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# Assessing the impact of an experimental policy instrument financing grassroots innovation intermediations

In this article, we present an innovation policy instrument currently experimented in France. This policy draws on the normative hypothesis that sustainable transitions rely on participatory research. The concept of participatory research emphasizes on the systemic dimension of participation of civil society to research and innovation (Joly, 2020). This systemic dimension needs a different framing of innovation policies which have to be inclusive, experimental and guided by social and environmental objectives (Schot and Steinmueller, 2018). This framing needs to sustain research intermediations in third sector organisations. The notion of 3rd sector echoes the anglo-saxon framework of society organized into three sectors: the State, the market and the 3rd sector. According to Alcock (Alcock, 2010), 3rd sector is associated with values and principles such as association, mutuality, altruism, democracy, and may balance values of State and market in research and innovation systems. 3rd sector organisations are major actors in the development and generalisation of social innovations (Bouchard, 2006; Stirling, 2008; Klein *et al.*, 2010; Maisonnasse, Richez-Battesti and Petrella, 2013). They coordinate the contribution of citizens to participatory research, translate and circulate scientific knowledge, and contribute to the problematization of elsewhere unaddressed research questions (Akrich, Méadel and Rabeharisoa, 2013; Irwin, 2014; Cointet and Joly, 2016). They steer (mostly as delegate of public service) social innovation hubs, labs and transfer centers which accelerate social innovation activities (Terstriep, Rehfeld and Kleverbeck, 2020). All these activities have been conceptualised as research intermediations (Barré *et al.*, 2020), on the basis on the literature on socio-technical transitions (Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2013; Seyfang *et al.*, 2014; Polzin, von Flotow and Klerkx, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2016; Martiskainen and Kivimaa, 2018; Matschoss and Heiskanen, 2018; Kivimaa *et al.*, 2019; Kanda *et al.*, 2020; van Welie, Boon and Truffer, 2020).

In a previous article, we produced a conceptual framework for research intermediations drawing on grassroots innovation for sustainable development (Lhoste *et al.* in press). We differentiated intermediations with respect to the associations' missions and networks, the place of research in their strategy, the infrastructures they share with institutions, the epistemic communities they involve, and the values they stand for. First, we observed that the relationship to knowledge is influenced by epistemic cultures. We differentiated associations valuing actionable knowledge (social innovation) from those who value scientific knowledge (natural sciences). Second, we compared the research and innovation activities they pursued thanks to the Fonjep-R call. We identified four key roles in participatory research : 1. Frame and coordinate research and innovation projects, 2. Coordinate networks and contribute to others, 3. Design and co-manage an infrastructure, and 4. Translate and legitimize different forms of knowledge. These networks may be either geographical or thematic, and mostly hybrid. Networks and intermediation objects or spaces are instruments of connection with the institutions, which are mobilized by the associations, with more or less strategic vision on their role in structuring the participatory research system. Knowledge might be experiential or scientific knowledge, depending on values, representations and goals. As a matter of fact, this role would rather refer to what transition studies categorize as mediations (Kanda *et al.*, 2020). When it concerns only scientific knowledge, mediations often refers to an interactionist paradigm of civil society participation (schot and steinmuller, 2018).

The crucial role of third sector organisations in participatory research processes have neither been acknowledged nor legitimized. In 2019, the Ministry of Education launched the first call for grant

financing research intermediations in associations. We have been delegated to support and study the implementation of the innovation policy through the ASIRPA real time methodology (Matt *et al.*, 2017; Joly, Matt and Robinson, 2019). This approach is crucial to assess the transformative effect of this new policy on the research and innovation systems. The paper is organised in four parts. First, we introduce our conceptual framework, and present the research design and case study methodology. Second, we present the results in two separate sections. In section one, we describe the emergence and implementation of the research policy. In section two, we introduce the second assessment tool of the ASIRPA methodology to analyse the impact pathway. In section three, we conclude on some reflexions on how/if the generalization of such a policy instrument may contribute to systemic transformation for transitions.

## 1 Conceptual framework and research method

Drawing on the concept of grassroots innovation, we mobilized the ASIRPA rt method to understand how/if the Fonjep-R delivers on its promises and contributes to the targeted transformations. It also allows the actors involved to strengthen their capacities to achieve the targeted transformations. Finally, it contributes to create and manage a community of practices. Grassroots innovation was first conceptualised by Seyfang and Smith (Seyfang and Smith, 2007) as « innovation networks of activists and organisations that lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development ; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved ». Drawing upon the social movements literature, Smith et al (Smith, Fressoli, Abrol, Arond et Ely, 2017) suggested three features of grassroots innovations. First, they are based in civil society forms of organisation but they follow different strategies and forms of engagement with institutional actors. Second, they use alternative forms of knowledge production : public participation, openness and common goods. Third, they are political actors and their strategy of alliance with institutions follows their own goals.

The ASIRPA real time method has been designed to support INRAE research and innovation project managers (Joly et al., 2019). The method draws on ex post research impact assessment and on the experience of actors involved in research programming. It is currently developed in a EU research program on co construction (Robinson, 2020). The method aims to design and experiment with tools to coordinate a research project or program in order to increase its chances of contributing to desired transformations ((Joly *et al.*, 2015), Matt et al. In press). Its theoretical and conceptual frameworks assume that impact is the result of a process whose objective is to provide solutions to problems. This process consists of transforming resources into impacts by building socio-technical networks. These networks are made up of heterogeneous actors, who get involved simultaneously or successively and play complementary roles in a series of translations which result in the transformation of scientific knowledge into actionable one (including socio-technical innovations). Non-human objects such as databases, collaborative platforms, third places, and other socio-technical equipment incorporate knowledge. They can facilitate or prevent interactions between humans (Star and Griesemer, 1989) and therefore play a major role in stabilizing networks as well as in their resistance to change.

