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WORKING PAPER

Associations at the Heart of Local Public Action:
A Study of Interactions at the Municipal Level

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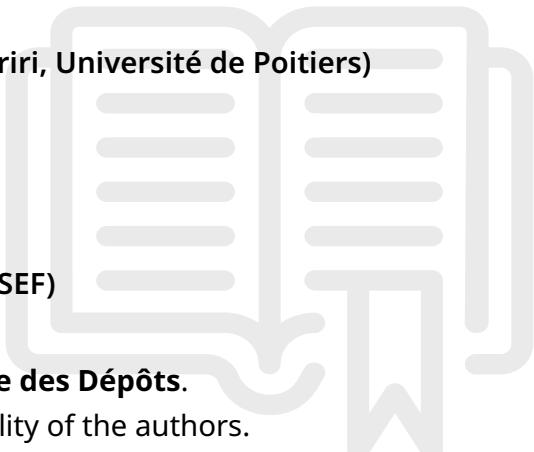
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Associations at the Heart of Local Public Action: A Study of Interactions at the Municipal Level¹

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Introduction

With the growing recognition by governments and international institutions of the importance of the social economy (Bouchard, 2009), waves of public policies have been implemented for years around the world to promote the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The SSE contributes to public policy as operators of activities related to social action and the general interest. The advocacy dimension of the SSE helps to bring new dimensions of social issues to the agenda (Fraisse *et al.*, 2017). Its entrepreneurial dimension also allows it to manage public programs or activities related to public policy, thus integrating it into public action. Among the SSE organizations that contribute to local public action, associations are particularly prominent.

Since 1992, the UN has promoted a sustainable development agenda based on seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The implementation of the SDGs is carried out in part by associations. For example, social action associations are often at the forefront of efforts to integrate marginalized populations and promote inclusion and cohesion, such as through community events (SDG 3). Environmental associations work to raise awareness about issues such as nature conservation, recycling and the ecological transition (SDGs 12 and 13). Human rights and advocacy associations campaign, for example, for gender equality

¹ Translated from French: ARTIS, A., RIBEIRO, L., « Les associations au cœur de l'action publique locale : Étude des interactions à l'échelle d'une commune », *Politiques locales d'ESS au service de la transition socio-écologique*, GSEF, 2025.

(SDG 5) and the rights of minorities. Thus, associations are an important pillar in the implementation of several SDGs, as well as in supporting citizens in achieving them. The implementation of these actions requires a contribution from public authorities at the national and local levels, which also encourages co-construction.

This contribution is highlighted by several international institutions (UNTFSSSE, 2014, 2022; UNRISD, 2019). In 2023, the UN resolution explicitly outlined the macro-, meso-, and microeconomic functions of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) and its cross-cutting contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to this resolution, the SSE can make a decisive contribution by complementing government action to provide effective responses to major global challenges such as inequality and the climate crisis, and to address the economic and social problems of territories and their citizens, particularly the most vulnerable.

However, this contribution, valued by international bodies, does not always follow through (Chaves and Gallego, 2020). Although associations have a cross-cutting impact on all the SDGs, this impact is not uniform. Thus, associations are at the heart of the construction of local public policy and a relevant ally for implementing sustainable development at the territorial level. We therefore intend to study the interactions between decentralized and deconcentrated public authorities and associations at the municipal level. Our study is based on a longitudinal monograph at the municipal level. We examined the interactions between public authorities and associations in five sectors of activity. We identified the links through the study of public policy instruments and their reference documents. We discuss this configuration through the lens of the documented specificities of public policies related to the SSE. We show that the municipal level remains a crucial level of action for associations and that co-construction is not systematic.

First, we present the theoretical framework for understanding local public action. Then, we outline our methodology to highlight the specific characteristics of the studied case. Finally, in the last section, we discuss the results.

1. The involvement of associations in local public action

1.1. Analyzing local public action

With the aim of ensuring that our approach is understood, we wish to clarify two aspects of our analysis: political action and its spatiality. Regarding the first aspect, public action is “the politically legitimized production of modes of regulating social relations” (Dubois, 2009, p. 312). The notion of public action marks a shift in perspective compared to that of public policy. It is an approach that, rather than focusing on State action and the intervention of public authorities, considers both the actions of public institutions and those of a plurality of actors (Commaille, 2010). By attributing a spatial dimension to it, the aim is then to study how it unfolds in subnational spaces. But political spatiality refers to several conceptualizations: the geographical territory of lived spaces, the political territory of

institutions, the natural territory of protected areas, the ritualized territory of communities, the military territory of international relations, or even the legal territory of autonomous regions (Faure, 2020).

Reforms in France over the past few decades (decentralization, regionalization and metropolitanization) have confirmed that the local level is relevant for the governance of societies (Douillet and Lefebvre, 2017). For example, State oversight is diminishing, and new powers are being transferred to local authorities. In the political and administrative discourse, the local level appears as the appropriate venue for resolving a growing number of problems, based on the principles of efficiency or subsidiarity (Faure, 1998). It is now considered a vector of innovation, impetus, experimentation and effectiveness.

