



## THESIS / THÈSE

### MASTER IN MANAGEMENT

#### The Influence of Creative Hubs on the Evolution of its Users Empirical evidence of the Namur Creative Hub (TRAKK)

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# The Influence of Creative Hubs on the Evolution of its Users

Empirical evidence of the Namur Creative Hub (TRAKK)

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## Abstract

*La croissance de l'économie créative a encouragé les décideurs politiques et les urbanistes à soutenir la créativité, la durabilité et l'innovation dans ce secteur en créant des hubs créatifs. Il a déjà été démontré que ces espaces physiques influencent l'état d'esprit, les opérations et le fonctionnement des entrepreneurs et des entreprises créatifs associés. Ce mémoire étudie empiriquement l'influence d'un centre créatif spécifique, à savoir le TRAKK à Namur, sur l'évolution de ses utilisateurs. Les résultats, générés après l'utilisation de l'approche de l'histoire de vie, de l'observation non-participante et de l'analyse de documents, indiquent que le FabLab au sein du TRAKK exerce une influence inspirante et de soutien sur l'état d'esprit, les opérations et le fonctionnement. Ces résultats indiquent également que deux éléments dans le TRAKK, l'infrastructure et les événements organisés, ont provoqué l'apparition d'événements déclencheurs qui ont eu un impact sur ses utilisateurs.*

The growth of the creative economy has encouraged policymakers and city planners to support creativity, sustainability, and innovation in this sector by establishing creative hubs. These physical spaces have previously been shown to influence the mindset, operations, and functioning of the associated creative entrepreneurs and businesses. This master's thesis empirically investigates the influence of a specific creative hub, namely the TRAKK in Namur, on the evolution of its users. The results, generated after the use of the life-story approach, non-participant observation and document analysis, indicate that the FabLab within the TRAKK exerts an inspiring and supporting influence on the mindset, operations, and working of its users. These findings also provide evidence that two elements in the TRAKK, the infrastructure and the organised events, have provoked the happening of triggering events that have had an impact on its users.

**Keywords:** Creative economy, Creative hubs, TRAKK Namur, FabLab, Life-story approach

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	I
Acknowledgements .....	II
General Introduction .....	1
1 Literature review and statement of problem .....	3
1.1 <i>Literature review</i> .....	3
1.1.1 Third places .....	3
1.1.2 Creative hubs .....	4
1.2 <i>Problem Statement</i> .....	7
1.2.1 Case study: the Namur Creative Hub TRAKK .....	7
1.2.2 Formulation of the research questions .....	9
2 Research methodology .....	11
2.1 <i>Method 1: Life stories</i> .....	11
2.1.1 Life stories in a narrative form (narrating) .....	12
2.1.2 Life stories in a remembering form (Remembering) .....	15
2.1.3 Life stories in an experiencing form (Experiencing) .....	16
2.2 <i>Method 2: (Non-)participant observation</i> .....	18
2.3 <i>Method 3: Document analysis</i> .....	18
2.4 <i>Research design</i> .....	19
2.4.1 Selecting participants .....	19
2.4.2 Set-up of the interview .....	20
2.4.3 Method of analysis .....	21
3 Empirical Analysis .....	22
3.1 <i>Story 1: ATLR Engineering</i> .....	22
3.1.1 Before the TRAKK .....	22
3.1.2 The Fablab .....	23
3.1.3 The TRAKK environment .....	24
3.1.4 Story analysis .....	27
3.2 <i>Story 2: Spade</i> .....	29
3.2.1 Before the TRAKK .....	29
3.2.2 The old and the new TRAKK .....	29
3.2.3 Different aspects of the TRAKK .....	31
3.2.4 Story analysis .....	35
3.3 <i>Story 3: THELIS</i> .....	37
3.3.1 Before the TRAKK .....	37
3.3.2 Workshops, coaching, and other sessions, etc. ....	38
3.3.3 The FabLab .....	40
3.3.4 Story analysis .....	41
3.4 <i>Story 4: 1.61</i> .....	43
3.4.1 Before the TRAKK .....	43
3.4.2 The competences .....	43
3.4.3 The development of 1.61 .....	48
3.4.4 Story analysis .....	48
3.5 <i>Story 5: Vinciane Lamy</i> .....	50
3.5.1 Before the TRAKK .....	50

3.5.2 Vinciane as an independent .....	50
3.5.3 Vinciane as a docent of HEAJ .....	53
3.5.4 Atmosphere at the TRAKK.....	54
3.5.5 Story analysis.....	55
General conclusion .....	57
Appendices .....	61
References.....	72

## General Introduction

In the context of the globalisation of the economy, the demand for creativity, innovation and sustainability is highly relevant today. To meet this relevant demand, policymakers and planners have decided to introduce effective tools and measurements to rethink the economic strategy and planning of large urban communities. Within many of these metropolitan areas, there has been an increase in the number of creative entrepreneurs as a result of the growth of the creative and cultural industries. To encourage the flourishing of these creative individuals, the concept of the creative city was born (Yencken, 1988). Creative cities aim to develop and implement creative ideas by establishing a favourable environment. To create such an ecosystem, policymakers and planners, in addition to changing the mindset of the cities and its inhabitants, also seek to provide physical spaces such as certain public infrastructure where creative minds can gather. One concrete place that has emerged out of this is the creative hub. Generally, such hubs emerge in large, unoccupied buildings that have not received any further infill since the initial activities were phased out (Pratt, 2021).

Creative hubs are seen as one of the solutions to cluster the growing number of individuals from the creative and cultural sector inside a specific urban community in order to develop ecosystems that positively impact innovation and welfare in a region. This is because creative entrepreneurs and innovative industries are seen as one of the drivers of sustainable economic growth and prosperity in a region (Moriset, 2013). However, one may not conclude from this finding that every creative hub has an equal contribution to economic progress. This is because creative hubs have strong local differences among themselves (Dovey, Pratt, Moreton, Virani, Merkel, & Lansdowne, 2016; Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015). Therefore, to explain from a macro-economic point of view the value creation of creative hubs in a specific region, we need to look from a micro-economic perspective at how the creative hub supports and influences the associated individuals, entrepreneurs, and early-stage businesses in their value creation.

In order to foster the value creation of any creative entrepreneur, start-up, or other type of user, a creative hub must first and foremost produce a positive effect on the user in question. This effect is achieved through the exertion of a certain influence by the creative hub that is beneficial to the mindset, operations, and working of the creative individual or early-stage business. In practice, this means that creative hubs offer a diverse range of activities, and other services such as coworking spaces, conferences, FabLabs, hackerspaces, student incubators, and workshops to facilitate the development of the creative entrepreneur, start-up, or hub user so that it can generate added value (Brown, 2017; Merkel, 2015; Moriset, 2013; Spinuzzi, 2012; Virani, 2015).

To provide an answer on how a creative hub can influence the mindset, operations, and working of the associated creative entrepreneurs, early-stage enterprises, and other users, I examine a specific case, namely the creative hub of Namur: the TRAKK. In order to be able to do so, I make use of a storytelling method, that is, the life story approach. In this approach, I conduct interviews with creative entrepreneurs, early-stage enterprises, and other users of the TRAKK to reconstruct and analyse their story at the TRAKK. Additionally, to provide me with more information, I also use non-participant observation and document analysis. More specifically, in this analysis I focus on how the FabLab has influenced the

mindset, operations, and working, and on the elements in the TRAKK that provoked a triggering effect on the participating creative individuals and businesses.

This master's thesis contributes to the literature that investigates the specific influences of a particular creative hub on creative entrepreneurs, early-stage businesses, and other users of the hub, by using the life story approach. As far as I know, no further research has been done on the influence of the TRAKK on the specific entrepreneurs and enterprises covered in the interviews. As the interviews can also be seen as a reconstruction of the lives and drivers of creative entrepreneurs, this master's thesis also contributes to the literature focusing on creative entrepreneurship.

The remainder of this master's thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the literature that is relevant to this master's thesis, followed by a description of the problem statement which includes the explanation of the specific case of the TRAKK and the development of the research questions. In Chapter 2, I first describe the methodology that I have used throughout the master's thesis. I construct a methodological strategy composed of three qualitative methods. Next, I describe the way to collect data, the set-up of the interview and the theory to analyse the interviews. Lastly, Chapter 3 displays and discusses the results of the interviews, providing, in particular, the story about the participant and a story analysis. Finally, I conclude my master's thesis with a summary of the main findings, the limitations of my research and some recommendations for further discussion.



# 1 Literature review and statement of problem

In the first chapter, I give an overview of the relevant literature to this master's thesis, followed by the problem statement, which can be subdivided into an explanation of my case study and a description of the research questions. The literature review begins with a portrayal of third places. I then discuss the rise and working of creative hubs, and detail two of its functions. Next, I describe the case of the TRAKK Namur around which I will work. The chapter concludes with the development of the research questions.

## 1.1 Literature review

### 1.1.1 Third places

Third places or public places like taverns, general stores, religious places, and colleges, places where people come together, is a concept that was first developed in 1989 by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his work *The Great Good Place* (1989). Originally, Oldenburg (1999) created a ranking of three places that categorise the activities of life. The first place, denoting the home or domestic space, the second place, indicating the work setting or the productive space, and the third place defined by Oldenburg (1999) as: “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.” (p.16), or the core space of informal public life (Firdaus & Fuad, 2021). This third place is a public space where social activities take place to interact with other people and that is outside the realm of home or work. Because uniquely a place to live and work is not sufficient, a third place fulfils, as a result, the human needs of being part of a community living space (Firdaus & Fuad, 2021).

According to Oldenburg (1999), third places are marked by eight characteristics that form its *raison d'être*. The first characteristic is *Neutral ground*, meaning that there must be places where individuals may come and go whenever as they please, where no-one has to play host, and where all feel at home and at ease. The second aspect is *Third place as a leveller*. A place that is a leveller is an inclusive place and accessible to every individual, i.e. independent of one's social status. In other words, there are no formal criteria of membership and exclusion of the general public. In third, there is the property of *Conversation is the main activity*. Neutral ground provides the physical space and levelling determines the interpersonal social environment for the sustaining activity of third places everywhere. This activity consists of joyful and engaging communication, and socializing. The fourth component is *Accessibility and accommodation*, which implies that third places are readily accessible on any moment of the day with assurance that acquaintances of the individual will be there. The fifth element is *The regulars* and indicates that the regulars, or the fellow customers, give a third place its character and tone, and that they ensure the visits of new people. Characteristic six is *Low profile* and emphasizes the homeliness or plainness of the third place. Homeliness or plainness contribute to the modest surrounding and appearance of the third place in order to discourage pretention and excessive self-consciousness among the regulars. *The mood is playful* characteristic determines the joy and acceptance tenor rather than hostility and anxiety. Every conversation has a value and contribute to the positive performance of the third place. The last component, *A home away*

*from home* signifies the congenial and domestic environment of the third place that links to the individual's home. Moreover, it provides a supportive psychological surrounding (Oldenburg, 1999). In short, following Oldenburg (1999), third places are 'homes away from home where unrelated people relate' (Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016).

Originally, the concept of third places by Oldenburg (1999) was primarily focused on communal physical locations for informal social relations rather than for business and productive work (Oldenburg, 1999; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Later on, because of the growth of the creative economy<sup>1</sup> and the corresponding creative class<sup>2</sup>, who still perceived third places as vital in making a community more attractive, the initial image of third places became more and more blurred (Florida, 2012; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). This creative class, a concept created by Richard Florida (2012), is characterized by having insecurity concerning their jobs, irregular working schedules, little human contact, and relative isolated working places (e.g., their homes) (Dovey, Pratt, Moreton, Virani, Merkel, & Lansdowne, 2016; Florida, 2012). Consequently, workers in the creative economy searched for venues, like coffee shops or libraries, offering them social interaction while having a break during the workday (Florida, 2012). Originally, these places were only meant to escape from isolation, but gradually, starting with answering an e-mail or having a small work discussion, they evolved into real work and meeting sites (Florida, 2012). As a result, third places integrating work and community, or the so called *fourth places*, arose (Dovey et al., 2016; Florida, 2012; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Nowadays, different types of, as I call them, hybrid third places exist. One of them is the creative hub, a third place combining business and community for the creative economy (Pratt, 2021; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016).

### 1.1.2 Creative hubs

With the rise of the creative sectors and the corresponding social class in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, creative hubs emerged, by the help of many policymakers<sup>3</sup>, to support growth and innovation in the creative economy (Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015). However, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of a creative hub because they are different in their DNA and values as they depend on the local creative economy and culture (Dovey et al., 2016; Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015).

In the literature, creative hubs are generally characterized by four dimensions (Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015). The first dimension involves the physical construction of a creative hub. Usually, the creative hub is a large space, in a previous life an industrial building or

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to European legislation, cultural and creative sectors indicate:

All sectors whose activities are based on cultural values or artistic and other individual or collective creative expressions. The activities may include the development, the creation, the production, the dissemination and the preservation of goods and services which embody cultural, artistic, or other creative expressions, as well as related functions such as education or management. They will have a potential to generate innovation and jobs in particular from intellectual property. The sectors include architecture, archives, libraries and museums, artistic crafts, audio-visual (including film, television, video games and multimedia), tangible and intangible cultural heritage, design (including fashion design), festivals, music, literature, performing arts, books and publishing, radio, and visual arts. (Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The creative class as defined by Richard Florida (2012) consists out of people working in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music, and entertainment whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content.

<sup>3</sup> According to Florida (2012), cities promote creative hubs by making favourable policy that attracts creative people and the corresponding creative class.

business centre, subdivided in smaller offices, studios or workshops for start-ups (Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015). These start-ups are early-stage creative businesses such as micro-businesses and one-man businesses in the creative economy (Virani, 2015). Results of Dovey et al. (2016) show that creative hubs have become nests for freelancers and micro businesses to gather, connect and collaborate.

Second, creative hubs frequently use a flexible and low access entrance system, that allows the start-ups to enter and leave the hub easily (Pratt, 2021).

Third, in creative hubs, two cross-cutting factors are present that create the value proposition of the hub (Dovey et al., 2016; Pratt, 2021). At one side, the mix of expertise and creative activities of the residents, on the other side, the objectives of the hub managers, founders, and funders (Dovey et al., 2016; Pratt, 2021). One type of organisation that plays a remarkable role in the creative economy, especially in the creative hubs, are universities (Ashton & Comunian, 2019; Comunian & Gilmore, 2015). Research of Comunian and Gilmore (2015) argues that universities are engaged in creative hubs by generating creative knowledge through sharing research and innovation and developing creative human capital (Ashton & Comunian, 2019). Creative human capital can be seen as academics, graduates, and researchers who interact within and across the creative hubs to capture the value of knowledge, experience, and education of creative disciplines (Ashton & Comunian, 2019).

The last dimension consists of 'hard' services and 'soft' services offered by the creative hub (Virani, 2015). The hard services are indicated in terms of the infrastructure within the hub such as renting desks, studio services, online services, meeting rooms, and FabLabs (Virani, 2015).<sup>4</sup> Soft services are non-tangible advantages such as the exchange, transfer and facilitation of knowledge, collaborative opportunities, and mutual social support of residents (Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015).<sup>5</sup> An aspect that is significantly involved in both services, is the contribution of the hub-managers, who act as business advisor and mediator, establishing both a collaborative atmosphere and a connection between the hub residents and the hub residents and the outside world (Brown, 2017; Merkel, 2015; Pratt, 2021; Spinuzzi, 2012; Virani, 2015). Findings in the literature show that the facility of intermediations and networking between the different actors is identified as fundamental in a creative hub's success (Brown, 2017; Dovey et al., 2016). Moreover, thanks to this facility, serendipity<sup>6</sup> is created. Serendipity allows people to connect in ways they had not before, to experiment, to engage in cross-disciplinary collaborations, to innovate and to develop new ways of working (Dovey et al., 2016; Jeffcutt & Pratt, 2009).

Although there is no all-encompassing definition for creative hubs, literature shows that creative hubs exist physically and that they manifest themselves by providing activities and services in a number of different ways to creative entrepreneurs and early-stage creative businesses (Ashton & Comunian, 2019; Dovey et al., 2016; Pratt, 2021; Virani, 2015). Of course, the type and number of activities and services depend on the creative hub.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I highlight two of them that are related to the case study investigated in my master's

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<sup>4</sup> As mentioned, there is no such as a universal definition of a creative hub. Therefore, this list is non-exhaustive.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>6</sup> A random meeting of two or more users of the creative hub leading to the birth of an idea that could become a new product or service in the future (Avdikos & Iliopoulou, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> In the literature different numbers are given: Besson (2018), and Virani (2015) each identify five types of creative hubs. While Ashton and Comunian (2019) define seven types of creative hubs, in a university context.

thesis, and that have grown with the rise of creative hubs: coworking spaces (*Tiers Lieux d'activités*) and FabLabs (*Tiers Lieux d'innovation ouverte*) (Besson, 2018).

#### 1.1.2.1 Coworking spaces

With the appearance of creative hubs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, coworking spaces have emerged globally. Coworking is a social phenomenon defined as *working-alone-together*-behaviour where entrepreneurs and freelancers share side-by-side a work setting<sup>8</sup> on a temporary basis (Besson, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Moriset, 2013; Spinuzzi, 2012; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Coworking is more than having access to space and facilities. In fact, it establishes new ways of organising work by encouraging peer-interaction and support collaboration between the users (Brown, 2017; Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Moriset, 2013; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Brown (2017) argues that the added value of coworking lies in sharing workspaces with other entrepreneurs and freelancers who have different and complementary contacts, experiences, and skills, but who share similar values and outlooks.

Moreover, the physical and social proximity also favours the development of a coworking spirit and of trust among the coworkers (Avdikos & Iliopoulou, 2019). These two elements are, according to Avdikos and Iliopoulou (2019), crucial for accelerating serendipity. As a result, coworking spaces are regarded as serendipity accelerators because they facilitate unexpected encounters, interaction, and the emergence of new ideas (Brown, 2017; Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Moriset, 2013). However, one should note that the degree of collaboration still depends on the willingness of the entrepreneur (Brown, 2017).

In addition to the aforementioned, coworking spaces are, from a financial point of view, advantageous for starting entrepreneurs and freelancers in the creative economy. Compared to renting an own office space, coworking spaces are much cheaper and reduce the individual and professional risks (Avdikos & Iliopoulou, 2019; Merkel, 2015).

#### 1.1.2.2 FabLabs

Besides coworking spaces, some creative hubs also offer FabLabs (*Tiers Lieux d'innovation*) (Besson, 2018). FabLabs<sup>9</sup> are like hackerspaces<sup>10</sup> a type of makerspace<sup>11</sup> (Capdevila, 2013; van Holm, 2014). According to the official Fab Charter (2012) of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), FabLabs are a global network of open community-based workshops to stimulate innovation by providing a local lab for sharing knowledge, experimentation, prototyping, and fabrication (Besson, 2018; Capdevila, 2013; Fleischmann, Hielscher, & Merritt, 2016; Krauss & Tremblay, 2019; Schmidt & Brinks, 2017). In reality, FabLabs give easily access to a diverse range of tools, such as digital industrial equipment (e.g., CNC, 3D printers, and laser cutters) and high-tech digital equipment (e.g., software and digital technologies) (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019; Schmidt & Brinks, 2017; Wolf, Troxler, Kocher, Harboe, & Gaudenz, 2014). They are available as a community resource and offer the possibility to individuals to make, invent and share their experience and gained knowledge (Capdevila, 2013; MIT, 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> This includes, at a charge: a shared desk, a shared office, studio, etc. (Avdikos & Iliopoulou, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Fabrication Laboratories.

<sup>10</sup> Hackerspaces are third places that are dedicated to the online world of hijacking (hacking), creation and permanent modification of software and its functions (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> However, makerspaces do not follow the MIT criteria mentioned in The Fab Charter (Capdevila, 2013)

Sharing knowledge openly and globally about the making process is the cornerstone and one of the aims of the FabLab communities (Fleischmann et al., 2019; Wolf et al., 2014). The openness of the communities enable invention by creating a global inventory<sup>12</sup> of shared knowledge that contains predefined processes and methods, a common grammar, and core operating capabilities (Suire, 2016; Wolf, et al., 2014). However, results from Wolf et al. (2014) show that sharing knowledge often remains on a local level due to the fact that documenting knowledge is not seen as a part of the making process, while it should be shared globally according to the MIT-criteria. In addition, Suire (2016) finds that the execution of a global knowledge inventory is difficult because of the positioning of the FabLab in a local ecosystem and the focus on corresponding local needs.

Financially, FabLabs are interesting as they reduce the cost of industrial tools (van Holm, 2014). Instead of buying a highly technological machine or software oneself, the FabLab only charges a fee for using (van Holm, 2014).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

### 1.2.1 Case study: the Namur Creative Hub TRAKK

The Namur Creative Hub, or the TRAKK, is a creative hub for cultural, creative, and technological businesses in the Belgian city Namur. The TRAKK is an open community that was founded in 2015 by the Economic Agency for the Province of Namur<sup>13</sup> (later on, abbreviated as BEP), KIKK<sup>14</sup>, and the University of Namur (later on, abbreviated as UNamur). Today, these three partners still manage the project, as the TRAKK can be seen. The first accommodation was a building of 400 m<sup>2</sup> in Namur (BEP Namur, 2019). At the start of 2020, the TRAKK moved to a new 3000 m<sup>2</sup> location in Namur (*Qu'est-ce que le TRAKK?*, n.d.). This move has provided the TRAKK to improve the efficiency of its spaces to its services.

As the TRAKK is an open community, it is a space within which various types of creative minds<sup>15</sup> and backgrounds meet each other, such as business entrepreneurs (e.g., start-ups, architects, designers, and engineers), student-entrepreneurs, creators, researchers, and other stakeholders (e.g., citizens, politicians, and academic personnel) (BEP Namur, 2019). The goal is to create collaborative intelligence by working, creating, and innovating collectively while learning from each other. Furthermore, it stimulates people from diverse backgrounds to thrive together as a community to cooperate on common projects, develop ideas, discuss informally ongoing topics, and solve problems by finding solutions (BEP, 2019; *Qu'est-ce que le TRAKK?*, n.d.).

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<sup>12</sup> First, this inventory was a manifesto or codebook. Nowadays, sharing knowledge is done online via FabLab wiki's and other digital tools.

<sup>13</sup> BEP, or *Bureau Economique de la Province de Namur* is a public organisation, created in 1963. Their main goal is the economic, social, and environmental development of the province Namur (*A propos: Le groupe BEP*, n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> KIKK is a non-profit association, founded in Namur in 2011. Besides being one of the three partners of the TRAKK, KIKK is also known for its expertise in digital arts, exhibition programs, co-production of works and installations. According to their website: "KIKK is a spaceship which organizes events, supports the production of artistic work and is involved in the emergence of new projects." (*About: What's KIKK?*, n.d.).

<sup>15</sup> See the definition of the cultural and creative sector as formulated by European legislation in footnote 1.

According to the website of the TRAKK, and from an organisational point of view, it is a place where work, life, and social relationships come together (BEP, 2019; *Qu'est-ce que le TRAKK?*, n.d.). These three factors are contained in the core activities of the TRAKK, which can be distinguished into four different services: Working, Inspiring, Creating, and Sharing (*Qu'est-ce que le TRAKK?*, n.d.).<sup>16</sup>

### 1. Working

The first category is Working, which includes the daily work of the people using the TRAKK, but also the creation and development of ideas. In order to stimulate this, the TRAKK provides shared offices, coworking spaces, and meeting rooms for entrepreneurs and enterprises. In addition, TRAKK has a student-incubator Linkube, subsidised by Sowalfin<sup>17</sup>, to help student-entrepreneurs launching their own business. As an example, the TRAKK has 500 m<sup>2</sup> of office space, 80 places for coworking, several meeting rooms, and an auditory to organise conferences (*Travailler au TRAKK*, n.d.).

