

Grassroots sustainability initiatives and the evolution of initiative practices

[WORK IN PROGRESS: PLEASE DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHORS' PERMISSION]

Wouter Spekkink^{*†ⁱ}, Jaco Quist^{*} & Udo Pesch

^{*} Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management

[†] The University of Manchester, Sustainable Consumption Institute

ⁱ Corresponding author: w.a.h.spekkink@tudelft.nl

1 Introduction

In efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of our societies, the practices that people adopt in their everyday life clearly demand our attention. Daily life routines are a strong determinant of household consumption patterns (Caeiro, Ramos and Huisinigh 2012), which are shown to give rise to more than 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and between 50% and 80% of total resource use (Ivanova et al. 2015), as well as an increasing quantity of waste production (Druckman, Sinclair and Jackson 2008). Given the impact that our everyday behaviour and its associated consumption patterns has on the environment, it is urgent that we understand how they can be transformed sustainably to reduce the environmental footprint of our societies (Shove 2004). In the FP7 funded project GLAMURS (Green Lifestyles, Alternative Models, and Upscaling Regional Sustainability), which ran from 2014 to 2016¹, one of the leading hypotheses was that grassroots sustainability initiatives provide models for more sustainable lifestyles, or aspects thereof, and that these models may inspire larger scale changes towards sustainable lifestyles. Grassroots sustainability initiatives can be defined as groups of “activists and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development [...] that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved” (Seyfang and Smith 2007, p. 585)². In the GLAMURS project we studied the novel bottom-up solutions developed in initiatives in 7 regions across Europe, and we developed visions and models that explored the role these solutions might play in sustainability transitions (Dumitru & García Mira 2016).

In this paper we build on three observations made during the GLAMURS project. First, with the exception of some of the sustainability initiatives we engaged with (e.g., ecovillages), the initiatives we studied tended to be organised around particular (sorts of) practices, such as repairing, energy practices, and growing food. Rather than trying to radically transform complete lifestyles, the initiatives more usually had the more modest aim of trying to influence specific practices in their local community. Second, these *initiative practices*, as we will refer to them in the remainder of this paper, can usually be traced to various other (configurations of) practices that serve as sources of inspiration, some positive and some negative. For example, the practice of repairing as it occurs in Repair Cafés takes positive inspiration from repairing as a hobby and from the social interactions that occur in ‘regular’ cafés, while it takes negative inspiration from wasteful design practices and costly commercial repair services of companies, and from the fact that nowadays people tend to throw out and/or replace broken devices that could still have been repaired. In this sense, the practices around which initiatives are organised can be understood as *translations* of various existing practices. In section 2 we

discuss how we can use the “radically simplified” perspective of Shove et al. (2012, p. 23) on social practices as integrations of material, competence and meaning elements, combined with Spurling et al.’s (2013) discussion of three types of intervention to change practices, to model these translations as the *breaking and making of linkages between practice elements*. Third, although different initiatives of the same type (e.g., different Repair Cafés) typically also engage in the same type of practices (e.g., repairing), there are notable differences across initiatives in the way that these practices are structured. In other words, different initiatives tend to produce somewhat different *translations* of practices. As we discuss in more detail in section 2 of this paper, we propose that the commonalities are primarily due to two overlapping reasons: (1) initiatives of the same type address similar problems, and (2) initiatives of the same type take inspiration from each other through *replication*, where existing initiatives inspire other people to set up similar initiatives elsewhere (Boyer 2015; Seyfang 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012; Seyfang and Longhurst 2013; 2016; Smith 2007). The differences, we propose, are primarily due to specific local circumstances in which new initiatives are set up.

The main aim of this paper is develop some conceptual instruments that can be used to (1) model the way in which grassroots sustainability initiatives translate practices, (2) identify dimensions of translation processes that allow us to distinguish between different types of translation, and (3) thereby provide a framework that can be used to understand how initiative practices evolve over time. In the next chapter we outline the basic conceptual building blocks that we use to develop our ‘practice-oriented’ understanding of translation. First, we briefly introduce the simplified schema of social practices as integrations of material, competence and meaning elements (Shove et al. 2012). We then discuss different types of interventions through which deliberate change may occur, building on the work of Spurling et al. (2013). We then discuss our ideas on how this relates to translation of practices, specifically in the context of grassroots sustainability initiatives. We then further develop our concept of translation in another chapter, where we build on empirical material obtained in our studies of Repair Cafés in the Netherlands to identify some specific mechanisms that underlie the translation of practices. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the framework, its limitations, and how it might be used in future research.