Bringing local systems of government and public action to light involves identifying interaction systems that link a group of individuals, defined by their social position and institutional ties, possessing specific resources, who contribute to governmental activity. To understand this system of interactions, we have adopted Hassenteufel's (2011) approach. First, we must analyze the resources exchanged (financial, political, knowledge-based, positional, etc.). Then, we process their cognitive framework by comparing their systems of representation, that is, by examining their capacity to understand configurations using the same interpretive lens. These resources and representations contribute to defining the actors' interests, and the logics of convergence and confrontation account for the challenges of defining and implementing networked policies.

However, government actors (elected officials and administrative staff), whether local or national, interact with a diversity of "non-governmental" actors, including associations. The participation of interest groups in local government is not limited to this right to representation, it can be based on a logic of involvement (Le Galès, 1995). We therefore start our analysis from this context, focusing on associations in particular, considering them as actors in local public action (Douillet and Lefebvre, 2017 b).

1.2. From the SSE to associations in local policies

Over the past two decades, a growing number of governments worldwide have implemented public policies to support the social and solidarity economy (SSE). Two generations of public policies in favor of the SSE can be identified (Chaves and Gallego, 2020). Several of these are cross-cutting policies, while others are sector-specific and can be combined. Sectorization leads to a division among SSE organizations, each dependent on its sector of activity in relation to public authorities, whereas cross-cutting policies foster an intersectional approach. Primarily rooted in the economic development responsibilities of local authorities, several sector-specific policies falling under their jurisdiction, such as national territorial experimentation programs (Territorial Economic Cooperation Hubs, Zero Long-Term Unemployment Territories, Territorial Start-ups, etc.) that support local SSE dynamics, have emerged.

However, the design of this type of policy is not inconsequential. Depending on the policies considered, SSE organizations may be caught up in emerging isomorphic logics or encouraged in their dimension of innovation and experimentation. Indeed, research on institutional isomorphism highlights how public mechanisms embody different forms of institutional pressure, leading to a movement of standardization of public action and producing a form of isomorphism for SSE enterprises, which must comply with the standards of market logic and the pursuit of efficiency. According to Chaves and Gallego (2020), at the international level, the transition to cross-cutting and integrated policies fosters a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic field of the SSE. This transition also reflects a trend toward encouraging greater citizen involvement and expanding opportunities for participation to include new private actors, both in the co-construction and implementation of policies.

While these trends are increasingly documented on public policies supporting the SSE, in certain sectors or territories, we have examined these findings in the context of the interactions between the municipal level and associations in five sectors of activity. Considering existing research documenting the evolving relationship between public authorities and associations, we aim to demonstrate the importance and specific nature of the municipal level as a level of action for associations.

2. Spatializing the research approach

As the analysis shows, the spatialization of public action encompasses several dimensions, so our proposal consists of a review of our methodology and the contextualization of our object of study. Our study is based on a longitudinal monograph focusing on a municipality, the center of a metropolitan area. Our monograph emphasizes the intricacy and links of local political action, combining the sub-metropolitan and inter-municipal levels.

2.1. Methodological framework

Our analysis is based on a case study, which admits contextualization, problem definition, justification, boundary definition, protocol establishment and material mobilization (Yin, 2009).

Our case is defined by geographical boundaries, the Grenoble territory and the actors observed, namely associations and local public actors (Table 1).

Table 1: Case characteristics

Scope of actors	Associations (under the 1901 law) and the City of Grenoble (elected officials and technical staff)
Geographic scope	The Grenoble territory (geographical, not administrative, definition)
Time period	2021 to 2024
Documents analyzed	Discussions, call for proposals and associative projects
Interviews conducted	Interviews with associations in the following sectors: cultural, sports, environmental, charitable and social action; interview with the head of the Grenoble Associations' Center; interview with the Deputy Assistant for Popular Education, Youth, Associative Life and Participatory Democracy; interview with the head of the "Sports Activities and Logistics" department

Source: Authors

We used various sources for the collection and analysis of qualitative data, including interviews, strategic documents (discussions, calls for proposals, etc.), and associations' reports. This qualitative analysis complements a quantitative analysis of data collected as part of the Observatories of Associative Life (OLVA, *Observatoires de la vie associative*) initiative, led by the City of Grenoble and supported by the National Network of Association Centers (RNMA, *Réseau national des maisons des associations*). The survey was distributed from April 7, 2023, to July 21, 2023, with 577 respondents and 501 usable questionnaires (63 associations with employees and 438 associations without employees).

The sectors selected were chosen based on their representativeness according to the number of establishments and their influence within the Grenoble territory. Furthermore, we selected sectors closely linked to public policies, such as social action and sports, and other sectors more closely related to emerging fields, such as the environment. For the designation of the sectors, we used the classification of activity sectors employed by Tchernonog and Prouteau (2023).

2.2. A committed territory

Grenoble is a city in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. It is the capital of the Isère department and the seat of the Grenoble-Alpes Métropole (metropolitan area). Its population is estimated at 160,483. Demographic indicators show that population dropped by 0.3% between 2014 and 2020. The dominant socio-professional categories in the territory are: 25% not engaged in active employment, 18% retired, and 17% managers and professionals. The Grenoble territory has an employment rate of 69.7%, 87.8% of which being salaried employees. The unemployment rate among the active population is 10.1%, compared to 7.3% of the active population in France. On the other hand, the number of jobs in the area has been rising since 2009 (92,776 in 2009 and 98,296 in 2020).

