

**From art to project: the cross-border diffusion
of a social innovation on the Belgian labor market**

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Introduction

Social innovation has been the focus of an increasing scholarly attention over the last decade (Howaldt & Schwarz 2010; Moulaert *et al.* 2013). This literature, however, has struggled with definitional problems and has remained rather descriptive and under-theorized, with only limited connections with broader theories in organization studies (Nicholls & Murdock 2012). Typically, it has been suggested that social innovation is characterized by specific diffusion (or “scaling up”) mechanisms that aim for wide replication and adoption, rather than control and profits for the pioneer innovators (Mulgan *et al.* 2007; Murray *et al.* 2010). Besides a lack of empirical validation, this hypothesis has also insufficiently been connected with theories that precisely focus on how new institutional arrangements emerge, are diffused and impact the broader institutional landscape, i.e. institutional entrepreneurship (Dorado 2005; Garud *et al.* 2002; Leca *et al.* 2008; Maguire *et al.* 2004) and more broadly institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006; Lawrence *et al.* 2009). This gap is even more surprising that most social innovations precisely aim to solve a social problem by challenging extant institutional arrangements, at least through discursive work theorizing intended institutional changes.

This paper contributes to filling this gap by exploring the diffusion patterns of a social innovation embodied by “Smart” (now SMartbe), a mutual non-profit organization introducing new practices on the Belgian labor market. In the late 1990s, Smart developed a new employment scheme designed to provide better income security to artists. Throughout the years, Smart has broadened the scope of its roles and target audience to become a multiple-arms structure (employer, service provider, worker union, etc.) that supports all the “creative professionals” whose activity is characterized by intermittency and project-based work.

Our research questions can be summarized as follows. First, we examine how this innovative employment scheme has been diffused, and in particular how the gradual extension of Smart's roles and target audience across established category borders has influenced the institutional work process. Second, based on how other actors in the field have reacted to and been influenced by the diffusion of Smart's new scheme, we explore how the latter has impacted the institutional landscape and regulatory framework around employment in Belgium. Third, in responding to these first two sets of questions, we examine the interactions between the social innovator (Smart as an organization) and the diffusion of the innovation in its environment.

Based on our findings, two key contributions are identified, each of which is likely to enrich our understanding of social innovation diffusion and more broadly institutional work trajectories. First, our exploration of the Smart case shows how the deliberate broadening of its roles and target audience category has both stimulated Smart's growth and centrality in the labor market, and maximized stakeholder attention and criticism so as to fragilize its position. Indeed, by gradually extending its roles from simple service provider to also employer and workers' representative, and by targeting an increasing number of professions, from "artistic" to "creative" and now "project-based" workers, Smart has moved away from its initial "experimental" sub-field (i.e. services in the arts sector) towards a broader cross-category positioning that has boosted its membership and thus its negotiation power on the whole labor market. This positioning, however, has also attracted criticism from a number of stakeholders who felt threatened by the "unorthodox" growth of Smart challenging traditional field boundaries and stakeholder negotiation schemes. On the one hand, such a cross-border diffusion may be a privileged, or even the only available growth avenue, for social innovations that emerge in strongly institutionalized fields *a priori* less permeable to bottom-up innovations (Hargadon & Douglas 2001). On the other hand, however, cross-border diffusion exposes the innovator to hostility from established stakeholders (Leblebic *et al.* 1991).

Second, the findings show that despite such criticism and opposition to the social innovator by a set of stakeholders who see their relevance and power position challenged by the cross-border diffusion work, the innovation itself pursues its diffusion through adoption by other actors. In other words, while the position of Smart as an organization is under attack, the innovative employment scheme finds fertile ground among different stakeholders eager to

adopt it, even in some cases those who frontally oppose the pioneer social innovator. It is thus suggested that the extension of roles and professional target categories by Smart has brought about a public debate extending beyond the diffusion trajectory of one particular organization and likely to affect the cognitive representations of the labor market as a whole. This may lead the social innovation to a level of “irreversibility” regardless of what happens to the social innovator itself. This is consistent with other studies examining the diffusion of innovative organizational forms that survive their initial promoters such as social enterprise (Tracey *et al.* 2011). However, in this case, what has been diffused is not an organizational form (here criticized for its gradual complexification) but rather a multi-dimensional innovation challenging the established actor categories in the labor market. Indeed, Smart’s employment scheme has induced a new combination of roles (new intermediary acting as both employer and worker representative) and the extension of traditional professional categories, leading to a new broad category of “project-based workers”, that has challenged the whole labor market institutional arrangements.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces the theoretical background of the study, drawing on literatures on institutional work, categories, and the labor market as a highly institutionalized field. The methods and the case used in this article are described in the third section. The findings are then presented in the fourth section and discussed in the fifth. The conclusion opens new research avenues regarding social innovation diffusion and institutional work in complex settings.

1. Theoretical background

The diffusion of social innovation as institutional work

If social innovators seek not only to solve a particular social problem at a local level but also to act on the broader system at the origin of the problem, they are inevitably engaged in institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006; Lawrence *et al.* 2009). In emerging fields, this typically takes the form of individual and collective action to create new institutional arrangements able to respond to the identified social problem, thereby leading to new organizational forms (Lee & Pennings 2002; Rao & Kenney 2008; Rao *et al.* 2000; Romanelli & Fiol 2008; Tracey *et al.* 2011), markets (Khair & Wadhvani 2010; Santos & Eisenhardt 2009) or market categories (Khair & Wadhvani 2010; Zuckerman 1999). Following

Nicholls (2010), these new arrangements may be “radical” and seek to overthrow some established institutions, or, more often, “incremental” or “institutional”, only challenging the established institutions when they hinder their development and with a relatively focused scope (e.g. fair trade, microfinance, integration of low-skilled workers, etc.).

In highly institutionalized fields such as the one considered here (see below), bottom-up innovation diffusion by non-dominant actors necessarily implies a challenge insofar as dominant actors are likely to oppose changes in the rules of the game and thus in the power configuration in the field (Hargadon & Douglas 2001). Institutional change seems possible only in certain conditions, for instance: when a coalition of unsatisfied actors within the field manages to build a credible alternative (Schneiberg 2005); when social movements mobilize sufficient support to overthrow extant institutions, push dominant actors to significant changes, or successfully encourage alternatives (Sine & Lee 2009); when an external jolt jeopardizes the legitimacy of extant arrangements (Tost 2011); etc. Although institutional work typically requires inter-organizational collaboration (Phillips *et al.* 2000), change dynamics may also emerge from isolated actors who successfully experiment alternatives likely to attract support (Leblebic *et al.* 1991).

