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Editorial

Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru

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Morality, or the lack of it, is a concern for all of humankind. When someone expresses frustration over a lack of morality in their environment, it indicates a deep respect for moral principles. If, however, someone remarks that there is too much immorality, they are expressing a desire for more morality in their world. Any such outrage about the absence of morality in our world, about the current state of morality, is important for any society. We must recognize that moral values have a place of their own, and that place is primarily in people's souls and their desires. People aspire for more morality, including honesty, fairness, courage, dignity, and freedom in their lives. Unfortunately, moral values do not have a prominent status in today's society, and this is not necessarily a matter of our desire, but of the very structure of the contemporary world. Today's world, characterized by extraordinary progress in the status of knowledge, science, and technology, has led to a situation where scientific, technical, and utilitarian values are dominated by only two categories—the possible and the impossible. In science, it is possible to know something or impossible to know something at a given moment; the same applies to technology and utility. However, science without moral conscience leads to the ruin of the soul.

From its very beginnings, humanity has developed a natural morality of preserving the human condition on Earth. This moral code has led to the creation of prohibitions born out of the need for freedom and survival. Every human being must exercise the freedom to establish self-imposed limits by refraining from actions that are harmful to oneself, others, or human nature in general. Freedom means to do anything, as long as you do not harm the person next to you, because your freedom ends where the freedom of others begins. The minimum condition for human morality is the ability to make free, rational decisions. The human condition includes having a rational morality, privileged by the fact that we also have a natural morality. Two very important values for morality—love and mercy—are natural and innate. As human beings, we are born with a certain capacity to strive for morality, and whether it develops or not is up to us. For example, Judaism,

Christianity, and other religions that emphasize morality have this particular strength in humanity precisely because it emphasize these two innate values. As rational beings, we have the special privilege of making judgments that are universally and necessarily valid for every rational being on Earth. Although we are finite, our capacity for reason and our aspiration to be moral allows us to grasp the concept of infinity. Therefore, life has a moral value. The fact that we are rational beings leads us to the attitude of having coherence and consistency in our judgments, statements, and behavior.

Among the causes of the decline of morality in society, we find that people have simply tried to adapt, especially in terms of survival, even if the shock has been great at certain points in history. Adaptation was to be achieved through work, honesty, fairness, courage, gentleness, simplicity—conditions for which people were often not prepared. It is imperative that the distinction between right and wrong, and between moral and immoral, should be made in the minds of as many people as possible. A democratic society is one in which the tendency of the people toward moral correction is supported through state institutions, and then obviously dishonesty must then be exposed through legal measures. The real education of society can be achieved with the right words, and a good educator is one who finds the right words to guide young people to do the right thing, not necessarily what they want, because inevitably desires do not always overlap with what needs to be done. The skill of an educator is to know how to slide freely between the two concepts of right and wrong, moral and immoral, knowing that these are boundaries and red lines that must not be crossed. Unfortunately, the public psychology of post-modernity has led to a fluidity of judgments and opinions, resulting in a leveling of opinions that makes it difficult for some to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, true education must clarify all the nuances between right and wrong, making them easy to distinguish.

Unbridled confidence in self-correction can sometimes lead to disasters, being even an immune-deficiency syndrome of today's society, when the humanitarian values of contemporary society are under attack, in particular the sanctity of life, human dignity, human freedom, and freedom between people. A project that will stand the test of time will be the one that will appeal again and again, not to the relativity of values, which obviously exists, but to the need for the absolute in life, for freedom, equality, and human dignity. It is up to each individual to ensure that society does not remain the same but that human morality increases. Every individual must recognize the sense of moral sanctity, bearing in mind that the more moral they become, the more they will strengthen the morality and humanity in themselves as well as in those around them.

Analyzing Current Debates in Management and Organization Studies: A Meta-theoretical Review and Dialectic Interpretation

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on concepts from the philosophy of science, dialectically synthesized are academic conflicts grounded in ideological and epistemological heterogeneity in management and organizational scholarship. The presented review and application of the meta-theory of scientific paradigms highlights connections and continuities with prior controversies to delineate, deconstruct, and reappraise current discourses in the pluralistic field of management and organization studies. Differentiating between theories of society emphasizing regulation vs. radical change, and scientific assumptions regarding objective vs. subjective realities, delineates *functionalist*, *interpretive*, *radical structuralist*, and *radical humanist* paradigms. Subsequent developments have transformed these ontological, epistemological, and axiological configurations into *post-positivist* (normative, mainstream), *interpretive* (constructivist, hermeneutic), *postmodern* (dialogic, poststructuralist), and *critical* (dialectic, antagonistic) research approaches. Associated meta-theorizing is applied to academic disputes involving critical management studies. Distinguishing degree and location yields four fundamental and foundational inter- and intra-paradigmatic conflicts: 1) the *evidence-debate* between critical scholars and mainstream functionalists; 2) the *performativity-debate* within critical management studies; 3) the *managerialism-debate* between radical structuralists and poststructuralists; and 4) the *ideology-debate* representing influences on adjacent fields, exemplified by an emerging critical paradigm in work and organizational psychology. Interdependent dynamics underlying these conflicts are framed as fermenting and fragmenting forces, driving paradigm delineation, differentiation, disintegration, and dissemination. The developed meta-theoretical perspective aims to facilitate more self-reflexive scholarship, meaning-making, and knowledge-creation by promoting deeper understanding and more proficient navigation of the organizational literature as an ideologically contested terrain of social science. Theorizing on research paradigms is helpful to make sense of underlying ontological, epistemological, and axiological fault lines. Trajectories of future developments are speculated about with a focus on dialectics between critical management studies and the emerging paradigm of critical work and organizational psychology.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy of science, research paradigms, academic discourse, critical management studies, critical work and organizational psychology, dialectic analysis, epistemological critique

Introduction

Situated at the nexus of powerful, inherent societal conflicts of interest, the interdisciplinary and heterogeneous field of management and organizational studies (MOS) has previously served as an academic battleground for heated ideological, methodological, and value-based disputes. Paralleling similar intellectual clashes in other fields, notably sociology (Strubenhoff 2018) and education (Ylimaki and Brunner 2011), these debates were fittingly termed the “paradigm wars” in MOS (Shepherd and Challenger 2013). Although contributions that explicitly problematize these fundamental paradigmatic conflicts seem to have subsided, the underlying tensions and contradictions may have camouflaged, diversified, and metastasized, but have not vanished (Learmonth and Harding 2006; McDonald and Bubna - Litic 2012). Against this background, the core objective of this critical review and essay is to outline, structure, and interpret current academic discourses in MOS, explore their foundations, interconnections, and dynamics, and suggest new patterns of meaning from a more integrated perspective, based on a previously developed meta-theoretical framework (Hornung and Höge 2021). Specifically, analyzed are debates surrounding the increasingly established, yet still controversial stream of Critical Management Studies (CMS), which broadly aims at promoting alternative interpretations of the functions, means, and meanings of management research, education, and practice (Adler, Forbes, and Willmott 2007). A pluralist umbrella-paradigm and self-described “big tent” approach, CMS is a heterogeneous movement that has set out to question, expose, and challenge prevailing understandings of management and organization, advocating for non-mainstream positions, alternative approaches, and unorthodox methodologies, rooted in critical thinking and emphasizing attention to power relationships and concern for social justice (Alvesson, Bridgman, and Willmott 2009). The big tent approach of CMS includes various (more or less) critical research streams and traditions, notably, Marxist Labor Process Theory (LPT), the Freudo-Marxist Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, but also other psychoanalytic, neo- and post-Marxist streams, including poststructuralist and postmodern theorizing, such as Foucault studies, phenomenology, discourse analysis, feminism, postcolonial and queer studies, critical race theory, post- and transhumanism, among others (Alvesson and Willmott 1992; Adler, Forbes, and Willmott 2007; Mumby and Ashcraft 2017). Paraphrasing an influential definition, CMS is an academic social movement that seeks critical questioning of dominant, harmful or limiting, under-challenged ideologies, institutions, interests, and identities by means of negation, deconstruction, re-voicing or de-familiarization. The practical aim is to instigate social reforms in the interest of

the majority, and/or those non-privileged, and to inspire resistance to and/or emancipation from those limiting influences, while maintaining some level of empathy and understanding for the effects of constraining conditions on people's experiences and actions (Alvesson, Bridgman, and Willmott 2009). Contentious elements in this definition, specifically the implied reference to a pragmatic stance and acceptance of real-world conditions, point towards and have culminated in the "performativity debate" within CMS, discussed below.

Critically questioning the taken for granted, challenging structures of domination, problematizing the non-neutrality of knowledge, and one's own positioning as a researcher, are considered common themes in CMS (Adler, Forbes, and Willmott 2007). In what has become a foundational contribution, Fournier and Grey (2000) have specified and condensed these issues, establishing *denaturalization*, *reflexivity*, and *anti- or non-performativity* as core paradigmatic principles or pillars of CMS. Echoing the classic critique of ideology, denaturalization means not taking social phenomena for granted (at face value), but rejecting, deconstructing, and transcending dominant (interest-guided, biased) interpretations of "common wisdom", by exposing their hidden agenda as projects of power (Seeck, Sturdy, Boncori, and Fougère 2020). Denaturalization requires reflexivity, as the critical interrogation of historical and socio-cultural contexts of observed phenomena as well as the interests served by prevailing interpretations, including the positioning and paradigmatic assumptions, biases, and intellectual preformation of the researchers themselves (McDonald and Bubna - Litic 2012). Anti- or non-performativity (as used here) refers to a stance that rejects any "functional" role of the researcher in colluding with the "management of human resources", i.e., the economic imperative of "valorizing" human activities via instrumental means-ends calculations to generate profit, considered exploitation in the classic critique of the political economy (Klikauer 2015a, 2015b). According to this postulate, CMS is antagonistically opposed to the goals of management, typically related to increasing efficiency and effectiveness or other economic objectives. However, this anti- or non-performative stance has become a matter of controversy, discussed below with regard to alternative objectives of "critical performativity" (Fleming and Banerjee 2016).

In the self-narrative of CMS, emergence of the paradigm in the early 1990s involved peculiar circumstances. As an academic movement, CMS was the result of sociologists and other critical social scientists in the UK (and Australia) seeking employment in business schools, following the neoliberal restructuring of universities, spelling austerity and cutbacks to less economically "value adding" departments and disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (Rowlinson and Hassard 2011). Academic success notwithstanding, the intellectual development of CMS has been influenced by the ideological defeat of the Left and the rise of the "New Right" in the form of Thatcherism and Reaganism, which would soon evolve into the hegemony of hyper-capitalist neoliberalism (Hassard, Hogan, and Rowlinson 2001). This account illustrates the tensions and dialectics of political

forces and socio-historical developments as drivers in the establishment, maintenance, and disintegration of research paradigms—a dialectic and dynamic interpretation, which is adopted in this essay. Unsurprisingly, CMS was never fully embraced by “functionalist” business-school disciplines, such as economics, mainstream management, or marketing, but, within the last decades, still has established itself as a significant stream with own networks, journals, handbooks and textbooks, conferences, representation in professional associations, editorial boards, and commissions (Adler, Forbes, and Willmott 2007; Klikauer 2015a; Parker 2023). Further, CMS has had considerable interdisciplinary outreach and impact on adjacent fields, contributing to the development of critical paradigms in other areas of MOS, such as accounting (Baker 2011), marketing (Tadajewski, 2010), organization history (Durepos, Shaffner, and Taylor 2021), organizational communication (Mumby and Ashcraft 2017), and human resource management (Bratton and Gold 2015; Delbridge and Keenoy 2010), but also applied social psychology (McDonald and Bubna - Litic 2012) and community psychology (Davidson et al. 2006). Thus, CMS has become increasingly institutionalized and influential as a pluralistic meta-paradigm.

More recently, however, not only the usual theoretical frictions and discussions, but more serious fissures and divisions have appeared along familiar fault lines of the included sub-paradigms, pitting different degrees of “criticality” and concerns with economic structures against each other. Underlying latent disagreements have, in varying degrees, become manifest in academic disputes and controversies, such as the “performativity debate”, which involves questions of seeking cooperation or conflict with managerial interests, and the suggested secession of Critical Theory-based and Marxist streams from CMS (Klikauer 2018). Reviewing, structuring, and discussing these debates is the core intention of the present essay, thus, trying to provide an overview of current issues in critical management discourse. Moreover, a central proposition of this contribution is that these disputes need to be interpreted as a continuation or (re-)manifestation of the so-called paradigm wars in MOS and others fields, respectively, that theorizing on research paradigms is invaluable for analyzing and making sense of the underlying issues, arguments, and disagreements in current academic discourse.

Paradigms in Management and Organization Studies

Scientific paradigms were first introduced by Kuhn (1962) as overarching and largely unquestioned frameworks, shared by groups of scholars, organizing commonly accepted assumptions, theories, models, concepts, methods, conventions, and cumulative results, that is, the “intellectual universe”, that the respective research stream, field, or tradition operates in and out of. According to such a fundamental and categorical conceptualization, researchers in competing, alternative or succeeding paradigms inhabit entirely “different worlds”, each

characterized by specific ontological (theories about reality), epistemological (methods for knowledge-creation), and axiological (values and objectives) bases, beliefs or conventions (Freshwater and Cahill 2013). These axiomatic building blocks are assumed to be only limitedly compatible, valid, or transferable across paradigmatic boundaries, giving rise to notions of *incommensurability* (Kuhn 1962; Shepherd and Challenger 2013). The most intensely and controversially discussed issue of incommensurability deals with questions regarding if, how, when, and to what extent paradigms are mutually exclusive, self-contained, and isolated—or, alternatively, whether and how knowledge can be transferred, combined, or integrated across paradigm boundaries, resulting in multi-paradigmatic, inter-paradigmatic, meta-paradigmatic or paradigmatically pluralistic types of research (Ardalan 2019; Gioia and Pitre 1990; Schultz and Hatch 1996). Alternative concepts challenging incommensurability are paradigm *integration*, typically viewed in a hierarchical sense, such that a “deviating” or fringe paradigm is assimilated into the mainstream, and paradigm *dissolution*, as a dialectical process, where both paradigmatic frames of reference (thesis and antithesis) are simultaneously negated, preserved, and transformed (synthesis) into a new higher-order paradigm (Shepherd and Challenger 2013).

Alternatively, assuming paradigmatic *pluralism*, scholars have speculated about the different ways in which paradigms interact with each other (interplay) to produce new paradigmatic configurations and research approaches (Schultz and Hatch 1996). Answers to the above questions heavily independent on how comprehensive, rigorous, and fundamental research paradigms are defined in the respective context, thus leading to claims regarding the elusiveness of the paradigm-terminology. Hence, paradigms are most adequately represented as multi-level concepts. Scholars have argued that distinct meanings of paradigm involve at least four different levels, summarized as (1) worldview, (2) theory of knowledge, (3) research tradition, and (4) example or model (Freshwater and Cahill 2013). On the hierarchically highest level, research paradigms represent a comprehensive worldview, an integrated way of relating to and thinking about the world, including deep-seated attitudes, beliefs, and socio-moral values (Ardalan 2019). On the next lower level, paradigms can refer to an epistemological position, i.e., a theory of knowledge and its creation, including shared belief systems, shaping the ways in which research questions are derived, posed, and investigated. Further, paradigms can also refer to different research traditions, schools of thought, or communities of practice within an academic discipline, which are partly defined by shared beliefs and models regarding which and how methods of inquiry should be employed in the respective field (Bonache and Festing 2020). Lastly, paradigms can refer to influential examples, conventions, heuristics, or models, i.e., more or less tried and tested approaches to identify and investigate research problems, for instance, statistical or discursive methods. Less frequently pointed out or discussed is the strong theoretical (and practical) convergence between paradigms and ideologies (Hornung, Höge, and Unterrainer

2021). Similar to paradigms, ideologies provide frames of reference with orienting and descriptive as well as normative and legitimating functions. Moreover, critical conceptions of ideologies emphasize that these frameworks contain elements aimed at biasing, manipulating, and instrumentalizing their adherents at the behest of undisclosed powerful particular interests that are central for the creation and dissemination of the respective ideologies (Seeck, Sturdy, Boncori, and Fougère 2020). Emphasizing similarities between “research paradigms” and “research ideology” is useful to make salient and better understand that research is not beyond interest-guided influences (Hornung 2012). On the contrary, critical socio-historical analyses show that science can be easily biased and turned into an instrument of deception, repression or propaganda (e.g., industry-funded research as lobbying of vested interest; government intervention against politically inconvenient research). Illustrating this point, recently an intensive debate has ignited within work and organizational psychology regarding the socially, morally, and intellectually corrosive effects of neoliberal ideology in the design of and academic research on workplace practices (Bal and Dóci 2018). This critique of research ideology, which can be seen as a manifestation of reflexivity, has become a constitutive element of a new critical paradigm (Islam and Sanderson 2022; Weber, Höge, and Hornung 2020), as outlined further below and integrated into a suggested meta-theory of paradigm conflict in MOS.

Based on the seminal work of Kuhn (1962) on the philosophy of science, theorizing on research paradigms has made important contributions to developing MOS as an interdisciplinary and pluralistic field. An important milestone in this line of self-reflexive research is Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) taxonomy of sociological paradigms underlying different approaches to organizational analysis, as well its reconceptualization by Deetz (1996), and the subsequent extension by Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013). An insightful review and rhetoric analysis of the ensuing “paradigm wars”, i.e., controversial discussions and contentious exchanges by proponents of conflicting research traditions and philosophies, is provided by Shepherd and Challenger (2013), who are compiling arguments brought forward by scholars for and against paradigm incommensurability, integration, pluralism, and dissolution. The present study follows different aims, focusing on more recent debates involving or surrounding the self-proclaimed pluralistic paradigm of CMS. Partly, these debates resemble continuations or new editions of previous controversies. Similar to the concept of paradigm itself, the term “paradigm wars” is not clearly defined. Frequently, refers to the divide between quantitative and qualitative methods, typically associated with positivist and interpretive traditions in the social sciences (Freshwater and Cahill 2013). However, while this rift surely serves as a “battleground” or zone of engagement, it does not reflect the whole “theatre of war”. Paradigmatic disputes go beyond methodological or even epistemological differences, but include different basic assumptions about the nature of social realities, the foundations of human societies, and the inherent psychology of

the human species. Specifically, intersecting the rift between quantitative-positivistic and qualitative-interpretive methods is another paradigmatic divide with regard to critical-emancipatory orientation. Identified by Burrell and Morgan (1979) as the sociology of radical change is the Marxist tradition of immanent social critique of the political economy with the stated objective of the revolutionary transformation of stratified class-based societies. Often marginalized or downplayed by the mainstream, this critical paradigm is especially relevant for the present analysis as a constitutive force, to some extent “reincarnated” in CMS, but also as a source of ongoing controversy and paradigmatic dynamism as well as potential fragmentation.

Laying the foundation of the meta-theory of social science approaches in MOS, Burrell and Morgan (1979) distinguish *functionalist* and *interpretive* from *radical structuralist* and *radical humanist* paradigms. These four paradigms are differentiated based on converging and diverging assumptions in two dimensions: a) regarding the *objective vs. subjective* nature of social science and investigated realities; and b) orientation towards *regulation vs. radical change*, emphasizing social order vs. conflict as basis of society and organization. Each stream is discussed with regard to philosophical background, intellectual foundations, and influence on organizational analysis. In simplified terms, the four paradigms are rooted in Sociological Positivism (functionalist), German Idealism (interpretive), Historical Materialism or Marxism (radical structuralist), and Freudo-Marxist Critical Theory (radical humanist). The functionalist paradigm is also influenced by systems theory and critical rationalism, while influences on the interpretive paradigm include phenomenology, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology (Ylimaki and Brunner 2011). Differentiating these paradigms, the objective–subjective dimension involves assumptions concerning ontology (realism vs. nominalism), epistemology (positivism vs. anti-positivism), methodology (nomothetic vs. ideographic), and human nature (determinism vs. voluntarism). In the objectivist approach to social science, reality is a “given”, existing external and independent from the individual; focusing on empirical evidence and hypothesis testing, research seeks to discover generalizable fundamental laws and causal relationships that govern reality through the operationalization and measurement of constructs and quantitative analysis; rather than emphasizing free will and agency, humans are considered to be more strongly influenced by their environments (Goles and Hirschheim 2000). In contrast, in the subjectivist approach, reality is viewed as socially constructed and interpreted by the individual; similarly, knowledge is seen as relative and research focuses on understanding meanings of phenomena within the entirety of situations by analyzing subjective accounts.

Radical structuralist and radical humanist paradigms reflect these contrasts at least to some extent. While both share a Marxist conflict conception of society as class struggle, in the latter, the material conception of economic realities is complemented by influences of psychoanalytic theory, emphasizing subjective consciousness. Underlying the regulation–radical change dimension are

incompatible theories of society. The “order” or “integrationist” view in the functionalist and interpretive paradigm emphasizes stability, integration, functional coordination, and consensus. Accordingly, society tends toward unity, cohesion and shared interests with societal forces continuously improving the status quo. In contrast, the “conflict” or “coercion” perspective informing radical structuralist and radical humanist paradigm focuses on change, conflict, disintegration, and coercion (Burrell and Morgan 1979). Accordingly, society contains deep-seated structural conflicts, as ruling political economic elites oppress, constrain, and exploit the majority. Based on the former, the sociology of regulation is concerned with the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesion, solidarity, need satisfaction, and actuality, whereas sociology of radical change emphasizes social transformation, structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction, emancipation, deprivation, and potentiality.

The initial taxonomy of Burrell and Morgan (1979) was later revised by Deetz (1996), who relabeled the regulation/order vs. change/conflict distinction into one of embeddedness in social discourses of consensus vs. dissensus. The objective–subjective (ontological) dimension was replaced with an alternative (epistemological) distinction regarding the origin of concepts and problems, contrasting an elite or a priori with a local or emergent approach. In this post-structuralist reinterpretation, the concept of paradigms was substituted with “softer”, more ambiguous alternatives of “discourses”, “studies”, or “approaches”. Deetz (1996) distinguishes *normative* (functionalist mainstream), *interpretive* (hermeneutic, constructivist), *critical* (radical emancipatory), and *dialogic* (deconstructionist) studies. These discourses are characterized by their historical “time identity” as modern or progressive, premodern or traditional, late modern or reformist, and postmodern or deconstructionist. Further dimensions along which these approaches are contrasted include basic goals, methods, hopes, metaphors of relationships and organization, addressed problems, concern with communication, promised organizational benefits, narrative style, mood, and social fears (for details see Deetz 1996). This influential revision both illustrates and represents the linguistic turn in MOS, reflecting increased concern with discourses, subjectivities, language, and communication, instead of material structures, economic interests, ideology, and theoretical meta-narratives (Mumby and Ashcraft 2017).

Taken together, the contributions of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Deetz (1996) were extremely influential in MOS and numerous authors have adopted, modified or extended their meta-theoretical taxonomies (Ardalan 2019; Gioia and Pitre 1990; Goles and Hirschheim 2000; Schultz and Hatch 1996; Hassard and Wolfram Cox 2013; Kornau, Frerichs, and Sieben 2020). Both the classic model and the revised version are integrated in Table 1. The alternative taxonomies displayed in Table 2 incorporate various adjustments or modifications suggested by subsequent authors (Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter 2012). Accordingly, different approaches to MOS can be differentiated by the degree to which they frame

organization as conflict vs. order (pluralism or diverging interests vs. unitarism or converging interests) and/or structures as determined vs. created (based on power and interests vs. agency and free will). The former applies critical (structuralist) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to postmodern (poststructuralist) approaches, the latter to interpretive (hermeneutic) and postpositive (functionalist) research. Further, interpretive and postmodern approaches share a relativist ontology and inductive epistemology, that is, they emphasize subjective perceptions and generation of knowledge from real-world organizations. Postpositive and critical approaches build on realist assumptions regarding the objective existence of social phenomena and prioritize deductive epistemology in form of the application and testing of theory in organizations. Some variation notwithstanding, the most frequently distinguished paradigms converge with what has been broadly identified as postpositive, interpretive, postmodern, and critical approaches to social research.

Although the dimensions of Burrell and Morgan (1979) still hold some validity, they do not fully reflect the complexity and nuances of the differentiated approaches anymore. Drawing on Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2012), main ontological (theories), epistemological (methods), and axiological (objectives) characteristics of the four paradigms are summarized in Table 3. In addition to the ontological relativism-realism distinction, epistemological differences regarding prioritized modes of knowledge-creation range from postpositive empirical-technical observation and manipulation, hermeneutic interpretation, and postmodern deconstruction of discourses, to radical theory-based critique (Kornau, Frerichs, and Sieben 2020). The latter is combined in the critical paradigm with an emancipatory axiology, aimed at instigating radical change and social transformation. In contrast, postpositive research is geared toward devising interventions to increase control and performance, whereas interpretive approaches are mainly concerned with description, meaning, and understanding. Most proximal to the critical paradigm, postmodern or dialogic approaches pursue objectives of denaturalization, that is, disclosing, unmasking, and debunking hidden power relations, opening them up to discursive deliberation, rather than striving to uphold or overturn structures of domination and exploitation.

Notably, in a tripartite revision, Hassard and Wolfram Cox (2013) differentiate between a structural, anti-structural, and post-structural paradigm. The latter is characterized as ontological relativist, epistemological relationist, methodologically reflexive and deconstructionist with regard to human nature. Moreover, these authors suggest that each paradigm contains more status-quo-oriented or normative and critical streams or sub-paradigms. Critical post-structural theories of autonomism, post-structural feminism and post-colonialism are contrasted with normative or uncritical post-structuralist approaches of actor-network theory, archeo-genealogy, and process theory. While relevant to demonstrate ambiguity in the delineation of paradigms, for the

present analysis, more general differences between critical (radical structuralist) and dialogical or postmodern (poststructuralist) approaches are more elemental to understanding paradigm conflicts in current discourses in MOS, which are outlined in greater detail below.

Table 1. Classic and Revised Taxonomy of Paradigms in Organizational Research

	Social Reality as Subjective Local / Emergent Origin of Concepts and Problems:	Social Reality as Objective Elite / A Priori Origin of Concepts and Problems:
The Sociology of Radical Change Social Discourse of Dissensus	Radical Humanist Paradigm Dialogic Studies Postmodern, Deconstructionist (postmodern / poststructuralist)	Radical Structuralist Paradigm Critical Studies Late Modern, Reformist (critical / antagonistic)
The Sociology of Regulation Social Discourse of Consensus	Interpretive Paradigm Interpretive Studies Premodern, Traditional (constructivist / hermeneutic)	Functionalist Paradigm Normative Studies Modern, Progressive (postpositivist / mainstream)

Source: Based on Burrell and Morgan (1979; in bold) and Deetz (1996).

Table 2. Alternative Taxonomies of Paradigms in Organisational Research

	Relativist Ontology: Subjective Perception Inductive Epistemology: Deriving Knowledge from Organizations	Realist Ontology: Objective Existence Deductive Epistemology: Applying Knowledge to Organizations
Organization as Conflict: Pluralist view emphasizing diverging interests Structures as Determined: Emphasis on socio-historical factors, structures reflect power and interests	Postmodern (poststructuralist, deconstructionist)	Critical (radical structuralist, dialectic, antagonistic)
Organization as Order: Unitarist view emphasizing converging interests Structures as Created: Emphasis on human agency; structures reflect the free will of individuals	Interpretive (hermeneutic, phenomenological)	Postpositive (functionalist, mainstream, normative)

Source: Own elaboration based on Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2012)

Table 3. Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Dimensions of Research Paradigms

	Ontology: Existence of Social Reality (Theories)	Epistemology: Modes of Knowledge-Creation (Methods)	Axiology: Values or Goals of Research (Objectives)
Post-positive Paradigm	Realism <i>Objective / Legitimate</i> Organizations serve a legitimate societal function and have an objective existence, independent of their members. Organizations as social systems are enduring entities	Observation <i>Empirical / Technical</i> As people must choose actions that get the best organizational results, individual mindsets matter little. To learn about an organization, it is sufficient to observe aggregate behaviors	Intervention <i>Regulate / Control</i> Research produces objective, generalizable knowledge on cause and effects, which can be used to explain reality, generate predictive theories, and to improve management practices
Inter-pretive Paradigm	Relativism <i>Subjective / Constructed</i> Organizations come into existence and are maintained through communication. They are socially constructed, existing only in relation to their members' subjectivities	Interpretation <i>Hermeneutic / Inductive</i> To learn about an organization, observation of aggregate behaviors is insufficient. The subjective mindsets of members must be examined and interpreted in context	Description <i>Understand / Elaborate</i> Research aims to describe the organization on its members' own terms. This knowledge can be used to inform general theories and applied to management practices
Post-modern Paradigm	Relativism <i>Subjective / Enacted</i> Organizations come into existence as temporary combinations of interests against the fluidity of larger historical and cultural discourses; they exist only in relation to these forces	Deconstruction <i>Decoding Discourses</i> Organizations as "texts" that can be "read" to deconstruct, decode, or trace back historical and cultural discourses underlying the formation of an organization's power relations	Denaturalization <i>Disclose / Debunk</i> Dominant interests maintain power by ensuring organizational discourses are rendered on their terms and seem natural; research seeks to "denaturalize" and reopen power relations
Critical Paradigm	Realism <i>Objective / Exploitative</i> Reflecting dominant societal interests, organizational power structures, exploitation have objective existence, formed by historical and cultural forces independent of people	Critique <i>Theory-based / Dialectic</i> Exposing hidden power structures in organizations by using general theories on oppression and exploitation as frameworks to analyze a particular organization	Emancipation <i>Transform / Liberate</i> Research exposes and changes structures of power and exploitation so that marginalized interests can resist and foreclosed opportunities for human development become possible

Source: Own elaboration based on Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2012)

Method: Hermeneutic Exploration and Dialectic Analysis of Discourses

The presented hermeneutic and narrative review aims to provide a stimulating exploration, structured compilation, and integrative discussion of current academic discourses in MOS, based on the application and extension of meta-theorizing on research paradigms. Warranted in this context is the disclaimer that the presented scientific narrative is subjective, interpretive, eclectic, and illustrative—intended to offer an informative as well as opinionated and provocative perspective. The hereby adopted epistemological stance reflects a critical position, unapologetic about not aspiring to post-positive standards for objectivity, replicability, and comprehensiveness, underlying the restrictive, technocratic approach of systematic literature reviews (Hornung 2012; Hornung and Höge 2021; Hornung and Rousseau 2018). Following more traditional approaches to scientific commentaries and narrative reviews, key publications were identified and collected; their contents structured in a theory-informed iterative process, and interpreted within the context of the authors' prior knowledge and nomological network, personal observations, and developed arguments. Calling attention to identified patterns and speculating about their possible interconnected meanings, some attempts at theory-building are offered, drawing on dialectic analysis and reasoning (Gioia and Pitre 1990). Methodologically, this hermeneutic approach aspires to the epistemological model of the problematizing review (Alvesson and Sandberg 2020), as a legitimate form of scientific advocacy and knowledge-creation (Hornung, Unterrainer, and Höge 2022). Following the hermeneutic processes outlined by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014), literature searches covered major databases in business and social science. Separate searches with various combinations of relevant terms were conducted to inform the different sections of the article, including publications on paradigms in MOS; review articles and chapters on CMS and the critique of evidence-based management (EBM); contributions discussing critical performativity; articles on managerialism and the labor process debate; and critical approaches in industrial, organizational, and work psychology. Listings of relevant articles were compiled, sighted, and sorted, based on abstracts and cursory readings. Additional articles were identified via cross-referencing and citation tracking. Key publications and exemplary contributions on specific topics are included in the presented integrative review without claims of comprehensiveness. A core theoretical contribution is the structuring of current debates within the framework of paradigmatic conflicts introduced next.

Framework: Paradigmatic Conflicts in Critical Management Discourse

Drawing on concepts from philosophy of science and their uptake in the MOS literature, selected discourses are integrated into a model of paradigmatic conflict, differentiating inter- and intra-paradigmatic conflicts, affirming or challenging paradigm boundaries. Distinguishing between location and degree, four types of

paradigmatic conflicts are included, labelled external and internal frictions and fractures. *Frictions* describe *fundamental* conflicts (first degree). *Fractures* (second degree) are *foundational*, i.e., constitutive for emerging new paradigms. The former conflicts do not challenge existing paradigm boundaries, the latter introduce new (previously latent, hidden or downplayed) paradigmatic demarcations. This distinction bears similarities with the dialectics of “agonisms” versus “antagonisms” (Parker and Parker 2017), where the former conflicts are productive, permitting some form of compromise or solution, and the latter involve mutually exclusive or irreconcilable positions (Shepherd and Challenger 2013; Schultz and Hatch 1996). The second distinction of conflict location differentiates *external* and *internal* (inter- and intra-) paradigmatic disputes. The former *reach across* paradigm boundaries, the latter are *contained within* a shared paradigm. Populating this matrix of domains (or types) of paradigmatic conflict are controversial discourses involving current CMS scholarship. These are: (1) the *evidence-debate*, delineating paradigm boundaries between CMS and the hyper-functionalist EBM movement; (2) the *performativity-debate*, differentiating positions regarding collaboration vs. conflict within CMS; (3) the potentially disintegrating *managerialism-debate* between moderate CMS pragmatists and radical fractions of Critical Theory and Marxist LPT; (4) the *ideology-debate*, which reflects inter-paradigmatic influences of CMS in fermenting and disseminating critique in adjacent fields, exemplified by the recently emerging new paradigm of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP). This framework is presented in Table 4. Outlined in the following sections are core tenets of each the four conflictual discourses, including aspects of their intellectual roots, historical background, and interconnections.

Table 4. Four Domains of Current Paradigmatic Conflicts Involving CMS

	Frictions: Fundamental Conflicts (First degree) Paradigmatic disagreements without challenging paradigm boundaries	Fractures: Foundational Conflicts (Second degree) Paradigmatic disagreements introducing new paradigm boundaries
External: Inter-paradigmatic disputes reaching across paradigm boundaries	(1) Evidence-Debate Proponents of CMS confronting Evidence-based Management (→ Paradigm delineation)	(4) Ideology-Debate Role of CMS in emergence of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (→ Paradigm dissemination)
Internal: Intra-paradigmatic disputes arising within paradigm boundaries	(2) Performativity-Debate Dispute on collaboration vs. conflict (non-/anti- or critical performativity) (→ Paradigm differentiation)	(3) Managerialism-Debate Breakaway of more radical Marxist and Critical Management Theory (→ Paradigm disintegration)

Source: Own elaboration based on Hornung and Höge (2021)

External Frictions: The Evidence-Debate

External frictions across paradigm boundaries are exemplified by hostile exchanges between proponents of CMS and EBM. Seeking to “improve” management decisions and organizational practices, EBM is relatively recent, yet highly influential hyper-functionalist movement, advocating systematic use of scientific methodology for the aggregation, synthesis, and transfer of organizational research into practice (Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau 2009; Rynes and Bartunek 2017). Prioritized are methods emulating natural science and medicine, i.e., quantification and statistical hypothesis testing, experiments and randomized trial-control studies, meta-analysis, systematic reviews, and decision support systems. Rooted in scientific positivism, EBM opposes the pluralist principles of CMS, fueling a heated controversy between the two movements, described in more detail elsewhere (Hornung 2012; Hornung and Rousseau 2018; Morrell, Learmonth, and Heracleous 2015). CMS scholars, notably Learmonth (2008) and Morrell (2008), have deconstructed EBM as an ideologically-driven political project, advancing managerialism through an agenda of positivistic *scientism*, reinforcing paradigmatic hegemony, while marginalizing alternative methodologies and non-mainstream positions. EBM would, even if not intentionally divisive, then effectively exclude and degrade qualitative research, specifically, interpretive and critical approaches not fitting the constrained, ideologically preformed canon of acceptable (evidence-based) methods (Learmonth and Harding 2006; Morrell and Learmonth 2015). Further, the politics of the EBM approach would delegitimize and suppress any research topics that do not fit the functionalist (exploitative) performativity of the managerial agenda. Striking a more reconciliatory note, Hornung and Rousseau (2018) have suggested theorizing on research paradigms to analyze the controversy, exploring ways to dialectically dissolve seemingly incommensurate assumptions of EBM and CMS. However, this search for common ground has been limitedly successful (Morrell, Learmonth, and Heracleous 2015). Subsequently, a comparative overview of the opposing, antagonistic paradigmatic features of the two streams, their criticism of each other, and mutual learning opportunities, was presented as a basis for further debate (Hornung 2018). This attempt to foster dialogue included contrasting the scientific paradigms of EBM and CMS along the dimensions of self-image, objectives, conceptions of evidence, processes, theories, methods, and image of the respective other. It is summarized in Table 5. This comparative analysis illustrates lacking communalities and provides arguments for paradigm incommensurability between fundamentally critical approaches and the functionalist postpositive mainstream in MOS research. At least in its inaugural version and in theory, CMS is critical about or even opposed to management, aimed at inspiring social reform, resistance, and emancipation of employees from managerial domination and exploitation. In contrast, EBM is explicitly managerialist, aspiring to be useful to management and, spreading a prototypically

unitarist ideology, claims to also benefit employees by “improving” managerial decision-making (Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau 2009). Whereas proponents of CMS have deconstructed EBM as political agenda naturalizing managerial interests, marginalizing critical thinking and methods, and co-opting or eradicating plurality, “evidence-based” scholars have branded CMS as obstructionist, unconstructive, unscientific, unrealistic, and self-serving, employing criticism for its own sake without offering “viable” alternatives. In many ways, the evidence-based debate represents an exemplary manifestation of clashing paradigms of order and regulation versus conflict and radical change, the archetype of which is the positivism dispute in German sociology (Strubenhoff 2018) between the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and proponents of so-called “critical” (i.e., scientific) rationalism.

Paradoxically, an important meta-theoretical contribution of EBM lies precisely in its divisiveness, thus activating, intensifying, and reinforcing ideological conflicts that otherwise might have remained latent, dormant or contained (Learmonth and Harding 2006). Similar to forms of resistance being activated by the exercise of power, paradigmatic plurality appears to emerge partly in response to being challenged by hegemonic and homogenizing forces. These are inherent in the technocratic and prototypically *fascist* tendencies of the evidence-based practice discourse, as analyzed by Holmes, Murray, Perron, and Rail (2006). Specifically, this critique refers to the exclusion, marginalization, and degradation of ontologically (theories), epistemologically (methods), and axiologically (values) deviating or non-conforming research paradigms. Exposing and denaturalizing EBM as a hegemonial political project of neoliberal managerialism and scientific positivism, has strengthened the paradigm of CMS. Branding EBM as a “backlash” against ideological and methodological pluralism (Learmonth 2008) has struck a nerve. Resembling a truly dialectic dynamic, likely not fully realized by its protagonists, EBM appears as the reactionary response to the emergence of CMS about a decade earlier (Hornung 2012). Hence, emergence, initial success, and establishment of CMS has evidently challenged the (post-)positivist and managerialists hegemony of mainstream research in MOS, including its humanistically disguised variations. EBM thus can be seen as the antagonistic counterforce or antithesis to CMS, seeking to reassert the normative dominance of the functionalist paradigm.

Since its inception about two decades ago, EBM has been increasingly established and progressively absorbed into the scientific model of mainstream research, teaching, and interventions, legitimizing and reinforcing those, while simultaneously advancing the academic political-economic interests of associated networks of scholars and practitioners. Similar to other types of political and social ideologies, an inherent feature of the scientific and managerialist model of EBM is that it strives for unquestioned dominance or hegemony, i.e., that its principles are fully and widely internalized and thus turn into normatively accepted scientific practices or “common sense” (Alvesson and Spicer 2016). Resulting in paradigm

delineation, the evidence-debate sparked by CMS has, at least temporarily, disrupted this homogenizing tendency by opening up critical discourse. Further, under the surface, the “ripple effects” of this inter-paradigmatic dispute appear to be connected to the emergence of a new critical stream in work and organizational psychology, a countermovement at least partly inspired by CMS and its resistance against EBM, as elaborated below (Parker 2023). Moreover, the stated goal of EBM to make an impact on organizational and management practices, coupled with the (partly correct) accusation that critical approaches are often rather theoretical and lack such an orientation towards the real world, may have, in turn, also contributed to the intra-paradigmatic performativity-debate within CMS, which is discussed in the following section.

Table 5. The EBM–CMS Dispute: Contrasting Competing Research Paradigms

Aspects / Dimensions	Evidence-Based Management (EBM)	Critical Management Studies (CMS)
Self-image	Useful for management, instrumental for improving organizational decision-making	Critical about management, aimed at inspiring social reform, resistance, and emancipation
Objective	Conscientious, explicit, judicious use of best available evidence from multiple sources	Challenging accepted, dominant, and harmful ideologies, institutions, interests, and identities
Evidence	Formalized, based on scientific research, organizational data, practitioner experience, and stakeholder perspectives	Diverse methods, including negation, de-familiarization, deconstruction, reframing, imagination, narratives, theorizing, introspection
Processes	Systematically asking for, acquiring, appraising, aggregating, and applying the best available evidence, and assessing outcomes	Using principles of denaturalization (ideology critique), reflexivity (context, history), and non- or critical performativity (emancipation)
Theories	Mainstream theories from psychology, sociology, business administration, and economics	Fringe theories, Marxism, Critical Theory, psychoanalysis, discourse theory, and deconstructivism
Methods	Oriented towards natural science, cause and effect, experiments, quantification, statistics	Oriented towards social science, qualitative, interpretative, deconstruction, narratives, linguistics
Other-image	Obstructionist, self-serving, criticism for its own sake, unconstructive, unscientific, unrealistic, offering no viable alternative	Political agenda naturalizing managerial interests, marginalizing critical thinking, alternative methods, and ideological plurality

Source: Own elaboration based on Hornung (2018)

Internal Frictions: The Performativity-Debate

Internal paradigmatic frictions characterize the “performativity debate” within CMS, pitting calls for more practical relevance and impact, along with concessions, compromise, and collaboration with management, against more radical and

principled positions emphasizing conflict, confrontation, and counteractions (Fleming and Banerjee 2016). Denaturalization, reflexivity, and anti-performativity were initially established as constitutive paradigmatic features of CMS (Fournier and Grey 2000). The notion of strict anti- or non-performativity, as principled refusal to participate in the managerial “valorization agenda”, however, was soon challenged by Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2009). Building on the truism, that CMS is also “performative” insofar as it seeks to attain alternative and emancipatory goals, these authors advocate for the more “constructive” approach of *critical performativity*, which they defined as “active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices [...] through affirmation, care, pragmatism, engagement with potentialities, and a normative orientation” (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009, 538). These five elements of their original definition are further elaborated in Table 6. Although suggested strategies may not sound overly sensational, they do contain a fundamental redefinition of CMS. Effectively suggested here is a transition from an antagonistic opposition against management with the goal of radical societal change or “macro-emancipation”, to a relationship of agonistic tensions, including a more empathetic stance towards the managerial perspective, pragmatic acceptance of real-world conditions, targeted collaboration with management on specific issues, and engaging in more limited, so-called “micro-emancipatory” improvements for workers (Parker and Parker 2017; Huault, Perret and Spicer 2014). Exactly how much positive regard, empathy, and compromise in engaging with management on “potentialities” is warranted and viable, versus the need for confrontation, subversion, and principled refusal, has become a matter of heated contention (Fleming and Banerjee 2016). Exemplary contributions to this discussion include Edwards (2017), Koss Hartmann (2014) and Wickert and Schaefer (2015). Taken together, these authors call for a less radical, categorical or canonical critique, advocating for moderate notions of “subversive functionalism”, strengthening the linkages between mainstream and critical perspectives, and developing incremental and progressive understandings of critical performativity, which includes mobilizing and pragmatically involving management to achieve meaningful change.

Considerably fewer in number and less prominently featured are voices of dissent and advocates for counter-movements to the “performative turn” in CMS, calling attention to the “collaborationist” character and high risk of failure of the suggested collusion with management (Fleming and Banerjee 2016), the defeatists, apologetic, and system-justifying functions of a shift towards micro-emancipatory interventions (Hassard, Hogan, and Rowlinson 2001), and insisting that CMS should first and foremost be concerned with the *critique of management* (Klikauer 2018). In a more moderate version of this criticism, Cabantous, Gond, Harding, and Learmonth (2016) point out that critical performativity is overly preoccupied with language and discourses, instead of material conditions of work, and neglects or downplays issues of power and politics in organizations. Further contributions have

criticized the misrepresentation of the theoretical basis of the concept of critical performativity (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, and Learmonth 2016), as well as its lacking or problematic practical feasibility within the broader anti-emancipatory context of employed labor in a capitalist economy (Butler, Delaney and Spoelstra 2018; King and Land 2018; King and Learmonth 2015). Accordingly, some authors have sought to demonstrate the concept of critical performativity and scholar-practitioner collaboration in the domain of non-capitalist, worker-recuperated, and democratic or otherwise “alternative” organizations (Esper, Cabantous, Barin-Cruz, and Gond 2017; Kociatkiewicz, Kostera and Parker 2021). Others have developed the connection between critical performativity and academic activism for socio-ecological justice (Contu 2020; Reedy and King 2019). An arguable more managerialist stream has applied the concept to critical leadership studies (Alvesson and Spicer 2012). Indeed, it should have become clear that the literature on the intra-paradigmatic performativity-debate in CMS is extensive and beyond the scope of this review.

Notably, after several years of controversy, Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2016), have expanded their proposal, suggesting to reorient critical performativity to focus on issues of public importance, engaging with non-academic groups, building social movements, and propagating deliberation. Branding their critics as being overly concerned with intra-academic debates, engaging in “author-itarian” (*sic*) theoretical policing, faking relevance through symbolic radicalism, and repackage common sense, these authors have presented a revised conceptualization, which is detailed in Table 6. This extended notion of critical performativity can be read as a process model, covering the phases of issue selection (public interest, reflexive framing), underlying reasoning or logic (care and circumspection, pragmatism and progressivism), actual forms of social engagement (involving disgruntled elites, mobilizing resources, micro-mobilizations, resonant framing) and desired outcomes (bullshit reduction, articulating alternatives, deliberation). Indeed, this extension reads somewhat less (co-)managerialist and better geared towards establishing CMS as a force for social transformation. Nonetheless, the confrontational rhetoric of Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2016) reveals substantial internal frictions and infighting within the CMS paradigm. Apparently, what has been called the “performative turn” or “third wave” of CMS has not only increased its momentum and practical impact, but has also resulted in a heightened level of internal dissent and division within the pluralistic meta-paradigm. The more severe and “fractioning” varieties of the performativity-question can be seen as culminating in the managerialism-debate, discussed below as an outgrowth or extension of the labor process debate led between radical structuralists and poststructuralists during the 1980s and 90s and characterizing the “second wave” of CMS (Thompson and Smith 2000; Tinker 2002). As such, the performativity-debate in several respects can be interpreted as a continuity of classic themes of conflict in MOS.

Table 6. Proposed Models of Critical Performativity

Original Elements of Critical Performativity (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009)	Extended Model of Critical Performativity (Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2016)
Affirmative Stance Location at close proximity to object of critique to identify points revision; empathetic instead of antagonistic stance towards management	Issue Selection Extent of public interest: Addressing issues of broader importance to non-academics Reflexive framing: Challenging widely held assumptions in a meaningful way
Ethic of Care Providing space for respondents' views, but also seeking to subtly challenge them; accepting and understanding subjectivities	Forms of Reasoning Care and circumspection: Taking opposing views seriously and fostering critical debate Pragmatism and progressivism: Developing counter-concepts from existing discourses Potentials and the present: Looking for alternatives that already exist in practice
Pragmatism Working with particular aspects of an organization; accepting real-world conditions and promoting communicative action among different stakeholders	Forms of Engagement Engaging disgruntled elites: Getting high status actors to support critical causes Mobilizing resources: Expanding means and opportunities for critical researchers Micro-mobilization: Forums engaging different non-academic groups Resonant framing: Connecting with the experiences of a wider audience
Potentialities Creating a sense of what could be by engaging latent possibilities in an organization; exploring "heterotopias" instead of unrealistic (utopian) aspirations	Desired Outcomes Bullshit reduction: Exposing ideology and deconstructing harmful ideas Articulating alternatives: Oriented towards potentialities of real-world heterotopias Deliberation creation: Forums where people with different position engage in debate
Normative Systematic assertion of criteria used to judge good forms of organization; focusing on positive aspects; finding opportunities for micro-emancipation	

Source: Own elaboration based on Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman (2009, 2016)

Internal Fractures: The Managerialism-Debate

Fractures within the pluralistic paradigm of CMS surface in the critique of its pragmatic approach as a manifestation and instrument of managerialism, implicitly colluding with and providing legitimacy to the domination and exploitation of workers for the interests of capital (Hassard, Hogan, and Rowlinson 2001; Parker and Parker 2017). In particular, Klikauer (2015a, 2018) deconstructs CMS as a domesticated form of tamed criticism and incremental reformism, striving for "better" management, instead of trying to overcome, sabotage or subvert managerial hegemony. Accordingly, he differentiates not only between CMS and Traditional Management Theory (TMT), but also introduces additional streams of Critical Management Theory (CMT) and Marxist (Labor Process) Management Theory

(MMT) as distinctive paradigms with constitutive theoretical foundations and epistemological interests, mapping out central themes, key publications, authors, institutions, and journals. The proposed classification of approaches is displayed in Table 7. In addition to the four versions of MOS distinguished by Klikauer (2018), Humanistic Management Theory (HMT) is included as an important fifth stream. Whereas TMT employs mainstream functionalist social science in service of an empirical-technical managerial interest in organizational efficiency and effectiveness, HMT enriches the mainstream by including and advocating for normative ethical and moral considerations (Laszlo 2019; Pirson 2019). Characteristic for humanistic management approaches are attempts to demonstrate or argue for the instrumentality of moral conduct and worker wellbeing for (longer-term) profitability goals (Weber, Höge, and Hornung 2020). Indeed, underlying fantasmatic logics of harmonious employment relationships, based on convergence of interest or unitarism (e.g., wellbeing, health as preconditions for performance) and industrial paternalism (employer responsibility for employee welfare) can be distinguished from more direct or aggressive forms of economism and instrumentality (e.g., performance management; testing and assessment). Eventually, however, both paradigms serve and legitimize the managerial functionalist regulation or domination agenda, rather than one of conflict, radical change, or emancipation.

