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Individual and collective roles in
organisational governance: focus
on governance activity through a
systemic approach

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Abstract

This exploratory research envisages organisational governance with a systemic approach: the governance activity is generated by a structure, which is composed of groups and leaders where the leaders' behaviour partially determines the interactions between components of this structure. This new model is defined and tested via intervention research processes based on an ethnographic approach, in two third-sector organisations: a cooperative supermarket and an ecovillage. The results demonstrate the heuristic interest of this approach for studying how the collective and individual dimensions are shared within the organisational governance system and subsequently, the compatibility between these dimensions. They also demonstrate its practical interest for third-sector collectives, which can use this model to gain autonomy in their metagovernance (governance of governance) capability.

We identify and discuss a type of leadership not hitherto described in the literature that we describe as pro-participatory. Unlike the figure of the "heroic" social entrepreneur often seen as the driving force of collective action, the pro-participative leader supports the achievement of the organisation's aims. He/she does this by creating the conditions for participatory governance and by fostering the development and autonomy of individuals through a servant leadership type of management. The collective and the pro-participatory leader are mutually shaped. The prospects and limitations of this research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Collectives are forming all over the world with the aim of influencing societal change: Their goal is to provide an alternative to the “market-oriented” model through experimenting with economic systems based on reciprocity and sharing. Ecovillages that develop permaculture, community-supported agriculture and cooperative supermarkets are all examples of this emerging trend. These collectives aim to place collective interest above that of the individual and promote environmentally-friendly development through prioritizing the values of solidarity, reciprocity, sharing and democracy. They mostly seek to promote a “collective” dimension of their governance that is based on democratic principles (Nyssens & Defourny, 2016), or by adopting community operating modes.

In the social enterprise typology recently defined by M. Nyssens and J. Defourny (Nyssens & Defourny, 2016) to describe the changing landscape of the social and solidarity economy (the “third sector”), these organisations fall under the “non-profit social enterprise” or “social cooperative” types. They have association or cooperative status. Their members are composed mostly of volunteers; staff recruitment, especially when it comes to choosing an executive director, generally arises as the organisation grows. In their governance system, there are generally one or more bodies, made up of elected or all members, which play a central role. When these organisations turn professional, a distinction may arise, to a greater or lesser degree, between the political structure (elected members involved in governance) and the technostucture responsible for operational steering of the collective action (Meier & Schier, 2009).

These organisations have specific features which make governance a particularly complex issue, a factor that has been highlighted in several publications (Spear, Cornforth & Aiken, 2009) (Meier & Schier, 2009) (Enjolras, 2009a) (Braconnier & Caire, 2012). These features include instability and difficulty in collective management (volunteer commitment issues); gaps in governance expertise; tensions between the political and operational dimensions of governance, particularly due to a lack of informational symmetry; organisational adjustments due to consistent interaction with the environment; resource hybridisation; etc. This complexity of factors affecting governance may have a significant impact on the smooth running of the collective, which may cause deviation from its operating mode and initial aim (Angel & Hermans, 2016).

These factors can create tensions in organisations between the striving for participatory governance on the one hand (which implies a long, deliberative decision-making and operational process) and the need for effective action on the other (with the appointment of individual managers for project management and operation) (Braconnier & Caire, 2012). These collectives seek to find their own socially innovative models of governance, as a result of their disapproval of conventional governance systems, however they lack a suitable “neutral” frame of reference (i.e., not prescriptive of a type of organisation) (Meier & Schier, 2009).

We addressed this need by developing an organisational governance model, where governance is viewed as a system made up of groups and leaders, which generates the governance activity. We did so through two intervention research studies (IR): in the first IR, with the cooperative supermarket, we inferred that combining structure, activity and leadership is an interesting way to represent governance mechanisms. We applied a systemic approach to translate this combination into a hypothetical model. We used this model to create an interpretative representation of the existing governance (frame of reference) for our second IR with an ecovillage. This frame allowed us to highlight the respective roles of the collective and individual dimensions in governance activity. During the second IR, we observed and followed collective use of this frame of reference within a metagovernance process governance of governance (Hufty, 2016) . At the request of the collective, we designed this process in order to reinforce the participatory dimension of the organisation. The goal of this experiment was to create the conditions so that the collective could respond to its own governance issues, which would result in the empowerment of the group in its metagovernance practices.

Furthermore, this analysis of the ecovillage governance system allowed us to demonstrate the compatibility between the participatory dimension of governance and the role and behaviour of leaders. We could show that the leaders’ activity consisted of, on one hand, management-related tasks, with behaviour similar to that of

"servant leadership " (Dierendonck, 2011); and on the other, of tasks creating the conditions for participatory governance. This compatibility between participation and leadership is the result of a mutual adjustment process, where leaders and groups interact and develop mutually. These observations have led us to propose and discuss a type of leadership not hitherto identified in the literature that we describe as "pro-participatory".

We also discuss the role of the researcher in the metagovernance process. Finally, while this study paves the way for further research on social enterprise governance, it involves limitations discussed below.

2. Modelling organisational governance in terms of activity, in a systemic approach

2.1 Organisational governance in the literature

In this section, we will look at organisations seeking to reinforce the participatory nature of their governance, while still incorporating and thus legitimizing the role of managers. How can we describe organisational governance by highlighting the articulation between its collective dimension, associated with the participatory process applied in the government bodies, and its individual dimension associated with the leaders' roles and behaviour?

The literature on organisational governance demonstrates, according to Hufty (2016) that studies in this area make use of the term governance through a mix of descriptive, analytical, normative and prescriptive approaches. These varied formulations on governance have resulted in a multitude of tools and a failure to come to a consensus-based methodological approach. Hufty further points to the lack of neutral analytical framework for organisational governance.

In the specific case of SSE organisations, research on organizational governance is still rare, as indicated by Meier and Schier (2009). They note a lack of interpretative and specific studies on the governance of social enterprises and associations. Thus, theories in this domain are mostly based on characteristics of conventional enterprises, where the role of the manager is predominant and placed above that of the "collective." In fact, the role of the collective is often neglected in these studies. In this context, Enjolras work stands out as an exception (Enjolras, 2009b). His approach to governance is based on a specific feature of voluntary organisations: the fact that they generally operate on the basis of reciprocity and in support of collective action. He points out that this reciprocity is linked with the climate of trust built up in organisations. He describes the structure of governance via 6 dimensions: organisational goals; ownership; residual claims (control and income); decision-making; monitoring and accountability mechanisms; and embedded incentives. These dimensions are dependent on the articulation between collective and individual dimensions, but this variable is not made explicit in the analysis.

Without a theoretical and analytical framework for examining the issue of organisational governance in terms of the respective role of collective and individual contributions, we are faced with the need to define a model elucidating this dimension.

The first stage in this process is to define the phenomenon to be modelled. Enjolras (Enjolras, 2005) defines governance in the field of social economy as, "the set of institutional arrangements governing the interactions of actors whose activities help achieve objectives that are in accordance with the general interest. With this broad definition, governance could cover all of the organisation's activities. We prefer the more precise definition provided by Hufty (2011), where organizational governance refers "to a category of social facts, namely the process of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms.

With this definition, studying organisational governance involves describing processes of interaction between actors. The multiplicity and complexity of these interactions, however, creates a challenge for analytical approaches, which may partly explain the lack of interpretative contributions of the organisational governance

phenomenon. To account for this complexity, Friedberg (Friedberg, 1997) suggests an approach that focuses on the study of action contexts, or systems. He advocates for the use of empirical proof and “by finding the causes of the structures and the characteristic ground rules of an action context not in extraneous phenomena, events or structures, but in processes of interaction itself, even those taking place between the involved actors”. However, this “endogenisation of explanations” supported by Friedberg can hardly produce interpretations that can be shared between actors. It is indeed difficult for a collective to discuss governance without a common, overall representation of the corresponding social reality.

Systemic methodology, due to its holistic approach, offers a method to model complex phenomenon and has thus been used in many research works on organisations (Bérard, 2009) (Tessier & Tellier, 1991) (Simon, 1964) (Homans, 1968). To our knowledge however, none of these studies explicitly targeted the organisational governance phenomena.