Highly institutionalized fields are characterized not only by locking power configurations, but also by the presence of strongly established cognitive categories, the boundaries of which have been consolidated over time. Thus, innovations are likely to challenge these categories, if not from the beginning, at least in the process of their diffusion. In this case, actors will need not only records showing their ability to experiment an innovation within established categories, but also framing processes likely to convince audiences that it is desirable to extend these innovations across category boundaries, beyond their local experimentation cradle (Benford & Snow 2000; Sine & Lee 2009).

Creating and modifying established categories

Categories are used to simplify complex information by setting discriminating boundaries (Lamont & Molnár 2002). They can apply to any types of objects, in organization studies most typically organizational forms and markets (Khaire 2014; Khaire & Wadhvani 2010), but also other elements as will be examined here. Whatever the objects, creating new categories, modifying extant ones and searching for their diffusion is potentially problematic

in highly institutionalized fields, where actors and practices are structured with the help of categories that are clearly delineated and understood by field participants. New actors and practices are likely to be tolerated only to the extent that they can be clearly affiliated with extant categories (Aldrich & Fiol 1994). When this is not the case, actors will lack cognitive legitimacy and be ignored or contested by established actors (Tost 2011; Überbacher 2014). This may lead to lack of support by stakeholders such as consumers, public authorities, or investors (Navis & Glynn 2011; Zuckerman 1999's "illegitimacy discount").

Through institutional work, nevertheless, new categories may be experimented and extant categories modified, even in highly institutionalized fields (Lounsbury & Rao 2004; Rao *et al.* 2005). New categories need to be connected to a certain extent with established ones, with the delicate balance of appearing at the same time as familiar and differentiated (Navis & Glynn 2011). Beyond cognitive resonance, pragmatic and normative legitimacy must be created to garner support (Suchman 1995) to the new or modified categories. This legitimacy-building work may be undertaken even without large resources and power centrality, as observed by Leblebic and colleagues: “radically new practices that may evolve into conventions are most likely to be introduced by parties from the fringes of an interorganizational field [...]. These players are the newer and/or less powerful participants, for whom experimentation is less costly in final outcomes and who are less likely to be sanctioned by more central players” (Leblebic *et al.* 1991: 358). To extend niche innovations to the broader field, actors also need to identify opportunities in the dominant arrangements (Jones *et al.* 2012) by exploiting institutional overlaps (Greenwood *et al.* 2011), contradictions (Battilana *et al.* 2009; Seo & Creed 2002) or voids (Mair *et al.* 2012).

This paper seeks to contribute to this body of literature by exploring institutional work efforts in a particular context of institutional complexity, i.e. when the institutional arrangement is not field-specific but rather spans across different sectors. This is typically the case with cross-border regulations such as those related to employment that apply to a large array of sub-fields. Hence, at least two regulative levels (labor market and field-specific) overlap, which may create ambiguities. This paper explores how a marginal actor can exploit such ambiguities as opportunities for institutional work, more specifically through cross-border diffusion based on new combinations of roles and gradual extension of professional categories that gradually by-passes field-specific requirements. As will be shown here, this

ability to span borders is both an opportunity for growth and visibility, and a driving factor for opposition by established actors.

Social innovation in the highly institutionalized labor regulation field

Despite differences among countries and cultures, the European labor market is characterized by a set of prevalent features that have been at the core of the institutional model and the legal system for more than a century (Sapir 2005; Wilthagen & Tros 2004), including:

- Bilateralism: the employment relationship structure is traditionally conceived as bilateral, i.e. between two parties: a single employer and an employee
- Binary statuses: the labor market regulation is organized around two distinct statuses: salaried worker or self-employed worker. There have been virtually no other configurations considered in between these two statuses.
- Standardized working conditions: the ideal employment contract, considered as allowing the best job quality and most widely promoted by public authorities, is the long-term and full-time employment contract

In Belgium, the employment regulation also relies on these three legal principles. However, more than in other countries, the labor market regulation is highly institutionalized (Xhauflair & Pichault 2013). All rules are defined through a collective negotiation process, the participants and boundaries of which are clearly circumscribed. It is said to be “corporatist” as it is structured around three actors – the worker unions, the employer representatives and the state – who are exclusively responsible for all the decisions regarding the labor market regulation. There are three levels of collective negotiations: 1) interprofessional (i.e. transversal to all sectors), 2) sector-based, 3) specific to the company. No formal employment rules can be developed outside this institutional framework.

Nevertheless, this institutional arrangement is increasingly questioned due to new realities of work and organizations, marked by the emergence of new actors and of new needs for flexibility and security (Sapir 2005; Wilthagen & Tros 2004). In Belgium as in many other European countries, public authorities are struggling to redesign the labor market regulation in order to meet these new needs. Yet, transforming the labor market regulation in coherence with the new realities of work and employment would mean scratching out the main categories on which regulation is based and create new ones, more adapted to the needs of the

workers and their users. This radical change would also endanger the very existence of the institutional actors (typically worker unions), or at least would require a deep transformation of these representative institutions (Regalia 2006; Xhaufclair & Pichault 2013).

However, micro-level actors have not waited for a top-down shift and engage in different types of "bricolage" in order to deal with their new needs of flexibility and security. They notably create new employment schemes that challenge the basic assumptions of the employment regulation (Regalia 2006; Xhaufclair & Pichault 2013). First, new multilateral employment schemes have been set up that triangulate the traditionally bilateral employment relationship (Davidov 2004; Havard *et al.* 2009): flexpools, umbrella companies, employers' alliances, etc. As a consequence, new third party actors, new intermediaries in charge of the management of these new employment schemes, appear in the collective regulation landscape, but institutionally they are not allowed any role even if they take (part of) the employer legal responsibility (Regalia 2006; Xhaufclair & Pichault 2013). The new employment schemes also favor the emergence of "in between" statuses, which do not fit the traditional distinction between professional categories, i.e. "salaried" versus "self-employed" worker. Finally, these new schemes take the "atypical" working conditions for granted and try to provide innovative solutions to secure these atypical workers, even if these solutions are far from the ideal-type of the full-time and long-term employment contract (Regalia 2006; Wilthagen & Tros 2004). The case of Smart perfectly illustrates this type of bottom-up innovation on the labor market.