2 Social practices and translations

2.1 SOCIAL PRACTICES - A SIMPLIFIED FRAMEWORK

The commonly used label of ‘social practices’ somewhat hides the fact that the views subsumed under it are quite diverse (Schatzki 2001; Reckwitz 2002; Welch 2017). Based on his attempt to work out the main characteristics of practice theories, Reckwitz (2002) suggests to define a social practice as “a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249). Most often, the concept is used to refer to everyday practices such as cooking, doing the laundry, shopping, showering, gardening, driving a car, and etcetera. What practice theories generally have in common is a focus on such practices as the main units of analysis in studies of social behaviour (Reckwitz 2002; Hargreaves 2011). Another common feature of practice theories is that practices are clearly recognized as entities distinct from the individuals that perform them (Welch 2017; Southerton & Welch 2015), often giving practices primacy over individual rationality and conscious reflection (Miettinen et al. 2012). Individuals are recast as *carriers* of practice that help (re)constitute practices by performing them. The behaviour of individuals is thus understood in terms of performances of practices, rather than as the expression of the individual’s private values, beliefs, or attitudes (Welch 2017). As Reckwitz’s (2002) definition suggests, the ends for the sake of which practices are performed, their normative and affective implications, and the understandings underlying them are all understood to be aspects of practices, rather than of the individuals performing them (Schatzki 1996).

Shove et al. (2012) developed a simplified, but highly useful framework that models social practices as integrations of three types of practice elements (also see Shove and Pantzar 2005):

- Material: Objects, infrastructure, tools, hardware and the body.
- Competence: know-how, background knowledge, and understanding.
- Meaning: mental activities, emotion, and motivational knowledge.

Social practices are understood as active integrations of these elements, thereby bringing into focus the relationships (or interactions) between them (see figure 1). The authors use car-driving in the USA in the 1900–1910s as an illustrative example, suggesting that the somewhat troublesome car engines (material) co-defined the kind of skills required to drive cars, which included a certain level of mechanical expertise and repair skills, in addition to skills like steering and braking (competence). The mechanical challenges also meant that driving was often seen as somewhat of an adventure in these years (meaning). The relationships between practice elements thus stand for how

integrated practice elements shape each other, giving the practice its basic character (Shove et al. 2012).

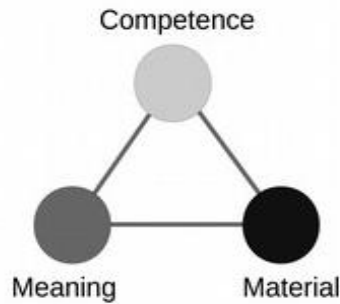


Figure 1: Practices as active integrations of meaning, competence and material. The figure is based on figures illustrated in Shove et al. (2012).

2.2 PRACTICE CHANGE AND TRANSLATION

The framework of *practices as integrations of elements* is highly useful for studying how practices evolve³, with a focus on how their elements change over time. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the performance of a practice itself is transformative, because the elements continuously shape each other. Also, there is always room for variation in the exact way that practices are performed, as not all carriers “prove to be faithful and reliable servants” (Shove et al. 2012, p. 138) Without denying the relevance of these more subtle sources of change in practices, we are interested specifically in intentional innovations of practice, brought about by deliberately *breaking and making linkages between practice elements*. Ideas on such intentional changes have been explored before by Spurling et al. (2013), who distinguish three types of intervention in practices (also see Welch 2017):