Among the many definitions, Le Moigne (Le Moigne, 1994) describes a system as an object that “carries out an activity, pursuing aims in a given environment, and whose internal structure changes over time without however losing its unique identity”. General System Theory, or GST, (Bertalanffy, 2012) describes systems with a dual breakdown: structural (into components) and functional (into activities). Modelling is a central method of GST, which consists of designing, then drawing a picture resembling the object under study (Le Moigne, 1994). In Le Moigne’s view, it is not a matter of analysing reality, but of designing a model of reality. Models are representations of knowledge about the systems, generally informed and developed by experts. Knowledge emerges from the use of these models, and is therefore multivalent and strongly linked with the context (Bérard, 2009) (Lyons, 2005). Approaching organisations with a systemic approach implies a “flexible systemic design”, given that there are always several possible versions of the system (Checkland, 1981) (Lyons *et al.*, 2003).

2.2 Model proposal

People who are involved in participatory government but who are not experts on governance per se, often reduce questions of governance to issues of structuration (decision-making processes and power dynamics that may influence these decisions). The ambiguity and ideological burden of certain words linked to governance, such as management, entrepreneurship, leadership, participation, democracy, or horizontality, may result in tensions which impede the collective definition of shared views. Our aim is to help actors work around these concepts, by approaching governance through *the activity* of governing. That is, the concrete work done to govern. The activity-based approach focuses on *what the system does*. It makes actors understand the governance phenomenon through concrete situations experienced in *action*.

Based on GST, we have inferred a model based on the following assumptions:

- Governance is a subsystem of the overall organisational system.
- The system structure is made up of components that play “roles” in governance: groups/bodies and leaders/managers.
- Activity is formed from a hierarchical structure of tasks. It is carried out by the components of the system.
- The distribution of activity among groups/bodies and leaders conveys the articulation of the collective and individual dimensions of the organisation.
- Interactions between components are essentially linguistic. They may be mediated by artefacts. They are partly determined by behaviours, particularly in respect of leadership.

Based on empirical observations, our approach consists of studying the components of the governance system (structural analysis). We then describe the observed governance activity in terms of a hierarchical structure of tasks (functional analysis) and the distribution of this activity in the structure. In a first approach, we consider the system as static (the analysis is done at a given time). We also concentrate the interactions’ study on the

behaviour of leaders in relation to the actors within the organisation and to governance groups (the "collective"). The role of artefacts in interactions and in the system dynamic will follow on from this initial exploratory research.

3. Research posture and method

3.1 Epistemological posture

We uphold the argument that reality does not exist objectively, but is socially constructed (**constructivism**): our representations of the world are informed both by the object and the subject (Landry, 1995). The research presented here was conducted through a back-and-forth process between our observations and theoretical knowledge (**abduction**) (Charreire & Durieux, 2014). Our approach is **qualitative**, as the results prove to be insufficient and too heterogeneous to carry out a quantitative analysis (Mahmood Nooraie, 2008). Furthermore, the richness and all-encompassing nature of qualitative data proved useful for our study due to its strong potential for deciphering complexity (Huberman & Miles, 2003). Given that knowledge about our topic is rare, our research is **exploratory** in nature. Our aim is to develop theoretical concepts that emerge from and are informed by field observation.

3.2 Research method

This study was conducted through an "intervention research" process, based on an organisational ethnographic approach.

3.2.1 Organisational ethnography

Organisational ethnography is intended to explain how organisations are socially constructed by studying practices and processes in situ, how they are materialised spatially and how they are also contextually and historically constructed over time (Grosjean & Groleau, 2014).

Two methods were used: participant observation and shadowing.

Participant observation consists of understanding people in the sharing of a common condition (Touraine, 1955). It consists of studying a social group by sharing its lifestyle and being accepted by its members. As pointed out by Whyte (Whyte, 2002), it is not a matter of identifying with the group, but taking part in everyday activities for a relatively long time, while also establishing some distance with the group.

Shadowing consists of following one person like his/her shadow, in his/her various activities and interactions, while taking numerous field notes or making audio and/or video recordings (Vásquez, 2014). This method is used to understand work practices and the actors' representations from their own experiences: it is thus rooted in activities.

3.2.2 Intervention Research

The aim of intervention research (IR) is to produce scientific knowledge usable for action (David, Hatchuel & Laufer, 2001), "actionable knowledge" (Argyris, 1985). It differs from action research by its focus on the instrumental dimension and by greater involvement of the organisation's actors. IR generally adopts a constructivist approach: conceptualising from compiled materials (Savall, 2004). IR helps improve practices by implementing tools and procedures in organisations (David, Hatchuel & Laufer, 2001). In IR, the researcher plays an active role in organisational change, by providing guidance (Sardas & Guénette, 2003). He/she accepts the influence that he/she will inevitably have on the organisation in which the intervention is carried out (Savall, 2004).

3.2.3 Research fields

A first intervention was carried out in a cooperative supermarket. It was initiated by an intervention researcher who was personally involved as a volunteer in the collective and who had no initial research purpose. However, due to her active involvement in the collective, the researcher did not systematically record her observations, and thus we are unable to make her experience an object of study. We do though mention this first intervention here as a “laboratory” for the emergence of a hypothetical model, which we subsequently tested through the second intervention.

The second intervention is the main focus of this article. It was conducted in an ecovillage, at the request of its collective, in order to support a metagovernance process: it was negotiated with these actors, within the scope of a DLA (Local Support Project) contract. The researcher adopted a distanced posture, with no personal involvement in the collective action. The intervention research began with an ethnographic data collection phase including participant observation (frequency of collective governance instances, participation in collective life and farming activities), shadowing (with the leader and with the garden-manager) and 7 semi-structured interviews repeated every 6-month (in 3 sets).

4. Intervention context and process

4.1 First IR on a cooperative supermarket

4.1.1 The "Park Slope Food Coop" phenomenon

Some ten cooperative supermarket projects have been launched in France since 2011, directly modelled from the *Park Slope Food Coop* (PSFC) in Brooklyn (www.foodcoop.com). However, "La Louve" in Paris is still the only project that has actually opened. In this model, “the cooperative principle is conveyed by the reinvestment of any profit for the benefit of the collective, and by a vote allocated to each member at the annual general meeting. Cooperative members contribute to the operation of the store alongside a team of staff. Only members can make purchases in the store. The aim is to make quality products accessible at lower costs, create trade and solidarity”. (La Louve supermarket website, translation by us).

4.1.2 Intervention context

The subject of our intervention is a project that was based on the Park Slope Food Coop model. It was launched by an individual who assembled a collective through public meetings.

At the time of the IR, 9 months after the project had been launched, the collective, organised as a non-profit organisation, was made up of some sixty active voluntary members and 250 affiliates. It had no staff. As the volunteers' involvement was a few months on average, nearly all the active members had been almost entirely replaced since the start of the project.

The individual who launched the project chaired the association, yet the governance was described as “shared” based on the principle of “co-designing the project through the involvement of all”¹. The governance structure was organised on a local level and global level. At the local level, ten working groups “were self-managed and co-designed the process”. Each group was in principle coordinated and guided by 2 “referents” appointed by the group. On a global level, the articles of association required that a board be elected at an annual general meeting, which would steer the project. This body could appoint a steering group (chairperson, treasurer and secretary) among its members.

The researcher, personally involved in the project, had observed in the first weeks of her involvement some tension around the governance issue. The project initiator complained of the lack of productivity of some groups and on the excessive independence of others. Some of the group referents withdrew from the project. The board

¹ Excerpt of a funding application submitted by the association

was not operational due to the defection of a majority of its members. The steering group, which had been appointed by the board at the start of the project, was however active. A temporary steering committee of some fifteen members had been set up, pending a restructuring of the governance system.

From the beginning of the project, "sociocracy" had been promoted as the model to be implemented to create "shared" governance. Statements, such as: "The implementation of Sociocracy marks a fundamental break in the mode of governance of an organisation. Based on system theory and cybernetics, sociocracy promotes organisation's efficiency and its members' empowerment" or indeed "by means of sociocracy, each individual will contribute to all the organisation's political decisions" (excerpt from a funding application file submitted by the association, citing no sources) helped to advance this idea. Despite this idealistic image of governance, the sociocratic model was a subject of much debate within the collective. The sociocratic model has not been the subject of research to date, and as such we cannot define it from scientific knowledge. It has been supported and promoted by consulting firms specialised in the third sector or by companies who question their own mode of governance. Furthermore, doubts were voiced on the project initiator's leadership, but this was often done outside collective group meetings and in the absence of the project leader.