### 2. Inspiring

Besides providing offices and other spaces to develop an idea or grow a company, the TRAKK tries to inspire entrepreneurs, student-entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders with diverse subjects by organising several events (*S'inspirer au TRAKK*, n.d.). The subjects that are presented, cover a wide range of topics related to entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation: smart cities (e.g., Vivre la Ville), innovative technologies (e.g., KIKK Market and Innov&Vous), design (e.g., TRAKK & Design), and experiences of entrepreneurs (e.g., Click&Chips).<sup>18</sup> The inspiration coming from these events aim at expanding the horizon of the attendants. For example, how others tackle a certain problem, or how others managed to organise a business or idea. Moreover, these events give the excellent opportunity to network.

### 3. Creating

The third function of the TRAKK is Creating, which stands for the possibility to conceptualize, design, prototype, and manufacture ideas (from scratch to a tangible product). To realise this, the TRAKK provides the usage of its FabLab. The TRAKK's FabLab is a 300 m<sup>2</sup> professional place to play with advanced technologies and high-quality digital machines such as 3D-printers, laser-cutters, and Computer Numerical Control (later on, abbreviated as CNC) based machines (*Créer au TRAKK*, n.d.). Additionally, the TRAKK offers coached innovation trails, technical workshops, and creative sessions to discover methodologies and tools, etc. (*Créer au TRAKK*, n.d.).

### 4. Sharing

Lastly, to favour social relationships, the TRAKK organises events to gather entrepreneurs, students, researchers, investors, and others to give them the opportunity to share, discuss and pitch in an informal way. Examples of past events are Mind & Market and Midis Pitch

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<sup>16</sup> On the website of the TRAKK: *Travailler, S'inspirer, Créer, and Partager (Qu'est-ce que le TRAKK?*, n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> Groupe Sowalfin, or *Société wallonne de financement et de garantie des PME*, is a public holding that invests in Walloon small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) (*A propos du Groupe SOWALFIN*, n.d.).

<sup>18</sup> Non-exhaustive list.

& Pizza (*Partager au TRAKK*, n.d.). Also, the TRAKK welcomes enterprises that would like to organise a teambuilding (*Partager au TRAKK*, n.d.).

From a financial point of view, as the TRAKK is subsidized by the Walloon and European authorities, it has to put measuring tools in place to determine its pertinence and success. Therefore, in order to be able to assess the value creation of the TRAKK, the Public Service of Wallonia Economy, Employment, and Research<sup>19</sup> (later on, abbreviated as SPW EER) outlined six qualitative indicators. These indicators focus on the success rate of several projects of enterprises, project leaders, and entrepreneurs (later on, abbreviated as EPPE) of the TRAKK and the creation and testing of new methods (*Suivi des impacts qualitatifs des hubs créatifs*, 2020). According to the SPW EER, the **six qualitative indicators** are (*Suivi des impacts qualitatifs des hubs créatifs*, 2020):<sup>20</sup>

1. Realisation of **unexpected projects** in the creative hub. These are innovative projects that are provoked by collaborations between entrepreneurs with different activities. These collaborations are stimulated, first, by promoting collaborative intelligence, cross-fertilisation of different types of entrepreneurs and activities, and gathering different audiences and sectors. Second, by having serendipity in the FabLab, coworking spaces, and other public spaces in the creative hub.
2. Success of the cases when an **EPPE is accompanied by a hub**. This indicator assesses the quality and coherence of effective support within the creative hub that permits the EPPE to progress quickly in their development at a favourable cost (e.g., idea creation, conceptualisation, and pre-prototyping).
3. The ability and the role of the FabLab to achieve **results in the process of pre-prototyping and finalising products**. More specifically, the access to equipment, knowledge, and qualified employees of the FabLab enable to concept and fabricate marketable products.
4. Increasing the number of **creative methods and tools** in innovation processes of EPPE. The hubs carry out a knowledge and skills transfer via several types of services (e.g., conferences, events, and workshops) to strengthen the creativity and innovation potential.
5. Success stories of **commercialised innovations or societal applications**. This indicator measures the expected final impact of a hub on its contribution to the development of EPPE's in terms of new products and services that are on the market or beneficial for society.
6. Documenting **new practices created or tested** by the hub. More specifically, by spreading the documentation, the hub ultimately tries to ensure a transformation of the local economy towards a creative economy.

### 1.2.2 Formulation of the research questions

Business-entrepreneurs, student-entrepreneurs, creators, and project leaders (EPPE) all call on TRAKK's various services at different moments in the development of their

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<sup>19</sup> The SPW EER, or *Service Public de Wallonie Economie, Emploi, Recherche*, is a public institution that implements the policies, within their scope and field, established by the Walloon government (*Public service of Wallonia*, n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> I translated the six indicators, proposed by the SPW EER, from French to English. The translated list gives a context of the six indicators.

business, ideas, and actions. In the context of the TRAKK and its new location, the objective of this master's thesis is to retrace the path taken by some of these EPPE at the TRAKK to understand how the TRAKK influenced the evolution of these EPPE. Therefore, the following research question arises: *"How has the TRAKK been influencing the evolution of the EPPE?"*. This will be the main research question throughout this master's thesis.

To get a better understanding of the potential influence of the TRAKK, I will consider the influence from different perspectives. The first perspective is the influence considered as the FabLab, a TRAKK service that the EPPE have been using. I focus on how the FabLab changed the EPPE and at what moments. This proposes the following sub question: *"How and when did the FabLab at the TRAKK change the EPPE in their mindset, operations and working?"*.

The second perspective of the influence of the TRAKK are the triggering events. Therefore, I try to identify notable changes in their mode of working, particularly in terms of their state of mind and their management methods. This concerns the discovery of the possible elements that have facilitated these changes. As a result of this, an additional research question becomes: *"Which elements at the TRAKK provoked the happening of triggering events for the EPPE?"*.



## 2 Research methodology

Before conducting my research, I build a methodological strategy that provides me of qualitative research tools throughout the empirical part of my master's thesis. This strategy is composed out of qualitative methods based on the advanced theoretical knowledge of empirical sociology as defined by the American sociologist Norman Kent Denzin (1975). The methods of qualitative research are described by Denzin (1975) as a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, respondent and informant interviewing, direct participation, and observation and introspection. According to Bowen (2009) and Denzin (1975), using multiple sources of data as part of the methodological strategy develops a non-contentious and complete picture of a social object. Furthermore, having complete qualitative data leads to essential insights and an in-depth description of the subject that considers all its relations and dynamics (Geertz, 1993). As a result, these data facilitate in constructing the subject and how the interlinked social world or situation works (Bertaux, 2005).

In the following sections of this chapter, I explain in a theoretical and practical way the qualitative research methods of the methodological strategy I will use. First, I discuss the life story method where I explain the construction of a qualitative framework to conduct the interviews. Then, I describe the (non-)participant observation method that focuses on gathering information through attending meetings and making observations. Next, I explain the document analysis method, which allows me to collect data from analysing internal documents. Finally, in the research design section, I describe the selection of participants in my study, the set-up of the interview, and the interview analysis method.

### 2.1 Method 1: Life stories

The life story approach is a methodological way of empirically addressing theoretical questions in social sciences. According to Atkinson (2002) and Bertaux (1984), the aim of the life story approach is to analyse the narrative of one's life, or a relevant part of it, and to construct identity in order to uncover social phenomena in a social context, such as the patterns of social relations (e.g., defining relationships, group interactions, and memberships) and the special processes that shaped them (Atkinson, 2002; Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2005). Life stories lend themselves to a multiplicity of uses because there are many ways to talk about a subject's totality of experiences (Bertaux, 1984).

The main breakthrough of the life story approach in sociological research dates back to the 1920's with the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920) by the sociologists Florian Znaniecki and William Isaac Thomas (Goodson, 2001; Rosenthal, 2018). To conduct their research on the experiences of Polish migrants in the United States, Thomas and Znaniecki relied mainly upon the biographies of the migrants (Goodson, 2001). Consequently, thanks to their pioneering publication, Thomas and Znaniecki laid out the foundations for the further use of the life story in sociological research. The prominent position of the life story approach was consolidated by its adoption by empirical sociologists of the Chicago School (Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2005; Bogdan & Taylor, 1998; Goodson, 2001, Rosenthal, 2018). Although biographical narratives were mostly used in the United States, later on, during the 1970's and 1980's, there was a commencement of the life story approach in Britain, France, and Germany (Atkinson, 2002;

Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2005; Rosenthal, 2018). This return was mainly spurred on by the French sociologist Daniel Bertaux with *Biography and Society* (1981), the German Martin Kohli with *Soziologie des Lebenslaufs* (1978) and the British Paul Thompson's *The voice of the past: Oral History* (1978) (Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2005; Goodson, 2001; Rosenthal, 2018).

Nowadays, the life story approach is a frequently used method to examine sociological, anthropological, educational, and psychological subjects. Some examples of fields of studies are migration and transnational biographies (e.g., Anthias, 2009; Breckner, 2007), educational subjects (e.g., Ball & Goodson, 1985; Casey, 1993; Kridel, 1998; Osler, 1997), gender studies (e.g., Haas, 2016; Köttig et al. 2017), and urban sociology (e.g., Becker, 2016; Witte, 2017). However, also in managerial and entrepreneurial research, life stories are an emerging methodological approach. For example, to study organisations (e.g., Czarniawska, 1997; Sahni & Sinha, 2016), entrepreneurship (e.g., Hytti, 2005; Steyaert & Bouwen, 1997), leadership (e.g., Adamson et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2002), and professional careers (e.g., Bertaux, 1980; Bertaux-Wiame, 1980; Gerritsen, 1987). As life stories allow the researcher to engage in a dialogical relationship, this enhances the construction, conceptualisation, and understanding of the reasons behind influences, developments, changes, and achievements of people in a professional social context (Johansson, 2004; Sankaran, 2018)

In order to be able to interpret and explain the underlying past and present influential social phenomena of each story of the EPPE at the TRAKK (the subject), I develop a theoretical framework based on the ideas of reconstruction as proposed by Rosenthal (2018). These ideas help reconstructing the *genesis* of the subject, i.e., the process of creation, reproduction, and transformation (Rosenthal, 2006; Rosenthal, 2018). More specifically, I propose following three ideas in my framework. The first concerns the theoretical concept of a narrative of a subject's history. The second idea deals with the reproduction or remembering of social phenomena that are part of the subject under study. The final idea examines the insights into the objectivity and subjectivity of the subject. In particular, in terms of the events and the actions of an actor in a system that proceed social phenomena. This idea covers also how intermediate relationships exert an influence in the subject's story.

These three underlying ideas are the theoretical building blocks of the qualitative framework to conduct the life story interviews. The first idea corresponds to *Narrating*, the second to *Remembering*, and the last to *Experiencing*. This framework will be used as a kind of guiding tool throughout my research. Each building block will be further elaborated by different theoretical concepts, based on the theories of leading sociologists such as Daniel Bertaux, Gabriele Rosenthal, and Paul Thompson. Subsequently, when taking interviews, the social phenomena that are cited in the interview can be linked to the concepts of the building blocks of the framework. This facilitates the analyses of the interviews as well as the subject. The complete framework can be found in Appendix 1.

### **2.1.1 Life stories in a narrative form (narrating)**

In social sciences, the life story is the outcome of a particular form of interview, the narrative interview, in which a researcher asks an individual person to tell him or her about all or part of his or her life experience in a specific sociological context (Bertaux, 2005).

### 2.1.1.1 Construction of a life story

The concept of a life story is built out of a narrative interview. This narrative interview exists when an individual narrates another individual, who could be a researcher or not, about a specific subject that covers an episode of his or her life (Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Essential in this sentence is the verb *to narrate* because this implicates that the subject's discursive production has taken on a narrative form like an autobiography, biography, or memoir. According to Gergen and Gergen (1997), the following five components appear to be important in the construction of narratives. First, each story has a point that is saturated with value. This means that, as narratives are evaluative, each story takes up a position with value, which can be desirable or undesirable. For example, the protagonist's well-being (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). The second component is the choice of events and actions that serve to make the goal more or less probable (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). Third, the events and actions covered in the subject are placed in a certain convention of ordering (e.g., linear, temporal). Fourth, the use of causal relations of events preceding the final state that form the plot of the story. Finally, the most properly formed narratives apply conventional signals to determine beginnings (e.g., 'once', 'it all began') and endings (e.g., laughing after a joke, making a point of the story) (Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

In the narrative form, certain episodes and experiences could have a relationship with respect to each other (Bertaux, 2005). These narrated episodes and experiences also contain descriptions, explanations, and evaluations. However, these three elements do not have a narrative form but contribute to the construction of meaning of the subject. Opposed to a subject in a narrative form is when, for example, an individual limits his or her subject rather to a description of an episode or experience, or if, while relating a series of events, the narrator merely connects them and evaluates them without saying anything about their relationship to each other. In the literature, this form of telling is called the chronicle and does not take the narrative form (Bertaux, 2005; Elliott, 2005).

In short, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between a subject in a narrative or non-narrative form. Sociologists talk about a life story when a subject takes on a narrative form i.e. when the subject covers an individual's experiences or an episode of his or her life (Bertaux, 2005). Furthermore, this life story is supported by descriptions, explanations, and evaluations that shape a better understanding of the subject.

### 2.1.1.2 Creating the backbone

Within one unique life story about a subject, different events, situations, episodes, and actions are narrated in a successive way. This sequence of activities within a life story is called by Bertaux (2005) as the *backbone of the story*. The metaphor of the backbone describes how an individual's life, or a subject is defined and formed by establishing coherent connections among life events. With this series of events, the researcher attempts to understand life events as systematically related (Elliott, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). To give a clear explanation, I cite Bertaux (2005):

The spinal column thus defined forms the line of a life. This line is not a straight line or a harmonious curve, as the often-used term 'trajectory' seems to indicate. Instead, most lives are tossed and turned by collective forces that redirect their paths in unexpected and generally uncontrollable ways. These forces are political, economic, and social,

such as economic crises, revolutions, wars, the development/decline of a city or region, technological developments, an epidemic, etc. (p.38).<sup>21</sup>

In other words, different micro-and macro-social events change the path of life. Therefore, the reconstruction of the narrated subject, in order to have a clear understanding, will take place *a posteriori*, ultimately leading to coherence (Bertaux, 2005).

To strengthen the analysis of my research questions, i.e. the period of the EPPE being present at the TRAKK, I construct a narrative identity of the individual in the life story to understand his life before the TRAKK. This narrative identity is a collection of life experiences and behaviours of the individual's past, present, and future (McAdams, 2001). It can help to understand better the backbone of the individual's life story at the TRAKK. The method of constructing the narrative identity that I use is based on the conceptual framework of entrepreneurial learning (triadic model) of David Rae (2005). This framework consists of three themes that outline the micro-and macro-social events, being present in the life of the individual: the personal and social emergence block, the contextual learning block, and the negotiated enterprise block (Rae, 2005).

### 1. *Personal and social emergence*

The first theme in the framework is the personal and social emergence block. Rae (2005) argues that personal and social emergence can be seen as the development of the entrepreneurial identity. This identity starts with the early life of the individual and includes education, social relationships such as family and friends, and the career formation (Rae, 2005). These elements are significant in shaping the behaviours and actions (Rae, 2005). So, the focus here lies on how the individuals are influenced in seeking their personal and social identities, i.e. who they are, who they want to be, or where they want to go.

### 2. *Contextual learning*

The second building block is the contextual learning block. Referring to Rae (2005), this block focuses on the 'work-environment' learning outcomes when individuals participate in communities, industries, and other professional networks. As a consequence of this participation, which creates a certain relationship, individual experiences can be related and compared with others to create shared meaning (Rae, 2005). Finally, thanks to this relationship, people learn in their social context to develop an intuition to recognize opportunities such as "who they can become" and "how to work with others to achieve their ends" as well as their capacities of "what can and cannot be" (Rae, 2005).

### 3. *Negotiated enterprise*

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<sup>21</sup> Original text by Bertaux (2005): La « colonne vertébrale » ainsi définie constitue la ligne d'une vie. Cette ligne n'est pas assimilable à une droite ou à une courbe harmonieuse, comme semble l'indiquer le terme souvent utilisé de « trajectoire ». La plupart des existences sont au contraire ballottées au gré de forces collectives qui réorientent leurs parcours de façon imprévue et généralement incontrôlable. Une guerre, une révolution, un coup d'État, une crise économique grave, une épidémie touchent simultanément et dévient le cours de millions d'existences individuelles. La fermeture de mines, d'usines ou de bureaux (ou au contraire leur ouverture), le développement ou le déclin d'une ville ou d'une région, d'une activité économique suite à la concurrence ou au progrès technologique, et bien d'autres phénomènes régionaux ou locaux peuvent affecter des milliers de trajectoires individuelles. (p.38).

Lastly, the third theme of the triadic model is the negotiated enterprise block. Following Rae (2005), the establishment of a business is carried out by more than one person. Instead, it is developed out of negotiated relationships with others (Rae, 2005). This block corresponds to the period when the individual starts his own business. This period covers the thoughts, and aspirations of individuals realised through interactive social processes of exchange with all the stakeholders within and around the business venture, like customers, investors, and co-actors such as partners and employees (Rae, 2005).

### **2.1.2 Life stories in a remembering form (Remembering)**

The second idea in the life story approach is the aspect of remembering. This aspect is closely related to the reproduction of social phenomena of the subject under study. Therefore, the reproduction can be studied by focusing on the way how memories of certain events and experiences are evoked and how they appear in the mind of the individual being interviewed (Rosenthal, 2018).

When individuals talk about their past, their present has to be considered too because the way people talk about their past is determined by their current situation (Rosenthal, 2018). According to Thompson (1978), narratives of a subject in interviews of relatively recent experiences, or current events can be assumed to lie between the actual social behaviour and the social expectations or norms of the time. However, interviews that go back further, have an increased probability in distortions that can unconsciously alter perceptions (Thompson, 1978).

Before describing the theoretical elements, first of all, I provide a broader understanding of the remembering aspect within narratives as it is useful to make a distinction between an autobiography and a life story. In an autobiography, a self-written and self-reflexive form, the subject presents a solitary retrospective view of an individual's past life as a whole. While in a sociological life story, which is a dialogical, oral, and more spontaneous form, the informant is immediately invited by the researcher to consider his past experiences through a filter (Bertaux, 2005; Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). The presence of such a filter will affect the way of narrating a subject in a life story i.e. a larger focus on the evocation of social phenomena caused by the different questions posed by the researcher (Bertaux, 2005).

A first concept how people evoke memories about past events is the way of remembering as explained by Edmund Husserl in the field of phenomenology. Husserl described remembering in terms of *noesis* and *noema* (Rosenthal, 2018). Different memories become more dominant and appear in new ways because of the weight and importance of present issues. These new memories are called *noema* and refer to what appears to us, whether we perceive it directly, remember it, or imagine it. While *noesis* is about how something is perceived when it took place, *noema* is about how something presents itself or about the meaning of the act (Rosenthal, 2018). When talking about past experiences in the present situation, memories are projected in a mind that narrates the past. Each new memory or, in this case a *noema* is related to other *noemas* within the whole noematic system (Rosenthal, 2018). This means that each *noema* may appear in different ways, forming a comprehensive, interconnected complex of possible or probable interlinked thematic conditions (Rosenthal, 2018).

A second concept of the remembering aspect is the mediation. Following Bertaux (2005), between the objective experience of an individual and the narration of that experience, a large number of subjective and cultural mediations exist. Examples of mediations are the perception of the individual about the event, the capacity of his or her memory to memorise, the personal reflexivity, the individual's narrative capacities, the parameters, and conditions of the interview. (Bertaux, 2005). When an individual undergoes an objective experience, at the same time, the person's perception and evaluation will shape the memorisation of this objective experience. As a result, the memorisation of the objective experience will be more subjective (Bertaux, 2005; Brannen, 2013). This memorisation of objective situations, events and actions and their subsequent evocation are the mediations of meaning that are attributed by the individual retrospectively (Bertaux, 2005; Brannen, 2013). These mediations of meaning implicate a reflexive totalization of the individual's objective experiences (Bertaux, 2005). This concept of totalization is defined by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre as: "The act of thought that unitize and totalize the diverse actions and observations of an individual within an objective experience." (Laflamme, 1983). Applied to a narrative interview, these mediations will shape the meanings of the objective experiences in the present when the interviewee narrates about those past objective experiences to the researcher. Although mediations might seem to have a subjective and redrawing effect on the narrative interview, they hardly touch the structure of the situations, events, and actions of the episodes of the subject's life (Bertaux, 2005). To illustrate with a metaphor: "His drawing is well restored; however, memories can retrospectively modify its colours." (Bertaux, 2005, p.41).

Lastly, in order to minimise the effect of subjective remembering, Thompson (1978) argues that the key concern is to introduce sufficient standardization, without breaking the interview relationship through hindering self-expression. An interview method aiming at a sufficient standardization is described by Thompson (1978) as a mix of two methods in each interview, open questions to encourage the subject to express his or her opinion freely, but gradually over time introducing a standard set of questions in so far as these are not already covered.

### **2.1.3 Life stories in an experiencing form (Experiencing)**

The last idea concerns the insights into the objectivity and subjectivity of the subject. More specifically, the events and the actions of an actor in a system that proceed social phenomena. Moreover, this part details as well how intermediate relationships exert an influence on certain actions.

Within the sociological context, theories of subjects are built around an underlying distinction of three different levels: system, actor, and intermediate intersubjective relationships or *lignes de force sociales* as Bertaux calls them (Bertaux, 2003; Bertaux, 2005). These intersubjective relationships are naturally created by connections of collegiality, friendship, hierarchy, and other micro-relationships of the actor with the system. Life stories support sociologists in the development of their theory as they uncover actions and events of what actors did, where and when, with whom, in which social context of the system, and with what results (Bertaux, 2003; Silverman, 2016). These actions and events reveal patterns of historical and present socio-structural relations that create objectivity in the life story.

Next, life stories could provide an answer on the consequences and evaluations of what has been done to those actors, and how they reacted to it. Although the actions and events might be objective, most sociologists often associate the answers on the consequences of an action or event as more subjectively oriented because personal skills, emotions, perceptions, values, and achievements take a notable place (Bertaux, 1984; Bertaux, 2003; Silverman, 2016). In other words, to get notion of the objectivity and subjectivity aspect, actions and events, along with their impact, need to be defined in order to interpret what has happened to a particular actor in the social context of the system (Bertaux, 2003; Bertaux, 2005).

Subsequently, referring to Bertaux (2005), each actor, acting in a system, requires so called invisible *lignes de force sociales* or intermediate intersubjective relationships to accomplish his evolution in the system. These invisible *lignes* refer to the psychological relationships between an actor and elements, such as other actors, in the system and shape both personal and social processes (Bertaux, 2003). More specifically, these intersubjective relationships show how they affected an actor, prevented an actor from doing what he wanted to do, or how they provided the actor with unexpected resources (Bertaux, 2003). However, one should notice the long-term view of intersubjective relationships because these forces are processes and thus sequences of interactions, actions, and events. As a consequence, the intersubjective relationships involve both subjectivity and objectivity (Bertaux, 2005). Subjectivity is seen in the process of a growing relationship because these relationships are built on personalities and transform steadily over time. Bertaux (2005) gives as examples: a couple relationship, a parent-child relationship, or a friendship relationship. At the opposite, objectivity lies together with the historical patterns and factual data wherein the intersubjective relationships between actors are established (Bertaux, 2005).

