Walking the Tightrope and Stirring Things Up: Exploring the Institutional Work of Sustainable Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable entrepreneurs operate under different institutional pressures, but they also aim to provoke changes in their institutional environment in order to advance the goals of sustainability. These changes are not always large-scale, successful transformations. This article adopts the concept of institutional work to explore how sustainable entrepreneurs engage in purposive, mundane activities to both fitting in and influence the prevailing institutional environment. In particular, our findings allow us to introduce and discuss four specific types of work: making sustainability convenient, and politicizing economic action, maneuvering around regulation, and relational work. At the end, we suggest that SEs may find themselves in a situation of aiming to transform the prevailing commercial institutional logic in order to promote sustainability goals while reproducing and reinforcing this same logic they would like to transform.

Keywords: sustainable entrepreneurs; institutional work; institutional logics; entrepreneurship; politicizing

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutional approaches have been used to increase our understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship, but in most cases the question has been how institutional pressures and drivers influence sustainable entrepreneurship (Delmas & Toffel, 2004; Marshall, Cordano, & Silverman, 2005; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018). Some research started to look into the reverse side of the relationship, acknowledging that for sustainable entrepreneurs to thrive they need to provoke changes in their business environment acting as institutional entrepreneurs (Gasbarro, Rizzi, & Frey, 2018; Shepherd & Pazelt, 2011; Thompson, Hermann, & Hekkert, 2015; Smink, Hekkert, & Negro, 2015). Yet, little is known about how sustainable entrepreneurs (SEs) try to do both things at the same time: influence their immediate socioeconomic context, while at the same time trying to fit into it. Our goal in this article is to explore this double movement of influencing and adapting which characterizes the interactive nature of the relationship between sustainable entrepreneurs and the environment.

Building on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), among others, institutional approaches have studied the enduring formal and informal conditions that structure the economic, political and social relationships between organizations and their environment. Subsequent developments recognized that, despite institutional pressures, variety in social behaviors and resulting change processes are possible because organizational fields are rarely homogenous. Rather, fields are marked by a multiplicity of institutional arrangements or logics (Seo & Creed, 2002; Gawer & Philipps, 2013; Mair, Mayer, & Lutz, 2015), understood as "the socially constructed historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012, p. 51). Even if one institutional logic is usually dominant in a field, other more or less peripheral logics can penetrate it. Following this insight, the

literature on organizational hybridity has made important contributions about the identity (Jolink & Niesten, 2015; Battilana & Dorado, 2010), internal governance structures (Mair et al., 2015), and practices (Pache & Santos, 2013) developed by organizations that navigate within institutional plurality, responding to diverse external expectations and trying to meet economic and social goals at the same time. Yet, most studies that take this approach to study social and sustainable entrepreneurship focus on internal aspects of organizations and tend to overlook the attempts they make in order to influence their environment. By contrast, in this article, we focus on an external perspective.

To develop such a perspective, some institutional approaches have taken a more agentic turn by using the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009), also applied by some scholars to the field of sustainable entrepreneurship. Yet, a more recent development in institutional theory has advocated focusing on the more modest efforts by individuals and groups to provoke changes in their environment, rather than emphasizing successful, large-scale institutional change (Lawrence & Sudabby, 2006; Lawrence, Sudabby, & Leca, 2011). Finally, others have explored the intersection between institutional work and institutional logics (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen, & Van de Ven, 2009; Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017), which revolves around a question of strategic importance for socially and environmentally responsible businesses: how actors conform to prevailing the institutional logic and simultaneously try to promote more sustainable practices.

Thus, this article seeks to complement the sustainability literature by exploring the question: *How do sustainable entrepreneurs combine adaptation to the prevailing institutional logic with advancing a sustainability logic?* Based on findings from four case studies of sustainable entrepreneurs, we identify four types of externally oriented institutional work and indicate how these types allow them both to adhere to the dominating institutional logics (the commercial logic)

and to promote small-scale logics shifts toward sustainability. We claim that they make efforts to balance (hence the "walking the tightrope" metaphor in the title) fitting in the commercial with their goal of advancing the sustainability logic (i.e., of "stirring things up"). They do so by combining the work we call "politicizing economic action", which questions the ethical neutrality of how we organize and consume goods and services, with the work we call "making sustainability convenient" by presenting products and services as convenient and attractive alternatives to those currently accessible on the market. They also do so through the work we call "maneuvering around regulation", which consists in adapting to existing legal regulations, while also trying to redefine them. Furthermore, our analysis suggests that these types of work are made possible by relational work, implying the efforts to build connections to actors embedded in the two competing logics. Finally, our cases suggest that neglecting efforts to balance and combine types of institutional work results in worse economic results and lower impact.

This article contributes to the sustainable entrepreneurship literature by showing that SEs purposively engage in different types of externally oriented institutional work to adapt to and to influence their institutional context. It thus complements the insights that claim that SEs need changes in prevailing institutional arrangements to succeed (Hall, Daneke, & Lenox, 2010; Dean & McMullen, 2007; Pinkse & Groot, 2015; Thompson et al. 2015, Shepherd and Peelt, 2011). Yet. we suggest that, since total institutional overhaul is unfeasible for SEs, they need to balance this with efforts to fit into their institutional environment. The article also contributes to the institutional work literature by investigating how different types of *externally* oriented work are interrelated. Doing this we extend considerations initiated by institutional scholars (Gawer & Philipps, 2013) who showed the mutual reinforcing and conditioning nature of internally and externally oriented institutional work. In the contrast to these authors, who have been investigating mainstream, large

commercial organization, we focus on small-scale sustainability oriented entrepreneurship and on the interrelation of different types of externally oriented institutional work.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Sustainable entrepreneurship, institutional theory, and institutional entrepreneurship

SEs have been defined as entrepreneurs who pursue economic, social, and environmental goals simultaneously (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Cohen & Winn, 2007; Belz & Binder, 2017; Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010; Thompson, Kiefer, & York, 2011; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). SEs can be individuals, groups of individuals or organizations; but, at any rate, they are not isolated or detached from other actors and disconnected from established norms. Accordingly, one can analyze their actions from an institutional perspective, as shaped by cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and processes that provide stability and meaning to social behavior (that is, by institutions; Scott, 2014). The potential of this perspective has not yet been fully exploited in the study of sustainable entrepreneurship (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018) and some valuable models of social entrepreneurship acknowledge that they do not account for institutional influences (Bacq & Alt, 2018). Other phenomena have made a much more wide use of the institutional perspective such as corporate social responsibility (Campbell, 2007; Amaeshi Adegbite, & Rajwani, 2016), corporate philanthropy (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2016), environmental management (Wang, Li, & Zhao, 2018), and multi-stakeholder initiatives (Zeyen, Beckmann, & Wolters., 2016). Nonetheless, there are some few studies that show, for example, how the coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphic pressures drive sustainable entrepreneurial activity in the Pakistan leatherworking industry (Wahga, Blundel, & Schaefer, 2018) or how these pressures vary across countries such as Canada, Tunisia and Cameroon (Spence, Gherib, & Biwolé, 2011), and how social norms and state-level

incentives influence environmental entrepreneurship in the solar energy field (Meek, Pacheco, & York, 2010).