The researcher observed a strong heterogeneity in people's representations of the governance concept, from her position as an active member. She noted a lack of common expertise to handle the perceived difficulties. She proposed a collective assessment to the steering committee, which initiated a 5-month metagovernance process.

4.1.3 Metagovernance process

The IR aim was to collectively develop enough expertise so as to be able to assess the sociocratic model in light of the specific features of the association, or to define the association's own view of a "shared" mode of governance. This objective was approved by the steering committee.

The metagovernance process started with a collective assessment of the cooperative project. This led us to notice the failings of the project's governance. The process continued with the collective design of governance guidelines through a seminar opened to all active members. This whole process had been previously validated by the steering committee. In the third phase, the steering committee defined three governance structure scenarios, and then proceeded to assess these in terms of advantages and disadvantages (fourth phase). This assessment was based both on the results of a feasibility analysis using a structure/activity frame of reference and governance specifications.

4.2. Second intervention on an ecovillage

4.2.1 The ecovillage phenomenon

Ecovillages are characterised by the fact that their action is envisaged through a holistic approach. The GEN network (Global Ecovillage Network), which is the most active internationally, defines an ecovillage as "an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology and economy) to regenerate their social and natural environments" (GEN int. board 2012). This movement is relatively recent (the term "ecovillage" emerged in the 1990s) and it is rapidly growing (for example, the main French network, "les colibris", created in 2007 listed over more than 400 ecovillages in May 2017).

4.2.2 Ecovillage profile

The activities of the studied ecovillage (founded in 2010) are structured into four missions: agroecology (organic permaculture, micro-farming, green building, sustainable food and local distribution development); popular education (including educational events within and outside of the ecovillage); sociocultural (organisation of events, workshops in the sociocultural field and Internet radio broadcasting) and resource center (training and support for project initiators, a library and action research programs).

At the time of the IR, the collective counted 150 members, some forty of whom were active (10 paid permanent staff, around ten volunteers with a strong involvement, some twenty volunteers occasionally involved). While over the 6 years of the ecovillage's existence, the original active members had been almost entirely replaced, the average period of active involvement was more than one year. Even after they left, the volunteers generally remained occasionally involved and supported the ecovillage after their period of active involvement.

4.2.3 Intervention context

From the launch of the project, the collective had stated its aim for participatory governance, with trials and regular system adjustments.

In the months prior to the IR, and under pressure from labour regulations, the collective had made the decision to differentiate jobs into two separate categories, each with their own pay grade. The collective also decided to legitimize the role of the founder by giving him the title of "supervisor". While this nomination was recent, the founder had played a central role in the association from its inception. This individual had taken on a de facto managerial role ever since the first recruitment in the organisation, even though the very notion of management was rejected. The announcement of his eventual withdrawing from the ecovillage, however, forced the other members of the association to understand more precisely the workings of his role as the association's leader. The collective decided to take advantage of the situation in order to reinforce the participatory dimension of its governance by setting up a "co-coordination" divided between several individuals. This prospect raised some doubts for fear that it would cause the organisation to fail.

Despite the collective work already conducted on governance issues, the active members' understanding of governance mechanisms appeared to vary from one member to another. This prevented the equal contribution of all the members and the notion of horizontality was vague. In order to be able to develop its own governance system, this collective needed to define and share a common representation of its governance by elucidating the participatory dimension and the role played by its leaders. As such, this association seemed to us to be an interesting test-case for our analytical model combining structure, activity and leadership: it provided the opportunity to draw a frame of reference inferred from our model in order to highlight the respective roles of the collective and of the individual. Our idea was to study its use by the collective in a metagovernance process and how this process informs the capacity for organisational learning.

In this context, the IR objectives and modalities were negotiated with the ecovillage collective, at its request and via the supervisor. The aim was to set up the conditions such that the steering committee could itself determine its own governance system, with a reinforced participatory dimension.

4.2.4 Metagovernance process

The first phase of this process consisted of defining a frame of reference of the existing governance, which demonstrated the partition of the collective and individual dimensions. This frame was then used to determine the feasibility of a transfer of the supervisor's activity to a possible "co-coordination" shared between several managers.

The frame of reference was drawn by combining analyses of structure, activities and leadership. The IR was conducted over a 5-month period. Most of the collective work was done in the fourth month during a 2-day seminar. The process is described below with its various stages.

- 1) **Ethnographic study** of the association (interviews, participant observation, shadowing, source document collection);
- 2) Drafting of an initial version of a frame of reference, by the intervention researcher;
- 3) **Co-design with a test group**: use and validation of the frame of reference; co-design of the metagovernance seminar program;

4) **Seminar/Part 1: Analysis of existing governance** (5 hours with some twenty members): work in groups, and subsequently in plenary session;

5) **Seminar/Part 2: Collective governance adaptation work** (7 hours): in groups, identification of supervisor's tasks suitable for transfer to co-coordination; plenary reporting and sharing sessions. This work resulted in a blocking situation, with the questioning of the very principle of co-coordination. An ad hoc group of volunteers was then set up to resolve the situation. Based on its suggestions, and following many discussions, the collective reached a consensus and a series of decisions were made.

6) **Ex-post analysis and reflexive feedback** by the intervention researcher (2nd version of the frame of reference); drafting of co-coordinator job descriptions.

5. Results

5.1 Case of the cooperative supermarket

The operational effects of the intervention were relatively limited, due to constraints and problems, the analysis of which provided significant elements for the progress of this study and particularly for the second intervention on the ecovillage.

As the existing governance was merely seen as a temporary set-up pending a better solution, the group sought out a prospective approach to assess the suitability of the various envisaged governance scenarios in respect of the specific aspects of the project. The intervention addressed this requirement by focusing the analysis on prospective scenarios combining structure and governance activity. We observed a difficulty for actors with no experience of project management and/or steering in identifying and understanding governance tasks. However, this difficulty was not encountered for a small group which was given the task of preparing the collective work by simulating the division of tasks on the governance structure components, for each scenario. In this small group work, the participants examined the tasks that were not obvious for everyone: the most experienced actors relied on real-life situations to make the matter easier for the others to understand. This group thus broadened its understanding of the concept of governance by referring to real-life scenarios, *confirming the benefit of a governance approach combining structure and activity*. We inferred that *the difficulty encountered by the other members of the steering committee would have been eased if they had started with a preliminary analysis of the existing governance before embarking on a prospective study, and by processing the tasks of the governance activity via work in small groups encouraging transfers of expertise*.

Moreover, in its discussions to compare the various scenarios identified, the collective was unable to reach a consensus. We explain this by the lack of tools relating to the leadership issue. Indeed, this underpinned many discussions and represented a stumbling block, without being tackled head-on. *We concluded that structure and activity were not sufficient to provide actors with a usable frame of reference to improve their governance: the leadership issue needed to be included*.

5.2 Case of the ecovillage

This second intervention led to the collective design of major adjustments to the governance system (set-up of co-coordination) and the validation of an implementation plan based on a experimentation/adaptation principle. It resulted in the initiation of a further IR, aimed at generating reflexivity on the co-coordination implementation process.

The use by the collective of an initial version of a frame of reference drawn up by the intervention researcher represented a collective learning opportunity: it helped increase the group's expertise. This led to the adjustment of the proposed frame of reference. On this basis, a prospective analysis was initiated on the participatory dimension of the governance. Thanks to the systemic approach to governance, combining structure, activity

and leadership, we were able to identify and describe a close compatibility in this organisation between leadership and the participatory dimension of governance.

We describe the results firstly in terms of frames of reference produced and of contribution of these frames of reference to understanding the articulation between the collective and individual dimensions of governance. We end this section with an analysis of the metagovernance capability of the organisation.

5.2.1 Frame of reference of existing governance drawn up by intervention researcher

Based on our systemic model, we drew up the frame of reference in three parts: an analysis of the structure of the governance system; an activity analysis; and a leadership analysis.