2. Methods

To explore the diffusion of social innovations on the labor market, a qualitative study was chosen for several reasons (see Lee 1999; Marshall & Rossman 1995). First, new employment schemes such as those designed by Smart are particularly complex, raise reactions from a broad array of stakeholders, and lead to lobbying and political activism (Montgomery & Oliver 1996). We needed to acquire a good understanding of the scheme itself, and to collect views and representations regarding the innovation, the innovator (Smart) and its impact on the field from a vast array of stakeholders. Second, as social innovation is usually a long-term process, we needed to get a longitudinal understanding of the phenomenon, from the emergence of the scheme, its progressive broadening, to its current impact on the Belgian labor market.

Data collection

Therefore, we carried out, between August 2012 and June 2013, 30 semi-structured interviews with key informants, including 12 internal stakeholders (1 founder/managing director, 6 managers, 3 members of the research department, 1 artist member of the Board of the Foundation, 1 former employee) and 18 external stakeholders such as artists and creative professionals (4), clients/users (2 theatre producers), professional associations (2 worker union representatives, 2 associations representing artists), competitors (2 representatives of the temporary work federation, 2 representatives of temporary work agencies), 2 politicians, and 1 representative of the public administration (National Employment Office). We also met a journalist who investigated and wrote a highly cited article on the Smart case. The interviews with the internal stakeholders focused on the history of Smart, the services offered to members, and the relationships of Smart with members and external stakeholders. The interviews with external stakeholders aimed at grasping their understanding and representations about the new employment scheme, about Smart as an organization and about the impacts of its actions and development on the broader arts and labor fields. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A document analysis was also conducted. Relevant internal documents, including 27 publications, reports and position papers from the research department, were scanned for information on growth strategies, target audience delineation and stakeholder perceptions. The position papers by the Smart research department were particularly useful to capture how Smart deliberately aimed to disseminate its vision and arguments about securing the careers of creative professionals. Finally, 12 relevant newspaper articles commenting on the growth of Smart were analyzed.

Data analysis

The data analysis consisted in several stages. First, a detailed narrative of the creation and development of Smart was written in order to develop a shared understanding of the case and to identify key events. This narrative was presented to Smart's interviewed persons, yielding interesting feed-back and discussions (also recorded and transcribed). Second, a thematic-type content analysis was carried out on the interview transcripts and documents collected. The data were chronologically structured into three key periods identified in the case narrative

(see table 1). These periods correspond to consistent associations of both internal elements (Smart's organizational form, size and target audience delineation) and external situation (legal environment and stakeholder reactions). The evolutions from one period to another can thus be seen as key stages of the institutionalization process as reported by the interviewees and in the documents. For each of these three periods, we structured the interview and document quotes around several issues and levels of analysis related to Smart: (1) content and objectives of the new employment scheme, (2) target audience and needs, (3) organizational form, (4) dialogue between Smart and its stakeholders-competitors, (5) institutional landscape. For each of these themes, explanations and justifications by Smart representatives and comments and critiques by external stakeholders were contrasted in order to reconstitute dialectic conversations. Third, we gathered these first-order issues into second-order conceptual issues (Strauss & Corbin 1990) related to the literature and the research questions, i.e. (1) diffusion of the innovation, (2) impacts of the diffusion and (3) cross-level interactions between the innovation and the innovator. This analytical process was iterative, identifying themes and connecting them to relevant literature. Finally, tables were built to summarize the data structure consistently with our theoretical dimensions. Some of these thematic tables will be presented to support our findings, while others will be illustrated by selected quotes.

3. The case: Smart

In Belgium as in many other western countries, the arts sector is a field where people have precarious employment statuses and where specific employment solutions are sought. In the late nineties, in Belgium, this need appeared quite strikingly through a controversial incident, when a young writer was compelled to reimburse the unemployment benefits she received while she was writing a book. This generated a huge mobilization by artists, protests and awkward debates, and ended up in a new legal provision for artists, facilitating the entitlement to social benefits. However, such solutions were adopted to answer the expressed needs in an isolated, ad hoc manner, thus not fundamentally altering the global functioning of the labor market.

In this context, in 1998, a band manager and an engineer coming from the industrial sector teamed up with the aim of providing a practical answer to these artists and creative professionals working intermittently and on a project basis. They created Smart, a small

mutual nonprofit organization acting as an intermediary appointed to manage the contracts concluded between its members performing an artistic activity and their clients or principals. Beyond this service, Smart's mission was to protect its members and to defend their interests while securing the surrounding legal framework. Smart (now SMartbe) scaled up quickly: in 2012, the organization counted 173 employees and 50.000 members, and invoiced 130 millions €. The organization is also developing in other European countries (France, Sweden, Spain and Austria).

The employment scheme provided by Smart is challenging the Belgian labor market regulation. The organization plays an intermediary role between its members performing an artistic activity and their clients or principals, providing its member artists a better (income) security, through facilitating the entitlement to social benefits. Two main tools are used by the organization to provide security to its members: (1) employment contracts and (2) activity management.

(1) The “employment contract” is a way of guaranteeing the artist pay and avoiding the artist the burdens of paperwork and debt collection. Smart acts as an intermediary appointed to manage the agreement concluded by the two parties, i.e. writing the contracts, invoicing the client, and paying a wage to the artist in the framework of an employment contract (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

(2) Smart's members are considered as entrepreneurs, who accumulate contracts, mobilize a variety of funding sources, take certain professional expenses into account over the long term, and construct projects on a wide scale. The Activity tool allows members to act as self-employed while still being guaranteed a form of stability, as they benefit from an employee status and the administrative services of Smart, as well as the support of an advisor. A piggybank is created for each activity (the budget) and managed by each member (who fills in purchased orders, invoices for copyright transfers, etc.). It can be used to finance employment contracts for the artist or for other staff, to pay expenses, monthly leasing payments, etc. The activity allows great freedom for members while keeping the paperwork minimal and

guaranteeing members' salaries or fees, regardless of whether the client has paid the invoice, thanks to a Mutual Guarantee Fund. Figure 2 summarizes the activity tool.

Insert Figure 2 about here

With its new scheme and its rapid growth, Smart created turmoil on the Belgian labor market, facing increased resistance by worker unions, interim companies, public authorities and others. The following table shows the evolution of Smart in terms of structure, services, target audience and stakeholder environment throughout three periods of time which have been delineated by major events described in the next section. This table shows the mutual interactions between Smart and its environment, documenting how its role as a social innovator and an institutional entrepreneur has evolved over time with the gradual extension of its roles and target audience across traditional category boundaries.

