co-creation were indeed where the mayor counted most on the support of his team: *“the mayor said, I know where I want to go in terms of sustainable development (...) what I need is that you bring in the population”* (M1-V). And so, they did: especially the municipal councillors were actively involved during the mobilization phase where they reached out to the population to encourage them to fill out the questionnaire. At a later stage, they all were present in public spaces to promote the project and motivate people to participate. As a matter of fact, they could be seen at each co-creation workshop wearing t-shirts with “Venelles in Transition” written on the back, thereby visually showing their involvement in and support for the project (O1-V to O5-V). By doing so, their aim was to increase legitimacy for the Venelles in Transition co-creation project and ensure people’s adhesion to these new practices. In this sense, their institutional work was both **operational and relational**.

DIRECTLY INVOLVED MUNICIPAL COUCELLORS AND PUBLIC MANAGERS AS SUPPORTERS

ROLE: “The Supporters”

INTENTION: Facilitating the implementation of co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Relying on their wider network and personal environment; using their positions within the organization to ensure internal acceptance of the project.

Besides the Sustainable Development department, the mayor’s team of internal supporters was made up of the two municipal councillors in charge of issues related to the SDGs, the manager in charge of the section to which this department is attached, as well as the general services director. Their role mainly consisted of facilitating the implementation of the mayor’s vision, and coherence between their perception of the project and his was essential: *“I agree with the way the mayor is handling it”*, M3-V expressed his full support for Venelles in Transition, an attitude that was shared by the other supporters.

At the very beginning, to help spur the mayor’s reflections about a participatory project to work on environmental issues, the general services director suggested thinking about a Transition Towns approach, since he had heard about it in his hometown: *“where I live, we have an association called S*** in Transition, whose main organizer closely follows what Rob Hopkins is doing (...) so I knew a bit about it. And I told the mayor that perhaps the notion of Transition Towns could be a tool for achieving our objectives (...) it seemed to correspond to his requests. That’s why I put them in touch.”* (M3-V). In doing so, this manager relied on his wider network to support the mayor’s efforts aimed at implementing co-creation.

Later, they also involved their closer environment in the project and when the number of expected attendees remained low. M3-V invited his son to the quiz night organized for the younger population of Venelles: *“the target was young people. My son’s 17 years old. That evening I picked him up and brought him along. I said let’s go, it’s fun”* (M3-V). In a similar vein, one of the municipal councillors brought her daughter a co-creation workshop (O2-V), and the other explained how they all counted on their personal environment’s participation in Venelles in Transition to boost participation rates: *“if all municipal councillors and their spouses fill in the questionnaire, that’s already 50 more, and if you mobilize the children and neighbors around you, you’ll soon reach 200 or 300”* (P1-V).

Vignette 4. The institutional role of the supporters.

Table 21 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in the design phase of Venelles in Transition as well as their underlying intentions.

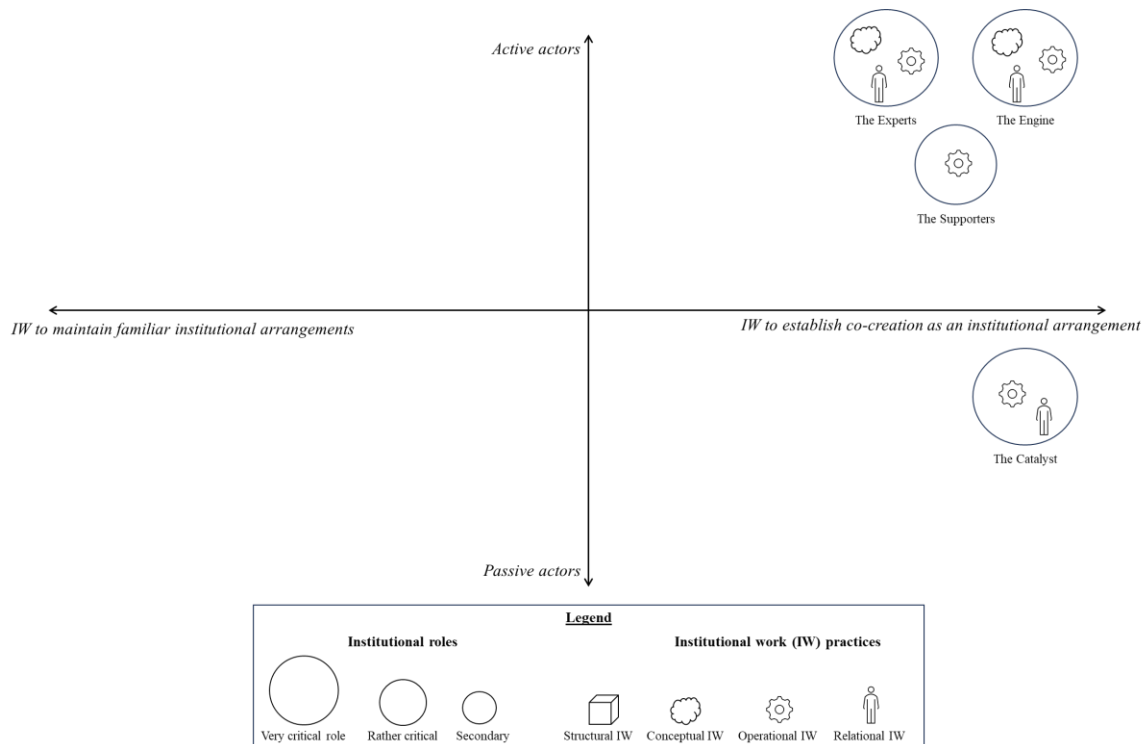
Table 21. Institutional work practices during the design phase of Venelles in Transition

	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW			
Conceptual IW	Clarifying the outlines and principles of co-creation (<i>experts</i>)	Insisting on the shortcomings of established bureaucratic processes (<i>engine</i>)	
Operational IW	Designing the co-creation process (<i>experts, engine, supporters, catalyst</i>)	Working with a consulting agency to reduce risk associated with the implementation of co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>)	
Relational IW	Gaining the municipality's trust (<i>experts</i>); Networking and lobbying (<i>engine</i>); Building trust and relationships with the population (<i>catalyst</i>)		

(Source: author)

From putting the project on the agenda to its design, the emergence of Venelles in Transition had a traditional-bureaucratic tone to it and was shaped by a top-down approach. Indeed, in its beginning stages, except for the consulting agency, the involved actors were all members of the organization – the mayor, the Sustainable Development department, his team of municipal councillors and top public managers. Their institutional work was aimed at implementing a carefully planned and seemingly linear co-creation process to achieve the mayor's desired outcome of a 2030 Agenda. Institutional work practices were more diverse than during the first stage and included conceptual, operational, as well as relational institutional work performed by all involved actors. Compared to the first stage, the mayor stayed in the background and increasingly relied on his team, while continuing to oversee the project. Figure 20 below illustrates these roles and salient institutional work practices.

Figure 20. Configuration of roles and practices during the design phase



(Source: author)

2.1.3. Deploying “Venelles in Transition”: first shifts in the project

Since this phase was about the deployment of co-creation, the various co-creation events were its cornerstone, and institutional work was highly operational as practical experiences of this new approach were provided. Conceptual work continued to underpin the operationalization of co-creation. As Venelles in Transition unfolded, new actors entered the scene: citizens, i.e., co-creation participants and therefore the cornerstone of the project, local associations in the field of sustainable development, as well as municipal councillors and public managers affected by the project. They engaged in a variety of practices, not all of which were aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement: some altered the opportunity for institutional change to pursue their own project, while others sought to maintain established roles and practices. The increasing complexity of institutional work as actors, roles, practices, and intentions become more numerous and diverse shows throughout this phase.

2.1.3.1. Venelles in Transition unfolds and requires a mix of institutional work practices on the part of supporting actors

The first step of the deployment of the Venelles in Transition project was mobilization. This required both **operational and relational** institutional work on the part of the

mayor's team. During this stage where a questionnaire was distributed among the population, the two involved municipal councillors as well as some of their colleagues stepped in and went from door to door to directly fill out the questionnaire with the inhabitants when the response rate remained surprisingly low: *"it's a good fifteen minutes, half an hour with each person. So, the aim isn't really quantity, but quality, and to fill out the questionnaire. All municipal councillors mobilized to do this"* (P1-V). The Sustainable Development department, too, was involved in mobilizing the population: *"we prepared the questionnaire to get them thinking, we hand it out to them in front of the schools, like, go ahead and answer it..."* (M1-V).

They moreover tried to achieve as much visibility for the project as they could, for example through billboard advertisements all over the town, or articles in the local magazine, "Venelles Mag", published three times a year⁵⁶: *"if you look at the last three front pages of Venelles Mag, the last three were all about sustainable development. We are there"* (M1-V). Numerous articles in local and regional newspapers were moreover published, informing about – and praising – Venelles' co-creation project⁵⁷. To promote the co-creation project and allow people to familiarize themselves with the idea, it was indeed important to be visible in public spaces: *"we understood the importance of being in the public space to make people talk, and to be understood"* (M1-V); *"we have to go where they are. Not invite them to come"* (M2-V).

The organizers, i.e., public managers and municipal councillors, observed that it would take a long time to develop a shared understanding of co-creation and its relevance: it was a *"conquest of time. We have to talk about it all the time. Try to talk about it all the time, in all places, with all audiences. That's why you have to raise awareness, you have to be in public spaces to see what's going on"* (M1-V). Every workshop began with a short reminder (O2-V to O7-V): what is co-creation, what are the SDGs and why co-create a local 2030 Agenda – these questions were addressed by the consultants before starting the actual co-creation workshops. In this regard, their **conceptual** work was highly repetitive and aimed at both the team organizing Venelles in Transition, and its participants. It would continue after the end of the co-creation phase: *"we go there step by step. We will have to create events all year long to talk about the environment and sustainable development in a more playful way"* (M2-V).

Their presence in the public space was thus essential in this regard. The supporters also jumped in to help with the deployment of co-creation. Since they were not meant to actively participate in co-creation workshops themselves, they wanted to make use of their position and boost the introduction of co-creation by motivating the population to

⁵⁶ The Venelles in Transition project has been mentioned in a total of 9 editions of the Venelles Mag between September 2021 and December 2023, as well as in one additional newsletter published by the municipality, see <https://venelles.fr/votre-mairie/magazines-et-publications/> (consulted on 13.12.2023)

⁵⁷ As of December 2023, we have collected 34 articles mentioning Venelles in Transition, published in local print newspapers, mainly "La Provence", as well as online.

participate. They decided to “*give a hand by going out in the field, at the market, in front of the schools, by putting it all on social media, telling all the municipal staff...*” (M4-V).

Making co-creation tangible and accessible to all was the aim of their interventions. Throughout the co-creation process, managers observed that the language they used to communicate these elements was important: “*it's really important to simplify the discourse. With any type of audience, even those who are well-informed, you have to speak in a very simple way to be able to move in the same direction; and it's also important to have a common base. We don't all have the same common base (...) So it's good to be able to put things into context... why are we doing this?*” (M2-V). At every co-creation workshop, posters, flashcards, and examples were provided to explain co-creation and the SDGs, and introductory remarks reminded participants of the goals of the co-creation process (O1-V to O7-V).

Hence, public managers’ institutional work also had a **relational** component. To implement co-creation and build legitimacy for this new approach, they realized that establishing relationships based on trust was essential. Indeed, due to the novelty of co-creation, both internal and external participants were sceptical and had to be reassured about the municipality’s intentions: “*it's also about their uncertainties, about building a relationship of trust... because people come... and you have to rebuild a bond of trust: we don't want to steal your ideas, that's not what we want, we want to think with you*” (M1-V); “*it's important to be available, to go meet with the population. We need to talk to them*” (M1-V). To do so, the mayor was present at co-creation workshops to engage with the population without participating in the brainstorming process (O2-V, O6-V), and guaranteed the transparency of the process to gain citizens’ trust – “*it's important that the people of Venelles know that their contribution is taken into account*” (P3-V); “*I feel like I've created an Excel monster. He's like, everybody must be able to find what they have said*” (E2-V). Together with his team, he stayed to have a drink with participants after each co-creation workshop and engaged in informal conversations with them (O2-V to O6-V; PO1-V). In this regard, providing small gifts for participants of the co-creation workshops was another gesture meant to highlight the importance of their participation and acknowledge their efforts (O1-V, O2-V).

The consultants, in collaboration with the Sustainable Development department, were in charge of planning and hosting the public co-creation workshops. In this sense, their institutional work was predominantly **operational** throughout this stage. They did not hesitate to adapt the approach to local conditions and to make modifications to the initial design when necessary: “*it's phase by phase. And then there are always small adjustments*” (E2-V). Since this was the first participatory process in Venelles, nobody knew quite what to expect. Having the possibility to make such last-minute modifications was therefore an important part of the consultants’ operational work. In this regard, they for instance eventually decided not to base the co-creation workshops on the SDGs since they seemed hard to grasp for participants and to use them as a loose guideline rather than a strict framework.

Hence, this is where citizens' presence began to provoke small shifts in the intended design: *"we tried it out at the first workshop. We really experimented. The idea was also to be part of the UN approach. We tried it, but we thought... no, actually"* (E2-V). After the co-creation phase, the consultants were in charge of making sense of the propositions citizens make during workshops, and link them back to the SDGs since a 2030 Agenda still had to be developed: *"we received the proposals and, for example, for the final document I looked at the proposals, I looked at the SDGs, and I said, such and such a proposal corresponds to such and such an SDG"* (E2-V). This shows how the consultants' operational work was marked by the emergent, evolving, and ever-changing setting in which co-creation took place, and had to be adapted to these conditions. It occurred backstage as they designed the project, and more visibly during the workshops where they intervened as facilitators.

The Sustainable Development department supported the consultants in the facilitation of the workshops: they had never done this before, and therefore felt like they *"were immediately thrown in at the deep end"* (M2-V). One of the workshops – the quiz night – was organized by the department alone, without the consultants' help. While they enjoyed organizing and hosting this event and put a lot of effort into it, they were disappointed by the low attendance rate: *"we [the consultants] didn't get involved, we let them make it their own thing. It was a pity because it was a lot of work and really fun", "they enjoyed themselves, it was a fun time for them"* (E2-V); *"we have put too much energy into this game. I think [M1-V and M2-V] enjoyed it"* (M4-V).

The internal team of municipal councillors and public managers stayed true to the posture they had adopted since the launch of the project: they were not meant to participate themselves, since it was "their" project. They positioned themselves at the receiving end of co-creation, avoiding intervening during co-creation workshops (O1-V to O3-V). They argued that it was important to let citizens express themselves: *"as municipal councillors, we could be present, but we couldn't really participate (...) we really want the residents to express themselves, and the project is led by the municipality, so for now I stay in the background"* (P1-V). Thus, municipal councillors justified their passive role during workshops by pointing out their leading role in the co-creation process; having commissioned the co-creation project, they seemed to want to distance themselves from the participants. They did so physically, by sitting in a corner of the room during co-creation events rather than mixing with the participants (O2-V to O5-V). With their "Venelles in Transition" t-shirts they stood out visually, too (O1-V to O5-V). However, over the course of the co-creation phase, this attitude seemed to change slightly. Indeed, at the fourth and final workshop, the two involved municipal councillors began to loosen up, attempting to participate in debates from time to time by raising their hands or whispering remarks under their breath (O4-V).

2.1.3.2. Local associations shape Venelles in Transition in different ways

Local association C, whose president took on the role of the “helping hand” in the deployment of the project, supported co-creation through concrete actions and thereby engaged in **operational** institutional work. While not invited to participate in the design of the project, she helped the municipality implement Venelles in Transition, and was for example involved in planning the quiz night, and acted as an expert for one of the roundtables at some workshops: “*with [name of association C] we tried to find many things: a bar to make it [the quiz] more fun...*”; “*they told me, you are in charge of this. So, I was an expert*” (A7-V).

A LOCAL ASSOCIATION AS A HELPING HAND

ROLE: “The Helping Hand”

INTENTION: Spreading the word about the importance of sustainability

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Relying on their local network to mobilize participants; technical expertise; experience; democratic legitimacy.

External actors, too, supported the implementation of co-creation in their own way; in this regard, we observe the role of local associations, and association C in particular. The association’s president played the role of the helping hand, actively supporting the project and contributing to the organization of several co-creation workshops. Regularly asked by the municipality to help raise awareness for sustainability issues, she was used to collaborating with them and helping out when needed: “*that’s what [name of association C] is all about. A lot of work to raise awareness. Enormous. At every event I’m there, at the associations forum, at Christmas, tennis, ... every time they call me*” (A7-V). Venelles in Transition was a chance for her to spread the word about the importance of both individual and collective action for the environment, while also boosting citizens’ involvement in local life: “*for Venelles in Transition, we do a lot of things. We try to make it progress (...) we try to include everybody... even if it’s small things, they can still get things going*” (A7-V).

As president of association C as well as another local organization, A7-V expressed her full support: she confirmed that she would be “*all in (...) until the end*”. Due to the size of these associations and her history of active involvement in local life, she was acquainted with a large part of the local population, among which she could promote the project: “*I know a panel of residents ranging from the very young to the very old (...) Sometimes they say hello and I don’t even know who they are*” (A7-V). On the other hand, her involvement in two large associations endowed her with a certain power over the municipality, which she could use to her advantage: indeed, “*this association has quite some influence over the municipality. Because it implies 400 people that vote*” (A7-V).

The mayor must thus be careful not to lose her support: as a matter of fact, A7-V has pointed out that while she was enthusiastic about the Venelles in Transition project and happy to be involved and able to contribute, she felt like her actions were not always acknowledged by the municipality: *“I fought for the association because there was only Venelles, Venelles, Venelles, but I said it’s the association, too! If you don’t see it, that’s not good. At some point you have to see who organizes it (...) It’s me who does this. It was not visible”*. However, instead of retreating from the project and reducing her involvement, she decided to continue collaborating with the municipality and provide support, but on her own terms: *“this time they make their poster, I make mine”* (A7-V).

Vignette 5. The institutional role of the helping hand.

On the other hand, Venelles in Transition led a second local association – Association A – to engage in **operational** institutional work aimed at a different intention as they launched their own project in parallel. Skeptical about the municipality’s intentions, they decided to “do their own thing”. In this regard, the launch of Venelles in Transition presented an opportunity for them to develop a new project on their own – an opportunity they immediately decided to seize: *“we saw the questionnaire, and were like, what now? We decided that everyone could of course respond individually (...) and that we would make a collective contribution”* (A3-V); *“the municipality’s project? What does it involve? We don’t really know (...) the municipality’s project has forced us to clarify our own positions on these issues”* (A1-V).

Their institutional work was therefore sparked by and complementary to the institutional work aimed at implementing the Venelles in Transition co-creation project. Rather than seeking to alter or undermine the institutional change project proposed by the municipality, they set up their own project in parallel: *“everybody does their thing, the municipality does theirs, we do ours... and we try to move on”* (A1-V).

A LOCAL ASSOCIATION AS AN OPPORTUNIST

ROLE: “The Opportunist”

INTENTION: Seizing the opportunity to launch their own project

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Relying on their network for expertise, power, and coherence; using an existing national framework to provide legitimacy for their local project.

While association C acted as a helping hand and supported the municipality’s project, association A’s role in the process looked different. Their intentions were not the same as those of the mayor and his supporters. Acting as opportunists, they seized the opportunity Venelles in Transition presented for them to get moving on their own project of a local

Citizens Climate Convention⁵⁸. They did so because they had doubts about the municipality's intentions behind Venelles in Transition: *"we are a bit scared of greenwashing"* (A3-V). The members of association A remained sceptical about the participatory nature of the project, wondering whether the population's proposals would actually be taken into consideration, or whether the project was merely meant to legitimize policy ideas developed by the municipality: *"one can get the impression that something has already been constructed, and they're trying to 'dress it up' democratically"* (A1-V).

To perform their institutional work, for association A, it was important to draw on an existing and accepted framework to develop their project – the national Citizens Climate Convention: *"we wanted to build on something that exists, that seemed interesting to us in its construction and its conclusions"* (A1-V). They did not hesitate to rely on external experts that could provide inputs: *"we always invite a specialist in the subject. Or two. People that are specialized in the subjects we treat, and we build our discussions on their input"* (A1-V). They moreover collaborated with other associations of their network to increase the impact of their actions and *"give some coherence and a global dimension"* to their work (A1-V).

All the while, they emphasized that they were not against the municipality's project. Rather, they wanted to be independent from the municipality and pursue their own ideas in parallel: *"we haven't tried to oppose them. We play the game, but we bring our own specificity"*; *"we're not opposed to the municipality's approach, but we want to seize the opportunity to move things forward"* (A1-V). They emphasized that they preferred working alone: *"it was just us"* (A3-V). However, they would not have initiated their project without the occasion that was Venelles in Transition.

Vignette 6. The institutional role of the opportunists.

2.1.3.3. Citizens bring Venelles in Transition to life

While on the one hand, institutional work was done by supporting actors in charge of organizing the project, co-creation participants also engaged in **operational** work. They contributed to the implementation of co-creation by taking part in the co-creation activities proposed by the municipality, from filling out the questionnaire to attending co-creation workshops, and participating in the COPIL: *"I filled out the online questionnaire"* (C2-V); *"every time, we discuss each objective. It's a completely open debate between us. Everybody contributes their ideas – or not"* (C3-V); *"we had to code whether we agreed that*

⁵⁸ Taking place in 2019-2020, the French Citizens Climate Convention consisted of 150 randomly selected French citizens tasked with proposing measures to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030. Proposed by President Macron in 2019 after the Yellow Vest movement, the Convention's June 2020 report included 149 recommendations. Macron committed to submitting them to Parliament or referendum. Implementation occurred through various channels, but many suggestions were only partially adopted, and numerous measures were rejected. See <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>

it's a priority, or whether it should be abandoned, or we didn't care" (C4-V); "we could express ourselves, make propositions, so... then there was this little game where we had all the propositions and we had to put a sticker on them to say whether we agreed" (C5-V). These practices brought the co-creation project to life, giving it a concrete form.

Some citizens went further and took the initiative to propose small projects on their own; while some of them depend on the municipality's support, others can be realized autonomously: *"I live in a condominium, for example, and just this weekend I sent a note to the members of the union council, asking them if they agreed to turn off our streetlights at night" (C5-V); "at one point in January I suggested we do 'one hour for the planet' in March" (C4-V). This shows that some participants' **operational** work was increasingly ambitious.*

Their institutional work was **conceptual**, too. These citizens, active participants in co-creation, quickly adhered to the municipality's narrative and emphasized the need for more participation during our interviews: *"one of the positive points is that they involve citizens in decisions" (C2-V); "it's important to consult after all! This approach is interesting" (C5-V). They went on spread the word about the importance of co-creation themselves: "I tell everyone, you have to go there, you have to give your opinion... it's our town, we have to do it" (A7-V). Moreover, not only political and managerial actors pointed out the shortcomings of bureaucracy as shown in the previous phase, but citizens did, too. During co-creation workshops, they could be overheard criticizing the closed-off nature of public organizations, and the problems this entailed for the development of responses to complex problems: *"we cannot solve this in silos. We must do it in a transversal way"; "we don't just have to implement actions; we also have to think differently. There are things we can't do like before"; "everything we're already doing is great, that's important, it's not that. But we are in a paradigm change" (participants at co-creation workshop, O4-V).**

Over the course of the co-creation phase, however, it became obvious to participants that the municipality had certain outcomes in mind, and that their reflection seemed to be steered in a way that corresponded to this vision. Citizens noticed that some of their propositions disappeared without an explanation: *"we've got 12, 15, let's say 20 [proposals] that were discussed around the workshop tables. What about the others? (...) Have the others disappeared, and if they return, why, what happens to the others..." (A3-V). Indeed, the organizers of the co-creation project had taken things in their own hands and re-organized the proposals in-between workshops to eliminate those that were already underway in Venelles or that could not be realized for various reasons. This was indeed part of the consultants' job: *"we let the consulting agency do its job: sorting through, deduplicating similar answers and so on" (P1-V). The role of citizens was therefore limited to providing inputs and working on the ideas selected by the municipality in the following workshops.**

CITIZENS AS ACTIVE FOLLOWERS

ROLE: “The Active Followers”

INTENTION: Participating in the co-creation project

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Personal experiences; professional expertise; democratic legitimacy.

Overall, the actively participating citizens were glad to have been given the opportunity to participate and shape local public policy: *“if I can contribute a little bit, that's great. That's what it's for, and I think that's good. When you attend meetings, the mayor and municipal councillors are there, and you can say what you think”* (C2-V); *“I think it's a very good initiative, to invite citizens to participate”* (C4-V). Some were eager to co-create because they felt like they could be useful and contribute their expertise in certain fields: *“I've got some technical knowledge, so I thought this would be a good time to share it”* (C3-V).

Citizens' inputs tended to be highly localized and based on personal experience. Since the SDGs, as global problems, are broad and can be hard to grasp, they tried to make them more tangible and relatable: during the workshops, they mentioned examples of public action implemented in other cities, as well as examples of their individual actions and problems (P01-V, O1-V, O2-V). Indeed, adopting a highly localized and individualized perspective seemed to enable citizens to participate in the joint ideation process, and make co-creation more concrete: *“everyone had concrete ideas. Like, on my street, you have to do this. It's ultra-localized. In my street I want that, it should be like that...”* (E3-V). Using these examples and referring to precise and local issues helped them feel concerned by problems that might at first seem too broad: *“I think that if people feel individually concerned in the short term, they participate more (...) when you talk about the 2030 Agenda, this seems far away for people, impossible, or it feels like a utopia so it's complicated”* (M4-V).

All appreciated the municipality's efforts to increase participation beyond Venelles in Transition, and also through the creation of citizen groups on a variety of issues: *“the approach is interesting, not only in terms of sustainable development, but also the fact of having created these consultative committees in different areas”* (C5-V). All respondents in the category “citizens” were indeed involved not only in the Venelles in Transition co-creation workshops, but also in at least one additional participatory activity, as the example of C1-V shows: *“I'm a member of the consultative group, and I'm also a member of the neighborhood interest committee”*. Through their participation, they endowed co-creation with legitimacy and infused it with meaning, beyond the Venelles in Transition project.

Their positive attitude towards increased participation, however, also came with high expectations towards the municipality. They wanted to see concrete results once Venelles in Transition and the 2030 Agenda were completed: *“a very positive [perception]. With a*

lot of expectations. But this also means, a lot of demands. It means that if nothing happens, we'll be disappointed" (C1-V). As a matter of fact, when they did not observe any action on behalf of the municipality months after the co-creation process, they expressed their disappointment and lack of understanding: "what are their constraints, why aren't we moving forward? What's holding them back? (...) a year has passed, the problem is complex, we have to move forward. On paper it's progressing, we're having meetings, but ..." (C4-V).

Venelles in Transition was perceived by citizens as a project strongly shaped and led by the municipality: *"we are not at town hall. It's them who do it..." (A3-V); "anyway, my opinion won't make much difference. But the mayor listened to me, in any case, and answered me very kindly" (C2-V); "it's a good thing that the politicians are doing there" (C4-V). Moreover, the municipality did not seem to be responsive to participants' propositions, even if they were concrete and people were willing to take a lead on their implementation: "there were a lot of people with very good ideas, experience and concrete cases, but I don't get the impression that anything is really being done (...) there are a lot of ideas, a lot of voluntary people, and they haven't helped them with their ideas..." (C4-V)*

Vignette 7. The institutional role of the active followers.

2.1.3.4. Maintainers show resistance to co-creation

If the participating citizens supported the intention of establishing co-creation as an institutional arrangement and engaged in operational work aimed at doing so, members of the organization's other departments participated only reluctantly. The Sustainable Development department had anticipated some resistance and therefore organized co-creation workshops for the municipal council early in the process: *"we quickly held an initial workshop to define the mission with the concerned municipal councillors (...) to get a good feel for the mission, what do you want, what's important to you" (M1-V). Without actively rejecting these new practices, they did not seem to see the need to co-create, either: "it's not that they were against it, but there were some, especially the older municipal councillors with a little more experience, who were dubious as to whether anything would really come of it. They said, it's good to do it, but it's pointless anyway" (P1-V).*

In addition to the municipal council, all departments of the municipality were targeted by public managers' **conceptual** as well as **operational** efforts to make co-creation more tangible: *"we organized a cross-department workshop (...) We blocked almost a day in the mayor's agenda to do this, which is already quite an achievement! The mayor, the general services director, the departments, the sustainable development department (...) We talked about it in a detached way (...) why am I doing this, because we have such and such objective..." (M3-V); "the first steps were to gain the trust of the departments, so that they understood exactly what we were going to do, where it stopped and where we needed them" (E1-V). This workshop attracted around a third of the organization's administrative staff, but without any concrete results: "it was a great time, but it didn't lead to much" (E2-V).*

When reluctance to participating in these workshops remained high, the mayor's team of supporters had to intervene and make internal participation mandatory. It was decided to "oblige" public managers and agents to do their part and participate in internal co-creation at the very least. Thus, they "*forced them to come*" to the internal co-creation workshop at the start of the project, as M1-V jokingly explained. The organizers believed that if their colleagues experienced co-creation themselves, they would be convinced of this new approach: "*if we don't give them a choice, if we say they have to come, they'll come and say, ah yes that's great*" (M4-V). As for the development of the Agenda, it was the general services director and division heads who demanded the departments' participation: "*if the general services director doesn't tell his agents that this is the priority for the month of February, these are the objectives...*" (E2-V).

Additionally, continuous **conceptual** efforts were required to help politicians and managers familiarize themselves with the ideas of co-creation: "*sometimes we had the impression that our municipal councillors didn't understand at all what we were doing. So, we had to refocus and hop... so there was really a lot of pedagogy required to explain the project*"; "*we were there to constantly educate and explain*" (M2-V). Yet, most members of the organization were simply not interested in incorporating the co-creation approach in their working methods.

Their maintenance work was therefore relatively automatic and mostly invisible, as they mostly continued working the way they had always worked and were not willing to attend co-creation workshops except when they were mandatory. "*Globally not interested*" (E2-V) public agents and managers therefore engaged in somewhat hidden institutional maintenance practices. While it was subtle, their conceptual work was based on the development of a narrative based on their skepticism regarding the benefits of co-creation: "*it means I'm letting people in who don't know how it works. At best they'll slow me down. At worst, they're going to waste my time. I think some departments, at least, had this skepticism*" (M3-V). They also questioned the necessity and added value of co-creation with non-experts if they themselves as municipal councillors could make more informed decisions: "*some spontaneously say, no, it's up to us elected officials to decide, we're not going to take citizens into account because it's not going to work*" (E1-V).

Through more **operational** institutional work practices, these maintainers tried to preserve established methods by emphasizing that those had proven to be effective: "*the technical services consider that when you respect the standards, you do what you're supposed to do*" (M3-V). They also attempted to integrate established practices in the proposed new ones. In this regard, maintainers resorted to practices they were familiar with and tried to continue working in this way even though it might not match the principles of co-creation. Both municipal councillors and public managers showed such behavior. Some municipal councillors, for instance, attempted to bypass co-creation by proposing projects to be discussed during co-creation workshops: "*those [municipal councillors] who already wanted to go into co-creation with a result, like, we're going to do your projects, so you could do this and that...*" (M1-V). Public managers, too, struggled with accepting the underlying ideas of co-creation, trying to preserve their habitual ways of

working: “for example, for a citizens' forum, she prepared a 15-slide presentation, and I told her no, that's too much, it's going to be us talking all the time again, but we want to give citizens a voice” (P1-V).

AFFECTED MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS AND PUBLIC MANAGERS AS MAINTAINERS

ROLE: “The Maintainers”

INTENTION: Preserving the status quo

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: professional experience and expertise; technical legitimacy.

While the handful of municipal councillors and public managers instructed by the mayor to bring Venelles in Transition to life were almost immediately supportive of the project, others required more convincing. Those municipal councillors and public managers who were not involved in the project acted as maintainers, seeking to preserve the status quo rather than implementing the new co-creation approach proposed by the mayor.

Obtaining the support of both political and managerial actors proved to be a complex undertaking due to their lack of interest in changing work modes: “*the agents were a little reluctant but in fact they were mainly a little disinterested (...) yes, globally not interested*” (E2-V); “*I can't think of one department head who said, that's great*” (M3-V)

Besides attending internal co-creation events, the organization's employees who were not actively involved in the implementation of the project were also expected to participate in other ways. This seemed to push them away even more: “*we asked them to participate, to answer questionnaires, to come to events... so it's a lot*” (M4-V). The organizers had to “*take them by the hand*” (M3-V) in order for them to participate, since for most, this was not perceived as a duty related to their status as citizens, but as work that had never before been part of their job description, and that seemed unnecessary to them: “*for them, it is an additional workload*” (E2-V); “*extra meetings, extra commissions... It's extra work, and I don't think you'll find a department manager today who says, I get a lot out of it*” (M3-V). Overall, they were relatively passive in their role of maintainers, which was mostly based on their lack of interest in co-creation practices.

Vignette 8. The institutional role of the maintainers.

2.1.3.5. National and regional public authorities give Venelles in Transition a platform

Public authorities at other levels – regional and national – and in Venelles' direct local environment also supported the co-creation project. Some of these public organizations showed their interest and support by inviting representatives of the town of Venelles to

events, providing space for them to promote the co-creation project. Indeed, in December 2021, right after the end of the co-creation phase, the head of the Sustainable Development and Citizen Participation department and the municipal councillor in charge of these topics were invited to speak about Venelles in Transition at a webinar organized by the regional biodiversity agency⁵⁹. The host of the webinar highlighted that the agency had supported the municipality throughout the entire process and attended the co-creation workshops, hoping that this project would inspire other towns to launch similar initiatives.

The mayor had moreover been invited to talk about his experience with the co-creation of a 2030 Agenda at a webinar organized by the Ministry of Ecological Transition in March 2022⁶⁰. The public acknowledgement of Venelles' efforts to co-create a local 2030 Agenda added to the legitimacy of the municipality's undertaking, giving them the occasion to promote their project and its underlying ideas.

At the final event where the 2030 Agenda was revealed to the public, the presence of a Member of Parliament added to the legitimacy of the municipality's efforts (O7-V). Her attending the event increased its media coverage, allowing once more to promote Venelles in Transition and the work that had been done over the past year.

Moreover, during both the co-creation workshops and our interviews, the France in Transition label that Venelles had received for its co-creation project was repeatedly mentioned: *“even the Ministry has labelled this project”* (P3-V); *“we were contacted by the Ministry of Ecology, and the mayor took part in a kind of conference at the Ministry to present the approach. Then, we were awarded the label maybe two months before the start of the process”* (P1-V). It was the Ministry of Ecological Transition that acted as a legitimacy provider and engaged in institutional work aimed at disrupting existing practices in this regard.

A NETWORK OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS AS LEGITIMACY PROVIDERS

ROLE: “The Legitimacy Providers”

INTENTION: Spreading the word about the benefits of co-creating a 2030 Agenda

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Relying on their network; using their central and powerful positions to raise awareness and legitimacy for the project.

The support of other public organizations at various levels endowed the municipality's project aimed at co-creating a 2030 Agenda with legitimacy in the wider field. The public

⁵⁹ Webinar « 1 Heure pour Comprendre et Agir », 14.12.2021, organized by ARBE Region Sud, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Afbt_2mTock&ab_channel=ARBE_RegionSud

⁶⁰ Webinar « Lancement de la feuille de route 2022 de la Communauté des territoires démonstrateurs de la Transition Écologique », 17.03.2022, organized by the Ministry of Ecological Transition, see <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x898gte>

organizations that were involved in various ways in Venelles in Transition therefore played the role of legitimacy providers.

Some showed their interest by attending co-creation events. Representatives of the metropolis and neighboring towns were present at the co-creation workshops, where they acted as experts at some of the round tables, and many also attended the final presentation of the 2030 Agenda (O7-V): *“there were other institutions too, the metropolis, also one on air quality, on biodiversity. And others, too, I believe...”* (E2-V); *“the president of the biodiversity agency attended the workshops, which shows a certain interest on behalf of the region”* (P1-V). Through their presence, they endowed the co-creation process with credibility. Others provided a platform for Venelles to promote the project to a wider audience (for instance, through the “France in Transition” label, or invitations to webinars).

The role of legitimacy providers was thus relatively passive but due to their status and position, these public authorities were able to create additional legitimacy for Venelles in Transition.

Vignette 9. The institutional role of the legitimacy providers.

Table 22 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in the deployment phase of Venelles in Transition as well as their underlying intentions.

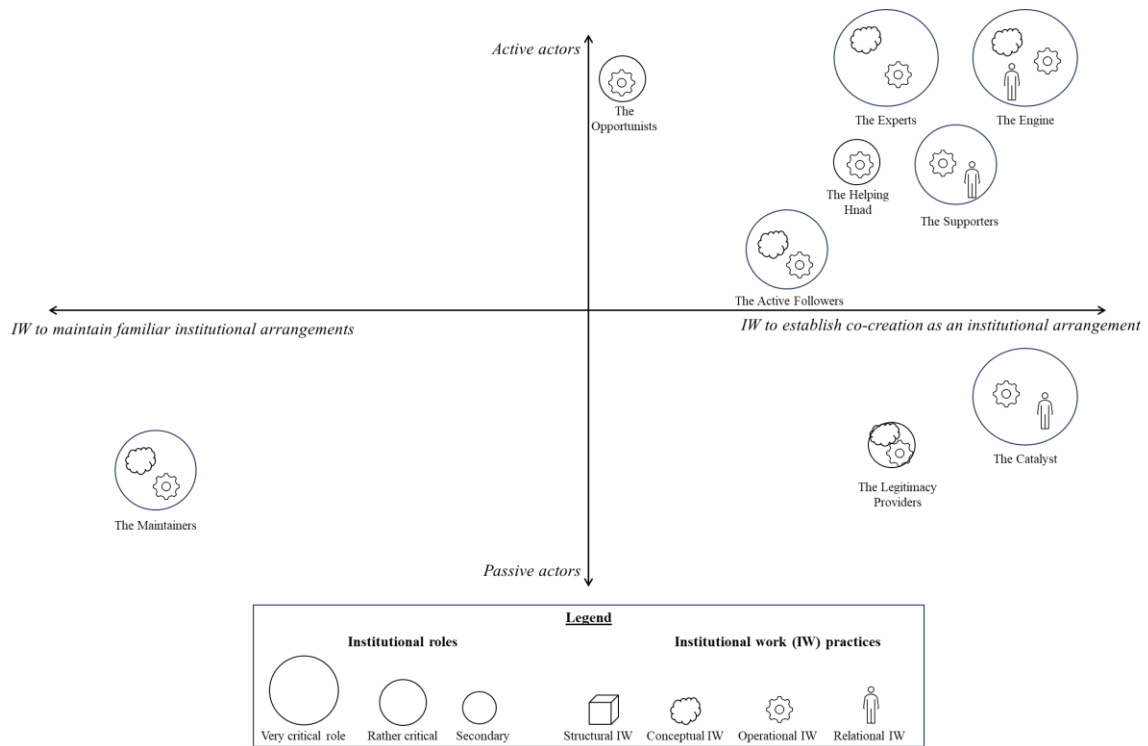
Table 22. Institutional work practices during the deployment phase of Venelles in Transition

	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW			
Conceptual IW	Strengthening the understanding of and the belief system associated with co-creation (<i>engine, experts, supporters, active followers</i>); Inscribing the project in a wider narrative about co-creation (<i>legitimacy providers</i>)	Pointing out the shortcomings of bureaucracy (<i>active followers</i>)	Questioning the necessity and added value of co-creation (<i>maintainers</i>); Emphasizing the benefits of established practices (<i>maintainers</i>)
Operational IW	Hosting internal co-creation workshops (<i>engine, supporters</i>); Mobilizing the population (<i>engine, supporters</i>); Hosting public co-creation workshops (<i>engine, experts</i>); Adapting co-creation design (<i>experts</i>); Taking part in co-creation and proposing their own small projects (<i>active followers; opportunists</i>); Supporting the municipality (<i>helping hand</i>); Providing a platform to promote the project (<i>legitimacy providers</i>)	Sanctions: making internal participation mandatory (<i>supporters</i>); Incentives: providing gifts for co-creation participants (<i>engine</i>)	Showing their lack of interest in co-creation through their absence or retreat from debates (<i>maintainers</i>); Integrating established practices in new ones (<i>maintainers</i>)
Relational IW	Being present and visible in the public space (<i>engine, supporters</i>); Building trust and relationships with the population (<i>catalyst, engine, supporters</i>)		

(Source: author)

The roles and practices observed during the deployment of Venelles in Transition still point to a predominantly top-down form of institutional work. However, compared to the previous phases, an increasingly diverse panel of internal and external actors were involved, and their institutional work practices and intentions were more varied than in the previous stage. The implementation of co-creation started to look slightly different than what had been planned. Figure 21 below illustrates the involved roles that show the importance of supporting actors, and their salient institutional work practices.

