Addressing sustainable urban mobility in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations: an institutional work perspective

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Résumé :

La littérature considère qu'en tant qu'organisations dont les membres sont d'autres organisations, les méta-organisations sont des véhicules pertinents pour réformer les institutions à l'origine des grands défis sociétaux. Cependant, la compréhension des mécanismes internes qui rendent les méta-organisations efficaces face à ces enjeux reste méconnu. A travers l'étude de cas approfondie d'une méta-organisation multi-parties-prenantes, j'explore la façon dont les membres publics et privés cherchent à relever le défi sociétal de la mobilité urbaine durable. A partir d'entretiens, observations et sources secondaires, j'identifie les tensions inhérentes aux collaborations entre acteurs hétérogènes (conceptuelles, structurelles et relationnelles). Puis, en mobilisant l'approche du travail institutionnel, j'isole des ensembles d'actions (théorisation, négociation et routinisation) intentionnellement posées par les acteurs pour développer une vision consensuelle de leur mission, réduire ainsi les tensions collaboratives et apporter les conditions propices à la naissance de pratiques collaboratives destinées à réformer la gestion de la mobilité urbaine. L'étude révèle la centralité du travail effectué par le personnel de la méta-organisation qui oeuvre, discrètement à faciliter ce processus. L'étude contribue aux littératures sur les méta-organisations et le travail institutionnel en révélant les mécanismes de niveau micro qui font de ces formes organisationnelles des véhicules capables de soutenir les changements institutionnels produits par des acteurs hétérogènes.

Mots-clés : Meta-organisation ; Travail Institutionnel ; Collaboration; Grand challenges

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Addressing sustainable urban mobility in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations: an institutional work perspective

1. INTRODUCTION

Grand challenges such as global warming, extreme poverty or sustainable cities have attracted increasing attention from the media and society whilst a constellation of stakeholders faces their consequences and may be part of their solution (Gümüsay et al., 2022). Addressing such challenges requires collective efforts sustained by actors from different fields – typically the private, public or third sectors – as well as changes in the way their action is coordinated, planned, and implemented (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). However, the different worldviews and interests of these distinct actors are likely to hamper their collaboration (e.g. Wijen & Ansari, 2007).

Meta-organizations – organizations whose members are organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) – have been identified as suitable forums for tackling grand challenges (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). Unlike traditional organizations based on hierarchy, meta-organizations tend to use consensus as a mode of decision-making that helps members conserve their autonomy, entrusting only a small part of it to the collective endeavor (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Meta-organizations have proven efficient in changing their members' behaviors and spreading environmental standards (e.g. Berkowitz et al., 2017; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019), thus appearing supportive of institutional change (Garaudel, 2020). However, these insights remain at a field or organizational level that cannot capture the micro-interactions between members' representatives. Such exchanges are important because members' differing worldviews are likely to trigger tensions hindering collaboration (Michel, 2020). Elucidating these micro-phenomena could extend our understandings of meta-organizations as change agents that support the tackling of grand challenges.

I aim to explore meta-organizational members' collaboration efforts meant at addressing grand challenges from a micro-perspective, using the institutional work (IW) view. This approach emphasizes the purposive actions that individuals and organizations implement to create, disrupt or maintain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Relevant for addressing issues such as grand challenges (Hampel et al., 2017), this perspective can capture the collective

process through which actors engage with norms and practices (*ibid*). While previous IW studies focus either on similar actors working together (e.g. Dorado, 2013) or heterogeneous actors in conflicting interactions (e.g. Maguire & Hardy, 2009), research about heterogeneous actors cooperating to transform institutions is in its infancy (Hampel et al., 2017). Such collaborative IW is marked by actors' different worldviews and interests that generate significant tensions (Hampel et al., 2017; Michel, 2020; J. Yin & Jamali, 2021). Overcoming them requires specific collective practices such as 'negotiating'(Helfen & Sydow, 2013) or 'creating common ground'(Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Studying these practices from within meta-organizations may illuminate features that make such organizational forms relevant for tackling grand challenges. Against this background, my research question is *how do meta-organizations affect their heterogeneous members' collaborative institutional work as they attempt to address grand challenges*?

In exploring this question, I conducted an in-depth case-study of CollaB, a meta-organization dedicated to creating a public and private sector collaborative governance of urban mobility in a city where the responsibility for this issue has historically been conferred to public actors. Data underpinning my research comprises in-depth interviews with member-organization representatives and meta-organization's staff, observations of public events and meta-organization artefacts, including confidential internal documents and publicly-available reports on its activities. This data allows to track the evolution of the collaboration over a four-year period.

My research shows that heterogeneous members face conceptual, structural and relational tensions when collaborating. Interwoven, these tensions are addressed by members' representatives and the secretariat staff who 'co-construct a common ground'. This collaborative, micro-level institutional work taking place within the meta-organization comprises three, combined efforts: theorizing common conceptualizations, negotiating meta-organizational mission and members' role, and routinizing the collaboration. Though the first two involve all actors, the latter is performed only by the secretariat. When the common ground is tested in real-life settings, it can either trigger the need for members to revise their shared vision or provide them with evidence that collaborative urban government bears fruit, at least symbolically. So doing, it encourages members to replicate the practice in other parts of their territory.

Findings contribute to meta-organization and collaborative institutional work among heterogeneous actors literatures. First, they deepen our understanding of meta-organization's

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influence over institutions by reporting micro-level phenomena that affect members' purposeful creation of new institutions. In particular, they expose the important role of the secretariat in creating a curated space that supports institutional change activities. Also, they nuance the current debate about meta-organizations' inertia by surfacing the nature of their membership and relationships among representatives as factors affecting the dynamics of consensual decision-making. Second, my study contributes to IW literature by identifying meta-organizations as concrete examples of free spaces (Polletta, 1999) enabling collaborative institutional work among actors from different fields. It highlights the importance of activities conducted by neutral individuals in supporting conflicting actors in their quest to create a common ground. It also expands our understanding of efforts required to create common ground by elucidating its dynamic and iterative nature.

I begin by reviewing the literature about grand challenges, meta-organizations, and collaborative IW among heterogeneous actors. I then describe contextual information about the case-study and methods used to collect and analyze data. Next, I present key findings before discussing their contribution to existing research.

Envoi de la communication :

Le nom du fichier doit être nommé de la façon suivante : **votre nom, suivi de la première lettre de votre prénom et de l'extension DOC ou RTF**. Par exemple, Max Weber soumettrait le fichier WEBERM.DOC.

2. PRIOR RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. GRAND-CHALLENGES

'Grand challenges' are conceived as 'specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation' (Grand Challenges Canada, 2011, p. iv). They relate to issues likely to affect both members of society and their environment on a potentially global scale (Gümüsay et al., 2022). Issues like global warming, decent work conditions, or sustainable cities could qualify as Grand Challenges.

Grand challenges have been studied from an institutional perspective at first (Ferraro et al., 2015). Associated with forms of institutional change, tackling grand challenges requires the

involvement of a wide array of actors who may be constrained by the institutions they intend to influence (Ferraro et al., 2015; Seo & Creed, 2002). As such, actors may collectively represent both the source and the solution of grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016). Though varied in character, grand challenges share three features (Ferraro et al., 2015). First, they are *complex*: they are marked by non-linear dynamics and are subject to feedback loops and phase shifts that make them difficult to change. Second, they are *uncertain* and hence difficult to predict and tackle as actions may cause unexpected outcomes. Finally, they are *evaluative* as actors may have different views about the nature of grand challenges, and different opinions about what constitutes an acceptable solution. Interestingly, meta-organizations have been identified promising devices for addressing grand challenges (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022).

2.2. META-ORGANIZATIONS

Meta-organizations are formal associations of organizations whose members collectively represent both the center and the subjects of authority (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). Example of such organizations include inter-organizational partnerships (Cropper & Bor, 2018), federations (e.g. Garaudel, 2020; Le Bianic & Svensson, 2010; Toubiana et al., 2017) or standard-making organizations (e.g. Boström, 2006). As organizations that have organizations rather than individuals as members, they exhibit specificities that influence their dynamics. For instance, they seem to depend much more on their members than conventional organizations, whilst being unable to impose authority through traditional means, like employment contracts (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). Indeed, members are reluctant to hand over their autonomy to others and tensions between members' autonomy and meta-organization's authority is a central concern (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008).

Meta-organizations represent a suitable organizational context for promoting cooperation. They constitute 'neutral spaces' capable of neutralizing members' conflicts away from public sight (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015). Thus, while joining the collective, each member can bring its own values, constraints, boundaries and social norms (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022). To conciliate their members, meta-organizations tend to adopt consensus as a mode of collective decision-making rather than relying on hierarchies that may endanger members' autonomy (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). While this modality has been associated with members' improved involvement (Malcourant et al., 2015), it has been criticized for generating inertia (König et al., 2012). Still, meta-organizations as structures

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appear suitable at promoting cooperation between members by issuing guiding principles (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Berkowitz et al., 2017) and creating linkages between separated actors (Reveley & Ville, 2010).