To understand and support the effectiveness of F-R on environmental and social transitions, it is necessary to identify the different phases of the innovation process, the actors and resources involved. In our case, these resources and actors have to be considered at two levels : 1. the global level of the grant experimentation, and 2. the local and meso level of the grant winners activities. The empirical material has been collected between 2013 and 2021. In 2019, Lisis was entrusted to accompany the steering committee and the manager of the community of practice of Fonjep-R grant winners. This has been performed with the tools used by the ASIRPA real time method (Joly, Matt and Robinson, 2019). Both tasks allowed boundary work which was impaired by the Covid-19 pandemic conditions and by organisational changes within DJEPVA. The three meetings that brought together the winners of Fonjep-R were organised online and were shorter than initially planned. Evelyne Lhoste has participated to the steering committee of three Fonjep-R calls (2019-2021),

analysed the selection process, and contributed to the management of the network of grant winners of the 2019 and 2020 calls (due to Covid-19, meetings were scarces). She had access to the application package for each association. She also achieved 50 interviews and several days of participatory observation to map the activities related to research in the 35 grant winners organisations. She organized three focus groups in may 2022 along with Loup Sardin to assess changes induced by the Fonjep-R in these organisations. She finally did some documentary analysis of reports, cover-up and websites to trace the socio-political dynamics at play. Evelyne L. has been a member of the think tank Alliss who advocates for the support and structuration of a 3rd sector in research and innovation. These embedded practices provide her access to empirical material along with a deep knowledge of the field and actors of citizen sciences in France, despite the health restrictions in 2020 and 2021. The other co-authors are members of the community of practice of Fonjep-R.

From these conceptual and methodological frameworks, we have analysed the data in several steps. We wrote several documents and shared them with the participants to the experimentation. First, the impact pathway included ordering and linking key events, objects and actors along a time-line from emergence of the instrument to the selection process. This allowed us to identify challenges and intermediations accomplished to solve those challenges when diagnosed along the process. Second, we produced a synthetic sheet for each one of the 35 grant winners. The sheet described the history, missions, size, sector, values, networks and intermediation spaces. A special attention was drawn to the organisation's relationships to research institutions (ESR), the networks it belongs to and coordinates, and any other activity related to knowledge production and circulation. It allowed us to produce an analysis grid to pinpoint the contexts, realities and difficulties of research activities in the 35 cases. We also included a description of the role of Fonjep-R employee in the associations' research activities i.e the activities that the actors identify as falling within the scope of the policy. The descriptive framework aims at understanding the associations' missions and history, their resources, how they engage in the production, circulation and use of knowledge, and what are their final goals and values. A special attention has been drawn to the organisation relationships to institutions (ESR), the networks it belongs to and coordinates, the objectifs and devices it created and managed, and any other activity related to knowledge production and circulation. Its activities were also analysed in relation to the grant call. The contents of these sheets were first used to produce a typology of research intermediations in associations, and second to feed the impact pathway. Third, we constructed impact pathways with Fonjep-R recipients in order to build the impact pathway of the FONjep-R and to contribute to community building. The results are presented below in two separate sections.

## 2 Results

The case analysis is based on the use of two tools derived from the ASIRPA methodology : the innovation narrative and the impact pathway. The innovation narrative presents the socio-historical context of the emergence of the Fonjep-R instrument, the actors involved in the experiment and its generalisation, and a chronology of the events that presided over the experimentation of F-R. It has been partly published as a case study to conceptualise intermediations in generalisation (Loconto et al, in press). In this paper, we detail the dynamics of translations that allowed to link agents (both human and non humans) and extend socio technical networks. We present the innovation narrative of the policy instrument and describe the intermediations occurring, and how the actors progressively reframe the instrument, and define the activities it may subsidise. We identified two phases that are qualitatively different: the emergence and dissemination of the concept of "sustaining research intermediation activities in third sector organisations" on one hand, and the experimentation of the instrument policy on the other hand. The first phase consisted of lobbying at the meso level, and the second included steering and implementing the experiment at the micro-meso level.

