

## **NEW MODE OF EXCHANGE INTRODUCTION: COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES OF MARKET SHAPING. THE CASE OF ECOBIZ**

### **Abstract:**

The objective of this research is to study the introduction of a new mode of exchange (i.e. collaborative platform) in a knowledge and technical unstable context. This research studies a single longitudinal case. The first results made appear evidences of a controversy. These evidences were then gathered into the ten steps of the Sociology of Translation. The narrative built following these steps show first that a new shape of market appeared after the introduction of the new mode of exchange. It shows then that the marketing practices also evolved to try to fit the new market shape. It is then discussed how the translation process impacted the representational, exchange and normalizing practices of the market shaping.

### **Keywords:**

Collaborative platform, mode of exchange, sociology of translation, market practices.

# NEW MODE OF EXCHANGE INTRODUCTION: COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES OF MARKET SHAPING. THE CASE OF ECOBIZ

## INTRODUCTION

This research is focusing on understanding how a new technology based on social media shapes the market and the marketing practices. To do so, we use the reading grid of the Sociology of Translation. More specifically the ten steps of translation in the Sociology of Translation (Akrich, Callon & Latour 2006) are presented and help understanding what the agents of a specific case did when facing the introduction of a new mode of exchange. The Sociology of Translation grid has emerged from the thematic and chronological analysis of the collected data and helps telling the story of case. It specifically helps understanding the process and the disruptive events in it. Those events result in a new market shape associated with new marketing practices at two levels: the executive and the operational ones. The paper is articulated as following: first the managerial and the theoretical contexts are presented. Second, the market shaping practices and the ten steps of translation are presented. Then we present the methodology before telling the story of the case. As a conclusion, we propose an emergent discussion of the findings.

## MANAGERIAL CONTEXT

“Web 2.0”, “Collaborative platform” are part of a current vocabulary, which has been transferred from the virtual world to the everyday marketing language. In the BtoC sector, new marketing practices involving consumers are emerging, as the example of [www.500.fiat.fr](http://www.500.fiat.fr) where the brand could collect 275,000 online opinions of consumers about the features of the new Fiat 500<sup>1</sup>. In the BtoB sector, co-creation using Virtual Markets or Inter-Organizational Systems are well established. But co-creation using social media like collaborative platforms remains unusual. However, some initiatives emerge, even involving sometimes several competitors using the same platform, as [www.salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com) example shows. This sales force management web platform allows any business to subscribe and benefit from a private space where to manage its salespersons. And subscribers participate online to the improvement of the platform by proposing new features to vote. The most popular feature is then developed and added to the platform.

This phenomenon is contaminating semi-public organizations as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (hereafter “CCI”). And, in France, since 2004, a new mode of exchange between a CCI and its business members has been introduced: Ecobiz. This collaborative platform promotes a new way of managing the relationship with clients. First it helps CCIs spreading local business and infrastructural information and news through the dedicated website. Second, it tries to encourage business opportunities through the single, region-scaled collaborative website, where companies can make calls for project. Third, it allows the CCI agents to create and animate thematic communities on different topics: human resources, quality, security and environment, industry, NTIC, etc. in order to foster economic activities. Within a thematic community an agent can create smaller groups where problem-solving is the main goal. These small groups, called ‘project groups’, gather collaborators from different companies about 4 to 6 times a year to share experience and find a methodology of problem solving in order to apply it back in their companies. These gatherings create great value to the persons participating as they co-construct together a solution they will apply then.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.zdnet.fr/actualites/la-nouvelle-fiat-500-demarre-en-trombe-grace-au-web-39371038.htm>

Despite important financial and human investments, the performance of the platform remains unevenly distributed among CCI territories, thematic communities and individuals. It is not a commercial success. Moreover, the core use of a collaborative platform in the BtoC sector is not at the heart of that BtoB collaborative platform. For instance, instead of participating online to project groups, collaborators need to meet physically for the project group to exist. Instead of having every member adding ideas, writing pieces of a document, only the community manager (the CCI agent) gathers the ideas, write the document and post it to the virtual space dedicated to the group. Final example, instead of spreading the document created to all the members of the website, it is only available to group project members who will download it and keep it for their own use.

These behaviors were striking and led the researcher to try to understand why the CCIs, executives, agents and clients involved did not use the collaborative platform as it was 'supposed' to be. So the specific use of Ecobiz could be considered as a result, and so we had to dig in the past story of the actors involved to understand what led them to this result.

#### THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Considering the importation of a BtoC practice to the BtoB sector involves anchoring this research into four different theoretical debates. First, it continues the idea of a dichotomy termination between BtoC and BtoB. Second, it blurs even more the organizational frontiers. Third it poses the question of who performs marketing within and outside the organization. Finally, it deals with the gap between theory and practice.

The main argument that supports the end of a BtoB / BtoC dichotomy consists in admitting the fact that any business and any individual within a business or a market is part of a network (Gummeson & Polese 2009). Being part of a network induces that an apparently exclusively BtoB network can be directly or indirectly linked to any BtoC actor or network. In this sense, it is not surprising to witness the arrival of BtoC tools into the BtoB world. On the theoretical side, some researchers (Cova & Salle 2008) suggested the use of BtoC theoretical currents to move closer BtoB and BtoC situations. In this sense, the Consumer Culture Theory or the Service Dominant Logic, which are typically used in the BtoC literature, have roots in the BtoB concepts when considering the consumer as a co-producer. So both BtoC and BtoB so called sectors have along the years contaminated each other both on practical and theoretical levels.