5.2.1.1 Structure analysis

According to its articles of association, the association is managed by a board of elected members (co-responsible collective), with no chairperson (collective non-profit organisation). In tables 1 and 2, we describe the structure of the observed governance. It is made up of 10 bodies and 15 individual functions. It includes a global level and a local, sectorial level. The steering committee is perceived by the actors as the main governance body, even though this role is devolved to the "co-responsible collective" in its articles of association. Note that a "feeling review" takes place each month, where the permanent team members voice their problems individually (without discussing solutions). This body plays a role in regulating tensions and the collective dynamic. It has, as such, an indirect impact on the participatory governance system, as well as in all ecovillage's activities. We have not included it in the governance structure, as it has no decision-making prerogatives and with a view to simplifying the frame of reference for easier use by the actors.

Table 1: Components of global level of governance structure

Component	Composition	Perceived role (by actors)
Collective components		
General assembly (GA)	All adherents ; opened to anyone wishing to participate	Association's activity reporting ; external communication (through outside participants to sessions) ; election of co-responsible volunteers
Steering committee (SC)	Permanent team's members and volunteers elected as co-responsible Opened to anyone as observer	Coordination ; everyday management that cannot be resolved in commissions ; strategy-related issues
Co-responsible collective	9 co-responsible elected by the GA among volunteer members	Responsibility of the HR function Intervention on HR issues that fail to be solved in CP
Weekly review	Whole permanent team	Coordination of commissions and activities; decisions related to local life
Individual components		
1 coordinator and 1 coordination assistant	Employees	Coordination; RH supervision; financial and RH management; community life facilitation; representation of the association outside; strategy and development
1 legal representative	Volunteer; member of the co-responsible collective; elected by the latter	Legal representation ; contracts signing
2 RH supervisors	Volunteers; elected by the co-responsible collective, within it	HR responsibility; annual interviews' conduct

Table 2: Local level's components of governance structure

Components	Composition	Perceived role (by actors)
Collective components		
6 thematic commissions	Everyone cooperating on the addressed theme	Reporting of employees on their activity; cluster's activity management (development of sectorial strategies, operational decision-making)
Individual components		
4 cluster's responsables	Employees	Support to commission's facilitator; supervision of cluster's employees
6 commission's facilitators	Volunteers	Commission's facilitation

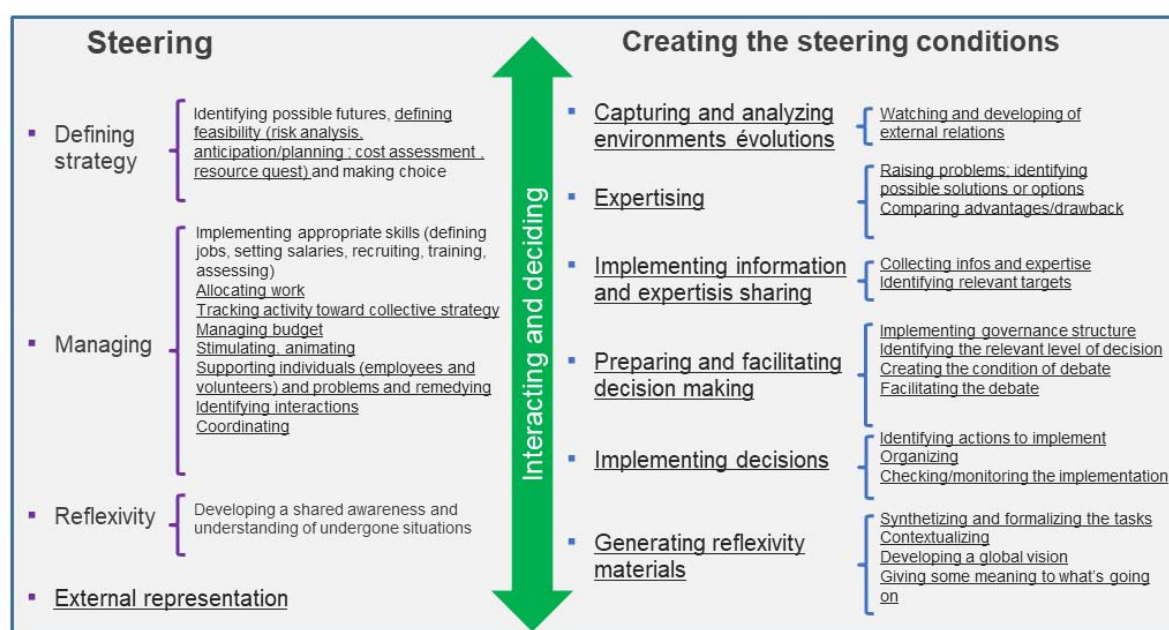
5.2.1.2 Activity analysis

The steering activity in companies is still the subject of active research, particularly with the trend towards reflexivity (Widmer, Schippers & West, 2009) (Schippers, West & Dawson, 2015). That of associations and social enterprises does not appear to have been the subject of research to date. These organisations however display specific aspects in terms of governance (such as the participatory dimension frequently sought or collective instability due to the volunteer commitment issue, mentioned above) that do not allow direct transposition of the representations based on companies. Consequently, the activity analysis was carried out from empirical observations, seeking to shape a tree structure as close as possible to the actors' experience. Adopting Hufty's approach (2011), we sought to identify tasks "of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms, and/or to the engagement of target-oriented collective actions".

While this inventory was drawn up for the purposes of exhaustiveness, with the requirement of maximising the use of the empirical observation, the categorisation was performed on the assumption of some arbitrariness. The idea was to allow the group, based on a "martyr" proposal, to understand the complexity of the tasks involved to define its own representation, particularly by adjusting the categorisation and formulation of items.

Figure 1 shows the result of this analysis.

Figure 1: Intervention researcher's analysis of activity, on global level



Interaction and decision-making are highlighted therein as a cross-disciplinary mechanism in all governance tasks.

Among the tasks identified, a first set appeared to contribute directly to “the engagement of objective-oriented collective actions”, for which we defined a Steering category with 3 sub-headings: Defining the strategy, Steering the course (managing) and Generating reflexivity. This categorisation is consistent with that proposed by Wildmer & al (2009) with the headings *Planning*, *Action/adaptation* and *Reflection*.

We identified a second set of tasks helping create the conditions for carrying out the tasks cited above, that we grouped in a section “Setting up steering conditions”. We categorised them under the headings Capturing and analyzing environments evolutions, Expertising, Implementing information and Expertise sharing, Preparing and facilitating decision-making, Implementing decisions and Generating reflexivity items.

5.2.1.3 Combining structure and activity analysis

Figure 2 shows an excerpt of the table used for the cross-analysis between activity and structure. For each task (rows), the components (columns) used to conduct it are identified (with the symbol X), specifying the nature of the contribution (P for Preparation/evaluation, drafting of proposals; D for decision) and the level of the structure in question (L for local and G for global). This analysis makes it possible to identify the activity deployed by each component of the governance system, indicating tasks carried out individually (for example “Finding resources” below), those conducted collectively (for example “decision-making” below for the “Defining strategy” task), and those involving both individuals and groups (for example “making suggestions” for the “Defining strategy” task).

Figure 2: Excerpt of the table Analyzing the activity distribution on the structure

Tâches de gouvernance		Remarques	Resp. pôle	Coordonnateurs	Superviseurs RH	Points hebdo	Commissions d'activité	Copil	Col. coresponsables	AG
Définir le cap	définir la stratégie, les objectifs ;		L : P et D	G et L : P		L : P et D G : P	L : P et D G : P	P et D		P
	intégrer les innovations ;			P				D		
	s'adapter aux évolutions des environnements			P				D		
Définir la trajectoire	analyser les risques ;			X				X		
	évaluer les coûts et les moyens ; monter le budget			X						
	hiérarchiser les priorités définir les stratégies d'action ;			P				D		
	anticiper/planifier ;			X						
	trouver les moyens (montage de demandes de financement)			X						
Conduire vers le cap	mettre en place les compétences appropriées : • définir les postes ; • fixer les salaires ; • recruter ; • former ou faire former ; • évaluer	Modalités participatives, ad hoc Les entretiens d'évaluation sont réalisés par les superviseurs RH, sur la base des avis collectés auprès de la coordination et des salariés	P P L X	P P X X	P P X X	P X X X	P X X X	D X X X	D D X X	X X
	répartir le travail		X	X						
	suivre les activités au quotidien		X	X						

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Because the test group encountered difficulties in using this tool, we produced a view of this frame of reference by applying two simplifications:

1) We focused the analysis on the global level, on the assumption that the local level could be considered as a set of governance subsystems. This assumption, that we inferred from our empirical data, was first based on the fact that the governance of this association operated on the principle of subsidiarity. It was also based on

the fact that the dynamics and the management of the commissions were very closed to those of the steering committee.