Remarkably, Klikauer's (2015a, 2018) analysis comes to very similar conclusions with regard to the current state of CMS. Accordingly, CMS combines a variety of more or less critical positions, such as poststructuralism, social constructivism, and phenomenology, but, despite frequent claims to the contrary, its grounding in Critical Theory (the Frankfurt School of Freudo-Marxism) would be spurious or superficial at best (Alvesson and Willmott 1992). Going beyond empirical-analytical TMT, which is oriented towards maintaining or increasing organisational control and domination, he attests CMS merely a hermeneutic interest with regard to understanding subjectivity and power relationships in historical contexts, but no genuinely critical-emancipatory intent, aimed at promoting active resistance and ending domination. Such a critical-emancipatory interest in freedom and autonomy, he sees exclusively addressed in the radical streams of CMT and MMT. In contrast, CMS is portrayed as complicit in dominating workers by educating management on how to better "handle" the human factor, fulfilling "palliative" and system-justifying functions in buffering (adding a "human touch" to) the hardships, suffering, and injustices produced by managerial regimes of system-inherent austerity, rationalization, and work intensification (e.g., cost cutting, layoffs, performance requirements). This scathing assessment echoes the critique of Braverman (1974), the "founding father" of Marxist LPT, directed at the social scientists of the early human relations movement, who were branded as the "maintenance crew" of management or the "handmaidens" to capitalism (Gerard

2023). Similar arguments can be made for HMT and business ethics, both of which rarely problematize fundamental structural conflicts of interest in employment.

Indeed, aside from a different (subjectivist) conception of social science, proponents of critical performativity have described the intent of engaging with and “improving” management in oddly similar terms as proponents of EBM have outlined their functionalist vision of “better” management (Hornung and Rousseau 2018). Pointing out these parallels, Klikauer (2018) argues that radical emancipatory intent, along with a critical theoretical foundation, determine paradigmatic boundaries. CMS would neither subsume the Marxist LPT tradition, nor represent the Freudo-Marxist Frankfurt School, which is probably best known for its credo of categorical refusal of compromise: “There is no right life in the wrong one”. Klikauer (2015a, 2015b) exposes and denounces the so-called “performative turn” in CMS, not as “subversion”, but as a “sell-out”, a self-sacrifice on the “altar of capital” in exchange for the “cheap pearls” of being accepted as “constructive” and practically relevant. His polemic rhetoric makes clear that he wants no part in what he considers a (not so) covertly managerialist project, stabilizing and colluding with, rather than challenging and opposing structures of domination and exploitation. Moreover, he leaves no doubt as to which side of the domination–emancipation divide he allocates the majority of CMS scholars on. Not a coincidence is the correspondence of Klikauer’s (2018) taxonomy with Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) four paradigms. Specifically, CMT corresponds with the radical humanist, MMT with the radical structuralist, and TMT with the functionalist position, while CMS is “downgraded” to the interpretive paradigm concerned with understanding and description, subscribing to a regulation agenda, rather than one of conflict or radical change. The radically critical and genuinely emancipatory paradigms of CMT and MMT differ slightly, with the former being more concerned with psychological aspects of the revision of false consciousness, and the latter more focused on economic and material conditions of workers and instigating structural social change. Notably, these envisioned streams are not fully developed, let alone established in MOS. However, the paradigm of MMT implies a “resurrection” of LPT, while CMT reflects the unfulfilled promise of CMS as a paradigm in MOS based on Freudo-Marxist Critical Theory. Another chance for realizing such a genuinely critical project might be the emerging paradigm of CWOP, which is outlined next.

Table 7. Five Sub-Paradigms in Management Research

	Theoretical Basis	Knowledge-Creating Interest
Traditional Management Theory (TMT)	Mainstream functionalist, performance-oriented organization science	Empirical-technical interest in increasing organizational control, efficiency and effectiveness
Humanistic Management Theory (HMT)	Mainstream enriched with normative ethical and moral considerations	Empirical-technical interest in demonstrating instrumentality of worker wellbeing for organizations

Critical Management Studies (CMS)	Various more or less critical, postmodern, and alternative approaches	Hermeneutic interest in understanding meaning and subjectivity in historical contexts
Critical Management Theory (CMT)	Frankfurt School of Critical Theory	Critical-emancipatory interest in freedom and autonomy, supporting resistance and ending domination through revision of consciousness
Marxist Management Theory (MMT)	Labor Power and Labor Process Theory	Critical-emancipatory interest emphasizing economic and material conditions and structural change

Source: Own elaboration based on Klikauer (2018)

External Fractures: The Ideology-Debate

Discussed under the heading of “external fractures” are impacts of CMS on the emergence of new paradigm boundaries in adjacent fields of social science, such as psychology, pedagogy, and history (Davidson et al. 2006; Durepos, Shaffner, and Taylor 2021). The focus here is on the emerging movement of CWOP, based on the authors’ background and involvement with associated professional initiatives and activities. The impact of CMS on the emergence of CWOP is documented, for instance, in the pioneering works of Islam and Zyphur (2009), who compare mainstream and critical perspectives on organizational topics, such as job analysis, employee selection, training, and careers; McDonald and Bubna - Litic (2012), who draw on CMS to point out problematic issues in social psychology applied to work and organizations, with regard to a biasing preference for positivist (quantitative) methods, an imbalanced focus on the individual, unreflected identification with the perspective of managers or owners, and lacking moral-ethical grounding; and Gerard (2016), who introduced the epistemology of the critical (radical structuralist) paradigm into industrial and organizational psychology. Foundational publications of CWOP further include the articles of Bal and Dóci (2018), Mumby (2019), and Weber, Höge, and Hornung (2020). Each of these contributions has sparked or is connected to broader scientific discourses and controversial debates in industrial/work and organizational psychology in Europe, the United States, and Germany. Providing momentum for the CWOP movement, a notable achievement has been to initiate debate within the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP), regarding the pervasive and unchallenged influences of neoliberal ideology on contemporary workplace practices as well as on psychological theorizing and research on work and organizations (Bal and Dóci 2018). Specifically, neoliberal ideology is analyzed as a cascading system of political, social, and fantasmatic logics, systemically biasing societal institutions of work, organizational practices, and the mentalities of individuals as well as the scientific representation and evaluation of these domains. Conceptualized in terms of a dogmatic trinity of individualism, competition, and instrumentality, the political logic of neoliberalism manifest in social and fantasmatic logics associated with

quantitative assessment and selection, performance focus and monitoring, growth and progress, harmonious employment relationships, and social engineering (Bal and Dóci 2018). In a discipline historically plagued by suppressed (i.e., typically not problematized) double-binds between humanistic ideals of employee wellbeing and personality development and the normative power of economic imperatives demanding perpetual increases in performance and profits, calling out the socially, morally, and intellectually corrosive consequences of subservience to particular political-economic interests has struck a nerve.

The cathartic momentum of the critique of neoliberal ideology in work and organizational psychology was demonstrated not only in the galvanizing role the formulated criticism has played for a growing group of critically-oriented researchers, but also by the defensive and passive-aggressive responses of leading scholars in the field (Dóci and Bal 2018; Weber, Höge, and Hornung 2020). Research has since progressed, including conceptual and empirical applications of the critique of neoliberal ideology as a matrix of political, social, and fantasmatic logics of individualism, competition, and instrumentality. Among others, a countermodel of radical humanist ideas of individuation, solidarity, and emancipation has been suggested (Hornung, Höge, and Unterrainer 2021). The most recent and comprehensive review of the emergence and positioning of CWOP was provided by Islam and Sanderson (2022), who elaborate how mainstream work and organizational psychology is shaped by a self-reinforcing matrix of scientism, individualism, managerialism, neoliberalism, and hegemony. Further, these authors explicitly position CWOP between mainstream work and organizational psychology and CMS, contrasting core themes, disciplinary roots, socio-political context of emergence, dominant conceptions of the person, epistemological or methodological orientations, and relations to practice between these two paradigms. Attesting to the emergence of CWOP is a growing international network of scholars and their academic activities, such as journal special issues (Abrams et al. 2023), workshops, meetings, and conferences (Hornung, Unterrainer, and Höge 2022), explicitly dedicated to developing and establishing this new paradigm.

Summarized in Table 8 are different versions of the critique of mainstream work and organizational psychology underlying this alternative paradigm. Common denominators are the restricted positivist methodology, individualization of systemic issues, prioritization of a managerial interests, and instrumentalization of employees. Further aspects relate to the naturalization of competition and market mechanism, lacking moral-ethical foundation, and hegemonial aspirations, i.e., claiming exclusive validity of its theories, models, and methods (Hornung 2012). To some extent these criticisms reflect the considerations underlying CMS as the need for an alternative paradigm that transcends scientific positivism, is not geared towards increasing performance and profits, and does not naturalize managerial power and exploitative

structures. Moreover, displayed in Table 9 is an attempt to map out the positioning of CWOP. Distinguished are influences from within psychology versus other fields of social science (intra- vs. interdisciplinary) and with a domain-specific focus on work and organizations versus broader socio-cultural applicability to life and societies (organization vs. social science). The latter include various streams of critical psychology and psychoanalysis (Parker 2009; Teo 2015; Tolman 2009), Marxist social critique and Critical Theory (Frankfurt School) as well as critical poststructuralist studies, in particular those focusing on neoliberal governmentality and subjectification (Fleming 2014; Munro 2012), but also feminism, postcolonial theory, and critical race studies as well as critical theories on sustainability, degrowth, and ecosocialism (Rose and Cachelin 2018). Interdisciplinary influences focusing on the work context have come, aside from sociology, mostly from CMS, as an important role-model for CWOP (Parker 2023; Islam and Sanderson 2022), but also from the broader field of organization studies and the mostly CMS-inspired stream of critical human resource management (Delbridge and Keenoy 2010). A more detailed account of the scientific ancestry of CWOP is provided by Weber (2023). As mentioned earlier, from a dialectic and dynamic perspective, the constitution of CWOP is not independent from, but a consequence of the ideological victory of CMS in exposing managerialism, positivism, and politics in EBM. After all, main proponents of EBM are scholars in occupational psychology and organizational behavior, where a spin-off of the evidence-discourse is highly influential (Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau 2009). Fractures in psychology, from this perspective, are connected to the “blowback” caused by EBM’s assault on ideological and methodological pluralism in management research. The emergence of CWOP thus can be interpreted as the synthesis of the dialectic antagonism between CMS and EBM.

Table 8. Criticisms of Mainstream Work and Organizational Psychology

McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012)	Bal and Dóci (2018)	Islam and Sanderson (2022)
Positivism		Scientism
Individualism	Individualism	Individualism
Managerialism	Instrumentality	Managerialism
Amorality	Competition	Neoliberalism
		Hegemony

Source: Own elaboration

Table 9. Disciplinary Positioning of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology

	Organization Science: Domain-specific focus on work and organizations	Social Science: Broader socio-cultural focus on life and societies
Intra-disciplinary: Critical streams within the discipline of psychology	The Emerging Field of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology	Marxist Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Psychology of the Subject, Analytical Social and Radical Humanist Psychology, Indigenous Psychologies, Critical Social and Applied Psychology
Inter-disciplinary: Critical streams from other social science disciplines	Industrial, Organizational, and Work Sociology, Critical Management Studies Organization Studies, Critical Human Resource Management	Social Critique, (Neo-)Marxism, Critical Theory / Frankfurt School, Poststructuralism, Feminism, Post- Colonial Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Sustainability. Degrowth, Ecosocialism

Source: Own elaboration

Discussion: Dialectics between Fermenting and Fragmenting Forces

Four domains of paradigmatic conflict involving CMS were outlined and their interconnections and intellectual backdrops discussed. Analyzed intra- and inter-disciplinary dynamics of paradigm delineation, differentiation, dissemination, and disintegration can be framed as driven by dialectic tensions between “*fermenting*” and “*fragmenting*” forces of and within CMS. Fermenting (inciting or stimulating) critique, CMS has been able to strengthen and consolidate own boundaries against EBM (delineation) and redraw paradigmatic boundaries in other fields, as discussed with respect to CWOP (dissemination). The ensuing boost in influence may have led to “overextending” the boundaries of CMS, losing shared understanding of core objectives and legitimate levels of cooperation (or collusion) versus conflict with management as a real-world force, resulting in fragmenting tendencies of paradigm differentiation and disintegration. Based on the above theorizing on contemporary paradigms in MOS, the framework of external vs. internal and fundamental vs. foundational conflicts should be further differentiated and extended, accounting for the plurality of approaches. Inter-paradigmatic conflicts between the postpositive and critical paradigm manifest similarly in different disciplines, such as sociology, management, and psychology. Intra-paradigmatic conflicts within CMS are led with different levels of severity between hardline critical theorists and moderately critical deconstructionist and postmodern streams, in the form of disputes on issues of ontology, epistemology, and axiology, constituting, delineating, and differentiating the broader umbrella-paradigm. In the critical tradition, the function of management is an antagonistic force, representing, imposing, and enforcing particular political-economic interests, defying, degrading, and distorting humanistic ideals of emancipation (at or from work). Appeal, integrity, and

legitimacy of CMS depend on its ability to instigate, distil, and channel discontent, outrage, and convulsion about social injustice, exploitation, and environmental destruction—not to participate in it. Thus, laudable aspirations to have a positive impact on people’s working life and pragmatically demonstrating that alternative forms of organizing are possible, risk diluting, distracting from, or even corrupting the core emancipatory project of CMS.

Fragmenting forces, however, are not limited to radical voices, demanding secession of genuinely critical approaches, but also includes those advocating for a “third way” by making CMS attractive and “palatable” for managerialism, reframing it as some variety of “business ethics” or “new human relations movement”, emphatic, subservient and “useful to”, instead of challenging, resisting, and counteracting, managerial interests, ideology, and modes of power. Representatives of such conciliatory approaches of paradigm “integration” are, for instance, Visser (2010, 2019) and Prasad and Mills (2010), who argue for strengthening the common ground and interconnections between ethical-humanistic aspirations in the mainstream and critical-emancipatory approaches in CMS. More radical fractions have argued that attempts at paradigm integration mean subsumption under and assimilation into the (openly or implicitly) managerialist mainstream agenda (Klikauer 2015a, 2015b, 2018). Despite likely well-intentioned calls for rapprochement, the common denominator between the functionalist mainstream and radical critical approaches is marginal. Former are based on an understanding of society emphasizing order, consensus, and regulation, the latter focus on structural conflict, domination, and the need for radical change. Domestic conflicts within the pluralistic CMS paradigm mirror these inter-paradigmatic tensions, respectively resemble self-similar “fractals” of those on a different level of analysis.

The mere existence of fragmenting forces does not mean that CMS will necessarily disintegrate. Dialectics of *reform or revolution* notoriously perturb and agitate social movements, appearing in different manifestations of contradictory tensions between opposing principles of incremental vs. radical change, compromise vs. conflict, pragmatism vs. purity, collusion vs. irrelevance or assimilation vs. marginalization (Röllmann et al. 2023). As argued by Rowe and Carroll (2014), momentum and strength can arise from such energizing dynamism between radical and reform-oriented forces within critical social movements. Whether CWOP will change paradigmatic structures and dynamics in psychological research on work and organizations, as CMS had done earlier, remains to be seen. Current fractures within CMS send a message to critical movements in other fields, cautioning them that too much compromise and collaboration with prevailing interests and those in power positions may end up compromising and corrupting the very goals of fundamental critique—not only on a personal and pragmatic, but also on a paradigmatic and meta-theoretical level (Parker 2023). Recognition, usefulness, relevance, and positive impact extract a high price of justifying and supporting an exploitative, destructive, and ideologically antagonistic system (Klikauer 2018). Raising the stakes for all to

take personal responsibility and principled action, both from an objective dialectic and a psychodynamic subjective perspective, there is no question, whether the metaphorical “dark side of the force” will strike back—but rather, when and how. Critical researchers are reminded that denaturalization and emancipation can be seen as two sides of the same coin of exposing ideology and upending domination (Mumby 2019). This is a qualitatively different perspective than functionalist observation and regulation or deconstructionist interpretation and understanding. Pragmatic arguments for nuanced understandings of critical performativity as well as sporadic promising examples of alternative organizations notwithstanding, the emancipatory interest at the core of critical research should be non-negotiable (Gerard 2023). The performativity-debate in CMS can be interpreted as an attempt to “walk the line” between the paradigmatic positions of radical critique, fundamental opposition, and theoretical aspirations of macro-emancipation versus more subtle attempts at subversion, pragmatism, and micro-emancipatory interventions. If and how the underlying dialectic between principled paralysis and corrupting collaboration can be resolved, is still an open question that requires situational solutions.

Conclusion: What Next?

Meta-theorizing on scientific paradigms offers an insightful framework to chart the intellectual territory of the interdisciplinary and paradigmatically diverse field of MOS. This concerns shared, related, and linked versus indifferent, incompatible, and antagonistically opposed ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, principles, and convictions concerning appropriate theories, methods, and values in management and organisational research. The deep-seated unconscious and ideological components of associated worldviews call for further applications of psychodynamic theorizing and dialectic analysis for future paradigmatic explorations of the MOS field as a domain of politically contested, but also potentially self-reflexive research. While each of the four analyzed debates warrant ongoing observation and attention, the most recent development of the emergence of a critical paradigm in the field of work and organizational psychology, inspired by the critical tradition in management studies, exhibits probably the most open and dynamic trajectory. The coming decades will show whether this emerging paradigm will become largely independent from and incommensurate with the normative functionalist psychological mainstream, dissolve and transform mainstream research from within, collapse and be (re-)integrated into the functionalist mainstream paradigm, or will fragment into a number of more or less marginalized critical sub-paradigms or research traditions precariously existing at the fringe of the mainstream. The first trajectory (incommensurability) would follow the developmental pathway of CMS, the second (dissolution) seems to be the pathway of the EBM movement, the third (integration) would mean outright

failure, and the fourth (fragmentation) would basically mean a return to the previous status quo. From the current vantage, all four trajectories as well as mixed or hybrid versions seem plausible. Although, according to the present analysis, there is a dialectic dynamic at work here, which scenario will eventually manifest, is not predetermined, but remains to be seen—and told.

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Harmony Unleashed: Crafting a Sustainable Future through Entrepreneurial Mastery in Moroccan Family Firms

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the ways in which certain attributes of family-owned enterprises facilitate their concurrent pursuit of sustainability and entrepreneurial orientations, hence giving rise to a distinct approach to innovation. The research concludes, using semi-structured interviews and an examination of nine creative and sustainable family businesses, that although certain family features encourage exploitation and others promote exploration, others enable both. The study indicates that these attributes function synergistically to fortify one another, facilitating the perpetuation and rejuvenation of family enterprises. The results give fresh perspectives on the distinctive capacity of certain family-owned enterprises to harmonize entrepreneurial and environmental objectives and suggest pathways for extrapolating these findings to companies possessing comparable attributes.

KEYWORDS: sustainability, entrepreneurial orientation, family business, innovation

1. Introduction

The scholarly discourse around family enterprises emphasizes the contradictory effects that a family ownership structure may have on the growth and progress of entrepreneurial endeavors. The family element does provide consistency, a long-term perspective, and less reliance on external factors, all of which foster creativity. Despite this, some family firms may develop a resistance to change if they cling to successful previous practices and stifle dissenting opinions and expressions that diverge from those of the dominant family. Therefore, the existing body of research on the correlation between family enterprises and innovation is lackluster and inconsistent at best (Calabrò et al. 2019).

To summarize, two diametrically opposed study streams exist. The first suggests that family companies assume much less risk than non-family organizations (Calabr et al. 2019), with this being primarily explained by the concern of jeopardizing the firm's viability and destroying the riches of future

generations. In contrast, according to the second study (Debellis et al., 2021), family participation in the administration of the company had a beneficial effect on risk taking. Family-owned enterprises would be capable of allocating the essential resources towards innovation and organizational development due to their enduring control and management structures and long-term strategic perspective.

Certain writers, like Calabr et al. (2019), use a route intermediate approach. It is said that family enterprises facilitate the preservation of previous approaches and assets, as well as their enhancement via recombination. They would not, however, generate new disruptive activities unless they acknowledge the need for innovation. The writers do not, meanwhile, define how this knowledge is attained. Previous studies, including the one by Zellweger et al. (2012), had put forth analyses suggesting that family-owned enterprises would strike a balance between risk aversion and continuity, as required by sustainability, and risk-taking and the pursuit of the necessary change to achieve sustainability, as required for continuity.

We concur with these writers and assert that family firms include unique attributes that result in certain innovation approaches, which we label prudential (Filser et al. 2016). Expanding on the research conducted by these writers, our inquiry pertains to the following: In what ways may some family-owned enterprises harmonize their entrepreneurial ethos with their commitment to sustainability by virtue of their unique attributes? How are these attributes translated into a distinct approach to innovation?

We postulate that this reconciliation is accomplished via organizational ambidexterity, a characteristic that serves as a source of competitive advantage. Our research demonstrates that family firms are, in fact, defined by attributes (Filser et al., 2016) that foster organizational ambidexterity—the capacity to both seek novel opportunities and use pre-existing knowledge and abilities. Certain family features will be shown to be favorable to exploration, whilst others will be conducive to exploitation. Although these qualities coexist inside the organization, they do not cancel one another out. They reinforce one another and operate as a system. Furthermore, some attributes are conducive to both exploration and exploitation. Thus, we suggest an examination of the way certain family-owned enterprises manage the interplay between renewal and continuity.

This essay aims to establish the explicit connection between organizational ambidexterity and familial features. One way to summarize this study is by establishing a connection between organizational ambidexterity and familial features.

Sustainability is defined as a sustainability of power (Rodríguez 2012), which can be further subdivided into a sustainability of management and control. A sustainability of control is attained when the capital remains within the control of the same group of shareholders (in this case, the family), and a sustainability of control is achieved when the managers are also members of this group. The maintenance of power continuity is often predicated on an organization's durability,

which refers to its potential to withstand and recover from internal and external disruptions while retaining its fundamental identity (Rodríguez 2012). In contrast, entrepreneurial orientation may be defined using the framework proposed by Martes et al. (2015) as including three fundamental elements: proactivity, risk-taking, and innovation. The family features must be modified in accordance with the framework for the innovation potential of perennial family enterprises that Filser et al. (2016) presented. Therefore, an empirical and theoretical expansion of this study is proposed in this paper.

To provide a solution to the research question, we will analyze nine instances of creative and sustainable family companies. By doing a study of the interviews, specifically the verbatim responses, with the managers of these enterprises, we can demonstrate how the family features are translated and how they generate vectors that promote both exploration and exploitation, as well as their coexistence.

The paper is organized in a traditional fashion. We start by referencing the relevant literature, including the fundamental attributes of family enterprises and organizational ambidexterity. Then, our sample and the technique used are presented. In the subsequent section, we shall expound upon the data analysis in two phases: initially, we shall illustrate the family characteristics by dissecting them into dimensions using three instances out of the nine in the sample, thereby illustrating the first stage; and secondly, we shall demonstrate which vectors, which originate from these characteristics, contribute to exploitation, exploration, and their simultaneous occurrence. Thus, we demonstrate the implementation of organizational ambidexterity. We will conclude with a synthesis of our contribution and a discussion of the research's limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1. The unique characteristics of a unique family business

Our conceptual framework, as proposed by Filser et al. (2016), emphasizes six key attributes: a long-term perspective (Duran et al. 2016), robust and intimate connections between the business and family spheres, consistent internal values, external relationship continuity, familial emotional investment in the trajectory (Gomez-Mejia et al. 2007), and judicious resource allocation and risk management (Miller 2011). The aforementioned family attributes draw inspiration from Miller's (2011) 4C model, which delineates the distinctiveness of family-owned businesses along four primary dimensions that define their particular configuration: the establishment of a cohesive and robust human community (Community); the quality and feasibility of the firm's external network (Connection); and a distinct command style (Command) comprising the decision-making process.

The objective of this study is to enhance the theoretical framework via empirical investigation into the practical manifestations of these attributes and their role in fostering organizational ambidexterity.

2.2. Family businesses that explore new opportunities while successfully operating their current activities

Since Duncan's fundamental work in 1976, which distinguished exploration from polishing the same body of knowledge and identifying new domains, other studies have underlined the superiority of businesses that simultaneously master these two techniques, which are so unlike in nature. Indeed, it is a question of using talents that are diametrically opposed. According to Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), organizations that can manage their present operations well while also exploring new prospects possess a sustained competitive edge. Thus, the organization may dedicate resources concurrently to the development of new activities and profit from more established ones, compensating for the inertia caused by the weight of older operations (ambidexterity allows for change while preserving continuity).

Despite the abundance of study dedicated to this notion, the implementation of this organizational ambidexterity continues to be an unresolved matter. Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008) highlight the diverse manifestations through which ambidexterity can be attained in a literature review. The specific way ambidexterity is implemented differs depending on whether it transcends organizational boundaries and remains confined to top management and divisions (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010) or at the individual level (contextual ambidexterity) (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). To achieve structural ambidexterity, organizational units devoted to the investigation of new domains must be distinguished from those devoted to the exploitation of existing markets. The general management is then responsible for ensuring the synergy among these units. The significance of this integration is underscored by contextual ambidexterity, which asserts that an individual situated in a favorable environment can engage in ambidextrous behavior, pursuing the revitalization of an activity while simultaneously ensuring the success of ongoing business operations. Filser et al. (2016) put out an alternative framework called multiplex ambidexing, whereby distinct integration processes occur concurrently and span across the many organizational levels of analysis, including individual, divisional, and top management.

Despite the abundance of literature on organizational ambidexterity, family businesses have received extraordinarily little attention. Furthermore, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), who are regarded as the progenitors of this concept, note that leaders must have the ability to coordinate the distribution of resources across established and emerging areas to attain ambidexterity. How exactly do they do this? This inquiry is seldom explored in ambidexterity research, despite its centrality to the challenges that leaders encounter (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010). Thus, the purpose of this research is to enhance comprehension of ambidexterity among family-owned enterprises.

3. Methodology

This study is based on nine case studies of family-owned perennial enterprises. Qualitative data do, in fact, provide thoroughly grounded depictions and elucidations of processes that are intrinsic to the local milieu (Miles and Huberman 1991). The following selection criteria were used to assemble the sample necessary for the nine case studies: Family character (A family business is an enterprise in which the progress of the enterprise is influenced by one or more individuals from the same extended family or multiple families. This influence is manifested through the possession of capital ownership rights, the prioritization of kinship ties in the selection of leaders (both internal and external), and the awareness of the business's significance to the family's interests. The definition includes an implicit aspect of pursuing perpetuity; the sector of operation (sales exceeding 3 million MAD were considered to mitigate the impact of the environment through sectoral diversity); and the company size (the companies included in the sample are among the largest publicly traded entities with revenues exceeding 3 million MAD).

Using these criteria, we were able to pick fourteen firms for interviews; however, for the sake of this study, only nine were used. The interviews consisted of top executives, including the CEO if feasible. The mean duration of these semi-structured interviews was around 1.5 hours. Utilizing an interview grid, the inquiries pertained to the translation of sustainability and entrepreneurial oriented variables into management procedures.

A content analysis was performed on the transcribed interviews, focusing on the lexical components included in the answer texts. This lexical analysis involves applying \bowtie to sentences and syntax to prioritize certain terms. Subsequently, a content analysis may be conducted by using the collection of most common terms (associated with each subject) from the lexicon to approximate each theme. The software used is Nvivo in its most recent edition.

4. Empirical results analysis

The analysis of the data is performed in two phases. We begin by using three business scenarios to show the various family features. In a subsequent stage, we demonstrate how these attributes enable family-owned enterprises to concurrently capitalize on existing expertise and undertakings, enhance them, and revitalize them via forays into uncharted territories.

4.1. Results on the unique characteristics of family businesses

Family enterprises, in general, operate with an eye on the long term. This quality is shown via the following three aspects: fiscal forbearance, diligence in carrying on family traditions, and coherence in decision-making. These three aspects will be shown via the use of excerpts taken from the three instances.

Financial patience:

FB n°1: "One factor that sets family companies apart from their competitors is the ability to have a long-term perspective. I have been the group leader for the company for the last three decades. That is the power of a family business: the ability to endure semesters of losses and become the only competitor in one's market, even if one is not the most skilled, is contingent upon prolonged table attendance. They are given time."

FB n°2: "A time asset is scarce among corporations; the process of entering a nation might span years, and its duration is not included into the valuation of financial markets. We have a 20-year investment stance. You cannot expect a family manager to respond in the same way as a CEO who has been with the organization for four years; because to his short lifespan, he will never have the same response or viewpoint."

The concern for the transmission of assets:

FB n°1: "We are anticipating 2024, when no other publicly traded firm is doing the same."

"The driving principle of the plan is to ensure that the group's spirit and historical values are passed on to future generations with dignity," states FB no. 3. Additionally, this horizon enables the management of one-time incidents beyond crises. It is widely acknowledged that a few challenging years may pass without doubting the viability of a corporation.

"A significant value that is intrinsic to family groupings is the value of wealth accumulation over time; it is not the 'It is difficult to complete a sprint race.' Thus, maybe fewer instances of irate individuals or coups, but undeniably a capability in the foreseeable future."

Consistency of decisions:

FB n°3: "We do not execute significant left-handed or rightward movements. Irrespective of investor sentiment or media coverage, we adhere to a predetermined plan of action. We are tolerant of odd and unusual behavior under certain circumstances. We have not succumbed to the sway of fashion's influences. Family governance provides more stability than market forces alone. It confers mental independence. Furthermore, the lengthy horizon enables a counter-cyclical reaction, enabling activities to be started marginally sooner than others during times of crisis."

Additionally, family enterprises are distinguished by the family's strong affiliation with the organization. This attribute is shown in the company along three dimensions: the degree of early involvement of family members, a profound interconnection between the family and corporate identities, and the form of governance. These three aspects will be shown via the use of excerpts taken directly from the three cases.

Early immersion:

FB n°1: "Critical is early absorption in the organization. I visited the location since, throughout my childhood, my parents would discuss it nonstop. Although the company was not in very excellent condition, I felt obligated to go since I had been constantly informed about it."

FB n°3: "The firm was where the children were born. They have committed it to memory. It was where they spent their youth. An emulation also occurs between the siblings. Every single one of the three of them is an absolute machine in the firm."

Family-Company Identity:

FB n°2: "Son of the founder, consistency is ensured. A single involvement by a family member is irreversible in this regard. Heavy choices are reached with the family's consent. Additionally, the ideals permeate the family's identity."

FB n°3: "Furthermore, it provides immense value at times of crisis: the family is so connected that we know they will persevere. The company's name implies that all operations have to be impeccable".

The type of governance:

FB n°3: "Two board members have familial ties. Family members engage in confidential brainstorming sessions when confronted with a complicated issue. A freedom of tone exists. Given that the boss's position is unassumable, politics are diminished. The topics are deliberated over with an element of openness".

Moreover, family-owned enterprises are distinguished by a substantial degree of internal stability. This attribute is shown by the stability of values and the absence of high turnover. This attribute also facilitates the maintenance of decision consistency during time. These two aspects will be shown via the use of excerpts taken from the three instances.

The stability of values:

FB No. 1: "We have roots and a tale to tell. We also try to attract individuals who embody the following qualities: a commitment to the long term, a willingness to share, and bravery.

FB n°2: "The organization has always valued creative independence. The possibility exists for any member to express dissent or propose an alternative course of action, since our organization operates as a family company whereby the bonds of kinship extend to our collaborators."

FB no. 3: "Concepts are seldom the subject of discussion; rather, we concentrate on initiatives and activities. We put our words into practice, the significance of both form and substance. The significance of labor is essential. We decline offers eight out of ten times. We purchase modest acquisitions. We like organic development."

Low turnover:

FB n°1: "An element of selection structure is that we appoint individuals who are not too concerned with money due to the absence of stock options and who are certain of their inability to attain the presidency. Therefore, the prospects that we want to acquire are diametrically opposed to those who would engage in an

extravagant prank in a bank with the intention of amassing \$30 million in incentives. Family company employees possess this humility and clarity. As a result, they have employment security. As the general manager remains constant, it is improbable that the boss will either, or so forth in clusters. Thus, a significantly elevated standard of excellence coexists with heightened mutual failure."

FB n°3: "We did not implement any redundancy plans or collective redundancies throughout the crisis. Just now, we cut the quantity of hires. The confidence is bestowed onto the personnel. Departing from them is often a challenging task. An extremely low rate of turnover exists (less than 4 percent among managers). Thirteen years of service is the mean tenure, while the mean age is forty-two. The members of the organization possess an exceptionally keen sense of connection. It is critical that the captain has confidence. Within a family company, one feels both safeguarded and under strain".

Family-owned enterprises are distinguished by their enduring alliances with external collaborators. This attribute will be shown via the use of verbatim accounts extracted from the chosen instances.

FB no. 1: "Customers and suppliers are members of the family."

"Our relationships with suppliers and consumers are similarly founded on long-term collaborations," states FB no. 2.

Family enterprises are distinguished by the family's emotional investment in the management, as the following passages directly quote from such an instance.

FB n°1: "The close connection between a family and a business is not only a source of strength, but also a unique obligation. It is certain that having seen several generations, centuries, wars, revolutions, family disagreements, and scientific advancements is a very profound source of happiness. This history is far more intriguing to me than the amount of money she will have earned for me."

"The corporation is its body, guts, and blood," said FB no. 3.

Moreover, family-owned enterprises are distinguished by their judicious distribution of resources. This attribute is shown in the form of financial autonomy and security. This aspect will be shown via the use of excerpts extracted from the three instances that have been chosen.

FB n°1: "It is impossible to have access to the money of a family business; one can only manage his cash flow. Paradoxically, this constraint improves efficiency. We spend just what we earn. Maintaining this group's growth and evolution in the realm of financial stability, which is to say, avoiding any dangers that may result in the destruction of 56 years of history, is what I continue to believe. Diversification has historically functioned as a risk mitigation strategy, as profitable sectors aid unprofitable industries. Conversely, acquisitions have naturally been more precarious and burdensome due to the fact that one has only their own cash flow (although we may have been ten times larger, that would have been controllable)."

FB n°2: "We have no debt whatsoever. We have always maintained a reputation for incredibly careful management. This is among our core values."

FB n°3: "A robust financial structure serves as a requirement for decision efficiency and autonomy. The adage that "we spend what we make" may seem counterintuitive to financiers, but setting a higher standard allows for flexibility and enhances security. A non-family CEO will prioritize the enterprise's success and willingness to undertake risks above safeguarding against potential losses."

4.2. Vectors of organizational ambidexterity

By emphasizing exploitation, exploration, and their simultaneity, we demonstrate how family traits facilitate the implementation of organizational ambidexterity via the use of verbatims extracted from the complete sample. Knowledge capitalization facilitates its exploitation and enhancement, which often results in the emergence of incremental advances. The examination of the interviews reveals that several attributes of family enterprises, including the establishment of a long-term perspective, the strength of familial and professional connections, and internal stability, all have a role in determining the capacity for capitalization.

Learning is indeed facilitated by leadership teams that are sustainable. This is supported by the following direct quotation: "Learn-the-trade knowledge and the durability of management teams are intrinsically related. In the last six decades, this organization has had just three managers, and those managers are well-versed in the company's operations, methods, and products..." (FB n°4). Furthermore, the early integration of family managers facilitates the intergenerational transfer of tacit knowledge.

"The firm was where the sons were born." They have committed it to memory. It was where they spent their youth. Brothers emulate one another; they all put forth ceaseless effort for the sake of the business. "Their expectations stem from a rigorous education that they have obtained" (FB no.7). Through managerial imitation, tacit knowledge is transferred from one generation to the next in the context of fathers and sons.

Certain human resource arrangements, including participation and training, as well as stability, loyalty, and employee faithfulness, are all elements that promote both individual and collective capitalization (Filser et al., 2016). The sixth FB highlights the near-security-like consistency that workers get from it. This stability consequently facilitates the accumulation of knowledge and abilities over an extended period.

The preservation of specific expertise may also be accomplished by the continuation of unprofitable activities: "We retain certain corporations due to the critical expertise they possess, which would be extinct otherwise" (FB no. 9).

This internal stability is accompanied by stable partnership ties, which, for instance, permit the capitalization of expertise gained from suppliers. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews indicate that some attributes, which are occasionally the same as those that fostered incremental innovation, promote and

aid in the formation of the ability to investigate new domains and fields of knowledge.

Undoubtedly, the encouragement of venturing into uncharted territories and disciplines may be fostered by an administration characterized by confidence and generosity over internal affairs. One manager attest, "People are the driving force behind innovation... There is no committee in our organization that can effectively contribute by examining tables of figures. Once an individual has shown their worth and trustworthiness, we will provide them with the necessary financial resources and independence to execute their ideas. (FB n°5). According to a CEO who was questioned, "delegation, autonomy, and independence are the crucial phrases for understanding how things function." Another manager emphasizes, "Unwavering compassion is what defines the administration of a family firm." When linked with internal and external stability, the provision of the liberty to make errors is a vital source of learning that follows because of autonomy and generosity.

Family enterprises are distinguished by an environment of assurance that is conducive to acquiring knowledge via practical experience. As shown by the remarks of the FB no. 3, "Within family enterprises, our performance may not always be exceptional; but the longevity of our personnel compensates for this. Employees that commit errors remain in their current position. However, in contrast to the major Anglo-Saxon firm models, our longevity among our personnel compensates for the fact that we may not be the most exceptional.

In Saxon nations, one changes sectors and countries every three years; hence, although one does accrue errors, they are no longer available for learning from. Another attribute that promotes exploration is the owner-managers' relative autonomy in decision-making: "A skilled family company manager, by virtue of his lineage, has a position of power that makes him capable of making relatively unchallenged judgments." In contrast to other company models where choices may be subject to debate, discussion, and dispute, our approach enables swift progression. (FB n°2). "The board of directors does not impede decision-making in any way," FB no.4 continues. "This attribute enables us to be both audacious and quick, going against the trend." Confirmed by the FB no. 1 statements: "My father, brother-in-law, and I were able to convene often and reach expeditious conclusions, including purchases, without involving the board of directors." The fifth-ranked FB is even more ecstatic about this core quality: "The absence of external shareholders enables us to be very responsive." The act of personally investing one's own funds lends credibility to the manager's strategic decisions. Individuals reason with themselves: It is his firm, it is his money, and he inspires mobilization. A closed capital led by a dictator is critically important for the development of family enterprises.

A certain degree of patience about the anticipated return on investment (patient capital) is not hindered by this velocity: Independence is an additional essential attribute of our organization. It is a significant limitation; however, there

are certain actions I would have refrained from undertaking had the company not been family owned. For instance, it took me ten years to become profitable on the American market during the internationalization process; however, we borne the associated expenses and acquired the requisite knowledge (new factory, new country, new customer). "Consequently, this autonomy becomes a virtuous limitation" (FB n°3). Similarly, a senior manager said, "Families do, in a sense, undertake risks; but they are investing in entities whose long-term profitability can be controlled." It may be argued that, ironically, increased reliance on reliable brakes on a vehicle contributes to heightened risk-taking.

This connection with time also affords us the opportunity to be unconventional, anticonformist, and unorthodox.

In conclusion, we have shown that the same family qualities (long-term orientation, internal stability) foster both exploitation and exploration. However, this is accomplished via distinct vectors, which hinders the mutual amplification of these two influences. The examination of the interviews reveals that the organizations affirm the coexistence of change and continuity, although via distinct perspectives and methodologies.

By judiciously allocating resources and maintaining steady and robust values, it is possible to retain a typically difficult position. A pursuit of financial independence thus restricts risk-taking. "Our approach to debt differs significantly from that of the NYSE-listed corporations." Cash monitoring continues to be seen as a fundamental tenet of entrepreneurship. Regarding this matter, the interviewed managers are unequivocal: "A family firm is constrained to spending solely by its earnings." The organization must thus carefully consider each investment choice. Diversification is seen as a strategy to reduce risk. "We are fortunate to have this variety since no firm has ever failed simultaneously."

It is logical to recognize that although innovation is the group's greatest asset, it must be implemented in accordance with the structure of family governance. This facilitates "consistency in development policies" (FB no. 2) due to the continuity of the management teams. Over time, an entrepreneurial orientation is passed down and maintained: "Children are immersed in an entrepreneurial spirit that fosters inventiveness." "Over time, one develops an entrepreneurial mindset when they are consistently surrounded by others who are also entrepreneurs."

The company's history serves to preserve the *El* as a communal memory of its evolution. A CEO emphasizes that "the history of the firm is the cornerstone of its success," which offers credibility, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a sense of accountability. Therefore, the organization is guided by a philosophy that permits it to undertake the bare minimum of risks required for its continued existence, while avoiding those that could be fatal: "We handle the company as if it were a child, permitting it to undertake calculated dangers; we hold it in higher regard than ourselves; sustainability serves as the primary incentive" (FB no. 7).

As one director observes, "From a management standpoint, there is one thing very difficult to control: the equilibrium between the tremendous demands, which are justified by the quality of our goods, and the enormous generosity, which is justified by the shareholder's humanism." Thus, maintaining this precarious equilibrium has been a persistent source of anxiety throughout the procedure. This testimony demonstrates how family companies may effectively reconcile two incompatible impulses.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to make a scholarly contribution to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the notion that family firms can effectively harmonize their sustainability strategy and entrepreneurial orientation by capitalizing on their unique attributes that enable them to execute innovative strategies that are organizationally ambidextrous.

This paper presents an empirical and theoretical expansion of the findings of Filser et al. (2016), who described these features in building on the pioneering work of Miller (2011). This article commences by employing a multi-case methodology and utilizing interviews with the founders/leaders of family businesses to illustrate and deconstruct these attributes into dimensions. It then proceeds to demonstrate how these attributes facilitate the establishment of organizational ambidexterity, which enables these companies to not only venture into uncharted territories but also capitalize on preexisting knowledge and capabilities. This article's particular objective is to establish a correlation between the family attributes and organizational ambidexterity.

Prior to the discovery of the vectors that promote ambidexterity, dimensions by which family features are diminished were identified via the study of the verbatim. Undoubtedly, the attribute of "pursuing a long-term perspective" is diminished in accordance with the following criteria: financial patience, preservation of patrimonial legacy, and long-term consistency in decision-making.

The "density of family-business interactions" is categorized based on the degree of early involvement of family members in the firm, the strength of the connection between the family and the company's identities, and the implementation of a particular form of governance. Internal stability is shown via the maintenance of consistent values and a minimal rate of attrition among both management and staff. As a final attribute, "prudent resource allocation" is correlated with financial independence and stability.

Preservation of connections and stability of teams (managers and staff) It is difficult to maintain an elevated level of knowledge due to the low rate of change across teams, even those in the field. Undoubtedly, the preservation of ties and partnerships, along with the minimal attrition rate of teams, especially executives, facilitate the transfer and enhancement of expertise. Furthermore, the early

involvement of family members in the enterprise facilitates the transfer of "expertise, principles, and social connections." This stability facilitates the transfer of tacit information (Tagiuri and Davis 1996; Miller 2011). It also ensures the stability of the organization's principles, which contribute to its capitalization by stressing the preservation of expertise or knowledge. In conclusion, considerations of preservation and prudence influenced the formulation of choice criteria that prioritize the continuation of successful approaches.

Conversely, financial patience and swift decision-making support the pursuit of novel prospects. Indeed, recent research on the management of disruptive innovation has demonstrated, given the inherently risky and seldom short-term profitable nature of exploration, the need to consider specific evaluation criteria that place a financial premium on patience. This underscores the significance of prompt decision-making in the exploration process. Implementing a novel methodology to evaluate the anticipated value of disruptive technologies is comparatively simpler for financially independent organizations. Additional research, like that of Loch et al. (2006), has shown the benefit of trial-and-error learning when testing hypotheses in highly uncertain domains. Support for this learning is provided by the actors' confidence and a tolerance for failure, both of which are fostered by the actors' stability, which enables them to benefit from their errors. Once again, these vectors may benefit from the unique attributes shown by family-owned enterprises. The autonomy that innovation carriers are afforded, as well as the incentive and reward systems that workers are provided with for trying innovative ideas, do really contribute to the advancement of innovation. Our study validates and expands upon this finding.

In addition, the stability and long-term perspective of family company executives, in conjunction with their independence, enable them to undertake investigations that will only become rational with the passage of time. The stability of the organization's values is a significant vector in this regard as well. Ambidexterity is achieved by the simultaneous operation of the renewal (exploration) and capitalization (exploitation) processes. Nevertheless, family enterprises are distinguished by a significant level of executive engagement, which may enable these two systems, which are inherently conflicting, to coexist freely (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010). To facilitate the coexistence of distinct assessment systems for incremental and radical innovations, upper management may, for instance, implement incentive and valuation systems that vary according to the nature of the innovations in which the players are engaged. Family-owned enterprises are used to navigating conflicts between opposing aspects, such as being too critical and generous with employees. Through capitalizing on this capacity to harmonize incongruous trends and effectively managing the ensuing strains, family enterprises may achieve the harmonious coexistence of innovation-related risks and the pursuit of sustainability.

The empirical observation detailed in this article provides further evidence that family businesses, by virtue of their unique attributes, have developed a unique capacity to concurrently develop capabilities that are occasionally regarded as incompatible but have the potential to become enduring competitive advantages. Furthermore, they provide a configuration that is favorable for the formulation of competitive innovation strategies via their cohabitation.

Using vectors that we have defined, we have comprehensively depicted and evaluated family traits in the case of both traditional and creative family enterprises and demonstrated that these attributes are simultaneously favorable to exploitation and exploration. This elucidates the way some pioneering and enduring family enterprises harmonize renewal and continuity. By providing this clarity, we validate the efforts of family companies like Carney to innovate (2005). In response to Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2010) request, we further develop the literature on organizational ambidexterity by elaborating on the case of family businesses, which had not been studied specifically before, and, most importantly, by demonstrating how organizational ambidexterity can be implemented in practice.

Further exploration is required about the applicability of these features to enterprises other than family businesses, going beyond the instance of family businesses. For this reason, scholars doing research on strategic renewal and innovation management may find the current contribution to be of broader relevance.

A constraint of this study is that the paper consistently refers to family companies without properly recognizing their variability and diversity. While our sample is varied in terms of company composition and diversity, recent research proposes that family firms may be distinguished by family traits, such as family cohesiveness (Chrisman and Patel, 2012). Further research might be conducted to investigate the hypothesized vectors and how they vary according to the forms of family cohesiveness.

An additional direction for research may be to examine the validity of the correlation between ambidexterity and attributes via the use of vectors identified through a quantitative survey of a substantial sample of family businesses. All these options may be investigated in the context of future study.

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Enriching Real Estate and Financial Literacy: Exploring Real Estate Use-Cases for Blockchain Technology

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ABSTRACT: Over the past decades, in Germany, substantial reforms in pension systems have shifted a considerable portion of responsibility for post-retirement income from the government to individuals. As a result, people are now obligated to proactively plan for their future provisions and refrain from delaying savings. At the same time, the problem of solving poverty among older people is a pressing topic. Meanwhile, to achieve an economic edge, a country's population must be well-educated regarding economic issues, such as securing retirement provisions, evading speculative bubbles, or fostering entrepreneurial pursuits. Proficiency in financial literacy, including real estate investments, enables individuals to access and engage with various financial tools and resources, enhancing their ability to make informed financial decisions and optimize their economic well-being. This paper aims to expand and enrich the current landscape of financial literacy literature. This is achieved by conducting a comprehensive interdisciplinary literature review. First, the given paper offers a perspective on literacy research, particularly emphasizing financial literacy in the context of real estate investments, including equity release opportunities. Real estate literacy is a sub-category of financial literacy with an explicit focus on real estate transactions. The authors then delve into the impact of blockchain technology within the real estate sector, showcasing distinct use cases that pave the way for the future of real estate. We argue that a comprehensive understanding of the real estate market, which involves knowledge of equity release options, can fundamentally change and enhance retirement considerations.

KEYWORDS: Financial Literacy, Digital Literacy, Real Estate, Blockchain, Equity Release, Germany

1. Introduction

To achieve an economic edge, a country's population must be well-educated regarding economic issues, such as ensuring retirement provisions, avoiding speculative bubbles, or encouraging entrepreneurship. Notably, young adults at the

beginning of their professional careers still face many financial decisions. Consequently, they represent critical societal stakeholders in various literacy disciplines, such as digital, financial, or real estate literacy.

Digital literacy is thereby increasingly intertwined with financial literacy, as modern financial activities and transactions often occur in digital spaces. This requires individuals to possess both technological competence and financial acumen to navigate and manage their financial affairs effectively in the digital age. Proficiency in digital literacy enables individuals to access and engage with various financial tools and resources to make informed financial decisions. Real estate literacy can be seen as a sub-category of financial literacy with an explicit focus on real estate transactions.

This paper originates from a interdisciplinary literature review. Given this context, this paper aims to enhance the existing literature concerning financial-, real estate literacy. First, it offers a perspective and describes the interrelation of literacy concepts, particularly emphasizing literacy relevance in the context of finance and real estate investments. Second, it delves into the impact of blockchain technology within the real estate sector, showcasing distinct use cases that pave the way for the future of real estate.

2. Technological Transformation in the Context of Advancing Literacy

2.1. Importance of Financial Literacy in the Context of Real Estate

The concept of financial literacy is prospering in the 21st century. Meanwhile, compared to other research subjects, this discipline can be classified as rather emerging. Not until 1992, the term financial literacy was coined in a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of a survey by Australia's NatWest Bank (Noctor et al. 1992, 4). In today's digital landscape, financial activities, and transactions frequently occur online, demanding individuals to master technological skills and financial expertise. This dual proficiency is essential for handling financial matters in the modern era. Meanwhile, within financial literacy, real estate literacy emerges as a subset discipline that centers explicitly on real estate transactions and offers measures to counteract retirement issues. In the past decades, extensive pension system reforms have shifted a substantial part of the responsibility to ensure income from the government to individuals after retirement. Consequently, individuals are today required to plan provisions early in their lives and avoid procrastination of savings. Nevertheless, according to several authors, the risk of old-age poverty is imminent (Stolper and Walter 2017, 1; Leiber 2018, 41). In this context, real-estate literacy is gaining importance which refers to the ability to make informed judgments and effective decisions regarding real estate transactions. Today this discipline is less acknowledged, as it primarily falls under the umbrella of financial literacy. However,

considering the importance and market size of the real estate sector, it is merely a question of time until it receives the appropriate recognition it merits.

