

Focus on... intersectoral action



Linking processes and effects of intersectoral action on living environments

LOCAL INTERSECTORAL ACTION GENERATES TANGIBLE TRANSFORMATIONS IN LIVING ENVIRONMENTS.

THESE TRANSFORMATIONS REPRESENT RELEVANT LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMUNITIES.

THE EFFECTS OBSERVED ARE RELATED TO THE LOCAL DYNAMICS OF CONCERTED ACTION.

MODELS MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO ILLUSTRATE THE LINKING OF TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES LEADING TO VARIOUS OBSERVED EFFECTS.

Living in a low-income neighbourhood with rental housing that is unaffordable and in poor repair, with unsafe streets and with few green spaces, is to live in an environment unfavorable to residents' health. Local intersectoral action is a popular strategy in promoting the transformation of living environments to remedy living conditions that lead to health inequalities. But what do we know about its outcomes? Researchers at the Centre Léa-Roback conducted a study on the effects of local intersectoral action by working with partners at the Montreal Initiative for Local Social Development. Together, they monitored three Community Intersectoral Committees over a five-year period (2011-2016). Below are the highlights from this research.

As the 21st century gets underway, much work remains to improve living conditions in low-income communities. Admittedly, local intersectoral action cannot replace robust public policies for reducing social inequalities and fostering health equity. These two strategies are, rather, complementary.

Working with people to improve living conditions in their neighbourhoods empowers them and constitutes a strategy advocated by both international experts and local practitioners. In 1986, the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* proposed that maintaining and improving population health requires the involvement of different sectors of society (health, school, municipal, community, etc.) in order to address social determinants of health such as education, housing, employment, and income. Intersectoral action (IA) is thus encouraged as an action strategy for implementation at all levels of intervention, from central to local. The World Health Organization has advocated IA as a priority course of action to reduce social and health inequalities (Closing the gap in a generation, 2009).

While this strategy is defined by certain principles, it comes with no instructions for its implementation. Rather, it calls for innovation in the face of uncertainty. It entails bringing together various actors concerned with the needs of their community and takes place in a unique local context that is constantly evolving.

Given these characteristics, implementing local intersectoral action can be complex and its outcomes are often uncertain. This is why documenting its effects, and accounting for how effects are produced, is of great interest, but also a challenge. Beyond simple description, this study models local intersectoral action by demonstrating how it functions to generate improvements in communities. This study is the result of a collaboration with the Montreal Initiative for Local Social Development. It was conducted over a span of five years (2011–2016) and focused on the practices of neighbourhood networks called Community Intersectoral Committees, in Montréal.

COMMUNITY INTERSECTORAL COMMITTEES AS A PLACE TO STUDY LOCAL INTERSECTORAL ACTION

In Montréal, 30 Community Intersectoral Committees promote local social development and support joint action leveraging collective capacity for the betterment of local neighbourhoods. These committees, some in existence for over 30 years, are supported by the Montreal Initiative for Local Social Development. With their mission and their history, Community Intersectoral Committees offered an excellent setting for studying the processes and effects of local intersectoral action.

What is intersectoral action?

Intersectoral action is a relationship built on a voluntary basis between actors from different backgrounds with a view to achieving common goals. It involves creating inter-dependencies between sector-specific interventions or the development of new broader interventions. At the local level, intersectoral action is usually deployed according to a community or regional approach and it mobilizes a wide range of actors. The concept of intersectoral action concerns to various sectors of public action. It also refers to relationships between the three main sectors of society: government and public organizations, the private sector, and civil society - along with hybrid sectors, such as philanthropy, which mixes characteristics of the private sector, the public sector, and civil society.

