

Bases for the organization of the University - Common Good

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Various approaches to Organizational Theory have had a multidisciplinary and diverse character. Each approach has depended on historical circumstances, as well as sociological, administrative and other complex approaches, which have become irreducible to a linear model of interpretation and analysis. In the first part of this article we explore the approaches of Organizational Theory from the relations between organization and knowledge.

The second part is about the core of the proposal of university organization which combines two aspects that question the instrumental reason: the first is inspired by the management of commons according to the contribution of the Nobel Prize Winner in Economics, Elinor Ostrom (2011); the second assumes the organization as an eco-system, based on Morin's complexity theory (1974, 1976), which extrapolates the logic of nature and living systems to understand the relationship of complementarity between system and orga-

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nization. In this regard, an organizational form (self-organization) that comes from knowledge and collective decisions is established, at the same time it precedes and gives the system meaning.

The third part, on the other hand, places the proposal of the eco-systemic organization in interaction with two positions that also refer to the life-system relationship, such as Habermas (1987a, 1987b) and Luhmann (2005), deepening the divergences between forms of organization, forms of communication and decision making. Finally, the management of commons goes beyond consensus, as a generic agreement between the parties and different from organizational communication, as a way of making restrictive decisions that point to the *autopoiesis* of the organization.

Organizational theory: between knowledge and instrumentalization

The progress of research on organizational theory and the controversies it generated were strongly influenced by socioeconomic and cultural changes of each era³, but especially due to the relationship between organizational theory and economic theory, between the dilemmas of *rationalization and power*.

In the middle of theoretical complexity, we are able to identify two defined lines; on the one hand, the line that explores the

3 Frequently, a world accustomed to thinking through totalizing models tries to force concrete reality by pretending to adapt it to postulates. Hirschman invites to consider the cyclical fluctuations with respect to public and private caused by the tensions between power and the search for common welfare in such a way that, depending on the historical moment, it would seem that the value of trespassing on private property or subversion- self-subversion had a fluctuating positive or negative valuation. The author reaches this conclusion by overcoming disciplinary boundaries and moving from one discipline to another in a flexible manner but without laxity (Hirschman, 1983).

consequences of instrumental rationality and bureaucratization as alienation and dehumanization of work and, on the other hand, one that develops the relationship between a person's psychological management and the organization in order to understand how the rules make the introjection of thought and action possible, also favoring depersonalized and dehumanized behavior (Pauchant, 1995).

In the late twentieth century, the *Foucault effect*⁴ seemed to converge the visions of the organization –both those based on relations of meaning and relations of production– in a type of space in which material and symbolic relations are produced respectively, between various social agents dependent on a defined structure.

Some propose a proximity between Weber and Foucault (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2001) based on how they conceive the relationship between *ethics* and *knowledge*, as well as between *discipline* and *power*. Thus, for Weber human life develops in the iron cage of bureaucracy and for Foucault the cage is within the institutional network of imprisonment (Burrell, 1988). It is fundamental to reconstruct the organization in a different way, possibly *going back to the future*, rediscovering the nature of the human condition,⁵ renewing our practices of freedom, rethinking our lifestyles so as not to sub-

4 The Foucault effect is a term referring to the impact the French thinker has had (Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 2013, Burawoy & Serratacó, 1989). As a starting point to rethink the practices of government, Foucault demonstrates that the problem of Governmentality is a problem of organization that goes beyond state action (Michael Foucault, 1991)..

5 For Pope Francis, speculation and the search for financial income tend to ignore all contexts and effects on human dignity and the environment. Thus, the Pope says it is stated that environmental degradation and human and ethical degradation are intimately united, there are those who say that they are not aware of performing immoral actions, because constant distraction takes away the courage to warn of the reality of a limited and finite world. Therefore, today anything that is fragile, like the environment, remains defenseless in the interests of the divinized market, converted into an absolute rule (Papa Francisco, 2015).

missively fall into “the type of individuality that has been imposed on us” (Michel Foucault, 1988).

Organizational Theory has gone from responding to a social ecosystem to being a rationalization of how to act in an organized manner. Organizational theorists, by concentrating their effort on building a discipline on the positive science model, created a science that instead of coming from organizational knowledge, has become the result of the efficient maximization of the machine system. Providing scientific rigor to the Organizational Theory leads to the introduction of logical or empirical procedures that promote the “efficiency and success” of its internal functioning since scientific discipline will seek to understand organizations by studying *decisions* and *behavior* (Ibarra Colado, 1999), but their pretensions to control what happens inside them will always leave little space to understand them as a *living whole*.

Then it could be said that the incoherence of Organizational Theory is that it has stopped reflecting on facts, processes and cycles of a human organization dependent on society, in order to become the ideology of an organizational practice. Therefore, when we believe the science of Organizational Theory is being applied, we are actually applying an instrumental policy of Organizational Theory. An organization does not have an economic reason but a social and political one. The critical objective of an organization lies in combining, with objectivity the individuality, interest and development of people⁶ with an interest in the community they depend on and

6 Constitute a Community among all, that is a producer and product of social innovation, where trust guarantees a new culture where the person can build meanings and interweave relationships with new ethics, an environment in the pure style of Don Bosco but according to our times and current poverty. A space characterized by the promotion of values where people and especially young people can develop their life projects by putting the acquired knowledge into action in a participative and collaborative way, where the transformation of the subject is done without

their interactions inside and outside the social group, including the relationship with the *Commons* of which they are also dependent.

