Title:
Managing Paradoxical Tensions in the Implementation of a social innovation: The impact of action research on the methodological framework (preliminary results)

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Note on content: This version of the paper differs from the one presented at the XXIst ISTR International Virtual Conference. It presents more specifically the methodological choice made in the context of the research project. Furthermore, it should be noted that this paper will take the form of a scientific article that will be integrated into the student's thesis (which is currently being written for her Master of Science in Management degree). In this sense, this paper is not in its final version.

Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary results of a longitudinal case study of a social innovation in a food security social economy meta-organization. Through a research internship, twelve months were spent in the organization observing and identifying the dynamics of implementing a mutualization project in the food security sector of the social economy in Quebec. In this paper, we examine the challenges and tensions arising from the paradoxes internal to this type of organization and, more specifically, in the context of developing a social innovation. The main question this paper seeks to answer is "why is it interesting to examine a meta-organization from the perspective of paradoxical tension theory in an action research context?".

Key words: meta-organization, tensions, paradoxes, pooling, social innovation, social economy, solidarity economy, action research.
Introduction

The aim of the research project is to explore and study the optimisation of the food security offer considering the pooling of the infrastructures and equipment of the partner members of a social economy organization. This paper contributes to the general theme of social innovations (SI) and the context in which they emerge and are implemented. Through a research internship, twelve months were spent in an organization observing and identifying the dynamics specific to the implementation of a pooling project in the food security sector of the social economy in Quebec (Canada).

In this paper, we examine the challenges and tensions arising from internal paradoxes to this type of organization and, more specifically, in the context of the development of a SI. The main question that seeks to answer is “why is it interesting to examine a meta-organization from the perspective of paradoxical tension theory in an action research context?”.

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to understand the context in which the organization under study operates. As social inequalities - such as food insecurity - are increasing, existing solutions are more and more called upon to scale up. Social economy organizations are invited to deploy their impacts by working collectively on a common response to such socio-economic issues. This can namely be done through the pooling of equipment and resources and the creation of organizations to bring them together. Generally, these projects aim to reduce operating costs. However, scaling up also calls on collective social organizations to develop new niches and expand their territory of action to increase their capacity and the quality of their services to the community. Organizations that are created by member-organizations to pursue such goals can be qualified as meta-organizations.

To our knowledge, few studies have examined the processes of pooling within a social economy meta-organization in the food security sector. This research project aims to fill this scientific gap and understand this emerging model and identify the factors involved in its implementation. To do so, we collaborated with The Sunny Spoon (TSS)\(^1\), a meta-organization that proposes an innovative business model. TSS proposes to bring together collective social enterprises from several regions in a territory that wish to develop social economy components in food processing and meal production for various clienteles. The objective is to increase the food supply by pooling existing community and public food production infrastructures. Moreover, while the sharing economy usually involves users of a single resource or piece of equipment, TSS aims to share several pieces of equipment and resources, which poses an additional and interesting challenge for both the managers of this type of organization and the researchers.

The paper presents the methodological choice as well as the theoretical framework based on the research internship that took place. This choice was made given that during these first months, several events had an impact on the objectives of the internship and therefore, impacted the methodology and the theoretical lens through which approach this research. These events ant the following organizational changes, as we will see, generated internal dynamics within the meta-organization and between the latter and its member-organizations.

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\(^1\) Fictive names have been used to insure the confidentiality of the information.
We first present the context of the internship and how the student's experience in the organization impacted the methodological and theoretical frameworks of the research. This section is completed by a brief introduction to the key concepts that allow us to circumscribe the nature of the organization observed and the project in which the student was participating as a researcher. Secondly, the theoretical framework of the paradox perspective will be introduced, highlighting the relevant contributions and explaining how this theory is appropriate for the case we studied. Finally, an open discussion will provide an initial reflection on the impact of action research in a context where it is the process of social innovation that is under the microscope as well as an organizational innovation approach.

1. Methodology and Research Context

This section aims at presenting the methodological and conceptual contexts in which the research project is situated. It will briefly explain the methodological strategy for the case-study, namely the observation and research internship at The Sunny Spoon (TSS). It will also introduce the reader to the different concepts with which it is possible to circumscribe the case-study, namely social innovation, food insecurity, meta-organizations and the collaborative or sharing economy.

1.1. Internship context

The research takes place in conjunction with an internship² for a period of twelve months within an organization. The organization, which we will call here The Sunny Spoon (TSS) had previously identified specific needs and responsibilities that shaped the nature of the internship, which was based on two specific objectives, namely to conduct an organizational analysis of the needs and possibilities of relevant pooling initiatives in a collective social enterprise context (in this case, the network of members of TSS), and to identify the characteristics that facilitate a pooling project in a collective social enterprise context specifically the pooling project. While this internship aimed at these two objectives, only one of them could be achieved in the twelve months of its duration. This led the research project to focus on the implementation phase of the project and its incidences on the organization and its relations with its members.