From a financial viewpoint, the expenditure on real estate rent forms a considerable component of a household's financial planning. A rule of thumb in Germany states that the monthly rent should not exceed 30 percent of the monthly net household income. However, with retirement, the pay usually falls; meanwhile, living costs tend to rise. In fact, according to the Statistisches Bundesamt, the housing cost burden amounts on average in Germany to 27.7%. The leader in terms of the cost burden is Hamburg, with 30.4%. The other end of the scale is represented by Thüringen, with 23.1% (Statistisches Bundesamt 2018). According to a press release of October 2020, 11.4 million, representing 14% of the population in Germany, lived in 2019 in households overburdened by their housing costs. These individuals spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing (Statistisches Bundesamt 2020). Moreover, income usually falls with retirement, while living costs tend to rise.

Insights collected by the Sparda Survey "Wohnen in Deutschland" 2019 further support the importance of this research emphasis. The survey shows that 63% of Germans believe home ownership is worthwhile. Meanwhile, the home-ownership rate in Germany occupies the penultimate place among all OECD countries with 51 percent, undercut only by Switzerland with 41.6 percent (Sparda Survey 2019). According to the Deutsche Bundesbank (2020), this causes wealth inequality.

A comprehensive understanding of the real estate market, encompassing familiarity with equity release choices, has the potential to change and enhance retirement considerations fundamentally. For example, equity-release products enable older people to ensure liquidity once retirement lies ahead. A stereotypical example of an asset-rich, cash-poor individual is described by McLean as the "Devon widow," living alone in the former family home but receiving only a small pension income (McLean 2018, 196; Loutzenhiser and Mann 2020 3). In an ideally symbiotic cycle, the challenge of retirement can be mitigated, simultaneously addressing the "house rich, cash poor" dilemma highlighted by McLean and tackling the issue of younger individuals struggling to save for their future needs. Within the mutually beneficial cycle, the retired individual could, for instance, transfer ownership while still residing in the house. The selling price might be a seller's loan, repaid by the younger buyer in manageable installments. It offers younger residents a chance to achieve property ownership and retirement provisions within a familiar area while enhancing retirees' financial situation and maintaining their quality of life. We believe this construct could resonate well in communities where residents are familiar with each other.

Remarkably, these equity release options generally differ from country to country and show different acceptance rates, despite, in some cases, similar demographics. In Germany, the term "Immobilienverrentung" describes equity

release options. As we delve into a more detailed exploration of equity release products and blockchain technology in the subsequent sections, a short introduction to most known equity release products is presented here:

Table: Equity Release Products

Equity Release Product	Characteristics
Leibrente (Life Annuity)	In a Leibrente, the homeowner sells their property and receives a lifelong monthly payment from the buyer. The buyer takes possession of the property upon the homeowner's passing.
Rückmietverkauf (Sale and Leaseback)	Homeowners can sell their property to an investor or buyer and then lease it back for a specified period.
Teilverkauf (Partial Sale):	Homeowners can sell a portion of their property to a buyer while retaining the right to live there. The buyer becomes a co-owner and receives their share upon the homeowner's passing.
Umkehrhypothek (Reverse Mortgage)	A reverse mortgage allows homeowners to receive payments from a lender against the equity in their property. The loan and interest are repaid when the property is sold, or the homeowner dies.
Zeitrente (Time-limited Annuity)	Like Leibrente, however, the homeowner receives regular payments for a fixed duration, as specified in the agreement.

Source: Own illustration

Concerning the outlined equity release options, it is important to emphasize that these products are not standardized. In Germany, all these products are subject to freedom of contract, resulting in diverse agreements. In the next chapter, this paper will provide a background on blockchain technology, including smart contracts. After that, it explores real estate use cases in the context of blockchain technology to further enrich the literacy literature.

2.2. Introduction to Blockchain Technology

2.2.1. Basics of Blockchain Technology

In the era of the digital revolution, individuals, organizations, and even countries find themselves surrounded by disruptive technologies. In the past, blockchain technology was mainly associated with the technology behind the cryptocurrency Bitcoin. Today, experts consider blockchain a major innovation beyond its initial scope (Swan 2015; Tapscott and Tapscott 2017; Marotta and Duc 2021). This creates many questions and fruitful debates about which business models and services may become obsolete and where processes can be streamlined and further optimized through blockchain applications (see Marotta and Duc 2021)

Blockchain technology shows an impressive debut. Only in 2008 did the technology arise from the introduction of the crypto-currency Bitcoin (BTC) of which the origin is a whitepaper published in 2008 under the pseudonym "Satoshi

Nakamoto” with the title: “Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System” (Nakamoto 2008 in Nordgren et al. 2019, 49). Then in July 2016, blockchain was already located at the top of the peak of Gartner's hype curve, between “smart robotics” and the “connected home,” and in 2017, the blockchain and distributed ledgers technology were listed as a “Top ten strategic technology trend” (Panetta 2017 in O’Leary 2017, 138). Today, Big Techs try to position themselves to use this technology; meanwhile, on the other side, governments attempt to regulate crypto along with blockchain applications given the potential interference of crypto and blockchain in state affairs.

Concerning regulation, there is a need to govern and educate. Blockchain is still in its early days and requires extensive monitoring to protect customers and users. At some point, due to its decentralized nature, it should eventually make central institutions and, therefore, the centralization of power dispensable. Until then, regulations are still required to support a well-functioning and sustainable ecosystem that protects customer interests (EU 2022).

Now, what is Blockchain?

In short, a blockchain is an open, distributed data structure that can efficiently record transactions. All executed transactions are stored in blocks, whereby each block refers to the previous one. These linear and chronological blocks form a data chain that stipulates all kinds of information, such as ownership and asset transfers. All blocks confirm any transaction's exact time and sequence, creating a counterfeit-proof chain. This prevents any block from being altered or inserted between two existing blocks. The validation of new transactions depends on the type of blockchain (Hacker and Thomale 2017, 8).

The objective of the blockchain is the creation of a decentralized peer-to-peer network. Peer-to-peer means that communication occurs directly between the network nodes, thereby making central authorities obsolete, for instance, coordinating and approving transactions. Unlike conventional networks, each network node stores all information instead of storing all data on a single server (Christidis and Devetsikiotis 2016, 2293; O’Leary 2017, 138). In contrast to centralized networks, the distributed ledger of a peer-to-peer technology allows each participant to obtain a local copy of the blockchain. Network participants can legitimize and verify transactions at any time or place. Consequently, the data storage is regulated locally, as well as the communication between the participants. As a result of the decentralized storage, the peer-to-peer network is considered more efficient and resistant to hacker attacks by ensuring a higher level of reliability in contrast to centralized systems (Rosic 2019).

The Harvard Business Review has identified the following principles as the “five basic principles” of blockchain technology:

Figure 1: The 5 Basic Principles of the Blockchain Technology

1. Distributed Database:	• Each party on a blockchain has access to the entire database and its complete history. There is no central control and every party can verify the records without an intermediary.
2. Peer-To-Peer Transmission	• Communication takes place directly between peers instead through a central node. Each node stores and forwards information to all other nodes.
3. Transparency with Pseudonymity	• Transactions are visible and transparent to anyone with system access. Users can however remain anonymous or provide proof of their identify.
4. Irreversibility of Records	• Once a transaction is entered the records cannot be altered.
5. Computational Logic	• Users can set up algorithms and rules that automatically trigger transactions between nodes.

Own Illustration based on Iansiti and Lakhani 2017, 5; Tapscott and Tapscott 2017, 3

2.2.2. Basics of Smart Contracts

A critical use case of blockchain technology involves “smart contracts.” These contracts can potentially leverage blockchains' usefulness on a truly meaningful scale (Crosby et al. 2016, 8). A contract is a bilateral or multilateral legal act that establishes rights and obligations based on an arranged transaction (Hart and Holmström 1986, 1). In principle, smart contracts feature the same kind of agreements between the different parties. However, unlike conventional contracts, smart contracts are algorithmic, self-executing, and self-enforcing computer programs that can implement contract terms automatically (Lauslahti et al. 2017, 2). Blockchain is thus the ideal place to store such a contract because of its immutability and cryptographic security (Marino 2015).

The concept of smart contracts was first introduced by Nick Szabo in 1996 (Magazzeni et al. 2017, 2 et seq.) and is, therefore, chronologically seen as more mature than blockchain technology itself. Szabo explained the idea of smart contracts as exemplary of a missing installment for a leased car. In the case of overdue payments, the smart contract automatically revokes the digital key to operate the vehicle (Szabo 1997). Smart contracts and their rules provide security for all involved parties in a transaction because the rules are written in unchangeable code. The most noticeable feature of any smart contract is the potential to eliminate the need for an intermediary to trust the execution of the contract. A trustless network is created, and the parties can transact even though they may not know and trust each other (Christidis and Devetsikiotis 2016, 2292). Ironically, the circumstances of a need for trust and liability initially favored the introduction of banks in the first place. Banks verified contract parties and gave guarantees regarding their trustworthiness. Today, via blockchain, the verification of contractual conditions can be realized through algorithms and subsequent contract terms, which are automatically executed without the interventions of intermediaries. This






comes with a faster reconciliation between transacting parties and offers a high level of automation potential by replacing many human interactions. According to several researchers, three elements of smart contracts make them distinct (Swan 2015, 15; Anjum et al. 2017, 84):

- autonomy,
- self-sufficiency, and
- decentralization

Currently, there are over 19.000 different cryptocurrencies that can be traced back to a variety of blockchain networks (CoinMarketCap 2022). Regarding smart contracts, the most extensive and most prominent blockchain network is Ethereum with its native token Ether. Most companies and projects are building on the Ethereum blockchain because of its vast community and its role as a pioneer in smart contracts. However, more blockchain networks are arising, challenging the incumbent regarding the scalability problems, e.g., transactions per second (TPS) or high Gas Fees. Blockchain networks such as Solana, Cardano, and Polkadot are just a few of them to mention. These blockchain networks pool great opportunities for smart contract usability (ibid.).

Today, several business ideas and projects are already up and running that connect the real estate market and blockchain or distributed ledger technology (DLT) applications. As illustrated in Figure 2, the overall market cap of crypto coins and tokens associated with real estate amounts to about \$95M. Meanwhile, the overall crypto market cap amounts to about \$1.23T (CoinMarketCap 2022). This also shows the early stage of the blockchain-based real estate business regarding the global real estate market volume.

Figure 2: Top Real Estate Tokens by Market Capitalization

Top Real Estate Tokens	Abbreviation	Price	Market Cap	in %
 Propy	PRO	\$ 1,10	\$ 80.879.459,00	85,17%
 vEmpire DDAO	VEMP	\$ 0,03639	\$ 6.318.866,00	6,65%
 Onooks	OOKS	\$ 0,3422	\$ 3.733.151,00	3,93%
 LABS Group	LABS	\$ 0,001387	\$ 3.066.548,00	3,23%
 ATLANT	ATL	\$ 0,006434	\$ 348.750,00	0,37%
Others	---	---	\$ 612.451,00	0,64%
Sum			94.959.225 €	

Own Illustration based on CoinMarketCap 2022

Next, the literature review provides an overview of research on the potential of blockchain applications in the real estate industry.

3. Use Cases of Blockchain in Real Estate

3.1. Introduction to Use-Cases

Blockchain possesses the potential to change the traditional real estate market fundamentally. Use cases can enhance existing processes and create new business models for companies and governments. There is a broad spectrum of possible use cases, such as:

- Scenario 1: Use Cases for investment opportunities
For example, tokenization of ownership (in the context of equity release)
- Scenario 2: Use Cases for efficient and effective processes/transactions
For example, transparency and safety about title transfer and title fraud
- Scenario 3: Use-Cases in the Metaverse

In the following, specific examples are outlined to explain the potential of blockchain applications in real estate.

3.2. *Blockchain-based Investment Opportunities*

Today, private investors experience notable financial barriers when trying to enter specific real estate transactions. For example, considering the situation from the seller's perspective, selling a share of a house in the context of equity release options can be challenging. The individual is likely to experience several barriers, such as relatively high transaction costs along with a spectrum of uncertainties concerning contractual arrangements. From the buyer's standpoint, private investors also encounter relatively high transaction expenses when engaging in direct investments in land or real estate assets. These include statutory fees and commissions, amounting to around 8-15% of the down payment. Furthermore, discussions about tax regulations in political forums introduce additional uncertainties, particularly concerning how real estate holding periods are treated for tax purposes. Consequently, pursuing real estate diversification comes with significant costs; alternatively, it can be accomplished through participation in a real estate investment trust (REIT) or investments in publicly traded real estate companies.

The blockchain idea we advocate describes the partial sale of land or real estate as a tangible asset investment accessible to a personalized budget. This process works by dividing the collectibles into many small shares or pieces. In the context of blockchain, these shares are called tokens and enable transactions at any volume, price, and at any time. All individuals can trade whatever asset is of their interest without significant transaction costs. In Germany, an alternative approach to the token sale of land or real estate is currently only being adopted by a few companies, such as Wertfaktor and Deutsche Leibrenten. Nonetheless, the high transaction fees remain a burden for private individuals. Although, the technical feasibility could be within reach through the democratic characteristics of blockchain.

Meanwhile, companies such as Timeless, Finexity, or Chrono24 already offer asset investment opportunities in the German market, such as oldtimers or watches.

Then why not provide land and real estate? Regulations in the United States partially leave more freedom, and competition is increasing. For instance, Lofty Marketplace offers tokens in cash-flowing rental properties starting at \$50 for a single investment (Lofty.ai 2022).

In the context of blockchain and smart contracts, such investments enable asset transactions at any volume, price, and time. This can disrupt the well-known real estate environment and boost the competition. Furthermore, these transactions can be embedded in the context of equity release products, locally referred to as “Immobilienverrentung,” which the authors consider a major solution to the severe retirement issue.

Bringing together the potential of blockchain technology and the exploration of equity release options offers investment strategies that enhance the overall quality of life and elevate the living standards of individuals who possess valuable properties but have limited liquidity due to a low income or a low pension. Now, choosing various equity-release products, such as the reverse mortgage or the partial sale of an asset established by the blockchain application, can further help these individuals with new options to ensure liquidity once retirement lies ahead. For example, retirees can find additional potential buyers, particularly if they sell their property while remaining in their residence. Considering the investor's perspective, an avenue emerges for advancing portfolio diversification.

Looking beyond blockchain, it is anticipated that the idea of equity-release products will attract increasing attention. This is especially notable due to ongoing discussions about the vulnerabilities within the retirement system. This brings us to the second example of using the blockchain and smart contracts to facilitate and improve real estate transactions.

3.3. Blockchain-based Land Titles

The land registry system in Germany, known as the “Grundbuchamt,” is an essential department in any governmental system. This register stores the records of land ownership. The record can then be used as proof of entitlement, ensuring fraud prevention and a smooth transition. For instance, in Germany, an industrialized country, individuals can rely on government bodies to trust property ownership. Meanwhile, in less developed countries, for example, Bangladesh, Georgia, Ghana, or Honduras, the registry systems already experienced substantial problems. Centralized systems in those countries have partially proven unreliable and prone to corruption, leaving individuals vulnerable to unlawful land thieves (OECD 2019; Alam et al. 2022). For example, one property may be sold to more than one buyer using inaccurate or corrupted data systems.

Meanwhile, in the future, governments can use a nationwide blockchain-based land registry system. The blockchain tracks all transactions with a timestamped digital signature and stores the data in a connected and distributed network. This

decentralized system prevents fraud and thievery by stipulating contracts, ownerships, GPS coordinates, satellite pictures, and further documentation.

The blockchain can also be used in advanced economies. Notaries profit from notarizing and certifying legal transactions, evidence, and signatures. In Germany, notary fees for acquiring a house are between 1% and 2% of the purchase price. At first sight, this seems like a poor way to ensure the redistribution of wealth as it primarily benefits a small group of lawyers and notaries.. Today, blockchain technology offers, in theory, a system to skip the intermediary or make them more competitive in terms of their services. Smart contracts offer a mechanism that enables the execution of predetermined actions when the contractual terms are met. This makes the notary redundant because no third party must mediate or validate transactions. The ownership will be transferred once the payment is made. There is no possibility to manipulate the contract conditions or cancel the smart contract. This leads to potential savings for individuals regarding notary fees and administrative overhead.

This last chapter briefly touches upon an omnipresent issue in the media, the metaverse.

3.4. *The Metaverse*

Lastly, we delve into a third example of investment opportunities tied to the intersection of blockchain and real estate transactions. This particular example is arguably the most theoretical among those discussed.

The Metaverse has been subject to many discussions since its introduction in 2021 by Mark Zuckerberg. Digital, futuristic concepts are said to restructure our well-known day-to-day lives while manifesting as new realities. From today's perspective, it can be said that the metaverse represents a digital version of the "real world" by providing online platforms that enhance the experience for individuals and businesses.

In this digital world, everyone is entitled to buy digital property or assets and call it their own. Two prominent examples of the metaverse experience are "Decentraland" and "The Sandbox." People can enter these digital worlds by using, for instance, specific crypto wallets such as MetaMask or Coinbase Wallet. The login process is closely associated with the so-called single-sign-on (SSO) process, commonly known as the login with Facebook or Apple. Also, logging in via a wallet is required since a digital world needs digital currencies to buy, for example, properties in the metaverse.

The metaverse presents a wide array of opportunities. In a future digital world, individuals can collaborate even better in a virtual space. This, for instance, disrupts and newly defines the idea of a home office. Individuals can virtually sit together in a virtual office while working from any place in the world. Today, Meta and other companies are working to introduce further artificial environments, including products and services. Individuals may be able to visit virtual stores to view and even

digitally experience specific services and products. This defines a new form of customer experience. Automotive brands may offer the digital experience of driving a new car model or fashion companies offer a unique perspective on online shopping. The entire experience, including the processing of a sale, can directly occur within the metaverse. This further connects the virtual realm with the physical world (CBS News 2022).

From an entrepreneurial perspective, the metaverse creates space for valuable business models, including new products and services. Regarding the purchase of property or real estate in the context of the metaverse, investors can speculate on land prices in this virtual environment. Individuals can then earn passive rental income from leased land in the metaverse. According to CBS News, the three other major platforms in meta real estate - Decentraland, Somnium Space, and Cryptovoxels - together own nearly 269,000 parcels of digital real estate, and the demand increases while prices rise (ibid.).

Even traditional banks are currently entering the metaverse and buying properties to "build" digital banking stores. JP Morgan was the first bank to purchase property in Decentraland and is now working on introducing the "Onyx-Lounge" to offer advisory services for tech-savvy customers. The American bank sees a business potential of over one trillion USD (Oxford Business Review 2021). In a nutshell, real estate from a metaverse point-of-view states an exciting development in the context of blockchain technology. However, it is in the early days and must prove its technical stability and global acceptance.

4. Conclusion

In an attempt to address noteworthy societal concerns such as old-age poverty and retirement pension, this paper explores real estate use cases within the context of blockchain technology. The objective was to widen and enhance the present landscape of literacy literature by conducting an interdisciplinary literature review.

First, the paper focused on literacy disciplines, particularly financial and real estate literacy, including equity release. Given the concerns and the importance of the real estate industry, the argument is put forth that real estate literacy deserves greater recognition as a distinct research discipline. Furthermore, it is argued that a comprehensive understanding of the real estate market, which involves knowledge of equity release options, can improve retirement concerns. Beyond the realm of blockchain, equity release products are expected to gain growing prominence in the times ahead.

The given paper then provides a perspective on digital transformations, focusing on blockchain technology. It addresses the essential characteristics of blockchain technology and the idea of smart contracts. As blockchain promises to prevent fraud, increase trust and transparency, and save time and money by eliminating intermediaries, it is one of the most promising technologies of the early

years of the 21st century. At the core, this research showcases blockchain use cases that pave the way for the future of real estate. As shown, blockchain offers a range of applications for the real estate industry, including creating new investment opportunities through asset tokenization. In parallel, blockchain provides avenues for democratizing real estate investments by streamlining transactions and lowering associated costs.

Lastly, the metaverse also offers opportunities regarding a new real estate market. As illustrated, today, a few fintech companies are embracing the metaverse and traditional businesses such as banks and fashion manufacturers. This shows that virtual reality has expanded substantially beyond the world of gaming, although the metaverse is still in its nascent stages. The success of both established and new business models in the metaverse depends on their ability to effectively offer their services and products in this new virtual world.

Regarding the changing environment, further investigation of how new technologies can support existing businesses will be helpful to generate. These studies may also explain how new processes can be used and embedded in existing structures and what risks and limitations may arise. Future research may also explore the acceptance of real estate tokenization from the perspective of sellers and buyers. Lastly, educational institutions assume a crucial role in supporting literacy disciplines. Ultimately, elevating literacy levels to maintain a country's economic leadership is paramount.

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Decision-Making Transparency in Public Administration

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, increasing citizens' trust in the authorities that govern us is crucial for the proper functioning of the state. People who are temporarily in public office must serve the public interest. Transparency is an ethical value but also a legal concept, subject to legal rules. In its activity, the European Ombudsman has often been called upon to give an opinion on whether European citizens' public access to documents was observed. In this context, in the present study, we aim to analyze the legal framework applicable to decision-making transparency in public administration, starting from the specificity of the public power regime governing the public sector activity, meaning that the public interest takes precedence over the private interest. From this point of view, we consider the topic to be of general interest, as it provides information not only for law specialists but also for private individuals who need to know their rights in relation to public authorities. The paper is divided into three sections: section I provides a brief introduction to the subject, section II investigates the national legislation on transparency in the public administration activity, and section III examines transparency in decision-making at European level through the case law of the European Ombudsman.

KEYWORDS: European Ombudsman, Constitution, public authority, decision-making transparency, Administrative Code

1. Introduction

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (Dexonline n.d.), *transparency* means: “way of working, principle of some leaders or governing bodies to make their entire activity known to the public at all times”. This analysis starts from the absolute need to observe the law, both by citizens and by the authorities, as laid down in Article 1 para. (5) of the Romanian Constitution, as revised: “*In Romania, respect for the Constitution, its supremacy and the laws is mandatory*”. The Constitution regulates several rights that can shape the broad framework of citizens' access to information of public interest: the right to information, the right of a person aggrieved by a public authority, free access to

justice, or the right to petition. We are interested in Article 31 on the *right to information*: para. (1) “*The right of a person to have access to any information of public interest may not be restricted*” and para. (2) “*The public authorities, in accordance with their powers, are obliged to ensure that citizens are properly informed about public affairs (...)*”. Otherwise, for the violation of their rights or legitimate interests by a public authority, injured parties have recourse to administrative due process. In fact, “human coexistence is increasingly feeling the need of security, clarity and order in its internal relations” (Popa 2008, 63).

This paper analyses the legislation applicable to the transparency of the work of public authorities, starting from the idea that “the current stakes for the leaders at the highest level in states are huge and on the long-term (...): identifying solutions and mechanisms to increase public trust in state authorities (...)” (Ștefan 2017, 96).

At the same time, in the documentary analysis that we will carry out, the paper will also include references to the case law of the European Ombudsman on the right to good administration. In this respect, research methods such as the comparative method, the logical deductive method and others will be used to combine theoretical and practical information.

2. The obligation of public authorities to ensure transparency in public administration

At national level, the legal framework applicable to public administration activity is mainly regulated by the Romanian Constitution and the Administrative Code (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019), to which other normative acts are added. Title III of the Administrative Code - *General Principles Applicable to Public Administration* regulates eight principles, of which we note: the principle of transparency and the principle of satisfying the public interest (Articles 8 and 10). Doctrine has pointed out that “it is for the first time that a normative act regulates rules having the value of general principles that apply to the entire public administration, both central and local” (Vedinaș 2021, 38). The principle of transparency is laid down in Article 10 of the Administrative Code:

“Paragraph (1) In the process of drafting normative acts, public authorities and institutions have the obligation to inform and submit drafts of normative acts to public consultation and debate and to allow citizens access to the administrative decision-making process, as well as to data and information of public interest, within the limits of the law.

Paragraph (2) The beneficiaries of public administration activities have the right to obtain information from public administration authorities and institutions, and they have the correlative obligation to provide the beneficiaries with information *ex officio* or upon request, within the limits of the law”.

According to the doctrine, “at the legislative level, this principle is already implemented, prior to the adoption of the Administrative Code, by Law no.

52/2003 on decision-making transparency in public administration” (Ștefan 2023, 65). Law no. 52/2003 “establishes the minimum procedural rules applicable to ensure decision-making transparency in central and local public administration authorities, elected or appointed, as well as other public institutions using public financial resources (...)” (Ibidem).

Another law that complements the legislation applicable to transparency in decision-making is Law no. 161/2003 on some measures to ensure transparency in the exercise of public office, public functions and in the business environment, prevention and sanctioning of corruption (published in Official Gazette no. 279 of April 21, 2023). “The civil servant is considered to be the legal institution of public law in general and administrative law in particular” (Buzatu 2011, 182). According to the doctrine, “the Administrative Code does not contain any novelties regarding the regime of incompatibilities and conflict of interest applicable to the function of member of the Government, but refers to the provisions of Law no. 161/2003 (...)” (Ștefan 2023, 213-214).

Related to the subject under analysis is also Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest, which in its Article 1 provides for free and unrestricted access of the individual to any information of public interest (published in the Official Gazette no. 663 of October 23, 2001).

With reference to Article 52 of the Constitution (the right of the person injured by a public authority), Law no. 554/2004 on administrative due process (published in Official Gazette no. 1154 of December 7, 2004) develops the legal framework applicable to administrative dispute actions for refusal of access to information of public interest.

3. Decision-making transparency at European level - the European Ombudsman’s case law

According to the doctrine “the European Union’s policy issues cover a broad spectrum of areas” (Conea 2020, 9). At the European level, public access to documents was regulated by Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of May 30, 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (published in OJ L 145, 2001). At the same time, “states are those that participate in international relations, but not anyway, but as legally equal subjects of international law” (Popescu 2023, 9).

In its Article 2 para. (1), the European legal act provides that: “*Any citizen of the Union and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State has a right of access to documents of the institutions, subject to the principles, conditions and limits defined in this Regulation*”. At the same time: “*in order to allow citizens to exercise their rights under this Regulation effectively, each institution shall grant public access to a register of documents*” (Article 11). Article 8 para. (3) specifies that: “*failure by the institution to reply within the prescribed time*

limit shall be considered as a negative reply and shall entitle the applicant to institute court proceedings against the institution and/or make a complaint to the Ombudsman in accordance with the relevant provisions of the EC Treaty”.

According to the doctrine, “the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour or Code of Good Administration contains principles of good administration and rules that must govern the administrative decisions, such as: legality, equality, proportionality (...), transparency” (Carp 2010, 4). In order to see the practical applicability of the European act, we will now present two cases settled by the European Ombudsman.

In a recent case, *the Ombudsman found maladministration*. In short, the applicant “requested public access to the positions adopted by the Member States on an implementing regulation laying down eco-design requirements for electronic displays. The Ombudsman considered that the Commission’s decision to refuse access to the requested documents was unfounded and that the refusal to grant access to the audio recordings and e-mail constituted maladministration”. (Decision in case 1944/2019/DL on the transparency of Member States’ positions on a European Commission proposal for a Regulation implementing the Ecodesign Directive).

In another case, *the Ombudsman found no maladministration*. In short, the applicant “requested public access to documents relating to ongoing negotiations on the taxation of digital services. The Council identified 53 documents, of which it granted access to 24 documents, refused access to 10 documents and granted partial access to the remaining documents. On the basis of the investigation, the Ombudsman closed the case as there was no maladministration on the part of the Council in refusing access to the 10 documents in question (...) on the basis of the need to protect the international relations and the financial policy (...) of the EU or its Member States” (Decision in case 1703/2021/AMF on the refusal of the EU Council to grant public access to documents relating to the ongoing negotiations on the taxation of digital services).

4. Conclusions

This analysis has revealed the legislation applicable to the transparency of the work of public authorities, so that we can draw some conclusions below. In this respect, the paper has outlined the legal framework applicable at both national and European level. If at national level the legislation is made up of the Constitution and other normative acts, such as Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration, the Administrative Code, etc., at European level there is EC Regulation no. 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of May 30, 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. “Regulations have general applicability” (Fuerea 2010, 141) and according to the Constitution, this European normative act is part of national law and must be observed.

From this perspective, at national level, persons who have been harmed in a legitimate right or interest by a public authority have recourse to administrative due process to complain to the judge. The Administrative Code provides that one of the basic principles applicable to public administration is the principle of transparency.

At European level, the European Ombudsman is the public authority called upon to deal, ex officio or on referral, with complaints concerning infringements of European citizens' right to good administration. At the same time, in order to see how the concept of transparency works in practice, the selected case studies focused on the finding of maladministration in relation to public access to documents.

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Examining Discourse of Undocumented Migration and Religious Faith: An Intersectional Approach

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ABSTRACT: The present study delves into the self-narratives voluntarily shared by Algerian undocumented migrants on publicly accessible social media platforms. It aims to unveil the multifaceted experiences of these migrants, exploring the pivotal role of faith within their narratives. Employing overarching intersectionality theories and critical discourse analysis approaches, these narratives highlight the importance of religious faith in justifying migrants' irregular journeys and shaping their aspirations for a better future, indicating a need to reevaluate its significance in their identity construction. Additionally, the analysis uncovers a prevalent narrative of mistreatment and a deep sense of non-belonging among undocumented migrants, revealing how discourse constructs perceptions of being the Other and perpetuates their marginalization by reducing them to objects of surveillance in host countries.

KEYWORDS: Discourse, narratives, migration, identity, faith, the Other

1. Introduction

"... I did not know where to go, no language, no family, no friends, no papers... I kept walking with tears. I slept that night sitting on a garden chair shivering with cold and fear. Then I felt the bitter taste of alienation, which I never thought bitter. In that moment of deep vulnerability, I found solace in my faith. Veiled, I whispered prayers, finding peace in the belief that I was not alone amidst the challenges I faced..." (Anonymous female migrant)

The poignant narrative of this anonymous female migrant offers a window into the disorientation and isolation experienced upon arrival in a new land. Her words evoke a profound sense of alienation that she had not anticipated, prompting questions about the extent to which migrants identify with their homeland and host society (Sam and Berry 2006; Jaspal 2015). Within this narrative, the migrant's reference to being veiled while offering prayers illuminates the intimate connection between her religious identity and her sense of belonging. It emphasizes the significance of religion and faith as a coping mechanism amidst profound challenges

(Garha and Domingo 2019), highlighting the profound impact of the migration process on individuals' inner worlds and identity formation (Jaspal and Breakwell 2014). In other words, the migrant's ability to articulate her emotions and thoughts amidst adversity reflects the complex interplay between external challenges and internal processes, underscoring the dynamic nature of self-perception in the context of migration. This resonates with Erikson's (1968) concept of the complexity of identity construction amidst migration-related experiences. Rumbaut (1994) further explores this by emphasizing the integration of 'here' and 'there' into a meaningful sense of self. Massey and Sanchez (2010) offer insights into how immigrants negotiate boundaries with the host community, illustrating the ongoing process of identity negotiation and boundary-brokering to preserve a distinct identity while striving for peaceful coexistence.

Through this narrative, the complexity of the migrant experience unfolds as a dynamic interplay between external challenges and internal processes, constituting a highly emotive event in a migrant's life (Brooks and Simpson 2013). This highlights a notable gap within the Algerian context research about undocumented migration discourse, where such complexities are not often addressed. By drawing upon the analytical frameworks of critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes the constitutive nature of discourse (Fairclough and Wodak 1997), and intersectionality theories (Kelly et al. 2021), this study aims to explore a central inquiry: How do linguistic resources contribute to the representation of various aspects of undocumented migration, particularly regarding religious faith? Against this backdrop, the present research endeavors to analyze similar narratives and draw insightful conclusions. To achieve these objectives, it is crucial to address the following three key research questions:

1. How is the concept of 'undocumented migration' understood and portrayed within narrative discourse?
2. In what ways are the identities of undocumented migrants, including their faith, reflected in discourses surrounding migration?
3. How can we comprehend the (self-)surveillance practices of undocumented migrants within the ostensibly all-encompassing countries of destination?

2. Intersectionality: A tool for migration research

Of paramount importance are inquiries into the conceptual framework of 'intersectionality' and its pertinence within the domain of migration. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw (1991), encapsulates an intricate matrix of concurrent systems of oppression. This definition underscores the necessity for scholars to concurrently consider gender and race, recognizing their interplay in shaping the multifaceted dimensions of experiences and elucidating resultant power dynamics. Thus, these facets do not operate in isolation but rather

intersect, culminating in a system of oppression reflective of the convergence of multiple forms of discrimination (Bernard 2022).

Within the scope of this investigation, the adoption of intersectional analysis commences with the acknowledgment that migrants possess layered identities influenced by social dynamics, historical contexts, and power dynamics. It is imperative to recognize that migrants often inhabit multiple communities concurrently, navigating both oppression and privilege simultaneously. What is particularly notable about this assertion is its illumination of how distinct experiences specific to certain migrant cohorts may remain obscured and marginalized (Larkin and Ross 2024). As such, the incorporation of intersectionality into our research demands a fresh perspective on concepts such as integration, inclusion, equality, and power dynamics. This paradigm shift is fundamentally rooted in the notion that attention should be directed toward the intersections among these factors rather than treating them as discrete entities.

3. Intersections of migration discourse, social media, and religion

Morgan (2010) brings attention to the inherent diversity in definitions of discourse and discourse analysis, indicating their variability based on the epistemological stance of the theorist. Despite this diversity, there are common characteristics of discourse that emerge. Wodak and Meyer (2001) assert that discourse, as a social practice, both shapes and is shaped by the social world, suggesting its dual role as both representative and constitutive. Bucholtz (1994) supports this perspective, emphasizing how speakers' identities emerge from discourse.

Examining discourse surrounding migration has been a focal point in various contexts, including media coverage and political communication (Galasińska 2010; Bréant 2013). Chauzy and Appave (2014, 62-72), along with van Dijk (2018), highlight the role of discourse in shaping perceptions of migration, including its impact, the identity of migrants, reasons for migration, and policy responses. Eberl et al. (2018) demonstrate how migrants are frequently depicted negatively in European media, impacting their integration into destination communities. Similarly, Ross (2019) highlights how mass media perpetuates ethnic and racial stereotypes, marginalizing minority groups and distorting public perceptions. Conversely, positive discourse empowers migrants to cushion their anxieties and foster inclusivity (Ihejirika et al. 2021).

The terms 'religion, spirituality, and faith' are subject to debate and carry various meanings, often used interchangeably despite their distinct nuances. Defining them universally proves challenging due to their diverse interpretations across cultures, traditions, and individual beliefs, ranging from closed to open worldviews (Rachel and Ross 2024). Recent studies have begun to elucidate the intricate nature of religious engagement among young migrants, both during and after their migration experiences (Martin 2014; Garha and Domingo 2019).

Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) observed that religious faith emerged as a coping mechanism among all unaccompanied young migrants in their study conducted in Ireland, while separated girls in Brook and Ottemöller's (2020) research in Norway utilized religious practices to preserve their cultural identities and establish new communities. Furthermore, the enactment of religious beliefs has been recognized as a protective factor for the mental well-being of young individuals within post-migration Somali communities (Im and Swan 2022). Mosques and churches have been identified as significant spaces of belonging for young migrants (Drammeh 2019), with examples such as the makeshift church constructed in the Calais "Jungle" camp, as highlighted by Chase and Allsopp (2021). However, the concept of belonging varies among individual young migrants (Drammeh 2019). These studies collectively emphasize the importance of analyzing and understanding migration discourse across diverse societal contexts.

4. Method

4.1. Collection of narratives

At the core of this study lie the narratives of various undocumented migrants, sharing their personal experiences voluntarily on publicly accessible social media platforms. Following a meticulous review of the amassed stories related to undocumented migration, three excerpts were chosen based on predefined criteria, as outlined by Labov and Waletzky (1967). These criteria encompass:

- a. *Abstract*: A succinct overview of the primary propositions that the story intends to convey.
- b. *Orientation*: Crucial contextual information such as time, place, and individuals involved.
- c. *Complicating Action*: Key events pivotal to the narrative's progression.
- d. *Evaluation*: Emphasizing the narrative's central point.
- e. *Resolution*: Detailing the resolution of the crisis or conflict.
- f. *Coda*: Concluding remarks.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that not all narratives encapsulate every element delineated above, yet the inclusion of complicated actions and resolutions remains crucial (Thornborrow and Coates 2005). The three selected excerpts, rendered in English, collectively offer a nuanced depiction of undocumented migration intertwined with religious faith. They explore diverse facets including the connection to the country of origin, motives driving migration, individual perspectives, lived experiences, and the level of integration within the ostensibly all-encompassing destination nations. Additionally, these narratives provide insights into the intricate process of identity construction.

4.2. *Analysis of narratives from undocumented migrants*

Riessman (2003) elucidates that the myriad definitions of narrative inevitably yield a spectrum of analytical approaches. Furthermore, as underscored by Rogers (2004), it is imperative not to confine scholars to singular methodologies, especially in the realm of (critical) discourse analysis; rather, there is a compelling case for embracing diversity in theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches. Aligned with the tenets of intersectionality, this study employs critical discourse analysis, with particular focus on Van Leeuwen's Analytical Framework (1996). Central to Van Leeuwen's framework is the pivotal concept of 'representation,' which pertains to how a social actor is depicted within discourse. This framework encompasses several key terms, including but not limited to exclusion, suppression, inclusion, passivization, and determination.

Of paramount importance is the notion of 'inclusion,' which involves positioning social actors prominently within an event and articulating them clearly within the textual context through strategic discourse techniques. Conversely, 'exclusion' entails the potential omission of a social actor from the text, necessitating their suppression or relegation to the background within the textual narrative. A social actor is considered 'suppressed' when no explicit references to them are discernible in the text. In the case of 'backgrounding,' there are subtle indications of social actor(s) in the text, albeit with these references being somewhat deferred or less conspicuous.

5. *Data analysis*

In this section, we explore the prominent themes identified within the narratives of undocumented migrants. Each narrative is presented individually, facilitating a deep exploration of the portrayed realities within the realm of undocumented migration and religious faith.

Excerpt 1: *Algerian male migrant was an employee, 34 years old, 1 year in France.*

"... Like anyone whose salary was not sufficient for his personal and family needs, I was eager for 'harga' (irregular migration), dreaming of living in paradise in European countries, not caring about religious restrictions (this is haram) and the dangers that may confront me in my journey. We were a group of 20 people, including a woman. We bought a wooden boat (6 meters) for amounts to 60,000 Algerian dinars. We were provided with petrol cans, a compass, and life jackets. After inquiring about the weather with a GPS device, the call was made with the mediator (the smuggler) to determine the date of the trip. After preparing the equipment for eating and sleeping and the sums of money in hard currency, we moved to the starting point (isolated area) at night. It was programmed and organized towards the Spanish coast (Almeria) and then to France. The tour

operator said: "The boat has a powerful engine, it will take us to the other bank in the shortest possible time", but the tragedy was that the money we paid was stolen. We faced significant obstacles, including the engine's failure, in addition to that, the tour operator did not know the destination as well as he had claimed, and the result was to stay at sea for long hours, and as a result, one of the garages (irregular migrant) suffocated due to his asthma disease. This led to a quarrel and disagreement between us because, I think, some were drug users. We were shocked, we spent 5 days at sea, and all our supplies ran out. We saw horrific scenes; some immigrants were eaten by a shark in front of our eyes, unfortunately.....".

1.1. The decision-making process in irregular migration

Excerpt 1 delves into a well-known form of migration, shedding light on the intricate stages that an irregular migrant undergoes before committing to the journey. This migrant embarks on the path by diligently saving a sum of money to cover the expenses associated with the trip. Subsequently, they navigate the intricate process of contacting and coordinating illegal immigration through intermediaries connected to smuggling networks. The narrative unfolds as they undertake a perilous boat voyage across the Mediterranean, ultimately culminating in their arrival at the distant shore on the opposite bank, signifying the culmination of their arduous journey away from their homeland.

1.2. Rationalizing irregular migration beyond religious norms

Within Excerpt 1, we encounter a narrative that provides a simplified yet poignant glimpse into what is deemed the norm within the context of undocumented migration. This undocumented migrant rationalizes their decision to engage in irregular migration by emphasizing their inability to meet their basic needs in their place of origin. The narrative commences with the statement, "Like anyone...", effectively encapsulating the rationale. It is worth noting the proactive effort to present a persuasive argument, even while recognizing that this choice exists outside the boundaries of the law and transcends the norms of religion.

1.3. Assigning blame to smugglers

In this narrative, we observe an alternative perspective. The central figure in the irregular migrant's journey is the facilitator responsible for crossing borders, commonly known as the smuggler. This individual assumes a dominant role in the migrant's experience. The narrative emphasizes the smuggler's responsibility for providing the necessary equipment and materials for the voyage. As explicitly stated, the smuggler capitalizes on the willingness of a significant number of migrants to take risks in their pursuit of migration.

Excerpt 2: *Algerian female migrant was a student, 26 years old, 5 months in France.*

"... I was constantly in touch with my friends in France. They painted a beautiful picture of life there for me, promising that if I came, I wouldn't lack anything. They assured me I could stay with them, and they'd take care of everything. Given the corruption, bribery, and nepotism back home, where the poor are mistreated, I saved up and traveled to France illegally, driven by the hope that my religious beliefs would guide me toward a better life. I sneaked onto a ship headed for Italy, not telling my family because I knew they'd stop me. I dreamed of a luxurious life on the Champs-Élysées, sending money home to support my family and make them proud. When I arrived, I was shocked that my friends had turned off their phones. I tried and tried but to no avail. I was not psychologically prepared for that. I regretted coming because I didn't have any papers and I didn't know where to go. I spent the night under an arch, and even veiled I was sexually harassed. The whole night I was on the run. It's been five months, and I'm still living on the streets, selling things to get by. I'm all alone, with no stable job or place to stay. It's hard fitting into this new way of life..." I'm tired of holding everything in. I want to find myself in these new gendered and racialized spaces, guided by my religion. I'm lost, and it feels like no one can help."

2.1. Silent suffering and self-blame

The female migrant in this narrative offers a poignant glimpse into the motivations driving her migration. Her story revolves around an unsettling truth, one often concealed by silence and self-blame. Her silence is so entrenched that it might easily go unnoticed by those around her. She departed her homeland in pursuit of a brighter future, a vision enthusiastically painted by her friends. However, this aspiration comes at a profound personal cost. Her tale reveals a dual threat she faces as a female and an irregular migrant. This narrative sheds light on the prevalent phenomenon of silent suffering experienced by many female irregular migrants. It serves as a stark reminder of the multifaceted challenges they confront, not only in their journey but also in the social and emotional burdens they carry. The silence and self-blame that shroud their experiences often serve as barriers to seeking help or sharing their plight with others.

2.2. Gender, family, and psychological distress

Within this narrative, the female migrant's identity is deeply intertwined with her family. Her aspiration to send remittances back to her family serves as a driving force behind her decision to migrate. Notably, she chose to keep her irregular migration a secret from her family, fully aware that they would oppose it. Despite her belief in achieving a better life, her journey is marked by loneliness, job dissatisfaction, and the lack of permanent residency, resulting in considerable psychological distress.

Additionally, the challenge of adapting to a new culture further exacerbates her emotional turmoil. The loss of familiar cultural norms contributes to profound shifts in her identity and self-concept. This narrative reveals the intricate relationship between family, identity, and the psychological well-being of female migrants. It emphasizes the significant sacrifices they make to improve the living conditions of their families, often at the cost of their own mental and emotional health. Moreover, it highlights the profound impact of cultural dislocation on their sense of self and mental stability.

2.3. Seeking communication and guidance to adapt while maintaining religious norms

The concluding phrase, "I seek information, what shall I do...", implies the migrant's search for guidance and resources. It indicates a necessity for access to consular services, social media platforms, or other sources of assistance in the host country. This statement reflects the migrant's recognition of the importance of communication and information access in navigating the challenges of irregular migration. It highlights the crucial role that support networks, whether formal or informal, play in aiding migrants during their challenging journey. Feeling overwhelmed, she seeks solace and direction in their religion amidst the complexities of new gendered and racialized spaces, expressing a profound sense of loss and helplessness.

Excerpt 3: *An Algerian male migrant, was working in the care sector, 34 years old, 3 years in France*

"...I came to France with a temporary visa, but I stayed longer than the period permitted. I went to the Barbès area because I have been told that there is an Algerian community with which I can adapt. But unfortunately, no one helped me there. The moment I arrived, they told me: 'Help yourself.' An Association guaranteed a stay of 15 days in a hotel for me, after which it gives me staying during this period an amount of 100 euros for my expenses... I will not lie, I stole to eat. For four months I did not shower. I couldn't find a place to charge my phone and clean my clothes. To obtain residency and nationality, I tried to marry an older woman, but I failed. I have a college degree, but I faced discrimination for finding a good job because they see us as unskilled and mainly a burden. So, I am working on selling cigarettes, but due to the pandemic, my business has worsened, and I can hardly provide for my needs. Sometimes my family calls me to ask for money because they think that I live in luxury... I blame my country because no procedures are available. Here the situation is inhumane... Despite all this, my faith in Allah keeps me going, urging me to seek a better future despite the hardships."

3.1. Pervasive apathy and the absence of a unified voice

This excerpt provides insight into a different facet of irregular migration, one where the central issue appears to be the widespread apathy within the migrant community itself. The migrant candidly highlights what, in their view, is amiss within their community. They assert that migrants with permanent residency status do not extend assistance to new undocumented migrants. While they acknowledge receiving financial support in the form of food and shelter, notably absent is any mention of psychological support. This narrative serves as a stark reminder of the challenges of cohesion within migrant communities. It underscores the need for a unified voice and greater empathy among migrants themselves, particularly between those with different migration statuses. The absence of psychological support raises concerns about the emotional well-being of migrants and the need for comprehensive assistance beyond basic sustenance.

3.2. Stereotypes and perceptions about migrants

Within the same narrative, the migrant harbors a pronounced negative attitude, perceiving that the host country stereotypically views him as an unskilled individual. He grapples with the perception of being an outsider perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity for the host community. This narrative highlights the pervasive issue of stereotypes and the impact they can have on migrants' self-perception and integration experiences. It underscores the importance of challenging such stereotypes to foster a more inclusive and understanding society.

3.3. Evolution of migration policy, integration, and religious resilience

The migrant's narrative emphasizes marriage as a potential pathway for integration, representing a departure from solely economic motivations towards broader social integration goals. This perspective underscores the multifaceted nature of migration, encompassing not only financial objectives but also aspirations for establishing a life in the host country. Furthermore, the migrant attributes the adverse effects of the pandemic on his business and acknowledges his homeland's role in his integration process. This acknowledgment reflects a nuanced comprehension of migration dynamics, acknowledging the influence of external factors such as economic conditions and pandemics on the integration trajectory.

Overall, the narrative demonstrates an intricate understanding of migration dynamics, recognizing the interplay between individual aspirations and external circumstances. Moreover, the migrant's reliance on faith as a source of resilience underscores the importance of religious belief in coping with adversity amidst the migration journey.

6. Discussion and interpretation

Consistent with the research conducted by Larkin and Ross (2024), the discussion of findings emphasizes the significant role of religious faith in justifying migrants' journeys and shaping their future aspirations. This prompts a reevaluation of its importance in their identity construction within host countries' contexts. The guiding questions of the study at hand span a broad spectrum of open-ended interpretations, delving into the complexities of undocumented migration and prompting reflections on societal perceptions and attitudes toward both male and female migrants. These inquiries challenge prevailing narratives that often categorize migrants as either criminals or victims, urging a more nuanced understanding of their experiences.

Furthermore, the narratives reveal the emotional intricacies of the migrant experience, which are shaped by external pressures and internal processes, significantly influencing their identities and interactions in new social landscapes. This is aligned with research conducted by Georgalou (2021) in the context of Greece, which shows that the lives of migrants are characterized by a mix of conflicting emotions. These include a sense of loss of belonging, irritation at Greek policies and mentalities, and concern for their families who remain in their homeland facing the crisis, juxtaposed with hopes for new beginnings and potential opportunities to fulfill their goals in the host country.

Despite the lack of clear definitions surrounding undocumented migration, expressions associated with it often perpetuate reductionist perspectives, emphasizing criminality or victimization. However, the narratives also highlight the construction of migrant identity as "being for the other and not-being for the self," imposed by societal expectations and necessitating compliance. Paradoxically, the effort to conform to these expectations may result in the internalization of prevailing ideologies, eroding migrants' agency and autonomy in these panoptic societies.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the self-narratives of undocumented migrants, seeking to comprehensively explore the multifaceted phenomenon of undocumented migration while recognizing religious faith as a strategy to address its complexities. Furthermore, it acknowledges the contested definition of religious faith, emphasizing the need for further research in the context of undocumented migration. Through meticulous analysis of unique experiences, the study endeavors to amplify the voices of undocumented migrants, allowing them to articulate their experiences, aspirations, and struggles. Additionally, by pinpointing areas requiring further attention, it aims to inform compassionate approaches to addressing the needs and rights of undocumented migrants. In essence, this study represents a dedicated effort to bring about meaningful change in the lives of undocumented migrants.

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Confrontation: Procedural-Criminal and Tactical-Criminalistic Aspects

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ABSTRACT: In the context of criminal prosecution, confrontation is an important element, particularly relevant for confirming and refuting the various versions exposed during the criminal prosecution. The main objective of confrontation is to elucidate the true circumstances of the case and eliminate significant inconsistencies identified in the previous statements of witnesses, suspects and accused. When the prosecuting officer decides to conduct the confrontation, it is imperative to show confidence in the ability of the participant who provided a truthful statement to withstand the psychological pressure associated with this procedure. The participant in the confrontation must be prepared and immune to any attempt by another participant to influence the modification or retraction of his statement. At the same time, in the phase preceding the confrontation, the criminal investigation officer must develop a strategic plan, including formulating the relevant questions, establishing the order of questioning of the participants and outlining the tactics to be applied within this procedure. Any violations or errors in the conduct of the confrontation can have a substantial impact on the completeness of the prosecution. From this perspective, elucidating the essence of the confrontation not only contributes theoretically, but also holds essential practical significance in the context of the effective and complete conduct of criminal prosecutions.