Unlike conventional organizations, meta-organizations also support collective action through the work of their secretariat (Roux & Lecocq, 2022). Directly employed by the meta-organization or delegated by some members (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018), this dedicated staff maintains organizational activity in a context where members have discontinuous relationships with the collective (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Garaudel, 2020). So doing, the secretariat can take care of daily management such as drafting meeting agendas (Garaudel, 2020) or managing the implementation of collective projects (Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). The secretariat can also provide services leveraging members' collective capabilities (Berkowitz et al., 2017), such as expert information (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2017), trainings (Furåker, 2020) or activities helping members to combine their respective capabilities to advance their cause (Webb, 2017).

Among the variety of meta-organizations, multi-stakeholder meta-organizations comprising actors from different fields seem particularly relevant to tackle social (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015) and sustainability-related Grand Challenges (e.g. Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). Scholars argue that addressing grand challenges requires moving away from traditional institutions (George et al., 2016), by generating practices that overcome the conflicting demands and incompatible prescriptions of a variety of actors (Ferraro et al., 2015). Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations bring together heterogeneous member, enabling them to draw on their expertise, reflect diverse interests and complementary perspectives and, ultimately, develop joint solutions (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). Whilst the influence of meta-organizations over institutions has been established (e.g. Cropper & Bor, 2018; Laurent et al., 2020; Vifell & Thedvall, 2012), for instance through issuing practice standards that may propagate beyond members (Le Bianic & Svensson, 2010; Vähä-Savo et al., 2019), little is known about the local micro-processes through which members collectively engage to change institutions. As argued below, the institutional work perspective has potential to develop new insights by exploring at the micro-level the actions performed within meta-organizations.

2.3. INSTITUTIONAL WORK

Institutional perspectives have traditionally paid attention to the interaction between organizations and the field in which they operate, emphasizing how institutions provide stability and meaning to social life while constraining actors' behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The institutional work (IW) approach reorients this focus to understanding how actors mobilize their agency to perform practices aimed at influencing (disrupting, creating or maintaining) institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). IW scholars have identified purposive actions affecting a multitude of institutions as well as their interplay (Hampel et al., 2017). For instance, Cloutier et al. (2016) elucidate interactions between conceptual, structural, operational and relational work when implementing reforms in public organizations. IW can result in failures (e.g. McGaughey, 2013), unintended consequences (Singh & Jayanti, 2013) or successes. Successes may be symbolic rather than substantive change when new practices are only superficially adopted (e.g. MacLean & Behnam, 2010). Dansou & Langley (2012) argue that testing periods enable actors to assess the effect of their micro-level actions over the empirical realm.

Notwithstanding a growing literature adopting the IW perspective (Gidley & Palmer, 2021), and despite their important potential to convey institutional change (Hampel et al., 2017) few studies pay attention to how heterogeneous actors collaborate to change institutions. Scholars suggest that inter-field coalitions may generate novel ideas and strategies to strengthen institutional acceptance (e.g. Delacour & Leca, 2017; Wijen & Ansari, 2007; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). However, tensions emerge among actors that do not share worldviews, languages and goals (Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Yin & Jamali (2021) show how different institutional logics result in tensions that are handled through different collaboration strategies. Helfen & Sydow (2013) demonstrate how 'negotiation work' could help actors overcome obstacles. For her part, Michel (2020) exposes that collaborative efforts performed by actors generate new tensions. Following Wijen & Ansari (2007) – and in line with grand challenges literature - recent studies have emphasized the importance of building a 'common ground' – a shared understanding of the situation – through collective framing, interdependency negotiation, co-building a vision and a structure of rules (Michel, 2020; J. Yin & Jamali, 2021). Interestingly, actors seem to benefit from specific spaces to conduct such a work.

Contexts hosting heterogeneous actors' collaborative IW have also been identified as crucial. Called "free spaces" (Polletta, 1999) or "relational spaces" (Kellogg, 2009), they represent social places where actors from different fields can interact, and whose boundaries isolate protagonists from the potential sanctions they would face otherwise (Zietsma & Lawrence,

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2010). Such spaces appear suitable for experiments and discrete negotiations aimed at incubating social transformation (*ibid*). Despite appearing valuable to initiate institutional change (Delacour & Leca, 2017; Michel, 2020; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), the current literature remains silent regarding the detailed effects of these spaces supporting heterogeneous actors' collaborative IW (Michel, 2020). Interestingly, though not naming the concept, Michel (2020) suggests that a multi-stakeholder meta-organization was a suitable free space for supporting members in building alternative frames aimed at challenging traditional food systems.

In sum, grand challenges are important issues that require the collective involvement of a multitude of actors from different fields to renew the institutions at the origin of the problem. Multi-stakeholder meta-organizations have been identified as suitable settings to initiate change in sustainability practices and governance. However, we still have little understanding of the micro-interactions between members with different worldviews and objectives when trying to transform institutions from within meta-organizations. The IW perspective has the potential to open this black-box by exploring *how do meta-organizations affect their heterogeneous members' collaborative institutional work as they attempt to address grand challenges*?

3. METHODS

I abductively apply theoretical insights from the IW literature to explore how meta-organizations affect their members' collaborative institutional work in an attempt to tackle Grand Challenges. Whilst abduction provides the flexibility associated with inductive research by grounding results in collected data, it also takes advantage of relying on former theoretical frameworks during the analysis process. Thus, the researchers can use concepts as 'a guideline when entering the empirical world' (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 558) while still considering unexpected observations that may remain unclear with a deductive approach. As such, abductive studies enable existing knowledge's extension and the insertion of original ideas.

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is based on a single, in-depth case study of the CollaB (all names are pseudonyms) meta-organization. Often used in organizational research (e.g. Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Laviolette et al., 2022; Michel, 2020; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), single case studies can provide rich and probing explanations of empirical phenomena (Burns, 2000), and are suited to explore "how" and "why" questions (R. K. Yin, 2003). They represent a relevant method to investigate emergent issues that have received little scholarly attention (ibid). This

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point is pertinent in my study as meta-organization 'research is still in its infancy' (Berkowitz et al., 2022, p. 8) and collaborative institutional work among heterogeneous actors may be considered an under-researched area (Hampel et al., 2017).

3.2. CASE SELECTION AND CONTEXT

I secured access to study CollaB's attempts at creating a new approach to tackling sustainable urban mobility based on collaboration between public and private actors. In the past, urban mobility had been the responsibility of public actors alone. Sustainable mobility is a challenge within sustainable city development, a United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United Nations, 2022), and requires actors from different sectors to collaborate to generate new practices. As such, the case represents a relevant field to conduct this research.

The case is rooted in a major French city whose airport zone represents the main employment area. 80.000 people commute every day to reach their job, generating traffic congestion and poor air quality. Independently, most of local firms implemented solutions such as car-pooling that never functioned properly, while public actors designed transport infrastructures that take years to implement. Acknowledging that their individual actions were not suited to solve the congestion problem, public actors and local employers collectively recognized that the traditional governance of mobility (handled by public actors) failed to address the issue and might benefit from more collaborative handling of the situation. The most important firms (JetcorP, AirhalL, TurbocorP, MotorcorP, and DevcorP) and a business-club (BusinesscluB) representing other companies approached the local city-council (LocalcouN) and transport authority (PubtranS) to devise common solutions. However, none of them were willing to invest significant resources in the project (Jonathan, 04.2020). In 2017, an opportunity occurred with a European agency's (UAE) call for projects aimed at developing sustainable urban mobility (UAE call, 12.2016). Actors decided to form a meta-organization, CollaB, that won a budget of 5.2 million euros to experiment with collective urban mobility governance.

The results section exposes how these heterogeneous members experienced tensions in their collaboration, and how the meta-organization's secretariat helped them to overcome these frictions to test urban mobility collaborative governance.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

Table 1 presents the data collection, combining semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival data, and explains how data were used in the analysis.

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3.3.1. Interviews

A set of 31 interviews amounting for 42 hours of records represents my main data source. A first round of interviews (from May 2018 to March 2019) was conducted with institutional affairs managers from the most important employer of the zone. Aimed at understanding their professional background, relationships with local government, and political and social issues driving their work, these interviews exposed urban mobility and CollaB as key issues on the local political agenda. I investigated the topic more thoroughly during second-round interviews (April 2019-March 2021). I interviewed all CollaB's representatives and secretariat staff to identify significant tensions among

members and day-to-day activities that were performed to construct the inter-field collaboration. As the grant received from an EU agency appeared significant in members' talks, I decided to interview two representatives directly involved in CollaB. Together, they offered a more 'critical' (Ursula, 06.2019) view of the work performed in the meta-organization and offered valuable confirmations or nuances. In a final phase, I contacted interviewees by e-mail or telephone inviting them to comment on the results.