Yet, sustainable entrepreneurs, insofar as they want to promote social and environmental goals, often diverge from prevailing, taken for granted patterns of thinking and acting, especially since the institutional environment does not usually support their initiatives. When they actively modify their business environment, including the regulations, societal norms and values, as observed by some scholars (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Thompson et al., 2015; Gasbarro et al., 2018), they can be considered institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988). In such cases, their influence on institutional conditions has consequences for the entrepreneurs that follow. This is consistent with the view proposed by Battilana et al. (2009, p. 71): "By our definition of institutional entrepreneurship, only when they generate new business models can entrepreneurs be regarded as institutional entrepreneurs." However, it should be noted that, although some scholars have studied how sustainable entrepreneurs engage in institutional entrepreneurship through their business models (Thompson et al., 2015; Pacheco, Dean, & Paine, 2010), radical institutional change is very rare. Moreover, these studies usually leave aside that sustainable entrepreneurs need to embed themselves into institutional contexts even when they want to modify them. In other words, it remains unclear what specific practices or activities they use to combine this attempt for change with the need to accommodate to an existing context. In this paper, we want to study how they pursue this equilibrium between promoting institutional change and simultaneously adapting to the status quo.

The concept of institutional logics has often been used to reconcile this need for adaptation with the possibility of change. Scholars suggest that transformation of socio-economic systems is possible because fields are in fact penetrated by diverse institutional arrangements and accompanying logics (Seo & Creed, 2002). Much work has been done treating social and

sustainable enterprises as hybrid organizations that attempt to manage internally the ambiguity associated with the presence of different (and often contradictory) values, expectations, and incentives from different stakeholder groups. For example, Pache and Santos (2013) studied how SEs integrate in their organizations diverse elements from the social welfare and the commercial logics; Battilana and Dorado (2010) indicated how hybrids struggle to create an organizational identity combining competing logics through their hiring and socialization processes; and Mair et al. (2015) investigated how they set up their governance structures and practices in order to combine and balance the prescriptions of competing logics. Yet, these approaches focus mainly on internal aspects, leaving under-explored how the creative responses by some hybrids go beyond issues of internal governance processes and of managing one's own identity; i.e., how they also engage in *externally oriented* responses to their institutional context, such as attempts to influence shifts in the logics that characterize a field. We suggest that these externally directed efforts are another distinctive feature of sustainable entrepreneurs.

2.2. Institutional work

A recent development to bring human agency back to institutional theory has used the concept of institutional work (in contrast to that of institutional entrepreneurship), which refers to the efforts of individuals to cope with, support, resist or change the institutional arrangements in which they live (Lawrence et al. 2011). The emphasis here is less on the success in achieving institutional change and more on the experience of individuals or groups purposively trying to do the change. Put differently, rather than large-scale social transformations, this approach allows to focus on more modest and mundane actions. The concept of institutional work delivers a useful analytical tool to study sustainable entrepreneurship, since it is based on the understanding that actors are embedded in institutional arrangements, which they sustain through their actions, but are

also aware, skillful, and reflexive, and can try to modify these arrangements (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). Studies on institutional work have identified how actors perform work to change boundaries and practices within a given field (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). They have also identified various processes through which actors sustain existing institutions and enhance their legitimacy, in addition to transforming them and appealing to new institutional arrangements (Katila, Laine, & Parkkari, 2017; Hampel, Lawrence, & Tracey, 2015). Overall, this approach allows to analyze different types of work, performed often in subtle ways, even if they do not always amount to a complete upheaval of the institutional context or the creation of brand new institutions.

An important type of institutional work underlined in the literature is the purposive effort to create, shape, and manipulate the meaning, values and norms as well as habits and routines associated with new technologies, products, and services. Most of this line of research studies a variety of discursive elements and rhetorical strategies through which actors attempt to advance an innovation in the market (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007; Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010) and how these innovations embed themselves in existing understandings in order to promote the product or service's uptake by users (Garud & Rappa, 1994; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Van de Ven, 1993; Purtik & Arenas, 2019). A well-known example is Kodak's engagement in discursive strategies to frame photography as an integral, taken-for-granted part of everyday life, studied by Munir and Phillips (2005). Less well-known is the use of these strategies in attempts to introduce social and environmental concerns in the institutional environment, while also adapting to this environment, as we study in this article. Further, another important type of work emphasized in the literature is that of finding allies and establishing coalitions among diverse groups (Garud et al., 2007). Again, what can be important for research on sustainable entrepreneurship are the

relationships with those groups that want to preserve the status quo as well as with those that want to promote the goals of sustainability.

There have been some studies at the intersection between institutional work and institutional logics (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009; Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017), which perceive organizations as managing the prescriptions received from their environment, and as active in trying to promote a shift in the prevailing logic. Yet, as in the studies on institutional logics, the focus here is usually internal to the organization. For example, Jarzabkowski et al. (2009) studied how different types of institutional work (mostly internally oriented) allow a utility company to cope with tensions between the market logic and the regulatory logic. Similarly, Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) show types of work used by environmental managers to reconcile the tensions between the environmental and the market logics inside the organization. Gawer and Philipps (2013) illustrate how Intel Corporation worked to replace the traditional supply chain logic dominating its field with a new platform logic following very different organizing principles, through externally and internally oriented institutional work. In our article, we pick up these authors' call for more research on the intersection of logics and institutional work, by focusing on externally oriented type of work rather than on internal aspects.

3. METHODS AND DATA

To answer our research question-- *How do sustainable entrepreneurs combine adaptation to the prevailing institutional logic with advancing a sustainability logic?*—we developed a multiple case study. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate to generate a deeper understanding of relatively unexplored and complex phenomena with multiple levels of analysis and multiple interactions (Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 1999; Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). A multiple case study has been used before in studies on sustainable and social

entrepreneurship (Thompson et al., 2015; Hockerts, 2015; Jolink & Niesten, 2015) as well as entrepreneurship generally (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009; Kistruck & Beamish, 2010; Farny, Kibler, Hai, & Landoni, 2019), since it is considered appropriate to illustrate an emergent theory and allows within and between case analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). We sampled four cases of sustainable entrepreneurship following the process and theoretical reasons described below.