Dealing with the debate focusing on the frontiers of the organization, the IMP Group research tradition has always been an advocate of the crucial role a consumer bears in the conception of an offer. That conception, that was until now, part of the marketer's exclusive role is now transferred to any market actor. It seems then possible to identify marketing practitioners outside the marketing department (Gummeson 1991; Webster 1992). One can identify them outside the company itself. Many have considered the consumer (Normann & Ramirez 1993; Toffler 1980; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). And others have considered any business partner (Axelsson & Easton 1992; Håkansson 1982). A few have gone beyond the human conception of a marketing practitioner (Hagberg & Kjellberg 2010).

Finally, the status of the marketing practitioner closes the circle of debates up to the difference between practice and theory by focusing on the conception of an offer where employees, customers and any partner contribute. Indeed, the intellectual process of this research mixes field observations and theoretical readings. By first observing a particular practice in the organization which looked alike co-creation as described in the BtoC literature, it has first been induced that the co-creation concept was at the center of the thinking process as a new practice for the observed actors. Soon, and after considering the BtoB literature, it has clearly appeared that, first co-creation was not an as new concept as thought, and second that it was not a new practice for the observed actors. As a consequence, the question focused on what led to so many new problems faced by the actors of the system. Finally, the recent work on the modes of exchange (Hagberg & Kjellberg 2010) brought tremendous help in understanding what was going on. By considering, not the concept but the tool, i.e. the mode of exchange, there it was possible to understand why in the first place the concept was considered from a BtoC point of view. In fact, the collaborative web platform is a tool coming from the BtoC field imported into the BtoB sector, which is a practice transfer, not a theory transfer. This transfer, however, as stated in this theoretical context, implies many theoretical questionings and brings together theory and practice, BtoC and BtoB, the inside and the outside of an organization.

As one can see, introducing a new mode of exchange coming from one field to another poses a certain number of problems that can be summed up in the following proposed question: **What are the implications of a new mode of exchange introduction on the individual and collective practices when knowledge and technology are not stable?**

While living the thinking process, data were still being collected. And soon, a new thread came to the front: the importation of that new mode of exchange was not part of a classic marketing process. There had not been any market study before the introduction of the platform, there had not been a time dedicated to the appropriation of the tool. In fact, the introduction of this new mode of exchange came from the willingness of a unique individual, who convinced one of his directors to translate the problem, mobilize the other actors and try to build and stabilize a network. This case was almost typical in its display that it can be used as an exemplification of how an organization tried to make the most of a new mode of exchange despite its unfamiliar technology and knowledge environment.

In order to frame this work, a first part is developed that deals with the definition of the practice concept as used in this research and a summary of the Sociology of Translation as a tool to study the practices of a specific case. In a second part, the methodology is presented before telling the story of the case framed into the ten steps of the controversy. As a conclusion, the emergence of a discussion is presented as well as the limits, contributions and next steps of the research.

## THEORETICAL DEFINITIONS

### THE MARKET SHAPING PRACTICES

There are three practices (Kjellberg & Hegelsson 2006) playing a role in the shaping of markets. The authors identified the exchange practices, the normalization practices and the representational practices. The exchange practices include activities involved in the economic process of goods or services exchange. The normalization practices deal with those activities contributing to the establishment of normative objectives to the agents, i.e. how a market and/or its agents have to be (re)shaped to fit another agent or group of agents' conception. The representation practices comprise activities that (re)present the economic exchanges as a market, i.e. which describe the markets and how they function. These different practices are used to identify the different practices in the case studied. By observing the agents' chains of translation, it becomes possible to understand the progression of a type of practice to another for a given episode or event.

### THE SOCIOLOGY OF TRANSLATION IN THE STUDY OF PRACTICES

Social media are a new mode of exchange available to clients and providers in the BtoB sector. It influences their practices on what they exchange and how they exchange it. The theoretical context of market shaping makes part of a debate laying on unstable knowledge and techniques, which defines the controversy (Latour & Woolgar 1979). The controversy implies to take a close look at the phenomenon while it is happening. Differently put, the introduction of a new mode of exchange has to be observed as it is done and not as a theory would define it (Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; Kjellberg & Helgesson 2007; Azimont & Araujo 2010; Hagberg & Kjellberg 2010).

In order to structure the plethora of data such an observation can produce; it was chosen to confront the results to the ten steps of the Sociology of Translation as presented by Amblard *et al.* (1996 pp.127-148).

First, the context analysis consists in analyzing the agents involved, their objectives, their stakes and the extent to which they can converge. One must wonder 'what are the reasons why an agent does what it does?' instead of relying on a more strategic and systemic reasoning. The description of the situations, the agents human and non-human, the devices and the systems forms the first step towards an understanding of what led to a specific result, i.e. the facts.

Second, the identification of the problem formulation and the traducer helps to understand what made the agents converge. The way it is formulated usually tries to make the synergy of all the specific situations face by the agents by reaching a certain level of generalization. The problem formulation is made by a traducer whose place plays an important role. The place infers the legitimacy of the traducer, which if not admitted by the agents will be challenged by the agents. The problem formulation allows a movement around a temporary and modifiable project whose goal is to answer the question asked.