To discuss Organizational Theory from a non-positivist paradigm of science, there needs to be a perspective from complexity. Therefore, for example Morin uses the concept of organization to explain the concept of a system that, for him, is a “global unit made up by interrelated elements whose interpretation constitutes an organization”... “it is a combination of different elements that are interdependent (...) it does not identify with the phenomenal object, it is projected onto it” (Morin, 1974, p. 28)

The unique system-organization is developed through relationships, interactions and interdependencies, in *attractors*, in cooperation, but also in repulsions and antagonisms because “if there is no force of repulsion, exclusion or dissociation, everything would be confusion and no system would be conceivable” (Morin, 1976). All this allows the determination of each of the parties taking into account that it is a complex system.

These notions produce an apparent contradiction since in a complex system order and disorder, as well as antagonists, are complementary. For example, by ordering disorder by organizing it systematically, while ordering it, the multiple interactions disrupt the new order according to a movement that associates them. Organization is the paradox between order and disorder, and negotiates the relationship for the maintenance of the systemic equilibrium.

It is about Managing a Common Pool Resource from the *organizational management of the economy* and not from the *economic*

substituting the person, that is, to enhance the humanism of the subject in an individual way, transforming knowledge into works, “accompanying and assisting”, educating for life (Bosco, Prellezo, Giraudo, & Moral, 2002)

management of the organization. This implies recovering the meaning (understood as meaning and direction) by changing mercantilist logics; recovering social, moral and cultural values; regaining the supremacy of the person over capital and society over the market; working from the cultural sustainability, from the determining qualities in the social context, even from economic sustainability, but focused more *being* than in *having*.

Organization for Common Good

Since the university is a complex organization-system that shares *common resources*, the question is how to understand these resources in the university. Thus, it is advisable to make a distinction between common goods that refer to *resources* and *systems* and common goods that refer to *property right regimes*. The university is a *system of shared resources* that encompass *goods* and *economic* and *production of knowledge regimes*, regardless the rights of private property on the University. In this book we will refer to these resources as *resources*.

Providing or appropriating a Common Good, even acting from self-organization and determination, does not necessarily imply ownership with respect to the property rights of the University. These rights can be public or private independently. What is clear is that in order for the university to exercise autonomy⁷, it must attribute the resources it manages a nature of commons.

7 University autonomy goes beyond self-determination. It deals with the production of transforming and pertinent knowledge, which lies precisely in the agreement between the critical sense (meaning, questioning and justification) and the transformation of society based on efficiency and rationality, that is to say: instrumental reason. In this sense, the autonomy of the university has a triple complexity: the relations with politics and the political decision-makers, the co-relations with the market logics that operate the society in which it is involved and the way in which it chooses and develops its answer

Therefore, it is possible to envisage two dilemmas regarding the *management of Commons*. On the one hand, the relationship between community action and the groups that own the property (public or private), and on the other hand, the internal logics of self-organization for the management of Commons. These two dilemmas, although they can be conflictive, are fruitful and derive from the way in which the community understands the *use, governance* and *sustainability* of the common pool resource⁸ and the characteristics of human behaviors such as competition⁹ for use, parasitism and overexploitation.

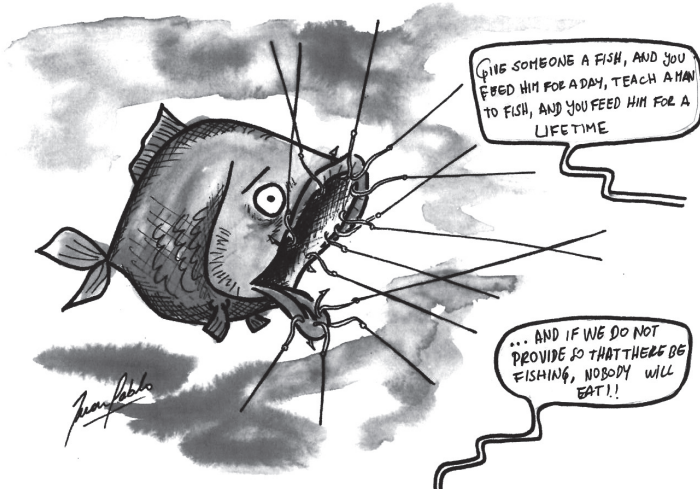
There is no magic formula to solve these dilemmas, but a continuous spiral of maturation, evolution and sophistication of the organization-system is possible. This requires: 1) *collective action* (Sandler, 1992), result of shared wills; 2) *self-government* mechanisms, result of *knowledge* and *shared wills* combined with *congruent* and *supportive institutional arrangements*; 3) *synergistic networks*, that is, organization and social recognition, reciprocity and public opinion that motivate people to do things *well* and also the *right things* (Beer, Eisenstat, & Foote, 2009); that is, in terms of *optimization* rather than *maximization*¹⁰ that guarantees sustainability.

8 Ostrom uses the term common pool resource; in this book it will be understood as the set of moral or cultural goods or values that belong to a community (Ostrom, 2011).

9 We are witnessing a modern individual without ties, but full of rights and duties. At the same time, the reification of people and the extreme commercialization of their relationships restrains all possible recognition among them and hinders the conception of values and their valuation. This individualistic competition puts people in a race for the purpose of having more, rather than being more, nothing is further from the eco-systemic logic of nature whose competence is based on strengthening its identity as a species.

