

How Translocal networks empower transformative community led actions?

Case study of ECOLISE.

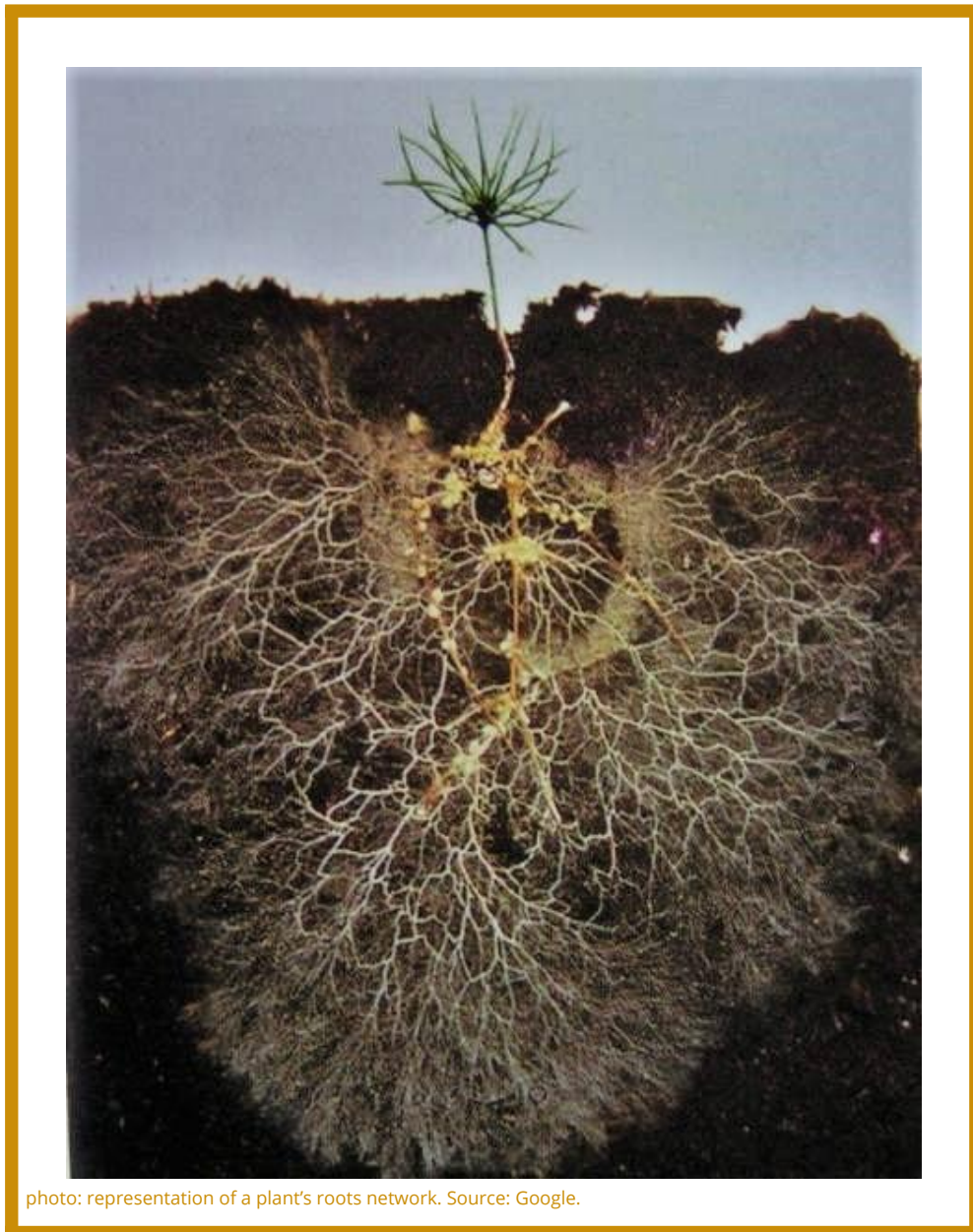


photo: representation of a plant's roots network. Source: Google.

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Title: **How translocal networks empower transformative community led actions? Case study of ECOLISE**

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”

Margaret Mead

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Executive summary.

The 21st century is characterized by its unprecedented societal challenges. Academics and politicians are pointing out social and technical innovations needed to address these challenges. The world sees the spread of transformative community-led actions. Along with their development, comes the establishment of translocal networks as a way to globally connect the locally rooted initiatives and spread the transformative goals. The following research questions the ways in which translocal networks empower transformative community led actions. I analyse the work of one translocal network: ECOLISE, the European network for community initiatives. Empowerment is analysed through: *diffusion, psychological empowerment and political support*. Results outlined that translocal networks have unique and future-fit organizational structures that can be split into three levels: the meta level, the meso level and the micro level. Moreover, translocal networks can undertake several empowering activities. These activities are as follow: **(1)** support the creation and the diffusion of knowledge on transformative community led actions among members and beyond, **(2)** create and deepen translocal relationships via online spaces (workshops, meetings, webinars) and via common projects, **(3)** establish a shared narrative that will unify the variety of members, **(4)** Increase the visibility of its members through translocal projects and events, **(5)** stimulate the engagement of its members into politics **(6)** building alliances, coalitions and advocating in politics, **(7)** allowing members to access additional funding capacities. The research also highlighted a number of barriers of two types: Internal and external. Internal barriers are concerned with **(1)** Limited usage of platforms to exchange knowledge **(2)** Difficulties to create a shared narrative **(3)** the lack of willingness of members to engage with institutional actors, **(4)** the difficulties of creating translocal relationships through online spaces, **(5)** Restricted visibility. Moreover, external barriers involve **(6)** Lack of institutional willingness and **(7)** limitation to accessing funding. As regards to the internal barriers, the research provides strategies to overcome them. Overall the research argues that translocal network empower transformative community led actions with 3 ways: **(1)** by unify the various types of community led actions and thus have more successful advocacies, **(2)** bringing awareness in politics on the benefits of investing in transformative community led actions **(3)** create translocal relationships that reinforce their willingness to pursue their efforts. Nonetheless, it takes time to efficiently develop empowering strategies and despite great efforts, the political willingness to support these alternatives remains low. The thesis finishes by a discussion and reflections as well as recommendations for further research and practical ones. As regards to the theoretical reflections, the thesis wishes to contribute to the theory of Haxeltine (2016-A) on the characteristics of translocal networks by verifying the authors characteristics: **(1)** facilitating diffusion and/or innovation of new practices, ideas, framings, narrative, knowledge and learning; **(2)** empowering local Social Innovation to engage more efficiently in institutional changes in their respective contexts; **(3)** exercising power and influence by lobbying, changing rules, building alliances with other actors. and by adding three additional ones: **(4)** create and deepen translocal relationships via online spaces (workshops, meetings, webinars) and via common projects, **(5)** Increase the visibility of its members through translocal projects and events **(6)** allowing members to access additional funding capacities.

Keywords: *translocal network, community led actions, ECOLISE, empowerment, transformative change*

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I. Introduction

1. Background

Institutional efforts for transitioning to sustainable societies focus on the improvement of existing regimes rather than transforming them. The current policy lines are reinforcing the system's mechanisms, thus locking society into these mechanisms that lead to path dependencies (Kemp and Loorbach 2003). Thus, policies pursue incremental strategies with a particular focus on market mechanisms and technological innovations, neglecting other forms of innovation that emerge organically from within society (Loorbach et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, research in sustainability and transitions outlines the limits of these incremental changes (Grin & Schot 2010; Markard et al 2012; Loorbach et al. 2017). Indeed, the technological focus of institutional actors is not sufficient and could even lead toward more unsustainable practices. For example, while they will argue for a shift toward electric cars, there are little incentives toward less car's usage (Feola & Butt 2017). At the same time, and alongside this illustration, efforts are being made into constructing more sustainable buildings with less energy usage, if no one educates people to make use of these technologies rightly, the efforts will be canceled by the unsustainable use of these technologies. Thus, technological improvement is not sufficient if one wishes to move forward sustainable societies in holistic ways (ibid).

Thereby, various scholars argue for transformative change as a necessity to address the multi-dimensional issues the world has to face (Avelino et al. 2019). Transformative change can broadly be defined as

“a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.” (Bongaarts, 2019. p.6).

In other words, it induces radical changes and systemic shifts of the production system, consumption, institutions, education, health as well as value systems of modern societies. Transformative change uses a systemic approach destined to profoundly change societal mechanisms and structures as well as enhancing people's well being and ecological balance (Bongaarts, 2019). It is designed for long term achievements.

Overall, transformative change proposes an holistic approach where changes occur in all aspects of society, including practices, values, beliefs as well as changes in institutional and market structures. As regards to its specificities, transformative change implies both technological as well as social innovation. Technical innovations are being acknowledged as a key to address current societal challenges. Indeed, actors involved in sustainable transitions are investing into technical novelties in particular in the field of finding news ways to fulfill basic needs (Loorbach et al., 2020). Technical novelties include environmental engeneuries and investment on renewable energy, organic growing and so on. However, transformative change also emphasizes social innovation (SI).

Pol & Ville. (2009) drew upon several conceptions of social innovation, and defined true social innovation as system changing, where the dominant structures, practices, beliefs and perceptions are altered. Grimm et al. (2013) argued in favor of social innovation as fostering systemic changes. Recently, the term social innovation has (re)emerged as a way to address current societal challenges (Angelidou and Psaltoglou 2017). Although there is no widely accepted definition of SI, it can broadly be defined as

“changes in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and or working” (Haxeltine et al. 2016 p.19).

Moreover, Angelidou and Psaltoglou (2017) argued that actors from any sphere can endorse the role of social innovator. From grassroots innovations, to top down institutions and through market actors, innovations do not belong to one societal sphere in particular and innovations can be transferred from one sphere to another (ibid). Nonetheless, Mulgan (2006) has pointed out that throughout history, social innovation has been mainly initiated and pursued by civil society actors.

As history repeats itself, today, citizens are again initiators of social, cultural as well as technical novelties that provide sustainable alternatives to the unsustainable practices of the system (Loorbach et al. 2020). All over the globe, citizen movements are rising collectively to bring about transformative innovations that respond to their needs. For instance, today, a large variety of bottom up initiatives such as transition movements, permaculture and ecovillages movements as well as community gardens, energy cooperatives or environmental activists propose alternative ways of 'living well' (Ahmadian 2019).

Their motivations originate from socio-cultural and livelihoods concerns (Ahmadian, 2019) and emphasize the need for regenerative agriculture, culture, education and social relations (Loorbach et al., 2020). They are often shaped in the forms of local initiatives seeking transformative changes, which include minimalist lifestyles, renewable and cooperative energy systems, low consumption models, short food supply chains, solidarity and social economy organisms, sociocratic models, self reliance and so on. Moreover, what makes these grassroots movements singular is that they are locally rooted, as they operate within their local environment and aim to address the problem they locally encounter (ibid).

2. Problem statement

Today, the spread of transformative initiatives are shaping together a new paradigm, including new values, lifestyles, norms, culture and practices (Loorbach et al., 2020). However, to exert influence on the dominant paradigm and bring about their transformative innovations, these grassroots need to move beyond the local and grow as well as need to be connected with higher levels of politics (Church 2005; Seyfang and Smith 2007).

Lack of institutional support

Indeed, while the locally rooted nature of these communities of engaged citizens is what makes them sustainable and transformative, the lack of institutionalized development at larger scale is what limits their growth and broader recognition (Loorbach et al. 2020). Thus, they need to scale up and gain more external recognition. However, the vision shared

among the communities of change-makers differ from the narrow vision followed by politicians and businesses which focus on a technocratic perspective of sustainability, and prioritize economic benefit above social welfare (Ahmadian 2019). In addition, there exists a policy makers' risk aversion which does not recognize the positive aspect of investing in experimental processes such as the one of grassroots (Seyfang and Smith (2007). As a consequence of these divergent interests, community led actions working toward transformative change struggle to gain recognition and legitimation from institutional actors.

Issue of scale

Considering the local nature of these communities of citizens, carrying transformative innovations, and the global dimension of the environmental and social issues that they aim to tackle, these communities need to diffuse their innovations and reach other like-minded people, if they wish to be impactful beyond their local environment (Seyfang and Smith (2007). However, the transposition of grassroots with transformative innovations at larger scale is difficult due to their geographical rootedness (ibid).

This introduction has provided terms in which the local movements of citizens working on transformative change can be defined. Indeed, we can refer to them as grassroots innovations, community led actions or even citizen movements. To avoid any confusion as regards to the term, in this thesis, I will for now refer to these movements as transformative community led actions.

3. Research aim and research questions

Transformative community led actions are growing across the planet and their multiplication across Europe and the world suggest that some interests should be put into these movements (Avelino 2018). According to their growth, many of these movements are connected, supported and organized throughout transnational or translocal network organizations. A few examples of these networks are the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), the Transition Town network, the Seed Exchange network, the Slow Food movement and many more (ibid).

Drawing upon the web article, *Time to ignite the power of translocal social movements* (2018), written by Avelino, assistant professor at the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions, which stresses the need to set a light on

“the countervailing power of translocal social movements to challenge existing economic systems, commercial interests and political ideologies.”

This research aims to dive into the potential role of translocal networks in supporting the empowerment of community led actions with transformative aims. A brief overview of networking potential is that it allows communities to move beyond the local and globalize their movements (Loorbach et al. 2020). Put otherwise, it connects globally locally rooted communities.

Furthermore, I consider that putting the focal point on empowerment is relevant because it is acknowledged that community led actions detain holistic solutions to address global issues

(Seyfang and Smith 2007; Sarkar & Pansera (2017)), it is then relevant to try and understand how community led actions can grow and spread as well as can be recognized within the wider society. The focus on translocality is one approach (among others) on which these communities can gain more recognition, legitimacy and credibility.

Having clarified this, the main research question is stated as:

How translocal networks empower transformative community led actions?

To help answering the research question, I have drawn a range of sub questions as follow:

- ❖ (1) *How are translocal networks organized?*
- ❖ (2) *What are the activities of translocal networks as regards to empowerment ?*
- ❖ (3) *What barriers occur in the activities of translocal networks?*
- ❖ (4) *How can translocal networks overcome the barriers they encounter?*

The research is conducted using a case study design where I intend to analyse the work of one network organization by paying attention to its activities and strategies. The translocal network organization under study is named ECOLISE, the European Network for Community Led Initiatives. ECOLISE's network supports the growth of community led actions with transformative aims. The case study will be introduced in more detail in chapter III.3.

Empowerment will be analysed using three concepts that have emerged from the literature review on transformative community led actions and translocal networks. Thus, empowerment will be defined in regards to the ways in which a translocal network can operate and will relate to the needs of transformative community led actions. These concepts are *diffusion*, *psychological empowerment* and *political support*. Each concept has a number of indicators. Chapter II.2. will provide more insights on these concepts and their relevance for translocal empowerment.

The outcome of this research wishes to provide more insights on the empowerment capacity of translocal networks in supporting transformative community led actions. However, The aim of the research is not to generalize the role of translocal networks as the investigation is based on the investigation of a single case study.

4. Scientific and Societal relevance

4.1. Scientific relevance

Translocal networks have developed following the multiplication of locally rooted alternatives addressing issues related to climate change, inequalities, and perhaps even a lack of democratic processes and hierarchical structures. Over the last decades, the scientific interest in grassroots movements or community led actions have increased and their potential contribution to societal issues is recognized (Seyfang and Smith., 2007; Sarkar & Pansera. 2017; Smith & Stirling. 2018; Smith et al. 2014).

However, this interest is quite recent and there are still many aspects that haven't been explored yet. This is the case for translocal networks and their possible contribution to raise up the voice of these alternatives. Therefore this research ambitions to contribute to the knowledge on the role of translocal networks in shaping an united community of changemakers that originates from the bottom.

4.2. Societal relevance

It seems important to investigate different ways in which society can respond to the unsustainable practices of our times, threatening our well being as well as the well being of natural ecosystems. Among the different ways to address the crisis, the emphasis on bottom up alternative solutions is not to neglect. Indeed, the current literature outlines the fact that these community led actions detain alternative, yet innovative, approaches to address the current issues in a holistic way. Therefore, this research investigates one of the ways in which these alternatives can gain more recognition and legitimacy.

Moreover, the outcome of this research might benefit people engaging in translocal connexions, such as ECOLISE's workers and members for example, as it aims to increase the understanding of translocal networks mechanisms as well as highlighting their barriers. Thus, translocal actors could potentially learn and improve their strategies.

II. Theoretical framework

This chapter starts with an introduction to (transformative) community led actions followed by a brief overview of the transition theory and the Multi Level Perspective. Furthermore the chapter elaborates on translocality and translocal networks.

Following the literature review, I present several parts of various theories that will help formulate the theoretical framework used in this research. The chapter ends by the conceptualization of the framework.