Third, the mandatory path allowing the controversy is the place (physic, geographic or institutional) or the statement from where the network will be created. This mandatory path is subject to negotiations, back and forth from the agents making the controversy.

Fourth, the continuous negotiations between context and content give birth to spokespersons that represent each group of agents and situation. For the micro network to grow, the traducer must ensure the legitimacy and the capacity to spread information of those spokespersons.

Fifth, the traducer needs to reduce the noise and complexity by making a shape investment. It consists in investing under any shape in the stabilization of a relation that will last the time needed. It designates the effort one is willing to make in order to substitute the many and hard to handle entities in favor of a set of fewer, homogeneous intermediaries that will be easier to handle.

Sixth, the intermediaries produced by the shape investment can be defined as anything that circulates among agents and situations and helps consolidate the network by becoming a reference to which one can rely on. An intermediary, as identified by Callon (1986, 1992) can be information (paper, disks, etc.), technical objects (measurement instrument), money, human beings and their competencies.

Seventh, once the situation simplified thanks to the problem formulation, shape investment and intermediary production, time is come to enroll and mobilize. By giving a role or allowing an agent taking one, the traducer favors mobilization and the growing of the network.

Eighth, extending the network make it more irreversible. To the hard core of agents mobilized, new entities will be added, making the network stronger and bigger. The increasing number of agents involved can make coordination more difficult, multiply contradictions and may blur the network building. The extension of the network needs to stay vigilant and transparent.

Ninth, vigilance consists in a constant watch of the elements that could jeopardize the network as competing translations. And tenth, transparency lays on the visibility, readability and understandability of what constitute the core of the network. Transparency on the common constructions and the rules governing agents' relations is a necessary condition for trust to spread in the network.

## METHODOLOGY

A unique case has been studied. The longitudinal case study took place from February 2008 to February 2011 with stronger interactions during the years 2008 and 2009. The objective was to study a phenomenon involving heterogeneous actors and groups of actors, facts and contexts, systems, while being aware of the subjective filter of the researcher in order to make some sense of a multiple voice story. The variety of data was preferred in order to understand the whole phenomenon (Badot *et al.* 2009) and define the outline of what was making part of it and what was not. In a unique case study, the more persons are interviewed, the more richness and complexity it is possible to show (Gummesson 2003). More specifically one of the criteria for the validity of a case study is the completeness of the data collected (Borghini, Carù & Cova 2010).

## FIELD ACCESS

The field has been accessed under the conditions of a research contract signed with the CCI of Rouen, which allowed the researcher to have a facilitated access to almost every part of the organizational system. In fact, the highest hierarchical levels were out of reach and so the point of view of the Presidents and Directors is only reconstituted by comparison and confrontation of the information given by the other actors of the case.

## DATA COLLECTION

The data collection is of an ethnographic type as Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) state it. Numerous and heterogeneous data were collected in order to increase the variety of angles on a single phenomenon. The data collected range from the website, internal and commercial documents for the non-human agents to actors' narratives, informal discussions, and participating observation for the human agents. Based on the recommendations of the authors, a list of what should be done and what was done is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between the ethnographic type of data collection and the actual data collection

Recommended	Realized
Data collection in "natural" environment	The researcher was employed at the Development Department of the CCI of Rouen during the whole study.
Participant observation, long time immersion	Field interactions took place from 02/22/2008 until 02/28/11.
Interpretation considered as plausible by informants	Interviews transcriptions presented to informants. In July 2009, first draft of the case narrative presented to the Development Director of the CCI of Rouen. Informal discussions with informants on researcher's perception on the project evolution.
Use of multiple data sources	See table 2.

In total, 92 hours, 51 minutes and 20 seconds of recordings are distributed among the 95 interactions with the field taking the form of interviews or observations. Every field interaction, whether recorded or not, led to an inscription into a log book.

Table 2. Type of data collected

Primary data	Secondary data
Actors' narratives (Bertaux 2005), Comprehensive interviews, Critical incident technique (Flanagan 1954), 13 meeting observations (participant and non-participant) (Becker 1998), 5 log books + 1 methodological log book, A few photographs, Emails and informal interviews.	Website, Browse statistics, Local news received by email from the website, Press clippings, Meeting minutes, Paperboard pages written during meetings, PowerPoint presentations, Cards with practical hints, Functional requirements.

### ANALYSIS

The analysis followed five steps in order to observe emerging patterns. To avoid any bias in a possible willingness from the researcher looking exclusively for clues of the 10 steps of controversy, it has been chosen to follow Miles and Huberman (1994) advices on how to analyze data from a single case study. A sequential analysis of the interviews was made. As the authors put it, a sequential analysis consists of five steps.

The first one is an in-depth reading of the interview transcriptions in order to get used to the vocabulary and the topics addressed, allowing then to elaborate a summary of each interview. The summary of each individual case unveiled what was essential in the experience of each agent while reducing the transcription for about one third, facilitating the treatment of the amount of data. The mean length of an interview transcription was of 26 pages (times new roman 12, single line spacing) ranging from 1 to 70 pages for the shortest to the longest one. The summary respected as much as possible the wording, expressions and emic vocabulary of the respondents and by extension of the studied group by using exact typical phrases or at neutral as possible re-wording.