To show the difference with other sociological techniques that have the same goal as life stories, Bertaux (2003) compares the life story interviewing with standardized biographical questionnaires. More specific, Bertaux (2003) compares the subjective and objective character of answers of life stories with those given in standardized biographical questionnaires. Although both ways of conducting research provide subjective answers, life stories leave room for in-depth descriptions and clarifications which yield an answer that is more objective (Battagliola, 1993; Bertaux, 2003). Moreover, with life story interviews, a researcher can rapidly switch to in-depth description and understanding of how such a sociologic phenomenon takes place (Bertaux, 2003).

Some researchers only focus on the reconstruction of objective and subjective meaning structures in the system, while others describe the actors' subjective experience, and still others try to interlink and distinguish several social relationships in the system where the actors themselves are not even aware of (Bertaux, 1984). Although the focus of the research might differ, one sees that the classification of system, actor, and intermediate intersubjective relationships needs to be defined in order to interpret the actions, events, and processes of a subject. Citing Bertaux's (2003) metaphor: "one has to identify the main games people are playing in this social context, along with the stakes of these games, their hidden rules, their inner workings and conflicting dynamics, and the power games being played." (Bertaux, 2003, Life Stories as '*récits de pratiques*' section).

## 2.2 Method 2: (Non-)participant observation

In order to gain more thoroughly an understanding of the working, mindset, and social reality inside TRAKK, I perform physical observational research. This qualitative method is used by researchers, as proposed by Denzin (1975), to share in the studied people's lives by taking their viewpoint while trying to learn their symbolic world. Depending on the objective of the researcher, the point of view can range from complete observer to complete participant (Silverman, 1985).

The way physical observation is done throughout the period of my research exists out of two major components. The first component, from an observing point of view, covers non-participant observation. This concerns the online team-meetings organised at the TRAKK, once every 14 days.<sup>22</sup> These meetings are attended by different employees of KIKK, BEP and the UNamur who work at the TRAKK. The objective of these team-meetings is to discuss the follow-up and progression of ongoing projects of the EPPE at the FabLab or at the TRAKK. Visiting these meetings should contribute to a better awareness of the functioning of the employees (instead of the EPPE) of the TRAKK, especially their mindset, competences to solve problems, effectiveness, efficiency, and the working conditions at the TRAKK. The second way of doing physical observation, and due to the pandemics of COVID-19 unfortunately a difficulty, is visiting the TRAKK as a participant being. Concretely, being present at the TRAKK means that I spent time to visit the creative hub, exploring its different functions like the FabLab and the working spaces (I worked in the office of the UNamur at the TRAKK) and get the chance to be introduced to the EPPE at the TRAKK.

## 2.3 Method 3: Document analysis

The last method applied to collect qualitative data is conducting document analysis. Following Bowen (2009) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis is a low-cost way to obtain empirical data that can be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge of the subject. The non-exhaustive list of documents like analyses of agendas, background papers, brochures, press releases, websites and working sheets is mostly used in combination with other qualitative research methods (Bowen, 2009). The reasons for analysing documents are to reduce the potential bias of a single method research, to suggest questions to be asked in an interview, to provide additional research data, and to provide a means of tracking changes and developments over time within the social setting (Bowen, 2009). As a result, besides using life stories and (non-)participant observation, document analysis effectively reinforces the knowledge base (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Straus, 2008).

Concerning the elements of document analysis at the TRAKK during my time as a researcher, I consider the following public information: the website of the TRAKK and its FabLab wiki, its posts on social media and other publications on the internet. In addition, I have access to internal information that includes both a shared Google Drive and an internal communication forum called Slack. In the shared Google Drive, documents like

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<sup>22</sup> I attended the following TRAKK team-meetings: 08/03/2021, 22/03/2021, 19/04/2021, 03/05/2021, 17/05/2021, and 31/05/2021.



*'Raconte-moi des histoires'* containing the already drafted stories and ongoing projects, can be found. Also, several files of the SPW EER regarding the qualitative indicators at the TRAKK are consultable in the Google Drive. Slack is an online internal forum of the TRAKK, used as a way of communication between the EPPE, employees and other stakeholders. These additional sources of information afford a profound understanding of the TRAKK and are used in combination with life stories, the main research method, and physical non-participant observations.

## 2.4 Research design

### 2.4.1 Selecting participants

Within the TRAKK, several start-ups, entrepreneurs, FabLab-users, and other stakeholders are present. To select the participants for the interviews, I use the strategy of theoretical sampling as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1974). Theoretical sampling aims to support the development of theoretical insights into an area of social life (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). Hereby, the researcher collects life stories from different participants in a certain social context to step out of singularity (Bertaux, 2005). However, theoretical sampling does not depend on statistical distribution criteria but on the development of the theory that is established during the research (Rosenthal, 2018). Therefore, the actual number of life stories studied is relatively unimportant. The researcher completes several interviews with various participants based on their potential to yield added value to the developed theoretical insights (Peters & Wester, 2009; Rosenthal, 2018). When the researcher has uncovered a broad range of perspectives in his theory of study, he reaches a moment of theoretical saturation where additional interviews generate no new insights (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998; Rosenthal, 2018).

Participants can be found in a number of ways. The criteria to select the participants are twofold. First of all, the participants in my research are only those who have a link<sup>23</sup> with the TRAKK. These consist of both residents and non-residents, independent of the period of their stay at the TRAKK. I use both to have a variety in the positioning and perception of the participants in my sample. Second, to differentiate between the residents at the TRAKK, I distinguish the different EPPE by the predefined six qualitative indicators of the Walloon government (see section 1.2 in Chapter 1). This way of classifying makes my sample more balanced and gives me the possibility to look at the differences in actions and the corresponding service of the TRAKK with respect to the qualitative indicator.

The first draft of a list of participants was done by creating a longlist. Via research done through document analysis and by recommendation of my mentor Véronique Dethier<sup>24</sup>, I composed a longlist of 11 EPPE, based on the aforementioned criteria. Hereafter, I shortlisted together with Véronique Dethier, and the employees of TRAKK, during one of the regular meetings<sup>25</sup> seven EPPE to do an interview with. These seven EPPE were chosen, because of the potential added value of their journey at the TRAKK. However, I

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<sup>23</sup> EPPE that have been using, at least once, the services of TRAKK: the coworking spaces, the FabLab, followed workshops or events, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Véronique Dethier works at the TRAKK as a research action and project officer.

<sup>25</sup> The meeting took place 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

take interviews based on the potential to yield added value to the already developed theory, so after completing each interview, I decide if I reached the point of theoretical saturation. Therefore, it is difficult in advance to indicate a definite number of interviews. The shortlist, as well as the longlist, with the classification of the EPPE can be found in Appendix 2.

Finally, the following five persons were interviewed: Jonathan Reis (ATLR Engineering), Benoît Vrins (Spade), Christophe Montois (THELIS), Tony Rey Paulino (1.61) and Vinciane Lamy.

#### **2.4.2 Set-up of the interview**

In this part I describe the set-up of the life story approach I put in place. By making use of the academic literature, I make use of verified theoretical aspects in conducting the interviews with the EPPE. Both before and during the interview, some implicit rules must be followed. As a consequence, I am able to design the conditions, wherein the interviews take place, as optimally as possible.

Before conducting the narrative interviews, the researcher should be aware of two practical elements. First of all, the researcher presents himself as ignorant in the field and turns to the individuals in a certain social context to focus on a particular *how* of a subject (Bertaux, 2005; Silverman, 2016). These individuals consist, as mentioned in the part *Experiencing*, of actors living in the system being studied. Here the emphasis is on what is external, i.e. in the system, to the actors: the social contexts from which they have gained practical knowledge through experience (Beaud, 1996; Bertaux, 2005).

A second element is that the researcher should minimize social relationships in interviews, like a social bond from the beginning, as they could be dangerous for two reasons. First, it increases social conformity in replies (Thompson, 1978). Second, increased intimacy does not always lead to less inhibition (Thompson, 1978). However, some level of assurance and enthusiasm decreases the difficulties of convincing the participant to free expression (Atkinson, 1998). Also, the presence of other people at an interview has a proven positive or increasing effect on conformity (Thompson, 1978). Concerning social relationships in my study, before starting the interviews I do not have any former social relationship with one of the participants. To minimize the presence and interference of other people, I arrange all interviews in a closed environment, like a conference room at TRAKK or an online meeting via Teams or Whereby. In other words, the human presence during the interview consists of the actor under study and me, the researcher.

From the moment the interview starts, according to Atkinson (1998), the following requisitions must be ensured. First, fundamental is to let people exactly know what your purpose is. Be clear how you will use the collected information: for private purposes, or for research goals. The participant has always the right to know if the content of his life story is anonymous or public (Atkinson, 1998). Next, respect the wishes of the people you are interviewing and explain what you will do throughout the interview (Atkinson, 1998). Some examples are requesting the usage of a tape recorder and the sharing of the transcripts to archives (Atkinson, 1998). In order to satisfy Atkinson (1998), I ask before each interview a permission to tape-record the interviewee because it is necessary in order to transcribe the orally recounted histories afterwards. Moreover, I create a letter of consent, of which a template can be found in Appendix 3, that tells the informants that the collected life stories will be analysed afterwards and will be used to draw a clear image of the influence of the

TRAKK on the evolution of the EPPE. In other words, their life stories are not anonymous. Finally, I ask the confirmation of each interviewee for giving the authorization to publish their life story (with their names) partially or wholly in my memoir. This letter of consent is signed by each interviewee.

During the interview, I use the methodology of semi-structured interviewing as described by Thompson (1978). To do this, Thompson (1978) proposes a mix of two questioning methods in an interview, i.e. open-ended questions to encourage the participant to express his or her opinion freely, but gradually introducing some standard questions, based on the predefined concepts, to ask about the subject if it had not already been covered. A list of questions, related to the concepts, can be found in Appendix 1.

### **2.4.3 Method of analysis**

Concerning the method of analysing the interviews, I base myself on theoretical sampling to develop grounded theory as proposed, initially, by Glaser and Strauss (1974). However, I follow Daniel Bertaux (2005) as well as he describes particularly this method of analysis for life stories. In theoretical sampling, data collection (see section 2.4.1 in Chapter 2) and analysis proceed together (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). Each interview yields a certain number of case-specific insights, such as experiences, events, and thoughts of the subject, about the social phenomena that relate to my research questions. The insights are then related to the theoretical concepts that I defined in my qualitative framework and that support me in understanding and developing hypotheses about the social phenomena of each specific case (see qualitative framework in Appendix 1). In other words, these concepts can be seen as a coding mechanism in order to understand the social phenomena present in each interview. After each individual interview, I draw the main findings of the corresponding social phenomena by doing an analysis of the story.

Furthermore, each individual interview helps to expand and refine the understanding of the social phenomena in order to provide evidence-based answers to my research questions. Finally, I construct a conclusion, based on the analyses after each individual interview, so that I can present an overall, 'cumulative', and conclusive answer to the research questions.

## 3 Empirical Analysis

This chapter presents the five interviews that I conducted. The structure is as follows; first, I narrate the story of the participant in terms of the different aspects of the TRAKK.<sup>26</sup> After each reconstruction of the story, I draw the main findings of the story in a story analysis through the method as described in the previous chapter (see section 2.4.3 in Chapter 2).

### 3.1 Story 1: ATLR Engineering

The first story is about ATLR Engineering. The interview took place on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> of March from 10h30 to 11h30. Due to the sanitary measures concerning COVID-19, several users of the TRAKK are forced to work from home. Therefore, this interview took place online via Teams.

#### 3.1.1 Before the TRAKK

This narrative is told from the perspective of Jonathan Reis, one of the five founders of ATLR Engineering. At the moment, Jonathan holds a technical-commercial function within ATLR Engineering. Since his engineering studies, Jonathan has been deeply interested in assembly, disassembly and solving technical issues. For him, this was a reason to join the company Make-It, based in Brussels, in 2019, where he had the opportunity to turn his passion for engineering into real work. Here, he worked with Alexis Hoge, Denis Thomas, Maxime Pepi, and Victor Xhurdebise with whom he later founded ATLR Engineering. After the closing of the electronics development department at Make-It, the idea for creating ATLR Engineering was launched at the end of 2019.

Without having officially launched their company ATLR Engineering, the team searched for an office to deploy its activities. However, in the past, the TRAKK asked Make-It to join the creative hub because the TRAKK was interested in start-ups focusing on hardware. Although Make-It did not move to the TRAKK, Jonathan and his founding partners of ATLR Engineering got aware of the TRAKK's interest in these kinds of firms. As ATLR Engineering was in search of an office location, it contacted the TRAKK back. Because developing hardware requires costly and technical machines, the TRAKK's FabLab provided ATLR Engineering with a real advantage. Additionally, from a financial point of view, prices in Namur were much lower than in Brussels. Also, from a networking point of view, the TRAKK lends the associated start-ups the opportunity to integrate very easily in a social community which Jonathan and his team perceived as beneficial. As a result, in February 2020, ATLR Engineering was officially born, and it started its business in the new building of the TRAKK.

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<sup>26</sup> The inserted paragraphs and citations are translated from French to English. However, the original transcription of each paragraph and citation can be found in the footnotes.

### 3.1.2 The Fablab

Since ATLR Engineering's start at the TRAKK in February 2020, the team has since the beginning been very interested in the FabLab. This is because of the fact that ATLR Engineering relies on the FabLab to make various prototypes to meet the demand of its customers. The use of the FabLab allows ATLR Engineering to reduce the costs of prototyping by using the machines and knowledge present in the FabLab, rather than having to rely on an industrial third party and pay a high price for the use of their equipment. In other words, the FabLab reduces the risk and gives ATLR Engineering the freedom to tinker. This possibility of tinkering, supported by the FabLab, has been a way for ATLR Engineering to do things that I classify in four terms: get inspired, collaborate, product understanding, and improve its operations.

Inspiration to emerge new ideas of prototypes has been coming mainly from inside ATLR Engineering. However, already some ideas have appeared because of the inspiration given by the employees working at the FabLab. Jonathan shows this by talking about the merging of a third idea, coming from two different ideas (ATLR Engineering's idea and the FabLab's employees' idea): *"The people from the FabLab are present and, euh, the fact that they're there means that I think we have quite a few ideas that come out of there, even if we're professionals, there are always more ideas in two heads than in one, so it's interesting to have them there and, euh, to have, euh, even an idea that comes out at one point with that idea plus another idea, that makes three ideas. (p.22)",<sup>27</sup> and "...it allows us to really explore a lot of paths. (p.21)".<sup>28</sup>*

Working at the FabLab has been offering ATLR Engineering opportunities to forge new collaborations with other EPPE, as Jonathan explains. Recently, the FabLab employees notified ATLR Engineering that a student-entrepreneur from LinKube<sup>29</sup> was developing hardware for his product. Thanks to this notification, ATLR Engineering and the student-entrepreneur from LinKube entered into a collaboration to develop a guitar pedal. Furthermore, thanks to their know-how and capabilities in the FabLab, ATLR Engineering has gained more recognition and has been receiving several prospects for possible collaborations with other start-ups. For example, Jonathan says that a future cooperation on a bracelet with another EPPE, Alan Hertz<sup>30</sup>, is very likely.

A third aspect of tinkering in the FabLab is gaining a better understanding of the products that ATLR Engineering produces and prototypes and also analysing whether there is room for improvement. *"In fact, it's DIY but it's very positive because it really allows us to find solutions that we might not have found if we had gone directly to the industrial way. And it really allows us sometimes to reduce costs, to really find a solution which, since we did it by hand, we understand much better how the system works. (p.21)".<sup>31</sup>* The FabLab permits

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<sup>27</sup> *"Les gens du FabLab sont présents et euh le fait qu'ils soient là ce que je trouve qu'on a quand même pas mal d'idées qui sortent de là, même si même si on est professionnel il y a toujours plus dans deux têtes que dans une, donc c'est intéressant de les avoir là et euh d'avoir euh même qu'une idée qui à un moment sort avec cette idée-là plus une autre idée ça fait trois idées."*

<sup>28</sup> *"Ça nous permet de vraiment balayer beaucoup de pistes."*

<sup>29</sup> The student-incubator at the TRAKK.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Hertz is an individual user of the FabLab.

<sup>31</sup> *"En fait c'est du bricolage mais hyper positif parce que ça permet vraiment de trouver des solutions qu'on aura peut-être pas trouvé si on avait été directement à façon industriel. Et ça permet vraiment parfois tout réduire les coûts, de mais vraiment trouver une solution qui vu qu'on l'a fait à la main, on comprend beaucoup mieux comment le système fonctionne."*

ATLR Engineering the usage of different industrial machines at a low cost. This provides ATLR Engineering to be able to experiment different prototypes and find solutions that it would not have found otherwise. Also, doing by hand has been increasing the team's knowledge of the product and its functioning.

Because ATLR Engineering delivers finished hardware, Jonathan believes that improvement and optimisation of operations is essential. Because of the step-by-step development in the FabLab, ATLR Engineering has a better understanding of its prototypes and production process and is aware of whether the product or the prototype of the product needs to be improved. During their trajectory at the TRAKK, there have been moments that, after a discussion with one of the FabLab members or after one of the FabLab employees had analysed the product, led to an optimisation of the products.

### 3.1.3 The TRAKK environment

In addition to the FabLab, in which ATLR Engineering was initially interested, the TRAKK environment, or the network, has been playing a role too in the trajectory of the company at the TRAKK. From the interview with Jonathan, I derive three key elements within the TRAKK environment to structure his story: the role of the TRAKK employees, the social interactions between the EPPE, and the events.

#### 1. The TRAKK employees

*"I think it's very much linked to the people who run the place. Whether it's the BEP or all the people who work at TRAKK, even the FabLab, and Laura [Latour]<sup>32</sup>. It's people who are very, euh, open-minded and who keep the place alive, and well, I think it's thanks to them that TRAKK has become what it is and that there's a, euh, life that's been created. (p.4)".<sup>33</sup> As Jonathan mentioned, the people working at the TRAKK (associated to BEP, KIKK or UNamur) play an important role in creating a certain atmosphere in the creative hub. At the moment of the interview, he describes the environment as: "at TRAKK, it's a lot of a lot of good mood, a lot of joy. (p. 13)".<sup>34</sup> Asking him what joy at work means for him, he responds: "The joy of working is linked to the fact that I work with people I respect a lot and that we have a really good time, and the fact that we are surrounded by really nice people. And this atmosphere is created by the people who run TRAKK. (p. 13)".<sup>35</sup>*

Besides creating a positive environment, the employees of the TRAKK also establish a solid ecosystem between the different start-up bubbles by personifying the values of the 'TRAKK-mindset'. This 'TRAKK-mindset' is defined by Jonathan as: "I would say that it's companies which are euh, which are open, which are not afraid to go towards other people and euh, which have this entrepreneurial spirit which allows them to really do what they want. They are not afraid to go to people, they want to build, they want to create, and they

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<sup>32</sup> Laura Latour is a project leader at the TRAKK, where she works on behalf of KIKK.

<sup>33</sup> "Je pense que c'est fortement lié aux personnes qui gère l'endroit. Euh que ce soit le BEP euh que ce soit tous les gens qui travaillent au TRAKK même le euh le FabLab, et Laura [Latour]. C'est des gens qui sont très euh très ouverts qui font vivre le lieu et ben euh c'est grâce à eux je pense que vraiment le TRAKK est devenu ce qu'il est et qu'il y a une euh vraiment une vie qui s'est créée."

<sup>34</sup> "Au TRAKK, c'est pour l'instant c'est beaucoup de beaucoup de de bonne humeur, de de joie."

<sup>35</sup> "Justement la joie dans le travail, elle est liée au fait que je travaille avec des gens que je respecte beaucoup et qui se passe vraiment des bons moments, et le fait qu'on soit entouré de gens vraiment très sympa. Et cette ambiance est créée par euh par les gens qui gèrent le TRAKK."

want to do things together. (p.8)".<sup>36</sup> The 'TRAKK-mindset' has been learning ATLR Engineering not to stay only in its own bubble or comfort zone but also to be more confident. This confidence supports ATLR Engineering to grow as a start-up and to build a network of relations.

## 2. Social Interactions

The ecosystem, formed by the 'TRAKK-mindset', has been generating beneficial outcomes for ATLR Engineering in fact. According to Jonathan, there is an atmosphere of confidence and trust that boosts social interactions: *"It's really a community that creates trust, because we eat together, often we meet, we discuss projects. It's really something very positive ... that was the basic idea of TRAKK and, euh, it really starts to create synergies and to allow companies to work together. (p.4-5)".*<sup>37</sup><sup>38</sup> More specifically, Jonathan makes in the interview a distinction between the type of social interaction: business collaborations, and informal rather consultative conversations.

In ATLR Engineering's history at the TRAKK, there has been one business collaboration so far: *"We are lucky enough to have contacts with 1.61, which is another company that is at TRAKK. It really creates a nice synergy, even if we knew each other before, the fact of being in the same place really allows us to work better together. (p.4)".*<sup>39</sup> Their cooperation created a symbiosis in development (1.61: strategic industrial design, ATLR Engineering: electronics and hardware design), contracts, and daily working. However, an important remark is that the people of ATLR Engineering and 1.61 knew each other from Make-It before joining the TRAKK.

Outside the building of the TRAKK, ATLR Engineering has worked together with Azimut, an incubator. *"Yes, we, euh, we worked with the Azimut incubator, and they really had a positive influence on the development of our company, they put us in contact with very interesting people and, euh, really allowed us to develop, so Azimut, who, euh, they are also at TRAKK now. But they were really important people in the development of our company. (p.23)".*<sup>40</sup> According to Jonathan, the connection with Azimut has had a very productive impact on ATLR Engineering. Azimut helped ATLR Engineering forward. At the moment, Azimut is present at the TRAKK and utilises the spaces for coworking.