Regarding the first objective, the goal was to identify and analyze, namely in the scientific literature, elements that would facilitate and better respond to the organizational needs related to the implementation and management of an infrastructure and equipment pooling approach. However, it was difficult to find literature outlining these issues for community organizations and collective social enterprises. Hence, to meet this objective, the student conducted a dozen semi-structured interviews with member-organizations of TSS, experts in the field of collaborative and sharing economy, as well as consulted multiple similar case studies (private businesses, non-profits, and cooperatives) to identify the issues and obstacles to implementing resource pooling. Also, the student had to identify and analyze concrete cases of pooling initiatives, namely in the food security sector or other fields with similar characteristics, notably the non-profit nature of the organizations involved. The objective was to define and measure the individual and collective performance of the organizations in TSS network. However, this objective was not achieved due to delays in the development of the pooling project and of the

² The research project is part of a fellowship with the Mitacs Accelerate program. See: HYPERLINK "https://www.mitacs.ca/en/programs/accelerate"
digital tool of the pooling platform. It was also required to propose appropriate elements and solutions in the context of the technology to be developed. Once again, this objective was not met since during the time of the internship, as TSS project became part of a much larger project, a major municipal project, which imposed various standards by which TSS had to conform. However, the student initiated two reflections in view of the development of the digital tool of the sharing platform: a first one on the issues of the governance of the pooling platform and its impact on the daily activities (development of its programs, hiring of personnel, etc.) of TSS; a second about the issues of the governance of the data generated by the sharing platform within the major municipal project. These reflections were based on research with experts in the sharing economy and the social economy, as well as a search for lessons learned from similar cases. This observation period and research internship at TSS determined the type of research that the student would conduct, a longitudinal case study based on qualitative data.

Also, the evolution of this internship had a direct impact on the methodological strategy, which was composed of three modalities of data collection: participatory and non-participatory observation, documentary analysis, exploratory semi-structured interviews and complementary semi-structured interviews. The Table 1 presents the different observation units and approaches during the internship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Units</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Observation</td>
<td>The student is undergoing constant observation in the organization. The student attends team meetings, work meetings, membership meetings, training sessions, etc. The student consults scientific and grey literature and complementary sources (e.g. organization websites)</td>
<td>May 2019 to May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory and non-participatory Document and complementary sources analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Exploratory</td>
<td>The student interviews member organizations and potential future members of the pooling project, selected by the student and the organization's executive management. The student interviews people who have participated in The Sunny Spoon project as a whole.</td>
<td>May 2019 to October 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Complementary</td>
<td>The student interviews people from organizations that led projects similar to The Sunny Spoon's mutualization project, selected by the student and the professor. The student interviews experts from different fields (collaborative economy, social and solidarity economy, etc.) selected by the student.</td>
<td>October 2019 to May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected through observation and the exploratory interviews had an impact on the conceptual evolution of the research project. The information collected during the first six months (exploratory phase) allowed the identification of internal tensions at TSS and to observe that these tensions were the result of organizational dilemmas. These dilemmas were present both within TSS's internal team and between TSS and its member-organizations. As for the
third unit, it completed the information collected previously and has not yet been analyzed (and will therefore not be examined in this paper).

1.1.1 Observation and documentary analysis

The observation and documentary analysis took place over the entire twelve months spent in TSS. Since the student had to be present in the organization (Mitacs program requirement), she was able to attend strategic meetings that allowed her to collect data. These meetings took five forms: team meetings (attended by all employees), work meetings specific to the pooling project (between the student, the executive manager and the person in charge of implementing pooling), individual meetings (between the student and the executive director), meetings with the partners of the pooling project (through the major municipal project) and meetings with the members-organizations (between all employees, the executive director and the member-organizations). In most cases, observation included student’s participation. The Table 2 presents all the meetings to which the student attended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Meetings</th>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of Meetings Assisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Meetings</td>
<td>In organization</td>
<td>Once a week, between 30 and 90 minutes. The student and The Sunny Spoon’s team.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Meetings Specific to the Pooling Project</td>
<td>In organization</td>
<td>Between the student and the manager of the pooling project. The duration is variable, between 60 and 120 minutes. The executive director will be present at more specific meetings and as needed. The duration will be a maximum of 60 minutes.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
<td>In organization</td>
<td>Once a week throughout the internship between the student and the executive director. The duration was a maximum of 60 minutes.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with the Partners of the Pooling Project</td>
<td>In organization</td>
<td>According to the needs of the different partners of the major municipal project. The representatives of the partners, the student and the executive director were present. The duration varied between 90 and 120 minutes depending on the need.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings with the Member-Organizations</td>
<td>Between organizations</td>
<td>Once a year. The member organizations, The Sunny Spoon’s team and the student were present. The duration was 120 minutes.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between organizations</td>
<td>As needed to complement the services offered to member organizations. The student, The Sunny Spoon’s team and the member-organizations. The duration was 90 minutes.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This participatory and non-participatory observation was possible at different types of encounters and exchanges that took place at two levels, i.e., within the organization itself and between TSS and its member-organizations. We chose to identify these two levels as intra-organization (observations within TSS) and inter-organization (observations between TSS and its member-organizations). Data collection stopped after the internship was completed.

To collect data during these observations, the student used an observation grid that allowed her to highlight elements such as the way words were spoken, decisions were made and how people reacted to organizational changes (opportunities, challenges, dilemmas). The development of this grid was inspired by similar research on governance of inter-organizational networks (Zerdani, 2015). In addition to this observation grid, the student created a logbook to collect her impressions throughout her experience as an observer in TSS but also as a student writing her research project. This logbook takes the form of handwritten and electronic notes and is arranged chronologically (from the first day of the internship).

### 1.1.2 Exploratory Semi-Structured Interviews

The exploratory phase is part of the first six months of the student's observation and research internship. As explained above, the objectives of the internship were to help the organization understand the needs and characteristics of the future users of the pooling project. Some of these potential future users, that we call mutualist users, had been previously identified by TSS (former employees) and the current executive director within the existing list of members of TSS as well as outside the actual membership of the organization. To collect this information, it was determined by the student, the professor and the executive director to conduct semi-structured interviews allowing to gather the characteristics and the needs of these future mutualist members. To do so, a data collection grid was created based on specific questions: mission, governance mode, service offer, interest in participating to the pooling project, needs in terms of pooling (including technological) and fears regarding participation in the pooling project. The selection of participants for these interviews was made by the executive director and in agreement with the student. In total, nine participants (of nine different organizations) were interviewed. These interviews were then the subject of a written report by the student that was presented to the executive director of TSS. Data collection from this category of participants stopped once the information collected was saturated (Royer & Zarlowski, 1999). The Table 3 presents a portrait of the semi-structured interviews with potential mutualist users in the exploration phase.