1. Literature review

1.1. (Transformative) Community led actions

As mentioned in the introduction, community led actions are in the realm of grassroots initiatives. This part aims to introduce in more detail the characteristics of community led actions, particularly in the context of transformative change and thus of climate change and sustainable development. Nonetheless, this is a brief introduction and the literature on grassroots innovations, including community led actions, is much broader.

What are community led actions?

The literature on grassroots innovation is relevant for a better understanding of community led actions. Seyfang and Smith (2007) recognize the diversity of grassroots innovations and argue that they can take various organizational forms such as: cooperatives, voluntary associations, community groups or social enterprises. The authors define grassroots initiatives within the context of sustainable development as

“networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom–up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved” (Seyfang and Smith 2007 p. 585).

Moreover, grassroots initiatives, including community led actions working toward sustainable development, induce the will to achieve transformation of their local situations (Hermans et al., 2016). Seyfang and Smith (2007) also see the relation between grassroots innovations and transformative change as these grassroots also seek for transformation beyond their local environment, to national and international systems. However, global transformative change is difficult to reach as grassroots often detain unique solutions applicable to their local context, thus hard to extend beyond this context (Hermans et al., 2011).

Characteristics of (transformative) community led actions

The particularity of (transformative) community led actions (and grassroots in general) is that they operate within their local environment. This local focus allows more meaning to people's actions and interactions (Creamer, 2015). Indeed, the formation of community led actions suggest a higher level of trust and communication among participants than it can normally be observed in media, local authorities or among politicians (ibid).

As observed by Rae and Bradley (2012) communities arising from shared values are generators of a shared vision which is grounded in common needs and common objectives (ibid). Alongside, Miller and Bentley (2012) argue that a shared vision among members of a community can create capacity, endurance, commonality and mutual goals. The authors also point out that these agreed goals can be constraining and can create tensions between individuals part of the same community (ibid).

Shared values and shared visions needed to create community-led actions echo with the work of Creamer (2015) who argues that social capital is a key element to the formations of community-led actions. Indeed, he understands social capital as the bundle of networks, norms and values shared among the members of the same community, facilitating cooperation and encouraging more altruistic behaviour (Creamer 2015)

Moreover, (transformative) community led actions, as other grassroots movements use participatory development efforts (Boglio Martinez, 2008). It means that these communities operate following a horizontal hierarchical model where participation is seen as a process in which people take decisions collectively based on the knowledge they exchange. This process aims to enhance the capacity of people to express their demand and formulate adequate solutions to their issues (ibid).

Another aspect of community led actions is resilience (Parkhill et al. 2015). Wickes et al. (2010) have defined community resilience as a complex multi-layered process in which communities can respond adequately to stress or change. In that sense, it is not only the capacity to respond to adversity but to improve themselves through adaptation. Thus, Adger (2000) defines community resilience as social resilience which is

“the ability of communities to withstand external shocks to their social infrastructure” (p.361).

Practically, the realm of community led actions is favorable to provide evidence of alternatives solutions for sustainable development. Indeed, they are small scale experimentation spaces which can deliver both social and technological innovations, providing alternatives solutions (Creamer 2015).

Conclusion

Overall community led actions, because of their nature, seek for transformative change. They are characterised by participatory processes as well as similar mindsets and values. Alongside, goals and purposes need to be adjusted to make sure all members of the community pursue the same objectives. Moreover, the literature has emphasized the ability of communities to create social resilience.

1.2 Transitions in socio technical regimes

When studying the role of community led actions with transformative aims, it is important to contextualize their role and functioning within the wider socio-technical system. Therefore, an introduction to Transition theory follows.

Socio technical transitions are characterized by *“fundamental changes in the structures, cultures and practices of a social system, profoundly altering the way it functions”* (De Haan & Rotmans 2011, p.3). Considering this definition, transitions should not be the result of incremental changes (ibid) but should imply transformative changes. Transitions describe a process of change following a systemic approach, destined to profoundly change societal mechanisms and structures. It is a complex process that involves alteration in the wide system configuration. (De Haan & Rotmans 2011)

Multi level perspective

When studying socio technical transitions, the multi level perspective (MLP) helps conceptualize the patterns present in these transitions. The MLP analyses how transitions can operate in society taking the perspective of three levels: the socio technical landscape, the regime and the niche(s). De Haan and Rotmans (2011) state that a transition is born when there are changes at all three levels, reinforcing each other and provoking systemic transformation. Overall the MLP framework finds its utility in researches focusing on transitions, or put otherwise on systemic changes.

Socio technical landscape

The socio technical landscape refers to the exogenous, wider context that influences the regime and niches. It includes political ideologies, societal values and macro economic patterns (Geels 2011).

Regimes

Regime refers to the dominant order in place shaping practices, rules and forming the deep structures in which individuals operate (ibid). The regime is characterized by its stability, and lock in mechanisms where innovation occurs incrementally, through small adjustments (ibid).

Niches

Niches refer to protected and unstable spaces of experiment, where innovation can grow without pressures from the regime (ibid). Innovations in niches are radical and constitute alternatives to the current regime. Niches are crucial in transitions as their aim is to bring about systemic changes (ibid). Schot and Geels (2008) distinguishes three processes in the development of niches:

- (1) the vision created and shared among the niche actors,
- (2) the building of social networks
- (3) the learning and articulation processes.

Smith (2007) argues that a growing niche shows potential to contribute to the replacement of a new regime. Henfrey and Penha-Lopes (2018) point out the correlation between political engagement and empowered niche. Thus, the growth and up-scaling of the niche and its potential for normalisation or at least political influence can contribute to shifting from one paradigm to another.

However, the empowerment of a niche is not a necessary condition. Actors can be disempowered while the transformation occurs (Haxeltine 2013). Particularly when actors

are empowered and manage to bring their social and technical innovations and thus influence the regime, it can have a disempowering effect as it can create a dependency relationship between the regime and the niche (ibid). For instance, Haxeltine A (2016 -B) points out that some highly formalized grassroots are perceived by their members as disempowering, particularly when the local context is replaced by a wider context, where local actors have harder time to relate their actions and values to this wider context. Furthermore, policy engagement all comes with the risk of co-optation, where the regime appropriates innovative solutions originated in the niche (Henfrey & Penha-Lopes 2018). This has a disempowering effect on the niche.

Critique of the MLP

The MLP has received a number of criticisms. This section will not elaborate on these criticisms, but will solely provide the outcomes that emerged from two major criticisms, relevant to this research, the one of neglecting agency and the one of bottom-up bias.

Notably, it has been criticized for neglecting the role of agency in transitions. Given the definition of Giddens, agency refers to the capacity for an individual or a group to create a change within the social structures (Inglis 2018). Critics argue that the MLP tends to limit agency to bounded rationality where capabilities are constrained by rules and structures (Geels & Schot 2007).

Responses to this critic recommend to look at agency through a different perspective. Following the work of Giddens and the structuration theory, structures are the medium of action. Giddens argues that rules and structures do not exist 'out there' but are the result of reproduction of practices (Inglis 2018). Therefore, by using their agency in creative ways, individuals can liberate themselves from the structures and shape new ones (ibid). Additionally Geels (2011) recommends to develop other kinds of agency than the bounded rationality. For example, adding the cultural and power dimension of agency in the MLP by incorporating insights from cultural sociology or social movement theory (ibid).

Furthermore, the MLP was criticized for its 'bottom up bias' emphasizing the importance of mainstreaming niche innovations, for transitions to happen (Geels 2011). To overcome this bias, more attention needs to be paid on the processes occurring at the regime and landscape level (ibid). As a response, Geels & Schot (2007) drew a typology of pathways in transitions that vary in timing and nature. These pathways are such: *transformation*, *(de)alignment - (re)alignment*, *technical substitution* and *reconfiguration*. Drawn upon Geels and Schot (2007) and Bergman et al. (2008), shortly summarized in **table 1**. there is an explanation of these pathways.

| Pathways | Descriptive |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>Transformation</i> | Moderate landscape pressure often instigated by a social movement criticizing failures in the regime. Regime adapts to the pressures by seeking for new practices and principles. Innovations can be found in the niches that have developed alternatives and the regime. Can involve power struggles. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>(de)Alignment</i> <i>(re)Alignment</i> | - | Sudden landscape pressure when the niche is not ready yet. Regime crumbles, leading to multiple niches competing for resources and support. One niche will overpower and become the new regime. |
| <i>Technological substitution</i> | | Strong landscape pressure. Mature niche breaks through the regime. Competition with the regime and eventually the niche replaces it. |
| <i>Reconfiguration</i> | | Niche innovations are developed and symbiose with the regime. Recombination of the old and new regime. |

Table 1: typology of transitions based on Geels & Schot (2007) and Bergman et al. (2008).

Conclusion

This introduction to transition theory and the MLP allows us to better understand the mechanisms in which community led actions are embedded. This section puts the emphasis on the niche level, as community led actions fit within the characteristics of niches.

1.3. Translocality and translocal network

Originally, translocality research has been developed as an attempt to better understand migration, mobility or the socio spatial dynamics and to conceptualize these transcended national borders (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Research on translocality is primarily concerned with the processes of spatially spread communities and interconnectedness (ibid).

Forms & characteristics

In general terms, translocality is described as

“the emergence of multidirectional and overlapping networks that facilitate the circulation of people, resources, practices and ideas” (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013 p.3).

The authors characterize translocal networks as networks in which local connections are as important as transnational (or translocal) ones. Additionally, Brown and Purcell (2005) in their research on scale, have concluded that socio spatial scales are (1) socially constructed, (2) fluid and fixed and (3) relational. Alongside, Sengers et al. (2019) argue that transnational links, including the share of various resources and knowledge between actors, can enhance the capabilities of local movements and can complement locals in the resources they lack. Generally, translocal networks are working both on the local and the global level by connecting communities globally and promoting international solidarity, while recognizing the importance of local identities, thus strengthening communities on that level (Loorbach et al. 2020).

However, translocal networks have various forms and do not all comply with the same degree of formalisation (Haxeltine 2016 -A). While some networks are formalized in forms of memberships promoting a specific innovation, others operate informally, such as interpersonal networks of advice and support where no membership is required (Vlasov et al. 2018). Examples of formalized networks engaged in sustainability and transformative change are listed in the **table 2.** below. Then, there are other translocal networks that exist in the form of informal settings. For example, Ley (2018) has studied translocal networking in

the context of resilience in Asian communities and has pointed out that community networks in Southeast Asia have helped local communities to overcome and recover more easily after the tsunami in 2004.

| Examples of formalized networks | Activities |
|--|---|
| the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) | connect intentional communities and ecological living, providing online space for education, exchange of experiences and political lobby work (Avelino et al., 2020) |
| the Timebank Network | working on value-based mechanisms for reciprocal service-exchange within a local community (Timebanks. 2015). It offers a software platforms to record services and exchanges (Avelino, F., et al. 2019); |
| the Transition Town Network | network for local resilience in the context of climate change (Transition Towns. 2015), |
| RIPESS¹ | intercontinental network promoting Social Solidarity Economy, connecting social and solidarity networks across the world (RIPESS, 2014) |

Table 2: Examples of formalized translocal networks.

Translocal networks within transformative change

Haxeltine (2016 -A), defines three characteristics of a translocal network in the context of transformative social innovation. There are as follow:

- (1) facilitating diffusion and/or innovation of new practices, ideas, framings, narrative, knowledge and learning;
- (2) empowering local SI to engage more efficiently in institutional changes in their respective contexts;
- (3) exercising power and influence by lobbying, changing rules, building alliances with other actors.

In addition Loorbach et al. (2020) argue that being part of a translocal network allows local initiatives to diffuse their innovations. The authors also distinguished three ways in which transformative communities can be empowered:

- (1) local embedding, focus on a local context;
- (2) translocal connectivity, development of translocal networks and a shared narrative;
- (3) discursive resonance, codification of knowledge, resilience and social cohesion.

Therefore, Loorbach et al. (2020) see the relevance of developing translocal networks in the context of transformative change, as it allows transformative community led actions to keep their local embedment while developing connexions with other like minded communities that are geographically distant (ibid). By merging into translocal networks, transformative initiatives help themselves *grow, replicate, partnering, instrumentalizing* and *embedding* their transformative innovations Loorbach et al. (2020).

¹ Réseau Intercontinental de Promotion de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire (translation: Intercontinental network of the promotion of social and solidarity economy)..

Finally, Avelino et al. (2019) sees the potential of these networks to bring a sense of impact and an increase in resources. The authors add that within a transformative change context, these two aspects are important as the initiatives often lack institutional support to acquire these resources (ibid). More generally, translocal networks provide an opportunity for the local initiatives to up scale and normalize their innovations (Avelino et al. 2019) and Loorbach et al. 2020). Finally to complement these informations, Rockenbauch et al. (2019) outline the importance of creating and sharing knowledge on sustainable grassroots and acknowledge the contribution of translocal networks in proving this knowledge. Spreading knowledge across the grassroots networks enables a common framing and shared values, which are important for the cohesion of the movements (ibid). Furthermore, through collective actions among its members, translocal networks have the potential to develop advocacy, lobby and gather broader political engagement (Loorbach et al. 2020).

Conclusion

As we have seen translocal networks in their different formats (informal and formal) have the potential to enhance the capabilities and create resilience of local movements. They can enable the spread of a practice and the knowledge associated to it, as well as providing the opportunity to up scale and normalize (through institutional recognition) local actions and movements.

2. Theoretical framework

The main research question of this thesis is as follows: *How translocal networks empower transformative community led actions?* While translocal networks and (transformative community led actions have been explained in the previous section of this chapter (II.1.), it is now important to define the main concept of this research: Empowerment.

To this end, the following theoretical framework makes use of various parts of theories and concepts that will help define empowerment. It is important to remind the reader that empowerment, in this research, is understood in relation to community led actions with transformative aims. Moreover, the research pays attention to translocal networks as being the 'actor' pursuing the empowerment of these community led actions. Therefore, empowerment is defined as regards to these two parameters. Empowerment will be defined throughout three aspects: *Diffusion, psychological empowerment and political support.*

2.1 Diffusion

Broadly speaking, diffusion refers to the spread of a new idea or practice from its original source to a large group of users (Soul and Strand, 1998). Following this definition, Walsh-Russo (2014) defines it within social science, as

“the spread of something across social institutions and through social networks; the greater the expansion, the greater the number of individuals affected.” (p.31).

In social sciences, the focus is put on the interactions between the spread of an idea, a practice and its reception within a local population (ibid). Alongside, McAdam et al. (2001) argue that social movement diffusion can be seen as the

“transfer in the same or similar shape of forms and claims of contention across space or across sectors and ideological divides.” (p.68)

Characteristics

Diffusion can be understood in terms of knowledge exchanges across members and across space. It is acknowledged that knowledge plays a role in the development of economic and social progress (Yang 2015) as well as essential for national wealth (Morone & Taylor 2004). Ernst and Kim (2002) understand the diffusion of knowledge as to transfer knowledge from one person or group to another. The authors add that knowledge diffusion is completed when the knowledge transferred is then internalized and translated into the capabilities of the receiver. Considering translocal linkages, Sengers et al. (2019) point to the fact that the creation and diffusion of knowledge (among other resources) contribute to the deployment of local capabilities.

Moreover, theorists of diffusion put the emphasis on structural mechanisms, such as social networks, as they stimulate the internal diffusion of ideas, practices, information and so on (Walsh-Russo (2014). Walsh-Russo (2014) emphasize the need to develop strong ties among individuals and groups in order to help spread the diffusion of their ideas and practices outside their ties and networks. Boschma (2005) emphasizes the importance of cultural proximity in contributing to grassroots development. It implies the social construction of a similar culture, helping to shape ties among initiatives. Moreover, in research on translocal diffusion, Loorbach et al. (2020) argue that ways to develop these ties and bounds is through developing manuals, websites, newsletters, training, courses and conferences to foster cooperation and relationship building.

By understanding these different diffusion mechanisms, Tarrow (2005) developed three diffusion pathways:

- (1) relational; which focuses on the ties and the sense of identity movements and organizations shared through channels and communication networks (Shawki 2013).
- (2) non-relational; which relates to the awareness of what is happening in other regions or countries and strategies of framing their claims (ibid).
- (3) mediated; which consider translocal links across organizations and their role in connecting movement together to exchange and diffuse ideas and information that they would not have shared otherwise (ibid).

Drawing upon Tarrow’s work - Shawki (2013) and its work on - Transition and Solidarity Economy Movements - argues that the three pathways are present. While non relational diffusion brings awareness of these movements across countries, relational diffusion contributes to connecting local initiatives together and creating relationships and bonds. Mediated diffusion, allows for in-depth knowledge exchange. In addition, the author precises that although these concepts are distinct from each other, they do overlap (ibid).