This territory also has specific political characteristics. Grenoble was one of the pioneering cities to implement the political project of the Municipal Action Groups (GAM, *groupes d'action municipale*) movement during Hubert Dubedout's term (Sellier, 1977). Between 1965 and 1983, following Mr. Carrignon's term, the municipality was governed by a Socialist mayor from 1995 to 2014, and currently by a Green mayor for over ten years.

The city, like the metropolis, is one of the local authorities pioneering in the implementation of public policies supporting the SSE and the associative sector. The local policy in favor of SSE in Grenoble-Alpes Métropole is the result of a commitment made as early as 2001. Compared to other local authorities, this metropolis is not new to this field; it was among the first large local authorities to engage in this approach (Artis and Bovet, 2022). More than three strategic plans for the SSE have been implemented without interruption or revision. In this context, the municipal government has been a driving force in the construction of this policy. The City of Grenoble has built its SSE policy through participation in projects such as one of the first cooperative community-oriented enterprises (SCIC, *cooperative societies of collective interest*) in the food sector. Since metropolitanization, initiatives supporting the SSE as an employer have been led by the Métropole. The city maintains a policy in favor of associations, through the associations' center.

3. A municipal territory marked by specific characteristics

In France, the number of associations is estimated at 1.37 billion (Tchernonog and Prouteau, 2023). Among them, 13% of associations have employees and 87% do not have employees (INSEE FLORES 2021). Associations are also a product of territorial structures (Itçaina, 2023). We will now examine the specific characteristics of the associative sector in the territory under consideration.

3.1. A vibrant associative life

The City of Grenoble has approximately 4,900 active associations², 615 of which have employees (around 12%, a figure similar to the national average). An average of 262 new associations has been created each year over the last 10 years. As Table 2 highlights, Grenoble has significantly more associations per 1,000 inhabitants than larger territorial areas.

Table 2: Comparison of data on associations in Grenoble and larger areas.

	Grenoble	Isère	AURA
Estimated number of active associations³	4,900	27,000	175,000
Number of newly created associations⁴	262	1,186	9,065
Number of associations with employees⁵	615	2,906	19,109
Population⁶	160,483	1,277,513	8,197,325
Number of associations per 1000 inhabitants	30	21	21

Source: RNMA, OLVA Survey Report for Grenoble (2023).

The classification of these associations by sectors of activity confirms the specific characteristics of the Grenoble territory, as shown in Figure 1.

² Estimate produced by the National Network of Associations' Centers (RNMA, *Réseau National de Maisons des Associations*) as part of the Grenoble's local Observatory of Associative Life (2023).

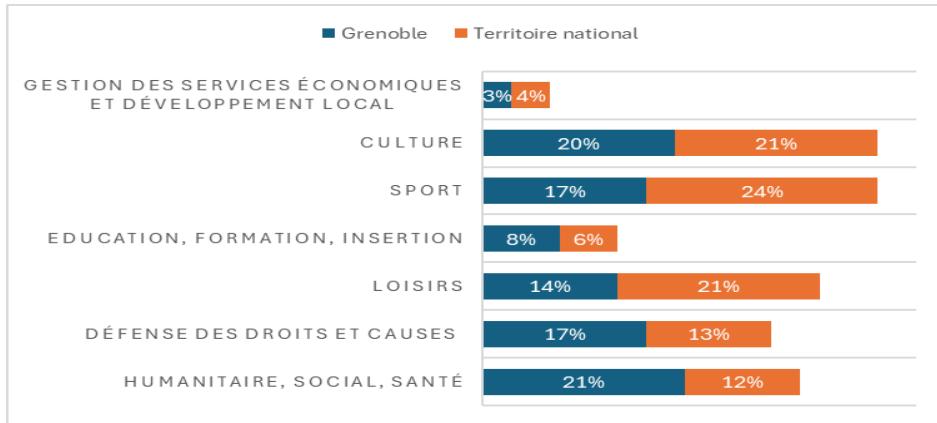
³ Source: Estimate produced by the RNMA at the municipal level, and "Research and Solidarity: Benchmarks and Key Figures" 2022 at the departmental and regional levels.

⁴ RNA 2022, RNMA processing, for the city of Grenoble (average of the last 10 years). However, for the region and the department, the data corresponds to a single year (Research and Solidarity, 2022).

⁵ INSEE FLORES 2020.

⁶ INSEE Population Directory 2022.

Figure 1: Distribution of associations by sector of activity according to the nomenclature of Tchernonog, V. Prouteau, L. *et al.*, (2023).



Source: RNMA, OLVA Survey Report for Grenoble (2023).