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<sup>36</sup> *"Je dirais que c'est des entreprises qui sont euh qui sont ouvertes qui ont pas peur d'aller vers d'autres dans d'autres personnes et euh qui ont cet esprit entrepreneur qui leur permettent de vraiment se faire quoi. Ils ont pas peur pour aller, les gens les gens veulent construire, les gens veulent créer, alors et ils veulent vivre les choses ensemble enfin. C'est vraiment ça, c'est le vivre-ensemble, l'envie d'entreprendre et ne pas avoir peur quoi."*

<sup>37</sup> *"Enfin, ça fait vraiment une communauté qui crée de la confiance en fait, vu qu'on on mange quand même ensemble souvent on se rencontre, on discute un peu de projet. Ça c'est vraiment quelque chose d'hyper positif."*

<sup>38</sup> *"C'était l'idée de base du TRAKK et euh c'est ça commence vraiment à à créer des synergies et à permettre aux entreprises de fonctionner ensemble."*

<sup>39</sup> *"En plus, nous, on a la chance d'avoir des contacts avec euh avec 1.61 qui est une autre entreprise qui est euh qui est au TRAKK. Vraiment créer une belle synergie, même si on se connaissait d'avant, le fait de d'être au même endroit ça permet vraiment de mieux travailler ensemble."*

<sup>40</sup> *"Oui, nous euh on a on a fonctionné avec le l'incubateur Azimut et eux ont eu vraiment une influence positive sur le développement de notre entreprise, ils nous ont mis en contact avec des gens très intéressants et euh nous ont vraiment permis de nous développer quoi donc Azimut qui euh, eux aussi sont au TRAKK maintenant. Mais ça a vraiment été des personnes très importantes dans le développement de notre entreprise."*

The second interesting aspect of the social interactions are the informal conversations or small talk. *“Well, if we see someone from another company, we go directly to them, try to see what projects they are doing, if everything is going well, we really do, we talk about everything. Everyone gives a little advice on what they know best, and I think we all relate to each other a little bit. (p.8-9)”*.<sup>41</sup> The core of this small talk is to share knowledge and experiences, about different encounters, between each other. The small talks take place when having a chat at the coffee machine, talking during lunch, or having a beer with someone. According to Jonathan, these are moments that facilitate the emerging of professional and non-professional ideas and advice. *“I think these are moments where there are very good ideas that emerge from, it's not necessarily professional but euh it's very important, I think from a personal point of view to discuss your life and I say sometimes even that can create professional ideas too. (p.27)”*.<sup>42</sup> To give two examples of a professional idea or advice: ATLR Engineering started, after being advised by an EPPE, to lease company cars. Or, by passing someone at the TRAKK, ATLR Engineering got the right contact for a project. However, influences on new operational or technical ideas have been rare.

### 3. Events

A third element in the TRAKK environment that is highlighted by Jonathan and that has been playing a special role for ATLR Engineering, and Jonathan in particular, are the events. The TRAKK arranges and organises events such as conferences, lectures, workshops, etc. *“I would say that here [the TRAKK] the most important moment we had recently, was when we participated in Mind & Market<sup>43</sup>. (p.24)”*.<sup>44</sup> During Mind & Market, ATLR Engineering won the pitching competition. This victory brought ATLR Engineering more prospects and media attention. Jonathan says events like Mind & Market gave him a boost in self-confidence because it taught him how to pitch a project. This improved him in doing business with others.

For example, in the future Jonathan plans to organise lectures and presentations with ATLR Engineering to share knowledge and experience to others. *“So we have an idea, euh, I would like, once the COVID is finished, to be able to organise conferences in the, what's it called, the amphitheatre of the TRAKK, to be able to really, yeah, give a little bit of a vision of 'how to create a product that has arrived, euh, to other entrepreneurs' and I think that opening up to explain how we work and how we see the fact of creating a hardware product, that could be very interesting for people who would like to launch themselves. Because we have some experience in creating products and we notice that a lot of people who come to*

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<sup>41</sup> *“Ben, si on voit quelqu'un d'autre entreprise, c'est directement aller au contact vers eux, essaye de voir quels sont ses projets qui sont en train de faire, si tout se passe bien on oui vraiment, on parle un peu de tout. Chacun donne un peu des conseils sur sur ce qui connaît mieux et euh je pense qu'on se rapportent tous un peu quelque chose.”*

<sup>42</sup> *“Oui, je pense que c'est ce sont des moments où il y a de très bonnes idées qui émergent de c'est pas forcément professionnel mais euh c'est très important je pense d'un point de vue non point de vue personnel de discuter de sa vie et je dis parfois même ça peut créer des des idées professionnel aussi.”*

<sup>43</sup> Mind & Market is an event organised by the TRAKK for entrepreneurs, experts, investors, and others, where innovative projects are pitched, discussed, and demonstrated through demo sessions (*Partager au TRAKK*, n.d.).

<sup>44</sup> *“Je dirais que là le moment le plus important qu'on a eu récemment c'est on avait participé au Mind & Market.”*



*see us, are not at all aware of what it involves, so you see, I would like to launch myself a bit like that. (p.18)".<sup>45</sup>*

### 3.1.4 Story analysis

To analyse the story of Jonathan and ATR Engineering, I investigate the different perspectives of his narrative.

First of all, Jonathan emphasises the benefits and usefulness of the FabLab by using the word tinkering. To describe tinkering, as Jonathan calls it, and the outcomes it provoked in detail, I consider four elements as I discussed earlier: to get inspired, to collaborate, product understanding, and improve its operations.

Concerning ATR Engineering's sources of new ideas, I think that during its relatively young journey at the TRAKK, ATR Engineering has already crossed several universes of inspiration in the FabLab. These encounters of colliding universes, of the different EPPE present at the FabLab, have given ATR Engineering inspiration and new perspectives to look at or tackle a given problem. As a result, ATR Engineering has repeatedly acquired new knowledge and creativity to have multiple ways to walk different idea paths.

In my opinion, the element collaborate can be seen in the way that the FabLab already provoked an unexpected collaboration between ATR Engineering and a student-entrepreneur from Linkube. Although ATR Engineering did not have many unexpected projects yet, the FabLab has already brought in several prospects. Consequently, I consider the influence of the FabLab to bring prospects as a trigger in the story of ATR Engineering.

Also, and closely related to the element of improving the operations, ATR Engineering has the opportunity to work meticulously and step-by-step in the FabLab. Jonathan and his colleagues of ATR Engineering can work at their own pace without any pressure of a limited amount of time and a large amount of money. This allows Jonathan to fully develop his passion in assembly, disassembly, and solving technical problems. Such an environment is, according to me, beneficial for improving the operations of ATR Engineering and the quality of their processes, in terms of promoting accuracy, precision, and product knowledge.

Referring to both product understanding and improving its operations, Jonathan presents the FabLab as like having 'an extra second brain' that reflects and thinks together with ATR Engineering. Not only when prototyping, also when a product is finished, the employees of the FabLab give their opinion about the improvements that can be done. This second brain can be seen as a sort of a second opinion, giving advice, and verifying the

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<sup>45</sup> *"Alors nous, on a pour idée euh, moi j'aimerais bien, de nouveau une fois quand le COVID sera terminé pouvoir peut être organisé des conférences euh dans le dans le, comment s'appelle, le l'amphithéâtre du TRAKK pour pouvoir vraiment, ouais, donner un peu une une vision de 'comment créer un produit arrivé euh à d'autres entrepreneurs' et je pense que avance ouverture sur expliqué comment nous on travaille et comment on voit le fait de créer un produit hardware, ça peut être très intéressant pour des gens qui se lancent, qui aimeraient bien le faire. Parce qu'on a une certaine expérience dans le le fait de créer des produits et on remarque que beaucoup de gens qui viennent nous voir, ne sont pas du tout compte de ce que ça implique, donc voyez moi, j'aimerais bien me lancer un peu comme ça."*

product and has, as a consequence, a favourable effect on the development of the prototypes and the quality of the products of ATR Engineering.

Concerning tinkering in general, the 'second brain' and the different universes of inspiration, that are present at the TRAKK, are in my opinion related to each other. Together they create an ensemble of different types of knowledge (of the different actors present in the FabLab) that are useful and insightful for ATR Engineering. Seen on a longer period, I am convinced that these influences, related to tinkering, have been an important element for ATR Engineering in a way of enhancing its operations, i.e. tackling problems, prototyping, and improving the processes.

Within the TRAKK environment, I gathered three key elements that have been playing an important part in the development of ATR Engineering: the role of the employees of the TRAKK, the social interactions between the EPPE and the events. In my opinion, these three elements are catalysts of the creation of an ecosystem at the TRAKK. This ecosystem is strengthened because all EPPE are together in the same building, there are no real social borders between them, and there is a philosophy or 'TRAKK-mindset'. This generates social cohesion and creates a high level of confidence.

When talking about confidence, Jonathan mentions that the Mind & Market event has had a relatively big impact on him. ATR Engineering's participation in the pitch, and certainly its victory, has brought many benefits. One of them is that Jonathan has developed himself as a person. The pitching competition increased his self-confidence as an entrepreneur, but I think it has helped ATR Engineering as well in becoming more solid and mature. Another benefit, which I assume provoked a change for ATR Engineering, is the professional result of winning in Mind & Market. Winning the pitching competition brought ATR Engineering new contacts, media attention, and four new prospects. As a result, I suppose, ATR Engineering's growth has accelerated.

To conclude, in their relative short journey at the TRAKK, ATR Engineering has experienced thus far several advantageous, changing, and learning moments. Until now, the TRAKK has been for ATR Engineering like a 'third hand' or a 'Swiss knife'. A multifunctional social ecosystem that is built on confidence, where people help each other in different ways. Like Jonathan admits: "*The real value of TRAKK is this network, these people who are very important. What do you gain from being, in fact, because by entering certain spheres, you get access to certain contracts that, if you don't know the right person, well, just for the sake of not existing in fact. (p.12)*".<sup>46</sup> The network, or ecosystem, of the TRAKK has been thus far a very influential element. This network consists, as detailed, of different catalysts. What the future will bring for ATR Engineering is unknown, but the founders are impatient in a positive way: "*We're waiting for the rest. We're...we're impatient, that's what impatience is, also to see how it evolves. (p.13)*".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "*Mais la vraie valeur du TRAKK, c'est ce réseau, ces gens qui ils sont hyper importants. On gagne quoi d'être en fait, parce que en rentrant dans certaines sphères, on obtient l'accès à certains contrats qui si on ne connaît pas la bonne personne, ben juste pour n'existe pas en fait.*"

<sup>47</sup> "*On est...on est impatient, voilà c'est ça l'impatience, aussi de de voir comment ça évolue euh.*"

## 3.2 Story 2: Spade

The second interview focuses on the story of the company Spade. The interview took place on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> of March from 10h00 to 11h00. Due to the sanitary measures concerning COVID-19, several users of the TRAKK are forced to work from home. Therefore, this interview took place online via Whereby.

### 3.2.1 Before the TRAKK

To narrate the story of Spade, I conducted an interview with Benoît Vrins, one of the three founders of Spade. At the moment, Benoît works at Spade as a customer experience designer and is also one of the three partners. Spade was founded by Benoît Vrins, Denis Balencourt and François Lamotte in Saint-Gilles, Brussels, in 2011. In what follows, I describe the story of Spade at the TRAKK from the perspective of Benoît.

Approximately 10 years before creating Spade, Benoît obtained a degree in digital studies and launched his career in the digital world, parallel to the rise of the internet. During his education in digital studies, Benoît created an interest in experimenting with different features of the emerging digital world, such as the relationship between humans, machines, and internet. In a way of learning-by-experience in the professional field, Benoît gained a lot of practical knowledge by first working as an employee for seven years and then as a freelancer for three years. As a freelancer, Benoît discovered the aspects of being an independent and learned what it is to manage a business. For him, the life as a freelancer gave him the opportunity to disconnect from rigid company systems, in which he had less freedom, and to stand on his own two feet. Therefore, in 2011, he decided to join forces with some freelancers, with whom he already collaborated, and founded Spade in Brussels. Spade is an agency that supports companies in building efficient digital products with user experience design methodologies and thereby focusing on design, strategy, and branding.

Since two and a half years, Spade is enrolled in the buildings of the TRAKK Namur. However, Spade's story can be divided into two parts. The first part corresponds to the period at the old TRAKK building, while the second part is related to the move and the usage of the new TRAKK building on Avenue Reine Elizabeth (2020-...). First, I'm going to describe the old TRAKK building in the words of Benoît, then I will give some differences between them. Finally, I describe some social phenomena that are explained by Benoît.

### 3.2.2 The old and the new TRAKK

The story of Spade at the TRAKK started in 2018-2019 in the first TRAKK building. Here, Spade rented coworking space to create a satellite office in the region of Namur: *“so the 'mother office', let's say, the first office is in Brussels in Saint-Gilles, and so we created a Namur office in addition. (p.3)”*.<sup>48</sup> The first TRAKK building was located in an old house in Namur and offered some facilities such as a FabLab, a common kitchen, and a garden. Benoît describes it as follows: *“We lived in an old house in Namur which I think belonged to the university in fact. So, it was more like a student community kot with all the businesses that work in the creative sector and so there was the FabLab which was in the garage and*

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<sup>48</sup> *“Donc le bureau 'mère' on va dire, le premier bureau c'est à Bruxelles à Saint-Gilles et donc on a créé une antenne namuroise en plus.”*

*there were people working upstairs and everything. Euh it was a happy mess in fact there, everyone met in the kitchen to drink a coffee, there was a huge garden, we had barbecues, euh. (p.1-2)",<sup>49</sup> "sometimes welcoming a client was a bit of a problem because it wasn't always very clean, it wasn't always, you know, if it was clean, but let's say there was a little side to it, the kitchen wasn't always neat and tidy or things like that. (p.2)".<sup>50</sup>*

Despite being an old, sometimes a bit disordered building, Benoît appreciated the old TRAKK building because of its atmosphere: *"To which a good euh there was at the same time the pleasure to euh live a little bit like students in a euh quite relaxed working atmosphere finally. (p.2)".<sup>51</sup> Moreover, thanks to this student-like atmosphere and the relatively small surface, as it was a house, the old TRAKK building was an easily accessible place with a high probability on social interactions: *"Whereas at the old TRAKK, it was much smaller and everyone knew each other, so in the best of cases there was an office that became available and then the week, well a month later, euh, the office was again complete and so there were two more people, euh, that you were getting to know. (p.4)".<sup>52</sup>**

In early 2020, Spade moved together with the TRAKK to the new location in Namur. Henceforth, Spade resides in the new TRAKK building: *"we move into a dimension where euh well suddenly everything is euh everything is much more flamboyant, much newer euh everything was done by architects. The place is magnificent, so it's clear that welcoming clients to the new TRAKK, organising workshops and so on, is a real pleasure. There are even people who come just because they've heard about it and who are very happy to be invited to a meeting here because they can get into a place they don't know. So, there's really euh euh voilà and then well now well everything is new, the kitchen is new euh everything is beautiful, everything is everything works. (p.2)".<sup>53</sup>*

However, as Benoît worked in both TRAKKS, he remarks that there are some significant differences between the two buildings: *"Oh yeah it's very very different [he coughs] with pluses and minuses. If I have the old TRAKK, the big interest, well, the whole positive aspect of the old TRAKK is the negative that you could find here [the new TRAKK]. (p.1)".<sup>54</sup>*

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<sup>49</sup> *"On vivait dans dans dans une vieille maison namuroise qui je pense appartient à l'université en fait. Euh et donc voilà ça ressemblait plus à un kot communautaire d'étudiants avec toutes les entreprises mais qui travaille dans un secteur créatif et et donc voilà il y avait le FabLab qui était qui était au garage euh il y en avait qui travaillaient à l'étage et tout. Euh il y avait un joyeux bordel en fait là-bas tout le monde se retrouvait dans la cuisine pour boire un café il y avait un énorme jardin on faisait des barbecues euh."*

<sup>50</sup> *"Accueillir un client là parfois c'était un peu limite euh parce que c'était pas toujours très propre, c'était pas toujours enfin si c'était propre mais euh disons que il y avait un petit côté la cuisine était pas toujours bien rangée ou des choses comme ça."*

<sup>51</sup> *"Auquel une bonne euh il y avait à la fois le le plaisir de euh de vivre un petit peu comme des étudiants dans une euh ambiance de travail assez relax finalement."*

<sup>52</sup> *"Tandis que à l'ancien TRAKK, c'était beaucoup plus petit et tout le monde se connaissait quoi donc dans le meilleur des cas il y avait un bureau qui s'est libérée et puis la semaine, enfin un mois après euh le bureau était de nouveau plein et donc c'était deux personnes en plus, euh que que tu apprenais à connaître quoi."*

<sup>53</sup> *"Voilà ici on passe dans une dimension ou euh ben soudainement tout est euh tout est beaucoup plus flamboyant, beaucoup plus neuf euh tout était réalisé par des architectes. L'endroit est magnifique donc c'est clair que euh accueillir des clients ici maintenant dans le dans le nouveau TRAKK, organiser des workshops et cetera c'est c'est voilà il y a même des gens qui qui viennent juste parce que ils ont entendu parler de ça et qui sont super contents qu'on les invite euh pour pour euh pouvoir pour une réunion là parce que comme ça ils peuvent euh ils ont la possibilité de rentrer dans ce lieu qu'ils ne connaissent pas quoi. Donc y'a vraiment euh euh voilà et puis bon maintenant ben tout est neuf, la cuisine est neuve euh tout est beau tout est tout tout fonctionne bien."*

<sup>54</sup> *"Si j'ai l'ancien TRAKK, le gros intérêt enfin, tout le l'aspect positif de l'ancien TRAKK c'est c'est le négatif que tu pourrais retrouver ici [le nouveau TRAKK]."*

A positive element in the old TRAKK, mentioned by Benoît, was, from a financial point of view, the relatively low price: *“That is to say, it was really cheap, we paid a rent that was much lower than what we pay now. (p.1)”*.<sup>55</sup> Besides the higher price in the new TRAKK, Benoît says that in the new TRAKK it is more difficult to get to know people, compared to the ease of meeting new people in the old TRAKK: *“here there are many more people who pass by and so there are lots of people to whom I say: “Hello!”, but I don't know who it is, we don't chat, so it's not easy. (p.4)”*.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2.3 Different aspects of the TRAKK

Since Spade joined the Namur creative hub, Benoît has been experiencing the TRAKK in different kinds of ways. In the interview, Benoît highlighted some different aspects that have been remarkable in his trajectory thus far. These aspects relate to the several social interactions in the common spaces of the building, the influence of the FabLab, and the organisation of events. As Benoît did not explicitly mention the differences between these aspects in terms of the old and new TRAKK building, I consider them together as a whole.

#### 1. Social interactions

The first aspect that Benoît details, is the importance of social interactions in the TRAKK. He mentions that social interactions in the building between him and other EPPE have been playing an essential role for him. For example, in the old TRAKK: *“in the old TRAKK [he coughs] what was going on in that kitchen was really important, yeah. (p.7)”*.<sup>57</sup> However, many of these social interactions in the TRAKK, whether they lead to a professional or informal outcome, happened through informal communication<sup>58</sup>. According to Benoît: *“it's a communication that isn't really structured, like we do now, where you say we'll make an appointment, we'll ask questions and so on. You see there's a real structure whereas when you arrive at the coffee machine, you don't know who you're going to meet and you don't even know what you're going to talk about yet, and in fact there's a lot of things that come out of that, in fact there are ideas, but sometimes I go downstairs for five minutes to get a coffee and I come back up and I have an idea. I write it down quickly on a piece of paper because someone told me: “We'll do that!”. Sometimes it's just a barbecue, but other times it's: “Oh yes, we could do a conference on such and such a subject”, “Oh yes, that's great, as well, I'll send an email right away to ask you if we could do it.”, and hup, there you go, you have an idea. And I think that's the magic of the informal communication from the coffee machine. (p.5-6)”*.<sup>59</sup> In other words, informal communication or unexpected, unstructured

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<sup>55</sup> *“C'est à dire que c'était vraiment pas très cher hein on avait payé un loyer qui était beaucoup plus bas que ce qu'on paye là maintenant.”*

<sup>56</sup> *“Ici il y a beaucoup plus de gens qui passent et donc y'a plein de gens à qui je dis ben si « Bonjour ! » oui, mais je ne sais pas qui c'est, on bavarde pas voilà donc c'est c'est pas facile quoi.”*

<sup>57</sup> *“Dans l'ancien TRAKK [il tousse] ce qui se passait dans cette cuisine là c'était c'était hyper important quoi ouais.”*

<sup>58</sup> By Benoît called: *la communication molle*.

<sup>59</sup> *“C'est une communication qui est pas vraiment structurée comme on fait là maintenant où tu dis on prend un rendez-vous, on va poser des questions et cetera tu vois il y a une vraie structure alors que quand t'arrives à la machine à café, t'as pas de structure euh tu sais pas qui tu vas croiser et tu sais même pas encore de quoi tu vas parler quoi et en fait de là il y a énormément de choses qui ressortent en fait il y a des idées quoi moi y'a des fois où je descends cinq minutes chercher un café je suis remonté j'ai une idée quoi euh. Que j'écris vite sur un bout de papier parce que quelqu'un m'a dit : « On fera bien ça ! » et tout et parfois c'est juste un barbecue hein mais d'autres fois c'est : « Ah oui on ferait bien une conférence sur tel sujet. », « Ah oui c'est génial, ah ben j'envoie un mail tout de suite un moment pour vous demander si on pourrait le faire. » et hup*

conversations have been providing Spade with several new contacts, ideas, opinions, or methods about professional and non-professional matters: *“it’s the fact that from a simple encounter which is a bit unexpected, you’re going to be able to euh, if you want to bounce back to euh, in a dynamic way, if you want, in your day. (p.6)”*.<sup>60</sup>

a. *Social interactions leading to a change in operations*

A professional outcome of informal communication that helped Spade in its operations and project management was a discussion with the architects of Level Studio, who also occupy an office at the TRAKK. Benoît discussed with them about using certain project management tools and the related cost and benefits: *“informal communication that we were able to have with companies, well with people who work there, I had [he coughs] a real reflection, euh, I’ll take an example here, I have a very clear one, euh, discussing with the people from Level, who are the architectural firm that is also at TRAKK, and we had a whole discussion about project management tools. How to use which tool to manage projects, is it Asana [project management tool], you know, and I’ve actually tested a lot of them, at some point I’ve actually tested some of them, and regularly I test some of them to check. (p.13)”*.<sup>61</sup> *“It was really interesting to share our experience of testing a tool: “Why do they use OMD.com? [project management tool]”, “Why do we use Notion [project management tool]?”. Here I was making a difference in how OMD is better than Notion and why Notion is better than OMD. (p.13-14)”*.<sup>62</sup>

b. *Social interactions focused on informal topics and small talk*

Not only professional outcomes, which are mainly focused on the business operations of Spade, have emerged. Also, other outcomes, related to personal feelings or the exchange of ideas, are described by Benoît: *“From time to time, you realise that the situation of another person at the TRAKK is in fact much worse than yours, so it’s reassuring to say to yourself: “Well, I’m super stressed.” It tends to reduce your stress because you say: “Well, the person next door is still more stressed than me.”. (p.21)”*.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, by grabbing a coffee or strolling through the corridors during a break, Benoît met several new people he did not know before: *“I find it very interesting of course, not everyone is independent at the TRAKK so you’re going to meet some companies, and the people who are euh at the coffee*

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*c’est parti, t’as une idée. Et ça je pense que c’est c’est la magie de de la communication molle de la de la machine à café quoi.”*

<sup>60</sup> *“C’est le fait que d’une simple rencontre qui c’est qui est un peu imprévue, tu vas euh tu vas pouvoir si tu veux rebondir pour euhm d’une manière dynamique si tu veux dans ta journée quoi voilà.”*

<sup>61</sup> *“La communication molle qu’on a pu avoir avec des des entreprises enfin avec des des gens qui travaillent là j’ai eu [il tousse] une vraie réflexion euh je vais prendre un exemple là j’en ai un très clair euh discuter avec les gens de de Level, qui sont le bureau d’architectes qui qui est aussi au TRAKK, et on avait toute une discussion sur les outils de gestion de projet quoi. Comment quel outil utiliser pour gérer les projets est-ce que c’est Asana [outil de gérer les projets] enfin tu vois de de voilà et moi en fait il y a j’en ai testé beaucoup en fait j’en j’en ai testé ça, à un moment donné comme euh ça j’ai enfin et régulièrement j’en teste régulièrement quelques-uns pour vérifier.”*

<sup>62</sup> *“C’était vraiment intéressant de partager notre expérience de test d’un outil quoi « Pourquoi est-ce qu’ils utilisent OMD.com ? », « Pourquoi est-ce que nous, on utilise Notion [outil de gérer les projets] ? » mais je faisais la différence pour en quoi OMD mieux que Notion en quoi Notion est mieux que OMD.”*

<sup>63</sup> *“Voilà c’est de temps en temps de se rendre compte que la situation d’un d’une autre personne au TRAKK en fait elle est bien pire que la tienne donc c’est rassurant de se dire : « Ben tiens moi moi qui suis super stressé. » ça a tendance à faire baisser ton stress puisque tu dis : « Ben celui à côté c’est quand même plus difficile que moi. » quoi.”*

*machine who are employees. (p. 19)*.<sup>64</sup> More specifically, Benoît talks about different types of people such as self-employed and employees. Benoît also sees differences among self-employed, like architects and digital designers. He admits that these interactions with other types of people influence his perspective on project management and his way of thinking.