The selection followed a process of progressive focusing (Stake, 1995) consisting of three phases. First, within the framework of a EU-FP7 research project and in cooperation with several researchers throughout Europe, a long list of about two hundred potential cases of SEs were identified using as a guide the definitions provided by the literature (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Belz & Binder, 2017). All cases came from EU countries with similar market incentives and environmental/social regulations. They belonged to four industries, which had been identified by the European Commission as having high sustainability impact: food, energy, mobility and living (which included diverse activities such as construction and hospitality). Second, the group of researchers of that project met on several occasions to select a final list of twenty-two cases from different countries privileging those that appeared as more balanced in the pursuit of the three goals and more innovative. To select these cases, the availability of secondary data (publications on the organizations and by the organizations, and websites) and accessibility for the collection of primary data (interviews) were also taken into account. Third, the three authors of this article reviewed all the cases and theoretically sampled four revelatory cases (Neergaard, 2007) meeting the following criteria: a) they were independent entrepreneurs, starting a new organization; b) the initiatives were relatively recent (less than eight years old at the time of the research) in order to collect vivid memories of the early stages of the initiatives, when they are likely to find more difficulties and institutional work is likely to be more visible; c) their product or service appeared as novel in their

institutional context at the time when they emerged; d) they had to adapt to the institutional context in which they emerged; e) they purposively aimed to modify some aspect of their institutional context. Finally, based on self-reporting and external observation from peers, two cases were chosen that were at the time of the research commercially viable, in terms of having been able to consolidate their innovative product/service, and two cases which had not yet reached breakeven, which allowed for case comparison. We considered that less successful cases could also provide insights about the phenomenon under study (Canales, 2016). This is, in our view, particularly relevant in the case of a study focusing on institutional work, which, as mentioned above, does not emphasize success in achieving major institutional change, but focuses on more modest and even non-successful attempts. This sampling strategy allowed to develop rich and deep insights about the institutional work of SEs as they interact with their context.

The four cases are the following. First, Retenergie, an Italian cooperative with more than one thousand members, producing and distributing clean energy, which was founded in Cuneo (Piedmont), but later extended to other Italian cities. Second, La Ruche Qui Dit Oui (henceforth, La Ruche; i.e., "the hive"), a French company providing an online platform and organizational support to communities of consumers to purchase quality food directly from small local producers, which has also expanded to other European countries, often under the name "The Food Assembly". Third, Rosa[i], a Polish hostel run by an anarcho-feminist cooperative, which offers itself as a meeting place for cooperatives and like-minded activists, as well as regular tourists. And, fourth, Zebramobil, a German company that offered an innovative solution for car-sharing services in Munich. Table 1 provides an overview of the cases, including geographical location, founding year, legal form, some considerations about the economic, social/community and ecological value created, and the data collected from each.

Insert Table 1 around here

3.1. Data sources and analysis

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with all the founders and the managers of the initiatives studied. The variation in the number of interviews depended on the size of the organization at the moment, mostly quite small due to being at an early stage. The interview protocol asked specifically about the interactions with the political, social and economic environment, but also other aspects of the initiative. All the interviews lasted between one hour and two hours and were recorded, transcribed, and translated. We triangulated this data with archival data and other secondary sources such as project documents, websites (including blogs and Facebook profiles), and press, radio, and TV interviews as detailed at the end of Table 1. The entire database was created between May 2014 and December 2016.

In the second stage, we wrote extensive narratives of about 30 pages in length for each of the cases, to build a rich understanding of the initiative and its context (Langley, 1999). In a third stage, following the "Gioia methodology" to systematically analyze collected data (Goia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), the authors analyzed each interview and additional data separately, proposing different open codes, and next held several meetings to achieve consensual interpretation about the codes and themes that emerged in relation to how agents adapt to and try to change their institutional context. We developed a list of first-order codes, which remained close to our data and referred to different activities such as promoting a sense of community and emphasizing democratic decision making. Next, we used an abductive approach (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), consisting in an iterative process of data interpretation within and across cases and confronting the

findings with pre-existing theoretical assumptions (Yin, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This led us to build a theoretical framework emphasizing interactive aspects of institutional work, grouping the first-order codes under our second-order themes, such as "politicizing economic action" and "relational work" (see Figure 1 for our data structure).

Insert Figure 1 about here

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4. FINDINGS

Our analysis of the cases show how SEs purposively adapt to existing formal and informal institutions while also trying to influence them in order to introduce their innovations and advance the sustainability logic, which "prescribes concerns for social justice and environmental preservation" (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011, p. 322) such as emissions reduction, clean energy, local food production, and citizen participation. The key players supporting this logic include civil society organizations, community groups, alternative social media, and cooperative banks. Democratic participation of various stakeholders, including users and consumers, is a preferred form of governance, and products and services are seen as means to respond to societal and environmental needs. In contrast, the prevailing institutions to which SEs try to adapt are dominated by the commercial logic, which includes structures, taken-for-granted assumptions and norms emphasizing growth, efficiency, and economic development. Among its key players, there are the incumbents in a given industry, its suppliers, and financial entities, but also regulators, public administrators, and the traditional media. Commercial success, professionalization, and managerial and technical expertise are highly valued by this logic. SEs are not just internally managing these different logics (as studied by previous literature); but in their external actions they purposively

strive to fit in the commercial logic to be viable in the market and at the same time they also attempt to advance the sustainability logic.

To do so, SEs engage in activities that constitute institutional work. In what follows, we explain the types of work SEs engage in emerging from our case analysis: *maneuvering around regulation*; *making sustainability convenient*; and *politicizing economic action*. Each of the three is enabled by *relational work*. We analyze how SEs combined these types of institutional work and what were the consequences of their choices. Table 2 gives a full description of activities belonging to each type of institutional work performed by each SE. In the sections below, we focus on characteristics of each institutional work and use selected examples from the cases.

Insert Table 2 about here

4.1. Making sustainability convenient

SEs in our cases engaged in practices aimed at presenting their social and environmental innovations as a convenient activity, accessible to mainstream users and consumers, easy to understand and use, attractive, and organized in a recognizable way. La Ruche aimed to be inclusive about the type of participants in the "food assemblies" supported by their platform: they appealed to clients and farmers who did not fully embrace sustainability mindsets and practices, such as non-organic farmers and customers motivated by individual benefits. The founder explains "*we have a vision where every farmer is organic […], but we need to be pragmatic as well. We know it's not the case today. So we cannot say we're going to build a network with only 100 percent organic certified farmers. No, it needs to be a process*" (Founder 1, La Ruche). Thus, rather than pushing straightaway for a grand vision, La Ruche founders emphasized practical and operational

considerations, which could fit well with a commercial logic: "*Our goal is to keep improving the efficiency of our platform so producers can focus on production and their relationship with members"* (Founder 2, La Ruche). The system created by La Ruche was meant to be attractive to both a highly-committed consumer and a conventional one driven by health, product quality, or improved user experience, who does not engage in the functioning of the food assembly or commit to regular orders.