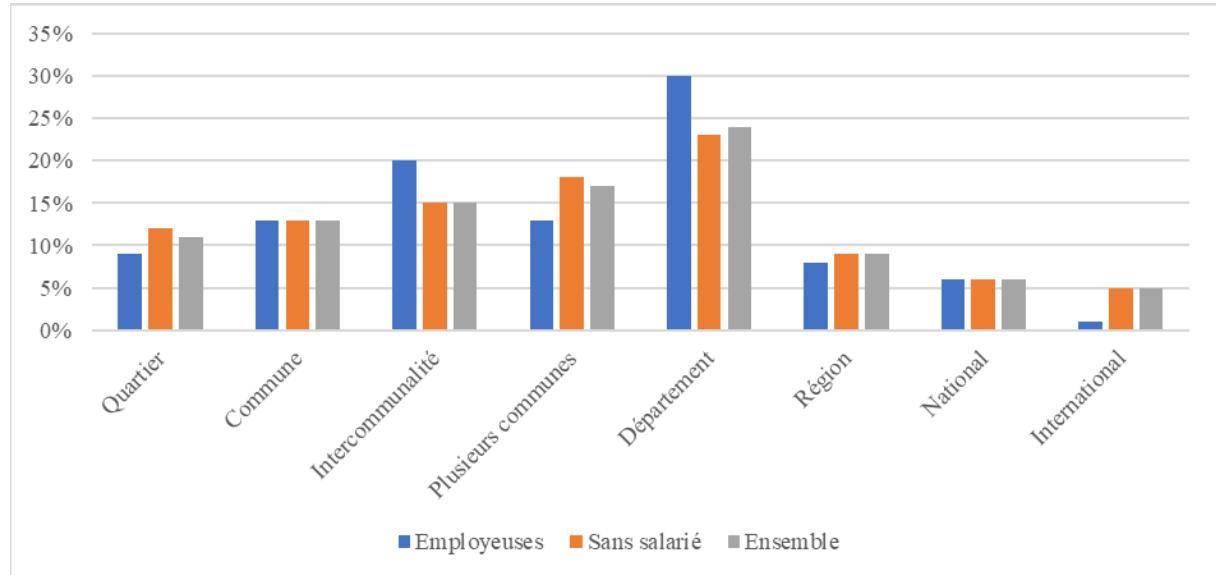
Territoire national	National Territory
GESTION DES SERVICES ÉCONOMIQUES ET DÉVELOPPEMENT LOCAL	ECONOMIC SERVICES MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
CULTURE	CULTURE
SPORT	SPORTS
EDUCATION, FORMATION, INSERTION	EDUCATION, TRAINING, INTEGRATION
LOISIRS	LEISURE
DÉFENSE DES DROITS ET CAUSES	DEFENSE OF RIGHTS AND CAUSES
HUMANITAIRE, SOCIAL, SANTÉ	HUMANITARIAN, SOCIAL, HEALTH

Humanitarian, social and health associations (a group encompassing solidarity and humanitarian action, social action and health associations) are strongly represented in Grenoble: they account for 21% of associations compared to only 12% nationally. The same is true for associations for the defense of rights and causes, which are better represented in Grenoble (17%) than nationally (13%) and in other major cities such as Nantes (15%) and Clermont-Ferrand (10%)⁷. The cultural sector comprises 20% of the city's associations, a figure very close to the national statistics (21%). Conversely, the sports sector is less represented in the city (17%) than nationally (24%).

The municipality is the preferred area of intervention for 24% of associations, with 13% of them operating at the city level in Grenoble and 11% in one of its neighborhoods. The department is also a preferred area of intervention for 24% of associations. Among these associations, 30% of those with employees operate at the departmental level, while 18% of associations without employees operate in several municipalities, as shown in Figure 2. Association activity in neighborhoods is characterized by the social action and leisure sectors. The sports and culture sectors primarily operate within the city.

⁷ National Network of Associations' Centers, Survey report for Clermont-Ferrand, 2022.

Figure 2: The area of intervention of associations according to employment use.



Source: RNMA, OLVA Survey Report for Grenoble (2023).

Quartier	Neighborhood
Commune	Municipality
Intercommunalité	Intermunicipal authority
Plusieurs communes	Several municipalities
Département	Department
Région	Region
National	National
International	International
Employeuses	With employees
Sans salarié	Without employees
Ensemble	Combined

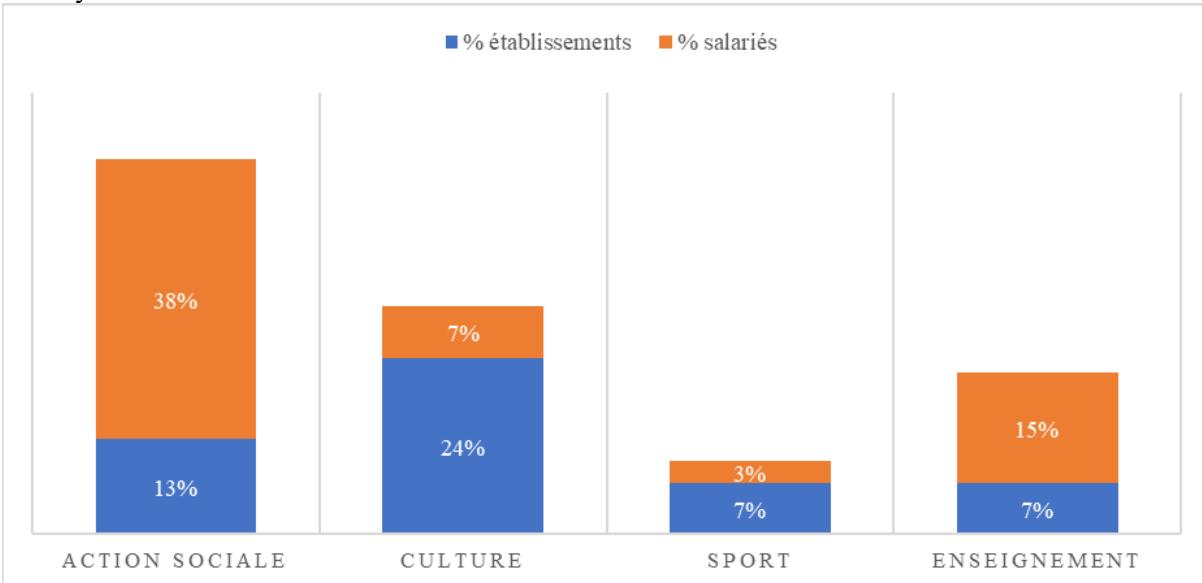
Table 3 highlights the key figures for employment in the associative sector in Grenoble.