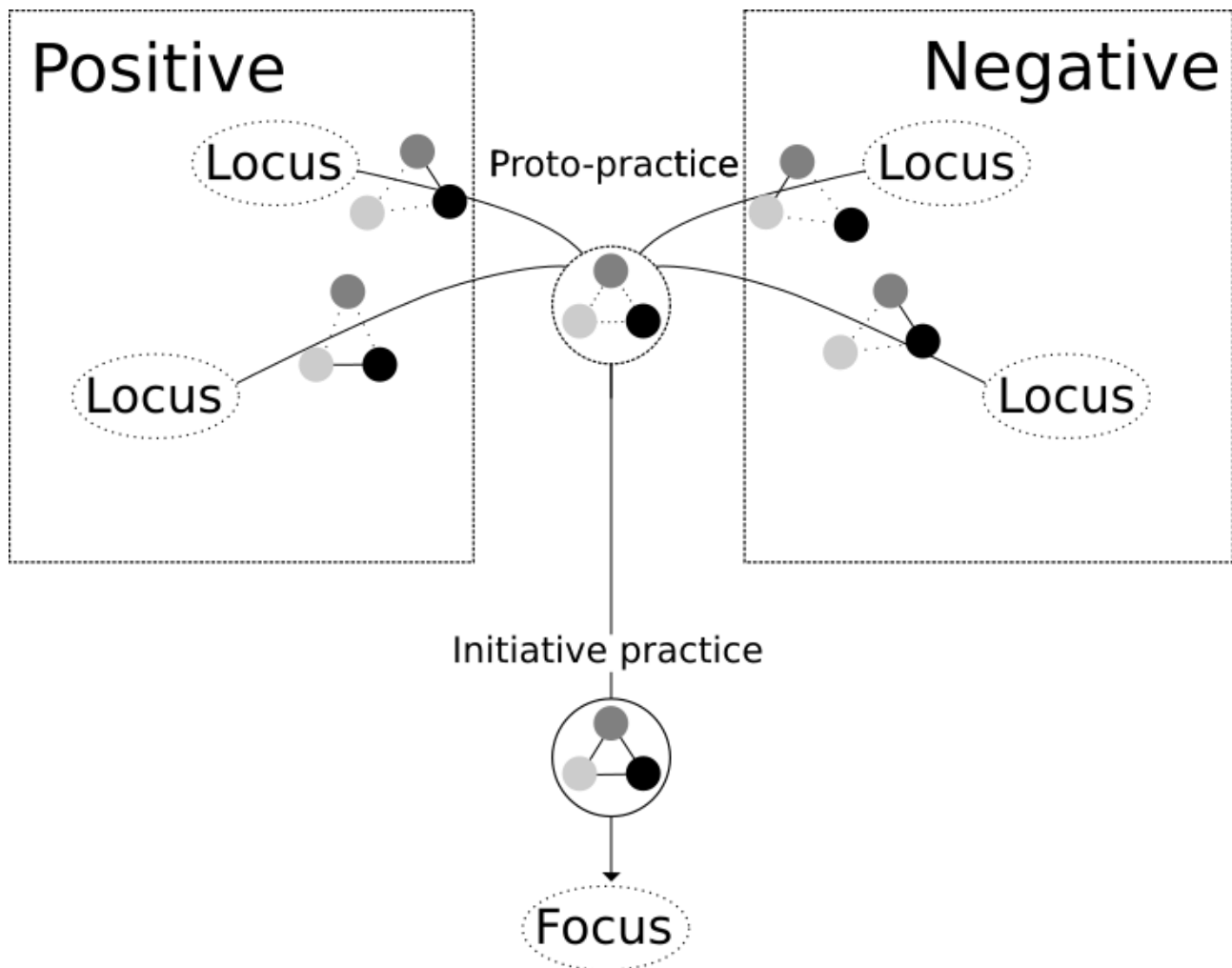
1. *Re-crafting* practices involves changing specific elements of practices (e.g., drinking coffee from a mug, instead of drinking coffee from a plastic cup);
2. *Substituting* practices involves replacing practices entirely with other practices that fulfil similar purposes (e.g., replacing car driving with riding a bicycle);
3. *Changing how practices interlock* focuses on changing how different practices hang together so that change ripples through interconnected practices (e.g., allowing work from home to reduce the need for people to drive to the office).

Our understanding of translation overlaps a great deal with this typology of three types of intervention. To some extent, grassroots sustainability initiatives, and the initiative practices they develop can be understood as attempts to intervene in practices of every day life that are deemed

unsustainable (cf. Smith 2007). However, grassroots sustainability initiatives typically do not attempt to change or substitute practices directly. Instead, they develop ‘alternative’ initiatives practices that typically also become tied to the context of the initiative. Thus, rather than changing (elements of) existing practices, grassroots sustainability initiatives translate them into something new.

In this sense, our concept of translation puts additional emphasis on the idea that “each ‘new’ combination of elements and practices is in some sense an emergent outcome of those that went before” (Shove et al. 2012, p. 125). Loosely based on Schatzki (2005), we think of any practice being situated in particular *sites* (wider complexes of practices) that form a context for practices, at the same time being constituted by those practices. That is, the context and the contextualised give each other a particular character. In translation, practices or practice elements get abstracted from their original context (linkages with other practices and/or elements) are broken, a process we will simply refer to as abstraction⁴. Abstracting practices and elements from their context means that they will lose some of their original character. A different character is given to them when they are integrated into their new context.

To distinguish between the *sources* of translations, and their *destination*, we use the concepts of *locus* and *focus*. A locus is thus a site from which a translation draws its inspiration, and a focus is a site in which the translated (initiative) practice becomes embedded. As we demonstrate in the next chapter, we can expect the translation of initiative practices to have multiple loci, whereas the focus is the grassroots sustainability initiative (as a complex of practices), and the wider complex of practices in which the initiative itself is embedded. Moreover, we propose that a basic distinction can be made between *negative* and *positive* loci. The negative loci are ‘problematic sites’ that grassroots sustainability initiatives try to be an alternative for. Similar to Smith’s (2007) green niches⁵, grassroots sustainability initiatives can be understood to develop their practices in response to sustainability problems they perceive in what might be called ‘mainstream practices’. However, to develop their alternatives, we argue, grassroots sustainability initiatives also draw positive inspiration from other sites (we offer illustrative examples in the next chapter).



The grassroots sustainability initiative and its wider context

Figure 2. Positive and negative loci, and the translation into a new initiative practice.

2.3 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES ACROSS INITIATIVES

Figure 2 visually summarises some of the ideas we discussed so far. What we did not address yet is what our perspective can tell us about the reasons for similarities and differences that we find across different initiatives of the same type. For the similarities our perspective suggests two slightly different, but overlapping reasons: First, initiatives of the same type address similar problems, and in that sense may directly share some of their negative loci. However, a second reason is that initiatives also become loci for each other, which we suggest is the basic mechanism underlying *replication* as described in grassroots innovation literature (Boyer 2015; Seyfang 2010; Seyfang and

Haxeltine 2012; Seyfang and Longhurst 2013; 2016; Smith 2007). To some extent, in *replication*, existing initiatives can be understood to play the role of *both negative and positive* loci for new initiatives of the same type, because the problems to which initiatives respond become embedded in their practices as motivational elements. In this sense, when initiatives serve as the loci for new initiatives (replications), they may pass on their negative sources of inspiration via the translated initiative practices that they pass on.

