

**Communication seminar on Meso approaches to agro-ecological transition – Montpellier –
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Title : Building the concept of meso : What can we learn about the role of intermediary actors for agroecological transition using functional analysis ?

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Summary : The concept of meso in agroecological transition studies is still less studied. Going beyond the static and descriptive perspective, in a dynamic perspective, it refers to the “intermediary” level between micro level, the one of individuals, and the macro level, the one of policies. This dynamic perspective highlights the top-down flow and the bottom-up flow of interactions. The study, based on dynamic approaches (historical and functional approach) gives an insight on the the role of intermediary actors for agroecological transition in the context of a developing country. The research question was : how to evaluate the performance of agricultural innovation system through the analysis of Innovation Support Services (ISS). It reveals how the objective of performance in an innovation system can be transmitted to individual actors, and how the constraints of those actors can be taken into account in the policies, through the lens of the analysis of functions activated by innovation support services. We thus suggest that the concept of meso captures the functions activated between the macro level and the micro level.

During the study, we observe classical actors such as the State, Private companies, and Research Institutes contributing to intermediary functions. They contribute, as classically, to the transposition of macro policies’ objectives to the micro level through the mobilization of meso actors such as private companies. It can be the orientation towards new varieties or production systems through subventions and training or the transposition of biopesticide production norms to private companies. The functions they activated were then the networking for the diffusion of resources (F₃), the mobilization of resources (F₆) and the coalition of advocacy (F₇). We also observe new actors such as Civil society and communities. They contribute to taking into account micro-level preoccupations to macro level by working for political recognition of the innovations. That led to law text regulating the definition and practice of organic agriculture for instance. In that context, there is little work toward transmitting constraints from the micro level to the macro level.

In the context of developing countries, classical and new actors can be taken into account in the landscape of the meso level. The analysis of innovation support services through functional analysis highlights the constitution, the role, and the place of the meso level through functions activated. In an innovation system, we define the meso level as the “linker” between two polarities of actors : the one defining the macro-orientation and the individual ones implementing the innovation. The functional approach gives a simultaneous perspective on the macro-meso-micro and the micro-meso-macro interactions. Each level can activate functions. From the macro to the micro level, those functions could be to transmit policies’ objectives, from the micro to the macro level, those functions could be to integrate the constraints of the individual actors.

The functional analysis approach highlights the importance of neglected actors at a meso level such as communities and civil society which need to be reinforced. It thus opens a field of research on whether specific functions are constituting the meso level in influencing the agroecological transition. However, the meso level on its own can have hindrances that influence policies. It is not only an “intermediary”.

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