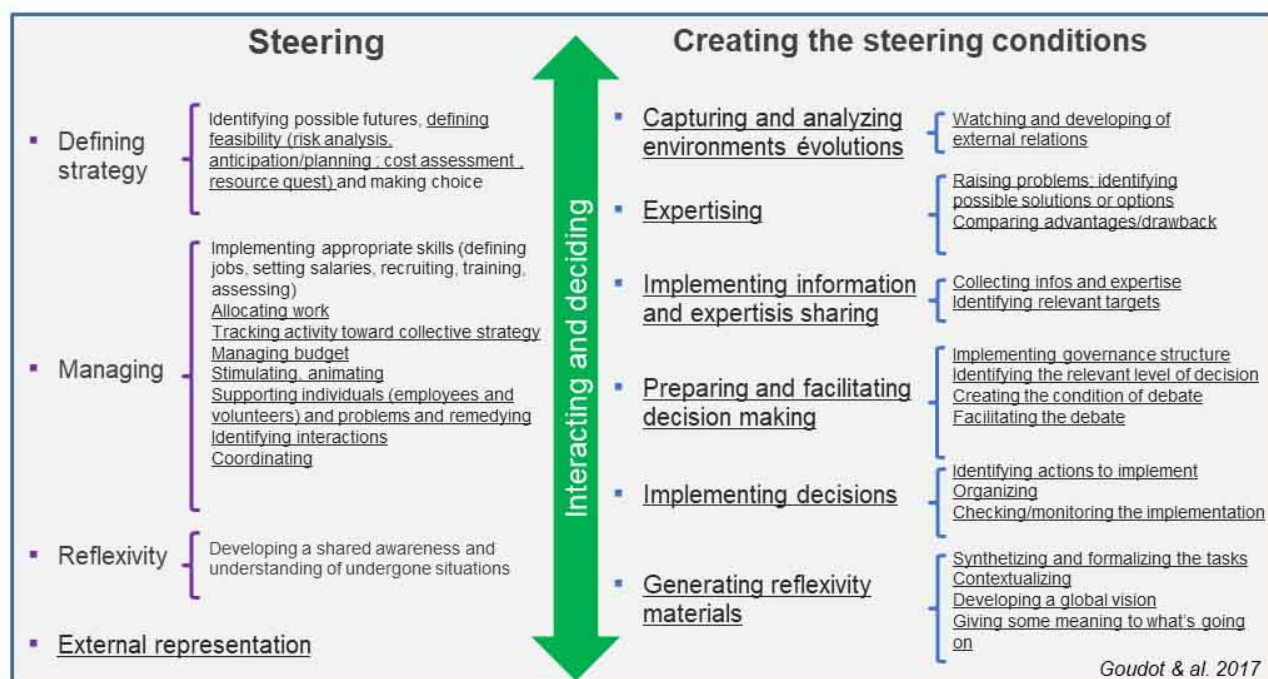
2) We presented the combination of the structure and activity analyses in a simplified manner: by underlining the tasks for which the leader's contribution prevails over that of the collective in the tree structure of the governance activity tasks.

Figure 3 shows the result presented to actors.

Our observations thus confirmed the participatory dimension of this ecovillage's governance, by describing the distribution of the governance activity on the global level between the collective bodies (essentially the steering committee) and the individual roles (essentially the supervisory role). The steering committee indeed ensured the strategy definition, the management of skills and remunerations and the reflexivity. Moreover, the analysis helped identify an individual supervisory role which was covering, on one hand, a set of tasks creating the conditions for steering oriented towards the collective bodies, and, on the other, management tasks, oriented towards the individuals.

For a large number of tasks, however, completion involved both the supervisor and the collective, which this simplified presentation does not show. For example, the "Identifying actions to implement" task, a subtask of the "Implementing decisions" task, could in some cases be solely in the supervisor's remit, and in others be carried out collectively by the steering committee.

Figure 3: Analysis of structure and activity proposed as collective analysis material: the individual/collective split is represented by underlining predominantly individual tasks



5.2.1.4 Leadership analysis

We inferred from the first intervention the need to introduce the leadership issue in governance modelling. For the second intervention, we incorporated it into our model as the main determinant of the dynamic of interactions between system components. Leadership thus forms the third section of the produced frame of reference.

We observed the behaviour of the supervisor (leader) with regard to the behaviour of the collective or of other individual actors, in carrying out governance tasks. We observed how he proceeded to steer and to create the conditions for steering, in collective phases and in their preparatory phases (back-office). We also observed the supervisor in conducting management tasks. The main observed trends are reported below. They appear to

be consistent with the values and the project of the ecovillage. A more detailed profile could help qualify this interpretation, but without modifying the main outline.

Tasks of creation of the steering condition, oriented towards collective bodies

In the collective phases, we observed a participatory governance, with collective steering capability (expertise, strategic analysis, reflexivity and decision-making):

- The task's objectives in progress were made clear and submitted for approval. Issues were presented clearly, and questions were raised to resolve ambiguities.
- The issue of values and ethics was central and recurrent in discussions, which regularly referred to the association project to query it or to return discussions to the undertakings collectively made.
- A time-frame was collectively approved. The collective dynamic was supported by spontaneously alternating roles (mediation and distribution/circulation of the word), besides a permanent facilitation role shared between the supervisor and one or two other individuals who could be volunteers (time-frame follow-up, summary of discussions and contextualisation).
- The collective dynamic appeared to be participatory. The participants (about 15 to 25 according to the bodies and sessions) were generally concentrated and involved. The influence capacity was relatively distributed: if the supervisor appeared to be influential in the strategic analysis, several other members also weighted in discussions. Implicit leaders thus co-existed alongside the supervisor. The circulation of the word was fluid: it covered practically all of the group. However, the younger members and those having recently joined the ecovillage appeared to be less active in discussions, without being excluded. The discussions took place in a climate of goodwill and mutual attentiveness, without aggressiveness even in the event of disagreement. In the dynamic for reaching a consensus, divergences were expressed, the overcoming of which helped drive the collective analysis. Reaching consensus in problem-solving and in the strategic analysis appeared in part to stem from a Hegelian approach, in respect of overcoming dialectical contradictions (Engeström, 2011).

In the discussions, the supervisor did not occupy a central position, most often being one actor among others. However, he appeared to foster the collective steering capability, by acting as a catalyst or spur, stimulating the contributions of other actors, to whom he easily passed the hand. For example, in a problem-solving scenario, he could intervene to state the problems and suggest solutions, but in a manner so as to invite responses to his suggestions and to enable discussions. His contribution was moreover decisive and was facilitating the group dynamic, when he endorsed a form of authority to remind the collective and individual commitments: values, objectives, rules/norms and means. However, the collective, or members of the collective, could also take on such a role: this authority transfer was then facilitated by the leader, through a withdrawing posture. We regularly observed such a shift of authority from the supervisor towards the collective and vice-versa, in collective governance situations. The leader's posture was as such modulated according to the collective dynamic. For this, the leader shifted from an overall view of the governance activity and its deployment on the structure formed of groups and individuals, to views of concrete field situations where action is adjusted. As such, this stemmed from a systemic thinking (Checkland, 1999) (Smith, 2001).

Besides these contributions in collective times, the supervisor was carrying out the tasks for creating the steering conditions in individual back-office times. For that, he made use of collective animation tools (especially from popular education) and of the project mode: collective process engineering (design of collective governance configurations in terms of choice of bodies, locations, agendas, etc); expertise; information formatting, etc. We observed that most of its back-office work was dedicated to the preparation of the collective sessions.