Furthermore, short circuit food chains usually face an organization challenge, insofar as they rely on volunteers. As one co-founder explained:

> "*One of the problems we had with these community economies is that everybody had to do work and it's difficult to attract more clients if everybody has to become involved. That's what we see in our system, 80 percent don't get involved. We needed to find a system where someone was going to do more work*" (Founder 1, La Ruche).

La Ruche solved the difficulty by using a pattern for organizing fitting the commercial logic: "*If it is going to be sustainable, the community hosts need to have revenue from the activity*" (ibid.). The establishment of a "professionalized" community leader included compensation, application, and selection procedures, thereby ensuring the viability of both the community and the food delivery process. By using these features, typical of a commercial logic, by being open to different types of consumers, and facilitating interactions between members (who met at weekly pop-up markets), La Ruche aimed to make sustainability convenient and eventually stimulate "*people go from a very individualistic way of consuming to a more collective way of doing it*" (Founder 1, La Ruche).

To lower cognitive and cultural barriers to its renewable energy initiative, the cooperative Retenergie designed an easy process of subscription and of switching from traditional energy providers without sacrificing price or quality in the service. It appealed to "mainstream" consumers concerned mainly about the price of energy, the reliability of delivery, and financial returns. In

fact, one of the founders of Retenergie emphasized values such as efficiency and savings (which are typically associated with the commercial logic):

> "*Our goal is to reduce the environmental impact of energy supplies. So it is normal for us to work on energy efficiency, while for a producer of electricity it is not: if you produce and sell electricity the more electricity that is consumed, the better for your profits. For us it is not a problem because we do not aim to maximize profit*" (Founder 1, Retenergie).

Regarding Rosa Hostel, despite the idealistic goals of the founders, many of their customers were unaware of the political, social and environmental agenda of the initiative. Rosa Hostel relied on key mainstream players to attract customers, such as the intermediaries in the hospitality industry: about 80% of Rosa customers came from the Booking.com portal. This situation made the founders somewhat uncomfortable, because they believed that these search engines privileged the price criterion. Yet, they did not turn their back to such commercial players as a way to reach clients.

Our fourth case, Zebramobil, made great efforts to attract mainstream users by showing the convenience of its service. Previous car-sharing systems at that time were, in their view, unappealing because they required reservations and predetermined parking zones. Although the initiative could have emphasized the positive side effects from a social and environmental perspective, these effects figured less prominently in Zebramobil's public presentations. Thus, orientation towards the average customer took prevalence over large-scale system change or creating a movement of users committed to social and environmental goals. In the founders' words, the goal was to make car-sharing "*cool, attractive, sexy*", and this meant flexible and visually appealing cars, so that young people would want to use them.

Thus, our cases show that SEs engage in a type of work which we call "Making sustainability convenient" in order to integrate mainstream customers and users, who follow a commercial logic in their interaction, with the hope of exposing them to the sustainability logic

regarding production, consumption, and market activities. Making sustainability accessible, easy, and attractive is a type of work that aims to establish a bridge between the commercial and the sustainability logics, by fitting into and reproducing the commercial logic, but also trying to advance the sustainability logic.

4.2. Politicizing economic action

At the same time, our cases revealed that SEs frequently interpret and present their initiatives in a way that goes beyond the act of consuming, using, or sourcing a product or service. SEs infuse these practices with a political meaning, beyond mere economic transactions. Both Retenergie and La Ruche aimed to lead individualistic, detached customers towards becoming community members, oriented towards the collective, engaged in the production process, and developing normative judgments regarding the social and environmental impact of their economic decisions. In doing so, they provided an alternative theorization of market activity and questioned the current system, which they presented as unethical and ecologically unsustainable.

In the case of Retenergie, the Italian cooperative producing and consuming clean energy, the organization put a strong emphasis on the values of citizen participation, energy self-sufficiency, and environmental protection. The cooperative presented itself as a new model to produce and manage energy by which members are simultaneously consumers and owners of the renewable energy plants, and directly involved in the decision-making process. They called this model "*energy democratization*" and claimed to be fighting a system dominated by big energy companies. In the words of one of the founders:

> "*Our common objective is to involve the most people we can in this small revolution we are carrying on; the more we increase the number of people engaged the more we improve our capacity to fund and build other plants with renewable energy so strengthen this self-handling model*" (Founder 1, Retenergie).

To connect with existing and potential members, Retenergie organized discussions via email lists, ad hoc meetings and permanent working groups where the feasibility of new clean energy production projects was openly debated and voted on. In sum, for those who became involved, purchasing household energy acquired a political meaning.

The founders of La Ruche, the French online platform connecting local food producers and consumers organized in small "assemblies" (or "hives" in the French version), wanted to create awareness among customers about their contribution to the local community and the natural environment, and not just a tool to obtain better produce. The very term "assembly" already carried a political connotation (in many countries the organization was called "The Food Assembly"). La Ruche also appealed to the values of authenticity and rootedness in a community by providing "*a place where farmers and consumers meet face-to-face*" and where you "*put a name on an apple: it's James' apple*" (Founder 1, La Ruche). Their community-building goal was emphasized in their website: "*Meet the people behind your food and your neighbors*". Despite adopting a commercial legal form, La Ruche presented itself as contributing to "*the promotion of a fairer food system*" (Founder 1, La Ruche), which is "*good for the local economy*" and supports "*producers that keep their farms at a human-scale*" (website, La Ruche). The understanding transmitted was that the choice between buying food from supermarkets, which import produce from distant regions, and doing so from local producers through "food assemblies" had repercussions for environmental protection, justice, and community development.

The founders of Rosa Hostel framed the problem they wanted to address with their initiative in an extremely broad manner as the exploitative nature of the capitalist system in terms of labor relations, environmental damage, and the reduction of citizens to mere workers and consumers. For the founders, the choice of sector in which they engaged was secondary: "*Our activity was supposed to be a loudspeaker. It was about the idea of a cooperative--and the values behind it. The*

subject of the activity was unimportant" (Founder 1, Rosa). They claimed: "*Most NGOs and foundations promote social enterprises and cooperatives without questioning the capitalist logic of exploitation and accumulation. We think the cooperative movement should replace capitalism, not make it 'digestible'*" (Founder 2, Rosa). The name of the hostel (after an early 20th century anarcho-feminist activist) was already a declaration of principles. Likewise, each room paid homage to a different social and political leader, whose biography and social cause were explained on the website. Special discounts were announced through Facebook for the participants of various political and cultural events taking place in Warsaw (such as a women's march or an LGBT pride parade). Later, this tradition extended into commemorating ideologically important events worldwide such as the Spanish Revolution of 1936 and the Jobs and Freedom March on Washington of 1963.