## 2.1 Innovation narrative

Since 2012, advocacy work has been performed for the legitimization of third sector in research and innovation for sustainability in France. At the beginning, a chore group produced advocacy work and generalized normative concepts such as participatory research, third sector and research intermediations. This chore group was formed of STS analysts and pioneers in the 3rd sector organisations (popular education). It diagnosed the obstacles to participatory research and accomplished the boundary work to make visible and acknowledge a strategic actor, the 3rd sector, and its role in grassroots innovation. First, they combined knowledge to write a contribution to amendments to a law on Education. Second, they formalized the think tank as an association (named Alliss) and coordinated the collective writing of a white paper on participatory research. Preparatory sessions involved over 100 organisations. There was an opportunity to open up the network to new actors from research institutions and 3rd sector organisations. The white paper entitled “Taking the knowledge society seriously” (Akrich *et al.*, 2017) was inspired by the eponymous report published for the Directorate General for European Research and Innovation (Felt, 2007). It was sponsored by three public organisations and was presented to the French national assembly in January 2017 under the auspice of deputies and invitation of several representatives of the research organisations. This first boundary object recommends to structure and subsidise partnerships between associations and the public research sector through the adaptation of an existing policy instrument called Fonjep (Cooperation Fund for Youth and Popular Education). Fonjep positions are grants paid on behalf of the State to associations<sup>1</sup> and granted the State label “youth and popular education” (JEP). This aid supports a project that requires the employment of a qualified employee granted for 3 years, renewable twice. According to the white paper, a “Fonjep-Recherche” line should add 400 units to the current stock of 5,600 Fonjep. Fonjep-R would subsidise research intermediations in associations. ALLISS also undertook the ‘dedicated socio-cognitive work’ (Geels and Deuten, 2006) necessary to build an epistemic community. On one hand, it accomplished visibility work in public research organisations through a number of boundary objects. For instance, a member of the chore group contributed to the report on « participatory sciences and research » written by the chief executive officer of INRAE, a report which mentions the need for intermediation spaces (Houllier and Merilhou-Goudard, 2016). INRAE<sup>2</sup> became a funding member of the platform along with Strasbourg University. Alliss invited the strategic actors of the dominant order to plead for the institutional recognition of the 3rd sector of research during a vigil of arms organized prior to the parliamentary debates on the multiannual law on the research program, on January 20, 2020 at the National Assembly. Even though CNRS<sup>3</sup> and the MESRI<sup>4</sup> were reluctant to this form of « ingerence » of civil society in research, both were represented. On the other hand, Alliss also organised 3 symposia, one in Paris (2015) and two in other regions of France (Occitanie 2017 and Bretagne 2021) to bring together 3rd sector organisations and academics. Before and during these events, the concepts of the 3rd Sector of research, research intermediations, participatory research, and innovation-at-large were discussed broadly and were diffused more widely<sup>5</sup>. One of the sessions of the first event was dedicated to « Les intermédiations recherche-société : nouveaux rôles, nouvelles fonctions, nouveaux métiers ? » to

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<sup>1</sup> An association is a collective of at least two individuals who decide to pool resources in order to carry out an activity whose purpose is not their personal enrichment (non-profit). In France, they are regulated through the « 1901 law ». Most of them are tight to public authorities through subsidies and service prestations. In France, associations are a proxy for the third sector since they represent 80 % of this sector organisations. These organisations are engaged in SDG in a variety of research and innovation fields ((Barré, 2020)).

<sup>2</sup> Institut national pour la recherche agronomique et l’environnement

<sup>3</sup> Centre national de la recherche scientifique

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of High education, research and innovation

<sup>5</sup> As an example, a synthesis of the first symposium is available at [file:///D:/Users/lhoste/AppData/Local/Temp/COLLOQUE\\_IRISS\\_2015.pdf](file:///D:/Users/lhoste/AppData/Local/Temp/COLLOQUE_IRISS_2015.pdf) (consulté le 18 juillet 2022)

identify and characterize the role of new fonctions interfacing sciences and society<sup>6</sup>. It was followed by the creation of a working group on « intermediations in research » which published a thematic issue in a professional journal (Cahiers de l'action, 2020).

This boundary work was relayed within third sector institutions. On June 2018, a leader association representing half the French associations, Le Mouvement Associatif (speaking in name of a network gathering over 50 % french associations), translated the Alliss white paper recommendation in a report entitled "For an ambitious associative life policy and the development of a society of commitment" presented to the Prime Minister, the Minister in charge of Associative Life, and the High Commissioner for the Social and Solidarity Economy. This translation emphasizes the objective to "have the resources to understand more finely the realities of associative life and its contributions, but also the issues and changes with which associations must deal». The research projects aim at reflexivity of the associative sector on its history and at investigating the ways to adapt to a changing world. They do not refer to social innovation projects although this is what triggered the 2017 white book. In addition, the institution decided to experiment the Fonjep-R instrument on an unidentified budgetary line for 10 positions.

In 2019, the first « call for Projects relating to grants awarded for the year 2019 for experimentation support for research partnerships for associations » was published. Fonjep-R was then experimented at the level of steering and selection of grant winners' projects, and at the level of grant winners' activities. The steering comitee was composed of 22 members representing : 1. the historical actors of popular education and associations, 2. the direction to the associative life, the youth and the sports within the ministry of education (DJEPVA), 3. ALLISS, and 4. the ministry of higher education and research. It reflected the diverse opinions of stakeholders, from supportive to mitigated for diverse reasons (see section above and Lhoste, 2022). The steering comitee proposed : 1. Not to construct an *a priori* evaluation grid for the projects selection, and 2. To accompany the grant winners through an evaluation framework and the creation of a community of practice. The two tasks were entrusted to representatives of Alliss, the second one being delegated to Evelyne Lhoste, author of this article. They were respectively funded by DJEPVA and INRAE/Fonjep. Both tasks allowed boundary work which was impaired by the Covid-19 pandemia conditions and by organisational changes within DJEPVA.

For each call, members of the steering comitee nominated representatives of their organisations in an hybrid selection jury divided into 4 thematic subjuries. This specialisation allowed associative jurés to feel comfortable in their field of competence but did not allow interactions between scientists from different disciplines. Most scientists struggled to understand which expertise they could mobilize, specially when they were not experts of the research field of the projects. Nevertheless, the recommandations from the steering comitee were to privilege neither the scientific quality of the project, nor the pertinence of the associative project, but the credibility of the development of an already initiated process according to the call eligibility criteria. No evaluation grid was provided. However in 2020 a FAQ was provided and in 2021, a training session was organised. In addition, the steering comitee decided to create a community of practice, by only partially renewing the selection committee.