Table 3: Employment in the associative sector in Grenoble.

Number of associative organizations with employees	737
Share of associative organizations	11%
Number of associative employees	6,095
Number of FTEs	4,440
Gross payroll (in millions)	137

Source: INSEE FLORES 2021.

Figure 3: Distribution of organizations with employees and positions according to sector of activity.



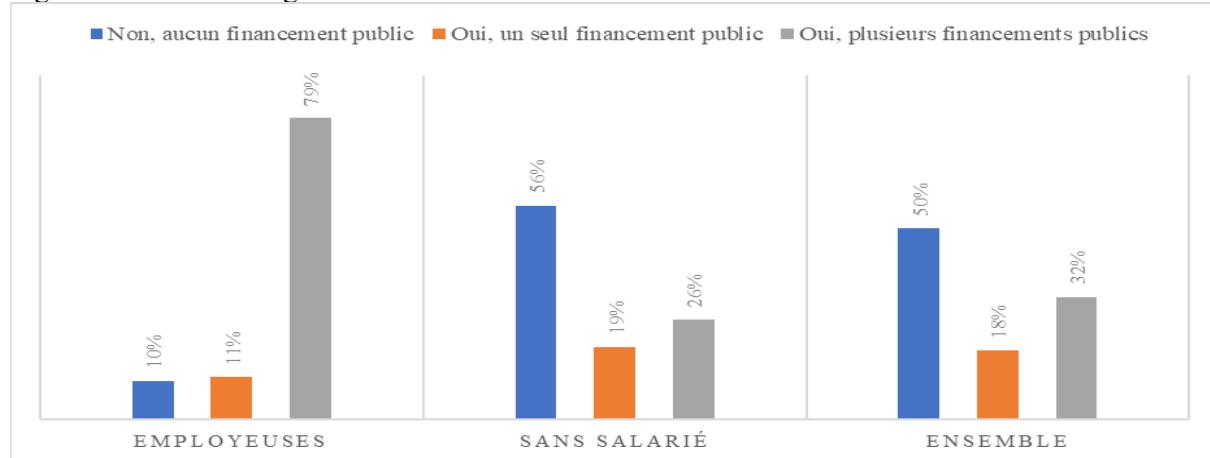
Source: INSEE FLORES 2021.

établissements salariés ACTION SOCIALE CULTURE SPORT ENSEIGNEMENT	organizations salaried employees SOCIAL ACTION CULTURE SPORTS EDUCATION
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The social action sector accounts for the majority of employing organizations and salaried employees. The education sector represents only 7% of organizations but 15% of salaried employees. Conversely, the cultural sector accounts for a large number of organizations but only 7% of salaried positions. This is consistent with national figures. This hierarchy is also reflected in budget levels. 40% of local associations have a budget between €1,000 and €10,000, while the national average is 46%. Conversely, very large budgets are more prevalent in the municipality⁸.

⁸ It is important to note that the distribution methods resulted in a greater impact on associations affiliated with networks or federations, or on employing associations (which typically have more substantial budgets). These various biases lead to an overrepresentation of medium and large associative organizations.

Figure 4: Public funding.



Source: RNMA, OLVA Survey Report for Grenoble (2023).

Non, aucun financement public	No, no public funding
Oui, un seul financement public	Yes, one public funding source
Oui, plusieurs financements publics	Yes, several public funding sources
EMPLOYEUSES	WITH EMPLOYEES
SANS SALARIÉ	WITHOUT EMPLOYEES
ENSEMBLE	COMBINED

79% of associations with employees report receiving multiple sources of public funding. 56% of associations without employees report receiving no public funding. Among associations without access to public funding, the sports and leisure sectors are the most represented. For associations that reported receiving only one source of public funding, the municipality is by far the primary source, particularly for associations without employees, for which it accounts for 56% of public funding. The department is the second largest source of funding for the associative sector, representing 24% of public funding for associations with employees.

3.2. Municipal public initiatives for the associative sector

The City of Grenoble has included support for associative life into its planning. This is addressed by highlighting the role of associations in fostering civic engagement. We will examine three key initiatives: the Center of Associative and Civic Life, the Volunteer platform, and membership in several networks.