As we see in these cases, SEs often infuse economic practices with a political meaning (i.e., "politicize economic action"), in different ways and to varying degrees. This manipulation of meaning is a type of institutional work that aims to change cultural-cognitive institutions and promote the advancement of the sustainability logic within the field in which SEs operate.

4.3. Maneuvering around regulations

From our case analysis it emerges that SEs adapt to existing regulations, yet they also engage in the work of changing, extending, or reinterpreting them to carry out their activities. For example, La Ruche found that it not fit any of the "*boxes*" classifying players in the food industry: "*The authorities didn't know what to do because it was so new*" (Founder 1, La Ruche). Thus, part of the founders' work consisted in conversations with public authorities about the business model and negotiating its status to find a right fit, whether as a retail firm, an intermediary, or a service provider. Eventually, after two years of functioning "*between the categories*", La Ruche was told

by local administrators to approach a higher government agency, which asked them to choose between the role of supplier and of intermediary (although La Ruche saw its role as somewhere in between). They were told that, if farmers and consumers were not in the same place to exchange the products, then La Ruche would turn into an intermediary. To avoid this role, a weekly pop-up market became an obligatory part of the business model. The lesson that one of the founders extracted from this process was: "*The law helps you to be creative*" (Founder 1, La Ruche).

The same could be said by the Rosa founders, who saw the introduction of the Social Cooperative Act in 2006 in Poland as an opportunity. The act clearly stated that this organizational form was aimed at social and professional re-integration, so that only unemployed, disabled people, and non-governmental associations aiming at fighting social exclusion could form social cooperatives and receive financial support from programs coordinated by local employment offices. The members of the future cooperative could not easily be considered as "*exposed to the risk of exclusion*". Yet, to fit into the category, three of the founders registered as unemployed. Furthermore, the process of application proved challenging for Rosa founders because their hostel business plan was atypical for this sort of projects and officials regarded it as too ambitious for a social cooperative. To get around this difficulty, they turned to EU grants. Considering the economic sustainability of the enterprise, one of the founders admitted with a tinge of irony:

> "*all this fuss with the social economy winds up functioning entirely on grants from the EU (…) they are networking, making study visits, and when you ask 'what to do in order to found a cooperative?' the answer is 'you need to apply for a grant'"* (Founder 2, Rosa).

Finally, the founders of Zebramobil made great efforts to discuss with public administrators ways to maneuver around or change to regulations on parking permits, so that their car-sharing vehicles could use spaces in the street reserved for neighbors. This change, which was essential for their business model, implied giving car-sharing the same status as private ownership of cars by residents of the city center. As one of founders explained:

> *"... [earlier] we never really had anything to do with politics, or the city administration, besides applying for a passport and so on, and yes, our first official act was to write a letter to Mr. Ude, which somehow took four weeks to reach the right desk, because they did not know what to do with it. [...] we tried to explain why it makes sense. Parking permits for cars for zones already existed, the only difference is that we were a car sharing provider, but this cannot make much of a difference! And then an 18-month odyssey started until we finally, I think it was the 15 March 2009, received the provision via a city council resolution for four years"* (founder 1, Zebramobil).

In sort, institutional work to change and maneuver around regulation is a crucial task for SEs to be able to advance their initiatives. While achieving regulatory change for parking permits was essential for Zebramobil, La Ruche successfully pursued the extension of the status of supplier to include some functions of an intermediary. Rosa founders used a newly developed legal form as a tool for criticizing the system and experimenting with alternatives to it.

4.4. Relational work

In addition to these three types of institutional work, our cases revealed that, far from the individualistic image of the "heroic entrepreneur", SEs engaged with and relied on different types of individuals and organizations that facilitated access to resources and opportunities, and provided legitimacy to their initiatives. They did not do this type of work only with like-minded individuals but also with those that were embedded in the prevailing commercial logic. First of all, all of them maintained intense relationships with public administration representatives, which as we saw above was essential since they were developing services that did not fit established regulatory categories. Retenergia represented energy producers and consumers in one. La Ruche was at the same time food provider and service provider. Zebramobil business model required changes in parking regulations, while Rosa wanted to be a hotel, a social cooperative, and an incubator for social initiatives at the same time. Repeated interactions and negotiations with public administration representatives were, therefore, of strategic importance.

Yet, choices made by the SE differed in relation to other types of actors and organizations. La Ruche and Retenergia actively reached out to alternatively oriented collectives like energy cooperatives or short circuit sales, which followed a sustainability logic, but they also had business partners embedded in the commercial world. Retenergia used financial and consultancy services from ethical banks and sustainably oriented organizations, but it also cooperated with mainstream energy providers to access the energy grid. La Ruche used financing from commercial business angels and consultancy from a socially oriented organization (Ashoka). By contrast, Zebramobil and Rosa were more selective in building relations. The first did not make substantial efforts in relational work with actors embedded in the sustainability logic: they did not cultivate links with NGOs, social movement organizations, or cooperatives and associations that promoted the green economy, civic participation or social causes. Their publicity relied on conventional channels rather than alternative media. When the founders decided to close Zebramobil and issued an email to users to announce the decision, some enthusiastic users asked if crowdfunding would be an option. But the founders turned it down as they considered it would not be economically viable.

Rosa hostel, on the other hand, which sprang from the anarcho-feminist movement, relied mostly on the ecosystem of ethical and environmentally conscious organizations affiliated under the umbrella of social economy, from which it purchased goods and services. As one of the founders said: "*There is an unwritten rule that social economy entities should use products and services of other social economy entities*" (Founder 1, Rosa). Rosa Hostel also sought the support from customers from alternative environments: discounts were offered to NGO workers and volunteers, cooperative members, trade union members, and non-affiliated social activists. Yet, at the same time, as we saw above, they also needed to cultivate their relationships with regulators, public administration and grant decision-makers.

Relational work, when it is most effective, bridges between diverse stakeholders, which

might offer different types of invaluable support to the new ventures (Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004). It is important to get this support from like-minded stakeholders that are aligned with the sustainability logics promoted by the SEs, but also with those that are following the prescriptions from the prevailing commercial logic. For that, SEs often need to appeal to the values, present their activity and offer a theorization which is aligned with those of diverse stakeholder groups and can be attached to their routines and norms. Thus, we see that relational work is intimately interconnected with other types of institutional work; for example, relational work with public officials facilitates the work of maneuvering around regulation and relational work with civil society organizations and activists allows engaging in the work of politicizing economic action. Yet, there are clear differences among SEs, which we discuss in the final sub-section of the findings.