For the differences across initiatives we also see two main reasons. First, as Seyfang and Smith (2007) suggest, grassroots initiatives tend to address specific local needs. We suggest that these local needs usually represent (typically negative) loci, but ones that are, in a sense, more proximate, and therefore particular, to the initiative as a focus. Thus, another dimension along which we can distinguish loci is between *distant* and *proximate* loci⁶, where more proximate loci are also more specific to the focal initiative. A second reason why differences arise across initiatives is that in each translation the focus (the specific initiative) is slightly different, that is, the complex in which the translated practice becomes embedded is somewhat unique. For example, different initiatives may use different organisational practices, or combine practices they adopt from other initiatives with yet other practices. As the specific character of practices is always changed through mutual shaping of connected practices or practice elements, practices of the same type will look different across different contexts.

In the next section we illustrate some of the points made in our conceptual discussion, using examples from our studies on three Repair Cafés in the Netherlands. In our discussion chapter, we further elaborate on some of the wider implications of the perspective laid out in the foregoing.

3 Translation processes in Repair Cafés

In this section we illustrate some of the ideas laid out in our conceptual chapter, using material gathered during case studies of three Repair Cafés in the Netherlands (in Delft, Schiedam and The Hague), which were carried out as part of the GLAMURS project (www.glamurs.eu; also see Spekkink et al. 2016). For this case study, we performed in-depth 10 interviews (7 with members of Repair Cafés, 3 with interested non-members), a focus group with 5 Repair Café members and 1 non-member, a net-mapping workshops with board members of the 3 Repair Cafés, and visioning and back-casting workshops with board members of Repair Cafés, board members of the National Repair Café Foundation (currently the International Repair Café Foundation), as well as several other stakeholders from academia, government and civil society⁷. In addition, we performed desk

research on the Repair Café movement, performed several site visits to the Repair Cafés that were part of the case studies, and had multiple informal conversations with board members of the Repair Cafés. Finally, prior to our own data gathering activities, and as part of the GLAMURS project, a student project was performed, as part of which interviews were held with board members of six Repair Cafés in the Rotterdam-Delft-The Hague region (including the 3 Repair Cafés on which we performed additional case studies), as well as with the initiator of the Repair Café movement (Kropcheva et al. 2015). For more details on the case studies, and the findings these produced see Spekkink et al. (2016; Also see Pesch et al. 2018).

The case studies were not designed to gather data on how the initiatives under study translate practices. Instead, the ideas underlying our perspective on the translation of practices emerged while the case studies were being carried out. In the next paragraph we offer a brief introduction in the Repair Café movement. We then offer some basic examples of translations that are performed, and the similarities and differences we find across the three initiatives that we studied in detail.

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE REPAIR CAFÉS

Repair Cafés are freely accessible meeting places where people gather to fix broken objects, share knowledge and experience on repairing, and simply have a good time with other people. The Repair Café movement was initiated by Martine Postma. She organised the first Repair Café in Amsterdam on October 2009, and chairs the Repair Café Foundation (started on 2 March 2010) that supports Repair Cafés in the Netherlands and other countries. At the time of writing this article there are over 1500 Repair Cafés in 35 different countries. Thus, Repair Cafés have spread quickly across the world, following a pattern that closely matches that of *replication* (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012). The three Repair Cafés included in our case study were started in 2011 (The Hague), 2012 (Delft) and 2014 (Schiedam). These Repair Cafés are organised once a month, and always on a Saturday. Some other Repair Cafés may be organised more frequently, but more than half of all Repair Cafés follow a similar pattern (see Charter & Keiller 2014; 2016). Usually, a Repair Café will be ‘open for business’ for about half a day. The number of volunteers in the three Repair Cafés ranges from around 15 (Schiedam) to about 30 (Delft), which is significantly higher than the average of the movement as a whole (which lies around 10; Charter & Keiller 2014; 2016). The Repair Cafés of Delft and Schiedam both have fixed sites, which is a room in the Science Centre of Delft University of Technology in the case of Repair Café Delft, and a room in a residential building for senior citizens in the case of Repair Café Schiedam. The Repair Café of The Hague visits different sites each month, although the same set of venues is visited each year. Sites are typically

low-key, and easy accessible, and have enough Postma space to house a large number of tables and equipment.