Table 1: Data sources and data use during analysis

Data source	Type of data	Use of data in the analysis
Interviews	24 interviews with CollaB's members 4 interviews with CollaB's delegated staff (secretariat)	Understand institutional context Identify collaboration's existing tensions Identify day-to-day activities to install the collaboration Understand motivations behind actions
	3 interviews with third parties	Corroborate interviews with members and secretariat
Observations	5 Public Relations events	Understand interactions with external stakeholders Identify institutional outcome
Secondary data	1 UAE call for proposal and guidance documentation	Understand the benefits and constraints associated with the grant
	12 UAE Activity reports Institutional communication (websites, organization presentations, social media) 18 Local press articles	Understand social, economic, and political contexts Track implementation progress Identify institutional outcome Support evidence derived from interviews
Informal exchanges	Phone call/e-mail exchanges with CollaB members and secretariat	Share initial findings, obtain feedback, solicit further information

3.3.2. Observations

Observations represent a second, though important, source of primary data. I attended five public events organized by CollaB between October 2019 and March 2021. These events were significant in appraising how members presented their collaboration to a public audience. Occurrences of informal interactions with stakeholders – such as employees and MPs – and among members, as well as formal accounts of collaborative experiments advancements were documented. Finally, together with written reports, the closure ceremony that celebrated the end of EU funding provided important evidence of institutional outcomes and details regarding CollaB's continuation.

3.3.3. Secondary data

Finally, I conducted extensive tracking of publicly available information. CollaB's and members' websites and social media were reviewed to gain understanding of the meta-organization's mission and evolution. Local press articles provided evidence of the collaboration's concrete achievements. Multiple reports published by the EU agency served the same purpose and brought interesting insights regarding the longitudinal development of the collaboration as well as more reflexive elements about the best practices of collaborative mobility governance. Altogether, secondary data provided social, economic, and political contexts for the analysis
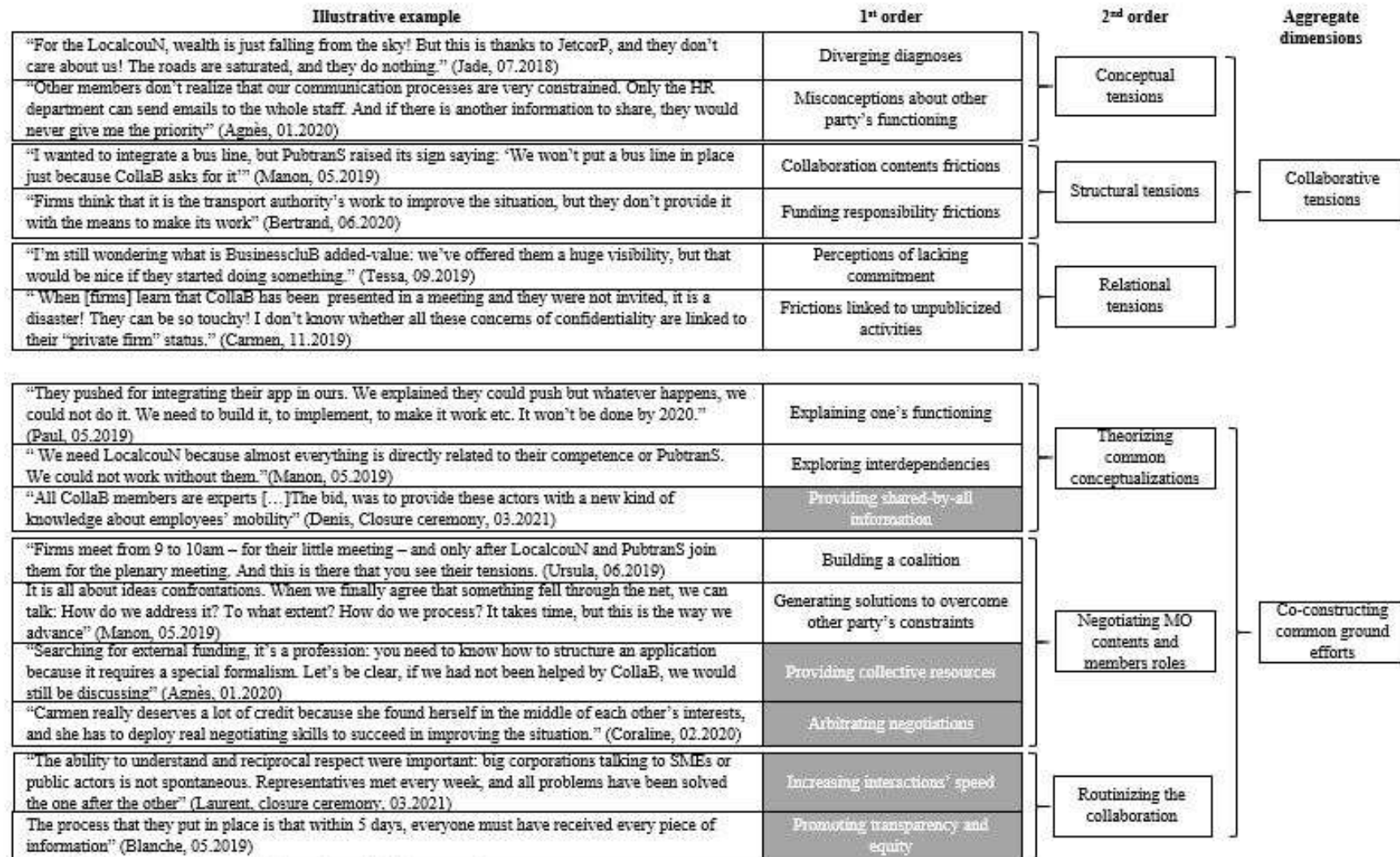
3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis process started by creating a detailed narrative able to synthesize my material while accounting for actors' different viewpoints (Dumez, 2016). It also provided an analytical chronology that helped me "to get on top of the data" (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 220) and enabled me to identify the importance of tensions between public and private actors as well as members' efforts to overcome these problems and the meta-organization secretariat's role to foster collaboration.

Inspired by the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013), I then coded the interviews and observations to capture the lived experience of my informants. Focusing on a collective of heterogeneous actors' work to change mobility governance from within a meta-organization, I inductively labeled sets of tensions related to members' heterogeneity, and actors' activities aimed at overcoming them. For instance, 'diverging diagnoses' or 'misconceptions about other party's functioning' represented first-order codes related to tensions; whilst 'explaining one's functioning' and 'exploring interdependencies' represented first-order codes linked to activities

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that members used to overcome their tensions. I looked for labels that remained close to the informants' statements while the abstraction process started with the phase of axial coding (Strauss, 1987). At this stage, emulating previous studies (e.g. Michel, 2020), I inductively clustered activities into categories of *types of efforts* and *types of tensions*. For instance, 'perceptions of lacking commitment' and 'frictions linked to unpublicized activities' were grouped as 'relational tensions'.

In the final coding phase, the different categories were interpreted in regard to the literature to derive aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, as a second-order label, 'Negotiating meta-organization's contents and members' role', inspired by Helfen & Sidow's (2013) study, captures the collaborative logic and institutional work associated with 'Generating solutions overcoming other party's constraints' (first-order code). Ultimately, the categories of efforts were aggregated in a common construct, 'co-constructing common ground' borrowed from Wijen & Ansari's (2007), which translates the collaborative work necessary for members to adopt a shared vision of their mission. Regarding tensions, I focused on the evaluative feature of grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015). For instance, the literature indicates that different actors may have different views about the problem's nature and solution, which I labeled as 'conceptual tensions'. Finally, these second-order categories were collated in the 'Collaborative tensions' aggregate. Figure 1 indicates the resulting data structure and additional supporting quotes.