Figure 21. Configuration of roles and practices during the deployment phase



(Source: author)

2.2. Making “Venelles in Transition” last: increasingly dispersed institutional work

The final phase of Venelles in Transition, i.e., the drafting of the 2030 Agenda, had not been planned to be as public as it eventually turned out to be. Indeed, while the involvement of citizens in the deployment phase had provoked changes in the initial design of the process, this entire phase has been modified to fit their demands for more extensive participation. In the end, co-creation took on a different form than expected: citizens’ institutional work led to a longer and deeper co-creation process, as they took on a new role – that of the pivots – and once again shaped the trajectory of Venelles in Transition. Both operational and structural institutional work could be observed. While no new actors appeared, citizens’ role changes: from active followers, they turned into pivots. The absence of non-participants moreover became visible.

2.2.1. Citizens change the trajectory of Venelles in Transition

Initially, this phase was reserved for selected participants: the internal team of organizers and their colleagues from other departments affected by the actions to be included in the Agenda, as well as the consultants who continued to support the municipality. It had been planned to inform all involved actors, including the population, of the progress regarding the deliverable, but they had not been ascribed an active role in this phase: “*we’ve engaged a consultation process, and it’s our duty to report on it. So, we’re going report back to the elected representatives who took part (...). Report back to the agents. And then to the public, to those who took part in the project*” (M4-V); “*a follow-up with the participants, to avoid that six months go by, and they don’t know anything*” (P1-V). These plans, however, changed, and institutional work turned out to be more dispersed due to the unplanned, emergent, and evolving involvement of heterogenous actors.

Citizens indeed played a pivotal role after the end of the public co-creation phase and were the reason for the creation of the COPIL, even though this was not part of the initial plan. Due to them demanding more extensive participation beyond the co-creation workshops, the consultants decided to propose the launch of a steering committee where citizens, politicians, and managers would be able to write the final 2030 Agenda together: “*there’s a bit of frustration on the part of people who would have liked to continue following Venelles in Transition beyond the workshops, and they don’t know how this will be possible*” (C1-V); “*we decide as we go, and here again, the governance part, for example, wasn’t included at all in the agreement. But we realized that there was a need to keep going*” (E2-V). In this sense, citizens were able to engage in some **structural** institutional work as they provoked the creation of a new governance entity.

Consultants, too, unexpectedly effected **structural** institutional work when they proposed the creation of the COPIL. Engaging in structural work had become possible for these actors because of the trusting relationship they had been able to establish with the municipality over the previous months of collaboration: “[the COPIL] *was our proposition, but he accepted it, which is also proof that he trusts us*” (E1-V); “*I think now we can allow ourselves to do this even more, because we’ve been working together for a year, and it went well, and they know we are reactive*” (E2-V).

At a later point these citizens moreover demanded for the COPIL’s competencies to be extended and for it to be endowed with some power to make decisions, rather than serving only as an echo chamber. As they continued to ask for more extensive involvement, and eventually provoked another change in plans whereby the role of the COPIL evolved, and it was decided that they would fully take part in the development of the 2030 Agenda. And the COPIL itself continued to shape Venelles in Transition: “*they really take their role seriously, and the meeting really was a turning point for the project (...) it is really the COPIL that demands politicians’ engagement, wanting to see concrete outcomes as soon as possible*” (M1-V). Thus, in some way, actively involved citizens ultimately made Venelles in Transition “their” project and shaped co-creation in a way that made sense to them.

These shifts happened only because citizens had become more active participants and had expressed their wish to continue co-creating after the workshops. E2-V confirms their role in this regard: “*I have the impression that this is the path we’re taking because of the presence of citizens in this entity; I think that if we’d only had elected representatives, they wouldn’t care a bit*”. It was citizens’ involvement and institutional work that pushed the intended limits of co-creation, shaping the trajectory of the Venelles in Transition project. The creation of the COPIL was publicly announced and its new role explained at the first presentation of workshop results (O6-V) to make a point and show that citizens’ demands had been taken into account: “*we now have to write the agenda. It’s important for the people of Venelles to know that their contribution is taken into account. We have a COPIL composed in equal parts of elected representatives and local residents who contribute to the drafting process. We’re not excluding the residents at this stage*” (P3-V); “*it’s important for us to continue to co-create until the end*” (M1-V). Indeed, at this event, both the changing attitude of the municipality and the evolving role of the COPIL could be observed.

CITIZENS AS PIVOTS

ROLE: “The Pivots”

INTENTION: Deepening co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Power of the collective; democratic legitimacy; personal experience; professional expertise.

After having conformed to the role they had been ascribed during the co-creation workshops, citizens were now hungry for more. They took on a more active and central role and turned out to be the pivots of Venelles in Transition. The project had been designed for them, and their participation was what brought it to life and determined its form. Through their participation, they shaped the development of the 2030 Agenda, and thereby the future of the town they lived in. At the same time, they shaped the form of the co-creation process itself.

While they themselves did not have the power to make final decisions, as a collective, these engaged and active citizens were able to push the municipality to go further and deepen co-creation. They not only acknowledged the importance and relevance of co-creation, but also actively took part in shaping the implementation of these new practices. To do so, they relied on the power of the collective: the COPIL was able to put pressure on the municipality and made them act: *“I don’t think that individually, we have weight in the decisions”* (C2-V). Other than that, these citizens were able to rely on their own expertise and experience to take part in drafting the 2030 Agenda: *“I was a member of the municipal council between 2015 and 2020 when I was municipal councillor for environmental issues”* (C1-V); *“I went to a general engineering school, specializing in environmental issues”* (C3-V). Competencies acquired prior to the co-creation process seemed to help them feel confident enough to fully participate. Indeed, others who were not able to refer to such competencies felt less legitimate to fully take part in the co-creation of the 2030 Agenda: *“I felt a bit isolated at first, I thought, what can I say? (...) For me, it was the very first time (...) I had the impression that all the others were qualified in the field”* (C5-V).

Vignette 10. The institutional role of the pivots.

2.2.2. Finding a balance between new and familiar practices

Consequently, co-creation turned out to be both longer and deeper than expected. While the implementation of this new approach had already sparked some resistance and skepticism among municipal councillors, public managers, and agents, with the creation of the COPIL, this became even more pronounced. Through his **conceptual** work aimed at strengthening positive beliefs associated with co-creation, the mayor therefore had to actively insist on his trust in the COPIL’s work to reduce fears associated with this emergent aspect of co-creation, which disrupted established practices. Having decided not to reserve a veto right regarding the final 2030 Agenda’s content, he appeared to have a lot of trust in the COPIL and citizens’ understanding of the issues faced by the municipality. He reaffirmed the positive beliefs associated with co-creation: *“the mayor has absolutely no control over the final document. It’s a choice, once again. I don’t think we should be afraid of that at all. Once again, I think that when you explain to the population the constraints we have, when you explain the obstacles there may be, and the ambition we all share, there’s nothing to worry about”* (P3-V).

He was aware of the novelty of the co-creation approach and the fears that might be associated with it, especially so if old patterns are deeply engrained. The mayor therefore sought to reassure those actors: *“of course some people still think like before, when you have entrenched postures there is likely to be some opposition, some issues. But with common sense (...) I think political wars are unlikely”* (P3-V). The mayor continued to show his commitment to co-creation by actively participating in the final event where the 2030 Agenda was presented to the public: he was present at roundtables, eager to answer questions and participate in discussions (O7-V). His aim continued to be the strengthening of the trusting relationships with the local population.

During this phase, the final 2030 Agenda was thus crafted not internally but with the participation of the COPIL. Therefore, once the co-creation phase was completed, neither the Sustainable Development department’s nor the municipal councillors’ **operational** institutional work stopped as they co-created the final 2030 Agenda. They worked with the other members of the COPIL to select, prioritize, and formulate the actions to be included in the Agenda: *“so, in fact, that’s what our work for Venelles in Transition is all about: taking each action and seeing who’s responsible for it (...) we take each action with [name of M1-V] and break it down like this: what’s feasible, when, how, what’s the budget?”* (P2-V). In doing so, their practices were aimed at the practical implementation of co-creation beyond the workshops with the population. Indeed, to help the co-creation approach spread within the organization, they tried to facilitate the task for other internal actors who were not directly involved in the project, but whose contribution was needed to finalize it: *“with [names of M1-V, M2-V, and P1-V] we cover all aspects of sustainable development, but also actions where we work in parallel with other municipal councillors (...) And then they can look at it, and it’ll be easier for them than if they had to write up the action themselves”* (P2-V).

Yet, the organizers remained careful not to go too far, either. Indeed, the COPIL had been ascribed a more important role in the process of writing the Agenda, and was no longer only a supervising entity, but co-creation had to stay within certain limits: *“we’ll also make sure to say that at some point, we don’t have the time, we’ve got to move on, and so we’ll suggest things to you. You amend them, but we suggest things. Because if we co-construct, if we start from scratch every time, we’re not going to make it”* (E2-V). The COPIL had been transformed into an instrument that was no longer a powerless observer, but not fully capable of making important decisions either: the municipality continued to have the last word. This illustrates how the municipality, following the consultants’ advice, tried to find their footing after their initial plans had been changed, and the trajectory of Venelles in Transition had been shaped by citizens in unplanned ways.

The citizens that are part of the COPIL have noticed that, while they were now included in the decision-making process, the municipality had pre-selected the actions they were to work on during meetings. Numerous proposals seemed to have been excluded without consulting the COPIL first: *“they gave us lists - they had already organized citizens’ demands, and we worked on that”* (C2-V); *“they were already pre-sorted! We saw ideas that had already been pre-sorted”* (C3-V). A gap between municipal actors and the population

was thus visible; some form of hierarchy persisted even though the COPIL now had a more powerful role, and the mayor insisted that he “*didn't have control*” over the outcomes (P3-V).

COPIL members still did the work they had signed up for and continued to shape the form of the new governance entity. They for instance proposed to work on broader objectives rather than looking into specific actions right away: “*instead of working on action sheets, the COPIL had suggested working on objective sheets (...) they wanted to think in terms of objectives. And it's interesting because it opens up a lot of perspectives in terms of strategy: because the objectives, associations can make them their own. Individuals can make them their own. Companies can make them their own*” (M1-V). The COPIL's inputs thereby paved the ground for future co-creation, or the outsourcing of actions to actors other than the municipality. After six months of work, the COPIL once more shaped the trajectory of Venelles in Transition. They called for concrete action, asking the municipal council to act: “*at the last meeting [in June 2022] we set out the priorities, with 70 priorities to be achieved between 2023 and 2026. Now we're really in a project mode, with a strong commitment from the COPIL members. They've told us that we really need to get going now, and not just say we're going to do things*” (M1-V). Once again, the municipality became aware of the need to pick up the pace because of the presence of citizens in the COPIL: “*this change in the project really comes from the pressure on behalf of the COPIL (...) it's really the COPIL who asked for the municipal councillors' commitment and who want to see something concrete very soon*” (M1-V).

Involved internal actors began taking ownership of the project, too. While municipal councillors had begun to participate more during the final co-creation workshops, they now started to make the project their own as they better understood its outlines: “*at first [name of P1-V] was shy about speaking up, but by the end he was more confident to say, we are doing this so that everyone can express themselves and co-create a certain number of actions*” (E1-V). Thereby, they participated more actively than in the beginning stages in shaping how co-creation was implemented in Venelles. In doing so they engaged in **operational** institutional work. Public managers decided to pursue co-creation and launched internal working groups (M3-V) as well as working groups open to the public (M1-V and M2-V) to continue working on issues that had been brought up during the co-creation workshops: a working group aimed at the development of bike paths in Venelles saw the light of day, composed of public managers, citizens, and led by an external agency that the municipality had included in this new project.

Other external actors were brought in by public managers to conduct various new projects they had launched after Venelles in Transition, such as regular series of public workshops around the “Climate Fresco”. This illustrates how internal actors began to introduce co-creation as a new working method. Other concrete actions to implement co-creation in a durable way were initiated as well: “*I asked to put a line in the next budget for a participatory budget*” (P1-V); “*we play around with other forms of management, of meetings, thought processes. We had a design thinking day*” (M1-V); “*it's something that we also incorporate in our work, our project management, to say we gather around the table,*

we debate, share our opinions, we co-construct” (M2-V). They were motivated to go further, hoping for the project to inspire other municipalities to do the same, and for Venelles to initiate more participatory projects in the future: “I think it can make waves... at least I hope so. That’s motivating” (M2-V).

At the same time, maintainers’ **operational** institutional work was still aimed at preserving familiar practices. They continued to display their lack of interest in changing their own working methods. From a practical perspective, they made it hard for the organizers to define dates for meetings, and showed reluctance when asked to work on actions to be included in the final document: *“when we came with the Excel sheet and said you’ll have to analyze it... There was a bit of conflict there: no, we won’t have time... you have to specify which action for which department because I don’t want to read all the actions...” (E2-V).* These actions made their rejection of co-creation more concrete and visible because they interfered with the implementation of this new approach at an operational level.

In addition to their internal efforts aimed at alleviating this resistance, the Sustainable Development department continued to publicly spread the word about co-creation. They aimed to build legitimacy by being visible in the public space: *“the more we show that we’re there, the more people will get used to seeing us [the team behind Venelles in Transition]. And recognize us” (M4-V).* For reasons of visibility and legitimacy, the team had invited regional- and national-level elected politicians not only to the various co-creation workshops but to the final presentation of the Agenda. The Member of Parliament representing the department to which Venelles belongs did indeed attend the final event where the 2030 Agenda was publicly revealed (O7-V).

After the public co-creation phase, the municipality’s willingness to spur long-term citizen involvement also in the implementation of the actions that would make up the Agenda became more visible. In the later stages of the project, their increasing attempts to leave space for citizens to take ownership of the project and ensure that Venelles in Transition persists instead of being a stand-alone project could be observed. A contact list where those who wanted to actively follow along could add their names was proposed (O6-V, O7-V). At one of the final events, the mayor again insisted on his wish to create a movement and for citizens to make the project their own: *“the objective of the process is not just the Agenda, but to create a link with the inhabitants, and to build a community around the project” (P3-V).* The municipality now emphasized that they counted on the population’s involvement for the realization of the actions they had proposed: *“we’ll be able to do 30, 40%, but do things yourself, it’s not up to the municipality to do everything” (P1-V); “it’s not the municipality who carries the project all alone. It’s the municipality with the citizens. Or the citizens with the municipality” (P2-V).*

A large part of the local population had indeed remained absent from the co-creation process, where mainly those citizens who were already interested in sustainability issues and/or involved in local life were represented. The “average” citizen, however, did not attend the workshops. These citizens were therefore “invisible” during the co-creation

project but are ultimately those concerned by its outcomes. By actively refusing to participate and waiting for the results to decide whether they would legitimize the co-creation approach or not, silent actors engaged in some more concrete and **operational** institutional work affecting the practical implementation of co-creation.

NON-PARTICIPANTS AS SILENT ACTORS

ROLE: “The Silent Actors”

INTENTION: Relying on others to do the work

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: democratic legitimacy.

The “average” citizen was perceived as rather passive by our respondents. They described this group of the population who is neither involved in associations or otherwise invested in local life, not particularly interested in sustainable development, as “*rather individualistic*” (A4-V) with a “*wait-and-see attitude*” (P1-V), wanting everything “*to be handed to them on a silver plate*” (A6-V).

Other actors tried to explain their absence by a lack of interest in public action and the high living standards in Venelles that might conceal the need for change: “*we're in a spoiled town, with citizens who have everything they need, but who don't necessarily want to take an interest in public affairs*” (C1-V). Their suspiciousness towards their local government and a lack of trust were also pointed out as elements explaining their passive behavior. This became obvious during the co-creation project, but also before, for instance during the last census where a part of the population refused to respond: “*for 10 or 15% it is really very very difficult. They feel like they're being spied on. They're suspicious, really*” (C2-V). They are not responsive to other forms of citizen participation, either, and rarely took part in the participatory activities proposed by the municipality before Venelles in Transition: “*a public inquiry, that's also citizen participation, But people don't use it, or use it very little. Also, it's not always exciting, but who goes to the town councils? Nobody goes*” (M3-V).

These silent actors, non-participants in co-creation, seemed to wait for the municipality to act on their behalf, unwilling to take action themselves. Yet, they have been described as the ones who criticize easily: “*there are many who don't hesitate to say what's going well and what's not. But when we say, come on, now you're going to tell us how we can do it, and above all you're going to do it yourselves, we see that they are much less responsive*” (P1-V). Citizens waiting for the municipality to act has repeatedly been pointed out as an issue affecting the development and implementation of responses to complex problems. Without the municipality taking the first step, most of the local population seemed to remain passive: “*we also observed the problem that when we launch operations to change habits (...) it is always the municipality that has to initiate the operation*” (P3-V); “*there are many individual initiatives, but we need a framework provided by the municipality*” (participant of co-creation workshop, O1-V).

Those who preferred to wait for the municipality to take action and who did not participate in co-creation for various reasons represented a large part of the local population. P1-V pointed out their overall lack of interest and summed up the perceived attitude of these silent actors: “*there are lots of people who don't care. There are people who tell me, I'm not interested, I don't want to answer the questionnaire. There are people who think that if they don't benefit from it, they shouldn't do it, there are people who think it's pointless, there are people who don't care, there are people who think it's just politics... and when you add it all up, it's already an important part*”.

Vignette 11. The institutional role of the silent actors.

Table 23 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in the final phase of Venelles in Transition as well as their underlying intentions.

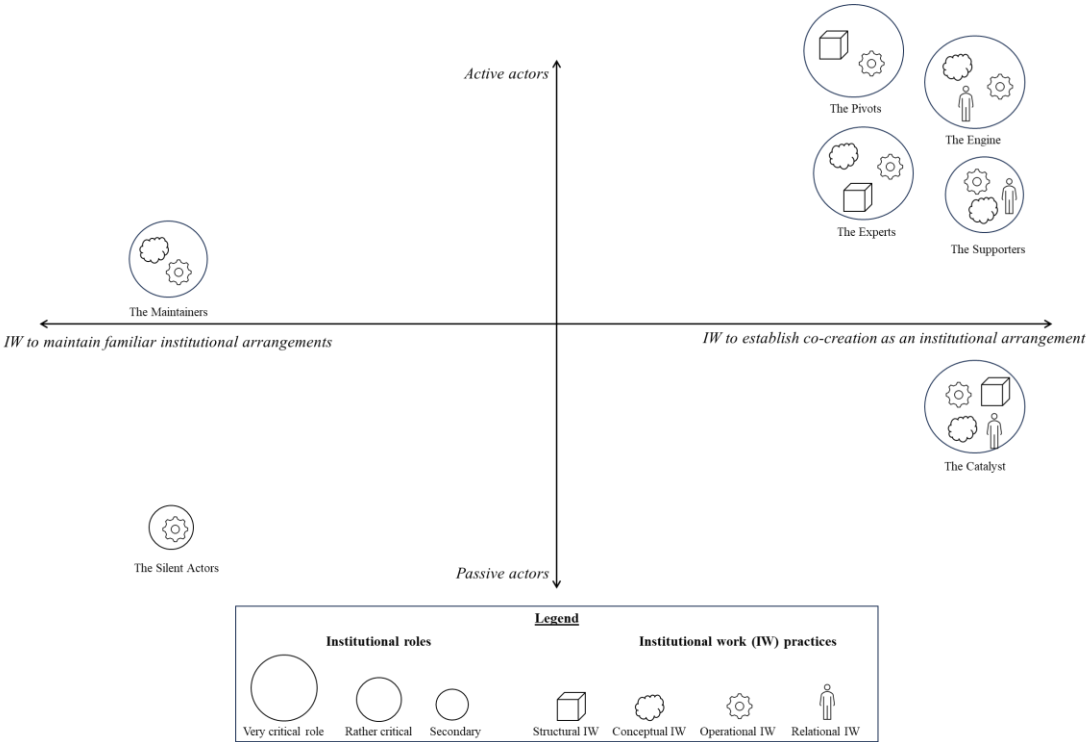
Table 23. Institutional work practices during the final phase of Venelles in Transition

	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW	Demanding more participation and provoking the creation of the COPIL (<i>pivots</i>); Proposing the creation of the COPIL (<i>experts</i>); Creating the COPIL (<i>catalyst</i>)		
Conceptual IW	Reaffirming positive beliefs about co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>); Reaffirming the will to create long-term change (<i>catalyst</i>); Taking ownership of the project (<i>pivots, engine, supporters</i>)	Reducing fears associated with co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>)	
Operational IW	Participating in the drafting of the final deliverable (<i>catalyst, engine, experts, pivots, supporters</i>); Incorporating co-creation in internal working methods (<i>engine, supporters</i>)	Keeping co-creation within certain limits (<i>catalyst, engine, supporters</i>)	Negatively affecting the drafting of the final deliverable (<i>maintainers</i>); Being absent (<i>maintainers, silent actors</i>)
Relational IW	Continuing to be visible in the public space (<i>engine</i>); Building trust and relationships with the population (<i>catalyst</i>)		

(Source: author)

While since the beginning of the project, the announced goal had been to “set the territory in motion” (E1-V), only once the initially planned public co-creation phase was over, citizens seemed to take ownership of Venelles in Transition. Their institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation became more active: this showed in them taking on the new role of the pivots. Structural and operational institutional work were dominant throughout this phase and performed by different actors. Thus, while a top-down form of institutional work shaped by a few central actors dominated the earlier stages of the Venelles in Transition co-creation project, later, the involvement of more heterogenous actors changed its trajectory and made institutional work more dispersed. Top-down institutional work affected the project at all stages to some degree but was increasingly challenged by the dispersed institutional work of heterogenous institutional workers, leading to the co-existence of different power configurations, institutional work practices, and institutional roles. They are represented in figure 22 below.

Figure 22. Configuration of roles and practices during the final phase



(Source: author)

In this section, we presented the findings for the case of Venelles. Two broad phases with different organizational forms of institutional work were identified based on observed practices and roles: top-down institutional work during the preparation and deployment phase which resembled traditionally bureaucratic procedures, and more dispersed institutional work once public co-creation was initially intended to be over. This critical role of participants as pivots was explored in this regard. As a matter of fact, dispersed institutional work occurred due to their request for deeper and more extensive participation. This was accommodated by the municipality who decided to adapt the design of co-creation to participants' expectations.

These findings illustrate the emergent nature of institutional work in contexts that involve a plurality of heterogenous institutional workers: in Venelles, their interactions shaped not only their institutional work practices but also their roles and intentions, and thereby ultimately also the organizational form of institutional work. As diverse actors took ownership of the co-creation project, the latter exceeded its initially planned scope. Overall, institutional work practices were numerous and diverse in this case, as were the underlying intentions actors pursued.

In the following section, we present the findings for the case of Klagenfurt.

Section 3: Presenting the findings: from dispersed to one-sided institutional work in Klagenfurt

In this section we recount the evolution of Mission KS 30. As it was the case for the Venelles in Transition project, two phases can be distinguished. Institutional work took a turn and its organizational form changed as actors' institutional work practices evolved throughout the process. While the first phase of the project consisted of negotiations between actors with different institutional roles and intentions, and institutional work therefore took a more dispersed form (**section 3.1.**), it was predominantly top-down and marked by the institutional work of one central actor during the second phase (**section 3.2.**). In this respect, we observe that diverse actors aimed to shape the form of co-creation early in the process, subsequently relying on a single actor to implement the project.

This section follows the same structure as the presentation of findings for the case of Venelles in the previous section. Each section contains subsections that explain the institutional roles we observe as they enter the scene, as well as their institutional work practices. Vignettes are provided to characterize these roles and explore the resources and competencies they mobilize to perform institutional work and pursue their intentions. This structure allows to provide context for more analytical aspects, and to understand how institutional roles and institutional work practices emerge and ultimately lead to specific organizational forms of institutional work. Figures representing the configurations of involved actors, and tables summarizing their institutional work practices and intentions are provided at the end of each section⁶¹.

⁶¹ To help the reader easily identify them, the broad types of institutional work (structural, conceptual, operational, and relational institutional work) are again printed in **bold letters** throughout the presentation of our findings, and the more specific practices are underlined.

3.1. Negotiating the design of “Mission KS 30”

The emergence of Mission KS 30 was marked by negotiations between the project partners: the city’s Sustainable Development department as the project leader (represented by the department head as the catalyst and two members of the department, acting as the implementers), and an external consultant in charge of organizing the participatory process. During these negotiations, actors with opposed visions performed mostly operational and conceptual institutional work, and conflicts between them emerged as they attempted to find common ground concerning the form of co-creation. Concessions on both sides were made as they went back-and-forth trying to agree on the most suitable design for the co-creation process. The form of institutional work was thus somewhat dispersed at the beginning, even though top-down elements could also be observed.

3.1.1. The department head identifies and seizes the opportunity for co-creation

As a reminder, this co-creation process was part of a broader project through which the city prepared its application for the EU Commission’s “100 Cities Mission”. This European program served as an incentive and a frame for the city to spur the implementation of co-creation since their application had to include a participatory dimension. This occasion was used to justify the break with established practices and introduce co-creation, something they seemed to have had in mind for some time: “*we’ve always said that at some point the department has to tackle the issue of citizen participation*” (M9-K). Institutional work was immediately predominantly **operational** in Klagenfurt: the most suitable form through which co-creation could be incorporated in the larger project had to be found.

They would not have been considered for the EU program otherwise: “*certain specifications as to what must be taken into account in the project are set out in these calls for proposals. And among other things, a participation process was desired. And that’s why we thought about how we could do this*” (M2-K); “*they don’t see the point (...) but there had to be a participatory dimension to this project. When someone comes and say this must be this way because it’s governance, or if you see the civil society participatory movement, this can be a starting point*” (E1-K). Mission KS 30 was a broader project consisting of seven work packages in total, one of them a participatory process: stage 1 of the process had to include the co-creation of a “climate-city contract” and a roadmap with concrete actions necessary to achieve the goals⁶². Thus, while the department head’s desire to implement a participatory process seemed to have been there for a while, it was also one of the requirements to obtain funding.

⁶² Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (2020): Stadt der Zukunft. 8. Ausschreibung. Leitfaden zur Projekteinreichung.

The head of Klagenfurt's Sustainable Development department decided to apply for a national grant that would allow to launch a project in preparation for an application at EU level. In this respect he acted as the catalyst behind Mission KS 30: *"actually, it originated from our department; we are also project leaders, and we sought out the project partners. The brainstorming happened collaboratively. [Name of the research center] is an expert in participatory processes and immediately told us what is feasible (...) Approval from the political authorities is definitely required, but the initiative came from us"* (M1-K). The local political sphere, as this quote shows, was not involved in the project.

Having decided to apply for this grant, the department head had to find the right project partner to take charge of the participatory part of the project. Thus, while the work package concerning the participatory process had been outsourced, as the initiator and leader of the project, he reserved his right to demand adaptations when necessary: *"we were involved because we are the project leaders and have the responsibility in the end"* (M9-K). He was present during the design phase of the project, where he did not hesitate to intervene in negotiations when certain elements needed to be changed to match his expectations.

The department head was later also actively involved during the official launch of the co-creation process where he represented the Sustainable Development department: he was present at the first co-creation event to explain the process, its form, content, and underlying ideas, as well as the status quo of public action for sustainable development in Klagenfurt to the participants. By doing so, he affirmed his role as the person behind Mission KS 30. His team continued to refer to him and his role in the project throughout the co-creation process even though he did not attend the workshops: *"he was always quoted by the others and was there for 5 minutes last time.... but he was always present, at least his name, because he was always mentioned"* (C3-K).

Once the co-creation project was on track, he stepped back and let his team and the consultant take charge of the more operational aspects. In this sense, he seemed to understand his role in the co-creation process as the catalyst initiating and overseeing the process: *"he was there at the start. He helped start the project and then formed the bracket again at the end, where he was also present at the closing event. But he left it to certain people in the department to communicate and do the workshops with us"* (C7-K). Not all involved actors showed understanding for his absence during the co-creation workshops: *"we tried to get him to come... he always comes when VIPs attend. Other than that..."* (E1-K); *"it was not important enough for him"* (C3-K).

If the catalyst's institutional work was predominantly operational the very beginning of Mission KS 30, **conceptual** work practices accompanied the design of the project. While this co-creation process was therefore mainly motivated by the city's desire to become one of the 100 Cities, at the same time, a narrative around the importance of co-creation still seemed to slowly develop within the organization and especially so within the Sustainable Development department. The project initiator and department head pointed

out the shortcomings of their habitual procedures and the importance of thinking about doing things differently by including citizens: “we focus so much on the inside and it's such an effort to keep all the players in line and alive so that nothing goes wrong, and you kind of forget about the most important players” (M9-K). The relevance of shifting from traditional policymaking towards more participatory processes was thus highlighted in internal actors' discourse as they worked to implement co-creation.

However, at the same time, a narrative questioning the relevance of co-creation appeared. The head of the Sustainable Development department emphasized the paradox of direct participation in a representative democratic system: “actually, politicians are the elected citizens' council. In terms of democracy, it's somehow a bit of a contradiction that on the one hand you have elected citizens' representatives making decisions and then you still have to establish a citizens' council so that the concerns of the citizens are taken into account. That's perhaps a bit of a strange development. You tend to wonder why something like this is necessary at all” (M9-K).

THE HEAD OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AS THE CATALYST

ROLE: “The Catalyst”

INTENTION: Being selected for the “100 Cities Mission” to spur public action for sustainable development

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Powerful position within the organization; relying on his team and relationships with his wider network; professional experience and seniority; commitment and persuasiveness; project funding; project partners' commitment.

The idea to apply for project funding that required co-creation came from the head of Klagenfurt's Sustainable Development department (M9-K). He acted as the catalyst behind the project, staying in the background but ensuring that the project was on track and matched his expectations: “he decides” (E1-K).

The head of the Sustainable Development department was the one to become aware of the opportunity to receive funding, first from a national and then hopefully a European program, helping cities to become carbon-neutral by 2030. Detecting opportunities for new projects was generally his role within the department: “in our department, he [M9-K] is the one who keeps his eyes open and says, this call could be interesting, let's do something” (M1-K). Indeed, since this project was not a response to a specific political demand, a driver within the administrative sphere was needed, and the department head took on this role: “I think the administrative rather than the political sphere was behind it (...) and then it needs support. And I think he really was in charge of it” (C7-K). He therefore played

a key role at the beginning of Mission KS 30: *“he was one of the significant initiators of this project”* (M8-K); *“I feel like that it is [name of M9-K]’s accomplishment”* (E1-K).

As department head, he was perceived as highly motivated and involved: *“the boss was at the last workshop, he is very enthusiastic about the project. He has the responsibility, and he is very very committed to every project, he gets really worked up”* (M4-K). When Mission KS 30 led to Klagenfurt being selected as one of the “100 Cities, he was elated: *“the boss was so happy that the project got approved that he bragged about it at every opportunity anyway. He was so happy, because, as he explained, the project is also a door opener for other projects”* (M6-K).

Over the course of his 20 years as head of the department, he has built a strong team on which he relied also for Mission KS 30: *“he really is the driver and has successively brought in people who can really support him well and who fit in well”* (M5-K). Besides the ability to get the right people on board, his extensive professional experience in Klagenfurt’s Sustainable Development department also put him in a position where he was able to initiate an ambitious project like Mission KS 30: *“of course I now have a very strong team, and also many possibilities to push these issues at the level of the city”* (M9-K); *“he has an overview like nobody else”* (E1-K). Because of his experience, he also knew how to obtain political support for his projects: *“our boss always prepares it well beforehand and then they also support it”* (M6-K); *“he always dresses it up well”* (M7-K). And he was motivated enough to do so and put the Mission KS 30 project on the agenda: *“I think you need a great deal of commitment and persuasiveness to get something like this off the ground and you must not run out of breath, even if you encounter resistance”* (M5-K).

He was able to rely on his powerful position within the department and more generally the local public organization to implement the co-creation process despite its novelty and the skepticism this provoked among his colleagues: *“he is part of the establishment but without him it probably wouldn’t be implementable either. I don’t know what would happen if it was [name of M2-K]’s turn and if he would have the same weight. [Name of M9-K] has built up a power base, and for this field that’s a miracle anyway. I think you need that. But I think he also has the weight... and even he can’t get the action field leaders around the table. And he doesn’t dare, he doesn’t do it either. But I think if he invited them, maybe six would come, and if someone else invited them, two would come”* (E1-K).

Despite these difficulties, he was able to obtain the necessary support to launch and promote the project: *“the city’s communication department for example is very open and fully supports us to keep going. And the political sphere also supports it”* (M9-K). Finally, the funding obtained for the project, as well as the commitment of the two participating schools were key resources: *“you don’t just need political commitment but also the money”*; *“both schools are very committed, you really need that”* (M9-K).

Vignette 12. The institutional role of the catalyst.

Since Mission KS 30 was broader than just the co-creation process, it was necessary to find both internal and external actors who would be in charge of its implementation. Internally, staff was assigned to oversee the entire Mission KS 30 project and bring it to life; this was the only instance of **structural** work that could be observed in Klagenfurt. The department head decided that two of his team members were to take charge of Mission KS 30: *“nothing happens by itself. There always has to be someone who takes the time to look after it. By now we have such a strong team in the department that we always find someone to take care of it. In our case it was [name of M2-K], who is the full-time caretaker, so to speak, but who is also supported by [name of M1-K], for example. She was also involved in this project and was also partly financed by the project”* (M9-K).

3.1.2. The Sustainable Development team takes over the operational aspects of Mission KS 30

Two public managers of the Sustainable Development department were thus responsible for the implementation of the entire Mission KS 30 project, a part of which was the co-creation process. Consequently, throughout the entire process, their institutional work was highly **operational** and concerned the practical and logistical aspects of the implementation of the co-creation process rather than its form: *“beforehand, we had to organize the schools and the classes, and a rough schedule, how we would divide everything up, which students would be suitable as mediators and for the steering group, how we would determine the action field groups...”* (M1-K). The concretization of Mission KS 30 was up to them: *“we take on the management of the project, that means, we make sure that everything is done on time (...) we are the communication point between project partners if questions arise. We are responsible for the dissemination work package. And of course, as the city of Klagenfurt, we are at the intersection of everything”; “[name of M2-K] usually takes care of the project partners, and together with them we were in charge of the application and wrote everything”* (M1-K).

However, they explicitly stated that it was not their job to participate in the design of the co-creation project, justifying their reluctance to do so by their lack of competencies: *“otherwise we only get in the way. We work with them, help where we can. And again, we're doing this for the first time, we have no experience, we have to go through the whole thing first”* (M2-K).

In their discourse throughout the project, these public managers mentioned the importance of opening up processes and including citizens in decision-making – *“we also know that it makes sense for a city not to make all decisions alone, leaving citizens aside. But it makes sense of course to sometimes do it together, to ‘live democracy’, so to say, to be transparent as a municipality”* (M2-K) -, and more specifically of including youth in policymaking processes – *“it's important to bring young people on board who will continue on this path when we have already retired”* (M5-K).

If their **conceptual** work seemed to be aimed at supporting the spread of co-creation, at the same time, they questioned its added value: *“I think it’s delicate to know when to have participation and when not (...) maybe the population’s opinion is different than ours. And I don’t know whether it is necessary to generate this conflict or not. I’m still not so sure when it is good to say, let’s do citizen participation”* (M2-K). This goes to show how the Sustainable Development team members, like the department head, developed narratives both supporting the implementation of co-creation and questioning it existed at the same time.

TWO MEMBERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AS THE IMPLEMENTERS

ROLE: “The Implementers”

INTENTION: Operationalizing co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Expertise; empathy; good relationships with other internal actors; close in age to co-creation participants.

While the head of the Sustainable Development department stuck to his role of the catalyst, remaining absent throughout most of the co-creation process, two members of his team were there to represent him and the department. In charge of the operationalization of the project, they acted as implementers translating his vision. If the expert was responsible for planning and hosting the co-creation workshops, these two public managers took care of the logistical aspects and helped out wherever needed: they were the implementers.

Their role consisted of managing the entire Mission KS 30 project. They were responsible for the logistical aspects of Mission KS 30 and the co-creation workshops, but not its content and final decisions: *“in terms of content, I don’t contribute, rather in terms of organization and strategy and these kinds of things, but it’s up to the others to decide”* (M2-K). “The others” being his superior, the department head: *“I think [name of M2-K] understands a lot and I think he is also open, but [name of M9-K] decides. It doesn’t really matter what he says”* (E1-K).

While they did not have the ability to make important decisions, the role of these two members of the department was essential as they helped bridge the gap between the other involved actors. In this respect, they were the link between the organizer and the local public organization. Through their constant presence, they ensured stability and a flow of information: *“without the two, it would have been a ‘stillbirth’ anyway. The two were personally committed and motivated and really carried it on behalf of the city (...) such processes need continuity. And if someone comes and goes then it tears it apart. In this respect [names of M1-K and M2-K] ensured continuity”* (E1-K).

Besides providing a link between the different involved actors, the two implementers also took on another role when it was required. They acted as roundtable facilitators when there were less participants than expected, or when they noticed that additional input was needed to move forward: *“I wasn’t just an expert and in the team of project leaders, but I was also a facilitator of the group”* (M2-K). In this sense, they switched between their role as implementers and a role as reality checkers (this role has mainly been taken on by public managers who were not directly in charge of the project). However, they did so somewhat reluctantly because to them, they were not there to contribute, but merely to guide the participants: *“it’s difficult because as a facilitator you shouldn’t really say what you think, but make sure others share their opinions and discuss (...) but then I also joined the discussions”* (M1-K).

Both public managers were relatively young, and the small age gap between them and the high school students made it easier for the latter to interact with them than with the other, older adults (O1-K, O2-K). Moreover, they were present at all co-creation events, which allowed for relationships and trust to develop between them and the students, and they could talk more freely: *“in my group it was perhaps a bit due to my role in the whole project because I was always there, even before the first workshop, and we always had a few students with us in the online meetings where we trained them. A few times the teachers were already gone, and we were alone with the students, and I then said, we talk at eye level and don’t be shy. I tried to convey that we are all equal and that everyone’s opinion is equally valid, which is why they talk differently to me in the workshops”* (M2-K).

Their age and constant presence made them more accessible for the students than the other involved actors. Another important competency they had was their empathy: *“he [M2-K] is very kind and has a feel for these processes (...) there you have someone who is good with citizens and different generations”* (E1-K). Moreover, they drew on their expertise to spur debates, and on their knowledge about the project to steer students in the right direction: *“I contributed my expert knowledge, I said these are the goals of the strategy, these actions and projects exist”* (M2-K).

Vignette 13. The institutional role of the implementers.

3.1.3. Negotiations between the project leader and the consultant

The design of the co-creation part more specifically was however handed over to an external project partner. The consultant who would be in charge of the participatory dimension of Mission KS 30 had been proactive to be selected for this job: as a matter of fact, when she learnt that Klagenfurt would apply for project funding and was starting to look for project partners, she contacted them directly. Outsourcing this part was necessary due to a lack of internal competencies: *“we’re still a bit blank in terms of*

competencies, because you have to be able to implement something like this" (M2-K). No efforts were engaged to acquire the necessary competencies: *"we are always going to need someone. We cannot do this on our own. We need an external person"* (M2-K).

This shows that the department head's structural work aimed at implementing co-creation was temporary: no veritable structural changes have taken place beyond the scope of the Mission KS 30 project which was limited in time. The Sustainable Development department seemed to be somewhat detached from the co-creation project. Formally, it was the consultant's responsibility, and this showed in the project leaders' discourse, too: *"we don't get the money, so we don't put in any effort"* (M2-K). Co-creation seemed to be treated as an add-on, ad hoc project and at this point, no intentional work was done to provide long-term foundations for co-creation within the organization. Rather, institutional work was soon aimed at defining the operational modalities of co-creation.

Once the project partner who would take over the organization of the co-creation process was found, negotiations concerning the design of the latter began. The form of co-creation, its depth and breadth had to be determined by the organizer together with the internal project leaders. While the co-creation work package was the responsibility of the external project partner, its form still had to be negotiated with and validated by the project leaders: *"it's normal that you discuss it with project partners"* (M9-K). However, they were far from co-creating the co-creation process: *"it's her job"* (M2-K). And so, for the organizer, the more concrete planning of the co-creation process began.

In this regard, her institutional work was **operational** as she suggested the co-creation methods and tools she had in mind for this project, based on the Foresight methodology. She aimed to implement an ambitious co-creation process: *"we mentioned strategic agenda setting, that is, the Foresight Process (...) it's not limited to participation, but in the best case it changes the strategy papers"* (E1-K). Initially, she had planned to include a variety of local stakeholders: *"we had the idea to develop a dialogue between generations. To start with schools (...) and then invite citizens more generally, so that the youth's perspective can be confronted to those of the so-called adults or experts"* (E1-K).

This is where the project leaders intervened, demanding to adapt the planned process. It seemed to be difficult for them to envision a co-creation process that would potentially affect their internally developed strategy: *"it was a back-and-forth during the design phase. They were like, is this really necessary? Who should we do this with?"* (E1-K). Moreover, bringing in a variety of stakeholders posed a problem: *"we actually really wanted to open up to all citizens and said why don't we put up posters in central squares in the city? The answer was: for God's sake, someone might come! So there's already this attitude, and fear"* (E1-K); *"the idea was to also hold a full-day workshop with politicians. I said I'm sorry, but that's not possible (...) they will all get up and leave because they work completely differently. And I can't have the CEO of some company... I can't expect someone like that to sit there for a whole day"* (M9-K). The organizer had to reduce the scope of her ambitious

ideas for the co-creation process (for instance, mixing generations, or opening up the process to the entire local population) to reduce fears around co-creation. These elements show how, through **conceptual** institutional work, the organizer attempted to explain the co-creation approach and establish a shared understanding of the latter.