KEYWORDS: confrontation, prosecution action, evidentiary procedure, means of proof, evidence, contradictions, divergences, psychological influence, circumstances of the criminal case, statements, truth, assessment, hearing, criminal investigation body, psychological portrait, witness, party injured, suspected, accused, procedural quality

Introduction

In order to be the basis of the conviction of the criminal investigation body, the information communicated by those who, in various capacities, participated in the

commission of a crime must represent a faithful and complete reproduction of the circumstances of the commission of the acts (Ciopraga 1996, 322). For objective or subjective reasons, sometimes contradictions appear between the statements of the persons heard, regarding one and the same deed or factual circumstance (Aionițoaie, Berchesan, Butoi et al. 1992, 166). When it is found that there are contradictions in the statements given in the same case by the persons heard (by parties among themselves, between parties or main procedural subjects and witnesses, between witnesses, etc.), the confrontation is carried out, which is a procedure to be heard in order to clarify the contradictions that exist between the statements previously given by two or more people (Theodoru and Chiș 2020, 426).

Contradictions are the object of the confrontation (Niță 2017, 173), whose role is highlighted when the need to clarify some facts or circumstances arises, especially in cases where the contradictions, ambiguities, inconsistencies in the statements of the person heard in a criminal case cannot be removed based on the examination of other means of proof, the confrontation remaining the only way to clarify, to clarify the uncertain aspects (Stancu 2007, 485).

Confrontation is an evidentiary procedure that consists in the simultaneous hearing of two people in whose statements, regarding the same circumstances, there are essential divergences (Osoianu, Ostavciuc, Odagiu et al. 2020, 200). The notion of "substantial contradictions" is not found in criminal procedural law, however, in practice, they are considered to be the contradictions between statements regarding the circumstances to be established and proven in criminal cases (Bashkatov et al. 2006, 235-236). Through confrontation, in addition to explaining the existing discrepancies in the statements of the persons heard in the same case, new data useful for solving the criminal case can be obtained. Confrontation is also considered a tactical means of verifying statements and clarifying the position of the perpetrator in relation to the act attributed to him (Dolea, Roman, Sedlețchi, Vizdoagă et al. 2005, 298).

Bercheșan (2002, 126-127) mentions that confrontation is still the same hearing. It consists of a complimentary evidentiary procedure in which, by way of derogation from the provisions of the criminal procedural law, the persons are questioned in each other's presence regarding facts, circumstances or issues where essential contradictions have arisen. Divergences between the statements of witnesses and other persons heard in the case may arise primarily due to objective and subjective factors that influence the process of perception, memorization and reproduction of information regarding the events. Secondly, the influencing of witnesses by interested parties in the case, through requests, promises, threats, corruption etc., should not be excluded either (Gheorghită 2017, 599).

The author Camil Suciuc mentions that the discrepancies can also be due to the insincere statements of some witnesses, who are either accomplices of the offender in the crime they were questioned about, or are accomplices in other crimes or are simply in bad faith. In the case of suspects/accused, discrepancies may be due

to the suspect/accused having committed the crime, although other suspects/accused or witnesses claim otherwise; the suspect/accused committed several crimes of which only one was discovered; the suspect/accused wants to escape criminal responsibility or wants to reduce it; the suspect/accused did not commit the crime, but takes it upon himself to escape another person; the accused cleverly uses the discrepancies in the statements of witnesses or other suspects/accused (Suciu 1972, 594-595).

Not every contradiction in testimony requires confrontation, because very significant discrepancies can be resolved by repeated hearings and other means, which sometimes more reliably establish the cause of their occurrence and make the necessary adjustments to the previously given testimony (Dulov 1973, 48). Many times, the contradictions between the statements of the persons heard can be removed by checking and collecting documents, performing searches, reconstructions, performing technical-scientific findings or expertise, listening to other people who have knowledge of the circumstances in connection with which they appeared. Therefore, the criminal investigation plan must provide for all possible activities leading to the removal of contradictions.

Only if, after exhausting these activities, the contradictions persist, the confrontation is organized. In this sense, it is recommended that the confrontation takes place, as a rule, among the last follow-up activities, when the definite conclusion has been reached that the contradictions cannot be removed in any other way (Aionitoaie, Berchesan, Butoi et al. 1992, 168).

At the same time, apart from removing the contradictions from the statements, during the confrontation it must be taken into account that:

- Participants in the confrontation can remember details they forgot;
- Participants in the confrontation can remember new facts;
- Even if during the confrontation each of the participants maintains their previous statements, from their behavior it can be understood which of them can be given more trust, and this can suggest the subsequent ways of verifying the statements of these participants. Apart from this, the behavior of people during the confrontation can contribute to the discovery of some of their character traits, which must be taken into account when choosing future hearing tactics;
- Sometimes, during the confrontation, the person who made false statements is forced to change his statements and thus he gets confused in his own statements, which allows him to be exposed. But if the suspect, the accused morally dominates the person with whom he is to be confronted, there is a risk that the latter, because of fear, will have to adapt his statements (Golunski 1961, 344);
- Carrying out this evidentiary procedure is important in order not to "lose" the evidence-statements of some people who for various reasons will not be able to participate in the substantive examination of the criminal case - advanced age, serious illness, death, going abroad, etc. (Osoianu et al. 2020, 202).

Results and discussion

Depending on how fully and qualitatively the preliminary preparation is carried out, the successful performance of the criminal investigation depends. Confrontation is a tactically and psychologically complex evidentiary procedure. Frequently, conflict situations occur within it, there is still the risk of revealing the obtained data and of losing previously made testimonies. Precisely for this reason, in order to exclude such situations, we are going to pay sufficient attention to the preparation for the confrontation, it is necessary to be equipped with audio-video recording means, as well as with other means necessary to obtain and fix the information. Sidorov (2016, 304-309) pays great attention to the preparatory stage in order to carry out the confrontation. According to the author, "in the preparation process, the consecutiveness of hearing the participants in the confrontation is determined, the measures necessary to ensure security are identified."

In the specialized literature, it is mentioned that when conducting the confrontation, it is recommended that the number of criminal investigation officers, who conduct the confrontation, be equal to that of the confronted persons, so that each participant is supervised by a law enforcement officer. At the same time, it is necessary for these people to be advised on the issues that are the subject of the confrontation, so that they are prepared to accurately capture the reactions of those confronted when the main issue is discussed and their inappropriate behavior in some situations. In certain cases, when the confrontation is being prepared with the participation of the accused, who has an aggressive behavior or poses a danger to other people, additional security for the criminal must be ensured, in order to exclude some incidents (Gheorghică 2017, 603).

In the process of investigating criminal facts, the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) can decide on the confrontation in the following cases:

- 1) The representative of the criminal investigation body assumes that the guilty person, under the influence of the statements of the witness (witnesses), the injured party or another accused or suspect, will provide the necessary statements and mention the true circumstances of the commission of the crime;

- 2) The prosecuting officer (prosecutor) really needs to compare the statements of two people because there are doubts about certain information. At the same time, the confrontation must be carried out even if the representative of the criminal investigation body understands that those interviewed will support their previous testimonies;

- 3) During the confrontation, the representative of the criminal investigation body, by presenting the same materials and objects to both participants, will be able to analyze their attitude towards these objects and documents;

- 4) The representative of the criminal investigation body has serious doubts in the statements of the parties, but does not have other evidence in the case, a fact that

may influence his conviction regarding the guilt or innocence of the perpetrator and the establishment of the circumstances of the criminal case;

5) It is necessary to remove the contradictions from the statements in case of an error of good faith of the interviewed persons, inconsistency in their testimonies, in particular, in the case of complex circumstances of the criminal case (Golovin 2015, 6).

As grounds for not carrying out the confrontation can be listed:

1) The presence of contradictions in the persons' statements does not influence the establishment of the circumstances of the crime, which determine its qualification, the establishment of the person's guilt and regarding other circumstances to be proven in the criminal trial;

2) The criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) is convinced of the correctness of the previously heard statements even if there are some contradictions between these statements and the statements of other participants in the trial, whether there is other sufficient evidence that allows the proper establishment of the circumstances of the case;

3) Carrying out the confrontation, by virtue of individual qualities of the person, may exceed the limits of the purposes and tasks of this evidentiary procedure, the representative of the criminal investigation body being convinced that he can have control over the created situation, he can master it;

4) Carrying out the confrontation between the participants in the crime can, instead of removing the contradictions, turn into a common understanding for the presentation of the same statements during the criminal investigation and when examining the case in court (Ibidem, 6-7).

Gavrilov and Zacatov (1978) explained the stages of preparation for the confrontation. Based on those mentioned by these researchers, we will present the algorithm of preparing for the confrontation, namely:

- The criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) studies the statements of the persons to be confronted, examines other materials of the criminal case;

- The causes of the appearance of contradictions, divergences between statements are to be clarified;

- The representative of the criminal investigation body studies the character of the relationships between the persons to be subjected to the confrontation;

- The criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) decides on the conduct of this evidentiary procedure;

- The plan regarding the performance of the confrontation is drawn up, the circle and the sequence of the questions to be asked are determined;

- The time and place of carrying out the criminal investigation action is established;

- The criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) selects the documents, objects, crime bodies, technical means, necessary to fix the progress and results of the confrontation (Gavrilov 1978, 120).

At the stage of preparing for the confrontation, the representative of the criminal investigation body performs an analysis of the initial data, determines the object of the criminal investigation action, consisting of actions, facts, circumstances, episodes regarding which it is planned to obtain statements from those involved in this evidentiary procedure. Even before the summons, the invitation of the persons is to be determined with certainty the object of this criminal prosecution action. In this sense, the representative of the criminal investigation body will study the materials of the case, those obtained through operative-investigative, archival etc. (Chervyakov and Bekshaeva 2019, 332).

In the process of studying the materials of the investigated case, the operative-investigative materials, the personal and archival materials, the criminal investigation body has the opportunity to identify:

- The purpose of the confrontation;
- The persons who will be summoned to be heard at the same time;
- The questions that will be used to reconcile divergent questions;
- The causes or motivation of the contradictions;
- The evidence and means of evidence that will be used;
- Contradictions that must be clarified during the confrontation (Pletea 2003, 255).

Also, the objective of the criminal investigation body at the stage of preparing for the confrontation, is to solve the questions related to the specialized knowledge, to determine the opportunity to obtain certain consultations from the specialists. In the opinion of Gura, in particular, "the assistance of specialists in the field of information technologies, economics and finance is needed". Or, in the case of certain criminal acts, it is necessary to know the basics of the economy, audit, accounting records, etc. (Gura 2013, 256).

Studying the personalities to be confronted is of great importance for the preparation and carrying out of this procedural and forensic tactical action (Gheorghiță 2017, 603). Apart from this, the character of the relationships between the persons who will be subjected to the confrontation and the other participants in the criminal process must be analyzed. An equally important task concerns the establishment of psychological contact between the participants in this evidentiary procedure. In order to achieve this objective, the prosecuting body must collect all the necessary information regarding the qualities and personality traits of those interviewed. This information can be obtained from reading and studying the materials of the criminal case (Chervyakov and Bekshaeva 2019, 332).

The ability to draw up a clear psychological portrait and study the traits and qualities of those who will be confronted is also an important task. By virtue of this fact, the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) will be able to obtain answers to a wide range of questions:

- Whether or not the persons between whom the confrontation is carried out are the ones they claim to be; corresponds their actual appearance to their behavior;

- What is the moral potential of the people subject to the confrontation, what are their life plans and values;
- What is the way of life, the level of education and professional training of the persons between whom the confrontation is carried out;
- What is the attitude of the confronted persons regarding the investigated criminal act;
- If the persons subject to the confrontation have a criminal past, have they previously been in the sights of the legal authorities or not, if so - then what was the purpose of the interest shown by the judicial authorities;
- In what circumstances, at what time and in what physiological or psychological state, under what conditions, the persons between whom the confrontation is carried out, perceived facts, events, circumstances with reference to which the confrontation is carried out, do they have any mental disabilities or physically at the time of the evidentiary procedure (Ibidem, 333).

It is important to pay special attention to the issue of determining the place and time of the confrontation. The selection of the place to carry out this criminal prosecution action depends on the concrete situation. In practically all cases, the confrontation is carried out in the duty office of the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor). In the opinion of Komosko (2028), the confrontation must be carried out in the office of the representative of the criminal investigation body for the following reasons:

- Carrying out the confrontation in the duty office of the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) requires minimal efforts regarding its conduct;
- The representative of the criminal investigation body does not waste time to travel to the place of confrontation and back;
- Working in a familiar and comfortable environment for him, the representative of the criminal investigation body is more confident, he can use the technical means at his disposal more effectively;
- The official framework, specific to the duty office of the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) positively influences the establishment of psychological contact between him and the participants in the confrontation;
- The framework, the official environment sets the participants in the confrontation towards a responsible and conscientious attitude in relation to the performance of this criminal prosecution action (Komosko 2018, 103-104).

The duty office of the representative of the criminal investigation body is not the only place where the confrontation can be carried out. It can also be deployed in other rooms. The author V. A. Bîcov, for example, is of the opinion that "in the case of certain categories of crimes, the confrontation can also be carried out at the location of one or more perpetrators, especially when one of them, for reasons of health, cannot present at the headquarters of the criminal investigation body. In this case, the confrontation is carried out at the location of the sick person, in the premises of the medical institution or at home" (Bîcov 2013, 47-48).

In relation to this fact, the mention of the author A. B. Soloviov is current that “in case of carrying out the confrontation outside the service office of the representative of the criminal investigation body, it is necessary to ensure a specific official atmosphere and to exclude any circumstances that would jeopardize the order of carrying out this prosecution actions” (Soloviev 2006, 160).

An important aspect of confrontation preparation is determining the timing of the confrontation. As Stelimah (2016, 99-109) claimed, “premature confrontation may not achieve the desired result, or it will exert a negative influence on the prosecution. Also, the late confrontation will be meaningless: the accused will already know the testimony of the witnesses or other accused, and he, making certain conclusions, will change his statements.”

Confrontation is also justified in cases where the prosecuting officer (prosecutor) has collected enough evidence to correctly assess the statements of the participants. But we also have situations when carrying out the confrontation is rational even at the initial phase of the research. For example, the confrontation between the injured party and the suspect is welcome immediately after the apprehension of the perpetrator. Favorable conditions for obtaining true statements can also be created due to the mental state of the person detained immediately after committing the crime, the spontaneous nature of the detention, as well as due to the lack of information about the evidence held by the criminal investigation body.

There are also cases when the confrontation is carried out with the aim of unmasking the person who makes knowingly false statements. In this case, the determination of the time to carry out the criminal prosecution action depends on several circumstances. First of all, the representative of the criminal investigation body is to establish with certainty which of those interrogated is hiding the truth. On the basis of this moment, the tactics of carrying out the confrontation are established. Also, the preparation, the moral state of the participant in good faith to state the truth face to face with the participant in bad faith also influences the selection of the time for the confrontation. Situations can often arise when witnesses, injured parties, weak-willed perpetrators refuse to participate in the confrontation. In such cases, the representative of the criminal investigation body must convince the persons concerned of the need to participate in this criminal investigation action, in the presentation of the information necessary for the criminal case by those in good faith (Chervyakov and Bekshaeva 2019, 333-334).

Ianovschii (2011, 247-248) concludes that “this prosecution action is effective in cases where it is carried out unexpectedly for the person who makes knowingly false statements. The participant in bad faith, assuming about the performance of the confrontation, does not need to know the day and time of its performance. In this case, the “surprise factor” will intensify its psychological influence on the person who knowingly made false statements.” It is also important to determine the circle of participants in the confrontation. This prosecution action can be carried out between the injured party and the accused, between the witness and the accused,

between two accused, two witnesses etc. Along with the nominated persons, other participants in the criminal process may also be brought into the confrontation. Thus, if the confrontation is carried out with the participation of a minor, the pedagogue and the child's legal representative will participate in this criminal investigation (Ianovschii 2011, 247-248).

Accomplishing the confrontation with the direct participation of minors can somehow affect the results of the criminal case if their personal qualities and age peculiarities are not taken into account. That is why, in order to avoid these unfavorable moments, the criminal investigation body must carefully study the individual peculiarities, the level of individual development, the volitional qualities of the adolescent prepared for confrontation, then his attitude towards the committed act. Plenary awareness of these moments avoids wasting time in vain, and foreseeing in a broad perspective the possible manifestations of behavior of the minor during the planned confrontation, helps those interested to place themselves with a well-prepared lesson in the undoubted selection of tactics related to the performance of this follow-up action criminal (Rusu 2004, 135).

Often, at the time of the confrontation, the teenagers who, during the questioning, unmasked the co-participants in the crime can change their previous statements, they can answer in silence to the new "shooting" of questions, and they can even refuse to carry out this act of criminal investigation altogether. And this is either from the fear of being ripped off by the co-participants, or from the want of soul injury, or from the ambition not to "taint" oneself, or from the fear of losing any vestige of authority in front of one's peers. In such cases, when listening to the child, it is useful to find the most accurate expression in order to neutralize the causes of the "friendly" behavior that immediately suits someone, to dispel fears and instill in him the conviction that leads him to realize the absolute necessity of carrying out this criminal prosecution action (Rusu and Pop 2005, 80). If the need arises to explain the materials of the forensic expert report, the expert (specialist) will also participate in the confrontation. If a person who does not know the language in which this criminal investigation is carried out is involved in the confrontation, the participation of a translator will be ensured. In case of necessity, in order to determine the results of the confrontation, carried out with the application of technical means, the representative of the criminal investigation body trains a forensic specialist in carrying out this evidentiary procedure (Chervyakov and Bekshaeva 2019, 334).

In some cases, the participation of other specialists (economists, accountants, technologists etc.) may be necessary to carry out the comparison. As V. N. Commissarov claims, "in the process of the confrontation there is a mutual emotional influence of the participants in this criminal prosecution action" (Komissarov 1980, 104). In the opinion of L. A. Tabacova, "the psychological influence of one participant in the confrontation on the other can have positive results - lead to the clarification of the causes of differences and their removal - as well as negative results

- when under the influence of his opponent, one of the participants changes his statements in the meaning of falsification, thereby aggravating the existing divergence between the statements" (Tabakova 2018, 24-26).

The criminal procedural law provides for the possibility of conducting the confrontation at the initiative of different participants in the criminal process (injured party, accused, defender etc.) under the conditions in which they have submitted steps in this regard. In this sense, the decision belongs to the criminal investigation body. Appreciating the approach taken, he decides if the contradiction to which attention is drawn is a substantial one and if, in order to remove it, it is really necessary to carry out the confrontation (Jitariuc 2022, 192; Obraztsov 2001, 159). In the process of carrying out the confrontation in cases with many episodes, it is of enormous importance to prepare for the presentation of all materials: accounting documents, photographs, extracts from minutes, criminal bodies etc. These materials must be systematized based on the fact that, at the appropriate time, the representative of the criminal investigation body can immediately present them to the participants in the criminal investigation action, without wasting time searching for them.

It is necessary that from the beginning the issue of fixing the results of the confrontation should be thought and resolved. In the process of preparation for carrying out this criminal investigation action, the representative of the criminal investigation body identifies the appropriate technical means that will be used (camera, video camera etc.). The author V. N. Nareadcicov mentions that "the preparation of document forms, writing instruments, personal computer, audio-video recording means is also attributed to the technical assurance of the confrontation" (Naryadchikov 2019, 108-113).

Conclusions

On the basis of the research conducted, we can come to certain conclusions in relation to the essence and tactics of carrying out the confrontation.

First of all, the confrontation represents an independent criminal prosecution action, which consists of the simultaneous hearing of two previously heard persons, with the presence of both, from the category of witnesses, injured parties, suspects, accused, on the same circumstances of the criminal case, in the analysis and comparing the information communicated to remove substantial discrepancies in their content in order to establish the truth in criminal cases.

Secondly, the confrontation is a complex criminal investigation action, the correct performance of which is possible only through the lens of the representative of the criminal investigation body reporting its essence and importance, first knowing its specifics and delimiting it from other criminal investigation actions.

Thirdly, the effectiveness of the confrontation largely depends on the quality of its preparation by the representative of the criminal investigation body. However,

the preparation begins from the moment of taking the decision regarding the rationality of the confrontation, accompanied by the technical assurance of the conduct of this evidentiary procedure, ending with the drawing up of a plan, which substantially eases the work of the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) in carrying out this criminal investigation action.

Fourthly, the achievement of the main objective of the confrontation - the removal of substantial divergences from the statements of the persons who were previously heard - is possible only in the case of carrying out this criminal prosecution action in strict accordance with the provisions of the law with the skillful use of certain tactical procedures. The harmonious combination of the provisions of the law with the scientific recommendations of a tactical order guarantees the achievement of the desired result. The differentiation of tactical procedures, specified in the specialized literature, facilitates the identification of the appropriate tactical rules in accordance with the circumstances of the concrete criminal case. The specificity of the tactical procedures in the case of the confrontation carried out with the participation of minors is explained by their psychological peculiarities. The application by the criminal investigation body of specific tactical procedures in the case of confrontations with minor participants contributes to obtaining appropriate information from them and establishing the truth in criminal cases.

Fifthly, the representative of the criminal investigation body must be aware of the psychological "environment" in which the confrontation takes place. The state of conflict is an indispensable component of every confrontation. The purpose of confrontation is to remove this state. By virtue of this fact, it is extremely important for the criminal investigation officer (prosecutor) to know the psychological characteristics of the participants in the confrontation, to apply an appropriate psychological influence on them, to exercise control over the psychological influence exerted by the participants in the confrontation on the representative of the body of criminal prosecution, control of the situation during the execution of this criminal prosecution action.

It is also necessary to review some shortcomings encountered in the practice of criminal investigation bodies in the process of conducting the confrontation. One of the most widespread errors is the non-confrontation, for the "fear" of the criminal investigation body to obtain some undesirable results in relation to the evidence already collected in the criminal case, while the situation created in the criminal investigation tells us about its necessity. However, such an error can determine the distortion of the truth or the emergence of difficulties in the process of establishing it. Another "gap" related to the performance of the confrontation consists in the insufficient application of technical-scientific means, a fact that will inevitably reflect negatively on its results.

Also, we would recommend the representatives of the criminal investigation body to refrain from carrying out confrontations between minors and adults,

because in such cases the presence of a psychological influence on the part of the latter is inevitable. Conducting confrontations between minors and adults can be accepted only in cases of extreme necessity, when other ways of establishing the controversial circumstances of the criminal case have been applied, but without result. The clarification of these aspects is of substantial importance for the proper and rapid discovery of crimes, for unmasking the perpetrators and bringing them to criminal liability.

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Towards Education 4.0: How Flexibility, Design, Interactivity, and Wellbeing Improve Learning Outcomes. A Real-Life Experiment in an Innovation Laboratory

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze whether providing design, flexibility, interactivity, and well-being can benefit learners. The deductive research approach is based on a qualitative exploratory design, including a real-life experiment and a survey with 94 participants. The participants completed a new one-week, full-time course in marketing and sales management in a newly created Innovation Laboratory. This study found that providing a flexible environment with design elements such as writable and magnetic walls, mobile sofas and seating sets, chairs, tables and lecterns support interactivity and collaboration. The coordinated use of color concepts and plants can enhance learners' sense of well-being and their ability to learn efficiently, while also promoting future-oriented skills such as creativity, analytical thinking and problem-solving. All this at low cost.

KEYWORDS: Education 4.0, innovation laboratory, educational infrastructure, design, wellbeing, real-life experiment

Introduction

Innovation research now encompasses not only technological innovations but also economic, social, organizational, and educational innovations: "Innovation can be directed toward progress in one, several, or all aspects of the educational system: theory and practice, curriculum, teaching and learning, policy, technology, institutions and administration, institutional culture, and teacher education. It can be applied in any aspect of education that can make a positive impact on learning and learners" (Serdyukov 2017, 8). The development from Education 1.0 to 4.0 is fluid but can be measured in levels of maturity (Berghaus and Back 2016). "Hence in Higher Education 1.0 students were largely consumers of information resources that were delivered to them for absorption" (Salmon 2019, 97). Education 2.0: communication, collaboration, connecting, invasion of technology and social networking. Education 3.0: from hybrid teaching settings to blended learning (Sanchez, Paukovics, and Cheniti-Belcadhi 2022, 4510). Methods: Small learning

units, online forums, shared learning, webinars, digital scripts, quizzes, free access to online libraries, OER and face-to-face events (Salmon 2019, 108ff.; Kauffeld and Othmer 2019, 100). Education 4.0: The goal is to learn collaboratively and interactively in a kind of flipped classroom, online and face to face - using agile methods and collaboration software (R. Sauter, W. Sauter, and Wolfig 2018, 76; Cheng, Ritzhaupt, and Antonenko 2018). Places can be separate, flexible, virtual, or co-working spaces. New forms of learning such as meetups, BarCamps or hackathons can take place (R. Sauter, W. Sauter, and Wolfig 2018, 77-82). This so-called social blended learning is recommended for agile competence development because digital transformation is a megatrend that will accompany us (R. Sauter, W. Sauter, and Wolfig 2018, 82). With practice-oriented and interactive teaching, this can be promising (R. Franken and S. Franken 2020, 184). Learning whenever, wherever, and however you want. To achieve and develop new competences to raise the skills for the future it is important to try new approaches (see figure 1).

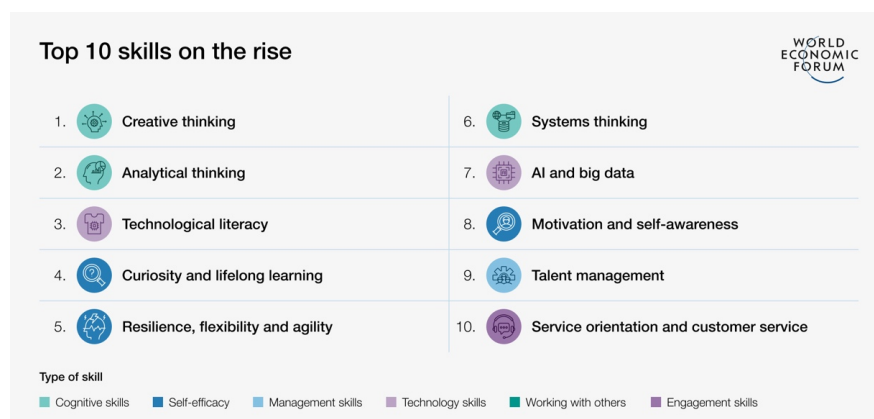


Figure 1. Top 10 skills on the rise
Source: World Economic Forum (WEF 2023)

The author of this article set up an Innovation Education Laboratory to test some of these methods and techniques and to convince shareholders and stakeholders to change the infrastructure and teaching methods towards Education 4.0. He conducted a real-life experiment in face-to-face teaching. Educational innovations should improve learning quality (Serdyukov 2017, 8). Five components are relevant: the novelty, the object, the change, the finalized action, and the process (Sanchez, Paukovics, and Cheniti-Belcadhi 2022, 4503f.). An innovation laboratory (short: Innolab) is a place dedicated to work (*laborare* in Latin) and to manufacture something. It is supposed to be a space dedicated to scientific experimentation (Sanchez, Paukovics, and Cheniti-Belcadhi 2021, 4504). Definitions: "(...) a physical, digital and human space for observation, experimentation and evaluation, to rethink and enrich learning and teaching attitudes and practices" (Sanchez, Paukovics, and Cheniti-Belcadhi 2021, 4511). „A space that aims to support the transformation of education through experimentation with emerging technologies, the promotion of creativity and the implementation of new teaching methodologies" (Almarez-Menéndez, Martín-García, and López-Esteban 2021, 5).

There remains a scientific gap in understanding how the design and functioning of an Innolab affect its performance. (Osorio et al. 2019, 1). Positive design can be viewed as a framework that encompasses designing for pleasure, function, personal significance, and virtue (Cooper and Kohlert 2017, 25). The users need to be in a space that reduces hierarchy and supports participation, dynamism, playfulness, and communication. It should encourage creative behaviors and support innovative projects with all needed resources, visualization-tools, and the ability to prototype (Lewis and Moultrie 2005, 4). It should stimulate the creativity (Moultrie et al. 2007). Studies have identified the success factors of collaborative learning (Delgado et al. 2020, 131). Lateral thinking should be promoted (Ștefănescu 2022, 115). The design, equipment and furnishings of the rooms can set the direction for the desired emotional behavior. A culture of joy should be conveyed. A culture of fear arises when signs show prohibitions, rules of conduct or the consequences of violations (Barsade and O'Neill 2013, 24). It is recommended of putting people at the center and planning for them (Gerstbach 2022, 46f.). These spaces disrupt structures to create networks of knowledge and change people's consciousness to develop and disseminate ideas more productively. They support conscious and chance encounters for sharing and collaboration. New connections are intended to promote communication and an active exchange (Gernstbach 2022, 117). Six dimensions are provided, that aim to boost positive wellbeing in the work environment by offering people choice and control over where they work and how they work: Optimism, Mindfulness, Authenticity, Belonging, Meaning, Vitality (Cooper and Kohlert 2017, 62). The design should support independent and individual learning processes. Alternation between learning input, practice, support, and reflection including presentation of performance - depending on the level of development and the emotional situation of the learner (R. Franken and S. Franken 2020, 178). Learning together supports the individual understanding. It promotes communication and problem-solving skills, it increases performance, self-confidence, belonging, ability to work in a team, conflict resolution, enjoyment of the work performed together and motivation (Töpfer 2010, 45). In an interactive group learning develops. It's easier to learn together, because the desire to belong to the group motivates people (Lienhart 2017, 45). A playful look of the rooms helps to approach project issues in a more joyful, experimental, and open-ended way (Brandes et al. 2014, 65). "Flexible spatial concepts are necessary for creative processes, e.g., movable furniture, standing tables, cushion landscapes, places of retreat, flexible partitions, whiteboards, presentation areas (...) are required" (R. Sauter, W. Sauter, and Wolfig 2018, 47). This stimulates creative thinking and strengthens well-being (Dopfer 2019, 121). Aesthetic buildings and design, colors, plants, daylight, wide spaces can have a positive influence on motivation and mood. These extraordinary places can create a "wow effect", which would increase the intrinsic motivation to also create something

extraordinary (Poguntke 2019, 84). Such places strengthen dialogue, an essence of Education 3.0 and 4.0 (Weis 2015, 226).

Methodology

The author conducted a qualitative experiment to uncover causal relationships. “The qualitative experiment is the intervention in a (social) object carried out according to scientific rules to research its structure. It is the exploratory, heuristic form of the experiment” (Kleining 1986, 724). “The aim of qualitative research is to depict reality based on the subjective view of the research subjects and thus to understand possible causes for their behavior and to understand their behavior” (Berger-Grabner 2016, 117f.). This real-life experiment took place in a newly created Innovation Lab in an Education Center at the public chamber of crafts in Nuremberg, Germany. The experiment involves two parts: first, changing the educational infrastructure, which includes the conception, planning, design, equipment, transformation, and operation of the Education Innovation Lab, and second, changing the way of teaching and learning. The design of the experiment is based on the above scientific findings and aims to demonstrate practical benefits.

Duration in months (planning until the final seminar in October 2023)	10
Seminar weeks - full-time (8 hours per day):	12
Number of participants:	124
Number of participants who completed the questionnaire:	94
Age of the participants in years:	18-36

This article focuses on the first part of the experiment – changing the educational infrastructure: the transformed classroom, its new design, and its changed equipment. The goal of these changes: Collaborative, flexible, and interactive learning with a feeling of well-being should be promoted and tested. The focus is on uncovering structures within the Education Innovation Lab. The object, a 25-year-old classroom (84 sqm) for 16 participants, is changed into an Innolab, i.e., the area of investigation is intervened. The object or area of investigation is then checked to see what happens at what effects. Manipulation is not carried out at will; the changing interventions should be carried out as controlled as possible and appropriate to the object under conditions that are as natural as possible (Mayring 2016, 58f.). When it comes to testing causal correlations, the experiment is considered the ideal way of research. The theory and the postulated cause-effect relationships are actively highlighted (Döring and Bortz 2016, 194). The process is not a deductive-hypothesis-testing, but inductive-discovering. The structures of the object should be made visible (Hussy, Schreier, and Echterhoff 2013, 213). The process consists of four steps: Description of the subject, experimental intervention, description of the changed object and conclusions on its structure (Mayring 2016,

59f.; Hussy, Schreier, and Echterhoff 2013, 213f.). In this article, the conclusions are drawn and analyzed in the chapter “Results and Discussions”.

(1) Description of the subject matter

So far, lessons in this room have mostly consisted of frontal teaching. This is the classic lecture that aims to impart theoretical specialist knowledge and has been criticized by scientists for years. The lecturers stand or sit in front of the class and provide information from the front. Discussions or group work are rarely carried out. Some lecturers place teaching material under the documentation camera and have the participants copy it. Due to this system, participants are encouraged to concentrate only on the exam content (Kauffeld and Othmer 2019, 128f.). All walls are painted white. PVC floor is gray and old. Cupboards are gray and are rarely used. There are no colors other than gray and white. Tables are one behind the other and should not be moved or regrouped. Tables and chairs are neither mobile nor ergonomic. Visualization consists of a screen, a projector, and a document camera.

(2) Experimental intervention and (3) description of the changed object

Note: the interventions (conversion work and equipment) should be carried out as cost-effectively as possible. The experiment is intended to show that change can work with limited financial resources (De Massis et al. 2017). Common techniques of qualitative experimentation: Structure (separation, segmentation, or combination), Limitation (reduction or attenuation), Expansion (adjection or intensification), Conversion (substitution or transformation) (Kleining 1985, 737). Five of them were used: combination, reduction, intensification, substitution, and transformation.

Design - Walls and Colors: The intervention consists of several combinations: All walls were repaired and initially painted white. The pillars of the walls were painted in gradating shades of blue. The front wall was filled, and a level surface was created. A blue color frame was applied to it. This frame is like the screen frame in movie theaters in 16:9 format. Training masters in the painting trade carried out this and paid attention to the proportions to maintain a pleasant visual experience. An approximately 4 x 1.5-meter rectangle was cut out in the middle of the wall. Like the magnetic pins on the refrigerator, this rectangle was partially magnetized with plaster to hold sheets or foils for collaborative work. The entire rectangle was painted with innovative white paint, which replaces the projector screen and serves as a writable whiteboard. This innovative color was discovered, tested, and applied by the training masters. The advantages: the separate screen and whiteboards (and paper) are unnecessary. The wall has been transformed and combines four functions: projector screen, magnetic wall, writable whiteboard and, thanks to the color and shape design, an aesthetic well-being with a pleasant feeling of space. A 4 meter piece of the cupboard wall was removed (reduction). The remaining 3 meter

long cupboard wall was painted and varnished in 8 graduated colors: from yellow, orange to pink and red, to simulate a sunset and ensure well-being (intensification of the color design). Effort: Removing the cabinets took two days. The painting work took four people around six days.

Floor: The old gray PVC floor was removed, the concrete floor was sanded, and two coats of transparent protective varnish were applied: the floor and painting trainers call this style “used” or “industrial look”. The floor is writable for fun (reduction and transformation). Effort: It took six people around five days to do the groundwork.

Lounge Furniture: In the niche created by the removed cupboards, wooden pallets painted dark gray were converted. Large dark blue seat cushions on them invite you to linger (substitution). The goal was to provide opportunities for breaks, but also for group work or discussion. Effort: It took two people two days to work on the lounge furniture.

Chalkboard and Document Camera: Hauschildt and Salomo (2011, 114) warn of resistance from those affected when changes occur. “Anyone who wants to innovate successfully should be clear about what they expect of those affected.” Teachers are different in their teaching and have decades of habits. Therefore, the chalkboard and document camera were left in the room.

Tables and Chairs: Used curved tables and semi-ergonomic chairs were removed from disused offices and placed in the center of the room. The old tables and chairs were replaced (substitution). Effort: two people needed two days. At the beginning of every experimental seminar week, the learners are asked to arrange tables and chairs as they see fit to create a relaxed and personal atmosphere. It considers that all experiences and emotions of those affected can have a direct impact on the course of the change process. Because the consequences could be resistance (Klinkhammer 2015, 21). Those affected (participants in the lesson) are thus made participants (in the design of the setting). The tables are distributed in the room at different angles and at different distances (combination and transformation) in different situations. Green plants and colorful flowers were placed on the windowsills (transformation). Indirect lamps were distributed (transformation). A mobile light green presentation desk was manufactured by a master carpenter (transformation).

Hybrid Setting: A hybrid setting was established to enable hybrid teaching. (Education 3.0): a laptop with a camera, microphone, light, a second projector. The online participants are projected onto the second screen so that the lecturers can see them and the participants in person at the same time (combination and intensification). “Qualitative experiments are interventions in a social object; like all experimental techniques, they change it. But their exploratory aim should prevent them from destroying it in the process” (Kleining 1986, 744). The room was slightly changed, not destroyed. Around € 6,000 was spent on these changes.

Results and Discussions

This chapter summarizes structural conclusions (Mayring 2016, 59f., Hussy, Schreier, and Echterhoff 2013, 213f.). “The methodology includes its careful application: the adaptation of the procedures to the object, the testing of limits, the gradual maximization or minimization of aspects in the object of study, the constant question-answer game in the dialogue principle, if possible, with the direct participation of those affected” (Kleining 1986, 744f.). At the end of the seminars, the participants were invited to take part in a survey. The questionnaire, comprising 36 questions, was standardized in German using “Microsoft Office Forms” to ensure equal conditions for all participants: period and time, wording, rating scale and order of questions. This standardization ensured the comparability of statements. The survey was carried out using a numerical scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 is “very good”, 2 is “good”, 3 is “satisfactory”, 4 is “sufficient” and 5 is “inadequate”. The school grade scale was selected because the target audience is familiar with these ratings from their educational and vocational experiences. This scale can measure the opinions and behaviors of respondents (Berger-Grabner 2016, 118). The average response time was around 6 minutes. Out of 124 participants, 94 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate: 75.8 %. Theoretical sampling is given (Berger-Grabner 2016, 117). The majority of participants rated the overall room design as good to very good as illustrated in figure 2 “How do you rate the room design?”

2. Wie finden Sie die Raumgestaltung insgesamt?

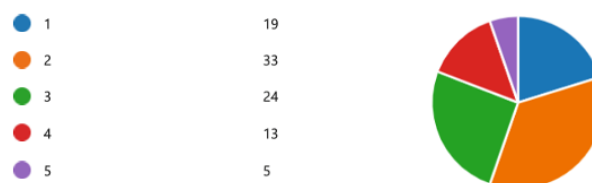


Figure 2. How do you rate the room design?

All responses (see Figures 2 through 15) show that most of the changes were rated very good to good (1 to 2) by the majority of respondents, over 50%. There is a causal relationship between the changes and the user acceptance. The following changes were best received: “How useful is the writable whiteboard wall?” (very good = 43; good = 22; see figure 9); “How well does this space support you in socializing?” (very good = 29; good = 38; see figure 3); „How important is the flexibility of the furniture to you?” (very good = 33; good = 32; see figure 12). The following ratings stand out: “How important are the additional seating options (upholstered furniture, sofas) to you?” and “How comfortable do you feel in this learning space (well-being)?” (see figures 13, 6): over 60% rated this as very good or good. This shows that the functional and emotional design changes are perceived as useful and

lead to better well-being (Cooper and Kohlert 2017, 25). The causal relationship between the changes and user acceptance is even more significant.

36. Wie gut unterstützt Sie dieser Raum beim sozialen Miteinander?

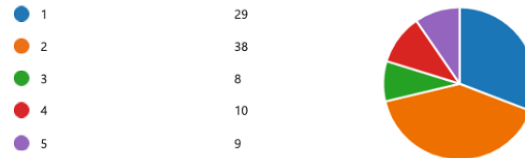


Figure 3. How well does this space support you in socializing?

32. Wie gut unterstützt Sie dieser Raum bei analytischem Denken und Innovation?



Figure 4. How well does this space support you in analytical thinking and innovation?

31. Wie gut unterstützt Sie dieser Raum bei Ihrem Lernerfolg?



Figure 5. How well does this space support you in your learning success?

21. Wie wohl fühlen Sie sich in diesem Raum?



Figure 6. How comfortable do you feel in this learning space (well-being)?

9. Wie wichtig sind Ihnen Pflanzen für das Wohlbefinden?



Figure 7. How important are plants to your well-being?

3. Wie finden Sie das Farbkonzept des Testraums?



Figure 8. How do you rate the color concept of the test room?

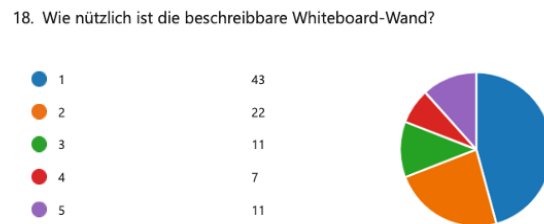


Figure 9. How useful is the writable whiteboard wall?

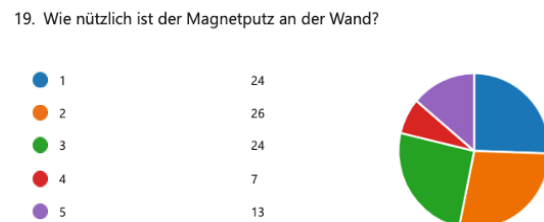


Figure 10. How useful is magnetic plaster on the wall?

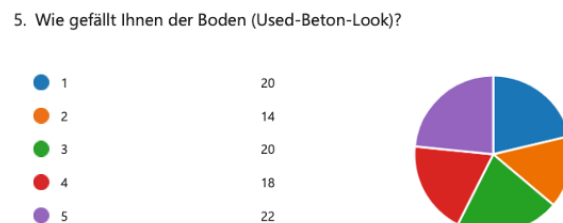


Figure 11. How do you like the floor (used look)?

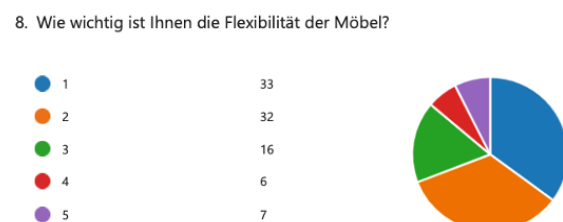


Figure 12. How important is the flexibility of the furniture to you?

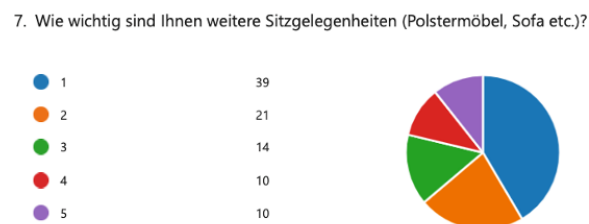


Figure 13. How important are the additional seating options (upholstered furniture, sofas) to you?

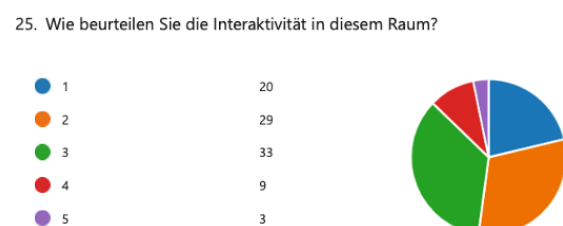


Figure 14. How do you rate the interactivity in this room?

1. Wie finden Sie die Raum-Flexibilität?

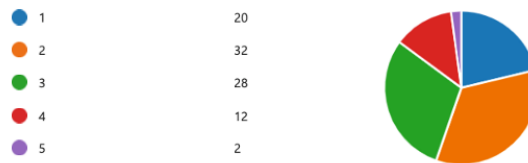


Figure 15. How do you rate the flexibility in this space?

If the grade “3 = satisfactory” is subsumed as acceptable or useful and included in the positive evaluation of the survey, the picture changes. Nearly all changes, except for the new floor and the additional seating (see figures 11 and 13), received positive feedback. Over 80% rated them as very good, good, or satisfactory.

The floor received the worst rating (see figure 11: 18 = sufficient; 22 = inadequate). Around 43% do not like the used look of the floor. On the other hand, the functional design is effective, and no additional expenses were incurred for carpeting or hardwood flooring. The magnetic wall received the second worst rating. Around 22% did not think it was useful (see figure 10: 7 = sufficient; 13 = inadequate). On the other hand, the majority consider it as useful. The survey included an open section for suggestions. Participants requested improvements such as better Wi-Fi, more ergonomic furniture, nicer floors, and air conditioning.

These answers demonstrate the existence of complementarity between innovative learning spaces and future-oriented learning (see figure 5 “How well does this space support you in your learning success?”: very good = 17; good = 32). The study demonstrates that a flexible environment, including writable whiteboard walls and flexible, mobile furniture promotes interactivity and collaboration (see figure 14 “How do you rate the interactivity in this room?”: very good = 20; good = 29). The use of a design concept that coordinates color and furniture designs, incorporates various plants, and utilizes indirect warm lighting supports learners' sense of aesthetic and emotional well-being, facilitating their learning process. This could support the development of future-oriented skills at a low cost. The research shows that an Innolab can provide useful test results. The outcomes of a qualitative experiment, through inductive discovery, help to understand possible causes for learners' behavior.

Conclusions

The tests in this Innolab are carried out carefully and step-by-step, with the involvement of the learners to provide scientific insights and practical effects. From an internal company perspective, this experiment and the study results mean that the author has received approval to make further investments and accelerate transformations towards Education 3.0 and 4.0. A concept for a fully digitalized learning space to test was already created. The upholstered furniture that was perceived as useful will be replaced by lounge sofas in a colorful American diner style

to facilitate group work and recreation. Another wall has already been painted with whiteboard paint. Rollable 5-corner tables in different colors for each learner have been purchased to improve flexibility and interactivity. The installation of a new floor, improved Wi-Fi, and air conditioning is currently being calculated.

After communicating the results of this study, the author of this article received approval from management to participate in a public tender to receive funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This funding could be used to convert and equip three additional seminar rooms in different analog, hybrid, and digital maturity levels. The study results serve as the justification for the official funding application. A main part of the funding applied for, is the design transformation and the technical equipment towards a “flipped classroom” (Cheng, Ritzhaupt, and Antonenko 2018) - to gradually achieve Education 4.0. These technical developments will be utilized in the next stage of development for digital educational infrastructure based on maturity levels, which will require additional testing and research.

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Policies to Facilitate the Global Energy Transition

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ABSTRACT: The transition to a green and sustainable economy requires a combination of well-thought-out industrial policy, significant investment and a strong commitment to social justice. Recognizing these imperatives, G7 leaders have taken on these challenges and set out an ambitious plan to ensure that no one is left behind in this crucial transition for the future of our planet. As G7 policies are implemented, emerging differences will be resolved through dialogue, cooperation, coordination and collaboration with international partners to support global decarbonization efforts. At the recent Group of Seven (G7) summit, world leaders recognized that achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement requires concrete and coordinated actions to facilitate the global energy transition. They emphasized that this process will require significant incentives and innovative industrial policies, along with substantial investments from public and private sources. Moreover, the G7 decided at this meeting that together, they will develop policies and practices that promote global trade and investment designed to maximize the use of clean energy and jobs for all states. Also, at EU level, measures such as green trade agreements and international partnerships are essential to reduce emissions and prevent carbon leakage, while ensuring a fair and sustainable transition for all parties involved.

KEYWORDS: energy transition, policies and practices regarding green energy

Introduction

At the recent Group of Seven (G7) summit, world leaders stressed the importance of taking decisive action to facilitate the global energy transition. Their goals are ambitious: tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050. To achieve these goals, it is essential to implement effective industrial policies and mobilize significant investment, both from public and private sources. One of the key points discussed was the importance of filling investment gaps. The G7 recognized the need to lower the cost of the global energy transition to make clean energy technologies more affordable for all nations. This will be achieved through regulations and investments that will support the development and adoption of these technologies. One of the main considerations was the need to

create incentives to make clean energy technologies more affordable. These incentives may include subsidies, tax breaks and other financial measures to encourage large-scale adoption of these technologies. It also emphasized the importance of coordination and transparency in national policies to avoid harmful competition and maximize the global impact of these efforts.

One of the main issues discussed was the need to create incentives to make clean energy technologies more affordable. These incentives may include subsidies, tax breaks and other financial measures to encourage large-scale adoption of these technologies. It also emphasized the importance of coordination and transparency in national policies to avoid harmful competition and maximize the global impact of these efforts. In addition to incentives, G7 leaders stressed the need for significant public and private investment to support the infrastructure needed for the energy transition, such as smart grids and energy storage capabilities. It is essential to create a favorable environment for attracting private capital, reducing risks for investors and promoting viable projects that attract financing.

Another crucial point was the accessibility of clean technologies. Reducing the costs associated with these technologies is vital to making them available globally. Technological innovation and economies of scale play an important role in this, facilitating the widespread adoption of renewable energy solutions. The G7 placed a special emphasis on social justice in the energy transition process. It is essential that this transition be fair and equitable, protecting jobs and creating new economic opportunities in emerging clean energy sectors. Education and reskilling of the workforce are also priorities to facilitate the transition of workers from traditional to renewable energy sectors.

G7 leaders act and improve cooperation to tackle the climate crisis and accelerate the global transition to clean energy to reach net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest, and reaffirm their unwavering commitment to the Paris Agreement at their latest meeting. I also recognize that public and private investment in the industries of the future, both at home and around the world, will be needed to achieve the proposed goals and that further cooperation is needed to fill the investment gap for the clean energy transition and to reduce the cost of the global energy transition. Furthermore, following the meeting, they decide that trade policies play a major role in achieving common goals and that these must be based on a shared commitment to strengthen the rules-based, fair and transparent multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

This calls for a comprehensive reform and strengthening of the global trading system so that it can respond effectively to the most pressing issues of our time, including sustainable development and the clean energy transition. G7 leaders see these views as the cornerstone of a just transition to a clean energy economy that delivers sustainable growth and high-quality jobs. In this context, we emphasize the importance of building secure, resilient, affordable and sustainable clean energy

supply chains and strong industrial bases that reduce unjustified strategic dependencies and benefit local workers and communities around the world.