10 Ecosystems prefer optimization rather than maximization, which is usually the opposite when it comes to mechanical or linear organizations. The eco-systemic complexity implies a balance between efficiency and equity, it encourages a vision where these are not only opposed but complementary at the same time, optimization entails adaptability to the system's functionalities, recycling information,

Figure 1
Appropriation – Provision



Source: The authors

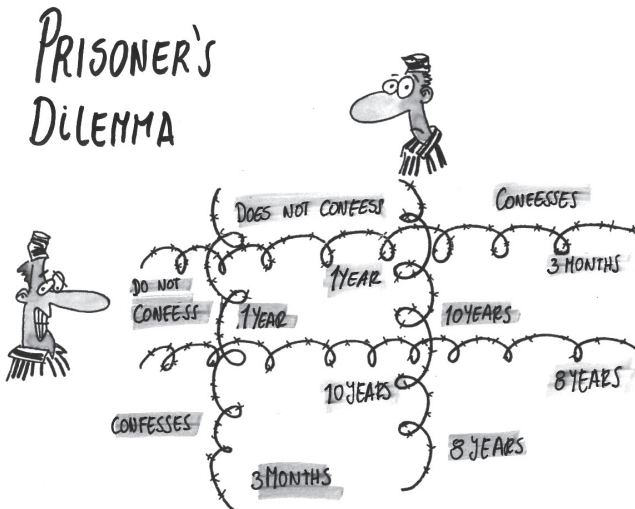
Some studies try to understand human behavior under conditions of freedom in order to obtain common benefits. For example, the prisoner's dilemma,¹¹ a non-cooperative game which refers to two suspects who are arrested and separated. The prosecutor is

processes and materials, as well as tending to multifunction. Maximization alone is only oriented to the result, justifying the means and breaking the interactions and interdependencies of the network (Walker, 2010).

- 11 According to Cunningham, the prisoner's dilemma was developed by the mathematician A. W. Tucker of Stanford University around the 1950s, early in the theory of games (Cunningham, 1967). Taylor argues that in a 2×2 game like the prisoner's dilemma the decision of the agents is induced (Taylor & Ward, 1982) since each prisoner must prefer non-cooperation both when the other player cooperates and when not, inferring that it is not profitable to provide the property in any case; the author considers that the real situations (given the dynamics in the decision making) themselves are not dilemmas of the prisoner, he proposes another alternative like the game of the hen

sure that they are guilty of the crime, but does not have the necessary evidence to convict them, he tells each prisoner separately that they can confess or not confess the crime which the police are sure they committed. If neither confesses, then the prosecutor will charge them with false minor charges, so that both will receive a lesser punishment; if both confess, they will be prosecuted, although the prosecutor would recommend lesser sentences; but if one confesses and another does not, then the confessor will receive an indulgent treatment for offering evidence, while the other will be treated with all the rigor of the law. If years are allocated, the strategic problem of the game would be as shown below:

Figure 2
Prisoner's dilemma



Source: The authors based on Ostrom, 2011

On the other hand, biologist Hardin (1968) suggested a metaphor about overpopulation by analyzing cattle herders sharing common pastures. He described how they, when seeking personal bene-

fits, use the maximum number of livestock possible to graze, which produces a tragedy. Hardin says: “ruin is the destiny to which all men run, when each pursue their own interest... freedom in commons supposes the ruin of all “(Hardin, 1968, p. 1244).

Olson argues that it is necessary to influence decisions so they commit *collective actions* (2002) through a system of incentives¹² that encourages people to contribute to a shared goal. Despite this, he identified a problem: *parasitism*, in which one of the agents obtains the advantages of the commons without contributing to their maintenance.

Although these metaphors and analyses harm the future of humanity, they must be assumed as a challenge since they do not take into account fundamental factors such as: (i) differentiate *open access* from the *management of commons*; (ii) only individualistic behavior is taken into account, but there may also be individuals or groups that work for common benefits and manage common resources when there are appropriate conditions, appropriate rules and conflict resolution mechanisms (Feeny, Berkes, McCay, & Acheson, 1990); (iii) communication in systems; (iv) eliminate relationships, interdependencies and natural synergies in human beings; (v) the possibility of what Polanyi called the *counter movement*¹³ is unk-

12 Considering the development of Organizational Theory, the theories about labor welfare arise jointly with labor psychology; and although initially created in an attempt to reconcile the positions against labor exploitation, they begin to design techniques and programs in order to manage and constitute the identities of the people with respect to the discipline and work practices, in order to facilitate reaching consensus for the organization (Ibarra Colado, 1999).

13 Karl Polanyi presents the possibility of a counter movement that emerges from society to protect itself against the contradictions presented by the market based only on exchange as a form of social integration, since according to the author a market regulated by invisible hand is utopian, an institution of this kind could not exist for a long time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society. Polanyi's effort to investigate the economic models of pre-capitalist societies

nown, since Hardin's solutions only go two ways; privatization and statism; (vi) it is confirmed that individualistic action is caused by the imposition of an economic system which many times is against the common will (Felber, 2012).

While any of these approaches is useful to understand aspects of commons, their concepts have been over-exploited as models considered *realistic*, when situations are much more complex and dynamic. Therefore, instead of analyzing why a person is *trapped* and has no way out, it would be better to think about how they themselves can find ways to increase *trust*¹⁴ and self-organize¹⁵ to produce reciprocal agreements. Then, diversity and complexity mean that there are no solutions for all the dilemmas of commons and that they must be developed in community.