2.2. Psychological empowerment

In general terms, empowerment refers to the belief that a person can direct actions toward desired outcomes (Elmes & Smith 2001, and Haxeltine 2013). Ewart (1991) argues that empowerment is both an individual and a social construct. This means that it refers to a

sense of personal control to operate change as well as to a group’s ability to control the resources of a community, engage into collective decision making as well as achieving shared goals. Thus, the author states that collective empowerment supports individual empowerment (ibid).

Characteristics

Recent research focuses on the understanding of empowerment by following a psychological approach. Haxeltine et al. (2017) distinguishes six dimensions of psychological empowerment (1) *relatedness*, (2) *autonomy*, (3) *competence*, (4) *impact*, (5) *meaning* and (6) *resilience*. **Table 3.** gives a brief explanation of these terms. These six dimensions relate to the motivation contained in individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and range from a-motivation to intrinsic motivation (Avelino et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation relates to the personal valued experiences an individual can derive from an action (Thomas & Velthouse (1990).

The work of Thomas and Velthouse (1990) on cognitive empowerment and motivation, argues that actors are intrinsically motivated if four conditions are fulfilled: (1) impact, (2) competence (3) meaning and (4) choice. The three first conditions echo with the psychological approach of Hazeltine et al. (2017). While choice refers to the ability to determine what one can do.

| Dimension of empowerment | Ingredients | |
|--|-------------|---|
| Capacity & willingness to mobilize resources | Relatedness | <i>'We are connected to each other/ we belong'</i> |
| | Autonomy | <i>'We can determine what we do'</i> |
| | Competence | <i>'We are good at what we do'</i> |
| | Impact | <i>'We can make a difference'</i> |
| | Meaning | <i>'We believe in what we do/ doing this is meaningful to us'</i> |
| | Resilience | <i>'We can adapt & recover'</i> |

Table 3: Dimensions of psychological empowerment retrieved from Avelino et al. (2019).

While the six dimensions of psychological empowerment, presented by Haxeltine et al. (2017), need to be present at the individual level, the conditions to satisfy these needs are created collectively (Avelino et al. 2019). Particularly *impact*, *meaning* and *resilience* are the outcome of collective action (ibid).

Psychological empowerment through translocal networks

Avelino et al. (2019) analysed five translocal networks and their contribution to the dimensions of empowerment and results have outlined that the fulfilment of psychological needs for empowerment is a process of *multi layered community building* in both the local environment and at the translocal network. According to the researchers, at the local level, the dimensions of empowerment are deepened while at the network level, they are expanded. Thus, translocal networks provide the opportunity for actors to feel the expansion of their impact and access to resources (ibid).

2.3. Political support (as regards to transformative community led actions)

As mentioned previously, political recognition is highly advised and plays a role in enabling (or not) the development of community led initiatives (Celata & Coletti 2019). Church (2005)

argues that local action needs to be linked to higher institutions. Concomitantly and as regards to sustainable development, political bodies recognize the importance of balancing national and global environmental governance as well as the importance of supporting everyday local actions among citizens (Seyfang & Smith 2007).

Various ways of support

There are various ways in which political support benefits transformative community led actions.

For instance, the support can be initiated through public grants and fundings, which is crucial for a large number of initiatives (Creamer, 2015). These types of financial support are mainly conducive and supportive gestures to the development of these initiatives. However, the bureaucratic burden of grants appliances are sometimes seen as too complicated and discourage grassroots to apply for it (Celata & Coletti 2019). Furthermore, some local initiatives do not wish to get government fundings as they want to reaffirm and preserve their full autonomy (ibid).

In addition to financial support, political actors can facilitate the growth of communities through taxation schemes, regulations and laws (Celata & Coletti 2019) particularly in the field of energy (Walker, 2008) and waste (Joseph, 2006). This support mainly originates from the national (or European) level, later translated into local governmental actions (Celata & Coletti 2019).

Moreover, local and regional governments can support the development of communities through granting them access to land, spaces and building to pursue their activities (Celata & Coletti 2019).

Finally, political support can be enhanced via the building of advocacies and coalitions. Their aims to facilitate the process of policy change, potentially in favor of the interest of community led actions (Komaie et al. 2018). There are different components of policy advocacy processes that can foster policy changes. First, it requires active community involvement and dialogues among various stakeholders (Annette et al. 2017). To this aim, specific tools have been identified to engage successfully in policy advocacies by including the ability to mobilize stakeholders (including organizations, individuals, groups). For instance, framing a shared message, engaging with various constituencies as well as organizing different activities that will help gain media attention are tools that enhance stakeholders involvement (Crooks et al. 2018).

In addition to involving various stakeholders, Komaie et al. (2018) -who study policy advocacies through Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) emphasize the role of providing training to engage communities in policy change processes. Moreover, Israel et al. (2010) -in research on community action for health disparities issues- points out that a critical aspect of empowering communities through policy advocacy is to gather and make use of information and knowledge harvested to inform policy actors on community led actions. Information can relate to the issues that communities are facing and the support

they need, as well as information attesting of their relevance. This information can be used as a basis for increasing the credibility of these communities (ibid).

Table 4. below summarizes the different ways in which political support can be deployed to assist the development of community led actions.

| Political support (as regards to community led actions) |
|--|
| Access to funding and grants |
| Contribution of supportive regulations |
| giving spaces and land for communities to develop |
| Advocacies and coalitions |
| Engage communities with institutional actors |

Table 4: Ways to assist community led actions through political support.

A translocal approach to political support

While considering political support within a translocal approach, Avelino et al. 2019 -A. argue that being connected to a translocal network contributes to the empowerment of local movements by inviting them to better engage with institutional actors. Moreover, an important component of the political support that can be endorsed by translocal networks in favor of institutional recognition for its members, is to build advocacies and coalitions beyond the local context, by engaging, in the name of its members, with higher institutional levels, such as the EU (Loorbach et al. 2020). This process allows individuals of like minded movements to blend into a collective and unified voice which can inspire and influence policy makers in their decisions (Israel et al. 2010). Thus, this process can contribute to policy changes.

3. Operationalization

The following conceptual framework is constructed on the basis of the different theoretical concepts outlined in the previous section (Section 2. of this chapter). I want to remind the reader that the purpose of the research is to understand how the support of translocal networks empower community led actions in their transformative aims. Therefore only the concepts that are relevant to analyse this topic will be selected. I have established three domains in which translocal networks could support empowerment of transformative community led actions.

- (1) Diffusion
- (2) Psychological empowerment
- (3) political support

The first aspect of empowerment will be to analyse diffusion, as regards to the contribution that translocal networks can bring to community led actions with transformative aims. Based

on the literature review, I conceptualize diffusion following the three pathways of Tarrow (2005). I retained two of these three pathways for the current research. I will pay attention to:

- ❖ Relational diffusion
- ❖ Mediated diffusion

The last pathway, non-relational diffusion, was discarded as it pays attention to the level of awareness that actors of a community of practice have, in other similar communities. As the purpose of this research is on existing translocal connexions, it is already pre-assumed that member's communities have awareness of each other, as they already belong to a translocal network of like minded members. The study thus puts the focal point on relationships among these members and the ways knowledge exchange is facilitated through the network.

Furthermore, another conceptualization of empowerment relates to the psychological aspect of the term. The literature has highlighted six psychological needs that should be fulfilled overtime. Three of these needs are explicitly fulfilled through collective action and will be retained for the purpose of the research. Indeed, as this research is taking a translocal approach and focuses on the network's role, I will look at the three collectively created needs:

- ❖ Impact
- ❖ Meaning
- ❖ resilience

Finally, the last concept of empowerment, that matches the study on translocal networks and (transformative) community led actions, is the political support needed to allow community led actions to grow. Political support is understood as regards to the role that a translocal network can have in order to enhance political support of its members.

While the literature has highlighted various ways in which communities need and can be supported, one aspect will be left out for the current research. 'Giving spaces and land' will not be taken into consideration for this analysis, as it only concerns the willingness of local governments that can only be accessible at a local scale. This research being on translocal networks, it can therefore not be applied.

Thus, I will, pay attention to:

- ❖ Access to funding and grants
- ❖ Engage communities with institutional actors
- ❖ Contribution to supportive regulations
- ❖ European advocacy and alliances

The following **figure 1**. represents the conceptual framework.

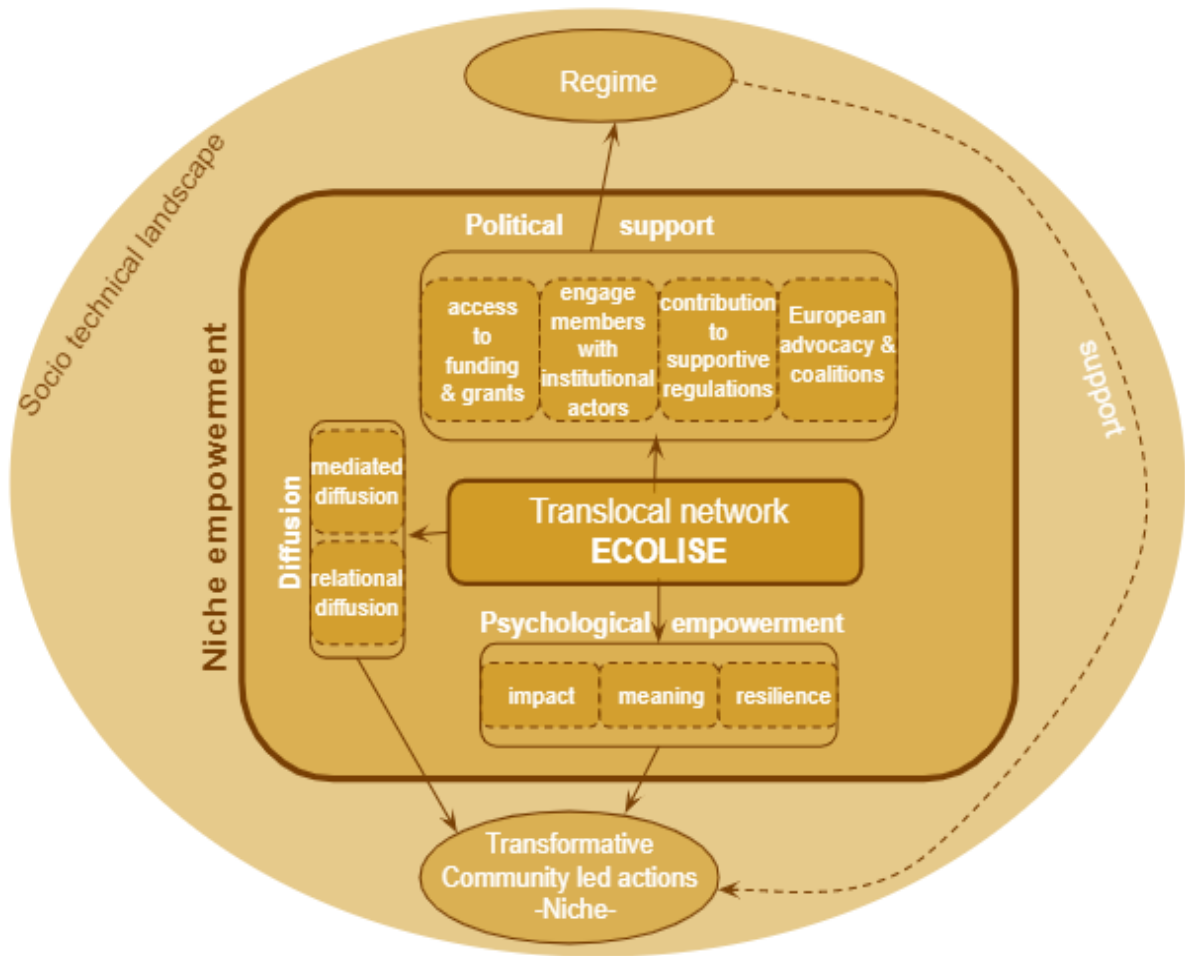


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

III. Methods

1. Research Paradigm: ontology & epistemology

Research paradigms are defined by Guba & Lincoln (1994) as

“ a set of beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world.” (p.107).

As regards to the research paradigm employed in this research, the aim of the research - whether translocal networks can empower transformative community led actions - tends to lead towards the post-positivist approach. As explained by Hesse (1980), the ultimate criterion of progress in this paradigm is

“that the capabilities of scientists to predict or control should improve over time.” (Guba & Lincoln 1994. p113)

This is the case in this inquiry where the ultimate aim is to better understand the role and potential of translocal networks and thus increase the knowledge and predictions on it.

Ontology

Considering the ontological question: *What is the form and nature of reality? What can be known about it?* The postpositivist approach assumes that reality exists “out there”. However, post-positivism recognizes the imperfect and flawed human intellectual mechanisms that can distort the objective reality. Therefore the ontological view of post-positivism is labelled by Cook & Campbell (1979) as critical realism. It implies that reality must be subjected to the widest possible critical examination in order to apprehend reality as close as possible from the truth. Though, this task remains imperfect (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

That explained, this research follows a post positivist ontology as I intend to reflect in my results an objective view of translocal networks and their empowerment capacities as regards to community led actions. Indeed, I set aside all personal judgements, values and opinions I have on the topic to stay as objective as possible. Although I also acknowledge that I cannot fully be objective and grasp the truth as regards to the topic. In order to apprehend reality as closely as possible, I intend to critically examine all outcomes I gain from the data collection.

Epistemology

Considering now the epistemological question: *What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? How is the knowledge of this external reality created?* The ideal of post positivism is to depict the patterns of the “real world”. Thus, objectivism is sought and the emphasis is put on external “guardians” of objectivity such as, a critical community for example (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Findings that are replicated cannot be assumed to be true as postpositivism tends to seek for falsification (ibid).

In order to pursue objectivism I will use external and critical people. First, the follow up of my thesis supervisors helped me to keep an objective viewpoint. Moreover this research will be sent for verifications to fellow students as well as to the case study organization. As regards to falsification, the conceptual framework developed in the previous chapter (II.3.) developed three concepts that can be used hypotheses as regards to the ways translocal networks empower transformative community led actions. These three hypotheses include *Diffusion*, *Psychological empowerment* and *Political support*. These hypotheses are not taken for the truth and will be subject to falsifications during the collection of data.

2. Research strategy: case study

The research pursues a case study design. Luck et al. (2006) define case studies as a “bridge across paradigms”, they do not have a fixed ontological and epistemological position. Nonetheless, Hollweck (2015) and Yin (2014) conceptualized case study research following a post positivist approach. The author describes post positivist case studies as using “a *realist perspective*” (p.17). Thus, this perspective wants to conserve the objectivity in the methodological processes of the case study design.

As regards to the particularities of case studies, there is no officially recognised definition of case study, Mills & Harrison (2017) argue that the fundamental role of a case study is to conduct an in depth analysis within a specific context. Therefore, the results can differ according to the context in which the study is carried out (Ragin 1992).

The aim of a case study is to understand the issue from the perspective of the participants . It has a strong emphasis on the interactions between research and participants. Case studies investigates one particular aspect of a wider topic and its narrow focus may contribute to a better understanding of a wider topic (Yin 2018). In this research, the wider topic relates to the empowerment of community led actions with transformative aims. As this topic is very broad and is composed of many aspects, I focus on the ways community led actions are empowered through translocal networks. The heart of the study, thus, is on the strategies of translocal networks specialized in supporting (transformative) community led actions. In this aim, a specific case study has been selected.

3. Case study selection

ECOLISE is the European Network of Sustainable communities. The network is defined as a non profit organization and aims to support and advocate for the development of community-led action in regards to transformative change and sustainability. The organization concentrates on the ecological, social, economic and political issues that societal systems are facing, while putting its attention to the hopes and solutions that community led actions can provide to these issues. Their work focuses mainly on Europe but also encompasses an international dimension.

The purpose of ECOLISE is to engage, support communities as well as to facilitate learning and collaboration among them. The vision that ECOLISE and its members build is based on certain values such as compassion, equity and solidarity. The network and its members wish to see a regenerative society emerging from the empowerment of resilient communities.




In their strategies to support communities in their actions, the ECOLISE council is supported by working groups focusing on several domains: policy advocacy, communication, knowledge and learning as well as research mobilisation (Ecolise.eu no date) and follow three principal strategies. **Table 5.** gives an overview of the three main objectives ECOLISE is working on.

| |
|--|
| 1. Creating a cohesive and integrated network of change makers that co create a holistic culture of regeneration |
| 2. Widespread public and political awareness on these citizen led communities and initiatives |
| 3. Inclusive framework for collaboration, sharing knowledge, research, learning and capacity building. |

Table 5: ECOLISE strategies. Source: Penha-Lopes et al. (2019).

As regards to the members, the network is composed of 46 organisations over 18 EU countries Macedonia and Switzerland (Climate ADAPT, 2019). Organizations are diverse and range from European networks, National network organizations, as well as specialist organizations and a few local initiatives (ECOLISE, nd).