To the unacquainted observer, these local committees' practices of exchange, democratic consensus-building, and collective decision-making may appear undirected. Even their actors themselves sometimes have difficulty grasping directions and scope along the way. One reason for this is that local intersectoral action is a long-term process. In reality, it involves both large-scale actions and daily tasks such as a follow-up call to understand the reasoning behind an action or the perspective of an actor on a situation. Employing a collaborative approach, intersectoral committees seek to identify common projects with overlapping missions, while forefronting overarching interests of the common good. Consequently, local intersectoral action is rarely spontaneous! In contrast, it results from daily sustained efforts among actors. It evolves according to specific local dynamics, and opportunities as they arise. Each community has its own reality, capacity, points of leverage, and solutions.

HOW DOES LOCAL INTERSECTORAL ACTION PRODUCE EFFECTS?

While actors can usually identify positive changes in the living environment associated with their practice, it is not always easy to account for how they brought about these effects. It can be challenging to focus beyond a committee's routine activities (meetings, environmental scan, diagnoses, priority-setting, etc.), to identify the linkages between local intersectoral action dynamics and observable transformations in communities.

This very question is central to the research study discussed here: **How does local intersectoral action produce observable transformations in the community?**

After five years of closely observing the concerted action of three Community Intersectoral Committees, the research team identified several local improvements associated with the action of those Committees. In addition, they were able to explain how neighbourhood improvements resulted from the collective-action processes of each committee.

The action of Community Intersectoral Committees generates tangible transformations.

By the end of the study, researchers had identified several transformations in the neighbourhoods associated with the Committees' local intersectoral action. The list included, but was not limited to:

- the greening of parking lots;
- the construction of a community greenhouse, including a socio-professional integration component;
- the conversion of a railway right-of-way into a bike and pedestrian path;
- the installation of park benches on a grocery-store route; and
- the marking of pavement at pedestrian crossings in school zones, designed with young people.

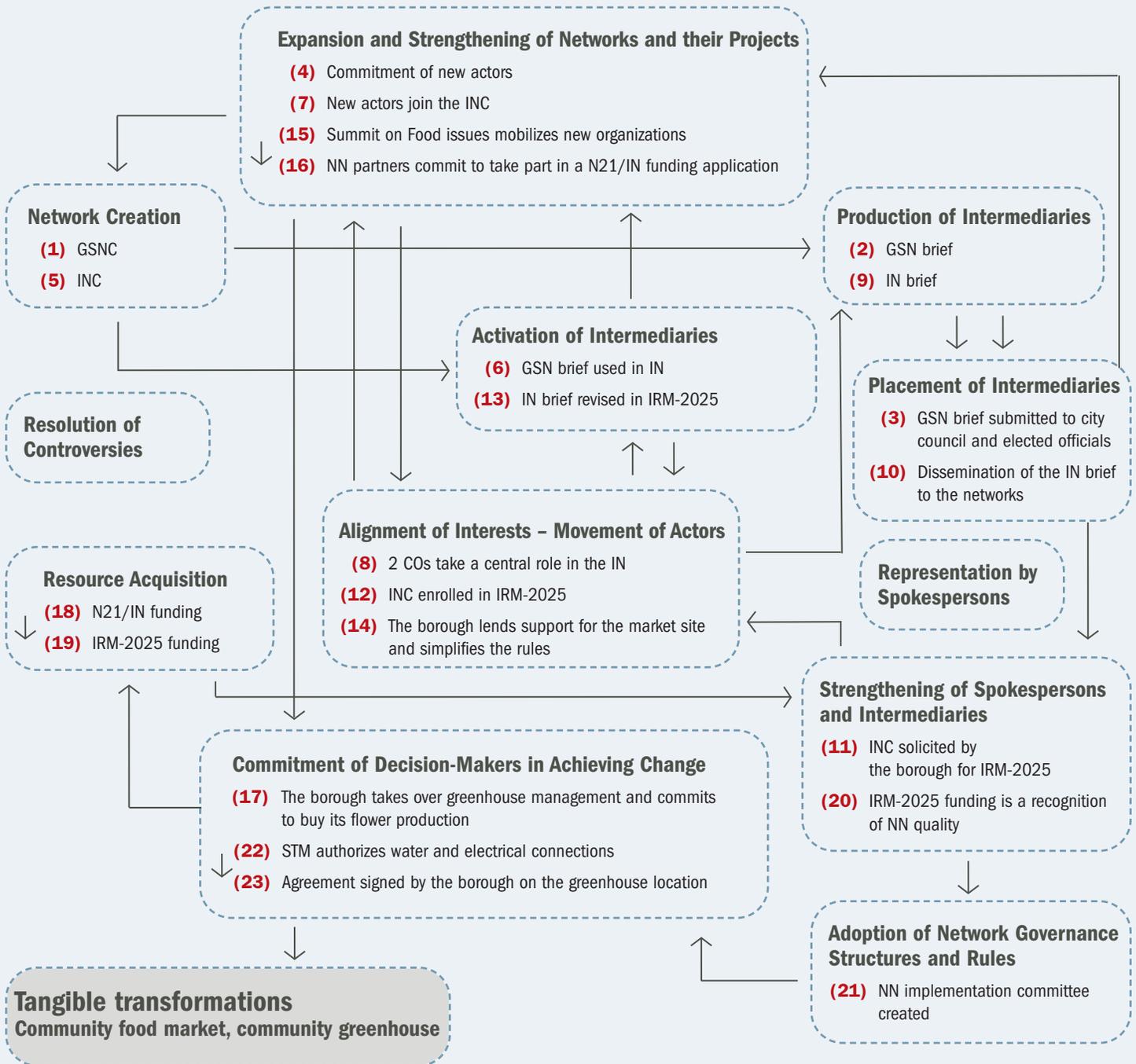
Clearly, the work of the Community Intersectoral Committees leads to observable local transformations that promote health and well-being in local community contexts. When aggregated and in combination, these transformations make community contexts healthier to live in, even if change seem modest in isolation.

