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Translocal empowerment in transformative social innovation networks

Flor Avelino^a, Adina Dumitru^b, Carla Cipolla^c, Iris Kunze^d and Julia Wittmayer^a

^aDRIFT/Transition Academy, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; ^bUniversity A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain; ^cUniversidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; ^dUniversity of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to public and academic discussions on empowerment and social innovation by conceptualizing the mechanisms of empowerment from a *social psychology* perspective, and empirically exploring how people are empowered through both local and transnational linkages, i.e. *translocal networks*. Section 2 conceptualizes empowerment as the *process through which actors gain the capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a goal*, building on different power theories in relation to social change, combined with self-determination theory and intrinsic motivation research. Based on that conceptualization, empirical questions are formulated to be asked about cases under study. Section 3 then provides an empirical analysis of translocal networks that work with social innovation both at the global and local level. A total of five networks are analyzed: *FEBEA, DESIS, the Global Ecovillage Network, Impact Hub and Slow Food*. The embedded cases-study approach allows an exploration of how people are empowered through the transnational networking while also zooming in on the dynamics in local initiatives. In the final section, conceptual and empirical insights are synthesized into a characterization of the mechanisms of translocal empowerment, and challenges for future research are formulated.

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1. Introduction

Numerous initiatives worldwide aspire to contribute to social change towards more sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies, often in response to contemporary socio-economic challenges (Longhurst et al., 2016; Loorbach et al., 2016). We study such initiatives from the perspective of social innovation, defined as changing social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, knowing and framing (Avelino et al., 2017). In earlier publications, we have argued that social innovation is *transformative* to the extent that it challenges, alters and/ or replaces dominant institutions in the social context

CONTACT Flor Avelino  avelino@drift.eur.nl  DRIFT/Transition Academy, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Postbus 1738, 3000 DR, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

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(Haxeltine et al., 2017). The empowerment of people is both a condition for and an intended outcome of such change in social relations and dominant institutions.

Policy discourses on social innovation display high expectations regarding the empowering potentials of social innovation, as illustrated by e.g. the claim of the *Bureau of European Policy Advisors* (BEPA) that ‘social innovation can empower citizens and strengthen the economic and social fabric to cope with the European and global challenges that lie ahead’. (BEPA 2010: 16). This emphasis on empowerment as both a means and an end of social change can also be found in academic research, not only on social innovation (e.g. Moulaert 2013; Moulaert, Mehmood, MacCallum, & Leubolt, 2017; Novy & Leubolt 2005; Rodriguez, 2009), but also on socio-technical and grassroots innovation (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012; Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Smith & Stirling, 2018). In that context, the issue of empowerment is often implicitly or explicitly related to the extent to which innovations and ‘niches’ can survive, thrive and possibly even replace existing institutions or ‘regimes’ (Geels, 2014; Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2010). Empowerment is then inextricably intertwined with processes of diffusing, mainstreaming and up-scaling innovation (De Haan & Rotmans, 2011; Hölscher, Wittmayer, Avelino, & Giezen, 2017; Smith & Raven, 2012; Van der Bosch 2010).

This paper contributes to both public and academic discussions on empowerment potentials of innovations by responding to three specific gaps in the state-of-the-art research, namely (1) the role of psychological processes and (2) translocal linkages in empowerment, and – more specifically – (3) the connection between those two in terms of how translocal linkages are (psychologically) empowering. To start with the first, much innovation literature has emphasized the importance of empowerment in its general political sense, and often lacks specific attention for how exactly individuals in the context of social collectives are empowered through *social* innovation, including the underlying *psychological* mechanisms. Empowerment is often taken as a general metaphor to describe how initiatives are enabled or how ‘niches’ gain strength/power vis-à-vis existing ‘regimes’ (e.g. Smith & Raven, 2012), without unpacking how the individuals involved actually experience such processes of empowerment. Moreover, a vast majority of empirical research on (social) innovation is focused on isolated *local* cases and initiatives (e.g. Jungmann, Baur, & Ametowobla, 2015; Mulgan, 2006; Novy & Leubolt, 2005; Rodriguez, 2009; Wittmayer, Pel, Bauler, & Avelino, 2017) and tends to neglect the empowering effects of *transnational* linkages. We contribute to that empirical state-of-the-art by explicitly exploring how people are psychologically empowered through both local and transnational linkages, i.e. *translocal networks*. Studying networks is crucial in understanding empowerment dynamics because networks ‘provide access to resources necessary for the concretization of ideas’ and ‘play a role in shifting the flows of power’ (Clegg, Josserand, Mehra, & Pitsis, 2016, pp. 281–282).

This paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we conceptualize empowerment as the *process through which actors gain the capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a goal* (Alkire, 2005, 2007; Sen, 1985, 1999), with a focus on the psychological mechanisms underlying this process, building on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and other intrinsic motivation research (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Based on that conceptualization, we formulate questions for the empirical analysis of translocal networks that work with transformative social innovation both at the global and local level (section 3). We analyse a total of five networks: the *European Federation of Ethical and Alternative*

Banks (FEBEA), *Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability* (DESIS), *the Global Ecovillage Network* (GEN), *Impact Hub and Slow Food*. Our embedded cases-study approach allows us to explore how people are empowered (or disempowered) through transnational networking while also zooming in on the dynamics in local initiatives. In the final section we synthesize the conceptual and empirical insights into a characterization of the mechanisms of translocal empowerment and formulate challenges for future research.

2. Conceptualizing empowerment

Building on a combination of political theory and social psychology, we define *empowerment* as the *process through which actors gain the capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a goal* (Alkire, 2005, 2007; Avelino 2017; Avelino et al., 2017; Sen, 1985, 1999). This process includes actors gaining (1) access to resources and (2) the capacity and willingness to mobilize resources to achieve their goal. *Disempowerment* refers to the opposite: the process by which actors lose such access, capacity and willingness (Avelino et al., 2017). Resources are defined broadly as persons, assets, materials or capital, including human, mental, monetary, artifactual and natural resources (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009).¹

In this paper, we focus on the psychological dimension of empowerment, which underlies and possibly precedes the process of gaining access to resources. As a well-known saying goes: to empower a man, we should not give him a fish, but rather a fishing rod. But what if the fishing rod breaks? And what if the man does not know he can fish, how to fish, make a fishing rod, or lacks the motivation to undertake any of such activities? Ultimately, empowerment requires not only access to resources, but also the capacity and willingness to mobilize them, and the belief that one can. To operationalize this process of gaining capacity, willingness and belief, this paper builds on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and intrinsic motivation research (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) to elaborate six dimensions of psychological empowerment: (1) relatedness, (2) autonomy, (3) competence, (4) impact, (5) meaning, and (6) resilience (Haxeltine et al., 2017).