Also, clean energy technologies have a special role in achieving these goals. However, it should be noted that in order to reach the common goal of zero emissions by 2050 at the latest, there are different paths depending on the energy situation of each country, the industrial and social structures as well as the specific geographical conditions.

Research methods and tools

The scientific research methodology assumed the specification of the research purpose and objectives, both for the study of the regulations developed internally and externally, as well as for the study of the directions and ways of action for the implementation of the new policies related to green energy. As a result, the research methods used were varied and included:

- ***bibliographic documentation*** by carrying out an in-depth analysis of data and information acquired through the study of legislation in the field of climate change and the economic transition that green energy;
- ***the qualitative research method*** by which the information necessary to carry out the field research was collected using observation (participative or non-participative);
- ***the cognitive-structural method*** that provided the framework necessary to optimize the conclusions by structuring information, analyzing the semantics and terminology used in the field of energy transition.

Reduction of emissions through commercial policies

G7 leaders recognize that trade policies are critical to combating climate change and can boost sustainable growth, and are proposing trade policies that promote decarbonization and lower emissions. An important aspect is that markets take into account emissions embedded in traded goods and not lower environmental standards to gain unfair competitive advantages. Although the G7 countries share common goals, their climate policies may vary, including different carbon pricing mechanisms, regulations and incentives. As a result, intensive collaboration is needed to develop the necessary data and tools, such as information on emissions embedded in supply chains. There is a risk that differences in the level of ambition in climate policies will lead to "carbon leakage" (the transfer of production to countries with less stringent regulations) so international collaboration is essential to address this risk.

Within the European Union (EU), trade policies are essential to achieving decarbonization targets and combating climate change. Trade plays a crucial role in promoting clean technologies and sustainable practices. The EU, one of the world's biggest trading players, uses its influence to encourage high environmental standards

and avoid “carbon leakage”, i.e. the transfer of production to countries with less stringent regulations.

The key measures we identify consist, first of all, in the initiation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) with the aim of preventing “carbon leakage” by imposing a tax on carbon emissions for goods imported from countries with better climate policies a little strict. The impact of using this tool is that imported products comply with the same emission standards as those produced in the EU, thus promoting fair competition and the reduction of global emissions.

Secondly, we mention green trade agreements by integrating environmental clauses dedicated to sustainable development and the environment, which oblige trading partners to comply with strict ecological standards. An edifying example of this is the EU-Japan Agreement, which includes commitments on the Paris Agreement and measures to promote clean technologies.

Thirdly, promoting renewable energy at EU level through the trade of renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency, facilitating the global transition to cleaner energy sources.

International Cooperation initiatives realized in partnerships with developing countries to support them in the transition to low-carbon economies, providing technical and financial assistance.

A careful analysis of the problem identifies challenges that require adapted measures. Thus, the divergence of climate policies resulting from differences in the climate ambitions of different countries can create challenges in the implementation of common trade policies. An effective solution could be intensive collaboration within international organizations, such as the WTO and OECD, to develop common standards and tools for measuring embedded emissions. Also, the resistance to change similar to each system, which manifests itself in the fact that partner countries may perceive the EU's strict trade policies as trade barriers. The solution also lies in continuous dialogue and negotiations to emphasize the long-term benefits of the green transition and for their cooperation.

The Economic Impact is an extremely important effect that derives from the increase in production costs resulting from the implementation of environmental regulations. Of course, the major benefits of developing and implementing these policies are also identified. In the long term, these measures can stimulate innovation and increased investment in clean technologies, leading to a more sustainable and competitive economy. Also, job creation in the renewable energy and green technology sectors.

We finally appreciate that at the EU level it is a proactive approach in aligning trade policies with climate objectives, using trade as a tool to promote decarbonization and sustainable development.

The impact of incentives

The G7 Clean Energy Economy Action Plan underscores the commitment of the world's largest economies to support a just global energy transition that leaves no one behind. This means that policies and investments will be geared to benefit all workers and communities, ensuring that no one is disadvantaged in this transition process (The White House 2023).

Achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement requires significant incentives, industrial policies alongside public and private investment. It is worth noting that the G7 states that the transition to clean energy will require filling investment gaps to reduce the cost of the energy transition globally and that they will ensure that the regulations and investments of the world's largest economies (G7 Clean Energy Economy Action Plan) they will make clean energy technologies more accessible to all nations and contribute to a global energy transition that is just for workers and communities and leaves no one behind.

Policy coordination is another crucial issue discussed at the G7 meeting. Leaders emphasized the need for policies to be designed to maximize the deployment of clean energy technologies and practices. This includes promoting fair and free trade and maintaining a level playing field globally. In this way, all economies can benefit from the energy transition, and the positive effects will spread evenly globally (The White House 2023).

The G7 committed to working together to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, recognizing that there are various paths to net zero emissions depending on each country's energy situation and socio-economic structures. It also highlighted the need for new incentives, industrial policies and significant investments to make clean energy technologies more accessible and ensure a just transition that leaves no one behind, and recognized the important role of trade policies in reducing emissions and in promoting sustainable growth, including through the use of carbon pricing mechanisms and other regulations.

Building Resilient Supply Chains focuses on increasing investment in clean energy supply chains and diversifying them to reduce strategic dependencies and ensure they are secure, resilient, affordable and sustainable.

Another hotly debated point was that the G7 pledged to promote research and widespread use of clean energy technologies and to collaborate on the development of international standards for critical minerals markets and support for global partners. In this sense the G7 reaffirmed its commitment to support countries around the world in their transition to clean economies, including through partnerships and financing for the development of clean energy infrastructure in such a way as to facilitate a global, sustainable and equitable energy transition, supporting both advanced economies, as well as those under development.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the global energy crisis have exposed significant vulnerabilities in global supply chains, significantly affecting economies

worldwide. In this context, G7 leaders reaffirmed at their last meeting their commitment to building resilient and sustainable supply chains for clean energy, recognizing the importance of investment and diversification to reduce strategic dependencies. In the implementation of this objective, the main aspects discussed consist, first of all, in increasing investments. Of course, it is essential to increase overall investment in the supply chain for clean energy production to grow at the rate proposed. Accelerating the development and deployment of relevant technologies is a major objective to address current vulnerabilities. To underline the importance of analyzing vulnerabilities and testing the resilience of these chains the International Energy Agency (IEA) will track and report on progress in the clean energy supply chain.

The diversification of supply chains consists in the fact that investments must be expanded globally for the manufacture and installation of clean energy technologies, ensuring safe, resilient, accessible and sustainable supply chains, avoiding the dependencies resulting from the geographical concentration of these chains. We appreciate the need to support the creation of local value in supply chains, but especially in the supply of critical minerals, in their processing and refining, so that they become robust, responsible and transparent.

International cooperation is crucial for aligning supply chains to recognized standards of responsible business conduct. Establishing partnerships with low- and middle-income countries is vital to building clean energy supply chains. These partnerships will catalyze public and private financing for climate and energy security investments, supporting the diversification of supply chains and achieving clean energy transition goals.

Conclusions

The transition to a more sustainable, low-carbon future is accelerating. The energy transition is driven by the progressive replacement of carbon-emitting fuels with renewable resources and clean air regulations and the direct and indirect electrification of many applications.

By nature of its uniform distribution, ***renewable energy overturns the traditional energy supply model***. Electricity no longer flows in one direction from the utility provider that generates it to those who consume it. The new energy ecosystem comprises a complex network of "prosumers": individual consumers and companies that produce their own energy locally, use what is needed and, in many cases, want to re-inject the excess into the grid. Also, the electrification of transport, residential systems and industrial processes will cause important increases in electricity demand in the coming decades. Data centers, offices, factories and similar locations can participate in this transition, through battery systems, thermal energy storage systems, but also through uninterruptible power supply systems that interact with the grid. This process will give rise to large bidirectional electricity flows, which will require a grid that has the flexibility to cope with volatility and

growing demand. For all this, the direct support of governments is necessary, through policies and regulations but also for the development of research activities to reduce the costs of new green energy sources, such as clean hydrogen.

Companies and individual consumers are getting involved in cleaner energy initiatives. Active electricity generation from renewable resources by companies reached 465 terawatt-hours (TWh), while production for individual consumption reached 165 TWh (IRENA2018). From the point of view of individual consumers, the rates for electric vehicle charging technology continue to decrease and the number of charging stations is constantly increasing.

Reducing grid dependency demonstrates that more and more households, businesses and communities are becoming independent energy producers that rely less on the utility grid. They generate, store and consume their own energy through solar systems, wind turbines, micro-grids and battery storage systems, all based on renewable sources. In addition, it creates a two-way flow that changes the energy management paradigm and reduces the impact of sudden power interruptions caused by power outages, cyber-attacks and extreme weather conditions.

Moreover, *digital innovation* can be used to make smarter energy management decisions among individual consumers or companies. It's about turning data from appliances, equipment or processes into actionable information that helps consumers and businesses streamline, maximize uptime and manage their energy footprint. Changing energy demand will impact infrastructure investments, and understanding this impact will be critical to choosing flexible systems that can seamlessly integrate different EV assets and infrastructure. Electric power systems, electric vehicle manufacturers and charging infrastructure providers can better understand how to use energy to maximize efficiency and reduce operational costs for beneficiaries.

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Data Strategy of Banks in a Platform Ecosystem Environment – Evaluation of Opportunities and Risks from the Perspective of Different Role Holders

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ABSTRACT: Banking today is increasingly taking place in platform ecosystem environments. Many new players are conquering the market and offering compelling banking products that provide added value and user experience. This trend drives banks to participate in this ecosystem, develop new business models, and provide sustainable solutions to their customers according to the holistic approach. However, these far-reaching decisions imply a comprehensive data strategy for banks. This paper evaluated opportunities and risks from the perspective of different role-holders. For this purpose, this paper applied a purely deductive research approach based on previous assumptions. It has a qualitative exploratory design based on structured interviews followed by Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). The categories and coding used within the QDA were generated through an interview guide. Esteemed experts from the banking, consulting, IT provider, software development, and startup industries were assigned to the three role groups of banks, IT providers, and regulators and interviewed to provide insights and new findings on various issues of data strategy, data exchange, interaction, and data governance frameworks. The research findings shed light on how banks strategically use and deal with data within platform ecosystems to improve the customer experience and create value for different stakeholders, as well as the associated potential risks with banks' data strategy, its categorization, and IT alignment with their business strategy. Understanding how these risks can be effectively managed and mitigated is crucial. Finally, it looked at how banks work with other ecosystem players to create frameworks and standards for data governance that ensure data security, interoperability, and trust within platform ecosystems.

KEYWORDS: banking, platform ecosystem, data strategy, data governance

Introduction

Banks are increasingly immersed within platform ecosystems in today's rapidly evolving financial landscape, where data reigns supreme as the currency of value

creation. As these ecosystems continue to expand and intertwine with various stakeholders, understanding the intricacies of data strategy becomes paramount (Rufo 2023, 165–178). This paper delves into the nuanced evaluation of opportunities and risks inherent in the data strategies of banks operating within platform ecosystems. From the vantage points of different role holders, including banks themselves, regulators, and technology partners, this paper explores how data strategies shape the dynamics of these ecosystems. By shedding light on the multifaceted perspectives surrounding data utilization, this article aims to provide valuable insights for stakeholders navigating the complex terrain of modern banking.

Problem definition

The topic of data and the associated control of this data and, above all, the extraction and acquisition of insights that imply corporate value must be managed professionally (Boso et al. 2022, 1218–1230). In conjunction with the exponential increase in data volumes (Langer & Mukherjee 2023, 100) and professional analysis to gain insights, companies are facing significant challenges (Choi & Park 2022, 1-2). Customer data is the gold of the 21st century (Giebe 2022, 350-355) and can be aggregated into an overall profile of a customer if individual data components are adequately analyzed and, above all, correctly linked. This overall picture of a customer is completed when external data from various data sources and third-party partners is brought together. This is referred to as a holistic customer approach (Bellos & Kavadias 2021, 1719-1722), meaning that products and services are developed in a customer-centric way, i.e., offered from the customer's perspective and for the customer (Fader 2020, 19-22).

However, due to the nature of their industry, banks face particular circumstances and challenges, such as outdated legacy IT structures (Lipton et al. 2016, 4-5) and, in particular, German banks with regulatory and data protection issues (Wendlinger 2022, 26-31) on the one hand. The Payment Services Directive 2 (PSD2) (European Union 2015, 30) opens the market to new participants. Banks can no longer use their customer data exclusively if the customer wants their data to be passed on by the third-party provider. However, banks can benefit from this opening and develop new revenue streams. Sub-processes, products, or services that would not be economically viable to develop themselves can be produced by creating new collaborations with new providers or FinTechs that specialize in specific services and have market expertise in their field and, where applicable, already have a successful or positive reputation and customer experience (Brodsky & Oakes 2017, 4-8). For these reasons, a bank cannot offer all services alone to satisfy customer's needs. With the help of partners and the further expansion of a bank's services, customer satisfaction and, thus, customer loyalty and retention can be increased (Omarini 2023, 75–113). This creates an environment of a platform ecosystem or a banking-as-a-platform that unites a wide variety of players alongside the bank around

the customer as a holistic starting point and exchanges data streams with each other (Cummins et al. 2020, 319–334).

A data strategy provides the guidelines for an organization's long-term decisions on how it uses data to fulfill its mission and organizational values (Grossman 2018, 45-51). The data strategy should be closely interlinked with IT (Legner & Pentek 2020, 11). In contrast to the data strategy, which is aimed at the data monetization strategy, the IT strategy creates the basis for all data-related activities in the company by aligning the application and system landscape. The IT strategy is not dealt with here in this paper, but how the data strategy can, among other things, align the IT strategy. A data strategy is essential for banks (Karkošková 2023, 7-9) to ensure a coordinated approach as a platform ecosystem player and establish a framework for handling data and exchanging it with other partners while weighing up opportunities and risks. The first frameworks for data ecosystem business models have already been published or are available (Ballon 2022, 4-13). However, the main question is whether banking sector experts know these governance frameworks and standards for creating holistic data management or are already using them within the company. After a thorough literature review, there are several definitions of data governance. According to Abraham et al. and the paper's research design, data governance is a cross-functional framework for managing data as an asset, formalizing data policies, standards, and procedures, and monitoring compliance (Abraham et al. 2019, 426).

Methodology

To evaluate a possible data strategy of banks in the environment of a platform ecosystem concerning two essential prerequisites, i.e., to generate data activities from data assets and data infrastructures (Bonvino & Giorgino 2024, 8-9) and to guarantee applicable EU data protection law (Coche et al. 2024, 3-7) and to analyze the opportunities and risks from the perspective of various role owners, a suitable scientific methodology must be selected. Standardized expert interviews (Hopf 2004, 203-207), which directly illuminate the views of various role holders in banks and collect sufficient primary data, are suitable for this purpose (Anjum et al. 2021, 6-10). This type of methodology is attributed to qualitative content analysis. Mayring says, "Qualitative content analysis wants to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis for a more qualitative text interpretation" (Mayring 2004, 161). The advantages, according to Mayring (Mayring 2004, 161), are:

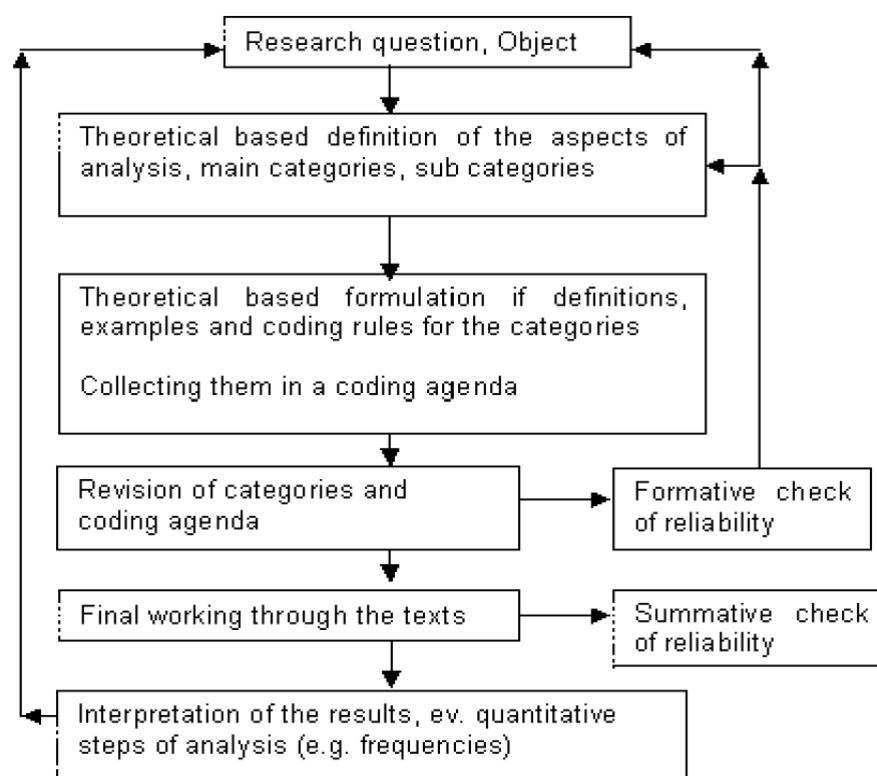
1. fitting the material into a model of communication
2. rules of analysis
3. categories in the center of analysis
4. criteria of reliability and validity

"The above-listed components of quantitative content analysis will be preserved to be the fundament for a qualitative-oriented procedure of text interpretation. We developed several procedures of qualitative content analysis, among which two

central approaches are inductive category development and deductive category application" (Mayring 2004, 161). This article is dedicated to deductive category application, meaning pre-formulated questions and existing categories in the expert interview move along the research questions from the literature analysis. Thus, a methodically controlled category assignment to a text passage occurs (Mayring 2004, 162-164).

As banks can cover more customer needs in the best possible way with the help of third parties and can, therefore, offer their customers a more comprehensive range of services, a holistic ecosystem of providers is developing around the customer that enables data exchange between partners and offers added value for the customer. Elements of a data strategy can be derived from this to regulate data exchange between partners. Expert interviews will be used to evaluate essential aspects of a possible data strategy in terms of opportunities and risks from the perspective of various role holders. To this end, it will be analyzed whether existing data governance frameworks (Bonvino & Giorgino 2024, 8-9; Karkošková 2023, 7-9) are already being used for this purpose and what content a framework should contain. The aim is not to develop a ready-made framework construct for a possible data strategy for banks. The paper initially intends to evaluate findings and potential elements and content of a possible data strategy and sensitize decision-makers to this topic. Further insights and possible ready-made data frameworks or decision matrices require further research.

Figure 1. Step model of deductive category application (Mayring 2004, 162)



In concrete terms, three research questions are initially set up as hypotheses for dealing with the topic. These are as follows:

RQ1: How do banks strategically utilize data within platform ecosystems to enhance customer experience and create value for different stakeholders?

RQ2: What are the potential risks associated with the data strategy of banks operating in a platform ecosystem environment, and how can these risks be effectively managed and mitigated?

RQ3: How can banks collaborate with other ecosystem players to establish data governance frameworks and standards that ensure data security, interoperability, and trust within platform ecosystems?

In the next step, further sub-questions are developed for the three main questions, intended to answer the main questions as a whole. For this purpose, main categories and sub-categories are formed for the main questions and sub-questions. After the interviews, the text passages of the interviewee's answers are coded and assigned to the appropriate categories in a coding agenda. After extensive research, the MAXQDA software (Friesen 2016, 34-40) was chosen to conduct the qualitative data analysis (QDA) and evaluation of the interviews. In particular, the seamless integration of the AI, which takes over the automatic transcription and translation of the interview texts in a time-saving manner so that this content can be continued for further manual editing and coding by the author, was convincing (Cao et al. 2023, 5-6). Before data is collected, it is essential to identify the right experts (especially competencies and working environment) for the topic in question. According to Kuckartz (2012, 141-145), the quality of the information depends on the selection of the interview participants who take part in the expert interviews or whose answers are subsequently evaluated. On the other hand, Creswell (2009, 95-108) shows that a concept or phenomenon that needs to be understood because it has been little researched deserves a qualitative approach. For this reason, Mayring's deductive category application is followed by an iterative procedure that ensures a continuous formative review of the reliability of the categories and the coding agenda created so that any necessary adjustments can be made. This can be followed by final work on the interview texts and the subsequent interpretation of the results. Finally, quantitative elements of the analysis, such as frequency or correlation analyses, can be incorporated into the evaluation.

Selection of the experts

According to Kruse, the procedure was followed for the correct selection and grouping of the experts. This states that the following necessary expert groups are essential for adequate overall coverage of the know-how from different perspectives. The first of these is the expert group, which has technical know-how. The second group possesses process knowledge, which goes hand in hand with informal or hidden knowledge. The third group of experts comprises interpretative knowledge, which contains ideas, ideologies, and explanatory patterns (Kruse 2014, 176). The group of experts with technical know-how is attributed to the "IT providers," the

group with process knowledge to both the "regulators" and the "IT providers" and the group with interpretation knowledge to all groups "banks, IT providers, and regulators," but primarily to those of the "banks." All participants interviewed are proven experts in their field and have at least senior or lead positions and specific knowledge in branches like consultancies, IT providers, banks, and FinTechs.

Expert descriptions

Group 1 "Banks"

Expert 1 (Senior Organizational Developer): Senior professional with 30 years of bank experience. This expert is currently working as a Senior Organizational Developer in Corporate/Business Development and Data Management and, before that year, in requirements consulting, sales management, human resources, and corporate communications with a specific focus on human and customer interactions.

Expert 2 (Lead Process and Innovation Management): This expert has at least 18 years of professional experience in banks and is currently working in process and innovation management. Before this, the expert worked in many other areas of a bank, in particular back office and management positions for quality assurance for deposit business, data control with legal support, and evaluation of these topics.

Expert 3 (Senior Project Manager and Expert for Bank Organization): Senior Expert Bank Organization with 19 years of professional experience in ESG banks. Currently an expert for core banking procedures and Partnership Manager and, therefore, the first point of contact for IT providers with whom we work. Before this, the expert worked as an IT security officer.

Group 2 "IT providers"

Expert 4 (Senior Manager Digital Banking): Lead Professional in Digital Banking with 27 years of experience in various banks and consultancies. He focuses on sales and multichannel, product/project management, and mobile banking.

Expert 5 (Team Lead Software Development): Team Lead and Solutions Architect with 12 years of professional experience, mainly in FinTech and e-commerce for banking. He has also worked as a freelancer with programming languages Java and Java Script and as a lead responsible for project management and implementation.

Expert 6 (Founder and CEO): Corporate generalist and entrepreneur focusing on data-driven loyalty and ad technology. More than 23 years of professional experience building digital business intelligence solutions with millions of users. Core expertise in beyond banking, contextual banking, and sustainable banking solutions.

Group 3 "Regulators"

Expert 7 (Senior Product Manager and Chapter Lead): Senior and Lead Professional for Corporate Governance and Multi-Product Manager with more than 11 years of professional experience in banking. Expertise is mainly in Online Banking, Payments, Innovations, Request to Pay, PSD2/PSD3, and Beyond Banking.

Expert 8 (Deputy Data Protection Officer): This is a senior expert on data governance topics focusing on data protection. This includes data protection law assessment and advice on transparency requirements in contractual arrangements with service providers.

Expert 9 (Senior Consultant): This is a Senior Professional for data governance and IT core banking system migration. Before that, the focus for many years was on organizational consulting for banks, new development of direct banks and ecosystem landscapes, end-to-end customer onboarding processes, and accompanying project management activities.

Results and discussions

Before investigating the research questions with the help of QDA can begin, a look at the coding system must be taken. The three research questions are listed here in Table 1, including the corresponding main questions, which have been summarized in categories. Sub-codes are assigned to the categories, which outline the individual categories and are intended to provide further depth of analysis and insight. All sub-codes were developed using the deductive research approach. During the investigation, however, supplementary and for the answer to the research questions, relevant further codings occurred so that these correspond to the inductive approach. In the last column, in particular, under "Further findings worth mentioning under Sub Code 1", further inductive insights are listed that arose during the interview process and are increasingly found in a deeper sub-code dimension.

Investigation of the research questions

The research questions are dealt with by analyzing the coded segments from the categories and centrally summarizing the core statements obtained from them in the categories. An overall evaluation will be carried out in 2 steps:

Single-based expert analysis. All experts' central statements or summaries for each category are recorded here.

Role-based expert analysis using cross-tabulation analysis. For this purpose, the experts are assigned to the three groupings, "Banks," "IT Providers," and "Regulators," and their statements are compared cross-functionally with the statements of the other groupings.

Table 1. Overview coding system

Research Questions	Categories	Sub Code 1	Number of citations (frequency)	Frequency in % of 745 citations	Further findings worth mentioning under Sub Code 1
RQ1: How do banks strategically utilize data within platform ecosystems to enhance customer experience and create value for different stakeholders?			261	35,03%	
	Data strategy in platform ecosystems		120	16,11%	
		Classification	29	3,89%	Central data management system, specification and recommendation by partners, data models and analysis options, cost/benefit ratio, cooperations
		Collection, analysis and use of data	50	6,71%	Increasing revenues, standardization, getting to know/understanding customers, sales channels, data protection and law
		Type of data collected and data sources	41	5,50%	Customer master data, customer behavior/interaction, transaction data, data sources
	Improving the customer experience		83	11,14%	
		Improve customer experiences and generate added value	23	3,09%	New insights about customers, targeted customer approach, user experience, data compliance
		Concrete examples	10	1,34%	Banking products, payment services, personalization, loyalty programs
		Personalize customer data	34	4,56%	Challenges, creating customer profiles, use of AI, embedded finance, data protection, green offers
		Effects of data usage on customer loyalty/satisfaction	16	2,15%	Customer centricity, increased customer satisfaction, prevention of customer churn, cost savings
	Value creation for stakeholders		58	7,79%	
		What value measures/metrics?	22	2,95%	E-commerce KPIs, joint product use, none, higher-level quality management, contractual agreements
		Creating added value for other interest groups	18	2,42%	Creating and selling customer profiles, non-banking strategy, use and sharing of data
		Data sharing agreements and cooperation initiatives	18	2,42%	Challenges, loyalty programs, none, transparency
			178	23,89%	
	Impact assessment		64	8,59%	
		Possible consequences for all participants	51	6,85%	Customers, banks, partners and everyone together
		Impact on trust in the ecosystem	13	1,74%	Customers, banks
	Risk mitigation strategies		72	9,66%	
		We banks proactively address and mitigate risks	40	5,37%	when initiating a possible cooperation, compliance
RQ2: What are the potential risks associated with the data strategy of banks operating in a platform ecosystem environment, and how can these risks be effectively managed and mitigated?		Risk management frameworks, cyber security measures and data protection guidelines	32	4,30%	when initiating a possible cooperation, frameworks, guidelines
	Joint risk reduction		42	5,64%	
		Working together to jointly manage data-related risks	24	3,22%	Advice/training, central/secured data pool, pseudonymization of data
		Role of data sharing agreements/governance frameworks for risk mitigation	18	2,42%	Ensuring and tracking common minimum standards for regulation, preliminary review of contracts by experts, clean separation of data storage and use
			306	41,07%	
	Collaboration with players in the ecosystem		52	6,98%	
		Collaboration to create data governance frameworks	28	3,76%	Infrastructure and quality, joint supervisory bodies, cooperation in working groups, Europe-wide data standards are not enough
		Challenges and successful examples of cooperation	24	3,22%	
	Data security and data protection		37	4,97%	
		Measures	14	1,88%	IT security, modular system, joint data protection agreements, training courses
		Protocols for data sharing	23	3,09%	Joint compliance project
	Interoperability and data standards		49	6,58%	
		Data standards to ensure seamless interoperability	17	2,28%	Challenges, legal requirements (PSD2/3), specifications by network partners, joint requirements engineering, use of centrally controlled services
		Importance of data formats, APIs and protocols	32	4,30%	Forecast and analysis of future protocols and interfaces; common, standardized, easy-to-maintain interfaces
	Building trust in the sharing of data		46	6,17%	
		How banks build trust in data sharing	32	4,30%	Work with partners who stand for trust in the market; bank brand, open and clear communication, sensitization of all participants
		Transparency initiatives and mechanisms for fair data practices	14	1,88%	Data strategy, overarching contractual construct for the entire ecosystem, central control system
	Compliance with legal regulations		65	8,72%	
		Compliance with regulatory requirements	19	2,55%	Voluntary certifications by banks, consistently implement applicable law, only allow audited/certified partners
		Challenges and strategies	46	6,17%	
RQ3: How can banks collaborate with other ecosystem players to establish data governance frameworks and standards that ensure data security, interoperability, and trust within platform ecosystems?	Governance frameworks		28	3,76%	
		Existence of governance frameworks and guidelines	20	2,68%	No standards available; available, but not which ones; no data transfer
		Ongoing adaptation of the frameworks	8	1,07%	Experts needed, technical development
	Dealing with data ownership		29	3,89%	
		Question of data ownership and rights in the ecosystem	15	2,01%	Agreements, restrictive data transfer, only query of other databases
		Cooperative approaches to resolving potential disputes	14	1,88%	Common behavior towards customers, equal benefit for each partner - no overreaching, central arbitration office

Single-based expert analysis

Research questions 1 to 3 are evaluated below based on the experts' answers. The associated categories are summarized for each research question.

RQ1: How do banks strategically utilize data within platform ecosystems to enhance customer experience and create value for different stakeholders?

Table 2 primarily expresses the heterogeneous responses of the experts. The exact answers can also be seen here. The classification of the data strategy in platform ecosystems is often specified and recommended by IT providers. Experts also consider data control essential to fulfill legal requirements in an overarching central data management system. There is a willingness to cooperate, but implementing a partner ecosystem is challenging and complex, and experts are urgently needed. The approach to collecting, analyzing, and using data is based on higher revenue expectations through generating and using additional offers, new potential business models, and sales opportunities. Howbanks are also being driven to act and think in ecosystem terms by the changing platform ecosystem world as a new competitive situation by new competitors such as (fin-)tech companies. For data analysis and evaluation, customer master data, transaction data for categorizing customer interests and needs, interaction data, some external data sources for enriching the customer database, and the networking of internal data with various departments are primarily used. To increase customer experience and generate further value, a user interface in the application where the customer can easily find their way around, transparency and fairness in the use of data, transparent and open communication, and, above all, a targeted customer approach are seen as success factors.

Table 2. Summary table for RQ1

	Data strategy in platform ecosystems			Improving the customer experience				Value creation for stakeholders		
	Classification	Approach why collection, analysis and use of data	Type of data collected and data sources	Improve customer experiences and generate added value	Concrete examples	Personalize customer data	Effects of data usage on customer loyalty/satisfaction	What value measures/metrics?	Creating added value for other interest groups	Data sharing agreements and cooperation initiatives
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD)	Specification and recommendation by partner Increase revenues by using additional offers; get to know/understand customers to predict and plan resources; use sales channels and suitable marketing campaigns	Customer master data (demographic data); tracking customer behavior; transaction data, frequency of input channels; data sources such as ATMs, use of other platforms, offers	New insights about customers	Binding to regional roots through sponsoring		Presence at the customer, always available and finding suitable solutions	SLAs only		Difficult, few skills available, you don't want to make yourself measurable, transparency for the customer should be made measurable
	Expert 2 (LPM)	Data control through compliance with legal requirements and evaluation of customer data; specification and recommendation by partners, lack of experience in building an external ecosystem Generating added value through non-banking services; dependence on IT partner to implement data protection slows down further development	Customer behavior is tracked less, but more click numbers, customer interactions from transaction data using smart data	An interface where customers can easily find their way around; transparency in declarations of consent, added value of the ecosystem must be greater than the regulatory framework, which currently ties up a lot of resources	Individual designs for current or credit cards, house bank program as a loyalty model	Individualization too expensive, therefore standards are used; AI is currently rated very highly, which models can the ChatGPT map in banks?; personalized CO2 tracker	Cost savings through synergy effects when using several banking products, favorable price for customers	none available		Investments in young companies, otherwise no cooperations or agreements
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO)	Data strategy is not part of the IT strategy, it is a separate strategy because it goes much deeper; data protection as a central issue; tension between benefits and data protection	Changed platform ecosystem world as a new competitive situation; dilemma between collecting as much data as possible and the data protection issue, where banks have a significantly different relationship than other ecosystem providers such as Facebook, Meta or Twitter; current use of separate data pools	Customer master data; tracking behavior on the homepage via heatmap and conversation rate/abandonment rates; transaction data	New insights about customers, which target group, demographic data; targeted customer approach; but: tracking of the user experience in completion routes only possible to a limited extent, systems do not support this function	similar construct to Payback as a loyalty program for organic supermarkets	Significantly more financial and technical resources required; manual and rule-based processes; tracking of homepage click behavior to change customer onboarding process; restriction to certain people, groups and clusters of people; use of AI	Customer surveys; using signs to understand customers when they want to leave the bank (early filtering)	Metrics for sales channel and product sales channel usage, what is case-closed and what is done by manual rework; SLAs	Regional ecosystem through loyalty program with organic supermarkets, otherwise the bank is still in its infancy

Specific examples of enhancing the customer experience include sponsoring regional roots, individual designs, loyalty programs such as the house bank program, loyalty programs for organic supermarkets or retail, or a CO2 tracker based on transaction data. The personalization of customer data takes place by awakening or covering customer needs and a prospective evaluation of a customer to send suitable offers to customers early. This is done by creating customer profiles so customers are only shown relevant content that interests them. Using and training AI makes it possible to anticipate the customer's needs.

However, banks require significantly more technical and financial resources for implementation, and manual and rule-based processes still dominate. Data protection is again seen as an implementation and risk factor here. Data usage measures have a positive impact on customer loyalty and satisfaction. Here, a more favorable offer can be made to the customer, as cost savings arise from synergy effects when using several banking products. In addition, customers who are ready to churn or cancel can be identified early and encouraged to stay by displaying suitable offers. By displaying relevant content, the customer has more fun with the application, extending the customer relationship. In addition to simplifying processes and applications and saving time, the customer feels understood and in good hands. Needs are recognized and taken into account in good time.

Value creation for stakeholders can be defined using various value measures and metrics. These include SLAs (Service Level Agreements), frequently mentioned contractual constructs. However, the usage rate of partner products, joint product usage, and benchmarks for mutual customer acquisition can also be important indicators. Important e-commerce KPIs such as conversion rate and establishing and tracking a higher-level, data-driven quality management system are also mentioned. However, some experts say that they are not aware of or do not use any metrics on this topic (table no. 2, exp. 2, 6 and 8, cat. 8). To generate additional value for other stakeholders in an ecosystem, loyalty programs, beyond/non-banking strategies to create a marketplace where bank as orchestrator brings providers and consumers together on one platform, the associated use and sharing of data in an ecosystem as well as the buying and selling of customer data or profiles are mentioned.

Data-sharing agreements and collaboration initiatives that contribute to the ecosystem's overall value proposition are often lacking. Challenges such as complex implementation, the need for more skills and mindset, political and rigid structures, and many data protection regulations make agreements challenging to design. On the other hand, there are ideas for implementing various loyalty programs and cooperation initiatives. To implement these cooperation initiatives, a joint reporting system must be set up to create transparency and ensure regulatory compliance.

RQ2: What are the potential risks associated with the data strategy of banks operating in a platform ecosystem environment, and how can these risks be effectively managed and mitigated?

First, the impact assessment and the possible consequences for all participants are examined. On the customer side, there is an unwanted sharing of their data, resulting in a loss of control over data sovereignty and the risk of sensitive data being used for analysis. For banks, there is the risk of incorrect conclusions being drawn from data, an increased reputational risk with third-party companies, and, if applicable, the risk of sanctions in the event of data protection violations in the ecosystem, unauthorized data use beyond the intended purpose and, finally, the loss of customer trust and termination by the customer. In turn, the cooperation partner may need better performance or fail to keep its performance promise. These risks hurt trust in the ecosystem. Experts agree that inconsistent data processing disturbs customer trust and that such data breaches can quickly go viral, accelerating the unsettled customer trust and the associated terminations. Banks, in turn, feel compelled to check their partner network more closely to ensure data consistency in the case of new systems or cross-systems. A poor reputation of the partner can weaken the bank's reputation and the brand, and the partnership can be permanently damaged. Banks can proactively address and mitigate risks as follows. When initiating a potential partnership, the choice should be made to favor high-performance partners with banking experience. For this purpose, a joint, modern, or currently used software that technically implements current law should be used. Before the application is introduced, the risks and requirements should already be recorded and taken into account in the decision-making process when choosing the application (table no. 3, exp. 1, 3 and 5, cat. 3). In addition, a precise definition and procedure for the use of the data should be recorded at the outset. The roles of each partner in the ecosystem should be clarified. Early and regular involvement of internal auditors and consultants and the implementation of monitoring and control systems should continuously monitor and, if necessary, identify risks. Contractual frameworks can prevent risks. It is essential to meticulously document objectives, findings, and joint measures with partners, such as cyber security and data protection guidelines. Furthermore, the contract should be balanced and fair and specify which partner may use which customer data. Dedicated encryption and access management must also be described in detail.

Other frameworks that should be considered for data and IT security are ISMS (Information Security Management System) for protecting all information in the company, ISO (International Organization for Standardization), and, in particular, ISO 27001 to reduce information security risks. Furthermore, the ISMS helps to better fulfill security regulations and promote the development of a security culture. BAIT (Regulatory Requirements for IT) helps financial companies create a framework for trusting cooperation between specialist departments and IT managers, reduce cyber risks, and optimize IT processes. PCI DSS compliance (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) establishes essential consumer protection. It helps reduce data breaches and fraud throughout the payment system and ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library), thus representing a collection of processes and tasks considered best practices for IT service

management. Compliance with and implementation of these frameworks must be monitored and checked continuously. External (renowned) audit experts such as the Chaos Computer Club can provide new impetus from outside and enhance the reputation of the bank or partner in the event of a positive audit result.

Table 3. Summary table for RQ2

	Impact assessment		Risk mitigation strategies		Joint risk reduction	
	Possible consequences for all participants	Impact on trust in the ecosystem	How banks proactively address and mitigate risks	Risk management frameworks, cyber security measures and data protection guidelines	Working together to jointly manage data-related risks	Role of data sharing agreements/governance frameworks for risk mitigation
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD) Customers: Sharing of data with many participants, loss of control ; data easily accessible due to EU directive Banks: drawing false conclusions from data ; right to be forgotten, correct control that customer data is eliminated on departure, otherwise claims for damages	Customers: Distrust of data storage	When initiating a possible cooperation: precise definition/procedure with data, pseudonymization of customer data	when initiating a partnership: project screening , agreement on objectives and findings, measures with partners such as cyber security measures, implement and document data protection guidelines ; use experienced, protected cloud environment ; compliance training for employees ; encryption and access management; but: people remain a risk	Create joint training courses/mindset; central, secure data pool , central partner for IT systems; agreement on the use of shared systems	Record a dedicated, detailed list/needs and tasks of individual partners
	Expert 2 (LPM) Banks: increased audit risk, reputational risk with third-party companies and possible sanction risk ; dependency on the third-party partner depending on specificity	Banks: Ensuring and implementing increased audit requirements in the environment	When initiating a possible cooperation: recommendation from the association partner and experience of banks, rely on third-party partners with banking experience ; proactive checks ; enter into few or no partnerships		Consistent exchange with partners	Preliminary review of contracts by experts (data protection, etc.)
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO) Banks: Reputational risk with third-party companies, lasting disruption of trust in the customer relationship until termination ; regulation, i.e. handling of data in the ecosystem		When initiating a possible cooperation: Mitigate risks as early as the requirements for creating the application , such as data protection, prior checking of data use, introduction of systems; product proposals for sensitive data (quality assurance); incremental introduction process (iterative fixing)		Creating a common understanding of insights, data interpretations and behavioral structures ; creating a common ecosystem in the network of banks for shared user insights	
	Expert 4 (SMDB) Banks: high regulation, risk and sanctions when evaluating data, which is not permitted; no data use beyond purpose; loss of customer trust and even customer relationship; overreaching of partners		Introduction of monitoring and control systems; creating more transparency than required by law; ensuring data autonomy for the customer	Designing a fair and balanced contract , who is allowed to do what with customer data; encryption and access management for confidential data; data security	Partner must have a suitable mindset	Uniform risk claim, ensuring and tracking common minimum standards for regulation; economic definition in contracts, especially lead management, how follow-up business of the partner is handled; clearly defined interfaces and transfer of responsibilities
IT Providers	Expert 5 (TUSD) Banks: Reputational risk with third-party companies, small partner companies are not aware of the banks' regulatory requirements , among other things, or are inexperienced ; no data use beyond the intended purpose ; single point of failure; risk of data loss for banks and customers Partners: poor performance	Customers: Data protection problems quickly go viral, customer confidence/customers lose;	When initiating a possible partnership: do not rely on inexperienced partners, mitigate risks in the case of requirements for shared, modern, utilized software	Encryption and access management, use of the latest standards, correct documentation and archiving for control bodies		Clearly defined interfaces and transfers of responsibility, definition of shelf lives, responsibilities and update cycles for certain data

Regulators	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	Customers: Use of sensitive data Banks: Reputational risk with third-party companies, strong controversy, high regulation, high security standards essential for partners ; lose customer trust/customers; change risk awareness and focus on international banks	Banks and third-party partners: Ensuring data consistency when switching/crossing systems; customers are not allowed to see other customers' data, but this sometimes happens; banks set themselves strong guidelines on data protection; poor reputation of the partner can weaken the bank's reputation	When initiating a potential partnership: use current technology that implements current law ; Compliance, i.e. involving internal auditors and consultants at an early stage and on a regular basis; monitoring and control systems , proof of security standards through external certifications ; trustworthy handling or pseudonymization of customer data; tracking opt-in and opt-out processes	When initiating a partnership: project screening Frameworks: ISMS, ISO, BAIT and PCI compliance; do all relevant legal documents comply with customer and applicable law?	Work with external consultants because this is not the banks' core business/know-how ; pseudonymization of data, personal data does not leave the bank; use SaaS/PaaS as a central, secure data pool ; agreement on the use of shared systems	Ensuring and tracking common minimum standards for regulation, powers of instruction, technical and organizational measures and order processing agreements; definition of risks
	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)	Banks: regulatory gaps in contractual agreements, sanctions; no consistent data collection	Customers: Uncertainty in the event of inconsistent data processing Banks and third-party partners: Ensuring data consistency when converting/crossing systems	Involve internal auditors and consultants at an early stage and on a regular basis	Frameworks: DIN standards	Advice and training, exchange formats in committees, specialist councils , etc.	Clean separation of data storage and use
	Expert 8 (DDPO)	Customers: Use of sensitive data Banks: Reputational risk with third-party companies, damage to image, risk of fines Banks and customers: no data use beyond the intended purpose		Involve internal auditors and consultants at an early stage and on a regular basis; monitoring and control systems such as IT security management, internal audits by Internal Audit and external audits	Frameworks: internal control system assessments Compliance guidelines: Follow up and monitor implementation	Advice and training, exchange formats in committees, specialist councils, etc.	Preliminary review of contracts by experts (data protection, etc.)
	Expert 9 (SC)	Banks: Reputational risk with external companies, onboarding of poor partners Partners: poor performance	Banks and partners: poor reputation of the partner can weaken the reputation of the bank, brand and ecosystem/partnership can be permanently damaged	When initiating a potential partnership: rely on experienced, strong banking partners; clarify who plays which role in the ecosystem	Frameworks: internal control systems, ITIL, BSI guidelines ; rely on renowned external audit experts such as the Chaos Computer Club	Data storage in a central, secure environment; evaluations are carried out via a central location through data queries from other participants; data pool owner acts in an advisory capacity for smaller, less IT/banking-savvy partners	Clean separation of data storage and use ; control via central data pool, definition of data flows to the central location ; stay in contact, talk to each other and listen to what the needs of the other ecosystem partners really are

How banks can reduce risks together with other players in the ecosystem starts with communication and the skillset to create a common mindset, which can be supported with training. The mindset includes a uniform understanding of the ecosystem's findings, data interpretations, and behavioral structures. Regular exchange formats in committees and expert councils and consistent exchange with partners should be used for this purpose. On the technical side, the agreement to use shared systems and a central, secure data pool that performs evaluations via a central location by querying data from other participants can help. On the other hand, it is criticized that the mindset for participation in the ecosystem does not exist and does not reflect banks' know-how and core business. For this reason, collaboration with external experts and data pool owners who can demonstrate experience in the platform economy is recommended. Agreements on the shared use of data and governance frameworks should initially be subject to a preliminary review by experts.

Other contents to be considered in such agreements include ensuring and tracking common minimum standards for regulation related to current laws like GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and PSD2/3, powers of instruction, technical and organizational measures, order processing agreements, and the definition of risks. In terms of technical implementation, clearly defined interfaces and transfers of responsibility and a clear separation of data storage and use are essential.

RQ3: How can banks collaborate with other ecosystem players to establish data governance frameworks and standards that ensure data security, interoperability, and trust within platform ecosystems?

According to experts (table no. 4, exp. 1, 3, 8 and 9, cat. 1), banks should agree on a standard system to improve collaboration with ecosystem participants. A participant, such as a data owner or orchestrator, can ensure consistent data storage, management, and IT security. In addition, there should be a uniform and shared understanding of the quality and interpretation of data and common control instances.

Table 4. Summary table for RQ3 part 1

	Collaboration with players in the ecosystem		Data security and data protection		Interoperability and data standards		Building trust in the sharing of data	
	Collaboration to create data governance frameworks	Challenges and successful examples of cooperation	Measures	Protocols for data sharing	Data standards to ensure seamless interoperability	Importance of data formats, APIs and protocols	How banks build trust in data sharing	Transparency initiatives and mechanisms for fair data practices
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD) Agreement on a common system, use of the same data fields/consistency; common understanding of quality and data interpretation; access only for authorized persons	Data outflow/control of any data loss; agreement and tracking of who gets which access rights; precisely defining and tracking the tasks of each participant; unequal mindset Example: auditor who is given access to a bank system	Joint data protection agreements, deletion concepts; training and sensitization of employees	ISMS, common authorization concept	Experts needed	XML is widely used, audio and multimedia too complex	Do not pass on data to third parties without being asked; sensitization and training of employees	Central control system
	Expert 2 (LFIM)	Dependencies and requirements of umbrella organizations			Specification by association partner		Bank brand as trust , open and clear communication; advising customers on IT security; raising awareness and training all participants	
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO) Agreement on a common system, common understanding of quality and interpretation of data; consistent data management; common control instances; access only for authorized persons; joint cooperation for uniform governance structures	Agreement on who gets access rights; agreement on the use of interfaces; interface control at the IT service provider	Permanent and immediate security updates, more investment in IT security	Common authorization concept with security levels; coordinated protocols		JSON, XML or CSV for temporary data exchange; forecast, analysis and use of future-proof protocols and interfaces; coordinated interfaces, data formats and security protocols	Work with partners who stand for trust in the market; open and clear communication, data autonomy remains with the customer; training courses	Data contradiction possible directly and at any time , so that actions lead to immediate constraints; central control system end to end

IT Providers	Expert 4 (SMDDB)	Common understanding of quality and implementation; common opt-in procedure; access controls and logging of accesses			Common authorization concept; common standard for customer identification (two-factor authentication)	Open Banking standards such as PSD2/3 requirements should also be demanded and implemented by partners; Open Banking Access to Account interface	Encryption via HTTPS, API standards such as JSON and XML	Bank brand as trust, cooperative data promise; open, clear and transparent communication on data use and purpose ; awareness-raising and training for all participants	Cooperative data promise
	Expert 5 (TLSD)	Define common processes and criticalities of data durability	startup in luxembourg collaborates with some participants within the ecosystem		Common authorization concept, latest encryptions see BSI recommendations; current common interfaces	Experts required; today often individual, bilateral agreements; joint recording of requirements; use of centrally controlled services	Encryption via HTTP, better HTTPS; JSON; common, standardized, easy-to-maintain interfaces	Appropriate corporate design; communicate honesty for data use openly and clearly; training courses	
	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	Europe-wide, central data standard necessary for competitive advantages; PSD2 is not enough; PSD3 will not be enough either; regulation always lags behind innovations; no exchange options, banks have heterogeneous interfaces	No know-how in banks, lack of speed; clean interfaces and data standard required, control of data flows and data security; control of authentication missing	Modular system, exercise of data control via interfaces; clear guidelines and a clear usable everyday framework	VPN, SSL encryption; sensible interfaces with appropriate protection; defined communication channels described in BAIT, PCI and ISO	Affiliate networks do not use a standard, platform is built before the platform in order to harmonize the data ; stipulation by PSD2/3; make self-built standard available to other participants	Protocols: https, tcp, ip, log Data formats JSON and XML, GraphQL for content areas; occasionally old standards such as VPN, Excel, CSV or DB2 data tables		Guidelines such as BAIT and PCI, contracts such as order processing agreements and technical organizational measures; new certification standard required ; international, meaningful exchange standard, support through higher-level contractual construct for the entire ecosystem; central reporting system
Regulators	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)		Do not send too much data beyond the intended purpose; paradigm shift in mindset, adaptation to new market conditions	Open and honest communication with customers on data use increases acceptance	Higher-level protocol for identifying the customer at each partner level; current, common interfaces	Joint recording of requirements; use of centrally controlled services	Definition of common interfaces	Open and clear communication; transparency about data use ; do not use data unsolicited or pass it on to third parties if no consent has been given and is not defined in the contract	
	Expert 8 (DDPO)	Cooperation in working groups; centralized data management, bundling of data flows via one system	Example: Introduction of a central communication system, communication was too little on one side, with the introduction of working groups communication and cooperation was good	Joint data protection management; processes for deletion concepts	Current, common interfaces	Joint inclusion of data exchange requirements in contracts; guarantee of confidentiality		Establishment of data protection guidelines , regular employee training	
	Expert 9 (SC)	One participant as orchestrator for consistent data storage and processing and IT security; use of the same data fields/consistency; further development of the ecosystem by obtaining additional data , new insights and data connections via data mining	New data can send the wrong signals to customers Example: Due to changes in purchasing behavior, customers receive offers related to their new life situation	A/B testing, a shared portal use of the customer	Common authorization concept; personalization by creating an account, do not offer guest login		Standardized, easy-to-maintain interfaces so that new participants can be integrated quickly	Work with partners who stand for trust in the market; rely on partners with banking experience who know and already implement the regulations of the banking environment; open and clear communication of the security aspect	National or international data storage; contractual fixation and establishment of control systems

Challenges include possible dependencies on the IT provider or orchestrator, uncontrolled data outflow or loss of data control, finding consensus when using standard interfaces, as banks often still use heterogeneous interfaces, unequal mindset or lack of know-how, and slow bank implementation and agreement on who gets access rights. Joint data protection agreements, guidelines, a clear, usable everyday framework, deletion concepts, and customer tracking via a jointly developed portal framework are required to ensure data security and protection. Joint authorization concepts and a common standard and higher-level protocol for identifying the customer at each partner level should enable data sharing. In addition, the customer should be personalized and tracked through the mandatory creation of an account. Guest login should no longer be an option.