It was evident that, should co-creation still take place, the process had to be adapted to fit the city's expectations and accommodate their apprehension. The consultant suggested a Foresight process with local high school students: *"I think it was a break-through when we suggested doing it with young people (...) schools as participants in a Foresight, you can control them. But opening it up and saying, let's go out and invite citizens, there's no positive experiences with this is Klagenfurt"* (E1-K). The municipality had to be reassured and have the perception of control to give their consent: *"for the city, it was about limitation and control. With schools, they have it (...) the city was scared of the 'VIPs', the industry and the local 'who is who' of stakeholders"* (E1-K); *"then came the idea of initiating a participatory process with a specific target. If you include the entire city right away, this might be too much for us"* (M9-K).

Moreover, while the organizer had planned for different types of stakeholders to mix at the very least at the end of the process to discuss the student's ideas, this was avoided by the internal project leaders as well. For the one workshop where other stakeholders would be invited, they had chosen a date where students would not be able to attend: *"we'll have 80 adults, and they chose a date where students are away. No students will be able to attend (...) that's what we have always warned them about, to have two separate formats"* (E1-K).

Thus, while the Sustainable Development department insisted that, since the work package had been outsourced to the consultant, they did not want to be actively involved in any planning, negotiations concerning the form, depth, and breadth of co-creation still characterized the preparatory stage of the project. They also insisted on reducing the scientificness of her approach, which seemed too abstract: *"she was always too scientific for me. I always had to slow her down and bring her back down to earth. The whole Foresight process was so complicated, nobody understood it anymore. It was too theoretical. I always had to bring her back and restrict her so that it wasn't so scientifically inflated"* (M9-K). The organizer's initially ambitious ideas were once more diluted by the project leaders' inputs.

For Mission KS 30, the project leaders indeed wanted a more operational approach and decided to use their existing Smart City Strategy as a base for co-creation, letting participants suggest additional actions. The idea was to present the existing strategy to them and *"simply complete the Smart City Strategy with their feedback. To simply fill the gaps, so to speak"* (M1-K). Co-creation was thus immediately framed by the city's existing strategy. For them, this was the safe way to go about the Mission KS 30 project since the Smart City strategy had already been approved by the city's political sphere: *"for the Smart City strategy and all its content we have complete political support. Political commitment"* (M2-K).

THE CONSULTANT AS THE REMOTE ORGANIZER

ROLE: “The Remote Organizer”

INTENTION: Setting up an ambitious co-creation process

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Scientific knowledge; expertise; experience; relationships with her wider network; support from other involved actors.

The consultant, an expert in collaborative governance processes with both scientific and practical expertise, reached out to the city of Klagenfurt herself to be considered for the lead of the co-creation work package of Mission KS 30. She was able to do so because of her network: *“my brother was in touch with the Green political party before the elections, and through him I got in touch with the head of the Sustainable Development department”* (E1-K). They decided to collaborate, and an agreement was found: the consultant would be completely in charge of the work package dedicated to the co-creation process. Being the only one responsible for planning this process put her in an isolated position. Moreover, her approach was considered too abstract and complex. Consequently, she played the role of the remote organizer, with the ambitious idea of putting in place a veritable co-creation process in Klagenfurt.

The consultant’s research center is dedicated to working with cities that seek to implement new governance processes: *“for us it’s always about governance in cities. It’s about setting up cooperative development and decision-making processes between cities and citizens”* (E1-K). For the Mission KS 30 co-creation process, she was a key actor: *“she was the most important person in that she pushed the whole process. Because she was instructed to do so”* (M9-K). The co-creation process was perceived as her project rather than the city’s: *“she was the leader of the participatory process and the work package (...) in terms of content, almost everything comes from them”* (M1-K). The Sustainable Development department seemed to be detached from the project, leaving everything up to the consultant; it was her job to set up the entire co-creation process and produce a report as the final deliverable: *“I don’t want to get involved, it’s up to her to make the process work... yes, we can’t intervene. We don’t have the knowledge, either (...) she is responsible for the work package, she gets the money for it”; “now she has to work with what the students wrote and make a report out of it (...) and that’s the actual output”* (M2-K).

The consultant’s work was therefore somewhat separated from the department’s who didn’t want to get involved, and a gap between them persisted. Geographically, too, the distance between the organizer and the other involved actors sometimes hampered the process. As a matter of fact, the consultant was located in the capital city of Vienna, a four-hour train ride away, and only came to Klagenfurt physically for the workshops.

While she was able to draw on her expertise and experience in this area to set up the Mission KS 30 co-creation process, she had never worked with young people before: *“it was my first time organizing such a process with teenagers”* (E1-K). Her lack of experience

with this age group turned out to be an issue. The participating high school students, but also all other involved actors, perceived the methods as too complex and abstract, and not suitable for the targeted age group: *“she wasn’t too abstract on purpose, but the students absolutely don’t understand”* (C3-K). This gap between the organizer’s vision and that of the other actors negatively impacted their relationship throughout the process: *“they weren’t quite on the same page with her, you could tell, the students and [name of E1-K], it didn’t quite work out”* (C3-K).

She was perceived as the remote organizer on her ivory-tower, far removed from the students’ reality: *“funnily enough, many students said, what she does is really a job? They didn’t see the work behind it and the usefulness (...) the students are far away from her world”* (C8-K); *“she’s a very interesting character and was very enthusiastic but not very professional, and I think she didn’t notice that the students didn’t take it seriously”* (M4-K). The organizer’s lack of adaptability reinforced the gap between her and the participants: *“when people use terms they use in their daily professional life, they really don’t notice that others don’t understand what they are saying”* (C6-K); *“she completely ignored our critique. She continued doing it her way”* (C8-K).

However, attempting to slightly adapt the existing Foresight co-creation methods to the young public, the consultant relied on the teachers’ inputs, since they knew the target best: *“we went through the concept with the teachers”* (E1-K). She also drew on the other involved actors’ networks to try to recruit participants other than the high school students: *“she contacted me, because after the first workshops she felt like she needed more perspectives or more adults or something (...) she asked if I knew some people”* (C1-K).

Vignette 14. The institutional role of the remote organizer.

It was then necessary to recruit co-creation participants: to respect the project leaders’ conditions, local high school students were the target. Two schools were selected, and this for a good reason: the Sustainable Development department had already collaborated with one of the schools in the past: *“we already have certain relationships as a base and on a personal level it’s a good match (...) so we know the teachers a bit and the headmaster and are on a first-name basis”* (M1-K); *“I think their idea behind bringing in this school was that they had already worked together”* (C7-K). The second school was found because of the consultant’s personal relationships: a family member was the school’s former headmaster, which is how she was able to get in touch with them and secure their participation. In this respect, the project leaders once more prioritized security and familiarity and thereby, the risks associated with co-creation were somewhat reduced.

However, while students were at the heart of the co-creation process, the organizer intervened and insisted on bringing in other local stakeholders as well. She pointed out the uselessness of a co-creation process with only one type of stakeholders: *“I said if no one else joins in then you can forget it. The students don’t have the experience of who the*

relevant stakeholders really are. Then they work in their own world and when it comes to decisions for actions, if this is not linked to existing strategies and measures and if people who are responsible for implementation are not there, then you have a - some people would say it was just for fun” (E1-K). The project leaders made some concessions in this regard and while they were still against opening up the process to the entire local population, “*it was allowed to contact people at the university, as well as Fridays for Future, and the public managers in other departments who are in charge of the fields of action*” (E1-K). Consequently, the organizer was able to slightly broaden the scope of co-creation and invite these stakeholders as well. In this sense, her **conceptual** work aimed at clarifying the outlines of co-creation and explaining its benefits seemed to have borne fruits.

A constant back-and-forth between the consultant’s ambitious ideas and the project leaders’ apprehensions characterized their negotiations at this stage: “*we really fought very hard and had to have some hard conversations*” (M9-K). Maintaining the status quo where experts, i.e., politicians and civil servants, are in control, and citizens are consulted when they see fit, seemed to be the aim of internal actors’ institutional work during the design of co-creation. To find common ground and find out how far the city was ready to go in terms of co-creation, the expert’s institutional work was tentative: she had to “*make small offers and see where they take the bait*” (E1-K). Institutional work was highly **operational** at this point since negotiations concerned the concrete form co-creation would take, and conflicting, given that the two sides – the external expert and internal project leaders – had very different visions of the depth and breadth of co-creation.

The expert’s work was therefore also **relational** throughout this first phase and aimed at gaining the project leaders’ trust so as to implement co-creation more easily. Since they had never worked together and Klagenfurt had never organized an extensive participatory process before, developing trust was essential in the beginning stages of Mission KS 30: “*but that's natural, we all need trust. And if trust is there and a fascinating person, then maybe you say okay I don't know this but I'll go along and see what happens. If someone you don't like tells you to do it, then you won't. Because you don't have the experience and you go along with the experience of the other person, and the bridge is trust. In that respect it's about building trust. And about understanding and not using pressure*” (E1-K).

Table 24 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in the first phase of Mission KS 30 as well as their underlying intentions.

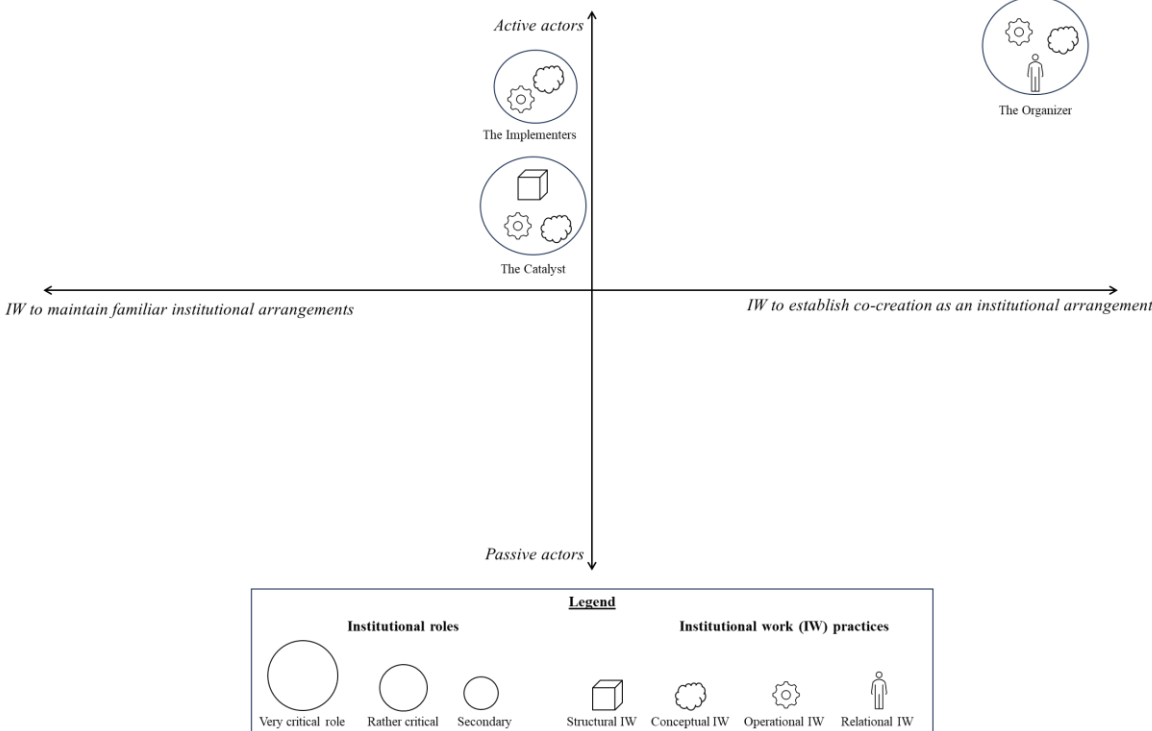
Table 24. Institutional work practices during the preparation and design of Mission KS
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	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW	Assigning staff to the project and finding a project partner for co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>)		
Conceptual IW	Developing a narrative around the importance of this co-creation process (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>); Developing a shared understanding of co-creation (<i>catalyst, organizer</i>)	European project as incentive to implement co-creation (<i>catalyst</i>); reducing fears around co-creation (<i>organizer</i>)	Developing a narrative questioning the relevance of co-creation (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>)
Operational IW	Proposing to recruit and mix diverse participants (<i>organizer</i>); Proposing co-creation methods and tools (<i>organizer</i>)		Building on the existing Smart City Strategy (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>); Recruiting only familiar participants (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>); Adapting the proposed methods and tools to make them resemble the status quo (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>); Making it impossible for different groups of stakeholders to mix (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>)
Relational IW	Gaining the project leaders' trust (<i>organizer</i>)		

(Source: author)

This first phase where the form of co-creation was negotiated consisted of a give-and-take between the involved actors, i.e., the head of the Sustainable Development department as the project leader, two members of his team as his supporters, and an external consultant as the organizer in charge of the co-creation process. It was marked by the internal actors' institutional work aimed at watering down the organizer's suggestions that, for them, were inadmissible and too ambitious. Diverse actors thus engaged in institutional work during this phase which was dispersed and top-down at the same time, eventually agreeing on to a diluted co-creation process. Their roles and salient institutional work practices, mostly operational and conceptual, are illustrated in figure 23 below.

Figure 23. Configuration of roles and practices during the design phase



(Source: author)

3.2. Implementing a diluted co-creation process: one-sided and top-down institutional work

While the preparatory phase was marked by the institutional work of several actors and the conflicts that emerged due to their diverging visions, the second phase where co-creation was deployed looked somewhat different. The head and members of the Sustainable Development department stayed in the background while the organizer alone was in charge of implementing the co-creation process. Numerous new actors and roles entered the scene. External actors participating in co-creation joined the project: high school students, their teachers, faculty of the local university, and members of the local Fridays for Future association. Other organization-internal actors joined, too: public managers from various departments attended co-creation workshops to share their expertise with the participants. While actors and roles as well as their intentions were increasingly diverse, this was not necessarily the case for their practices. The implementation of co-creation was mainly shaped by the organizer's institutional work, since most other actors displayed little involvement and did not seem to take ownership of the project. Institutional work thus paradoxically took on a predominantly top-down form throughout the deployment of co-creation.

3.2.1. Teachers help adapt the modalities of co-creation

A kick-off event gathered all involved actors – students and teachers, the project leaders from the Sustainable Development department, as well as the organizer – and marked the official beginning of the Mission KS 30 co-creation process. The department head was the central figure at this event, explaining the project and its content to the participants: “*we had a kick-off event where everything was explained in terms of content: how the strategy is structured, a bit of specialist knowledge behind it... but not by a person from the university, for example, not an external expert who provides an overview of climate change issues in terms of content. That was done by the head of the department*” (M2-K). Rather than inviting an external expert, he took charge of explaining the sustainability issues with which Klagenfurt is confronted to the participating students.

Since high school students were the core of the process, the co-creation method had to be adapted to this age group. This is where the teachers' institutional work contributed to shaping the co-creation process for the first time. Since the organizer had never worked with teenagers before, she relied on the teachers' inputs regarding the suitability of the method and the adaptations to be made: “*we also talked through the concept with the teachers. There are Foresight methods, and you have to try to adopt and adapt them*” (E1-K). In this sense, they guided not only the students during workshops, but also the organizer beforehand. Performing **operational** institutional work to shape the concrete form of co-creation, they were involved in the preparation of each workshop, providing the organizer with their feedback: “*as teachers, we were involved in the pedagogical part of the preparation. There were always different stages of preparation. First there was always*

a meeting with the city and the organizer and teachers where we said, okay, what has to come out of the workshop, what is it about and what is the content that she wants to incorporate, what has to come out in the end and how can we somehow organize it so that it is also manageable and feasible for the students” (C7-K).

Teachers thus shaped the operational modalities of co-creation beforehand, but also more spontaneously when they detected elements they thought would not work: *“she also changed the process a bit on the spur of the moment when we said it won’t work like this or like that and she really listened to our opinion” (C3-K).* They also participated in creating the groups that would work on each field of action, as well as the group of student mediators acting as facilitators for each of these fields: *“at the beginning, we already talked about who would be interested in being a ‘Foresight’ [student mediator]. And then we also actively selected those who we thought could take this on” (C7-K).* In this sense, teachers supported the organizer through their operational work and acted as translators between the different spheres.

The teachers oversaw the co-creation process, without being responsible for its organization, and without actively participating themselves. Since they had not received any background information, they were not able to help students out with specific content-related questions, and did not consider it their role, either: *“I didn’t really see that as my job at all. Since we had exactly the same information as the students and weren’t prepared, I couldn’t have guided them in terms of content” (C8-K).* When necessary, they relied on their personal experience and knowledge to provide inputs: *“we helped them out with our experience” (C3-K).*

Apart from shaping the co-creation method to adapt it to students’ needs and abilities, teachers’ institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation thus mainly consisted of leading and guiding the students during the workshops – without really co-creating with them: *“guiding the students a bit in their work (...) without giving your own opinion” (C3-K); “motivating the students. Motivating them and making sure they attend, and then during the workshops making sure they are not on their phone all the time or doing something else (...) sparking their thought process, but not in terms of content, at all” (C8-K); “the teacher always said, you have to participate now, you have to work” (C1-K).* Since instructions were often too complex for students to understand, teachers often tried to translate and explain: *“with our students, we often stood there and our microphones on Zoom were muted, and we translated for them what [name of E1-K] actually wanted from them” (C8-K).*

TEACHERS AS GUIDES

ROLE: “The Guides”

INTENTION: Accompanying co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Authority as teachers; professional experience with students; life experience.

The local high school teachers involved in Mission KS 30, like their students, had not chosen to participate in the project. It had been their headmasters' decision: *“we got involved without deciding to do so. It was because of the subject that we participated with the students. We didn't know about it”* (C3-K). As guides, they were not meant to co-create with the students, but to accompany and support them to ensure the smooth implementation of co-creation.

Since the co-creation project somewhat *“fell into [their] laps”* (C6-K), the teachers did not include any preparation exercises in their classes. Neither the method nor the content of Mission KS 30 was discussed beforehand: *“we didn't prepare them at all during class, because we were like, the organizer is going to take care of the introduction”* (C3-K). They had not received much information before the start of the process themselves, and their role as well as the project objectives remained unclear until the first workshop: *“it wasn't really transparent, the reason why were involved”* (C6-K); *“I was thrown in at the deep and like the students”* (C8-K). They did not actively seek information either: *“at the beginning I didn't know at all what it was about. There was no communication. I just went there (...) There were many files on Teams, I could have looked into it, but it was too much work at once”* (C6-K). Only at the first workshop did the teachers find out that they were to act as guides for the group they were attributed: *“my role is to mediate. Not at all to bring in my own ideas (...) it wasn't my role to contribute to the discussions, but to explain the procedure, to make sure they respected the timing, to distribute the material”* (C3-K). To do so, they relied on the authority they had due to their habitual role as teachers (O1-K, O2-K).

Consequently, they struggled to find their place - *“we never really knew why we were there”* (C6-K) -, which, over time, led to a loss of motivation: *“I'm not going to read the 32 pages, that's too much (...) we spend so much time there and now she [the organizer] wants us to look at that beforehand, too”* (C3-K); *“my interest wasn't that great because I was busy with other things, so I didn't get that involved”*; *“often, I didn't really understand the reason behind my presence there. I didn't want to be absent from school so much either”* (C6-K); *“as a teacher at a project like this, you ask yourself, do I really have to dedicate my working hours to participate”* (C8-K). During the co-creation workshops, these teachers could at times be observed performing other, unrelated tasks such as responding to e-mails or phone calls, marking exams, or having a cup of coffee with other teachers in one corner of the room. Only when they felt observed, they took part in their group's conversations (O1-K, O2-K), and they tried not to let their lack of motivation show: *“tomorrow at the meeting, we are going to pretend to be nice and interested”* (C3-K).

Among the participating teachers, the headmaster of one of the schools seemed to be an exception: she was highly motivated, since it had been her decision to participate in the project: *“the headmaster is personally committed to our participation (...) she said our students and our subject are perfect for it”* (C3-K). Throughout the year-long project, she considered herself to be the necessary driver, encouraging her colleagues and students to keep going even though the project required a lot of time and energy: *“you always need people who are the driving force behind it so that it doesn't fizzle out and go down the drain. That's a big risk. So, in this case, I was this person”* (C7-K).

During the workshops, she was actively involved in her group's discussions most of the time and had a different perception of her role in Mission KS 30 than her colleagues: *“sometimes I also felt like a team member and then joined in the discussion when I realized it was working well (...) and when I had the feeling that another initiative was needed, I might have intervened a little”* (C7-K). However, her active participation was not well received by her colleagues and students. They considered that she did not respect her attributed role: *“the headmaster did too much. She was told that she shouldn't, but she can't hold back. My colleague and I did that, but she didn't manage it. But we had been told that the contribution should come from the teenagers, it shouldn't be us”* (C3-K); *“she intervened a lot in our group (...) teachers were meant to take notes and not to be in the spotlight. Sadly, this was not the case for us”* (C5-K). This illustrates the ambiguity and lack of precision of each involved actor's roles.

Vignette 15. The institutional role of the guides.

3.2.2. The ambiguous role of two researchers

A similar role to that of the teaches was played by two faculty members of the local university who had been invited to the workshops when the organizer had noticed that additional expert perspectives were needed. However, they were unsure whether, like the teachers, they were meant to merely guide the students, or whether they should co-create with them. Their role remained ambiguous: *“in the end, there was a lot of input on my side (...) I don't know, maybe I should be even more active, but I don't really want to. It's a bit complicated”*; *“our role as adults is not to give too many ideas, we are there to guide, but without limiting them or telling them what to do. So, I tried to let them talk”* (C1-K); *“the idea was for us to bring in some expertise as faculty, and somehow also to support the discussions in terms of content”*; *“I tried to find my role. I didn't really succeed”* (C2-K).

Consequently, they switched between being mediators and staying in the background and participating more actively. They struggled to find their place in their respective groups (O1-K). Especially in groups with rather passive students, they felt the need to get involved to help them complete their tasks: *“it was a bit ambivalent. On the one hand, I wanted to hold back because I thought it was about the young people and they should formulate their input. But on the other hand, some of them were very passive”* (C1-K).

RESEARCHERS AS MEDIATORS

ROLE: “The Mediators”

INTENTION: Accompanying co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Theoretical knowledge; personal experience; good relationships with other involved actors.

Besides members of the local Fridays for Future association, the organizer also invited two researchers in the field of Science, Technology and Society Studies. As faculty at the local university, they were asked to contribute an additional perspective: *“I had the impression, she felt like it didn’t work with students alone. And that they thought about what to do, and then they contacted the university, among others”* (C1-K). They joined Mission KS 30 at the second co-creation workshop and acted as mediators, facilitating discussions among students, and supporting them throughout the process.

The two researchers agreed to participate because of their personal and professional interest in both the participatory method and the issues related to sustainability: *“I’ve always been interested in it both personally and professionally (...) we both were like, it’s interesting for us also from a professional perspective. For me because I wanted to get to know a Foresight process for a class (...) so I have some interest in participatory processes”*; *“it’s also an issue in our field”* (C1-K); *“I have a personal interest in climate change, the biodiversity crisis, sustainability, and the environment in general. I also want to build up a second line of research, so to speak. Simply because I also find it interesting not to deal with just one topic”* (C2-K). Both had some professional and theoretical knowledge about the topics at hand, but also knowledge based on personal interest and experience: *“I rather have ‘amateurish’ knowledge, simply because I’m interested in it. Especially in urban development, governance a bit more, democracy in general. In our field of science and technology research, participatory approaches are a thing, too”* (C2-K).

They were well received by the other participants. The teachers were glad to have their support: *“everything worked well, and with her, the first-name basis was no problem, the students were at eye level with her”* (C3-K). Even though interactions with students were smooth, the two researchers did perceive some hierarchical differences due to their status and age: *“as soon as adults are there, especially if they don’t know them, teenagers tend to withdraw”* (C1-K); *“we still felt some hierarchical differences, for sure. I think it’s also because there are different levels: the people from the city are there as experts, we too, in some way. And sometimes it’s also just because of the age gap”* (C2-K). Their role in the process, however, remained ambiguous: were they meant to merely guide the students and take on a role similar to that of the teachers? Or should they provide more specific input?

Vignette 16. The institutional role of the mediators.

3.2.3. High school students as co-creation participants do as they are told

As mentioned above, a group of selected high school students received additional training to prepare them for their role as “student mediators” that would lead their assigned groups. Besides preparing them from an operational point of view, the idea behind these training sessions was also to increase these students’ understanding of the co-creation method and its relevance: *“the idea was to say, I train young people so that they can lead such Foresight processes in their groups. That’s why [name of E1-K] tried to keep repeating this”* (C7-K). This preparation concerned the method itself rather than the content of the co-creation workshops: *“in terms of content, she didn’t really explain us any details beforehand, actually”* (C5-K). The organizer, performing **conceptual** work, aimed to enhance this group’s comprehension of the co-creation approach and convince them of its usefulness so that they would then convince their peers.

Then, during the actual co-creation workshops, the group of student mediators as well as the other participants followed the instructions given by the organizer. Indeed, their **operational** institutional work supported the implementation of co-creation, but was limited to complying with instructions and doing as they were told (O1-K, O2-K). Most participants struggled to understand both the instructions and the reason why they were doing what they were doing, and consequently, they were not motivated to be more proactive: *“I just think that many didn’t know what they should do and what it was all about (...) and then they just did something that they thought might be right”* (C6-K). Everyone of these participants, however, contributed to the implementation of co-creation and working towards the project objectives through their active participation: *“there were many who really immersed themselves and were really present”* (M2-K); *“the students contributed their opinions more than I would have thought”* (M4-K).

Students’ participation in the institutional work process was therefore limited to implementing co-creation from an operational point of view by playing the role they had been ascribed. However, they felt like they were able to shape neither the form of co-creation nor its outputs, and therefore, did not make the effort to try: *“from time to time I had some ideas and said something, but as I said, I didn’t really feel heard or that it would really change anything. Nevertheless, I always contributed my opinion simply because it was important to me to say something about it. It never really occurred to me to resign. My time was too valuable for that. But I was always able to say how I felt about it and without any problems”* (C4-K).

In this sense, students seemed to stick to their habitual role of following the instructions given by an authority. By proposing to be on a first-name basis (“duzen”)⁶³ during

⁶³ There are two ways of addressing people in German: “Siezen” is a more distant and polite way, while “Duzen” is more familiar and usually used for kids, friends, or family. “Duzen” means being on a first-name basis, while “Siezen” means addressing people by Mr./Mrs. and their last name. This corresponds to the French “tutoiement” (more familiar) and “vouvoiement” (more distant and polite).

workshops, the organizer attempted to counteract this through **relational** work aimed at helping participants go beyond their formal relationships. However, these role perceptions were highly entrenched, and all actors struggled with applying this idea, which most ultimately rejected: “*we are all on a first-name basis, she said. But that didn't work because the students didn't want that at all. We really stayed in our traditional roles. We don't care, but you could tell that the students didn't want that*” (C3-K); “*I've always made sure that we stick to our roles, I personally find it better that there is a little distance*” (C4-K); “*the first-name basis, that's difficult*” (C5-K). Even between “adults” – internal actors and the expert in particular – this idea seemed somewhat surprising and difficult to accept: “*when we wrote the proposal together, everyone in the department was on a first-name basis, but not with us because we came from outside. And then at some point I introduced the first-name basis and that was a big shock*” (E1-K). While the organizers' idea was to strengthen trust and help participants step out of their habitual roles, they most did not seem to be ready to do so.

STUDENTS AS ACTIVE FOLLOWERS

ROLE: “The Active Followers”

INTENTION: Doing what is necessary to achieve the project objectives

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Good relationships with and support from the involved public managers; technical competencies acquired at school.

Local high school students as co-creation participants were at the heart of project. The co-creation process had been designed with them in mind; however, the methods were not always adapted for their age group (for instance in terms of length or formulation of exercises) and sometimes too complex (for instance in terms of vocabulary or examples). This made their participation somewhat difficult at times, limiting their ability to shape the process.

While some therefore never really adhered (they took on the role of silent actors), others were active followers, doing what was required for the implementation of co-creation. Others again were part of a special group, the “student mediators”⁶⁴, that is, as group leaders for the field of action they were working on; and those who were “simple” participants. The student mediators' role was to explain the instructions to their group and answer questions when necessary, as well as to facilitate brainstorming and discussions. To do so, they were convened to additional training sessions before each workshop. By the organizer, they were briefed about the method rather than the content of the workshops: “*beforehand we always had meetings where we talked about what we were going to do (...) we usually didn't understand much. We just went through all points,*

⁶⁴ These student mediators were also called “Foresights”, which is why we use both terms interchangeably.

what was going to happen, and that was it” (C4-K); “we didn’t really get more background information, we just had a meeting a week before the next workshop” (C5-K).

During the actual workshops, however, their role was less visible than what they had been told: *“in practice it was very different of course. There, the teachers of course also took the lead (...) it was presented differently than how it really was” (C4-K).* It was also their teachers who had selected them for this role: *“maybe because we seemed reliable and engaged, and because we often share our opinions (...) I think I would have done it voluntarily as well” (C5-K).* They were told that as student mediators, they should spur discussions rather than share their own opinions: *“therefore, I refrained from sharing my opinion too much, that’s what we had been told, not to share our own opinions but to let the others talk” (C5-K).* The student mediators were perceived as involved and interested: *“they actively asked questions, in my group they were very active (...) they did most of the work and motivated the others”; “I was especially surprised that these ‘Foresights’ did such a good job expressing themselves and leading the group” (C3-K); “in my group there were two really smart ones who knew what it was about” (C8-K).*

Besides these student mediators, the second group of active participants were *“‘simple’ workshop participants”* who were *“part of the Foresight process and were getting familiar with it but were less required to really immerse themselves” (C7-K).* It was their role to complete the tasks they were given, from the development of utopias and visions to the concrete formulation of their more realistic ideas. How the co-creation process went depended on the temper and motivation of the group members. While some were rather reserved, others were sometimes perceived as very assertive and even aggressive: *“one student in the group was very dominant and aggressive in her behavior (...) she reacted very aggressively to what I said (...) the two others were very reserved, but not visibly disinterested” (C1-K); “sometimes there were very shy people. Others really flourished” (M1-K); “you might have four rather introverted ones. And then you have two who are extroverted and seeking conflict and then you suddenly have a discussion” (M2-K).*

Each of the two schools being specialized in different fields – one in technology and engineering, the other in economy and social issues – the students mainly drew on these competencies to develop ideas and proposals: *“the students know more about energy issues than me, because they have the technical knowledge” (C2-K); “my department in the school is about new energy and electric vehicles, so the project really fits in” (C6-K); “in our case there is more know-how about the economy, or about generations” (C8-K).* Yet, due to the complexity of the process, their ability to shape the co-creation process was sometimes limited. They struggled to understand the instructions, and therefore settled for the necessary minimum: *“she explained it but in a way that students still didn’t understand, and in the end, they gave up”; “many said, just do it, at least we’re doing something” (M1-K).*

Vignette 17. The institutional role of followers.

Among the participating high school students, a second group could be observed. While some, as described above were relatively actively involved, following instructions, others showed less interest and motivation. They were present, but reluctantly so. This group of participants took on the relatively passive role of silent actors. By playing this role, and even more so than the group of active followers, they contributed to maintaining the status quo where students do as they are told, without challenging or questioning instructions: “*some guys said yes to everything*” (C3-K); “*they didn’t really take it seriously (...) I think the majority just went along*” (C6-K). When asked to participate during the workshops, they did so reluctantly and only after having been asked to do so multiple times (O1-K, O2-K).

STUDENTS AS SILENT ACTORS

ROLE: “The Silent Actors”

INTENTION: Relying on others to do the work

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: democratic legitimacy; relying on other involved actors’ work.

As opposed to the above-mentioned active followers, their motivation to get involved was low, and while they were present, they hardly ever actively participated during the workshops. It was evident that these students were there because their presence was mandatory. Acting as silent actors, they were present but not interested in the co-creation process nor the issues to be treated, and this showed in their passive behavior.

These students stuck to their habitual role and did as they were told: “*teenagers, I think, are very much used to getting tasks done. Like, ok, we must do this and that now, how do we do it, now we have these results...*” (C1-K). Like at school, they did not go beyond the bare minimum. For some, it was simply due to a lack of interest: “*like with every project, there are those who are absolutely not interested and who just sit there and that’s a pity of course*” (C8-K); “*there are those who are half asleep, on their phone, who are not interested at all*” (M1-K). Others might have been motivated at the beginning, but when they struggled to understand the method or the issues at hand, they lost interest: “*they are like, I don’t understand. They then briefly think about what it could be, and then the next weird word they don’t understand comes up. And then they just block, and no matter what you tell them, they don’t get it anymore. And if this goes on all day, you lose them, and then they also lose motivation, and then it comes to this situation where they just quickly do something and say we’re already done. Then they don’t really think about it anymore*” (C6-K); “*after two hours they take their phone, and you lose them if it’s not interesting enough. It was too long and too complex*” (M2-K).

Their presence at the workshops helped increase the legitimacy of the process because, theoretically, they participated in co-creation. In practice, however, they were not

engaged in any intentional efforts to implement co-creation. As silent actors, these students did not challenge the implementation of the co-creation approach either. Rather, through their passive behavior, they contributed to maintaining the status quo where, as young people, their role was to merely complete the tasks they were given, without questioning or seeking to shape the process or their role in it.

Vignette 18. The institutional role of the silent actors.

3.2.4. Public managers guide students and shape ideas

While they remained somewhat passive, students were those who were at the core of the process: they were expected to give their opinion and propose ideas, while the other actors were there to support them. Not all of those other participants stuck to their ascribed roles, however. The invited public managers' role was similar to that of the teachers – they were there to support and guide the students when needed: *“I took on a supporting role and also acted as a facilitator sometimes”* (M1-K); *“we were there to fill up the groups with experts (...) supporting students and explaining and showing”* (M2-K); *“when there were questions, to answer them... I also tried to steer it through questions: what else could we do there, how could you say that...”* (M5-K). This is how they had been briefed by the members of the Sustainable Development department who had invited them: *“we were meant to steer and facilitate the discussions a bit”* (M5-K). As such, their institutional work was highly **operational** and shaped the form, the trajectory, and the outcomes of the co-creation process.

Indeed, in addition to supporting the students, they also shaped the course of co-creation by subtly guiding the students' ideation process. Ideas that were considered as too innovative or too far removed from their existing Smart City strategy were quickly transformed into propositions that far more resembled their own vision for Klagenfurt's future: *“I was like, how do I intervene? I don't really want that in the Smart City strategy”* (M2-K); *“there were always agreements between the expert and the city in which direction to steer things”* (C7-K); *“they told me that they felt like they had to make things more realistic”* (C1-K); *“it was about having a realistic vision”* (M3-K); *“I kind of brought it back to reality”* (M4-K); *“I was there as someone who knows the mission and the goals a little bit, and to support the students so that they don't drift off completely”* (M5-K).

They also insisted on issues that seemed to be more important for the city than for co-creation participants: *“we didn't talk about governance the first time, and yesterday input came from the people from the city. For them it seemed to be an important issue, so they talked a lot about the processes and how to improve them. And then students drop out a bit”* (C2-K). Paradoxically, they however continued to point out that co-creation participants were free to propose what ever they wanted: *“I completely handed over the decision-making process. And then I stepped in again when things went in the wrong direction. When they drifted off or something”* (M2-K).

During the co-creation workshops, the role of the public managers from the Sustainable Development department was more ambiguous than their colleagues'. As a matter of fact, they sometimes stepped out of their role as implementers and intervened more than expected, taking on additional tasks when they deemed it necessary due to the lack of involvement of other actors: *"I've taken on a supporting role and often also a moderating role. As a replacement for a teacher, so to speak, because one school had so few. I sort of jumped in and took over (...) It was a bit exhausting for me because the division didn't quite work out: in the end, I took over moderation, documentation, and discussion because the students always saw me as the interface"* (M1-K). During co-creation workshops, they were the link between the organizer and the participants. Indeed, the students sometimes struggled to understand the organizer's complex explanations, and these two public managers jumped in to translate her ideas in a more accessible way: *"they explained a lot"* (C8-K); *"you don't have to stick to certain terms, you could say something else. Citizen participation instead of governance, for example (...) at the last workshop that was an issue, and so we tried to explain the ideas"* (M1-K). They switched between their role as implementers and that of the reality checkers which was taken on by public managers from other departments. Moreover, they also tried to bridge the gap between participants, spark debates and encourage them to share their opinions: *"in the end I talked to everyone individually"* (M1-K); *"I've always tried to tease something out and always ignite it on and spark it"* (M2-K).

PUBLIC MANAGERS AS REALITY CHECKERS

ROLE: "The Reality Checkers"

INTENTION: Steering the ideation process in a realistic direction

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: Expertise; experience; technical knowledge; technical legitimacy; good relationships with participants.

These public managers, as opposed to the two implementers, were not involved in the organization of Mission KS 30, but their work was in some way related to the existing Smart City strategy. Consequently, they were there to guide the students, inform them about the status quo, and the city's possibilities and limits in terms of action for sustainable development. In this sense, they acted as reality checkers, sometimes even "gatekeepers" aiming to steer participants' ideas in a realistic direction, thereby limiting institutional work that could be aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement.

A dozen members of the city's various departments – from urbanism to mobility and statistics, among others – were invited when participants required additional input due to their lack of knowledge about the city's actions and competencies. Those from other departments attended voluntarily and because they were interested in discovering this

new approach: *“yesterday, apart from our department, they were there voluntarily. We said, do it if you are interested, come along. And their came voluntarily, which shows that there is a certain interest”* (M2-K). At the same time, those public managers from the Sustainable Development department showed less interest in participating since it was not “their” project: *“everybody has their area, and you do it to do someone a favor. Like, next time, you do something for me (...) we went where they told us to go and did our job”* (M6-K); *“it was not really out of interest (...) at the beginning we were not really eager to go there”* (M7-K).

At the workshops, these public managers saw their role as that of technicians contributing their expertise. They did however not quite know what to expect and apart from a few instructions about their role, they had not received any preparation: *“I got the written invitation and didn’t really know how the setting was and what would await me, how it would go. And now I don’t know what will happen with the results”* (M5-K); *“at first, I was surprised [to be invited]. Then I asked what it was about (...) I tried to find out what it was about”* (M6-K). These managers tried to stick to their attributed role and avoided sharing personal opinions or ideas. Rather, they tried to guide students and provide examples to help them make their proposals realistic and align them with the city’s vision for the Smart City strategy: Their interactions with students were relaxed and at eye level (O1-K, O2-K): *“I think nobody had difficulties expression themselves”* (C4-K); *“apprehension about interacting with the people from the city, this was certainly not the case”* (M5-K); *“in our group we were definitely at the same level”* (M7-K).

Some considered the role of these reality checkers to be essential: *“it was good because you get a picture of how things currently are, because we don’t really know the background”* (C5-K); *“if we had said we are doing this for the city of Klagenfurt, and no one from the city administration had shown up, it would certainly not have been received well. But this way, students always felt like they were involved and could see for themselves what was happening”* (C7-K); *“what was great and really useful for the students was the fact that people from the city came to the workshops and sat with us and told us this is not feasible and that cannot work and so on”* (C8-K).

However, at the same time, others questioned its added value for a veritable co-creation process: *“maybe it’s necessary to produce a result the city can work with. But I don’t know if that’s really the idea behind a Foresight process, to produce realistic, pragmatic things”* (C1-K); *“it also has a slowing effect because as a student you can’t really say I would like this, because then they are immediately like, this process and that process make this very difficult”* (C2-K); *“in the end, nothing was left of very futuristic projects, but it has of course been reduced to what is maybe implementable in the city”* (C7-K). While the experts’ inputs made students feel like their ideas could be realistic enough be implemented, they also prohibited them from developing too ambitious or innovative visions for Klagenfurt’s future.

Vignette 19. The institutional role of the reality checkers.

While during workshops, the ideation process was steered by public managers, the outputs of each workshop, too, were transformed. But not by the Sustainable Development department itself: in-between workshops, the students' proposals were rewritten by the organizer. These interventions shaped both the form and the results of the co-creation process: *"the students didn't understand how this [their ideas] has been integrated in the process"; "they have done a lot in-between workshops" (C3-K); "I think it has always been rewritten a little bit by the consultant (...) how, I don't know, they haven't told us" (C4-K); "from my point of view it's all a bit absurd because you can't start a process by saying I want to involve you now and you can finally be part of it and you bring your opinions. And then I correct it as I need it, as the adults need it" (C6-K)*. These interventions allowed to produce a final deliverable that fit everybody's – that is, the project leaders' as well as the organizers', but not so much the participants' – expectations, but the use of which was doubted by the expert: *"it's going to be a pretty report that includes the results of the work with the youth (...) but the question will be, what is the impact?" (E1-K)*.