Ostrom seeks to understand how a group of agents, in an independent context, can self-organize and self-govern themselves in order to obtain common benefits (2011) even though they are tempted to

rescued a concept of reciprocity and redistribution with respect to sharing work, thus showing that it was not only possible to find outputs harmonious with the values of society, but also they existed throughout the history of mankind (Polanyi, 2007). In the Ecuadorian context it is not necessary to go back so far in time, the Sumak Kawsay, proposed by the indigenous movement, elevates the relevant values of its social conception: integral humanism, communitarianism, plurinational community democracy, plurinationality, unity in diversity, self-determination, sovereignty, independence and international solidarity. Based on knowledge and community practices, they propose the harmonious relationship between man and nature, establishing the concept of harmony as caused by the imposition of an economic system often against common will (Felber, 2012).

- 14 The subject can be deepened in the compendium made by Adela Cortina in an article that summons a group of thinkers around ethics and trust (Cortina, 2003).
- 15 The concept of organization is necessary to explain the concept of system. The system is a "global unit made up by interrelated elements whose interpretation constitutes an organization... it is a combination of different elements that are interdependent... it is not identified with the phenomenal object, it is projected onto it" (Morin, 1974, p. 9)

live at the expense of others or act in an opportunistic manner. This argument suggests that the behavior of the agents depends on how they know, consider and evaluate the costs and benefits of their actions, as well as their perception of the relationship between these actions and the results since the latter also establish a cost –benefit relationship.

The author, when analyzing the behavior of the agents that take part in a “common pool resource” (Ostrom, 2011) which she calls *appropriators* and *suppliers*, argues that when the agents act independently the total benefits are generally lower than those they would have if they had established a joint strategy. This is why they feel bound to establish a mechanism of organization, since a single individual action is not capable of realizing or promoting a common interest or purpose (Olson, 2002).

Now, this does not necessarily imply creating some kind of structure-organization, but rather self-organization based on systemic, interdependent, circumstantial behaviors and applying a certain frequency so they can occur. That is, conjugate and coordinate activities without changing a form of shared culture (Kreps, Milgrom, Roberts, & Wilson, 1982).

Ostrom’s approach is particularly important because it suggests addressing the problem of governance of commons not only from classic paradigms such as the *prisoner’s dilemma*, but also considers that the problems of managing commons are characterized by collective action and, therefore, because of the problematic related to appropriation-provision. Thus, the approach establishes an initial assumption: the appropriators in situations of common use resources (which can also be considered a set of goods, moral and cultural values which are part of a community).

The congruence between *appropriation* and *provision* implies the constant search for solutions to overcome the imbalances between the appropriation and availability of resources. Likewise, it

implies finding appropriate ways to assign responsibilities to build, restore or maintain the common use resources (Ostrom, 2011). These imbalances occur when too many agents appropriate the common resource¹⁶ or larger amounts of the resource because they have greater capacity to take advantage of it. Therefore, this allocation of the flow of the appropriate resources is given in order to reduce the conflict around the assignment of rights and atomization of resources.

The dependence of agents with the common use resources of limited access, denoted by the ability to access resources according to the rules that are created in the community, as well as compliance monitoring mechanisms, make the University a different structure to the *prisoner's dilemma*. A decompensation of the balance that results from privileging appropriation will lead the agents to survive in any factor of production outside the current rules (Townsend & Wilson, 1990).

Another problem with appropriation has to do with temporary access to resources due to heterogeneity and uncertainty. This can place certain agents in privileged positions with respect to others in such a way that, if the agents perceive that access to resources has an unfair distribution, they can reverse their willingness to take part of activities which contribute to the common use resources.

The problem of appropriation and its regulation have to do with the organization for supervision and control, which implies a modification of the organizational structures and the normalization of the entire university, establishing relations of strategic behavior between appropriators and the monitoring councils¹⁷.

16 The term common property resources is used in relation to a limited access resource, that is, where a group of appropriators depends jointly on the system to access the resources

17 Gardner defines this interaction as the game between detection and deterrence (Gardner, Ostrom, & Walker, 1990). To establish limits that contribute not to affect

Regarding the aforementioned issue, the different ways of assigning responsibilities to build, restore or maintain the University Ecosystem (common use resources) that provide resources, if agents act independently their efforts will not be as productive as if they acted collectively, therefore the common good will not be sustainable.

There is no one single way to solve these problems. The only agreement is that the models used to produce a collective action (Oliver, 1980) imply different assumptions and conclusions. Therefore, the university government must ensure the participation of the community in the university and leave behind an endogamic or autarchic government of the university for the university. Otherwise, a dialogue between instrumental reason and critical sense (direction and reason of being) would not be possible.