Table 1: Main features of the three identified periods

	1st period 1998-2003	2nd period 2003-2011	3rd period From 2012 on
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual non-profit organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umbrella private foundation (not philanthropic) + different legal entities with non-profit or cooperative statuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning to transform the non-profits into cooperative structures with a social aim • European development (France, Sweden, Spain)
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third party payer • Legal employer (since 2003) • Paper work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal employer • Professional and representative association • Temporary work agency • Equipment leasing • Smart Immo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning to create a new legal structure dedicated to project-based work, with a social aim cooperative status • European services structure for artists • Supporting legal actions
Target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project-based workers
Stakeholder attitudes (worker unions, competitors, public authorities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unions and competitors: No consideration • Public authorities: tolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unions and competitors: claim that Smart is in breach with labor law • Public authorities: legal and fiscal controls + « artist hunt » 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unions: negotiations + supporting legal actions • Competitors: planning to copy some Smart services • Public authorities: legal analysis, collaboration and possibly recuperation ambitions

The next section details this process of growth and diffusion, analyzing the new combinations of roles and extensions of audience category delineations by Smart, the evolution of stakeholder stances from tolerance to opposition and partial adoption, and the impact on both the institutional environment of labor regulation and Smart as a pioneer social innovator.

4. Findings

5.1. First period: addressing the needs of artists

Smart's creation as an answer to institutional gaps

Smart emerged to respond to a number of failures and gaps in the work organization of artists. At that time, artists had precarious statuses, due to their work characterized by intermittency and multi-employership. Dealing with the administrative complexity engendered by this particular way of working was a real obstacle course, either for artists themselves, who do not necessarily had the administrative and legal skills required to manage their career and preserve their entitlement to unemployment benefits, or for the employers and contractors, who felt insecure due to the absence of clear public policies regarding artists employment (and unemployment) situations. The two founders of Smart developed answers to what they identified as “a fault on the labor market continent” (*Smart co-founder*).

Most stakeholders also positively welcomed the solutions offered by Smart, recognizing the pressing problems facing artists. As table 2 shows, politicians, the public administration as well as the legal actors welcomed the emergence of Smart, at least as long as their scope remained focused on artists in the original sense of the term (see below).

Table 2: Identifying and exploiting institutional gaps in the employment system

"The creation of Smart suited many people" (Representative of the secretary of state against fiscal and social fraud)

"The state was interested because there were many failures in the system" (Representative of the Association of Professional Art Technicians)

"The founders have created a way of organizing that did not exist. They allowed people to work autonomously but in a mutual system" (Newspaper interview of SMartbe recently appointed director)

"The politicians accept us because they understand the tool. But they could break it, make things more

difficult. Yet they know it's not in their interest. So they just want to limit the number of people who can benefit from it" (Artist and SMartbe administrator)

"We've been contacted by the work legal prosecution office who immediately clarified that they weren't there to undermine Smart" (Director of the SMartbe Foundation)

Early recognition and growth, new services

Smart grew at a very fast pace. After one year of existence, Smart counted 1000 members, and the number of employment contracts managed was expanding each year. This growth was quite hard to manage for a small organization that was discovering a system without clear boundaries. One of the two founders admits: *"It was really bricolage, we were totally blundering. We did not even know if what we were doing was legal. We just tried to be good enough in order not to make fatal errors."* (Smart co-founder)

However, thanks to the cash flow generated by the 6.5% fee charged by Smart on all contracts, Smart was able to offer its members a mutual guarantee fund that allows paying wages even if the ordering party has not yet paid the balance. Beyond the representation of artists and the social secretariat services, Smart developed new services to members (advice, consulting, etc.). While stretching the limits of legality, Smart was still recognized as a legitimate actor in the field. Quite interestingly, Smart was invited by the regional public authorities in charge of arts and culture, to join the "National Artists Platform" mandated to prepare the negotiation about a new "artist status".

The 2002 Law

Following the debates in this National Artists Platform, a law was voted in 2002, which defined a new status for artists. Smart considered this law as an approbation of its practices and demands. The aim of the law was to facilitate administrative procedures and to bring artists out of undeclared work, while offering them a beneficial scheme. From that time, even without a working contract between the ordering party and the artist, the latter was considered as a salaried worker by the social security, and the ordering party was considered as the employer.

The law also provided a new definition of the artist that went beyond the previous definition focused on "performing artist". Under pressure of Smart and other stakeholders, the new

definition extended the notion of “artist” to every creator, performer or interpret of paid artistic work, in the audio-visual, plastic art, music, literature, entertainment, theatre or dance sectors.

Lastly, the intermittent nature of the artistic work was taken into account regarding the artists’ entitlement to social benefits. The entitlement was facilitated through the conversion of “cachets” (or pay-per-service) into their equivalent in working days. There was also a particular rule for performing artists and technicians who were allowed to maintain the highest unemployment benefit rate during 12 months.

5.2. Second period: extending roles and audiences

New roles: employer and multiple service provider

The 2002 law was a determining factor for the development of Smart, and reinforced the scheme designed by Smart, as it clarified its operating framework and appeared to approve the options taken by Smart. In 2002, Smart became third-party payer, which means that Smart pays the artist on behalf of the artist’s user. Therefore, Smart became the artist’s employer, and was responsible for all employer’s duties, such as social security payments, withholding tax and VAT.

From 2004, Smart expanded its range of services to members. Smart launched its Activity tool (see case description), allowing artist members to autonomously manage complex projects inside the Smart legal structure, and facilitated by the numerous computerized tools made available to members. In line with the mutual guarantee fund, Smart also started to provide financial service facilities, as an alternative to bank and credit institutions most often reluctant to support artists. Smart offered several advantages to members: a user-friendly platform, wage optimization advices, facilitated access to social benefits, and a range of services to ease the lives of its members.

First extension of target audience: from artists to creative professionals

Importantly, the target audience was significantly enlarged, far beyond what the 2002 law had prescribed. Smart accepted as members numerous professions such as beauticians, (graphic)

designers, craftsmen, translators, masseurs, etc. In brief, many workers whose professional activities are creative, project-based and/or intermittent and who did not fit well in the Belgian social security legal framework. The research director of Smart explains: *“We wanted to avoid entering into the logic of an artistic discipline: Smart aims all artistic services, whatever the sector. What makes the strength of Smart is to accept non-artistic services. Some of them are not considered artistic in the legal sense, but refer to creative professions. We accept them because the artists also offer non-artistic services to better earn their lives, and we want to offer them the facilities of a unique counter.”* Thanks to this target audience and service extensions, the membership exploded, reaching 43.000 members in 2011 and a large diversity of professions.