Data standards to ensure seamless interoperability should be open banking standards by PSD2/3 specifications and should be required and implemented by all partners, as bilateral agreements still prevail today. For this reason, technical requirements are to be adopted jointly, and standards already developed in-house are to be made available to other participants. However, experts are required to implement these standards. HTTPS for current encryption and JSON and XML for current APIs for data exchange will help as common technological standards (table no. 4, exp. 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, cat. 6). The contracts should define these standards and be as standardized and easy to maintain as possible so that new participants can be integrated quickly.

To build trust in the ecosystem, banks should, above all, communicate openly, honestly, and clearly with customers regarding the use and purpose of data. The bank's brand stands for trust. That is why they should only work with experienced partners who also stand for trust in the market. Data sovereignty is the responsibility of the customer. All participants in the ecosystem and their employees should be sufficiently sensitized and trained for this. Transparency initiatives and mechanisms for fair data practices include establishing a central control system, the cooperative data pledge, a new certification standard, and a direct, feasible data appeal at any time.

Banks should ensure that the other ecosystem participants implement applicable laws and guidelines such as ISO, GDPR, and PSD2/3 to guarantee the legal regulations in the ecosystem. However, the cooperating partners must also be audited and certified. Here, voluntary certifications of the partner and the banks that go beyond the legal requirements can create trust and be decisive in the choice of a partner. Employees should also be sensitized and trained for this purpose. However, there are many challenges involved. Maintaining compliance is complex and requires external experts for implementation. The shortage of skilled workers and the further increase in regulation exacerbate this situation, making implementation more complex and delaying it. At the same time, there is criticism that the regulatory requirements are too generic and general and do not reflect reality. On the other hand, heterogeneous standards for data exchange prevail, which are opaque and complex. Furthermore, it must be ensured that each participant and their service

providers/partners also implement all regulatory requirements and that monitoring is established. Experts have answered that governance frameworks and guidelines for data sharing are heterogeneous. Either no such frameworks exist (table no. 5, exp. 3, cat. 3), the existence of such frameworks is confirmed but not which ones exist (exp. 4, 8 and 9, cat. 3), or individual frameworks such as ISO27001, SfO (Written fixed Order) as the umbrella term for instruction management in the financial sector and, according to AT 5 MaRisk (Minimum Requirements for Risk Management), contains important provisions for an organization, its internal control system and its IT systems, PCI-DSS compliance, outsourcing management, and the internal specialist service standards are mentioned by the governance department (exp. 1, 5, 6 and 7, cat. 3) for treating the data strategy. It is also noted that some standards need to be updated or recorded to control the data flows. The frameworks are continuously adapted annually and in the event of changes to the provider or technical developments.

The handling of data ownership is primarily ensured by the fact that the customer retains data sovereignty, meaning that he has control over the data relating to himself or to which he is entitled (Gray et al. 2024, 7-8). This is regulated in the customer master agreement or if the customer's declaration of consent is required. Full data traceability should be consistently maintained. The players in the ecosystem are permitted to create a shared data pool from metadata and to compare it to evaluate their own needs so that the individual's data pool remains unaffected and there is no mixing of data, only a query of other data pools. On the other hand, a non-competition clause or a limitation of follow-up business can be agreed upon in contracts. Most experts mention the cooperative approach, which involves establishing a uniform, central arbitration body with a neutral stance and expertise to settle potential disputes. Other collaborative approaches to resolving potential conflicts, for example, in the case of uncoordinated or inappropriate use of data or data breaches, include common behaviors such as openness and transparency towards customers and ensuring equal benefits for each partner so that one or more partners are not unduly advantaged.

Table 5. Summary table for RQ3 Part 2

	Compliance with legal regulations		Governance frameworks		Dealing with data ownership	
	Compliance with regulatory requirements	Challenges and strategies	Existence of governance frameworks and guidelines	Ongoing adaptation of the frameworks	Question of data ownership and rights in the ecosystem	Cooperative approaches to resolving potential disputes
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD) Only allow verified, certified partners (e.g. ISO certification)	Raising employee awareness; maintaining compliance, shortage of skilled workers	Guideline: ISO 27001	Ongoing adjustments in the event of changes to the provider; in the event of technical (further) development	Customer master agreement and customer consent	Uniform, central arbitration body
	Expert 2 (LPIM) consistently implement applicable laws such as ISO, MARisk, market catalogs; new customer processes and materiality checks	Maintaining business operations due to excessive regulatory requirements, insufficient capacity for implementation; regulatory requirements continue to increase	No data transfer, only to fulfill legal requirements		No data transfer, only to fulfil legal requirements e.g. PSD2	

		Compliance with legal regulations		Governance frameworks		Dealing with data ownership	
IT Providers	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO)	ISO, BSI guidelines, IT security from BaFin, BAIT Risk, Dora, EU GDPR, sfixO according to KWG, audits	Sensitizing employees; maintaining business operations due to high compliance requirements, hiring of external employees necessary for compliance; know-how and experts needed, as implementation is difficult; regulatory requirements continue to increase	none available or partially outdated	Experts needed, shortage of skilled workers	Full data traceability, conviction through scientific evaluation approach; customer goodwill	Arbitration board/ombudsman with a neutral stance and expertise; each partner should have a data protection officer
	Expert 4 (SMDB)	Voluntary certifications by third parties, audited by ISO standard	Use state of the art encryption technologies; external, independent certification of the partner	available, but not which		Non-compete clause or limitation of follow-up business in contracts	Common behaviors such as openness and transparency towards customers
	Expert 5 (TLSD)	ISO 27001	Training for employees; which peripheral systems are affected? Dependencies; monitoring obligations for document-based processing; capacities required for implementation	ISO 27001		Full data traceability for the customer	
	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	Voluntary certifications; BaFin regulations	regulatory requirements too general and generic, not reflecting reality; overarching contract that accurately captures data flows desirable for all parties; heterogeneous standards for different data flows, which is burdensome and opaque	ISO and PCI as essential; bilateral standards such as AVV and TOM, accompanying audits such as pentests and technical audits that check implementation; otherwise no standard that only checks the actual data flows; streamlining of contracts and processes to be checked	centralised standard in Europe, not only raw data as in PSD2	Restrictive, no disclosure of data - only if required by law according to PSD2	
	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)	Applicable law such as GDPR	Communicate legislative changes at an early stage and implement them in teams; who is responsible?	Specialist service standards in the governance department	Ongoing adjustments	Payment services agreement in multibanking	
Regulators	Expert 8 (DDPO)	Implement applicable law GDPR	Onward transfer/outsourcing management; monitoring that each participant and their service providers/partners also implement all regulatory requirements; monitoring obligations of partners for their service providers in the ecosystem; very extensive regulatory requirements, difficult to implement	Guidelines: sfixO, data protection management Frameworks: many available, but not which ones	Annual review cycle		Liability clauses in contracts
	Expert 9 (SC)	Implement applicable law, need-to-know principle	Mutual submission of regular reports/evaluations; central point for maintaining regulatory requirements; what do I do with other data?	Framework: Outsourcing management Guideline: ISO 27001 Further frameworks available, but not which ones		Data autonomy for the customer, simple and fast deletion of data and data traceability; creation of a common data pool from metadata and comparison for own needs, data pool of the individual remains untouched, no mixing of data - only query of other data pools; customer behavioral data on a platform (expert system with AI)	Common behavior towards customers, personal acquaintance of the participants/partners; equal benefit for each partner - no overreaching; uniform, central arbitration office/ombudsman

Role-based expert analysis using cross-tabulation analysis

In the following chapter, the experts are assigned to the three groups, "Banks," "IT Providers," and "Regulators," and their statements are compared cross-functionally with the statements of the other groups. The frequencies of the sub-codes of each group are examined so that the relevance of the informative value of the answers is assessed using matches and deviations.

RQ1: How do banks strategically utilize data within platform ecosystems to enhance customer experience and create value for different stakeholders?

Table 6 shows the role-based expert analysis for RQ1. At first glance, the answers are very heterogeneously distributed, and it takes work to recognize patterns in the analysis. It is noticeable that there needs to be more evidence of concrete examples for improving the customer experience. Furthermore, the experts from the bank's group provided little evidence in the "value creation for stakeholders" category, with 13 quotes compared to the other two groups. This shows the somewhat restrictive attitude of the banks, which is that the focus is not on generating value for different interest groups. Therefore, there are also few data-sharing agreements and cooperation initiatives. For example, expert six from the "IT Providers" group provided nine quotes on the sub-code "Personalise customer data." In contrast, Expert 1 (group "Banks") and Expert 8 (group "Regulators") were unable to add anything to this topic. It can also be noted that the entire "IT Providers" group was able to contribute more content with 18 quotes than the "Banks" group with nine quotes and the "Regulators" group with seven quotes.

Table 6. Role-based expert analysis for RQ1

Expert	Categories Sub Codes	Data strategy in platform ecosystems				Improving the customer experience			Value creation for stakeholders		
		Classification	Approach why collection, analysis and use of data	Type of data collected and data sources	Improve customer experiences and generate added value	Concrete examples	Personalize customer data	Effects of data usage on customer loyalty/satisfaction	What value measures/metrics?	Creating added value for other interest groups	Data sharing agreements and cooperation initiatives
	Expert										
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD)	1	9	9	2	1	0	1	2	0	2
	Expert 2 (LPIM)	4	4	6	2	2	3	2	1	0	2
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO)	3	3	5	3	1	6	2	3	2	1
IT Providers	Expert 4 (SMDB)	2	10	10	3	1	7	1	3	5	0
	Expert 5 (TLSD)	4	0	1	5	1	2	1	6	3	0
	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	3	7	2	2	0	9	4	0	2	7
Regulators	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)	6	5	3	1	2	1	3	2	3	3
	Expert 8 (DDPO)	3	3	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	0
	Expert 9 (SC)	3	9	4	2	1	6	1	5	2	3
Total		29	50	41	23	10	34	16	22	18	18

Compared to the other two groups, the IT Providers consistently provided the most quotes in their answers. This indicates a high level of expertise and relevance to the ecosystem environment. On the other hand, this role group's nature and professional practice also imply a presumed obligation to market this subject area positively.

RQ2: What are the potential risks associated with the data strategy of banks operating in a platform ecosystem environment, and how can these risks be effectively managed and mitigated?

Table 7 shows the role-based expert analysis for RQ2. It is striking that many possible risks are mentioned with a data strategy in the ecosystem. Half of the risks are mentioned by the IT provider group, which, as the connecting arm, can provide the most comprehensive view of the different perspectives of the participants. In addition, the slightest evidence was provided on how the risks can affect trust in the ecosystem. The Regulators group contributed the most minor evidence overall, which is surprising as this is about risk identification and mitigation. Banks and regulators provided the most minor content in the category of joint risk mitigation. However, the statements in this category were supported with the fewest citations compared to the other two groups.

Table 7. Role-based expert analysis for RQ2

	Categories Sub Codes Expert	Impact assessment		Risk mitigation strategies		Joint risk reduction	
		Possible consequences for all participants	Impact on trust in the ecosystem	How banks proactively address and mitigate risks	Risk management frameworks, cyber security measures and data protection guidelines	Working together to jointly manage data-related risks	Role of data sharing agreements/governance frameworks for risk mitigation
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD)	5	1	2	11	6	1
	Expert 2 (LPIM)	4	2	9	0	1	1
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO)	6	0	5	1	2	0
IT Providers	Expert 4 (SMDB)	8	0	3	2	2	4
	Expert 5 (TLSD)	8	3	5	1	0	3
	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	9	4	8	6	8	3
Regulators	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)	2	2	1	2	1	1
	Expert 8 (DDPO)	5	0	5	3	2	1
	Expert 9 (SC)	4	1	2	6	2	4
Total		51	13	40	32	24	18

RQ3: How can banks collaborate with other ecosystem players to establish data governance frameworks and standards that ensure data security, interoperability, and trust within platform ecosystems?

Table 8 shows the role-based expert analysis for RQ3. The fewest statements with evidence are cited for "Governance frameworks" and "Dealing with data ownership," which means that the existence of such governance frameworks and guidelines is not or only partially available, which the experts were not always able to define. Many experts, especially IT providers, need help answering how data ownership is dealt with in the ecosystem or only have a few approaches. Much evidence was found in the "Compliance with legal regulations" category, with particular reference being made here to challenges and the fact that the regulatory requirements are already immense and that, as a participant in the ecosystem, regulation increases even further, which banks generally find difficult to implement due to a lack of expertise, capacity, and speed. External experts are often required here. The group of regulators provided the slightest evidence in the "Interoperability and

data standards" category, and the group of banks in the "Data security and data protection" category.

Table 8. Role-based expert analysis for RQ3

Expert	Categories Sub Codes	Collaboration with players in the ecosystem		Data security and data protection		Interoperability and data standards		Building trust in the sharing of data		Compliance with legal regulations		Governance frameworks		Dealing with data ownership	
		Collaboration to create data governance frameworks	Challenges and successful examples of cooperation	Measures	Protocols for data sharing	Data standards to ensure seamless interoperability	Importance of data formats, APIs and protocols	How banks build trust in data sharing	Transparency initiatives and mechanisms for fair data practices	Compliance with regulatory requirements	Challenges and strategies	Existence of governance frameworks and guidelines	Ongoing adaptation of the frameworks	Question of data ownership and rights in the ecosystem	Cooperative approaches to resolving potential disputes
Banks	Expert 1 (SOD)	4	5	3	2	1	3	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
	Expert 2 (LPIM)	0	4	0	0	1	0	4	0	1	7	2	0	1	0
	Expert 3 (SPM + EBO)	7	4	2	3	0	7	3	3	5	10	1	3	2	4
IT Providers	Expert 4 (SMDB)	5	0	0	4	2	4	6	1	2	1	1	0	1	2
	Expert 5 (TLSD)	1	1	0	4	7	5	8	0	1	9	1	0	1	0
	Expert 6 (F + CEO)	6	3	4	3	3	10	0	6	3	5	5	1	1	0
Regulators	Expert 7 (SPM + CL)	0	2	1	2	2	1	4	0	1	2	1	1	1	0
	Expert 8 (DDPO)	1	3	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	5	4	1	0	2
	Expert 9 (SC)	4	2	2	4	0	2	3	3	3	5	4	0	6	4
Total		28	24	14	23	17	32	32	14	19	46	20	8	15	14

Conclusions

According to the first research question, most experts say banks are willing to cooperate as participants in the ecosystem. However, implementing a partner ecosystem is challenging and complex; experts are urgently needed. With the addition of partners, banks can now cover further customer needs and create added value. By making customer profiles based on customer interests, categorizing purchases and transactions using AI, and evaluating the data prospectively through individual and targeted personalization of services, banks can create added value outside of their traditional banking business (e.g., through loyalty programs). On the other hand, banks are also being driven to act and think in ecosystems by the changing platform ecosystem world as a new competitive situation by new competitors such as (fin-)tech companies. In addition, banks need significantly more technical and financial resources for implementation, and manual and rule-based processes still predominate. Data protection is again seen as an implementation and risk factor.

For treating the second research question, bank experts identified several risks when exchanging data in the ecosystem, such as incorrect conclusions being drawn from data, an increased reputational risk with third-party companies, and, if applicable, the risk of sanctions in the event of data protection violations in the ecosystem, unauthorized data use beyond the intended purpose and, finally, the loss of customer trust and termination by the customer. To mitigate these risks, when initiating a potential partnership, the choice should be made in favor of partners with banking experience and high performance, a joint, modern, or up-to-date software that technically implements current law, a precise definition, and procedure for the use of data as well as the roles of each partner in the ecosystem and the early and regular involvement of internal audit and advisory bodies as well as the implementation of monitoring and control systems.

For banks to collaborate with other participants in the ecosystem, this requires jointly developed data governance frameworks (third research question). The definition of a shared, centrally used system, which can ensure more consistent data storage and management and IT security, a uniform and shared understanding of quality and interpretation of data, and shared control instances are essential. Challenges include possible dependencies on the IT provider or orchestrator, uncontrolled data outflow or loss of data control, finding consensus on the use of standard interfaces, as banks often still use heterogeneous interfaces, unequal mindset or lack of know-how, slow implementation by banks and agreement on who gets access rights. To build trust in the ecosystem, banks should, above all, communicate openly, honestly, and clearly with customers regarding the use and purpose of data. Data sovereignty must remain the responsibility of the customer.

The experts reflect a heterogeneous picture regarding governance frameworks and guidelines for data sharing. Either no frameworks exist, some exist but cannot be mentioned, or few exist. Furthermore, a central, neutral arbitration body is desired to intervene and resolve a dispute. There is still room for improvement here for both banks and other participants in the ecosystem. Measures for action can include the establishment of an expert committee before entering into a multilateral business relationship where each participant involves experts. These can define the overarching shared goal and which customer needs and services will be served before the contract is concluded (holistic approach). Once the big picture has been derived and the business strategy has been jointly defined, IT due diligence with IT alignment can translate the business strategy to the data strategy of an individual participant and as a participant in a joint ecosystem construct for feasibility. For the translation of the business strategy into the data strategy to succeed, the joint development of a data governance framework for the shared use of data in the ecosystem must be ensured at this point at the latest. Here, the use of data and its definition and interpretation of use, data exchange relationships and the centrally used IT architecture required for this, and the distribution of roles, etc., can be worked out at a detailed level to be able to deliver added value to customers as an ecosystem network.

A central, neutral arbitration body should be installed once a functioning data exchange has been established in the ecosystem. To maintain neutrality, avoid potential conflicts of interest, and avoid taking sides, this body must be someone who is not a participant in the ecosystem.

Based on recommendations and use cases from experts, the outlook for possible future developments in data utilization strategies within platform ecosystems is that the experts see the centralized or holistic use of customer data with the help of intelligent data and a significant expansion in the use of AI use cases as critical success factors. It is worth looking at overseas trends in the USA and Asia. At the same time, the experts point out that there are still too many doubters in the banking environment who are afraid of data usage and complexity. In addition, the level of regulation in Europe and Germany remains high and is often a blocker to the progress

of further projects and innovations. Possible improvements in data governance include synergy effects and better cooperation between partners to increase efficiency. Finally, framework agreements should be more transparent and tangible for employees and customers.

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Harmonizing Public Financial Governance in Morocco: Crafting Innovative Revenue Strategies for Sustainable Prosperity

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to pinpoint municipalities requiring assistance in bolstering their own-source revenues and financial governance. The analysis underscores the crucial role of diversifying revenue sources, transparent and efficient management, and the implementation of revenue generation strategies in supporting municipal financial performance. Identification of municipalities with high own-source revenue ratios reveals successful practices and effective strategies, offering inspiring examples for those aiming to enhance financial governance. Additionally, classifying municipalities based on revenue and expenditure tiers exposes significant differences, enabling the identification of opportunities for improvement in expenditure management and revenue generation. This study provides valuable insights for local policymakers to elevate the financial performance of municipalities.

KEYWORDS: municipalities, own-source revenues, financial governance, revenue generation strategies, expenditure management, financial performance

Introduction

The Kingdom of Morocco is a constitutional, democratic, and parliamentary monarchy. The new constitution was enacted on 29 July 2011 following what is now known as the Arab Spring. Article 1(3) of the Constitution states that "The regions of the kingdom are administered in a decentralized manner. This system is based on advanced regionalization." Prior to the Arab Spring, an ad hoc consultative commission was established to broaden regionalization and produced the "Report on Advanced Regionalization" which guided the new overarching reforms set out in the constitution.

The king is head of state and plays a key role in Moroccan politics, although the role was reduced by the new 2011 Constitution. The King chairs the Council of Ministers, the Higher Council of the Judicial Branch, and the Higher Council of

Ulema. The 2011 Constitution strengthened the role of the prime minister, who is the head of government. Executive power is still shared between the government and the king. The king appoints the prime minister from the party that performs best in elections to the House of Representatives.

The Morocco Parliament includes two chambers: the House of Representatives (members elected by direct universal suffrage for a 5-year mandate) and the House of Councilors (members elected by indirect universal suffrage for a 6 year mandate). The two chambers have equal legislative power. The order in which texts are considered is the only area where the House of Representatives has more of a say.

Morocco has four sub-national divisions of local and regional authorities:

- 12 régions;
- 12 prefectures and 63 provinces;
- 1503 Communities or municipalities.

Besides the 2011 Constitution, various acts give set out the territorial organisation and division of powers. These three organic laws were adopted in June 2015:

- Loi organique n° 111-14 relative aux régions- organic law N° 111-14 regarding regions ;
- Loi organique n° 112-14 relative aux préfectures et provinces - organic law N° 112-14 concerning prefectures and provinces ;
- Loi organique n° 113-14 relative aux communes - organic law N° 113-14 on the communities or municipalities.

These three organic laws distinguish between three categories of awards: own responsibilities, shared responsibilities and powers transferred, which will be exercised based on the principles of subsidiarity and substitution. As well as the various levels of decentralisation mentioned above, Morocco also has several levels of deconcentration of central government: the 17 wilayas, which correspond to the different regions, with the exception of the Tangier-Tétouan region, which comprises two wilayas (Tangier-Tétouan region and Tétouan); the 75 prefectures and provinces; the pachaliks (urban administrative areas) and the caïdats (rural administrative areas). The governor of the prefecture or province – i.e., the representative of central government at prefecture and province level – implements the decisions of the prefectural/provincial councils. The 2011 Constitution, meanwhile, stipulates that this role will be fulfilled by the presidents of these councils, not by the governors. Thus the 2011 Constitution reduces the role of central government (the wali or governor) in the regions as well as in the prefectures and provinces.

The aim of this article is to explore the interplay between financial governance and the performance of local authorities, serving as the cornerstone of our research. Subsequently, we will endeavor to address the following question: **What is the influence of financial governance on the performance of local authorities?**

This issue subsequently leads to other secondary and more detailed questions:

- What challenges do local authorities face in implementing good governance principles?
- What is the performance of municipalities in terms of financial governance?

The adopted methodology is grounded in an iterative approach that combines theoretical elements, including documentation and data gathering, with practical aspects, such as case studies and interviews involving diverse stakeholders and collaborators, including division chiefs and service managers.

The foundational documentation will be comprised of official texts, specifically the three accounting decrees, the budget preparation circular, gender dysphoria, and GIR reporting. Data collected through interviews, meticulously recorded and transcribed, will be systematically cross-referenced with documentary syntheses to yield a comprehensive overview. The dissertation will conclude with a comprehensive summary, delineating the outcomes of our research, along with in-depth theoretical and practical reflections.

Research Objective

The fundamental objective of the analysis concerning Financial Governance (GF) and the performance of Local Authorities (CTs) is to comprehend how CTs manage their financial resources and how this management impacts their performance. Specific objectives may encompass:

- Identifying municipalities requiring support for enhancing their Financial Resource Management;
- Assessing financial governance: Analyzing the financial governance of municipalities allows for deciphering how they manage their finances and whether they do so transparently and responsibly;
- Identifying the challenges that municipalities face in managing their financial resources and improving their performance;
- Analyzing disparities among municipalities;
- Proposing recommendations: By pinpointing shortcomings in GF and performance, the analysis can assist in suggesting solutions, including modifications to budgetary procedures and the implementation of capacity-building programs for local officials.

Data Compilation for Revenues and Expenditures

1. Data Compilation:

Our methodology is grounded in the compilation of budgetary data, involving:

- Gathering data concerning the revenues of Local Authorities (CTs), extracted from the GIR platform.

- Collecting data regarding expenditures, extracted from the GID-reporting platform.

2. Sampling Variables:

Before elucidating the chosen sampling methods and determining the sample, it is paramount to underscore two fundamental concepts: population and sample.

- A population is defined as a finite set of objects (individuals or statistical units), all sharing one or more common characteristics.
- The sample constitutes a subset of the population, selected scientifically to accurately represent the population.

In our study, we employed the 20/80 method, or Pareto's principle, for the selection of own revenues. Conversely, the selection of mandatory operational expenses adheres to the provisions of the organic law governing municipalities.

3. Own Revenues:

The method employed to select the own revenues involves identifying those that constitute 80% of the total. To achieve this, several steps were undertaken:

- Sorting own revenues in descending order;
- Calculating cumulative revenues (CCR): The CCR for a municipality is the sum of its revenues along with the previous CCR.
- Calculating the cumulative percentage. This involves the cumulative frequency of each tax divided by the total number of own revenues across the entire population.

Own revenue	Calculation of Cumulative Increasing Revenues	Cumulative percent
Own revenue 1	Own revenue 1	Own revenue 1/Total Own Revenue
Own revenue 2	Own revenue 2 + Own revenue 3	(Own revenue 1+ Own revenue 2)/Total Own Revenue
...
Own revenue 1503	Total Own revenue	Total Own revenue/ Total own revenue

We have been able to identify eight types of own revenues that represent more than 80% of the total. These include:

- Temporary occupation fee of the municipal public domain by movable and immovable property related to the exercise of trade, industry, or profession;
- Temporary occupation fee of the municipal public domain for commercial, industrial, or professional use;
- Property tax ;
- Professional tax ;
- Tax on land development operations;
- Municipal service tax ;
- Tax on unbuilt urban land;
- Fees on the revenues of agents in the wholesale fruit and vegetable market.

Compulsory Expenditures:

Municipal expenditures are diverse and are delineated by the competencies vested in them by decentralization laws.

The operational segment comprises all outlays essential for the municipality's day-to-day functionality, representing recurring annual expenses. These encompass the following categories: personnel costs, maintenance and procurement expenses, various operational costs aligned with the municipality's competencies, and debt service charges. Among these expenditures, only those stipulated in Article 181 of Organic Law No. 113-14 pertaining to municipalities are deemed obligatory. These notably encompass:

- Personnel expenditures ;
- Public lighting levies, potable water provision;
- Municipal waste management ;
- Other levies ;
- Road maintenance ;
- Additional upkeep ;
- Public transportation administration.

4. Ratio Selection:

In our financial analysis methodology for municipalities, we adopt an approach centered on the statistical treatment of specific ratios related to their budgets. For our study, we have chosen to highlight three fundamental ratios that form part of the obligatory metrics in this analysis:

- Own Revenues per Capita ;
- Mandatory Expenditures per Capita ;
- Own Revenues / Mandatory Expenditures.

It should be noted that data input, recording, and processing operations are conducted using Microsoft EXCEL.

Assessment of Subsidy Budgeting Policy for Municipalities

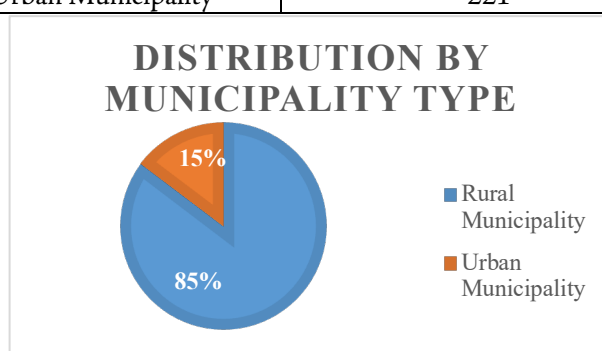
Evaluating the financial situation of municipalities through the analysis of per capita ratios of own revenues and mandatory expenditures enables informed decision-making to ensure the long-term viability of these municipalities while guaranteeing the provision of efficient public services to their residents. With the help of this tool, it becomes possible to gain a better understanding of municipal financial management, optimizing available resources and addressing the population's needs in a sustainable manner.

Distribution of Municipalities:

Municipalities are distributed based on their urban or rural nature: Urban municipalities are primarily located in densely populated areas characterized by

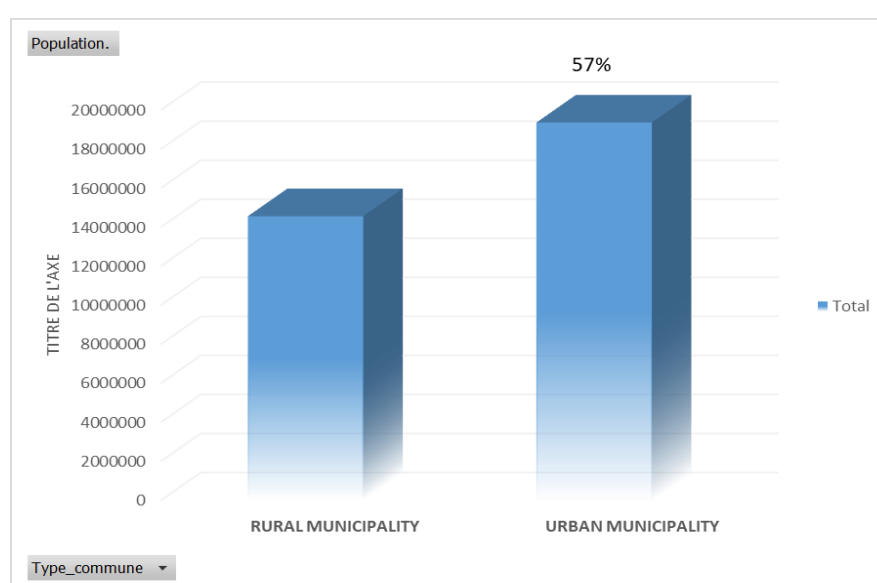
urban development, modern infrastructure, and advanced municipal services. These include major cities, urban centers, and peri-urban areas. Rural municipalities are found in sparsely populated areas, focused on agriculture, livestock, and craftsmanship. They comprise villages, small settlements, and remote areas distant from urban centers. These rural municipalities are spread across the country, especially in rural and agricultural regions.

Type of municipality	Quantity of Municipality Types
Rural Municipality	1282
Urban Municipality	221



According to the presented graph, rural municipalities significantly dominate in terms of quantity, accounting for over 85% of the total municipalities, totaling 1,282 rural municipalities out of 1,503. In contrast, urban municipalities constitute only 15% of the total, with only 221 urban municipalities out of 1,503. However, this should not diminish the role of urban municipalities, which act as major economic, administrative, and cultural centers throughout the country.

Population:



The distribution of this population by residential area highlights the predominance of the urban population, reaching 57%, despite the considerable

number of rural municipalities. This equates to 19,347,462 residents in urban areas compared to 14,546,553 inhabitants in rural areas.

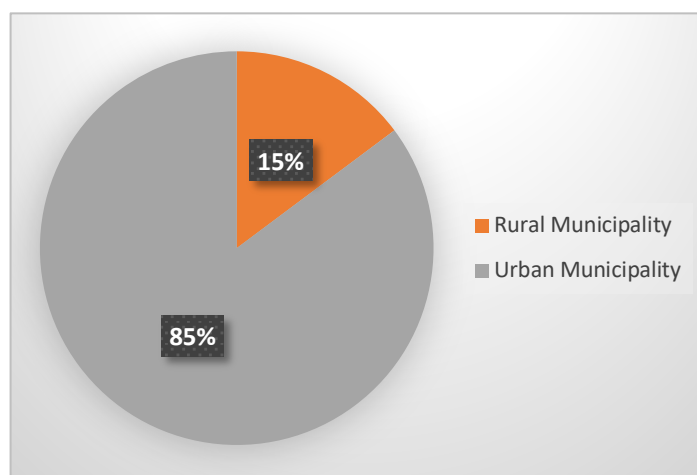
Two key factors characterize the high urbanization rate in Morocco:

Rural Exodus: The rural population's exodus and the development of a society focused on industry and services have made urban centers a major source of wage employment. In Morocco, the rural population's exodus is a direct consequence of drought affecting most rural areas, which has become a structural phenomenon due to successive years of drought, despite considerable efforts by the state to stabilize the population.

Very High Birth Rate in Urban Areas: The extremely high birth rate in urban areas (an average of 7.8 children per family).

In stages, the rural population ranges from 0 to 80K inhabitants, whereas the urban population can reach up to 3,400K inhabitants. This may be attributed to the expansion of major urban areas with the extension of their perimeters and the proliferation of their suburbs, as well as the emergence of new medium-sized cities, making urban municipalities places capable of accommodating a larger population.

Categorized Recipe by the Number of Municipalities per Type:



Total Own Revenues	2021	2022	Total
Rural Municipality	2 113 705 755,85	2 687 821 944,91	4 801 527 700,76
Urban Municipality	12 178 254 357,73	12 511 699 394,20	24 689 953 751,93
Total	14 291 960 113,58	15 199 521 339,11	29 491 481 452,69

Urban municipalities account for most total own-source revenues, comprising 84%, which equates to approximately 12.345 billion MAD. In contrast, rural revenues constitute a mere 16% of the aggregate, averaging around 2.401 billion MAD. Several pivotal factors underpin this conspicuous disparity between the two categories of municipalities:

Economic Prosperity: Urban locales typically boast a higher degree of economic development. This translates into augmented local revenue streams such as commercial taxes, corporate income taxes, and registration levies.

Population Density: Urban areas exhibit greater population density, resulting in a larger resident base contributing to municipal finances, notably through property taxes. Urban municipalities, therefore, enjoy an expanded taxpayer foundation, thereby enhancing their fiscal income.

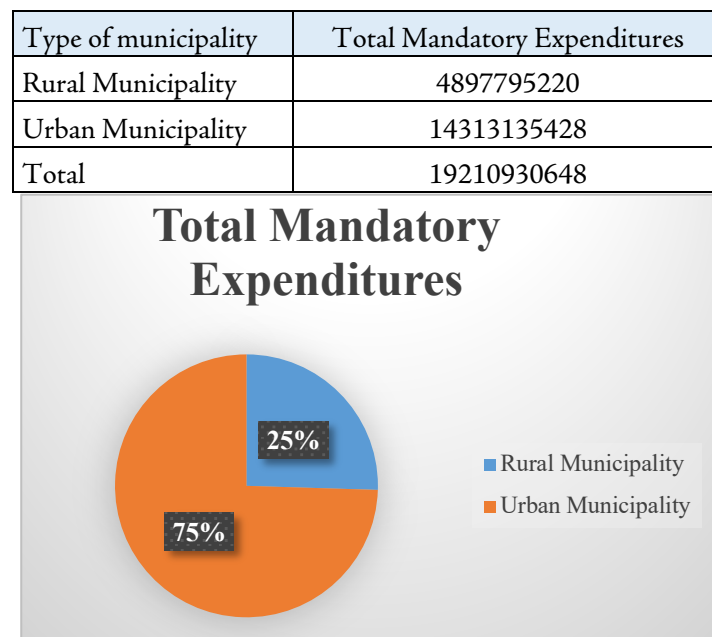
Infrastructure and Services: Urban areas are also characterized by more extensive infrastructure and service provisions. Urban municipalities must invest in critical domains such as water supply, sanitation, electricity, and transportation. These investments necessitate significant funding, frequently sourced from urban municipalities' own revenue streams.

Tourism: Urban localities draw a substantial influx of tourists, further bolstering revenue accrual. Cities like Casablanca, Marrakech, and Tangier are renowned tourist destinations, benefiting from revenue generated by accommodations, dining establishments, tourist attractions, and visitor taxes.

In sum, the amalgamation of economic vitality, population concentration, infrastructure development, and tourism in urban areas confers a substantial edge in own-source revenues compared to their rural counterparts.

Expenditures by Municipality Type:

The table depicts the aggregate Own-Source Revenues (OSRs) of rural and urban municipalities, offering insight into the expenditures for each category.



Urban municipalities exhibit a noteworthy distinction in terms of OSRs, comprising 75% of the total, amounting to \$4,897,795,220. In contrast, rural municipalities, constituting 25% of the sample, have recorded a cumulative total of 14,313,135,428.

Note: The results gleaned from the graph underscore that our study will be specifically centered on urban municipalities.

Analysis of Own-Source Revenue Ratios for 2021-2022

By analyzing per capita net revenue ratios, we can identify the major sources of fiscal income for each municipality. This allows us to gain a better understanding of the distribution of fiscal resources among different taxes and to highlight the economic impact of each tax category on the residents.

We have numbered each ratio for ease of reference.

Self-generated Revenues	
Temporary Occupation Fee for the Municipal Public Domain by Movable and Immovable Property related to the Exercise of Trade, Industry, or a Profession.	Ratio 1
Temporary Occupation Fee for the Municipal Public Domain for Commercial, Industrial, or Professional Use	Ratio 2
Property Tax	Ratio 3
Professional Tax	Ratio 4
Tax on Subdivision Operations	Ratio 5
Municipal Services Tax	Ratio 6
Tax on Unimproved Urban Land	Ratio 7
Fees on the Revenues of Wholesale Market Agents for Fruits and Vegetables	Ratio 8
Total Self-generated Revenues	Ratio 9

To thoroughly grasp the various intricacies and challenges of our issue, it appeared necessary to conduct a quantitative study that will serve as a framework for examining our problem, which is the impact of financial governance on the performance of municipalities within the CTs. This approach will enable us to gather insights and perspectives from key stakeholders in this field. To accomplish this, we have opted to conduct telephone interviews with these stakeholders to aid us in analyzing the obtained results.

Several illustrative examples are provided as follows.

Ratio 1: Temporary occupancy fees within the municipal public domain for movable and immovable assets associated with the operation of commerce, industry, or professional activities:

- The municipality of My Yacoub exhibits the highest ratio relative to other municipalities for the years 2021 and 2022.
- This situation can be attributed to a combination of factors:
- The municipality may have implemented an increase in fee tariffs, thereby contributing to a heightened ratio.
- A surge in commercial activities within the municipality could also account for this trend.

Ratio 3: Property Tax:

The municipality of Saïdia distinguishes itself by maintaining the highest property tax ratio in 2021 and 2022 among its peer municipalities.

Several factors may account for this situation:

- The property tax rates imposed by the municipality of Saïdia exceed those of its counterparts.
- The composition of Saïdia's real estate portfolio, characterized by a substantial number of high-value properties, has contributed to elevated property tax amounts.

Ratio 6: Municipal Service Tax:

- The municipality of Gueznaia has experienced an elevation in the ratio of the municipal service tax for the years 2021 and 2022.
- Multiple factors can account for the higher ratio of this tax within the municipality of Gueznaia: Gueznaia serves as an industrial zone.

Max	Ratio 1	Ratio 2	Ratio 3	Ratio 4	Ratio 5	Ratio 6	Ratio 7	Ratio 8	Ratio 9
Urban Commune 2022	201,85	266,49	368,55	1 135,90	784,87	2 099,98	1 154,33	101,54	12 660,65
Urban Commune 2021	86,11	527,76	464,59	1 097,53	843,54	2 170,01	1 427,21	88,79	11 033,04
Min	Ratio 1	Ratio 2	Ratio 3	Ratio 4	Ratio 5	Ratio 6	Ratio 7	Ratio 8	Ratio 9
Urban Commune 2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	26,87
Urban Commune 2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33,71

- The municipality maintains a comparatively modest population size.

Average	Ratio 1	Ratio 2	Ratio 3	Ratio 4	Ratio 5	Ratio 6	Ratio 7	Ratio 8	Ratio 9
Tier0 0-15K_2022	7,0361074	19,88564	9,8490426	35,45493	11,537422	75,0159325	75,6993399	0	747,7385207
Tier0 0-15K_2021	6,0450731	12,90577	11,194165	43,525834	16,1078681	82,3632816	51,003483	0	623,9170299
Tier1 15K-50K_2022	8,3100083	17,06754	13,195013	74,155087	21,0341168	130,974397	116,837821	0,06291682	606,8533426
Tier1 15K-50K_2021	6,7399439	16,92742	14,446802	79,808754	15,092618	137,073941	139,92996	0,0838891	592,5370137
Tier2 50K-80K_2022	7,4884156	17,0939	19,235316	68,497502	9,29854951	126,301374	99,0330795	1,68813075	496,5642533
Tier2 50K-80K_2021	7,4620428	11,296	19,667175	78,022124	7,95727347	132,232244	109,021647	1,39297774	513,4627323
Tier3 80K-250K_2022	7,609208	20,28041	8,461511	71,577362	8,9684161	127,00563	69,5014802	6,57552893	469,3742099
Tier3 80K-250K_2021	7,0134837	13,2367	8,3350086	75,935929	11,8575921	129,432103	69,8682649	6,12934751	452,2642826
Tier4 250K-600K_2022	13,304217	29,57494	19,693707	143,54713	4,95162275	204,051939	64,4413128	25,3764231	637,0894961
Tier4 250K-600K_2021	10,024517	27,05991	20,859125	149,79782	5,92263069	219,028999	66,6030929	22,8006401	628,0367927
Tier5 600K-3400K_2022	10,823752	45,5531	19,321761	153,4659	7,89990151	186,245317	76,8266254	37,6074063	656,1638283
Tier5 600K-3400K_2021	8,3080056	34,85984	20,407806	156,39179	6,99645946	196,233027	79,9363027	33,0875697	631,8791017

Note: The referenced municipalities, characterized by their elevated respective ratios, have implemented substantial fiscal endeavors, and have effectively generated the requisite revenue via these proprietary income streams.

Analysis of 2021 recurring mandatory expenditure ratios:

As previously outlined in the methodology, we have enumerated a set of seven DOs, as defined by the organic law. The analysis of personnel expenditures per capita may exhibit significant variations. Payroll expenses can diverge from one municipality to another, even in cases where they share a similar population size. Consequently, it is more judicious to direct our attention towards the aggregate sum of the DOs.

Commune	Type of territorial authorities	Population	Tranche population	Total mandatory expenses
COMMUNE DE CASABLANCA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	3357173	Tier5 600K -3400K	2853481778
COMMUNE MARRAKECH	COMMUNE-URBAIN	911990	Tier5 600K -3400K	827312979,3
COMMUNE DE RABAT	COMMUNE-URBAIN	573895	Tier4 250K -600K	811476439,6
COMMUNE TANGER	COMMUNE-URBAIN	947952	Tier5 600K -3400K	511099707,5
COMMUNE DE FES	COMMUNE-URBAIN	1091512	Tier5 600K -3400K	492925595
COMMUNE DE SALE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	890403	Tier5 600K -3400K	489030121,3
COMMUNE MEKNES	COMMUNE-URBAIN	520428	Tier4 250K -600K	382723850,6
COMMUNE OUJDA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	494252	Tier4 250K -600K	347803744
COMMUNE AGADIR	COMMUNE-URBAIN	421844	Tier4 250K -600K	339972190,6
COMMUNE DE KENITRA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	431282	Tier4 250K -600K	327584614
COMMUNE TETOUAN	COMMUNE-URBAIN	380787	Tier4 250K -600K	304862194,5
COMMUNE LAAYOUNE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	280000	Tier4 250K -600K	284755802,2
COMMUNE SAFI	COMMUNE-URBAIN	308508	Tier4 250K -600K	203428662,5
COMMUNE TEMARA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	313510	Tier4 250K -600K	178946998,2

It is observed that major cities in Morocco exhibit higher DOs, a phenomenon that can be explained by several factors:

-As significant economic and administrative centers, these cities often face an increased demand for public services such as infrastructure, healthcare, and transportation. Consequently, the costs associated with providing these services to a dense and diverse population may be higher.

-They frequently serve as hubs for both public and private investments, leading to an upsurge in infrastructure and development projects. These investments aim to promote economic growth, facilitate employment, and enhance the quality of life for residents. However, they can also result in higher expenditures for the implementation and maintenance of these projects.

	Total mandatory expenses / population		Total mandatory expenses / population
Max		Min	
Urban commune	7 172,50	Urban commune	90,73
Average		Total mandatory expenses / population	
Tier0 0-15K			146,10
Tier1 15K -50K			48,91
Tier2 50K -80K			13,52
Tier3 80K -250K			17,00
Tier4 250K -600K			5,00
Tier5 600K -3400K			3,00

We observe that the ratio decreases between Tier 1 and Tier 2 because there are incomprehensible DOs with ratios decreasing as the population increases.

Impact Assessment of Enhanced Financial Governance

This part is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of municipalities, grouped by tiers, while examining the ranking of recurring DOs for 2021 and the RP (Revenue Potential) for the 2021-2022 period.

- Comparative Analysis of Municipalities by Population Segment:

This study examines urban municipalities, grouping them into five strata based on their population:

Tier 0: Population from 0 to 15,000 inhabitants

Tier 1: Population from 15,000 to 50,000 inhabitants

Tier 2: Population from 50,000 to 80,000 inhabitants

Tier 3: Population from 80,000 to 250,000 inhabitants

Tier 4: Population from 250,000 to 600,000 inhabitants

Tier 5: Population from 600,000 to 3,400,000 inhabitants

The ranks of DOs are determined based on these tiers, considering the total of DOs.

A similar methodology is applied for RPs.

- Classification of municipalities by population tiers (Tiers 0 to 3)

Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE SAIDIA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	20	2	2
COMMUNE TAFRAOUT	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	17	23	26
COMMUNE IFRANE	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	32	6	8
COMMUNE EL OUATIA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	33	3	3
COMMUNE ZMAMRA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	52	5	5
COMMUNE TOUARGA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	19	64	62
COMMUNE JAMAAT SHAIM	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	47	44	12
COMMUNE ROMMANI	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	61	38	47
COMMUNE OUAD AMLIL	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	49	9	22
COMMUNE TARGUIST	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	84	42	39
COMMUNE TISSA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	59	30	16
COMMUNE BNI DRAR	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier0 0-15K	57	43	46
Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE BOUZNKA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	5	6	7
COMMUNE MECOUAR-KASBA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	1	4	4
COMMUNE GUEZNAIA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	4	1	1
COMMUNE CHEFCHAOUEN	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	24	32	37
COMMUNE BEJAAD	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	40	42	52
COMMUNE AZEMMOUR	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	31	49	55
COMMUNE ZEGHANGHANE	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	17	68	65
COMMUNE HARHOURA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	2	5	5
COMMUNE KASBA TADLA	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	49	33	33
COMMUNE ASSILAH	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	16	27	24
COMMUNE SIDI YAHIA EL GHARB	COMMUNE-URBAINE	Tier1 15K-50K	37	74	76

Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE OUEZZANE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	1	16	17
COMMUNE MARTIL	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	2	3	2
COMMUNE TIZNIT	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	4	5	9
COMMUNE M'DIQ	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	3	4	3
COMMUNE FNIDEQ	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	9	14	13
COMMUNE SIDI BENNOUR	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	5	2	4
COMMUNE SIDI KACEM	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	12	13	11
COMMUNE ESSAOUIRA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	14	8	7
COMMUNE AL HOCEIMA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	7	9	5
COMMUNE SEFROU	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier2 50K -80K	17	18	18
Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE EL JADIDA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	5	3	3
COMMUNE BENI MELLAL	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	6	9	8
COMMUNE MOHAMMADIA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	12	2	2
COMMUNE NADOR	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	2	8	4
COMMUNE KHOURIBGA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	13	10	18
COMMUNE TAZA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	7	20	22
COMMUNE LARACHE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	3	11	17
COMMUNE BERKANE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	1	14	15
COMMUNE KSAR EL KEBIR	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	10	30	28
COMMUNE SETTAT	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier3 80K -250K	17	6	9

The rankings of municipalities in terms of DOs and RPs across these four tiers exhibit a substantial degree of heterogeneity. This observation underscores significant disparities among the various municipalities.

Indeed, certain municipalities claim the top position in terms of RPs yet find themselves in less favorable positions regarding expenditures. Conversely, there are municipalities capable of generating considerable RPs while managing restrained expenditure. In contrast, certain municipalities display modest RPs but engage in higher spending.

This multifaceted landscape of municipal performance introduces complexity into our analysis and may preclude us from arriving at definitive conclusions now.

- Classification of Municipalities by Population Strata (Tiers 4 and 5):

Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE DE RABAT	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	1	1	1
COMMUNE MEKNES	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	6	8	8
COMMUNE OUJDA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	7	6	7
COMMUNE AGADIR	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	3	2	2
COMMUNE DE KENITRA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	5	3	3
COMMUNE TETOUAN	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	4	5	4
COMMUNE LAAYOUNE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	2	9	9
COMMUNE SAFI	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	8	4	5
COMMUNE TEMARA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier4 250K -600K	9	7	6
Commune Urbain	Type of territorial authorities	population	Expenditure rank	Revenue rank 2021	Revenue rank 2022
COMMUNE DE CASABLANCA	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier5 600K -3400K	2	1	1
COMMUNE MARRAKECH	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier5 600K -3400K	1	2	2
COMMUNE TANGER	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier5 600K -3400K	4	3	3
COMMUNE DE FES	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier5 600K -3400K	5	4	4
COMMUNE DE SALE	COMMUNE-URBAIN	Tier5 600K -3400K	3	5	5

We can observe a correlation between RPs and DOs for municipalities:

For Tier 4: it is evident that the municipality of Agadir distinguishes itself as the top performer within its tier. It ranks second in terms of RPs and third in terms of expenditures. It is good that the municipality of Agadir is maintaining a positive financial balance with generated revenues exceeding incurred expenses, leading to a budget surplus. A budget surplus can have several positive implications for a municipality.

Similarly, for Tier 5: the municipality of Casablanca stands out as the top performer within its tier. It holds the first position in terms of RPs and the second position in terms of DOs. This situation confirms solid financial management and the potential for a budget surplus. These observations highlight the exceptional performances of Rabat and Casablanca, respectively in Tiers 4 and 5. These results reflect the ability of these municipalities to maintain a positive financial balance while maximizing revenues and effectively managing expenses.

Recommendations

Effective financial governance is essential to ensure the sustainability of municipalities and the delivery of quality public services. To optimize available resources and enhance financial performance, it is imperative to identify improvement opportunities and implement concrete measures.