## 2. The FabLab

A second aspect that Benoît speaks of is the FabLab. In the FabLab, Spade is offered the opportunity to work with a wide range of different precious digital industrial tools and to call on the shared knowledge coming from both the FabLab employees and the FabLab wiki. When Spade uses the FabLab, there are according to Benoît *grosso modo* two kinds of approaches: *"There are indeed cases where you come up with an idea and you can have a very precise idea. And so, you rent the time to access the machines and so on. And then in other cases it's rather, you don't really know what you want and then it's according to what you know that there is a way to do. (p. 10)*".<sup>65</sup>

In line with the first approach, Spade made use of the FabLab in the past to develop a product called Minotaure: *"So we created a product called Minotaure [a program for building websites] and which is in fact a methodology for design for digital projects: "How to set up a digital project etc. with and to create a good dynamic with all the people who are involved in the project?". And so, we prototyped a box with wooden cards that you can manipulate in workshops. (p.9)*".<sup>66</sup>

The second approach is close to DIY and prototyping by Spade itself in combination with the support of the FabLab staff, the shared FabLab knowledge, and the available machines: *"Well, I've followed advice, but sometimes it's technical advice, you see, at the FabLab, well, I've done things and then they've told me: "Well, no, we'd leave everything like that because it's going to be quicker, because the machine, well, well, well, it's going to work more quickly, it's going to cost you less, well, and the result will be more beautiful, etc.". So, I go back to my office, and I rework the whole file and then I come back down the next day and I adapt it, you know. There's this trial-and-error dimension where people are there to help you at the FabLab too, so they can advise you, so yes, take advice from people, yes, yes. (p. 11-12)*".<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, as a result of the availability of several machines, Benoît demonstrates by talking about a possible company purchase of a 3D printer, Spade can reduce its financial risk by avoiding a huge financial investment in, for example, a 3D printer.

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<sup>64</sup> *"Je trouve très intéressant évidemment tout le monde n'est pas indépendant au TRAKK donc tu vas croiser des des entreprises et les gens qui qui sont euh à la machine à café sont des employés."*

<sup>65</sup> *"Il y a effectivement que tu viens avec une idée et tu peux avoir une idée très précise et et donc voilà tu tu loues le temps d'accès aux machines et cetera et puis dans dans d'autres cas c'est plutôt, tu sais pas trop ce que ce que tu veux et puis c'est en fonction de de ce que tu sais que il y a moyen de faire."*

<sup>66</sup> *"Ben donc on a créé un produit qui s'appelle Minotaure [programme pour construire des sites web] euh et qui est en fait une méthodologie euh design pour pour euh dans le cadre des projets digitaux hein : « Comment mettre en place un projet digital et cetera avec euh et faire créer une bonne dynamique avec tous les gens qui sont impliqués dans le projet ? » et et donc notamment on a on a prototypé une boîte euh qui avec des cartes en bois que tu peux manipuler sur des euh dans des ateliers en fait."*

<sup>67</sup> *"Ben j'ai suivi des conseils mais qui sont parfois des conseils techniques quoi tu vois au FabLab ben j'ai j'arrive faire des trucs et puis ils m'ont dit : « Ben non euh on laisserait tout comme ça parce que ça va aller plus vite, parce que la machine ben euh ben va travailler plus plus rapidement, ça va te coûter moins cher euh et puis le rendu sera plus beau et cetera. » hop je repars dans mon bureau je retravaille tout le le fichier puis je redescends le lendemain et j'adapte enfin tu vois. Il y a cette dimension essais-erreurs ou les gens sont là pour t'aider au FabLab aussi quoi donc te conseiller donc oui suivre des conseils des gens oui oui."*

### 3. Events

Thirdly, there are events, formations, and other sessions that have had a significant impact on Spade. In particular, Benoît talks about the ease with which he can follow conferences, formations, and information sessions because they are organised in the TRAKK, near Spade's office: *"Sometimes there are training courses offered or an information session and so on and so forth and all that comes to show you: "Well, that's great because, euh, at the end of the day, I'm going to have a conference and then I'll go back to work.". So yes, I'm going to learn something that will benefit my business. (p.25)".*<sup>68</sup>

It is not only the organisation of the events and the ease with which they can be followed that Benoît cites. The quality of the content of the events is also at a level that Benoît delights. To illustrate, Benoît talks about a particular conference of Thiagi<sup>69</sup> that impressed him:<sup>70</sup> *"It was absolutely great, I didn't know this guy, but then you go on the internet and type in Thiagi and you'll see that he is in fact someone who is internationally renowned, he gives conferences all over the world and he was in Namur, so I said to myself: "This is an incredible opportunity, there's a guy, he's not a follower of Thiagi, he's the guy who comes to Namur." So, you say: "Well, it doesn't cost much, it's near my place, it's proposed by the TRAKK, yes, I'm going there right away, in fact I have to go there." And since I did this training, there were two of us at Spade who did it and "BAM!", it opened up a lot of things, we created games, and after a day's training, we immediately understood what the interest was for the company. (p.26)".*<sup>71</sup> For Spade, the conference of Thiagi set some things in motion. The experience and knowledge of Thiagi opened a perspective full of new challenges for Spade: *"No, yeah, the games, we've created three games, yes, we have three games at the moment, only one of them is used, no, two of the three we are using at the moment. So again, it's in research and development because we have to find the time to make them and so on, but we test them in the workshop with our clients and it's exciting in fact [he hesitates] yes, it is, it's no, no. (p.27)".*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *"Parfois il y a eu des formations quoi qui sont proposées ou une séance d'information et cetera et donc tout ça vient te dire : « Ben c'est génial parce que euh à la limite du travail et puis à midi je vais suivre une une conférence et puis je remonte travailler. » donc oui là je vais aller apprendre quelque chose qui fait que ça va je vais avoir un bénéfice sur mon entreprise."*

<sup>69</sup> The Thiagi Group is an organisation providing ready-to-use training activities focusing on leadership, soft-skills, and technical skills. To do this, they use instructional design, game design, workshops, and coaching (*How Did It All Begin?*, n.d.).

<sup>70</sup> The Thiagi Group was invited for a conference and a masterclass that was organized by the UNamur and the TRAKK.

<sup>71</sup> *"C'était c'était absolument génial moi je connaissais pas ce gars-là, mais après tu vas sur internet tu tapes Thiagi tu vas voir c'est en fait quelqu'un qui est connu internationalement, il fait des conférences partout dans le monde et il était à Namur quoi donc hein moi j'ai je me suis dit : « Mais ça c'est une opportunité incroyable quoi y'a un mec, c'est pas un disciple de Thiagi c'est carrément le gars même qui vient à Namur quoi. » donc tu dis : « Ben ça coûte pas grande chose, c'est à côté de chez moi, c'est proposé par le TRAKK, oui j'y vais tout de suite quoi en fait il faut que j'y aille. » et ça depuis que que j'ai qu'on a fait cette formation on était deux chez Spade à le faire à BAM ça a ouvert plein de trucs quoi on a on a créé des jeux même enfin voilà c'est après une journée de formation on avait compris tout de suite quel était l'intérêt pour l'entreprise quoi."*

<sup>72</sup> *"Non ouais les jeux, les jeux là on a créé trois jeux euh oui on a trois jeux pour l'instant il y en a qu'un qu'on utilise euh non y'en a deux sur les trois qu'on utilise actuellement voilà. Donc de nouveau c'est en recherche et développement parce qu'il faut trouver le temps pour les faire et cetera mais on les teste en atelier avec nos clients et c'est c'est passionnant en fait [il hésite] oui c'est c'est c'est non non."*



### 3.2.4 Story analysis

As Benoît explained me in the interview with the different aspects of the TRAKK, I suppose that Spade's presence in both the old and new creative hub has had a supportive effect on the company's growth process. In terms of growth, I consider the way in how the operations, mindset, and working methods have changed through the TRAKK.

A social phenomenon that is interesting in the context of the influence of the TRAKK is informal communication and its different outcomes, as explained earlier by Benoît. In my opinion, informal communication has changed Spade in two ways. First, the unexpected meetings with other EPPE that provoked an exchange of professional knowledge such as the discussion with the architects of Level Studio about the methods of approaching a project and the different tools to manage projects. These cross-disciplinary knowledge transfers, in this case between architects and digital developers, are essential in a way of opening new perspectives for Spade to use new programs and tools to increase efficiency and to manage work. Therefore, I believe that these cross-disciplinary elements have provoked a triggering effect on the method of working of Spade. The second way are the moments when Benoît talks to other EPPEs about work, life, and relatively less serious topics. This provokes moments that are motivating, can inspire to tackle a project, or simply serve to get to know each other better in a business-like and friendly way. As Benoît demonstrates by mentioning the role of the kitchen in the old TRAKK, these conversations have been valuable for Spade.

Moreover, I think that there can be seen a link between informal communication that Benoît describes, and his life as a self-employed, in which there are no constraints of a rigid system. Benoît is very autonomous in his actions within the TRAKK. He communicates with different people from different professional fields in order to have interactions that are interesting both for him and for Spade. One can see that he personally wants to discover the TRAKK in complete freedom.

A next factor that I think strongly influences Spade is the FabLab. As Benoît narrated, Spade uses the FabLab to fabricate products with an already developed idea in mind. In other words, the FabLab has here, in my opinion, a dimension of being a tool to create and fabricate a product. In this dimension, the FabLab offers Spade nothing more than the possibility to produce. Nevertheless, I think the moment when Spade produced Minotaure can be seen as an important one, because it showed the effectiveness of the FabLab. But although the creation of Minotaure, I do not see many significant influences coming from the FabLab in this dimension, rather it is a matter of proving its effectiveness.

However, it has also been the case that Benoît enters the FabLab without having a concrete idea. Accordingly, the present resources in the FabLab inspire him, such as the shared knowledge of previous creations by other FabLab users, the experience of FabLab employees, or he gets inspired by doing trial-and-error himself. More concretely, Benoît specifies that it is rather technical advice or some physical support that the FabLab employees give him. In my opinion, the resources in the FabLab have in this case an inspiring dimension. The FabLab is not just a tool to produce, but it is rather a tool to discover unfamiliar technical areas, new ideas, original approaches, or even the boundaries of what is possible. Exactly this changes Spade in its way of working because it is served with new knowledge.

Finally, based on Benoît's enthusiasm, I think that Thiagi's conference has been the element that has most influenced Spade, from a 'product' point of view, so far. TRAKK invited Thiagi, a person previously unknown to Benoît, to give a conference. Although his unfamiliarity with Thiagi, the presence of Benoît and his colleague at the conference resulted in an unexpected outcome for Spade. In particular, the conference of Thiagi triggered Spade to make use of game-based methods to increase the performance of companies. Benoît was so convinced that he started developing card games to use for Spade's clients. In short, the card games resulted in a new type of product for Spade, and it changed its way of working with clients. I also see that TRAKK's infrastructure played an important role in the conference of Thiagi. The fact that the conference took place near Benoît's office, motivated him to attend the conference.

### **3.3 Story 3: THELIS**

In the third story, I investigate the company THELIS. It took place on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> of April from 13h00 to 14h15. Due to the sanitary measures concerning COVID-19, I organised an online interview via Teams with Christophe Montois from THELIS.

#### **3.3.1 Before the TRAKK**

THELIS is a Belgian company founded in 1988. Since 2008, Christophe Montois has been working for THELIS. After his studies in biotechnology, Christophe first gained experience in the agronomic business for two years. He then worked 10 years in the pharmaceutical industry with in the first part an emphasis on industrial process development and, in his last years, a focus on coaching and good practices in the pharmaceutical environment. Parallel to his professional career of 12 years, Christophe obtained two different degrees: one focusing on HR-management and another on labour sciences. These degrees taught him to take a critical look at the functioning and management of businesses. In his master's thesis of the Master in Labour sciences, he focused on the efficiency and wastage, and the corresponding role of HR within a specific SME environment. This topic intrigued Frédéric Peeters, the CEO of THELIS and with whom Christophe had close contact, to such an extent that he offered Christophe a job at THELIS. Today, Christophe works as a business director at THELIS and is responsible for the areas such as HR-management, change-management, and innovative projects.

The activities of THELIS consist of designing and developing new electronic products and offering IT solutions, supported by informatics and, since a few years, Artificial Intelligence (later on, abbreviated as AI), in a business-to-business market (abbreviated as B2B market). According to Christophe, not only engineering and developing play an important role in THELIS' activities, but also creativity and innovation. In other words, integrating innovation and creativity allows THELIS to respond to specific customer needs and to look at its business from a different angle. Moreover, as THELIS' business is still growing, the organisation must also grow. It was from these perspectives that the (old) TRAKK came into the journey of THELIS.

As a director of THELIS, Christophe had close contact with a person who worked for the Economic Agency for the Province of Namur (later on, abbreviated as BEP) at that time. This contact with the BEP gave THELIS the possibility to follow several workshops and to build a network in order to grow. Gradually, partly due to Christophe's background, THELIS became more interested in certain topics such as managerial innovation, creativity, and user-centric innovation, and it started to follow coaching sessions, and workshops at the old TRAKK, where BEP is one of the partners, in 2016. Therefore, in what follows, I focus on how these activities played a role in the story of THELIS, seen from Christophe's perspective.

In addition, because of an internal demand for prototyping, THELIS also used the FabLab in the old TRAKK building. However, as THELIS has its own offices, it never used the coworking spaces of the TRAKK.

### 3.3.2 Workshops, coaching, and other sessions, etc.

Since Christophe is working at THELIS, he always has emphasized the integration of innovation and creativity within the operations, mindset, and management at THELIS to become more agile and to support the building of a solid innovative corporate strategy. In order to do so, according to Christophe, the employees, and directors of THELIS have attended various coaching sessions, and workshops at the TRAKK. The coaching sessions and workshops that the TRAKK offers to all types of companies aim to change the mindset of the company in certain areas, or at least learn the company something new.

#### 1. Managerial Innovation workshop

In 2016, THELIS joined a coached workshop at the TRAKK about managerial innovation, as Christophe describes: *"It was in 2016 on euh, managerial innovation where I had initiated a certain number of reflections and mechanisms in the company and very early on in discussions with the BEP, so the economic office for which TRAKK works, I shared these thoughts with them and they told me: "But it's interesting because we are also working on this and we can perhaps help you." So, there was support that was given, which accelerated a certain number of things, and which provided a method for working on managerial innovation. (p.7)".*<sup>73</sup> At first sight, this coaching looked very favourable for THELIS, as the TRAKK came up with a concrete proposal and THELIS had faced some difficulties and struggles with using innovative tools to implement managerial innovation: *"Yes, so, euh, for this managerial innovation, clearly, we saw it as 'we're tinkering' and trying to do something. And we don't really know how to go about it, and the arrival of TRAKK was: "Well, we have a clear vision of what needs to be done, tools, etc., we can help you.". So that was quite welcome. (p.35)".*<sup>74</sup> However, despite the enthusiasm of THELIS before and during the coaching and workshops, the final outcome was rather unsuccessful: *"Euh, what's wrong with that is that, in my opinion, we made a mistake out of enthusiasm. So, it's it's the approach that was so exciting that we went, I think, too fast, too far. So, it changed our way of doing things. At first, because it gave us tools and a structure. But in a second phase, perhaps we went a little too fast and so, euh, we didn't anticipate the problems that were behind it, euh, they arrived little by little because the time to generate a change, to observe what was happening because it was a slow drift which took 2-3 years and then, when we noticed that the drift was happening, we said to ourselves: "Ah, damn, it's not the right direction in which we're going and we have to correct it." So, yes, it changed the way we do things. (p.35-36)".*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *"C'est en 2016 sur euh l'innovation managériale où moi, j'avais enclenché un certain nombre de de réflexion et de mécanismes dans dans l'entreprise et très tôt en discutant avec le BEP [Bureau Economique de la Province de Namur], donc, le bureau économique pour lequel le TRAKK travaille. Euh j'ai partagé ces réflexions là et ils m'ont dit : « Mais c'est intéressant parce qu'on travaille aussi là-dessus et on peut peut-être vous aider. », donc il y a eu un accompagnement qui a été fait, qui a accéléré un certain nombre de choses euh, qui a amené de la méthode pour pouvoir travailler sur l'innovation managériale."*

<sup>74</sup> *"Oui, donc, euh, pour cette innovation managériale, clairement, on a vu ça comme on est en train de chipoter et d'essayer de faire quelque chose. Et on sait pas trop comment on va s'y prendre, et l'arrivée du TRAKK c'était : « Ben nous on a une vision claire sur ce qu'il faut faire, des outils, et cetera, on peut vous aider. », donc ça c'était assez bienvenu."*

<sup>75</sup> *"Selon moi, on a on a pêché par enthousiasme, donc c'est c'est la démarche était tellement emballante qu'on est allé, je pense trop vite, trop loin. Donc ça a changé notre façon de faire. Dans un premier temps, parce que ça nous a amené des outils, une structure. Mais dans un deuxième temps, peut-être à à aller un peu trop vite. Et donc, euh. Et on n'a pas anticipé les problèmes qu'ils y avaient derrière euh ils arrivent petit à petit parce que le temps de générer un changement, d'observer ce qui se passe parce que c'est une dérive lente qui a vu, c'est sur 2-3 ans et et après, quand on remarque que la dérive et là on se dit : « Ah zut c'est pas*

Christophe admits that it all went too fast for THELIS at that time because its organisation had not yet been entirely evaluated. Hence, the employees lost touch with the framework that was put in place to implement the innovation: *“We misjudged the fact that taking people into an area where they were given a lot of autonomy, euh with a framework, voluntarily leaving a very fine framework, was not appropriate. In any case, it was not appropriate in the situation of THELIS at the time, which led to encouraging autonomy, but which went as far as a sense of, euh, independence. (p.7)”*.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the increase in independence and autonomy led to dissociation and incoherence within the organisation and negatively affected THELIS in its growth.

After the unsuccessful implementation of the innovative framework, THELIS restarted themselves by gathering all information and processes of the organisation and the gained knowledge of the coaching in order to create a clear, unambiguous, and solid framework. As mentioned by Christophe: *“We have corrected the situation, we are not abandoning the idea, it's just that the path we took was not the right one. (p.8)”*.<sup>77</sup> Concerning the new framework, Christophe mentions that THELIS is finishing this soon.

## 2. Other coaching sessions and workshops

Besides workshops and coaching in managerial innovation, nine members of THELIS participated in a workshop on creativity. Following Christophe, the scope of the workshop was focused on: *“So euh, to learn like: “What does a creativity workshop look like?”. So that, when we are in this situation with a client, we are not lost, that we know what our role is, what we can do, and so we can finally have a first, well, a first experience of what creativity is, knowing that these are meeting formats that we can create with our clients to generate ideas with them. So, the aim is to train our developers in this, not so that they are capable of leading a workshop or building a workshop, but so that they can have the right place in the workshop so that it is productive and that their view and their help are interesting for the client. (p.11)”*.<sup>78</sup>

More recently, around March 2020, Christophe and two other directors attended a learning on user-centric innovation: *“We followed a training course on user-centric innovation, which is based on the principle that, before developing anything, so before spending money, so development in the strict sense of the word, we spend a lot of time looking at concrete situations and the experience of users in order to bring out the main hypotheses, the ideas that are most worth pursuing in order to find an original solution. Euh, which will end up in*

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*c'est pas la bonne direction dans lequel on va et il faut corriger. », donc euh, oui ça a changé la façon de faire.”*

<sup>76</sup> *“On a mal évalué le fait que d'emmener les gens dans une zone où on leur donne beaucoup d'autonomie, euh avec un cadre hein, on on volontairement laissant un cadre très fin, ne convenait pas. En tout cas ne convenait pas dans la situation de THELIS à l'époque, ce qui a amené en fait à encourager l'autonomie mais qui est allé jusqu' à une notion de euh d'indépendance.”*

<sup>77</sup> *“On a corrigé le tir, on n'abandonne pas l'idée, c'est juste que le chemin qu'on a pris n'était pas le le bon, c'est pas celui.”*

<sup>78</sup> *“Donc euh d'apprendre comme : « A quoi ressemble un atelier de créativité ? », pour que, au moment où avec un client, on est dans cette situation-là, on ne soit pas perdu, qu'on sache finalement quel rôle on a, ce qu'on peut faire et donc prendre finalement une première enfin une première expérience sur ce qu'est la créativité euh, sachant que ce sont des des formats de réunion qu'on peut nous susciter avec nos clients pour générer des idées avec eux. Donc le but c'est de former nos développeurs à ça, non pas pour qu'ils soient capables d'animer un atelier ou de construire un atelier et pour qu'ils puissent avoir la bonne place dans l'atelier pour que celui-ci soit productif et que leur regard et leur aide soient intéressants pour le client.”*

*applications or euh or other things, but that's such an idea, to train oneself in this user-centric innovation approach. (p. 12)".<sup>79</sup>*

These coaching sessions and workshops have partly influenced THELIS in using new methodologies in managing its clients. For instance, THELIS offers creative workshops for its clients, uses a customised approach, and intensively accompanies the client through the technical process of electronic design and IT solutions: *"In fact, innovation is important for us because we do it for ourselves, and that's why we're called upon by our clients, so we widen the field of innovation, as I was saying earlier, and go beyond the technical field, which seemed obvious, and that's why we've made it a priority to turn to TRAKK, to be trained by people who are used to doing this on a daily basis. And so, to adopt these ways of thinking so that they permeate the teams and the way we accompany our clients euh, and therefore to be richer in our customer support. (p. 17)".<sup>80</sup>*

### 3.3.3 The FabLab

A second aspect of THELIS' trajectory at the TRAKK is the FabLab. The reason for using the FabLab is explained by Christophe as follows: *"There is another element which for me was interesting and which was a demand, or a lack in our company, so we do electronic development, but we also do production, which is mainly subcontracted, but we still give this electronic production. And sometimes, we have to go to the prototype stage, we have to be able to work on what is not at the heart of our business, i.e. everything that is an electronic box, the electronic board is in a box. (p. 13-14)".<sup>81</sup>* Instead of contacting industrial companies or other third parties, who only prototype at a large scale and often at a high cost, the FabLab gave THELIS the opportunity to make 3D prints or other simulations of its products.