3.2.5. Young activists challenge the co-creation design

Some complained that while there seemed to be interventions in-between workshops, scientific input during workshops was not sufficient. While the participating high school students were not always satisfied with the information they were given either, they did not complain. Those who demanded additional input were the members of the local "Fridays for Future" association⁶⁵ who had been invited to the workshops. These activists demanded a more scientifically grounded and overall more ambitious co-creation process. In this respect, they were the only participants challenging the diluted form of co-creation and shaped the co-creation design through their **operational** work. In terms of content, they did not feel like they had enough information to develop concrete proposals: *"the people from Fridays for Future complained that there was not enough input" (C1-K); "the members of Fridays for Future for example said that sometimes it was not scientific enough, that they would have liked to have more input, and there you see how two worlds clash" (M3-K)*.

The project leaders reacted to their request and invited more public managers than initially planned to attend the workshops, and act as experts to support participants in the ideation process. In this respect, these activists, in their role as challengers, were able to shape the form of the co-creation project and contributed to making co-creation slightly broader: *"it was already planned but we also got this feedback (...) we acted right away and tried to mobilize some people" (M1-K)*. However, their expertise would have been beneficial at an earlier stage where students struggled to imagine realistic alternatives: *"you should bring in experts from the city right at the beginning, who explain what is already happening, what would be possible" (M1-K)*.

⁶⁵ #FridaysForFuture is a youth movement. It began in 2018 with Greta Thunberg's protest against the lack of governmental action on the climate crisis. See <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>

As opposed to the high school students, these young activists wanted to go further and did not content themselves with following the rules and doing as they were told without questioning the process or other participants' ideas. Their institutional work was thus also **conceptual** and aimed developing a vision of co-creation that was deeper than what was proposed. In line with their association's principles, their inputs were more radical: "*they [students] felt like they [Fridays for Future members] took everything too seriously and caused them more trouble*" (C1-K); "*they were very keen on confrontation, and this wasn't the right setting for that*" (C8-K); "*the Fridays for Future girl said again and again, we have to do that right away*" (M4-K).

LOCAL ACTIVISTS AS CHALLENGERS

ROLE: "The Challengers"

INTENTION: Pushing the limits of co-creation

RESOURCES AND COMPETENCIES: commitment; specific knowledge.

The organizer's idea for the co-creation process was to gather a variety of local stakeholders. While it was not possible to do so due to the project leaders' fear of opening up the process to the wider public, she was able to invite members of the local "Fridays for Future" association. These young activists were students at the local university and there to push high school students' reflection further. In the co-creation process, they took on the role of challengers: they pushed the intended limits of the co-creation method and demanded a more scientific approach to develop ambitious yet feasible ideas.

Their role in the co-creation workshops was unclear but seemed to be similar to the students': they were there to share their opinions and develop ideas, whereby they engaged in operational work: "*the Fridays for Future members, I don't know, actually, they generally shared their opinions a lot, which was partly very negative, but it was their opinion. They were there like us students to give their opinion*" (C5-K).

Consequently, their interactions with the other participants and especially so students and teachers were complicated. They had different visions of the co-creation process and its ideal results: "*I overheard a comment by one group last time, they were like, there is one from Fridays for Future in our group, he really exaggerates, and then we have to explain everything*" (C1-K); "*it sometimes led to interesting dynamics with the Fridays for Future people: students sometimes looked at them like, what are they doing here and what are they so upset about*" (C2-K); "*nothing against this movement, but the students actually pretty much rejected them, too. I don't know if they don't have a bigger problem with the movement now than before. Simply because they were very destructive and were always just bad-mouthing whatever idea came up. They never said, that's a good approach or something, but always immediately said what was really bad about it or what wouldn't work, and they simply had no feel for the students at all. That made the whole thing very unpleasant in some*

cases and unfortunately, they were very out of place” (C8-K). Indeed, while “Fridays for Future” members were ambitious and impatient, and there to stand up for their ideas and convictions, the other participants seemed more mellow and satisfied with more realistic ideas: *“in the eyes of Fridays for Future, it’s still not enough, but for a technician or an average person, it’s maybe satisfactory”* (C7-K).

While high school students and teachers found their participation difficult, other actors appreciated the additional inputs these activists provided: *“it’s exhausting, but it’s important to have these different perspectives”* (C1-K). Their outgoing nature and knowledge about sustainability was pointed out: *“when someone like this is in your group, you can stay in the background”* (M6-K); *“the one from Fridays for Future was great (...) she seemed very smart. I noticed this because I didn’t know she was from this movement. I noticed that students worked on something and then she questioned whether that was a good idea. I was like, she is good”* (M7-K).

Vignette 20. The institutional role of the challengers.

3.2.6. Co-creation runs out of steam

Over the course of the co-creation phase, the internal narrative was increasingly dominated by skepticism. The arguments highlighting the importance of participation seemed to be drowned out by public managers’ narrative aimed at maintaining established practices and downplaying the relevance of co-creation: *“it’s a nice thing to do ... it’s great that they participate, that they have ideas and get involved, and for me, it has served its purpose. This formal purpose where we needed it for the application for funding”* (M6-K); *“what can really be the outputs, we already have a Smart City strategy”* (M7-K). Their **conceptual** work showed that they did not seem to be interested in making co-creation a permanent feature in their organization’s set of practices.

No structural work was undertaken at this stage, either, to provide the conditions for the durable implementation of co-creation. It remained a stand-alone project with an expiration date: *“we have to complete it and we learn from it (...) we must execute, communicate, plan... Project done, next”; “it ends in the fall”* (M2-K). Indeed, co-creation, did not seem to play an important role in Klagenfurt’s immediate future: M1-K and M3-K agree that *“it was a preparatory project for the 100 Cities Mission”*. Mission KS 30 and especially its participatory part were always presented as a clearly delimited project: *“you have to define its scope in some way (...) it has a limit and at some point, you have to say, this is possible, this is not. It’s planned to last a year”* (M2-K).

The resources the municipality was ready to put into this project were limited as well. This showed in their decision to hold the workshops in one of the schools instead of renting a location; moreover, they were hesitant to provide food and drinks even though each workshops lasted the whole day: *“it was great that the school let us use their premises*

*because it was a big problem to finance it (...) at this school we had the room for free” (M1-K); “also incredibly frugal, I have to say. At the second workshop they didn't order any catering for the students!” (E1-K). By limiting the resources made available for Mission KS 30, they showed their lack of commitment and attachment to the project through very concrete and **operational** actions. They were reluctant to cover addition costs that exceeded funding they had received for Mission KS 30: “we haven't set aside that much budget for workshops, because we thought that was the [name of the consultant's research center] work package, but we also have to take care of that now” (M1-K); “if we rent a location somewhere else that costs money (...) and this is not covered by the project funding and we can't just pay for it with the department's budget” (M2-K).*

At the final event, however, the city had prepared gifts for the participants to thank them for their participation in the co-creation workshops. This gesture was highly appreciated: “the class received a €500 voucher, and they were very happy about it. They felt it was a certain appreciation” (C6-K); “I think that was very nice and very appreciative; we teachers also received a basket with sustainable products, which was also very nice” (C8-K). At the same event, the project initiator and department head also verbally thanked all participants, repeatedly insisting on their contribution to Klagenfurt's selection as one of the “100 Cities”: “the students also liked the fact that the city of Klagenfurt explicitly thanked them for receiving an award.... or some project that they submitted... where they cited youth participation and because of this they can now call themselves one of the hundred climate-neutral cities. And [name of M9-K] then emphasized again and again that one of the reasons why they received this is precisely this youth participation process” (C8-K). Some **relational** work could thus be observed towards the end of the process.

While the decision to include Klagenfurt in the EU “100 Cities Mission” was extensively covered by the media, the co-creation process was hardly ever mentioned by the press in this regard: we have identified only one online newspaper article mentioning the co-creation process⁶⁶. All the while, it had been portrayed as unique and innovative internally throughout the process: “Mission KS 30 is supposedly one of the first participatory processes of its kind in Austria. The first project that genuinely involves schools, young people” (M1-K); “what's unique is that we have youth and your perspective, it's unique in Austria to have a Foresight process like this: we have activists, we have scientists, and people in the city who make an effort every day to implement these things and get things moving” (E1-K). The co-creation dimension of the project was communicated to the public only once Klagenfurt had won an award for it: in June 2023, they had been awarded the Austrian “Energy Globe” award in the special category “youth” for having implemented a participatory process with high school students⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Advantage.at: Städtische Führungskräfte bereiten sich auf Klimaneutralität vor. 11.07.2022, see <https://www.advantage.at/artikel/staedtische-fuehrungskraefte-bereiten-sich-auf-klimaneutralitaet-vor>

⁶⁷ 5min.at: Klagenfurt bei "Energy Globe Österreich Award"-Verleihung ausgezeichnet. 15.06.2023, see <https://archiv.5min.at/202306671901/klagenfurt-bei-energy-globe-oesterreich-award-verleihung-ausgezeichnet/>

Table 25 below summarizes the institutional work practices observed in the deployment phase of Mission KS 30 as well as their underlying intentions.

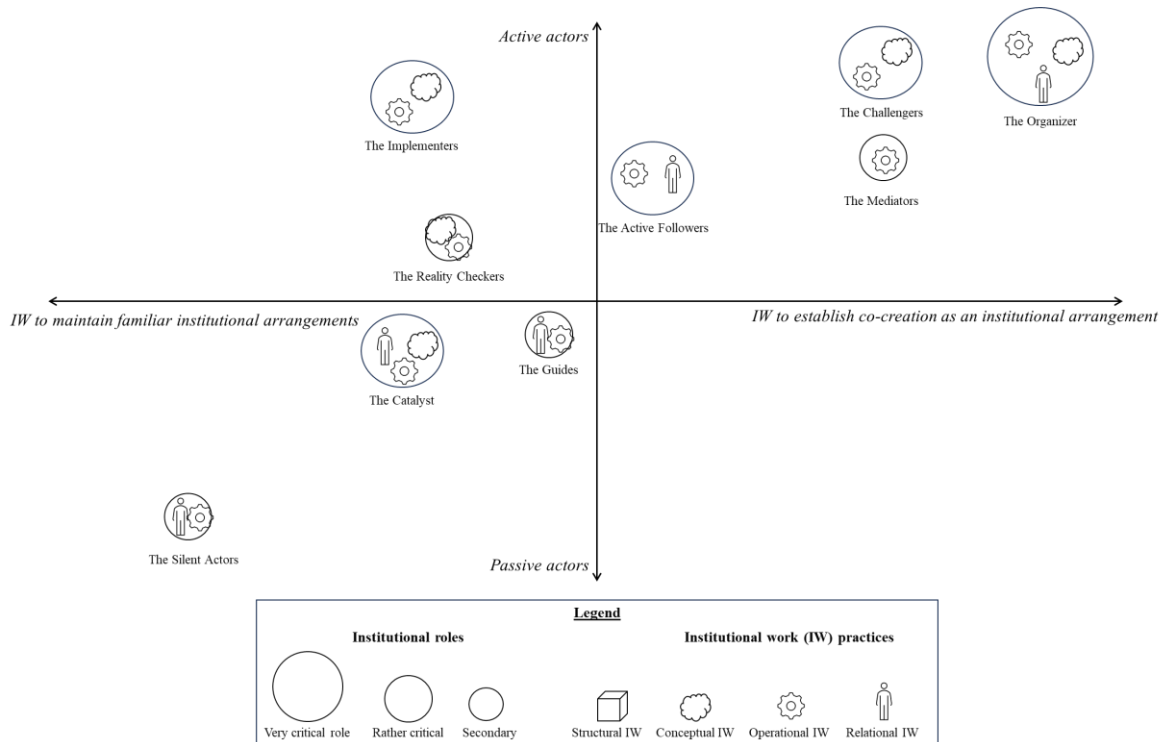
Table 25. Institutional work practices during the deployment of Mission KS 30

	Aimed at creating	Aimed at disrupting	Aimed at maintaining
Structural IW			
Conceptual IW	Explaining the approach and its relevance to a small group of selected participants (<i>organizer</i>); Insisting on a deeper vision of co-creation (<i>challengers</i>)		Developing a narrative aimed at maintaining established practices (<i>implementers, reality checkers</i>); Presenting co-creation as a stand-alone project (<i>catalyst, implementers</i>)
Operational IW	Adapting the form of co-creation to the public (<i>organizer, guides</i>); Participating in co-creation (<i>active followers</i>)		Limiting resources (<i>implementers</i>); Guiding the ideation process (<i>reality checkers</i>); Guiding the students (<i>guides, mediators</i>); Following instructions (<i>active followers</i>); Transforming ideas (<i>organizer</i>)
Relational IW	Proposing to be on a first-name basis (<i>organizer</i>)	Providing gifts for participants and thanking them (<i>catalyst</i>)	Recruiting participants based on familiarity (<i>catalyst, organizer</i>); Rejecting the first-name basis (<i>active followers, silent actors, guides</i>)

(Source: author)

Compared to the beginning stages of Mission KS 30 where negotiations between multiple actors with different roles and intentions shaped the form of co-creation and institutional work was more dispersed, over the second half of the process, institutional work was relatively one-sided. The institutional work of one actor, the organizer, was predominant: the implementation of co-creation was left to her. The other participating actors, while they were numerous, were more passive, and their institutional work practices less visible. While their intentions varied, they did indeed not engage in great efforts to shape the form of co-creation or ensure its durable implementation. Therefore, institutional work seemed to correspond to a top-down form during the deployment stage of Mission KS 30. The observed roles and salient practices are illustrated in figure 24 below.

Figure 24. Configuration of roles and practices during the deployment phase



(Source: author)

In this section, we presented the findings of the Klagenfurt case. Two phases could be identified based on observed practices and roles: a first phase of negotiation where institutional work was more dispersed, even though top-down elements could be observed; and a second phase of predominantly top-down institutional work during the deployment of co-creation. These findings show that dispersed institutional work during the design phase of co-creation led to a dilution of the latter: divergent intentions collided and the municipality's fears of opening up decision-making reduced the scope of co-creation.

In the second phase, where a plurality of actors were involved as co-creation was deployed, institutional work was paradoxically rather one-sided and marked by a top-down approach. As a matter of fact, institutional work throughout this phase was dominated by a central actor, the organizer, while participants remained rather passive. Overall, a lack of institutional work practices could be observed in this case.

In the following chapter, we compare the findings for both cases before discussing them with regard to prior literature.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 4

The aim of our research is to understand **how actors' institutional work shapes the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations as they face Grand Challenges**. While chapters 1 and 2 have set the stage through a review of relevant literature allowing us to develop our research questions, and chapter 3 was about the design of our empirical study, the results of the latter were presented in chapter 4. The first section of chapter 4 presented the cases of our "two-case case study", and sections 2 and 3 contained the presentation of findings. We chose to dedicate one section to each case to elaborate on the findings regarding all three research questions (institutional work practices, institutional roles, and organizational forms of institutional work) in a narrative way, thereby giving an overview of the case as well as its particularities and avoiding repetition.

In **section 1**, the two cases were introduced: the French town of Venelles, and the Austrian city of Klagenfurt. For both, we first elaborated on the institutional features shaping the environment in which the respective local public organization is situated. Then, we presented the towns themselves, as well as the co-creation projects we studied for this research: Venelles in Transition and Mission KS 30.

Then, in **section 2**, we presented the findings for the case of Venelles. A variety of institutional work practices based on different underlying intentions as well as various institutional roles could be observed. Our findings moreover suggested to divide the process of the implementation of co-creation into two broad phases: the launch of the project, which consisted of agenda-setting, design, and deployment; and the phase after public co-creation. The evolution citizens' role in the process led to a pivotal point that allowed to distinguish the two phases and identify two organizational forms of institutional work: a predominantly top-down form throughout the first phase, and a more dispersed form during the second phase.

Finally, in **section 3**, we presented the findings for the case of Klagenfurt. As for the case of Venelles, the involved actors mobilized different institutional work practices depending on their respective intentions and took on a variety of different roles. While many similar practices were observed in the two cases, how actors mobilized them depended on both the context and their intentions. Most institutional roles were different from those observed in Venelles. This case, too, consisted of two broad phases: the negotiation of the design of co-creation, as well as its deployment. While the first phase involved several different types of actors and institutional work manifested in a predominantly dispersed organizational form, the second phase was dominated by the institutional work of one central actor and therefore resembled a top-down organizational form. However, elements of both are present in the two phases.

CHAPTER 5: Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The findings of our empirical study aimed at exploring the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations from an institutional work perspective and through a “two-case case study” have been presented in the previous chapter. As we told the story of each case, we were able to retrace the implementation and evolution of co-creation in Venelles and Klagenfurt. In doing so, we provided the big picture of the cases as well as more detailed insights into the specifics of the institutional work practices and institutional roles observed in both contexts, as well as the organizational form of institutional work. This allowed to identify multiple phases presenting different configurations of practices, roles, and forms of institutional work in each case. In doing so, we focused on describing our findings and stayed close to the observed events and discourse of respondents.

This chapter proposes an analytical and comparative presentation of the findings through a cross-case analysis, as well as a discussion with regard to prior literature. Consequently, this chapter is structured in two sections:

Section 1 consists of a cross-case analysis of our findings. Here, we compare the findings for our three research questions on actors’ institutional work practices, their institutional roles, as well as the organizational form of institutional work based on the two before-mentioned aspects. This allows to put our findings into perspective and develop responses to our research questions.

In **section 2**, we propose a general discussion of findings with regard to our review of the literature. The structure of this discussion resembles that of the cross-case analysis. We begin by discussing how our findings regarding research questions 1 and 2 enrich prior literature on **micro-institutional work** through our focus on heterogeneous actors’ practices and roles. Then, we discuss research question 3 and propose the notion of **arenas of institutional work** to provide a meso-level setting for micro-level institutional works. We finally propose to discuss **organizational variations** of institutional work arenas.

Section 1: Cross-case analysis: different configurations of institutional work in Venelles and Klagenfurt

This section addresses the three research questions through a comparison of the two cases. Cross-case analysis allows to put the findings of each individual case into perspective and to situate them within their context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While the analysis of the individual cases facilitates in-depth understanding of the implementation of the respective co-creation process, the results of cross-case analysis offer a broader comparison, enabling us to appreciate the similarities and differences of the cases (ibid.).

In this section, we thus explore these differences and similarities as well as contextual elements that might help us understand these variances with regard to the three research questions. We also explain the conclusions to draw for our study of heterogenous actors' institutional work shaping the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. In this sense, each section ends with a conclusion where we elaborate on our responses to the respective research question.

We begin with research question one about heterogenous actors' institutional work practices (**section 1.1.**). Then, we look at these actors' institutional roles, our second research question (**section 1.2.**). Finally, the third research question concerning the organizational form of institutional work brings the threads of our argument together (**section 1.3.**).

1.1. Institutional work practices: the pursuit of divergent intentions

In this section, we propose to compare the findings for the two cases with regard to research question 1. To do so, we investigate how actors have mobilized the different institutional work practices in Venelles and Klagenfurt respectively, and with which aim in mind. We follow the same structure as in the presentation of findings (**chapter 4**), and use the four forms of institutional work, i.e., structural, conceptual, operational, and relational institutional work, to frame this section (see **chapter 2, section 2.3.**). Moreover, we compare actors' intentions and explore whether their institutional work was aimed at creating, disrupting, or maintaining institutions. We end this section with a conclusion to respond to this research question.

Table 26 below shows the number of references to the above-mentioned institutional work practices for the cases of Venelles and Klagenfurt. In this regard, we find that the different practices and intentions are represented in both cases. A co-existence of all four forms of institutional work can therefore be observed in both cases, and a variety of intentions were pursued as institutional work was aimed at creating, disrupting, and maintaining institutional arrangements. However, the varying numbers of references to the different sub-codes point to the prevalence of different institutional work practices and intentions in the two cases. We choose to show these numbers purely to illustrate differences and similarities of the two cases and remain true to our entirely qualitative approach to content analysis as explained in chapter 3.

Table 26. Comparison of number of references to institutional work practices and intentions across cases

Sub-codes of code “Institutional work practices“	Number of references <i>Venelles</i>	Number of references <i>Klagenfurt</i>
IW aimed at creating	178	36
IW aimed at disrupting	29	4
IW aimed at maintaining	38	124
Structural IW	22	6
Conceptual IW	68	36
Operational IW	139	108
Relational IW	67	38

(Source: author)

A more detailed overview of the institutional work practices identified in the two cases is presented in figure 25 below.

Figure 25. Institutional work practices in Venelles and Klagenfurt



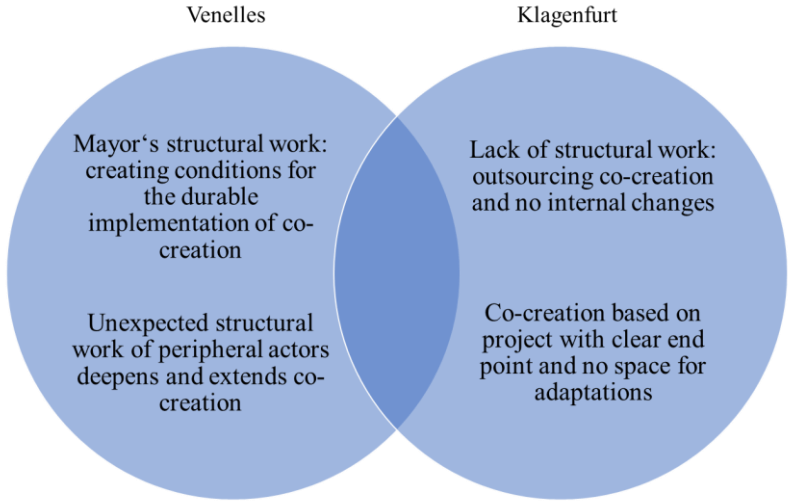
(Source: author)

The four types of institutional work can be observed in both cases. However, important differences should be pointed out regarding the presence and mobilization of these practices in Venelles and Klagenfurt. The following subsections address each form of institutional work and the particularities that were observed for each case.

1.1.1. Structural institutional work

Structural institutional work concerns the creation of organizational conditions that facilitate the implementation of co-creation. In this regard, structural work is required to provide the foundations for co-creation, since it is a novel approach and implies a shift away from public organizations’ established bureaucratic functioning. Indeed, the latter marked both local public organizations, which did not provide a fertile ground for innovative and open policymaking practice such as co-creation. Engaging in structural institutional work enables actors to change these conditions and support the implementation of co-creation. Important differences can be observed between the two cases in this respect.

Figure 26. Structural work in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

In the case of Venelles in Transition, the structural institutional work of one actor in particular marked the very beginning of the project: the mayor. To allow for co-creation to become the long-term change he proclaimed, he undertook slight modifications in the organizational structure so that it would allow for both internal collaboration among departments, and co-creation with external actors. Importantly, he also endowed the organization with a new department dedicated to Sustainable Development and Citizen Participation. This department was not only in charge of Venelles in Transition but was

created with the idea of implementing co-creation in all fields of the municipality's future action. Two new positions were created by the mayor to absorb the workload that would come with the use of co-creation and to allow for the integration of this approach within the organization over the long-term.

While the mayor's structural work marked the beginning stages of Venelles in Transition, other actors somewhat surprisingly engaged in this form of institutional work at a later point as well. The consultants as well as the actively participating citizens sparked the creation of a governance entity, the COPIL, that would change the trajectory and the depth of co-creation. Citizens demanded the creation of this instrument, and the consultants listened, and, with the municipality's consent, gave shape to this idea. An entirely new entity through which not only citizens but also public managers and agents as well as municipal councillors from the mayor's list and the opposition would take part in writing the 2030 Agenda consequently emerged from their unexpected structural institutional work.

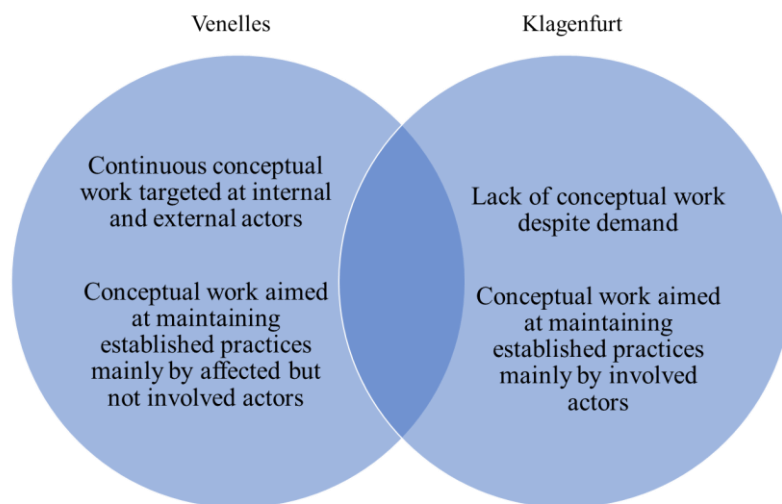
In the case of Klagenfurt, however, structural work played a far less important role than in Venelles. Hardly any efforts to change the structure and functioning of the Sustainable Development department to accommodate co-creation over the long-term could be observed. While two members of the department were assigned to the broader Mission KS 30 project and one of these positions was partially financed through project funding – here, some structural work on the part of the department head can be observed – the organization and implementation of co-creation were outsourced. An external project partner was in charge of this part of Mission KS 30, and no internal changes or efforts were made to integrate co-creation. Changes to be made to accommodate Klagenfurt's selection as one of the "100 Cities" and potential future projects with citizens related to this EU Mission – for instance, the creation of new positions within the department – were mentioned but have yet to be concretized.

The different mobilization of practices of structural institutional work in the two cases can be explained by actors' underlying intentions. In Venelles, the Venelles in Transition co-creation project was meant to be only the first of many of its kind, and consequently, a durable framework allowing to integrate co-creation in the organization had to be developed. In Klagenfurt, on the other hand, co-creation was a requirement to receive project funding, and was intended to remain limited to the Mission KS 30 project. Thus, while the intentions with regard to structural work in Venelles were to create the foundations for the implementation of a set of new practices, i.e., co-creation, in Klagenfurt, the lack of structural work can be explained by the absence of such aims, and the more pragmatic objective of complying with the criteria to receive funding for a stand-alone project.

1.1.2. Conceptual institutional work

Conceptual institutional work can be observed in both cases. It concerns the establishment of a belief system around co-creation, and the clarification of the content and goals of this new approach. In this sense, we found that it was used differently depending on actors' intentions. It can be mobilized to facilitate the implementation of co-creation by explaining its relevance and functioning. But it is also used to counter its implementation by developing narratives emphasizing its limitations and the benefits of established practices. While both can be observed in the two cases, differences persist regarding the use of conceptual institutional work in Venelles and Klagenfurt.

Figure 27. Conceptual work in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

While in both cases, some involved actors engaged in the development of a narrative about the importance and relevance of co-creation, this practice was more prevalent in the case of Venelles where a more diverse set of actors joined in on this narrative, and with much more insistence. Even before the launch of Venelles in Transition, the mayor had begun developing a narrative around the importance of participation, especially regarding sustainability issues: these had been the pillars of his re-election campaign. This illustrates how conceptual institutional work was used by the mayor to prepare the implementation of co-creation through Venelles in Transition. Throughout the process, the mayor and other involved internal and external actors continued to strengthen this narrative. In Klagenfurt on the other hand, the importance of the specific co-creation process related to Mission KS 30 was emphasized, but less so the need for continuous co-creation beyond this project. As opposed to Venelles where the narrative revolved around Venelles in Transition as the starting point of a long-term movement based on citizen

participation, in Klagenfurt, actors highlighted the project-aspect of the co-creation process. They repeatedly insisted that co-creation was mobilized for this specific project which had a pre-defined end point.

During the beginning stages of co-creation, actors in the two cases explained the outlines of the project, the methods, and the content. In Venelles, this was the consultants' job, and their conceptual work was targeted at internal actors first and concretized through meetings and workshops, before beginning the public phase of the project where the target of conceptual work was the local population. Here, involved public managers and municipal councillors, and especially so the Sustainable Development department as the "engine" behind the project joined in and, having understood the outlines of co-creation, engaged in conceptual work themselves. Together with the consultants, they continuously explained the relevance and benefits of co-creation to both their colleagues and the population, be it during workshops, through posters in the public space, or articles in the local magazine. In addition to emphasizing the benefits of co-creation, all involved internal and external actors also pointed out the shortcomings of bureaucracy. These practices aimed at clarifying and justifying the co-creation approach were less prevalent in the case of Klagenfurt. On the contrary, participants repeatedly criticized the fact that they had not been sufficiently informed about the goals of the Mission KS 30, their role in the project, or the relevance of the method. In Klagenfurt, as opposed to Venelles, only a small group of selected participants obtained additional information regarding the tools and methods used in each workshop; they were meant to convey this information to their peers. However, even for this group of participants, the co-creation approach remained abstract.

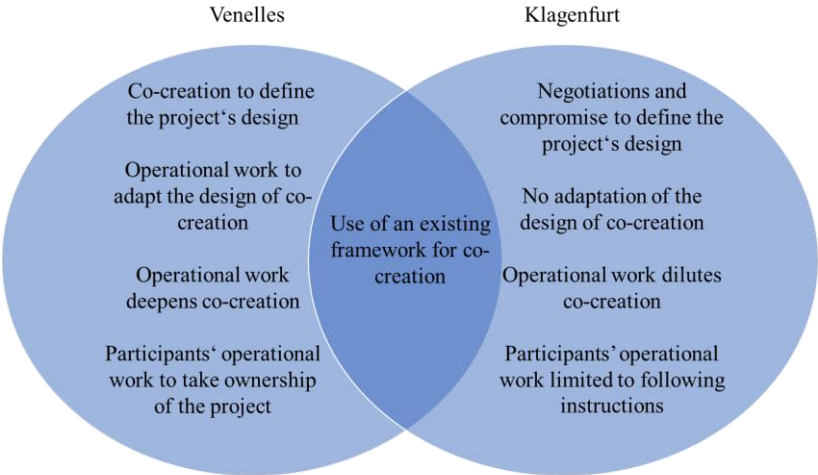
Institutional work practices aimed at maintaining the status quo through narratives questioning the relevance and added value of co-creation were identified in both cases as well. In Venelles, those public managers and municipal councillors who were not directly involved in the project but affected by the implementation of co-creation engaged in conceptual work aimed at downplaying the need for co-creation. Their conceptual work was less visible than that aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement in Venelles. Yet, it hampered the implementation of co-creation within the organization since the resistance of those adhering to this narrative slowed down the spread of this new approach. In Klagenfurt, on the other hand, directly involved public managers and even the project leaders questioned the need for and added value of co-creation. They repeatedly presented the co-creation process as a clearly delimited project rather than a new approach to policymaking. Them referring to the department head as the "boss" further strengthened established practices and roles. In this regard, the participating students, too, openly emphasized that they were more comfortable with traditional power relations and practices than with the more horizontal ones implied by co-creation. While in Venelles, conceptual work aimed at maintaining the status quo was performed mainly by those actors who were not directly involved in the project but in some way affected by it, in Klagenfurt, the opposite seems to have been the case. Those public managers from departments other than Sustainable Development who attended

workshops without being part of their organization expressed more interest in co-creation than those working in the department leading the project.

1.1.3. Operational institutional work

Operational institutional work was the dominant form observed in both cases. It is related to the concretization of co-creation through which the new approach is made tangible. Operational work thus concerns the ways in which actors shape the implementation of co-creation through concrete actions. Different intentions can spur operational institutional work. This was the case in both Venelles and Klagenfurt, where it was aimed not only at creating new institutions but also at disrupting and maintaining existing ones.

Figure 28. Operational work in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

In the case of Venelles in Transition, designing the project and imagining its outlines was actors' first preoccupation in terms of operational institutional work. The consultants, the mayor, and his internal his team of supporters worked together to give shape to co-creation through Venelles in Transition. This first concrete example was meant to help establish co-creation as a new institutional arrangement in Venelles. In Klagenfurt, constant negotiations between the external organizer and internal project leaders, and a back-and-forth between more and less extensive co-creation in terms of breadth and depth marked the design stage of Mission KS 30. The consultant's vision was ambitious as she suggested a broad co-creation process that could potentially affect the city's existing strategy. Fearing too-extensive participation, the Sustainable Development department team was quick to intervene, watering down this vision to one they deemed acceptable – one that far more resembled current practices than an innovative and open co-creation

approach. For instance, this showed in the decision not to mix different types of actors in the co-creation process, but to let high school students work on their own whilst “adults”, i.e., public managers and other external local stakeholders, would evaluate their ideas in a separate workshop.

In Venelles, the opposite was the case, and the mayor had explicitly asked for diverse actors to mix as early in the process as possible so that realistic ideas could be developed. It should still be pointed out that in Venelles, separate co-creation workshops were held specifically for municipal councillors and public managers and agents. Moreover, Klagenfurt strongly limited the resources they were ready to put into the Mission KS 30 co-creation process, which furthermore contributed to reducing its scope. Venelles, on the other hand, had been happy to pay for the consultants’ methodological support, and ensured that the financial aspect did not limit the ideation process during co-creation either.

In Klagenfurt, the design stage was thus characterized by compromise and give-and-take as the divergent interests and intentions of these actors clashed and informed their operational institutional work, while in Venelles, the co-creation process was co-created through the operational work of actors with similar intentions.

Both co-creation projects were inscribed in broader programs in different ways. One incentive of Venelles to launch Venelles in Transition and work on a local 2030 Agenda was the attribution of the national “France in Transition” label. In Klagenfurt, the project was part of the city’s preparation to apply for the EU Commission’s “100 Cities Mission”. Broader programs thus presented a starting point in both cases and shaped the overall design of the co-creation projects. This common element suggests the importance of mobilizing globally accepted frameworks as a setting for co-creation, and reinforces the role of mission-oriented innovation to foster institutional change. Since these respective projects were the municipalities’ first experiences with co-creation, legitimacy had to be obtained not only for the objectives of the project in terms of content – i.e., the necessity to act for the environmental transition – but also for the method itself – i.e., citizen participation. Frameworks such as the UN SDGs or an EU-wide program presented legitimate settings to experiment with the new and unfamiliar co-creation approach.

In Klagenfurt, the use of a broader framework turned out to be much more restrictive, limiting the participants’ ideation process. In Venelles, the use of the SDGs was abandoned due to its complexity that hampered the process. The consultants quickly changed the intended design of the process so that it would fit participants’ needs and expectations; they also modified the tools and methods used during the workshops to adapt them to the audience. The consultants thereby demonstrated their adaptability as they made last-minute adjustments. Klagenfurt, despite the participants’ obvious struggles with this framework, did not show the same ability to adapt, but the organizer continued to use the intended design even when participants’ feedback was clearly negative, and issues persisted during workshops. Some small adjustments were made – here, the teachers

engaged in some operational work as they advised with the organizer -, but the design remained too complex for the young participants.

Consequently, we can observe practices aimed at adapting the design of co-creation in both cases. However, actors pursued different goals in doing so. In Venelles, the design of the co-creation workshops and the methods used were adapted to fit the requirements of the participants. This flexibility ultimately allowed for more effective co-creation. In Klagenfurt, on the other hand, adaptations were made to accommodate the municipality's fears around co-creation, leading to a diluted co-creation process.

In Venelles, the increasing heterogeneity of institutional workers and their operational work practices showed at the deployment stage, for instance in the workshop attendees' active participation that sometimes went beyond the planned co-creation events. Participants took ownership of Venelles in Transition: some decided to propose their own projects, thereby taking co-creation out of the formal arena. Apart from the organizer's work aimed at implementing the planned co-creation method, the deployment stage in Klagenfurt was marked by operational institutional work aimed at maintaining existing practices and roles. Participants' operational work remained limited to them following instructions and completing the tasks they were given; teachers, too, remained in their habitual role and guided the students, explaining the tasks at hand, and calling them to order when necessary. Public managers shaped both the concrete form of co-creation as well as its outcomes by not only guiding the students, but also their ideation process which was put back on track when ideas seemed too utopian for these civil servants. These outcomes were then further transformed by the organizer in-between workshops.

Operational institutional work continued to be dispersed towards the end of Venelles in Transition. At this stage, a variety of actors with diverse interests participated in drafting Venelles' 2030 Agenda in the steering committee, taking co-creation further than what had been planned. Public managers increasingly incorporated co-creation in internal working methods whereby they, too, gave shape to this approach. At the same time, those who were still not convinced of the need to co-create continued to show their resistance and made the drafting of the Agenda, where their participation was required, more complicated by playing hard-to-get. This is where the operational work of the top managers supporting the mayor was key to disrupt established practices: they made internal participation in co-creation mandatory. The final deliverable, while it was co-created by the internal and external actors who were members of the steering committee in Venelles, was drafted by the organizer alone in the case of Klagenfurt. This points to a watered-down co-creation process in Klagenfurt where, in the end, most actors' operational work was not intended at making co-creation a permanent feature of the organization's set of practices, and neither of the involved actors took ownership of the Mission KS 30 project.

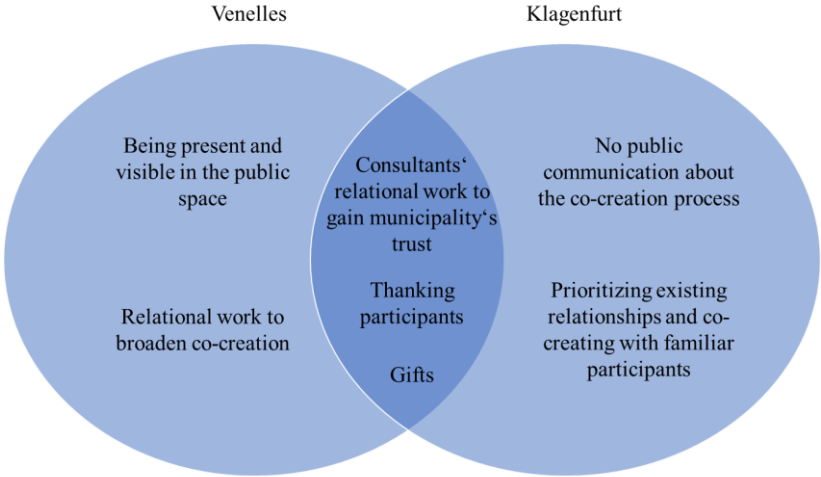
In Venelles as in Klagenfurt, a diversity of actors shaped the institutional work process and the trajectory of co-creation; as opposed to Venelles, the heterogeneity of institutional

worker did not make co-creation broader or deeper, but diluted the approach until Klagenfurt was left with a watered-down design for co-creation. The co-existence of a variety of operational institutional work practices and underlying intentions can thus be observed in both cases.

1.1.4. Relational institutional work

Finally, instances of relational institutional work can be observed in the two cases. Relational work concerns the development of trust and relationships that facilitate the implementation of co-creation. Trust did indeed turn out to be crucial in both Venelles and Klagenfurt. Relational work however looked different in the two contexts.

Figure 29. Relational work in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

In Venelles as well as in Klagenfurt, it was necessary for the external consultants to gain the municipality's trust. Since neither municipality disposed of previous experience with citizen participation, they depended on the respective consultants, whom neither of them had known before, for methodological support. Consequently, the co-creation process was entirely in the hands of consultants the municipalities encountered for the first time in the context of these co-creation projects. The consultants knew that mutual trust would therefore be a prerequisite for successful collaboration. In both cases, they engaged in relational institutional work targeted at the respective municipality throughout the process, and especially so at the beginning.

In Klagenfurt, relational institutional work was mostly limited to this aspect and targeted at internal actors, but some instances where participants were the target of relational work could be observed as well. A clash of intentions characterized these manifestations of relational work: the organizer, for instance, suggested that participants be on a first-name basis during workshops to facilitate their interactions– a proposition that was rejected by most, as they sought to maintain their familiar roles and the established hierarchical relations between students and “adults”. Relational work in Klagenfurt also showed towards the end of the process when the department head publicly thanked the participants and presented them with gifts as a reward for their contribution.

Gift giving and thanking participants as relational work practices were also observed throughout Venelles in Transition, but relational work targeted at co-creation participants went further than in Klagenfurt. The mayor, as a matter of fact, engaged in relational work throughout the process as he wished to build trust and relationships with the population to facilitate their acceptance of the new co-creation practices. His team of supporters joined him in these efforts, which manifested for instance through informal conversations with participants after workshops, and also showed when municipal councillors decided to go from door to door to encourage inhabitants to fill out the questionnaire and subsequently attend co-creation workshops.

In Venelles, space thus played an important role for relational work. Indeed, in addition to going from door to door, the mayor and his team quickly understood the importance of being present and visible in the public space in order to gain people’s trust and raise awareness. Going where people already were instead of waiting for them to come where the municipality invites them turned out to be a key element of relational institutional work in Venelles. In this respect, the organizing team of Venelles in Transition has identified certain public spaces such as the farmers market or local schools at drop-off and pick-up times, as well as local events that attract the population as strategic spaces to get in touch with the population and develop trusting relationships through informal conversations. Venelles’ idea was to be as visible as possible and to repeatedly stress the need for and benefits of co-creation to create legitimacy for the new approach.