- In general, all municipalities could benefit from streamlining their DOs and improving their RPs. It would be prudent to promote these initiatives by implementing suitable evaluation and support mechanisms to optimize municipalities' financial governance and promote their economic and social development;
- The implementation of urban planning schemes should be accelerated to enable municipalities to enhance their own-source revenues;
- Municipalities with limited own-source revenues but higher expenditures could be encouraged to improve their own-source revenues. In this regard, providing support from regulatory bodies could be suggested to identify solutions for increasing revenue;
- For municipalities generating substantial own-source revenues while having lower expenses, it would be opportune to incentivize them through performance grants.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to identify municipalities that require support to improve their own revenues. The paper began with a recapitulation of the main theoretical foundations of local authorities and the relationships between them, as well as the relationship between local government finance and the performance of local authorities. Our in-depth analysis allowed us to gain a better understanding of

how municipalities generate their own revenues. Diversifying sources of revenue, including local taxes, fees, various rights, and economic activities, is necessary to ensure strong financial governance and support the performance of municipalities. By identifying larger municipalities (tiers 4-5) with a higher ratio, we observe that they have succeeded in generating significant own revenues through effective resource management. These municipalities have optimized the collection of local taxes, implemented appropriate fee pricing policies, and developed profitable economic activities. Their ability to generate additional revenue contributes to their overall financial performance.

Identifying municipalities with a higher ratio has allowed us to highlight best practices and effective strategies for generating own revenues implemented by these municipalities. These success stories can serve as inspiration for other municipalities seeking to improve their financial governance and performance. The analysis also allowed us to determine which municipalities spend the most. To make the comparison between mandatory expenditures and own revenues homogeneous, we chose to classify them into strata (0-5). By classifying municipalities into strata, we grouped municipalities with similar expenditure levels. This allowed us to compare financial performance more fairly and highlight differences between groups of urban municipalities.

Through this tiered ranking, we were able to identify municipalities that may have opportunities for improvement in expenditure management and the generation of own revenues. Municipalities in the higher tiers (tiers 4-5) can benefit from a thorough evaluation of their financial management practices, with a focus on optimizing mandatory expenditures, seeking additional sources of revenue, and implementing strategies to strengthen their financial autonomy.

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From Iron Curtains to Digital Frontiers: Geopolitical Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe amidst the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the geopolitical perspectives regarding the spread of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) in Central and Eastern European countries in the years to come. This research paper aims to explore the geopolitical dimensions that are unfolding at the “periphery of Europe” in the context of new technological advancements which are prone to radically change the economic landscape of Europe. Central and Eastern European countries possess unique economic traits making the region worth researching, especially given the disruptive capacities of technological innovation and the eventual proliferation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In light of the war in nearby Ukraine, regional security, cooperation and economic development, represented by organizations such as the EU, NATO, or the Three Seas Initiative, are prone to influence the technological areas as well, with the proliferation of Industry 4.0 representing a central element in the debate alongside changes in terms of geopolitical thinking.

KEYWORDS: Fourth Industrial Revolution, geopolitics, geoeconomics, economics, Central and Eastern Europe, energy, security

Introduction

In the wave of fast technological advancements and unprecedented connectivity, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) has emerged as a disruptive force, reshaping global economic landscapes, and societal and political structures. As the world hurtles towards an era marked by the merging of digital, biological, and physical dimensions, the geopolitical implications of this paradigm shift are increasingly important to discuss. This article aims to unravel the intricate tapestry of the geopolitical environment in Central and Eastern Europe concerning the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Central and Eastern Europe, a region characterized by rich history, cultures, and geopolitical complexities, stands at the crossroads of Industry 4.0's

proliferation. The interchange between technological innovation and geopolitical dynamics has become a defining feature, influencing the economic trajectories, political alignments, and national security paradigms of countries within this region. This paper explores the nuanced ways in which Central and Eastern European (CEE) nations navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by IR 4.0, delving into the geopolitical implications that arise as these countries harness emerging technologies which come to alter contemporary geopolitical thinking altogether. This article aims to shed light on how nations in this region are strategically positioning themselves within the global technological landscape, and how these choices reverberate across geopolitical fault lines.

The intersection of global economic interdependence and regional security concerns further complicates the regional geopolitical dilemma. By surveying the intricate interplay between technology and geopolitics, this article provides insights into the evolving power dynamics in Post-Communism Europe, offering an extensive approach regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise at the intersection of IR 4.0 and geopolitical, geoeconomic and geotechnological considerations.

Methodology

A comprehensive literature review was used in order to conduct the research. Therefore, rigorously researching, selecting and systematizing the relevant works concerning the economics, geopolitics and geoeconomics of Central and Eastern European countries in regard to the proliferation of Industry 4.0 represents the backbone of this paper. The relevant literature was chosen favoring the more recent works, as the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution can be viewed as a novelty. However, attention was paid to major works in the area of geopolitical thought, no matter the publication year, to show the constant change regarding theories and schools of thought. Moreover, the paper focuses on the Central and Eastern European countries which are part of the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Three Seas Initiative, in order to maintain a cohesive approach in the research.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution represents an unprecedented wave of technological innovation that can influence all aspects of society. The concept, popularised by the German economist Klaus Schwab (2019), envisions an economic landscape that is automated and connected like anything humanity has ever witnessed. Industry 4.0 will radically change the way we perceive agriculture, industry, services and even unemployment, with an increasing level of automation being a key element in the discussion (Philbeck and Davis 2018).

Along with increasing connectivity and automation, another important element in the disruptive techno-economical transition is the fusion of different areas, such as that between the digital and biological worlds (Figure 1) (Schwab 2019). Furthermore, one of the main areas which will likely be disrupted by IR 4.0 is the manufacturing sector, as the new technologies will likely lead to the emergence of smart factories, autonomous facilities that will be able to auto-manage themselves, including self-maintenance, with the help of advanced robotics, sensors, Artificial Intelligence and more (Qin, Liu and Grosvenor 2016)

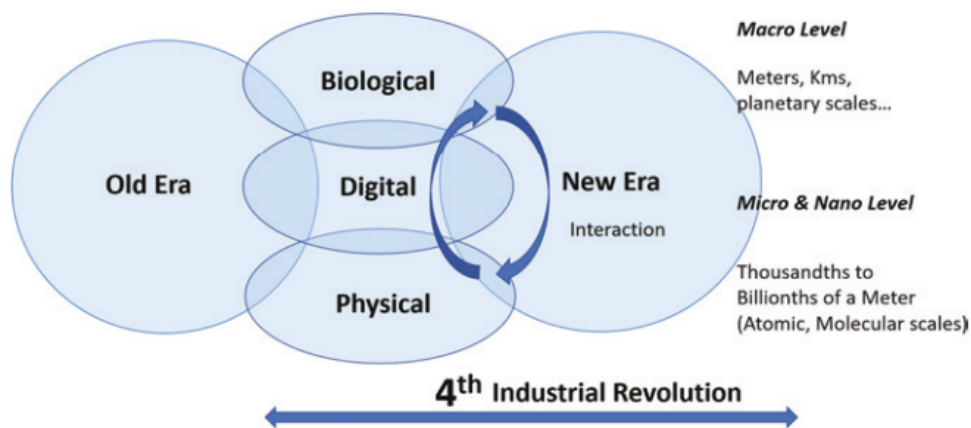


Figure 1. The technological fusion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Source: Skilton and Hovsepian (2017)

However, just like with any other Industrial Revolution, the context, the implications and, most importantly, the effects, are on a global scale, the disruptive character of IR 4.0 bringing into discussion unseen geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics, much different from the ones witnessed in the past (Figure 2).

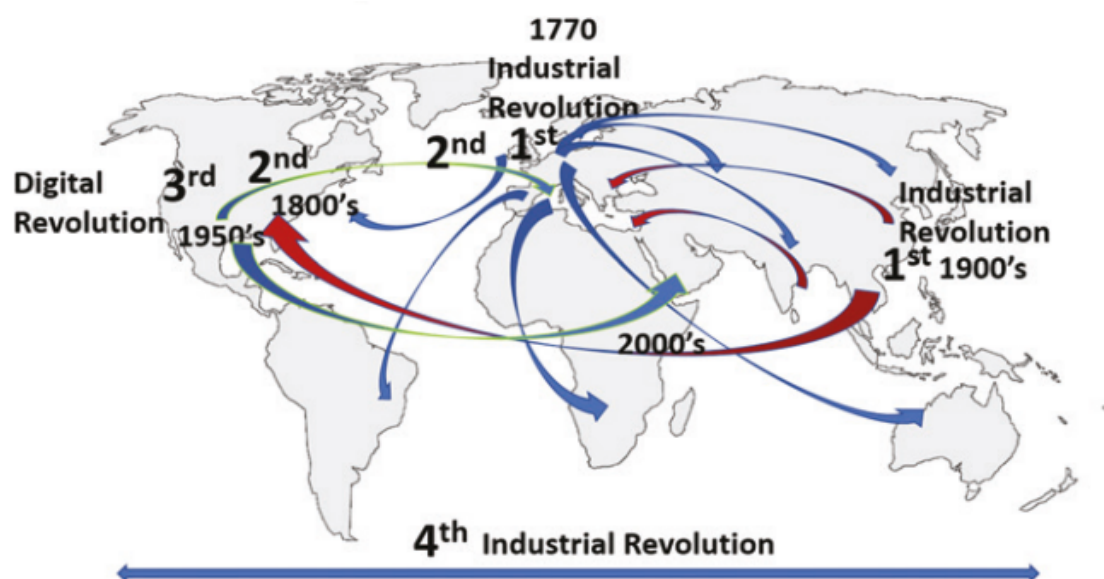


Figure 2. West–East dynamics of the Industrial Revolutions

Source: Skilton and Hovsepian (2017)

The economic particularities of Central and Eastern Europe

The Central and Eastern European geographic space presents elements of contemporary interest that can be linked to the possible spread of new technologies. Thus, the phenomenon of industrial relocation to this region can be discussed. The process of relocating production to Eastern Europe began with the entry of the respective states into the European Union, leading to the creation of new jobs in industries such as the automotive sector (Naudé, Surdej and Cameron 2019).

In the European Union, this process has meant, in the last 20 years, relocation of the manufacturing processes to the states that joined the organization in the 2004-2007 period (Neumann 1997), with the economic basis for these moves being the low cost associated with production, best illustrated by lower wages (Marin 2006). Although the relocation of production to Eastern Europe has been a key point in the last two decades, this phenomenon may be subject to further change, with the “reshoring” process (relocating industries, for example, from the Far East back to Europe) being increasingly discussed, especially in the post-pandemic context. Furthermore, industrial sectors that have grown in Eastern Europe (such as the automotive sector) have the opportunity to quickly adopt technologies specific to the new industrial revolution, while losing sectors (such as textiles) do not (Naudé, Surdej, and Cameron 2019). Additionally, “Global Reshoring & Footprint Strategy” shows that 60% of executives in the global supply chain expect to relocate some production back to their home country (the American or European continent) (Consultancy.eu 2022). Therefore, the context of a developing manufacturing landscape in the CEE countries and the subsequent proliferation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the region marks the relevance of discussing the evolving geopolitics in the region which may further influence these processes.

A shift in geopolitical thinking

Geopolitical thinking is constantly evolving to cope with the technological transformations which further influence economics and international relations. Furthermore, as technology further progresses presenting itself as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, slowly eroding the spatial dimensions that separated humanity for most of its history, the debate between the importance of space (geographical space that is) versus the importance of ideologies in the grand picture of geopolitical thinking becomes more important than ever. In addition, the place of Central and Eastern European countries in this context is an important element in the discussion. Starting from Mackinder’s Heartland theory, we can already see the geostrategic traits of CEE, as his theory states the utmost importance of one’s control over the region. As Mackinder himself wrote: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland, Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, Who rules the World-Island commands the World” (Mackinder 1919, 105–107).

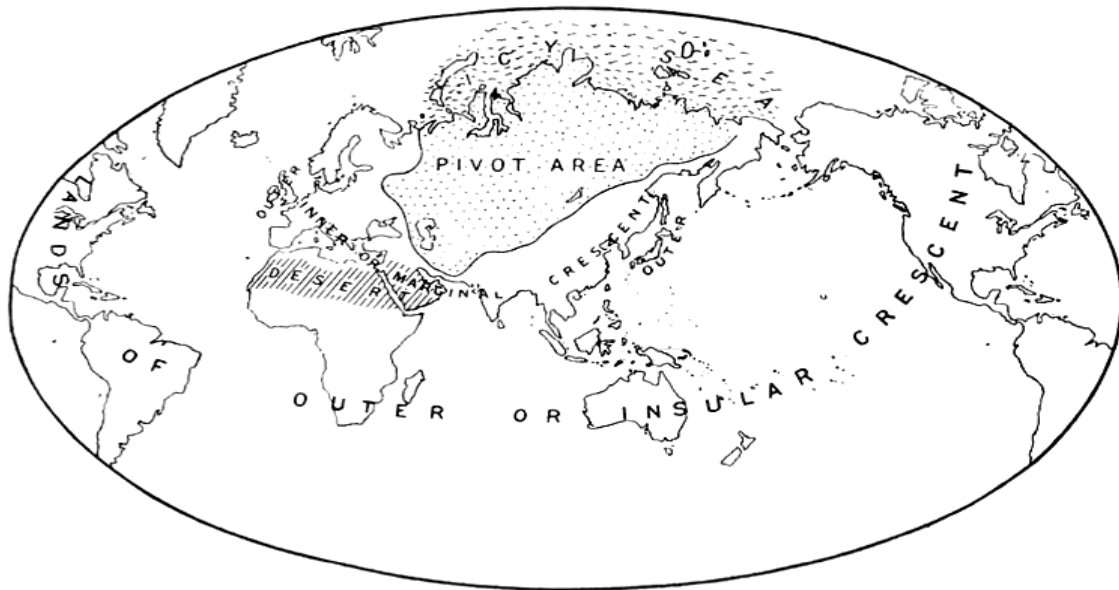


Figure 3. World map according to Mackinder's theory
 Source: Mackinder (1904)

Therefore, this geographical-centred theory iterates the importance of Central and Eastern Europe, as it can be viewed as a 'gateway' to the Heartland, with the Heartland being a key component in the geopolitical dominance of the whole world (Figure 3). However, it should be noted that this way of thinking can be interpreted as geographical determinism. Technology plays a key role in the critique of Mackinder's Heartland theory as he over-appreciated developments in railway transport at the expense of maritime networks which are still dominant to this day (Dugan 1962). Moreover, the technological changes which the world is experiencing are slowly eroding the physical boundaries which characterized human interaction for most of our history. Therefore, space-oriented geopolitical thinking, such as the Heartland theory, tends to lose relevance in the modern world.

A fundamental part of the discussion regarding modern geopolitical thinking is the diminishing influence of nation-states as today's international relations are populated by various organizations, institutions or even individuals, with all these actors shaping the international landscape. For this reason, we might even witness a complete transition which focuses on these actors and less on the Westphalian system characterized by nation-states and their respective geographical boundaries. Moreover, the increasing influence on international affairs of supra-national and sub-national entities, as well as the interconnectedness of the modern world, especially in financial terms, is leading to an increase in the popularity of geoeconomics, marking a shift from politics-oriented to economic-oriented thinking (Bánkuty-Balogh 2023). Another key feature here is the shift from competition between states to cooperation between states, solving increasingly international problems, such as terrorism, climate change or natural resource scarcity becoming

imperious (Tuathail 1998). Castells (1996) views technological advancements as the main determinant in this shift as the new actors are constantly aligning and realigning, the international system becoming more decentralized, organizing itself into economic and/or political spheres. Even if geoeconomics brings into discussion a more commercial or economic-centered view compared to geopolitics, they are both integrated into the geostrategic discourse (Sparke 2007). It is largely considered that technological advances have led us away from geography-centred models in international affairs, and we can only imagine what will emerge after the Fourth Industrial Revolution. That being the case, geotechnology tends to merge some features of the two vectors (geopolitics and geoeconomics) while stressing the importance of technological advancements (past, present or future), being regarded as a reason for a nation's or organization's success in the world stage (Goodman and Khanna 2013). Even if geography has played a lesser role in recent years, conflict, proximity to conflict or natural resources competition and energy supplies are still heavily geographic factors in nature. When we add into discussion future technological advancements which will radically change the world, or the economic spheres or ideology, it seems that Central and Eastern European countries are of utmost geostrategic relevance which seems to exceed disciplinary boundaries.

Bennett (2007) mentions the whole Anglosphere as an important actor of contemporary geopolitics, being made up of English-speaking countries, resembling an archipelago with islands scattered all over the world, with its main representatives being the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, these nations forming a network, their cultural, legal or economic similarities forming the basis of this civilizational project. Therefore, this approach, in contrast with the geography-centred dogma from the last century, relies on the current state of affairs. Consequently, the increased interdependency on the world stage is paving the way toward a new level of multilateralism, redefining power on a supranational level (Vihma and Turksen 2015), the European Union is an example of such supranational endeavours.

The Three Seas Initiative in the IR 4.0 Dynamics: Energy and Security

All the shifts mentioned above are prone to influence the geostrategic status of CEE countries, even more so when the strategic traits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its proliferation are brought into discussion. Factors such as a possible relocation of European Industry in the CEE countries which would translate to such a proliferation would contribute to the strategic importance of the region in geoeconomic terms. On the other hand, in more traditional terms, following Mackinder's approach, the CEE countries still possess that strategic importance, in this case a more geographical-centred importance. Therefore, judging by the recent shifts in geopolitical thinking but also keeping an eye on more traditional ideas, we see the strategic relevance of the region as a constant. The region's place in the

world's international relations can be interpreted based on all evolving and revolving paradigms mentioned above, as a geographical pivot of strategic importance to the international actors (national, sub-national or supra-national), as a region integrated into the economic sphere of the EU or closely aligned to the Anglosphere through the Three Seas Initiative, an organization largely seen as being under American patronage, with the latter having complex implications.

Along with the European economic and political integration of the CEE countries, the security dilemma possesses great importance, taking shape in NATO membership. All CEE countries on which this paper focuses are both EU and NATO members, with regional security playing a larger role since the War in Ukraine. However, these countries (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, along with the Baltics, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece) are members of the Three Seas Initiative, a complex regional organization with economic, political and security implications which may have an impact on the proliferation of IR 4.0

The Three Seas Initiative, launched in 2016 to foster regional cooperation and economic development, particularly in infrastructure and energy sectors, has twelve members, with Greece set to join after the 2023 Bucharest Summit (Górka 2018; Wilczek 2023). The Initiative gained momentum following Donald Trump's participation in the 2017 summit, signifying greater geopolitical implications for Euro-Atlantic cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe (Górka 2018). Named after the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas, which define its geographic boundaries, the Initiative traces its roots to the interwar concept of Intermarium. This proposed federation aimed to unite newly independent states post the Great War for regional security against potential threats from the East (Soviet Union) or West (Germany), originating from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Ryszard Zięba 2023, 261-273).

While serving as a platform for subregional politics and strengthening economic ties among its partners, the Initiative is geopolitically perceived as a bridge between Washington D.C. and Europe, particularly amidst strained relations between Brussels and the White House during the Trump Presidency (Grgić 2021). It operates within the European framework, akin to the Visegrád Group (Ryszard Zięba 2023, 261-273). Here we see the connection to the newer trends in geopolitical thinking focused on sub or supra-national actors. The security focus of Central and Eastern Europe extends beyond military concerns to encompass various levels, notably the energy and infrastructure sectors. The Three Seas Initiative aims to enhance security through expanded cooperation in energy, transportation, digital communication, and economic sectors, contributing to the resilience of the European Union as a whole (The Joint Statement 2016).

A primary objective is to improve connectivity by establishing a network of economic arteries, including pipelines, railways, highways (Via Baltica), and telecommunication lines on the North-South Axis (Grgić 2021).

In the current geopolitical landscape, the energy sector holds paramount importance in Central and Eastern Europe due to its rapid economic growth. The region's stable energy supply is crucial, especially considering its reliance on conventional energy sources, posing challenges to EU environmental objectives (Tutak and Brodny 2022). Chow (2014) emphasizes the importance of economic cooperation for energy security, given the influence of economies of scale. Integration and connection to the larger European market are key features for securing a stable energy supply, aligning with one of the main objectives of the Three Seas Initiative. Moreover, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has altered regional actors' agendas regarding Russian energy imports. Policies and investments in LNG terminals, technologies, and transnational energy connections have become vital, with potential conflicts arising with European environmental objectives (Ryszard Zięba 2023, 229-230). Energy infrastructure investments are transforming Southeastern Europe into a regional gas market. Projects like the LNG terminal in Alexandroupolis, Turkey's Sakarya, and Romania's Neptun Deep play a role in reducing dependence on Russian imports. LNG's increased role and upstream production advancements are expected to contribute to regional energy independence by 2025-2028 (Bowden 2022).

The North-South Axis, central to most Three Seas Initiative projects, is reshaping the geopolitical landscape. These projects, along with European funding, create a complex network of energy connections, potentially changing the energy dimension in Central and Eastern European countries. Cooperation remains key.

Before the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, energy security was a divisive subject within the Three Seas Initiative as two factions emerged: the "New Cold Warriors" (Romania, Poland, Croatia and the Baltics), with a more aggressive stance towards Russia and the "Pragmatics" (Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria) favouring a friendlier approach (Kurečić 2018). The invasion likely shifted perceptions of collective security, fostering greater cooperation.

These investments in the energy and infrastructure sectors may bolster the economic advantages in the region. While starting as investments meant to enhance the security of the region (especially the energy security amidst the War in Ukraine) and to reduce the economic gap between Eastern and Western Europe, these investments are prone to take shape into opportunities regarding the proliferation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the region, even more so as IR 4.0 will likely be seen as a priority in terms of regional security. As complex as the technology itself, the context, here represented by the Three Seas Initiative, is set to encompass economic layers of complexity which come into contact with the region's native geostrategic traits. It is here where we witness the intricate elements that come into play when discussing the future spread of Industry 4.0 in the former Eastern Bloc, a phenomenon so complex it is likely to transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Conclusion

The desire for modernization and catching up with more developed EU regions connects the Three Seas Initiative countries. Therefore, when we consider the security of the region which translates into a multitude of fields, such as energy security, the 3SI is likely to play a larger role not only in the geopolitics or geoeconomics in the region but also in the geotechnology landscape. The nature of the Three Seas Initiative in terms of geopolitical thinking may still be up to debate as it can be seen as an interpretation of the Intermarium idea and a display of Mackinder's geographic-centric model but also as a display of modern geopolitical thinking, as it can be interpreted as a regional bloc, a supra-national actor, an organization under the larger European project, or even as an extension to Bennett's Anglosphere theory. All these possibilities bring further complexion to the debate which only emphasises the importance of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of security. Furthermore, security as a concept is starting to encompass other fields as well, not just the purely military view, with energy, technology and even manufacturing security (as the Pandemic showed us how global supply chains can be easily disrupted) being mentioned more often in recent times. Therefore, these elements translate into the Fourth Industrial Revolution becoming a central topic in complex contemporary affairs in the Central and Eastern European countries no matter the predominant geopolitical school of thought. Whether under an American or European (or under both) Framework, the Three Seas Initiative is set to offer multiple opportunities in the context of future disruptive technological changes that we call the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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Levinas and the Faces of Art

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ABSTRACT: Does art have ethical possibilities? Can literature disclose our responsibility for other people? This short text aims to unfold some nuances of responsible and irresponsible art as they appear in Emmanuel Levinas's sparse remarks on aesthetics. We examine some common ways of conceiving Levinas's thoughts in literary studies, followed by a closer discussion of his ideas on the possibilities of art in "Reality and Its Shadow" and his late interviews on Vasily Grossman and Sacha Sosno.

KEYWORDS: Emmanuel Levinas, ethics, aesthetics, Vasily Grossman, Sacha Sosno, philosophy of literature, literary criticism

1. Introduction

Emmanuel Levinas's existential philosophy is a meditation on the *constitutive* role of morality in human life, a reminder of what ultimately gives existence its meaning. The starting point of ethics, in his view, takes place in the encounter with the vulnerable and exposed face of the Other, in its appeal that urges the self to infinite responsibility. The encounter with the Other and its Otherness is the condition for responsibility, for meaning and morality.

If ethics begins with the face-to-face encounter, how can we hear the appeal of the face in art and literature? The question of Levinas's view of art and literature is disputed (for some different views, see Robbins 1999; Hofmeyr 2007; Bruns 2015; Fagenblat and Cools 2021). Levinas's philosophy does not directly focus on the philosophy of art or literature. For example, he never asks the question of what literature is, nor does he examine its concepts. However, he sometimes refers to writers such as Proust, Celan, Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. Still, the remarks about art and literature are vanishingly few in Levinas's oeuvre. To speak of a coherent view of art or literature would, therefore, be doing his thoughts injustice. However, some of Levinas's thoughts overlap with the philosophy of literature, and it is not a coincidence that Levinas is often used in readings that aim to extract an ethics from works of art and fiction. In the following essay, we will review some common ways

of conceiving Levinas's thoughts in literary studies, after which we discuss more closely Levinas's ideas on the possibilities of art in "Reality and Its Shadow" and in his late interviews on Vasily Grossman and Sacha Sosno.

2. Literature review

Extracting ethics from aesthetics is not a new discipline in the humanities. On the contrary, ethical readings have, for the greater part of literary history, been the very form of the interpretation of literary works. The approach was challenged when literary theory made its entrance in the 20th century. At the end of the 80s, however, literary studies returned to ethics and the Other: responsibility and otherness became standard concepts for research. (See, for example, Miller 1987; Booth 1988; Siebers 1988; Nussbaum 1990. An early champion of ethical readings of literature against the claims of new criticism and structuralism is Murdoch 1997 and Murdoch 2003. For a good overview of the ethical turn in literary studies, see Eskin 2004.) Using Levinas in this context is, however, not entirely unproblematic. If one wants to follow Levinas's central line of thought, it means that one must renounce the possibility of doing a so-called empathetic reading, that is, the attempt as a reader to enter into feelings and thoughts of the characters in the work and thus supposedly broaden the understanding of oneself and others. For Levinas, this would mean the self's reduction of the Other to the Same, replacing the Other with an extension of oneself. (See, for example, Levinas 2012, 102–103. For a related critique of the problems of empathetic identification as associated with *Einfühlung* and *Verstehen* see Stein 1989, 15–16, and Scheler 2017, 9–18.) If the encounter with the Other means the exit of the self from its self-absorption—the recognition of the Other as an Other, someone absolutely foreign—then ethics is not a question of identification but instead a question of difference. On the part of the reader, what is required is a responsive attention that counteracts the tendency to identify, it counteracts a reading that assumes similarity. Instead, one would have to face the very foreignness that puts one's own identity at stake.

Jill Robbins's book *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (1999), stands out in the field of the Levinas research that examines the relation between ethics and aesthetics. In the study, she challenges partly the distinction between an ethical and a rhetorical language, and partly Levinas's distinction between poetry and philosophy. The title itself alludes to the possibilities of literature to uncover alterity. Robbins does underline that a literary text does not carry alterity in the same way as another human being, but at the same time, she adds that her "goal is to explore the ways in which reading alters—or interrupts—the very economy of the same that the other interrupts" (1999, xxiv). In this way, literature can open a passage or a window towards the Other.

The first part of Robbins's study contains a close reading of Levinas's view of language in works such as *Totality and Infinity* (2012) and *The Trace of the Other*

(1986). Robbins summarizes Levinas's critique of Western metaphysics, on how the Same always tends to draw the Other into its own self-understanding and thereby exclude the possibility of encountering the Other as an Other. She describes how one should best understand Levinas's view of literature:

There is an incommensurability between the more originary level of Levinas's ethical discourse and the discourse of literary criticism. This means that an extrinsic approach to the topic will lead nowhere, for it is not a matter in any case of applying Levinas's philosophy to the interpretation of literary texts. An intrinsic approach to the topic is required, one that will take into account both what Levinas says about literature and how he says it ... (Robbins 1999, 39)

Robbins's remarks are primarily aimed at scholars who hope to be able to easily apply Levinas's philosophy to art and fiction. One could partly agree with her to the extent that it is necessary to critically examine what Levinas says about art and fiction in relation to his philosophy. In the second part, she attempts to examine Levinas's view of art and literature in general—in relation to Levinas's own readings of authors such as Rimbaud, Agnon, Blanchot and Celan. While Robbins creditably is reading lesser-known texts by Levinas on aesthetic matters, her study lacks an analysis of Levinas's late work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (2010) and its operational distinction between the Saying and the Said. Robbins writes that we should not “presuppose that we know what the Saying is” but for her this is the end of argument, not the starting point (1999, xxiii). To some extent, this is understandable: it is difficult to write about Levinas without the risk of thematizing the concepts which, even for the author, always falls victim to thematization. The Saying is no exception here. It is, after all, quite possible to—after examining central concepts in Levinas's philosophy, such as the Saying—to use Levinas's terminology to extract an ethics from art and art criticism, without ignoring the incommensurability between discourse of ethics and the discourse of aesthetics.

A relatively new contribution to the research on Levinas's relationship to literature is the anthology *Levinas and Literature: New Directions* (Fagenblat and Cools 2021). The anthology is a comment on the philosophical discussion about Levinas that arose with the publication of his collected works, *Oeuvres Complètes* (which were published in 2009, 2011, 2013). The edition contains, for example, fragments of two novels Levinas began writing during his time in prison during the war and continued to work on right up until the 60s (Fagenblat 2021, ix). Michael Fagenblat writes in his introduction that Levinas's forgotten fiction fragments shed new light on the question of the philosopher's relationship to literature. Fagenblat proposes a reading that questions the possibilities of literature to show the Other in a moral sense, but whose possibilities, paradoxically, are precisely to be found in this impossibility. Fagenblat writes: “It is as if literature affords a way of tracing the sense of goodness under the conditions of its absence” (2021, x). He continues: “Far from

presenting the Other, then, as does the psychological novel, the literature that interests Levinas explores the implications of a world deprived of the sense of the Other, a world verging toward the abyss of indeterminate, meaningless existence" (2021, x). For Fagenblat, literature offers the possibility of functioning as "a *pharmakon*, at once poison and medicine, descent into egoism and senselessness, but also orientation toward the Other" (2021, xii–xiii). Levinas's conflicting approach is also the unifying link for the majority of the anthology's authors, regardless of whether they examine Levinas's own literary attempts or study literature through a Levinasian lens.

3. Irresponsible Art—"A Dimension of Evasion"

Is Levinas's critique of literature and art as conflicting as the critics make it out to be (see Cohen 2016)? In his later works, especially in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas develops an almost iconoclastic attitude to the written representation's ability to show the Other (2010, 89). This temperament is already present in the early essay, "Reality and Its Shadow" (1987), but then mainly as a way of showing some particular shortcomings of art—and by extension the shortcomings of the aesthetic discourse—in relation to our responsibility in a world with other people. The essay, written as a response to Jean-Paul Sartre's thesis about engaged literature, is short but dense. Levinas criticizes the idea that literature could be used as a tool to change the world (Sartre 1949). Literature, according to Levinas, cannot reveal anything about reality because it is neither true nor untrue. Art escapes all claims of truth—it is just a shadow of reality. Levinas is clearly influenced by Plato (see, for example, Book X of *The Republic II*, 1942). Both suspect that the representation of reality in art, the mimetic image, can cloud our relationship with reality as such (Plato 1942, 605b–c). While Plato suspects that art leads us away from the good, Levinas is worried that we are taking the shadow-world of art as a truth: that we engage in it so strongly that we risk forgetting the Other. Thus, in "Reality and Its Shadow," Levinas's discussion of art results in a question about how the responsiveness of art should be evaluated. He believes that this can only be done in a life where our responsibility for our fellow human beings binds us ethically: "art, essentially disengaged, constitutes, in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion" (Levinas 1987, 12).

He goes on:

Do not speak, do not reflect, admire in silence and in peace—such are the counsels of wisdom satisfied before the beautiful. Magic, recognized everywhere as the devil's part, enjoys an incomprehensible tolerance in poetry. Revenge is gotten on wickedness by producing its caricature, which is to take from it its reality without annihilating it; evil powers are conjured by filling the world with idols which have mouths but do not speak. It is as though ridicule killed, as though everything really can end

in songs. We find an appeasement when, beyond the invitations to comprehend and act, we throw ourselves into the rhythm of a reality which solicits only its admission into a book or a painting. Myth takes the place of mystery. The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city. From this point of view, the value of the beautiful is relative. There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague. (Levinas 1987, 12; compare with Plato 1942, 606a–607a)

In this light, art invites irresponsibility. Whatever art's playful possibilities show, it will thus uncompromisingly clash with the reality of the Other for whom we are unconditionally responsible, and it is in her presence that we see art's irresponsibility. Letting art show the Other would be a form of idolatry, since the representation binds the essence of the Other in an image or in a caricature of something we view from a distance. Our responsibility is then broken by the light that the image casts on us. Where we thought the image shows the depth of the Other, the responsibility for her as our fellow being and neighbor has already been broken (see also Levinas 2010, 122–123).

4. Art as a Reminder of our Infinite Responsibility

In other parts of his works, however, Levinas is more positive about the possibilities of art. In a discussion of the Russian-Jewish writer Vasily Grossman's book *Life and Fate* (2006), Levinas believes that Grossman's collective novel, anchored in a real historical context, sheds light on how the face of the Other's is directed towards us and what our responsibility towards her looks like. In this light, according to Levinas, art can have the ethical potential that he has previously rejected. How can this be understood? One way to understand this paradoxical stance is that, according to Levinas, a narrative representation cannot show the face of another, while he believes that art has the potential to illuminate what our responsibility for the other looks like.

Levinas gives clues as to how it is possible to see the face in art, to hear its appeal in literature. In interviews conducted during the 80s and 90s, he mentions Grossman's *Life and Fate* on several occasions. In Grossman, Levinas sees a kinship with the idea of an ethics beyond essence and ontology. Grossman succeeds, according to Levinas, in describing the vulnerability and exposure of the face in such a way that the reader can hear its call for infinite responsibility.

The face does not mean exclusively the concrete face. In *Alterity and Transcendence* (1999), Levinas writes:

Face that thus is not exclusively the face of man. In Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (Part Three, Chapter 23), there is mention of a visit to the Lubianka in Moscow by the families or wives or relatives of political prisoners, to get news of them. A line is formed in front of the windows, in which they can only see each other's backs. A woman waits for her turn: "Never had she thought the human back could be so expressive and transmit states of mind so penetratingly. The people who approached the window had a special way of stretching the neck and back; the raised shoulders had shoulder-blades tensed as if by springs, and they seemed to shout, to cry, to sob." Face as the extreme precariousness of the other. (Levinas 1999, 140; see Grossman 2006, 667)

The bent necks and backs of the people are vicarious faces, whose screams, cries and sobs carry an ethical demand that shines through the text. In this sense, art is a face because the work of art engages us in a way that mobilizes agency and responsibility. The performance seizes us and tears us into the world with the Other again. In fact, I am reminded of this. This is not a question of aesthetic contemplation but a question of how I am already responsible for the Other. In the interview book *Is it Righteous to Be?* (2001), Levinas's reading of Grossman deepens:

Grossman isn't saying that the nape is a face, but that all the weakness, all the mortality, all the naked and disarmed mortality of the other can be read from it. He doesn't say it that way, but the face can assume meaning on what is the "opposite" of the face! The face, then, is not the color of the eyes, the shape of the nose, the ruddiness of the cheeks, etc. (Levinas 2001, 208)

The key words are not "weakness" or "mortality" but simply: "can be read from it." The face of the Other is, in its vulnerability and exposure, *readable*.

Levinas returns to Grossman in a 1990 interview with Françaises Armengaud, in a conversation about the faceless sculptures of the artist Sacha Sosno:

Without mouth, eyes or nose, the arm or the hand by Rodin is already a face. But the napes of the necks of those people waiting in line at the entrance gate of the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, in order to transmit letters and packages to parents or friends—arrested by the GPU, according to Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*—napes which still express anguish, anxiety and tears to those who see them in the waiting line, are—though otherwise—obliterated faces. Can Sosno's obliteration, by means of a square placed over the face, by its brutal negation, have the same signification, the same profundity? (Levinas 2019, 35)

Levinas speaks of obliterated faces. Faces that are present through their absence, that attract attention by disappearing and become visible in their disappearance.

The face is not an object among others in the world, is nothing that can be examined, visually perceived or touched. It is neither a representation nor an image nor anything that exists in the world of ideas. The face precedes language and thought, philosophy. The face hides an infinity that only shows itself as a trace (see 1986). The question is not: what is the face? Rather, what role does it play for Levinas, what significance does the face have for ethics in general?

If a work of art succeeds in showing a human appearing as human in its vulnerability and exposure, then it is a face.

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The Search for the Self in Augustine's *Confessions* and Its Relevance to Modern Morality

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ABSTRACT: Augustine of Hippo is not only a great thinker of the ancient and medieval world but also a landmark of self-search and inner reflection. Modern philosophers such as Charles Taylor recognize Augustine's contribution to the development of the understanding of personal identity in the contemporary context. Through his *Confessions*, the importance of the search for the Divine has been highlighted and the fact that this search is not only an act of self-discovery but also leads to deep reflections on human nature and on the way sin operates in our existence. The paper explores the moral norms that emerge from Augustine's concept of the "inner man" and their relevance to modern society. Augustine highlighted the paradigm shift in understanding the self in relation to God and divine love, and his vision is necessary in the contemporary context where we see an emphasis on individualism and inner searching.

KEYWORDS: morality, Augustine, inner man, modernity, soul

Introduction

The central concern of man has always been to define himself and to express himself in the light of his identity. The profound quest has been to understand oneself as a special being distinct from others. In his search as a fallen being he found countless means by which to express his individuality and power. Regardless of the historical time to which we refer, we see the sin-stricken man altering the quality of his life because he finds false means of self-expression.

By going back to antiquity, in Saint Augustine of Hippo, we find the necessary landmark and significant lessons for modern man to regain his lost morality. By evaluating his masterpiece *Confessions*, we will see how the search for the self lost in sin becomes the key to understanding his theological system, but also the starting point for living a new morality. Through his *Confessions*, Augustine leaves posterity a valuable legacy of soul searching, self-knowledge and its moral impact.

Augustine - landmark of the search for the formation of modern identity

Before delving into Augustine's conception of the nature of the soul, inner turmoil and the formation of human identity, it is worth making a few remarks about this dimension of Augustine's search. Speaking of the philosophers of antiquity and modernity, Anthony Kenny divides them into two categories: introverts and extroverts. In the extrovert category, he singles out Thomas Aquinas and Wittgenstein, and in the category of those who are followers of this school of thought, we speak of Descartes, Hume, and Augustine, who is par excellence the founding father of this orientation (Kenny II, 207). The British philosopher's observation is important because it creates a link between the perception of Augustine and the content of his theology, which comes from the act of reflexivity.

Another outstanding philosopher of modern times, Charles Taylor, said in *Sources of the Self*, referring to Augustine:

Augustine's turn to the self was a turn to radical reflexivity, and this made the language of interiority irresistible. The inner light is that which shines in our presence for ourselves; it is that which is inseparable from being our creatures with a first-person point of view. What distinguishes it from the outer light is precisely what makes the inner image so compelling that it illuminates that space in which I am present to myself... It is no exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the interiority of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought (Taylor 1992,131).

Frank Vander Valk comes to the same conclusion when he says in the introduction to his article *Friendship, Politics, and Augustine's Consolidation of the Self*,

St Augustine played a central role in the development of the modern understanding of personal identity. He is credited (and blamed) with facilitating a so-called turning inward, for inventing an inner space that has profound theological and philosophical implications... Augustine's focus on the inner life is reflected in his transformation, of friendship losing its inherently broad social character and political dimension (Vander Valk 2009, 125-146).

The sources of Augustine's thought on the inner man

The concern to understand the mentality related to the soul or the inner man is absolutely necessary in order to make use of the lessons Augustine can offer to modernity. For this we should allow ourselves to be captivated by the world in which Augustine lived and the Greek heritage he assimilated (Rotaru 2013, 104-108). Augustine's intellectual interest in discovering the inner man is rooted in the philosophical conceptions of Plato and Plotinus, and has to do with using cognitive

capacities to understand the self. For Augustine, the outer man is animated in life by the five senses, but also by certain features of the soul that belong to the outer man, such as memory, but the greatest faculty of the human being was for him the reason or intellectual soul (Kenny 2002, II, 207-212). We must therefore be concerned not to put Augustine into the categories with which we operate today when we speak of the inner man and the outer man, but we must be interested in the concepts with which he developed his theology.

In Plato's writings, we find the seeds of his thinking about the soul. For Plato, the body was an obstacle that had to be removed, because the senses and the body hinder the knowledge of true wisdom: truth (Kenny 2016, I, 233). Also, for Plato, "the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it" (Plato 2002, 102). Plato believed that the soul functions optimally when it is not disturbed by sensory influences. He believed that the solution to this ideal state lay in liberation, often understood as liberation through death. On the other hand, Augustine's thought presents a significant paradigm shift. In his writings, he emphasized that man can know God by searching the depths of his soul. Thus Augustine placed the possibility of divine knowledge in the inner sphere of the individual.

From this command center of the human being, Augustine develops a deeper understanding of human nature, highlighting its utter corruption and the necessity of divine grace to obtain redemption. In contrast to Plato's view of liberation, which often related to the afterlife through death, Augustine promotes the idea that liberation and divine knowledge can be attained through the internalization of spiritual seeking and the soul's direct relationship with God.

Another aspect that must be taken into account in the overall understanding of ancient thought is the dualistic conception of the Greeks that was also seen to some extent in Augustine and "which sees the soul imprisoned in the body" (Kenny 2016, 229, vol. I) an eminently negative conception that marked philosophical thought. However, through his deep inner exploration, Augustine departs from the usual philosophical approach and seeks ways in which the relationship between God and man can become a reality. His central concern is to find the divine presence and to establish a right connection with it. In his search, he observes that he inevitably faces a major dilemma: according to his conception, God cannot be dissociated from the corporeal sphere, and here the intervention of the imagination becomes crucial, since it is the factor that disrupts efforts to deepen the inner knowledge of the human being. For Augustine, the problem of limiting the divine presence to the bodily sphere was a crucial challenge in his search. He sought a solution to this problem. The solution he proposes involves a "turning away" from the bodily dimension in order to correct misunderstandings about God. In Augustine's view, focusing on the soul involved identifying a new perspective through which God could be perceived, one that was free from the constraints associated with the body and the external nature of man. Phillip Carey captures Augustine's profound quest when he says that his aim

... is to take us beyond evidence and words to see God with the eyes of the mind.... A crucial point in Augustine's interiorization, therefore, is that moment of insight that represents the culmination of his efforts from both subjective and objective perspectives. This moment represents both the experience he strives to attain and the peak of his inquiry into the nature of the soul. Clairvoyance represents that moment when his mind, with the mind's eye, perceives immutable Truth; it is the moment when Time reaches Eternity, offering a foretaste of eternal bliss, an experience of the Divine. Therefore, "insight" is perhaps the most appropriate modern category we can use to interpret Augustine's epistemology in his work (Carey 2003, 72).

The Search for the Inner Man in the *Confessions*

In the *Confessions*, Augustine's autobiographical book, we observe several features that define the language of interiority and the search for the inner man. One of the first characteristics is that this search for the self has an upward progression and rhythm and involves an immersion into the depths of the human soul. "This search passes in Augustine's vision through three stages, which are (1) the outer world here on earth, (2) the inner world of the soul, and finally (3) the transcendence into the world of divine realities. Therefore, for him, knowledge is not an immutable given of the knower, but an ever-increasing relationship with God" (Crişan 2015).

Here again, it should be noted that understanding God for Augustine takes place through the examination of cognitive powers and that it involves a journey that involves overcoming the stage of emotions and turning man towards the intellect.

And so, gradually, we have ascended from the knowledge of bodies to the soul which perceives things through the bodily senses and from there to the inner power of the soul to which the bodily senses communicate external facts; this step constitutes the limit of understanding of animals. Hence the next step is the reasoning power, to which the facts perceived by the bodily senses are submitted for judgment. This reasoning power, recognizing that in me it too is subject to change, has raised itself to the step of self-understanding and has removed my thinking from the bondage of habit. She thus escaped from the confused swarm of contradictory images, to discover in what light she had bathed herself when she proclaimed beyond all doubt that what is unchangeable is preferable to what is changeable, and how she came to understand that she herself is unchangeable; for, if she had known anything unchangeable, she would by no means have come to prefer with certainty what is unchangeable to what is changeable. And so, in the flash of a thrilled glance, my reasoning power rose up to Being as such (Augustine 2018, 327).

The second characteristic of soul-searching leads Augustine to deep reflections on the nature of man, conclusions about the nature of evil (Augustine 2018, 297-301-307), an understanding of the essential doctrines that have marked Christianity, and finally to the shaping of a theological system. Why the soul as the central concern of the quest? Frederick Copleston tells us that, for Augustine the soul was created by God and that original sin was also born there (Copleston vol. II, 2009, 76-77). Thus said, the fall and ascension find their source in the human soul. As for the method of understanding the human soul, Charles Taylor says that Augustine's theological system, in which good and evil are defined, is related to the act of reflexivity (Taylor 1992, 139). From man's descent into himself comes an understanding of the role of will power, the conflict between good and evil, and a comprehensive understanding of love in all aspects of life. Thus, God can be known through what he has created and through direct communication, but especially can be known "through ourselves" (Taylor 1992, 126). Thus, we see that for Augustine, good and evil are related to the soul and that understanding the soul is important. It should also be mentioned here that Augustine's dilemmas frequently concern the relationship between creation, man, and God. These three dimensions are found in his inner analysis, which seems at times to throw him into the path of despair (Augustine 2018, 311) because he cannot glimpse any solution to the problem of evil that gnaws at the human interior. The solution he identifies at such moments lies in the redemptive power of Christ, grace, which will become a fundamental truth in the theology of the Church, and the role of the Church (Augustine 2018, 307).

It should come as no surprise that in developing his doctrinal understanding of the Trinity, Augustine makes use of metaphors of the soul and its activities to put God in the clearest possible light (Augustine 2018, 667). What Augustine is really looking for is man as the image of God, which is found in inner presence and self-love, and this act of knowing, in which the knower and the known are one, occurs when love finds its place in the human heart and leads man to a reflection of the image of God (Taylor 1992, 136-137).

Moral norms deduced from Augustine's 'inner man' and their relevance to modern society

We cannot analyze Augustine's conceptions of the inner life without making a connection with the values and moral norms that emerge from this analysis. There can be no act of knowledge without speaking of certain ethical and moral consequences. The link between morality and man's self-image is closely linked.

It is captivating the perspective that Justo L. González proposes when he says that in Augustine we see the culmination of "the inner struggles of a person in whom two cultures, two heritages, two visions of the world have clashed and mingled - in short, of a mestizo". (Gonzalez 2016, 9). Augustine's search should be understood from the perspective of a traveler, a man who is in a constant search for inner peace and tranquility. Perhaps here we see a separation between the ancient/medieval man

with this perspective of interiority and the modern man who finds his inner turmoil but seeks external solutions. From a certain point of view, we all live between two cultures and the solutions we find to our inner turmoil are important because they define our morality. For Augustine, life meant more than ephemeral existence. Phillip Carey tells us that,

For Augustine, what human life means is the attainment of the blessing of wisdom, and therefore what morality means is the purification of the mind's eye, the healing of its defects and the endowment of the virtues it needs in order to see clearly the Truth and that in Augustine's vision of morality, the purpose of human life is defined epistemologically (wisdom and understanding), the way is defined in ethical terms (virtue and purification), and the whole process is to be understood psychologically (as a turning point and a journey of the soul) (Carey 2003, 72).

We understand from Augustine's concern for the interior of the human being that one of the ways in which a healthy theological system, with moral and ethical norms, comes into being is when we are concerned to find God. Knowing and deepening our knowledge of Him is man's primary endeavor. In these attempts at self-discovery and knowing God we are confronted with the two forces that shape man's conception of the world and life: good and evil. Augustine teaches us, through the conclusions he reaches, that evil is within the human heart. He understands this conflict even more concretely when he says that the struggle is at the level of the imagination (Augustine 2018, 247-297), and that we should overcome this barrier to see spiritual realities. Augustine seeks to remove the limiting view of evil that is seen outside the human being, in our fellow human beings, in circumstances, in creation, etc. Through his vision we see how man can rise by understanding himself as a fallen being. Inner evil is only the first stage of understanding oneself, as Augustine clings to the grace of Christ to find redemption and connects to God to be lifted out of his condition.

Analyzing modern times, Charles Taylor, speaking of the paradigm shift in the history of thought regarding the understanding of the self and the effects it has on the moral plane, points out what is essential and has been lost in the human quest.

We have traced an aspect of self-knowledge that has entered into the formation of modern identity. This has taken me from Plato, through Augustine's internalisation, to the new position of disengagement that Descartes inaugurates and Locke intensifies. To trace this development is to trace the constitution of a facet of the modern self. The adoption of the position of disengagement from the self defines a new understanding of humanity and its characteristic powers. And with it comes new conceptions of the good and new locations of moral sources: an ideal of self-responsibility, with its accompanying new definitions of freedom

and reason, and the related sense of dignity. To come to live by this definition - as we cannot fail to do, since it pervades and rationalizes so many of the ways and practices of modern life - is to be transformed: to the point where we see this way of being as normal, as grounded in perennial human nature, as are our physical organs. Thus, we come to believe that we "have" the self as we have the head. But the very idea that we have or are 'a self', that man is essentially defined as 'self', is a linguistic reflection of our modern understanding and the radical reflexivity it implies (Taylor 1992, 177).

In this new relation to the self, says Charles Taylor, "we go inward, but not necessarily to find God; we go inward to discover or to confer order, meaning, or justification on our lives" (Taylor 1992, 177).