4.5. Walking the tightrope and stirring things up

Our analysis has identified four different types of externally oriented institutional work undertaken by SEs when they try to adapt to the prescriptions of the commercial logic while promoting the sustainability logic. While trying to make their sustainable products and services attractive for their consumers, SEs also try to influence changes in the fields of food distribution, of energy production and distribution, of urban mobility, and of hospitality, so that the sustainability logic gains some ground. This shows that SEs have to find a balance (hence the metaphor "walking the tightrope" between making efforts to fit in the prevailing institutional arrangements, and trying to influence shifts in the logics dominating a field (i.e. they aim to "stir things up").

However, our case analysis also reveals that this does not occur to the same degree in all situations and cases. Two cases from our sample, Retenergie and La Ruche, engaged more fully in

the four different types of institutional work, while this was much less the case with the other two, Zebramobil and Rosa hostel. We suggest calling the former "balanced SEs" insofar as they used relationships and resources, followed prescriptions and appealed to values from both the sustainability and the commercial logics. In contrast, the other two cases, Zebramobil and Rosa hostel, could be labeled "unbalanced SEs" insofar as their institutional work ended up prioritizing either the commercial logic or the sustainability logic. Zebramobil was more concerned with following the prescriptions of the commercial logic and Rosa hostel those from the sustainability logic; neither of them tried to find creative ways to connect both and they did not engage in all the different types of institutional work. For example, Zebramobil did not engage in the work of "Politicizing economic action" and Rosa did only for their like-minded supporters but not for many clients of the hostel, which were not so aware of the connotations they attached to their activity. Moreover, when Zebramobil engaged in the work of "Making sustainability convenient", it ended up disconnecting the initiative from the sustainability logic. This prevented this initiative from looking for opportunities and mobilizing resources from actors following the sustainability logic. As a result, they had less capacity to advance the sustainability logic. Thus, we suggest that those SEs that engage in various types of externally oriented institutional work, which we called balanced SEs, may be more capable to influence logic shifts than unbalanced SEs.

Our distinction bears some resemblance with the two types of hybrid organization identified by Mair et al. (2015) in their study on boards and governance structures: conforming and dissenting hybrids. The former (similar to our unbalanced SEs) rely on structures and activities strictly aligned with either the social welfare or the commercial logic, perceive multiple logics as conflicting, and tend to outsource activities prescribed by the conflicting logic to separate entities and organizational processes. By contrast, in their argument, the latter use defiance, selective coupling, and innovation as mechanisms to combine and balance the prescriptions of several institutional

logics. In tune with our external focus in this article, we add to Mair et al.'s conclusions that the balanced SEs from our study are "dissenting" in a different sense; i.e., insofar as they are not merely accommodating to the status quo but are trying to provoke changes in their environment when they launch and consolidate their social and environmental innovations.

5. DISCUSSION

The present findings have three implications for research on sustainable entrepreneurship and for the potential of using the concept of institutional work in this field. First, we argued that SEs need to balance promoting changes in their institutional environment with adapting to the institutional environment. SEs want to provide goods and services in order to promote social and environmental goals. For this, they often need to promote shifts in their institutional environment, as pointed out by some previous studies (Pinkse & Groot, 2015; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Thompson et al, 2015; Hooggendoorn et al, 2019). Yet, unlike other agents such as social movements or activists (Hargrave & van de Ven, 2006; Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008), SEs are disinclined to use threats, pressure, or large-scale social mobilization to make dominant institutions change. Instead, they are looking for opportunities to make their social innovations prosper in the market; hence, they need to embed their innovations in the commercial institutional logic. For example, as we saw in our cases, they make their sustainability innovations attractive, easy to use, and convenient, and adapt to existing regulations. They also engage with public administration officials to find an appropriate fit. Thus, while previous research has shown that institutional change is done by either *disembedded* peripheral actors or central actors lowering their embeddedness (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), our research suggests that some actors, such as SEs, try to promote changes while simultaneously and purposively embedding themselves into the dominant institutional logics. Yet, by embedding themselves into the commercial logic, they are

reinforcing and sustaining it. This leads to a somewhat paradoxical situation: this type of agent has the aim of transforming the commercial institutional logic to promote sustainability goals while reinforcing and sustaining the same logic they would like to transform.

Second, our study enriches scholarship on sustainable entrepreneurship by adopting the lenses of institutional work, understood as the "somewhat neglected capacity of actors to purposefully select elements of the institutional context within which they operate so as to deliberately 'create' a new context" (Gond & Boxenbaum, 2013, p. 707). The literature on institutional work re-examines the relationship between agents and institutions and directs our attention to the efforts of individuals or groups of individuals rather than large-scale social transformations (Lawrence et al., 2011). The difference between the concept of institutional work and other approaches to institutional theory such as institutional entrepreneurship is that it does not emphasize success in bringing institutional change or a widespread adoption of innovation. The concept of institutional work also denotes some kind of intentionality, even if often small in scale and not necessarily a big strategic vision. Finally, the institutional work approach allows us to see that sustainable entrepreneurs as not isolated from their context, but embedeed in it. Yet, what our case analysis reveals is not only that they operate within this embeddedness but that they intentionally and reflectively try to embed themselves in their context, through "Relational work", the work of "Making sustainability convenient" and "Maneuvering around regulation".

Third, in this article we explored some particular types of institutional work SEs engage in in their attempt to promote social and environmental goals while adapting to their institutional context. Rather than aiming to provoke a complete upheaval, we argue that SEs engage in institutional work in order to promote the advancement of a competing logic in a particular field. Complementing Gawer and Phillips (2013), who also discuss the relation between institutional work and logic shifts, our study reveals that the combination and mutual reinforcement of four

types of externally oriented institutional work allow SEs to try to influence a logics shift towards sustainability while embedding their innovations in the market. An important type of institutional work underlined in the literature is the purposive effort to create, shape, and manipulate the meaning, values and norms as well as habits and routines associated with new technologies, products, and services. As we saw in our cases, by making sustainability convenient, SEs decrease the perceived risks of the innovation and engage in a form of mimicry, defined as "associating new practices with existing sets of taken-for-granted practices, technologies and rules in order to ease adoption" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 221). Less well-known is the use of strategies in order to infuse new meaning to old practices, as we find in some of our cases. According to our analysis, we suggest that by politicizing economic action SEs are changing the normative associations of a practice. Rather than simply trying to legitimize new practices and organizational forms to appeal to those who preserve and reproduce dominant institutional logics (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), SEs also appeal to potential allies among social movements and activists that challenge the prevailing order. In other words, the work of "politicizing economic action" that emerges in our study offers a complementary view to the one offered by McKague, Zietsma and Oliver (2015) in their study on the development of the dairy sector in Bangladesh by an NGO. These authors explored how actors integrate in their daily lives practices that reflected new norms and values. To explain this, they refer to a process that consisted, broadly, in giving a market meaning to an activity that had a traditional, nonmarket meaning up to that point. Our study shows the reverse type of work: we find agents that turn a market activity into a practice infused with a nonmarket meaning. As we saw, the SEs from our cases engage in market activities but theorize them as the advancement of democratic decision-making, of community building, and as part of a large-scale social transformation.