These trends sketch a leader contribution facilitating the participatory dimension of governance, by fostering the collective steering capability, by committing a form of authority which supports the collective in fulfilling its commitments, and by continuously adapting its posture in order to support the collective dynamic. This

facilitation was gained through tasks of creating steering conditions, through interventions in collective phases, but also through preparatory back-office work.

With its participatory governance and with its leader playing a key role in creating the conditions for the participation, this ecovillage appeared to represent a case of close compatibility between leadership and participatory governance.

Management tasks, oriented towards individuals

The supervisor's relationships with the active members of the association were based on mutual trust, or even complicity or friendship, like most of the relationships among active members. He was behaving frankly. He was easily acknowledging his own mistakes. He was also pointing out mistakes of others without perceptible judgement or embarrassment. As such, he was fostering a favourable climate for everyone to express their opinion, including in the event of failings (authenticity and interpersonal acceptance). He did not tend to emphasise his own successes or the role of his contribution in collective success (humility). He was demanding on the quality of productions and on compliance with collectively adopted rules. He was encouraging the individuals to whom he provided guidance to clarify their professional objectives with regard to the association project, and to keep them in mind in orienting their work (providing direction). He was encouraging them to increase their autonomy and to develop their professional activity in the directions that were important to them, while reminding them of the association project and the collective commitment (empowering and developing people).

Organisational learning

The historical perspective helps relativize this broad-brush picture of the relation between the collective and the leader. The interviews that we conducted with the "long-term" members of the association revealed that this relationship was progressively shaped through the interactions between the members of the ecovillage and via the collective dynamic. The actors and their collective have changed their leader, who has changed them in turn. This relationship of interdependence was fueled by a strong commitment to common values, particularly democratic values. Several "figures" in the association, implicit leaders, played a particularly important role in this respect: they opposed the leader's positions which did not leave sufficient scope for the collective or which were drifting toward manipulation. As such, the compatibility formed between the leadership and the participatory dimension of governance is the result of an organizational learning process. This one may have been fostered by the central role assigned from inception by this association to the analysis of governance and to the group dynamic.

Effects on the organization

In the conducted interviews, the staff expressed mostly satisfaction in respect of the governance of the ecovillage and in respect of their own experience at work, particularly in terms of perceived autonomy and personal development.

If tensions could sometimes be voiced at the various levels of the organisation, the climate was rather marked by mutual trust: disputes were mostly resolved without embedment.

We observed an individual and collective ability to meet commitments in terms of objectives and also to make do with limited resources, which conveys organisational efficiency.

In the interviews, but also in collective times and in informal conversations, the people regularly expressed concern for the collective interest. They also expressed commitment to the association project, which was devised for social change. Political motivations appeared to be clearly at the heart of their collective action. We observed a recurrence of references to values and ethics in formal and informal discussions, with the expression of concern for equity. This conveys a citizenship dimension of the actors' lived experience and a societal responsibility dimension of this organisation.

Several aspects of the trajectory of this ecovillage convey a **singular organisational adaptation capacity** over the first six years of its existence: a large panel of interdependent projects successfully led; the overcoming of manifestations of hostility from the environment, by resisting self-withdrawal temptation; the rapid growth of the technostucture; regular adjustments of the organisational methods and tools in order to face the encountered problems.

Finally, the ecovillage exhibited a **relative stability in its volunteer population**: volunteers could get actively involved over periods of the order of one or two years, even more. Furthermore, they generally withdrew their involvement progressively, maintaining long-term connections (occasional involvement, participation in organised events).

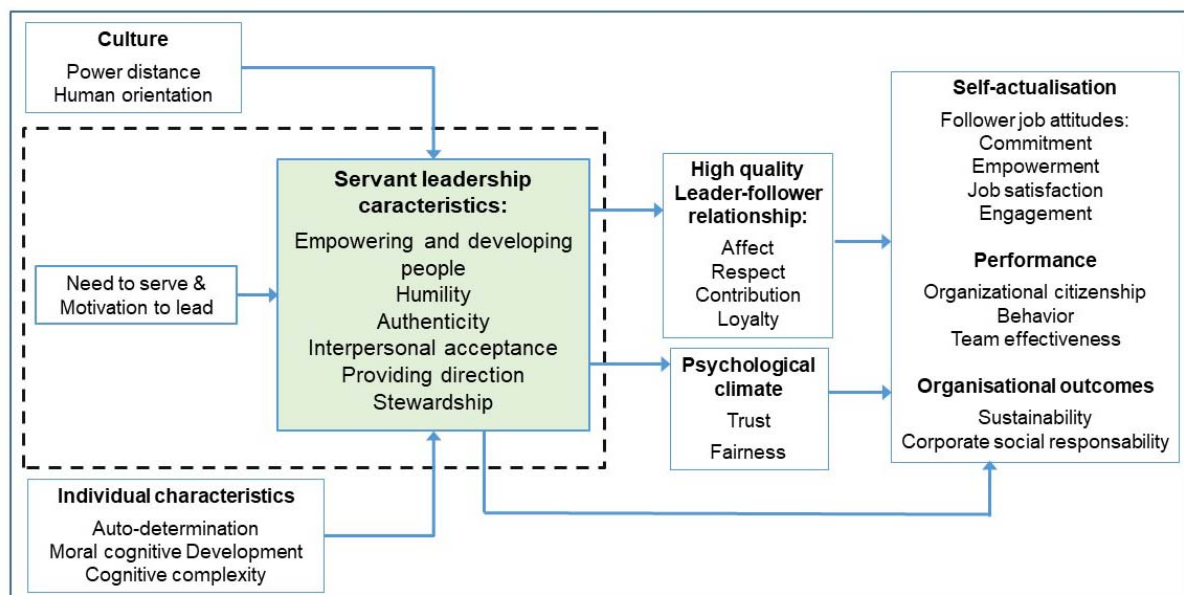
The conjunction between a climate of trust and equity on one hand, and the adaptability and development capability of the organisation on the other (conveying effectiveness in terms of action), are possible facilitation factors of volunteer commitment. We believe that it has also to do with the leadership/participation compatibility.

Type of leadership

Among the types of leadership identified in the literature, that of servant leadership is the closest to what we observed in this ecovillage: all the items characterising this type of leadership are indeed featured in our observations. The servant leadership is based on the motivation to lead, combined with that to serve. Figure 4 shows the diagram describing this model, as proposed by Van Dierendonck (2011).

The left section describes the antecedents associated with this type of leadership, whereas the right section describes the consequences on the personal relationships between the leader and his/her followers, on the psychological climate and on the organisation. A feedback arrow conveys the interdependence between the characteristics of the leader and those of the followers and the organisation.

Figure 4: the “servant leader” model, according to Van Dierendonck



5.2.2 Use of the frame of reference by the collective

The collective worked on the diagram in Figure 3 to determine in turn, as the intervention researcher has previously done, the predominant collective or individual dimension in completing each task. For this, people had to stop on some of the tasks, and to refer to concrete everyday situations in order to be able to understand them. This was particularly the case with the tasks of the "Creating the steering conditions" category, and also

with tasks dealing with reflexivity. Progressive understanding of the complexity of governance work thereby emerged from a collective learning process.

This collective work raised awareness of the amplitude of the role played by the supervisor in governance, and of the facilitating dimension of this role in respect of participation and collective dynamic. But it also resulted in minimizing this role, compared to the ethnographic picture drawn by the intervention researcher. For example, for the "Expertizing", or "Risk analysis" tasks, the actors finally agreed that the supervisor was providing initial elements, in such a way that the collective was subsequently capable of capitalising on them to take over. Note that in the discussions on this matter, the supervisor's influence was particularly decisive, which paradoxically illustrates his ability to influence the group.