Examples of European members of ECOLISE can be found below this paragraph in **table 6.**

| Members organization | Description |
|--|---|
|  | Transition Town Network is a worldwide network, originated in the UK, by the scholar Robb Hobkin. It aims to foster local citizens to move toward more resilient and sustainable societies. The emphasis is on the local context. The networks built itself in the aim to create connections and support among local transition communities. |
|  Permakultur Institut e.V. | Founded in 1983, Permakultur Institut e.V. is a national German network of permaculture movements. Its purpose is to support the development of sustainable ways of living by organizing an educational work on permaculture design approaches. Based on practical experience and networking the network supports various projects and initiatives of people who want to engage in permaculture (Permakultur, n.d.). |
|  | Red de Transición is a national Spanish network working on resilience in community led actions toward sustainable development and inclusivity. They highly focus on dynamizing the spanish transition and in supporting local citizen actions and initiatives working on sustainability, resilience and related domains. Their work involves training and workshops on local resilience and community led actions toward sustainability. They are also involved with various projects with municipalities and partners. (reddetransicion, n.d.) |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>The ICLEI - the Local Governments for Sustainability - is a global network of regional and local governments engaged in sustainable urban development. The network represents 1750 governments and other partners. Their objective is to drive local action toward, resilient, equitable and nature based society. They also aim to influence policies in the direction of sustainable development. This global network is connecting actors from Africa, Europe, Middle East and West Asia, to exchange with peers and drive environmental, social and economic change (iclei-europe, n.d.)</p> |
|  | <p>Located in the small town of Salies de Béarn in the South Ouest of France, <i>Salies de bearn en transition</i> is a citizen association created in 2011. It is a local initiative inspired from the wider Transition movement. Their work focuses on ecological well being, regeneration, and resilience in a context of a climate crisis. Their work is illustrated in projects, such as a community garden, and events such as climate march, organic market, workshops (salies-de-bearn, n.d.)</p> |
|  | <p>Cultivate is a civil society organization working on sustainability. The organism is based in Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Ireland. Their work focuses on active education. They emphasize the role of community led projects in bringing solutions to sustainable and well being issues. Their work includes permaculture design courses, events relating to resilience and social inclusion in communities. The organization is also involved in European projects on the generating knowledge to influence policy processes toward sustainability (Cultivate, n.d.)</p> |
|  | <p>Drift is an institute in the field of sustainability transitions. The institute develops transformative knowledge and new methods of practice that aim to support people, cities and various sectors (academic, professionals...) in investing toward sustainability and fundamental changes. It is engaged in four main activities: academic research, consultancy, education and public dialogue and debate (Drift, n.d.).</p> |

Table 6: samples of ECOLISE's members.

The large majority of ECOLISE's members are National Networks and thus have members themselves that are, most often, other local initiatives or communities.

Each member is independent from each other and operates within their own context, have their own organization and functioning as well as their own focus. Nonetheless, members share similar visions and through their involvement into common projects -originated by ECOLISE- they have the opportunity to interact, share their stories and collaborate together.

Why this case selection?

As seen above, Members of ECOLISE vary from local communities to European organizations. Besides a few members such as DRIFT or ICLEI, the vast majority of members can be defined as grassroots organizations represented in the form of community led actions. Moreover, the totality of ECOLISE's members exists in the purpose to find sustainable solutions to current issues and thus imply working on transformative change as they represent alternative ways of addressing the sustainable issues.

Therefore, the investigation of ECOLISE seems to be an ideal example for exploring the role of translocal networks as regards to community led actions and transformative change. Indeed, ECOLISE is a blend of both the translocal aspect of the research as well as the focus on transformative community led actions. Moreover, the network is quite recent and the functioning and purpose of its existence have not been investigated yet.

4. Methods

The section aims to answer the methodological question: *How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?* The answer to this question is constrained by the answers given to the ontological and epistemological questions (Guba and Lincoln 1994). While positivism precognizes quantitative methods, post positivism recognizes the use of qualitative methods in the aim to foster falsification of hypotheses (ibid). Nonetheless, whether the researcher uses quantitative or qualitative methods, the inquiry should remain objective.

I have privileged qualitative methods for this research as I follow a case study design. As pointed out by Van Thiel (2014) case studies are described as a versatile form of qualitative inquiry. Moreover, qualitative methods allow to collect more situational informations and reintroduce discovery within the inquiry as it grants the researcher with various viewpoints and thus help in the determination of meaning and purposes (Guba and Lincoln 1994). This is particularly important when conducting exploratory research as it is the case here.

Moreover, in order to be of good quality, a research needs to be both internally and externally valid. In this respect, Yin (2013) pointed out that using a case study design -especially a single case- can be challenging when following a post positivist approach.

Considering the issue of external validity Yin (2013) suggested ways to increase these challenging aspects. As regards to generalizations, the author suggests to “*connect the theory to the extant literature.*” (p.327). Following this proposition, I developed my concepts (Diffusion, Psychological Empowerment and Political support) following an extensive literature review based on previous research on translocal networks, particularly in the field of transformative community led actions.

In the aim to increase internal validity, Yin (2013) suggests to make use of triangulation methods and particularly the data source triangulation or the methods types one (bid). Following this suggestion, I use, in this research, the data source triangulation. I combined semi structured interviews with documents analysis such as reports and internal documents. Furthermore, I have conducted observations from attending numerous meetings of ECOLISE and its members. Section 4.1 below will elaborate more deeply on these different data.

4.1. Data collection

Interviews

This research will use interviews as the main data collection.

As translocal network researches are quite new in the academic field and due to their singularity, interviews are the most suited data to gain understanding on translocal networks' functioning. Furthermore, following a case study design interviews are particularly useful as they are sensitive to the context and give the research various viewpoints thus allowing a better chance to come as close as possible to the truth.

The investigation follows a case study design on a specific translocal network. Thus, the interviewees as well as the interview questions will relate to the network ECOLISE. Moreover, the research pursues a post positivist approach, therefore in order to avoid biases and stay objective using qualitative methods, I conducted semi-structured interviews with general questions so that all interviewees had the space to talk lengthily and elaborate without me guiding their sentences.

Selection of interviewees

Three types of interviewees were selected:

- ❖ the National Contact Points (NCPs)
- ❖ the Network staff
- ❖ Partners' coalitions

Initially, local practitioners were also selected as interviewees but along the process were removed as I realized that local practitioners were not directly linked to ECOLISE, thus they did not have insights on their strategies. Alongside, NCPs as well as staff members are also practitioners, involved in local initiatives. This input was judged sufficient considering the scope and goal of the research.

NCP's were chosen after attending numerous work meetings. The NCPs that attended most meetings were selected. These stakeholders are relevant to interview as they are the direct intermediaries between ECOLISE and local practitioners thus they can testify and give evidence on the potential benefits or barriers of being involved in a translocal network.

The staff members of ECOLISE were selected considering the role of each in the network. Following the three concepts of empowerment that constitute this research, three different staff have been selected to answer questions. These people have been chosen regarding their role at ECOLISE, they were the best suited to answer my questions.

As regards to the selection of partner coalitions, I have sent emails to several partners and only two partners responded. Thus, these two partners have been selected. It was important to add partner's coalitions to the interviewees as they could bring an external point of view and they could give more insights regarding the concept of political support.

Interview type

Regarding the interview type, the interviews are semi structured interviews. A list of questions was prepared and organized around the three concepts of empowerment (diffusion, psychological empowerment, political support) and their associated indicators. Each interview was also composed of introduction questions. Depending on the interviewee category (NCP, staff or partner coalition), the interview guide differs. **Table 7.** below provide information about interviewees, their role and the interview guide associated with each. The list of questions was sent to the interviews who asked for it. Considering the complex and spread structure of the network and its members and the current sanitary context, only digital interviews were conducted.

| Interviewee | Rôle | interviewee's organization | interview guide |
|-------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| A | NCP | Red de Transicion | 1 |
| B | NCP | Rete Italiana Villaggi Ecologici | 1 |
| C | NCP/ Research assistant | Sunny Hill Slovenia | 1 |
| D | NCP | Carraig Dulra | 2 |
| E | NCP | Croatia permaculture | 2 |
| F | Network coordinator | ECOLISE | 3 |
| G | Communication coordinator | ECOLISE | 4 |
| H | Research coordinator | ECOLISE | 5 |
| I | Policy coordinator | ECOLISE | 6 |
| J | Director of RIPPES Europe | RIPPES Europe | 7 |
| K | Secretariat of the Sustainable Development Observatory at EESC ² | EESC | 8 |

Table 7: List of interviewees and referred interview guide.

Document analysis

Besides the interviews, the analysis of internal documents have also been included into the investigation. As an intern at ECOLISE, I was granted the access to several online tools and platforms in relation to their work. Furthermore, I made use of several articles and publications from ECOLISE and peers as well as information contained on their website. I also explored the 'wikipage', an online platform where knowledge on community led actions is registered.

Table 8. Below provides an overview of the different internal documents analysed.

² European Economic and Social Committee

| | Documents and publications used in this research |
|---------------------|--|
| Publications | ECOLISE Annual Activity Report 2019 |
| | Reshaping the Future, the First Status Report on Community-Led Action on Sustainability and Climate Change in Europe 2019. |
| Documents | All meeting notes between the communication manager and NCPs, related to the organization of the EDSC. |
| | Operationalization of Communities for Future - Draft version. |
| | Internal ECOLISE strategy 2016-2020. |

Table 8: Internal documents analysed

Observations

From mid- April until September, I have partially been involved with the work of the network organization ECOLISE, particularly alongside the communication domain. I have attended several meetings regarding the communication and organization of their yearly event - the European Day of Sustainable Communities- as well as meetings regarding the launch of their new programme - Communities for Future-.

The attendance and involvement into these meetings was helpful to understand the organizational structure of the network as well as getting more insights on their activities, particularly the EDSC and CfF. Since ECOLISE is a translocal network, the majority of the work of its members occur through online platforms of work and online communications tools.

4.2. Data analysis

When using qualitative data, interpretation is key to the analysis, thus, putting the research at the center of the analysis. In this research, I am aware of my own subjectivity. Nonetheless, the effort was made to try and analyse the data objectively, free from my own values and beliefs and to stick to the data. To this aim, I made sure I stuck to the concepts.

Interviews

Interviews lasted from 30min to 60min depending on the availability of the interviewee. The analysis of the interviews were done by recording each interview and transcribing it. The transcripts were then coded with colors. These codes were linked to themes developed on the basis of the conceptual framework. Nonetheless, new themes emerged while analysing the interviews. **Table 9.** below, gives an overview of the different codes that have been used. Besides coding, I also worked with specific parts of the interviews that seemed important to answer the questions.

| Themes | Codes |
|---------------|--------------|
|---------------|--------------|

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Roles & activities | Member's role | |
| | ECOLISE's role | |
| | ECOLISE's activities | |
| Psychological empowerment | Shared narrative | |
| | impact | |
| | Resilience | |
| ECOLISE's evolution | | |
| Limitations | | |
| Diffusion | Knowledge creation | |
| | Building relationship | |
| Political support | Funded projects | |
| | engaging members | |
| | advocacies | |
| | EU programmes & events | |
| | Coalitions | Benefits of partnerships |
| | | Role of partnerships |
| | | Reasons for partnerships |

Table 9: Interview codes

Observations

Observations were conducted through online platforms of work and communication. As an intern, I was granted access to several online platforms where member's organizations could exchange and work.

The main platform was google drive where all sorts of documents were shared such as the meeting notes, updates documents, translations, pictures, press release and so on. For specific tasks, such as the organization of the European Day of Sustainable Communities website, other platforms such as Trello and Slack were used. Although these platforms were not really popular and their usage was limited.

Regarding the meetings, all of the one I have attended were done through Zoom. When attending the online meetings, I collected notes and was often in charge of writing the minutes. Each meeting was summarized into a shared google document which allowed me to save the essential information of each meeting.

IV. Results

Following the theoretical framework developed previously (II.2.), this section analyses the translocal network, ECOLISE as regards to the three concepts *Diffusion*, *Psychological empowerment* and *Political support*. Each of these concepts have allocated indicators that relate the characteristics of the concepts. The section first starts with an overview of ECOLISE's organizational structure, in the aim to clarify some aspects of ECOLISE.

1. Organizational Structure

This section aims to provide data as regards to the first sub question: *How are translocal networks organized?*

Specificities of the network

As a meta network, ECOLISE's aim is to represent a globally unified community of locally active practitioners working toward transformative innovations and regeneration. Thus by being a meta-network, ECOLISE is not directly working with local communities and practitioners, but mostly with the national network organizations that these communities are part of. However, it is interesting to note that while the meta network itself is active beyond borders, it is constituted of local practitioners and enthusiasts regarding transformative innovation. Indeed, whether it is the local communities, members of the network, or the workforce of ECOLISE, they all are local practitioners within their localities. Most of them are living in sustainable communities and are connected to ECOLISE members at the local scale. Thus, ECOLISE's staff are wearing several hats, sometimes as staff sometimes as a practitioner.

Internal structure

Founded in 2014, the working team is now constituted of 11 staff members but this number is growing (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). The internal structure of ECOLISE is composed of a General Assembly, a Council and Presidency, a Secretariat which comprise an Executive Director as well as an Executive board. In addition, the network developed a number of working groups and task groups. As regards to the tasks division of each member that constitute the internal structure, **Table 10.** below, provides an overview of the role of these members.

| Internal structure | Role |
|--------------------------------|--|
| General Assembly | Meetings once a year. Decide short and medium strategy. Elects the Council members twice a year. Composed of all members. |
| Presidency | Elected twice a year. Member of the Executive board |
| Council | Role is to undertake reflection and strategic planning that will deliver outcomes aligned with the vision and aims of ECOLISE. |
| Task groups and working groups | Role is to assist the Council in the implementation of strategies. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Secretariat</p> <p>Executive direction & Executive board</p> | <p>Board: Constituted by the ECOLISE President, the Vice President, the Executive Director and a Council member. Their role is to establish short and long term objectives, monitoring the progress and feasibility of the action plan proposition.</p> <p>In addition the board also prepares Council meetings, provides reports and recommendations on key issues.</p> |
|---|--|

Table 10: Internal structure of ECOLISE and attributed roles. Derived from the Internal ECOLISE Strategy 2016-2020.

The work is done through online collaboration and online work platforms, with occasional events ‘in person’. Nonetheless, from may 2020, ECOLISE has opened an office in Brussel. Brussel was chosen as it is the center of European politics, therefore it was a strategic decision to facilitate the political engagement of the network. The Brussel office will permanently host staff as soon as the sanitary situation improves.

Evolution of ECOLISE

ECOLISE today is much more complex and diverse than at its origin. 2017 was a milestone in ECOLISE’s evolution as they organized their first European day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC), together with the European Commission. The event aims to celebrate sustainable community led actions and their work by offering initiatives the space to organise events related to their activities (permaculture, eco places, sustainable education...). Moreover, the EDSC is a way to draw attention to european policy makers and to create opportunities to build bridges and make new connections (Pocock, 2018). In 2020, the 4th edition took place from September the 16th to the 23rd and had paid attention to community initiatives that are shaping a safer, healthier and more sustainable living, showcasing potential responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

Another milestone for ECOLISE was in 2019 when ECOLISE accessed additional funding. The network celebrated its 5th anniversary and received the influence prize³, an award, attributed to initiatives considered as ‘real game changers’ within the context of transformative change and sustainable development (Penha-Lopes, et al. 2019). From this victory, ECOLISE used this additional funding to develop their organizational structure by developing what they named the National Contact Points (NCPs). NCPs are national organisations that represent local initiatives or networks in the country they live in.

Alongside with the network’s development, ECOLISE launched on September the 19th, 2020, a new programme, namely Communities for Future (CfF). CfF is an european-wide action programme that aims to widespread the mainstreaming of regenerative and transformative community led action on climate change and sustainability. From this new programme, the strategies of ECOLISE are deepened and will now be restructured into four domains of action: *Inspire*, *Enable*, *Advocate* and *Learn*. The CfF strategy reflects the overall development strategy of ECOLISE and the goals that the network is pursuing. Considering the four actions of domains, we can derive the main objectives of the CfF and outline the development strategy of ECOLISE.

³ The influence prize is an award given by the Lush Spring Prize for Influence. (Penha-Lopes, G., et al. 2019)

- First, *inspire*, refers to giving the space to new communities to emerge. By inspiring and guiding in practical ways the development of more community-led initiatives as well as connecting them with different policy initiatives at various scales, ECOLISE is supporting the growth of initiatives.
- Second, *enable* refers to the willingness to develop an europe-wide framework which will help facilitate and support engaged members as well as strengthening the links between members and the network. The first step toward this is to co-create, together with the members and partners, a shared and collective vision. In addition, the project aims to connect with other organisations, with similar vision, such as Extinction Rebellion or the Fridays for Future protests, and engage them to join the collective narrative.
- *Advocate* is already a present composant of ECOLISE’s work that will be deepened within the CfF project. The main advocacy strategy is to work more efficiently with partners and policy makers, to create a favourable policy context for community led initiatives.
- Finally, *learn*, refers to the wish to develop an understanding of the work the network follows as well the impact the work pursued. From these learning, the aim is to generate knowledge to enhance the success of future initiatives and activities..