The expectations of the 2019 call were broadly formulated : *"projects benefiting the development of the association, union or federation, as well as their members to strengthen: a) Long-term research partnership capacities, at the level of territories or disciplinary fields of general interest, capitalization logics through alliance strategies with higher education and research organizations and their components; And/or, b) In the long term, the internal "research" skills within the associations as well as a federative culture of research and innovation. Associations, unions or federations must have clearly defined the expected structural effects regardless of the axis chosen»* (our translation). The eligibility criteria translate the negotiated vision of the stakeholders. First, the document claims that these resources aim at reinforcing the capacities of research in associations through partnership with research public organisations. This point is important since the French Ministry of Research fears that

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<sup>6</sup> Available on the [platform website](#)

research activities may escape professional scientists in public organisations. Second, the concept of intermediations is translated in the criteria of eligible projects. These projects must demonstrate a clear structuring objective and/or reinforcing internal “research” skills within the associations as well as a federative culture of research and innovation. Individual research projects (likely a PhD) were also excluded since they are not structuring and may be funded through another instrument (CIFRE). Third, the triggered associations must be labelled as JEP. The latter item emphasizes on the expected structuring effect both on the actors and on national, regional or departmental networks. Are excluded associations representing associations defending and/or representing a professional sector or defending the specific interests of their members, as well as associations that would be identified as “para-administrative”. These precisions trigger associations involved in « engagement society » as mentioned in the 2018 report. In addition, the document indicates that the experimental dimension of the call implies an evaluation framework specific to any experimentation. Following this first call, 10 files were selected out of 50. This demonstrated that this type of subsidies was a need for associations as claimed in the first recommandation.

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The experimentation was replicated in 2020 and in 2021 and upscaled to 25 positions both times. The steering comitee organised the selection process in two phases. In the first one, 4 thematic subjuries would select five cases out of 15. In the second one, the 20 selected cases would be distributed with the sub-juries who would then select 3 cases out of 5. 10 cases would then be selected out of the 12 remaining ones in plenary session. This selection process produced a rather heterogenous corpus of winner associations in terms of size, ressources, sectors, age and geographical area (table 1). For example, they cover 5 of the 7 registered sectors of the French associative landscape (Tchernonog and Prouteau, 2019) : environment, social and humanitarian issues, culture, defense of rights and causes, education and training including non medical research. They differ also in terms of the networks within which they act and their role in these networks, whether they are leaders or not. As a consequence, the participatory research activities of the association and the level of action of the Fonjep-R employee (coordinating a single research project or steering the structuration of an hybrid network) differ as well as their final goals in terms of transitions. In the end, the heterogeneity of the grant winner associations is a translation of the fragmentation of this organisational field (Lhoste and Barbier, 2018; Loconto, 2020; E. F. Lhoste, 2022). They vary according to the scientific fields in which participatory research takes place and the boundary work associations have to further accomplish to structure research and innovation ecosystems. In our specific case, the 35 organisations winning the grant are key intermediaries in the impact pathway. We have published a typology of research intermediations elsewhere (Lhoste et al., in press).

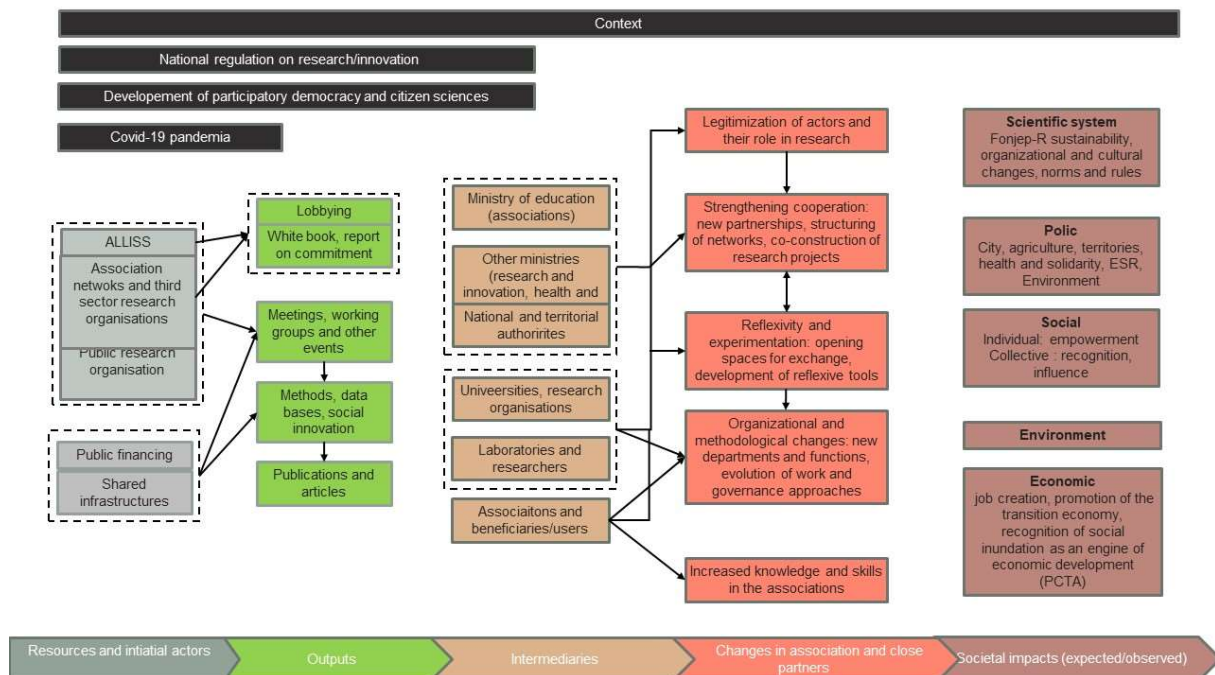
The steering comitee progressively specified the attempts of the call and the rules for the selection process. We observe how the members of the original chore group, through their participation to the steering comitee, reframe the translations as they go along, not only by specifying the terms of the call for tenders, but also by intervening during the selection process, thus extending their advocacy and boundary works at the meso level. We analyse how the nascent epistemic community produced boundary work to maintain the objective of the Fonjep-R instrument, while negotiating its framing with institutions and continuing to expand this community in third sector organizations. This requires not only social and organizational learning, but also maintaining influence in institutional circles and