We also suggest that "Politicization economic activity" should be distinguished from other types of institutional work by SEs emerging from our analysis—"maneuvering around regulation" and "relational work"—which take place at the structural and regulatory-political level and may be considered a type of advocacy (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), i.e., mobilizing political and regulatory support through deliberate techniques. Contacts with regulators and legislators were a constant in our cases. Yet, at the same time, when regulations could not be changed, SEs also engaged in manipulation and extension of the meaning of the regulation. These more nuanced, modest, and indirect practices expand prior studies highlighting the need for SEs to become active in the political arena to promote institutional change (Pinkse & Groot, 2015; Slager, Gond, & Moon, 2012). Taken together, the engagement in all these types of work supports the argument that to understand how agents introduce innovations it is necessary to move beyond explanations focusing only on market mechanisms (such as the detection of an opportunity, knowledge of the market, competition, or product quality).

Finally, in addition to the contributions to the field of sustainable entrepreneurship and institutional work, our study also holds some lessons that could turn into promising avenues for future research in the field of corporate sustainability in general. Since, as said earlier, sustainable entrepreneurs could be individuals, organizations or groups, it is possible for a corporation to be engaging in similar types of institutional work in order to advance social and environmental sustainability, while it is adapting to the formal and informal norms and rules of the commercial logic. Due to the complexity of large organizations with several units, as well as several products or services, these efforts are likely to be mixed with many other actions and more difficult to observe than in the case of small, recent SEs as we have studied here. However, it should also be examined whether in cases of large and well-established corporations, which are already well-embedded in their institutional context and even occupy central positions (as Battilana points out,

2006), their attempts to modify this context implies different types of institutional work from those observed here.

6. LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

The findings that emerge from this study have the limitations in terms of generalizability that characterize an exploratory, multi-case research design. Our criterion to select initiatives that were less than eight years old had the advantage that all the founders were available for interview and had a good recollection of the process from the very beginning. The downside is that, in some cases, we cannot draw strong conclusions about the type of institutional work carried out in later stages of sustainable entrepreneurship and the degree of change in norms and behaviors achieved among consumers. Future research could analyze types of work at later stages of the process and focus on the impact. For example, it could study whether at the later stage of exploitation the balance between the logics and the types of work changes. Furthermore, following prior studies (De Clerq & Voronov, 2011), in our analysis we have talked about the sustainability logic as encompassing social and environmental aspects. In our cases, perhaps due to the early phase of the initiatives, these aspects did not enter into tension; but it would be worth exploring whether there are situations where these tensions emerge.

By adopting the theoretical lens of institutional work, we were able to identify distinctive types of work carried out by SEs. We have seen how they question the ethical and political neutrality of the prevailing ways of organizing and consuming goods and services (a type of work which we label "politicizing economic action"), yet at the same time they connect to the commercial logic when they present their products and services as convenient and attractive alternatives to those currently accessible on the market (a type of work we call "Making sustainability convenient"). They follow existing legal regulations, but while doing this they try to

redefine them (a type of work we call "maneuvering around regulation") or even push for new regulations. Furthermore, our analysis suggests that these types of work are made possible by relational work, implying the need to build connections to actors embedded in the two competing logics. In combining these types of work, SEs may find themselves in a situation of aiming to transform the prevailing commercial institutional logic in order to promote sustainability goals while reproducing and reinforcing this same logic they would like to transform. These types of work open new avenues for future research in the fields of sustainable entrepreneurship. Their combination and the capacity of "balanced" and "unbalanced SEs" to shift institutional logics at the field level could be subject to further qualitative and quantitative studies. Another interesting avenue would be to compare systematically whether the characteristics of the field (e.g. its maturity or the type of activity) or of society at large can pose difficulties for or facilitate the effective practice of some forms of institutional work.

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Table 1: Overview of the cases

		Retenergie	La Ruche Qui Dit Oui	Rosa Hostel	Zebramobil
	Industry	Energy	Food	Hospitality	Mobility
	Main geographical location	Piedmont, Italy (expanded to other Italian regions)	France (expanded to other European countries)	Warsaw, Poland	Munich, Germany
	Founding year	2008	2011	2010	2011
	Legal form	Cooperative	Enterprise	Social cooperative	GmbH
	Novelty	Democratically governed cooperative developing collectively owned installations for renewable energy production, purchasing groups and counselling. Possibility to shift to 100% renewable energy.	Online platform and software connecting farmers and consumers to encourage local food distribution and consumption. Activities coordinated by specially employed community leaders.	Democratically governed social cooperative runs a hostel offering "committed accommodation". Combines social engagement (promotion of cooperatives, support for social and environmental rights movements) with commercial activity.	Innovative approach to car sharing based on three elements: station-independent parking; car-on-demand (no need for reservations); technology-based solution.
	Commercial viability	Cash-flow guaranteed due to investments of cooperative members	Reached breakeven and expanded into new countries; successfully compensates assembly leaders and covers platform costs.	Difficulties reaching breakeven. Strong support from public administration.	Company stopped business activities due to poor economic performance, lack of support by investors and incumbent firms.
Value Created	*Economic value*	7 PV plants with a value of €1.3M, 455 kWh installed and a share capital of €540k.	Farmers paid fair prices, community leaders compensated, and platform costs covered by model.	Cost of business activity in the first year was €62.363, and income was €54.687. Currently founders are earning about €2,39 per hour, about minimum wage in Poland.	Car-sharing at an affordable and attractive price, making privately-owned cars unnecessary.
	Social/ community value	Energy democratization and collectively-owned renewable energy plants.	Jobs created in local farms, local economy revitalized, personal contact consumer-producer, and development of community feeling.	Delivers a model for three other cooperative-run hostels in Poland, and became a place of study visits of corporatist-to-be and officials from all Poland.	Reduction of congestion and noise.
	Ecological value	Cooperative's plants produced 290.317 kWh, saving 148.062 kg of CO2 in 2012.	Local and (mostly) organic production lowers carbon footprint. Less food transport reduces emissions.	Introduced several environmental solutions/activities, e.g..: in their cafeteria.	Reducing number of cars, thereby reducing emissions, and realizing gains in stationary and flowing traffic.
Data	*People interviewed*	3 co-founders 5 managers	2 co-founders and 2 managers (two visits to local food market)	2 co-founders 4 managers	2 co-founders (3 interviews: one interviewed twice)
	Type of archival data and secondary sources	Minutes, plans (PV, wind and hydro-power), financial plans, plant technical assessments, media reports, founder/co-founders/members/partners' videos, articles.	Websites, documents (including financial information), video interviews, articles.	Press articles, radio and newspaper interviews with the founders, social media. .	Minutes, articles, website