Table 11. provides an overview of the milestones that testify ECOLISE’s evolution.

| Year | Characteristics |
|------|--|
| 2017 | First EDSC. It marks the beginning of the collaboration with the European Commission. EDSC became a yearly event. |
| 2019 | Influence Prize. Access to additional funding, giving birth to the NCPs. |
| 2020 | Launch of CfF. New European action program. Aim is to widespread mainstreaming of Community led actions. NCPs capacity should be extended. |

Table 11. ECOLISE’s evolution milestones.

Role of the NCPs

NCPs are the direct intermediaries between local initiatives part of the national network, and the meta network, ECOLISE. They are in direct collaboration with the staff’s members. Decisions regarding the selection of these NCPs, have been participative and open as members selected themselves voluntarily. In most cases, one person (or more in some cases) from the members organization in each country was selected internally by the organization itself, to be the representative of its country at ECOLISE.

As regards to the purpose of NCPs, the aim was primarily to catalyse the national initiatives for the yearly events in the European Day of Sustainable Communities and to also support awareness at the country level (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). Thus, their work and collaboration was centered around the organization of the EDSC. Nonetheless, in the near future, the role of the NCPs should be extended as ECOLISE is constantly evolving. New potential funding could be unlocked to allow greater collaboration with members. Within the

CfF European wide program, there is an opportunity for ECOLISE to grow and access additional funding that will allow the network to extend its capacity and to extend the role of the NCPs. Apart from this, CfF has the ambition to be widely recognized at institutional levels by connecting member's activities to policy points.

2. Diffusion

This section provides content that will be used to answer the second sub question: *What are the activities of translocal networks as regards to empowerment?* It also aims to bring content to answer the sub question: *What barriers occur in the activities of translocal networks?* and the sub question *How can translocal networks overcome the barriers they encounter?*

The first concept, *diffusion*, was developed following the work of Tarrow (2005) and is composed of two indicators: *Mediated diffusion* and *Relational diffusion*. This section will investigate ECOLISE to see how aspects of these two indicators are translated in the network's strategies.

2.1. Mediated diffusion

Mediated diffusion relates to the level of knowledge that is exchanged and shared among members of the same community of practice. The exchange of individuals knowledge contributes to create better understandings of these practices and thus generate more accurate knowledge. ECOLISE has integrated this aspect of diffusion into their strategies and several tools have been developed to share and generate new knowledge about community led actions that are working on different aspects of transformative change. This section aims to unfold these strategies.

The 'Knowledge commons'

One central strategy in the aim to enhance the exchange of knowledge on community led actions is the elaboration of what is called the 'knowledge commons'. 'Knowledge commons' is a tool that aims to generate knowledge on community led actions that are working in various domains of transformative change. In addition, this platform was developed in the aim to enhance a better use of this knowledge. As put by the research coordinator at ECOLISE, 'knowledge commons' has the purpose to

"get understanding on the movement that they will meet, to get understanding on the nature of their movements, their strengths and limitations". (Interview H).

As regards to the technical aspect of the 'knowledge commons', it is established through an online space, named 'the wiki page', where information which relate to community led actions within the context of transformative change are presented. It includes the mode of operationalization of these communities, their activities, the barriers encountered, the lessons learned and much more. Information is accessible in open source and aims to be inclusive and available for all. This means, it is not only for the existing communities or members of ECOLISE, but to anyone that is interested on the topic and wishes to learn more about community led action.

This platform of knowledge also wants to be participative as knowledge can be generated by community efforts in addition to academic research. The key component of generating new knowledge is 'action learning'. By that, I mean, learning by doing, observing what happens and then reflecting to plan what to do next. Therefore, there is a great emphasis, in knowledge common, on informal research where practitioners learn from their actions. In addition to these informal researches, the use of formal researches, such as academic researches made on ecovillages, permaculture and transition movements, is also recognized as complement to action learning. Simultaneously, knowledge harvested in informal research provides ground for more formalized researches.

Barriers to the 'knowledge commons'

Despite the high ambitions of 'knowledge commons', results of interviews conclude that there is very limited usage of members, thus making it less efficient as it aims to be. Reasons that explain the limited usage of the platform are various.

First, there is a lack of awareness of its purpose and relevance. Indeed, most members have heard of it but do not know how to access it or contribute to it. In addition, so far, the technical aspect of the 'wiki' is unattractive, creating barriers for potential uses. Moreover, members do not grab the benefits that can be derived from 'knowledge commons', and consider the time's investment too high compared to the possible benefits received.

Prospects of the 'knowledge commons'

Considering the limitations of the 'knowledge commons', some of the discouragements mentioned have already been acknowledged by staff members and the elaboration of a new wiki page aims to address some of the issues faced by members. Particularly, the technical complexity of the previous 'wiki page' is being improved. The new framework is shorter and the design more attractive. In addition, the new wiki will soon have additional technical innovations such as databases, maps and other primary data, making it more attractive.

As regards to the lack of incentives, from members, to make use and contribute to the 'knowledge commons', the new programme Communities for Future offers perspectives to stimulate member's usage. Discussions are happening now and prospects go in the direction of extending the role of the NCPs into curating information on community led actions within their own country. For this purpose, members will use the 'wiki page'.

The status report

Alongside 'knowledge commons' and, with the aim to diffuse knowledge and understanding on community led actions working for transformative change, ECOLISE works on the publication of a status report. Derived from the 'knowledge commons', the status report outward facing document that summarizes the activities, progress and contribution to climate mitigation of these community led actions. As an outward facing document, the status report is a product that can be delivered to institutional actors to help reach more visibility and recognition of communities into decision makers. Indeed, it is used as a basis to build cases for advocacy in National and European institutions. However, the benefits of the status report in bringing more awareness in political institutions could not have been analysed regarding the scope of this research and thus its efficiency is not determined.

The newsletter

Finally, another aspect in which ECOLISE is working on the creation and the diffusion of knowledge is the newsletter. Indeed, the newsletter can be considered as a tool used to build connexions and support knowledge exchange among members. It is organized on a monthly basis, and gathers news of the ongoing projects. It is written in a language that is accessible to everyone including members as well as policy makers and a broader audience. The aim is to transcribe and mainstream the jargon used within communities, such as permaculture, transition jargon, into a broader audience.

2.2.Relational diffusion

Relational diffusion is understood as the relationships that members nurture. The literature highlighted a number of tools that can help generate and strengthen these ties. These tools include manuals, websites, newsletters, training, courses and conferences. ECOLISE recognizes the importance of building strong relationships among members, in order to create a more cohesive community based on trust, solidarity and mutual support. Thus, this section will unfold the ways in which the network creates and nurtures relationships among members.

Building relationships

Practically, building relationships between ECOLISE's members and staff means developing spaces for collaboration, membership strategies as well as supporting the role of the NCPs. However, as being a meta network, relationships within ECOLISE's network cannot be built with 'in person' meetings. These relationships need to be created through the creation of online spaces. Thus, considering this geographical distance and the need to build strong relationships among members, ECOLISE has developed various online gatherings such as informal discussions, webinars and workshops. These online events contribute to shape acquaintances and build relationships among members.

In addition to these tools, each year ECOLISE's board organizes an 'in person' general assembly. The country chosen for the assembly differs from year to year and it is also live streamed so that members that cannot attend physically can still join. Organizers ask online participants to commit to the assembly as they would if they were there. These yearly 'in person' events are a great way for members to connect in a different way and have more of these informal discussions and 1 to 1 exchanges, coffee breaks exchanges and so on.

Another aspect that supports relationship building is the setting of a common project, namely the EDSC. In order to successfully organize the EDSC, members need to get together and work toward the organization of this event. Indeed, working together on a common project gives members the opportunity to work for a common objective and thus gives the need to collaborate together to reach this objective. Moreover, it increases the sense of collectivism and reassures members in their own objectives. As an NCP explains:

"having the European Day of Sustainable Communities as a focal point has begun to coalesce this notion of the fact that there is practice and there are examples of community

led action that, you know, that are worth knowing about, I suppose, worth interacting with but also worth, simply knowing about them" (Interview D).

For the purposes of the EDSC, NCPs meet every month through the online platform ZOOM and discuss strategies regarding the EDSC and the tasks that need to be done (such as media promotion, national networking, events organized, funding processes ...)

Meetings always start with a 'check in round' where participants share about their day, the weather in their respective country and other more personal information, before moving on to the agenda. From this first round, members can derive a sense of proximity and closeness from each other despite the fact that they are far away from each other. It has been noted that with time and the repetition of these meetings, members have developed more acquainted relationships. They describe their relationships as being based on trust and solidarity, giving each other mutual support.

Effects of relationship building

Results from members interviewed attested the reinforcement of the relationships they have with other members as well as relationships with ECOLISE's staff. Moreover, participating in these meetings also increased, for some of the members interviewed, the knowledge and understanding of the global movement they are part of.

At a smaller scale, national networks, members of ECOLISE, do see the benefits of being part of a meta network as reinforcing the link with other initiatives. As explained by the NCP

"So we are working with visibility and also connexions. Not only us with newly discovered initiatives or existing initiatives to create stronger bounds but also on relationships between initiatives themselves." (Interview E)

For example, when organizing the EDSC, NCPs need to network and contact potential initiatives that will be interested in organizing an event. This process gives a reason to contact other communities and initiatives with whom they already have established connexions, but also new ones. As mentioned by the NCP Spain,

"[...] In Spain while we reached last year, I think we were like 35 communities and some of them I have never heard of them, so certainly I have heard of communities I would not have if I was not involved in the EDSC." (Interview A).

Furthermore, this process reinforces the relationships between members's initiatives within the national context. the link between them can be deepened, as they have a common reason to connect or reconnect together through the EDSC. It was noted that the countries where most events were registered for the EDSC, were the countries with the strongest relations and personal contacts.

Barriers

While the connexions are improving both nationally and translocally, barriers still remain. First, the process of building strong ties among members is still ongoing and long. Despite

great strategies developed to collaborate from a distance, making connexions and creating bounds digitally is harder and takes longer than if members could meet in person.

Language is sometimes an issue when trying to collaborate and exchange across localities. While all meetings are facilitated in english, the daily work of local communities and national networks are in their native language and thus most information on their activities is written in their native language, creating difficulties to exchange and learn about each other's activities. For example, events registered online for the EDSC publish information in their native language, and are not accessible for everyone to read it.

Moreover, Zoom sessions can be challenging due to the lack of interactions or internet connection issues. Several members experience trouble to grasp and understand all information given during the meetings as it is scheduled tightly and there is a lot of content put into these meetings. These limitations have been illustrated during the NCPs meetings regarding the EDSC, this year. Indeed, there have been several issues such as funding delays and technical issues with social media diffusion and the technicalities of the website. All these technical issues took on discussion time and there was less space for sharing experiences and updates about their activities. Members felt less directed and experienced a lack of clarity regarding what they needed to do. Moreover, the organization of the EDSC was altered and challenged this year, as the sanitary situation created lots of uncertainties.

Finally, even though members wish to see more of these translocal connexions and ties among members and communities there are contextual barriers to it as well. Each country has its own context, its own structure which make initiatives across borders different and perhaps not transferable. For example, being a grassroot organization working on transitions in Italy is different than being one in Ireland. Northern countries have a context much more favorable than southern countries, as regards to sustainable transition. This can create tensions and misunderstandings if they are not well addressed.

2.3. Concluding notes

Table 12., below summarize how the concept of mediated diffusion is translated into the work of ECOLISE.

| Mediated diffusion applied to ECOLISE | Characteristics | Barriers |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Knowledge commons | Platform of knowledge with formal and informal knowledge on community led actions. | Lack of awareness from members, of its relevance and functioning. Time consuming. |
| Status report | Outward facing documents for decision makers that present potential of community led actions as regards to climate mitigation. | Out of the scope of the research. |
| newsletter | gather information on ongoing projects. Mainstreaming of communities's jargon. | no information. |

Table 12: ECOLISE's strategies as regards to mediated diffusion.

Table 13. gives an overview of the different strategies used by the network to create and deepens relationships among its members. Their characteristics and limitations are also presented in the table.

| Relational diffusion applied to ECOLISE | Characteristics | Barriers |
|---|---|--|
| Online gatherings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Webinars. ➤ Workshops. ➤ Informal discussion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Internet connexions issues. ➤ Lack of curiosity of local and national contexts. |
| General Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Once a year 'in person meeting' ⁴ ➤ 1 to 1 talks. ➤ Live stream for people missing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cannot be attended by everyone |
| Common projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Organizations meetings. ➤ At national and local scale: reinforcing collaborative purposes. ➤ Sharing experiences, get inspired. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Technical issues slowing down the relational process. ➤ Linguistics issues for national projects sharing. |

Table 13: ECOLISE's strategies as regards to relational diffusion.

3. Psychological empowerment

This section intends to bring substance to answer the sub question: *What are the activities of translocal networks as regards to empowerment?* It will also contribute to answering the sub question: *What barriers occur in the activities of translocal networks ?* as well as the last sub question: *How can translocal networks overcome the barriers they encounter?*

⁴ expect during COVID

Psychological empowerment is regarded here, as the one created collectively. It is analysed using three indicators: *Impact*, *meaning* and *resilience*. This section will analyse ECOLISE's strategies to bring psychological empowerment to its members.

3.1. Impact

The literature about the psychological dimension of empowerment defined *impact* as being able to make a difference. The investigation of the ECOLISE's case as regards the sense of impact, shows little evidence that outlines the feeling of members of making a difference. Nonetheless, results of this investigation show that the number of initiatives that organized events for the EDSC has grown over time. The communication coordinator, explains:

"[...] the first year were very few and then it grew slowly. Last year was the biggest year ever. As I said you had events registered in 27 countries. [...] It went from Portugal to Ukraine. From Greece to Sweden, Finland. You know it was really all four corners of Europe. [...] And we also sparked the North America Day of Sustainable Communities". (Interview G)

In addition, members interviewed do recognize the benefits of being involved with ECOLISE, particularly as regards to increasing the visibility of their activities and thus have a greater feeling of being part of something bigger than their own community or initiative. This is particularly true at national level.

Increased visibility

The visibility of ECOLISE's members is mainly developed by participating in the European Day of Sustainable Communities, as it is showcasing the work, values and purpose of community led action at European scale. Through the EDSC, communities are given the opportunity to introduce their work and lifestyles into a broader, more mainstream audience. For example, by organizing visits and tours of ecovillages or communal gardens, practitioners enrolled in the EDSC, can present their lifestyles to whoever is interested to participate.

Moreover, as the networking intensifies for the purpose of the EDSC, it contributes to extending the NCPs contacts within their own country. Indeed, EDSC brings a good opportunity for NCPs to reach out to other local initiatives, outside their own community, as they have a project to suggest. Indeed, results outline the importance of having a focal point to collaborate on, in order to interact with local practitioners. For example, in Croatia, where the network *Permakultura* is networking and connecting with other like minded movements, increasing the feeling of having an impact at national level.

In addition, while organizing the EDSC, members are in charge of promoting the day and thus make use of the media to do so. An illustration of this can be found in Spain, where the national network, *Red de Transición* was able to promote the EDSC on national radio and newspaper articles which favorise the visibility of, first, the National network and associated local initiatives as well as the visibility of the general movement of community led actions.

Barriers & prospects

Despite the great opportunity that the EDSC represents, the impact and visibility of its actors are limited. Indeed, outside the scope of the EDSC, there is no follow up, so far, on a yearly basis. The EDSC is a punctual event that makes these movements visible only at the time it happens.

Nonetheless, there is awareness of the limitation of the EDSC into bringing constant visibility and ECOLISE is working on a new programme to enhance yearlong visibility and collaboration. Communities for Future, tries to take this limitation into account, and has the ambition to connect and stimulate the organization of events all year long. As pointed out by an interviewee,

“However now it is going to be more connected to Communities for Future, [...] it is a broader thing than just one event in September, it’s bringing together the community projects, connecting them [...]”. (Interview C).

The ambition is to extend the work of NCPs beyond the EDSC, and continue to generate constant projects all year long. This new project is still in its early phase, and discussions regarding the operationalization of this year long activity is not yet defined at this point.

3.2. Meaning

As illustrated in the literature review, creating a sense of *meaning* among members part of the same movement favors the collective psychological empowerment of this movement. *Meaning* can, thus, be generated by the development of a collective identity, including a shared narrative, on the goals and activities pursued. The following part will investigate the strategies of ECOLISE in trying to shape this shared narrative and thus create a sense of meaning.