Figure 1: Data structure

Illustrative example	1st order	2nd order	Aggregate dimensions
"For the LocalcouN, wealth is just falling from the sky! But this is thanks to JetcorP, and they don't care about us! The roads are saturated, and they do nothing." (Jade, 07.2018)	Diverging diagnoses	Conceptual tensions	Collaborative tensions
"Other members don't realize that our communication processes are very constrained. Only the HR department can send emails to the whole staff. And if there is another information to share, they would never give me the priority" (Agnès, 01.2020)	Misconceptions about other party's functioning		
"I wanted to integrate a bus line, but PubtranS raised its sign saying: 'We won't put a bus line in place just because CollaB asks for it'" (Manon, 05.2019)	Collaboration contents frictions	Structural tensions	
"Firms think that it is the transport authority's work to improve the situation, but they don't provide it with the means to make its work" (Bertrand, 06.2020)	Funding responsibility frictions		
"I'm still wondering what is BusinesscluB added-value: we've offered them a huge visibility, but that would be nice if they started doing something." (Tessa, 09.2019)	Perceptions of lacking commitment	Relational tensions	
"When [firms] learn that CollaB has been presented in a meeting and they were not invited, it is a disaster! They can be so touchy! I don't know whether all these concerns of confidentiality are linked to their "private firm" status." (Carmen, 11.2019)	Frictions linked to unpublicized activities		
"They pushed for integrating their app in ours. We explained they could push but whatever happens, we could not do it. We need to build it, to implement, to make it work etc. It won't be done by 2020." (Paul, 05.2019)	Explaining one's functioning	Theorizing common conceptualizations	Co-constructing common ground efforts
"We need LocalcouN because almost everything is directly related to their competence or PubtranS. We could not work without them."(Manon, 05.2019)	Exploring interdependencies		
"All CollaB members are experts [...]The bid, was to provide these actors with a new kind of knowledge about employees' mobility" (Denis, Closure ceremony, 03.2021)	Providing shared-by-all information		
"Firms meet from 9 to 10am – for their little meeting – and only after LocalcouN and PubtranS join them for the plenary meeting. And this is there that you see their tensions. (Ursula, 06.2019)	Building a coalition	Negotiating MO contents and members roles	
It is all about ideas confrontations. When we finally agree that something fell through the net, we can talk: How do we address it? To what extent? How do we process? It takes time, but this is the way we advance" (Manon, 05.2019)	Generating solutions to overcome other party's constraints		
"Searching for external funding, it's a profession: you need to know how to structure an application because it requires a special formalism. Let's be clear, if we had not been helped by CollaB, we would still be discussing" (Agnès, 01.2020)	Providing collective resources		
"Carmen really deserves a lot of credit because she found herself in the middle of each other's interests, and she has to deploy real negotiating skills to succeed in improving the situation." (Coraline, 02.2020)	Arbitrating negotiations		
"The ability to understand and reciprocal respect were important: big corporations talking to SMEs or public actors is not spontaneous. Representatives met every week, and all problems have been solved the one after the other" (Laurent, closure ceremony, 03.2021)	Increasing interactions' speed	Routinizing the collaboration	
The process that they put in place is that within 5 days, everyone must have received every piece of information" (Blanche, 05.2019)	Promoting transparency and equity		

Note: Shaded squares indicate activities performed by the secretariat

4. RESULTS

I begin my analysis by describing CollaB's key features. I then identify three forms of collaborative tensions emerging from the heterogeneous members' collaboration. In each case, I unpack how each tension was overcome thanks to specific efforts from members and the meta-organization's secretariat. Finally, I illustrate how these combined efforts enabled concrete testing and adaptation of urban mobility governance, and how the experiment results constituted symbolic institutional outcomes.

4.1. COLLAB'S KEY FEATURES

CollaB's mission involved experimenting with the 'collaborative management' (Suzanne, 12.2019) of urban mobility. Hoped to continue after the expiration of EU-level funding (Carmen, 04.2019), the meta-organization would allow its members to cooperate, coordinate and take joint decisions about mobility topics such as car-pooling, infrastructures, or remote working (CollaB launch leaflet, 09.2018). Member organizations appointed representatives to voice their position in collective decision-making, but also to be the CollaB 'ambassadors' within their home organizations (Carmen, 11.2019). To support the collective endeavor, human resources and information systems were made available to the meta- organization and can be considered elements of its secretariat. First, the City Council delegated a full-time employee and an external consultant to handle day-to-day management questions. Second, a digital platform combining data on member employees (e.g. home address, work address) associated with local infrastructures, weather, and real-time traffic was designed to predict commuting behavior and assess the efficiency of collective actions (Mobility trophy ceremony, 11.2019).

Members designed CollaB's structure to support the collaborative nature of their work. First, they relied on a consensus-based decision-making process. According to Paul (04.2020) 'in traditional public consultation, we listen to people, but we take decisions alone. With CollaB's collaborative governance we *must* leave the meeting with a common stand-point'. Second, members restricted the membership because 'any discussion already require[d] half an hour: 80% to understand each other, 20% to decide. [Members] didn't advance fast enough. That's why [they] did not want to integrate additional companies' (Manon, 05.2019). Finally, members adopted a system of rules and monitoring based on work packages that stated expected outcomes, established members' contributions, and checked progress of collaboration through bi-annual steering committee meetings. Despite these structuring efforts, members nonetheless faced significant issues that emerged from their respective public and private backgrounds. In

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the next sections, I unpack the tensions encountered, and the practices undertaken by members to overcome them.

4.2. ADDRESSING CONCEPTUAL TENSIONS: THEORIZING COMMON CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

4.2.1. Conceptual tensions

CollaB members faced differences in their conceptualization of the traffic congestion problem. Given their own experiences and organizational missions, public and private members adopted different understandings about the problem's nature and maintained misconceptions regarding each other's functioning. These differences prevented them from devising common solutions.

Public and private members reached different diagnoses concerning the nature of the problem at stake, and who was responsible for it. Private firms associated traffic congestion with their employees' deteriorating working conditions (Manon, 05.2019), and lamented public authorities' limited involvement to provide solutions. For instance, a firm's representative reported that, when asking the transport authority to increase capacity, she was told that nothing would be done because of budget restrictions (Agnès, 05.2019). Conversely, public actors were more concerned with the attractiveness of the local economy and long-term planning issues remarking that firms had not recognized their own responsibility in the current situation:

> Firms understood the territory as traffic jam, traffic jam and… oh, traffic jam. As experts, at PubtranS, we read the territory differently: traffic jam - for sure – but also upcoming urban projects and the economic and demographic dynamism. Because if the area is congested, it is not only the others' fault. […] Firms generate mobility, they are mobility actors. They should not come to us only to say: 'Do something because it is a mess outside my front door'. (Paul, 06.2019)

Members also had misconceptions about their respective organizational functioning and constraints. For instance, a firm's representative was underestimated by public actors when she invited an MP to discuss an upcoming law. The transport authority declared the MP would never accept the invite because protocol demanded that local councilors invited him. This sort of event being part of Blanche's job, she replied, outraged: 'where are we? this is the internet era, so I call him!' (05.2019). Conversely, private firms largely ignored constraints imposed by political decisions on public actors. For instance, after each local election, PubtranS proposes development plan for a vote in local councils. This plan fixes a framework of missions that

directs and limits the transport authority's action over a 6-year period. A secretariat member reports frictions between private actors and PubtranS because 'firms did not understand they could not do whatever they wanted but had to comply with PubtranS' politically-approved framework of missions' (Coraline, 02.2020). Furthermore, private members pushed for decisions that were inconsistent with the functioning of public entities. On one occasion, firms' representatives advocated for the transport authority to integrate an independent car-pooling digital platform into its mobile application – a suggestion that neither complied with public entities' regulations nor was consistent with PubTranS' economic model:

> They told us 'You just have to integrate their service into your application and business model'. But our business model is based on monitoring passengers volume. With a bus, we can estimate the cost for operating the line […] but with car-pooling, we can't: the private business model does not fit within the public one. (Paul, 06.2019)

Altogether, different diagnoses and misconceptions about their respective constraints led members to imagine non-implementable solutions. The lack of a common set of references generated 'frustrations' (Coraline, 02.2020) and created dead-ends detrimental to the shaping of collaborative mobility governance. Paul summarizes the situation: 'We don't speak the same language, […] this is where there are tensions: we can agree on a project, but we may not share the means to end up there. We don't share the same codes in the private and the public worlds.' (06.2019)

4.2.2. Collective effort to theorizing common conceptualizations

To address conceptual tensions, CollaB members made efforts to theorize common conceptualizations that would serve as the basis for collective decisions. 'Theorizing' relates to 'the development and specification of abstract categories, and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 226). To do so, (i) members educated others about their own constraints and (ii) explored their interdependencies to clarify the extent of their shared responsibility. For its part, the secretariat (iii) helped them by providing shared-by-all information.