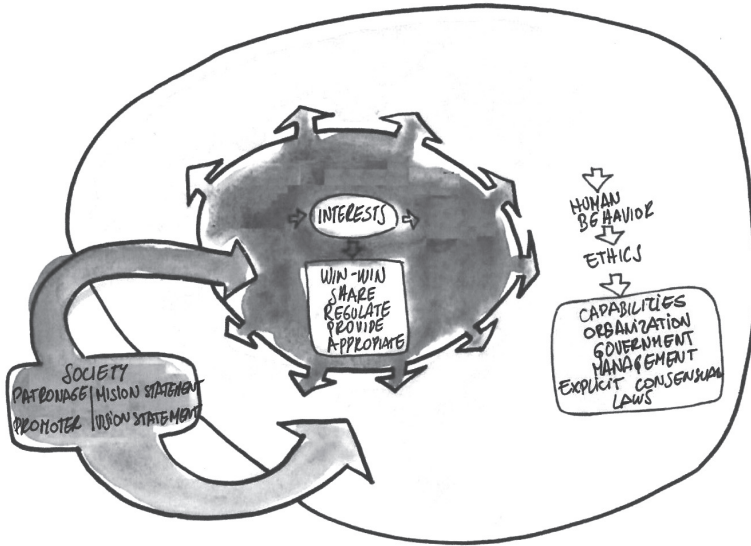
Then, it is possible to rethink government systems by combining representative collegiate bodies and gregarious bodies (groups), not subject to the political dynamics of representative democracy. This way, personal interests are regulated by common interests, endowing with positive synergies that call for communication for change in an ecosystem that enhances people's skills (Salgado, De los ríos, & López, 2017) and the community (Salgado & Herrán, 2017).

A representative collegiate body, which we will call the Monitor Council, for example, which comes from the State or the Promoters, both for public and private universities respectively, has the mission of ensuring that shared agreements or constituted norms are complied with. This guarantees not only the university's *raison d'être* as a product and producer of society, but also the logics of

the resource itself, it is essential to establish the relationship between the choice of an individual strategy and the choices made by the other agents, as well as establishing the dependence between the solution of supply problems and the solutions to the problems of appropriation.

appropriation-provision of the agents so that there is a sustainable balanced / non-balanced management of common use resources.

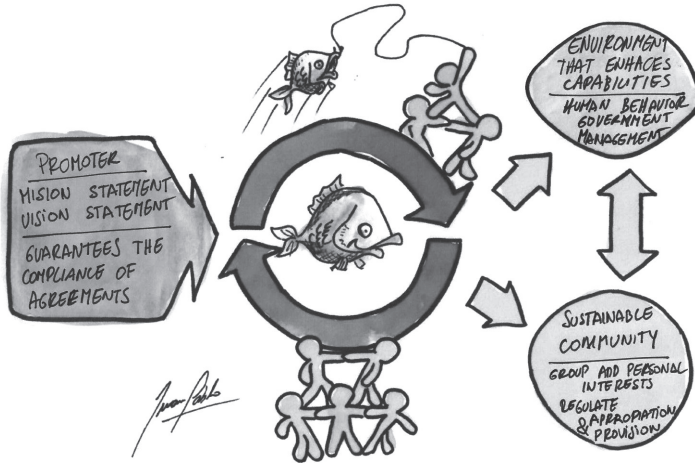
Figure 3
Society, university, environment that enhances skills



Source: The authors

On the other hand, the Councils of collective action among the agents should guarantee the congruence between *appropriation-provision* establishing rules for the use of resources, approved in consensus, where the majority of the agents whose strategies are affected participate and therefore also suppose the knowledge of others about them. That is, accept that the council apply and supervise its compliance.

Figure 4
Monitor council and councils of collective action



Source: The authors

The main concern regarding the establishment of rules is the dynamic and constant change of the organization of groups and therefore of the University. This also implies flexibility (not laxity) in the rules of the game created in agreement with the agents. In this regard, Ostrom states that changing and flexible organizations, in contrast to restricted and rigid institutions (Ostrom, 2011, p. 101), have the following mechanisms:

- Changes in rules that apply to actions at a certain level are given within a set of rules which are generally “fixed” at a wider level (they can only be modified by the Monitoring Council.) Changes in the rules of higher levels are generally more difficult and expensive to carry out, which increases the stability of mutual expectations among individuals who interact according to a set of rules (these modifications can be carried out by the Collective Action Councils).

Table 1
Rules and levels of analysis

Rules	<i>Constitutions</i> Monitoring Council (Promoters)	<i>Collective Election</i> Institutional govern- ment councils (Government col- legiate bodies)	<i>Operational</i> Collective action council (Self-organiza- tion councils)
Levels of analysis	Constitutionality	Collectivity	Operability
Processes	Formulation Management Adjudication Modification Macro monitoring	Design of policies Administration Adjudication	Appropriation Provision Specific monitoring Imposition

Created based on Ostrom (2011, p. 111)

In this regard, the university can combine the institutional (internal) aspect and the external significance of its presence. The eco-systemic emergency principle sustains the validity of the norms for the community, acting from the “bottom / up” based on intuitive and sometimes not very articulated experience. Once the consensus emerges, the monitoring body guarantees the decrease in value permeating the community “top / down”.

This shared ecosystem, which enhances skills, feeds the organization –system of the university as a common use resource. Ostrom’s research on commons identified the following design principles characteristic of long-term institutions that are described below¹⁸:

- The existence of clearly defined boundaries.
- The rules of use are coherent both with local conditions and with the dynamics of appropriation-provision.

18 It can be deepened in “Governing *the Commons*” by Elinor Ostrom (2011, pp. 167–185).

- The individuals who are affected by the rules can participate to modify them, that is, in collective action arrangements.
- The behavior of appropriators and suppliers are accountable to themselves and to external authorities, through monitoring mechanisms and mechanisms to self-monitor the behavior of members.
- A graduated system of sanctions is available.
- There are simple and effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

There is a minimum recognition of the rights of the appropriators to constitute their own self-organized groups without being questioned by external authorities.