understanding the needs of third sector organisations. In 2020, the call was also open to non-Youth associations, as planned and despite the protests of the representatives of these associations (CNAPEJ). A 50/50 ratio was negotiated. The procedures were modified in order to overcome the pitfalls of previous calls. On the one hand, the eligibility criteria were refined. It was specified that they could be new projects or projects already developed and in need of acceleration, and that priority would be given to projects linked to one or more SDGs. On the other hand, the objectives of the call were "... *through the strengthening of professional competence(s), to develop the capacity(ies) of associations to establish, consolidate or develop research partnerships in order to: a) conduct internal and/or external organizational transformations capable of supporting either the development and innovation of the association, or the strategies of alliances between associations, in terms of research; b) move from an identified problem to a research question<sup>4</sup> by strengthening the expertise capacities of associations.*" In 2021, the formulation of expected activities has been clarified: "*a. conduct internal organizational transformations the development and innovation of the association in the field of research; b. conduct external organizational transformations able to support the strategies of alliances between associations, in the field of research; c. move from an identified problem to a research question by strengthening the expertise capacities of associations.*" This formulation benefits from the experience of the two previous sessions and is the result of a negotiation between members of the steering committee. In particular, the last item reframes the participation of third sector organisations in research as knowledge brokers (Meyer, 2010).

## 2.2 The impact pathway

The impact pathway is a central tool for the collective representation of the impact production process. The standardized outline corresponds to the different steps in an innovation pathway : productive configuration, outputs, intermediaries, and impacts (Matt et al, 2016). Productive configuration takes into account both the organizational complexity of innovation processes and their embedding in a wider context. It allows to define long-term and short-term transformation targets: What has changed since the beginning of the project? what will change at the end of the project? What are the critical points in the different stages? ASIRPA focuses on two key elements : the role of intermediaries in key translation processes, and the generalization (scaling up/out). In our case, the challenge was to reconcile the diverse research intermediations produced by grant winners under a common umbrella (Lhoste et al. In press) prior to understand how the innovation policy was enacted and if it was relevant to the generalization of participatory research. Therefore, the impact pathway of the Fonjep-R (Figure 1) graphically represents the objectives of the experimentation and the major steps in this process. The black bars refer to the environment that conditions the experimentation (detailed in paragraph a below). The grey boxes present the initial actors and resources whose activities (materialized by arrows) produce knowledge translated into intermediate objects (green boxes, detailed in paragraph b). The general spirit of the ASIRPA method consists in considering that these productions are not sufficient to produce change. It is their appropriation by new actors that leads to change. Figure 1 identifies these actors (pink beige boxes, paragraph c) at the origin of the changes (orange boxes, paragraph d, table 4). At this stage, and since other partners were not invited to participate to the focus groups, these changes are mostly related to the actors involved in the the grant recipient organisations and their partners. Changes take shape in practices (organizational, social) and in the development of new infrastructures, rules and norms. They occur at the local level (in the association and among its partners) or at the global level in public policies, the organization of institutions, and practices in organizations... These different changes at all levels of a system can have longer-term societal impacts (brown boxes, paragraph e).





In the following paragraphs, we detail the contents of the boxes represented in Figure 1 in order to clarify the impact pathway of the Fonjep-Research and the obstacles/levers to its success. Thus mobilized, the ASIRPA method is indeed a steering tool for monitoring the experimentation of an innovative policy instrument. It could also be a monitoring tool for beneficiary organizations and help them to orient their research activities towards the desired transformations. It is also a valuation tool and is currently been used to promote the instrument towards administrative leaders.

### a. Context

The context plays a major role in an experiment and its potential generalization. Contextual factors can be internal or external: 1. the composition of the intervention's partnership, the level of collaboration between actors, the leading actors, access to additional funding, etc., which are related to the set-up of the intervention, and 2. the regulatory context, crises, trends in the economy... Experimentators can consider these factors as risks or opportunities or they can attempt to them. In the present case, we considered two main contextual factors : the political and institutional environment of research/innovation in France, and the Covid-19 crisis.