Members' effort at explaining their functioning. Facing misunderstandings about potential solutions, members explained their specific organizational functioning to each other. Private members had to clarify internal processes to justify their constraints. For instance, a representative explained that he was unable to broadcast a promotional movie for the car-

pooling platform because his company would not allow materials that were not done in-house (Agnès, 01.2020). Public actors, in turn, faced constant challenges to their positions. First, their legitimacy as autonomous entities was not understood by all members. Blanche reports: 'I was certain that PubtranS took its directives from the LocalcouN, but they explained that they were a syndicate of different cities which made things more complicated' (05.2019). Second, public actors had to clarify their competencies in a complex web of multiple public entities operating across the territory:

> We have to explain the political governance of public entities. At the beginning, member
>
> firms had difficulties: 'You're in charge of public transportation, the Region is in charge
>
> of railroads, the Department of school transport and roads, but for us some roads depend
>
> on the city… This is a mess!' The firms have trouble figuring out the public governance
>
> because it is layered. So, we do lots of pedagogy. (Paul, 06.2019)

Members' effort at exploring interdependencies. Confronted with their different diagnoses, members explored how their opposing views could nurture each other's and combine to form a more homogeneous conceptualization. First, collaboration offers a stage to express criticisms regarding current solutions that prevented employees to change their habits. Years earlier, PubtranS developed a car-sharing solution whose adoption by employees failed despite firms' support. In CollaB meetings, companies blamed the lack of mobile applications and automated matching between drivers and travelers (Agnès, 05.2019). The transport authority 'understood why firms were not satisfied with [its] solution' (Paul, 06.2019) and encouraged them to bypass the problem by adopting a private alternative. Second, CollaB offered a space where members could share information to identify areas of coordination. For example, public actors presented the territorial dynamics and infrastructure projects, whilst companies exposed their development plans and supply flows (Paul, 06.2019; Thyphaine, 11.2019). Finally, exchanges raised members' awareness regarding their interdependencies, sharpening their understanding of how they could collaborate:

> Unlike associations, we, the firms, can create a resonance with public infrastructures.
>
> Regarding biking, my firm has made investments: we have doubled parking space for bikes,
>
> we created changing rooms and increased the number of lockers, and we added showers.
>
> (Thyphaine, 11.2019)

Secretariat's effort at providing shared-by-all-information. Alongside members' efforts to build a common frame of references, the secretariat provided supplementary capabilities that helped create shared diagnoses. That was the case of a digital platform that aggregated the employees' addresses and commuting habits whilst combining them with weather and public data. According to the platform developer, the challenge was to bring 'a new set of knowledge to members that were experts in their domains' (Closure ceremony, 03.2021; Press release, 01.2021). Through real-time evolving mappings, this collective asset offered renewed, data-driven information 'shared by all actors' that eased collaborative decision-making. Agnès (01.2020) reports an insight provided by the tool:

> Thanks to this platform, we have all discovered that cycling could represent a viable commuting alternative for 40% of our employees, whilst public transportation amounted to only 14%. I tell you that the cycling specialists in LocalcouN smile to us now!

Through their work at collectively building common conceptualizations, members overcame their conceptual tensions to an extent that allowed them to refine their understanding of collaboration obstacles and acceptable solutions. By providing aggregated information from all members, the secretariat offered elements that transcended individual conceptions and represented a robust consensus enabling shared diagnoses. Thyphaine (09.2019) illustrates these changes by acknowledging the modification in firms' perspectives regarding mobility: 'Who is turning the zone into an island? Mostly the zone's employees. Then, our firms must commit and offer solutions to make their life easier.'

4.3. ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL TENSIONS: NEGOTIATING THE MISSION'S CONTENT AND MEMBERS' ROLES

4.3.1. Structural tensions

Linked to their conflicting interests, members experienced structural tensions regarding their ambiguous roles, organizing principles and resource allocation models that hindered the development of their action. Indeed, their interests were not necessarily aligned, but consisted rather in '80% common interests' as assessed by an external auditor (Ursula, 06.2019). These disagreements manifested themselves in tensions regarding the collaboration's contents and funding responsibilities, and sometimes appeared related to diverging members' conceptualizations.

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First, diverging interests caused tensions related to the content of the collaboration. Often, due to conceptualization differences exposed above, members presented proposals that were non-implementable because of actors' specific constraints. Some ideas, however, generated interests' conflicts because they were perceived as 'interfering' with some partners' core business. Manon provides an interesting illustration:

> For PubtranS, the public transport topic is sensitive as we address their core business. Therefore, at start, it was not addressed within CollaB. But I personally pushed to integrate the topic and they were like "No way, we don't speak about this issue which is of our own responsibility and do not relate to CollaB." (05.2019)

Another structural tension related to role assignations, and who had to fund specific actions. As projects were implemented, members devised unplanned actions that required additional resources. The tension manifested in the contrast between private members' increasing 'ambitions' regarding collective actions and their reluctance to support the costs (Ursula, 06.2019). Such situations created frictions between firms and public actors about funding responsibilities, noteworthily rooted in different conceptions of each other's missions:

> The car-sharing should be thought at the city scale, not at the employer's. Until now, we handle it, but it is not our duty. It should be part of PubtranS' approach and strategies. (Jacques, 05.2019)

> Companies tend to think that public administrations are only there to provide money, but they have budgets and other priorities. We can't be everywhere. […] It is like the public sector should always be at their service (Carmen, 11.2019).

Related to conceptualization issues, such tensions over the content and funding responsibilities resulted in paralysis, preventing members from taking decisions. Laurent indicates: 'Often, CollaB meetings consisted of listening to two people saying 'We want to implement this and that' and PubtranS replying 'No, we already do that'. We need to adopt more constructive positions if we want to progress.' (09.2019)

4.3.2. Collective efforts to negotiate CollaB content and member roles

To overcome structural tensions described above, actors initiated collective efforts aimed at negotiating the mission of CollaB and its members' roles. 'Negotiating' represents attempts 'to

define or redefine the terms of their interdependence' (Helfen & Sydow, 2013; Walton & McKersie, 1991, p. 3). While members engaged in (i) structuring a coalition and (ii) generating solutions acceptable to all actors, the secretariat (iii) provided collective resources and (iv) arbitrated members' discussions.

Private members' efforts at building a coalition. Structuring a coalition of private members represented a first activity linked to negotiation efforts. As their collaboration within CollaB implied the creation of an inter-firm mobility plan, company representatives decided to arrange weekly meetings to discuss their projects and devise new developments away from public actors. Interviews suggest these activities resulted in the construction of an 'homogeneous' (Carmen, 11.2019) front of private firms. Private members used self-referencing metaphors such as 'the four musketeers' (Tessa, 09.2019) that translated a strong sense of cohesiveness, and used expressions translating their common purpose at influencing public actors: 'Will we finally make the local authorities understand that what they were doing before was not perfect?' (Blanche, 05.2019). According to Tessa (09.2019), this united front allowed firms to push for integrating new actions in CollaB. From the secretariat's point of view, the coalition appeared questionable:

> Sometimes I felt the firms were not working for CollaB, but rather for their own plans. There was CollaB and its money, fine. But they kept adding new issues and they were not playing by the rules of a collaboration, they were first gunning for their own plan. (Coraline, 02.2020).

Members' efforts at generating solutions to overcome other's constraints. Parallel to the confrontational effort associated to the logic of coalition, a more collaborative set of actions implied generating innovative solutions likely to navigate diverse organizational constraints and reluctances. First, members used the multi-stakeholder nature of CollaB to bypass regulative constraints associated to members' status. As PubtranS and LocalcouN were tied with complex fair-competition regulations, having them contract with a car-pooling service-provider was, at best, difficult. Private actors had no such difficulties: 'We worked as firms: we searched for the best options and put them to work. LocalcouN can't do so because they are constrained by competition regulations and may face lawsuits. As private firms, we can choose whatever we want' (Jacques, 05.2019). Second, when facing partners' reluctances, members navigated their irreconcilabilities to find an agreement. Manon was convinced that her employees faced a 'last kilometer issue' because of missing public transport options.

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Understanding that the transport authority would not provide additional services, she worked at finding an approach likely to convince PubtranS:

> CollaB's mission was about urban mobility, and I made a point that it was aberrant that we avoided the public transport issue. Then, we found a compromise to avoid interfering with PubtranS' competencies whilst still contributing to the debate. We made an audit of the service for all our premises, and we draw recommendations with PubtranS' help to ensure it was doable. We've managed to officially express our needs, step by step, through discussion. (Manon, 05.2019)

Secretariat's efforts at providing collective resources. The secretariat proved crucial in finding collective resources that alleviated tensions relative to funding responsibilities. As CollaB was emerging, secretariat staff delegated by LocalcouN had strong expertise in applying for external funding. According to Carmen (11.2019) '[at the Europe department] we have experience and knowledge about grant opportunities. Members came to us with ideas linked to a private-public mobility partnership, and we found the UAE call.' The application process required a specialist consultant's supervision who reworked the application to match EU expectations (Coraline, 02.2020) which led to success. Denis (05.2019) reports how CollaB's resources removed difficult conversations regarding funding responsibilities:

> No members would have financed [the digital platform] by themselves. In collaborations, actors tend to say 'wait, we won't put money in this, it will not be ours'. It's always someone else who must pay. At some point, there is a need for a third party to say 'this asset is important for our vision, I'll finance it'.