The importance of psychological dimensions of (dis)empowerment has been acknowledged within international development studies grappling with the question of empowerment for impoverished groups (Friedmann, 1992). Recently, the importance of basic psychological needs such as autonomy has been recognized in conceptualizations of empowerment for the study of social innovations (Alkire, 2007; Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2017; Reznickova & Zepeda, 2016). We go beyond these efforts by developing a more nuanced account of the different psychological dimensions of empowerment. Self-determination theory's account of basic psychological needs and a universal strive for well-being provides us with an understanding of drivers of involvement in social innovation and the ways social innovation contexts support the thriving of individuals. Using insights from intrinsic motivation research, we can account for the dynamic nature of the process of empowerment, as members of social innovation initiatives experience both successes and failures in efforts to achieve goals (Ryff & Singer, 2003).

We approach empowerment as a dynamic process (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). It depends on enabling conditions allowing individuals and groups to generate and maintain the psychological resources to pursue goals that matter to them. Key to understanding empowerment is the cross-cultural existence of three basic psychological needs, as documented in self-determination theory (Baumeister

& Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002): (1) *autonomy*, (2) *competence* and (3) *relatedness*. *Autonomy* refers to the ability to choose one's own acts and to act in line with personal values and identity, *relatedness* is about feeling connected and part of a social group, as well as receiving support and recognition from it, and *competence* refers to developing mastery and the perception of effectiveness in carrying out actions (Bidee et al., 2013).

The quality of basic need satisfaction is related to the motivation that individuals experience (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This motivation is posited on a continuum that ranges from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is considered to be innate and refers to a sense of pleasure or delight in doing certain things (i.e. our 'natural' interests). Intrinsic motivation can be supported by contexts that allow for the pursuit of such interests. However, self-determination theory also points out that the majority of human endeavours require doing things that are not inherently pleasant or intrinsically rewarding. Through a process of internalization, elaboration of, and identification with collective values and goals, we make them our own and create our unique combination, which is then experienced as an important part of our identity. Self-determined motivation as such is broader than intrinsic motivation and refers to striving for values and goals that come to be experienced as our own, even if they originated from a social context or collective.

In addition to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, the belief in the ability to achieve goals requires the actual experience of achieving some degree of *impact* and *meaning* (Bandura, 2000; Thomas & Velthouse, 1999). An important source of a sense of meaning is the elaboration of a collective identity, which can also supports in the often demanding journey for social change and innovation. This collective identity is captured in narratives and images that describe how a collective becomes what it is and also often includes a theory of change regarding the goals that it wants to achieve. This process of meaning-making is also a key aspect of empowerment. Finally, as they encounter failure, people develop psychological and behavioural strategies that allow them to maintain the motivation to pursue their goals, and to take next steps. This capacity to learn, adapt and recover from set-backs is *resilience*, the last dimension of empowerment.

While the six dimensions of empowerment (see Table 1 for an overview) are present at an individual level, the relational and organizational conditions for psychological need satisfaction are created collectively. When impact, meaning and resilience are the result of collective action in achieving shared goals, we talk about collective empowerment. The psychological dimensions of empowerment are experienced at an individual level, but they are constituted through relations, shared practices and collective action. Through a sense of belonging to a community, an individuals own appraisal of the six dimensions of empowerment is intimately related to an appraisal of these capacities at the collective level, and through a common identity that becomes experienced as a source of personal

Table 1. Dimensions of psychological empowerment.

Dimension of empowerment	Ingredients	
Capacity & willingness to mobilize resources	Relatedness	'We are connected to each other/ we belong'
	Autonomy	'We can determine what we do'
	Competence	'We are good at what we do'
	Impact	'We can make a difference'
	Meaning	'We believe in what we do/ doing this is meaningful to us'
	Resilience	'We can adapt & recover'

empowerment. Individual experience cannot be completely isolated from its social dimensions, as it is constituted through social interaction and mediated by the socially-shared construction of experience.

We use this conceptualization of empowerment to analyse how actors in social innovation networks are empowered in the context of translocal networks. With ‘translocal network’ we refer to networks in which local connections between actors in local initiatives are (at least) as important as transnational connections across actors and initiatives (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Drawing on five embedded case-studies, which are introduced in the next section, we empirically unpack how and to what extent actors involved in translocal networks are empowered at both local and transnational levels. Based on the dimensions of empowerment as specified above, we ask the following empirical question about the case-studies: *(how) do actors gain access to resources and a sense of relatedness/ autonomy/ competence/ impact/ meaning/ resilience through being involved in the local initiative and the transnational network?* Processes of empowerment often also entail disempowerment (whether intentional or unintentional) (Avelino et al., 2017). While the focus in this paper is on empowerment, we also shortly reflect on contrary disempowerment effects of each chase in terms of reflecting how actors loose access to resources and a sense of relatedness/ autonomy/ competence/ impact/ meaning/ resilience.

3. Empirical case-studies

Each of the chosen translocal networks, *FEBEA*, *DESIS*, *GEN*, *Impact Hub* and *Slow Food*, directly aims at power shifts through empowerment of specific parts of the population. The Impact Hub, for example, is a global network of urban co-creation spaces for social entrepreneurs that aims to increase the positive impact of each single entrepreneur to tackle societal challenges. We study the networks as embedded cases, both at the level of the transnational network and one specific local initiative (see Table 2). Together, the cases form a diverse set in terms of geographic locations (both urban and rural across different European countries), domains (food, housing, finance, entrepreneurship, design) and types of networks (from formal to informal, from centralized to loose). Using a diverse set for our empirical exploration strengthens the robustness of our findings and provides the opportunity to build a comparative understanding of translocal empowerment across different contexts.

Table 2. Embedded case-studies of 5 translocal networks.