The Associations' Center (*Maison des Associations*) in Grenoble is a municipal facility, staffed by city employees who take care of managing and running a shared space for the city's associations. Established 39 years ago, it is being restructured⁹. During the National Day of

⁹ <https://www.grenoble.fr/325-la-maison-de-la-vie-associative-et-citoyenne> and <https://www.grenobleencommun.fr/volontaires-de-grenoble-un-lieu-une-plateforme-une-communaute-citoyenne>,

Citizenship and Fraternity (2024), the elected official responsible for Popular Education, Youth, Associative Life and Participatory Democracy announced a new direction for the Associations' Center, which would then be known as the Center of Associative and Civic Life (MVAC, *Maison de la Vie Associative et Citoyenne*), reflecting the evolution of its functions. This transformation followed a consultation with associations conducted as part of the Observatory of Associative Life (OLVA), a consultation tool for associations designed to better understand their needs and thus reformulate the services offered to them.

The MVAC welcomes and provides meeting rooms, convivial spaces, exhibitions, and material resources for associations and citizens. It supports associations and citizens in their projects by offering training, individual support, talking circles, networking, and special events. The MVAC also encourages everyone's involvement in city life through initiatives such as participatory budgeting, citizen engagement, and project workshops. It works to raise awareness and promote the actions of associations and citizens through communication campaigns, a calendar of events, a newsletter, and a directory of associations. It also organizes events and facilitates networking, notably during the Associations and Sports Forum and the Volunteer Day. According to the elected official, this change aims to move beyond the traditional use of individual offices to favor shared use. The MVAC of Grenoble is a municipal facility dedicated to supporting and developing local associative life, as well as promoting citizen initiatives.

In addition to the new Center of Associative and Civic Life, which serves as the central hub for Grenoble volunteers, a new digital platform centralizes all initiatives promoting citizen engagement. The *Volontaires de Grenoble* platform¹⁰, launched in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic and operational in 2024, is a digital tool designed to encourage and facilitate voluntary mutual aid in Grenoble. It brings together various solidarity initiatives such as volunteering, solidarity sponsorship, support for migrants, and neighborhood mutual aid, providing the opportunity to anyone who wishes to get involved in the city's solidarity life. Grenoble Volunteers is now structured around three pillars: a physical location (the Center of Associative and Civic Life), a digital platform (*Volontaires de Grenoble*), and a community of citizens committed to acts of fraternity and solidarity, whether through associative or individual initiatives.

Since 2015, the City of Grenoble has joined the Network of Solidarity Cities and has declared itself a "Land of Welcome," gateway to innovative initiatives. Among these initiatives: in 2015, it established an online platform to collect offers of solidarity and launched the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC 2 CM), for urban governance of migration, within a network of cities in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe; in 2018, it joined the support network of the National Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories (ANVITA, *Association nationale des villes et territoires accueillants*), and symbolically awarded the city medal to Cédric Herrou, an emblematic figure in migrant aid.

accessed on 18/12/2024.

¹⁰ <https://www.grenobleencommun.fr/volontaires-de-grenoble-un-lieu-une-plateforme-une-communaute-citoyenne>, accessed on 18/12/2024.

As stated above, municipal policy is built around the MVAC. 39% of associations use the MVAC. Most of these associations were founded before 1950, are chaired by someone over 62 years old, and are familiar with Grenoble's support service for associative life. The most represented sectors are humanitarian, social, health, and defense of rights and causes. 66% of Grenoble's associations are unaware of the city's support service for associative life. Among these, the majority are associations without employees (RNMA, OLVA Survey Report for Grenoble 2023).

3.3. Interactions embedded in institutional and sectoral logics

As we detail later, we studied the public actors involved, the public mechanisms mobilized, from subsidies to non-monetary forms (provisioning, etc.) to characterize the interactions between the city and the associations involved in the field concerned.

a) Focus on the sports sector

Grenoble is the ninth city in France with the highest sports participation, according to a survey by Ville de rêve (De Sousa, 2024). In fact, the city has many facilities, around twenty gymnasiums, a dozen stadiums, an ice rink, several climbing gyms, among others.

Awarded the "Active and Sporting City" label, Grenoble has approximately 800 associations in this sector. Among them, 20 are linked to mountain sports, a testament to the territory's specific character and the diversity of sports activities in Grenoble. Three specific programs—"Youth in the Mountains", school ski trips, and sports camps during school holidays—aim to encourage young people to discover mountain sports.

Grenoble's sports policy, included in the 2023-2028 guidelines, is based on five cross-cutting priorities: gender equality, support for priority groups, ecological transition, health and well-being, and community education and citizenship. From 2025, associations will be required to complete training on combating sexual and gender-based violence to be eligible for municipal subsidies (Pascal *et al.*, 2024).