3.2 SOME OBSERVATIONS ON HOW THE REPAIR CAFÉ MOVEMENT EMERGED AND DEVELOPED

The very first Repair Café was organised in Amsterdam on 18 October 2009, by Martine Postma, who later became the director of the Repair Café Foundation (Stichting Repair Café 2011; ‘First makers, now menders’, 2014). The first Repair Café was primarily inspired by environmental concerns, as she saw the issue of lifetime extension of broken goods as a promising way to raise environmental awareness, and to provide a critical lens on consumer behaviour (a newspaper described the goals of the first Repair Café as reducing waste and protecting the environment; ‘Zelf kapotte spulletjes repareren in Fijnhout’ 2009). Awareness of the social contributions of Repair Cafés grew as the movement expanded (Kropcheva et al. 2015). After a successful first session, the initiator, with the help of several stakeholder organisations, managed to organise 9 other sessions in different Neighbourhoods of Amsterdam in 2010 (Stichting Repair Café 2011). The Repair Café concept started to get attention across the country, partly thanks to significant media attention. On 2 March 2010, the Repair Café Foundation was established, which helped to set up 20 additional Repair Cafés across the country. The Foundation created an information package for interested people, and sent a Repair Café Bus to provide hands-on support at locations where people had concrete plans to set up a Repair Café (Stichting Repair Café 2012). A year later the number of Repair Cafés in the Netherlands increased to 53 (Stichting Repa Postma ir Café 2013). In the years following this Repair Cafés also started to appear in Belgium, Germany, France, the UK and the US (Stichting Repair Café 2014), and soon after the number of Repair Cafés started to explode (see figure 3).

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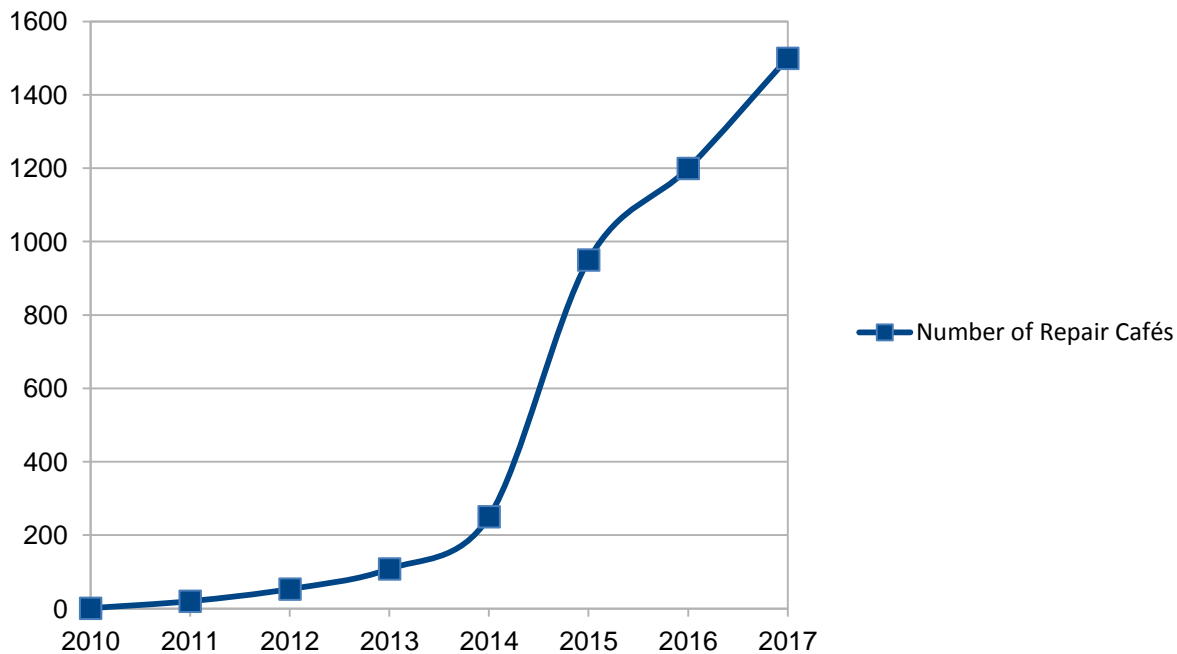


Figure 3. Growth in number of Repair Cafés, based on information of annual reports for the years 2010–2016. From 2014 the numbers are approximate.

Initially, new Repair Cafés in the Netherlands were primarily taken up by Transition Towns movements, local branches of environmental movements, welfare organisations, neighbourhood associations, and public organisations. More recently performed surveys indicate that most Repair Cafés are set up by informal groups of motivated individuals, although a fair share of them are still organised as part of Transition Town movements. These surveys also show that a significant amount of Repair Cafés are now set up by public/governmental organisations (Charter & Keiller 2014; 2016).