The second step deals with the constitution of coherent units, in this case groups of agents that present the same characteristics. Even though not presented in this extract of the global research, the constituted groups emerged quite simply fitting the organization chart of the CCIs observed. Four groups appeared: two groups of individual representing respectively the operational level and the strategic level of the project, the two other groups are made of non-human agents. The first non-human group is made of the Institutions, composed by the representations that the human agents described. As said before, the highest level of hierarchy was out of reach during the field presence. It appeared that it was not only out of reach for the researcher but for the human agents interviewed also, which implied to build this very specific group. The second non-human and last group is the product itself, Ecobiz. Its composition is made of the website itself, its technical architecture, the software editor and the technical team in charge of making it run. Since Ecobiz doesn't literally have a voice, its story was summarized with the gathering of what was said and written about it and its online appearance.

The third step consists in a chronological ordering of each unit, upon which are built narrative scenes as stated in step four. This step was crucial to identify the thematic categories emerging from the story told by the informants. The chronological ordering was the simplest task to achieve. Indeed, every date or time period appearing in the transcription was systematically put into a specific file and organized chronologically with a recognition mark of who said it, which allowed the confrontation of the individual stories. The fourth step was realized along with the third one. Since the chronology concerned all informants, it was easier to compare what each group of agents experienced at a specific time period. The trickiest part, which can be the object of biases, was to label the time period. This is the step where the process of controversy appeared. Among the 10 steps described by Akrich, Callon & Latour (2006), some were easily identifiable; others required some creativity and maybe over-interpretation from the researcher. But as Culler (1992) states it: “Over-interpretation is more interesting and more accurate than 'fair' and moderated interpretation since it allows, beyond evidence, to unveil underlying systems”.

Finally, in a fifth and last step, and for the purpose of this communication, a choice was made to put aside what was not related directly to the subject. So, are presented in the result part, only what was relevant to the Ecobiz controversy (Akrich, Callon & Latour 2006; Latour 1989, 1992, 1993).

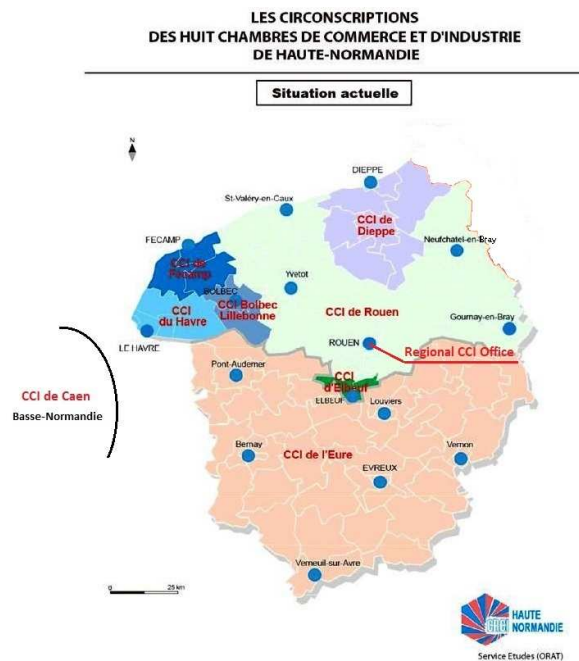
## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The collective story based on the individual narratives is reconstituted following the 10 steps of translations as it appeared in the thematic analysis.

## CONTEXT ANALYSIS

In Normandy, the territory was historically shared among nine local CCIs. It is the only region of France with many CCIs. In 1982, the decentralization law initiated connections and then mergers of smaller CCIs. In 1997, still eight CCIs are present on the Normandy territory. In 2002, Raffarin abides a law relative to the decentralized organization of the Republic, leading to the connection of other small CCIs of the region. When Ecobiz, in 2004 is introduced in Normandy, seven CCIs share the territory. Figure 1 shows the status of the territory of Normandy CCIs (indicated in red).

Figure 1. Status of the territories shared among Normandy CCIs



These connections draw the context in which local CCIs missions are realized. These connections are supposed to bring better collaboration between CCIs in order to reach efficiency and profitability. In this sense, the 2005 law promulgating the status of the Regional CCIs, which until then only had legitimacy on the referring to the National CCI, allowing the government to observe local CCI activities. From now on, the goal of Regional CCIs is to federate and manage all region scaled actions.

Four CCIs, Le Havre, Rouen, Evreux and Caen as well as the Regional CCI are involved in the Ecobiz project. Since their creation, a rivalry exists between Le Havre and Rouen, about which current members of each CCI talk about, as this employee states: *“there are problems of shared vision and shared will. The Chambers have troubles working together. This is due to conflicts of interest between chambers. It can be compared to kindergarten squabbles.”* (Rouen CCI, Community Manager 1). At the strategic level, this rivalry is also admitted: *“The rivalry we have between Le Havre and Rouen, basically is historical, always these little 'who's the boss' games.”* (Le Havre CCI, Marketing Director).

On the local level, this historical background has repercussions on the everyday collaboration around three main topics: the frontier of territories, the customer bases and information sharing among CCIs. On the regional level, albeit the 2005 law, the main consequence consists of quarrels about which action is regional or local putting at stake the Regional CCI status. Table 3 presents the shape of the market before the introduction of Ecobiz and the practices associated.