### Table 3. Portrait of the Semi-Structured Interviews with Potential Mutualist Users in the Exploration Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Type of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>5 Potential Mutualist Users (member-organizations of The Sunny Spoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Potential Mutualist Users (not member-organizations of The Sunny Spoon)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the interviews with potential members of the pooling project, the student conducted semi-structured interviews with actors who had participated to the development of TSS and to the pooling project. These actors were selected with the executive director of TSS since he was in the best position to identify the key people to contact, and the information collected would serve both him/her and the student. A data collection grid was produced to bring out the following information: the role of these actors in the development of the organization and of the pooling project, their affiliation with TSS as well as their expertise (professional or not). This information helped the student contextualize the development of the organization itself and the evolution of the sharing project within the organization. Notes and reflections were collected in the student's logbook. The Table 4 presents a portrait of the semi-structured interviews with actors who had participated to the development of The Sunny Spoon and the pooling project.

Table 4. Portrait of the Semi-Structured Interviews with actors who had participated to the development of The Sunny Spoon and to the pooling project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Type of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>1 Former Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Former Employee as a member-organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Expert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is during this second round of interviews that a preliminary analysis of the student's first observations and impressions are discussed with the professor. These discussions lead to the identification of certain fears regarding the implementation of the pooling project within TSS. These fears seem to be the result of current or past challenges and tensions within the organization’s dynamic but also regarding the relationships and dynamics between the organization and its members. Moreover, by learning more about the development process of the pooling project, the student comes to identify issues regarding the implementation and future deployment of the project and of its technological platform. It is therefore at this precise moment, after the first six months, that the student begins a literature review that will lead her on the path of paradoxical tensions in an organizational context.

1.1.3 Complementary Semi-Structured Interviews

The complementary unit, as its name indicates, aims to complete the data collected during the previous phase and to deepen the analysis of the case study from the perspective of paradoxical tensions in the organization. During this period, TSS is already part of the major municipal project and, from then on, the pooling project took a new direction in its development. The student therefore took the initiative, in agreement with her professor, to explore cases similar to TSS's pooling project. The selection of the case studies is made according to three non-mutually exclusive criteria: to have set up or to have tried to set up a pooling project (with or without a technologic platform); to have aimed at pooling services and/or equipment and/or resources; and to make sure to have a representation of cases resulting from the collective social economy (allowing more easily to make comparisons with the nature and mission of TSS). These criteria were selected after a brief primary online research that allowed us to note that pooling projects in the food production, transformation or distribution sector were not so numerous. These criteria however led to the identification of numerous similar case studies in other sectors. The selection was based on a brief online search of similar cases (mission,
platform, services, sharing economy) and was supplemented by an existing benchmark inventory (created by TSS team). It is important to note that all the data and information collected in this section of the internship were not transmitted to TSS and remain confidential.

A semi-structured interview grid was created specifically for these similar case studies, taking into consideration a particular interest in developing a pooling project and the internal and/or external tensions that may have been experienced by these organizations. The questionnaire addressed the following elements: the organization's mission and service offering; where the pooling project fit into the development of this service offering; what challenges were encountered and what were their nature; how these challenges were resolved; who were the key partners in the project; and what would the project leaders do differently. Notes and reflections were collected in the student's diary at that time too. The Table 5 presents a portrait of the semi-structured interviews with similar cases-studies in the complementary phase.

Table 5. Portrait of the Semi-Structured Interviews with Similar Cases-Studies in the Complementary Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Type of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>8 Members of similar cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These interviews allowed us to identify generic issues (possible conflicts and tensions) that organizations that have implemented or attempted to implement a pooling project have faced. However, in the context of this paper, this aspect will not be put forward.

1.2 Additional Data Sources

In addition to the data collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the student also conducted documentary research to collect and analyze different internal documents of TSS. These documents include the following: annual report, project history, market study, feasibility study and financial statements. This information completes the overall vision of the pooling project and the understanding of the organizational context in which it is inserted. It was very relevant and helpful in drawing a realistic picture of TSS case-study. The Table 6 presents a portrait of the additional data sources collected and specific to the TSS organization.

Table 6. Portrait of the Additional Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propriety of the Documentation</th>
<th>Type of the Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sunny Spoon's Internal Documentation</td>
<td>2 annual reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 financial statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 feasibility studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 business plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Impacts and Limits to the Methodology

This methodology was chosen to ensure the credibility of the research field and conclusions that will emerge. Since the student was in the organization (both on-site and in the online exchanges such as text messaging) for twelve months, it allows for a better understanding of
the nature of the organization as well as the different perspectives of the participants (employees, member-organizations, partners). Over the months, a real trust was created between the team and the student. One-on-one meetings with the executive director ensured the accuracy of the data collected about the organization (history, mission, vision, operations). Multiple sources of information (observation units) help to ground the findings in the reality of TSS. The collection tools were chosen and adapted according to the needs (observation, semi-directed interview, logbook) and used by the student to ensure the reliability and stability of the data collected. The student, except in individual meetings with the executive director, did not intervene with the team or with the members and her position as observer was explained at each meeting (confidentiality agreements and examples of the type of information collected were signed by people who were present at the various meetings observed).