In Venelles, the project organizers moreover aimed to increase the visibility of co-creation through traditional means such as posters or newspaper articles, hoping to mobilize people for the workshops. This was something that Klagenfurt explicitly avoided: they preferred recruiting co-creation participants based on familiarity rather than promoting the workshops and inviting anyone to attend. The co-creation events were mostly held in one of the participating schools rather than in publicly accessible spaces. In this sense, Klagenfurt’s relational work aimed at recruiting participants was focused on familiarity and existing relationships to keep the circle of attendees small, while Venelles sought to broaden the spectrum of participants.

RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION 1 – actors’ institutional work practices

The cross-case analysis of our findings regarding research question 1 (“What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?”) shows striking differences between the two cases of our study. As table 26 at the beginning of the section indicates, in both Venelles and Klagenfurt, practices associated with operational institutional work are the most current. However, dominant intentions vary: while in Venelles, actors’ institutional work is mostly aimed at creating new institutional arrangements, that is, establishing co-creation as a durable practice, in Klagenfurt, the intention to maintain existing rules and norms prevails.

Overall, institutional work practices are more pronounced in Venelles than in Klagenfurt. Indeed, we coded more units of analysis related to practices and intentions in the case of Venelles (541 occurrences) than Klagenfurt (352 occurrences). While this quantification of our findings is purely illustrative, it confirms what we observed: institutional work is less intense in Klagenfurt than in Venelles. The shortage of institutional work related to the implementation of co-creation in Klagenfurt can be observed with regard to all four types of institutional work practices.

*We observed that, apart from the creation of one position linked to the broader Mission KS 30 and not to co-creation specifically, no structural work was done in Klagenfurt, and that both conceptual and relational work were less developed than in Venelles. In both cases, the starting point for the implementation of co-creation was a **broader framework** (the national “France in Transition” program and label in the case of Venelles, and EU-wide 100 Cities Mission in the case of Klagenfurt) used to justify and frame the implementation of co-creation. Both organizations mobilize this setting to add legitimacy to their first co-creation process and to make it more easily acceptable for internal and external actors.*

However, we find that co-creation as a major institutional change still requires the reflexive efforts associated with institutional work in order to be durably implemented. A lack of institutional work entails a loss of the substance and sense of co-creation. This shows in the case of Klagenfurt where a watered-down design is implemented mainly by one central actor, the organizer. This observation confirms our intentions that the deployment of policy co-creation in local public organizations and institutional work go hand in hand.

*We also notice the importance of actors’ institutional work and intentions to be flexible and to adapt as co-creation unfolds. Especially when heterogenous actors come together in co-creation, institutional work seems to require one crucial skill: **adaptability**. The case of Klagenfurt illustrates this point. There, institutional work mostly occurs in a top-down and one-sided manner and is performed by one central actor throughout most of the process. This actor, i.e., the organizer, does not seem to incorporate participants’ feedback in the design of the co-creation project, even when it becomes evident that the latter is too complex for most participants. This lack of adaptation to participants’ needs leads to a decrease in their motivation to co-create, which we observe in their institutional work practices that are mainly aimed at maintaining the status quo.*

The positive impact adaptability of institutional work can have on the trajectory of the institutional change shows in the case of Venelles. There, participants’ feedback, needs, and

preferences are incorporated, and space is provided for them to act and take ownership of the process. Ultimately, this flexibility gives rise to a more extensive and deeper co-creation process as involved actors engage in institutional work with more ambitious intentions, and structural work does not only occur at the beginning to provide the conditions for co-creation, but also towards the end through the creation of a governance entity.

We also observed **negotiation, compromise, and a back-and-forth in decision-making** to be recurrent practices when institutional work is more dispersed. In both cases, these practices characterize the design phase, and in the case of Venelles also the later stages where more heterogenous actors are involved in co-creation. These practices, however, lead to different outcomes in the two cases: while the compromises found during the preparatory stage in Klagenfurt diluted the co-creation approach, in Venelles, the continuous co-creation of the co-creation design deepened the latter.

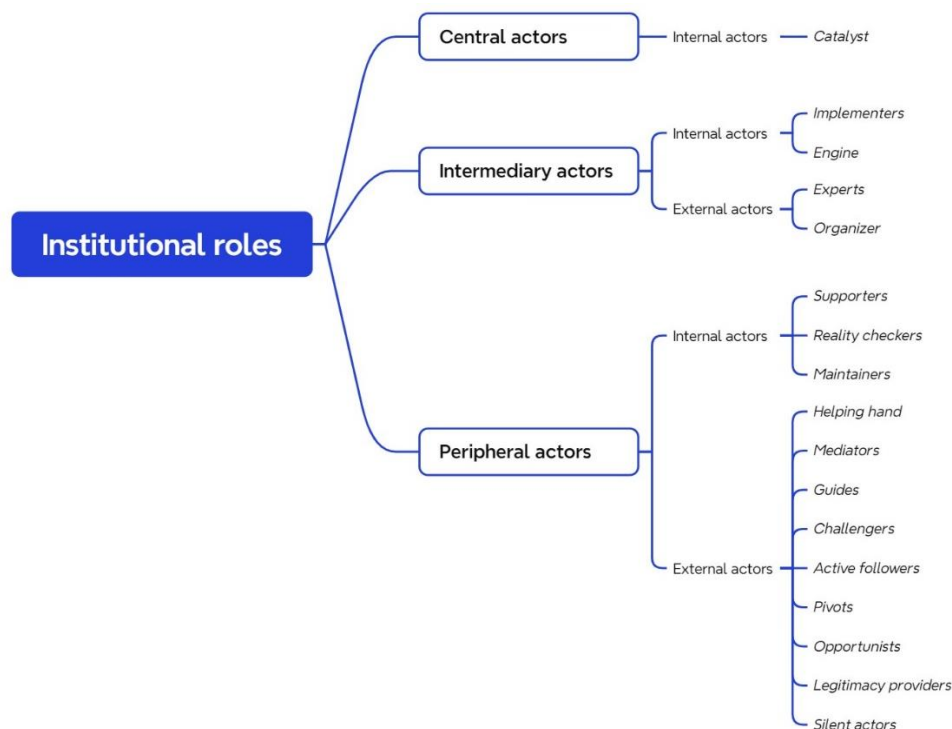
In sum, this cross-case analysis regarding research question 1 about actors' institutional work practices provides insights into the complexity of heterogenous actors' practices and intentions as they shape the implementation of co-creation. Our cases show that a multiplicity of practices and intentions co-exist, evolve over time, and shape one another. Moreover, similar institutional work practices take different shapes and lead to different outcomes depending on the underlying intentions. Our research design based on two cases allows to observe these differences and similarities, and to explain them based on contextual elements.

1.2. The “who is who” of institutional work: a diversity of actors and roles

We now investigate research question 2 which is concerned with the institutional roles actors take on as they engage in institutional work. The findings for the two cases are compared as we look at the configurations of actors and roles in both Venelles and Klagenfurt and the differences and similarities the two cases feature. We moreover provide insights into the resources and competencies each role draws on, as well as actors’ main intentions for the institutional work they perform in this role. For reasons of clarity, we divide the observed roles into three broad categories: central actors, intermediary actors, and peripheral actors. Moreover, we distinguish organization-internal from external actors. We end this section with a conclusion to respond to this research question.

In figure 30 below, the different roles observed across the two cases are shown. We have identified a total of **17 different roles**: one of these roles is taken on by central actors; four by intermediary actors; and 12 by peripheral actors. In sum, six roles were taken on by internal and 11 by external actors. While some roles share certain characteristics, only three of the same roles are observed in both Venelles and Klagenfurt: this is the case for the “catalyst” as well as the “active followers” and the “silent actors”.

Figure 30. Institutional roles in Venelles and Klagenfurt



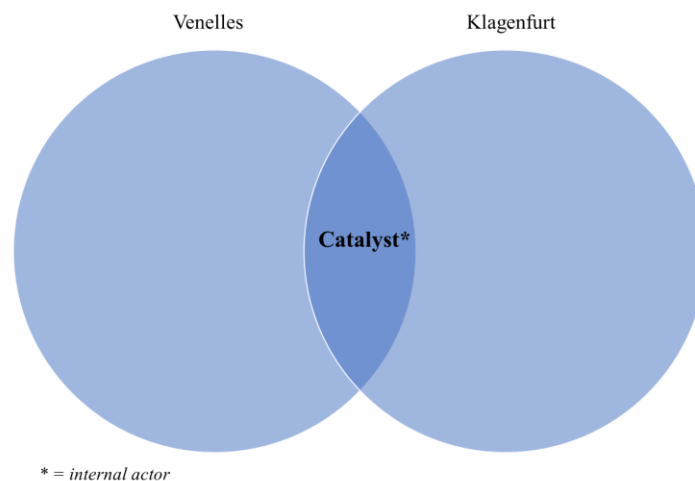
(Source: author)

To identify the differences and similarities of the two cases with respect to the second research question, we propose to explore each of the three categories and the roles associated with them. We thereby aim to illustrate the configurations of actors in the two cases to provide an overview of the observed institutional roles.

1.2.1. Central actors

Central actors are those actors who usually occupy powerful positions within the respective organization. Their role and institutional work have attracted most attention in past studies (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Central actors' positions give them access to the resources necessary for the implementation of co-creation and endow them with the power to do so. We have identified **one role** in this regard: the catalyst.

Figure 31. Role of the central actor in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

The role of the **catalyst** was observed in both cases. However, this role was not taken on by the same type of actor in Venelles and Klagenfurt. As a matter of fact, while the mayor acted as the catalyst of the Venelles in Transition project, it was the head of the Sustainable Development department in the case of Mission KS 30. Generally, a catalyst can be defined as something that makes a reaction happen more quickly without itself being changed⁶⁸. This definition can be adapted to match the institutional role of the catalyst as observed in our study, whereby it refers to an actor making the implementation of co-creation happen, without their own role being changed. In our study, the catalysts initiated the project and then mostly engaged in institutional work practices that laid the foundations for the implementation of co-creation. They moreover

⁶⁸ "Catalyst". In: Cambridge Dictionary, online, see <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/catalyst> (consulted on 17.01.2024)

oversaw the process, mostly without being actively involved themselves: the operational aspects were left to their teams. However, in both cases, the catalysts played an important role during the design of the co-creation process where they adapted the consultants' propositions to match their expectations and the local conditions.

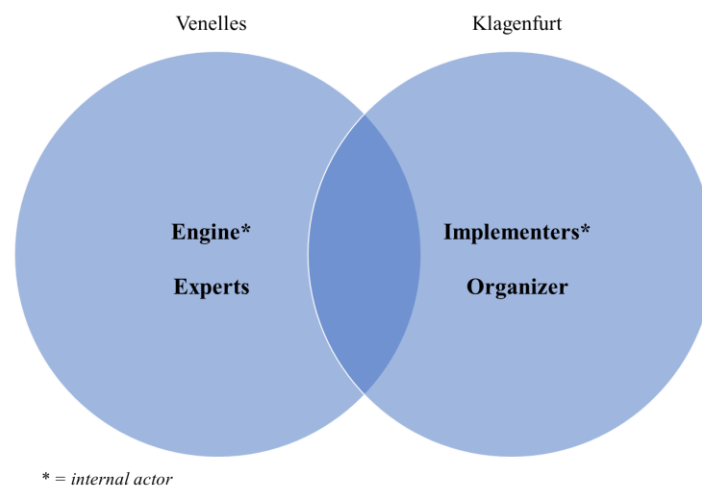
Both catalysts were able to rely on their powerful position within the respective local public organization, even though in Venelles, the mayor as the catalyst was part of the local political sphere, while the department head as catalyst in Klagenfurt represented the administrative sphere. Political actors were absent from Klagenfurt's Mission KS 30, and apart from giving their formal consent to the project, there was no further involvement. The catalyst was thus a high-level public manager. In Venelles on the other hand, the project was characterized by strong political leadership and a present and interested mayor. As a matter of fact, the mayor in his role of the catalyst was the central actor of Venelles in Transition, even though his active involvement was limited.

The catalyst's intentions were in both cases related to the successful implementation of co-creation. In Venelles, strengthening citizen participation had been a political priority since the mayor's re-election; in Klagenfurt, the department head had put co-creation on the agenda through a broader project aimed at being selected as one of the EU's "100 climate-neutral cities". A more pragmatic goal has thus stimulated Klagenfurt's catalyst's actions, while the mayor of Venelles saw this co-creation process as the start of a long-term change towards more citizen involvement. This difference also shows in their institutional work practices. In Venelles, the catalyst's institutional work was almost only aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement, and he engaged in structural, conceptual, operational, as well as relational practices to pursue this intention. In Klagenfurt, on the other hand, the catalyst showed a more reserved attitude and seemed to switch between his intention to implement co-creation and to maintain established practices; he for instance explicitly demanded for co-creation to be less deep and broad than suggested by the organizer.

1.2.2. Intermediary actors

Intermediary actors, for which we identified **four distinct roles**, provide a link between central and peripheral actors. In both cases, the members of the Sustainable Development department who were in charge of implementing the respective co-creation project, as well as the consultants were intermediary actors.

Figure 32. Roles of intermediary actors in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

In Klagenfurt, since the catalyst remained in the background throughout the process, the consultant took on an important role: the **organizer**. As a matter of fact, while the department head had initiated the Mission KS 30 project, the co-creation part was entirely outsourced to the consultant. This means that while Klagenfurt's Sustainable Development department officially led the project, the consultant was in charge of planning and implementing the co-creation process and drafting the final report. This division of labor was due to Mission KS 30 being divided into seven work packages and having to satisfy certain criteria to obtain project funding. The organizer's role and institutional work were therefore essential for the successful completion of the co-creation work package. She relied on her professional experience as a consultant for collaborative governance and scientific expertise as a senior researcher in this field to develop an ambitious vision for a deep and broad co-creation approach.

The department head as the catalyst, however, used his role as project leader to largely reduce the scope of the co-creation process as it had been suggested by the organizer. This illustrates the ambiguity of this institutional role: responsible for the co-creation process, yet depended on the project leader's consent, the organizer was not able to fully implement her vision for the co-creation process. Even though she was formally in charge of the work package, the catalyst did not hesitate to make use of his veto right to shape the process to his liking. On the other hand, when things did not work out as planned or methods and tools did not appeal to participants, the blame was entirely put on the organizer alone. In the presentation of our findings, we referred to the consultant as the "remote organizer" due to her isolated position: a physical gap (except for the co-creation workshops, she was located in Vienna while all other actors were in Klagenfurt) as well as a gap in terms of their lived realities persisted between her and all other involved actors who perceived her as "otherworldly", too scientific, and detached from their reality.

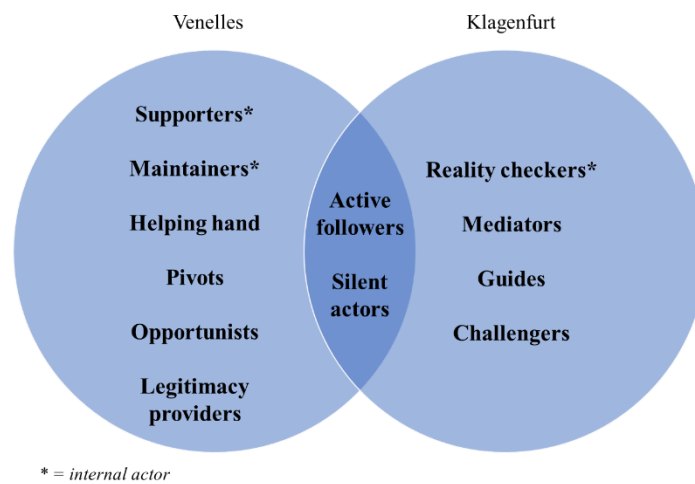
In Venelles, the consultants took on the role of the **experts**: as opposed to the consultant in Klagenfurt, the co-creation process was not entirely their responsibility but was co-created with the mayor and his internal team. The experts had been hired to support the municipality with their expertise and experience and were therefore able to shape the co-creation project, but the team of municipal actors were very much involved in all steps and final decisions were up to them. Consequently, the role of the experts was defined more clearly than that of the organizer in Klagenfurt and less ambiguous. Their institutional work was mostly limited to the operationalization of co-creation as well as the preparation of the project which also required conceptual work to clarify the outlines of the co-creation approach. At the same time, and despite their less central role, they had more liberty than the organizer in Klagenfurt to make suggestions in terms of methods and tools, and these suggestions were usually well received by the municipality instead of being rejected or diluted as it was the case in Klagenfurt. In this respect, towards the end of the process, through the creation of the steering committee, these consultants were able to engage in some structural institutional work as well.

If the consultants' roles were different in the two cases, so were the roles of the department in charge of the co-creation project. In both cases, the responsible department was the Sustainable Development department. While in Venelles, the two members of this newly created department were the veritable **engine** behind Venelles in Transition, the role of the two managers in charge of Mission KS 30 was limited to that of the **implementers**. The role of the engine implies, as does the name we attributed to it, that the department acted as the driver behind the project. While it had been initiated by the mayor and designed with the consultants' support, their commitment and efforts made the implementation of Venelles in Transition possible. They went far beyond their job description and put considerable time and effort into this undertaking. It was also their institutional work that allowed for co-creation to go beyond this specific project and be carried on after its official end not only through the steering committee but for instance also through newly created working groups with citizens and changing internal working methods. In Klagenfurt, the role of the implementers was more marginal and mainly consisted in organizing the logistical aspects of the project. They were intermediary actors in that they formed the bridge not only between the organizer and the department head, but also between the organizer and the participants. They sometimes had to translate the organizer's complex language to make it more accessible for the participants. Generally, these two implementers thus engaged in mostly operational institutional work ensuring a smooth implementation of co-creation through the workshops. Almost paradoxically, and as opposed to the Sustainable Development department of Venelles who seemed to be entirely convinced of the need for continuous and durable co-creation, in Klagenfurt, the department in charge did not seem to be convinced of the need for change and would sometimes engage in institutional work aimed at maintaining practices and roles as they were.

1.2.3. Peripheral actors

Peripheral actors include both organization-internal and external actors and represent the largest category of the three with **12 identified roles**.

Figure 33. Roles of peripheral actors in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

The internal actors in this category include public managers from different departments of the respective organization as well as municipal councillors. Across the two organizations, three roles of internal actors could be observed. To begin with, the public managers and municipal councillors who were directly involved in Venelles in Transition acted as **supporters** of the change project initiated by the mayor and spurred by the Sustainable Development team. As such, their institutional work and intentions resembled the mayor's, and they were there to assist him in his efforts aimed at making co-creation an established practice in Venelles. While the mayor provided the necessary conditions for the implementation of co-creation, his team of supporters was responsible for its operationalization. In this respect, they were actively involved throughout the entire process and engaged in conceptual, operational, and relational institutional work to pursue their intention of durably implementing co-creation. While some of them were higher up in the organizational hierarchy and therefore disposed of some power over their respective teams, all were subject to the mayor's decisions which they had to execute. While they did not have the power to make important decisions with regard to Venelles in Transition, they did not participate in co-creation, either: they attended the workshops to represent the municipality, but without actively taking part in it. It is in this sense that their institutional role was veritably that of the supporters.

In Klagenfurt, municipal councillors were not involved in Mission KS 30, but public managers from numerous different departments of the local public organization were. They had been invited to attend the workshops and guide the participants through the co-creation process, giving inputs with regard to their respective field of expertise. In this sense, they acted as **reality checkers**. As the name of this role suggests, they were meant to put participants' ideas into perspective, evaluate their feasibility, and provide insights into ongoing projects in Klagenfurt. Thus, as opposed to Venelles, they were invited to co-create with the external participants to some degree; however, their role remained somewhat ambiguous since not their personal opinion but their expertise as local public managers was requested. Consequently, some struggled to find their place; others intervened often, guiding participants' ideation process; and others again preferred to stay in the background and only intervened when asked to do so. Interestingly, in Klagenfurt, those public managers from departments other than Sustainable Development seemed to fulfill their role of reality checkers with more enthusiasm and interest for the co-creation approach than those from the department in charge of the project. The latter thus engaged in institutional work that seemed to be aimed at maintaining the status quo where citizens hardly or not at all involved in policymaking,

This was especially visible in the case of Venelles. However, while some of the involved actors in Klagenfurt acted as **maintainers**, in Venelles, this role concerned those public managers and agents who were not directly involved in the co-creation project but in some way affected by it and/or its outcomes. As maintainers, these actors were not interested in implementing co-creation and preferred preserving the established and familiar norms, procedures, and roles. Their institutional work was less visible than that of other actors, and mainly consisted in attempts at hindering the effective implementation of co-creation through a lack of interest and participation.

Among the external peripheral actors are individual citizens – i.e., the main co-creation participants – as well as associations who participated or not in the respective co-creation process.

Two associations actively played a part in Venelles in Transition, and one in Mission KS 30. They took on very different roles. First, we observed one association in Venelles acting as the **helping hand**. The president of this association, used to collaborating with the municipality and eager to spur public action in the field of sustainable development, supported the project and its implementation through operational work. A second association in Venelles took on the role of the **opportunist**. As a matter of fact, while members of this association still attended some of the co-creation workshops to see for themselves how the project was conducted, the most flagrant aspect of their role and institutional work is the autonomous project they have decided to launch in parallel. While their intention was not to hinder the implementation of Venelles in Transition, they remained skeptical about the municipality's intentions and seized the occasion to start a project of their own. Their institutional work was therefore not aimed at opposing the institutional change initiated by the mayor and his team; rather, they altered the

opportunity and used it as a motivation for their own independent undertaking. Finally, one association was involved in Klagenfurt's co-creation process: several members of the local Fridays for Future association attended the workshops where their role seemed to be to co-create with the other participants. However, they went further and took on the role of **challengers**. As such, they pushed the limits of the co-creation design through their institutional work as they demanded – and obtained – more input on the part of local experts. Because of their demand, the organizer slightly adapted the design and the implementers invited more public managers than initially planned to participate in the workshops.

The other co-creation participants took on the role of **active participants** in both cases. They were the main target of co-creation: the local population of Venelles, and local high school students in Klagenfurt. As active participants, they followed the instructions they were given, completed the tasks and exercises planned for the co-creation workshops, and were mostly motivated to do so and interested in both the method and the content. However, they rarely went further and did not question the instructions or ask for changes in the co-creation approach. To fulfill the tasks they were given, these participants most relied on their personal experiences and professional expertise, or knowledge acquired through their education. This is why especially the high school students tended to struggle with their role: given their young age, the tasks were often too complex for them. However, used to complying with the rules, they did as they were told as best as they could.

This is why their teachers took on the role of **guides**, and also why faculty of the local university had been invited and acted as **mediators**. These two roles, which could only be observed in Klagenfurt, were relatively similar. Teachers, however, used the authority they had over their students to guide them in a less gentle way than the mediators who were not in the same hierarchical position and had not known the students before Mission KS 30. In this sense, especially teachers, through their institutional work practices mostly consisting of guiding and scolding students to ensure they completed their tasks, maintained established role perceptions rather than challenging them and fully immersing themselves in co-creation. Both guides and mediators helped translate too-complex instructions for the students and tried to explain the content of the exercises as best as they could, given that neither of them were experts in the field of sustainable development. Their roles were somewhat ambiguous, and they struggled to find their place: they were meant to guide students rather than co-create with them, but when students were passive or overwhelmed, they had to intervene rather than simply guide so that the exercises would be completed.

In Venelles, we observed the evolution of the role of active participants into a different role: the **pivots**. Indeed, rather than being “simple” participants, the most actively involved citizens turned out to be the pivotal point of Venelles in Transition. A pivot can

generally be defined as a person or thing on which something else depends⁶⁹. In this sense, citizens in Venelles did act as pivots, supporting an evolving and changing project, and ultimately changing the trajectory of this project, extending and deepening co-creation. Through their active presence, they shaped the trajectory of co-creation. By demanding more, deeper, and longer participation, they provoked the creation of a governance entity that would oversee the drafting of the 2030 Agenda. And through their continued motivation to go further, they made the competencies of this entity evolve from a powerless committee to a veritable decision-making body. The participants in Klagenfurt's project did not display the same commitment or motivation and remained more or less active participants throughout the process, with the exception of the Fridays for Future activists who, as **challengers**, successfully pushed the limits of co-creation.

If some participants turned out to be the pivots of Venelles' project, others were passive. In both cases, a passive role could be identified: **silent actors** were involved in Klagenfurt as well as in Venelles, but in different ways. What these roles have in common is their wait-and-see attitude: these actors, rather than actively participating in co-creation, relied on the other participants' work. While the silent actors in Klagenfurt were present at the workshops, but hardly participated, in Venelles they were non-participants and did not attend co-creation events. However, both, even though it was somewhat invisible, affected the implementation of co-creation. On the one hand, the silent actors' passive behavior where they waited for instructions and for others to do the work contributed to maintaining the status quo where citizens in general and young people in particular are not included in policymaking: they excluded themselves from participating even though they were physically present. The silent actors in Venelles, on the other hand, had an impact on the implementation of co-creation through their non-participation since their absence diminished the legitimacy of the project and the co-creation approach.

A final role of external actors is that of **legitimacy providers**. This role could be observed in the case of Venelles where the municipality's network of public organizations at local, regional, or national level contributed to increasing the legitimacy of the co-creation approach. These organizations, by attending Venelles' workshops or inviting representatives of the municipality to spread the word about their co-creation project and its benefits and relevance, allowed for Venelles to promote their project and thereby increase the legitimacy of co-creation as a new policymaking approach.

⁶⁹ "Pivot". In: Cambridge Dictionary, online, see <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/pivot> (consulted on 18.01.2024)

RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION 2 – actors’ institutional roles

The cross-case analysis of our findings regarding research question 2 (“What are the institutional roles of the heterogenous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?”) demonstrates that institutional roles highly depend on the organizational context in which institutional change occurs. As figures 31 to 33 show, only three roles can be observed in the two cases; the other institutional roles we identified are specific to each case.

*Our findings thus invite to conceive of institutional roles as **highly context-dependent**. They show that a fine-grained analysis is required in order to identify the roles of institutional workers since they are constituted of both their practices and intentions, as well as their interactions with other institutional workers. We find that actors’ social position in the field can be useful as a first step of characterizing their roles, but it is necessary to look beyond these position since they only allow for a superficial analysis of institutional roles. This is illustrated by the number of peripheral roles we identified and all of which are in different ways crucial to the implementation of co-creation in the respective organization. As a matter of fact, the supporting roles these actors take on are non-negligible and can therefore not be reduced to their peripheral position. We observe that an increasing number of these supporting roles emerge as the process of implementing co-creation advances.*

*Overall, actors’ institutional roles seemed to be less clear in the case of Klagenfurt than in Venelles. More **ambiguity** regarding each actors’ responsibilities and margin of maneuver could be observed in Klagenfurt, whereas in Venelles, roles were relatively clearly defined. Our findings suggest that the clearer the institutional roles of all involved actors, the more likely they are to actively engage in the co-creation process. As a matter of fact, we find that actors who are unsure of their role and responsibilities tend to remain passive instead of participating in co-creation. The case of Klagenfurt shows that when actors have difficulties finding their place in co-creation, the entire process could be jeopardized, and outcomes might not match expectations.*

*Our study moreover points to the importance of a nuanced and dynamic understanding of institutional roles due to the fact that the latter may change over time. Indeed, our findings show that roles are not stable constructs but subject to **constant evolution**. As actors are confronted with others’ institutional work practices, intentions, and roles, their own might be reinforced or on the other hand challenged and transformed. This is illustrated by the changing role of citizens in the case of Venelles. There, the participating citizens who had first taken on the role of active followers broke out of this role and turned into the pivots of the Venelles in Transition project. The emergence of this unintended role ultimately led to a deeper co-creation process.*

In sum, in a similar vein to research question 1, our findings regarding research question 2 stress the importance of a nuanced and dynamic approach to account for the complexity of heterogenous actors’ institutional roles as they engage in institutional work. Moreover, we find that institutional roles highly depend on contextual factors related to the organizational and institutional environment.

1.3. Bringing it all together: how practices and roles shape the form of institutional work

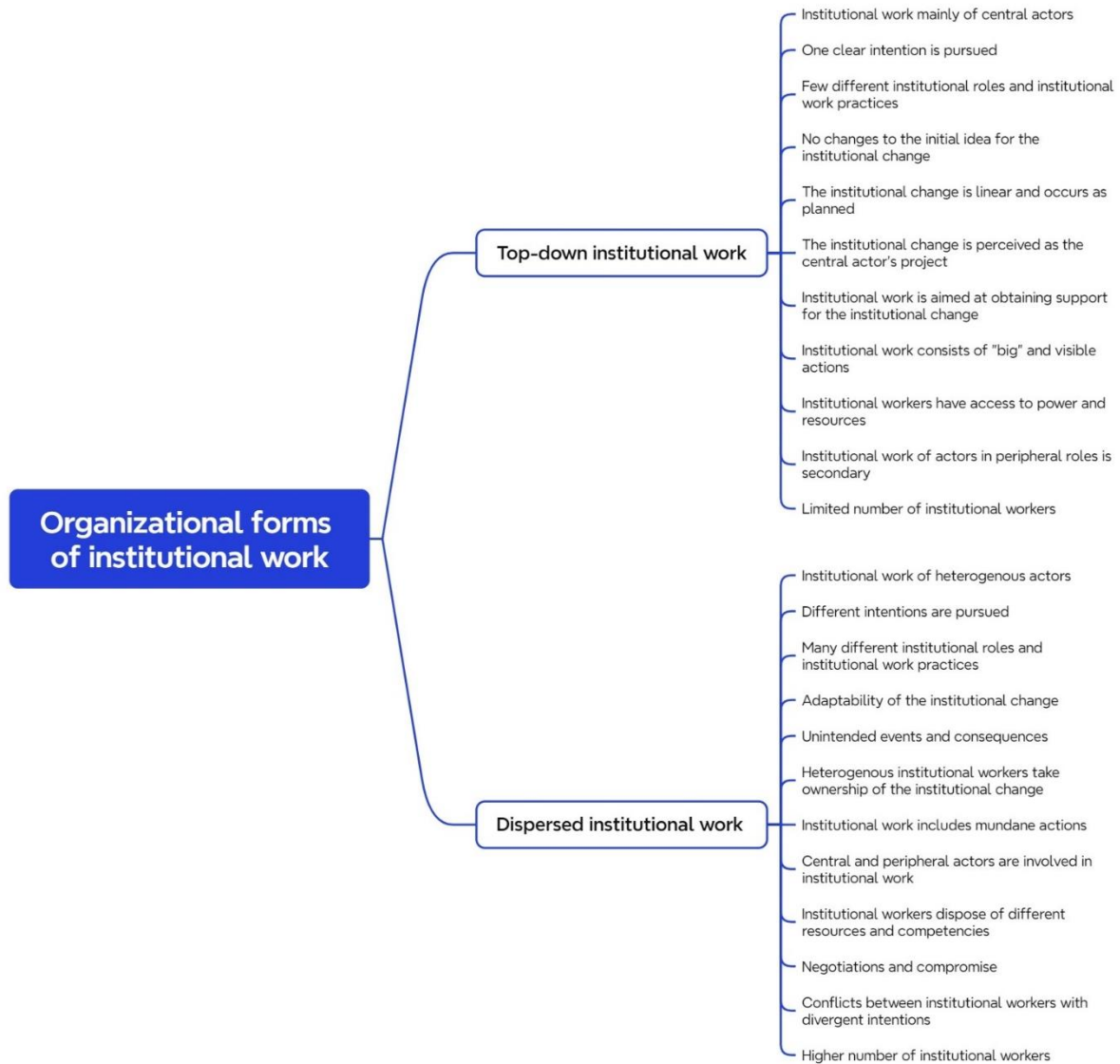
In this final section of our cross-case analysis of findings, we address the third research question: the organizational form institutional work takes. The organizational form of institutional work refers to the form in which institutional work manifests based on the involved actors, their institutional roles, as well as their institutional work practices (see **chapter 2, section 3.3.**). We end this section with a conclusion to respond to this research question.

In both cases, not one but two distinct and yet interrelated organizational forms of institutional work have been observed. Both Venelles and Klagenfurt show features of a **top-down** form of institutional work, as well as of a **dispersed** form of institutional work. Our findings suggest that the organizational form of institutional work depends on the phase of the implementation of co-creation. As a matter of fact, in the two cases, a pivotal point can be observed, and indicates a shift in the organizational form of institutional work. While this is more visible in the case of Venelles, signs of this shift from one form of institutional work to another can also be observed in Klagenfurt.

In this respect, and as shown in the presentation of our findings, the implementation process of co-creation can be divided into two broad phases in Venelles: (1) the launch of the project, including agenda setting, design, and deployment of co-creation; (2) the phase after the initially planned public co-creation process. The first phase points to a top-down form of institutional work, while in the second phase, institutional work takes a more dispersed form. In the case of Klagenfurt, the implementation of co-creation can also be divided into two phases: (1) the preparation and design of the co-creation project; (2) the deployment of co-creation. As opposed to the case of Venelles, institutional work shows a more dispersed form during the first phase, while it is more one-sided and top-down during the second phase. This difference is however less striking than in the case of Venelles: as a matter of fact, top-down institutional work is present all throughout the process in Klagenfurt.

Before we elaborate on the ways in which these two organizational forms of institutional work manifest in our study, figure 34 below summarizes their characteristics as we have observed them across the two cases.

Figure 34. Organizational forms of institutional work and their characteristics in Venelles and Klagenfurt



(Source: author)

Through our empirical study, we have identified a set of characteristics that have led us to qualifying the organizational form of institutional work we observed as either predominantly top-down, or predominantly dispersed. The two organizational forms of institutional work can be distinguished in terms of involved institutional workers (their position, heterogeneity, intentions, institutional roles, and number), institutional work practices, adaptability of the institutional change, or the interactions of institutional workers.

These aspects are observed in different ways in the two cases we studied. Table 27 below provides more detailed insights into the **top-down organizational form** of institutional work and illustrates how and when it was predominant in Venelles and Klagenfurt.

Table 27. Top-down institutional work in Venelles and Klagenfurt

Characteristics of a top-down form of institutional work	Venelles		Klagenfurt	
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Institutional work mainly of central actors	X		X	
One clear intention is pursued	X			
Few different institutional roles and institutional work practices	X		X	
No changes to the initial idea for the institutional change				X
The institutional change is linear and occurs as planned	X			X
The institutional change is perceived as the central actor's project	X		X	X
Institutional work is aimed at obtaining support for the institutional change	X	X	X	
Institutional work consists of "big" and visible actions	X			
Institutional workers have access to power and resources	X	X	X	
Institutional work of actors in peripheral roles is secondary	X		X	X
Limited number of institutional workers			X	

(Source: author)

Table 27 clearly depicts a difference not only between the two cases, but also between the two phases each case consists of. Indeed, we can clearly see how a top-down organizational form of institutional work is predominant in the first phases of both cases. While the second phase of Venelles in Transition is predominantly dispersed (see table 28 below), top-down institutional work persists in Klagenfurt. There, it is in the first phase elements of a more dispersed form can also be observed.

Institutional work in both cases was indeed at first dominated by *central actors* with access to *power and resources*. The design phase did not include peripheral actors in either case. Rather, only the project leaders and external consultants engaged in institutional work. Consequently, *few different institutional roles* were involved. In Venelles, *one clear intention* was pursued by all involved actors at this stage: that of the mayor. As the catalyst, he alone performed the institutional work necessary to initiate the institutional change and continued to be the central actor of Venelles in Transition throughout the process. A “Transition Town” approach, typically bottom-up, was implemented in a top-down manner. He determined the direction that Venelles in Transition would take, and, in a traditionally bureaucratic way, his team followed and executed his decisions. In this sense, the mayor stayed true to his role as the political leader of the local public

organization and decided on the course for action on his own. His institutional work at this stage consisted of “*big*” and *visible actions*: through his structural work, he created the department that would manage Venelles in Transition and future co-creation projects.

Consequently, the design and deployment phase were shaped by the mayor’s intentions – establishing co-creation as a durable practice in Venelles – for which he sought his team’s *support*. Therefore, well into the public co-creation phase where workshops were held, institutional work was predominantly top-down, and co-creation was implemented in a *linear* way, always in line with the mayor’s intentions, and without the occurrence of unintended events and turns.

In the case of Klagenfurt, on the other hand, several *divergent intentions* clashed regarding the design of co-creation for which the consultant had a very different and more ambitious vision than the project leader, the city’s Sustainable Development department. *Negotiations* therefore shaped the design phase of Mission KS 30, where a constant back-and-forth led to compromises and concessions on both sides. If only a *handful of actors* were involved at this stage, all of which in a *central position*, their *heterogeneity* and their *different institutional roles* reinforced the *conflicting* nature of their institutional work.

The form that co-creation would take was therefore *shaped by their interactions*. The internal actors’ intention to keep co-creation small and restrict it to a project clashed with the organizer’s vision and led to a dilution of the co-creation design, reducing its scope in terms of depth and breadth. The catalyst and his team of internal supporters – the implementers – used their *powerful position* as project leaders to dilute co-creation. Consequently, institutional work resembled a mix of a top-down and a dispersed organizational form in this first phase of Mission KS 30.

Table 28 below summarizes the characteristics of a **dispersed organizational form** of institutional work. It shows that the second phase of Venelles in Transition was clearly dominated by a dispersed form, while in Klagenfurt, top-down institutional work persisted.

Table 28. Dispersed institutional work in Venelles and Klagenfurt

Characteristics of a dispersed form of institutional work	Venelles		Klagenfurt	
	<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>	<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>
Institutional work of heterogenous actors		X	X	X
Different intentions are pursued		X	X	X
Many different institutional roles and institutional work practices	X	X		X
Adaptability of the institutional change		X	X	
Unintended events and consequences		X		
Heterogenous institutional workers take ownership of the institutional change		X		
Institutional work includes mundane actions		X		X
Central and peripheral actors are involved in institutional work		X		X
Negotiations and compromise			X	
Conflicts between institutional workers with divergent intentions			X	
Higher number of institutional workers		X		X

(Source: author)

In both cases, *increased heterogeneity* of actors as well as a *higher number* of the latter could be observed throughout the second phase that included the deployment of co-creation. Consequently, *more diverse interests and intentions* were represented. In the case of Venelles, the initially planned co-creation approach was soon *adapted* to the participants' actual needs and expectations for the project. This was not the case in Klagenfurt where a rigid approach led to a decrease in motivation and active participation due to the complexity of the process. Indeed, the organizer pursued her initial plan in a *linear and non-flexible* manner rather than adapting it.

The organizer turned out to be the cornerstone of the deployment of co-creation. While the design of co-creation had been negotiated with a variety of actors earlier, her institutional work shaped its operationalization, the course of action, as well as the outcomes. *Other actors remained secondary*; even the participants and the representatives of the Sustainable Development department stayed in the background. Their institutional work was limited to implementing co-creation through their participation in the workshops. Thus, while a *high number* of heterogenous – *central and peripheral* – actors were involved in co-creation and pursued different intentions, the processes mostly rested on the *institutional work of a single actor*. Actors other than the organizer did not take ownership of the project; on the contrary, they perceived it as “her project”, acting as if they did the organizer a favor by participating.

In Venelles, as a matter of fact, citizens in their role of pivots have provoked the shift from a top-down organizational form of institutional work to one that was more dispersed.

Once they had *taken ownership of the project* and began to infuse co-creation with meaning, their institutional work was aimed at pushing the limits of the approach and its design. They seemed to be frustrated with the scope of co-creation, were eager to go further, and shared their dissatisfaction with the municipality. The institutional change, as planned by the mayor and his team, was subsequently adapted to their demands. This illustrates how the institutional work of a higher number of heterogenous actors – *central and peripheral* – with *different intentions* led to shifts in the trajectory of the implementation of co-creation. *Unintended events* such as the creation of the steering committee as a governance entity occurred due to this dispersed institutional work. However, institutional work also consisted of *more mundane actions* of all actors – for instance, the integration of collaborative working methods in the daily operations of the Sustainable Development department.

While certain top-down elements persisted and the municipality for example pre-selected the ideas on which the newly created steering committee could work, dispersed institutional work was predominant throughout this phase in Venelles. Rather than being monopolized by a central actor, power was more *decentralized*, and decision-making distributed among a broader range of actors. Venelles' mayor and his team did not seem to be scared of inviting a plurality of actors to participate in decision-making and had opened up the process to the entire local population to make it as broad as possible. Klagenfurt, on the other hand, displayed fear regarding the change that co-creation implied, and let in only a selected group of participants. Thereby, the scope of co-creation was deliberately kept small, and institutional work contained elements of a top-down form throughout the process. Participants did not make the project their own, but simply did as they were told.

RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION 3 – organizational forms of institutional work

The cross-case analysis of our findings regarding the third and final research question (“How do actors’ roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?”) allowed to identify two organizational forms of institutional work: top-down and dispersed institutional work. They are relatively distinct in one case (Venelles) and more intertwined in the other (Klagenfurt).