Common roots

As regards to the member’s organizations represented by ECOLISE, they all voluntarily came together and joined the meta network because they have the same roots, share the same vision and work toward the same objectives. Indeed, the large majority of ECOLISE’s members are civil society organizations, working toward the regeneration of societal and natural systems through the use of transformative innovations. They cover areas such as food and agriculture, education and health as well as energy and social economy with a strong emphasis on ecological and communal values. They all include themselves within the global community of change makers, bringing alternative solutions to the dominant paradigm and are organized in horizontal ways, outside of hierarchical structures.

Disparities

Nonetheless, while they share common visions and common values, they are very much fragmented within their own field. From permaculture movements to energy cooperatives and ecovillages, these movements have different focal points. While one focuses on energy transition, the other one aims to transform agricultural processes or lifestyles. Moreover, It has been noticed that these movements do not interact much among each other as they mostly operate within their own context and focus on their own activities. However, to be part

of an unified community of changemakers, some actors see the importance of creating an international and collective identity.

Toward a shared narrative

Arguments in favor of a more unified identity are related to the wish to expand community led actions beyond localities and the ambition to potentially represent community led actions in politics. Indeed, when they are isolated within their local context, communities have much less weight than if they were unified into global vision. Thus, developing a shared narrative that will catalyse the diversity of community led actions into one formal and unified narrative is privileged as regards to building advocacies, as it will allow policy makers to see the correlations between all the different activities of community led actions.

There are different steps undertaken by the network organization to support the elaboration of a shared narrative. First of all, the premise of creating a shared narrative is to build relationships among members. Indeed staff members interviewed see the importance of creating space where members can meet and can get to know each other as well as become informed on the work each of them is doing. Section 2.2. of this chapter, on the relational diffusion provided insights on how these relationships are being built and how they are evolving. The importance of connecting members together and creating relationships is to reveal the synergies among them. By highlighting the synergies across the different activities of members, members and staff's members will gain a better understanding of the variety of community led actions. This process will thus unfold components that will lay the foundations of this shared narrative. Nonetheless, this is a long process, as we have seen previously, relationships take time to be established.

In parallel, the status report, mentioned previously, is also seen as a basis to shape this shared narrative. Indeed, the report is a gathering of information and knowledge on community led actions regarding transformative change and contain foundations to this narrative. As put by an interviewee, working at ECOLISE,

"the knowledge common, I see it, very much supportive of this shared narrative to strengthen the opportunity for it to be grounded in robust understanding." (interview H).

Technically, the process of building the shared narrative aims to be participative. Staff members would like the contribution of its members. That is why more (online) spaces are created to discuss this narrative. Up to now, it is too soon to be defined yet. However, outcomes for interviews show that members appreciate the process as it gives a chance to members to re-think their visions and redefine their focus and identity. Collaborating on a shared narrative is an opportunity for members to question their work and its alignments with their values. It is a good reflective process.

Barriers

Though it is promising there are limitations to the establishment of this shared narrative. Indeed, as there isn't 100% cohesion across the activities of ECOLISE's members, a strong identity that preserve the independence of members will be hard to define. Indeed, community led actions represented by ECOLISE are locally rooted, operating within their

own context, and thus, disparities about priorities can differ. For instance, the general context and priorities in Italy can be different than the one in Scotland, thus shaping different focuses and activities and thus making it hard to define a strong shared narrative.

In addition to that, some members have doubts on the development of a strong common narrative, as there is a risk to exclude some possible partners from the global community if the narrative is too narrow. This goes against the vision of ECOLISE and its members of being inclusive and thus they have to be careful not to be too strict.

3.3. Resilience

Resilience is understood here as the capacity to overcome obstacles and thrive. In order for the movements to be impactful in the long run, resilience is needed. This part provides insights on the ways the translocal network ECOLISE tries to bring resilience to its members.

Local resilience

There are different scales in which resilience can be applied. Within this research, at the local scale, practitioners have their own ways to create resilience. Indeed, as communities are locally rooted and geographically spread across European countries, building resilience within each community needs a local strategy. As there are differences in political contexts, climate or priorities, the way one community will create resilience and adapt will differ from the way another community, in another country or region will do.

Translocal resilience

Considering ECOLISE, resilience of community led actions as a whole can be enhanced by the network's work. In order to understand better the way resilience is understood when taking a translocal perspective, it is relevant to remind that the communities members of ECOLISE originate from grassroots movements that function with a high degree of volunteerism and personal investment. Moreover, if we consider the transition literature and the MLP perspective introduced in the literature review, community led actions studied in this research are considered as niches, places of experimentation with alternatives functioning that operate outside the regime's mechanism. Therefore, they do not have much support from formal institutions, the latest being shaped by the regime. Concretely, it means that community led actions are confronted with funding difficulties that can threaten their resilience overtime. Limited funding capacities brings limitations to the degree of contribution that these communities can have. That is why, in the aim to support the resilience of its members in their activities, ECOLISE can contribute to accessing larger funding capacities. Outcomes of interviews put in light the importance of these funding into the development of the work of members.

Funding

Funding that directly supports members and their community are mainly generated for the purpose of the EDSC. This funding is unlocked by the Network via European funding mechanisms. It is deployed each year around the time of the organization of the EDSC and constitutes a budget that is attributed to NCPs in order to support their work in the organization of the EDSC. Ways on how this budget should be spent are various, and it is up to the NCPs to choose as they wish to make use of it. The results of interviews outlined two

main ways in which NCPs spend this budget, either they use it as a financial support going straight to the NCP. In that case, the money that goes to the NCP member constitutes a payment for intense networking, promotions and other tasks endorsed by the NCP during the process of organizing the EDSC. Another way to spend this money is to allocate the budget directly into the national network or local association. This money is then used to organize events including seminars, workshops and so on. An example of it can be found in Italy, where the network *Rete Italiana Villaggi Ecologici* is using this money for a school project. This project is centered around the EDSC and is a training project where project's participants come together over three or four days and brainstorm, share knowledge and exchange their respective strategies. Therefore, ECOLISE funding is used to facilitate this project.

Funding explained in this part only relates to the funding delivered directly to the members. There are more funding mechanisms unlocked by ECOLISE, that will be explained in the next section on political support (IV.4.). These additional funding are not destined directly to members to support their local activities, but rather to support the growth of community led actions in general. This is why it will be explained in the next section.

Barriers

These additional funding are limited in the sense that they are punctual and deliver for the purposes of the EDSC and only apply for NCPs. The lack of consistency of these funding thus limits the impact that they have in contributing to increase the resilience of the members.

Mutual support

ECOLISE, also understands resilience in terms of mutual support. This means that resilience starts with understanding what are the needs and potential barriers that community led actions are facing to be able to develop ways to support them in their needs. That is why, strategies of ECOLISE regarding resilience include the development of tools and methodologies to improve knowledge and communication. Here the vision of resilience can be intertwined with the concept of mediated diffusion developed in section 2.1. of this chapter, where platforms to share and generate knowledge enhance the understanding of community led actions for transformative change. In addition, the communication tools such as meetings, newsletter, webinars and workshops are additional tools to guide members to connect and exchange about their own situation and so to help facilitate the learning process and contribute to the resilience of all members.

3.4. Concluding notes on psychological empowerment

The **table 14.**, below summarizes the different aspects studied to understand psychological empowerment. as regards to the case of ECOLISE.

| Psychological empowerment applied to ECOLISE | Characteristics | Limitations |
|--|--|--|
| Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased visibility (public and politicians) ➤ Networking, events and use of media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited to the EDSC ➤ Assessment is limited in this research. |
| Meaning (shared narrative) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Building relationships ➤ Use of the status report ➤ Collaborative draft | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risk of being less inclusive ➤ Lack of cohesion across members ➤ issues of independence of members organizations |
| Resilience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financial support ➤ Mutual support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resilience is rooted in local contexts. |

Table 14: Psychological empowerment applied to ECOLISE.

We have seen in this section that ECOLISE enhances the visibility of its members, by engaging them in European events that stimulate community led actions to increase their networking and engage with media coverages. Moreover, the network puts efforts in shaping a shared narrative, created collectively, that will unified the diverse activities of its members. Finally, being involved with ECOLISE, provides more opportunities to access financial capacities in the aim to develop their activities and enhance mutual support. Nonetheless, there are still limitations to these psychological empowerment. Indeed, as shown in the table, the visibility is bounded to the EDSC, the shared narrative is challenging to define as it should remain inclusive and preserve the independence of members. Moreover, we cannot speak of resilience in strict terms, as it is rooted at the community level.

4. Political supports

This section gives elements that will help answer the sub question *What are the activities of translocal networks as regards to empowerment? As well as the question What barriers occur in the activities of translocal networks ?* and the last sub question *How can translocal networks overcome the barriers they encounter?*

Considering the four indicators of political support, (developed in chapter II.2.3) *accessing funding and grants, engaging communities with institutional actors, contribution to supportive legislation and advocacies & coalitions*, this section aims to apply these indicators to the work of ECOLISE. The aim is to understand better how the strategies of the network contribute to enhance political support toward community led actions.

Political support is crucial if one wishes to mainstream ideas and visions. Community led actions often operate outside the societal structures and bureaucratie. This is especially true for the ones that aim to bring transformative change as their foundations of existence is

structural change. Considering the different pathways of transitions developed by Geels & Schot (2007), a niche - here transformative community led actions - has various ways to access power (see Chapter II, section 1.2). Whether it is by symbiosis with the regime, replacing it, competing with it or by the regime adapting to the niche's alternatives, transitions involve interactions between the niche and the regime. Thus, transitions implies interactions within the political realm. By being locally rooted, community led actions have the privilege to be contributing practically to what they want to see change. However, this local scale does not allow these movements to be visible on a higher level such as the EU. Thus, being connected to a meta network can facilitate this process.

4.1. Access to funding and grants

In the attempts to see community led actions with transformative aims grow, getting access to funding is a requirement. To this aim, this part aims to illustrate how ECOLISE can contribute to unlock funding mechanisms. Indeed, the network works closely with European institutions to try and access european funding.

European programmes

In order to access these fundings, the network set up projects that can be integrated into European programmes. Through the proposition of these projects into european programmes, European funds can be unlocked as they are part of wider European goals. For example, in 2020, ECOLISE and its partners have launched two European funded programmes namely, UrbanA, working on sustainable and just cities, and COMETS, the Collective Action Models for Energy Transition and Social Innovation (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). These projects are both included in the Horizon 2020 European programme. The UrbanA project is led by the ICLEI and includes various ECOLISE members such as DRIFT and *FCiência.Id* (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). Its aim is to foster contributions on sustainable and just cities by synthesizing the knowledge harvested from previous EU researches, city makers, civil society and local governments and to translate it into action (UrbanA. n.d.). The other project, COMETS aims to explore the impact of collection action in the field of energy transition and social innovation. The project proposes to develop tools and methodologies to support learning (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019).

Therefore, here, we can see that the access to funding does not directly provide ECOLISE's members with funds for their local activities, but instead, it allows them to be involved in European funded projects that are working on similar aspects that the communities work on at their own scale. Thus, these projects are supporting the general growth of community led actions and their activities.

Communities for Future programme

Moreover, funding can also be allocated via different sources. Instead of integrating projects within European programmes, ECOLISE has recently been given the opportunity to access funding for the purposes of their own programme. Indeed, with the launch of Communities for Future programme, the new born project, ECOLISE has been offered the opportunity to access additional funding, namely the DEAR project funding. At this point, the funding proposal has not yet been accepted, but if it is agreed by all members, it will grant the

network and its members additional funding that will be allocated to extending the capacity of NCPs and allow a more constant collaboration of NCPS.

4.2. Engage communities with institutional actors

In the aim to support the development of community led action, ECOLISE wishes to support the engagement of its members into political actions. This part develops the ways in which ECOLISE does so.

Involving members to participate in political discussions

The first step in which ECOLISE engages its members into politics is by inviting its members to participate in political discussions. Following the advocacy work endorsed by the policy coordinator at ECOLISE, invitations to political discussions and policy circles are forwarded to members and, if they wish to, members can take the role of experts in these meetings and preach their interests.

An illustration of the participation of members in group discussions will be the Climate Pact, part of the European Green Deal. ECOLISE's secretariat as well as member's organizations such as GAIA Education⁵, Ecovillage Germany and Transition Town initiatives participated in these discussions with other European actors. The aim of this approach is to create space for members to interact with the EU level and make their voice heard.

Involving members with national politicians

ECOLISE aims to engage their members directly with their national politicians and Members of Parliament (MEPs). In this aim, the network creates opportunities for members to have a reason to do so. A recent illustration where ECOLISE created opportunities to engage their members with their national politicians was in September 2020, for the launch of their new programme Communities for Future. The programme was officially launched in Brussels on September, 29th, 2020, it was also decided to do a pre-launch at national scale during the course of the EDSC. For this occasion, NCPs were solicited to get in touch and invite members of the parliaments. This was very much appreciated by members as ECOLISE provides good guidance in the process and also it was facilitated by the focus on the new programme Cff.

Figure 2. below, brings an overview of the different ways in which ECOLISE engage its members with institutional actors.



Figure 2: ECOLISE's approach to engage members with institutional actors.

⁵ An international NGO for sustainable education.

barriers:

Results indicate that while members see the relevance of engaging into higher politics, they do not necessarily seek to be part of negotiations and discussions. In some cases, it is this lack of willingness to pursue political work that motivated members to join the meta network, so that someone else, more qualified will do it. The context in which members work is very much grassroots oriented and thus members feel discouraged to commit to bureaucratic procedures and develop political skills. Moreover, This process is participative and mostly voluntary, and members do not always have the time to commit to these meetings. Members have their own commitments in their local contexts and don't have space to attend political discussions with higher institutional levels..

4.3. Contribution of supportive regulation

This part aims to present the efforts of ECOLISE in trying to influence policies that will contribute to the development of new policies toward transformative community led actions. While the success of the network in achieving policy change can be questioned, this part mainly develops on the ways they attempt to do so.

Influencing political events

In order to influence policy makers, ECOLISE is active in different political events and tries to influence their outcomes. A few examples of the efforts, in 2019, ECOLISE have participated in the Conference on Climate Action (ICCA), organized by the french network *Comité21*, network organization on sustainable development. This event was hosted by the OECD and focuses on 'ecological citizenship'. (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). In addition, in December 2019, ECOLISE's representatives were present at the COP25 climate negotiation held in Madrid (Penha-Lopes et al., 2019). By attending more than 350 different work sessions and workshops, the outreach coordinator was present among others to enhance the voice of community led initiatives for sustainable development. Furthermore the network is active in different EU grouping experts meetings that are working on community level. For example, the European Structural and Investment funds⁶, ECOLISE is invited to these experts meetings and advocates for community actions in the EU's long term strategies.

The space taken by ECOLISE'actors in these European meetings and events highlight the high degree of ambition of the network in influencing policy development in favor of community led actions toward transformative change. As mentioned by an interviewee, working at ECOLISE,

“what really matters is not looking at a few climate legislations and how communities contribute to climate action but also looking overall how to change the EU's narrative on transformative change and ensuring elements of what we work on and the solutions that we provide and the narrative that we have, enter the policy debate within the EU and enter to the narrative around the EU.” (Interview I.)

⁶ ESI fund includes the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and the Fisheries Fund

Influencing European programmes

ECOLISE is involved with European organisations and tries to influence their programmes so that it will reflect the needs of the communities better. An illustration of this is when members are solicited to give opinions and expertise on the CLLD programme, which is concerned with the delocalization of funding decisions from the national government to local authorities. This programme is an European Commission experiment and aims to follow an integrative approach where all sectors and activities are working together, looking at the synergies among them and creating partnerships, to better adapt policies (European Social Fund., n.d).

Alongside, ECOLISE is involved in the operationalisation of a new European funded programme, namely the Smart Villages programme, which will be launched in 2021. Smart villages is a sub-theme of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and has an objective to revitalize rural areas through digital and social innovation (Ecolise. n.d.). The programme aims to revitalize societal aspects such as health, education, energy, transport and so on toward more sustainable practices and, emphasize the role of information and Communication Technology as well as the importance of community led actions and projects (Ecolise. n.d.). This European wide programme has gathered numerous networks and inspiring initiatives across Europe, including ECOLISE.

Barriers

Overall, the outcome of the investigation of the translocal network ECOLISE does not provide solid examples in which the network has directly contributed to the elaboration of new policies, supporting community led actions and transformative change. However the present investigation has limitations and the outcome does not mean that ECOLISE has not actually contributed to the elaboration of new policies. Nonetheless, this part has highlighted the fields in which the network is active to try and attempt to influence the policy orientation. By being present on many European events and active in European programmes, the network brings the awareness of community led actions, on to the policy makers.

4.4. Advocacies and coalitions

Political advocacy is understood as a large and collective support in the aim to inform policy actors on a topic and reach their attention to conduct changes advocated by these parties. This part investigates the advocacy strategies employed by ECOLISE. There are several steps in the establishment of ECOLISE's advocacies.