Table 3. Status of market shape and marketing practices before Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices		Before Ecobiz
Market shape		Territorial division of customer base following conscription frontiers Autonomy of each CCI to develop actions of economic development fostering
Exchange practices	Strategic level	Non-merchant relation to market
	Operational level	One-to-many informative sessions on business administration training (passive clients) One-to-one diagnosis sessions on business administration training (active clients)
Representation practices	Strategic level	Based on elected Representatives (political) They form Representative committees to follow economic development fostering projects of interest
	Operational level	Based on experience from one-to-one meetings with clients Use of a CRM software on a qualitative basis (no statistics used to segment customer base)
Normalization practices	Strategic level	Top to bottom decision making based on a leader vision on an economic development fostering project
	Operational level	Strong hierarchical role of local middle managers

When Ecobiz is introduced in Normandy in 2004, three local CCIs, Rouen, Le Havre and Caen (belonging to the lower Normandy region compared to the higher Normandy region), were trying to merge some projects in order to prove to their Representatives and Presidents their ability to work together. Among the considered projects, Ecobiz appeared as one of the alternatives. But it was not chosen by the three Development Directors involved since the project raised more questions than answers, as the Caen CCI Development Director told.

Nevertheless, the Le Havre CCI President was enthusiastic about Ecobiz and decided to buy it for his CCI. His decision was made upon assumptions on the need for local businesses for a more connected collaboration with other local business, while leading a regional 'Economic Intelligence' committee with the help of the Regional CCI structure. This disruptive event is the one that led to the introduction of Ecobiz on the market although local CCIs were not ready to adopt it, nor the clients. In 2004 the Controversy begins.

#### PROBLEM FORMULATION AND TRADUCER

The President of the CCI of Le Havre bought Ecobiz in 2004. The platform was too expensive for a too small territory to be profitable. He decided to send his Development Director to the Regional CCI in order to find some help at the level of the whole Normandy territory. The Development Director knows well the Vice Director of the Regional CCI and convinces him to make the Regional CCI lead the project on the reasons of mass effect and size of territory.

The interlocutor at the Regional CCI was “well” chosen, consciously or unconsciously, by the Development Director since the Vice Director is known to find compromises. *“I have a service note here, written on November the 19<sup>th</sup>, which is called 'Ecobiz, Project for a regional deployment', in 2004, trying to think about the pros and cons of a regional deployment. We had to convince the other CCIs of the interest of that tool. Also the business model we could build to support this acquisition, this deployment.”* (Vice Director Regional CCI). The Regional CCI is mobilized by the CCI of Le Havre without much effort. It takes the lead and formulates the regional problem of Ecobiz on the cost sharing and the impulsion of a new organization based on the networking of companies and the CCIs.

#### MANDATORY PATH AND CONTROVERSY

Short before getting the Regional CCI to formulate the problem on a regional level, the Le Havre CCI created a Mandatory Path locally. It created in 2005 a steering committee composed of elected Representatives to define the positioning and business model of the platform. Along the sessions, the committee agreed with the managers of Le Havre CCI on the fact that the platform could not remain on the local level. The two reasons brought by the committee, as stated by its leader, were first a financial reason: *“The committee did not want that the platform cost anything, it foresaw something that would even bring revenues, so we had to make the two things converge towards a compromise between free access and services subject to charges in order to make the platform profitable.”* (Leader of Le Havre Ecobiz Committee). The second one lays upon territory reasons: *“If you want to put together clients and providers will not be necessarily present on the Le Havre platform, they can be located in Rouen, other can be located elsewhere, even anywhere on the globe, in short the Le Havre platform did not seem large scaled enough.”* (Leader of Le Havre Ecobiz Committee). The Le Havre Development Director had the key to formulate the problem to the Regional CCI, while guaranteeing his legitimacy thanks to the Representatives' work.

Making Ecobiz a mandatory path on a regional level was done by involving representatives on a regional level. These representatives were, for some of them, making part of the 'Economic Intelligence' steering committee mentioned in the context analysis. This steering committee had both institutional and geographical convergence objectives. Institutional since it involved representatives of the CCIs, who also were the customers, the businesses constituting the network of a CCI. Geographical, since it was constituted by representatives of every CCIs of the region. This steering committee was the reference on a political level and contributed to the nomination of spokesperson in each CCI involved in the project.

The problem formulation as the traducers put it and making Ecobiz a mandatory path, transforms the shape of the market from a territorial, autonomous one to a network one. CCIs of the region were not used to work together on a same project. CCI Clients were used to local offers, not regional ones. Table 4 shows the before and after Ecobiz status on the shape of the market.

Table 4. Change in the market shape since Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices	Before Ecobiz	After Ecobiz
Market shape	Territorial division of customer base following conscription frontiers Autonomy of each CCI to develop actions of economic development fostering	Discussions to put into question the territorial division of customer base CCIs form a network of competencies and have to collaborate on actions of economic development fostering

#### SPOKESPERSONS

The leader of Le Havre steering committee became a spokesperson in his professional network giving Le Havre CCI arguments to convince the other spokespersons that Ecobiz had success and could have more. *“When I was working on its development, the place it had in my mind and in the communication I was spreading towards my team, was strong.”* (Leader of Le Havre Ecobiz Committee). This individual became a spokesperson because of the role he was given, and so takes a place into the Enrollment and Mobilization step also, showing that the Controversy steps are not necessarily chronological.

