

**COLLECTIVE INNOVATION IN LOCAL IDENTITIES
AS LINKED TO INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EQUIVALENCE POSITIONS :
THE ENLIGHTENING CASE OF WINE COOPERATIVES IN LANGUEDOC
(FRANCE)**

Y.CHIFFOLEAU

*INRA-SAD / UMR Innovation
2 place Viala 34 060 Montpellier Cedex 2, France – chiffole@ensam.inra.fr*

Abstract

To analyse and understand the current dynamics of innovation in French rural areas, one has to overcome some of the underlying preconceptions, usual in rural sociology during the 1970s and 1980s, adapted to the objectives and content of an agriculture now out of date. The basic principle of those former approaches - “innovation is produced by interactions” - still stands, but the question is then how to analyse what kind of interactions are relevant today, and why and how they work. An empirical study of the recent innovation dynamics in Languedoc wine cooperatives, based on network sociology, and structural interactionism particularly, produces new insights and enables the building of a renewed theoretical and methodological framework that fits the current or still-to-come processes. Indeed, Languedoc viticulture constitutes an exemplary case for a prospective analysis of the on-going trends throughout Europe and particularly in France. This paper presents the different stages of a field work developed between 1997 and 2000 and stresses the network data production and processing methods developed, which both drove and were driven by a theoretical progression.

Key-words : innovation, cooperative, viticulture, network sociology

Introduction

This paper aims at proposing a renewed sociological framework designed to analyse and to understand the current dynamics of innovation in the French rural environment. This one cannot be placed on the opposite end of the spectrum from the typical urban environment anymore (Offner, Pumain, 1996).

Its definition as a conglomeration of villages functioning along a “gemeinschaft” pattern (Tönnies, 1944), inhabited by a homogenous population of farmers who implement exclusively technical changes does not grasp the current situation.

The evolution of agricultural and rural societies in the globalisation frame is so much the more impressive that the French “Agriculture Orientation Law” of 1999 assigned new functions to agriculture : production of quality ; environment-friendly management of the territory ; generation of employment. Those trends prompt rural households to keep on diversifying the ways they carry out their agricultural activities (Laurent, 1995). Moreover, those new functions of agricultural not only rely on the implementation of new types of innovations within farming systems and processing firms, but they also rely on the development of new methods for their management.

Indeed, agricultural producers and processing firms are driven towards complex and “radical” innovations (Freeman, Perez, 1988) that do not fit anymore to the “modernisation” or intensification patterns. In order to develop quality productions, the changes have to occur simultaneously in the technical domain as well as in the organisational one (Allaire, Sylvander, 1997). Moreover, innovations carried out by individual farmers are increasingly

finding themselves embedded in collective groups - organisations, producers' groups, commodity chains, territorial projects - that can be seen as "systems of organised action" (Friedberg, 1992). The Languedoc wine sector, as an important and dynamic agricultural sector managed by cooperatives firms gathering heterogeneous producers involved in a "quality revolution" (Touzard, 1996), asserts itself as an exemplary field to analyse such new kinds of dynamics, from a sociological standpoint. A first stage of qualitative research led to question a structural approach, inherited from frameworks developed in rural sociology in the 60s-80s and assuming preconceptions not fitted with the current content and objectives of agriculture. If the basic principle of those former approaches - "innovation is produced by interactions" - still stood, the question was, in a second stage mobilising network sociology, to know what kind of interactions are relevant today in view of collective innovation, why and how they work and how to analyse them. By presenting the iterative research programme in Languedoc through, for each stage, i) hypotheses, ii) data production, iii) data processing, iv) questions, this paper highlights the "grounded" building of a renewed theoretical and methodological framework (Glaser, Strauss, 1967) that may better fit the current or still-to-come processes in French rural settings. This framework sheds new light on the sociology of innovation in rural environments and enables the development of network sociology in such environments while also giving practical orientations for innovation management within collective settings.