Name	Translocal network	Local initiative under study
FEBEA	Different types of members-owned credit cooperatives	Fiare –Spain
DESIS	Network for design for social innovation and sustainability	POLIMI DESIS Lab Italy –Italy
Global Ecovillage Network	Connects intentional communities and other eco-communities	Ecovillage Tamera –Portugal
Impact Hub	Global network of urban co-creation spaces for social entrepreneurs	Impact Hub Amsterdam –Netherlands
Slow Food	Network linking food to a commitment to sustainable development	Convivium Slow Food Freiburg – Germany

Data collection and analysis took place in the context of the EU-funded ‘TRANSformative Social Innovation Theory’ (TRANSIT project 2017) project which aimed, amongst others, to understand how people are (dis)empowered to contribute to processes of transformative change, by integrating diverse interdisciplinary perspectives on social change and by empirically analyzing 20 translocal networks (Avelino et al., 2017; Wittmayer et al. 2017). Following methodological guidelines (Jørgensen et al., 2014, 2016; Pel et al., 2017; Wittmayer, Avelino, Dorland, Pel, & Jørgensen, 2015) that included sensitizing concepts, data collection was done in the period from 2014–2016 – and for DESIS included some follow up work. For each embedded case, we performed 12–20 interviews, did participant observation of 22+ hours and reviewed primary and secondary literature as well as social media outlets and websites (Cipolla, Joly, & Afonso, 2015; Dumitru, Lema-Blanco, García-Mira, Haxeltine, & Frances, 2015; Dumitru, Lema-Blanco, Kunze, & García-Mira, 2016; Kunze & Avelino, 2015; Wittmayer, Avelino, & Afonso, 2015). In general each case-study was conducted by two closely collaborating researchers. Since interviews were our main data collection method, we prompted interviewees to reflect on a personal sense of empowerment and their perception of collective empowerment through the interview questions. Data analysis was on the one hand done deductively, using the sensitizing concepts as code, and on the other hand inductively to allow for additional insights to emerge (Haxeltine et al., 2017).

The empirical research focused on those actively involved in the networks and/or their local initiatives. Distinctions between different kinds of involvement e.g. ‘members’, ‘users’ and ‘beneficiaries’ are not clear cut. For instance, in the case of the Impact Hub network, the social entrepreneurs that are the ‘users’ of the services of the network also refer to themselves as ‘members’ of the Impact Hub. The formal members of the Global Ecovillage Network are collective entities (i.e. ecovillage projects), and within these some individual residents are also actively involved in the network. In this paper, we focused on studying any individuals who consider themselves to be actively involved in the network and/or a local initiative, whether formally or informally, as a member, participant, organizer and/or user.

3.1. *Febea*

Credit unions and financial cooperatives are member-owned financial intermediation organizations that aim to create an alternative financial system and support a fairer, more inclusive, and environmentally sustainable economy. They endorse values of solidarity, place shared social and environmental objectives at the core of economic transactions, and work towards changing the logic of ‘profit for the sake of profit’ that currently governs traditional banks. They join forces through the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks (FEBEA). FIARE (the Foundation for Investment and Responsible Saving) is the Spanish subsidiary of FIARE BANCA ETICA, a European credit cooperative that carries out its financial activities in Spain and Italy. FIARE was created in 2003 in the Basque Country as a movement of citizens and social organizations aiming to promote socially responsible savings and investment among both private individuals and institutions.

Being member of a credit union gives **access to a wealth of resources**, most typically knowledge about the functioning and management of a financial institution. Most members do not have previous training in finance and they learn to create financial

services based on ethical principles of solidarity, trust, and inclusion through hands-on experimentation.

FEBEA is an inspiring learning space about legal issues, banking structures, and plurality of owners about this form of having a bank owned by the cooperatives. We also learned quite a lot about the importance of a presence on the ground, of having volunteers of the cooperative and involving them in the bank processes, so that they can contribute in the assessment of the projects and the assessment of loans, in the control and verification of output of projects. (Member interview #5; Dumitru et al., 2015)

A **sense of relatedness** is promoted through a group culture based upon core values: equality, mutual respect, reciprocity, cooperation and search for consensus. Credit unions are keenly aware of the importance of building positive relations and the sense of being part of a movement, by providing spaces for informal experience sharing between practitioners of credit unions in different parts of the world. Connectedness is seen as an essential part of credit unions:

When we reach stability or grow, we could lose proximity to the community, our participation circuits, social connectedness and thus people's motivation. Furthermore, if the financial tool is successful, we could be in danger of forgetting our cultural work, our political work, our alliances with other networks. (Member interview #1, FEBEA, *ibid*)

Credit unions promote **autonomy** in different ways. First, by providing clear information about products, operations and projects they fund, they aim to counteract the dependency and passivity clients of traditional banks experience. Members are in a position to make informed and congruent decisions. Secondly, they promote decentralization and participation, through membership owned structures and equal decision-making power.

In my personal opinion, joining FIARE has to do with values. If you have other banks saving your money, you are contributing to a series of nasty things. If you have FIARE save your money, you have the opportunity to decide. I do not know of any single project funded by FIARE that I didn't support. To have that capacity to reject awarding credit to a project because it doesn't fulfil the requirements you believe in is a great advance. (Member interview #10, FIARE, *ibid*)

Through direct experience with building and managing a financial entity, credit unions contribute to acquiring knowledge about developing an initiative as well as challenging existing systems and institutions. This knowledge contributes to a **sense of competence**, of *'financial issues not being only for the smart people, the professionals or the experts. Everybody in FIARE should be knowledgeable of the issues that are up for discussion. Otherwise participation would be a lie'* (Leading member of Fiare, 2014 *ibid*). Furthermore, assuming different roles in the international network and exchanging experience with people coming from different backgrounds also contributes to a sense of competence:

I am in the ethics committee [...] I learn a lot. And then I have the feeling that I provide a service by being the secretary of this commission and it feels good. (Member interview #2, FIARE, *ibid*)

Starting a credit union contributes to a sense of **impact**. This is often achieved through the initiative and effort of small number of people, who are able to demonstrate what is possible, even without the support of traditional institutions such as governments or regular banks:

We have demonstrated that normal people are able to create a bank, which is also a tool of empowerment, because it shows that individuals can change society. Until now, we were just people working together, but we realized that (through the cooperative) we could be and change much more. (Member interview #3, FIARE, *ibid*)

Members experience a sense of **meaning** by actively engaging in a project that aims to ‘*do something real, transforming utopia into reality*’ (Member interview #3, FIARE, *ibid*). Initiatives provide opportunities for becoming active and experimenting with ‘utopic’ alternatives to existing social and economic systems:

What I like most about Fiare is how it is constituted. Beyond being an ethical bank -because we have Triodos- Fiare has a different ideological base and performance. In Fiare we are involved in the construction of this bank. We are part of the project. (member interview #1, FIARE, *ibid*)

Finally, a sense of increased **resilience** is gained by overcoming obstacles and transforming them into opportunities for creative adaptations. For the Spanish credit union FIARE, the 2007-2008 financial crisis came with new banking requirements that made many credit cooperatives and small local banks and saving institutions (which used to fund local/regional economies) disappear. They adapted by merging with the Italian credit cooperative Banca Popolare Etica:

New obstacles appeared in the process of constitution of FIARE: the banking policy was tightened. The legal requirements to create a bank have increased, including the necessary capital for the legal authorization by the Spanish regulator. These issues led to the agreement with the Italian Banca Popolare Etica to become partners within a single bank. (Member interview #1, FIARE, *ibid*)

Making positive use of challenges is also a result of their capacity to recover and adapt. The economic crisis also contributed to increased citizen awareness of the problems of traditional banking practices, which supported credit unions in making their message more easily understood:

Explaining the aims of our project takes us now half an hour less (after the crisis). In 2000, when we proposed alternatives to the financial institutions, people asked us: why do you have to look for alternatives? Explaining these issues today is easier. People understand what had happened and they consider reasonable to look for alternatives. The crisis facilitated this and our membership has increased. (Member interview #7, FIARE, *ibid*)

Although participating in developing successful alternative financial institutions is experienced as empowering, disempowerment also surfaced as the project grew and adapted to changes in the broader social and institutional context. In merging the Spanish with the Italian credit cooperative and meeting the legal requirements to become a bank, FIARE attracted a wave of new members and became a larger organization. Autonomy to explore alternative financial solutions became more limited, although specialization was counteracted by maintaining the original association (as a legal entity) and exploring alternative projects at the margins of the new bank. Moreover, to use resources efficiently, members took on responsibilities that fitted their skill set, thus replacing the original style of taking on a diverse set of roles and responsibilities and developing new competences. Contexts in which direct, face to face, relaxed interactions where members can exchange experience become scarcer. This decrease in direct contact, which is a key element for

developing trust, empathy and a sense of solidarity, was experienced as de-motivating especially by those who participated from the start. As they grew, new members joined with expectations shaped by their interactions with traditional banks. To align more traditional bank services with the credit cooperative's active participation ethos, new members are educated to counter disempowerment.

3.2. Desis

Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS) is a global network of labs based in design schools. The main idea is that design schools, based on regular activities undertaken by teachers, researchers and students and tapping into students' enthusiasm and faculty experience could help in supporting and accelerating social change towards sustainability. It is considered to be the '*first network of schools dealing with social innovation, specifically in the design field*' (Member, interview #1 in Cipolla et al., 2015). The POLIMI-DESIS Lab, based in the Department of Design at the Politecnico di Milano in Italy, is composed of a group of researchers adopting a strategic and systemic approach to design, with a specific focus on design for services and design activism. Its objective is exploring how design can enable people, communities, enterprises and social actors to activate and manage innovation processes, aimed at experimenting with sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing.

DESIS operates based on regular activities undertaken by teachers, researchers and students. Programs run with no financial support and DESIS coordination only connects these activities promoting collaborative knowledge production and exchange. At a local level, members have access primarily to intangible **resources** by being involved in activities, but also to physical resources (office space, equipment, furniture, classrooms) available in the labs.

DESIS cannot manage any money. So, it is not an association for profit nor without profit, or non-profit. How does this work? The idea is that every project we do is done by the labs. It is a network of nodes with a network of activities and a very large and flexible coordination of everything. (Member, interview #1, *ibid*)

DESIS was co-founded by former PhD candidates of Politecnico di Milano, who became professors in universities all over the world and set up the first DESIS Labs. A sense of **relatedness** emerged based on their common history. DESIS as a platform connects their past (as colleagues theorizing about design for social innovation) to their present (practicing it in the labs). This sense of a mutually supportive community spread throughout DESIS. The founder (and former advisor of the co-founders) performed a key role in this process:

He (the founder) listens a lot. He is a great amplifier in a conscious and unconscious way. Sometimes I see him saying things that I have said. (...) he is a good spokesperson because he can say things that you recognize yourself. He absorbs and makes a synthesis. This is a great dowry and will be fundamental for the DESIS Network. (Member, interview #2, *ibid*)

DESIS aims to instil a sense of **autonomy** in the sense of independence from the usual body of knowledge provided to students:

designers have mainly been part of the (social and economic) problem that we now have to face. Moving from here to become part of the solution, to become active agents in the

transition towards sustainable ways of living, designers must make a profound change in their culture and praxis. (DESES founder - Manzini, 2007)

When we started working, at least here, with a public administration, what they expected from designers was totally different from what you delivered. They started to understand that creativity is not only something you use to produce chairs. (Member, interview #2, *ibid*)

The network and the local labs aim to interact to compose a platform for developing new knowledge and **competence** in designers to move ‘from the idea of designing to solve problems to one of designing to enable people to live as they like while moving toward sustainability’ (DESES founder - Manzini, 2007 and to ‘promote new ways of living, in a kind of new system of solutions for people’s everyday life’ (Member, interview #2, *ibid*). The aim is to equip students and professionals to perform this new role: ‘this more theoretical dimension was translated into tools and into something that could influence more directly the schools, in the teaching’ (Member, interview #1, *ibid*).

Students are regarded as the main channel through which **impact** is produced. It includes the development a set of pioneering projects targeted to exemplifying a new design practice and to creating a demand for these new professionals.

Our main channel for impact is our raw material, and our raw material are the students . . . (They) will be the younger designers of the next generations, and after all it is for them that we try now to conceptualize what design for social innovation is, because we are in a way, saying that a designer is not anymore who it used to be. And if we insist to train and to educate young designers for this new way of being designers, then we have to create for them the condition to work and to exist in the society. (Member, interview #2, *ibid*)

There is a sense of **meaning** derived from the belief that design education can be transformative through the development of visionary projects in the DESIS Labs. It is considered that DESIS gathers those motivated to nurture a culture of change and transformation in universities.

It is a belief. It seems that the DESIS Network is a kind of movement, of activism. This is a disciplinary movement, people that feel themselves a different kind of designer. This is not like (other social innovation network) that wants to involve more people, parts of the population. Our view is more technical and professional; it is from a point of view of a specific discipline and job. (Members, interview #2 and #5, *ibid*)

DESES considers society as a vast laboratory for creativity that can be channelled to tackle societal challenges and to promote a transition towards sustainable ways of living. DESIS Labs aim to participate in these processes and, by being based in universities, have the flexibility to explore and consolidate new frontiers, to test new ideas and projects, to prototype them, to fail and to try again. This experimental character is part of the design discipline itself and fosters in DESIS members a sense of **resilience**.