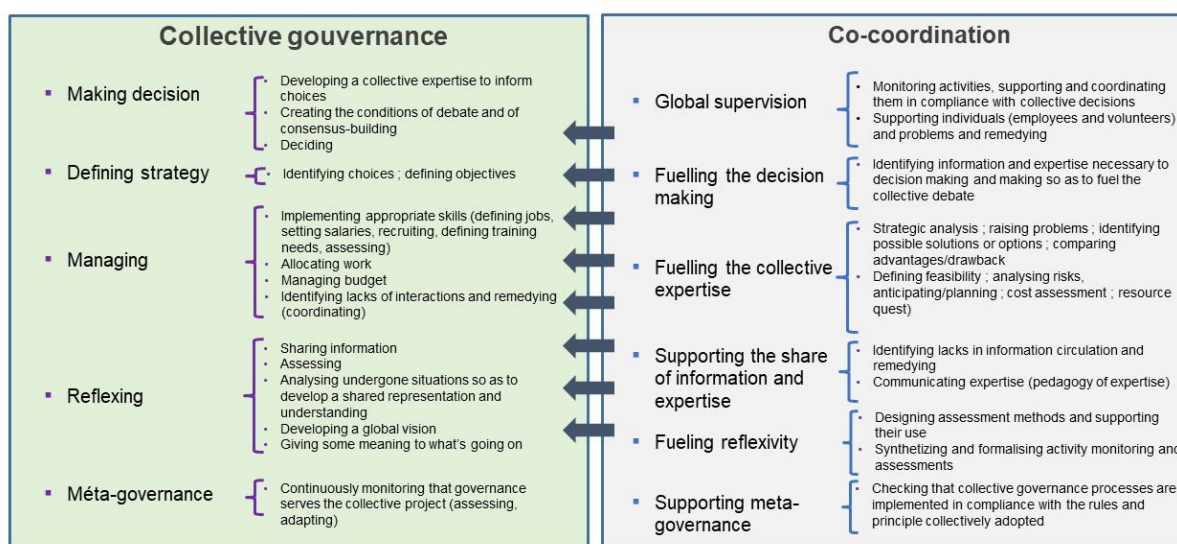
After this work, the group recognized in the servant leadership diagram (Figure 4) an appropriate picture of the behaviour of its supervisor, but also of its various sectorial managers. It saw in this picture a useful expression of the frame of mind of the association, even of its culture.

This collective work on the existing governance thus generated the acceptance of the leadership concept, in its "servant" sense. It confirmed the close compatibility between the participatory (collective) dimension of the governance and the role and behaviour of the supervisor.

5.2.3 Prospective frame of reference of the governance

The steering committee subsequently examined, for each task carried out by the leader, whether a given task could be distributed between several individuals according to a "co-coordination" principle. Figure 5 shows the results of this process, after an ex-post analysis by the intervention researcher. The collective thus drew a "prospective" governance picture aimed to foster participation, by giving the collective the full steering role, while the co-coordinators are given the role of setting up the conditions for collective steering and of providing servant type management.

Figure 5: Prospective interpretation of the outcomes of the intervention research on the ecovillage



This interpretation conveys the distribution of activity between the collective (on the left) and the individual (on the right). It thus enables a visual approach of the link between structure and activity. It provides a metagovernance tool for collective use that is easy to understand for non-experts.

This prospective process did not bring about any addition or withdrawal of tasks, on the set of tasks resulting from our ethnographic study. However, it modified the categorisation and raised awareness on the weight of some tasks in the activity. For example, the actors realised that their governance practices left little scope for reflexivity, and that this represented an area for improvement. Strategic decision-making was another example

of a task that was arduously discussed: the participants agreed that it was at the heart of governance and should fall entirely within the remit of the collective. The intervention researcher conveyed this here by showing decision-making as the first task under the "Collective governance" pane. This collective prospective work clearly resulted in modifying the distribution of governance activity, increasing the collective part to the detriment of the individual part. This was an essential part of the metagovernance process, given the initial group's expectations.

The introduction of leadership into our model enabled the group to address the issue of hierarchy and management, and to identify and describe a type of leader compatible with a participatory governance. This collective projected the issue beyond their current leader, considering the servant-leadership as a behavioural ideal to be targeted. He was in this way able to infer concrete management consolidation actions, such as the definition of an internal training plan on servant type leadership.

5.2.4 Metagovernance capability

After working on the frame of reference of governance, the actors of the ecovillage made a set of decisions aimed at modifying their governance, with concrete measures (action plan) to implement these changes: transition from 2 to 4 clusters; transition from coordination to "co-coordination" with a precisely defined role, particularly in terms of articulation of this role with that of the collective steering bodies; appointment of co-coordinators; adoption of an implementation method, by trial with reflexivity mechanisms; implementation of an internal training plan on servant leadership.

The discussions which have lead up to these decisions involved all the members of the collective. Some tensions aroused when considering the associated risks, giving rise to heated debates. Given the initial difficulty of this group in tackling management issues head-on, this set of decisions taken in a matter of a few hours seems to us to convey a strengthening of its metagovernance capability. Indeed, the awareness of a number of items raised by the process appears to have been decisive in this strengthening:

- participatory steering of the organisation implies that the appropriate conditions have been set up, through a set of tasks requiring individual empowerment;
- recognition of the usefulness of the management role, when performed in a manner supporting the participatory dimension of governance and supporting staff development and autonomy;
- the leader is one part of a whole; leaders and actors/collective are in interaction and shape each other mutually: they form a system; the participatory dimension is not incompatible with leadership;
- interrelationships between the multiple tasks involved in governance practices, giving the latter a complex dimension;
- metagovernance may consist of improving governance by resolving potential activity deficits.

This change in the collective representations combined with the strengthening observed in its metagovernance capability are indications of the relevance of the proposed model with regard to its intended social aim.

6. Discussion

We propose a model which combines structure, activity and leadership, based on GST (Le Moigne, 1994). This model generates a representation of organisational governance elucidating *what the system does*. In an academic context still lacking an analytical framework of organisational governance suitable for describing its underlying mechanisms and providing an interpretation incorporating its complex dimension (Hufty, 2016), this new approach to organisational governance makes it possible to incorporate and reveal the organisational complexity. It allows for the description of the overall functional coherence, while highlighting the respective roles of the collective and leaders in the governance system.

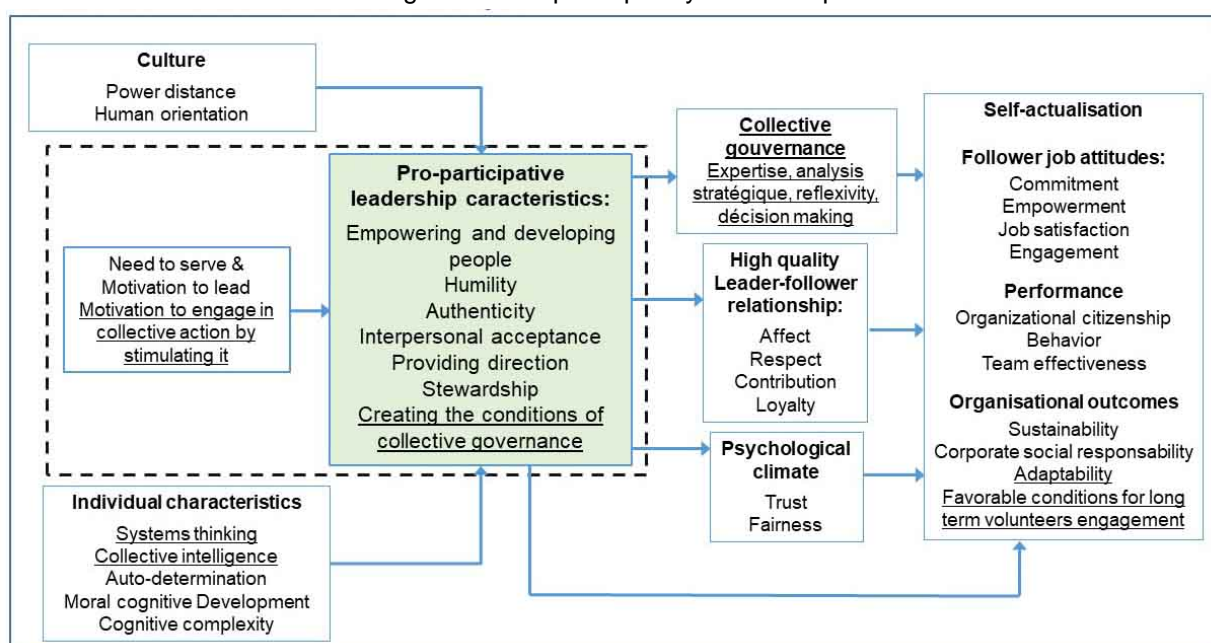
Our research demonstrates that non-expert actors can understand and collectively use the frames of reference produced from this model, in order to examine the participatory dimension of their governance and its articulation with leadership. The focus on activity allows the actors to sidestep structure, power and decision-making issues, by envisaging participatory governance through lived governance situations. This systemic model as such appears to be suitable for facilitating the implementation of collective metagovernance processes in SSE organisations.