The other spokespersons are in a quite straightforward manner the Development Directors of the other CCIs involved. Since the Mandatory Path was composed by Representatives of each CCI, the network constitution followed the hierarchical path. As the Development Director at Rouen CCI states it: *“The Presidents of each CCI committed themselves to the President of Le Havre CCI.”* (Development Director Rouen CCI). Once a President is committed, the Director is asked to have the project undertaken by his teams. And even though several critiques were raised by the Development Directors, the main intermediary, which was money, convinced them to deploy the product, regardless of their first reluctance.

#### SHAPING INVESTMENTS

As to establish the roles of the spokespersons, there was constituted in 2006 a Technical committee with one member of each CCI involved, usually the Development Director. This technical committee was the interlocutor of the traducer, the Regional CCI, and of the leader of the whole project, the Development Director of Le Havre CCI.

The Development Director of Le Havre CCI, by gathering these spokespersons was able to have every 6 weeks, meeting frequency of the technical committee, to get a global view of the different local interests. It allowed him to produce or get produced the intermediaries necessary to bond the agents together.

Once this technical committee gathered, the 'Economic Intelligence' steering committee dedicated to Ecobiz was dissolved leaving the traducers without the voice of the CCI representatives. This element will have consequences in the extension and irreversibility step. In the functioning of a CCI, the presence or absence of representatives in a committee shows how much a file is of importance for the businesses of a territory. As the Rouen Development Director explains, the thematic of a committee has an influence on the participation rate of representatives. Usually representatives are more present for

infrastructure topics, but they also are present for topics dedicated to the business development. Table 7 sums up the changes in representational practices at the strategic level.

Table 7. Change in the representation practices at the strategic level since Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices		Before Ecobiz	After Ecobiz
Representation practices	Strategic level	Based on elected Representatives (political) They form Representative committees to follow economic development fostering projects of interest	Based on elected Representatives (political) Reluctances by the Technical committee to form another Representative Committee. No feedback from Representatives, no representation of the market

#### INTERMEDIARIES

The first intermediary was produced by the Regional CCI and was basically the money. The product cost 190K€ (including 120K€ of straight acquisition + 70K€ of maintenance, hosting and operating budget), and before regionalization cost. This bill paying, engaging act by the Regional CCI made it invest in the shape of a technical committee as explained above.

The second intermediary is the price paid by each CCI making part of the technical committee. The calculation of the price was based on the tax rate paid by each CCI depending on the number of business constituting the customer base of a CCI. The Rouen CCI, with a base of 17000 businesses has a 0,3% tax rate. Reported to the total cost of the project, the Rouen CCI had to pay around 80K€ as the DevelopmentDirector recalls.

Another intermediary is the positioning of the product written on a one face sheet of paper and distributed to the local project leader in Rouen and in the network. With this intermediary, the members of the Rouen project were notified of the positioning and could start acting. The positioning consisted in dividing the platform into two parts, a free access one, where any business could read the local news and updates about the life of the platform, and a part subject to charges where a business had access to thematic communities (limited to three), a member directory, a showcase for 150€ per year. Table 5 shows how the change in the exchange relation to the market.

Table 5. Change in the exchange practices at the strategic level since Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices		Before Ecobiz	After Ecobiz
Exchange practices	Strategic level	Non-merchant relation to market	Merchant relation to the market (even though symbolic)

## ENROLLMENT AND MOBILIZATION

A role had to be taken by the agents involved. This is where the groups of agents as presented in the methodology part take their entire signification.

The strategic level group, i.e. the technical committee, had the role of making decisions, sharing the ideas and difficulties faced by the local teams and informing them of the decisions made and directions the project was taking. The decision role of the technical committee was the most difficult to achieve. In 2008, when asking what the technical committee does, the local project leader says: *“The technical committee has difficulties in making decisions, whether there are too many subjects on the agenda or one of the members was absent and they have to wait for another meeting, which pushes away a decision to four to five months.”* (Local Project Leader in Rouen). On the informing role, the local project leader in Rouen says that he has a global vision thanks to his Development Director. And the sharing role, the same individual is confident in the fact the points raised by the team are conveyed to the committee.

On the operational level, the members of the Ecobiz project were designated internally to work in a thematic community, based on their expertise area. This was made in every CCI and for a single community there were three, four or more web community managers representing each territory. A community coordinator volunteered to take the lead and manage the community on the regional level. This system had unevenly distributed results. In the communities where a consensus on its topic could be made showed the highest levels of cooperation. In the communities where the topic could be understood too differently from one business geographical network to another, the cooperation was nonexistent. For example, the community called 'Industrial Performance' covered distinct markets between Le Havre and Rouen. In Le Havre it had to be understood as the port industry, while in Rouen it had to be understood as the metal industry. The role of a community manager or a local project leader was not integrated, but added to the main job of the employees involved.

The role of Ecobiz during its existence was to initiate an organizational change both on the individual and the institutional levels. The community managers learnt and created new exchanges practices. In order to fill in the platform with content contributions had to be posted. It required the community managers to learn a new way of writing based on a more journalistic style: *“a more journalistic writing style, this is a new competency.”* (Rouen CCI, Community manager 2). To write, the information gathering and synthesizing has to be more effective: *“When I read, I get to the heart of the matter, where is the main idea?”* (Rouen CCI, Community manager 2). This content helps the animation of a community, and within a community, smaller groups of professionals labeled 'Project Group', who gather around four times a year to discuss a specific problem: *“This type of animation is innovating. Animation in itself is not new to us, but the logic underlying a work group animation is. You have to make problems emerge, structure the thought, federate and build a group in order to make it produce collectively.”* (Rouen CCI, Community manager 2). Leading a work group implies beforehand recruiting members among local businesses.