Disempowerment in DESIS includes perceptions of limited autonomy, impact and meaning among members. There is autonomy for participants in the Labs, with a minimum requirement to be affiliated to DESIS, i.e. to promote and support social innovation processes through design. The network has a decision-making mechanism that allows to manage the key processes of the association, for example, to elect the coordinator and its coordination plan (Cipolla et al., 2015). However, the network does not have a deliberative process for members to discuss and eventually agree about issues of

concern and develop common standpoints. It results that the standpoints of the founder converge with (what is considered to be) that of the network (Member, interview #2, *ibid*). The role of the founder and his standpoints were crucial to develop the network (Cipolla et al., 2015), but progressively, as the network evolves, there is an increasing demand for autonomy among active members and the lack of it is perceived as disempowering. The quest for participation through deliberative processes includes also the founder and expresses the will to increase the impact of DESIS. The network operates based on universities and an important expected impact of DESIS is to be influential in the design education for social change – and to influence social change *per se* – through educational mechanisms. Limitations to reach such impact disempower members and founder. This also has consequences in the meaningfulness for participants. The interest and affiliations are increasing, which may indicate that these disempowering aspects may be perceived more strongly by longer-term members. Paradoxically, the disempowerment aspects are also empowering since they create a tension that pushes the network to evolve. Activities to increase the knowledge exchange and participation between labs are under development and aim to create the conditions to solve these disempowering aspects.

3.3. Global ecovillage network

The Ecovillage movement emerged in the 1980s/90s when thousands of local ecovillages emerged worldwide in response to ecological and social challenges. *The Global Ecovillage Network* (GEN) was founded in 1995 as a legal charity and bottom up network for education, exchange of experiences and political lobby work. It has branches on each continent and many national networks. One of the GEN members is Tamera, an ecovillage in the South of Portugal, where 170 people live and work on site permanently, accompanied by hundreds of visitors from all over the world. A central feature of Tamera is its belief that societal challenges (e.g. war, ecological destruction, inequality) originate from distorted human relations. Tamera is mostly known for its Water Retention Landscape, its Solar Village experiments with low-tech innovation in energy and its relation to peace activism.

GEN provides monetary, artefactual, mental, natural and human **resources**. This includes experiences in basic self-made technologies, social capital and voluntary engagement as well as financial support for ecovillage members and initiatives. GEN also provides a public online database, including an interactive map, which informs people about ecovillages projects across the world.²

GEN is a very informal network that relies on personal contacts. It fosters a sense of **relatedness** by providing a platform for sharing experiences with living and working in an ecological community. These experiences, as well as shared visions of ‘a better world’, and being part of a world-wide movement contributes to strong bonds. Moreover, GEN is a platform for sharing group building methods that are developed and tested across ecovillages:

The emotional level is crucial. The Forum [a specific group building method used in ecovillages] is central as a learning method for going through your own processes. Singing and massaging each other: these are non-mental activities. (GEN Interview 5; Kunze & Avelino, 2015)

We do a lot of sharing: Being heard and sitting in a circle; Some people and guests say it is the first time they ever feel really heard. (GEN Interview 4, *ibid*)

Gaining a sense of **autonomy** is at the heart of the ecovillage movement, as most ecovillages aim to reach high levels of ecological, economic and social self-sufficiency in their local and regional context. Sharing experiences on how to achieve such autonomy is an important function of GEN and also of individual ecovillages:

We also try to achieve a global effect. We are an education place for peace workers, also from the global south and crises areas. People come that want to learn how to create sustainability, autonomy in an ecological and social dimension. We support projects in different continents and we provide knowledge to everybody who wants it. (Tamera Interview 1, *ibid*)

Besides ecological and economic self-sufficiency, individual ecovillages as well as the GEN network organizations search for a balance between individual autonomy and community solidarity, partly by exploring alternative governance structures and autonomy-oriented decision making methods such as e.g. sociocracy.³

The ecovillage movement provides an opportunity for developing **competences** in diverse areas of life. For instance, visiting and residential academics are encouraged to also work in the garden or kitchen, while farmers and cooks get involved in organization and decision making. Events organized by GEN often focus on sharing, learning and experimenting with socio-ecological, socio-technological and social competences.

A sense of **impact** is primarily driven by the many real life examples in the hundreds of ecovillages across the world, often in the form of small-scale transformation experiments. *'We have positive, real examples. Seeing a living example is much more valuable than talking. Living the change.'* (GEN Interview 5, *ibid*). In the case of Tamera, the permaculture gardens, the man-made lakes and the organic buildings are particularly strong physical manifestations of idealistic philosophies. As formulated by a Tamera resident:

The special thing is that I am experiencing this on myself. Not somebody is telling me stories. I walked in this place. (...) I [was away] for a few months, and I came back and it was full with water ... ! (Interview TAM3, *ibid*)

Through its interactions with governments and science, GEN has advanced people's feeling of being taken seriously by providing international visibility, credibility and legitimacy to the work of GEN members:

GEN started off as islands and experiments of the future. Today we live in a different world. Awareness has risen dramatically. The concepts that GEN was using 10 years ago are currently used by many politicians and even in the corporate world. Now it is no longer about creating future island but it is transitioning society to resilience. (GEN interview 1, *ibid*)

Members of GEN gain a sense of **meaning** through a shared narrative of *'Changing the world one heart at a time'* (GEN Interviewee 4, *ibid*). GEN connects different ecovillages as well as other ecological movements in developing narratives and strategies on social change, which resonate with the ideas that individual ecovillages develop. Tamera strongly emphasized that it wants to create new social systems, or in fact, a new world, a 'Realistic Utopia'. The *Tamera Manifesto for a New Generation on Planet Earth*, for instance, argues that *'the world is in transition towards a new way to live on Earth'*, that *'we are experiencing*

the collapse of the mega-systems', and that *'the new planetary community is making a fundamental system-change'*.⁴

Resilience in the sense of socio-ecological resilience, technological and economic independence is an important goal in itself for the ecovillage movement. A psychological sense of resilience is also fostered within and between ecovillages in the explicit attention for experimentation, failure, recovery and regeneration, conflict resolution and flexible decision-making methods.

Living in an ecovillage can also include disempowering aspects. First, the legal frames of the respective governments often have limiting effects on local eco-innovations. For instance, many laws restrict the use of compost toilets, independent water (re-)use or eco-construction of houses. In Tamera, there have been conflicts with the local governments regarding slow adaptation of land-use planning regulations, which did not allow Tamera residents to build any more houses (resulting in many of them having to live in trailers). Tamera has also created its own certified school (combining elements from Montessori and Waldorf), but residents still have been legally obliged to send their children to the official local school. Second, the personal engagement that is required to live in an intentional community is very intense. While the focus on inner work and social relations is often considered empowering, it also seems to be one of the main sources of challenges and power struggles. In Tamera, when asked explicitly about issues of disempowerment, the thing that was mentioned first and foremost concerned 'inner power struggles' (Kunze & Avelino, 2015). It was often emphasized that working on social relations can be extremely confronting and difficult and that this can be disheartening. It was also mentioned that at such disheartened moments, the community is experienced as supportive.