Harvest the needs of members

As ECOLISE is a translocal network representing transformative community led actions, the first phase to build successful advocacies is to harvest the needs and interests of members as regards to the policies reforms that are needed in order for transformative community led actions to grow. To this aim, ECOLISE organizes policy circles with its members.

Building coalitions

Furthermore, building strong alliances with like minded organisations is an integrative part of ECOLISE's advocacy plan. When working in European politics, two types of coalitions are followed by the network, namely institutional coalitions and non institutional ones.

Institutional coalitions

An example of institutional coalitions is the collaboration of ECOLISE with the EESC, the European Economic and Social Committee. It is an european advisory committee representing an organized civil society, including employers, trade unionists and representatives of social occupational, economic and cultural organizations. The role of the EESC is to examine policy proposals and give their opinions based on agreements made among themselves. The EESC can also adopt its own initiative on topics that members judge important. ECOLISE has been working together with the EESC for several years now. They organize Brussels policy events every year, within the scope of the EDSC, to discuss ways to include community led actions within the commitments of the Paris Agreement. In these meetings, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Eu's Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities are also present.

The ECOLISE and EESC coalition brings an opportunity for the network to collaborate with EU institutions and represent a civil society that is able to speak with decision makers about their interests. Moreover, it is an opportunity to bring actual testimonies from local actors up to European politics. Alongside, ECOLISE also contributes to bringing awareness of the work of its members within their coalitions. For example, during the in house training of new mandated members at the EESC, ECOLISE's representatives were solicited to present their initiatives and work in practice to these newly mandated members.

From these institutional coalitions, ECOLISE aims to see the endorsement of Communities for Future by the highest european level. This means that ECOLISE wishes to gain the recognition and acknowledgement of the positive contribution of community led action to the climate emergency by higher institutional levels, and the grant of more financial support and investment into community led actions.

Non governmental coalitions

Besides institutional coalitions, ECOLISE is also partnering with non governmental organizations. It includes NGOs such as the Climate Action Network Europe or RIPPES, the global network on social and solidarity economy. Non governmental coalitions aim to help create momentum around the narrative on transformative change and to ensure that, through the building up of coalitions, communities initiatives are recognized and taken as full stakeholders within the climate debate. The aim is to,

“amplify their voices [...] when we are going together with 10 or 15 NGOs, we are signing letters or we are signing positions papers that were signed by CAN Europe and 140 others NGOs, then it makes more of an impact.” (Interview I).

Moreover, coalitions with other NGOs support the work on networking, by allowing the emergence of new partnerships that would not have happened otherwise. These non

governmental coalitions are concerned with joint framing and joint initiatives to help strengthen the global community narrative. It, thus, requires agreements, among all parties, on terms and demands they wish to make at European institutions.

For example ECOLISE is partnering with the network RIPESS Europe, working on social and solidarity economy. This coalition is beneficial both ways. Indeed, ECOLISE brings along to RIPESS its expertise on climate justice and climate change. This expertise is considered as relevant for the development of RIPESS Europe as they want to integrate the climate dimension within their vision. Moreover, RIPESS can bring their experience and share the content of their work with ECOLISE. Indeed, RIPESS is now taking part in the research strategy of ECOLISE and contributes to the yearly report, thus the knowledge can be expanded. Moreover, RIPESS complements the understanding of community led actions by bringing in the economic dimension. Thus, this coalition is the merging of two complementary aspects of the same vision. It helps support the creation of holistic knowledge which can, therefore, be beneficial for advocacies. Indeed, the networks are working together on common projects and events such as the EDSC and aim to elaborate common campaigns.

Supportive knowledge

In order to enhance its advocacies, ECOLISE is making use of a knowledge based in the potential of transformative community led actions. The aim is to provide evidence on their positive contribution as regards to the climate breakdown.

To this aim, the policy coordinator and colleagues use the outward facing document, the status report in their advocacies. The status report provides evidence of the effectiveness of community led actions and emphasizes the fact that community led actions are providing solutions beyond technological improvements and carbon reductions. This document supports the advocacies by showcasing the activities and contribution of community led actions in responding to the climate emergency.

Figure 3. below summarize the different aspects in which ECOLISE is building advocacies.

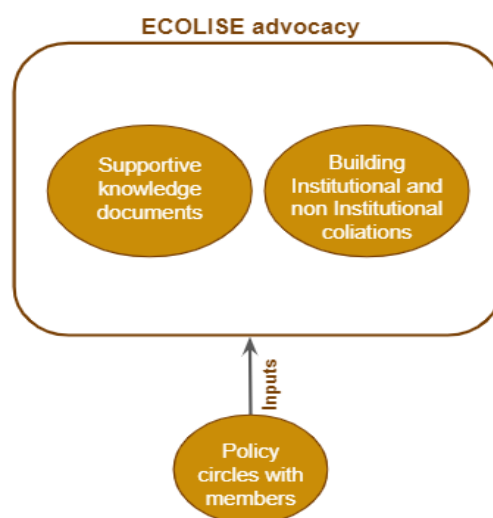


Figure 3: Aspects of ECOLISE's advocacies. Derived from investigation.

Member's perception of advocacies

While des advocacies are mainly led by the policy coordinator employed by ECOLISE, relationships exist with members. Indeed, members have good trust into the advocacy work that ECOLISE pursues. As explained by an NCP,

"I see ECOLISE as a policy organism, sort to say, that can pass forward our needs, may be even formulate it, certain policies that can be done, set into European institutions [...]"

(Interview C)

Even more, most members interviewed feel grateful to have a qualified person that is dedicated to advocate for them and bring the voice of community led actions and transformative change into a mainstream and political audience. Indeed, sometimes communities do not have time nor the tools to do so.

Impact of advocacies

This research is not able to provide strong evidence on the actual impact that the advocacies that the network pursue. Nonetheless, there are testimonies that show the evolution of ECOLISE within European politics. As explained by EESC's member

"They have been doing this very well with the EESC and they have started doing this more and more with the commission within the last years and I think with the parliament as well. And if they are able to do the same, you know if they are able to find leaders within the parliament and the commission that can support their calls, like they have found at the EESC, they will be able to elevate their message and their voice in the European decision making." (Interview K).

Moreover, the effect of advocacies and coalitions can be reflected in the wording and narrative of the current Climate pact, where key points of ECOLISE have been elaborated within the pact. As explained by a member of the EESC

"It seems that finally something is being done. So that is a good thing and it was actually funny to see how much of our demands and wording is used in the climate pact, and I am sure for ECOLISE, they can also recognize the parts in which they were advocating, and now it is there. Not everything is there, but you can certainly see that something has shifted and it is a start and it is up to the actors to really work to move on with the awareness, you know, that this is something much bigger." (interview K).

Barriers

Despite the active work that ECOLISE puts into building good advocacies for its members, this investigation outlined one main limitation: the lack of political willingness.

Outcomes of the interviews with the EESC's members testify the amount of work that is still needed in order for policy makers to consider holistic sustainable solutions and civil society's needs within their processes. While key points have been acknowledged by decision makers

and put into the political agenda regarding sustainability and climate change, there is still a long way before all concerns and recommendations can be applied.

4.5. Concluding notes

From finding ways to engage members with institutional actors, taking the role of advocates in European politics and building strong coalitions, contributing to influence policy lines in favor of its members or to establishing programmes to get access to financial capacities, we can see the efforts put by ECOLISE in trying to bring more institutional recognition of its members. There is still a long way to go before communities can feel empowered by institutional actors, but the evolution is encouraging. Moreover, it is helpful to have specific and qualified people to operate these political strategies.

V. Ending

1. Conclusion

As regards to the first sub question, *How are translocal networks organized?*

The investigation of the translocal network ECOLISE has shown that the case study network has a singular organizational structure that is quite complex to understand. Indeed, as they operate remotely with no geographical space, the structure differs from traditional translocal networks. ECOLISE organizes its work by making use of online tools and platforms, to meet and share information. All meetings, webinars and training are facilitated through the Zoom platform. Documents and information are shared and edited by members, using Google Drive. In addition to online work, members and staff's members gather once a year in 'real life' for the purpose of the general assembly. Considering the geographically fragmented nature of translocal networks in general, it can be assumed that similar networks such as the Global Ecovillage network operate in the same ways that ECOLISE does. Although I do not have any indications that this is in fact the case.

Moreover, translocal networks need to find ways to keep close contact with its members if they wish to keep their needs and interests up to date as well as to make sure that information flows both from and to the local and the meta network. To this aim, the study of ECOLISE highlighted a way to facilitate the maintenance of links between the locals and the meta network. Through the developments intermediaries representations that work as the bridge between the local practitioners and the meta network, conexions can remain. While intermediary representatives allow members to stay connected to the network, it also allows staff members to stay in touch with the needs and work of their members.

Overall, the organizational structure of a translocal network is challenging and can be considered as future-fit. Indeed, translocal networks are frontrunners with digital work which is convenient considering the COVID issues. Moreover, considering a global-localised world, online structures are required. In respect to the organizational structure of translocal networks, the example of ECOLISE, suggested a three level approach on how they can be organized. There is first, the people engaged at the network level, that is considered the meta level. At this level, the work focuses on developing strategies and tools to foster and enhance collaboration with and between lower scales as well as setting up the objectives and projects. Furthermore, at a meso level, there can be representatives that will act as the direct intermediaries between local communities and the meta network. Finally, the last level is the one where the local communities can be found. These local movements are rooted in their local context and environment and connect with the meta network through direct contact with national representatives. **Figure 4.** below presents a simplified version of the organizational structure that translocal networks can take, following the example of ECOLISE.



Figure 4: three levels approach to translocal networks' organizational structure.

As regards to the second question, *What are the activities of translocal networks as regards to empowerment?*

Considering the three concepts used in this research to define empowerment, I will now summarize the activities that translocal networks can undertake as regards to the wish to empower its members. I would like to remind that, in this research, empowerment is destined to transformative community led actions.

Diffusion

(1) The investigation of the network ECOLISE provides elements that translocal networks can support the creation and the diffusion of knowledge on transformative community led actions among members and to the general public. Knowledge includes information on the activities, barriers and lessons of the different types of transformative community led action. In the case of ECOLISE, the strategy is known as the 'knowledge commons' and the technical medium in which it is fulfilled is an online space named 'the wiki (see chapter IV.2.1)'. Translocal networks can combine both informal research, such as action learning processes in communities as well as formal research, including academic studies on ecovillages, permaculture and transition movements. This interplay between formal and informal research can strengthen the generation of knowledge on transformative community led actions.

Besides providing a database to extend the knowledge on transformative community led actions, the research on ECOLISE has proven that a translocal network can also diffuse this knowledge within the political sphere. In this regard, a translocal network can make the choice to release publications in the form of an outward facing document, delivered to institutional actors for advocacy strategies. This, of course, can only be applied if the network pursues advocacy strategies.

Finally, it is worth for translocal networks to generate a regular newsletter to members and subscribers. This newsletter should be constituted of information that will enhance the diffusion of knowledge, ideas and practices.

(2) Moreover and suggested in the literature, creating bounds and strong relationships is almost a prerequisite to foster collaboration among participants and to spread ideas and practices. The investigation of ECOLISE highlights this need. Indeed, the network's members recognize the importance of building relationships and strengthening them in the objective to pursue a better capacity building. Thus, considering translocal networks and their geographically fragmented form, relationships must be created and deepened via online spaces where members can get to know each other, exchange together and start building

bounds. Tools such as online workshops, webinars and trainees help to reinforce the relationship among participants, including the staff members. In addition collaborating on common projects is an efficient way to enhance these relationships building as it provides a focal point for participants to work on.

Psychological empowerment

ECOLISE's investigation showed several activities in which a translocal network can support the psychological empowerment of its members.

(3) First by elaborating a shared narrative, translocal networks can enhance the coherence among members. The relevance of establishing a shared narrative is that it allows to shape an united community, sharing the same values, same ideals and objectives. It also gives the opportunity to determine the common characteristics of all members' organizations and to tackle the possible fragmentation among them. Therefore, the aim is to help fill up the gap between the fragmented visions of the diverse members and to interconnect them within a stronger identity created collectively. This can, thus, contribute to generate a greater influence as the different communities are more unified. It can particularly be important when the network engages into political discussions and advocacies.

In respect to the ways in which a shared narrative can be built, building strong ties, working on common projects and establishing trust among the different members can slowly create the premise of what will be a shared narrative.

(4) Furthermore, translocal networks can develop projects that will increase the visibility of transformative community led actions both to a general audience and to policy makers. The visibility to the general public can be developed by establishing translocal events, as is the case at ECOLISE with the EDSC. Through this event, members see the global visibility increase because they are given the opportunity to showcase their work, values and purposes into a broader audience. At national level, also, as the event gives opportunities for local initiatives to connect and collaborate together and to promote their activities in media.

Political support

There are several activities that translocal networks can pursue in the aim to support their members in the political sphere.

(5) First, translocal networks can decide to stimulate the engagement of its members into politics. This can be achieved when the network takes the initiative to invite members to discussions and policy circles organized by institutional actors as well as to invite them to political events. Moreover, they can push its members to contact their national politicians and Members of Parliament (MEPs) by giving them incentives to do so. For example, as shown by ECOLISE, it can be the launch of a new event or new programme.

In addition, the investigation of the network ECOLISE has revealed another way for translocal networks to engage their members into politics that does not imply that members engage directly with their politicians. This means that the network can organize discussions

on policy circles where members co-create the advocacy guidelines, however, the actual engagement with political actors remains the responsibility of the network's advocate person.

(6) Following this, translocal networks can change the game through building alliances, coalitions and advocating in politics. This is verified in the case study of ECOLISE, where European advocacies are an important part of their work.

As regards to building alliances, and coalitions, the case study has highlighted two types of coalitions that a translocal network can engage into:

- (1) Institutional coalitions which seek the recognition and acknowledgement of the positive contribution of their members in a certain political issue;
- (2) Non governmental organizations which wish to increase the voice of the network's members within institutional discussions through joint framing. Moreover, it supports to strengthen the narrative as well as support the creation and exchange of knowledge.

Translocal networks can endorse the role of advocates within politics by engaging in political events compatible with the members' visions and goals. Throughout their advocacies, they exercise the interests of members within the adequate political venue in order to raise the awareness among politicians and gain support for its members. The advocacy could increase the support on community led actions as well as facilitate the development of new norms or regulation or rules, in the advantages of the network's members.

(7) Finally, results have highlighted that translocal networks can support the resilience of its members by allowing them to access additional funding capacities. Left alone in their localities on the micro scale, local actors can have more difficulties to access funding from institutional actors. They mostly benefit from local or regional grants and donations. However, when connecting with a translocal network, and thus joining a larger community, other types of funding can be unlocked. This is verified in the case of ECOLISE where European funds have been unlocked to allow locals to participate in European projects at their own scale. These additional funds will allow local transformative community led actions to keep existing and even extend their local activities.

Table 15. below summarize the activities that translocal networks can take in the aim to empower transformative community led actions.

| Empowering activities of translocal networks as regards to transformative community led actions |
|--|
| (1) support the creation and the diffusion of knowledge on transformative community led actions among members and beyond. |
| (2) create and deepen translocal relationships via online spaces (workshops, meetings, webinars) and via common projects |
| (3) establish a shared narrative that will unify the variety of members |
| (4) Increase the visibility of its members through translocal projects and events |

- | |
|--|
| (5) stimulate the engagement of its members into politics |
| (6) building alliances, coalitions and advocating in politics. |
| (7) allowing members to access additional funding capacities. |

Table 15: Empowering activities of translocal networks supporting transformative community led actions

The activities mentioned above echo with the characteristics of translocal networks developed by Haxeline (2016-A) on transformative social innovation. Section 3.1. later on, will elaborate upon this previous research and the present findings will try to contribute to extend her theory.

To answer the third question, *What barriers occur in the activities of translocal networks ?* Considering the seven previously mentioned activities, translocal networks can encounter barriers that can slow down their ambition. Among the existing barriers, we can distinguish two types. The first type is concerned with internal matters and the second type relates to external issues, independent from the network's ability.

Internal barriers

(1) As regards to the development of platforms of knowledge that aim to facilitate the diffusion of innovations or new practices and ideas, results of this research outlines several issues that threaten the good functioning of these platforms. First, it is important to make users become familiar with the tools used to gather knowledge and exchange practices. The lack of awareness on how to use it as well as the complexity of the platform can slow down the process of building a strong knowledge base. In addition, it can be hard for users to see the benefits that can be received from these platforms, especially compared to the amount of time they have to put in contributing to the database.

(2) Moreover, in the efforts of building a common identity and a shared narrative among members of a translocal network, barriers remain. Indeed, it is challenging to develop a strong identity within a community of fragmented and independent movements. Actors need to take into account the local context and the disparities in priorities within each movement. Added to that, when considering translocal networks within the context of transformative change, members that are creating a collective identity have to be careful to stay inclusive. The risk of developing a strong collective identity is to exclude potential participants.