Compared to what was done before, the recruiting activity for Ecobiz means selling the platform. The selling activity is not well handled by employees since they are not used to it. The tactic elaborated to help them, takes the shape of business breakfasts where Ecobiz is presented and sold.

The last new activity emerging from Ecobiz is the regional coordination based on networking. This coordination is the practice directly linked to the change of market shape involved by Ecobiz. Indeed, the cross-functional way of working was, at the time of Ecobiz, a practice relatively new within a CCI. Getting to a cross-functional collaboration among CCIs was a gap to be crossed by the operational and strategic levels. This would lead to perfect network-based collaboration in a world defined by the local project manager as a “*Care Bear world*” (Rouen Local project manager). Table 6 summarizes the changes at the operational level with the Ecobiz introduction.

Table 6. Change in the practices at the operational level since Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices		Before Ecobiz	After Ecobiz
Exchange practices	Operational level	One-to-many informative sessions on business administration training (passive clients) One-to-one diagnosis sessions on business administration training (active clients)	Two previous levels on on-going activities One-to few problem-solving and experience sharing on business administration training (active clients and active animator)
Representation practices	Operational level	Based on experience from one-to-one meetings with clients Use of a CRM software on a qualitative basis (no statistics used to segment customer base)	No previous experience Still no use of the CRM software Use of subscription and web statistic indicators at the end of the project

It is on the operational level that the mobilization rooted itself. The local leader scheduled regular meetings with different spheres of actors. The Individual project review gathered the community manager, the Rouen local leader and the Development Director and was helped by a review of the road map. The Rouen community managers’ meetings consisted in sharing the everyday life with Ecobiz between the operational members only. It is in these meetings that much of the work was done to build tools, like commercial tools. The Rouen Ecobiz meetings, where department heads and the Development Director were present had a more internal communication purpose. On a regional scale, the managers of a thematic community gathered once a month to decide what the road map for the next month was.

#### EXTENSION AND IRREVERSIBILITY

The network extended nevertheless on the strategic level thanks to the efforts brought by the technical committee to communicate and foster motivation. To do so, the Le Have Development Director scheduled several seminars gathering different employees and department heads among the CCIs. These seminars helped recruiting new ‘Ecobizians’. Even though they did not know yet how to integrate Ecobiz in their activities, the challenge consisting in making Ecobiz a new alternative offer was won, since it became a “*tool that one can use if necessary*” (Rouen Local Project leader). At the same time, a partnership was signed with a national bank to finance a part of the platform costs. In exchange to the 150K€ brought by the bank, the institutions committed to the quantitative objective of recruiting 1000 members per year for three years, from 2006 to 2009. The 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2008, 561 paying

members out of the 3175 total members were listed by the local project leader. The 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2008, during a technical committee meeting, between 600 and 700 paying members were listed. Efforts were provided also internally on the operational level. The first generation of community managers took to heart to train outsiders of the project. For example, one of them scheduled once a month a one-hour meeting with her colleagues to deal with a practical topic like ‘how to post a document on Ecobiz’, spreading the usage across people within a CCI.

On the institutional level, again the Le Havre Development Director played an important role in extending the network. He used his interpersonal network to convince the Caen Development Director to take part in Ecobiz, first by inviting him to the Technical committee meetings, second by giving him arguments in order to negotiate with his hierarchy.

In this sense, more and more individuals were involved in Ecobiz, even though not enough to stabilize the organizational change. One more CCI from a nearby region got involved, complicating the institutional relations. However, these two elements enabling Ecobiz to establish an irreversible process of network locking-in.

## VIGILANCE

In 2008, after the series of events mentioned above, the vigilance of the Technical committee was jeopardized. At that time the Director of the Regional CCI retired and was replaced by the former Director of the Versailles CCI. He had implemented Ecobiz on its territory with a specific positioning. The Versailles Ecobiz was the network of the networks. It hosted any business network, whether it was thematic or territorial. The business networks hosted by Ecobiz already existed in a physical form before creating a virtual space on the platform, the website being a simple documentary base. In Versailles, this positioning was reputed to make the platform a success. The new Director of the Regional CCI, became easily the new traducer and formulated the problem in a new way: If the stakeholders of the project wanted it to be a success from a quantitative point of view, they had to change the positioning of the platform to better stick to the market reality.

A whole new process of translation began, with consequences on the individuals, on the platform, but not on the institutions. Indeed, the Rouen local project leader became the regional project leader helping communicate the new positioning of the platform, manage the new technical team and sell the platform to local business networks. Ecobiz, whose technical problems were too important, was killed and during the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2010, a new platform was born named ‘Merezo’ (Play on words meaning: My Networks). The institutional obstacle to a cross-functional collaboration was hedged by closing the thematic communities. The role of community manager was only dedicated to the few employees who had the competencies and willingness to keep leading project groups, but were not labeled Ecobiz anymore. The other community managers came back to their former occupation consisting in leading thematic or territory physical clubs, for which, if desired by the members, a virtual space could be opened on Merezo. Table 8 shows how Ecobiz brought a change in normalization practices at both strategic and operational levels.