3.4. Impact Hub

The Impact Hub (IH) is a network of social entrepreneurs, combining elements from co-working spaces, innovation labs and business incubators. Impact Hubs across the world aim to create a *'vibrant community of passionate and entrepreneurial people'*, a *'source of inspiration providing meaningful content'*, and a *'physical space that offers a flexible and highly functional infrastructure to work, meet, learn, and connect'*.⁵ In 2005, the first Hub was opened in London, followed by Hubs in São Paulo, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. In 2017, there are over 95 local IHs across five continents and more than five Impact Hubs in the making. Combined, the IHs have over 16.000 members, mostly social entrepreneurs. Impact Hub Amsterdam was founded in 2008. Today, it has a total of around 350 members, as well as a wider network of partners and followers that participate and/or cooperate in programmes.

At the local level, social entrepreneurs access a whole range of **resources** through the co-working spaces, including physical resources (e.g. office space, desks, furniture, printer, coffee machine etc.) as well as more intangible resources (knowledge, expertise, contacts). Being a member of a local IH provides one with connections to other IHs elsewhere, thereby gaining access to various urban places and professionals around the world – both physically as virtually.

While there are considerable differences between local IHs, they are connected through three specific 'Globally Shared Values': trust, courage and collaboration. Users of local IHs

are referred to as ‘members’ of a co-working space, who belong to a local and global community of like-minded people. There is a shift of focus from formal relations between employers and employees, or between landlords renting out office spaces to clients, to the more informal relations between independent entrepreneurs sharing a co-working space. This focus on (an improved sense of) **relatedness** is argued to be one of the main attracting features of the network:

It is about the quality of relationship and the way we operate with each other. (...). Not just pure service relationships or nice products and services. That’s nice, but people come in for something bigger. The way of being together is why people come to our Hubs. (Member global Impact Hub team, interview #8 in Wittmayer, Avelino, & Afonso, 2015)

The sense of **autonomy** of the many social entrepreneurs who are members is increased through becoming member of an IH as a way of gaining access to necessary resources (e.g. office space), while remaining independent. By collaborating and uniting forces at both local and international levels, social entrepreneurs make a better chance of competing with larger enterprises for capital investment, thereby challenging the competitive advantage of larger enterprises.

Numerous local and international gatherings, both locally and internationally, are organized for social entrepreneurs to learn and develop **competences**. These include various courses on business models, meetings for attracting investors, or programmes for expanding one’s business internationally, such as the IH Scaling Programme:

Every country has its cultural and legal differences. If you are a relatively small business and want to expand, it can be a nightmare where to start. An IH scheme like this [the IH Scaling Programme] is a place for you to go, and to meet people, to learn, get orientated, advice to start. (...) [It is] the most meaningful concrete demonstration so far of us delivering our purpose of being globally connecting (...) in a way that is helping social business to thrive. (Manager Scaling Programme, interviewed for TRANSIT CTP database⁶)

More generally, being a member of IH means gaining access to a global and local pool of people with different sets of competences, knowledge and experiences. As described by a member of the IH Amsterdam team: *‘Instead of just having ten colleagues here who are working towards the same purpose, you have a hundred all over the world.’* (Interviewee #4 in Wittmayer, Avelino, & Afonso, 2015). Moreover, social entrepreneurs can gain legitimacy and visibility through the common IH brand, vision and network, which helps them profile their own enterprise and mission.

The IH quite literally and explicitly aims to increase the **impact** that social entrepreneurs have with their work. Such impact is elaborately discussed in meetings and courses, monitored through e.g. annual impact reports, as well as targeted through specially designed programmes such as e.g. the *Investment Ready Programme*. On the one hand, there is a focus on local and urban action, which results in physically tangible spaces and projects. On the other hand, there is the global sharing of all those local experiences, which increases the collective sense of impact:

There’s people who are living this change and by making it not just an isolated place here in the city, we show that it’s happening all over the world. (...) We have a common purpose. All the hubs all over the world, we’re working towards the same goals. (Interviewee #4, *ibid*)

It's so powerful if you get together and align on exploring business opportunities for impact globally. (...) Last week we were together designing how to create global businesses with tremendous local impact, and we can do it together. That is really strong for me and that makes me excited about exploring and expanding this network. (Interviewee #17, *ibid*)

The IH presents itself as a '*unique impact ecosystem of people and organizations creating a radically better world – locally and globally*' (Impact Hub website, 2018). The IH aims to combine for-profit entrepreneurship (i.e. making a living) with non-profit societal goals (e.g. sustainability, poverty reduction, environmental protection, etc.), thereby challenging the distinction between for-profit and non-profit. This is a sense of **meaning** that it instills in its members. For entrepreneurs coming to the IH for the first time, this is reported to be one of the empowering insights:

A lot of people think that you have to make a choice, it's either choosing for something that is good and (...) not being able to sustain yourself, or choosing for something which is destroying the world a little bit more but you can make a living with that. And I see people coming in here and slowly waking up and lightening up and seeing (...) that you can actually combine the two. And it's possible, it's not some kind of a fairy tale. (Member Impact Hub Amsterdam, interview #4; in Wittmayer, Avelino, & Afonso, 2015)

The whole set up of the IH aims categorically at learning, by providing several formal and informal learning channels. From the informal coffee corner and lunch table, to 'hosting' practices where trained 'hosts' have an explicit task to connect individuals to learn from each other, to extensive programming with a variety of events, courses and workshops. Part of the culture of learning is the explicit sharing of failures. At the international level, there has been the organization of 'Fuck Up Nights' to exchange failures, and the IH Amsterdam regularly organizes 'Failing Forward Nights' where entrepreneurs are given a stage to share and discuss their challenges. Through this focus on learning how to adapt and recover from failure, members develop a sense of **resilience**.