*In both cases, top-down institutional work can be observed in the first phase. It is even stronger in Venelles where institutional work is led by the mayor and marked by his important and visible actions. The intention to implement institutional change is visible in this case: without fear, Venelles decided to open up policy making to the local population. Over time, it is therefore possible for institutional work to become more dispersed as heterogenous actors get involved in the project and make it their own. A higher degree of **integration of the sense of co-creation** can be observed in Venelles as opposed to Klagenfurt. There, top-down institutional work persists throughout the entire project of which participants do not take ownership.*

*In both cases, the confrontation of heterogenous actors pursuing divergent intentions through their institutional work provoked shifts in the initially planned institutional change. The earlier stages of Venelles in Transition were characterized by a more traditionally bureaucratic approach and a shy attitude towards co-creation which was implemented through top-down institutional work. Once the planned public co-creation process was already over, involved citizens' increasing interest for more and deeper co-creation led to a pivotal point where the municipality was requested to release some control and allow for more extensive participation. Institutional work became more dispersed. Consequently, **the implementation of co-creation emerged from heterogenous actors' institutional work practices and institutional roles as they pursued divergent intentions.***

*In the case of Klagenfurt, different institutional roles, institutional work practices and divergent intentions collided in the beginning phase of the project where its design was negotiated, and its scope reduced due to the project leaders' fears associated with co-creation and their desire to maintain familiar practices. In this sense, **the implementation of co-creation was diluted through heterogenous actors' institutional work practices and institutional roles as they pursued divergent intentions.** Throughout the deployment phase, the institutional work of the organizer was essential and other actors' practices remained secondary. The case of Klagenfurt shows that the involvement of heterogeneous actors does not necessarily give rise to dispersed institutional work.*

*In sum, our findings suggest that **the durable implementation of co-creation in local public organizations requires a dispersed organizational form of institutional work and is incompatible with a pure top-down form.** Our study moreover shows that multiple organizational forms of institutional work are likely shape one single institutional change process: they might **co-exist** whereby elements of different forms can be observed at the same time, as it is the case in Klagenfurt; or we might be able to observe a **sequence** of organizational forms of institutional work whereby one form occurs after the other, as illustrated by the case of Venelles.*

Section 2: Discussion of institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of policy co-creation

In this section, we propose to discuss the findings of our empirical study with regard to the literature explored in chapters 1 and 2. The discussion of the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations through institutional work is organized in three stages, corresponding to the three research questions.

We first center our discussion around the micro-level of institutional work. Here, we argue for an acknowledgement of the messiness that characterizes the institutional work of heterogenous actors (research questions 1 and 2). Looking at institutional work practices (**section 2.1.1.**) we discuss the complexity of the latter and propose to cross types of institutional work practices with types of intentions to achieve a more fine-grained analysis. We also point out the importance of a diachronic approach to institutional work that allows to account for its emergent nature. Then, we look at actors' institutional roles (**section 2.1.2.**) and discuss the roles identified through our study with regard to existing literature. We moreover provide insights into the resources and competencies heterogenous institutional workers mobilize to pursue their intentions.

Finally, we move from the micro-level of individuals to the meso-level of the organization (research question 3). We introduce the notion of arenas of institutional work as the organizational setting in which heterogenous actors' institutional work takes place (**section 2.2.1.**). Then, we propose an integrative model of the organizational variations of these arenas of institutional work (**section 2.2.2.**). We discuss two variations observed through our study and explain the reasons for the absence of two others.

2.1. Acknowledging the messiness of institutional work (*discussion of RQ 1 & 2*)

This first section focuses on the micro-dynamics shaping institutional work and discusses our first and second research questions concerning actors' institutional work practices (RQ 1) and institutional roles (RQ 2). It is divided into two parts. They refer to the theoretical and conceptual framework of our doctoral thesis in order to highlight the theoretical and conceptual contributions. Respectively, we discuss how our findings enrich past work on institutional work practices (**section 2.1.1.**) and institutional roles (**section 2.1.2.**).

2.1.1. Understanding heterogenous actors' institutional work practices and intentions

Institutional work as a theoretical perspective concerns the actions and interactions of actors aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions, thereby paying attention to their practices, and less so the outcomes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). As actors may need to mobilize a variety of forms of institutional work to attain the desired outcome (Hempel et al., 2017), and unintended consequences potentially occur, linking practices to specific results seems difficult. Institutional work is therefore conceptualized as a set of practices rather than a linear process that follows a sequence of steps towards institutional change.

To date, institutional work tends to be explored from a macro-perspective (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) and we therefore know more about the field level than about individuals and how they shape institutional change through their practices (Smets et al., 2015). If individuals and their institutional work practices tend to receive little attention, the heterogeneity of actors and their intentions and practices have been outright ignored by most institutional work studies (Hempel et al., 2017). It is however essential to account for the diversity of institutional workers involved in a single institutional change process; especially so in our research context where the implementation of co-creation per definition implies the involvement of diverse actors. The latter are likely to pursue divergent intentions through a multiplicity of practices, whereby they most certainly mobilize different resources and competencies. Studying social-symbolic work more generally, Lawrence and Phillips (2019, p. 248) point out that "*combinations of different forms of social-symbolic work are likely to involve distinct motivations, practices, and effects*". Applying their idea to institutional work as one form of social-symbolic work, we assume that this is also the case *within* a process of institutional work involving heterogenous actors. As a matter of fact, "*research on institutional work has begun to take more seriously the idea that different people in communities and societies interact with institutions in different ways, with different resources and responsibilities, and different appreciations of the degree to which they can and should influence those institutions*" (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019, p. 207).

We therefore propose to discuss the findings of our study with regard to institutional work practices in two stages. First, we argue for the importance of crossing frameworks of institutional work practices and intentions (**section 2.1.1.1.**); then, we point out the value of a diachronic approach to institutional work (**section 2.1.1.2.**).

2.1.1.1. The complexity of institutional work practices and intentions

With respect to institutional work practices, past literature has developed a plethora of categorizations and typologies (see **chapter 2, section 2.3.**). For this study, we are most interested in institutional work at the micro-level since we investigate the institutional work practices of individual actors. In this regard, Cloutier et al. (2016) identify four forms of managerial institutional work in the context of reform implementation in the public sector: structural, conceptual, operational, and relational institutional work. These four forms are interrelated and do not occur in a linear manner, which points to the dynamic and complex nature of institutional change processes (Arnaud & Serval, 2020), and of actors' institutional work aimed at implementing and shaping such processes.

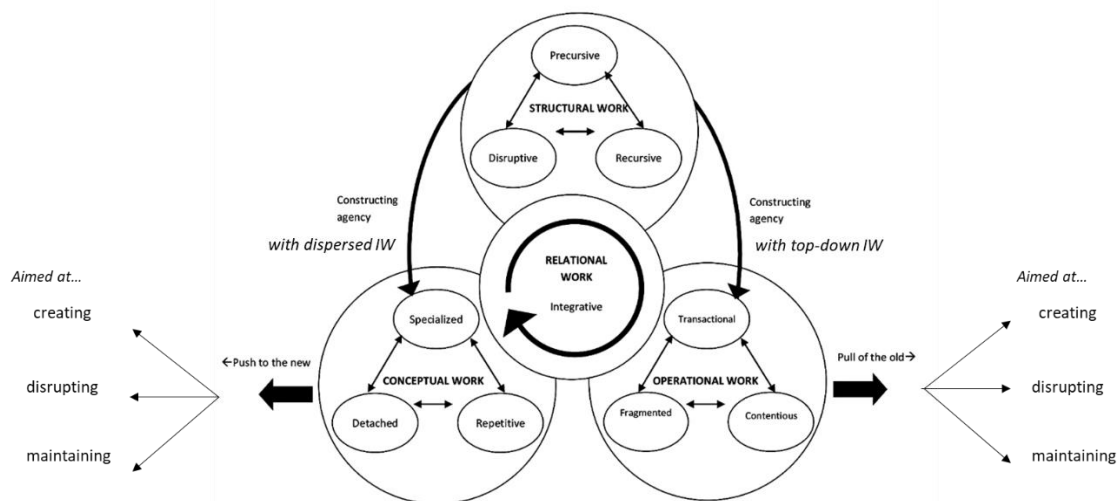
We therefore referred to this framework throughout the presentation of the findings of our empirical study (**chapter 4**). Basing our reflection on Cloutier et al.'s research is particularly relevant due to its encompassing nature that allows to study the institutional work process and actors' practices in their entirety by taking into consideration the diverse types of institutional work they are likely to engage in. By applying it to our research on heterogenous actors' institutional work, we extended the original framework which focused on public managers' institutional work. Indeed, while public managers are one set of institutional workers we study, other actors from the local political and civil society spheres and their institutional work are studied as well. In doing so, we account for the diversity and heterogeneity of their intentions and practices and respond to the call of Hampel et al. (2017) to study dispersed actors' institutional work.

Previously, the study of these four types of institutional work focused on structural, conceptual, operational, and relational work aimed at *creating* new institutions (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Cloutier et al., 2016). Our findings however suggest that the creation of institutional arrangements is not the only aim pursued by actors engaging in one or multiple of these institutional work practices. As a matter of fact, we found that actors can perform either one of these forms of institutional work as they seek to *create, maintain, or disrupt* institutions. To present the findings of our study, we therefore crossed the four types of institutional work proposed by Cloutier et al. (2016) with the three initial categories identified by Lawrence and Suddaby in 2006 (see figure 35 below). The latter represent the broad underlying goals and intentions of actors' institutional work: creating new institutional arrangements, but also disrupting or maintaining them.

These two typologies of institutional work are therefore complementary as they and mobilizing both of them allows for a more nuanced investigation of actors' institutional work at a micro-level. As Breit et al. (2018, p. 31) observe, Cloutier et al.'s typology

“complement[s] the framework of Lawrence and Suddaby by describing a concrete set of activities that are performed by actors at different levels in the reform processes”. **By crossing the two, we can account for the variety of practices and intentions that co-exist as heterogenous actors engage in institutional work.** Based on our findings, the adapted model moreover suggests that institutional work can occur through both a dispersed and a top-down approach, depending on the configurations of actors and roles that are observed.

Figure 35. Crossing institutional work practices and intentions



(Source: adapted from Cloutier et al., 2016)

In our study of actors’ institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation, we find that **structural** institutional work is aimed at creating a new institutional arrangement, i.e., establishing co-creation as a new institution, by providing the organizational conditions for it. While structural work laid the foundations for other forms of institutional work in the case of Venelles, it was absent in the case of Klagenfurt, where the remainder of the implementation of co-creation was marked by obstacles and resistance, and overall less smooth. Hence, our findings confirm that structural work is “*on the critical path*” (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 270) of the implementation of institutional change, and therefore necessarily also related to the intention of creating new institutions.

Conceptual institutional work, on the other hand, as our study shows, can indeed be associated with different intentions. The institutional work practices that are of conceptual nature were aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement, but also at maintaining and disrupting existing ones. In this respect, narratives for instance are not only developed to support the emerging institutional

arrangement of policy co-creation and create legitimacy for it, but also to disrupt established practices and routines in order to make space for new ones, or, on the other hand, to stress their benefits and maintain them. Moreover, as the case of Venelles shows, actors perform conceptual institutional work to maintain certain practices that support the introduction of new ones. In this case, the shared perception of Venelles as a historically active municipality in the field of sustainable development was used to facilitate the implementation of co-creation by insisting on the need for innovative ideas.

Then, we find that **operational** institutional work, too, can be mobilized to pursue the creation as well as the maintenance and disruption of institutions. Our cross-case analysis shows that this is the case in both organizations we studied. The involved actors performed a variety of concrete practices that shaped the implementation of co-creation according to the goals they pursued. The fragmented and contentious nature of institutional work (Cloutier et al., 2016) is therefore especially prevalent in settings that involve heterogenous actors with divergent intentions. Its transactional dimension was visible in the case of Klagenfurt in particular where actors with conflicting intentions diluted the co-creation process through their extensive negotiations about its scope. This illustrates that when operational work practices aimed at creating and maintaining collide, the resulting institutional change might be marginal due to some actors' concessions and compromises, and others' desire to adhere to existing norms and practices. Especially if maintenance work is performed by actors in the more powerful roles, their institutional work might "drown out" the other actors' efforts and reduce the scope of institutional change (cf. Bisschops & Beunen, 2019).

Finally, our findings broaden our understanding of **relational** institutional work and suggest that associated practices and intentions can be manifold. Predominantly aimed at establishing trust (between the consultants and the municipality, between the municipality and citizens), relational work indeed underpinned the other forms of institutional work as Cloutier et al. (2016) observed in their original typology. Trust was an essential resource for the implementation of co-creation as it helped build acceptability and legitimacy for the new approach. A particularity with regard to relational institutional work could be observed in our study: the use of space was essential, especially in the case of Venelles.

This invites to consider the use and the role of **space** in institutional dynamics (de Vaujany et al., 2019) and more particularly with regard to relational institutional work. Our findings show that space was a crucial element of actors' relational work practices: it was used to promote the co-creation project and increase its visibility⁷⁰. The

⁷⁰ In this regard, the table summarizing our observations of co-creation events in Venelles (table 15, chapter 3, section 2.2.) includes a column specifying the time and place of the event, since the municipality paid particular attention to this aspect.

public space in a literal understanding⁷¹ was invested in different ways: through outdoor co-creation events or booths providing information about the project at other events; by directly interacting with people at the local farmers market to encourage them to participate; or by going from door to door to mobilize and inform people about the project. However, when the local population was asked to invest “the municipality’s” space, that is, attend events organized at the town hall’s premises, space negatively affected the implementation of co-creation. Consequently, the importance of “going where people already are” was frequently pointed out by actors in the case of Venelles and stresses the importance of the public space for the relational institutional work necessary to implement co-creation as a new institutional arrangement. In this respect, space as a material element in institutional work can be used to make complex and abstract approaches such as co-creation more tangible and anchor them in actors’ reality (Meyer et al., 2018). Space can therefore be a powerful tool of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2013) to promote the institutional change and allow for actors to familiarize themselves with the emerging institutional arrangement. Moreover, recent research shows that it can itself be the target of actors’ institutional work and therefore be shaped by the latter (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Tiszone et al., 2019) or, in turn, affect actors’ institutional work (Serval et al., 2022).

In sum, our findings show that different intentions guide the involved actors’ structural, conceptual, operational, and relational work. Not always are their institutional work practices aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement. Depending on their interests, actors also mobilize these different forms of institutional work to the end of maintaining or, more rarely in the two cases we studied, disrupting existing institutional arrangements. Thus, we suggest that while the four types of institutional work are essential for actors’ work aimed at creating new institutional arrangements and were mobilized to this end in the two cases, they can also be used to pursue other intentions. It is therefore essential to account for the different ends to which these practices can be mobilized to paint a truthful picture of **the complex, often messy, and sometimes conflicting institutional work performed by heterogenous actors.**

2.1.1.2. For a diachronic understanding of institutional work

In this regard it seems essential to develop a **diachronic understanding of institutional work** allowing to account for the different configurations of institutional work practices and intentions that might occur within a single process, as well as their evolution and interactions. From a “life cycle” perspective of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), the latter occurs in relatively linear and structured phases from institutional emergence to maintenance and destruction (Ben Slimane & Leca, 2014). However, we find that actors do not necessarily pursue one and the same intention throughout the entire

⁷¹ Habermas (1991) defines the public sphere as an area in social life where actors can come together to discuss and identify societal issues, and thereby influence political action. While this is not unrelated to our research on the implementation of policy co-creation, we do not refer to this notion here but to a literal understanding of the materiality of public space.

process of institutional work. Our findings indeed suggest that actors switch between intentions or hold different intentions at the same time. For instance, they might engage in institutional work aimed at establishing co-creation as a new institution, while still holding on to certain existing institutional arrangements. Rather than adhering to a seemingly linear and relatively structured “life-cycle” vision of institutional work, we suggest that it is important to **take a non-linear approach and account for the consecutive and/or parallel existence of multiple institutional work practices with different underlying intentions**. The fact that these intentions might evolve over time adds another layer of complexity. Rather than attempting to put a label on actors and categorizing their institutional work as *either* aimed at creating *or* maintaining *or* disrupting certain institutional arrangements, we suggest that a more flexible and nuanced approach is necessary to grasp the complexity of institutional work.

In this regard, our findings show that actors tend to juggle with different institutional work practices to pursue their intention(s). In cases like ours, where actors are unlikely to initiate radical changes right away due to the inertia that characterizes the public sector and its organizations, we find that they juggle with different intentions and institutional work practices to implement a new institutional arrangement. Moreover, these actors must get familiar with the new co-creation approach which implies a paradigmatic shift (Torfing et al., 2021) for local public organizations dominated by a bureaucratic vision. As they are exposed to co-creation and get acquainted with its underlying principles, the intentions they truly wish to pursue emerge crystallize over time. Their initial intention with regard to the institutional change might therefore gradually shift as they interact with others, and potential risks and benefits of the change become clearer to them. In this regard, a “**tipping point**”⁷² where the organizational form of institutional work, based on practices, intentions, and roles, changes, might occur at some point of the process, as particularly the case of Venelles and the pivotal role of citizens show.

An example of a tipping point can be drawn from the case of Venelles and citizens’ institutional work. Early in the process, their institutional work was mostly operational and aimed at implementing the approach as it had been planned by the municipality. In doing so, they did not necessarily pursue the goal of establishing co-creation as an institutional arrangement but saw it as a stand-alone project they were happy to take part in; thereby they maintained the status quo with entrenched hierarchical relationships between citizens and their government. Institutional work was top-down and led by a central actor: the mayor. He performed institutional work to durably implement co-creation: laying the foundations for the implementation of co-creation through his structural work, he engaged in conceptual and relational work throughout the entire process to pursue this intention. Towards the end of Venelles in Transition, however, it was citizens’ structural institutional work aimed at taking co-creation to the next level

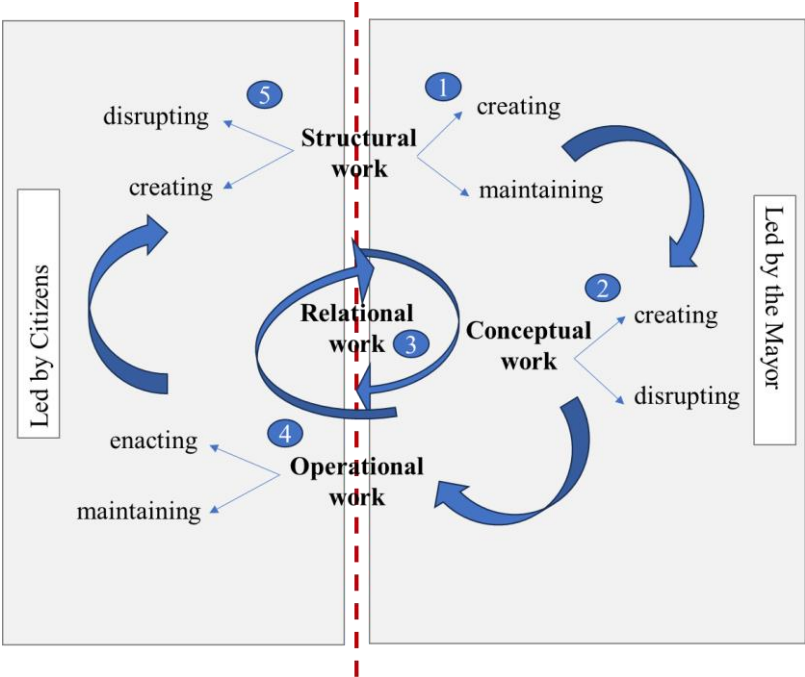
⁷² In innovation theory, the notion of the tipping point has been conceptualized by Everett Rogers in 1962 in his seminal book “Diffusion of Innovations”. In his understanding, the tipping point is the breaking point in the diffusion of an innovation: this is when the majority of potential consumers can be reached, and the innovation can become a mass-market success.

and making it last that eventually deepened the process and changed its trajectory. Institutional work thus became more dispersed after the tipping point where citizens' role changed.

This example also highlights the importance of leaving space for actors' institutional work to evolve. It shows how peripheral actors can engage in unexpected forms of institutional work and shape the trajectory of the institutional change process. It moreover illustrates the complex mix of institutional work practices and underlying intentions with which actors juggle as they shape the implementation of co-creation as a new institutional arrangement in a constraining environment.

This illustration of a "tipping point" dynamic in institutional work is shown in figure 36 below. This figure depicts how actors' institutional work practices and intentions are interrelated and shape one another, ultimately provoking a tipping point in the institutional change process where institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation is led by local citizens rather than the mayor. While this illustration might indicate a certain order of institutional work practices, as we have demonstrated throughout the presentation and discussion of our findings, this is meant to show the dominant practices and intentions that lead to a tipping point. Actors are likely to mobilize them in parallel or go back and forth between them.

Figure 36. The tipping point dynamic in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation



(Source: author)

CONCLUSION - DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION 1

To discuss the findings regarding our first research question about actors' institutional work practices, we built on two main points. First, we proposed to cross two typologies of institutional work in order to provide more detailed insights into what it is that heterogenous institutional workers do, and at the same time consider their underlying intentions. While various institutional work practices have been studied in the past, they were mostly related to the intention of creating new institutional arrangements (Arnaud & Serval, 2020; Cloutier et al., 2016). Through our study, we propose to account for the diversity of intentions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) that may underpin institutional work practices within the same institutional change process.

If past studies show how actors with divergent intentions are able to overcome their differences and engage in collective action (Wijen & Ansari, 2007), we account for the complexity that the heterogeneity of actors entails when their practices and intentions co-exist and collide without giving rise to collective action. Rather than assuming that heterogenous actors' institutional work converges towards a shared perception of the institutional change, our study contributes to a more distributed understanding of institutional work in complex settings (Boon et al., 2019).

In this respect, we also suggested a diachronic understanding of institutional work that allows to account for the evolution and change of institutional work practices and intentions over time. As opposed to a vision of institutional work based on the "life cycle" of institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) or the division of institutional work into a sequence of phases (Battilana et al., 2009; Ben Slimane & Leca, 2014), the findings of our study invite to take a more nuanced approach. Hence, we argue that especially when heterogenous actors are involved, institutional work tends to be iterative, emergent, and messy, marked by a constant back-and-forth between actors and intentions, rather than linear and foreseeable. In this regard, we suggest that a "tipping point" dynamic might occur and shape the trajectory of institutional work and the institutional change it is aimed at.

At a micro-level of institutional scholarship, both of these considerations enable us to explore the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors as they pursue evolving, divergent, and sometimes conflicting intentions. In this sense, our study allows us to answer to calls for insights into individual actors' institutional work practices to explore the micro-dynamics of institutional processes (cf. Schilke, 2018). We thus contribute to opening the "black box" of institutional dynamics that include heterogenous actors (Staggs et al., 2022). In a context of Grand Challenges more specifically, we have shown through the lenses of institutional work that "mobilization in messy issues will, in and of itself, be messy, with uncertain results" (Klag & Langley, 2023, p. 39).

2.1.2. Developing a more nuanced understanding of institutional workers and their roles

The second research question was concerned with actors' institutional roles. In line with Lawrence and Phillips (2019, p. 213) we understand institutional roles as "*public identities that people take on, that shape their behavior, and that shape the responses of others to that behavior*". They are "*roles that can be taken on and abandoned by different actors in different ways in different contexts*" (p. 293). In our review of the literature, we have identified a set of six institutional roles actors might take on as they engage in institutional work: the institutional entrepreneur, the opportunity creator, the supporter, the opponent, the maintainer, and the consumer (see **chapter 2, section 3.2.**). For each role, main characteristics, resources, and competencies, as well as the institutional work practices they are most likely to perform were identified.

The aim of our study was to conduct a more fine-grained analysis of institutional workers' roles. In this respect, we identified a set of 18 more detailed roles. For the sake of clarity, to discuss them, we propose to refer to the three broad categories of institutional roles developed by Lawrence and Phillips (2019), each of which is associated with a dominant intention: (1) institutional entrepreneurs whose institutional work is aimed at creating institutions; (2) institutional caretakers whose institutional work is aimed at maintaining institutions; and (3) institutional troublemakers whose institutional work is aimed at disrupting institutions.

If our empirical study allowed to corroborate and confirm the presence of such roles in institutional work processes, it has also enabled us to refine these categories and identify more precise institutional roles. In this sense, we argue that the three categories proposed by Lawrence and Phillips ought to be treated as loose "meta-categories" of institutional roles, which are constituted of a number of context-dependent and more specific roles. Moreover, we add the meta-category of supporters which has proven to be a critical category of roles in both cases explored for our empirical study. We will now discuss each of these meta-categories and the contingent roles we identified through our studies (**section 2.1.2.1.**). Then, we propose to discuss the resources and competencies actors in these roles mobilized for their institutional work (**section 2.1.2.2.**)

2.1.2.1. The institutional roles of actors involved in the implementation of co-creation

In this section we propose to discuss how our findings enrich past work on the three meta-categories of institutional entrepreneurs, institutional caretakers, and institutional troublemakers.

The meta-category of institutional entrepreneurs

Within the meta-category of the institutional entrepreneur, we observe several roles of actors with different positions in the field. The **catalyst** as a central actor, the **organizer**

as an intermediary actor, as well as the **pivots** and **opportunists** as peripheral actors. The main intention of actors taking on these roles was indeed to create new institutional arrangements. However, the roles we observed do not fulfill all the criteria of the role of the institutional entrepreneur as identified in the literature (see for example Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004). They are not necessarily “hypermuscular” actors (Lawrence et al., 2009) single-handedly achieving institutional change. Rather, their institutional work is connected to that of other actors whom they rely on to work towards the implementation of co-creation as a new institutional arrangement.

In this regard, the **catalyst** is not even actively involved or present throughout the entire process of the implementation of co-creation. The institutional work of actors in this role is essential for the creation of the opportunity for institutional change, and they act as the – sometimes invisible – leaders behind the change project. However, as opposed to the institutional entrepreneurs depicted in most literature, they leave the operational aspects of implementing change to their team of supporters. The role of the catalyst goes beyond that of the opportunity creator identified in the literature (Alvarez et al., 2015; Delbridge & Edwards, 2008) in that catalysts have an interest in the institutional change and play a role in its implementation, whereas this is not necessarily the case for opportunity creators. We moreover observed that the institutional work of the catalyst is important for the coherence of the entire process. Especially when heterogeneous actors are involved, the catalyst acts as the cornerstone and sets the tone for the institutional change. In this sense, our findings also show that when the catalyst is not completely convinced of the institutional change which they made possible, its scope is likely to be reduced.

The **organizer** as the role of an intermediary actor is associated with the meta-category of the institutional entrepreneur as they pursue the goal of establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement. The role of the organizer – taken on by a consultant in charge of organizing the co-creation process – turns out to be essential when the institutional change was not completely supported by the catalyst who made it possible. In this case, the implementation of co-creation takes shape through the institutional work of the actor occupying this role. Since they are in a less powerful position than the catalyst and moreover external to the organizer, the institutional work of the actor taking on this role is however likely to be hindered by obstacles and resistance.

The institutional roles of the pivots and the opportunists are different. The role of the **pivots** is associated with the category of the institutional entrepreneur since the institutional work of actors occupying this role shapes the institutional change. It determines the form the change, i.e., the implementation of co-creation, ultimately takes. While this role makes its entrance at a later stage of the process of implementing co-creation, it defines its trajectory. This illustrates how the intentions of actors can evolve over time: before taking on the role of pivots, the institutional work of these actors was not necessarily aimed at establishing policy co-creation as a new institutional

arrangement, but rather at maintaining the status quo where citizen participation occurs sporadically.

Finally, the actors in the role of **opportunists** act as institutional entrepreneurs in that they identify and seize the opportunity for the creation of an independent local project. Their institutional work occurs in parallel to that of the other actors and it not directly aimed at integrating co-creation in the local public organization's set of institutional arrangements but spur the involvement of civil society in public policymaking in a broader sense through their project.

The meta-category of institutional caretakers

Two institutional roles identified in our literature review (the maintainers and, to some degree, the consumers) can be associated with the meta-category of the institutional caretaker. The findings of our study allow to further decline this category into the following more precise roles, all of which are in peripheral position: they are **implementers, maintainers, reality-checkers, guides, active followers, and silent actors**.

The institutional work of the actors occupying these roles was mainly aimed at maintaining established norms and practices. This can partly be explained by the uncertainties that come with the implementation of new and unfamiliar co-creation practices and the ambiguity regarding all involved parties' roles and responsibilities (Bisschops & Beunen, 2019). A natural response therefore seems to be to resort to well-known institutional arrangements and to seek to maintain them.

The **implementers** were in charge of the logistical aspects of the implementation of co-creation. They were actively involved in its operationalization; however, they did not contribute to establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement, but rather to diluting these practices until they resembled existing ones. One of the implementers was called "the professional carer"⁷³ whose work was necessary for the realization of the project. While this referred to the actor in question taking care of the project and its implementation rather than him preserving established institutions, what he ultimately did resembled the role of an institutional caretaker.

The roles of the **reality-checkers** and the **guides** are associated with this meta-category because the aim of their interventions during the co-creation process was to reinforce established practices and roles rather than allowing for a veritable co-creation process. Their operational institutional work contributed to further diluting the co-creation process: they guided participants rather than letting them co-create freely. The role of the **active followers** was thus shaped and restricted by their institutional work. Active followers' institutional work was limited to applying instructions, whereby they participated in the operationalization of co-creation on the one hand, but on the other

⁷³ Translated from German "*der hauptberufliche Kümmerer*" (source: interview with M9-K)

hand also maintained entrenched hierarchical relations where citizens and particularly so young people are subject to other actors' actions.

Finally, the institutional roles of the **maintainers**, and the **silent actors** are part of the institutional caretaker meta-category. Their behavior was more passive than that of other actors. As a matter of fact, while silent actors in Klagenfurt were present at the co-creation events, maintainers and silent actors in Venelles were not. The role of the silent actors sticks out. These actors have the capacity to act and shape the institutional change, but do not intend to. It is merely through their presence or absence that they endow – or not – the institutional change with legitimacy. Their passive behavior, refusing to immerse themselves in co-creation, can be understood as agency aimed at preserving existing institutions. This is in line with McCarthy and Glozer's (2022) conceptualization of "silence as agency". In this understanding, silence must however be temporary to still be institutional work; a complete retreat would not qualify as agentic behavior. The actors taking on the role of silent actors did not completely retreat in the case of Klagenfurt: while they were "silent" a lot of the time, their institutional work aimed at maintaining was sometimes more visible.

Finally, if past studies show that institutional maintenance is often pursued by powerful actors in a field who have access to power and resource and seek to keep hold of it (Blanc & Huault, 2010; Currie et al., 2012), our findings suggest that institutional maintainers are not necessarily in such positions. Rather, their intention to maintain the status quo is related to the entrenched nature of the established institutional arrangements they are familiar with and know how to enact: less uncertainty is associated with established practices, roles, and norms (Zucker, 1977) than with emerging ones.

The meta-category of institutional troublemakers

The meta-category of institutional troublemakers is less prevalent in our study. Our findings allow to identify two institutional roles associated with this category: the **pivots** who can also be found in the above-mentioned category of institutional entrepreneurs; and the **challengers**.

The role of the **pivots** has already been explained above. With regard to the category of institutional troublemakers, our findings show that pivots, through their institutional work aimed at extending and deepening the co-creation process, shape the trajectory and the form of co-creation. In this sense, they act as troublemakers – however, they do not disrupt an established institutional arrangement, but an emerging one. Actors taking on the institutional role of **challengers** pursued similar intentions but to a lesser degree. While the pivots veritably aimed to change the scope of the co-creation process and were interested in it becoming a durable practice within the organization, the challengers lived up to their name and challenged the specific tools and methods used during co-creation workshops, questioned other participants' contributions, and the overall approach on which co-creation was based. Neither of these actors are opponents seeking to prevent or undermine the institutional change or completely alter its course (as identified for

example by Alvarez et al., 2015; Ben Slimane, 2012; Creed et al., 2002; Dover & Lawrence, 2010); however, the actors occupying these two roles performed institutional work aimed in one way or another at disrupting the emergence of co-creation as an institutional arrangement, and shaping its trajectory.

The meta-category of supporters

To the three meta-categories proposed by Lawrence and Phillips (2019) we add a fourth: the supporters. The institutional role of supporters has been identified in our literature review, and manifests in different ways in the findings of our empirical study. The importance of actors providing legitimacy for the institutional change initiated by an institutional entrepreneur and facilitating the institutional work of the latter has already been stressed by DiMaggio (1988) in his ground-breaking article on institutional entrepreneurs. While it has been found that supporters' institutional work is not always aimed at helping institutional entrepreneurs but can also be aimed at supporting those who oppose the institutional change (Ben Slimane, 2012), our findings show that those who take on supporting roles do support the intended institutional change project. They thus act as "subsidiary actors" as observed by DiMaggio (1988).

In this sense, our study allows to identify numerous institutional roles: they are the **implementers**, the **engine**, the **organizer**, the **experts**, the **supporters**, the **helping hand**, the **legitimacy providers**, the **active followers**, and the **mediators**. While the importance of supporters being in central positions in order to influence and mobilize other actors has been pointed out (Delacour & Leca, 2017), our findings suggest that they are in intermediary and peripheral positions rather than in central ones. Many of these roles have already been explained in the above-mentioned meta-categories which shows that they might pursue different intentions. Overall, actors in these roles perform institutional work that supports the implementation of co-creation practices. They were more (implementers, engine, experts, supporters, active followers) or less involved (helping hand, mediators, legitimacy providers) in the operationalization of co-creation, and the extent of their institutional work varied. The degree to which they supported the idea of establishing co-creation as a new institutional arrangement differed, too, but ultimately, the institutional work of actors in all of these roles contributed to the implementation of co-creation. Those actors who initiated and/or led the implementation of co-creation, i.e., the catalysts and the organizer, would not have been able to pursue this institutional change single-handedly since most of the operational aspects were handed over to the supporters, or depended on them.

While the role of supporting actors in institutional work has been somewhat neglected in past literature which shines the spotlight in "heroic" institutional entrepreneurs who single-handedly implement change (Lawrence et al., 2009), our findings emphasize their

importance. This is illustrated by the number of supporting roles observed in our study: of a total of 17 observed institutional roles, nine fall in the category of supporters⁷⁴.

2.1.2.2. The resources and competencies associated with institutional roles

Most of past research has focused on the enabling conditions that spur the institutional work of institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009; Battilana & Leca, 2009). While these findings partly also apply to other actors' institutional work and the resources and competencies they can mobilize to pursue their intentions, little is known about the conditions that facilitate their more "mundane" institutional work. In our study, we observed numerous types of resources and competencies the involved actors drew on to engage in institutional work. They corroborate those identified in our review of the literature (see **chapter 2, section 3.1.**), while also enriching past findings and adapting them to actors other than powerful institutional entrepreneurs. The resources and competencies we identified are mostly located at the individual level and concern (1) actors' skills, (2) actors' environment and position in the field, as well as (3) several factors related to the context of policy co-creation.

Institutional workers' skills

First, actors' skills seem to be the most important resources and competencies they rely on to pursue their intentions through institutional work. This confirms past literature where the importance of institutional entrepreneurs' reflexivity (Battilana, 2006), and social skill (Fligstein, 1997, 2001) which can be further declined into political (Garud et al., 2002) and discursive (Alt & Craig, 2016; Battilana et al., 2009) skills has been emphasized. Emotional competences have been identified as well (Ben Slimane & Leca, 2014). We propose to divide actors' skills into three categories: personal skills, professional skills, and relational skills.

Personal skills, besides reflexivity which is a prerequisite for institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), includes the ability of institutional workers to be forward-thinking and proactive. These skills were especially important for the actors who put co-creation on the agenda and participated in its design. Moreover, commitment and persuasiveness were important personal skills for these actors who acted as the drivers behind the institutional change and needed to mobilize others.

In a similar vein, adaptability was important. Our study illustrates the importance of adaptability well: in Venelles, the consultants were able to make last-minute adjustments in the methods they used and also adapted the general principles and goals of co-creation to the diverse participants and their needs and expectations. Ultimately, this led to a deeper and more extensive co-creation process since participants adhered to the idea of the institutional change. In Klagenfurt, besides from the initial dilution of the co-creation

⁷⁴ Some of these roles fall in one of the other three categories as well, while some are purely supporting roles.

approach, no such adaptations were made, which negatively impacted participants' comprehension of the process, their motivation, and consequently the outcomes of the process. Adaptability thus proves to be an essential skill for institutional workers who operate in settings marked by heterogeneity of actors. It goes beyond adapting the vocabulary used to frame the institutional change and the discursive skills this requires (Alt & Craig, 2016; Battilana et al., 2009), but rather implies adjustments of the institutional change itself due to divergent intentions.

Professional skills refer to institutional workers' technical expertise and professional experience (Ben Slimane and Leca, 2014, observe the importance of institutional workers' social and technical knowledge in this regard). These skills were above all related to the content of co-creation and the contributions they were able to make in terms of proposals for concrete policy measures. Professional expertise and experience also affected institutional workers' perceptions of their legitimacy to co-create and therefore shaped whether or not they actively participated in implementing co-creation. The importance of knowledge acquired prior to co-creation to feel legitimate to participate is illustrated by the example of one participant in the case of Venelles: she declared that she felt isolated and not in the right place when she noticed that all other participants seemed to be qualified to share their opinions on sustainable development because of their professional expertise⁷⁵. Competencies acquired through professional experience, education, and professional training were thus not only important to propose concrete ideas in the co-creation workshops, but also to feel legitimate to engage in institutional work aimed at implementing co-creation.

Moreover, seniority in the organization (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006) was observed as a resource actors drew on. Their seniority in the respective organization and/or position allows them to be able to rely on a well-established network. It moreover provides them with extensive knowledge about the organization and its functioning, which they can use to their advantage as they perform institutional work (Suddaby et al., 2016). Finally, the authority actors possess in their professional environment can be conducive to their institutional work. Actors in positions of authority tend to be confronted with less resistance (Battilana et al., 2009) which facilitates their institutional work as they pursue their interests. In our study, the use of authority as a resource for institutional work can be observed not only with regard to central and powerful actors; peripheral actors, too, rely on their authority to perform their institutional work. This was the case for the high school teachers participating in Mission KS 30 who used their authority to maintain the hierarchical relationship they have with their students.

The third set of skills we identified through our study concerns **relational skills**. The emotional competencies observed by Ben Slimane and Leca (2014) fall into this category. These skills prove to be essential to obtain other actors' trust. Trust was identified as a key enabling condition for institutional work especially in a public sector marked by a

⁷⁵ Source: interview with C5-V

decrease of citizens' trust in their government (Schmidhuber et al., 2021). Consequently, in order to establish co-creation as a new institutional arrangement, trust must be built. This does not only concern the relationship between citizens and the local public organization even though trust is a prerequisite for their participation in co-creation (Fledderus, 2018). But trust must also be established between those who put co-creation on the agenda, and those who design and implement it.

Our study shows that in local public organizations lacking experience with co-creation, external actors tend to be brought in to support the organization. These consultants must acquire the organization's trust in order to be able to implement co-creation since this approach is unfamiliar and might spark apprehension and resistance. Besides trust, good relationships with other involved actors are an important resource for institutional work. These actors include both co-creation participants and organization-internal actors whose contribution is necessary for the implementation of co-creation. Being on good terms with the other parties involved in co-creation can facilitate actors' institutional work and reduce the resistance they might otherwise be confronted with as they pursue their intentions.

Moreover, empathy as a relational skill was helpful, too, and used to adapt the discourse to the respective audience. Especially in a co-creation context where multiple life realities collide, it is important for institutional workers to be empathetic in order to reach the diverse participants and mobilize them.

Environment and position in the field

The second set of resource and competencies concerns institutional workers' environment and position in the field. Past research on enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship has emphasized the importance of actors' social position (Battilana, 2006) and stressed that a central position gives access to the power and resources necessary to implement institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) or maintain institutional arrangements that benefit them (Blanc & Huault, 2010). Actors' positions in the field condition the degree of pressure they are subject to, their socialization and their ability to act despite existing institutions (Battilana, 2006). In this regard, we identify three categories of resources and competencies: actors' position in the field, their professional and personal environment, and the support system they can rely on.

First, our study corroborates past findings on the importance of a central **position in the field** to be able to pursue institutional change. Institutional workers in *central* positions are able to put the institutional change they desire on the agenda and give it the shape that best corresponds to their interests. Despite the resistance they might encounter, actors in central positions can pursue the institutional change according to their intentions since they are in a position that endows them with the power to do so. Besides access to power, central actors also have easier access to the resources necessary for the

implementation of the institutional change, and can decide how to use the financial, human, or material resources they dispose of.

However, our study also confirms past findings that emphasize the benefits of being in a *peripheral* position (Coule & Patmore, 2013; Garud et al., 2002; Leca et al., 2008; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). In this regard, the power of the collective seems to be the most important resource for institutional workers. Without necessarily gathering in formal groups (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022; Perner & Skjølvik, 2018) or engaging in collective action (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006), as has been pointed out by past research, institutional workers that pursue similar intentions can alter the trajectory of the institutional change. As a matter of fact, dispersed actors sharing similar intentions might be able to put pressure on those who decide on the course of the institutional change, i.e., the scope of co-creation in the case of our research. Even if their institutional work remains dispersed rather than unified, the “tyranny of the majority” (Habermas, 1991) can enable actors, as peripheral as they may be, to pursue their intentions and engage in institutional work.