Since they are anchored in community needs, opportunities, and constraints, the transformations observed are unique in their correspondence to local community dynamics, culture, and history. Effectively, the transformations result from a rich, complex dialogue between actors from different backgrounds, including residents, regarding the needs and capacities of their community. They also carry imprints of this collective perspective, which is a distinctive feature of the intervention of the Community Intersectoral Committee.

The dialogue facilitated by the Community Intersectoral Committee within their community is by nature intersectoral and multi-network. This dialogue takes the form of a participatory democracy, based on an "integrated" or concerted analysis of the issues, "from the bottom up," contributing to an increased local capacity for action. This emergent character distinguishes the action of the Committees from that of other intermediate-level citizen consultation bodies, which often deal with subjects defined unilaterally by actors in positions of power.

Let's take a look at how local transformations reflect this dialogue.

Modeling of the Process of the Centre-Sud Community Intersectoral Committee



The main environment transformations related to the NN are:

- 1) Refurbishing of the community food market: installation of refrigeration equipment, cultural and educational programming, and extended market hours;
- 2) establishing a community greenhouse: production, processing, and distribution of low-cost garden products; community kitchen, workshops on urban agriculture and the environment; jobs and occupational training for young people.

Production of Effects

Case — Community Food Market and Greenhouse

The action occurs on three levels: the neighbourhood, the borough and the City of Montréal. Green and safe neighbourhoods (GSN) is one of the Community Intersectoral Committee's priorities for action.