#### **Institutional environment**

Associations depend on public intervention, both national and local. Therefore, their resources are heterogeneous. It is worth stating that, until the creation of the Fonjep-recherche, there was no public support to research and innovation in associations even though some of them benefit from public delegation of social services, and others are involved in knowledge production and circulation. In any case, associations were not eligible to the financial rule of French National Research Agency (ANR). Therefore, they could not contribute as full partners to ANR calls for participation to a research project. An exception was the national program CO3 (Co-construction of knowledge) co-sponsored by ADEME and several foundations (2016-), dedicated to funding participatory research projects for environmental transitions, since projects were coordinated by associations (although they were not funded full cost). At the territorial level, grants for economic development focus on employment, entrepreneurship and technical innovation to the detriment of social innovation. There are some exceptions in innovation policies either at the national or regional level. For example, the AMI led by the University of Lille, in partnership with the European Metropolis of Lille, aims to support third sector collectives in the Haut-de-France region, as well as the participatory budgets of the Occitanie region, which finances citizen innovations for transitions. In addition, associations are eligible for the Innov'up calls for projects of the Ile-de-France Region, but territorial funding is subject to the vagaries of local

politics. Moreover, elected officials do not always understand the opportunities that participatory research offers in terms of innovation (in the Tiers lieux, for example) and some activist projects such as wild life protection are subject to political controversy. At the national level, the social and solidarity economy sector also benefits from incentives for innovation with support such as the "French Impact" or "Young Innovative Company" labels. Third places are also eligible for the "Fabriques de territoire" and the "Connected Campus", funding that can benefit participatory research. Funding for the implementation of territorial clusters of economic cooperation (PTCE) registered in the SSE have gradually disappeared from the political and media agenda as of 2017. Several other multi-stakeholder experiments are underway: 1. the Groupements d'employeurs associatifs and Pôles Territoriaux de Coopération Associatifs (PTCA) whose first PA was published in 2020 by the Fonjep, 2. the Sociopôles program experimented with in the Lyon metropolis and funded by AG2R La mondiale (Résolis number 23, 2021), and 3. the calls for medico-social research projects by the Caisse nationale de Solidarité pour l'Autonomie in partnership with the Institut pour la recherche en santé publique (IRESP) .

The networks of third places, TILIOS (free and open source third places) and France Tiers-lieux (institutional association), benefit from their own financing. 1800 co-working TLs and fablabs were counted in 2018 (Levy-Waitz report, 2018). The AMI "fabriques de territoire" received 800 applications and selected 170 winners, including 134 projects dedicated to the public in difficulty. The objectives concern transitions (energy, food, work, etc.) and inclusion. Research activities are not very visible in third places although over 60 % of them claimed that they were (or planned to be) involved in action research (**rapport 2020**). The national council of third places and the association France tiers lieux are intermediaries between the actors and the State: construction of competency referentials, animation of regional networks, and dissemination of resources (including those of the field such as [movilab.org/wiki/Accueil](http://movilab.org/wiki/Accueil)). A report should be issued every year.

The European regions research and innovation network (ERRIN) is a platform of 120 regional authorities from 22 European countries represented by their Brussels offices. In France, 12 representations including Brittany, Occitanie Europe, Hauts de France, Auvergne-Rhones-Alpes, Pays de la Loire, Centre Val de Loire. The Occitanie region coordinates a working group on "innovation and investment". There are others: science and education for society, low-carbon cities...

Despite the institutionalization of participatory research, not all researchers (and their institutions) are in favor of recognizing co-research, which is poorly known and still feared despite a charter (see the innovation story). At Inserm, Faurisson et al (2016) identified 4 profiles of researchers based on their opinions: the committed, the pragmatic, the reluctant and the distant, illustrating the reluctance to change in the research community. The committed researchers are the most supportive. This commitment can take extremely varied forms. Some are involved in associations, or even militate in them, and intervene as scientific experts. Others have been solicited by associations to provide scientific knowledge on issues that concern their associative project and reflexivity on practices. The latter use associations to access the data necessary to carry out their research protocols and to resolve the research questions they ask themselves. The latter research does not necessarily contribute to the production of actionable knowledge.

However, the institutional environment for research is changing. Any measure of support for the research activities of associations is an agent of change in their posture towards them. We are thinking in particular of the position taken by the CNRS scientific council with regard to the third sector of research and of some projects for 2021 such as the very recent "participative research" prize managed by Inrae.

### **Covid-19 pandemia**

The health crisis revealed the current difficulties of the associative sector while showing its essential place in society. Thus, the Makers have been collectively engaged since the first containment to produce medical equipment (masks, visors, ...). In response to these initiatives, France Tiers lieux has created an emergency support fund "Makers against Covid-19", funded by the Fondation de France, from which 43 structures have benefited.

From the point of view of the Fonjep-research experiment, the laureates give a rather positive assessment of the first year under Covid. The periods of lockdown partially slowed down progress in

the research in progress and the partnership dynamic, but they were conducive to reflexivity and new ways of acting. The first lockdown also initiated a dual contradictory movement: on the one hand, the pressure to "make up" for the time lost in the spring, to multiply the number of meetings and projects, and on the other hand, a difficulty in fulfilling all the health safety conditions (real or imagined), sometimes fear, and over-interpretation of the instructions that complicate and weigh down the work.

The associations most dependent on project-based funding could be the most impacted by the economic consequences of the crisis. Indeed, projects have been stopped and employees have been laid off. Accompanying measures have been put in place (see webinar organized by Le mouvement associatif and France active, January 19, 2021). Will these measures be enough?

#### b. Major outputs

As output, we considered the products of the work of the steering committee, the community manager, and the grant winners. The steering committee met twice a year to coordinate the selection process. Beside the call itself, its productions are two reports, and training tools for the jury. It also made recommendations for the next sessions, including the premisses of an evaluation grid. Its members also participated to the three meetings organised by the community manager for the community of practice. Due to Covid restrictions, all three meetings had to be shortened to half-day online sessions. At the end, three scientific papers should be published (Lhoste, 2022, and two papers in press included this one).