Sports associations in Grenoble receive subsidies from the National Sports Agency (ANS, *Agence nationale du sport*), the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, the Isère department, and the City of Grenoble, as they share responsibility. However, there does not seem to be a coordinated roadmap between these different levels of government. The municipality provides subsidies for operations, sporting events, school programs, and the management of municipal staff. Grenoble's total budget allocated to the sports sector in 2024 was €7.8 million out of approximately €90 million, according to the city's budget report. The city also provides sports facilities and premises free of charge and has a significant and costly commitment to infrastructure. Yet, it seems that Grenoble is not developing an associative sports policy for associations.

b) Focus on the environmental sector

Since 2014, the municipality, led by the Green Party, has established several delegations dedicated to the environment, both at the city and metropolitan levels. These delegations, more specialized and focused than those of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region or the Department, support numerous initiatives promoting ecological transition.

Several significant actions illustrate the framework and forms of municipal support (Bour *et al.*, 2024). The Biennial of Cities in Transition, organized every two years since 2015, highlights initiatives for social and environmental transitions. A Citizens' Convention for Climate has been created to involve citizens in the fight against climate change. Framework agreements have been co-signed with the Métropole and the National Agency for Ecological Transition. These agreements primarily focus on promoting existing actions supported by the city. The city also supports environmental associations by providing them with premises and subsidies. Calls for project proposals are regularly launched to support environmental education, biodiversity and agriculture.

Despite strong ambitions, subsidies granted to environmental associations remain limited. In 2023, only 17 associations received subsidies (€160,000), compared to significantly higher amounts for sports (€3 million) and culture (€2.7 million). This figure decreased further in 2024, with only 14 associations receiving support. Funding priorities, which vary annually according to political choices, create instability for small associations. The lack of multi-year agreements exacerbates this situation, making long-term project planning difficult. Some associations express their frustration with the limited dialogue with the city and the failure to consider their recommendations.

c) Focus on the cultural sector

Cultural associations in Grenoble benefit from support involving several public actors (Houdou *et al.*, 2024). The city's strategic vision focuses on societal and environmental transitions, with programs that support cultural associations. We also observe inter-institutional collaborations. The City of Grenoble offers several forms of support to cultural associations. In 2023, financial subsidies amounted to €2,910,506, representing 10 to 40% of the associations' budgets. These subsidies are often renewed annually and allocated according to criteria related to cultural and cross-cutting themes. In addition to subsidies, the City of Grenoble provides free accommodation for 21% of cultural associations (OLVA 2023) and makes 80,000 m² of space available (offices and performance venues). In its Grenoble Culture(s) 2025 plan, the city also states that it will provide party equipment, advertising displays from the city network, information relays via the website and social media, and also the construction of sets/costume making.

It also plays a facilitating role by establishing monitoring committees that bring together the Métropole, the Department and the DRAC for the coordinated management of key projects. The DRAC acts as a liaison for national policies, supporting artistic creation, cultural education, and key regional projects. The Isère Department is involved in local initiatives (heritage sites, music schools, and community projects).

The municipality advocates for a co-construction of the city's cultural policy in collaboration with cultural associations. However, the concept of culture differs between cultural and institutional stakeholders. Indeed, a strictly sectoral frame of reference¹¹ makes it difficult to consider the cross-cutting nature of the actions of cultural associations and the cultural activities carried out by non-cultural organizations. This can lead to difficulties for associations in finding leaders capable of reconciling their artistic vision with administrative and structural imperatives.

d) Focus on the humanitarian, social and health sectors

Focus on migration

For the past twenty years, a genuine "local turning point" has manifested itself in migration governance, shown by an increase in local initiatives promoting solidarity-based welcoming. As preferred intermediaries for residents, local governments and associations play a central role in removing obstacles to the economic, social and cultural inclusion of newcomers, while also fostering their participation in local life. However, public action related to migration issues falls under the jurisdiction of the Isère Department, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region or the State. Within this institutional context, where the city lacks jurisdiction and the issue is divisive, the city has chosen to focus its efforts on hospitality (Bourgard Arad *et al.*, 2024).

The City of Grenoble, which joined the Network of Solidarity Cities in 2015 and declared itself a "Land of Welcome," is implementing innovative programs. In 2015, it launched the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC 2 CM), for urban governance of migration, within a network of cities in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe; in 2018, it joined the ANVITA support network (National Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories) and symbolically awarded the city medal to Cédric Herrou, an emblematic figure in migrant aid.

Public actors, such as the Municipal Social Action Center (CCAS, *Centre Communal d'Action Sociale*), collaborate closely with local associations to pool resources and support the most vulnerable populations, particularly asylum seekers. The CCAS operates in a complementary manner with other local actors working to combat precariousness. Furthermore, the municipality of Grenoble, through its various initiatives, actively supports associations working with migrants, thereby strengthening their impact and capacity for action.

In Grenoble, the collective *Collectif Migrant.e.s en Isère* brings together around twenty associations committed to welcoming migrants and implementing concrete actions. This collective organizes monthly meetings in collaboration with the city hall and four associations dedicated exclusively to supporting foreign nationals. This active associative network carries out several projects to help migrants and strengthens local actions promoting inclusion.

¹¹ It is important to remember that in the cultural sector we distinguish five fields of cultural action: live performance (theatre, concerts, opera, dance, circus, etc.), visual and written arts (painting, drawing, sculpture, writing, musical composition, etc.), socio-cultural animation (cultural centers, cultural action centers, etc.), heritage, and artistic and cultural education.