- The interdependent tasks of *appropriation-provision*, as well as those of *supervision-sanction*, *conflict resolution* and *government activities*, are organized in multiple levels of activities and in a nested structure.¹⁹

The governance of the university is produced in what we will call *meeting places*²⁰ where the multiple flows of research and teaching

19 The author uses the term nested enterprises to refer to the articulation of multilevel institutions, when the common use resources are broad systems.

20 The meeting places are the product of the crossings of multiple flows that intervene in the creative and research dynamics of the university: professorship, postgraduate and undergraduate theses, research programs, groups, teaching staff, external demands, internal demands, publications, dissemination of results, linkage of research, technology transfer, innovation and development, entrepreneurship, etc. The planning from the base that deals with problems of each node (Research Groups and study programs) and their teaching-research interactions with the multiple meeting places. These places form a base structure on which central integral planning is needed, which deals with long-term generic problems, negotiated and agreed upon by the same groups through a socially disseminated university network. The integral approach should favor meeting places, dynamic, flexible and horizontal places, where the rules and practices of research can be reinvented. The outbreaks of the groups can be multiple, the more, the better, and they are created or disseminated according to their practical use. It is necessary to recognize them as a network based on multiple meeting places that do not follow a hierarchical order because they belong to the order of creativity that produces outbreaks from any point

functions intervene. For this, it is necessary to have a model of university governance bodies that interact in an uncontrolled rhizome and through action can undertake planning from below (Salgado & Herrán, 2017). Thus, the university community will regulate the collective interest as a movement of provision and sustainability of the university, and the individual interest of appropriation of what the university offers.

The eco-systemic organization²¹ extrapolates the logic of nature and living systems to understand Organizational Theory. Without absolute pretensions, it tries to collect some particularities of living organisms as a result of evolution and conjugate them with coincident approaches of notable theorists throughout history. It may leave a sense of *disorder*, but its strength lies precisely in the ability to discover and explain reality from a *different perspective of order*, where no controlled or strict readjustments are needed because there are other elements that facilitate monitoring and management of its projection from knowledge management that the organization itself produces. Hence, order remains elsewhere, hidden in personal and community development that sustain the Common Good.²²

The eco-system organization, communicative forms and decision making. Dialogue with other views

The proposal, based on the organization that conceives social forms and institutions as living entities that participate in the same

21 The proposed eco-systemic organization does not equal the organization's ecology approaches. The first proposes an analogy with nature to understand the organization as a living organism that promotes the development of people; while the second focuses on the processes of creation, change and disappearance of organizations as a result of a natural selection in the middle of the jungle of capital.

22 In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II stated that the autonomy of the University is necessary to carry out its functions effectively and guarantee its members academic freedom, safeguarding the rights of the person and the community within the demands of truth and of the common good (Pope John Paul II, 2014).

ecosystem, both agrees with and differs from the interpretation of two thinkers who treat the distinction between life and system differently: Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas, both controversial Germans. Luhmann is closest to the functionalist positions (from the right wing) and Habermas, one of the last proponents of the Frankfurt school of critical thinking (close to the European left wing).

From our perspective, what is institutionalized –the system– is a subsequent reality that expresses life, and this fundamental characteristic is what differentiates it from Luhmann’s point of view, who believes the organization as a social system is an autopoietic and self-referential reality, different from biological systems. For Habermas, the system is confronted in a dialectical reality with respect to life. Both of them offer possibilities to better specify our proposal.

Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) addresses the theory of society and organization from the general theory of systems, which implies a break with classical European theory and its concepts because it was produced in times of less complexity. In addition, it is not about improving society but about observing and understanding it in order to reduce complexity and act in the midst of it. Unlike Ostrom, Luhmann sees organizations as systems that seek not to regulate access to commons, but to produce themselves taking restrictive decisions regarding their environment in order to minimize their causality as much as possible. Unlike our proposal, his model presents organizations whose communication makes sense to make decisions in order to reduce uncertainty and complexity.

Our brief comment is based on his key writing: *Society and system: the ambition of theory* (Luhmann, 1990) which, although specific types of systems are distinguished, concentrates on the theory of

social systems.²³ Social systems are accessible through a type of contingent problematization that constantly generalizes and re-specifies without looking for essences, substantialities or subjectivities that support social action, such as, for example, social *classes*; substituted notions, as we shall see, for the *self-referential system*.

His view offers a non-descriptive point of view in the sense of accounting for the complexity of organizations, but rather operational and as Luhmann advises, “the general theory of systems (...) is formulated in the language of problems and their solutions”; In terms of granting “different functional-equivalent solutions” between the systems (Luhmann, 1990, p. 46) harboring a functional perspective and a vision of social systems and of the organization as acting structures. Therefore, he does not speak “of states but of operations” (1990, p. 75) and emphasizes the relationships between elements of the system in terms of opting and deciding, understandable only from “operational possibilities” with their environment (1990, p 47).

Society is a particular form of system endowed with the “ability of establishing relationships with itself, and to differentiate these relationships from the relationships with its environment” (1990, p. 44). The environment and the world are non-systems (1990, p. 67) because –we understand– they are not acting units; at the same time, people are not part of the system but of the environment.²⁴ The social system is a different self-referential reality and at the same time it structurally orients its environment; that is, “it cannot exist without the environment” (1990, p. 50) and the actions of the system aim to produce a difference with respect to the environment. The point is

23 It is worth stating that Luhmann unfolds his general theory of systems in a theory of organization in his posthumous work *Organization and Decision* (2006, 2010), focused on decision making and its forms of communication.