SPRING 2012	(1) Creation of the GSN Committee (GSNC) (Network Creation). Based on an inventory of public consultations held in the neighbourhood from 2009 to 2012 and a consultation in 2012 on safety and green issues, (2) GSNC drafted a brief converging on the objectives of the Committee's 2011–2014 action plan (Production of Intermediaries).
MARCH-APRIL 2013	(3) The GSNC submitted this brief to the borough council. A counsellor invited the GSNC to submit the brief to city council and to government elected officials (Placement of Intermediaries). The GSNC initiated mobilization of all of the neighbourhood actors, which resulted in the commitment (4) of new actors (Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects).
MAY 2013	The City created a new program—Integrated Neighbourhood (IN) and the borough is one of the pilot sites. (5) The GSNC got involved by forming an IN Committee (INC) (Network Creation).
SEPTEMBER 2013	(6) The GSNC work and brief served as the basis for the IN process (Activation of Intermediaries) and (7) other actors joined the INC (Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects), (8) particularly two organizations who will assume a central role: Community Food Market (urban agriculture) and Urban Pathway (landscaping) (Alignment of Interests – Movement of Actors).
OCTOBER 2013	The INC submitted its (9) IN brief to the borough (Production of Intermediaries) (10) and also disseminated it to different networks (Placement of Intermediaries). This served as a means of promoting the community and public points of view and of influencing the borough and City.
MARCH 2014	(11) The borough encouraged the INC to subscribe to the City's Imaginer-Réaliser-Montréal-2025 (IRM-2025) program. This indicates the creditability acquired through the GSN and IN briefs circulating in the administration (Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects). (12) INC members found themselves enrolled in the IRM-2025 process (Alignment of Interests – Movement of Actors). (13) IN brief priorities were revised (Activation of Intermediaries); a consensus was established for a project focussing on greening and access to food; and an objective to prior priorities was added: increase local food offerings. After a number of iterations, the project received the City's approval. It included revitalization of the community food market located on the site of the local subway station at the entrance to the neighbourhood (with a lively public place) and the creation of a community greenhouse (production of plants, seeds, greens, and fine herbs) on a site to be designated. Establishing the project's eligibility and obtaining funding took more than a year of back and forth between the actors in IRM-2025, the borough, and the City. (14) The borough supported the choice of the site for the market and collaborated in obtaining the necessary agreements with Société de transport de Montréal (STM). It also played a significant role by streamlining the regulatory and construction process for the greenhouse (Alignment of Interests – Movement of Actors).
WINTER 2015	The Nurturing Neighbourhood (NN) project remained focused on the community food market and community greenhouse. It pursued outcomes in the areas of food security, greening, revitalization of a public place, occupational training, placement in horticulture, and education on urban agriculture. (15) The Community Intersectoral Committee organized a Summit on Food issues that mobilized members of the general public and businesses. In addition, it established connections between existing and future projects and involved many organizations that, to that point, hadn't had NN involvement (Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects).
SPRING 2015	Encouraged by the Community Intersectoral Committee, (16) the NN partners collaborated to submit a funding application to the City's Neighbourhood 21/IN program, targeting support of young people in occupational training at the greenhouse (Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects). (17) Desiring to play a major role in the project's visibility, the borough committed to take responsibility for the building of the greenhouse and committed to buying its flower production for annual distribution to residents (Commitment of Decision-Makers in Achieving Change). (18) This support guaranteed the City's approval of the proposal to Neighbourhood 21/IN and its funding (Resource Capturing).
JUNE 2015	(19) The NN project submitted to IRM-2025 was also approved by the City (Resource Capturing), (20) which serves as recognition of the quality of the work carried out (Strengthening of Spokespersons and Intermediaries). (21) An implementation Committee was formed (Network Setup and Governance).
NOVEMBER 2015	(22) (22) Permits for water and electrical connections were issued by the STM (Commitment of Decision-Makers in Achieving Change), allowing work to go forward in spring 2016.
WINTER 2016	(23) As the result of negotiations with a private company, the borough signed an agreement to formalize use of the land where the greenhouse would be built (Commitment of Decision-Makers in Achieving Change). NN partners continued their work to build and maintain cohesion among themselves and with the public with respect to the project and other activities carried out in the territory.