1. First stage : collective innovation as linked to the morphology of the professional network

1.1. The Languedoc wine cooperatives, exemplary case to study current innovations in rural settings

Agriculture in Languedoc has been developed as both a familial and a market-oriented activity since the beginning of the century and still stands as one of the main economic sectors of the region, mainly based on viticulture. The wine regional sector has undergone a drastic change in the last ten years, from mass to quality production. This market-driven "quality revolution" encompasses a wide range of radical and complex innovations, in matter of technical subjects and organisation within the grape production units (final uprooting of 20% of the vineyard, introduction of new varieties, new cultural techniques) as well as in the cellars (in matter of supply management, processing and marketing). Cooperative firms are the main managers of this transition, as organisations dominating the sector since the 30s and still claiming for 75% of the regional production and 90% of the vine-growers in the 90s. From the framework of a "social movement" (Oberschall, 1973) in the 60s-70s, with members' demonstrations enabling the maintenance by lobby on State of a profitable mass production although less and less adapted to the demand, these organisations evolved to "producers' groups", gathering very heterogeneous people (numerous and diverse part-timers) for pragmatic economic reasons rather than around a political common project ("weak" vs. "strong" commitment). In this context, the challenge consists, for their leaders, in promoting co-ordinated changes both at the firm and farm levels, in order to cope with the new markets requirements (red premium variety wines). However, in such an egalitarian and democratic organisation as the cooperative ("one man, one vote"), collective action around an innovative project has to be driven without strong sanctions towards free-riding (Olson, 1965), voice or apathy (Bajoit, 1988) in order to limit exit to wineries (private vinification firms), which are developing in Languedoc. In 1996, many coops' Boards were complaining about strong difficulties in dealing with such a challenge, even those who implemented differentiated payment systems to boost the transition by "pioneers". A firm (Puisserguier), quite early and radically involved in the quality revolution, asked for help to INRA researchers, with whom

they had collaborated before, in the framework of the regional action-research programmes developed by INRA (INRA-DADP).

Languedoc wine cooperatives thus appear as an exemplary field to question the conditions and modalities of “together innovation”, currently developed in French rural areas, construed, along Livet and Thévenot’s categories of collective action (Livet, Thévenot, 1994), as the implementation of co-ordinated changes by more and more heterogeneous people linked to an organised action system and contributing to its productive project, but not necessarily to a “collective project” along a voluntary way, and who may not know each other.

1.2. Social networks reviewed as the key factor both for innovation and collective action

From a sociological standpoint, “together innovation” in rural areas constitutes a research question at the interface between two research fields : “innovation” on the one hand, particularly of that in rural lands, and “collective action” on the other hand. Rather than a review of the different theoretical developments in each of these research fields, we focus on precisely what emerges at the interface, in other words, the role played by social networks. In rural sociology, social networks were first considered as diffusion vectors of innovations imported from the outside and brought into the group (Ryan, Gross, 1943). The innovation spreads along an epidemiological model (Rogers, 1962), from primary interactions between prescriptors and “pioneers”, identified as the farmers with the highest socio-economic status and with important cosmopolitanism (Mendras, 1967). Adoption of the new item by the other farmers is a function of the time required to become aware of the item and then to mobilise the resources for its implementation. In a second time, from the “convergence process” highlighted by Rogers and Kincaid (1981) along which communication contributes to the production of a common language which remains at the basis of every action, Darré developed the following approach : the exchanges of technical dialogue between farmers leads to the production of knowledge allowing the development of a (more or less exogenous) innovation within a “local professional group” of “peers” (Darré, 1996). In this framework, the capacity of collective innovation is seen as dependent on the morphology of the technical dialogue network of producers and could be evaluated by an exhaustive study of all these exchanges at the group level (Darré *et al.*, 1989). More precisely, a group structured in “clusters” linked by “weak” ties, along Granovetter’s definition (1973), should be more likely to develop a common innovation in a short time. Furthermore, along the descriptions made, “clusters” are generally composed of people sharing both an economic proximity (similarity of production resources) and a geographic proximity.

At the same time, works on collective action highlight that social networks take part in the regulation of organised action. Interactions encourage the development of social representations, particularly of a “common knowledge” base of collective action (Lewis, 1969). At the same time, they promote the learning of both the rules of the organisation and the work procedures (Ponssard, 1994). Finally, they give rise to the development of individual innovations useful for the common project, or, at least, compatible with its main orientations by enabling the legitimisation of the rules (Reynaud, 1989). More generally, relationships contribute to develop and to keep trust (Orléan, 1994) within a group and encourage the exercise of a collective pressure that limits the recourse to “heroic” sanctions (Coleman, 1990).