The focus on social entrepreneurship also has disempowering dimensions. Social entrepreneurship is characterized by the combination of entrepreneurial and commercial means with social goals (Alvord, Brown, & Letts 2004, p. 262). It is 'not-for-profit' in that profit is made, even though it is not the main or only goal. Social enterprises are often celebrated as providing viable alternatives to privatization and re-regulation (Laville, 2003; Ridley-Duff, 2009). One of the disempowering 'risks' of this concept lies in political discourses that present 'social entrepreneurship' as a replacement for publicly funded services and as a 'solution' for budget cuts. A related concern lies in the increase of self-employed 'social entrepreneurs' in the Netherlands (CBS, 2015). While this might be empowering in terms of increased independence/ autonomy, it also obscures fragile and precarious lives that many self-employed entrepreneurs are forced to live (e.g. limited access to social security benefits). In the Dutch public debate, worries have been expressed about this trend (e.g. Tonkens and Duyvendank, 2015; Van Stigt, 2013). Notwithstanding any political position on this, the ideas and practices of the IHs may be (ab)used to legitimise certain political discourses, and the increase of social entrepreneurship may have unintended consequences in interaction with its socio-political contexts.

3.5. Slow food

Slow Food (SF) is a global grassroots movement, whose aim is to transform current systems of food production, distribution and consumption towards clean, fair and good food. The movement proposes a change in relations between producers and consumers, based on an ethic of co-responsibility, conviviality and enjoyment, the right to food, and the protection of cultural diversity. The *International Association of Slow Food* is based in Bra (Italy), with a membership of 100.000 people and one million supporters in 160 countries around the world. The Slow Food convivium Freiburg (SFFR) was opened in 1998 as one of the first convivia in Germany. Running diverse project like member dinners, youth education in schools and participating at a large annual consumption fair, the number of members has slowly and continuously grown to 300.

SF members acquire **resources** such as knowledge about the why and how of producing food and the negative impacts of the current food system on biodiversity, rural areas and cultural and community traditions:

Basically, Slow Food allowed me to value the products we are consuming. I am aware now that when we eat a pineapple, that pineapple has travelled thousands of kilometres. That this tomato we eat in November is no longer a seasonal product. Life is full of these apparently small details. But as human beings we need to eat three times a day, so it's really not a trivial issue. (SF member interview #1; Dumitru et al., 2016)

Next to knowledge, SF members can access emerging local economic circuits which provide an alternative market for interested consumers and small SF producers, who find it difficult to compete on the regular food market, due to higher production costs.

Collaborative relations between consumers and producers are promoted through the facilitation of contact and face-to-face encounters, having fun and meeting around food, which contribute to the experience of **relatedness**, empathy and feelings of ownership. This sense of relatedness is also established with people from other parts of the world sharing the same values, interests and goals. Meeting other members of the global community in face-to-face events like the 'Terra Madre' is highlighted as a highly emotional experience, which enhances a sense of belonging and a common identity.

Maintaining the **autonomy** of different groups is recognized as important in order to maintain motivation and align practices with the ethos of the movement. SF also coined the term 'austere anarchy' to refer to the freedom of different grassroots groups to organize as they saw fit while upholding the principles SF endorsed:

They organized an assembly of all the people involved in the network at the time they launched the campaign 'Slow Food 2.0', with a slogan of 'austere anarchy' which meant a 'free interpretation of the movement' as long as we were engaged in doing something. We were allowed to run the youth network with autonomy, taking care of our resources and maintain a united attitude to the work we are doing. It is a turning point, because it is an intended call to put aside selfishness and fulfil the purpose of the movement. (SF member interview #2, *ibid*)

A sense of **competence** is gained through hands-on learning about the food system through e.g. cooking together. Participation in the network is also experienced as an insightful learning experience:

Slow Food allows people to develop their leadership skills (...). I knew nothing on food systems ten years ago and now I'm working in schools helping them develop food systems (...) Slow Food gave me the opportunity to become a leader and I was able to take it to certain levels and become effective about it. (SF member interview #6, *ibid*)

SF members *'feel proud to have been pioneers'* (SF member interview #10, *ibid*), and experience a sense of **impact** through their contributions to changing the food system. Successful projects and activities work as flagship initiatives and as proof of what can be achieved:

We are doing the work we can do and it is important work. There was no one before thinking about 10.000 gardens in Africa. And we have made life easier for 10.000 communities. And with very little help. With people's money, with a few organizations, and this has been so important, it touches me deeply because I see it as my thing as well. (SF member interview #7, *ibid*)

Being effective and being successful, thus demonstrating collective capability is an important part of keeping members motivated, as happens for instance through the organization of successful food fairs. SF Freiburg is the largest exhibitor at an annual regional consumption fair with 42.000 visitors. This gives members a sense of both impact and relatedness:

Success is important to strengthen the group, the bond, to make us feel eager to continue making more, to extend our work as far as we can. Many producers have sold out their products sometimes by the end of the morning. (SF member interview #8, *ibid*)

SF offers a sense of **meaning** in that members can contribute to social transformation, through the different roles they play within the movement. In the case of SF Freiburg, members engage in education about natural food through e.g. cooking with children in elementary schools. Volunteers aim to *'do something for the planet, to leave the world a better place than when you come into it'* (SF member interview #1, *ibid*).

I think the major benefit of me being part of Slow Food is that it gives me some structure to do the work that I want to do. (...) as an individual it would be hard for me to do this kind of work and be taken seriously but having a non-profit organisation behind me allows me to point to something that I belong to and to which the work is associated to. (SF member interview #6, *ibid*)

Producers who endorse the SF philosophy often face important challenges in their local communities as the existing food system is geared towards 'fast' and industrialized production practices. Through international network activities, members share experiences with others facing similar challenges in many parts of the world, receive support and conceive of themselves as part of a larger movement. These, in turn, contribute to **resilience** in the pursuit of transformative goals, as illustrated by the following quote regarding how people felt after the Terra Madre network event:

Terra Madre empowers people to return to their territories, they all say that they felt lonely, but after Terra Madre they did no longer feel that way. Slow Food is an international network that understands what they are facing; people share the same issues and problems that they have to cope with in their countries. (SF member interview #4, *ibid*)

In some contexts, entrenched class and racial divides are reproduced when local SF initiatives were started by chefs and those who could enjoy food in expensive restaurants. When the organization is then extended towards other groups or areas (e.g. rural or indigenous areas), this can create friction along long-standing class divides. Careful steering towards

inclusiveness is a key factor in creating a context of autonomy and relatedness that would empower and maintain the motivation of old and new members. A disempowering aspect of the local convivium of SF Freiburg concerns its relation with the national SF network, where legal and financial power are centralized. Most of the local convivia do not maintain their own legal structures, and as a result members of SF Freiburg experienced some limitations and felt as if they were just ‘a satellite of SF Germany’ (ibid). Different visions on the development of an initiative sometimes also contribute to disempowerment. Another local SF initiative went through a deep crisis with a new leader steering resources from biodiversity projects to engaging in more intense political activism, which led to a loss of motivation by and resistance from long-standing members. A new executive director was hired, who re-engaged de-motivated members through opening a debate around how to restructure the organization and making sure everyone was heard and included.