3.3 SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE REPAIR CAFÉ MOVEMENT AS A WHOLE

There are a few things that generally hold for most Repair Cafés (see Charter and Keiller 2014; 2016): The Cafés promote repairing as a way to reduce the amount of waste that our society produces. A closely related aim is to recognize, maintain and spread knowledge and expertise on repairing (for example, by teaching visitors how to perform certain repairs), bringing the practice of repairing back into local society in a modern way. Another main goal of Repair Cafés is to promote social cohesion in local communities by connecting neighbours from different backgrounds in easily accessible, low-key events, and Repair Cafés also fulfil a social function by providing low-cost repairs to people that cannot afford to go to regular repair venues. As mentioned before, the initiator of the Repair Café movement at first primarily had environmental concerns in mind, but some of the other Repair Cafés that here initiative

inspired deliberately used their initiatives as a way of increasing social cohesion locally, by bringing neighbours together in a friendly atmosphere. When the Repair Café Foundation was started, the overall mission was already presented as a dual goal of (1) reducing waste and encouraging people to live more sustainably, and (2) performing a social function by offering people a meeting place in their local community, where everyone is welcome and can make her/his own valuable contribution (Stichting Repair Café 2012). That being said, throughout the Repair Café movement environmental concerns still tend to be the dominant motivation for setting up a Repair Café (Charter & Keiller 2014; 2016; Lyons 2018). The respondents in our own case studies were also united in their dismissal of the ease with which people throw away products that break down. They typically blame this on a lack of environmental awareness (in a general sense), a lack of awareness about the possibility of repair (or of how easily some broken items can still be repaired), but also, in some cases, on the lack of affordable repair services. Thus many people that start a Repair Café do so to encourage people to live more sustainably, and to provide them a valuable service that helps them to do so (Charter & Keiller 2014; 2016).

There are some interesting things that we can learn about translation patterns from this more general overview of the Repair Café Movement (we deepen some of these insights in the following paragraphs). First of all, the first Repair Café the main negative locus of the first Repair Café can be roughly summarised as the environmental consequences of how people use devices in the household. More specifically, the initiator was concerned with the fact that people tend to throw away broken devices too easily (unnecessary waste), that people engage in excessive consumption patterns, that people lack the skills to repair objects, or lack the appreciation for such skills and the people that have them (Stichting Repair Café 2012; Kropcheva et al. 2015). There were also positive loci, including ideas laid down in a Repair Manifesto published in 2009 (‘Tweede leven dankzij het Repair Café’, 2010). Repairing as hobby (something you do because it is a pleasure to do) can be considered as a positive locus, and the notion of Repair *Café* points to the café-like environments where people come together in a pleasant atmosphere as third positive locus for the first Repair Café that was organised (Repair Cafés typically also serve coffee and tea to contribute to this atmosphere). The synthesis of these various sources of inspiration (both negative and positive) is social, easily accessible platform, where people can have their broken items repaired in a friendly, inviting environment. Moreover, by being involved in the repairs themselves, visitors can also learn skills they can apply themselves.

The initial Repair Café itself became a locus for new Repair Cafés across the Netherlands (and later across the world), where the initiators shared similar

concerns about unnecessary production of waste (thus, a shared negative locus), but where at least some of these initiatives also saw the Repair Café as way to address another negative locus, which can be roughly summarised as a lack of social cohesion in their neighbourhoods. This quickly transformed the meaning of repairing in Repair Cafés. The fact that it was soon after adopted in the mission statement of the Repair Café Foundation can also be understood as a translation, where the practices of the original initiative are transformed based on inspiration drawn from initiatives that followed it. Our own studies of the 3 Repair Cafés in the GLAMURS project suggest that another negative locus that became apparent over time concerns the production practices of manufacturers. Most of our interviews mentioned a concern about what they perceived as ‘planned obsolescence’ (also see Charter & Keiller 2014;2016), and tendency of manufacturers to make their products hard to repair (and increasingly so). For some of the volunteers that we spoke with this meant that repairing also became a form of activism or resistance against the practices of manufacturers. An interesting example of this activism is a custom repair manual for a popular type of coffee machine in the Netherlands (a machine that was infamous among Repair Café volunteers for the difficulty of even opening it), which was created in a collaboration between Repair Café volunteers from 4 different Repair Cafés in the Netherlands (Brattinga et al. 2015). Some of our own respondents also mentioned that they believe that repairs are deliberately made expensive, in order to encourage people to buy replacements for their broken devices instead. Over time, the Repair Café movement has also become increasingly involved in efforts to ensure increased durability and repairability of products, as evidenced, for example, by a joint mission statement that the move Postma ment published in 2015, together with several other movements ‘Joint Mission Statement: Sustainable Consumption and production: Improving product durability and reparability’, 2015). This suggest that, at some point, the design and production practices of manufacturers also came into focus as a negative locus for the Repair Café movement.

Indeed, the foregoing is a mostly general discussion of what inspired the Repair Café movement, and their practice of repairing, which does not give us insights in what differences emerge across Repair Cafés, and how these can be explained. In the below, we offer a closer examination of the 3 Repair Cafés that were part of our GLAMURS case studies, providing some initial , more specific evidence for the occurrence of translations of practices.