Montreal Initiative for Local Social Development

In operation since 2006, the Montreal Initiative is a program supporting local intersectoral action that brings together three regional funding bodies (Centraide of Greater Montreal, City of Montréal, and the Regional Public Health Agency CIUSSS du Centre-Sud territory of Montreal) with the Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition of Montreal, which represents the 30 local committees. This innovative program supports joint local action within a local area and funds a process, rather than programmed outcomes. It is left to each community to problematize their situation and to prioritize what local collective action will be undertaken.

Source:
http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/d_soci
http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/d_soci_al_fr/media/documents/cadre_reference_initiative_montrealise_15_juin_2015.pdf



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Second Action Area Self-Representing and Influencing Others

In order to carry out transformations that respond to local needs, the initial network develops a perspective on solutions while simultaneously working to enlist the engagement of key actors who can leverage action. In order to convey their ideas, collectives produce "intermediaries," which act as instruments of mobilization or influence. Intermediaries are documents directed outward with a purpose beyond simple information-sharing. They are strategic tools. They contain ideas to put forward for solidification or ideas that are already consolidated, for the purpose of promoted them among key actors. Also, community spokespersons make representations to key actors. In concert, intermediaries and spokespersons interact with external entities to influence and rally key actors to the positions of the community. In return, their interactions contribute to the legitimacy and credibility of the spokespersons and intermediaries.

This second area thus includes activities aimed at ensuring committee legitimacy and credibility, as well as encouraging the support of key actors in attaining committee objectives. This area has five related transitional outcomes.

Production of Intermediaries

Expression of convergent ideas (plans, reports, briefs) and positions (priorities, projects, solutions) in material form within a network. Intermediaries stabilize agreements and carry ideas and positions to other actors of interest, or networks, in order to achieve goals.

Placement of Intermediaries

Introduction of intermediaries into other networks, to decision-makers, to media, or into other intermediaries (e.g., briefs) where they can be taken up or adapted to mark progress towards achieving goals.

Activation of Intermediaries

Appreciation and use of intermediaries by actors of interest or networks.

Representation by Spokespersons

Actions/statements to communicate positions, generate interest, or influence the position and commitment of other strategic actors or networks with a view to achieving goals.

Strengthening of Spokespersons and Intermediaries

Reinforcing the legitimacy and credibility of spokespersons and the intermediaries they convey, ensuring that they are better recognized by the populations and groups on whose behalf they speak and taken into greater consideration by strategic actors.

Third Action Area Aligning Necessary Actors and Resources

In order for a transformation project to move past the discussion phase and become a community reality, the local committee promoting it must galvanize material as well as social resources. At a certain stage, the committee produces results. This is evident when new key actors join the committee, when funding or other resources are obtained, when a decision-making actor rallies behind the project proposed by the committee and commits for making the change happen.

This third action area involves the network in mobilizing key actors, as well as obtaining and allocating resources in order to accomplish its projects. This action area involves four transitional outcomes.

Alignment of Interests – Movement of Actors

Changes in position (opinions and points of view), engagement of actors in new roles, transformations in power relationships that promote collective action and achievement of the network's goals. These alignments and movements result from negotiations and power dynamics among the actors.

Resource Acquisition

Harnessing the resources necessary for the network's operation and to achieve its goals, specifically funding, labour, technical support, and expertise.

Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects

Recruiting new actors, adding nonhuman entities, strengthening ties within a network or between networks.

Commitment of Decision-Makers in Achieving Change

Commitment of actors holding the reins of decision-making and action, whether inside or outside a network (e.g., municipal services, businesses, nonprofits, community organizations) in producing effective changes in living environments.

CHAINS OF TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES FACILITATE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ACTION OF COMMUNITY INTERSECTORAL COMMITTEES

Remembering that local intersectoral action is a form of horizontal governance helps clarify how its outcomes relate specifically to its processes. The actors taking part in the action do so on a voluntary basis. Each actor has its or their own identity, mission, and specific interests. However, the objective is to focus on actions that go beyond individual missions, while integrating them at least in part. This is what often takes time.