1.3. Formalisation, test and questioning of a structural interpretation of collective innovation

From these primary theoretical contributions, we decided to develop, from the beginning of 1997, a micro-sociological and historical analysis of the professional network within a representative cooperative, that means the evolution of all the exchanges relating either to vine-growing or to the organisation itself. As Darré *et al.*’s works and results prompted us to

do, we assumed the hypothesis of one morphology more favourable to collective innovation, in concrete terms, a professional group structured in clusters tied through weak relations. We thus supposed some changes in the morphology of networks within cooperatives in the 90s, allowing to explain the dysfunctions in collective innovation about which their leaders were complaining at the end of 1996. Puisserguier, carrying a “social demand” and above all representative of both the current innovations in Languedoc and the conditions of these changes (big group issued from a merging of two neighbouring coops, differentiated payment system...), appeared as an “enlightening case” (Mitchell, 1983) to develop a historical analysis in order to compare the situations in 1990 and in 1997.

Data production on the evolution of professional networks in Puisserguier combined some difficulties : i) big group with fuzzy boundaries (many moonlighters are taking part in the production) ; ii) very heterogeneous population (only 15% of full-time farmers) ; iii) professional networks embedded in multiplex relations (superposition of life and work places) ; iv) “tense situation” that usually leads to a positive evaluation of past events and distorts an historical analysis already limited by data shortfall and that is considered, by network analysts, as a poorly studied issue for which only a few methods have been proposed (Sujor *et al.*, 1996). Then, faced with the impossibility of developing an exhaustive study of professional dialogue relationships along Darré *et al.*’s methods, we selected a primary sample of individuals representative in 1997 of practices diversity relative to vine-growing and to the coop. Thus, in the first step of our work, we aimed at developing a qualitative approach of the current status of professional relationships and of their evolution, from a representative sample increased gradually, throughout a close by close relationship progression. This type of work allowed us both to develop and to test a method of network-data production, from enquiries on “life story” (Demazière, Dubar, 1997) that focused on practices. Throughout the discourse, we highlighted or asked for the relationships which could have encouraged and/or helped the changes of technical or social practices mentioned by the interviewee.

If we assumed that the implementation of an innovation, within a group of farmers, relies on professional dialogue relationships between them, that meant, as a first step, we had to confront two types of people sets : “people with similar technical and social practices” on the one hand, “clusters” on the other hand. The work led to the following results :

- i) some people, with equal resource levels and farming systems at the same development stage, linked by strong professional dialogue relations, do not have similar innovation practices. Particularly, they act in different ways relating to the prescribed innovations and do not share the same point of view on the collective project ;
- ii) some people develop similar innovation practices and share the same point of view on the collective project without being linked by professional dialogue relations to others who act or think like them. Moreover, they do not have the same relation to the vine-growing activity (main activity on the one hand, leisure activity on the other hand, for example) and do not share an economic and/or geographic proximity.

Thus, a professional dialogue group does not automatically constitute a group of homogeneous technical and social practices. At the same time, people with similar practices are not necessarily linked, and their relation to the farming activity is so different that it is difficult to consider them as “peers”. However, throughout a discourse analysis, we put into evidence that this last group “qualify” (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991) in the same manner the innovation objects of the “action together” - namely, grape on the one hand, productive project, materialised by the types of wines produced, on the other hand. Given these results, we were encouraged to resort to structural interactionism in order to develop a renewed analysis framework.

2. 2nd stage : between structure and interactions, the alternative of interactions between positions

2.1. The structural interactionism corpus as a resource for a renewed framework

Research works on networks linked to the theoretical frame of “structural interactionism” provided tools to go beyond the presumptions of a collective innovation dependent on professional dialogue relationships within a stable social form composed of “peers” and structured in homogeneous clusters linked by weak ties. According to H.C. White, one of the founders of this approach, society consists in a “magma” of multiplex interactions in which it may appear some “identities”, as collective entities sharing common principles, temporarily stabilised by the control of each inner or crossing interaction. The set of controls contributes to the regulation of a collective action at the macro-level through the implementation of an “institution” or a “style” (according to the degree of formalisation) abstracted (“decoupled”) from the elementary interactions and based on norms, rules and procedures (White, 1992). From such an approach, combined with concepts developed in sociology of organisations and economics of conventions, we proposed to assess *together innovation* as a dialectic process between interactions and institutions within an *organised action system* as a *local identity* pursuing an *innovation project* consisting in the implementation of changes on *objects of collective action* by heterogeneous people both involved in this system, through a concrete action on these objects, and in many other actions and interactions possibly linked to other identities. For example, the Languedoc wine cooperative may be assessed as a *local identity* based on *grape* and *productive project* as objects of collective action, relative to which people (official members as well as moonlighters) have to develop new practices, technical (vines on wires, new way of pruning...) as well as social (attendance to technical meetings...), along the project carried out by their leaders.