(3) As regards to the efforts to engage members into institutional changes, results show that while members see the relevance of engaging into higher politics, they do not necessarily seek to be part of negotiations and discussions. The main reasons are the lack of time to invest in the process and the burden of complex bureaucratic procedures. In some cases, it is this lack of willingness to pursue political work and invest within bureaucratic structures that motivated members to join the meta network, so that someone else, more qualified, will do it.

(4) Furthermore and regarding the development of translocal bounds and relationships, the geographical fragmented nature of translocal networks does make this task complicated.

Indeed, the fact that relationships need to be created through online communication without space for informal discussions and coffee breaks slows down the process in which bounds are created and deepened. Moreover, digital connections are not as efficient as in person meetings. Problems of internet connections and tied scheduled meetings can also be barriers to the fluid progress of relationships building.

Considering translocal networks also implies to consider the different languages spoken by members. While English is the language preferred when dealing with international actors, barriers regarding the level of English spoken by the members are present. Members do not always find the right English words to express themselves and therefore the communication and comprehension can be biased.

(5) Finally, the research has highlighted that the visibility of the network and the activities of its members can be limited to a single moment per year which, thus, limits the impact that members can have on the general public and politicians.

External barriers

(6) Another barrier that concerns political support and particularly the role of translocal networks to exercise power and influence over politicians through advocacies and coalitions, relates to the willingness of politicians to put more recognition on the role of community led actions. As this willingness is still limited the power given to the general movement of community led actions remains low.

At the moment there are still locks in mechanisms and stronger lobbies (chemical industry, liberal markets, fossil fuel industries...) that come in the way of more reforms toward transformative change. Moreover, the divergent interests of the many actors active in the political realm make reforms even more complicated. There is hope that with the scientific back up on climate change and the awareness of civil society pushes investments in transformative change, although there is still a long way to go.

(7) Moreover, while the investigation allows me to argue that translocal networks can bring financial support to its members, this support is limited. Indeed, in the case of ECOLISE, punctual European fundings have been released for the purpose of the EDSC nonetheless they are not constant in time. In addition, the access to European fundings is binded to European programmes in which members enroll and thus are not for their own developpement at local scale. Overcoming this issue remains in the hands of the decision makers through their capacity and willingness to unlock more flexible funding to local governments who will allocate this money to the local communities.

Table 16. below summarize the barriers that translocal networks can encounter within their activities.

| Internal barriers | External barriers |
|---|--|
| (1) Limited usage of platforms to exchange knowledge | (6) Lack of institutional willingness |

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| (2) Difficulties to create a shared narrative | (7) limitation to accessing funding |
| (3) Lack of member's willingness to engage in politics | |
| (4) Difficulties of creating translocal relationships through online spaces | |
| (5) Restricted visibility | |

Table 16. Barriers relative to translocal networks activities. Derived from ECOLISE's case.

To the last sub question, *How can translocal networks overcome the barriers they encounter?*

Considering the previous question on the barriers occurring in translocal network's activities and using the barriers developed in **Table 16.**, I will now present the strategies that a translocal network can develop to overcome the internal barriers. These strategies are derived from the solutions developed by the translocal network ECOLISE. Later on, in section 3.3. I will provide further recommendations to support the process. External barriers have been disregarded in this section, as explained previously, they are independent from the network's capacity and relate to external factors.

(1) As regards to the first barrier. The issue of usage is mainly due to the lack of stimulation given to members to make use of the platform's, its complexity and its unattractive design. Drawing upon the strategies of ECOLISE, it is first important to create an easy and attractive design for the platform of knowledge in order to facilitate usage. In addition, it is advised to allocate specific people that will be in charge of gathering information and adding content on the platform. This strategy can improve the cost-benefits ratio as a specific budget and time will be allocated to these people. As illustrated in the case study, the role of the NCPs will be extended to 'curator of informations' on community led actions and thus they will be in charge of adding relevant content as part of their tasks.

(2) As regards to the second barrier, it relates to the difficulties of establishing a shared narrative within a community of fragmented and independent movements (permaculture association, ecovillages...). To overcome this issue, it will be important for translocal networks to make this process a collaborative one. The development of a shared narrative should be a co-creation process with members. Moreover, the knowledge harvested could be used as a support in the process. Examples derived from ECOLISE's case will be to create a draft document open to all members as well as to schedule meetings to discuss the details of this shared narrative.

(3) The results of the analysis on ECOLISE showed that members part of a translocal network are not inclined to participate in political negotiations and advocacies and prefer to leave this task to the policy coordinator of the network. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial for members to become more familiar with the process of engaging with institutional actors so that they could do it with their own governments. To this aim, translocal networks can make sure to invite members to policy circles and discussions that they receive and to stimulate their involvement by giving them a reason to engage with politicians. The case of ECOLISE shows that these simulations can be provided by the launch of a new programme

or event. Moreover, these incentives should be coupled with the support from skilled people, at the network's level. The aim is to provide guidance to members and facilitate the process.

(4) As regards to the barrier of translocal relationships, results can testify that building relationships is challenging. Nonetheless, by being aware of the complexity of building strong ties among members through online platforms, translocal networks can develop strategies that will enhance mutual support and thus stimulate ties. These strategies are characterized mainly by engaging members into common projects and events (webinars, trainees).

(5) Finally considering the issue of visibility, the case of ECOLISE shows that visibility of members should be stimulated by organizing external events and projects on a constant basis rather than in a single and punctual one. Thus, translocal networks should deploy constant strategies to this aim.

To the main question, *How translocal networks empower transformative community led actions?*

An important finding of the case study of ECOLISE is that translocal networks do not work in the aim to empower community led actions within their local context. Indeed, their goal is to empower the global community of changemakers that these communities represent. This means that instead of serving the interests of the locally rooted communities that are working independently in their local contexts, a translocal network seeks to gather these communities into a global movement and thus support the development of this general movement.

Particularly, for translocal networks that are supporting alternative ways of development, (transformative change, regenerative systems, etc) they exist in the aim to gather a stronger movement of united like-minded communities. Thus, by elaborating an unified narrative translocal networks brings together the fragmented transformative community led actions. Once this shared narrative is built, it is easier to advocate in favour of transformative community led actions (including all different activities) to institutional actors as they can be represented as a whole. Thus, I conclude that the first way that translocal networks empower its members is by **(1) providing opportunities to unify the various types of community led actions and thus have more successful advocacies.**

Now, considering the MLP developed by Geels (2011), we have seen that this research emphasizes the niche level. Niches are small spaces of experimentation representing alternatives to the regime. These niches, thus, need to grow and empower themselves to be able to exert influence. Geels (2011) stresses that in the aim to empower a niche, attention should be paid on the processes occurring at the regime (and landscape) level. This means that the priorities of political agendas (and in the general public) can be influential factors to the development of a niche. Therefore, we can argue that, advocating and trying to match the interest of political actors with the interests of transformative community led actions, might contribute to the regime being in favour of investing in their ideas and practices. Considering this argument, translocal networks deploy adapted strategies including advocacies and coalition building in the aim to increase the interest on transformative

community led actions. Thus, **(2) by bringing awareness in politics on the benefits of investing in transformative community led actions**, translocal networks empower their members.

Moreover, translocal networks deploy strategies to connect the different movements together through common projects and events that support their feelings of being part of something bigger than their own movement. This process of **(3) creating translocal relationships reinforce their willingness to pursue their efforts**.

Therefore, this research concludes that translocal networks support the empowerment of transformative community led actions as a whole in three ways. These ways are illustrated in **table 17**. below.

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1. | unify the various types of community led actions and thus have more successful advocacies |
| 2. | bringing awareness in politics on the benefits of investing in transformative community led actions |
| 3. | create translocal relationships that reinforce their willingness to pursue their efforts. |

Table 17. Ways translocal networks can empower transformative community led action

While translocal networks supporting transformative community led actions have empowering capacities, they have to consider the internal challenges presented in this thesis. With efforts and good strategies these internal challenges can be overcome.

However, their empowering capacities have limitations that go beyond their own willingness to achieve greater empowerment. Indeed, some external factors block their efforts. The main issue is linked to the lack of political support. Decision makers need to be integrative in their actions and invest in these transformative communities by unlocking bigger and constant financial capacities as well as investing in supportive regulations. As transformative community led actions represent alternatives to the current functioning of the system and despite the increasing recognition, the political support for these alternatives remains low. Nonetheless, considering the global awareness on climate issues and the scientific back up, there is hope that the trend may go in their favor.

Finally, I would like to stress that the process of empowering members of a translocal network is a long one. It takes time to set up the organizational structure of such a network and develop efficient empowering activities. Thus, new translocal networks need to be patient and perseverant.

2. Discussion

Writing this thesis was a long, challenging and worth doing project. Coming to the end of the process, there are a few points that I would like to highlight.

First, this research investigated the role of translocal networks as regards to community led actions and transformative change. Therefore findings do not account for translocal networks with different purposes. It could be the case that some aspects will be similar, such as the organizational structure, however it is most likely that the activities and barriers do not correspond with the findings of this research. Thus, this research does not provide understanding on translocal networks in general. Moreover, the present findings cannot be generalized to all translocal networks active for transformative change. As the thesis is only constituted of a single case study it is difficult to extend the findings to all translocal networks concerned with transformative change. In addition to this point, the spotlight of this research was put on empowerment, thus the final findings as well as the activities presented here relates to this concept. Therefore, if we consider another focal point to study translocal networks, the findings may vary.

Second, there are several aspects that were not analysed in depth. While my internship was concerned with the coordination work done to expand the network's relationships with its members, and the organization of the yearly event, I was not able to investigate the constant work done for advocacies nor the research work in detail. Information regarding these two last points have been delivered solely by the interviews and relevant information could be missing. I also have to stress that the bias view of the interviewees may have influenced the outcome. Indeed, interviewees are more likely to have a positive view on the network as they are supporters of it. Furthermore, ECOLISE is constantly evolving, changing and structuring, therefore the strategies presented in this research are not fixed in time and are suggested to change. Particularly since ECOLISE has recently released its new programme Communities for Future, which may give the opportunity to extend the empowering strategies of the network.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic which cancelled the opportunity that I had to investigate the network ECOLISE by doing an internship alongside the network coordinator of ECOLISE. This would have been an opportunity to dive deeper into the different aspects of the work of ECOLISE. In addition it would have allowed me to expand my role as an observer.

3. Reflections

3.1. Theoretical reflections

Considering the early times of research on translocal networks and transformative change, there is no accepted theoretical framework to study such a topic. Therefore the present study used several theories to conceptualize the final framework. The theories established here have been inspired from the little literature on translocal networks as regards to transformative change. Particularly the findings of Haxeltine (2016-A) on the characteristics of translocal networks to transformative social innovation. Looking back at the author's findings, and the present findings, I have found correlations and complementarity across the two. Haxeltine (201-A) developed three characteristics, they are as follow:

- (1) facilitating diffusion and/or innovation of new practices, ideas, framings, narrative, knowledge and learning;
- (2) empowering local social innovation to engage more efficiently in institutional changes in their respective contexts;

(3) exercising power and influence by lobbying, changing rules, building alliances with other actors.

The previously mentioned activities of translocal networks presented in the conclusion echo with these characteristics and, thus, the current findings come to verify again the conclusions of Haxeltine (2016-A). **Table 18.** Below provides an overview of these correlations.

| Translocal network characteristics developed by Haxeltine (2016 -A) | Empowering activities of translocal networks as regards to transformative community led actions (derived from the case study) |
|---|---|
| (1) facilitating diffusion and/or innovation of new practices, ideas, framings, narrative, knowledge and learning; | <p>← (1) support the creation and the diffusion of knowledge on transformative community led actions</p> <p>(3) establish a shared narrative that will unify the variety of members</p> |
| (2) empowering local social innovation to engage more efficiently in institutional changes in their respective contexts | <p>← (5) stimulate the engagement of its members into politics.</p> |
| (3) exercising power and influence by lobbying, changing rules, building alliances with other actors. | <p>← (6) building alliances, coalitions and advocating in politics.</p> |

Table 18. Validation of Haxeltine (2016-A) characteristics with the findings derived from the case study on ECOLISE

Moreover, the investigation of the translocal network ECOLISE unfolded additional activities that translocal networks can endorse. These additional activities can be translated into complementary characteristics. Therefore I wish to build upon the theory developed by Haxeltine (2016-A) by adding three additional characteristics. They are as follow:

- (4) create and deepen translocal relationships via online spaces (workshops, meetings, webinars) and via common projects
- (5) Increase the visibility of its members through translocal projects and events
- (6) allowing members to access additional funding capacities.

Table 19. provides an overview of the different characteristics of translocal networks as regards to transformative change. The table includes the three characteristics developed previously by Haxeltine (2016 -A) and additional ones, derived from the case study of ECOLISE.

| |
|---------------------------|
| characteristics of |
|---------------------------|

| | translocal networks as regards to transformative change | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Translocal network characteristics developed by Haxeltine (2016 -A) | (1) facilitating diffusion and/or innovation of new practices, ideas, framings, narrative, knowledge and learning; | (2) empowering local Social Innovation to engage more efficiently in institutional changes in their respective contexts; | (3) exercising power and influence by lobbying, changing rules, building alliances with other actors. |
| Translocal network characteristics derived from the ECOLISE's case study | (4) create and deepen translocal relationships via online spaces (workshops, meetings, webinars) and via common projects | (5) Increase the visibility of its members through translocal projects and events | (6) allowing members to access additional funding capacities. |

Table 19. characteristics of translocal networks as regards to transformative change

These new characteristics will need to be tested for verification in other researches. Nonetheless, they can contribute to increase the understanding of translocal networks pursuing the development of transformative change.

3.2. Methodological reflections

Coming to the end of the process, I realized that the data collection could have benefited from a less strict interview guide. Although I gained great insights from the interviews, I noticed that the three last interviews were more insightful as they were less binded to the concepts and thus allowed greater flexibility.

Moreover, I have thought of using quantitative data in addition to the qualitative ones. However, this option was disregarded in this research because the aim was not to evaluate the actual empowerment rate but solely to understand the ways in which translocal networks empower transformative community led actions.

3.3. Recommendation for further research

In order to extend the knowledge on translocal networks, their role in sustainability transitions and the empowerment of transformative community led actions, further investigations in similar translocal networks could be beneficial. Research could for example be based on the Global Ecovillage Network, the Transition town movement or other smaller networks such as the timebank network. Moreover, it will be interesting to compare these case studies in order to highlight similar patterns and/or differences. It will thus enhance the external validity of such research.

In addition, further research could benefit from more quantitative data as a complement to the qualitative ones. Indeed, it will be worth, in the objective to complement understanding and knowledge on translocal networks, to be able to measure with more accuracy the degree of empowerment that they contribute to. By that I mean, that the use of quantified data, will bring complementary and measurable information of the actual countervailing weight of translocal networks within sustainability transitions.

Finally, the three characteristics developed by Haxeltine (2016-A) and the potential complementary ones from this investigation could be used as a starting point for further research. Particularly the ones developed in this thesis could be investigated further to allow their verification.

3.4. Empirical recommendations

The findings on ECOLISE's case study underlined a number of barriers (see **table 16**, p. 62). While two issues are external and independent from the efforts of ECOLISE, others relate to the activities that ECOLISE deploys. These internal issues have already been acknowledged by the network and as seen previously, efforts are being made to overcome these barriers. Nonetheless, I wish to suggest further recommendations to help in the process of ECOLISE. Recommendations are concerned with the issues of relationship building and the 'knowledge common'.

Recommendations to improve relationships

As relationships among ECOLISE's members are digital and the platforms are online spaces, there are tight schedules and strict agenda during meetings which limits interactions among members. Moreover, the meetings I could assist in were focused on the organization of the EDSC and thus had a single focal point with very limited spaces to exchange on their daily work, issues and so on.

In the aim to enhance relationship buildings, more meetings can be organized outside of this focal point. Additional meetings can be more focused on member's daily work and activities as well as barriers encountered. This will allow members to be curious of the activities of their peers, to get inspired from one another and most importantly to create a feeling of closeness that will enhance personal relationships.

Nonetheless, meetings are constraining as they ask for commitment and time that members do not always have. Another option, still in the aim to improve relationships, will be to set up an online chat available at all times and devoted to exchange ideas, ask advice on member's personal cases. In this case, interactions will not be bound to the meetings and everyone could exchange when they desire to.

Recommendation to improve the 'knowledge common'

Considering the issue that relates to the 'knowledge commons' and the lack of usage, it could be interesting to provide a detailed instruction manual to make sure that members know how to use it. This could be done by making an instructive video on how to upload content that would possibly enhance understanding and thus usage.

Moreover, it is important to make members understand the relevance and importance of exchanging knowledge and to democratize it in an open space so that they are motivated to devote time to do so. To this aim, a webinar could be set to explain the relevance of it.

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