24 As stated by (Melich, 1995, p. 18) “Society is a system, but a system that is not made up of individuals, of man, but of communications. Men are part of society’s environment”

not to understand the environment, but to act in relation to it. The relationship with the environment is always confusing and changing and being able to act in relation to it implies observing selectively.

The system acts to gain a difference regarding the environment and in that difference achieve unity with itself in relation to its subsystems:

... the unity of the system can be interpreted based on the beginning of the construction of its differentiation. Through differentiation, the system becomes more systematic, and, in addition to its mere identity (in its differentiation from *others*), it gains a second constitution of its unit (in its differentiation *with itself*). The system can reach its unity as the primacy of a certain form of differentiation, for example, as the equality of its subsystems, as a simple series, as a hierarchy, as a difference of function systems. Here, more demanding (unlikely) forms of systemic differentiation represent central evolutionary acquisitions that, if successful, stabilize systems at a higher level of complexity (Luhmann, 1990, p. 55).

Autopoiesis is understood as the ability to control “some and not all the causes that are needed to achieve a certain effect”, according to a calculated process of selection and verification. Therefore, the system is as complex as its “operational possibilities of selection” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 82). Thus, systems operate through a continuous process of differentiation with respect to the environment, opening possibilities to select only those options that allow them to differentiate themselves by specifying themselves more and more.

The environment is always open and lacks the capacity for action; while the system is closed (communication is valid only within the system, outside the system there is no communication) but open to the environment. Autopoiesis implies that the system “reproduces actions” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 94). This restates the problem of self-organization in the sense that the problem lies in the “capacity of

connection” that makes autopoietic reproduction possible, which in turn makes it possible to achieve its existential base. There will be more structured answers than others, but they should always guarantee existence in the difference.

Every system implies elements and relationships, therefore in a system “there are no elements without a relational connection, nor relationships without elements” (1990, p. 59), both (elements and relationships) constitute the systemic complexity. The elements acquire meaning when they act together, when they are related to each other to select differentiating options of the system regarding the environment.

Elements are considered such if they are used “from top to bottom” according to autopoiesis (1990, p. 64) where Luhmann differs from Morin, who believes life proceeds “from the bottom up” (see note 22, 1990, p. 65). At this point, the belief based on biomimicry defended in this article distances itself from Luhmann since he proposes that decision-making and institutional norms can and should express those “bottom-up” practices that make the viability of commons possible. The relations between elements are regulated by conditioning, by the “conditions of possibility” that they can carry out, in a constant game of inclusions and exclusions. The more possibilities they can carry out for themselves, the more complex the system is (1990, p. 66).

Complexity and uncertainty are states to be overcome. Because the system is complex, it must select and *reduce* options to reduce complexity and self-produce. At the same time, the complexity of the environment overruns the system and the system reaches the selections through which the environment adapts better to the system (1990, p. 71). Thus, Luhmann transcends the adaptive postures in which institutions and organizations seek to adapt to the environ-

ment to propose the opposite belief: thanks to the selections of the system, it is the environment that ends up adapting to the system.

A second type of complexity “is a measure of indeterminacy or lack of information. In this regard, complexity is the information that a system lacks in order to fully understand and describe its environment [complexity of the environment] or itself [system complexity]” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 76). Thus, complexity is a “horizon of selection” through which systems reintroduce in themselves “the unknown variable and hence the reason why it is effective, as a factor of fear, as a concept of insecurity and risk, as a problem of planning and decision, as an excuse” (1990, p. 77).

Every system is self-referential. In its theory there is no place to suppose subjects of action and election and these are replaced by the concept of a *self-referential* system that acts in its difference “for itself”. As explained later, “selection can no longer be conceived as an initiative of a subject, nor analogously to an action. It is a process without a subject, an operation produced by the existence of a difference” (1990, p. 86). The concept of a self-referential system... “maintains that unity is something that must be built and does not pre-exist as an individual, as a substance, as an idea of the operation itself” (p. 88).

Self-reference is the “capacity of connection” that makes it possible to overcome the paradox of losing oneself (1990, p. 91). Social systems are *systems of meaning* since they are capable of acting “for themselves” meaning that they perform in external environments, and not “in themselves”; they are isolated to the external environment (p. 98). The meaning allows the system to operate with respect to its internal differences and according to the environment.

Self-referentiality of systems result in political and communicational consequences. First of all because the system generates asymmetries that are not always translated into hierarchies and theory

advocates for “the resignation of the possibilities of unilateral control... no part of the system can control others, without falling under control” (1990, p. 96), and suggests control and counter control devices. The problem of control is compensated by self-observation, applying distinctions, especially regarding the system-environment distinction. Control and counter control make sense as long as they allow autopoiesis.

Autopoiesis depends to a great extent on the capacity for structural adaptation of the self-referential system and on the scope of the system’s internal communication (Heidegger, 1988). Information is such when it is integrated into a selective process to guide the decision based on the difference, resisting the pressure of the environment. This implies that a self-referential system is such when its decisions are subtracted from an external command to itself.

Communication –conversation– is approached from the multiple constitution of the system because, as a complex unit, it admits divergent complexities. Communication can be *mutualistic*, either to promote the individualization of complex systems as to admit the possibility of various behaviors (Luhmann, 1990, pp. 100-101). But the truth is that in all cases communication will always be mutualistic because “to communicate means to limit (that is, to set limits to oneself and to others)” (p. 102). Thus, Luhmann suggests that agreements and consensus are not possible as equidistant positions, the achievement of arrangements or sum of agreements and balances, since communication produces decisions that involve very specific limits and options, only those that make autopoiesis possible. To communicate is to decide to selectively reduce the surplus of possibilities that are open to decision-making.