Discussion & conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to conceptualize and empirically explore how people are empowered in translocal networks working on social innovation. Empowerment was defined as the *process through which actors gain the capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a goal*, which depends on actors gaining (a) access to resources and (b) the capacity and willingness to mobilize resources to achieve a goal. We distinguished six dimensions of gaining such willingness: satisfaction of the psychological needs for (1) relatedness, (2) autonomy and (3) competence, and achieving a sense of (4) impact, (5) meaning, and (6) resilience.

We then explored these dimensions empirically in five translocal networks (*FEBEA*, *DESI*, *the Global Ecovillage Network*, *Impact Hub*, *Slow Food*), by posing the following question: *(how) do actors gain access to resources and a sense of relatedness/autonomy/competence/impact/meaning/resilience through being involved in the local initiative and the transnational network?*

We found that each of the above-mentioned psychological dimensions of empowerment are fulfilled through a process of multi-layered community-building in both local initiatives and translocal networks. In the local initiatives, the six dimensions of empowerment are ‘deepened’, while in the translocal networking, they are ‘expanded’ (see overview in [Table 3](#) below). It is this particular combination of ‘local deepening’ and ‘translocal expansion’ that is specifically empowering.

The translocal network is a crucial way for social innovation actors with transformative ambitions to experience an expansion of their impact, including an increased access to resources. This is crucial because social innovation actors with transformative aims often cannot gain a sense of impact or access to resources within the context of dominant institutions (from which they – by definition – wish to deviate). Gaining access and a sense of impact through both local connections and a translocal network may function as an alternative to lacking institutional support. As such, the combination of local embeddedness and transnational connectedness enables actors to persist in challenging, altering and replacing dominant institutions. This helps to explain how transformative agency can develop despite of the unfavourable power dynamics that social innovators face in relation to dominant institutions in current economic and socio-technical systems.

This insight contributes to the state of the art on (social) innovation, which often tends to focus on the existing relations between innovations vs. incumbent institutions,

Table 3. Dimensions of empowerment in relation to local and translocal mechanisms.

Dimension of empowerment	Individual & collective sense of empowerment	Local mechanisms for deepening	Translocal mechanisms of expanding
Relatedness	<i>We are related to each other</i>	Creating conditions to renew relations in ways that support wellbeing (e.g. face to face contact, spontaneous interactions).	Meeting and relating to others in other places.
Autonomy	<i>We can determine what we do</i>	Creating local contexts that facilitate doing things differently in line with one's values.	Creating larger supportive contexts for autonomous action – e.g. by pooling resources and creating alternative markets.
Competence	<i>We are good at what we do</i>	Developing & sharing local skills & expertise through hands-on experimentation and learning	Developing and sharing translocal skills and expertise, through becoming part of a larger movement and developing strategies for wider transformation
Impact	<i>We can make a difference</i>	Changing local circumstances and expanding ideas to local communities.	Increasing access to resources and legitimacy, based on evidence that there is local and global impact.
Meaning	<i>We believe in what we do</i>	Local sense-making and collective identity.	Confirming the broader existence of certain shared values (e.g. shared narratives).
Resilience	<i>We can adapt & recover</i>	Drawing on local networks created to survive crises/ pressures.	Sharing & learning from each other's failures & challenges; drawing on the resources of a larger movement.

alternative vs. mainstream, small vs. large, niches vs. regimes. A sole focus on these bifurcations underplays the power of translocal connections as an opportunity for up-scaling and institutionalization 'by other means'. Translocal networks are not just a way for replicating innovations to diverse contexts, but also a matter of (1) distributing access to resources and institutions, (2) up-scaling, normalizing and institutionalizing social innovations and (3) psychologically empowering actors through an increased willingness and belief that they can and want to mobilize resources to realize alternative goals.

Across our case-studies, we have also observed disempowerment challenges, most often in terms of loss of a sense of autonomy or competence when confronted with unfavourable institutional contexts, unintended consequences, or internal or external hierarchies and inequalities (between government and initiative, between network and initiative or within the initiative between members). While this paper has focused on the empowering dimensions of translocal networks, an important challenge for future research would be to more systematically unpack the dynamic relations between empowerment and disempowerment. For this future research on (dis)empowerment we distinguish three specific foci.

First, the relation between the different dimensions of (dis)empowerment (e.g. how they compensate or counteract each other), and the processes through which they are developed and combined over time, deserve further research. For instance, how, when and to what extent do people give up a sense of autonomy for a higher sense of impact, and what is the effect on their overall sense of (dis)empowerment? A second focus concerns the fact that translocal embeddedness is not exclusive to social innovation initiatives, but also applies to dominant institutions (through e.g. transnational regimes, multinational companies, and so on). The translocal knife cuts on both sides of this globalizing world: for each translocal network promoting alternative solutions, we can find numerous

(inter)national formal and informal networks lobbying the political and commercial interests of existing conglomerates. Be it the fossil fuel industry, the housing market, central banks or agricultural monopolies, the power of centralized public-private partnerships affects the extent to which social innovation networks can have a transformative impact at both local and translocal levels. For future research we propose a systematic comparison of (dis)empowerment processes in the confrontation, competition and/or collaboration across different translocal networks, not only those working on social innovation and transformative change, but also those defending and reproducing existing configurations. Finally, this paper has not looked into the (un)intended (dis)empowerment effects of social innovation networks regarding *other* communities outside of their target groups. While we analyzed how the people involved are empowered as they collectively work on social innovation and change, it would also be relevant to scrutinize the *outcomes* of this work in terms of (dis)empowerment, by assessing how and to what extent the social ambitions of these networks (e.g. social justice, equality, positive social impact, sustainability) are being realized for a wider set of audiences.

Notes

1. Mental (information, concepts, ideas, beliefs), human (human leverage, personnel, members, voters), Artifactual (apparatuses, products, construction, infrastructure), natural (raw materials, physical space, time, organic life) and monetary (funds, cash, financial stock, currencies). There is no inherent hierarchy between the resources – they are interrelated and to mobilize one resource, others might be used.
2. The map can be found here: <http://gen-europe.org/ecovillages/find-ecovillages/index.htm> and the global platform: <http://sites.ecovillage.org/>
3. **Sociocracy** is a system of governance, using consent-based decision making among equivalent individuals and an organizational structure based on cybernetic principles.
4. <https://ecovillagecymru.wordpress.com/tamera-manifesto/>
5. <http://www.impacthub.net/inside-impact-hub/>
6. <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/sii/ctp/impact-hub-scaling-programme>

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