In such a frame, we assumed people may be characterised by a specific relation to the objects of collective action, as the qualification of “the objects which suit” (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991) in the context of the innovation project. According to the first research stage, we supposed this relation was carried out through specific technical and social practices relative to these objects. We thus defined a *strategic block* as a set of people sharing in actu the same relation to the objects, without conditions of economic, social or geographic proximity nor ties between them. In the context of an innovation project, we assumed this block as a set of people *equivalent towards the project* and likely to behave in the same way towards the promoted changes. Following White’s approach that Burt specialised in situations of innovation, we thus shared the principle of professional settings composed by people observing those they assess “equivalent” in order to take their strategic decisions and particularly innovate (Burt, 1982). This approach enabled to renew the model of innovation as linked to face to face ties. But although Burt highlighted ex post that people who adopted an innovation at the same time may be characterised by the same “structural equivalence position” rather than by direct links between them, we assumed that, in actu, people behave according to those sharing the same *position of equivalence to the project*. Indeed, people share a structural equivalence position if they have the same relations (nature and form) with the other positions, that means this position is an analytic concept which may be revealed only through data production on the whole network and mathematical processing. That led some scholars to propose other kinds of equivalence positions, as “role equivalence” linked to a specific relational profile (Mizruchi, 1993) for example, in order to understand and to preview similarities of (innovative) behaviours within a set of people. From these bases, we assumed the process of together innovation as linked to two interdependent factors : the *diversity of equivalence positions to the project* on the one hand, the *interactions between these positions* on the other hand. Positions, as sets of specific practices relative to the objects of action,

reveal indeed more or less convergence with the innovation project, whereas this convergence, following an interactionist point of view, is conditioned both by interactions and style.

2.2. Test and improvement of the structural-interactionist model

2.2.1. From new hypotheses to new principles for the data production

In such a framework, one can explain the “dysfunctions” in together innovation brought on by officials by analysing the evolution of both strategic blocks and professional relationships between them. We mobilised three kinds of methodological corpus to produce the data :

- i) ethnography, with life in the village of Puisserguier several times for several months, in order to develop a “reputation” allowing the efficiency of ethnographic tools (participating observation, non directive enquiry...) and production of knowledge (Beaud, Weber, 1997) ;
- ii) research-action, because of a programme initially planned to support the development of the coop, but also because it appeared necessary to involve actors in order to understand a complex situation ;
- iii) network analysis, with specific tools allowing to activate the networks.

The first step consisted in the delineation of the strategic blocks in 1997, from our first stage of research and some new interviews of experts. We proceeded by defining a set of technical and social practices, relevant towards the project of the coop in 1997 and allowing to report the inner diversity. Nine blocks were thus defined, each one showing a specific qualification of “the objects which suit” highlighted through discourse analysis. From this base, we chose two people in each block, characterised by a high number of relations for the one, a low for the other, according to first interviews. Our aim was then to analyse the evolution of both the relation to the objects and the professional relations, from the end of the 80s, within a specific sample composed by all the people included in the ego networks of the 18 persons first selected, that meant 81 persons. Among the tools mobilised for data production, three of them may be pointed out :

- i) production and general diffusion at the end of 1997 of an *information leaflet* presenting previously unstated points of view (as contrasted qualifications of “the objects which suit”), through extracts transcribed word by word from current discourses of our primary interviewees. This served to show an open-minded posture thus decreasing the reticence by “outcasts”, to highlight and precise the evolution of “what suits” from the start of the quality revolution, but also to reveal ego networks through discussions (spontaneous or provoked by the researcher) around this leaflet ;
- ii) adaptation of the “position generator” technique (Degenne, Forsé, 1994) for network-data production, by asking the interviewee to precise his relations with members of some “institutions” (e.g. technical groups) with whom we knew, or supposed he was or had been in contact (e.g. because of neighbourhood). In that way the interviewee, which generally discusses at first (even only) his strong ties, was prompted to speak also about his weak ties (McCallister, Fischer, 1978) ;
- iii) graphic representation of the “zone” (ego relations and ties between ego relations) of our interviewees in 1990 and in 1997 and presentation to them, who were thus encouraged to precise or modify some elements. Such a data production technique had been possible (and efficient) because of the trust progressively developed with the interviewees, by immersion in the village and maintenance of regular relations with them.