3. 4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE REPAIR CAFÉS OF DELFT, SCHIEDAM AND THE HAGUE

There were a few differences between the 3 Repair Cafés that we studied that quickly became obvious. The Repair Café in Delft stood out because of the

relatively large number of volunteers that were able to handle electronics, and for the relatively complicated repairs (e.g., computers) that their volunteers were capable of carrying out. One of the board members explained to us that he and others were not initially involved for environmental motivations, but based on their passion for technology (volunteers also shared several stories about interesting or unusual devices that they repaired at the Repair Café). In addition, a relatively larger number of the volunteers are highly educated people. This is at least partly a consequence of the fact that the Repair Café is established in a small city with a large technical university. There is, in fact, a concrete link between the university and the Repair Café, as the Repair Café uses the University's Science Centre as their venue. There is at least one other way in which this has affected the activities of the Repair Café in Delft, which is that the Repair Café occasionally organises thematic lectures in collaboration with small technology companies that are present in the Science Centre. For the Repair Café, these lectures are also a way of attracting additional volunteers.

The Repair Café of Schiedam stands out because of its relatively close links to welfare. This is primarily due to the background of the person that started the Repair Café, who worked for the municipality of Schiedam in areas such as welfare, debt counselling, and volunteering. The initiator told us that already before he learned about the Repair Café movement, he was concerned about the fact that people tend to throw away things that can still be easily prepared. He learned about the Repair Café movement via radio transmission in which the initiator of the movement was interviewed. He contacted the Repair Café in Amsterdam for support in setting up a Repair Café, and he found a welfare organisation from his network willing to provide a venue for free. In return, volunteers of the Repair Café automatically become volunteers of the welfare association, and are occasionally asked to perform simple repairs (and similar tasks) for senior people that are in the welfare organisation's care. In addition to improving sustainability, the initiator saw providing accessible repair options for low-income people and improving social cohesion / reducing loneliness as important contributions of the Repair Café. At the time of our case study, the initiator of this Repair Café was also in the process of setting up a second Repair Café, which was to take the form of a neighbourhood workplace, dedicated to teaching people new skills through learning-by-doing. The initiator also indicated that he is primarily interested in setting up Repair Cafés in relatively 'low-performing' neighbourhoods of Schiedam. To some extent, the Repair Café also helped unemployed people to find a new job.

The Repair Café of The Hague stands out because of the way in which it is organised. This Repair Café was established in 2011 by 'het Haags

Milieucentrum' (HMC; Environmental Centre for The Hague), a non-profit organisation that engages in various activities dedicated to protection of the environment. The HMC occasionally uses the Repair Café as a podium for other initiatives, such as an initiative where people were stimulated to measure how much food they waste, and in an initiative where people could hand in old video tapes that were then turned into something new at the Repair Café. The Repair Café of The Hague does not have a fixed location, but organises sessions in 8 different parts of the city. There, they Repair Café can make use of neighbourhood centres for free (the neighbourhood centres also benefit from the Repair Café, because they are required to organise a certain number of activities to obtain subsidies). Often, there are other initiatives organised in those neighbourhoods, and the Repair Café usually connects to these initiatives. The Repair Café also invites other initiatives to sessions of the Repair Café as a way of promotion. For example, the Repair Café has hosted a plant doctor, a book binder, and a so-called ink pen doctor. Two of the board members of the the Repair Café of The Hague explained that using different locations across the city makes it difficult to realise the social aspect of the Repair Café mission. This is somewhat compensated by the establishment of 5 smaller Repair Cafés across the city. Although these were mostly established independently, the larger Repair Café of The Hague does offer advise and expertise to them. At the time of our study, the Repair Café was looking into building links with schools that offer technical education.

This is only a rough overview of some of the differences between the Repair Cafés we involved in our case studies, but it reveals some differences in the ways that the concept of Repair Café is implemented, and how this is linked to the different contexts (foci) in which the Repair Cafés became embedded. For example, the Repair Café Delft was established in a technical university city, and this is reflected by the large number of highly educated people in the Repair Café, and the relatively large number of volunteers that are able to handle electronics, or other complicated repairs. The Repair Café of Schiedam has a relatively strong focus on the social dimension of the Repair Café movement' s mission, which is linked to the fact that it was established by a person with a background in welfare, and that it is still closely linked to a welfare organisation. By contrast, the social dimension of the Repair Café movement' s mission is relatively difficult to realise for the Repair Café of The Hague, as a result of it being organised like a 'travelling circus' (as two board members described it). In a sense, the Repair Café is the 'least local' of our three cases, but perhaps also the most connected to other Repair Cafés, as well as other types of initiatives in their city, which may at least partly be explained that it was established by an organisation that also has other initiatives in their 'portfolio' .

From the perspective of our framework, these differences are understood as outcomes of the different translations performed by the people that started the three Repair Cafés, and our proposition is that these differences in translations can be linked to their different foci. Based on our data, we were not able to identify clear differences in the loci of the 3 Repair Cafés we studied, and in general respondents across the Repair Cafés mentioned very similar things when discussing what inspired them to set up / get involved in their local Repair Café. The main positive locus is quite clearly the Repair Café movement (our respondents typically refer to the movement as a whole as their main source of inspiration). The three Repair Cafés also mentioned the same negative loci (although there are differences in emphasis), and these also overlap with those of the wider Repair Café movement. Based on our limited data it is difficult to say to what extent these negative loci were ‘adopted’ from the Repair Café movement, or were an existing concern for the initiators to which the Repair Café provided an answer. We expect that it is a bit of both, that is, that the initiators of the Repair Cafés already had various environmental/social concerns, but that the way that they now frame these concerns is partly a consequence of their acquaintance with the Repair Café movement. Yet, we find differences across the three Repair Cafés, for example, in how they are organised, in the kinds of volunteers they attract, and what other activities, besides repairing, members of the Repair Cafés engage in, and these differences can be traced to the particulars of the settings in which the Repair Cafés were established.