Although THELIS made use of the FabLab, there were some issues that hampered THELIS in its activities after a while: *"There was an impediment which is silly, but it's an impediment, euh, two impediments, it's accessibility. Euh, it's that here we are when we arrive on the old site, well it was at the time of the old TRAKK building. Parking was almost a 'bête noire' if you wanted to do it during the day. And the other thing is that the workshop was quite crowded because citizens come, makers come and so the workshop is used for many things and we are often in a rather industrial, organised mode, et cetera. We arrive, we*

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<sup>79</sup> *"On a suivi d'une formation sur la l'innovation centrée utilisateur, donc qui est qui part du principe que on, avant de développer quoi que ce soit, donc avant de dépenser de l'argent, donc du développement à proprement parler, on passe beaucoup de temps à regarder les situations concrètes et le vécu des utilisateurs pour aller faire émerger les hypothèses principales, les idées qui valent le plus la peine d'être poursuivies de trouver une solution originale. Euh qui se retrouveront dans des applications ou euh ou d'autres choses, mais donc ça, c'est telle idée se se former à cette approche innovation centrée utilisateur."*

<sup>80</sup> *"En fait, l'innovation, c'est important pour nous parce qu'on le on le fait pour nous c'est quelque part pour ça qu'on est appelé par nos clients, euh donc on euh élargir le champ de l'innovation, comme je le disais tout à l'heure et dépasser le champ de la technique, semblait une certaine évidence et donc c'est c'est plus pour ça, savoir que le TRAKK, on a fait une spécialité de nous nous tourner vers le TRAKK pour pouvoir être formée par les gens qui ont l'habitude de faire ça au quotidien. Et donc de de nous approprier un petit peu c'est ces modes de pensée pour pouvoir bien que ça percole dans dans les équipes et dans la façon dont on accompagne nos clients. Euh, et et donc être plus riche dans notre accompagnement client."*

<sup>81</sup> *"Il y a un autre élément qui est qui pour moi était intéressant et était une demande enfin un manque en interne dans notre société, donc on fait du développement électronique, mais on fait aussi de la production euh qui est principalement sous-traitée mais encore donne cette production électronique. Euh et parfois, on doit aller à l'état de prototype, on doit pouvoir travailler sur ce qui n'est pas au cœur de notre métier, c'est à dire tout ce qui est boîtier électronique, la carte électronique se retrouve dans un boîtier."*

*start up, we pack up and that was a bit disturbing. (p.14)*.<sup>82</sup> Since THELIS has a rather industrial approach to prototyping, with an emphasis on electronics, compared to many makers who do not always have a clear approach, it has considered investing in some digital industrial tools as well. But rather than simply investing in these machines, THELIS is considering creating its own internal Lab. In particular, the Lab will integrate the creative and innovative processes that THELIS has learned in its workshops at the TRAKK in order to foster intrapreneurship, i.e. the development and the maturation of internal ideas and projects.

### 3.3.4 Story analysis

In contrast to the previously interviewed entrepreneurs and enterprises, and their narratives, the story of THELIS highlights another dimension of the TRAKK. This is because THELIS is different from the other interviewees as, firstly, it does not use the coworking spaces and, secondly, THELIS is already advanced beyond the start-up stage (when joining the TRAKK, THELIS was in the growing stage).

The experience from his previous employers, his creative and innovative mindset, and the knowledge gained through his academic degrees on Labour sciences and HR-management that Christophe brought with him to THELIS in 2008, changed THELIS in several ways. As mentioned before, in his function as director, Christophe has been seeking to create a growing organisation of THELIS that is flexible and performant in an environment where innovation should be at the heart of the business. One approach to achieve this state of mind was managerial innovation. Therefore, THELIS attended coaching sessions and workshops at the TRAKK in order to understand how companies organise and implement managerial innovation. Unfortunately, after having evaluated the state of the outcome, THELIS concluded that the intended result of the workshop was not achieved. This because the framework, used as a tool for implementing the managerial innovation, came too early and was not sufficient. As a result, the employees lost connection with the proposed target.

Although the framework of managerial innovation did not initially work out from an organisational point of view, some interesting elements can be drawn from the coaching sessions and workshops in general at the TRAKK, according to the interview with Christophe. I suppose that the managerial innovation workshops brought THELIS useful tools, methods, and knowledge about the processes of managerial innovation. Therefore, I think that the gained knowledge will be useful for THELIS to refine and improve their organisation in the future. In addition, I presume that the workshops on creativity and user-centric innovation at THELIS caused a triggering event. These workshops introduced THELIS to a new method of approaching and working with customers. More specifically, the workshops supported THELIS in developing a customer-centric approach. Within this approach, elements such as tailor-made advice, close personal contact, and effectively meeting the demand of the customer are key. I also think that the workshops have partly

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<sup>82</sup> *“Mais il y avait un frein qui est qui est bête, mais c'est c'est un frein euh enfin deux freins c'est l'accessibilité. Euh, c'est que nous voilà quand on arrive sur de sur l'ancien ben c'était à l'époque de l'ancien bâtiment du TRAKK. Se garer était quasi une bête noire si on veut le faire en journée. Et l'autre chose c'est que il y avait l'atelier était assez encombré parce que viennent des citoyens, viennent des des makers et donc l'atelier sert à plein de choses et nous, on est souvent dans un dans un mode plutôt industriel, organisé, et cetera. On arrive, on se lance, hup on range et et ça avait un peu perturbé.”*

inspired THELIS to create its own creative innovative methodologies, such as the AI-approach and the creative ateliers for clients.

Concerning the internal Lab of THELIS, I assume that the impediments that Christophe mentions, the tinkering-approach in the old FabLab, and also the knowledge gained from the workshops about creativity, triggered THELIS to create its own Lab. In my opinion, the internal Lab focuses on intrapreneurship and on the creative and innovative processes that THELIS learned during the workshops at the TRAKK, among others.



### 3.4 Story 4: 1.61

The fourth interview describes the story of 1.61 (pronounce as: *un point soixante-et-un*). It took place on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> of April from 14h00 to 15h15. Due to the sanitary measures concerning COVID-19, I organised an online interview via Teams with 1.61.

#### 3.4.1 Before the TRAKK

1.61 is the enterprise of Tony Rey Paulino. As he is the founder of 1.61, I invited him for an interview. The activities of 1.61 consist of three services. The first service lies in the strategic domain and contains the conceptualisation of products and services (e.g. how to create value and capture value with a product or service). The second service is the assistance in the design of a product (e.g. making drafts, prototypes, and 3D models). Finally, the third service is guiding the client during the production stage (e.g. composition of workflows and quality charts, set-up logistics, and searching manufacturers).

The story of 1.61 at the TRAKK is told from the perspective of Tony. Before creating 1.61, Tony worked 10 years for the European Space Agency (abbreviated as ESA) and subsequently two years at Ateliers du Saupont in Bertrix. However, Tony always had the idea in his mind to build a team and to grow collectively a business. And so it came to pass, in 2019 Tony made the decision to start his own company and the idea for 1.61 was born. At that time, Tony was not yet affiliated at the TRAKK. His positive feeling for the TRAKK came at the time when Tony was still a coach at the company Make-It and he had not yet founded 1.61. However, Tony had then already the idea to create 1.61. During that period, Make-It was looking for offices to set-up its activities. Together with Make-It, Tony visited the offices of the TRAKK. The visit of the TRAKK pleased Tony very much because of the presence of positive energy, dynamism, and the ability for growing as a start-up: *“I visited the offices with them and as I was in the process of creating a company, I said to myself: “Well, we need an office, we need something that looks good.” So, euh, and that's where the TRAKK actually appeared to me to be essential because of its location, because of the energy that had, euh, here's, you know, there was a whole, it was a whole, it was a beautiful dynamic that seemed to me to be important to create 1.61. (p.2-3)”*<sup>83</sup> As a result, these elements created together with his ‘gut feeling’ his positive perception of the TRAKK and so in January 2020, Tony started officially his journey with 1.61 in the new building of the creative hub.

#### 3.4.2 The competences

Since the presence of 1.61 at the TRAKK in 2020, Tony points to the creative hub as an environment with complementarities between the different EPPE. According to Tony: *“There are companies that are very complementary to each other, so this also means that we can either work for them, so on a small part or on larger projects, or conversely, I can go and look for my colleagues from TRAKK to be able to carry out projects together, because they are right next door, because it's easy to talk to them for this or that reason.*

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<sup>83</sup> *“J’ai visité les bureaux avec eux et comme j’étais dans dans dans cette optique donc de créer une société ben je me suis dit : « Ben tiens, il faut un local, il faut quelque chose qui en jette. » hein. Donc euh et c’est là le TRAKK effectivement m’est apparu essentiel par sa situation, par l’énergie qui avait, euh voilà le tu sais y avait un tout, c’était un tout, c’était une belle dynamique qui me semblait importante pour créer 1.61.”*

(p.4)".<sup>84</sup> These complementarities between EPPE exist because of the presence of certain competences at the TRAKK. These competences are part of the ecosystem of the TRAKK: *"What's interesting is to have an ecosystem, a very small ecosystem, I wouldn't say self-sufficient because that's not true. We don't have all the skills at TRAKK either, but in any case, we have skills that are interesting to keep an eye on. (p.4)".*<sup>85</sup> Based on the interview with Tony, I detail three different aspects that comprise these competences within the TRAKK's ecosystem. These aspects are the social interactions between 1.61 and other EPPE, the FabLab and the value of the presence of the Economic Agency for the Province of Namur (later on, abbreviated as BEP) for 1.61.

## 1. Social interactions

The first aspect of the ecosystem of the TRAKK, that is mentioned by Tony, is the ease of having social interactions with other EPPE. These social interactions include both formal business collaborations and informal conversations inside the TRAKK.

During its stay of one year and a half at the TRAKK, 1.61 has already collaborated with other EPPE such as ATR Engineering, Kingsize<sup>86</sup> and Thomas Léonard<sup>87</sup>: *"ATLR Engineering, for example, euh, these are guys I know well before TRAKK, euh, but who are really coming on strong, who have a great expertise from an electronic point of view, who euh, here we get along very well, so it's easy to collaborate with them, euh, and as they are just next door, ben voilà, euh, let's go and have a coffee, we'll discuss such and such a project. So, it's easy, it's really easy. Euh, I've already collaborated with Kingsize, so, euh, on a project, euh, called IONNYK, so, euh, or I've also collaborated with euh Thomas Léonard, photographer. So, euh, who is also there, it was also on the IONNYK project, and I needed an expertise in imaging, euh. (p.4-5)".*<sup>88</sup> Together with ATR Engineering, Kingsize and Thomas Léonard, 1.61 worked on a common project IONNYK<sup>89</sup>. Tony explains that the project consisted of different phases: *"In fact, it's because, at a given moment, therefore euh in the execution part, euh they identified a need euh to develop an electronic card euh for the control of the power, hein therefore euh and therefore I knew ATR well, therefore I knew that ATR had the competences to answer what is a discharge and therefore it was me who was looking for ATR. On the other hand, for Kingsize, it was in fact a bit of a coincidence, it was the project leader from IONNYK, euh, who said: "Oh, you're at TRAKK? We work with Kingsize." So, it was the project leader who chose*

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<sup>84</sup> *"Il y a des sociétés qui sont très complémentaires les unes avec les autres, donc euh ça veut dire aussi que on peut, nous, soit travailler pour eux, donc euh alors sur une petite partie ou sur des projets plus grands, euh ou alors à l'inverse, je peux aller chercher mes mes collègues du TRAKK pour pouvoir réaliser des projets ensemble hein donc parce qu'ils sont juste à côté, parce que c'est facile de de discuter donc pour tel ou tel raison."*

<sup>85</sup> *"Ce qui est intéressant, c'est d'avoir un écosystème en fait, un tout petit écosystème euh je pas dire autosuffisant parce que c'est pas vrai. On n'a pas non plus toutes les compétences au TRAKK, mais en tout cas on a des compétences qui sont euh intéressantes euh de de garder à l'œil."*

<sup>86</sup> Kingsize is a creative studio, based in the TRAKK, that is specialized in brand creation.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Léonard is a photographer, based in the TRAKK.

<sup>88</sup> *"ATLR Engineering, par exemple euh donc, ce sont des gars que je connais bien avant le TRAKK déjà, euh donc mais qui monte vraiment en force, qui ont une belle expertise d'un point de vue électronique qui euh voilà avec qui on s'entend très bien, donc c'est facile de collaborer avec eux donc, euh, et comme ils sont juste à côté ben voilà euh ben viens on va prendre un café, on va discuter de tel et tel projet. Ben voilà c'est facile, c'est vraiment facile. Euh, j'ai déjà collaboré aussi avec Kingsize hein donc euh pour euh sur un projet, euh, donc, euh, qui s'appelle IONNYK, donc, euh, ou j'ai aussi collaboré avec euh Thomas Léonard, photographe. Donc euh, qui est là aussi c'était aussi sur le projet IONNYK et j'avais besoin d'une expertise en imagerie hein."*

<sup>89</sup> A screen with a photographic picture that you can change by using an application.

*Kingsize as the service provider. (p.26)*.<sup>90</sup> *“And afterwards, during the project, euh in front of the execution, if we needed this expertise in lenses, euh optical lenses, euh and euh that's where I looked for Thomas, so in the office next door, euh who is a photographer, who has measuring devices to be able to euh see that the quality of a lens compared to another, so, euh, and we signed a small contract with him to be able to euh benefit, in inverted commas, from his expertise. (p.26-27)”*.<sup>91</sup>

The example of IONNYK shows how a project can trigger several encounters between EPPE. According to Tony, these meetings are mainly based on the differences in technical competences between each EPPE: 1.61 first relies on the engineering competences of ATLR Engineering, then on the photographic skills of Thomas Léonard. However, thanks to the IONNYK project, 1.61 has met Thomas Léonard and Kingsize.

The benefits of the diversity in technical competences stem, according to Tony, to some extent from the social accessibility and favourable physical environment of the TRAKK. The social accessibility and the physical environment are conducive for 1.61 to continue a relationship and to have new meetings with other EPPE: *“The guys from ATLR Engineering I know before, so TRAKK had nothing to do with it, right? So, in fact, what the TRAKK allowed was to continue to consolidate the collaboration. Euh, there's an expression which says: "Out of sight, out of mind", well, the fact that the TRAKK has allowed us to continue to consolidate the collaboration. The fact that we're together in the same building, that we see each other often, that we discuss everything, well, he knows, it happens that: "Oh well, in fact I think there's such a project that could be interesting that we do together." It's not the kind of conversation you have with a company that's not in the same building, so, euh, that's somewhere else, you wouldn't think of picking up the phone specifically to discuss. (p.8)”*.<sup>92</sup>

Besides business collaborations, 1.61 has been having as well informal social interactions with the EPPE. Following Tony, thanks to the fact that all EPPE are under the same roof, there are no real barriers. This facilitates the ease to have casual conversations with other EPPE and, as a result, a sort of confidence is created: *“It creates, it creates links, it creates human links above all. So, trust is not just a matter of euh how to say it of skill, of expertise, euh it's also a matter of person to person. So yes, the TRAKK is clear that indirectly the fact of being there under the same roof favours, so it's a human-to-human relationship.*

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<sup>90</sup> *“En fait, c'est parce que, à un moment donné, donc euh dans la partie exécution, euh ils ont identifié donc un besoin euh de développer une carte électronique euh pour le le contrôle de la puissance, hein donc euh et donc je connaissais bien ATLR, donc je savais que ATLR avait les compétences pour répondre à ce qu'est une décharge et donc c'était moi qui étais chercher ATLR. Euh par contre pour Kingsize ça c'est en fait un peu par hasard, c'est le porteur de projet de de IONNYK euh qui disait : « Ah ben tiens tu es au TRAKK ? Nous, on travaille avec Kingsize. », donc c'est là ça venait du porteur de projet, que c'est lui qui avait choisi Kingsize comme prestataire.”*

<sup>91</sup> *“Et après pendant le projet euh en face d'exécution, si on avait besoin donc de cette expertise dans les verres euh les verres optiques euh et euh c'est là où j'ai cherché Thomas, donc dans le bureau d'à côté euh qui est photographe, qui a des appareils de mesure pour pouvoir euh voir que la la qualité d'un verre par rapport à un autre, alors donc, euh, et que on a fait un petit contrat avec lui pour pouvoir euh profiter, entre guillemets, de son expertise.”*

<sup>92</sup> *“Les gars d'ATLR Engineering je connais avant donc, le TRAKK n'y est pour rien, hein ? Donc en fait, ce que le TRAKK a permis c'est de continuer à consolider la collaboration. Euh voilà tu je veux dire, il y a une expression qui dit : « Loin des yeux, loin du coeur. », hein ben, le fait qu'on soit justement ensemble dans le même bâtiment qu'on se voit souvent, que on discute de tout et de rien, ben il sait, ça arrive que : « Ah ben tiens, en fait je pense qu'il y a tel projet qui pourrait être intéressant qu'on fasse à deux. », c'est pas le genre de conversation qu'on a avec une société qui serait pas dans le même bâtiment, donc euh qui serait ailleurs on penserait pas prendre le téléphone spécifiquement pour pouvoir discuter de savoir.”*

(p.8-9)".<sup>93</sup> For Tony, these human relations with others are: *"the human relationship in general, so you meet someone, you appreciate them, you start to get to know them more and more and, well, there's a trust that's established without explaining why, but there's this alchemy that's, euh, favourable. (p.21)".*<sup>94</sup> 1.61 builds human connections with other TRAKKEURS<sup>95</sup> by: *"we drink a beer on Friday afternoon, we have a coffee on Monday morning with, well there you go, it's really, it's really a beautiful euh also a beautiful a beautiful ecosystem of life, euh, so euh. (p.16)".*<sup>96</sup>

## 2. The FabLab

The second aspect that comprises competences is focused on the FabLab. For Tony, the FabLab is: *"As we're designers, well, it's necessarily the FabLab, so it's really interesting to make prototypes and to have access to machines that we don't necessarily have at home. So, euh, even euh if I have a workshop at home, well, having a CNC [Computer Numerical Control] or a laser cutter, euh, we don't use that every day, so euh it's better to have a place that offers it. (p.5)".*<sup>97</sup> As the TRAKK provides costly equipment and highly technical machines at the FabLab, 1.61 does not have to incur large expenses. This supports 1.61 in the execution of its core operations.

Since the start of 1.61 at the TRAKK, it has been using the FabLab in two ways. First, 1.61 works with the machinery to design prototypes of products for its clients: *"To make products, so, euh, you have to make prototypes when you design products, so euh having machines that are there, that are available, well, that's becoming a necessity. (p.9-10)".*<sup>98</sup> The second way is collaborating with the employees of the FabLab: *"we've already received projects from the FabLab because the FabLab didn't know how to respond. Euh they were more industrial projects or projects of a larger euh here of another nature so it was also the design of another nature and so effectively the FabLab contacts us euh, so to know: "Well, how would you do it?" or euh, and we help each other, so euh. (p.10-11)".*<sup>99</sup>

When 1.61 works at the FabLab, there are several possible sources of influence (e.g., other users, and FabLab employees). Although 1.61 wants to remain independent of these

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<sup>93</sup> *"Elle crée, elle crée des liens, créer des liens humains avant tout hein. Donc, la confiance n'est pas juste une affaire de de euh comment dire ça de de skill, de de d'expertise, hein, euh c'est c'est une affaire aussi de personne à personne. Donc oui le TRAKK que c'est clair qu'indirectement le fait d'être d'être là sous la même la même toiture, elle favorise hein donc c'est c'est relation d'humain à humain oui."*

<sup>94</sup> *"C'est comme c'est la relation humaine de manière générale hein, donc on rencontre quelqu'un, on l'apprécie, on commence à le côtoyer de plus en plus et euh ben voilà, il y a une confiance qui s'installe sans pour autant expliquer pourquoi mais il y a cette alchimie donc euh, qui euh qui est propice, qui est qui est favorable."*

<sup>95</sup> Denomination to indicate the active members of the TRAKK.

<sup>96</sup> *"On boit une bière le vendredi après-midi, on prend un café le lundi matin avec bon voilà, c'est vraiment c'est c'est vraiment une belle euh aussi une belle un bel écosystème de vie, hein, donc euh."*

<sup>97</sup> *"Comme on est designer ben c'est forcément le FabLab hein donc vraiment intéressant pour faire des prototypes pour pouvoir accéder à des machines qu'on n'a pas forcément à la maison. Ben donc, euh, même euh si j'ai un atelier à la maison ben avoir une CNC [Computer Numerical Control] ou avoir une découpe laser euh voilà on utilise pas ça tous les jours donc euh il vaut mieux avoir un endroit qui qui le propose."*

<sup>98</sup> *"C'est de faire des produits hein, donc, euh, on te pour faire quand on conçoit des produits, on doit forcément faire des prototypes, donc euh avoir des machines qui sont là, qui sont disponibles ben c'est ça devient une nécessité."*

<sup>99</sup> *"On a déjà reçu des projets de la part du FabLab parce que le FabLab ne savait pas répondre. Euh c'étaient des projets plus industriels ou des projets de plus grande euh voilà d'une autre nature donc c'était la conception aussi d'une autre nature et donc effectivement le le FabLab nous euh contacte hein, donc pour savoir : « Ben tiens, comment est-ce que tu pourrais faire ? », ou euh et voilà, on on s'aide mutuellement, donc euh."*

influences as much as possible, there have been some little intellectual influences like on the validation of a prototype or the use of a certain material. However, these were not strong influences but rather advising influences. Mainly, these influences pop-up by communicating with others through a discussion or a conversation.

### 3. The presence of the BEP

Thirdly, Tony speaks about the presence of the BEP as being an important element for 1.61: *“the presence of the BEP in the building, euh, as I told you, we are a designers so that means that we are in projects which are either in the creation phase or in the process of being or companies which are being consolidated and, euh, the BEP is an important economic player, euh, so in this process of innovation and of making companies grow, euh, so there too, we have privileged discussions with them. (p.5)”*.<sup>100</sup> Tony explains that the BEP can be seen as an economic actor who takes the role of a kind of facilitator, and of a kind of business partner.

The role of facilitator concerns, referring to Tony, the management of the TRAKK environment, like the building, and the conservation of the alchemy in the ecosystem of the TRAKK. Tony admits that they deliver good work: *“they managed to keep that positive momentum I was telling you about earlier. (p.17)”*.<sup>101</sup> Related to the environment, Tony admits that he likes to work in the TRAKK by making a comparison between the TRAKK and a business centre: *“So you can see, so euh it's a very open place, it's a place so euh very luminous, so euh where there's colour and all that so euh already you feel well in the building, it's a bit cocooning eh, so euh so already that it's really nice euh you get out a bit, so from the cold business centres with old furniture, white walls, very hospital-like, so, euh, so already that's something that's really good when you enter the TRAKK, you feel good. (p.15-16)”*.<sup>102</sup> Tony says that a business centre evokes an image of a hospital in his mind. This in contrast to the TRAKK, where he has a good feeling and where he likes to be.