Table 2: The three externally-oriented institutional work done by the four sustainable entrepreneurs and the enabling relation work

	Making Sustainability Convenient	**Politicizing Economic action**	**Maneuvering around Regulation**	**Relational Work**
Retenergie	Designing the service **as easily accessible** and **not differing** from others (convenience). Assessing emerging ideas **according to economic criteria.** Founders stress that they want to make their ideals compatible with the economic viability of the project.	Founders stress **democratic participation**, as well as environmental sustainability and portray the cooperative form as a logical development (democratic governance) of previous non-profit organizational form. Retenergie organizes regular and ad hoc face-to-face meetings to promote **participatory decision-making** in energy projects as well as maintaining forums and discussions via email.	Adopts **cooperative form** in order to emphasize communal and democratic **values** (participation of local groups, democratic participation, self-reliance and solidarity). **Using** changes in energy production **regulation** in order to pursue sustainability agenda.	Maintained links with **environmental non-profit** from which it emerged ("Solare Collettivo"). Interacts with other **non-profits, associations and activists** in the fields of renewable energy and solidary-based purchasing groups (e.g. ReteGAS and EnergoClub). Purposive selection of **business partners** sharing sustainability and community related values: e.g., its provider of financial services is "Banca Etica", the first PV plant was installed in a cooperative. Partnering with Avanzi, a consultancy and research organization, specialized on sustainable development. Joining like-minded networks e.g. REScoop (European Federation of Energy Cooperatives). Cooperation with incumbents in order to access wider publics (e.g. need to access **traditional grid** to reach every house) and sell their hydroelectric production. Collaboration **with public administration in municipalities** (need to access local infrastructure and resources, e.g., the province and the municipality of Cuneo collaborated for construction of first plant, **mayor** of Cuneo became member of Retenergie's board of directors).
La Ruche Qui Dit Oui	Emphasis on "**efficient**" local food distribution, "modernization through technology", and "**professionalization**" of community leadership. Connecting with **"mainstream" customers** driven by purely individualistic motives (like health, quality, or improved user experience). Designing the service as easily **accessible** and **not too differ**ent from others (convenience: no need to order	Communication of the long-term objective as **transforming** the food production and consumption system. Emphasis on **benefits for local communities** through strengthening ties with neighbors and promoting **local "human-scale" economy.** Benefits for the environment (less emissions due to local sourcing) also communicated.	After several meetings and discussions, La Ruche chose the legal form of a **service provider company**, which forced the establishment of face-to-face markets. Obtains support from **public institutions supporting start-ups** (incubators and platform connecting entrepreneurs and professionals, in IT sector). Obtains support from existing protectionist regulations in agriculture in order to advance the sustainability agenda	Connecting to **existing purchasing groups** engaged in short circuit food systems and **community supported agriculture).** Reaching out to leaders of sustainability logics (gained recognition and support from **Ashoka)**. Partnering with sustainability oriented partners (**organic certified farmers**: about 50% of farmers involved), as well as **conventional farmers**, i.e. without organic certificates. Meetings with **local administration** representatives, trying to find an adequate procedure and form for an atypical food/service provider. Reaching for resources from commercially oriented actors (business angels).

	every week or to commit to a minimum amount of orders).		(policies designed by **Ministry of Agriculture** to support local farmers and short circuit retails).	
Rosa Hostel	Initiative does **not** emphasize **professionalism, efficiency or business mentality.** Initiative perceives clients as mainly driven by price. In their outreach to clients, they are not connecting to the alternative norms and values.	Presenting cooperatives and co-ownership as **direct challenge to the capitalist system.** Name of hostel and names of rooms after **revolutionary leaders** and special discounts given on significant dates or alternative social movements.	Rosa founders **take advantage of and creatively reinterpret new Social Cooperative Act**, a social policy to help people exposed to risk of social exclusion, though they did not meet all requirements. Acquired unemployment status in order to be able to access institutional help directed to unemployed	Maintaining and extending multiple links to **associations supporting social economy**. Hosting workshops and festivals for cooperatives and groups in **anarcho-feminist movement**. Discounts given to **cooperatives**. Founding and functioning of cooperative widely covered in articles on webpages related to social economy and NGO sector. Reaching for resources from sustainability-oriented actors (financial and organizational help in periods of internal crises provided by the **Social and Economic Investment Company**, member of the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks.) Partnering with sustainability-oriented groups (e.g. food products from neighboring food **cooperatives**). Partnering with commercially-oriented actors: some services (e.g. laundry) provided by **"conventional" enterprises** and use of **intermediaries** in the tourism industry (such as Booking.com). Interacting with **public officials** from national registry court and **unemployment office** aimed at finding appropriate legal form and at complying with the regulations. **Wide media coverage of** founding of the cooperative by "conventional" local newspapers.
Zebramobil	Emphasis on "**cool**", "**sexy**" for users, and facility of use. To be more attractive to users they aimed at making the **experience as similar as possible as to using one's own private car**, by eliminating requirement for reservation and predetermined parking.	**As movement for social transformation:** Not emphasized. **Alternative norms and values:** Not emphasized.	Adoption of traditional **legal form** for a company in Germany: GmbH. Attempts to **change** regulations regarding parking permits.	No links with NGOs, associations, or environmental groups. Apparently, no links with sustainability-oriented companies or entrepreneurs. Had one round of meetings with sustainability-oriented business angels, to no avail. Founders relied on own capital. As former **BMW** employees, founders maintain contacts and friends in the firm. They held bi-weekly meetings for eight months with BMW. Later, they established a business partnership with **Audi**. **Political actors and administrations:** Several meetings with **city representatives and political parties**. Contacts from **KVR** (department of public order), from which it got support to launch press conference. Support from **MVG** (public transport association) for advertisement on subway and registrations. Informal support from **police** who gave early notice when cars found badly parked.

ENDNOTES

[i] The name has been changed, as the founders requested anonymity.