Secretariat's efforts at arbitrating negotiations. Secretariat employees used their position in CollaBmeetings to arbitrate between members. Working to 'surf over the precarious magic of collective action', the secretariat mission was to adopt a neutral posture and ensure that the collaboration unfolded correctly (Laurent, 10.2019). As such, managers in the secretariat had no power regarding decisions but acted to warn actors and overtly raise problems that had to be addressed (Carine, 12.2019; Carmen, 11.2019). They also represented 'valves' during animated conversations to stop escalating exchanges. Coraline testifies: 'Often, representatives shouted at each other or stopped coming to meetings so that we had to thump the table with our fists and say that these were not tolerable' (Coraline, 02.2020). Furthermore, when members were

too demanding and the discussions failed to reach conclusion, the secretariat staff served as 'treaties guardians' and recalled former agreements to bypass the situation:

> When [firms' representatives] are in meetings and push too much for integrating new projects, I have to tell them that we committed to implement things and that we should first do these things. I put them back in their place. Often it translates in 'Oh we could ask PubtranS to do that' and I say: 'It is absolutely not in CollaB's mission so far'. This way, we advance. (Carmen, 11.2019)

Through their negotiating efforts, members and the secretariat try to overcome structural tensions that emerged from misaligned interests. Thus, conflictual situations strengthened by collective oppositions can generate consensual solutions. The secretariat provides valuable support to this endeavor by removing some issues related to collective assets financing, and by moderating members' discussions. Jacques (05.2019) summaries the situation:

> In the end, the logic associated to collaborative work is not 'I'm right and you're wrong' it is rather 'we have an issue that exists, what do we do about it'. All those fights and confrontations are useful to define the best compromise.

4.4. ADDRESSING RELATIONAL TENSIONS: THE ROUTINIZING MISSION OF THE SECRETARIAT

4.4.1. Relational tensions

Frictions can emerge from the quality of the relationships between individual representatives. In CollaB, these tensions were mostly related to trust issues and emerged in concerns regarding partners' commitment and transparency. Such relational tensions were deeply interwoven with conceptual and structural tensions, emerging as more latent though as important features.

Relational tensions manifested themselves first in member suspicions regarding others' commitments. Interviewees shared concerns regarding the reality of their partners' involvement. In CollaB's early life, firms appeared to others as 'having no intention to spend time nor money until the grant was received' (Coraline, 02.2020). However, for companies, this behavior was consistent with their organizational functioning. Agnès (01.2020) questions: 'as AirhalL environment manager, what legitimacy would I had to spend hours on urban mobility? I was only able to sell it internally because it was backed with a budget'. Thus, interrogating members' commitment seems also linked to misconceptions regarding their organizational

constraints. A similar pattern appears between private and public actors. Because of time-consuming processes and administrative burdens, LocalcouN took eight months to appoint a secretariat manager (Carmen, 11.2019). Companies interpreted this delay negatively:

> LocalcouN and PubtranS did not believe in the collaboration. Not only didn't they believe
>
> in it, but for one year they did not provide human resources and they were digging their
>
> heels in! (Agnès, 05.2019)

Secrecy about non-publicized activities also appeared as a primary concern that affected members' trust toward each other. For instance, PubtranS developed a car-pooling experiment away from the airport zone. Firms 'became angry' (Blanche, .05.2019) when they learned about it, because they feared this project would negatively affect their own car-pooling experiment. For them, PubtranS was promoting its own interests at the expense of the collaboration, which contrasted with the fair-competition rules the transport authority used as a justification (Jacques, 05.2019). Blanche lamented: 'If we do something collegial, they should have explained beforehand' (05.2019). Public actors and the secretariat raised comparable concerns regarding private actors' regular closed meetings. Indeed, they noticed the secret activities performed in the coalition of private firms, which they perceived as an unfair behavior:

> Normally we were not supposed to create new projects within CollaB. But private actors
>
> organized themselves and develop their own plans in the inter-firms' meetings. They build
>
> new contacts, meet people, and they report what can be reported in plenary sessions. But
>
> we never know what happened in these closed meetings. I should have been allowed to
>
> attend these meetings, for my own understanding, see what they talk about, what happens,
>
> what are the problems. But PubtranS and I are cordially not invited. […] I feel it is
>
> somewhat unhealthy (Carmen, 11.2019)

Overall, despite seeming disconnected from matters discussed within CollaB, relational tensions appeared related to other sets of frictions. Relationships among members were affected by suspicion that were likely to affect, in turn, members' effort to navigate their differences regarding their conceptualizations and interests. As such, the conflictive nature of representatives' interactions indirectly influenced collaboration efforts in a way that could threaten achievements. Julien (03.2019) remarks: 'When collaborating, you face peculiar

relationships with people, and it is necessary that people like and respect each other to put nice things in place.'

4.4.2. Secretariat efforts to routinize collaboration

Addressing the relational tensions required activities aimed at 'routinizing' members' interactions. According to Lawrence & Suddaby (2006, p. 233), 'routinizing' implies 'actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day-to-day routines and organizational practices'. Interestingly, such activities were performed by the secretariat and involved structurally increasing the number of interactions among members and providing a working framework that promoted transparency and some sense of equity among members. Such efforts proved essential to improve collaboration.

Secretariat's efforts at increasing the speed of interactions. The secretariat created mechanisms to increase the number of occasions members could exchange. According to initial rules, members had only to meet in bi-annual "steering committees" that made 'offloading disagreements unlikely' owing to the presence of representatives' hierarchy (Carine, 09.2019). In between these meetings, members multiplied inefficient interactions. CollaB's manager reports that 'given the multiple projects and the needs for dialog, we were destined to spend our whole lives in meetings' (Carmen, 11.2019). Emulating the example of private members, the secretariat organized informal, plenary, weekly meetings. They represented a necessary means to support 'upstream work with lots of discussions' (*ibid*) to be ready for steering committees. Members agree that 'these frequent and regular meetings helped to make [their] initial preconceptions [about collaboration] evolve' (Closure ceremony, 03.2021). These meetings also changed members' opinion about each other. For instance, whilst PubtranS' representative was perceived as 'really critical at start, he radically changed' (Tessa, 09.2019), even appearing as a positive force: 'all of us appreciate working with Paul, he accelerates our discussions' (Thyphaine, 11.2019). Finally, members' recurrent interactions led to inter-personal attachment:

> In my whole career, it is the first time that I find myself with external people half a day each week. It creates something. I would feel weird should it end. It makes you want to participate in other collaborative management systems, and I think it is something we all share – which was not obvious at start. (Agnès, 01.2020)

Secretariat's efforts at promoting transparency and equity. The secretariat also designed a working framework that ensured information circulated among members, and that equity in conversations was promoted. Private actors were particularly concerned with transparency issues, a criticism that became so important that it justified weekly meetings whose 'goal is to share information, because otherwise firms would have been the first to cry they were not informed' (Coraline, 02.2019). As such, the secretariat created a constraining process to improve transparency (Figure 2). Carine (12.2019) reports 'The weekly meetings and the process were not thought necessary at start, but when you've got your nose to the grindstone, you may forget to inform others who feel you are not involved'. Another virtue offered by the procedure was to ensure a certain degree of equity. The diversity of members in terms of size, could have brought power issues. However, according to Carmen (11.2019): 'JetcorP they are 40.000 vs. DevcorP with 300 employees, but the JetcorP's representative won't have bigger slots or space to talk in the weekly meeting, they all have the same'.

According to my data, addressing the relational tensions was an activity handled by the secretariat. Through creating high-frequency meetings between bi-annual steering committees, the secretariat encouraged representatives to build deeper relationships. It also improved exchanges that became essential to share their functioning and alter their previous misconceptions, thereby benefitting the efforts performed to theorize common conceptualizations. Furthermore, the secretariat gave representatives space to oppose their interests away from their hierarchies, which enabled constructive conflicts resulting in consensual decisions. This feature was further strengthened by clear processes that promoted a certain degree of transparency and equity allowing all members to express freely. In later

Figure 2: Weekly meeting procedure (adapted from interviews Carmen, 04.2019; 11.2019; Manon, 05.2019)

Weekly meeting procedure

1. Before Wednesday, members express their will regarding the agenda
2. Wednesday, secretariat manager shapes the agenda according to members' will
3. Thursday, the agenda is sent to all members and uploaded on the working platform
4. Friday's meeting.
   a. Firms' closed meeting: 9.00-10.30 a.m.
      i. Round table – 5 minutes per member
      ii. Working session
   b. Plenary meeting: 10.30 – 12.30 a.m.
      i. Round table – 5 minutes per member
      ii. Project 1. – Presentations, potential discussion and collegial decision
      iii. Project 2. – Presentations, potential discussion and collegial decision
      iv. Project n. – Presentations, potential discussion and collegial decision
   c. Minutes of meeting written, sent to members and uploaded on the working platform

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periods, members demonstrated advanced degrees of trust that translated in procedural improvements. For instance, after lamenting the burden that represented the decision processes in her firm, Agnès reports:

> In other collaborations or even for internal projects, you need to have your decisions validated by your boss, your president and by an internal committee. In CollaB, things became much more agile. When other members need an authorization, we tell them "Yes, go with it, we won't go through the whole process". We sometimes derogate from our internal rules. At the start, CollaB implied arduous processes, but now, it became an accelerator. (01.2020)

4.5. INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOME: TESTING THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Thanks to their theorizing, negotiating, and routinizing efforts, CollaB's members and secretariat overcame their tensions and were able to concretely experiment with collaborative mechanisms for addressing urban mobility.