During the stay of 1.61 at the TRAKK, the BEP has also acted as a business partner for 1.61, in the sense that the BEP is somewhat involved in the interests of 1.61. In its relatively young journey at the TRAKK, the BEP has already offered some attractive paths to 1.61. More specifically, when the BEP knows that there is someone in need of a certain expertise, they ask 1.61. Or, when 1.61 asks for know-how, the BEP comes to offer help: *“at the level of the BEP as such, euh well there, we had complementarities to make and so there, really, in a discourse that was a little more business-like, therefore euh where: “Well, do you have such and such a project?”, “We have such expertise, we could help each other.”, or, uh, the opposite: “I have projects that need your expertise.”. So, it's a give-and-take, so you have to work in a win-win situation, everyone is trying to create their own place, which is*

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<sup>100</sup> *“La présence du BEP dans dans le de dans le bâtiment, euh, comme je vous l'ai dit, on est designer donc ça veut dire que on est dans des projets qui sont soit en phase de création ou en train d'être ou des entreprises qui se qui se consolident et, euh, le BEP c'est quand même un acteur économique euh important, hein, donc dans cette démarche d'innovation et de de faire grandir les sociétés hein, donc là aussi, on a de discussion privilégiée avec eux quoi.”*

<sup>101</sup> *“Celui qui gère donc le bâtiment et, euh ben c'est ils ont réussi à conserver cette dynamique positive que je te parlais tantôt.”*

<sup>102</sup> *“Donc tu vois bien, donc euh c'est un lieu très ouvert, c'est un lieu donc euh très lumineux, donc euh où il y a de la couleur et tout ça donc euh déjà on sent bien dans le bâtiment, c'est un peu cocooning hein, donc euh donc déjà ça ça c'est vraiment sympa euh on sort un petit peu, donc des des business centers froid avec des vieux meubles, des murs blancs euh très hôpital, hein, donc donc euh donc déjà ça c'est c'est quelque chose qui qui est vraiment bien quand on rentre dans le TRAKK, on se sent bien hein.”*

*normal, so, euh, well, you have to know how to think of others and be able to take but also give back. (p.17)<sup>103</sup>.*

### **3.4.3 The development of 1.61**

Since its entry in 2020 at the TRAKK, the different aspects of the ecosystem have been helping 1.61 to grow. I summarize the relative fast growth of 1.61 by using Tony's clear comparison.

In the interview, Tony compares the development of 1.61 with the take-off of an airplane. In 2019, when Tony created the idea of 1.61, the preparation of the airplane began. This means the idea and general objective behind 1.61. Subsequently, in January 2020, Tony had the opportunity to join the TRAKK with his idea of 1.61. The TRAKK offered Tony an office to work, access to the TRAKK environment and a helping hand to concretise his plans. From then on, the airplane was arranged and ready for take-off. Onwards in 2020, after having fully prepared the airplane, 1.61 started its take-off. This phase consists of building up the company internally and making it ready to start doing business. By the end of 2020, 1.61 arranged everything internally and got the wind in its sails. Right now, 2021, 1.61 is growing as a business by attracting more projects and increasing the number of employees. As a result, 1.61 is searching for his cruising speed.

### **3.4.4 Story analysis**

The previous sections explain on the basis of three aspects of the ecosystem of the TRAKK, the social interactions, the FabLab and the presence of the BEP, which competences are present, according to Tony. Consequently, these competences have been resulting into complementarities between 1.61 and other EPPE and they have been facilitating informal social interactions. Besides this, I am convinced that 1.61 has also grown through the steady forces of the ecosystem at the TRAKK. This because Tony mentions that he has not experienced any real triggers yet but instead, his journey is more like a puzzle where every time a piece of the puzzle is filled in. To be more specific, it is each day of working in and experiencing the ecosystem that adds a piece to the puzzle.

However, an important event at the TRAKK for 1.61 that opened new perspectives is, in my opinion, the IONNYK-project. This project brought different types of technical competences together, such as engineering skills (ATLR Engineering), photographic skills (Thomas Léonard), and digital skills (Kingsize). I think that this variety in technical competence, seen from a cooperative point of view, led to unexpected contacts for 1.61 at the TRAKK. More specifically, before developing IONNYK, 1.61 did not know that it would be collaborating with Kingsize and Thomas Léonard. However, thanks to IONNYK, 1.61 came into contact with these two firms. Although one does not know what the future will bring, these contacts could lead to more collaborations in the longer term.

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<sup>103</sup> *«Au niveau du BEP en tant que tel, euh ben là, on avait des complémentarités à faire et donc là, vraiment, dans un discours un peu plus business, hein, donc euh où : « Ben tiens, t'as tel projet ? », « Nous, en fait, on a telle expertise, on pourrait s'entraider. », euh, on a l'inverse : « Moi j'ai des projets qui ont besoin d'être de tes expertise à toi. », et donc c'est du donnant-donnant hein donc il faut travailler en win-win tout le monde cherche à créer sa place qui est normal, hein, donc, euh ben voilà, il faut savoir penser aussi aux autres et pouvoir prendre mais redonner aussi.»*

In general, from Tony's story, I assume three elements that have created a sustainable and innovative business network for 1.61 that can trigger unexpected projects, business collaborations, and professional contacts such as the IONNYK-project. These are the presence of a variety of different strong technical competences inside the TRAKK building, the social accessibility to talk to people, and the favourable physical environment, such as the shared kitchen, the corridors, and the coffee machines.

Next, based on Tony's testimony, I suppose, that the FabLab can be evaluated from two perspectives according to its functions. The first function is the availability of the machines and equipment that enable 1.61 the possibility to prototype and conceptualise the client's product. The use of the FabLab gives 1.61 an economic advantage because the financial risk of buying machines itself is minimised. From this perspective, I see the FabLab rather as a tool to achieve a certain goal, i.e. making prototypes of a product, at a relatively low cost. The second function of the FabLab appeals to me as a place where new knowledge is generated and shared through projects, such as 1.61 helping the FabLab employees with a problem. In this way, know-how of one side (here: 1.61) is transferred to another side (here: the employees of the FabLab) in the form of an advice, a discussion, or a conversation. From this perspective, the FabLab can be seen as a universe in which different actors share knowledge and capabilities in order to improve the technical operations of each other. Although the FabLab had no significant influence on 1.61's mindset, 1.61 was influenced in a minor intellectual way several times while prototyping in the FabLab. This influence mainly affected the features of the project 1.61 was working on.

Finally, I consider the pleasant atmosphere of the TRAKK, including the infrastructure as well, where mutual trust and confidence dominate, as a catalyst in the TRAKK environment. This catalyst creates a certain alchemy within the TRAKK. I see this alchemy as a decisive element in generating the positivity and dynamism Tony talked about. In my opinion, this alchemy does not change the core of 1.61, but it is reflected in the working atmosphere of 1.61. To say it in his words: *"Yes, at TRAKK we are rather well surrounded, there are rather nice guys, people, really nice people with whom we want to discuss, with whom we want to exchange, and whom we want to see every day, so I mean, euh, it's good, it's a nice place. When I say a nice place, it's also for the people who are there. (p.15)".*<sup>104</sup> I am convinced that this positive working atmosphere has each day a positive effect on the growth of Tony's company.

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<sup>104</sup> *"Oui au TRAKK on est plutôt bien entouré il y a peu, il y a plutôt des gars sympas, de, des gens, de gens sympa vraiment avec qui on a envie de discuter, avec qui on a envie d'échanger qu'on a envie de voir tous les jours aussi hein donc je veux dire euh voilà, c'est c'est bien c'est un bel endroit. Quand je dis un bel endroit, c'est aussi pour les personnes qu'y sont."*

### 3.5 Story 5: Vinciane Lamy

The fifth interview focuses on the story of Vinciane Lamy, also known as VINCE or Gribouillis. The interview took place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> of April from 11h00 to 12h20. Due to the sanitary measures concerning COVID-19, several users of the TRAKK are forced to work from home. Therefore, this interview took place online via Teams.

#### 3.5.1 Before the TRAKK

With around 30 years of working experience in the graphic communication and advertising industry, Vinciane Lamy has had a rich professional career. During her long career, she worked for various communication, advertising, and publicity agencies including some bureaus in Flanders. Working in Flanders, opened for her a new perspective on working dynamics. More specifically, Vinciane was immersed in an Anglo-Saxon culture where the mindset is focused on professionalism, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

Vinciane lived for a long time in Charleroi, where she was charmed by the dynamics that emerged from small creative business units. Whereas in Namur, where she worked for the Haute Ecole Albert Jacquard<sup>105</sup> (later on, abbreviated as HEAJ), the infrastructure created to support creative minds was too big in her viewpoint. The TRAKK, however, was different from Namur, the city that moves at the pace of the Meuse and the Sambre and where everything moves at a relatively calm and moderate speed. In the TRAKK, there has been a mindset, based on dynamic innovation and openness, that moves forward and evolves. This mindset convinced Vinciane to join the TRAKK. Today, Vinciane is self-employed under the pseudonym VINCE, she is a docent-coordinator in graphic communication and advertising at the HEAJ, and continues to contribute her knowledge and experience to other projects.

For about five à six years, Vinciane has been using the TRAKK to create and carry out her own projects as a self-employed and to teach courses on creativity to her students of HEAJ. Therefore, I highlight the story of Vinciane from these two angles. Additionally, as Vinciane describes the TRAKK in words: *“If I were to give values to TRAKK. Euh, I would say benevolence, innovation, technology, creativity, fun euh joie de vivre, well-being at work, that's it. (p.28)”*,<sup>106</sup> I demonstrate the value and relevance of these key elements through the experiences of Vinciane.

#### 3.5.2 Vinciane as an independent

Before using the TRAKK in the context of her job as an employee at HEAJ, Vinciane followed conferences and workshops and worked in the coworking spaces in the TRAKK and tested the FabLab by carrying-out some projects.

1. Workshops, conferences, and coworking spaces

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<sup>105</sup> The Haute Ecole Albert Jacquard is a higher education institution, based in Namur, that is famous for its professional education in design, video games, and transmedia, among others.

<sup>106</sup> *“Euh, moi si je je donne des valeurs au TRAKK. Euh, je dirai bienveillance, innovation, technologie, créativité, amusant euh joie de vivre, bien-être au travail, voilà, je trouve que c'est voilà.”*



A first aspect of the TRAKK that Vinciane has experienced are the workshops, conferences and coworking spaces. Since she entered the TRAKK, Vinciane has always had a feeling for the TRAKK because of its proposals of interesting and innovative things, the topics that are discussed in the workshops and the guests that are invited to give a conference about certain domains. These elements distinguish the TRAKK from what could be seen as 'usual business' in the province of Namur.

An important element to Vinciane are the different workshops that she has followed in the TRAKK: *"I followed several workshops on creativity with euh Anne Wallemacq<sup>107</sup> and Véronique<sup>108</sup> was there, I did several, euh. It was very enriching because it was different from what I learned or from what I teach my students, it was another practice, euh, it's more intensive, it's over a few days, well, I found it very interesting from a personal point of view. Euh and besides, there are even things that I took from it to adapt to my way of teaching and everything, so it was really very, very interesting. (p.6)".<sup>109</sup>* As Vinciane explains, the workshops on creativity were intensive but interesting. In the end, however, she gained new knowledge in the field of creativity and, moreover, picked up some elements that she applied in her courses.

An interesting dimension of the workshops is, according to Vinciane, that there is not only the intent to teach something new, such as current subjects, but also to provoke discussions between the candidates and speakers: *"So yes, I think that there is a lot of influence because when we did the workshop with Anne Wallemacq, etc., we had a lot of discussions because what I like a lot in the workshops that are organised is that there is always, euh, the very convivial side which is taken into account, so we'll arrive, euh there are sandwiches and drinks, so there are always moments of pause which are envisaged to be able to discuss in an informal way what we are experiencing during the workshop but also on many other projects. And so, euh, I think that euh, in any case for my part, the influence is at this level, it's when we discuss projects, life, etc., in an informal way, that euh, that we have a lot of exchanges of process, of influence, of advice, of good and all that, so, euh. (p.18-19)".<sup>110</sup>* As Vinciane explains, these discussions are mainly sparked off by the friendliness and openness of the employees and workshop organisers at the TRAKK, who therefore facilitate to create an environment conducive to discussions and brainstorming sessions.

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<sup>107</sup> Professor Doctor Anne Wallemacq is a professor at the faculty of management at the University of Namur.

<sup>108</sup> Véronique Dethier works at the TRAKK as a research action and project officer.

<sup>109</sup> *"Moi j'ai suivi plusieurs workshops sur la créativité dont euh avec euh Anne Wallemacq et Véronique était là j'en ai fait j'en ai fait plusieurs, euh. Voilà et c'est très enrichissant parce que c'est différent que ce que de ce que moi j'ai appris ou de ce que la manière dont j'apprends à mes étudiants c'était une autre pratique euh c'est voilà, c'est plus intensif, c'est sur quelques jours enfin voilà, je trouvais ça très intéressant d'un point de vue personnel. Euh et d'ailleurs voilà, c'est y a même des choses que j'ai récupéré pour adapter dans ma manière de donner cours et tout donc c'était vraiment très très intéressant."*

<sup>110</sup> *"Donc oui je, enfin, je pense qu'il y a même énormément d'influence parce que quand je vois quand on a fait le workshop avec avec Anne Wallemacq, et cetera, euh, on a on a beaucoup discuté parce que ce que j'aime beaucoup par exemple dans les workshops qui sont organisées, c'est qu'il y a toujours, euh, le côté très convivial qui est pris en compte, donc on va arriver euh il y a des sandwiches et des boissons, donc il y a toujours des moments de pause qui sont prévus pour pouvoir discuter de manière informelle sur ce qu'on est en train de vivre sur le workshop mais aussi sur plein d'autres projets. Et donc euh, donc je pense que, euh, en tout cas pour ma part, l'influence, elle se fait à ce niveau-là, c'est quand on discute comme ça, de manière informelle, des projets, de la vie, et cetera, que euh, que là on a énormément d'échanges de de processus d'un oui et d'influence, de de conseils, de de de bon et tout ça donc, euh, voilà."*

To work on her personal projects, Vinciane has regularly used the coworking spaces of the TRAKK. Specifically, during the summer period when it is quiet, she spends some time here: *"I took advantage of coworking, also during the holidays, to work on these projects, and so on, in the peace and quiet, and then we had the FabLab next door, so it's very easy. We create projects and then modify them, we have the FabLab next door, we can put them into practice straight away, so that was very nice. So, in fact, it's also all these experimental projects that I do for myself or in the project with my daughter, etc. (p.6-7)".*<sup>111</sup> In other words, using the coworking spaces is closely related to creating in the FabLab for Vinciane because of its physical proximity (the ease to visit the FabLab) and the experimental aspect of her projects (e.g., making concepts and graphic design).

## 2. The FabLab

Vinciane has also made use of the FabLab. In the interview, she describes two approaches how she experienced the FabLab.

Firstly, from a more experimental point of view, Vinciane has developed her own projects in the FabLab and collaborated on a project of her daughter: *"I created, I tested for example very hard the FabLab around a personal project that I develop with my daughter euh, who is an artist, we had a common project, so euh which was to make large printing forms, so we tested a lot of lino, well it's it's to make engraving, we make it in the form of it's not a stencil, it's good, it's engraving, it's linocut. But we wanted something very precise, so we worked a lot in the FabLab last July and August, to create all our shapes, all our objects, we worked with the CNC that cuts the wood and so on. (p.6)".*<sup>112</sup> Moreover, thanks to the opportunity to design and work in the FabLab, Vinciane gained knowledge about the use of the machines. In addition, the presence of the FabLab staff, as well as those of the TRAKK, provoked interesting discussions, solutions, and reflections during the execution of projects. For example, about the use of a certain type of material or a technique. The result, as she describes, is that Vinciane has been able to expand her list of useful contacts on the one hand, and to improve her know-how and technique on the other hand. For Vinciane, such a working environment contributes to pleasure at work, as it seems as if you are working with friends: *"Well, I don't feel like I'm working, I'm going to have fun instead. It's and it's almost like joining a group of friends, euh yes, we're working on a project but that's it. It's very cool, it's a lot of fun and always very instructive too. There's a lot of sharing, it's a very, very nice atmosphere, euh, and there you go. (p.7)".*<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *"Moi, j'ai profité du du coworking, aussi pendant les vacances, ben pour travailler sur ces projets-là, et cetera au calme et puis on avait le FabLab à côté, donc c'est très facile. On crée les projets puis on modifie les projets, on a directement le FabLab à côté, on peut, on peut mettre en pratique tout de suite donc ça c'était, c'était très chouette. Donc voilà en fait c'est c'est aussi tous ces projets expérimentaux que je fais pour moi ou dans le dans le projet avec que je fais avec ma fille, et cetera."*

<sup>112</sup> *"Moi j'ai créé j'ai testé par exemple très fort le FabLab autour d'un projet personnel que je développe avec ma fille. Euh qui, est artiste, on avait un projet en commun, donc euh qui était de faire des grandes formes d'impression donc on a testé beaucoup de de lino, enfin c'est c'est c'est pour faire de la gravure, on fait de c'est sous forme de c'est pas du pochoir, c'est bon, c'est de la gravure, c'est de la linogravure. Mais voilà, on voulait quelque chose de très précis, donc on a on a beaucoup travaillé au FabLab en juillet-août dernier, pour créer toutes nos formes, tous nos objets, on a travaillé avec la CNC qui découpe le bois et cetera."*

<sup>113</sup> *"Euh ben j'ai pas la sensation de travailler, je vais plutôt m'amuser quoi. C'est et c'est presque allait rejoindre une bande de copains euh oui, on bosse sur un projet mais c'est voilà. C'est c'est c'est très cool, c'est très amusant et et toujours très instructif aussi. Il y a beaucoup de partage, c'est c'est une très très chouette ambiance euh, et et voilà."*

The second approach of how she experienced the FabLab is more related to the aspect of 'the FabLab being a source of influence and inspiration'. Inspired by the research and development aspect of the FabLab, Vinciane is in the process of starting her own R&D Lab, the Vwalà Lab, a collective of designers and communicators that focuses on providing strategic solutions and design: *"We know that, euh, we've already created a FabLab, euh not a FabLab, a research and development lab called Vwalà Lab. And euh and in fact, there, we propose both strategy solutions and designs. We show a little bit of what we should be aiming for and, euh, we presented the project to the BEP (Economic Agency of the Province of Namur) and the TRAKK. Euh and they naturally, are super, super enthusiast about this project euh because well they find that indeed if they have the opportunity to work with people who have the desire to develop products or the desire to develop projects, well often the design does not follow, and therefore he found that our project of of the Vwalà Lab was really the missing link. So that's something we presented, euh, at the end of December for which we have, we've just finished the website. Euh and here we are, so, we're starting slowly. (p.9)".*<sup>114</sup> For the moment, the Vwalà Lab is working on a project for a catering company to equip it with sustainable, circular packaging. As for the future, the Vwalà Lab is negotiating for a permanent place to progress further growth: either in the TRAKK or in a new infrastructure.

### 3.5.3 Vinciane as a docent of HEAJ

Besides having her own projects as an independent, Vinciane is also involved as a teacher-coordinator in the collaboration between the TRAKK and the HEAJ. After personally testing the facilities and equipment of the FabLab and the TRAKK, she decided to offer certain courses in partnership with the TRAKK. The focus is mainly on the graphic aspect of conceptualising, creating, and using practical tools in order to make the bridge between the theory taught in class and practice, as it is in reality: *"What we learn in the context of graphic communication and advertising, we are asked to do packaging, we are asked to design space, and particularly in packaging, which is a very demanding field in graphic communication, in any case what we learn, euh, which was very interesting to work, euh, with the TRAKK. It's precisely all the aspects of modelling, creation and using all the tools, all the machines of the FabLab, euh to create prototypes and show what it can look like. (p.1-2)".*<sup>115</sup>

In the last two years, Vinciane has been giving, in partnership with the TRAKK, a course on rebranding. This course aims to rebrand a Belgian brand by proposing new packaging.

<sup>114</sup> *"On sait enfin, euh, qu'on a déjà créé maintenant c'est un FabLab, euh pas enfin un FabLab n'importe quoi, un Lab de recherche et développement qui s'appelle Vwalà Lab. Et, euh et en fait, là, on propose à la fois des solutions de stratégie et des designs. On, on montre un petit peu vers quoi il faudrait tendre et euh et donc là on a fait la présentation du du projet aux BEP et au TRAKK. Euh et eux naturellement, sont sont super, super chaud par rapport à ce projet euh parce que ben il trouve que en effet si eux ont l'occasion de travailler avec des gens qui ont l'envie de développer des produits ou l'envie de développer des projets, ben souvent le design ne suit pas, et donc il trouvait que notre projet de de de du Vwalà Lab c'était vraiment le le rouage qui manquait. Donc voilà, c'est quelque chose qu'on qu'on a présenté, euh, fin décembre pour lequel voilà on a, on vient de terminer le site internet. Euh et et voilà, donc, on commence doucement."*

<sup>115</sup> *"En fait, nous ce qu'on dans le cadre de la communication graphique et publicitaire, on est amené à faire du packaging, on est amené à designer l'espace, euh, et et particulièrement dans dans dans le packaging, qui est quand même un domaine très prenant dans la communication graphique, en tout cas dans nous ce qu'on apprend, euh, ce qui était très intéressant de travailler, euh, avec le TRAKK. C'est justement tous les aspects modélisation, création et d'utiliser tous les tous les outils, toutes les machines du FabLab, euh pour créer des prototypes et montrer à quoi ça ça peut ressembler."*

To do this, Vinciane signed a contract with the TRAKK to give the enrolled students a subscription on the FabLab. As a result, the students have the opportunity to learn about the graphic communication profession in practice: *“for two years now, euh, we have had a project within the courses which is to carry out a rebranding of a Belgian brand and to propose its new packaging and all its strategic communication and within this framework, euh, I made a contract with the TRAKK where each student has a subscription to the FabLab to carry out the models in real, both in 3D but with the laser and so on, to make the packaging in real life, so that the students also understand that their job is not just to imagine labels or make posters, but also to create an object as such. And euh, before, when all these machines didn't exist, euh, the graphic designer couldn't design objects, that was reserved for designers since all the 3D machines exist, and that's all, all the machines that exist in the FabLab. Well yes, one says that the graphic artist now has the opportunity to become a designer and to create the object as such and test it. (p.2)”*.<sup>116</sup>

The other part of her role as a teacher at HEAJ is to keep abreast of new trends and tendencies in the professional field: *“so part of my job is to look for the, euh, trends for the future, what will be the important social trends, what people will be looking for. (p.2)”*. According to Vinciane, it is essential that people in graphic communication have a broad culture and knowledge and always keep themselves informed about new things. She does this mainly by doing research, but also by attending conferences and workshops such as those on creativity and on sustainable, recyclable materials, that the TRAKK organises.

#### **3.5.4 Atmosphere at the TRAKK**

Finally, in the interview Vinciane talks a few times about the general atmosphere within the TRAKK. The atmosphere was for her a very important reason to join the TRAKK and is still one of the reasons to keep coming. According to Vinciane, the TRAKK and its staff give her a lot of energy as it is a cool and young place full of dynamics that develops business in a creative, innovative, and sustainable way: *“I find that TRAKK has a very young and dynamic side, and I think that's because the people who work there are young, but there are also students, start-ups, and it's really full of energy because these young people are simply there. And I want to be in this kind of thing. (p. 19-20)”*.<sup>117</sup> In other words, the TRAKK is teeming with ideas.