Professional relationships had been coded in the following way, for each of the two periods : i) content (general information, work, equipment, technical advice) ; ii) nature (“institutional” or “informal”) ; iii) intimacy (graded 1 to 3 and defined by the interviewee himself) ; iv) frequency (3 levels). Furthermore, because of changing conditions affecting the context of the research (orientation of the productive project towards products diversification and wine

promotion through territory) and because we were observing, since the end of 1998, the development of both new ties and positions to the project, we also stocked data relating to what we consider as a third period, from the end of 1998. Finally, we aimed to stress the position and the relations of each of the 81 persons within our sample, at three dates : 1990, 1997, 1999, by a privileged relation with the 18 people first selected.

2.2.2. *A data processing along two dimensions finally combined for a better understanding*

(1) *Evolution of strategic blocks* : the beginning of the 90s featured the multiplication of conflictive strategic blocks (from four in 1990 to nine in 1997) consecutive, particularly, to the implementation of a differential payment system in 1992. Vine-growers contested vigorously the new criteria chosen to assess different levels of grape quality, thus defining their loan, and their measure by members of the Board. More generally, the “quality” model of the leaders has been questioned, because of new problems (in matter of environment or farm management) due to the implementation of a bigger farm requiring more investments, work, skill and still not profitable for members. In such a context, people preferred to develop different practices, that they learned through off coop relations, than those prescribed and although better paid. Finally, from a “weak consensus” in 1990 about a quality revolution that they had to start, but in which nobody wanted or could really involve, that explains only four blocks with compatible practices, the group evolved towards very contrasted points of view about “what suits” in 1997. Divergences were also increased by the arrival, in the 90s, of new kinds of members, coming from the city to insert a “promising sector” compared to the others, thus substituting to retired farmers without successor : vine-growers’ sons or wives, salaries preparing an establishment for themselves or their children...

(2) *Dynamics in professional relations* : we want to stress some points relative specifically to the network analysis, before to show the interest of the two-fold approach (blocks / relations) to understand Puisserguier evolution and more generally, processes of together innovation.

i) all relations can not be considered equivalent : our interviewees themselves prompted us to distinguish different levels of “relevance” within ego networks in a given context. Indeed, by discussing about the content of each relation at each period in order to translate them into quantitative data, they stressed some relations more “useful” than the others towards the collective project, at each stage of the coop trajectory.

ii) the ego networks are very labile : many relations have been broken during the 90s, particularly those with the Board members presently serving as “judges”, even ones assessed as very intimate or frequent in 1990. Moreover, intimacy and frequency are little correlated for one relation, thus questioning the assessment of the intensity of a relation by frequency as Granovetter did in different contexts. More generally, such results question some conventional ideas inherited from the “gemeinschaft” model for rural settings.

Then, by crossing the number of blocks and of “relevant” relations at each period, we confirm and precise our hypothesis that innovation together may not be linked only with the number of ties within a “group”, independently of the context and the value of the ties in this context, but not more with the number of positions alone, as the 1990 situation shows. We thus propose an integrative, dynamic and operational “grounded” model based both on qualitative and quantitative data, allowing to question first statements and to highlight the potentialities of the group in 1999, beyond little change in matter of the total of ties.

(3) *Crossing of blocks and relations through quantitative and qualitative data* : between 1990 and 1997, the multiplication of divergent strategic blocks, first highlighted by a qualitative approach, brought with it a decrease in the total number of ties, but also a concentration of the “relevant” ones in the same block (table 1). According to the hypotheses we made, these results explain the dysfunctions in the together innovation process about which the officials were complaining in 1996. Moreover, the results question the situation of 1990 first assessed

as “better” : beyond more numerous ties on the one hand, less numerous and more consensual blocks on the other, the relevant ties towards the collective project were in practice very few activated between the blocks. That explains why there were in fact very few innovations outside the managing team and their close (belonging to the same block), who were not diffusing information about what has to be done in order to keep the State subsidies for new varieties replanting. Last but not least, this approach highlights the new stage of the group, from the end of 1998, through the development of a new kind of relation, as “exchange of different resources” or “collaboration about a project”, between people from different blocks. Moreover, the blocks of 1997 are showing more and more convergence in matter of “what suits” in a new context. Indeed, the society evolves to new demands towards agriculture (environment-friendly production, “traceability”...) that prompted the government to promote new orientations for the sector and new recommendations to the farmers. More directly and pragmatically, new needs or difficulties due to the quality revolution (management of a complex system for the ones, establishment for the others...) are boosting farmers, in a more rewarding context thus decreasing previous tensions, to new kind of exchanges with diverse people with whom they were not or less tied before. This dynamics in relations and positions is consistent with some improvements in matter of collective action, according to the leaders of the coop themselves. However, some tensions and, in practice, divergent blocks, are persisting because of a style which does not recognise and valorise the diversity of resources within the group, although highlighted as useful by the members themselves. In consistency with our research-action programme, we thus propose a renewed organisational design for the cooperative, promoting exchanges of diverse resources in the frame of a “rural cooperative” as a system of complementary activities developed along a new style rewarding different kinds of skills and functions (Chiffolleau, 2001).