We also collected the productions of the grant winners. Those are rather eclectics and depend on the objectives and the activities of the associations, its values and sector of activity, its resources and missions regarding research and innovation as well as on progress of its work in terms of processing and structuring of its research activities and partnerships. We grouped the products into categories. The grant winners created (or developed pre existing) learning tools and intermediation devices (depending on the phase of the associations' project): observatories and surveys, training programs, virtual platforms, editing books and reviews (translating scientific knowledge, ....), and third places. They also started new research projects, expanded pre-existing networks, created new ones and were able to participate in others. They organised hybrid seminars and working groups to problematize a research question. Some associations created a scientific council (or integrated scientists into the board of the association).

#### c. Changes and short term outcomes

In this paragraph, we present the outcomes of Fonjep-R (table 1). The first direct effect acknowledged by grant winners was that it conferred time and legitimacy. Participating more regularly to working groups and soliciting researchers more often made research intermediations more visible. For example, associations that have been intermediating citizen sciences project for a long time, such as naturalist associations, applied to the Fonjep-R because they claim they have "always done this". FONjep-R provides grant winners with time to set up reciprocal acculturation and produce transversal infrastructures. In this respect, it is complementary to partnership agreements which provide legitimacy and the opening activities of research organisations to civil society. Several promoters of Fonjep-R specify that the grant gave them more time to devote to these activities and facilitated their relations with researchers who more readily invite them to participate in their networks.

As a result, grant winners are also increasingly solicited by the research world. For example, one association was invited for the first time to co-organize a seminar with researchers. Consequently, the Fonjep-Research is a powerful lever for developing participatory research. By legitimizing the role of associations, it fostered the diffusion of their research/innovation products, i.e. scaling up (engaging more participants in the same project), replicating a project in a different situation, or translating a project in a different domain through the community of practice (according to Seyfang

et longhurst 2016). It also prompted research actors (researchers, laboratories, universities and schools), but also certain decision-making bodies such as local and national authorities (Ministry of Health and Solidarity, the Ministry of Culture), and administrative bodies such as the national family allowances fund, to recognize the third sector as a credible and legitimate player in research and innovation.

Increasing the number of positions dedicated to research in the associations fostered the development of new partnerships and the structuring of hybrid networks strengthened cooperations. With respect to institutions, the Fonjep-R has proved to be a lever for other sources of funding. This has led to new research projects, organizational and methodological changes in the EPSTs and associations, notably through changes in governance and modifications in work approaches. It also facilitated the implementation of reflective and experimental approaches within the institution. Needless to say, the availability of salaried time to devote to research has led to an increase in the skills of employees and associations. The intermediation function is even sometimes identified as a position, it could be characterized and integrated into the associative project. However, we would like to point out that, as with the function of socio-cultural animator, any attempt at professional framing runs the risk of impoverishing the intermediations which evolve over time and according to the associative project.

Fonjep-recherche facilitated knowledge transfer between projects, within the association (between members, employees, and volunteers, or between beneficiaries, employees, and field professionals), and between organizations, structuring cooperation with institutions at the local and national levels. Conversely, the associations that received a Fonjep-R grant have set up a hybrid governance system: they invite scientists to represent institutionalized research within the association (scientific council, board of directors, etc.). These "passeurs" demand the formalization of research partnerships: co-publication, rules of compensation for the work of volunteers, data sharing... All these experiments contribute to changing the way things are done and facilitate organizational learning in the networks. Associations also contribute at the meso level by diverting regulations that are not adapted to their situation and/or by participating in working groups. By getting involved in a network such as the Alliss multi-stakeholder platform, some associations can contribute to setting up or changing the cultures, rules and norms of cooperation between the TSR and the ESR (conventions, SCIC TSR-public, CIFRE associative, governance...) and public policies in favor of the recognition of research and development in the activities of associations.

Although this was impaired by the Covid-19 pandemic, Fonjep-R created a community of practices of research intermediation. As a matter of fact, the nascent community of practice as launched working groups (on data management), and initiated advocacy for the reconduction of Fonjep-R. Some of them also responded to the call of project recently launched by ANR for participatory research. For the first time, associations may be full partners and are eligible for full cost. Since ANR finances 50 %, the Fonjep-recherche was considered as a suitable co financing instrument. This complementariness seems essential to negotiate a viable exchange model between associations and laboratories. Networking allows circulation not only of knowledge for research (either scientific or experiential), but also organisational learnings, values, and cultures. Therefore, Fonjep-R may lead to a greater diffusion of the culture of participatory research. Some Fonjep-Rs have been invited to sit on other selection juries for participatory research projects in other territories. Representatives of associations (often the Fonjep-Research holder) also participate in the governance of national (Observatories of the seasons, Vigie Nature, network of ethnopoiesis, National Council of third places) or local (universities and local authorities) bodies. However, the governance of observatories is still to be studied. It is not clear whether associations are considered as managers, or contribute to the steering of those intermediation spaces that sometimes contributed to create with their data. Nevertheless, most of them are considered as co authors in scientific publications.

Other expected changes also include valorization of associative knowledge, Integration by associations of the practice of experimentation as a research and innovation activity, integration of the principles of cooperation with the TSR in epistemic practices, circulation of ideas with organized

civil society, strengthening of the support system for participatory action research, and finally more innovation.

Table 1. Outputs observed by the grant winners.