A new, pro-participatory type of leadership?

We identified all the characteristics of servant leadership in the role and behaviour of the leader of the studied ecovillage. However, we also identified a set of decisive traits and tasks for supporting participatory governance practices, which are not featured in this archetype. In terms of general leadership characteristics, the leader's activity is indeed focused on setting up the conditions for collective governance; his motivation is not merely linked with the need to serve and lead, but also with that to engage with the collective dynamic, while fostering it; in terms of individual characteristics, the leader applies a holistic thinking and adaptability to fulfil his role; in terms of characteristics of the organisation, the organisation exhibits a participatory dimension of its governance with effective collective steering capability, as well as adaptability and relative stability in respect of volunteer commitment.

We believe that these characteristics play an essential role in the compatibility that we observed between the participatory dimension of governance and the leadership. We suggest that this compatibility provides a state of equilibrium which is essential to the smooth running of the governance of such an organisation. We see it as the result of a close, adaptive interdependence between actors/collective and the leader. Through this interdependence, the leader deploys a stance combining servant leadership behaviour, an ability to foster the collective dynamic in the governance system and a systemic thinking. In our opinion, this leadership did not exist prior to the participatory operating mode, but is in turn a mechanism which is co-designed by the interaction between the collective and the leader, who is himself part of the collective. This combination results in a leadership which, while comparable to servant leadership, is characterised by its fostering of the participatory/collective dimension. We suggest that the leadership observed in this ecovillage represents a type of leadership not hitherto identified in the literature that we qualify of “pro-participatory”. The diagram in Figure 5 summarises its main characteristics. Additions to the “servant” type that we described in the sections above are underlined for highlighting purposes.

Figure 5: “Pro-participatory” leadership?



With this type of leadership, the humble attitude and the behaviours which create the conditions for collective governance are parts of a whole driven by the collective dynamic rather than by the individual dynamic. This creates an alternative profile to that of the “heroic” social entrepreneur proposed by the U.S. trends in social innovation research found in the U.S. (Defourny & Nyssens, 2014).

Specific psychological and social risks may possibly be associated with this type of leadership. The supervisor referred to a feeling of exhaustion as partial grounds for his decision to withdraw from the project. Continuous adaptation of the authority and management posture to create the conditions for a collective dynamic could be the cause of this. This adaptation represents a variable for adjusting an unstable equilibrium between participation and leadership. Under pressure from the collective seeking to uphold the participatory dimension of governance, the leader maintains this equilibrium while caught between democratic and collective values, on one hand, and the need, on the other, to make actual progress in the implementation of the association project, take individual initiatives, make decisions and take on authority. This pressure could stem from cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Positioning of the researcher

The use of the model to define frames of reference of organisational governance necessarily involves an ethnographic, qualitative approach. Indeed, the actors have very mismatched and poor knowledge in most cases of the tasks involved in governance. The leaders themselves are not always aware of their modes of action. In-situ observation of the activity by the research is hence required. Participant observation and shadowing proved to be particularly suitable methods for analysing activity, but which involve delicate positioning on the part of the researcher. Capturing the activity as close as possible to reality implies minimising the impact of the observer’s view. Suspected misuse of this knowledge in power games may lead actors to modify their activity or reject the observer. The challenge is to build a confidence relationship with the observed actors. It is about creating an environment where the researcher’s presence is natural, while at the same time distanced from governance issues. This is no trivial matter in an organisation where everyone is invited to be an active contributor in the collective governance. We addressed this challenge in two ways. Firstly, the role of the researcher was regularly questioned with the collective in the metagovernance process. This is how one of the actors suggested amending the frame of reference by introducing the researcher as one of the components of governance: we have retained this suggestion for our future research projects. Secondly, the researcher found a place in the collective by taking part in farming and in everyday collective tasks, while distancing herself from issues which were discussed in governance meetings. She tried to stick to the minimum necessity for conducting the research action.

Moreover, if it is a matter of enabling a collective to acquire autonomy in its metagovernance capabilities, as was the case here, the researcher’s intervention may impede the achievement of this aim. Here again, this risk may be minimised by limiting the intervention researcher’s role to reflexivity, expertise and creation of engineering models, processes and tools. This distancing was facilitated by the fact that the research intervention began by a period of several weeks of ethnographic observation: the researcher successfully adopted a participant observer’s role before getting actively involved in metagovernance processes.

Isomorphism bias

In the approach that we used, we generated “views” of the organisation (activity analysis, leadership analysis, analysis of governance structure) which may have partly determined the actors’ representations. This methodological bias introduces a risk of mimetic institutional isomorphism (Enjolras, 1996), if the approach is rolled out to other associations. The ethnographic approach may help prevent this bias: it allows to introduce actors to preliminary versions of frames of reference which are based on empirical observations, and therefore hopefully as close as possible to the specific substance of the considered organisation. The researcher’s posture is also decisive in preventing this bias: as neutral as possible and querying his own representations.

Limitation of the leader's posture

In the studied ecovillage, the leader had himself requested the intervention. His pro-participatory profile helped him to accept a critical collective evaluation of his role (he was forming a system with the collective). In the case of the cooperative supermarket, the leader was rather quite reticent to the metagovernance process which was initiated under the collective pressure. This reticence may have influenced the collective dynamic, and prevented from overcoming the governance issues. The method proposed here could therefore be inappropriate in the case of leaders whose profile is not pro-participatory. It would be more relevant for emerging collectives with aspirations for participatory governance so as to facilitate the development of a systemic relationship between the leaders and the group via a mutual learning process of the background of organisational governance.

Research prospects

This exploratory work implied a simplified use of GST. Its results encourage the continuation of further research by enhancing the model:

- Governance was considered as static (snapshot). We need to consider the activity in its dynamic, in terms of processes.
- As an initial approach, we simplified the nature of the interaction between components of the governance structure to the type of behaviour of the leaders. The role of artefacts in the collective dynamic and their uses by the leaders offer promising prospects, in our view, to supplement this hypothesis. Activity theory could thus provide a productive combination with the systemic approach (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki, 1999) (Clot & Béguin, 2004).
- We studied the activity distribution between collective and individual dimensions of governance in terms of predominance. A more detailed analysis could help further the study of the pro-participatory leadership type.
- The fourth prospect for refinement lies in the inclusion of the different governance levels, as our analysis focused on the global level. Can governance actually be described as a set of subsystems? It will be necessary to examine the parallels between the mechanisms at play in each of the governance levels.

The next stage of our research is to define frames of reference of governance for other SSE organisations, starting with other ecovillages, and to examine the various hypotheses formulated in this paper. This will involve enhancing the model by confronting to other organisational set-ups. It will be about seeking to identify the differences underpinning the specific features of organisations, particularly in their ability to adapt to changes in external environments, to implement social innovation and to retain the involvement of volunteer actors. As such, this research paves the way for promising anthropological prospects in relation to the governance of SSE organisations. However, the ethnographic approach imposes an unavoidable limit: its necessarily long investigation times make it difficult to envisage the study of a broad panel of organisations. The choice of studied fields thus appears to be major challenge for subsequent research.

7. Conclusion

The systemic approach here described gives SSE actors a new way to understand organisational governance, by combining activity, structure and leadership. It enables them to shift their focus from power and decision-making issues and from representations of governance that focus on the central role of leaders. Governance then becomes a system where the actors/collective and leader fit together; metagovernance consists of an analysis of what the system does and how the distribution of governance activity over the groups and leaders affect its workings. As such, this model addresses a crucial challenge both for research and for SSE organisations: understanding the mechanisms which produce compatibility between leadership and the participatory dimension of organisational governance, and enabling collectives who so wish to transition from

an organisation hierarchically structured around individual charismatic leadership towards a less hierarchical organisation oriented towards pro-participatory leadership.

The first steps on this path are promising and conducive to continuing in this direction by testing the model and approach on other SSE organisations, and beyond.

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