Interestingly, as table 3 shows, the blurry notions of artist and artistic work were recognized by several stakeholders who supported the extension of the definition up to a certain extent. Yet, Smart was quickly criticized for exploiting this ambiguity and extending its membership far beyond what reasonably entered the scope of arts and creation.

Table 3: The ambiguous definition of artist and artistic work

<p><i>"The definition of what is an artist will never be clear. Each one of us is somehow an artist. What matters is to regulate how the workers are best protected"</i> (Representative of the national employment office)</p> <p><i>"Over time there have been several definitions of what is an artist, what is artistic work, according to the law on unemployment and the law on social security for salaried workers"</i> (Director of SMartbe Foundation)</p> <p><i>"[The government work policies] are limited to the artists. We have a problem with that. We would like [these policies] to include all the people around. An artist, that's a reduced and undefinable notion. Smart is criticized but no one can define what is an artist"</i> (Representative of the Association of Professional Art Technicians)</p> <p><i>"The national employment office already divides us between artists, creators, technicians,... There are many professions that are not in their database. It's normal that they don't know if they don't practise the jobs. Yet they are deciding who is artist or not. This makes no sense!"</i> (Representative of the Association of Professional Art Technicians)</p> <p><i>"The definitions are everything but clear, and so the workers affiliated with Smart can decide if they want to frame their work as artistic or not"</i> (Journalist)</p>

Stakeholder critiques on Smart's confusion of roles

Until then, most stakeholders had considered Smart as useful for a marginal part of workers, i.e. artists. Hence, its employment scheme remained rather unnoticed in the broader area of work regulation. However, in the 2000s, Smart gained considerable visibility, extended its services and its target audience and became very profitable.

Worker unions, for instance, had long considered Smart with benevolence. In Belgium, worker unions are intermediaries between the unemployed and the federal public service for social security. Consequently, they were fully aware of Smart's activities, being in charge of the administrative processing of Smart's members requests to unemployment benefits entitlement.

However, Smart started to position itself as a union of artists, taking advantage of the fact that most artists were not (efficiently) represented by conventional worker unions, notably because artists are not "conventional" workers. Smart thus claimed this representation role: *"We manage to unite workers around tools and services that don't compromise their personal identity. They have both their autonomy and a collective representation structure in which they don't need to be actively involved. The target public interested in our services was already on the boundary between independent and salaried work. These are jobs that require autonomy but that couldn't either be in total isolation."* (Director of SMartbe-APMC¹).

This role was acknowledged by public authorities who invited Smart at several negotiation processes on artists, as a representative body of the latter. A politician summarizes this recognition: *"There are different clans in the artistic sector and artists weren't able to structure themselves and have a spokesperson. Smart structured itself to be able to defend and represent artists. Of course they have their interests, it's debatable, but they answered a need, and they allowed to take many things out of illegality, so it's not too bad"* (Representative of the Green Party). This was also acknowledged by other experts in the field, for instance: *"The artists aren't able to come together in a network and this is a gap that Smart exploits by claiming to be an association that represents artists"*. (Consultant from a social office for artists)

This move, however, was heavily criticized by worker unions, as admitted by Smart's APMC Director: *"the worker unions woke up because we were eating on their plate"*. As shown in table 4, this led to frontal opposition not only by worker unions but also by other stakeholders of the employment sphere who did not recognize Smart as a representative body and criticized the confusion that Smart created with the role of worker unions.

¹ APMC/ Association of the Creative Professions

Table 4: Critiques on Smart's confusion with worker union roles

"They pretend to be a worker union whereas they are absolutely not one. It's very detrimental for the sector. They're not a worker union because they have neither the logic, the philosophy nor the legal structure." (Art service demander)

"By doing this, they fragilize the organization of artists through unions. They take the place of worker unions without taking the role of negotiation. I think there's something very problematic. [...] How can Smart, as defender of the workers, negotiate with itself to sign a collective work agreement? The dialectic between the one who has the statute of salaried worker and a boss is necessary. By occupying both places, Smart kills this dialectic." (Director of a theatre school)

"We met them to understand what they do, how, and talk with them. I remain unsatisfied, because they maintain the confusion. When they talk, it's Smart, and Smart claims they speak for 45.000 people. But the members do not necessarily agree with [what they say]!" (Worker union representative)

"They claim to have the truth, they are defending the artists. But they don't have a mandate to represent the artists! They proclaim themselves as representing the artists, but it's not the case. And still from the inside that's their message" (ex-Smart employee)

Another set of critiques came from temporary work agencies and other competitors. They accused Smart of unfair competition mainly because, as already mentioned, Smart acts as the artists' employer, paying them their wage and charging the service purchaser. However, most competitors considered that Smart did not fulfil all the employer's responsibilities and thus created confusion for the artists and the service purchasers. Table 5 summarizes this set of critiques.

Table 5: Critiques on Smart's confusion with employer's role

"For the service providers, Smart is the employer. But it's well written in the general conditions, Smart is not the employer. They've had trouble with that ambiguity" (Consultant from a social office for artists)

"Part of the sector considers that Smart contributes to diluting the responsibilities of employers vis-à-vis the artists" (Director of a theatre)

"Smart erases the distinction between worker unions and employers. They put themselves in between the two [...] So they contribute to deprofessionalizing the profession because they take the employer's responsibility away from the profession" (Director of a school for actors)

"Smart is only an intermediary [between the artist and the service purchaser] but they present themselves as a social office, they play with this ambiguity. As Smart is not an employer, they don't respect the work agreements and salaries. [...] This is unfair competition" (Director of legal affairs, Federation of temporary work companies)

"Why do we need to respect the employers' obligations with all the associated costs whereas the Smart system is tolerated? The whole system built for 20 years in the temporary work sector is thrown away when the Smart system is tolerated, because it's much more interesting financially for the employers" (Director of legal affairs, Federation of temporary work companies)

Stakeholder critiques on Smart's size and extended target audience

More generally, stakeholders became impressed by the size reached by Smart, and by the increasing diversity of its membership. *"Smart has really become a pool for many professions outside the artistic world"*, complained the legal director of the federation of temporary work agencies, *"I would never have thought that it would be possible to grow so massively without the authorities putting legal barriers"*. Or: *"Unbelievable things are made legal through Smart. And the reactions are very slow"* (Representative of the Association of Professional Art Technicians)

Temporary agencies and worker unions, although traditionally sworn enemies, then joined their forces to lobby public authorities and limit Smart's activities. They complained at the labor prosecution office. This happened in 2008, in the economic crisis context, when politicians were also trying to rationalize public budgets. The pressure of a large political party put an end to the tolerance that Smart had enjoyed until then. *"During ten years, the national labor office had a more 'generous' interpretation of the law, then they decided to come back to a more literal reading. The official reason was the abuses, but they could never give clear figures [...]. The unofficial reason is that among worker unions there were many complaints about Smart's role."* (Representative of the Green Party).