Habermas’ proposal is different and presents the concepts related to system and lifeworld in the two volumes of *Theory of communicative action* (Habermas, 1987a, 1987b). In general terms, the author in-

tends to provide clues to carry out “true” modernity, which is unknown to instrumental reason which has reduced rationality to technique. Habermas’s task is to rectify the unfinished project of the illustration.

To comply with what has been said, he proposes to consider ethics from the contribution of language; in other words, Habermas’ ethics is based on the potentiality of language and dialogue, on the idea of the individual that talks “rationally” and supports the constitution of a free and rational subject. From there he suggests discursive ethics in which, through dialogue, the ethical problems of contemporary societies could be resolved. It is through communicative rationality that the consensus that would resolve moral questions of contemporary societies. Therefore, moral is not a pre-established dogma, but the result of the procedure deployed from dialogue and consensus. However, in order to achieve communicative rationality required by Habermas, the existence of a series of symmetry conditions is necessary, in other words, an ideal speech situation based on free, equitable and critical participation.

Regarding the above, language is not a simple “medium” of communication or transmission of meanings. It has a *telos* that is to be communicative rationality, an understanding that allows the constitution of a meaningful world. The paradigm of Habermas is that of intersubjectivity: not relativism or dogmatism. Linguistic understanding is communicative, discursive and argumentative rationality. It allows rational consensus within the lifeworld among interlocutors. Thus, the function of language is communicative intersubjectivity; the lifeworld is produced in it.

The lifeworld is made up of two areas: material and symbolic. The material area is the domain of instrumental operations and technological application to the domestication of nature through work (Díaz Montiel & Márquez Fernández, 2008). In the symbolic area, subjects communicate their needs, interpret the world, negotiate

their action; all this through language. Modernity has produced the division between the system and the lifeworld; and through rationalization, it fractured these two areas of the lifeworld and contrasted them. It is now a matter of integrating the two spheres of interaction.

Communicative interactions are intertwined in the lifeworld, communicative action allows the conditions of validity, the conditions of discursive rationality. The lifeworld refers to the point of view of the subject that acts in society. The system works externally, it contemplates society from the observer, that is, from the “non-involved”.

The lifeworld is composed of culture (continuation of valid knowledge, tradition and renewal of cultural knowledge), society (stabilization of group solidarity) and personality (training of agents capable of being accountable for their actions). Each component of the lifeworld is correlated to the system: cultural production, social integration and personality development.

The main problem for Habermas is how to connect the conceptual strategies that imply the lifeworld and the system. He considers that the perspective of social integration is centered on the lifeworld and is achieved through the consensus generated by communication, while the perspective of integrating the system is integrated through external control over individual decisions. The problem is that each perspective ignores what the other contributes. In this regard, it is necessary to integrate the two conceptual strategies and understand societies “simultaneously as a system and as a lifeworld” (1987b, p. 168).

In summary, Luhmann’s position is contrary to biomimetics because the organization is not a living system, it is a social one. Thus, this discards the possibility of considering it an eco-system. Its contribution refers to the management of organizations included as autopoietic and self-referential social units, whose elements are connected to each other in function of effective operations for their

specification and differentiation regarding the environment. Therefore, it is not commons that are not at stake, but the effectiveness of differentiation processes based on communication that restricts and reduces complexity. At the same time, it favors social action understood as technology, exercised from top to bottom and as a substitution, giving control an important role.

This is what our model intends to change when suggesting a way to intervene the opacity of systems and subsystems from dialogue and meeting places. From our perspective, systems are groups of people who risk the viability of collectively managed commons in their decisions.

Habermas, on the other hand, refers to a model of society conceived from the imaginary of liberal democracy. From his theory of communicative action, he establishes a tense and dialectical relationship between the lifeworld and the system, which leverages forms of communicative action based on consensus from which the lifeworld seeks to prevail over the system. However, the Habermasian consensus responds to the reality of European democratic societies and is subject to an idealized vision of social subjects presented as immune to the asymmetries of power that, most of the time, determine and condition consensus.

The government's perspective of commons does not appeal to the forms of action and communication of systems nor to that of European cosmopolitan societies, it rather appeals to the institutionalized forms of collective action characteristic of Andean and rural communities, which must act and decide their continuity in its territory, along with the continuity and efficient use of its resources. In this regard, Ostrom's contribution shows its limit by stopping in the conditions of agreements about commons resources –secure the provision-appropriation circuit; the credible commitment; and mutual monitoring (2011, pp. 95 ff.)– without delving into the type

of collective subject that decides: the community whose constitutive fact represents its anchor in the territory over which it exercises jurisdiction. Territoriality is the great absence of Ostrom's contribution.

Community management of collective resources is based on modes of communication that transcend the ethics of control and the programmed organization of processes between systems; they are even beyond the communicative forms that reduce the consensus to the product of an intermediate negotiation between individual or corporate interests. The perspective advocated in this article aims to cultivate forms of communication and collective decision making that are contiguous with the ethics of responsibility, which make the viability of vital resources and common goods possible by considering agents not as units of a system or subsystem but as responsible and deliberative subjects debating from the position of those who assume a common debt, in full possession of what is at stake and the scope and consequences of their decisions.

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