However, we are aware that this research strategy has its limitations. For example, in most semi-structured interviews conducted within member-organizations, potential users of the pooling project were targeted by TSS's executive director. It would have been relevant to survey all the member-organizations to have a more global vision of the possible interests and impacts of the pooling project on all the members. Moreover, all these interviews were conducted individually. It would have been relevant to do focus groups and to see the dynamics between members interacting on this project (this component is currently missing from the research project). Also, individual meetings with team members were not conducted since very few seemed to be aware of the progress of the pooling project (and even of the real mission of the project). It would have been interesting to have their point of view, as employees and those responsible for the other programs, on how they see the development of the pooling project within the development of the organization itself.

1.4 Theoretical Concepts Not to Be Overlooked

As mentioned, the observation and research internship impacted the theoretical context of the research project. It was important, from the beginning of the internship, to identify the theoretical concepts under which the pooling project within TSS falls. Four key concepts were identified: social innovation, social economy, sharing economy and meta-organization.

1.4.1 Pooling Project as a Social Innovation

Social innovation is the basic theoretical concept linking both to the student's specialization and the nature of the pooling project. The meaning of the term "social innovation" can be used to describe several activities that have a purpose and scope to address societal problems (poverty, inequality, etc.) as well as a transformative purpose (Schumpeter, 1967; Klein & al., 2014; Lévesque & al., 2016; Klein & al., 2019). The Quebec Social Innovation Network defines the latter as (RQIS, 2011) (our translation):

(...) a new idea, approach or intervention, a new service, a new product or a new law, a new type of organization that responds more adequately and sustainably than existing solutions to a well-defined social need, a solution that has found a taker within an institution, an organization or a community and that produces a measurable benefit for the community and not only for some individuals. The scope of a social innovation is
transformative and systemic. It constitutes, in its inherent creativity, a break with the existing.

From this perspective, the angle that interests us for this project is to better understand the trajectory of a social innovation, in this case the pooling project, from its ideation to its implementation. We choose to situate the student's observation and research internship on the development trajectory of the pooling project (see Figure 1). To do so, we refer to two key models of "social innovation trajectory": the social innovation process of RQIS (2011) and the swirl model of Akrich et al. (2006). These two models aim to situate the student's internship and thus, circumscribe the case of the pooling project within a social innovation trajectory. The Figure 1 localises in time the internship observations within the successive phases of unfoldment of the social innovation.

**Figure 1. Internship in the Social Innovation Process of the Pooling Project**
(Source: Inspired by RQIS’s Social Innovation Process and Akrich et al.’s Swirl Model)

As illustrated by the orange box, the student's internship was mostly in what we can call the Emerging phase and at the beginning of the Experimentation phase. Thus, through the evolution of the pooling project, the student was able to observe different interactions between the actors and stakeholders of the pooling project within the organization and its member-organizations. These different interactions had an impact on the development of the pooling project and therefore, the research project. Thus, the student was able to observe the process of a social innovation, but more specifically, the collective action of The Sunny Spoon, its member-organizations and their organizational dynamics.
1.4.2 Social Economy and Collective Social Enterprises in Quebec

The case of the research project is characterized by its service offer, including its pooling project, but above all by the fact that it is a social economy organization and represents member-organizations that are also part of the social economy. Broadly speaking, the concept of social economy can be conceived as a subset of social enterprises, although the term is not used in Quebec to qualify the social economy (Bouchard, Cruz-Filho & Zerdani, 2015), where the term “collective enterprise” is preferred. Collective social enterprise (CSE) can be broadly defined as the use of market-based approaches to address social issues or bringing “business” sources of revenue for civil society organizations (Kerlin, 2010). A distinction can be made between collective and non-collective social enterprises. The notion of collective social enterprise refers to social enterprises that are either collectively owned by their members or that have no individual ownership. Typically, CSEs are cooperatives and non-profit organizations that produce goods and services, and that are democratically controlled by members (users or citizens) without them benefitting financially from their investment in money or in other forms (time, donations). Jointly with the concept of non-profit, the concept of “limited profitability” can be used to mark the difference between CSEs and privately owned for-profit social enterprises (social businesses, social entrepreneurship, B-Corps, etc.) (Coheur, 2019).

CSEs are “social” in the sense that they pursue a social goal (service to members and/or service to society) but also in the sense that they share distinguishing organizational features overarched by their social purpose: democratic governance; restricted or prohibited distribution of surplus; autonomy and independence from the State; and the organized production of goods or services (Bouchard, Ferraton, Michaud & Rousselière, 2008; Bouchard, Cruz Filho & Zerdani, 2015). CSEs are also a subset of what is called social and solidarity economy (SSE) in countries of Western Europe and of Latin America (and some parts of Canada, namely Quebec), a notion that covers cooperatives, associations (or non-profit organizations), mutual societies, and in some countries also foundations and other enterprises with a social purpose and limited profitability (Monzón & Chaves, 2017). In Quebec, the framework law on social economy (Quebec, 2013) recognizes cooperatives, associations and mutual societies as components of the social economy. This concept remains central to our analysis of the case since it is hypothesized that it will have an impact on the paradoxical tensions that The Sunny Spoon and its member-organizations will face during the development process of the pooling project.