Thus, interactions between the city and associations are legitimized by a framework of hospitality. This framework is largely consensual, but it translates into limited public funding and significant in-kind contributions (provision of offices, public reception areas, and targeted actions such as access to culture or sponsorship ceremonies). These actions reflect a certain activism that compensates for the disengagement of the State, a phenomenon already studied in numerous other communities (Del Biaggio *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, in this sector, interactions between associations and the city operate outside the framework of a migration policy driven by decentralized public authorities.

e) Focus on the sector of integration through economic activity (IAE)

Associations involved in IAE are medium-sized employers that receive significant funding within the framework of an established national public policy. Integration through economic activity (IAE, *insertion par l'activité économique*) falls primarily under the centralized jurisdiction of the State, which relies on delegations and departmental directorates for labor, employment and integration. This policy translates into national mechanisms that can be implemented by local authorities, such as the "1% for Integration" program or the Local Plan for Integration and Employment (PLIE, *Plan Local pour l'Insertion et l'Emploi*). Public procurement is also an increasingly used instrument. In this sector, the city adopts a framework based on local engagement in community-based SSE initiatives and comprehensive support for associations, one aspect of which leads to a positive impact on the IAE (Cupillard *et al.*, 2024). The provision of associative premises and event spaces is a common form of support that allows associations to minimize operating costs. Thus, local policies towards IAE associations in the Grenoble Métropole are multi-scalar, built between the competent and active metropolitan level and the more thematized and diffuse municipal level.

Concluding discussions

Our study analyzed the interactions between public authorities and associations. Unlike the numerous and comprehensive works carried out on the relationship between the SSE and public authorities, our study offers an analysis at the municipal level, the scale at which associations operate, and within sectors characterized by different institutional logics. This perspective allows for a better understanding of the institutional logics in place and for a more nuanced understanding of the characteristics of these actions, considering the specificities of the public policies involved.

Across the board, our results show several contributions on three main dimensions: the importance of the municipal scale, the absence of a specific reference framework for the associative world and a very relative co-construction of local public action.

In the five sectors studied, local authorities contribute to supporting the work of associations. This support takes various forms. Financial support, through subsidies, is sometimes limited. However, non-financial support, through the provision of resources and facilitation, is

significant. For certain sectors strongly integrated into public policies, such as social action, the national level contributes to the smooth functioning of activities standardized at that level. Complementarily, the municipal level supports cross-cutting activities or those not covered by national policy. For sectors less defined by national sectoral policies, the municipal level remains a source of support for the development of these initiatives. Regarding public policies in favor of SSE, support from local authorities is available through a multitude of sectoral channels. Thus, municipal policies are important levers for the associative sector, particularly through non-financial support. This support takes place within a complex environment in which associations interact with various stakeholders guided by their sectoral logics and frameworks.

However, our study shows that municipal, and even extra-municipal, public policies lack a framework specific to the associative sector and do not adopt existing national frameworks for the social and solidarity economy. For example, in the five sectors studied, co-construction is not systematically present, but it is conditional. In other words, public authorities rely on sectoral frameworks, such as hospitality in the field of migration, to support the actions of associations. In this case, there is no framework specific to the associative sector. The framework of the city studied supports associations within the context of its broader citizen engagement. Therefore, there is no framework linked to the institutional specificity of associations as a structured form of non-profit collective action. Associations are supported when their activities align with the objectives set by the city, as is observed internationally for public policies supporting the SSE (Artis and Ribiero, 2024).

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Founded in 2013 in Seoul, the GSEF – Global Forum for Social and Solidarity Economy – is a global organization of local governments and civil society actors committed to promoting and developing the social and solidarity economy. Its 90 members, present in 35 countries, represent the diversity of SSE stakeholders: local governments, networks of actors, associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, universities, etc. The GSEF supports the development of the SSE around the world by promoting dialogue between public authorities and SSE actors in order to jointly develop local public policies that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the emergence of ecosystems conducive to the SSE.

The GSEF thematic working groups (WGs) were voted on at the General Assembly on May 5, 2023. The WG on "The Impact of SSE Public Policies on the Achievement of the SDGs" brings together some fifteen researchers from all continents. It is led by Marguerite Mendell (Karl Polanyi Institute) and Timothée Duverger (Chair Terr'ESS, Sciences Po Bordeaux) and supported by the GSEF General Secretariat employee working on his CIFRE thesis.

Following on from research already conducted by the GSEF in partnership with UNRISD, which led to the production of guidelines for local SSE policies, in January 2024 the Research WG launched a call for contributions to gather proposals for working papers focusing on three recurring processes in public action: development, implementation, and evaluation. Through the analysis of these processes of SSE public policy development, the authors of the papers (both researchers and SSE actors) were asked to examine two fundamental dimensions: the contribution of these local policies to the achievement of sustainable development goals, and the paradoxes associated with the institutionalization of the SSE.

A reading committee composed of GT members evaluated more than forty proposals, including the seventeen working papers now published under the title *Local SSE Policies enabling the Socio-Ecological Transition*. Each paper is available on the GSEF website, free of charge, in its original language (English, French, or Spanish) and in English. This publication and the English translations were made possible thanks to financial support from Caisse des Dépôts.

The concrete examples provided by these working papers will feed into programs to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and support the development of public policies favorable to the SSE.



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