Table 8. Change in the normalization practices since Ecobiz introduction

Shape of market and marketing practices		Before Ecobiz	After Ecobiz
Normalization practices	Strategic level	Top to bottom decision making based on a leader vision on an economic development fostering project	No decision making on projects Rely on regional project leader
	Operational level	Strong hierarchical role of local middle managers	Local middle managers being removed from the organization chart Rely on the regional project leader

#### TRANSPARENCY

The transparency, not as a step, but as a process evolving all along the story of the platform played an important role into the arrival of the new traducer. Too much transparency or not enough cannot be determined. In fact, the back and forth between the technical committee members on the positioning topic contributed to the development of uncertainty among the operational members. The place of Ecobiz into the strategy of each CCI was not clear, having managerial consequences. The local middle managers did not know how to integrate these new practices to the old ones, for which the employees had formal objectives. It had been asked by the operational members to be given a job function list and to have Ecobiz included in their formal objectives. The innovation was alternatively considered as a concept and a tool by the technical committee, preventing them from being able to manage it as a real product, as they had done before for other products. Finally, the story of the lobbying process engaged by the President of Le Havre CCI was associated to the noun Ecobiz and contributed to the image of an imposed project, for which a new start became necessary.

#### CONCLUSION

##### EMERGENT DISCUSSION

The first results of this research seem to reinforce the interconnection between the different practices and between the different levels of practice (collective and individual) and their influence on market shaping as Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) stated. On the context of a new mode of exchange introduction, and in the case studied more specifically some practices seem to be under-represented while others tend to come to the foreground. Indeed, the exchange practices are the ones that are subject to standardization by the work of the operational agents. The efforts made in favor of the teaching, sharing and communicating the exchange practices put them, during the life of the platform in its first version, at the core of the network building. On the other hand the representational practices were almost absent of the network building and by extension did not help in the stabilization of the network. There were no data available on membership statistics, no counting process was implemented and there seemed to be no expressed needs for it. On a more qualitative level, the representatives were taken away from the network, leaving the agents without a market vision on the platform. The normalizing practices were then unable to take any shape since no control of performance could give a feedback on what should become the norm or not.

When dealing with the variation of agents (Hagberg & Kjellberg 2010) some assessments can be made. Within a mandatory, hierarchical constitution of agents, a more informal one took place. Based on their abilities and willingness to make the platform a success, two groups of agents arose that contributed to operational and strategic changes. The operational group of agents was composed by the local project leader and one of the community managers. Their program was to bring Ecobiz in the general use. While the community manager used teaching skills to spread the exchange practices linked to that new mode of exchange, the local project leader used interpersonal and project management skills to favor regional collaboration at the operational level. The strategic change even though not fully attained on the regional level, had the opportunity with Ecobiz to become acted within Rouen CCI. The Development Director helped with the Rouen community managers succeeded in making cross-functional collaboration and management by objectives become close to an organizational norm.

On a more abstract level, the immersion into the peculiar world of Chambers of Commerce gave rise to a discussion on the existence of a fourth practice. A Chamber of Commerce is at the edge of two systems. It can be considered as a civil service or as a consulting firm. In order to know what its role and objectives are, the agents that make it up use a discourse practice. What it produces is intangible and it is not subjected to any results obligation. What constitutes a fact is what is said about it and how it is said. The fact of naming someone 'Project leader', at least in this context, make that individual take the lead without, at least for a while, writing it down or putting the words in act by the person who pronounced them. It raises the question on 'How to do things with words' as Austin (1970) puts it. Then, the discourse practice could be itself at the edge of the representational and normalizing practices and refer to Foucault's work (1975). The power that rose from the discussions of a few onto the many that participated in the network building of Ecobiz can be seen as a clue of the power of the discourse. A new path of research is opened to go investigate into the strategic management field on the discourse practice.

#### MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

On a theoretical level, this work tries to further understand the concept of market shaping and how the introduction of a new mode of exchange can influence the chain of translation of agents. On a methodological level, this research adopted an approach based on the sociology of translation, which allows taking into account not only the actors, but all agents and their role in the process. This method allowed the researcher to take into account both the complexity of the case while trying to extract the very substance of it. On a managerial level, the aim of the study is to help decision makers and managers in a CCI network to identify which agents to withdraw, add or modify from/in a virtual collaborative project and when.

#### MAIN LIMITS

On a theoretical level, the main limit lays in the narrow conceptual landscape the practices were defined. A larger spectrum of definitions would have helped identifying other practices as understood in other fields of research. On a methodological level, making an extract of more global research is frustrating since other perspectives cannot be presented, therefore withdrawing part of the richness of the data. Even though the ten steps of the Sociology of Translation was a very helpful tool to present the results, the format chosen here does not completely respect the guidelines provided by the Sociology of Translation, which is 'description, description, description', withdrawing a part of the richness of the case.

## FUTURE STEPS

In an inductive research process, the next step is to open the horizon of interpretation possibilities, trying to connect the case structure to an existing theory or trying to build elements of a new one. If one wants to use the Sociology of Translation, it may be possible to go further than what was done here. For example, within each step of the translation, one can apply the variation of agents model (Hagberg & Kjellberg 2010) and find out what networks can be built within the network.

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