Especially actors in central position are able to rely on their **environment** to perform institutional work and pursue their intentions. Both their professional and personal networks can support institutional workers’ efforts aimed at implementing or shaping the institutional change (cf. Ben Slimane & Leca, 2014). Actors in their environment can provide legitimacy or resources that are required to spur and sustain the change. In this sense, the **support** institutional workers obtain from this environment can be a key resource for them. The importance of the institutional role of supporters has been discussed in the previous section. This role can represent a resource for actors occupying other more central institutional roles. At a strategic level, the support from other central actors within the organization or in its direct or broader environment can be a driver of institutional work. At a more operational level, this support might come from more peripheral actors within the organization. In the context of our study, the support from consultants and project partners was also essential in this regard.

Contextual factors related to the implementation of co-creation

Finally, several contextual factors specifically related to the institutional change pursued through actors’ institutional work in our study – the implementation of policy co-creation in local public organizations – are identified as resources. In this regard, the importance of mobilizing a **framework** for co-creation that is already well established at a broader level must be pointed out. As a matter of fact, for organizations that have no experience with co-creation, inscribing co-creation in a wider movement seems to be the most secure way to initiate this institutional change. The use of a global framework such as the UN SDGs as a setting for co-creation, or the justification of co-creation through the participation in an EU-wide program present legitimate settings for a first co-creation process. Finally, when co-creation is part of a funded **project**, the financial resources provided for it through the project grant can spur institutional work since the financial aspect does not present an obstacle, or less so.

Table 29 below summarizes the resources and competences that heterogenous actors can mobilize to engage in institutional work.

Table 29. Enabling conditions for heterogenous actors’ institutional work

	Enabling conditions for heterogenous actors’ institutional work
Skills	<p>Personal skills: reflexivity, forward-thinking, proactive, adaptability, commitment, persuasiveness.</p> <p>Professional skills: technical expertise, professional experience, seniority, authority, competencies acquired through education or professional training.</p> <p>Relational skills: gaining key actors’ trust, good relationships with participants and internal actors, empathy.</p>
Position and environment	<p>Position: central: access to resources, powerful; peripheral: collective power of dispersed actors to put pressure on central actors.</p> <p>Environment: relying on professional and personal network.</p> <p>Support: support from internal and external central actors (strategic level), internal team of supporters (operational level), project partner’s commitment.</p>
Contextual factors	Globally/nationally accepted framework as a legitimate setting for co-creation, project funding.

(Source: author)

CONCLUSION - DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION 2

*In light of the critiques of an understanding of institutional workers' roles that is limited to their social position in the field (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) where they are characterized as either central or peripheral actors (Furnari, 2016; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Leblebici et al., 1991), we propose a more **nuanced approach to institutional roles**. This perspective sheds light on **the complexity and the dynamics of institutional roles** as we suggest that actors are not confined to one single role, but can change roles; moreover, roles and their intentions and practices can evolve over time. **It allows for a more fine-grained and holistic analysis of the institutional roles actors take on in institutional work.***

*In addition to proposing a more detailed approach to institutional roles, we also turn the spotlight on **the crucial role of supporters**, one that has been identified in the early stages of institutional entrepreneurship research (cf. DiMaggio, 1988), but neglected since. The new meta-category of supporters once more stresses the need to look beyond the dichotomy of central and peripheral roles whereby central roles tend to be portrayed as more conducive to institutional work (Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009). As a matter of fact, actors in supporting roles are most often in peripheral positions, but their institutional work is visible and crucial.*

*Our understanding of institutional workers as **silent actors** enriches existing literature where actors in the role of consumers are perceived as relatively active, mobilizing in groups and using their power as the "market" for the outcomes of institutional change to affect the latter (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). In addition to providing new insights into the role of consumers in institutional work, our study also provides a more fine-grained understanding of the role of maintainers (Currie et al., 2012; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Montgomery & Dacin, 2020; Wright et al., 2021), and introduces the role of the silent actors.*

*It must however be pointed out that the relationship between institutional roles, institutional work practices, and intentions is not straightforward: we cannot assume that each role can be ascribed one clearly defined intention. Over time, actors might preserve their institutional role but pursue different intentions, mobilize a variety of practices, and shape and re-interpret their roles. **We therefore suggest thinking about these roles as a loose framework that leaves space for the intentions and institutional work practices associate with the respective role to evolve and change.** The complex and dynamic nature of institutional roles is illustrated by the fact that some of the roles discussed in this section are associated with multiple meta-categories.*

It seems critical to adopt a more nuanced understanding of institutional roles precisely because they are not stable identities (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Especially in an environment shaped by complex dynamics and the interactions of a multitude of heterogenous actors shaping each other's institutional work, this approach seems too restrictive and does not display the full spectrum of possibilities. We therefore once again argue for the importance of a nuanced approach allowing to account for the messiness of

institutional work free from a priori assumptions about actors' institutional roles, practices, and intentions.

*Finally, we discussed **the resources and competencies institutional workers can mobilize** as they pursue their intentions. The findings of our study allow us to establish a set of enabling conditions that are not specific to one institutional role as it is the case in most past research focused on the institutional entrepreneur (Battilana, 2006; Battilana & Leca, 2009; Ben Slimane & Leca, 2014). These enabling conditions apply to heterogenous actors and therefore mirror the diversity of institutional workers that characterizes co-creation.*

2.2. An integrative model of institutional work arenas (*discussion of RQ 3*)

The discussion of the findings of our empirical study has so far been focused on the micro-level of institutional dynamics: the institutional work of individual actors, and their institutional roles. Thus, we were interested in actors and dynamics “*below the organization’s institutional context*” (Zucker & Schilke, 2019, p. 372). In this regard, we proposed the notion of arenas of institutional work to frame the setting in which these actors operate. However, the micro-level can only be understood and defined in relation to other levels (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2019).

To discuss our third research question, we therefore move up one level and look at the organizational forms of these individual actors’ institutional work. This discussion is based on the findings regarding the first two research questions about institutional work practices and institutional roles. Building on these two dimensions and also explicitly including actors’ social position, we propose an **integrative model that we coin as “arenas of institutional work”**.

Once we have depicted the main features of institutional work arenas (**section 2.2.1.**), we go one step further and conceive of them as a kaleidoscope allowing to shed light on different organizational variations of institutional work arenas depending on practices, roles, and field positions (**section 2.2.2.**). The configurations of institutional work practices, roles, and positions identified in the literature and our findings reveal four organizational variations of institutional work arenas: top-down, collective, dispersed, and bottom-up.

2.2.1. Building institutional work arenas

We have discussed the findings of our empirical study with regard to heterogenous actors’ institutional work practices (research question 1) and their institutional roles (research question 2) in the previous sections. To close the discussion of these micro-level aspects of institutional work, we now propose to bring the threads of our arguments together. To do so, we introduce the idea of “**institutional work arenas**”. This notion is based on the assumption that institutional change is shaped by the institutional work of heterogenous actors with divergent intentions and institutional roles; to affect the institutional change, these actors come together in what we refer to as arenas of institutional work.

Our understanding of arenas of institutional work is inspired by the literature that invites to conceive of (public) organizations as **arenas for co-creation** (see for example Sørensen & Torfing, 2019; Torfing et al., 2019, 2021). Indeed, our findings suggest that the development of arenas for co-creation requires the institutional work of heterogenous actors that occurs in arenas of institutional work. Without actors’ reflexive work aimed at implementing the major institutional change that is co-creation, the latter loses its sense and cannot be deployed in a durable manner. Arenas enable co-creation to take place, but

first and foremost provide a framework for co-creation activities. Co-creation thus requires the duality of the arena as both a specific enclosure and the very object of the co-creation activities.

The institutional work perspective illustrates neo-institutional theory's increasing interest in agency and the individuals that shape and are shaped by institutional dynamics (Ben Slimane, 2019). However, research explicitly focused on the micro-level of individuals, their institutional work practices and roles remains relatively underdeveloped despite their importance in institutional change dynamics (Hampel et al., 2017; Heaphy, 2013). This can be explained by institutional work scholars' intention to move away from the very actor-centered institutional entrepreneur approach: institutional work pays attention to processes rather than actors (Ben Slimane & Leca, 2010). Without focusing on one specific institutional role as the institutional entrepreneur literature does, we aim to contribute to emerging research on the micro-level of institutional work and shed light on actors' lived experiences (Lawrence et al., 2011) by discussing their practices and roles.

By accounting for the heterogeneity of institutional workers and the institutional roles they take on, we show how institutions are inhabited by "*people doing things together*" (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 213). By highlighting their divergent and sometimes conflicting institutional work practices and underlying intentions, we point to the potential "institutional wars" (Hoffman, 1999) that might emerge as these heterogenous actors meet, and do not always do things *together*, but sometimes *in parallel* to or *against* each other. We connect these two arguments in a discussion of heterogenous actors' micro-institutional work that, we argue, takes place in arenas of institutional work.

We propose that institutional work arenas are characterized by the following features. (1) Arenas of institutional work are **tangible or intangible spaces** where heterogenous actors gather as they perform institutional work aimed at shaping an emerging or existing institutional arrangement. (2) Arenas of institutional work consequently accommodate a **variety of institutional roles, institutional work practices, and intentions**. (3) Arenas of institutional work are characterized by the **interactions** between these roles, practices, and intentions as they shape each other and the form of the institutional change that is underway.

First, we understand arenas of institutional work as **spaces** – tangible or not – where heterogenous actors perform institutional work aimed at shaping an emerging or existing institutional arrangement. These spaces might be made tangible through the organization of events such as co-creation workshops where the emerging institutional change, i.e., co-creation, concretizes. This is where actors can consequently gather and perform their institutional work in a physical setting which allows for direct interaction with other institutional workers. In this sense, the notion of arenas of institutional work can be partly linked to emerging research on the role of "place" in institutional work, where Lawrence and Dover (2015) for instance observe that "place" can contain (establish and maintain

boundaries around institutional work and the targeted institution), mediate (act as interpretive filters connecting institutional work to targeted institutions), and complicate (introduce unexpected layers of complexity) institutional work. Moreover, a “place” itself can in be an end of actors’ institutional work when their efforts are aimed at constructing it; in this respect, “place” can be understood as an institution (Arnaud & Serval, 2020). Tissone, Hernandez, and Moustier (2019) propose “place work” as a new dimension of institutional work that refers to the redefinition of practices, boundaries and places.

Arenas of institutional work might thus resemble the discursive spaces that constitute the public sphere in Jürgen Habermas’ understanding. However, arenas of institutional work do not have to be physical. No tangible space has to exist in order for heterogenous and dispersed actors to perform their institutional work directed at the same institutional arrangement. These arenas simply “*call a ‘public’ into existence (Bryson et al., 2017)*” (Hofstad et al., 2022, p. 206), that is, they frame these actors’ institutional work and center their practices around the institutional arrangement concerned by the institutional change.

Then, arenas of institutional work, physical or not, accommodate a **variety** of actors, roles, practices, and intentions. We argue that arenas for institutional work are where the institutional work of heterogenous actors pursuing divergent intentions through a variety of institutional work practices occurs. As opposed to the notion of “battlegrounds” (Hallett, 2010) or “battlefields” (DiMaggio, 1988) where institutional wars (Hoffmann, 1999), take place in organizational fields as actors with different interests collide, the idea of an arena for institutional work is not based on the assumption that conflicts *must* occur. While, depending on the involved actors, the roles they take on and the intentions they pursue, their institutional work might lead to conflicts or blockages, they do not have to be insurmountable and could even spur institutional change.

The findings of our study illustrate both. In the case of Klagenfurt, conflicting interests led to hard negotiations, decreased motivation and commitment, and diluted the institutional change. In Venelles, on the other hand, divergent perceptions of the scope of co-creation generated a more extensive and deeper co-creation process than intended, thereby spurring the implementation of this new institutional arrangement. Thus, rather than conceiving of arenas of institutional work as “war zones”, we once again draw on Habermas’ (1991) conception of the public sphere, where the idea is not to negotiate and find a compromise at all costs (which is what happened in the case of Klagenfurt), but rather to open up a space for dialogue where opinions, interests, and ideas can co-exist. **Applying this approach to the notion of arenas of institutional work, we highlight the importance of letting heterogenous actors’ institutional work practices and intentions co-exist in their complex messiness.**

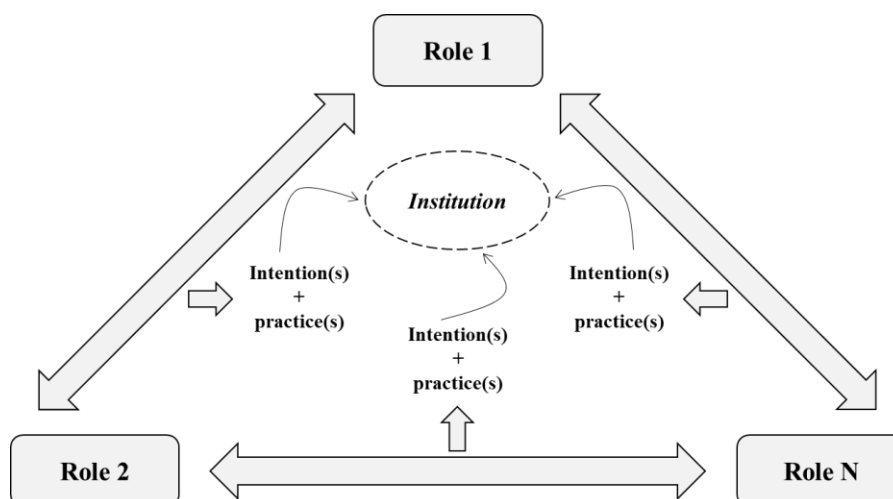
Finally, **interactions** and interrelations between these roles, practices, and intentions characterize arenas of institutional work. As a matter of fact, while institutional workers’ efforts may be directed at the institutional arrangement at hand, at the same time, they

are likely to affect other actors' institutional work. The institutional work practices of actors pursuing the same or similar intentions might be mutually reinforcing. Institutional work practices mobilized to pursue divergent or conflicting intentions, on the other hand, are potential obstacles that could slow down or hinder institutional work. At the same time, actors' intentions might also be affected by those of the other actors present in the arena of institutional work: intentions might emerge and change as actors interact, which in turn affects the institutional work practices used to pursue them. The notion of arenas moreover allows to include the role of the silent actors, whether their institutional work is passive or active, and whether they are present within the arena or not. By including them in the arena, we can account for the ways in which this role shapes the intentions and practices of others even though it is "silent". The permeability of the arena's boundaries also makes it possible for actors to come and go; in this sense, silent actors might be more or less "silent" depending on the stage of the process.

The interactions that characterize arenas of institutional work can be illustrated by the example of the unplanned emergence of a governance entity, the steering committee, in the case of Venelles. Here it was the participants' intention to deepen and extend co-creation that provoked the municipality's actions and changed their initial intention. Due to the citizens' demand, they decided to widen the scope of co-creation and aim for a more ambitious co-creation design than initially planned. Moreover, they engaged in structural institutional work to do so as they created the steering committee through which continuous co-creation would be ensured. This shows that the interactions between heterogeneous actors' institutional roles, institutional work practices, and intentions do not only shape those of others, but also the trajectory and form of the institutional change underway.

Figure 37 below illustrates our understanding of arenas of institutional work. It shows the co-existence of a variety of actors, roles, practices, and intentions in a physical or imagined space that provides a frame for their institutional work and interactions, centered around a specific institutional arrangement. The boundaries of both the institutional arrangement in question as well as the arena itself are permeable, as we assume that they continue to be shaped by actors and their institutional work.

Figure 37. Arena of institutional work



(Source: author)

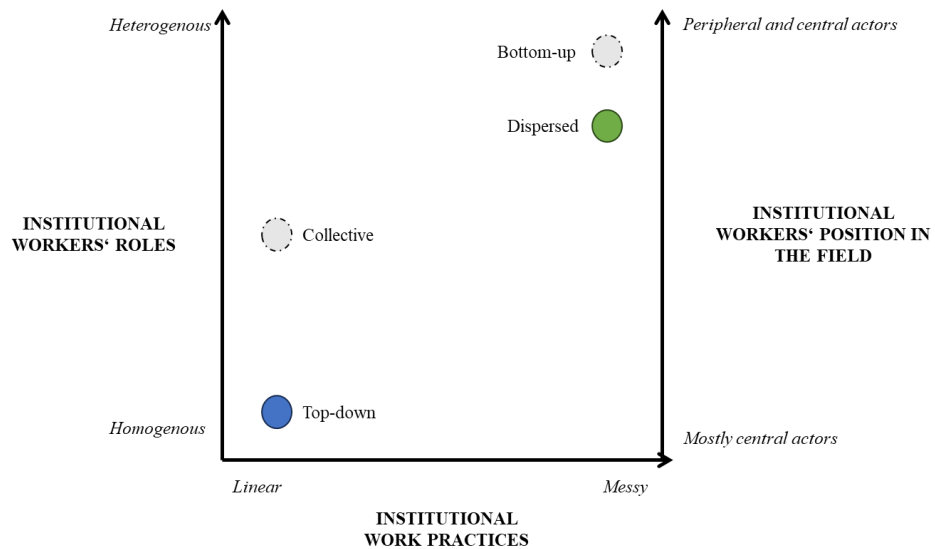
2.2.2. Organizational variations of institutional work arenas

The organizational variations of institutional work arenas we discuss in this section roughly mirror the four organizational forms of institutional work we have identified through our literature review (see **chapter 2, section 3.3.**). However, except for institutional entrepreneurship which has been studied extensively (Hardy & Maguire, 2013, 2017) and mostly corresponds to the top-down form we identify, little attention has been paid to other organizational forms of institutional work and prior literature remains unclear.

The four variations we discuss here are: top-down institutional work, collective institutional work, dispersed institutional work, and bottom-up institutional work. While we observe two of these forms in our study, i.e., top-down and dispersed institutional work, we do not observe the two remaining ones, i.e., collective and bottom-up institutional work. We include them in this discussion to provide an overview and show the spectrum of organizational forms of institutional work identified through our study and/or in prior literature.

Before discussing these four forms with regard to both the literature and the findings of our study, we clarify the three dimensions that were used to develop the model. These three dimensions are: institutional workers' **roles**, their social **positions**, and their institutional work **practices**. Figure 38 below shows the model integrating these dimensions and depicting the four organizational variations of institutional work arenas.

Figure 38. An integrative model of the organizational variations of institutional work arenas



Legend

- The colored circles (*blue and green*) signify that these forms of institutional work have been observed in our study.
- The grey circles with a dotted line signify that these forms stem from prior literature.

(Source: author)

First, with regard to actors' **institutional roles**, the spectrum reaches from *homogenous* roles to *heterogenous* roles. This is intended to represent the degree of diversity of institutional workers: are they and their roles rather homogenous with similar intentions and interests, or are they heterogenous and their intentions divergent or even conflicting?

Then, the nature of actors' **institutional work practices** is associated with the degree of diversity as well as with the number of involved actors. We assume that if actors and institutional roles are numerous and heterogenous, the institutional work practices they mobilize are as well. On the other hand, the smaller the number of institutional workers and the more similar they are, the more straightforward their institutional work. Consequently, with regard to institutional work practices, the spectrum reaches from *linear* – a straightforward process of institutional work that goes as initially planned – to *messy* – an institutional work process full of unexpected events and turns, and potentially unintended consequences.

Finally, we include actors' **social position** in the field as a third dimension in the model. This is important since, as Battilana et al. (2009, p. 76) observe, "*actors perceive field conditions differently depending on their social position in a field, which influences their 'point of view' about the field and gives them differential access to resources*". Consequently, actors in peripheral or central positions likely do not perceive the institutional change in

the same way as they are affected differently by it; they moreover do not dispose of the same set of resources and competencies to engage in institutional work and shape the change project. Both sides of the spectrum – central and peripheral positions – have been found to be valuable for institutional work (Furnari, 2016). To characterize the actors involved in the different forms of institutional work, the spectrum thus ranges from *mostly central* actors to *peripheral and central* actors.

In the subsequent discussion of the four forms, we focus on the two which were observed in our empirical study: top-down institutional work and dispersed institutional work. For the two remaining variations, collective and bottom-up institutional work, which were not observed in our two cases, we refer to the literature explored previously (**chapter 2, section 3.3.**). We aim to briefly define these two variations and discuss the reasons why in our study of the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations, they were not observed.

2.2.2.1. Top-down institutional work

A top-down variation of institutional work arenas is characterized by the involvement of mostly **central and powerful actors** (one or several of them). If actors in other positions do engage in institutional work, they take on supporting roles and facilitate the central actors’ efforts aimed at institutional change. Since a powerful actor initiates and leads institutional work, the latter is likely to be straightforward and **linear**. The nature of the institutional roles the involved actors take on tends to be **homogenous** since one clear intention is pursued: that of the leading institutional worker. Figure 39 below shows where a top-down variation is situated on the spectrum of each of the three dimensions explained above.

Figure 39. A top-down organizational variation of institutional work arenas



(Source: author)

The findings of our study reveal several features of top-down institutional work (see **section 1.3.** of this chapter):

- Institutional work is mainly performed by central actors
- One clear intention is pursued
- Few different institutional roles and institutional work practices
- No changes to the initial idea for the institutional change
- The institutional change is linear and occurs as planned
- The institutional change is perceived as the central actor's project
- Institutional work is aimed at obtaining support for the institutional change
- Institutional work consists of "big" and visible actions
- Institutional workers have access to power and resources
- Institutional work of actors in peripheral roles is secondary
- Limited number of institutional workers

While these characteristics are in line with prior descriptions of institutional entrepreneurs and their institutional work (Battilana et al., 2009; Leca et al., 2008), our study provides a more fine-grained understanding of central actors' institutional work and suggests that they are not necessarily institutional entrepreneurs.

However, these central actors are not the only institutional workers shaping the implementation of co-creation as a new institutional arrangement. While they initiate and lead the change and steer it in the direction that suits their interests, other actors' involvement is required in several ways. First, the institutional change proposed by central actors, i.e., policy co-creation, relies on the participation of diverse parties. Then, in our study, these central actors' institutional work does not cover all phases of the process of implementing co-creation. Rather, operational aspects are handed over to their team of supporters, and central actors mostly provide the conditions for supporters' operational work through their structural work and ensure cohesion through their relational work. Thus, without the involvement of other institutional workers, the institutional change would not be implemented.

Several differences can therefore be observed between a top-down form of institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship. Yet, in both cases, the process of institutional work is strongly shaped by a central actor. Past research on policy implementation has found that the central actors performing top-down institutional work are public authorities (Pemer & Skjølvik, 2018). Our findings are in line with these observations: the institutional work of a mayor in the one case, and a department head in the other characterizes the top-down form.

This variation of institutional work arenas can be observed in both cases of our study. This can be explained by the dominant paradigm shaping public organizations in both cases: the Public Administration paradigm (Osborne, 2006). The **bureaucratic functioning** of public organizations dominated by this paradigm implies strong hierarchical relations and a vertical power line where decisions are taken by the most

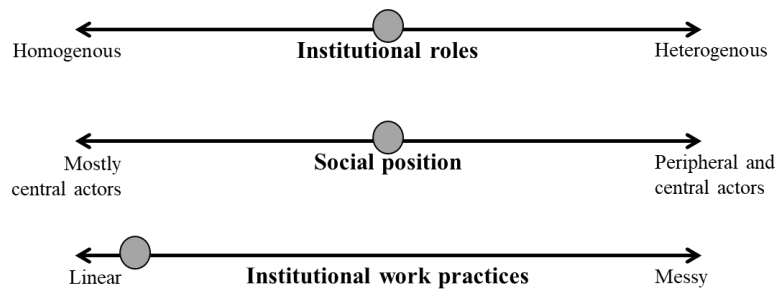
powerful actors – political authorities or top-management – and implemented by civil servants; other external actors are secondary (Brix et al., 2021; Sicilia et al., 2016; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). The entrenched bureaucratic mindset and associated routines and roles are reflected in the implementation of co-creation in the two organizations we studied.

Thus, we find that even the implementation of co-creation, an approach associated with the New Public Governance paradigm rather than Public Administration, is marked by the long tradition the latter has in local public organizations. While we initially expected that top-down institutional work would not be suitable in a context marked by Grand Challenges that require the collaboration of diverse actors (George et al., 2016), we find that it still shapes the organizational form of institutional work in certain phases of the process. In the case of Venelles, it is partly superseded by dispersed institutional work towards the end of the co-creation process which leads to a more extensive institutional change than initially planned, and the development of an ambitious 2030 Agenda to locally tackle the SDGs. However, in Klagenfurt, top-down institutional work is visible throughout the entire process, diluting the institutional change, decreasing participants motivation, and generating policy ideas that resemble the existing strategy.

2.2.2.2. Collective institutional work

A collective variation of institutional work arenas has not been observed in our study. While this presents an interesting avenue for future research, we decided to include this form in our model to represent the different organizational variations of institutional work arenas. Based on prior literature, and as shown in figure 40 below, collective institutional work is performed by a **relatively homogenous** set of institutional workers who pursue relatively similar intentions. While their perceptions of the ends of the institutional change or the means to achieve it might differ, they share a similar overall vision (Silvola & Vinnari, 2021) due to them being part of the same institutional environment (Farny et al., 2019; Maguire et al., 2004), which is what enables their collective action. This reduces the likelihood of conflict (Hampel et al., 2017), leading us to expect a relatively **linear** institutional work process despite the involvement of a higher number of actors. It is through collective action that actors that **do not necessarily occupy central social positions** can engage in institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017).

Figure 40. A collective organizational variation of institutional work arenas



(Source: author)

Consequently, we would have assumed that the citizens participating in co-creation engage in collective institutional work to pursue their shared interests despite their peripheral positions. In both cases, however, their institutional work was dispersed rather than unified. As a matter of fact, as opposed to what is announced by the literature (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Torfing et al., 2019), we did not observe increased cohesion among citizens due to co-creation. They did not mobilize in groups to increase their power, as past studies predict (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018). Rather, individual citizens proposed individual projects to take co-creation to the next level; and individual citizens requested more extensive and deeper co-creation. These individual demands accumulated and ultimately changed the trajectory of co-creation, giving rise to a more dispersed form of co-creation. However, this was not due to collective action.

We thus find that the idea of “co-creation institutional work”⁷⁶ (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009) does not necessarily apply to the institutional work performed by the actors involved in the process of implementing co-creation, and do not observe the joint efforts proclaimed by Funari (2016). The lack of collective institutional work could again be traced back to the highly bureaucratic functioning that shapes not only public organizations but also their relationships with the local population, as well as relationships among citizens. The latter are neither used to collaborating with their local government, nor with each other.

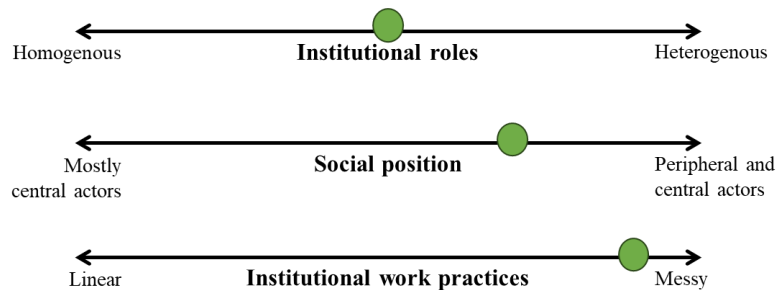
2.2.2.3. Dispersed institutional work

The second organizational variation of institutional work arenas our study did reveal is dispersed institutional work. It is characterized by the involvement of a multiplicity of **relatively heterogenous** actors in institutional work, that might contain more homogenous groups of actors. The intentions they pursue are equally diverse and might even be conflicting. These actors can occupy a **variety of social positions** that rank from

⁷⁶ Zietsma and McKnight (2009) define co-creation institutional work as multiple members of an organizational field co-creating institutions through an iterative process consisting of negotiations, experimentation, competition, and learning. Over time, they find that shared conceptions of problems and solutions are thereby developed.

the most central to the most peripheral. This indicates that institutional work is likely to be **messy**, since the diversity of involved actors, practices, and intentions might give rise to unplanned changes and unintended consequences.

Figure 41. A dispersed organizational variation of institutional work arenas



(Source: author)

The findings of our study allow to identify a set of characteristics of dispersed institutional work (see **section 1.3.** of this chapter):

- Institutional work is performed by heterogenous actors
- Different intentions are pursued
- Many different institutional roles and institutional work practices
- Adaptability of the institutional change
- Unintended events and consequences
- Heterogenous institutional workers take ownership of the institutional change
- Institutional work includes mundane actions
- Central and peripheral actors are involved in institutional work
- Negotiations and compromise
- Conflicts between institutional workers with divergent intentions
- Higher number of institutional workers

Recent studies point out the importance of learning more about the institutional work of dispersed actors (Hampel et al., 2017; Michel, 2020). Indeed, when institutional work scholars do account for the institutional work of multiple actors, their efforts are mostly depicted as collective; they draw on different resources and institutional work practices and work together as a collective (see for example Broccardo et al., 2019). Research on heterogenous and dispersed actors pursuing divergent intentions and affecting one another's institutional work through their interactions remains underdeveloped (Hampel et al., 2017). While some studies investigate the institutional work of multiple sets of actors in parallel – Perner and Skjølsvik (2018) for instance study the institutional work of both policy makers and public organizations affected by their decisions – little is known

about the interactions between more heterogeneous actors such as those involved in co-creation.

In this sense, our study allows to shed light on the dynamics that shape a dispersed organizational variation of institutional work arenas when the latter is performed by a multiplicity of heterogeneous actors. It illustrates that in a setting as rigid and inert as local public organizations shaped by a bureaucratic functioning, dispersed institutional work, where central actors share their power to some degree, does not simply emerge. Rather, those actors who traditionally represent the power center, i.e., local political authorities and top public managers, must show a willingness to release control to a certain extent to allow for dispersed institutional work to take place. Without their decision to do so, entrenched roles and processes persist and do not accommodate a more dispersed form of institutional work – rather, a top-down form of institutional work prevails.

When institutional work is dispersed, there is no single power center monopolizing decisions about the trajectory of institutional change. The latter tends to evolve in an anarchic and erratic manner since the involved institutional workers' intentions and actions are hard to predict and might entail unexpected and unintended consequences that in turn affect the institutional work of other involved actors (Boon et al., 2019; Slager et al., 2012).

Efforts aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions may overlap, occur in parallel, or as a mix in dispersed institutional work. As a result, the outcomes of dispersed institutional work might not necessarily correspond to institutional workers' initial intentions. While the institutional work practices that constitute dispersed institutional work are reflexive and motivated by a specific purpose, they are not necessarily "grand" but can be small and mundane. They can be performed by a diversity of actors occupying different institutional roles, from powerful institutional entrepreneurs to marginalized actors and groups of institutional workers with similar interests. The practices they engage in are therefore likely to be just as diverse and may be aimed at divergent institutional outcomes.

The number of institutional workers naturally tends to be higher in dispersed institutional work than in other variations of institutional work, and especially so top-down institutional work. However, a higher number of involved actors does not necessarily give rise to dispersed institutional work. This is illustrated through our study where in both cases, involved actors are more diverse and more numerous in the second phase of the process of implementing co-creation. However, only in the case of Venelles does this manifest as dispersed institutional work. In the case of Klagenfurt, institutional work takes a more dispersed form when less actors are involved, but they engage in more negotiations about the institutional change; when a higher number of actors takes part in the process, a one-sided form of institutional work dominated by a single central actor prevails.

Through our study, we clarify the particularities of dispersed institutional work which differs from other organizational forms of institutional work in several ways: the involved actors, their roles, social positions, and the practices they mobilize are more diverse and messier than what most studies show. It is marked by unforeseeable dynamics and emergent processes (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). Therefore, we understand dispersed institutional work 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**. Dispersed institutional work consists of negotiation, experimentation, competition, and learning process that shape actors' practices and intentions and ultimately also the trajectory and form of institutional change.

2.2.2.4. Bottom-up institutional work

The final organizational variation of institutional work arenas we wish to discuss is a bottom-up form. Like collective institutional work, it was not observed in our study. We will discuss below how the context in which our study is situated is not conducive to bottom-up institutional work. The characteristics of this variation of institutional work, identified in literature, are situated at the opposite side of the spectrum than those of top-down institutional work. Bottom-up institutional work is thus characterized by the **heterogeneity** of institutional workers and their roles (Svensson et al., 2022).

Moreover, the involved actors tend to be marginalized groups of the population and are therefore in **peripheral** positions (Marti & Mair, 2009; Rodner et al., 2020). Since a diversity of actors, intentions, and institutional work practices collide in bottom-up institutional work, it is likely to be **messy**. The peripheral actors involved in bottom-up institutional work not having privileged access to power and resources, their institutional work practices may be highly distributed small and mundane actions (Lawrence et al., 2009) rather than “grand” ones.

Figure 42. A bottom-up organizational variation of institutional work arenas



(Source: author)

While the critical role of actors in peripheral positions has been pointed out (Greenwood et al., 2011; Leblebici et al., 1991) and especially so with regard to the development of responses to Grand Challenges (Berrone et al., 2016), we find that the context of our study does not accommodate bottom-up institutional work. Local public organizations are predominantly shaped by a bureaucratic worldview where decisions are taken in a top-down manner (Brix et al., 2021; Sicilia et al., 2016; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018), which does not present a fertile ground for approaches situated at the other end of the spectrum, i.e., bottom-up processes.

Collaborative decision-making approaches such as co-creation are usually initiated and led by political authorities rather than citizens themselves, who are invited to participate in a process centered around the public organization (Couture et al., 2022). Indeed, *“politicians accustomed to holding all the formal political power and responsibility, and public administrators in public bureaucracies based on centralized control and professional expertise, are likely to shy away from involving citizens and their organizations in the initiation phases of public innovation projects, as this would imply a considerable loss of public control”* (Sørensen & Torfing, 2018, p. 390). An institutional change that is defined by purely bottom-up processes is therefore relatively unlikely given the traditional-bureaucratic worldview that shapes public organizations and their members today. Bottom-up institutional work does however present an interesting avenue for future research, especially with regard to the resolution of Grand Challenges that require public and private actors at all levels to take action (Berrone et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION - DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION 3

To discuss the findings with regard to our third research question about the organizational forms of institutional work, we built on our empirical study and the responses it provided to research questions 1 and 2. We proposed an integrative model of institutional work arenas, and four organizational variations of the latter.

*Situated at the meso-level of institutional dynamics, the notion of “**arenas of institutional work**” builds on the micro-level dynamics explored in the two first research questions and helps us frame heterogenous actors’ institutional work. In this sense, arenas of institutional work represent tangible or intangible spaces where institutional work occurs. They are characterized by the diversity of institutional roles, institutional work practices, and intentions that is implied by the heterogeneity of institutional workers that gather in these arenas. Moreover, interactions between these actors in arenas of institutional work shape not only the institutional work process but also the form of the institutional change at which institutional work is aimed.*

Through the introduction of arenas of institutional work, we invite to make space for the diversity and complexity of institutional work. Particularly in institutional work processes marked by the heterogeneity of actors and practices, this notion allows to account for the evolutions, unexpected turns, and unintended consequences that might accompany institutional work, and encourages researchers to reduce a priori assumptions about the process and its outcomes (cf. Hallett & Ventresca, 2006).

*In this sense, **by introducing the notion of arenas of institutional work, we respond to calls for the acknowledgement of the micro-level of institutional dynamics** (Zucker & Schilke, 2019) and to “bring individuals back into institutional theory” (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 53), and **reconcile the micro- and meso-levels of institutional dynamics**. Without assuming that conflicts and “institutional wars” (Hoffmann, 199) necessarily arise as the divergent intentions of heterogenous institutional workers collide, arenas of institutional work provide a space to study how micro-level actors engage in institutional work and how their interactions shape both their intentions and practices, as well as the course and form of the institutional change itself. Building arenas of institutional work thus contributes to neo-institutional theory’s shift away from a pure macro-level focus and towards an increasing consideration of individuals and their roles in institutional dynamics (Schilke, 2018).*

*We then discussed the **organizational variations of institutional work arenas**. Our study suggests that two variations shape the implementation of policy co-creation in local public organizations: a top-down and a dispersed form. In this section, we thus discussed these two variations alongside the two others identified through our literature review in chapter 2: collective and bottom-up institutional work. They were not observed in our study, and we tried to retrace the reasons why.*

The top-down variation mostly corresponds to a form of institutional work identified in the literature: institutional work performed by central actors (Ansari et al., 2013; Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2017). However, while in the literature, these central actors are usually portrayed as omnipotent and heroic, implementing institutional change on their own (Garud et al., 2002; Lawrence et al., 2009; Staggs et al., 2022), we find that even institutional work that is done in a top-down manner requires other actors' support. Thereby we once more stress the important role of supporters in institutional work, and especially in settings where a diversity of actors is affected by the institutional change.

The second variation we observe, i.e., dispersed institutional work, enriches literature in that it stresses not the collective action of heterogenous and dispersed actors (Wijen & Ansari, 2007), but points to the co-existence of diverse intentions and institutional work practices. They do not necessarily lead to collective action. Rather, heterogenous actors pursue their intentions through institutional work, whereby they might affect and shape those of others. Through the notion of dispersed institutional work, we are therefore able to account for an organizational variation of institutional work arenas where heterogenous actors do not find compromise to engage in collective action but continue to pursue their individual intentions.

A model of the four organizational variations of institutional work arenas was developed in this discussion and is based on the three dimensions of actors' institutional roles, their social positions, and their institutional work practices. The contribution of our study with regard to institutional work scholarship mainly consists of the insights we provided into the emerging notion of dispersed institutional work, as well as of a clarification of top-down institutional work and how it can be distinguished from institutional entrepreneurship. In doing so, our study invites to understand how institutional work manifests depending on the configuration of involved actors and their practices.

*Finally, as pointed out in the presentation of our findings for each case as well as in the cross-case analysis (**chapters 4 and 5**), we stress that one institutional work process does not necessarily only manifest in one single organizational variation. As a matter of fact, our findings illustrate that the latter is likely to change and evolve in different ways and directions over time. Different organizational variations of institutional work arenas may be separated by a tipping point that is more or less visible, just as they might overlap: elements of top-down institutional work could be observed when a dispersed form is dominant, and vice versa. Once more, we therefore highlight the importance of a nuanced approach not only to institutional work practices and institutional roles, but also to the organizational forms of institutional work that develop based on these two aspects.*

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 5

While in chapter 4, we presented our findings for each of the two cases, we analyzed and discussed them in this chapter. Chapter 5 proposed a cross-case analysis of the findings of our study aimed at understanding heterogenous actors' institutional work as they shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. In this chapter, we moreover discussed our findings with regard to prior literature.

In **section 1** on this chapter, we analyzed the findings of our study across the two cases of Venelles and Klagenfurt. This enabled us to provide responses to our three research questions about actors' institutional work practices, their institutional roles, and ultimately the organizational forms of institutional work in a context of co-creation in local public organizations. We found that the implementation of policy co-creation requires reflexive institutional work practices, and that a lack of the latter entails the loss of the essence of co-creation. Our findings across cases moreover stress the context-dependent nature of institutional roles and invite to think about the organizational forms of institutional work as evolving rather than associating one single form with one process of institutional change.

Then, in **section 2**, we confronted our findings to prior literature and discussed how the latter is corroborated and enriched by our study. This discussion allowed us to reconcile the micro-level of heterogenous individual institutional workers and their practices and roles (RQ 1 and 2) with the meso-level of organizational forms of institutional work (RQ 3).

With regard to *research question 1* about institutional work practices, we emphasized the importance of crossing different types of practices with different intentions for a holistic understanding of institutional work. Then, we suggested that a diachronic approach to institutional work is required, in particular when heterogenous actors are involved since their practices and intentions are likely to be shaped by their interactions. We showed that tipping points are likely to occur in institutional work processes involving heterogenous actors. With regard to *research question 2* about institutional roles, we proposed a more fine-grained analysis than in most past studies and highlighted the dynamic nature of institutional roles as they may evolve over time. We also pointed out that the role of supporters, while often neglected in past literature, is crucial for the implementation of co-creation. Finally, we proposed a set of resources and competencies that heterogenous institutional workers draw on to pursue their intentions. With regard to *research question 3*, we introduced the notion of "arenas of institutional work" to frame micro-institutional work. We developed an integrative model of the organizational variations of these arenas based on actors' institutional work practices, their institutional roles, and social position in the field. We discussed the two variations identified through our study, i.e., top-down and dispersed institutional work, and how our findings enrich past work on this topic. The reasons why the two other variations identified through our literature review were not observed in our study were also discussed in this section.

CONCLUSION OF PART 2

Part 2 of this doctoral thesis contains the empirical study of the question **how heterogenous actors' institutional work shapes the implementation of policy co-creation in local public organizations**. In this part, we presented the outlines of our research design as well as the findings of our study for the three research questions and discussed the latter with regard to the literature reviewed in part 1.