Carrying out an action requires resources and key actors taking on active roles. In this context, the role of the Community Intersectoral Committee is to converge actors's viewpoints and to promote the achievement of joint local actions while reinforcing the empowerment of citizens and communities.

Once the significant actions in each case studied had been identified, **chains of transitional outcomes** became evident. Each significant action was coded according to one of the 12 transitional outcomes. This made it possible to trace the chain of transitional outcomes specific to each transformation observed in the living environments. The production of the effects of local intersectoral action obeys systemic dynamics in which specific sequences of transitional outcomes—whether they lead to effects or not—are adapted to the various contexts. The dynamics are considered systemic because the interactions and actions carried out by the network of actors are rooted in the various contexts in which they are produced (the neighbourhoods) and in which they evolve over time.

Chains of transitional outcomes have to be consolidate to move things forward. They may be interrupted or dropped, taken up by other networks of actors, or even crisscrossed. Even when they don't lead to a tangible transformation in the environment, they produce transitional outcomes that can be reintegrated in other efforts to achieve collective goals, as the context changes.

Models were produced to illustrate the chains of transitional outcomes leading to tangible transformations in the living environments. One such example is presented in the box on the centre pages.

CONCLUSION: POINTS OF REFERENCE FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE ADVANCEMENT OF LOCAL INTERSECTORAL ACTION

Whether via park benches, bike paths, a market-garden greenhouse, or community activities, local intersectoral action helps generate significant tangible transformations in living environments. Moreover, these effects correspond to a community's needs, culture, and history. Community Intersectoral Committees support these transformations by producing transitional outcomes that punctuate the progression of action to its effects. Such action is carried by collective vision that makes it strategic. It follows a systemic, but not linear, progression towards objectives in uncertainty context within which the key of change is through actor engagement. The identification of markers in the advancement of local intersectoral action shows that, in the long term, transitional outcomes are achieved. Furthermore, these transitional outcomes link together based on actor dynamics, according to their contexts, leading to transformations in living environments.

By focusing on the dynamics and strategic nature of intersectoral action, this study sheds light on key actions and moves forward the achievement of improved living environments. This advancement of knowledge offers a useful reference point that practitioners and other actors involved in local intersectoral action can use to reflect on their practices and to guide future action. Whether used retrospectively to study progress made or prospectively to map out next steps, these outcomes offer benchmarks to illustrate, describe, and understand the progression of local intersectoral action in its context, towards observable transformations in living environments. In short, these outcomes are a inspiring call for innovation and to revisit the design, analysis, and sharing of advances in the development of local communities.

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About This Study

Objective

Document the production of effects of local intersectoral action carried out by Community Intersectoral Committees in Montreal.

Method

Multiple case study, in three Community Intersectoral Committees in Montréal (2011–2016) and a **prospective study** providing real-time documentation of the progress of actions to observable transformations in the living environments.

Approach which combines theory and field work in modelling the production of effects of local intersectoral action.

Data processing. Reduction and analysis of four data sources (documents, observation notes, logbooks, and interviews) according to a coding system based on actor–network theory. Analysis of an initial case led to an inventory of directory transitional outcomes networks actors use to produce effects. This inventory was then consolidated by analysing three other cases. Models of the production of effects were produced to illustrate the chains of transitional outcomes leading to the various effects.

Funding

CIHR, 2011–2016: (ROH 211-215).
SSHRC Connection Grant (611-2019-1023) for the translation

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A publication of the Canada Research Chair in Community Approaches and Health Inequalities (CACIS), <https://chairecacis.org/> (CIHR funding 950-232541, RCHS0344)

Legal deposit:

ISSN 2292-1427

Focus on... intersectoral action. Linking processes and effects of intersectoral action on living environments (print)

ISSN 2292-1435

Focus on... intersectoral action. Linking processes and effects of intersectoral action on living environments (online)

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