Discussion

The introduction that we offer into the idea of *translation of practices* by (or into) grassroots initiatives, and our illustrations of the idea still leaves important questions open. Based on our limited data, we are not able to distinguish between more distant loci and more proximate loci for local Repair Cafés, and how these interact. This may well be a limitation of our data, as the material that we used was not gathered through a study that was designed to understand translation processes. It was also not possible for us to offer insight in the origins of specific elements of the practice of repairing as we find it across different Repair Cafés. A more detailed analysis can be offered if particular elements of initiative practices are traced to the loci and/or foci of translation processes, and if a more detailed account is given of way that elements from different sources of inspiration shape each other when they are linked together in their new context.

Clarifying these issues will require additional empirical research into the Repair Café movement and other movements, where reconstructing translations are the main focus of analysis. Ideally, such studies would follow the emergence and development of several Repair Cafés from their beginning, allowing the researcher to observe and ask about the main sources of inspiration of these initiatives, and to make detailed studies of the specificities of the sites in which new initiatives are established. Another possibility is to make detailed reconstructions of initiative practices across different instances of the same type of initiative, and to then try to ‘trace’ their elements to their original loci. We believe that our framework can offer useful guidance in such studies, by pointing to relevant aspects of the translation process (positive and negative loci, proximate and distant loci, differences in foci). A study dedicated to reconstructing these translation processes can also pay more specific attention to the specific elements that are taken from different loci, and how these are then assembled into particular initiative practices.

We have also left open the question of *who* does the translation, and how this matters for the outcomes of translation processes. This is potentially an argument for greater attention for *translators*, although this may lead to the attribution of a greater significance to particular individuals than is typical in practice-oriented perspectives, and opens the door to individual-oriented analyses of the values, beliefs and motivations of ‘translators.’ An alternative is to approach *translating* as a special class of practices, characterised by its own constellation of meanings, materials and competences. From this perspective, setting up a sustainability grassroots initiatives, organised around particular practices (e.g., repairing, growing food locally, energy use), can be understood as an example of a translation practice, making the initiators the carriers of translation practices.

The final matter we wish to address here are wider implications of our framework for thinking about how movements like the Repair Café movement emerge and develop. The most important of these is perhaps that our concept of translation implies that *replication* is perhaps a misleading word, because it underplays the fact every re-enactment of a practice is different from its original (i.e., practices don’t travel; see Shove et al. 2012). We believe that the way that these movements spread (through the extent that this ‘spreading’ occurs through the establishment of new local initiatives of the same kind) is more accurately described as adaptive reproduction, where existing initiatives or

ideas serve as a major source of inspiration, but where new instances are always to some extent adapted to particular circumstances. This also means that we will find many different versions of the same kind of initiative practice within one movement, and that the competences, materials and meanings associated with these practices evolve in complex ways as the movement grows.

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- 1 See www.glamurs.eu for detailed information on the project.
 - 2 We base our concept of grassroots sustainability initiatives on the concept of grassroots innovations, as discussed by Seyfang and Smith (2007). However, since we want to focus specifically on individual initiatives, rather than the networks or movements that they form, we use a slightly different phrasing.
 - 3 In their book, Shove et al. (2012) discuss numerous ways in which the reproduction and/or change of practices can be represented using their approach.
 - 4 Shove et al. (2012) discuss more specific mechanisms through which different types of practice elements travel. We acknowledge that different types of elements also travel in different ways, but in this paper we use the term *abstraction* to summarise these different types of travel.
 - 5 Smith (2007) defines green niches as “spaces where networks of actors experiment with, and mutually adapt, green organizational forms and eco-friendly technologies” (p. 427). He suggests that these often emerge in response to sustainability problems perceived in regimes, which he defines as “mutually reinforcing and entrenching cognitive, social, economic, institutional and technological processes that sustain existing trajectories of development” (p. 428).
 - 6 Although we suggest that it is mostly useful to use this dimension in a more abstract sense, the idea of distant versus proximate loci can be made more concrete by considering how closely connected loci are to their focus, comparatively speaking. Schatzki (2002) suggests that all complexes of practices can be thought of as eventually forming a giant network of practices. In theory, proximity can thus be defined in terms of how close two complexes of practices are to each other in this network.
 - 7 The same activities were carried out in a case study of a Dutch Energy Initiative, called Vogelwijk Energie(k), situated in The Hague. In the visioning and backcasting workshops stakeholders for the two types of initiative were brought together.