1.4.3 The Sunny Spoon as a Meta-Organization

During the first six months of the observation and research internship, discussions between the student and the professor about the organizational form of TSS led to conceive it as a meta-organization. To do so, we first compared the nature of TSS to the following concepts: network of organizations, network-organization, and interorganizational relationships. The network organization can be distinguished as being "(...) made up of companies linked to strong and frequent exchange relationships creating a group isolated from the global market where supply and demand confront each other" (Ferrary & Pesqueux, 2004, p.110). While the network-organization refers to the fact of organizing in a network and where the latter becomes a support to facilitate the implementation of an exchange system between the organizations of this network (Ferrary & Pesqueux, 2004). In the literature, two approaches dominate what can be understood by an interorganizational network (Zerdani, 2015):
1) As a particular group, organization or institution (network of individuals, social network) where "(...) networks are just particular institutions (…) and correspond to a mode of governance associated with specific contracts (Zerdani, 2015, p. 28);
2) As a logic of organization or social interactions that can be observed (the relationships between network members), and how "network actors or organizations experience the exchange, rather than the specificity of the institutional framework underlying this exchange" (Zerdani, 2015, p. 28).

As mentioned, we have chosen to define TSS as a meta-organization and we based ourselves on the concept discussed by some authors, such as Arhne & Brunsson (2005), Berkowitz & Bor (2018) and Berkowitz & al. (2018). These authors consider a meta-organization to be an organization or association with organizations as members. They also have three main characteristics:

1) they have a decided social order, i.e., they are the result of decisions based on membership, hierarchy, rules, control, and sanctions;
2) they are an association in the sense that the members form the center of authority. This willingness to associate must remain voluntary and members retain their autonomy;
3) they are themselves organizations (composed of organizations and/or individuals) that possess resources that they can (but do not necessarily) share with the collective.
4) the member-organizations are, at the same time, owners, co-producers, clients or end-users of the collective.

One of the characteristics of meta-organizations is that they are structurally weak (riddled with conflict) but at the same time very effective in their field (i.e. strengthening the identity of their members), a situation that can be seen as a paradox (Dumez, 2009). Besides the fact that we prefer the concept of a meta-organization (that it does more justice to the nature of TSS's network), we find that this concept allows us to study the phenomena that allowed the construction of the collective action (that led to TSS) between the member-organizations in a way that makes it easier to focus on the dynamics (and thus, possible paradoxical tensions) (Berkovitz & al., 2017).

2. Theoretical Framework: A Paradox Perspective

The theoretical framework of this research project is the paradox perspective in a context of organizational change. This organizational change is encountered in the emergence and experimentation phases of a pooling project of The Sunny Spoon. This theoretical framework, it should be recalled, was determined following the initial observations and reflections that took place during the exploratory phase of the student's observation and research internship. The student and professor found it interesting to try to understand how TSS could meet both opposing demands (from internal or external forces), and the student's internship provided an opportunity to explore these outcomes.
2.1 A Paradox Perspective

Paradox theory is considered relevant to this case study because it facilitates the analysis and categorization of certain organizational dynamics within hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Observations made during the exploratory unit of the internship at TSS exposed the tensions and dilemmas arising inside organization and between organization and its member-organizations, as the social innovation project was unfurling. However, these were not precisely dilemmas, as they were not based on a choice between two options, nor on a compromise, since there was no transfer or loss of gains in the decision. It appeared that the notion of paradox was more adequate to qualify these elements as persistent and time-bound contradictions. Thus, we are led to believe that these events of tension are based on paradoxes internal to TSS, related to its dual mission as a collective social enterprise (social and economic) and its organizational nature as a meta-organization (multiple identities). Based on this observation, we adopt the theoretical framework of paradox, thus noting the contributions of Lewis (2000), Smith and Lewis (2011) and Lewis & Smith (2014) who categorize paradoxes in organization. We also incorporate literature raising paradoxical tensions in social and solidarity economy, network organizations, as well as situations of collaboration and coopetition, as our initial observations suggest that these paradoxical tensions animate the dynamics of governance, management and strategic development of TSS.

As Lewis & Smith (2014) argue, studies conducted within the paradoxical perspective identify different strategies that enable managers and employees to accept and manage paradoxical tensions more effectively (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p. 16). Managers and employees learn over time to cohabit and coexist with these paradoxical tensions inherent in their organizations. Thus, the paradoxical perspective allows for a better understanding of organizations (internal processes) and their environments (market dynamics) that become more complex over time and with the evolution of the organization. The perception of paradoxical tensions can therefore be decisive in an organizational and decision-making context.

2.2 Tension and Paradoxes

But what do we mean by the term tension? Maignan, Arnaud and Chateau Terrisse (2018) have inventoried the different meanings that the term tension can have in an organizational context (Maignan et al., 2018). Thus, tensions can be defined as discomforts resulting from conflicts (ideas, principles, actions) (Michaud, 2013) or be the result of an opposition between forces, values, objectives, principles and confrontations between actors (Guedri, Zied & al., 2014; Château Terrisse, 2013). They can be the consequences of a contradiction that one would have tried to resolve (Guedri, Zied & al., 2014). They can be both negative and positive (Lewis, 2000). And as the authors point out, they can "push the organization and its actors to evolve and surpass themselves, they reveal new representations and perceptions" (Maignan & al., 2018, p. 129).

For its part, the paradoxes are, according to Lewis (2000), contradictory but related elements; elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when they appear simultaneously and they persist over time (Lewis, 2000, p. 760 as cited in Lewis & Smith, 2014). Moreover, the yin and yang symbol are used by Lewis (2000) to represent paradoxical tensions as "polarities that are interrelated in a larger space" and in that way, keeps the situation with a holistic approach (Lewis, 2000 as cited in Lewis & Smith, 2014, p. 8).
There are two key components to the paradox: the tensions that emanate from it and the simultaneous answers as the solution provided (Lewis, 2000 as cited in Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). It is this second component that is the keystone of this perspective. Since paradoxical tensions are omnipresent and persist over time, they can have a long-term impact on the development of organizations, hence the need to identify them, accept them, find simultaneous answers and finally, coexist with them. In summary, the paradox highlights the complexity of the system in which an organization is embedded.