Table 1 : the trajectory of Puisserguier seized through the evolution of relevant ties between strategic blocks (within the 81 persons sample)

	1990	1997	1999
<i>Starting point observations (according to the VCF officials)</i>	<i>Subscription of the membership to the new productive project</i>	<i>Resistance to prescribed innovations, free- riding, voice</i>	
Number of strategic blocks	4	9	9 (in evolution)
Number of ties	694	495	527
Rate of both “relevant ties” and “inter-block” ties = “together innovation indicator”	6%	9%	33%
<i>Retrospective analysis</i>	<i>Few innovations outside the managing team and their close</i>		
<i>Facts noticed by officials from mid-1999 (and confirmed by longitudinal work)</i>			<i>Individual and collective performances improvement</i>

2.3. A both qualitative and quantitative approach as necessary for the theoretical and operational progression

Rather than to mobilise the dynamics observed since the end of 1998 in order to “validate a model”, we prefer to stress the principles of a new kind of approach, enabling to go beyond

some of the conventional ideas developed in parallel about the determinants of collective action (e.g. supposed to be dependent to the density of the network) and innovation (e.g. as due to the influence of face to face links). Our challenge was to combine these two fields of research which are not usually jointly questioned, through the exemplary case of Languedoc cooperatives involved in the quality revolution. According to us, this challenge had been favoured by our aim to translate qualitative data to quantitative ones, initially in view of an operational model, but that finally allowed to go beyond the facts by understanding their “sense”. In that way, we share the posture of some networks analysts, combining qualitative and quantitative data production and processing to avoid descriptive reports on the one hand, tests of mathematical models on the other (Borgatti *et al.*, 1998). We thus also assume that network analysis is not a goal in itself but a tool, allowing to understand dynamics of collective action particularly (Lazega, 1994). However, relative to other social networks analysts interested in innovation processes, we stress a model also grounded on technical objects, that constitutes besides one of the proximities between our approach and those developed by the French Centre of Sociology of Innovation (Akrich *et al.*, 1988), even if the status of the objects is different in each case.

Conclusion

Languedoc viticulture gives an example that illustrates on-going trends throughout Europe and particularly in France : individual and radical innovations, carried out in a complex environment where collective organisations are dominant. From the longitudinal study of a representative cooperative, we grounded a renewed framework to understand and support innovation processes in local identities. This framework stems from the concepts and methods developed in network sociology, and particularly, structural interactionism, but also sociology of organisations, even if it is apparently a very different way to analyse organised action systems, without explicit references to “relations of power”. However, by highlighting some “strategic blocks” as linked to qualifications of “what suits” and above all, by stressing the importance of relevant interactions between them, we thus propose a “politicised model” in view of collective innovation analysis and management.

In this line, the case of Puisserguier may be mobilised to illustrate another kind of interpretation of Burt’s theory on innovation. According to him, the capacity of action and innovation of an “entrepreneur” is all the bigger than there are some “structural holes” in his network, that means no ties between his relations (Burt, 1992). In Puisserguier, the conflicts in the 90s led to structural holes within the Board previously functioning as a “clan”. The breaking up of some of the traditional relationships encouraged, in reaction, the emergence of new ones including people previously considered as different and ignored. It contributed to a repoliticization of the local identity, allowing more numerous members to become entrepreneurs in such an “enterprise with multiple bosses” as the cooperative firm (Phillips, 1953). Of course, our involvement in the trajectory of Puisserguier may have favoured such a new dynamics, but we also observed the development of new kinds of relations, substituting to older ones, as well as convergence between positions, in other cooperatives we studied in parallel, without intervention. However, in the current new step in markets globalisation challenging the French wine sector, and especially Languedoc, since the end of 2000, networks and positions seem to evolve again in local identities, towards new configurations much less favourable to diversity and exchanges within the groups, as we are highlighting through the longitudinal work we are pursuing.

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