In **chapter 3**, we developed the epistemological and methodological framework of our study. In this regard, we elaborated on our constructivist epistemological position, its relevance for our research object, and its implications for our research design. Then, we explained our abductive mode of reasoning, our qualitative approach and the “two-case case study” it is based on. The criteria for the selection of these two cases – a French and an Austrian local public organization – and their value with regard to our research object were laid out. We moreover presented the methods used to collect data: semi-structured interviews (36 interviews with 41 respondents), participant and non-participant observation (11 observed events = 46 hours in total), and analysis of secondary data (188 documents) used to corroborate the two primary data sources, i.e., interviews and observations. The choice of thematic coding using the NVivo software was explained, as well as the main codes we used. Finally, we elaborated on the criteria of validity and reliability that can be used to ensure the scientificness of a qualitative study.

In **chapter 4**, we first presented the two cases of our empirical study: the “Venelles in Transition” project in the town of Venelles, France; and the “Mission KS 30” project in the city of Klagenfurt, Austria. Then, the findings for each case were presented in a narrative way. To do so, we divided both cases into two broad phases: in both cases, the nature and roles of the involved actors, their practices, and thus the form of institutional work differed between the two phases. While our findings suggest predominantly top-down institutional work in the first phase of Venelles in Transition, and a more dispersed form towards the end of the process, the opposite can be observed in Klagenfurt, even though top-down institutional work featured throughout the entire process of implementing Mission KS 30.

In **chapter 5**, we first conducted a cross-case analysis of findings for each research question in order to put them into perspective and identify similarities and differences between the two cases. This cross-case analysis stressed the necessity of institutional work for the implementation of co-creation; it showed that institutional roles are highly context-dependent and require a nuanced approach; and suggested that the organizational forms of institutional work can evolve over time. In our discussion of these findings, with regard to research question 1 about institutional work practices, we highlighted the complexity of institutional work in contexts that involve a plurality of heterogenous actors. To analyze their institutional work, it is important to account for the

shifts in practices and intentions that are likely to occur as institutional workers interact. Our discussion of actors' practices and intentions also stressed the relevance of a diachronic approach to institutional work that leaves space for the latter to evolve; as practices change, tipping points may occur and shape the trajectory of both institutional work and the institutional change it is directed at.

Our discussion with regard to research question 2 about institutional roles provided a more detailed understanding of the latter and showed the importance of supporting roles. In this discussion, we moreover emphasized that institutional roles are not stable but might evolve over time as institutional workers interact and shape one another's practices and intentions. We proposed and discussed a set of resources and competencies specific to heterogenous actors' institutional work which they can draw on to pursue their intentions.

With regard to research question 3 about organizational forms of institutional work, we introduced the idea of "arenas of institutional work" to frame institutional work at the micro-level of individual actors. We developed an integrative model of the organizational variations of these arenas that vary based on actors' institutional work practices, their institutional roles, and their social positions in the field. We discussed top-down and dispersed institutional work, i.e., the two variations that emerged in our study, and provided a definition of dispersed institutional work. Moreover, we explored the reasons why the two remaining forms identified in our literature review could not be observed in the cases we studied. In sum, the discussion of our findings allowed to provide important insights into the micro-institutional work of individual actors, their institutional work practices, and institutional roles, and to reconcile this micro-level with the meso-level through institutional work arenas and their variations.

Conclusion

To conclude our doctoral thesis, we begin with a reminder of the research objectives as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks (1), followed by a brief look back at our main findings (2). Then, we identify the contributions (3) and limitations (4) of our study. Lastly, we propose avenues for further research (5). Table 30 at the end of this section summarizes these aspects and the structure of this study.

1. Research objectives and theoretical and conceptual frameworks

The starting point of this doctoral research was the observation that neither supra-national entities such as the United Nations or the European Union, nor national governments are capable of resolving the complex problems they face on their own. Local governments are a critical part of the development of responses to problems such as climate change and its consequences, migration, or gender equality: these issues – Grand Challenges – crystallize at the local level where both public organizations and citizens are confronted with them daily. This level is where these problems concretize and are shaped by the local context. Local public organizations are therefore urged to act and develop responses that fit local conditions and the needs of the local population.

This led us to wondering how these local public organizations go about finding ideas for policy solutions to complex problems, and we observed that policy co-creation practices are increasingly used to do so. Indeed, co-creation allows to incorporate the knowledge, needs, and resources of heterogeneous actors by opening up policymaking processes. Thereby, policy responses can be developed for complex problems that cannot be addressed single-handedly by one actor. In our doctoral thesis, we therefore decided to investigate how policy co-creation is implemented in local public organizations to address Grand Challenges.

We found that the implementation of a novel approach such as co-creation is complexified by the paradigms that shape the functioning of local public organizations. Both the bureaucratic Public Administration paradigm and the private sector inspired New Public Management paradigm do not provide fertile grounds for open and collaborative approaches. The implementation of co-creation major changes of established norms, routines, roles, and practices. To alter the long-standing and entrenched institutional arrangements shaping public organizations, the purposeful and reflexive work of the heterogeneous actors involved in the implementation of co-creation – local elected politicians, public managers, and the local population – is therefore required. This is why neo-institutional theory and more specifically the institutional work perspective provided the theoretical framework of this thesis.

We thus explored **how the institutional work of heterogenous actors shapes the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations.**

What actors actually do to engage in institutional work and shape the implementation of a new institutional arrangement, i.e., policy co-creation, remains unclear in most past literature that tends to adopt a macro-approach, neglecting the micro-level of institutional dynamics where individual actors act and interact. We, however, were interested in individual actors' institutional work practices and the underlying intentions that guide their actions. What are the specific practices they mobilize? How do they mobilize them? What are their intentions and are they necessarily related to the establishment of co-creation as a new institutional arrangement? And in a context like co-creation that involves a plurality of actors with potentially divergent interests, how do institutional workers' interactions shape their institutional work practices and intentions? To date, these aspects of institutional work at the micro-level remain a black box. This led us to formulating our first research question: **What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?**

The heterogeneity of actors involved in the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations also challenges the widespread assumption that institutional work is most often performed by powerful interested actors, i.e., institutional entrepreneurs. While an extensive literature has studied this type of actors and their practices aimed at implementing new institutions, little is known about other actors and their roles in institutional work. Yet, in a co-creation setting, actors are per definition diverse and therefore usually in different social positions, with varying degrees of power, and unequal access to resources. We thus came to the conclusion that the institutional roles of the actors involved in implementing co-creation needed to be investigated in order to provide a more fine-grained account of the micro-dynamics of institutional change. These observations led us to formulating our second research question: **What are the institutional roles of the heterogenous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation?**

Together, insights about individual actors' institutional work practices and their institutional roles give rise to specific organizational forms of institutional work. Depending on the configuration of actors, the organizational form in which institutional work concretizes is likely to vary: it might be dominated by central actors in the role of institutional entrepreneurs, or, on the contrary, be bottom-up when peripheral actors lead institutional change. However, we found that except for work on institutional entrepreneurship centered around powerful actors, once again, little is known about forms of institutional work that include a wider spectrum of heterogenous actors. And marginalized and/or peripheral actors tend to receive little attention in this regard. Therefore, to bring the threads of our reflection together, we built on the two previous research questions to develop the third: **How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?**

Consequently, our study is based on a main research puzzle about the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations, and declined into three research questions. The notions of Grand Challenges and policy co-creation provided the context and the conceptual framework (**chapter 1**), while the institutional work perspective provided the theoretical framework (**chapter 2**).

To empirically study these questions, our research design (**chapter 3**) was based on a qualitative approach and more specifically a “two-case case study” (Yin, 2018). Two local public organizations, one in France and one in Austria, were explored as they implemented co-creation projects aimed at developing local public policy to respond to the UN SDGs. This research design allowed to put our findings into perspective and identify similarities and differences between cases, while still developing a deep understanding of each case. Our qualitative study was based on the triangulation of three data sources, whereby semi-structured interviews (36 with 41 respondents) and observations (11 observed co-creation events) were the main sources, and the analysis of secondary data allowed to include contextual elements and corroborate the data. Thematic content analysis of the data revealed how our respondents perceived their and others’ institutional work practices and roles throughout the process of implementing co-creation.

2. Main findings

Our findings were presented in a narrative way: one section was dedicated to each case (**chapter 4**). Within these sections, the findings regarding the three research questions about institutional work practices, institutional roles, and organizational forms of institutional work were presented. Our findings revealed the complexity of institutional work in settings involving a multiplicity of heterogeneous actors. Numerous institutional work practices directed at divergent, sometimes conflicting intentions co-existed in both cases, and were shaped by actors’ interactions. The findings moreover showed that institutional roles are dynamic and highly depended on the context of institutional work. The organizational form of institutional work, as our findings illustrated, was not stable throughout the process but continuously evolving as actors’ practices and roles did, too.

The cross-case analysis as well as the discussion of findings (**chapter 5**) were structured around our research questions. The aim of this final chapter was to respond to the three research questions, and clarify how our study enriches past literature.

With regard to research question 1 about institutional work practices, we showed that crossing micro-institutional work practices with underlying intentions allows for a holistic yet fine-grained analysis of institutional work. This understanding of institutional work enables us to account for the parallel existence of a diversity of practices and intentions, as well as to acknowledge changes of the latter. A diachronic rather than linear

approach to institutional work moreover proved to be essential in order to study the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors, their interactions, and evolution.

With regard to research question 2 about institutional roles, our findings suggested that in addition to the institutional entrepreneur, a diversity of roles are involved in institutional work. Moreover, we showed that institutional roles are dynamic and likely to change over time. The crucial role of supporters was pointed out, and the often-neglected agency of the “silent actors” emphasized. Finally, we proposed a set of resources and competencies that heterogenous institutional workers draw on to pursue their intentions.

Finally, with regard to research question 3 about the organizational forms of institutional work, we proposed the notion of “arenas of institutional work” to frame micro-institutional work and connect the micro- and meso-levels. Understanding micro-institutional work as taking place in arenas invites to conceive of actors’ practices, their intentions, roles, and interactions as interrelated, affecting one another as well as the institutional change itself. In this regard, our study emphasized that institutional work comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. An integrative model of the organizational variations of institutional work arenas, based on actors’ institutional work practices, their institutional roles, and social position in the field, was developed. The two variations observed in our study were characterized and discussed, which allowed us to distinguish top-down institutional work from institutional entrepreneurship, and to propose a definition of dispersed institutional work.

3. Contributions

The contributions of our doctoral research are threefold: they are of theoretical (3.1.) and methodological (3.2.) nature, and we moreover identify several managerial recommendations for local public organizations implementing co-creation (3.3.).

3.1. Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contributions of this thesis are set out in detail in the discussion (**chapter 5**) and are structured around three main points. The first two points concern the micro-level of institutional work, and the third the meso-level and the organizational forms of institutional work.

First, our thesis contributes to research about **micro-institutional dynamics**, and more specifically the institutional work of individual actors. Through our study of heterogenous institutional workers, their institutional work **practices**, and institutional roles, we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of micro-institutional work. In this regard, we point out the complex, dynamic, and emergent nature of institutional work situated at

the micro-level of individuals. First, our study thereby contributes to opening the black box of heterogeneous institutional workers' practices and provides insights into what it is they really do, and how interactions between them shape their practices and intentions.

Second, our fine-grained analysis of their institutional **roles** allows to enrich past literature by looking beyond the heroic figure of the institutional entrepreneur, and accounting for the heterogeneous actors involved in institutional change. To stress the importance of actors other than those who are central and powerful, we introduced the meta-category of the institutional role of supporters.

Third, our exploration of the **organizational forms institutional work** can take on depending on the configuration of involved actors provides insights into the meso-level of institutional work. To frame the setting in which heterogeneous actors' micro-institutional work takes place and acknowledge its complexity, we proposed the notion of arenas of institutional work. The development of an integrative model containing four variations of the latter allows to go beyond institutional entrepreneurship which has been studied extensively. Through this model, we showed how top-down institutional work differs from institutional entrepreneurship and once again insisted on the critical role of supporters, especially in settings marked by the heterogeneity of actors. Moreover, we proposed a definition of dispersed institutional work and thereby enriched the emerging literature on this dimension of institutional work.

3.2. Methodological contributions

Then, our contributions are also of methodological nature. We provide an *in situ* account of institutional work, that is, we were able to observe heterogeneous actors' institutional work as it unfolded, rather than analyzing it in retrospect. Thereby, we respond to recent calls (Bisschops and Beunen, 2019; Zarpelon et al., 2019) that invite researchers to mobilize such approaches when studying institutional change in general, and institutional work in particular. Observing institutional work in real time allowed us to account even for small, unexpected shifts and changes as well as unintended consequences, and to acknowledge all involved actors' roles in the process of implementing co-creation rather than retrospectively analyzing its end results. This illustrates the central role of observations as a main data source in this study.

Moreover, the will to be *in situ*, i.e., on site, as institutional work unfolded also explains our focus on only some phases of co-creation. As a matter of fact, this thesis only concerns actors' institutional work aimed at shaping the design and deployment phases of co-creation, and neither includes the implementation of co-created policy nor its evaluation. Since these co-creation processes are still ongoing (the timeline for the implementation of co-created policies is 2030) and we mobilized an *in situ* approach to data collection, it was not possible to include the remaining phases of co-creation in this research.

3.3. *Managerial recommendations*

Finally, we also identified several managerial implications of our study. They concern the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. Since co-creation is still a relatively new approach and empirical studies remain rare, “best practice” examples are scarce. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, our study does not cover co-creation from ideation to evaluation but only includes the phases up until its deployment, and therefore, our managerial recommendations concern the process of implementing co-creation rather than “best practices” aimed at achieving certain outcomes. We identified four main points that may be of interest to local public organizations as they experiment with the implementation of co-creation: the need for adaptability, the choice of the most suitable space and time, the organizational embeddedness of co-creation, as well as professional training for public managers and elected officials.

First, the findings of our study suggest that **adaptability is key**. This is where our research design based on a “two-case case study” was particularly valuable. We were able to observe important differences between the two cases whereby one shows a high degree of adaptability and the second does not. It is in the first case that the scope of co-creation ended up being more extensive than planned, as the adaptability of the design gave rise to a deeper and longer co-creation process. Not only the duration of the co-creation process was extended to fit participants’ expectations and allow for more extensive participation, but so were the tools and methods. Reducing the complexity and adapting it to the participants’ level of knowledge ensured smooth and unproblematic participation, and an end result of the co-creation workshops that satisfied both the participants and the municipality. Adapting co-creation to participants rather than imposing a rigid design can lead to more productive co-creation sessions with more satisfying outcomes. Reducing the complexity of the methods, the language used, or the objectives of co-creation might be necessary depending on the participants. On the other hand, it could also be necessary to increase the ambition of the co-creation process, for instance if participants consider the proposed issues to be insignificant, or if they request more extensive participation. The implementation of co-creation thus largely depends on its participants. Co-creation organizers should therefore actively listen to their feedback and incorporate it even if this means making last-minute changes. *Our first recommendation for public organizations implementing co-creation is therefore to demonstrate their adaptability, listen to participants’ feedback and incorporate it in the design of the co-creation approach, even if this means diverging from the initial plan.*

Second, our study emphasizes the importance of choosing **the right space and time** for co-creation. Once more, our two cases showed important differences in this regard, whereby one quickly recognized the impact of time and space on co-creation. The most suitable location and time for co-creation events depend on the targeted population. For instance, should the working population be the target, organizing co-creation events towards the end of the day or on the weekend might be beneficial. Alternating between the two, that is, proposing events both on weeknights as well as on the weekend, can help

ensure that those who wish to attend can do so. In any case, the duration of the co-creation events must be adapted to the target. In this regard, a balance must be found. Participants must have enough time to complete the tasks, but if the event is too long, their motivation and attention are likely to decrease as tiredness sets in. Then, the right space for co-creation must be selected. A location that the targeted population is familiar with and can easily access can help ensure satisfying attendance rates. Moreover, making use of the public space and organizing co-creation outdoors, if meteorological conditions allow for it, can be beneficial to increase the visibility of the co-creation event. Choosing a location that targeted population already frequents can moreover encourage them to attend the co-creation event. *Our second recommendation is therefore to carefully select both the time and the space for co-creation events, and to keep in mind the potential participants' habits and preferences.*

Third, our study invites to give thought to the **organizational embeddedness** of co-creation. In this regard, for co-creation to be implemented in a durable way or even on a project-basis, we suggest that it is important to provide the organizational conditions for the integration of this approach. In one of the cases we studied, favorable organizational conditions for the implementation of co-creation were provided through the creation of a new department dedicated to both sustainable development and citizen participation. However, smaller actions can have a big impact as well. If the resources allow it, creating a position within the organization or the department in question that is dedicated to citizen participation in general, or the co-creation project at hand can be beneficial. Since the implementation of co-creation requires a lot of time and energy even when external consultants support the organization, having a position dedicated to co-creation can ensure that this is done carefully, and not merely added onto someone's already heavy workload. This moreover ensures the visibility of co-creation within the organization as well as for external actors for whom this employee can be the main interlocutor. If it is not possible to create a new position within the organization, it can be valuable to train current staff in co-creation methods and thereby raise awareness and providing them with the knowledge and tools to implement co-creation. As a matter of fact, this is crucial even if a new department or position can be created: indeed, the findings of our study stressed the importance of having "internal supporters" to ensure the diffusion of co-creation within the organization and reduce resistance.

Apart from dedicating a department or position to co-creation and training staff, organizational embeddedness can also be ensured through more mundane actions as well as through discourse. Our study shows that the creation of a narrative about the importance of co-creation, and the constant repetition of its relevance and added value help create legitimacy for this approach. Moreover, even if co-creation is about including citizens in decision-making, incorporating these principles into internal working methods can also increase the acceptability of this new approach and normalize it for the members of the organization. In this respect, co-creation workshops for public managers and agents, and/or municipal councillors could be held, methods such as design thinking could be used, or collaborative tools could be introduced. Finally, providing shared strategic

documents that allow for all involved parties – elected officials, public managers and agents, as well as the local population – to develop a shared understanding of the policy objectives could allow for them to take ownership of the co-created policy and align their efforts. *Consequently, our third recommendation is to incorporate co-creation in organizational processes, be it through big or small actions.*

Fourth, **dedicated professional training programs** in collaboration with universities or other higher education institutions could be particularly useful to familiarize (future or current) public managers and elected officials with these methods. While these trainings could be independent programs for professionals, they could also be inscribed in public management university programs. For instance, a course on “Innovation and Design Thinking” is part of the Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance’s “Public Marketing and Communications” Master’s program⁷⁷. However, similar courses remain rare in current public management programs. Incorporating courses on collaborative policymaking methods into the university programs that train tomorrow’s public managers would therefore be a valuable step. While different training programs are provided by various organizations in France such as the CNFPT (French National Center for Territorial Civil Service) that for instance proposes courses in public innovation methods⁷⁸, these offers are dispersed, and not available in all regions. *Our fourth recommendation is therefore to provide generalized and accessible professional co-creation training courses for public managers and elected officials.*

4. Limitations

The limitations of our study are of both conceptual and methodological nature. They are related to the study of co-creation, as well as to the design of our empirical study. These limitations present opportunities for further research, on which we elaborate in the following section.

First, in this thesis, we were not able to study all **phases of co-creation**. We paid attention only to the stages of designing and deploying co-creation, not the outcomes of the process. As a matter of fact, studies that investigate an entire co-creation process are rare for a good reason: co-creation takes time. Even if in the cases we studied, the “deadline” for the implementation of the co-created policies was 2030 since they were related to the UN SDGs, studying the outcomes of the co-creation process would have required more extensive field work to collect data. Realistically, this was not feasible given that we conducted this research for our doctoral thesis which we intended to complete within

⁷⁷ IMPGT, Master in Public Management - Public Marketing and Communications, see <https://impgt.univ-amu.fr/en/formations/master-2-marketing-communication-publics> (consulted on 05.02.2024)

⁷⁸ CNFPT, Innovation Publique, see <https://www.cnfpt.fr/se-former/former-vos-agents/etre-accompagne-ses-projets/linnovation-publique-collaborative/innovation-publique/corse> (consulted on 05.02.2024)

four years. While it would have been highly interesting to conduct a longitudinal study that includes the outcomes of co-creation, our time was limited.

Second, and also related to the study of co-creation, our focus on the implementation of the co-creation approach did not allow for us to study the **content of co-creation** at the same time. We thus neglected the ideas that emerged from co-creation and the mechanisms behind them, and rather focused on the way in which actors shaped the implementation of the approach itself. In a similar vein, we did not focus on the content of the Grand Challenges tackled by the respective organizations. Instead, we investigated the process of developing responses through co-creation – within a context of Grand Challenges.

Third, from a methodological perspective, the limitations of our study are related to our choice of a **qualitative research design based on a multiple-case study**. The latter consisting of “only” two cases does not allow for generalization, and while our goal was to develop a deep understanding of each case rather than to generalize the findings, this choice might raise questions about the transferability of the latter. It would be necessary to include a broader spectrum of cases to explore and compare how different national, cultural, administrative, and institutional contexts affect the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations. Moreover, to ensure that the perceptions of all involved actors are included, it would have been beneficial to conduct more interviews. In this regard, it would also have been interesting to interview “non-participants” to study whether or not they in their role of silent actors engaged in some kind of reflexive institutional work or not. We moreover regret that we did not have the opportunity to attend and observe internal meetings related to the organization of the respective co-creation projects.

Finally, by presenting the findings of our empirical study for each case separately and in a descriptive way in chapter 4, and then through a cross-case analysis identifying similarities and differences in chapter 5, **redundancies** might occur. We opted for this structure to increase the transparency of our empirical work and to conceptualize our findings step-by-step but are aware that this could be perceived as repetitive.

5. Avenues for further research

These limitations lead to the development of several research avenues. They emerge from the findings of our study that were not directly related to our research questions, and therefore not exploited in this thesis. These avenues for further research revolve around the role of space in institutional work, the outcomes of co-creation, and the impacts of the implementation of co-creation on the institutional arrangements that shape local public organizations.

First, while we briefly mentioned the **role of space** as a driver of the implementation of co-creation in the cross-case analysis of our findings, it would be interesting to deepen our understanding of the impact the material dimension of space can have on institutional work. As a matter of fact, while Lawrence and Phillips (2019) consider materiality to be one of the essential facets of institutional work, it remains largely overlooked by institutional work scholars. Some emergent work begins to explore the role of place or space in institutional work: Lawrence and Dover (2015) identify three roles of “place” in institutional work, and Arnaud and Serval (2020) introduce the notion of “territorial work” to refer to instances where the construction of the territory is the target of institutional work. Tissoe, Hernandez, and Moustier (2019) propose “place work” as a new dimension of institutional work that refers to the redefinition of practices, boundaries and places.

While we referred to this emerging literature only marginally in this study since the focus was not on the material aspects of institutional work, in parallel to our doctoral thesis, we are already engaged in first reflections on the roles of materiality in general and of space in particular in institutional work. As a matter of fact, we have been working on a study of the roles of materiality in institutional work in the context of an emerging institutional logic. For this study, currently under review, we investigate a co-creation experiment in a different local setting. Moreover, in a forthcoming article, we aim to understand how the territory shapes local public managers’ institutional work as they deploy co-creation in the case of Venelles. The findings of this doctoral thesis suggest that it would be interesting to continue the exploration of the role of space in institutional work, as well as with regard to co-creation for which it can act as both a driver and an obstacle.

Then, while our study’s focus on specific **phases of co-creation** was mentioned as a limitation in the previous section, it can also be transformed into a research avenue. As a matter of fact, longitudinal studies of co-creation including its outcomes and effects remain rare, but would be valuable in order to identify mechanisms that contribute to the successful deployment of co-creation. Thus, studying not only the design and deployment of co-creation, but also the implementation of co-created policies and the evaluation of their outcomes presents an interesting avenue for further research. While most existing literature insists on the benefits of co-creation and stresses its positive outcomes, calls for studies about the “dark side of co-creation” are becoming louder (Steen et al., 2018). While we briefly mentioned potential benefits and pitfalls of co-creation in our literature review, they were not apparent in the presentation and discussion of the findings of our empirical study since our object of research did not explicitly concern them. Therefore, in future studies, it would be interesting to explore how co-creation can lead to both the creation and the destruction of public value (cf. Acar et al., 2023).

When paying attention to the outcomes of co-creation, it becomes apparent that the study of co-creation can also enrich institutional work literature. Indeed, the exploration of outcomes remains marginal in institutional work where the focus is on the process itself. Investigating the outcomes of co-creation through an institutional work lens could

therefore be a highly relevant idea for future studies. Another aspect included in our study's limitations above is our neglect of the **content and mechanisms of co-creation** due to our process-focus. Studying how heterogeneous actors agree on the formulation of policy problems and jointly develop responses to them would however give interesting insights into co-creation and its value with regard to Grand Challenges (cf. Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022; Kroeger et al., 2021).

Finally, our findings show that the organizational forms in which institutional work manifests can evolve and change over time. This illustrates that while co-creation might be a paradigmatic shift, it does not completely erase and replace the institutional arrangements on which public organizations rest. Rather, processes of **hybridization and institutional layering** (Polzer et al., 2016) seem to occur as co-creation is added onto an existing set of institutional arrangements (Torfing et al., 2019). This was not the focus of this thesis where we paid attention to the process of implementing co-creation rather than the end result of actors' institutional work processes. However, our findings suggest that the public organizations that implement co-creation turn into hybrids as they combine new institutional elements related to co-creation with already existing ones. Indeed, existing and entrenched practices continue to be mobilized despite the introduction of co-creation, and the organization is able to resort to either new or established institutions depending on the context.

The relevance of studying public organizations as hybrids when they implement co-creation is emphasized by the observation that in our study alone, the two cases seem to show two different types of hybridization. While decoupling – the superficial endorsement of co-creation, while established practices continue to be mobilized – occurs in the case of Klagenfurt, selective coupling – the purposeful enactment of selected practices related to co-creation – takes place in Venelles (cf. Pache & Santos, 2013). Indeed, we observed that co-creation seemed to be implemented in Klagenfurt mostly to comply with the selection criteria to obtain project funding, while Venelles insisted on the wish to start a local movement of citizen participation. In this regard, we could thus investigate whether hybridization and institutional layering are merely a transition stage as co-creation begins to be implemented – or will these public organizations remain hybrids? Moreover, combining this perspective with institutional work could reveal how institutional work is related to hybridization, which types of institutional work can be mobilized to achieve which type of hybridization, and how actors do so in a purposeful and reflexive manner.

To close this section, table 30 below summarizes the structure and main aspects of our doctoral thesis.

Table 30. Thesis structure and summary of central elements

Research object	<i>How does heterogenous actors' institutional work shape the implementation of co-creation in local public organizations facing Grand Challenges?</i>
Research questions	<i>RQ 1: What are the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation? RQ 2: What are the institutional roles of the heterogenous actors engaged in institutional work aimed at shaping the implementation of co-creation? RQ 3: How do actors' roles and practices shape the organizational form of institutional work?</i>
Conceptual and theoretical framework <i>(chapters 1 and 2)</i>	<i>Context: Grand Challenges Main concept: policy co-creation Main theory: neo-institutional theory/ institutional work perspective</i>
Epistemological position <i>(chapter 3, section 1.1.)</i>	Constructivism
Mode of reasoning <i>(chapter 3, section 1.2.)</i>	Abduction
Empirical approach <i>(chapter 3, sections 1.2. and 2.1.)</i>	Qualitative approach "Two-case case study" of the implementation of policy co-creation in a French (town of Venelles) and an Austrian (city of Klagenfurt) local public organization
Data collection <i>(chapter 3, section 2.2.)</i>	Triangulation of primary and secondary data: Semi-structured interviews Participant and non-participant observations Analysis of secondary data (documents)
Data analysis <i>(chapter 3, section 2.3.)</i>	Thematic content analysis Qualitative analysis through coding (use of NVivo 12)
Criteria for evaluation <i>(chapter 3, section 2.4.)</i>	Internal validity External validity Construct validity Reliability
Main findings <i>(chapters 4 and 5)</i>	Complex and emergent nature of heterogenous actors' institutional work practices Context-dependent and dynamic nature of institutional roles Evolving nature of organizational forms of institutional work
Theoretical contributions <i>(chapter 5)</i>	Study of micro-institutional work of heterogenous actors, their practices, and institutional roles Introduction of the notion of arenas of institutional work and an integrative model of their organizational variations Definition of dispersed institutional work
Methodological contributions	<i>In situ</i> study of institutional work
Managerial recommendations	Adaptability of co-creation Choice of time and space for co-creation Organizational embeddedness of co-creation
Limitations	Study of selected phases of co-creation only Neglect of content of co-creation and Grand Challenges Qualitative research design based on two cases
Avenues for further research	The role of space in institutional work Holistic study of co-creation and its outcomes Hybridization, co-creation, and institutional work

(Source: author)

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guides

Appendix B: Coding table

Appendix A: Interview guides

Two slightly different interview guides have been prepared: one for actors involved in the organization of the co-creation process (guide 2), and one for actors participating in it (guide 2). When questions were inspired by past studies, the sources are cited next to them. When necessary, the questions were slightly adapted to the respective co-creation process and the local particularities during interviews. Since the interviews took place in French and German, the interview guides were translated as well. We include only the English version in this appendix to match the language of the remainder of our thesis.

Guide 1: Actors involved in the organization of the co-creation process (elected politicians, public managers, consultants)

Brief presentation of myself and the research project; disclaimer that interviews are anonymous; question about recording/notes.

1. Presentation

- a) Could you introduce yourself and your role in a few sentences?
- b) Could you describe your city in a few sentences?
- c) How would you describe the population of your city?
- d) Have you already organized participatory processes? If so, could you give an example? How did this process go? (*cf. Bertels & Lawrence, 2016*)
- e) How receptive is the current structure of your organization to participatory processes/ what are the internal dynamics regarding participation? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)
- f) What do you do to incorporate such a process into the structure (which management/communication/technical means do you have for this)? (*Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Gawer & Phillips, 2013*)

[reformulation, follow-up questions, details]

2. Project

- a) Could you briefly describe this project?
- b) What are the stages of this project? How does it fit into local policy and what is the role of politics in the process?
- c) What were the motivations and objectives of this participatory process? Who initiated it and how? By whom and how is it managed (*cf. Currie et al., 2012; Ko & Liu 2021*)?
- d) Which people are involved internally in the project and what is their role?
- e) Which external stakeholders are involved in the project and why? What is their role and when do they intervene in the project? (*cf. Currie et al., 2012; Ko & Liu 2021*)
- f) What is your role in the project? Are you able to fully accomplish these tasks? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)
- g) (How) does the participatory process affect the organization's priorities? (How) does it affect role and relationships within the organization? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)

[*reformulation, follow-up questions, details*]

3. Organization of the project

- a) How was the organizing team for the project selected? What is its role?
- b) What do you think of the organization of the project and the workshops? (Organization of the roundtables, time management, visual preparation, group size,...)
- c) If applicable: Remember the workshops and especially your group: how was the group composed? How did your interactions with the other stakeholders go? What was your role in the group? What difficulties did you encounter? Can you describe a specific situation?
- d) Is there internal resistance to such a participatory process, or have you encountered other problems within the organization? How do you deal with this? (*cf. Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Ko & Liu 2021*)
- e) How do you mobilize external stakeholders for the project? Do you encounter difficulties, and if so, what are they? How do you deal with them?
- f) Which groups of actors were easy/difficult to mobilize? How do you deal with them?
- g) In your opinion, is it difficult to reach common ground when identifying and prioritizing the problems? How do you deal with this?
- h) Do the priorities of the stakeholders correspond to those of the city? If not, how do you deal with this?

i) In your opinion, are the ideas proposed to solve the problems in the workshops realistic?

j) Were you surprised by the priorities and/or ideas?

k) How is the implementation of the proposals decided? How can you, at your level, influence the decision (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)?

l) What happens in-between workshops with the work already done?

m) Ideally, what would citizens contribute? What would be ideal citizen participation? Do your colleagues share this perception? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)

n) What are the main obstacles to achieving this ideal situation? What would you need to achieve it? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)

m) If you could start the project all over again, would you do anything differently?

n) Do you have anything to add?

[*reformulation, follow-up questions, details*]

Guide 2: Actors participating in the co-creation process (individual citizens, associations)

Brief presentation of myself and the research project; disclaimer that interviews are anonymous; question about recording/notes.

1. Presentation

a) Could you briefly introduce yourself?

b) Could you describe your city in a few sentences?

c) How long have you lived in your city and would you say you feel connected to it?

d) How would you describe the population of your city?

e) Why and in what capacity did you participate in the project? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)

f) Have you ever taken part in a participatory process before?

[*reformulation, follow-up questions, details*]

2. Project

a) How would you describe the project? What is the motivation behind it?

- b) In your opinion, how does the project fit into local policy?
- c) Were you already familiar with the issues dealt with in the project? How important are these topics to you?
- d) How accessible and understandable are these topics for you?
- e) How accessible and understandable do you think these topics are for the other participants?
- f) What is your role in the project? Are you able to fully accomplish your tasks? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)
- g) In your opinion, are all affected stakeholders involved in the project? What is the respective role of the participants?
- h) Which actors do you interact with most? How does the collaboration go? (*cf. Glimmerveen et al., 2020*)

[*reformulation, follow-up questions, details*]

3. Organization of the project

- a) What do you think of the organization of the project and the workshops? (Organization of the tables, time management, visual preparation, group size,...)
- b) Remember the workshops and especially your group: how was the group put together? How did your interactions with the other stakeholders go? What was your role in the group? What difficulties did you encounter? Can you describe a specific situation?
- c) Did you experience any difficulties in participating? How did you overcome them? (*cf. Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Ko & Liu, 2021*)
- d) In your opinion, is it difficult to reach common ground when identifying and prioritizing the problems? How do you deal with this?
- e) Are your priorities in line with those of the city? Those of the other participants?
- f) What was your goal in the idea prioritization phase?
- g) In your opinion, are the ideas proposed to solve the problems in the workshops realistic?
- h) What was your aim when proposing measures?
- i) Have you experienced difficulties in fully expressing your opinions and ideas? What factors may have affected you negatively? Or which factors have had a positive influence? (*cf. Bertels & Lawrence, 2016*)
- j) Do you feel heard and taken seriously?

k) Were you surprised by the priorities and/or ideas?

l) Do you know what happens to the work already done in-between workshops?

m) Do you know who will decide on the proposals and in what timeframe?

n) What would you change about the organization of the workshops/project?

o) Do you have anything else to add?

[reformulation, follow-up questions, details]

Appendix B: Coding table

Codes that emerged *a posteriori* are distinguished from *a priori* codes in the coding table through the gray background.

Code “**1. Context**” allows to develop an understanding of the setting in which co-creation took place.

1. CONTEXT
1.1. Local public organization
1.1.1. Administrative sphere
1.1.1.1 silos
1.1.1.2 Sustainable development department is different
1.1.1.3 internal relationships
1.1.1.4 resources
1.1.2. Political sphere
1.1.2.1 image-focused
1.1.2.2 history of engagement for environment
1.1.3. Societal sphere
1.1.3.1 relationships with associations
1.1.3.2 lack of knowledge about public action
1.2. Territory
1.2.1 Demographic characteristics
1.2.1.1 aging
1.2.1.2 wealthy
1.2.1.3 gap
1.2.2 Geographic characteristics
1.2.2.1 calm
1.2.2.2 quality of life
1.2.2.3 infrastructure

Code “**2. Co-creation**” allows to better understand the features of the respective co-creation process and to enrich the presentation of the cases as well as of the findings directly related to our research questions. It relates to the literature in chapter 1, sections 2 and 3. Not all *a priori* codes applied to our cases.

2. CO-CREATION
2.1. Benefits
2.1.1. cohesion
2.1.2. diversity
2.1.3. educational effects
2.1.4. democracy
2.1.4.1. importance of participation
2.1.4.2. openness of the organization
2.1.5. education
2.1.6. inclusivity
2.1.6.1 cohesion, feeling of belonging
2.1.6.2 balanced
2.1.6.3 different participation modalities
2.1.7. innovation
2.1.8. legitimacy
2.2. Issues
2.2.1. creativity needs more support
2.2.2. filter
2.2.3. lack of concrete inputs
2.2.4. lack of transparency and communication
2.2.5. little knowledge about city's environmental policy
2.2.6. little media attention
2.2.7. outcomes depend on politics
2.2.8. question of competencies
2.2.9. separation of actor groups
2.2.10. space for co-creation
2.2.11. symbolic project
2.2.12. the why remains unclear
2.2.13. time for co-creation
2.2.14. young public
2.2.14.1. hierarchy
2.2.14.2. issues not adapted to the public
2.2.14.3. process not adapted to the public
2.2.15. reconciling different levels of interest and knowledge
2.2.16 recruitment of participants

2.2.17. lack of participation
2.2.18. scepticism
2.2.19. usual suspects
2.2.20. co-creation modalities are too restrictive
2.2.21. complexity with various new and existing modalities for participation
2.2.22. lack of reactivity
2.2.23. limited capacity for innovation
2.3. Changes
2.3.1. Organizational processes
2.3.2. Actors, roles, skills
2.3.3. Relationships

Code “**3. Institutional work practices**” refers to RQ 1 about the institutional work practices of heterogenous actors aimed at shaping the implementation of policy co-creation. It relates to the literature explored in chapter 2, section 2.3., and *a priori* codes are based on the typologies of institutional work proposed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) (codes 3.1. to 3.3.), and Cloutier et al. (2016) (codes 3.4. to 3.7.).

3. INSTITUTIONAL WORK PRACTICES
3.1. Creating
3.2. Disrupting
3.3. Maintaining
3.4. Structural
3.4.1 political program
3.4.2 modifying organizational structure
3.4.2.1 creating positions
3.4.2.2 creating a department
3.4.3 finding project partners
3.4.4 creating new governance instruments
3.5. Conceptual
3.5.1 developing narratives

3.5.1.1 developing narratives around the benefits of co-creation
3.5.1.2 developing narratives around the shortcomings of bureaucracy
3.5.1.3 developing narratives questioning the added value of co-creation
3.5.2 clarifying the outlines of co-creation
3.5.2.1 explanations of form and content
3.5.2.2 using a broader framework for co-creation
3.5.2.3 presenting co-creation as a movement
3.5.2.4 presenting co-creation as a project
3.6. Operational
3.6.1 mobilizing
3.6.2 designing co-creation
3.6.3 hosting workshops
3.6.4 adapting co-creation
3.6.5 participating in co-creation
3.6.5.1 participating in workshops
3.6.5.2 participating in drafting the deliverable
3.6.5.2.1 negatively affecting the drafting of the deliverable
3.6.5.3 following instructions
3.6.5.4 guiding the ideation process
3.6.5.5 transforming ideas
3.6.6 proposing own projects
3.6.7 integrating new practices into existing ones
3.6.8 showing lack of interest through absence
3.6.9 limiting resources
3.6.10 asking internal participation mandatory
3.7. Relational
3.7.1. gaining trust
3.7.1.1 gaining the municipality's trust
3.7.1.2 gaining the population's trust
3.7.2 networking and lobbying
3.7.3 being present in the public space
3.7.4 proposing first-name basis
3.7.5 rejecting first-name basis
3.7.6 recruiting participants based on familiarity

Code “**4. Institutional roles**” refers to RQ 2 about actors’ institutional roles in the institutional work process. *A priori* codes are based on the literature studied in chapter 2, section 3.2. (for example, Alvarez et al., 2015; Ben Slimane, 2012; Delbridge & Edwards, 2008; Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Gluch & Svensson, 2018; Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Not all *a priori* codes applied to our cases.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ROLES
4.1. Institutional entrepreneurs
4.2. Opportunity creators
4.3. Supporters
4.4. Opponents
4.5. Maintainers
4.6. Consumers
4.7. Catalyst
4.8. Implementers
4.9. Engine
4.10. Experts
4.11. Organizer
4.12. Reality checkers
4.13. Helping hand
4.14. Mediators
4.15. Guides
4.16. Challengers
4.17. Active followers
4.18. Pivots
4.19. Opportunists
4.20. Legitimacy providers
4.21. Silent actors

Code “**5. Organizational forms**” refers to RQ 3 about the organizational forms of institutional work. *A priori* codes are based on the literature studied in chapter 2, section 3.3. Again, not all *a priori* codes applied to our cases.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS
5.1. Bottom-up
5.1.1 peripheral actors
5.1.2 little access to power and resources
5.1.3 mundane IW
5.2. Collective
5.2.1 homogenous roles
5.2.2 similar intentions and IW practices
5.2.3 little access to power and resources
5.2.4 mobilization in groups

5.2.5 proximity
5.3. Dispersed
5.3.1 multiple actors, central and peripheral
5.3.2 heterogenous actors and roles
5.3.3 multiple intentions and IW practices
5.3.4 unintended consequences
5.3.5 adaptability of the change project
5.3.6 taking ownership
5.3.7 mundane IW
5.3.8 conflicts, negotiations, compromise
5.4. Top-down
5.4.1 few actors, central positions
5.4.2 homogenous roles
5.4.3 clear and shared intention and similar IW practices
5.4.4 linear process
5.4.5 institutional change perceived as one actor's project
5.4.6 IW is "grand"
5.4.7 peripheral actors are in supporting roles
5.4.8 awareness and reflexivity of actors
5.4.9 access to power and resources

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