2.2.1 Smith and Lewis’s Contribution and Categorisation of Organizational Tensions

Currently, our preliminary research led us to look more specifically at the conceptual framework of the paradox perspective. This perspective goes against the so-called traditional organizational theory. Compared to the traditional angle of analysis, which takes more rational, logical and linear approaches, the paradox perspective focuses on surprising, counterintuitive and tense approaches (Lewis & Smith, 2014, p. 17).

The paradox perspective, as proposed by Smith & Lewis (2011), brings a new way of perceiving decision making. For example, in the context of a dilemma encountered by an organization, the organization traditionally sees the solution as "either A or B" (contingency theory). However, with a paradox perspective, an organization may instead see the solution as "both A and B" (Lewis & Smith, 2014). To this end, the authors created a model with four paradox categories representing the core activities of an organization: belonging (identity/interpersonal relationship), learning (knowledge), organizing (process), and performance (goals) (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). It is at the junction of these four categories that we find these organizational tensions. Smith and Lewis (2011) inventory these paradoxical tensions.

Figure 2. Smith & Lewis’s Categorisation of Organizational Tensions
(Source: Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383)
In the case of a paradox of belonging, tensions arise between the individual and the collective as individuals and groups seek homogeneity on the one hand and distinction on the other. In an organizational context, everyone's roles, belonging, and values can conflict as well as coexist (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). For the learning paradox, tensions emerge in a context where the dynamics of an existing system change, renew, shift, and innovate. This category of tensions highlights the nature and space of new ideas within an organization, such as both radical and incremental innovations (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). The organization paradox refers to tensions arising from internal processes to achieve desired outcomes (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). Finally, the category of performance paradox includes tensions generated by the complexity of stakeholders with competing goals and needs (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383). As highlighted in Figure 2, it is when these organizational paradoxes are put in opposition (in any situation) that tensions can be generated. Learning and performance elicit tensions between developing capabilities for a future and success in the present (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996; Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005 as cited in Smith and Lewis, 2011, p. 384). Learning and belonging will create tensions between the need for change and the desire to maintain a developed sense of self and purpose (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Learning and organizing will create tensions at the levels of organizational capabilities that seek to be effective and enable agility simultaneously (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The intersection of organizing and performance can create tensions between the process and the outcome and can generate conflicts between employees and customers (Gittell, 2004). Whereas belonging and performance can create tensions when individual identity-driven goals and collective goals aren’t the same (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Finally, belonging and organizing can create tension when individual efforts do not meet collective ones (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

In parallel to the contributions of Smith & Lewis (2011) and Lewis & Smith (2014), several contributions have been made to determine the contexts in which these paradoxical tensions can appear in organizations. Among these contributions, let us name: work-life balance (Rothbard, 2001), identity (Huy, 2002; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006), innovation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith & Tushman, 2005), strategic leadership (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), corporate governance (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003), and hybrid organizations (Jay, 2013; Smith, Gonin, & Besharov, 2013) (as cited in Lewis & Smith, 2014). Other examples express tensions at the individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), dyad (Argyris, 1988), group (Smith & Berg, 1987), project (van Marrewijk, Clegg, Pitsis, & Veenswijk, 2008) and organizational (Cameron & Quinn, 1988) levels (as cited in Smith and Lewis, 2011). To our current knowledge, few focused on meta-organizations and their relationship between the organization and member-organizations. This theoretical approach would also be relevant in the interest of TSS to consolidate its multiple approach (as a member-organization representative) to ensure good governance practices and its organizational development and performance over time and according to the desires of expansion. Moreover, the fact that the meta-organization has a plurality of member-organizations automatically generates a multiplicity of viewpoints. Cohen and March (1974) indicate that this plurality increases uncertainty within the organization and may result in competing goals among stakeholders (Cohen & March, 1974 as cited in Smith and Lewis, 2011). This section briefly presents how this research envisions using paradoxical tensions to analyze the data collected throughout the internship experience.
2.2.2 Complements to Contributers of this Perspective in Connection with The Sunny Spoon

As indicated, we have begun a preliminary search for complementary contributions to paradox theory that would be relevant to our case study given its organizational nature. These include contributions on paradoxical tensions generated in the context of collective social enterprises, organizational networks, and in collaborative and cooperative contexts.

The theoretical field of paradoxical tensions in the context of collective social enterprises has been emerging. Among the contributions are those concerning non-profit organizations, cooperatives, and hybrid organizations that, by their dual mission, create tensions within the identity, performance, and governance of these organizations (Michaud, 2013; Jacklin-Jarvis, 2015; Berge & al., 2016; Audebrand & al., 2017; Bouillé & Cornée, 2017; Arvidson, 2018; Rey-García & al., 2019; Civera & al., 2020; Best & al., 2021).

Based on the case study presented by Audebrand & al. (2017), we want to highlight possible connections between the cooperative model and the meta-organization one. We see similarities in the fact that they are both owned and controlled by their members (Audebrand & al., 2017, p. 218). Especially, in the case of TSS, even though it is legally registered as a non-profit organization, it embraces the democratic principle where each caterer member has an equivalent voting right. As mentioned by Audebrand & al. (2017), this type of governance generates several paradoxes and tensions related to economic efficiency and democratic participation of the members of the company (Audebrand & al., 2017, p. 218). The authors also categorized the paradoxes of a cooperative through the four categories of organizational paradoxes determined by Smith and Lewis (2011). Therefore, as a user-owned business, they have paradoxes of belonging and identity: “Memberships, values, and roles, particularly those coexisting in opposition, within cooperatives can highlight various tensions between members’ drives for homogeneity versus heterogeneity” (Cook & Burress, 2009; Puusa, Hokkila, & Varis, 2016 cited by Audebrand and al., 2017, p. 226). In addition, authors mention that conflicts can arise when members have multiple roles within the organization (Audebrand and al., 2017, p. 226).