Reorganization to answer critiques

The labor prosecution office determined that it lacked jurisprudence about the issue, and was not competent to define who is an artist and who is not (see also table 3). As stated by a labor prosecution officer, *"at the labor prosecution office, nobody had any prerequisite knowledge, as there was no pending disputes. There is no real artist status, only some legal provisions, which have not all been conceived for artists. There is no real consolidated code (...). I don't have legitimacy to define who's an artist and who is not"*. The labor prosecution office merely recommended that Smart clarify its structure and activities.

"We've been contacted by the work legal prosecution office who immediately clarified that they weren't there to undermine Smart", says the Director of the SMartbe Foundation. A collaboration was started with the labor prosecution office to clarify Smart's set of activities considered obscure and, consequently, dubious. For the sake of clarity, Smart then decided to

split its structure from a single non-profit organization into several entities, with various legal statuses depending of the respective core businesses², and all held by a private foundation.

The foundation was named SMartbe, and was the outcome of an urging need to secure the organization's assets. Indeed, Smart had become very rich, and members in the General Assembly of the association had diverging views about how to manage these assets. The latter were then transferred to the new SMartbe foundation with, as stated by one of the founders, *“the aim to dissociate financial issues and democratic issues and to protect the organization from internal actors who tried to get control of it”*.

The private foundation SMartbe defines the strategy and manages the whole structure, providing support services in HRM, accounting, etc. to the member entities. It is responsible for the ethical use of financial resources, and for the continuity and expansion of the structures, of which the foundation is the major shareholder.

The « Artist hunt » and the redefinition of the target audience

The National Employment Office (ONEM) had initially been rather tolerant towards Smart. However, after the complaints by the worker unions and temporary work federation, the ONEM seemed to discover the situation: *“We noticed that the number of people claiming to be 'artists' is increasingly high [...] we didn't know that there were as many people affiliated with Smart as salaried workers”* (ONEM representative).

The ONEM considered the rise of unemployed people with the artist status as an abuse, and started to control more strictly these “said-artists”. This was the beginning of what has been called “the ONEM crisis” or, as titled by the artists themselves, the “artist hunt”. This change

² The new SMartbe holding is composed of five entities :

- The Secretariat for Casual Workers, with a non-profit organization status, which manages the artistic employment contracts that fit with the “artist status”
- The Temporary Work Agency, a private limited company, ironically named the Interim Palace, which manages the artistic employment contracts that do not fit with the “artist status” and non artistic labor
- Productions Associées, a non-profit organization offering the framework for the development of creative projects
- The Professional Association of the Creative Trades (APMC), for lobbying and defending “creative” members
- Matlease, a cooperative company, for lending equipment and providing financial services and credits to members

in the ONEM stance generated tensions and legal disputes. Smart decided to support members willing to dispute the ONEM decision to deny them their entitlement to unemployment benefits. Smart argued that there was confusion between the “artist status” and the Smart membership. The organization blamed the narrowness and the impreciseness of the very definition of the “artist” (see table 2).

While engaging in disputes with the National Employment Office, Smart decided to refocus on its core business and to redefine its target. Year after year, the members’ occupations had become increasingly distant from the artistic field, including gardening, consulting, massaging activities, etc., engendering suspicions and allegations even from within, for instance: *"Smart is an excellent tool from the moment they stayed in the little nich they had, which is to make the link between the artists and the job providers. Then, there was good work to do, help to bring. But from the moment they enlarged, it was about estheticians, masseuses,..."* (former Smart employee)

In 2011, Smart redefined the boundaries of its target audience: from 2012, the organisation only accepted members whose activities fall into the “creative” scope: *“To become a member, you now have to work in an area which is part of what we call ‘the creative professionals’. This definition includes: artistic and creative professions; technical-artistic professions; art-related professions (production, broadcasting, etc.); all professions that have historically been part of SMartbe and have many things in common with creative professionals: journalism, communication, translation, socio-cultural activities organisation, and professions relating to the web, training and events”* (Smart presentation brochure, 2012). This focus back on the core business aimed to legitimize Smart’s demands to public authorities and to secure the defence of the members. However, all members who had registered before 2012 were allowed to remain full members, whatever their occupations.

5.3. Third period: integrating “project-based work” into the labor regulation

Integration of Smart’s scheme into Belgian and European institutional landscape

The National Labor Council (NLC) is the main consultative body in the Belgian social dialogue system. Composed of representatives of worker unions and employer federations, this body advises the Belgian federal government regarding employment policy issues. The

NLC was asked to adopt an opinion about a review of the artist status. Although several opponents to the Smart scheme were part of the NLC, the notice published in July 2012 by the consultative body globally maintained the existing system, with slight modifications only. Smart therefore considered that it was cleared of abuses allegations and that it could maintain its different services. According to Smart, another proof for that was that 150 Smart's members, excluded by the ONEM from the right to unemployment benefits because they could not prove that their occupations were of an artistic nature, won their cases against the ONEM at the Labor Tribunal.

Although there has been no major dispute involving Smart since the 2012 events, the ONEM is still exercising a strict control of the artists asking for entitlement to unemployment benefits, and new court cases are being processed. However, this does not impede Smart from further developing its scheme and proposing a wider range of services to its members.

Smart is also developing similar initiatives at the European level, together with partners in Sweden, France, Spain or Austria. Smart Belgium thus shares its experience and knowledge to other organizations and tries to build its expertise about labor market rules in European countries, in order to ease and secure their projects across the borders of countries and activity sectors. Smart has joined European networks and think tanks, such as IETM (International Network for contemporary performing arts), ENCATC (European Network on Cultural management and Cultural Policy Education), Culture Action Europe, etc. Smart is thus developing visibility and legitimacy at the European level, as an expert organization representing individual artists. Through this European development, Smart also hopes to obtain a better recognition for its projects in Belgium.