Consequently, these elements in the atmosphere generate, following Vinciane, an internal philosophy or 'TRAKK-mindset', which is personised by the TRAKK employees and the EPPE. Moreover, this philosophy creates a bond within the TRAKK that Vinciane considers

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<sup>116</sup> *“Depuis deux ans maintenant, euh, on a un projet au sein des dans les cours qui est de réaliser une un rebranding d'une marque belge et de de proposer son nouveau packaging et toute sa communication stratégique et dans ce cadre-là, euh, j'ai fait un contrat avec le TRAKK où chaque étudiant a un abonnement au FabLab pour réaliser les maquettes en vrai, à la fois en 3D mais avec la laser et cetera euh pour réaliser les donc les packaging en vrai, pour que les étudiants aussi comprennent que leur métier, c'est pas juste euh, d'imaginer des étiquettes ou de faire des affiches, mais aussi de créer un objet en tant que tel. Et, euh, avant, quand toutes ces machines-là n'existaient pas euh, le graphiste ne pouvait pas designer des objets, c'était réservé aux designers depuis que toutes les machines 3D existent, et voilà tout, toutes les machines qui existent au FabLab. Ben oui, il le dit le graphiste maintenant à l'occasion de devenir designer et de créer aussi l'objet en tant que tel et le tester.”*

<sup>117</sup> *“Je trouve que le TRAKK il y a vraiment le côté oui, très jeune et très dynamique euh et ça, je crois que c'est parce que les gens qui y travaillent sont jeunes, mais qu'il y a aussi des étudiants, des start-up, vraiment voilà, ça bouillonne des d'énergie parce que ces jeunes simplement et et moi j'ai envie d'être dans plutôt dans ce ce genre de chose quoi.”*

beneficial: “*They want this place to remain cool, serious, respectful but at the same time, without any headlock, without euh and euh, so I think they are all in this state of mind and I believe very strongly in synergies, I think that we attract people, and we attract projects that have the same philosophy as us. And, euh, and so here I find that, in any case, the euh I don't know all the people of the TRAKK, I don't know all the team, but in any case all the people I know, all the people I've met they are, they are in this same logic of, of here we work simply in an efficient way, we take the time to do things, we take the time to do things well. (p.27)*”.<sup>118</sup>

### 3.5.5 Story analysis

The interview with Vinciane Lamy about her story at the TRAKK reveals some interesting aspects about how the TRAKK has influenced her already creative professional life. First, I look at the way how the FabLab has influenced Vinciane in doing her work, based on the two dimensions described earlier. Then, I draw some conclusions concerning the environment and the philosophy or ‘TRAKK-mindset’.

First of all, I consider the FabLab from an experimental point of view. Vinciane already tested, created, prototyped, etc. own projects and collaborations with her daughter. In this way she gained knowledge about the usage of the FabLab equipment and got to know the employees and other users of the FabLab better. In my opinion, the acquired knowledge and the interactions with people have influenced Vinciane in a number of ways. From the interview with Vinciane, I gather that her expertise of the FabLab machines improved. This created a sort of ‘expert position’ for her, which is shown by the fact that she was consulted when the TRAKK was deciding on the purchase of a new machine for the FabLab. Moreover, Vinciane had moments of discussions and reflections during the period she used the FabLab. It seems that these moments extended her professional network, which ultimately led to new solutions and breakthroughs from an operational aspect. She says that she has discovered new types of sustainable materials to develop her projects, and that she can contact people in her surroundings instead of going abroad when having a creative idea.

Secondly, I also observe the FabLab from an inspirational point of view. For this, I refer to the founding of the Vwalà Lab. I suppose that the Vwalà Lab, the R&D lab, is mainly the outcome of two intersecting elements. On the one hand, the concept and the methodology used in the FabLab, and on the other hand, the Flemish experience of Vinciane in using professional design and strategies for brands in the local economy. In other words, these two elements triggered the establishment of the Vwalà Lab.

Thirdly, Vinciane attended a number of workshops and conferences at TRAKK such as on creativity, innovation, and sustainability. From the descriptions of her experiences, I believe that the topics of the workshops generated new insights into creativity that she has applied

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<sup>118</sup> “*Ils ont envie que que cet endroit que cet endroit reste cool, sérieux, respectueuse mais en même temps voilà sans prise de tête sans euh et euh voilà, donc, je trouve qu'ils sont tous dans cet état d'esprit et enfin moi je crois très fort aux synergies, je crois que on attire les, on attire les gens et on attire les projets qui sont dans la même philosophie que que nous. Et, euh, et donc voilà moi je trouve que, en tout cas, les euh je connais pas tout tous les gens du du TRAKK, je connais pas toute l'équipe, mais en tout cas tous les gens que je connais, tous les gens que j'ai rencontrés ils sont, ils sont dans cette dans cette même logique de, de voilà on on travaille simplement de manière efficace, on prend le temps de faire les choses, on prend le temps de bien faire les choses.*”

in her courses, but also allowed Vinciane to keep up with new trends and tendencies in the industry. In addition, I think there are the elements around the workshops and conferences that Vinciane mentions, such as conviviality and informality, that play an important role in determining the atmosphere in the TRAKK and subsequently the feeling of the participant, in this case Vinciane. I suppose that these elements are catalysts that motivate Vinciane's work. In other words, a climate/environment is created that triggers interactions that can lead to something new (e.g., the provision of sandwiches after the workshop in order to continue the interaction).

Finally, I notice that the philosophy that exists in TRAKK, about which Vinciane speaks, has a special role in her story. Based on the interview with Vinciane, I suppose that certain elements that are important in the culture of TRAKK, such as sustainable business, responsibility towards the environment, ecological thinking, and being innovative, have instilled a kind of awareness in her: *"we work on this kind of project with, euh, at the level of this research and development lab, the desire to make recyclable packaging, very ecological, et cetera, and rather, euh, in virtuous circles in fact, so this is also where we join the philosophy of TRAKK. It's not just creativity, we also pay attention to our carbon footprint. (p.9)".*<sup>119</sup> This awareness has been gradually conveyed by being present in the TRAKK and the FabLab, attending conferences and talking to EPPE and employees of the TRAKK: *"so there are conferences that are organized in a few weeks here, from next week I think euh, by the TRAKK, at the level of here of the recyclable materials, sustainable and so on. (p.10)".*<sup>120</sup> That's why the nature of Vinciane's projects have also begun to focus on these values. For example, she is in the process of starting a master's degree in eco-design and is doing research on recyclable packaging made from hemp. As a result, I believe that the cultural elements of the ecosystem of the TRAKK have given a certain twist to Vinciane's mindset and her projects in the sense of adding new competences and capabilities.

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<sup>119</sup> *"On on travaille sur ce genre de projet avec euh, au niveau du de ce Lab de recherche et développement l'envie vraiment de faire du du packaging recyclable, très écologique, et cetera donc, et plutôt, euh, dans des cercles vertueux en fait, donc c'est là aussi ou on rejoint la philosophie du TRAKK."*

<sup>120</sup> *"Donc il y a des conférences qui sont organisées dans dans pendant quelques semaines ici à partir de de de la semaine prochaine je pense. Euh, par le TRAKK au niveau, voilà des des matériaux recyclables, durable et cetera."*

## General conclusion

An answer to fulfil the relevant demand for creativity, sustainability, and innovation was provided by policymakers and city planners by initiating the development of creative hubs. Creative hubs are mostly unoccupied industrial spaces where individuals and early-stage enterprises, belonging to the creative and cultural sector, work. Although there is no scientific consensus in the literature on the universal definition of creative hubs, there are certain recurring elements. For example, the literature talks about creative hubs influencing and favouring the mindset, operations, and working of entrepreneurs, early-stage enterprises, and other individuals. Overall, empirical research results confirm that the employees, activities, services, and environment of the creative hub positively influence the users of the hub. However, there are strong local differences between creative hubs. In order to examine the extent to which an individual creative hub influences the evolution of its creative entrepreneurs, early-stage entrepreneurs, and other users, this paper will focus on a specific case of a creative hub, namely, the TRAKK in Namur.

Through a life history approach, non-participant observation, and document analysis, empirical data of five entrepreneurs and individuals with a link to the TRAKK was collected: Benoît Vrins (Spade), Christophe Montois (THELIS), Jonathan Reis (ATLR Engineering), Tony Rey Paulino (1.61), and Vinciane Lamy. After using the life story approach to reconstruct each individual story in detail and analysing the empirical data, I found results for each individual case. However, aggregating the results of the cases offers a twofold answer to the question to what extent the TRAKK has influenced the evolution of the creative entrepreneurs, early-stage businesses, and other users.

First, I explored how and when the FabLab, a service offered by the TRAKK, has changed the EPPE under study in their mindset, operations, and working. After comparing the results from the interviews, I can conclude that the FabLab has inspired and supported the EPPE at different times. First of all, I observe that the FabLab has an inspiring influence in the ideation and product definition phase by generating new ideas and promoting collaborations. This happens thanks to the presence of other actors in the FabLab, who share their experiences and knowledge. Secondly, the FabLab supports the EPPE in their operational activities during the prototyping and product design stage, as experienced by ATLR Engineering, Spade, 1.61, and Vinciane Lamy. This support, which mainly comes from conversations, discussions, and reflections with actors in the FabLab, consists of giving advice on the use of certain machines, materials, and methodologies and results in opening new perspectives for the EPPE. Here, the FabLab can be seen as a second opinion, or a second brain alongside the EPPE, as indicated by ATLR Engineering and Vinciane Lamy.

Furthermore, I analysed the elements within the TRAKK that caused a triggering event for the EPPE. From the analyses of the interviews, I conclude that the presence of two elements is at the basis of triggering events. The first element that recurs in the interviews is the infrastructure of the TRAKK that favours social interactions within the TRAKK. As a result, informal communication takes a prominent role and social cohesion is created in the TRAKK, which ultimately manifests itself in a TRAKK-philosophy. The empirical results suggest that, on the one hand, such an environment fosters serendipity, as ATLR Engineering experienced with Linkube's student-entrepreneur and the possible future collaboration with Alan Hertz and 1.61 with the unexpected meeting of Kingsize and

Thomas Léonard, and on the other hand, the entrepreneurs and start-ups advance in their professional and personal development. The second element that emerges from the interviews after analysis are the events, workshops and coaching sessions organised by the TRAKK. These opportunities for the EPPE have led to relatively important, and sometimes unexpected, outcomes that have impacted positively the mindset, operations and working. For example, after winning the pitch in Mind & Market, ATLR Engineering's visibility increased, bringing in more prospects and boosting the self-confidence in the company. For Spade, attending Thiagi's conference opened up a whole new way of working, namely a client approach that is game based. THELIS, on the other hand, developed, partly by attending workshops on creativity and user-centric innovation, a methodology that enables them to better answer the customer's demand and thereby offer a better service. For Vinciane Lamy, as well, the workshops opened up new horizons. Not only did she gain new insights and competences into creativity that she has incorporated into her courses at HEAJ, but her mindset has also changed, so that the scope of her projects is now more focused on sustainability and ecologically responsible business.

Furthermore, I conclude from the results of the EPPE in my study that the TRAKK has an influence by combining total freedom on the one hand, with coaching leadership in its services, activities, and within the building on the other hand. I perceive total freedom as the way in which informal communication and social cohesion are established, i.e. with few physical barriers, togetherness, harmony, and openness. Coaching leadership means, how I see it, to give frequently attention, feedback, and instructions that lead to a basis of trust, commitment, and results. The blending of these two factors works, in my opinion, as a kind of catalyst that allows the EPPE on the one side to work, act, and interact freely, and on the other side gives the necessary push to stay on the path of growth.

Overall, the results from the interviews confirm that the TRAKK has had an influence on the evolution of the present creative entrepreneurs, early-stage businesses, and other users. Although these results give a detailed picture of the TRAKK's influence, I would like to point out a limitation of the research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 1.61, ATLR Engineering, Spade, and Vinciane Lamy (THELIS does not use the coworking services) were forced to work from home. As a result, these EPPE were unable to work in TRAKK for a long period of time and, consequently, could not make use of the TRAKK facilities. More specifically for Spade and Vinciane Lamy, who used the old TRAKK, this could mean that they may or may not have a distorted perception of the influence of the new TRAKK. This could mean that certain memories of the old TRAKK are weighted against those of the new TRAKK, which could, wrongly, portray the new TRAKK.

This memoir contributes to the discussion on the influence of creative hubs on the evolution of its users. More specifically, this work contributes to the understanding of a specific case of a creative hub, namely the Namur Creative Hub, or TRAKK. Arising from the limitations of my work, some recommendations for future research are given. As a first recommendation, I suggest further research into the specific influence that both the old and new TRAKK have had. This is because the old TRAKK had a more tinkering approach, while the new TRAKK has a more professional approach. From this, one could examine significant differences between the influence of each. A second, more financially oriented, recommendation is to investigate to what extent the positive effect of the TRAKK's influence on an EPPE actually creates value from the EPPE's financial point of view.

Although there are strong local differences between the value creation of creative hubs, I can conclude from the results of my master's thesis that the TRAKK has mainly had a



positive influence on the mindset, operations, and working of ATR Engineering, Spade, THELIS, 1.61, and Vinciane Lamy. In addition, this influence has been able to translate into a positive effect for the EPPE in terms of creativity, sustainability, and innovation.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: qualitative framework

LIFE STORIES	EXPERIENCING	How to observe? (Examples of questions)
<p>= <i>the experiences of someone told by the person him/herself – room for perception</i></p> <p>→ Objectivity-subjectivity</p> <p>→ System-actor-intersubjective relationships</p> <p>→ Benefit from the knowledge they have acquired through their direct experience of this world or situation, without getting entangled in the necessary singularity, nor in the inevitably subjective character of the narrative that will be made of it</p>	<p>1. Perception and feelings (emotions)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which image do you have about TRAKK? (perceiving + dominance of memories)               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why this image? What does it mean?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. What is your perception of TRAKK?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is your perception of TRAKK now?</li> <li>b. What was your perception of TRAKK before entering?</li> <li>c. How did this perception change?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Which emotions do you feel when talking about TRAKK?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ask what these emotions mean for the interviewee and which feelings they provoke.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. What was the happiest time at TRAKK?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Would you recommend TRAKK to others?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	<p>2. Comparing TRAKK with other places (contrasting)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is for you the difference between TRAKK and a classic firm? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is TRAKK for you?</li> <li>b. How do you see a classic firm?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Why do you see TRAKK as <i>(his answer of the difference)</i>?</li> <li>3. <i>(His/her answer of the difference)</i> do you like this?</li> <li>4. What do you like the most at TRAKK?</li> <li>5. What makes TRAKK unique? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Remarkable differences in service (supporting), education, networking, ...?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
	<p>3. Metaphors</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you see the TRAKK as a real office or as an entrepreneurial bubble? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Is TRAKK more like a parent (helps raising the firm/creative idea) or a friend (nothing more than 'an institute' who is there in any case of help)? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
	<p>4. <i>Lignes de force sociales</i>/intersubjective social relationships → Relation system-actor</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you see yourself to TRAKK? As an employee? As an entrepreneur? Part of the family? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Do you see the people working at TRAKK as friends, colleagues, service people, ...?</li> </ol>

	→ Interrelationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is, in your opinion, a friend, colleague, ... at TRAKK? What should they do?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. How did these social contacts at TRAKK influence your firm or product? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Did they lead to a change of your product? If yes, how?</li> <li>b. Did they lead to <i>rencontres inattendues</i>? If yes, how?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. In what kind of way did TRAKK change your mindset? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	5. Courses of actions - services provided by TRAKK that had significant changes in the mindset, management, ... of the entrepreneur/enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Did you used a service provided by TRAKK? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which one?</li> <li>b. When?</li> <li>c. Why?</li> <li>d. Result?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. How did TRAKK influenced your decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When?</li> <li>b. Do you perceive this as a kind of support?</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. How did TRAKK influenced your way of doing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When?</li> <li>b. Do you perceive this as a kind of support?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	6. Outcomes and results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How has TRAKK changed your mindset? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When did this started?</li> <li>b. How?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<b>REMEMBERING</b>	<b>How to observe? (Examples of questions)</b>
<p>= <i>the way how a memory appears in mind of the interviewee, the reproduction</i></p> <p><b>Noesis</b> = when remembering the past is determined by the current situation.</p> <p><b>Noema</b> = which memories are more dominant than others (due to the dominance of the present issue)</p> <p>→ Between a social situation and an event, <i>perception and evaluation schemes</i> are inserted</p> <p>→ Questions about how their present perception of TRAKK, influences their answer of the past</p>	<p>1. The past seen from a present perspective</p> <p>2. Noesis → Way of remembering</p> <p>3. Noema → Dominance of memories due to present issue</p> <p>4. Establish coherent connections among life events → Create meaning</p> <p>5. Evocation of certain memories</p>	<p>1. When did you joined TRAKK?</p> <p>2. Why did you choose for TRAKK?</p> <p>3. Did you know any other places like TRAKK before you joined? a. If yes, which ones? And how?</p> <p>4. How did my interest in TRAKK arise? a. Which time in my life? b. Why?</p> <p>5. Which events were important for you at TRAKK?</p> <p>6. Which changes were important for you at TRAKK?</p> <p>7. What did you expect initially from TRAKK that they would serve you?</p> <p>8. How do you look back at your time at TRAKK? a. Which emotions?</p>

	<p>6. Mediations (between objective experience and narrating)</p> <p>7. Telling their own journey of their life at TRAKK</p>	<p>9. Are there any similarities between your path at TRAKK and that of others at TRAKK?</p> <p>10. Do you see any causal relationships while being at TRAKK with respect to your enterprise?  a. Do you see TRAKK as responsible for this?</p> <p>11. Have there been any remarkable change(s) that affected you at TRAKK?</p> <p>12. Has TRAKK changed your life in some way, did it evolve you as a person?  a. How?</p>
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	<b>NARRATING</b>	<b>How to observe? (Examples of questions)</b>
<p>= <i>category of narrative that interviewee is telling and which period it covers</i></p> <p>→ Structure of the narrative</p> <p>→ Create a 'backbone' of the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questions about life trajectories in a certain social context. Uncover patterns of social relations and special processes that shaped them</li> <li>- Understanding the different contexts of the interviewee</li> </ul>	<p><u>WHAT?</u></p> <p>1. Episodes, experiences, ...</p> <p>→ Narrative form</p> <p>2. Descriptions, explanations, evaluations, ...</p> <p>→ No narrative form, are just part of any narrative and contribute to construction of meaning of narrative form</p>	<p>1. Is the interviewee <u>narrating</u> an episode or experience of his life? Is he creating a story about something that happened?</p> <p>2. Is the interviewee <u>clarifying</u> some episodes or experiences of his life by giving explanations, descriptions, ...?</p>
	<p><u>WHEN?</u></p> <p>1. Personal and social</p> <p>→ Who is this person?</p> <p>2. Contextual</p> <p>→ Development of a person through participation in community, industry, and networks</p>	<p>1. Could you tell me a little bit more about your personal background?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Age, region of living, studies, hobby's, working experience</li> </ul> <p>2. Who inspired you to become an entrepreneur?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Family, friends, celebrities, ...</li> <li>b. School (ask after their studies)</li> <li>c. Work environment</li> </ul> <p>3. When did you create your own creative idea?</p> <p>4. Could you please tell me about your start as an entrepreneur?</p>



	<p>3. Negotiated enterprise</p> <p>→ Development of a person through negotiated relationships with stakeholders of your enterprise</p>	
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**Appendix 2: longlist and shortlist of the EPPE for the interview**

N°	EPPE	NAMES	Contact	INDICATOR	CHARACTERISTIC	DATE OF THE INTERVIEW
1	ATLR	Alexis Hoge (Hardware engineer) Denis Thomas (Firmware Engineer) Jonathan Reis (Co-founder & Sales) Maxime Pepi (Co-founder & CEO) Victor Xhurdebise (Project manager)	Direct at TRAKK - Slack	Unexpected projects	Pre-prototyping + Unexpected projects (Linkube, Alan Hertz,...)	Tuesday 16/03  10h30-11h30  Online-Teams
2	Spade*	Benoît Vrins (Co-founder)  Vianney Tribolet  Zoé Naniot	Direct at TRAKK - Slack	Pre-prototyping	Change in mindset (coaching, workshops, ...) + Pre-prototyping	Wednesday 17/03  10h-11h  Online-Whereby
3	THELIS	Christophe Montois (Director) (cmontois@thelis.be)  Frédéric Peeters (fpeters@thelis.be)  Laurence Soetens	Mail- Telephone call	Creative methods and tools	Change in mindset (coaching, workshops, ...)	Friday 02/04  13h-14h30  Online-Teams

4	<b>1.61</b>	Alexandra Vazut Jonathan De Bouw Tony Rey Paulino (CEO & Designer)	Direct at TRAKK - Slack	Unexpected projects	Pre-prototyping + Unexpected project (IONNYK)	Wednesday 07/04  14h-15h15  Online-Teams
5	<b>Vinciane Lamy</b>	Vinciane Lamy	Mail- Telephone call	Pre-prototyping	Both Haut Ecole Albert Jacquard (HEAJ) and TRAKK	Friday 23/04  11h-12h30  Online-Teams
<b>Reserves</b>						
6	<b>Alan Hertz</b>	Alan Hertz	Direct at Fablab – Slack	Pre-prototyping	Pre-prototyping	
7	<b>Level Studio</b>	Olivier Blareau Stéphane Bernard (Gérant)	Direct at TRAKK - Slack	Pre-prototyping		

8	<b>Urban Architecs</b>		Direct at Fablab – Slack	Pre-prototyping		
9	<b>Bamboumeuse</b>	Mike ??	Direct at Fablab - Slack	EPPE accompanied by hub		
10	<b>Simon Chavée</b>	Simon Chavée	Direct at Fablab - Slack	EPPE accompanied by hub		
11	<b>Schmitz Digital Printing</b>	Bruno Schmitz Véronique Schmitz	Direct at Fablab - Slack	Creative methods and tools		

*Notes:*

- **In red:** contacted person
- **\***: Spade asked to have the right on rereading if some information concerning Spade is published by hubscreatif.be

### **Appendix 3: Letter of consent**

#### **Formulaire de consentement :**



Titre de la recherche : Story-telling et impact des entreprises et porteurs de projets accompagnés par le TRAKK

Nom chercheur : Arthur Peumans

But de la recherche : Retracer le parcours de plusieurs entreprises au TRAKK

Cet entretien a lieu ...../...../.....

Merci d'avoir accepté d'être interviewé dans le cadre de ce projet de recherche. Ce mémoire est réalisé dans le cadre d'une évaluation qualitative du projet du Hub créatif de Namur TRAKK, à destination de l'équipe du TRAKK, et de ses contributeurs financiers, à savoir la région Wallonne et le financement FEDER de la Commission Européenne. Il vise à mettre en lumière les histoires vécues dans le TRAKK en vue de partager les pratiques.

Ce document vise juste à valider que vous acceptez que :

- L'entretien soit enregistré sur ordinateur portable et dictaphone et qu'une transcription soit produite;
- Vous avez le droit de recevoir la transcription et d'avoir la possibilité de corriger toute erreur factuelle si vous en formulez la demande;
- La transcription de l'entretien sera analysée par Arthur Peumans en tant qu'investigateur de la recherche et par tous les collègues de l'Université de Namur et chercheurs avec lesquels il pourrait collaborer dans le cadre du processus de recherche;
- La transcription de l'entretien fera partie intégrante du Master's thesis d'Arthur Peumans;
- Le TRAKK est invité à publier sur le site commun *hubscreatifs.be* et leurs sites et réseaux sociaux respectifs les versions retravaillées des cas ainsi que les nouvelles pratiques. Ils feront également l'objet d'une publication sur le site dédié au FEDER en Wallonie *europe.wallonie.be* (sous réserve de l'accord du DCFS). Il est prévu de traduire en anglais les cas exemplaires retravaillés et les nouvelles pratiques confirmées, pour diffusion au sein des réseaux européens du SPW EER notamment;
- Si vous êtes inquiet au sujet de cette recherche ou de la façon dont elle est menée, vous pouvez contacter Arthur Peumans à l'adresse [arthur.peumans@student.unamur.be](mailto:arthur.peumans@student.unamur.be).

**Signature du participant et la date**

**Signature du chercheur**

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