Also, the preliminary research has identified contributions to the paradoxical tensions within the dynamics of organizational networks and inter-organization relations (seen previously). We define these relationships as collaboration and/or coopetition (cooperation while being in competition). The paradoxical tensions that emanate from this type of relationship are often related to the performance of the organization in relation to the network to which it belongs (Tidström, 2013; Zerdani, 2015; Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Vangen, 2017; Bouncken et al., 2018; Tidström et al., 2018; Gillett et al., 2019; Jakobsen, 2020).

2.2.3 Possible Paradoxical Tensions that The Sunny Spoon Might Encounter

The set of contributions consulted during this first preliminary research allowed us to identify a series of paradoxical tensions that our TSS could face and that are presented in the following section. Here is a preliminary inventory of the paradoxical tensions we have identified:

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3 Note that the inventory is not exhaustive in this version of the paper.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradoxical Tensions</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility vs. Control</td>
<td>Lewis &amp; Smith (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility vs. Efficacy</td>
<td>Adler, Goldofas, &amp; Levine (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration vs. Control</td>
<td>Sundaramurthy &amp; Lewis (2003); Michaud (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration vs. Autonomy</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control vs. Emancipation</td>
<td>Papa, Auwal &amp; Singhal (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy vs. Control</td>
<td>Michaud (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration vs. Exploitation</td>
<td>Andriopoulos &amp; Lewis (2009); Smith &amp; Tushman (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autocracy vs. Democracy</td>
<td>Lewis &amp; Smith (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy vs. Democracy</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social vs. Financial</td>
<td>Lewis &amp; Smith (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social goals vs. Economic goals</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global vs. Local</td>
<td>Lewis &amp; Smith (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralisation vs. Decentralisation</td>
<td>Siggelkow &amp; Levinthal (2003); Beech &amp; al. (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual vs. Collective</td>
<td>Murnighan &amp; Con-Ion (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit vs. Social responsibility</td>
<td>Margolis &amp; Walsh (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation vs. Mainstream</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability vs. Change</td>
<td>Michaud (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction vs. Empowerment</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneity vs. Homogeneity</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion vs. Exclusion</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-Down vs. Bottom-up</td>
<td>Audebrand &amp; al. (2017)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As explained above, the observations made during the exploratory phase of the observation and research internship at TSS revealed logics that resembled organizational conflicts. We determined that these conflicts were not dilemmas but tensions that the organization faced repeatedly and in different contexts. By taking this reflection further, we determined that they emanated from internal paradoxes linked to the nature of the organization (as a meta-organization and social and collective enterprise trying to set up an innovative project). These paradoxes came back in the form of dualities: dual mission (social and economic), dual levels of ownership (organization and member-organization), dual vision of development (innovative projects and need to consolidate the primary mission), etc. We have grouped these dualities under three main units of analysis: governance, internal management and strategic development of the organization. The next section briefly presents the preliminary results.

3. Discussion

In this discussion, we contextualize our initial results, knowing that half of the data collected (the last six months) have not yet been analyzed. As we will see here, this part of our work is illustrative of the incidences of pairing a research project to an internship, where unpredicted events in the internship’s goal turn out to be new and interesting research opportunities.

3.1 The Impact of the Research Context on the Methodology

In a research project, theoretical and methodological frameworks are selected based on the research objectives before the research begins to be implemented. Usually, this is the correct sequence. However, this research took place in the context of an internship within the studied organization and therefore the evolution of the organization, as well as the path undertaken for
the development of the pooling project, had an impact on the methodology and the data collection strategy, as well as on the concepts useful to analyze our case study. Aiming at first to analyze and implement an information system backing up a technical infrastructure for sharing resources, the internship’s objectives were reoriented as the project’s unfoldment took a different turn. Nonetheless, this situation turned out to be an opportunity to analyze the developments of the implementation of a SI within a complex environment, that of a meta-organization of a social economy food security ecosystem. Thus, the adaptation of the research design as well as the objectives of the internship were oriented to help the meta-organization understand and better anticipate the organizational issues related to this innovation.

This evolution illustrates the inductive nature of a qualitative participatory action research project embedded in the natural framework of a social phenomenon, exposing in this case the swirling nature of a social innovation process and the highlighting of its actants and how they adapt to the vagaries of the project's development and to the processes that result from it (Ackrich et al., 2006). This element is all the more interesting since it allows us to underline the role those social relations, as well as collective action, have in the process of a social innovation. Moreover, this observation led us to suspect that the tensions experienced were indicative of paradoxes specific to this case and specific to social innovation processes (Murray et al.,, 2010). We believe that our analysis of the final results will make it possible to identify the paradoxical tensions experienced during the implementation phase of a social innovation within a social economy meta-organization and, more specifically, in the construction of the processes set up by a collective action.

3.2 The Paradoxes Perspective, a Conducive Approach for this Project

The preliminary results of our research lead us to believe that the very nature of the meta-organization raises paradoxical tensions of the Belonging - Performance type. Taking up elements of the definition, the meta-organization is part of a decided social order that allows it to keep the organizational autonomy of its member-organizations and thus, the latter remain independent. Moreover, in the case studied, the member-organizations take on several statuses, depending on the exchange situation in place: owner, co-producer, customer and end-user. As we have briefly seen, the performance objectives linked to the development of the meta-organization may have had an impact on the real needs of the members, to the detriment of their involvement in the pooling project. The strategic decisions made by the executive director left little room (voluntarily or involuntarily) within the pooling project to give priority to other projects deemed more important and advantageous for them (development of the service offer). Moreover, these decisions have created tensions within the internal team of TSS (intra-organizational). It will be interesting to see in a further analysis if these choices will have an impact on the level of belonging to the pooling project but also to the meta-organization itself.