Second extension of target audience: from creative professionals to project-based workers

Although they have had to take into account the opposition from several actors in the field, Smart has continued to imagine new solutions for its current and potential members. The organization now wants to provide solutions to all workers concerned by project-based work, and suffering from the uncertainty and discontinuity associated with it. Interestingly, Smart claims that its strategy and development are driven by the members themselves, whose working conditions are increasingly characterized by project-based organisation. *"There has been a clarification of our area of action, of our target public. The work prosecutor's office*

wanted to understand why Smart has extended its activities to non-artists. We explained that historically, Smart was created to answer the needs of artists and technicians, and then professions that are associated and necessary in the production chain. Smart then opened itself to other professions because the people are forced to diversify the types of services, and they do subsistence services outside the artistic world. These multiple activities are problematic and Smart wanted to provide a global response. Actually, Smart still targets the same public, but it's that public that enlarges its activities.» (Director of SMartbe Foundation).

Multiple arms for multiple roles

Somewhat chastened by its recent problems with public authorities, Smart tries to stay on the safe side. The organization is planning to create, apart from Smart, a new structure for this expanding audience of project-based workers. *"Due to external pressures, we've had to reduce the activities, but we've kept the professions associated with the evolution of society towards project-based work (computer engineer, journalist, translator,...). We would like to create a new structure for the people who work on a project basis, even for what is not explicitly artistic. The system evolves, we have to secure workers"* (Director of the research office, SMartbe). The ambition of developing new solutions and diffusing them onto the whole labor market remains rather clear, as suggested by the newly appointed director: *"The creative professionals are in fact the forerunners of what will be the organization of work and employment in the future. They like to have autonomy while constantly connecting with other professionals. However in the current system their project-based work brings discontinuity and precariousness and we want to build solutions for all the professionals in this situation"*. (Newspaper interview of SMartbe new director)

However, Smart still struggles with its different roles. On the one side, the organization identifies itself as a simple service provider, designing tools to support the career paths of artists and project-based workers: *"We want to offer adapted tools whatever [the workers'] choices: salaried worker, independent worker, entrepreneur,... What's at the core of our action is not to employ everyone, to defend a particular status, but rather to offer tools that allow [workers] to manage their activity and to secure the different situations"* (Director of SMartbe Foundation). On the other side, Smart still wishes to remain a key representative actor at Belgian and European levels. This generates tensions inside the different entities of

the foundation. *"There's a tension in Smart between the two missions which are "providing tools to users", our entrepreneurial job, and "representing users". In terms of tools, it's not a problem to enlarge the public, as long as the tools work, the users don't necessarily need to identify themselves with the carrying structure, they're just users. But it's different in the representation structure, where a strong identity is a matter of credibility. I think we should develop a new association to defend the rights of non-artistic intermittent workers. The problem is that we already have so much work to defend artists and creative workers: who will take the lead and defend non-artistic intermittent workers? That field is even more mined."* (APMC Director).

Stakeholders: supporting the innovation rather than the innovator

Whatever happens to Smart in the future, it seems that the employment scheme designed by Smart for creative professionals is less and less challenged as such. At most, labor market authorities are tightening the conditions of access to unemployment benefits for those who claim the artist status, and are carrying out reinforced controls.

Hence, the critiques on Smart have shifted away from the content of its actions and the scope of its target audience, to focus more on the organization itself. As table 6 shows, two main critiques have been formulated: the combination of roles leading to a “multiple-arms” structure, and the private nature of Smart leading to a commercial, profit-making image.

Table 6: Critiques on the multiple-arms and private structure

"What annoys us with Smart, it's the tentacles. Who speaks when Smart speaks? If they want to be a representing association, ok, but is that compatible with the role of employer? With the role of material renting? I understand the marketing of SMart, with a unique name, but I think it weakens them. Everybody wants their hide, but not the same hide. So they get many enemies because of their ambiguity" (Worker union representative)

"Smart for project-based work? Yes, but which Smart?" (Representative of a worker union)

"They're confusing all their projects" (Representative of the Green Party)

"Material leasing, activity management, artistic and non-artistic contracts, advice, legal support, fairs,... we have everything. We have so many products that the others don't have, that because of all that we're perceived as commercial, which we're not at all" (SMartbe manager responsible for Flanders)

"We've had massive denigrations, so we spend our time justifying all the things we do" (SMartbe director in charge of representing the artists)

"Defending artists is a matter of general interest [...]. SMart has become too big. It's always problematic to leave such an issue to a company rather than to the state" (Artist not using SMartbe)

The last quote illustrates a position taken by several stakeholders, which is to support the diffusion of the services and tools created by Smart, but disconnecting them from the Smart structure because of the reasons suggested above. In particular, public authorities have long shown interest in the schemes developed by Smart and could be tempted to recuperate them, as this politician confesses: *"I think we'll need this [kind of mechanism] for project-based work. But separate from Smart, otherwise we're lost. They're confusing all their projects. [...] In fact we need a public Smart"* (Representative of the Green Party). In brief, Smart has managed to broadly diffuse its innovation in the field but, while doing so, it has extended its scope and combined several roles that have led to threatening its organizational legitimacy.

5. Discussion

Category extension as a driver of both diffusion and opposition

The findings first show how the roles of Smart and the delineation of its target audience categories has evolved parallel with the process of institutional work. The role evolved from simple service provider in terms of employment contracts up to a broad array of both employer and worker representation functions, thus unprecedentedly combining different roles traditionally taken by clearly separate actors on the labor market and challenging the well-established "employer-employee" divide. In a similar way, the target audience categories of Smart were redefined and extended from the traditionally accepted "artistic" field-related category up to a broader cross-field category of "creative professionals" and "project-based workers". Whereas the first category was clearly field-specific, the second evolved outside of the arts sector and the third applied to a broad array of work configurations. Smart then profiled itself as the service organization able to support any insecure worker whatever its sector of activity. Thus, in both cases (roles and target audiences), Smart challenged the established categorizations by extending and combining them in unorthodox ways.