The theorizing, negotiating and routinizing efforts performed by members and the secretariat created a common ground that laid the foundations for implementing collaborative decisions. Cycling, an issue that was initially not addressed in CollaB, represents a fair illustration. As their work advanced, private members in the inter-firms' meetings considered biking as a promising solution. As a coalition, they tried to negotiate the meta-organization's content but

failed at convincing others who replied 'this issue is not in CollaB' (Tessa, 09.2019). It was only once the secretariat – thanks to the digital platform - provided new information suggesting its high potential, that public members agreed that cycling could be a valuable solution, and modified their co-constructed conceptualization (Agnès, 01.2020). Unfortunately, as this project was unexpected, resources were lacking for its implementation (Manon, 05.2019). This episode happened after the secretariat decided to routinize members' interactions through multiple meetings and pacified the difficult relationship between the transport authority and private members: 'With PubtranS, oh boy! It was complicated. But now, they have completely changed their position. All that to say that when we work together, at some point, we converge' (Agnès, 01.2020). Noticing the funding difficulties and appraising its own interest to support biking (Paul, 06.2019), the transport authority generated a solution that overcame the collective's constraints and negotiated its role to provide the resources needed for the project (Thyphaine, 11.2019). Through the combination of theorizing conceptualizations, negotiating content and roles, and routinizing collaboration efforts, members succeeded to test in real conditions whether providing rentable bicycles and improved cycling infrastructures increased employees' use of alternative transportation means (press article, 10.2020).

'Testing' represents important moments where members confronted their plans with their concrete effects. Such moments could trigger the revision of strategies, thereby requiring to adapt common ground co-construction, or could represent successes that would constitute symbolic outcomes.

In a first place, testing could trigger the revision of the constructed common ground. For instance, when unsatisfied with implementation results, members revised their plans, as explained by Blanche (05.2019): 'we take reports and take resolutions even if sometimes we revise them because three weeks later, we realize that we were not following the right path'. But interestingly, implementations could also reveal new problems that required adapting the common shared vision. For instance, Whilst the cycling project was advancing, private members faced their HR departments' reluctancy to promote cycling among employees (Manon, 05.2019). Indeed, in France, employers are liable for employees' accidents if they happen during the journey between home and work. As cycling appeared more dangerous than other transportation means, private members' interests were threatened by the new project. This fact triggered new theorizing and negotiation efforts that resulted in training offers for employees:

> Before promoting cycling, we have to train people because the 'accidentology' is also about
>
> behavior. When people take their bike, they go through red lights, they ride on sidewalks.
>
> We have to educate bikers to decrease the risk of accidents. (Manon, 05.2019)

Ultimately, testing and adapting their actions provided members with evidence that collaborative approaches to urban mobility brought conclusive results and could be transferred to other territories. The first years of CollaB's action resulted in a 9% decrease of employees' single use of cars, which members saw as a success (Closure ceremony, 03.2021; Press article, 03.2021; Press release, 03.2021). Such figures appeared as a symbolic outcome that members could use to consolidate their action. Anticipating the future, Tessa (09.2019) shared: 'when the EU grant expires, if we want to have budgets to continue, we will have to demonstrate that CollaB had impacts. […] When I will have to defend that internally, I will be able to say that within three years, there were 100 new cyclists - it is 10% of our employees – and it will help me.' According to a UAE expert's report (01.2021): 'CollaB continues to implement actions that are 100% financed by partners', indicating lasting commitment to urban mobility collaborative governance. Public authorities have expressed their desire to emulate CollaB's example in other parts of the city:

> Based on [CollaB's results], it is obvious that partnership and dialog are keys to success. It
>
> is together, public actors and firms, that we have to work for reducing traffic congestion
>
> and preserve air quality. (PubtranS CEO, Closure ceremony, 03.2021)

> And thanks to PubtranS, we now have to duplicate CollaB over our whole territory.
>
> (LocalcouN vice-president, Closure ceremony, 03.2021)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Addressing grand challenges requires collaboration of actors from different fields to shape new taken-for-granted practices that move away from their failing predecessors. Though meta-organizations appear suitable spaces to achieve such a mission, little is known about the micro-interactions between their members who may not share worldviews. These interactions may generate significant tensions that hinder collaboration. The IW perspective has potential to shed light on these tensions and how actors navigate them. As such, my study explores how meta-organizations affect their heterogeneous members' collaborative IW as they attempt to tackle

grand challenges. To do so, I investigated the CollaB case, a meta-organization created to experiment with a novel public-private approach to urban mobility governance.

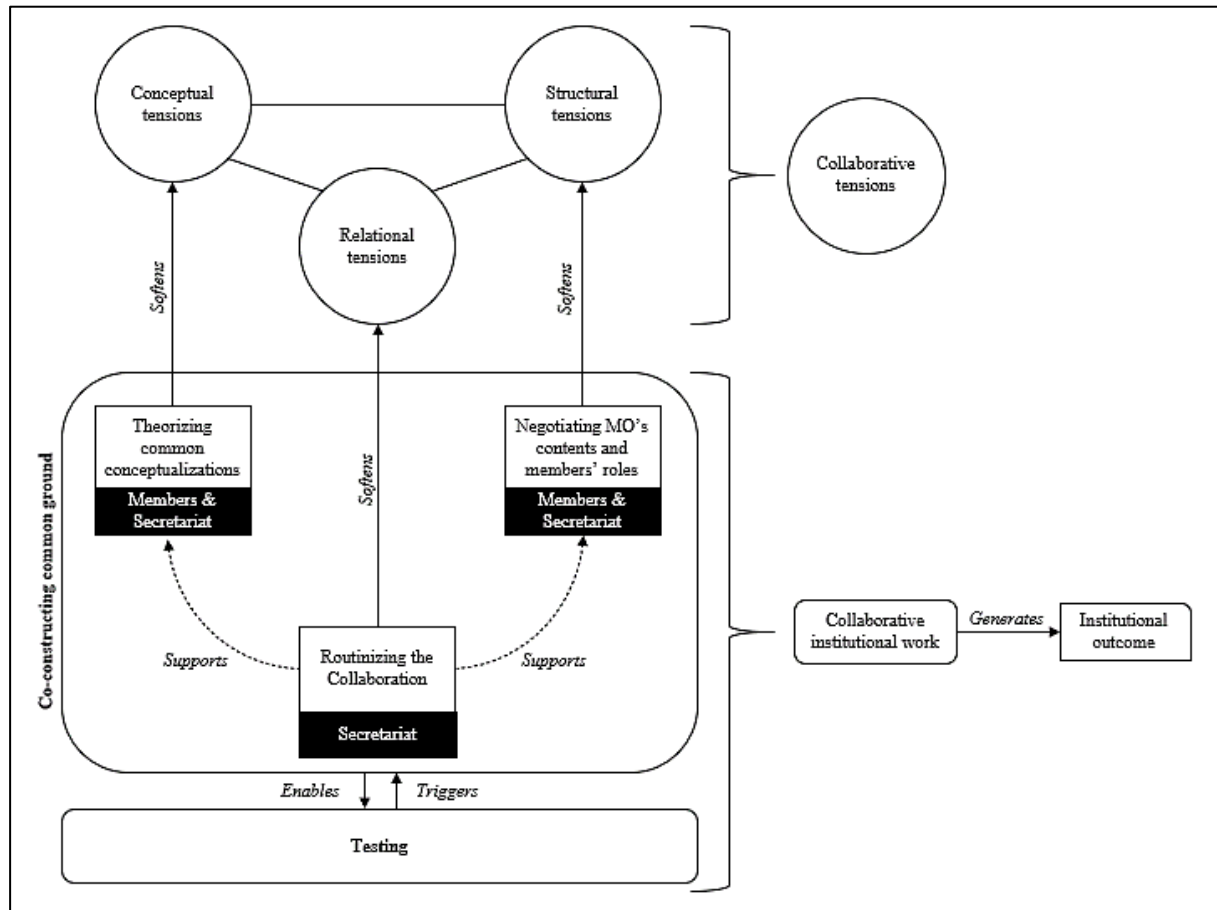**Figure 2:** Collaborative institutional work in multi-stakeholder meta-organizations

Figure 2 summarizes the key findings. When collaborating in meta-organizations, heterogeneous members face a set of intricated tensions that hampers the testing of a collective approach to urban mobility governance. These tensions are addressed through the effort of co-constructing a common ground – a collection of three practices that ultimately lead members to adopt a shared vision of their collective missions and roles. Performed by members and supported by the secretariat, 'theorizing common conceptualizations' practices tackle members' conceptual divergences by homogenizing their diagnoses regarding the situation and possible solutions. Accomplished by the same actors, 'negotiating the meta-organization's content and members' role' practices address structural tensions by allowing members' to agree on a unified collective strategy. Finally, through 'routinizing the collaboration' practices, the meta-organization's secretariat softens relational tensions among members by enforcing a working framework suitable to collaboration. It also supports the other sets of practices by improving representatives' relationships. The co-construction of a common ground enables the

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concrete development of testable experiments. Such 'testing' confronts members with the material consequences of their decisions and may trigger the need to revise their shared vision and adapt their plans. Evidence of the collaboration efficacy constitutes symbolic institutional outcomes that members may mobilize to maintain their contribution and expand collaborative urban mobility governance to other spaces.