Also, preliminary results lead us to believe that, in addition to its nature as a meta-organization, the organizational structure in which TSS operates, that of social economy organizations, has an impact on the types of paradoxical tensions generated. Thus, as a social economy non-profit organization involving its member-organizations in decision making processes, this affects the very governance dynamics of TSS. The paradoxical tensions are found under the Belonging - Organizing type, since the needs of member-organizations for pooling do not seem to have been prioritized by the executive director compared to other programs of TSS. Moreover, it is interesting to note that all the member-organizations interviewed by the student mentioned the
interest of implementing the pooling project within their services and activities, but that none of the steps expected to be taken during the first six months of the internship actually took form. On the contrary, it is mostly potential users external to the meta-organization's network (entrepreneurs, universities) that mentioned an interest in pooling (in direct communication with TSS), either to pool their under-used spaces or mentioning their rental needs. Again, the paradoxical tensions are found at both levels of analysis, intra-organizational and inter-organizational.

Finally, the implementation of a socially innovative project, such as the pooling project within TSS, coupled with the use of new technologies, such as a platform, seems to have generated paradoxical tensions of the Learning - Organizing and Learning - Performing types among member-organizations and between them and the meta-organization. The pooling project is innovative in its approach (as part of the service offer of The Sunny Spoon and to bring member-organizations to scale-up) but, as indicated in the results obtained from the interviews with potential users (member-organizations and non-member-organization), several fears and barriers must be considered while developing the project. These fears are related to the organizational and technological changes that organizations will have to undergo, such as changes in procedures, training, development of new services, etc. These tensions have not yet been addressed by TSS during the first six months of the internship but will be in the second half. It will then be interesting to analyze how TSS will integrate this information into the development phase of the pooling project, in the continuation of our research work. Moreover, it will be interesting to analyze the similar cases that were studied during the second half of the internship since these types of tensions were mentioned by some of these organizations and it was even said that they had a direct impact on the success or failure of some projects.

3.3 Explore the Data from the Exploratory Phase

This discussion is not complete, as the data analysis is still ongoing. As mentioned, the last six months of the internship (including data obtained from interviews with organizations that have implemented or were attempting to implement sharing projects similar to that of TSS) have not yet been analyzed. We would therefore like to emphasize that these preliminary results are indeed the results of the exploratory phase of the internship project and are related to the implementation phase of the social innovation. We find it relevant to mention that during this first phase of data analysis, we were surprised by the nature of inter-organizational relations and the impact that the vision and leadership of an executive director had in the development of the pooling project. As presented, the paradoxical tensions at the intra-organizational level are currently between hierarchy - democracy and between centralization - decentralization of information, organizational powers and decision-making. While for the inter-organizational level, the paradoxical tensions seem to be linked to the development of the service offer and the network, that is, between the social (mission and activities) and the economic (activities and the nature of some socio-professional insertion organizations), between the innovative (different projects such as social pricing and the mutualization project) and the mainstream (the program in the schools), between the individual (the reality and the needs of each member organization) and the collective (the meta-organization and the vision of development of the service offer offered to the member organizations).

In this perspective, it will be interesting to analyze how the meta-organization can combine its will to innovate (through its primary mission, its global service offers and specifically, its
pooling project) while involving its member-organizations and consolidating current and future service offers. It thus appears that the paradoxes approach is useful for observing and analyzing the construction process of a collective action within the trajectory of a social innovation, and more specifically, through an organizational prism. This prism will be all the more interesting to analyze since it is, in the case of The Sunny Spoon, an organizational approach but also, inter-organizational one.

Conclusion

As presented in this paper, the data collection stage is now complete. However, we still need to complete the analysis of the data collected in the complementary stage. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a full answer to the current research question, namely "why is it interesting to examine a meta-organization from the perspective of paradoxical tension theory in an action research context?". However, considering the analysis of the preliminary results, as presented above, we believe that we are on the right track, namely that the paradoxical perspective remains an interesting approach to address the case of The Sunny Spoon for three reasons.

First, it appears that action research can have an impact on the angle of analysis, and therefore, on the theoretical framework of a research. In the case illustrated here, we find it interesting to use the student's experience with The Sunny Spoon (and the organizational changes she witnessed) to highlight the internal processes within a social innovation process. This aspect is even more interesting since it allows for the generation of scientific knowledge based on both these processes and the paradoxical tensions that can emanate from them.

Secondly, we see that a collective action aiming at a social innovation (here, a pooling project) can lead to organizational changes, but also to inter-organizational innovations. From this perspective, the case of The Sunny Spoon, as a meta-organization, allows us to highlight not only the approaches put forward by the member-organizations but also the impact of the different actants in the social innovation process. Thus, the paradoxical tensions observed are all the more relevant to identify since they reflect an organizational, but above all, interorganizational approach and how they are managed.

Thirdly, the contribution of this research project to social innovations is about collective action. In the case of The Sunny Spoon, the meta-organization is not just a single actor who impacts the trajectory of the social innovation, but a set of heterogeneous actors, the member-organizations. In this sense, the organizational context specific to this case, i.e. a meta-organization emerging from the social economy, as well as its pooling project, as a social innovation, remains a subject little analyzed by researchers.

The next steps will therefore be to continue the analysis of the last six months of the internship to see if these preliminary results corroborate with the final ones.
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