These boundary-crossing categorizations were closely connected with the evolution of stakeholder stances and the broader environment. Typically, Smart took advantage of the initial ambiguity around the definition of "artist" to gradually extend its scope to creative professionals. It also took the opportunity of the poor representation of artists by traditional worker unions and of the ambiguities around the employer's role to deploy itself as bridging these two distinct functions. Smart felt encouraged in this way by the initial tolerance of

competitors and the recognition by the state and other stakeholders welcoming solutions to artists' needs. However, the dramatic growth of membership due to this extension led competitors and stakeholders to oppose Smart. The latter reacted superficially, by redefining its target audience without fundamentally changing it and by reorganizing its structure, adding new arms for each new role taken. Although contested, the creation of a multiple-arms structure enabled Smart to further extend its roles and target audience and to establish itself in a broad array of work fields. The category extension can thus be seen both as the emblem and as the driver of the institutional work project through which Smart sought to diffuse its new employment scheme and grow as an organization, echoing other studies examining the role of categories in institutional diffusion trajectories (Jones *et al.* 2012; Khaire 2014; Lounsbury & Rao 2004; Rao *et al.* 2005).

In terms of target audience, Smart diffused its new employment scheme by creating a broad category cross-sector category that to a certain extent shares features of a “boundary object” (Briers & Chua 2001; Carlile 2002; Lainer-Vos 2013; Star & Griesemer 1989; Yakura 2002). Boundary objects are “artefacts of practice that are agreed and shared by communities, yet satisfy the informational requirements of each of them” (Sapsed & Salter 2004: 1518). The boundary object of the "project-based work" category thus enabled Smart to create interactions between subfields that previously appeared as distinct. From the starting point of the cultural subfield, the innovative scheme was abstracted from its initial experimental context and made available to other fields through the boundary category of project-based work. While this creation corresponds to the social innovators' strategy to signal the challenge of protecting project-based workers, it remains unclear, however, if this boundary category will effectively be used by other actors to address the problem. In other words, the legitimacy of the newly created category is still not secured, even if the latest findings suggest partial adoption in the discourses by different types of “competitors” (worker unions and temporary work agencies).

Institutional work outcome: diffusing the innovation rather than the innovator

Second, the findings show contrasted behaviors when looking at the reactions of stakeholders both in and across fields regarding Smart and its employment scheme. On the one hand, the innovation itself, i.e. the new employment scheme, and its connection with the newly created "project-based work" category, received more appraisal and had a clear impact on the other

actors' practices. Most strikingly, the Belgian federation of temporary work agencies, after years of lobbying with the aim of prohibiting the scheme set up by Smart, gradually promoted the scheme among its members. Other stakeholders encouraged the development of the scheme but through another (typically public) organizational form. The gradual adoption and support of the scheme may bring the institutional innovation towards a level of irreversibility, even if this might happen at the expense of Smart itself.

The findings, especially the most recent stances, show that Smart's creation and diffusion, together with other supporting stakeholders (such as the networks at the European level), have had an important impact on the Belgian –and potentially European– labor market regulation. As presented in the second section, this regulation was initially only bilateral, seeing employers on the one side and employees on the other side, without any possibility to stand between or bridge the two roles. With the diffusion and replication of Smart's scheme, the role of a third-party legal employer has been legitimized, although critiques remain from some worker unions. This type of third-party intervention challenging the bilateral, dichotomic system (“you're either employer or employee”) has now been further diffused by other such schemes (Xhaufclair & Pichault 2013), for instance worker cooperatives that form a new source of inspiration for the managers of Smart.

Next, the binary categories of “salaried worker” and “independent worker” have also been challenged by the emergence and recognition of a third category of “project-based (intermittent) workers”. Thanks to Smart and other actors, this “boundary” category has grown from the sole arts sector to nearly all other sectors and is now getting structured and represented at the macro level of the employment dialogues (Davidov 2004; Regalia 2006).

Finally, the standardized format for labor, through a homogeneous, full-time and unlimited working contract has also been challenged by Smart's action. The heterogeneity of working situations has become increasingly accepted, and the protection organized taking into account this heterogeneity of contracts and situations (Regalia 2006). The focus of the regulation is no more the working conditions (through labor law) but the preservation of the entitlement to social rights (unemployment benefits, health insurance, retirement benefits, etc.).

Yet, on the other hand, Smart as an institutional entrepreneur is heavily criticized precisely for transgressing field boundaries and exploiting ambiguities in its own interest. The private

nature of Smart is seen by several stakeholders as a contradiction with the general interest nature of the mission of protecting workers. Several voices thus call for a public system that would recuperate the Smart scheme from its initiator. Hence, we can clearly observe a diverging trajectory between the evolution of the innovation that has carved out its space into the institutional landscape, and the innovator whose organizational legitimacy and control over the innovation is no longer secured (see also Tracey *et al.* 2011).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to contribute to understanding the diffusion trajectories of social innovations. This was achieved through a rich case study of a new employment scheme introduced by the Belgian non-profit organization Smart in the artistic sector and gradually diffused to other professional categories. The findings show how the roles and target audience were gradually extended and combined in new ways, causing both rapid growth and visibility for Smart and its new scheme, but also increasing suspicion from established actors. Thus, while the innovation pervades field boundaries thanks to cross-sector categorization, the innovator struggles to achieve sufficient organizational legitimacy in order to “follow” the diffusion of its innovation.

Although the complexity of this case study makes clear-cut conclusions difficult and the long-term outcomes of this diffusion work are not yet visible, we believe that our study brings two major contributions to research in this field. As a first contribution, our article highlights the role of category extension and combinations as pivotal in the context of institutional complexity. More particularly, when institutional layers overlap and when boundaries between categories (in this case professions) and thus fields are unclear, than it may be useful to exploit ambiguities by creating and addressing “boundary” categories that span across multiple fields.

A second contribution is to suggest that the specific type of institutional work described above represents both the potential of responding to institutional ambiguities and favoring stakeholder adoption, and the threat of compromising the situation of the social innovator and institutional entrepreneur. The latter’s success is likely to depend on how it manages to engage in collaborative work, abandoning the monopoly over its innovation and convincing audiences of its non-opportunistic behavior. It is thus suggested that an institutional

entrepreneur diffusing a social innovation across field borders may face a dilemma of either sharing its innovation maximally while restraining its own ownership and growth prospects, or favoring the latter with the risk of frontal rejection by dominant actors. Other studies over longer time periods and in others contexts are required to examine and compare how different social innovators face this dilemma. More broadly, future research should examine institutional work around social innovations to highlight both the entrepreneurial strategies and the contextual factors that enable social innovations to scale up beyond their initial context and have a lasting impact on their institutional environment.

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