Category of change	Observed effects	Description
Legitimacy	<i>Acknowledgement of the role of associations as intermediaries (technical and soft skills)</i>	by individual scientists, universities and research organisations
		by citizens as a scientific intermediary
		by network leaders and other local actors
	<i>Increased demands</i>	to contribute to training sessions and seminars
		to participate to research and innovation programs
		Sollicitation de la part des DLA (Crefad Loire)
	<i>Reassure and motivate the actors involved</i>	to sit of participatory research juries
		from other local partners in social and solidarity economy
		volunteers on the legitimacy to experiment
	<i>Easiness to take position</i>	scientists: willingness for co-construction of research project
		to disagree with institutions within established networks
		to assert a rigorous approach to (non scientist) partners
		to assert the association's legitimacy in research intermediations
		cooperation between practionners and thinkers, research activities in the association
		doctoral fellowship and other research fundings, innovation policy instruments, national and local public subsidies, private fundings
<i>Improvement of visibility</i>	of research and innovation activities in the association	
	reinforcement of social capital, know how, networks and legitimacy	
	Identification of new partners at the local level	
	Multiplication of dialogue spaces between researchers and stakeholders	
Strengthening cooperation	<i>Communication</i>	More transmission of information with national partners and public authorities
		Participating to scientific meetings allows to tie up new collaborations and inclusion in new projects and programs (national and international)
	<i>Participation in new networks</i>	Formalisation of a "group of scientific interest"
		Development of a partnership strategy with universities and research centers
		Extending partnership at the national level
	<i>Structuring of a pre-existing network</i>	integration of new actors
		The association as an intermediary or as a leader of research projects
		Community of practices on research intermediations (with other networks)
<i>Structuring of a new network</i>	Epistemic community around a common problem	
	Creation of a steering committee with universities and research organisations around common problems	

		Partnerships with local authorities, associations, and scientific institutions to develop evaluative and participative action research in various sectors such as energy transitions, child protection, and third places
		Formalising partnerships with research organisations : connecting data bases, creating an hybrid steering comitee,
	<i>Widening of research scope</i>	New scientific disciplines
Changes in the association	<i>Organisation of the working process</i>	Creation of a department/fonction dedicated to research
		Recruitment of interns, doctoral students, researchers
		Animation of the volunteer community: increased involvement of researchers in information/training
		Reorganization of the missions of employees / organigram of the association
		Setting up of a working time on participative methods
		Monitoring (benchmarking) and documentation work
		Reinforcement of the advocacy approach
	<i>Governance</i>	Scientific board or inclusion of scientists in the board of trustees
		Creation of the national association and emergence of common projects
Changes in the association	<i>Development of skills and knowledge</i>	Appropriation of the research process by the employees
Changes in the association		Reflective tools for training and on remobilization approaches in an open space of popular education
		Data capitalisation
		Creation/reinforcement of an internal dynamic around research and reflexivity processes
		Training of volunteers on participatory research
		Empowerment of volunteers and beneficiaries

#### d. Expected and observed impacts

Societal impacts drove the advocacy work of Alliss since 2012. Although this may take a while before these impacts may be assessed, the steering comitee anticipated impacts in the different domains of participatory research. Five dimensions of impact, classically studied in the literature (see Joly et al., 2015a, b for a complete review of the literature) and significant in terms of the missions of the participatory research, have been selected as a proxy for Fonjep-R early impact assessment : economic, environmental, territorial and social, political, and health. During the focus groups, the six dimensions of societal impacts were identified: politics, science and society, environment, agriculture, social/territorial, and economy. At this stage, health, solidarity and cultural impacts are in the social/territorial dimensions (table 2). As anticipated in the previous section, Fonjep-R contributes to transforming the academics dimension of impact. Participatory research is not yet acknowledged as a legitimate strategic action field (Joly, 2020) with its own epistemic culture and research professionals in both public and third sector organisations. French policy interest in participatory research is just changing norms and rules. The 2021 Resarch program Act did not introduce notable changes in research and innovation public policies. In July 2022, the ANR transformed its funding rules, allowing the associations to access full-cost funding in the "science and society" Calls for Projects. However, transformation of the organization of research should include systemic adaptations such as the modalities of evaluation of researchers and of the legal

formalization of research/TSR partnerships, and adaptation of university training programs and pedagogies. Recently, over 350 research organisations from more than 40 countries signed an agreement on reforming research assessment to « maximise the quality of research and its resulting impacts » which should not only rely on impact factors and quantitative evaluation. Training programs for research intermediaries are upon prototyping. In other dimensions, the actors of our case study mentioned scarced impacts.

### 3 – Discussion

In this paper we report the emergence and first phase of the experimentation of the instrument policy. This intervention research is an opportunity to develop our knowledge on participatory research, at the meso level of the structuring of the strategic field of action, and at the micro level of the research processes from the linking of actors to the production of impacts. This work suggests that it is possible to accompany the implementation of a grassroots innovation using a model developed to articulate directionality and flexibility. We have conducted three iterations with the steering committee. It is necessary to continue the work and to extend it to other actors of participatory research in order to identify critical points and to build a scenario of generalization of public policies in favor of participatory research. To do this, it will be necessary to consider not only the stakeholders involved in research processes, but also the actors in the structuring of the field of participatory research: network heads of associations and "science and society" officers in universities and research organizations as well as decision-makers in the ministries concerned. This work also constituted a training for the actors who are directly confronted with the challenges of evaluating the impact of their activities.

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