5.1. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE META-ORGANIZATION LITERATURE

Findings contribute to the meta-organization literature in three ways. First, this study deepens understandings of meta-organization influence over institutions by reporting the micro-level phenomena that affects members' purposeful crafting of new institutions. At the macro-level, meta-organizations have been depicted as institutional change agents that shape conceptual definitions (Vifell & Thedvall, 2012), change cultural norms (Le Bianic & Svensson, 2010) or affect field boundaries (Laurent et al., 2020). Without referring to IW literature, Carmagnac & Carbone (2019) report activities performed by a multi-stakeholder meta-organization to institutionalize sustainable palm oil supply chains, but do not provide a detailed account of members' interactions. In line with former research, my study indicates that meta-organizations are significant actors in the creation of new institutions. However, it stretches our understanding by specifically exposing the detailed, purposeful actions that heterogeneous actors perform to shape future institutions. Indeed, confronted with collaborative tensions, members' representatives perform a set of activities aimed at generating consensual agreements (e.g. 'exploring interdependencies') whilst promoting their interests (e.g. 'building a coalition'). However, members' confrontational negotiations may impose to revise their previous conceptualization in a back-and-forth movement, thus revealing the importance and complexities of representatives' functions in achieving an arrangement. As such, institutions that emerge from a meta-organization appear to be the result of a careful crafting performed by members' representatives during the 'co-constructing common ground' effort. These elements recall that the creation of institutions through institutional work is as much about intentionality as it is about individual effort (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), revealing the micro-level processes in meta-organizations' functioning.

Second, this research expands our knowledge of meta-organizations as neutral spaces by specifically surfacing the role played by the secretariat in softening tensions between members. Existing literature evokes meta-organizations as neutral spaces allowing the internalization and neutralization of conflicts (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Dumez,

2015). These studies indicate benefits derived from neutrality (like eased dialog), but do not engage with the tactics and mechanisms used at the practice-level to overcome inter-member tensions. By contrast, my research not only reveals members' activities to overcome the tensions emerging from their collaboration, but also exposes the important actions undertaken by the secretariat to prevent and manage conflicts. Despite remaining neutral in decisions taken by the collective, the secretariat provides information that helps members move away from their own visions to adopt a renewed collective diagnosis. The secretariat also arbitrates and balances negotiation exchanges while imposing behavioral conventions that pacify members' interactions. My research thus suggests that meta-organizations may appear more as 'curated' spaces - cautiously monitored by the secretariat - than mere neutral spaces. This finding also complements Roux & Lecoq's (2022) call for further studying the secretariat as an 'essential' constitutive element of meta-organizations. Whilst these authors provide the example of a powerful secretariat that represents a 'necessary evil' (p.73) to support collective action, this research presents a rather 'weak' secretariat with little agency to constrain member-organizations. Still, its activities remain crucial to support collaboration, indicating that low prerogative levels do not preclude secretariat's significant actions.

The CollaB case also contributes to on-going debates about the dynamism of meta-organizations. Whilst some studies have pointed to meta-organizational adaptability (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019; Cropper & Bor, 2018; Laurent et al., 2020; Peixoto & Temmes, 2019), other have emphasized their inertia due to increased bureaucratization over time (Vifell & Thedvall, 2012) and consensus-based decision-making (König et al., 2012). The CollaB case provides an illustration of the evolving dimension of inertia in meta-organizations. In early stages, members' representatives reported difficult and long discussions to reach a consensus. However, they also described a drastic change in later phases. Contrary to König et al.'s (2012) who suggest moderate meeting frequency can counterbalance inertia in homogenous meta-organizations, all participants in CollaB associated this improved efficiency with the secretariat's 'routinizing collaboration' practices and the increased pace of meetings. These elements suggest that the dynamic dimension of meta-organization inertia could be associated with their multi-stakeholder nature. Over time, the 'co-constructing common ground' efforts enabled members to integrate each other's constraints which decreased the time lost in 'explaining one's functioning' activity. Also, the improved quality of the relationships between representatives seems to have encouraged them to occasionally bypass their home organizations' administrative processes to simplify collective action.

5.2. CONTRIBUTION TO INSTITUTIONAL WORK LITERATURE

The case study brings three contributions to the IW literature. First, I build on existing research, which suggests the importance of free spaces to enable collaborative IW, by specifically pointing to meta-organizations as relevant forms to support IW. Former studies (Delacour & Leca, 2017; Michel, 2020; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) have highlighted that purposive collaborations to affect social change may benefit from 'free' or 'relational spaces' as 'areas of isolation, interaction and inclusion' (Kellogg, 2009, p. 657). Though useful concepts, free spaces remain ambiguous theoretical constructs that can be applied to a vast variety of empirical elements (e.g. physical spaces, virtual spaces, linguistic codes, organizations, subcultures (Polletta, 1999). This renders the connection between free spaces features and their effect over IW difficult. By contrast, I identify meta-organizations as organizational architectures and collective entities (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022) that constitute specific forms of free spaces suitable to conduct IW. As a meta-organization, CollaB creates the structure that links public and private actors whilst isolating their interactions from the outside world. Within meta-organizations, representatives can confront their visions far from their hierarchies' sight and in an atmosphere of relative equity supported by the secretariat's working framework and the consensual decision-making process. This context appears relevant to 'co-constructing common-ground' as it preserves members' autonomy – as illustrated by PubtranS' frequent refusal to implement private actors' proposals - whilst encouraging them to collaborate (e.g. 'generating solutions overcoming other party's constraints'). While confirming the importance of free spaces, this study thus draws attention to more specific organizational conditions under which actors perform collaborative IW. Focusing on organizational architectures allows to generate insights linking structural features (e.g. heterarchy, membership) and their effect over IW.

Second, this study extends the understanding of shared vision co-construction by integrating the work of supportive entities dedicated to the collective endeavor. Prior studies paying attention to the works performed by heterogeneous actors emphasize the role of diverging worldviews, objectives, and languages (e.g. Michel, 2020; Wijen & Ansari, 2007; J. Yin & Jamali, 2021). Such elements generate tensions specific to inter-field collaborations that actors must address. In line with these studies, I highlight the importance of 'co-creating common-ground' efforts whose goal is generating a vision largely shared by the actors. However,

previous research focuses attention on the activities performed by actors directly involved in the co-creation process (e.g. Michel, 2020; Wijen & Ansari, 2007). By contrast, this study sheds light on the activities performed by neutral entities devoted to supporting actors' collaboration efforts. Whilst CollaB members actively work at 'theorizing common conceptualizations' and 'negotiating meta-organization's contents and members' roles', they are affected by the subtle help of the secretariat in 'providing shared-by-all information' or 'arbitrating negotiations', for example. Additionally, CollaB's staff conducts alone the 'routinizing collaboration' practices for the sole benefit of members. Thus, by differentiating between members and the secretariat, and identifying a new category of actors involved in collaborative IW, my results illustrate the interdependence and interwoven nature of actions directly targeted at the creation of institutions, and actions aimed at supporting this creation.

Third, in line with the previous contribution, the research deepens our knowledge about the nature of 'creating common ground' efforts by emphasizing its dynamic and partial dimensions. The literature addressing 'creating common ground' stresses its importance in contexts where heterogeneous members collaborate (Hampel et al., 2017; Michel, 2020; Wijen & Ansari, 2007). However, it is depicted as a seemingly linear process that, once performed, enables actors to continue their actions (Michel, 2020). I offer another perspective by pointing that testing triggers new needs to co-construct a common ground. Indeed, when implementing their actions, members assess their efficiency. This can encourage them to revise their previous decisions and adapt their vision accordingly. For instance, when implementing their biking decisions in the real world, representatives realized that HR colleagues would not promote cycling for liability reasons, potentially decreasing the project's potential. As the implementations advanced, problems that were not previously identified emerged and forced members to refine their common vision. In the biking case, the new constraint identified by private members led to affect the 'theorizing' by introducing the notion of accidentology and triggered new needs for 'negotiating' by adding employee training courses focused on cycling issues. As such, this study illuminates the iterative dimension of 'co-constructing common ground' which does not represent a fixed integrated vision of the situation at stake. Rather, it constitutes a set of interrelated statements that requires constant revision as collaboration unfolds.

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