In this comparison between Augustine's self and the self of modern man, we see a distinct difference in direction. Whereas in Augustine's case we see a deep concern for the knowledge of God and the search for happiness and fulfillment in relationship with Him, in the case of the contemporary individual we see a predominant orientation towards the self, characterized by an emphasis on personal egoism. In modern man's self, there is an intensification of the search and a deviation from the original goal. The morality that Augustine's descent into the self gives rise to leads to an ever deeper understanding of divine love with broad theological implications, of responsibility for the self and for one's fellow human beings. In the context of the new paradigm, obligations and responsibilities are thought of from the perspective of one's own self, which is autonomous, independent and has only oneself as a reference point. The natural consequence of the new identity is that everything is thought of through the prism of selfish happiness, a fundamental experience to which Augustine referred, but from a different point of view.

Far be it from me, Lord, far be it from the heart of your servant who confesses himself to you, far be it from me to think that any joy could make me count myself happy. For there is a joy that is not given to those without godliness, but only to those who serve you willingly, and this joy is you yourself. And this is the true happiness of life, to rejoice in you, for you and because of you; this is true happiness and there is no other happiness. Those who imagine that there is any other happiness are looking for another kind of joy, which is not true joy. Yet from a certain image of happiness their will cannot be detached (Augustine 2018, 483).

Tim Keller notes the uniqueness of Augustine's thought and highlights the warped understanding related to the morality of our time:

For the Greeks and Romans, the great human struggle was between the mind (which they believed had its place in the soul) and the passions (which they believed were to be found in the body.) If you wanted to gain

strength, courage, self-control, and wisdom, you learned to sublimate the emotions in the face of the dictates of reason.... For modern people, the great struggle is almost the reverse. We believe that our deepest feelings are "who we really are" and that we must not repress or deny them. The great human struggle is between emotions and a repressive society that so often gets in the way of self-expression and self-realisation...

When St Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, the ancient world had never seen anything like it. He explored his past, his history, and the internal motivations that moved him. The reason why the classical age never produced such a work was because, in his view, internal motives and feelings were unimportant, just things to be overcome. On the other hand, our contemporary culture has no way - as Augustine had - of sifting through the emotions, of discovering which of them are liberating, because they take us away from the misery of self-centeredness, and which are enslaving (Keller 2015).

Personal change occurs by transforming paradigms about the love we have (for details see Smith 2016). We should seek our identity in ourselves. From this point of view, Augustine's concern for introspection is useful to us as long as we seek God as our external landmark. It is important to note the main aspect of our inner search, which is highlighted by Carl R. Trueman when he says that

Augustine's inward reflective movement does not end there, but always ends by turning outward to God. Ultimately, his feelings are placed in context and corrected by the larger truth that is God and his revelation in Christ (Trueman 2022, 341).

Through the completion of this stage - the self seeking and finding God - we see the Christian virtues manifesting, at the level of life, as the fruit of Christian living (for details see Smith, 2019).

Conclusions

Following this assessment, some conclusions are in order regarding the search for the self in Augustine's *Confessions* and how it may mark the morality of modern man. Augustine's concern with the notion of the soul has its origins in Greek thought, but what he is doing is going further and finding God through the soul. Augustine picks up on these influences, but goes a step further by delving into the religious dimension of the soul. Augustine explores how the soul can become a path to knowing God. In *Confessions*, we find Augustine's act of inner reflection and how his spiritual experiences lead him to the conclusion that it is through the soul that a genuine connection with the divine can be achieved.

Given the historical period in which he wrote his work, Augustine's great merit is recognized in that he succeeds in offering a profound insight into the human heart

through introspection. The analysis of his own conscience leads him to discover a direct link between the soul and the existence of God. In this sense, he simply goes beyond philosophical approaches to the soul to a mystical-theological dimension (Rotaru 2005a, 147-156).

Significant in his search is the fact that through the search for the self, his concern is closely linked to the knowledge of God. For him, the knowledge of the inner man has as its goal the knowledge of God. From this interest his theology is born, in which we see the main values and dogmas that will mark the history of the Christian Church, but also proposes an introspective understanding of the conflict between good and evil. We note that the distinctive feature of his theology, which creates an impact on morality, is the love that exists between man and God. Through it, man finds his identity and expresses it in accordance with the biblical philosophy of love described by God.

In the context of modern times, in which man's self-conceptions are distorted and perverted, in which understandings of the self are narrowed by a materialistic vision, we learn from Augustine of Hippo how important it is that the personal self is reflected in God and his values (Rotaru 2005b, 231).

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Restoring Virtue, Reclaiming Freedom: A Thomistic Approach to Addiction Recovery

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary counseling for people battling addiction confronts a significant challenge due to the widespread misconceptions regarding morality, rights, and liberties that pervade modern society. This lack of knowledge frequently stems from an inadequate grasp of human psychology. Despite the passage of time, philosophers from ancient Greece and Rome to present-day Thomists have consistently upheld the unity of the human body and mind, with their epistemological frameworks solidly grounded in empirical evidence. For a successful Christian approach to counseling addiction, a correct understanding of temperance is indispensable.

KEYWORDS: virtues, addiction, Thomas Aquinas, Christian counseling, ancient philosophy, Thomism

1. Introduction

Addiction recovery is widely acknowledged to benefit from the guidance of professional counselors, particularly in cases involving severe chemical dependencies. However, when we consider addictions of a different nature, such as those related to eating, drinking, or sex, the path to recovery may not always be as straightforward. In these instances, individuals may find themselves grappling with pleasures that compromise their ability to make sound judgments and exercise self-control.

In such complex situations, we propose that addicts can often chart their own course to recovery through a multidisciplinary approach that combines the insights of philosophy and theology. Philosophy (Rotaru 2005a, 25-38), dating back to ancient times, was originally conceived as a practical tool for personal improvement and ethical living. While it has evolved into a more abstract and academic discipline in recent centuries, its core principles remain rooted in the pursuit of wisdom and virtue. Similarly, theology offers valuable insights into anthropology (Rotaru 2005b, 35-316) and the quest for spiritual fulfillment under the influence of divine grace. By integrating theological approaches with philosophical wisdom, individuals

grappling with addiction can access a rich tapestry of insights and resources to support their journey towards recovery.

2. “The roaming unrest of the spirit”

From a Christian perspective, humans are beings that need to attain the furthest potentialities of their nature. Art, science, universities, everywhere there are people, they should feel focused, enthused, and energetic in their quest for their own moral and spiritual progress (Rotaru 2023, 62-79). Both their affections and reason should be involved in this, but we know that this is not the case. In fact, lust is strongly affecting the reason (Kreeft 2014a). Instead of a state of enthusiasm, they end up in a muddle of addictions, many of them unidentified, that are limiting their development and potentialities. Aquinas is emphasizing the fact that it is *acedia*, “the roaming unrest of the spirit”, that makes people unwilling to accept their great destiny and nobility prepared for them by their Heavenly Father, a disorder that is turning them to the insatiability of different vices (Pieper 1965, 201). We will argue that a correct understanding of the cardinal virtues rooted in the Thomistic perspective could give a starting point for those who want to become free of addictions.

There is a strong opinion that in the field of virtues there is no possibility for new ideas, because the brightest thinkers over the centuries have contributed heavily to it. It is important, though, for the new generations, to correctly understand the concept of virtues, and the relationship between virtues and reason and truth, as man's thoughts and actions will be molded and guided by the perfection of reason in the pursuit of truth (Hadot 1995, 12). But there seems to be no truth without prudence, similarly as there is no justice, fortitude, or temperance without it. If temperance seems to be the virtue that the addicts would need, we will see that it is not possible to attain it without the joint effort of the other ones. For instance, temperance needs prudence for the right transformation of the knowledge of truth into valid decisions, through the three steps process of deliberation, judgment, and decision (Pieper 1965, 162).

Natural desires that cause the general *intemperantia* of modern-day society seem to be weaker than they manifest. The additional strength is given by the large availability of the devices invading society from multiple directions: from drugs, shops, accessories, to applications, and real-life opportunities (Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat - Proverbs 23:20), in a context of lax self-control and public opinion. *Intemperantia* is obviously an expression of weakness, and we can notice it at transformative leaders with great impact on society. These leaders exhibit a very poor classical (in fact, foundational) education, and this highly impacts their views and influence. Strangely enough, these essential powers (namely the delight in food and drink and sexual pleasure) that contribute to self-preservation, self-assertion and self-fulfillment are

manipulated and channeled in a way that contribute together to the self-destruction of the moral person (Pieper 1965, 149), when they degenerate into selfishness (Pieper 1965, 150). In other words, although humans are naturally inclined towards desire, it is the artificial stimuli that society has created that lead to the most sinfulness. These stimuli, fuelled by a combination of uncontrolled desire and self-serving ambition, have created a culture of excess and indulgence that has corrupted the natural expression of sexuality (Pieper 1965, 173). The addict, because of his hidden immoderate pleasure-seeking, is in a contemptible situation, more than the one who sins openly (Pieper 1965, 196).

But *intemperantia* seems more than an unconsciously self-indicted suffering. According to St. Thomas, the sin of the flesh is, in fact, both a punishment and cure from God for the sin of pride, which seems to be much worse than the fleshly sins. In other words, it is not the flesh, but the spirit that lies as the main cause of the addiction. It is suffering that will represent another facet of the remedy prepared by God for the ones asking for spiritual health. To effectively conquer the allure of worldly pleasures, it is important to confront the underlying spiritual transgressions within us that fuel them.

It is very clear, according to philosophies rooted in Christianity, that becoming free from addiction, similarly as becoming free from the sinful way of life, is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, as temperance is one of the fruits of the Spirit listed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. The same Apostle states that “I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Addressing addiction requires a collaborative effort of the Holy Spirit and individuals, who will make them understand the theory behind living correctly in the world, so in opposition to what has been presented them ignorantly and wrongly. As Pieper asserts: “not unjustly has it been said of psychotherapy unrelated to either religion or metaphysics that it tends to produce an anxiously fostered middle-class tranquillity, poisoned by its triteness. This failure is no accident, but rather an inevitable accident” (Pieper 1965, 150). He is stating the same idea in another place: “what is required is that the dogmatic truth of God the Creator and His works be wholly appropriated in humbly confident assent, and that this truth obtain the radiant and vivifying power which is the exclusive property of genuine vitality” (Pieper 1965, 172).

The knowledge of the virtue of temperance is important in freeing the human person gradually away from addiction, as it has been observed that “ethics without virtue is illusion” (Kreeft 1992, 21). Addiction is a result of the mind not being controlled anymore by the reason, but being afflicted by *perturbationes animi*, which originate in *intemperantia* (Frank 1968, 233). The Latins were so drastic that they believed that *cupido* and *libido* lead to psychological pathologies and that love of women (*mulierositas*) was of the same category as love of money (*avaritia*) (Frank 1968, 234).

This research relies heavily on the pragmatic character of Pieper, Kreft and Hadot's thinking. The latter is strongly advocating the need for a practical perspective of studying philosophy, while the first two, with their thinking rooted in Thomism, show the mechanics of the pursuit of virtuous living, for a better understanding of human behavior. Our research is just a clear example of the fact that, at the end of the day, all theory and all philosophy find its practical utility even in an endeavour as difficult as ours. In other words, philosophy (and theology, or metaphysics, in the language from above) should be introduced as useful tools for the betterment of mankind, and as anti-addiction tools.

3. The wider context of *intemperantia*

Addiction is opposite to temperance and moderation. The latter belong both to the fourth cardinal virtue, so they are not to be achieved lightly. There is a long road from the state of addiction to that of virtue, and the person capable to complete it proves himself as strong as the addiction, or the *intemperantia* he fought against. According to Pieper, "In St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (12: 24) it is written: *Deus temperavit corpus*. "Thus, God has established a harmony in the body, giving special honor to that which needed it most. There was to be no want of unity in the body; all the different parts of it were to make each other's welfare their common care." The primary and essential meaning of *temperare*, therefore, is this: to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole" (Pieper 1965, 150). In other words, the road to temperance is not through negative actions, but living according to order, or reason. One important element for its success is the right knowledge that would reveal the dis-order that is in the addict's life. Reason will reorder the building blocks of knowledge in the subconscious to the extent that there will be a strong tension between the intemperance side of the addict, and the new personality, strengthened day by day through the right spiritual practices. The role of *temperantia* is the achievement of man's inner order (Pieper 1965, 147), while the destruction of this inner order by the total weakening of the powers that sustain self-preservation is called intemperance (Pieper 1965, 148). The re-ordering doesn't mean abstinence, and rejection of pleasure, because, in Thomist view, this would be considered a *vitium* (a moral defect), because heresy is always closely related to exaggerated ascetism (Pieper 1965, 154).

This living according to reason is the experience that the philosophers had from antiquity, whatever school they belonged to. It is important to remind as often as possible that at the beginning, philosophy was a practical school trying to improve those attending the master's speeches. Before Christianity, philosophy was mainly a way of making people better, according to what they sensed to be the Logos (Rotaru 2005c, 295-324). In this respect, it was possible to be used against the vices of their times for the improvement of the addicts.

The Greek Orthodox tradition, as a heir of the Greek ancient philosophy, has a great deal to say about *intemperantia*. According to Stăniloae (Stăniloae 2019, 87), the untrained human person is attracted by pleasure, and at the same time he is fleeing from pain. Freedom is possible through a joint effort of the spiritual (which in Greek is called *askesis*) and mystical exercises. The same is true from the Western perspective: “chastity, continence, humility, gentleness, mildness, *studiositas*, are modes of realization of the discipline of temperance” (Pieper 1965,151).

Another dimension to the relationship between virtues and freedom from addiction emerges, namely, the difference between *temperantia* and *continentia* in the realm of chastity. While the former expresses total control over the will and urge, the latter is more about the control of the conscious will. It is only in the situation of *temperantia* that both the will and urge are under the control of the rational order (Pieper 1965,163). Another relevant term in this study of virtues from a Thomist perspective is that of weakness, *infirmetas*, when somebody sins as a result of being uncontrolled.

Hope for healing or transformation from *intemperantia* from solely reason should not be expected. Rather, a combination of knowledge with the natural affects should be considered. In other words, we see a higher chance of success when we build on the foundation of correct information, and influencing the invisible side of personality, the one enchained. The correct knowledge should give a clear understanding of what is wrong in the argumentation of the one trying to escape from addiction. This type of knowledge has been available for centuries, and contemporary additions should be carefully considered.

Intemperantia is also strikingly harmful when the person is not seeing things to get information out of them but is enjoying the process of seeing. The same is true about ‘the concupiscence of the palate’, when tasting food is more important than the eating itself (Pieper 1965,200). This aspect of *intemperantia* is called by the Thomists *curiositas*, because it is a sort of inordinate knowledge that is acquired for the wrong purpose.

4. The effects of *temperantia*

It has been observed that lust takes away clarity and reason in the mind, as well as restrict freedom in the will. And these two powers, mind and will, are the two most precious powers of the soul, and their objects—truth and goodness—are the only two things we absolutely and eternally need. That is why lust is no casual and relatively harmless sin and is drawing people to addictions (Kreeft 2014a).

It is the opposite of *intemperantia* that will have the liberating effect from these addictions. It is well-known from antiquity that *vexatio dat intellectum*, difficulties produce the true knowledge of reality, as opposed to the one that is a result of the above-mentioned *curiositas*. It is the Divine intervention that makes people become sober from their metaphorical drunkenness, that could include the literal

drunkenness as well, but also any other addictions. The addict who wants to get out of his bondage must first know his true position in the Divine plan, he also must know the goals that were set for his life and strive to attain them with Divine grace. This is a time-consuming goal, because he will have to be blessed with the right attitude of keeping away from all the dangerous paths that could appear in his attempt for liberation. As discussed above, the artificial triggers are numerous, and they could allure him in another wrong path. *Temperantia* can be realized only when all these paths, leading to wrong, earthly, telluric goals, become meaningless in comparison with the Divine sonship he was prepared for. In other words, it is a total rejection of any worldly, seemingly unharmed benefit (leadership in spiritual congregations, wealth, charisma, prestige etc.) and aiming at the wisdom of knowing what is really required of him. Pascal, cited by Kreeft, concludes his *Pensee* #347 in the same spirit: "Let us then strive to think well; that is the basic principle of morality" (Kreeft 2014b). By cultivating a deeper understanding of Heavenly wisdom, the path to holiness becomes less challenging and the choice of good becomes effortless. However, reaching this state of effortless goodness requires a lifetime of dedicated effort (Kreeft 2014c).

This research does not advocate a passive attitude by waiting for God to make the necessary changes, or worse, to believe that He will do them instantly at baptism. On the contrary, in the sanctification process of a Christian addict, he first needs to realize that he is not sinning because of deliberate lack of obedience to God, but because of his weakness, ignorance and blindness. Part of his guilt is shared with his fellow church members and leaders, who were not able to give an appropriate teaching and did not warn him. Every time when defeated, he will have to understand that he needs a stronger grace from God, which would help him to become free. For Kreeft, "one of the most serious faults in the evangelical and fundamentalist ethic is its passivity" (Kreeft 1992, 23). He repeats it in another place: "one of the misunderstandings [...] the one that sees these virtues as a sheer gift of God and not also as hard human work [...] sees righteousness as automatically coming with the territory, or part of the package deal" (Kreeft 1992, 43). Laaser recommends the use of the terms "healing" or "transformation" more than recovery because addicts, he says, go forward by healing and transformation, and not by recovery. On the same pattern, he recommends not calling families healthy or unhealthy, but families that make mistakes (Laaser 2009, 18). We fully embrace these recommendations on the basis that Christian individuals and families are, according to the Scriptures, both spiritually ill and suffering also of ignorance. They are also fortunate being able to realize and accept that they have these weaknesses.

According to St. Thomas, sloth is the source of lust, and its cure would be the knowledge of God, having God the central principle in life, through spiritual passion and joy, because everything is a substitute of God. Sloth is defined as "sorrow in the presence of spiritual good" (Kreeft 2014d). He adds that there are two ways of

escaping from sorrow, corresponding to the “irascible” and “concupiscible” emotions. When sorrow is produced because of a pain (like a wound), it produces an irascible (averting) anger and a rejection of the pain. On the other hand, when sorrow is produced by boredom, people turn to “concupiscible” (attracting) emotions, which produce lust.

For a person fighting with addiction, it is important to understand that in life it is more important to concentrate on the engagement in serving the public good instead of gratifying the own pleasures. That is true today as it was in the classical antiquity and Middle Ages because “the community depends on the public spirit of its citizens” (Frank 1968, 238). In other words, it means involvement in the public sphere for the public good, as those Venetians who prepared themselves to become *Pregadi* or *Rogadi*, asked to participate in the Senate to serve the people of Venice.

5. Conclusions

We have met several Latin concepts describing this virtue, borrowed by Pieper from Thomas Aquinas, such as *intemperantia* (intemperance), *temperare* (the harmony of the human body), *vitium* (a moral defect), *continentia* (continence), *infirmetas* (being uncontrolled), *abstinentia* (an anti-gratification of the palate, by abstinence from food, drinks), *curiositas* (knowledge acquired for the wrong reason). It is clear that addiction can arise from a wide range of sources.

Christian addicts need to realize that their suffering comes from their lack of spiritual activity. As Aristotle pointed out, humans instinctively seek to avoid pain and discomfort. This innate aversion to sorrow manifests in two primary ways: first, we strive to eliminate the source of distress, and second, we gravitate towards pleasurable experiences as a means of escape. This explains why individuals who find spiritual pursuits unfulfilling often turn to physical pleasures for solace. In other words, “Man cannot live without joy. That is why one deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures” (Kreeft 2014d).

The entanglement of addiction frequently emerges from deliberate indulgence in sinful behaviors, serving both as a natural consequence and a potential divine retribution. Specifically, individuals who embrace non-traditional sexual orientations may find themselves ensnared in addiction, which, in the broader theological context, can be viewed as both a punishment and a path to redemption for the sin of pride that they so much celebrate. This complex interplay underscores the multifaceted nature of addiction, suggesting that it may serve as a consequence of personal choices while also carrying deeper spiritual implications related to individual moral conduct and divine intervention.

When approached with the right perspective, philosophy serves as a potent tool for personal development and enlightenment. Originating as a practical discipline, its early roots were deeply intertwined with the pursuit of wisdom and the enhancement of individuals through engagement with the teachings of masters.

By immersing themselves in the discourse of philosophical thought leaders, students sought not only to expand their intellectual horizons but also to cultivate practical virtues and refine their moral character. Thus, philosophy, when embraced earnestly and with the intention of self-improvement, stands as a valuable resource for navigating life's complexities and striving towards personal growth and fulfilment.

However, it would be unrealistic to rely solely on reason for the prospect of healing from addiction. While reason undoubtedly plays a crucial role in understanding and addressing challenges, the complexity of human experience often necessitates a multifaceted approach to healing. Beyond rationality, healing often requires emotional support, spiritual power in the form of the grace of God, and interpersonal connections. It is through a holistic integration of various modalities, including but not limited to reason, that individuals can embark on a journey towards profound healing and transformation. Therefore, while reason may provide valuable insights, it should not be viewed as the sole remedy for the intricacies of human suffering and growth.

One of the most glaring deficiencies within evangelical ethics concerning addiction lies in its tendency towards passivity. This passive stance impedes the ethical framework's capacity to effectively address the complexities of addiction and provide meaningful support and guidance to those affected by it. Rather than actively engaging with the multifaceted challenges of addiction, evangelical ethics may adopt a passive approach, characterized by a lack of proactive intervention and a failure to initiate meaningful dialogue and action.

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The Influence of the Mass Media on the Christian and the Response of the Church

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how the mass media affects the Christian faith and how the Church responds to this challenge. The Church can respond by strengthening the efforts of education and continuous formation of the faithful regarding the correct interpretation of the faith in the changing context of the mass media. While challenges exist, the Church can respond through a strategic approach, promoting education, developing spiritual discernment, and actively engaging in dialogue and effective communication. This active response can help maintain the integrity of the Christian faith in an ever-changing media environment. The Church can use mass media to promote its messages and values, using modern means such as podcasts, online platforms, and social networks to communicate effectively with believers and the general public. The Church can also pay special attention to training its leaders to be prepared to address the specific challenges of the media's impact on the Christian faith.

KEYWORDS: Church, society, media, faith, impact, God, freedom, communication

Introduction

Mass media has become an omnipresent force in contemporary society, having a significant impact on individual and collective life. Christianity, as one of the most widespread religions, is not immune to the influence of the mass media. The impact of mass media on the Christian faith is a complex phenomenon with multiple aspects and consequences. Mass media can influence how people perceive and adopt social values and norms.

Mass media can contribute to the individualization of faith, allowing believers to choose their own religious interpretations and practices. This can lead to diversity but also to fragmentation in Christian communities. Mass media has become a crucial actor in the contemporary social landscape, affecting various aspects of human life, including the religious sphere. Mass media has contributed to the globalization of religious communities by connecting believers around the world.

The contemporary Church is now more connected and aware of cultural and theological diversity. Encouraging the development of spiritual discernment is essential to help believers filter and evaluate media content according to their Christian principles. The church has developed an active presence on various social networks, facilitating interaction with believers and providing a way to share its message and values in an accessible and interactive way. In a world in which the free circulation of information is guaranteed, the right to information is considered one of the fundamental human rights (Audiovisual Law 1992); the problem that arises is whether, in the absence of a valorization of information, this right does not turn against man. It has been noticed that the world has a huge appetite for information, and the mass media takes care to continuously feed this thirst, stimulating its curiosity, a curiosity that is often sterile, if not even evil.

The impact of mass media on man

In one form or another, the mass media is omnipresent in society, extending its influence directly or indirectly on everyone. Thus, the Christian is subjected to a continuous bombardment of information, which depersonalizes him and makes him lose his self-awareness. The development of the technique led to the emergence of increasingly attractive media tools, likely to create a real fascination for the recipient. The mass media thus end up imposing values and behaviors. Under these conditions, it was noted that the mass media represents a power in the state, but it is not a power in itself, but a power in someone's hand. As long as those who hold this power are of good faith, pursuing the development of the human personality, education (Rotaru 2021b, 190-196) in the spirit of authentic values (Rotaru 2021a, 87-92), and the closeness of man to God, everything is fine. Unfortunately, experience proves that things are not like that. The society we live in is not a Christian society, but a secularized one where permissiveness and relativity of values are the new social views imposed on everyone, especially through the mass media (Timiadis 1997). Secular areas of life are seen as autonomous, i.e., carried by their own values, principles, and motivations, different from religious ones" (Schmemmann 1995, 115). As Clement remarked:

Secularized society is a society in which, most often, silence rules, as far as God is concerned. In many environments it has become impolite and even obscene to talk about God. Modesty about God has taken the place of modesty about sex; more than modesty, a real inhibition; what our ascetics call oblivion, that is, a kind of spiritual sleep that can be very agitated and that the media, in moments of respite, fills with prefabricated dreams (Soare 2001, 47).

The misunderstood freedom of information circulation has made the mass media a source of dangerous information, of false and unreal ideas, in the absence of a coherent system of authentic values. The competition between the different

media channels and the desire to gain the widest possible audience, thus leads to the dissemination of increasingly harmful messages, by exalting violence and eroticism, cultivating pride and greed, disparagement and nonsense. The myth of stars, proposed as universal models, is promoted. Man thus ends up no longer living himself, but surrendering his experiences to models, falling into clichés. But, these stars, most of the time, make a pride of their immorality and affirm their adherence to different sects and syncretistic movements. The effect is devastating, especially on young people at the age of looking for models and identifying with them, and can be seen in the entire attitude of teenagers, from clothing to behavior. By isolating religion in the sphere of personal subjectivism, secularism opened the way to the pulverization of European Christianity in the dust of religious movements that proclaim their creeds more and more loudly. The search for the sacred is a defining element of the human condition, and when the way of the Gospel has been abandoned or forgotten, this search can take on the most harmful forms.

Losing spiritual values, the secularized man takes refuge in pseudo-religion. This is why at level H of the European consciousness two main trends in the search for religiosity can be noticed today: "Jesus without the Church", that is, the expression of the longing for "direct and pure" religious experience, and "Religion without the Church", meaning the tendency towards esotericism. Secularism (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) thus becomes the mother of subjective fantasies that can reach the most aberrant manifestations.

Modern secularism promoted by the mass media is characterized not by a denial of religious values, but by a confusion of values in which there is no longer any objective criterion of truth, by establishing the equality of religious values with other values (eluding the fact that religious values are integrative values) and by syncretism. Saint Maximus the Confessor remarked that the life of fallen man is a pursuit of pleasure and a run away from pain and that only the Savior Christ can "break" this circle. To a large extent, the mass media takes advantage of this behavior of fallen man, promoting a philosophy of finding man in pleasure, giving the illusion of the possibility of its continuous acquisition in the absence of pain. This philosophy is primarily promoted by advertising, which occupies a very important place in the mass media due to the financial dependence on it.

The influence of advertising on society

The omnipresence of the mass media means that no one can escape the influence of advertising. The result of intense demographic, geographic, behavioral studies, advertising shapes the way of understanding life, the world, one's own existence, especially regarding the motivations of selection criteria and behavior, having an indirect but strong impact on society.

The functions of advertising are to inform and convince the potential customer to purchase. But, in the conditions of fierce competition, advertising tries more and more to seduce, bringing deceptive arguments, cultivating pride, exploiting vile behaviors, stimulating artificial needs and distorting reality. In general, advertising promotes the profoundly anti-Christian idea that happiness and full self-realization is acquired through the consumption of certain products or services. (Communications 1997, 5-6). As a result, the hierarchy of values is falsified, cultivating euphoria, hedonism, narcissism and individualism, disturbing the relationship to the real world by offering an illusory world from which struggle, suffering, failure have disappeared. The type of individual who only knows how to live by appropriating everything is being promoted: possessing, consuming, consuming instead of contemplating (Brune 1996). The main advertising maneuvers consist of:

- ♦ to reduce the individual's aspirations to things;
- ♦ to frustrate by awakening some nostalgia whose fulfillment is promised through consumption;
- ♦ to eroticize the products promoting the idea that man exists only for sex, and the sexual experience is lived in consumption;
- ♦ to alienate by conforming the human being to the products;
- ♦ to infantilize the consumer. Advertising language bypasses the rational defense system:
 - ♦ anesthetizing intelligence through rhetorical procedures, the abandonment of the principle of contradiction, the perversion of the principle of identity, the loss of the principle of rationality, the confusion of values, and, on the other hand, the overdevelopment of cerebral automatism, of thoughtless behaviors, reflexes;
 - ♦ increasing credibility through pseudo-evidence of the image;
 - ♦ arousing and manipulating the public's emotions;
 - ♦ laying traps for consciousness through a network of voices and melodies.

Advertising thus transposes man into a world of abundance where objects rush to conform to personal will, thus breaking him from reality and diverting him from the essential problems of life, towards materiality. "In the context of asserting the autonomy of man and the world, Bonhoeffer said, there is no longer any need for God as a working hypothesis, either in morality, politics or science" (Letters and Papers from Prison 1968, 121). In other words, God is no longer involved in man's destiny, in the sense that he is no longer considered the Proniator (*Proniator-God's provision for all people's needs and in all situations and circumstances of their lives. 2. Supreme divinity, deity, God; providence; care, mercy, mercy, etc., considered as attributes of divinity*) who gives authentic meaning to the world and history. His rightful place God thus remained empty in the consciousness of modern man, that is, just right to be populated with phantasms, anguish and obsessions. This absence of God

from the consciousness of secularized Europe actually annihilates any truth of life, apart from that of corruption and death.

This absence, of a frightening tragedy, clearly defines the content of European nihilism and religious indifferentism as a mass phenomenon, with all the disastrous consequences that these phenomena entail (Yannaras 1996, 7-9). Television currently has the strongest impact among the means of mass communication. It is addressed to the most sensitive but also the most corruptible human sense, sight. Through the eyes, man first of all makes contact with the world, with external reality. It was not by chance that Christ the Redeemer drew attention to the fact that the eye can become the "gateway to sin" (Mat. 18:9), because "if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark" (Mat. 6:23) (Nicolescu 1997, 112).

Karl Popper, one of the theorists of the "open society" believed that "television has become a colossal political power in potential; one could even say the greatest of all as if it were the Word of God itself" (Badea 1998, 3).

According to this analyst, in contemporary society television tends to take the place of God. In the following, we will try to present some elements that make the impact of television so strong.

- Television transforms the event, the reality into a show, meeting the human need for spectacle and thus creating pleasure. It aims at the original and the agreeable in relation to the complexity and depth of life. Watching television, the individual has the impression that he dominates the world;

- Television seeks to create a comfortable imaginary, changes the meaning of reality by replacing it with fiction, offers an illusory world in which experiencing pleasure suppresses responsibility, offers the pleasure of general consensus by returning to a certain primitivism and the pleasure of stability in the atmosphere of illusions by leaving reality. In this sense, the series play an important role in keeping man in an illusory but stable reality, offering him models of behavior;

- Television is usually a faithful propagator of the ideology of modern society that supports total permissiveness and the relativity of values. As a result, it is not surprising the frequent presence on screens of exacerbated eroticism and extreme violence which, at the same time, fascinates and perverts.

The love between a man and a woman is reduced to sexuality, the partner becoming only a pleasure-producing object that, when it no longer fulfills its function, is changed. It is concerning how much this model has "caught" among the younger generation.

Specialists talk about a real hypnotic effect that television has on the viewer. In any case, it is clear that television is addictive, behaving like a real drug. Man's attitude towards it often becomes vicious: he realizes its harmfulness, he hates it and yet he willingly falls prey to it. Although it seems like an easy way to banish loneliness, television does not solve this problem, but, on the contrary, contributes to isolation, offering only the illusory solution of escaping from reality (Nicolescu

1997, 113). The television is a great devourer of time, becoming a continuous presence in human life. Or, knowing that time is "the interval between his loving call God and the response of personal love; no Christian can afford to waste it."

The temptation of television manipulation in the field of information is particularly great because:

- has a strong emotional effect due to the presentation of images;
- allows imperceptible tricks;
- allows the use of subliminal messages (Bucur 1997, 3).

Secularization, therefore, can be defined as "the process of changing orientation that includes a religious dimension for thought and action with one centered on the world itself as the only perceived reality" (McKim 1996, 253). It can be said that secularization is characterized by three aspects: a decrease in religiosity, a narrowing of the meaning of religion and an internal secularization, which considers an adaptation of religion to the ideas of modernity. Therefore, specified Marko Rupnik:

Today, when humanity finds itself in a terminal phase of the secularization process, when the denial and alienation from God no longer offers any aspiration, the man matured in the fire of humiliations, failures and sufferings that marked every step of this journey, is in the situation of the prodigal son in the Savior's parable, "coming to his senses" and seriously meditating on returning to God and to himself (Oros 1998, 65-66).

Subliminal messages are images or texts imperceptible to the naked eye but which are registered by the subconscious, influencing the behavior and way of thinking of the viewer. Without being a bad thing in itself as long as it is limited to the transmission of information, television becomes harmful when it distances man from God, even more so when a TV station tries to impose itself as a true idol by claiming not only admiration, but also adoration, total inner conformity to the ideas it systematically proposes (immediate gain, immediate satisfaction, the illusion of quickly lived well-being, the pleasure in which man likes to indulge in dreaming while forgetting about the real situation) and aiming to shape a entire generations in this sense.

The Internet has, in turn, an increasingly strong impact, tending to monopolize the attention of the young generation through the unsuspected possibilities it opens up. Its special attractiveness comes from the fact that it opens up the possibility of active participation of the user in retrieving the information. The advantages and disadvantages of television are also present in this case. However, the possibility of manipulation is much greater by sneaking in false information and blocking access to certain information. One of the truly satanic applications of the Internet is the possibility of entering a virtual reality, in the creation of which man can participate freely. The boundary between reality and

fantasy is thus abolished, man remaining disarmed in front of the devil. As George Uscătescu also wrote:

The culture of the West feels that both its instinctive forces and its religious and ethical experience are decaying. Formalism dominates his creation, skepticism, the very roots of his belief and metaphysical motivations. In Western culture, reason has subjected everything to discussion, and the result is that everything is subject to lack of reason (Ciolan 1987, 70).

The great tragedy of Christianity, besides its compromise with the world whose structures are becoming more and more opaque to the glory of God and the compromising of the idea of "Christian duty", is its transformation into a "religion among others". This means that in the life of the secularized European, Christ no longer counts as the true God of the true God, incarnated for the salvation of man and the world, but as a simple founder of religion, along with other exemplary figures of the history of religion.

The Church is considered an outdated, intolerant, fundamentalist, or reactionary institution. Not infrequently, the religious factor is considered a residual phenomenon in the life of the modern world, which will die out as modernization and globalization (Rotaru 2014, 532-541) root their own myths in people's consciousness. The main victims of the mass media are children, they do not have the power of discernment and take uncritically everything that is transmitted to them. Studies conducted in the USA show that most children, although they are also looking for entertainment, follow the media because they want to understand the world. As John Condry pointed out: "Children find it more difficult - because of their limited power of understanding - to discern between fact and fiction, being thus much more vulnerable than adults (Badea 1998, 7). The mass media can therefore be a source of dangerous information, promoting the relativism of values and permissiveness on all channels and by all means. Those who follow the mass media assiduously are more aggressive, indifferent to the problems of their peers, eager for the easiest possible enrichment and indifferent to Christian moral values. In an unequal society, the market thus becomes an instrument of amplifying inequalities. Max Weber noted very well that:

When the market is abandoned to its own legitimacy, it shows consideration only for things, not at all for persons, not for the duties of fraternity or piety, and not so much for the original human relations, proper to personal communities (Koninck 2001, 36).

It can therefore be said that when respect for the human person as a principle of personal ethos is abandoned, the principles of economy, power and the ability to influence the masses become idols that are worshiped as such.

In conclusion, it can be said that we are dealing with "a supposed disappearance of the supernatural" (Berger 1990, 1) or a "myth of religious decline"

(Stark 1998, 1). To what has been said so far, we can add the fact that in Romania, as in the whole world, there is a strong informational war through which certain centers of power try to control society. Some of the stages through which dependence on power centers is achieved are:

- creating a state of "fascination" of the political class at the beginning of its formation.

- based on this effect of fascination, which actually means blocking the critical function of the mechanism for evaluating the values presented to him, the politician creates laws in accordance with the requirements of the power centers without being aware of this. And all politicians ensure that these laws are respected;

- distancing the population from the fundamental problems of the economy and society by "drugging" them with irrelevant information, especially in the area of miscellaneous facts (Bucur 1997, 3).

As a result, it is not surprising that programs that reflect Christian spirituality have a low weight in the mass media. In this context, direct attacks against the Church periodically appear. It is obvious that these attacks are directed by certain power centers aimed at decreasing trust in the Church. The media's attack against the Church is not limited to direct attacks, however. All the negative elements that have been identified above regarding the impact of mass media on man, are in fact an attack against the Church, humanity restored in Christ. The mass media product is the depersonalized and lonely man, emptied of self-awareness, fed with advertising and infused with the hedonistic ideology of contemporary society. The idols promoted by the mass media, namely wealth, pleasure and worldly cares, are, according to the parable of the sower, the thorns that stifle the fruition of the Word of God in the human heart (Luke 8:14). It should be remembered, however, as St. Siluan also said: "If you love power and money, you will never know the love of God" (Athonite 1998, 170). Christians must therefore be aware of the harmfulness of the contemporary mass media and understand that the continuous pressure they are subjected to from it can influence them even without being aware of it. It can be said, as Brooks did, that "secularization does not represent the future, but the past's incorrect vision of the future" (Brooks 2003).

The Church's response to ongoing media pressure

Church servants, by virtue of the charisma they have, are obliged to make believers aware of these dangers, recommending moderation in media consumption, through a rigorous selection of programs and publications. Man's communion with God through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is the beginning and goal of the Christian life seen from the eschatological perspective. According to Solovyov:

This civilization elaborated particular forms and external materials for life, but did not give mankind the inner content of life itself; after bringing out

certain isolated elements, he brought them to the maximum degree of development, as far as this is possible in their separation, but he left them without an organic connection and therefore devoid of living spirit, for which reason all this wealth is dead capital (Soloviov 1971, 48).

A few recommendations are particularly important in this respect:

- Be a critical thinker.
- Don't believe everything you read or hear.
- Teach your children to feel uncomfortable in front of everything that is inappropriate.
- Pay attention to the classification of the shows. Many shows considered valuable or successful promote immorality.
- Set limits regarding the time spent in front of the television.
- Give the children the opportunity to ask or discuss what they see. In this way, they will be able to develop their own ability to analyze what they see or hear.

The Church should ask for and participate in the development of ethical codes to be respected by media producers, codes that ensure truthfulness, respect for the dignity of the human person and social responsibility. Faced with the pressure of the contemporary mass media that pushes man towards the old life without Christ, which is actually death, the Church must insist on living the new life in Christ. Freed from the "informational bombardment" in this way, time and energy are saved, which can be used for prayer and for returning to oneself and to the essential problems of life, for rediscovering the personal relationship with God and with fellow human beings. The mission of the Church still remains that of testifying before people the words of the new life given by Christ in order to make those who receive the word in faith partakers of this life. The mission of the Church can only be based on the experience of knowing God. Living and applying Christian teachings is, thus, precisely the domain of Christian morality. Florenski specified the following in this regard:

Not one of the different spheres of existence - art, philosophy, science, politics, economics, etc. - it cannot be considered an independent essence, but it is only about representations that take, indeed, the forms dictated by the laws of this world, but only at certain moments and under certain conditions, more precisely only for so long and only to the extent in which the culture, taken as a whole, refuses to structure itself according to the figure of Christ. In the sphere of culture, if you are not with Christ, you are inevitably against Him, because in life there is no and there can be no neutrality in relation to God. Christianity cannot remain passive in the face of the world and cannot indifferently assume every element, as if it were something that goes well on its own anyway. The spirit cannot be passive: it can appropriate anything

and can use anything, but only after it has transfigured it in accordance with the figure of Christ (Florenski 1924, no.4, 52-53).

The Church must take full advantage of the media tools to make the message of the Gospel reach as many people as possible, taking into account the specifics of communication through the mass media. However, this does not mean neglecting the direct relationship, the impact of the word being much stronger, because it not only transmits information, but also ensures the personal meeting, the transmission of moods and feelings. When the word is mediated by a communication channel, its impact is much less, the informational side prevailing. For example, the impact of the word spoken by a "spiritual father" in a direct meeting is completely different, compared to the same word received through a recording. The impact of mass media on the contemporary Church is therefore a complex phenomenon, including significant changes in communication, social relations and the formation of public opinion. The Church must approach these changes wisely, managing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities to strengthen its message and influence in an ever-evolving digital world. Emphasizing the importance of an authentic Christian life, Solovyov concluded:

In the ancient world it was enough to contemplate divinity as an idea. The new world, which has already seen divinity as a real appearance, can no longer limit itself to contemplation. She must live and act by virtue of the divine principle that is revealed in her, making herself again in the image and likeness of the living God. Humanity must not contemplate divinity, but make itself divine. According to this, the new religion cannot be only a worship of God, a worship, but must become an active divine work, that is, a work together of divinity and humanity to make, from the carnal and natural, that of to become spiritual and divine again (Soloviov 1998, 97).

Mass media provide opportunities for the Church to learn, connect and dialogue with a diverse audience. These opportunities can help increase mutual understanding and build bridges between diverse communities. However, too much media coverage can lead to a loss of authenticity and spiritual depth. Therefore, the Church must carefully manage the balance between the media and living the faith. The European mass media, especially the famous international dailies that create currents of opinion, have an anti-religious policy, if not simply anti-Christian. Likewise the profitable industry of cinematography and entertainment. It is obvious that a materialistic conception dominates in Europe, the destiny of the European citizen being played only at the level of earthly life. Hence the ridiculous and tragic rush for the highest possible standard of material wellbeing and comfort, the forcing of any possibilities of access to the pleasures of life, the obsessive preoccupation with physical health and beauty, the horror of aging and the anguish in the face of death.

The materialism of the consumer society is experienced in experiences devoid of any spiritual perspective: the obsession to earn as much money as possible, the desire to have as much fun as possible, the tyranny of fashion as a means to distinguish oneself from others or to be like others, the disregard sacrifice, escape from any social involvement, etc. Hence the fact that today, most Europeans are no longer able to give a clear answer to the question about the purpose of their life.

Whoever lives in such a dispersed environment has no way to assume a unitary vision of life. At this stage of history it is clear that the notion of tension between the ideals of the Gospel and the values of the world has faded in the Christian consciousness, which means that the idea of "Christian duty" has died.

Despite the visible collapse of so many so-called Christian empires, peoples, and states, countless Christians are still convinced that, in fact, all is well with the world and that they can happily accept its way of life, its values, and its priorities, paying simultaneously and their religious duties. [...] Moreover, the Church and Christianity are considered rather as means that should help to achieve a prosperous and happy life in this world, as a kind of "spiritual therapy" that allows all tensions and all conflicts to be resolved and which brings that inner balance that guarantees success, stability and happiness (Buga 1992, 50-51).

Given that the mass media provide a space for public debate on religious and ethical issues, the contemporary Church must navigate this environment, providing answers to the questions and criticism of the general public. The mass media play a significant role in shaping public perception of the Church, with news, broadcasts, and media analysis influencing public opinion about faith, practices, and social issues in which the Church is involved. On the other hand media communication has influenced group dynamics in communities of believers, and social relations have become more diverse and complex, sometimes generating tensions or changes in the traditional structures of the Church. Adaptability and discernment are therefore essential to successfully navigate this complex and dynamic environment.

The influence of the media on the Christian and the response of the Church it is therefore a complex and ever-evolving subject in the contemporary era where technology and communication have become integral parts of our daily lives. Analyzing this theme, it is evident that the media and Christianity interact in a variety of ways, and their impact on believers and Christian communities is the subject of intense and diverse debates. The media, in its various forms such as television, the Internet, print media, and social media, exerts a significant influence on Christian believers. Through these channels, messages, ideas and perspectives are transmitted and internalized in a rapid and extensive manner. The mass media can contribute to the enrichment of knowledge and the promotion of Christian values,

providing access to sermons, religious music, teachings and important events in the life of the Church. However, the media can also present significant challenges for believers and the Church as a whole. Excessive exposure to secularized or morally objectionable content can erode Christian values and undermine an individual's faith. Also, manipulation and distortion of information for commercial or political purposes can generate confusion and skepticism among believers.

Conclusions

In the face of these challenges, the Church must assume the responsibility to adequately respond to the influence of the mass media on the believers. First, education and spiritual formation become essential priorities to strengthen faith and develop critical discernment in the face of media content. The Church must encourage believers to carefully choose information sources and discern between messages that support Christian values and those that contradict them. The Church also has the opportunity to use the media for its own missionary and educational purposes. Using online platforms for evangelism, preaching, and spiritual instruction can expand the sphere of influence and bring the Christian message to a wider and more diverse audience.

In conclusion, the relationship between the mass media and Christianity is a complex and dynamic one that requires continuous attention and discernment on the part of believers and the Church. With a balanced and responsible approach, the media can become a valuable tool in promoting Christian values and strengthening individual and community faith.

The Church must therefore use the mass media to call people to an authentic life in Christ, but it must not lose sight of the fact that these media channels cannot replace the direct relationship of the minister with the believers. Using media tools, the Church must take into account the cultural context of the era, the "new culture" created by the mass media, and freeing itself from triumphalism, to find a language accessible to today's man.

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Apprenticeship Lessons Before, During and After the Second World War, with Relevance to the Context of Contemporary Christianity

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the Second World War, in which atrocities were committed, Christianity had to take a stand or remain indifferent, protest or not protest, act or not act, suffer, sacrifice or compromise, save one's life at the expense of another's life or lose one's life saving another's life, be a victim or a murderer. These poles are not always taken to extremes, sometimes, there are middle paths whereby the distances are narrowed and therefore these paths are to be recommended. However, the vicious circle of the power of darkness repeats itself at certain intervals in history, revealing that human beings sometimes remain cornered in learning certain lessons. If in the human dimension life is a common good, a priority, and being a disciple of Jesus Christ implies that the life of the other is sacred and the sacredness of life is above all else, in the human-divine dimension expressed by the term conscience, to affect one's life implicitly leads to affecting the divine being itself, so that the expression *to annihilate conscience* is in fact to annihilate the very presence and participation of God in humanity.

KEYWORDS: WW II, alien theology, creative grace, discipleship, silent theology

1. Introduction

One of God's great graces to mankind is that he asks people to be disciples and not masters. To be a disciple means to be constantly around the master and closely supervised by the master. To be a disciple is to be given the opportunity by the master, and at the same time, the master's willingness for the disciple to have the chance to try again and again (Rotaru 2012b,5). The qualification obtained generally exceeds the apprentice's ability to understand his level, or rather it is impossible for the apprentice, looking from the perspective of the apprentice, to obtain the same image as the master, looking from the perspective of the master. One thing is certain: the disqualification of the apprentice arises only when he renounces the process of becoming and praxis. Being a disciple is God's invitation to the human being to transcend the limited horizon of becoming, of knowledge and

praxis, in the struggle towards excellence to grasp a horizon that recedes and rises the more intense the attempt (Rotaru 2010, 7). To be a disciple is to remain a disciple in the hour and power of darkness, when there are no answers, no solutions and no redemption, but only fidelity to the master who departs from the disciple precisely in the most difficult hour.

In the context of the Second World War, in which many atrocities were committed, Christianity had to take a certain attitude or remain indifferent, protest or not protest, act or not act, suffer, sacrifice or compromise, save its life at the expense of another's life or lose its life saving another's life, be a victim or a murderer. These poles are not always taken to extremes, sometimes there are middle paths whereby the distances are narrowed and therefore these paths are to be recommended, yet the vicious circle of the power of darkness repeats itself at certain intervals in history and all history reveals however that the human being sometimes remains cornered in learning certain lessons.

One of the greatest challenges of being human is defining one's own identity. According to the dictionary, identity implies being identical to oneself, a dictum definition hardly accepted in the field of science, yet this definition challenges man to a deeper investigation. Greek philosophy, the philosopher of the West, concluded his search with the words "Nosce te ipsum", and Avicenna, the philosopher of the East (Rotaru 2005, 276-278), concluded his philosophy with the words "How I wish I could know who I am, what it is in this world that I seek," so from sunrise to sunset mankind's concern is his own identity.

Because of my profession, I had the opportunity to meet many ethnicities, tribes, from different places, uncivilized, underprivileged people, categorized as third or even fifth world. My amazement was when, in the Kalahari desert, I came into contact with such a fifth-world tribe. When I managed to communicate with them, they told me that their main concern was to find out "who they are, where they come from, why they are on earth and where they will go after death". In the Sahara desert, another tribe tells me that their tragedy is the loss of their identity, because their identity is closely linked to the desert that is fading into the hotter sand and no longer welcomes them to live there. God's people could provide some answers but they hold so sacredly the name YHWH, the name by which they are called, that the mystery remains shrouded. Only that kenosis-theosis of Christianity reveals the mystery that the human being can now declare: *I am what Christ is in me*, and in the case of this article, the identity of the human being is to be a *disciple of Jesus Christ*, whose orthodoxy is the Gospel - the good news - and whose praxis is to be a bearer of the Gospel.

Present challenges of a political, social, economic, spiritual, religious nature and the ever-deepening human complexity call for the human being to seek answers and solutions. When theology has failed to provide humanity with the answers it seeks, other sciences and ideologies have intervened and, lacking a divine foundation, have offered concepts of life that have aggravated both the immanent dimension of

divinity and the transcendent dimension of the human being. Today, therefore, theology has a sacred duty not only with regard to the relationship between the human being and divinity but also a literal duty to correct and heal the errors of history, otherwise there is a risk that these errors will be repeated again and again.

Europe is currently facing a migrant crisis. The harsh reality is that their countries are no longer livable. At the same time, Europe's harsh reality is that these migrants do not allow themselves to be assimilated by Christian and democratic values; on the contrary, they want to promote their own values, not understanding that it is precisely these so-called values that have made their countries of origin unlivable. At the same time, the reality of Europe is that it is facing secularism caused by the relativization of authentic faith. The situation thus becomes quite tense: whether Europe considers the migrant crisis as a symptom or even considers it as the cause of social destabilization, the reality is that Europe is faced with having to make decisions and act on the crisis that lies ahead.

The history of the Second World War shows us the conflict between Nazi and Fascist ideology on the one hand, and Communist ideology on the other, a conflict in which Christianity was also involved, willingly or unwillingly. Pure race, living space, final solution, atheism, exploitation, the bosses of darkness war against each other, forgetting even their diabolical mandate to fight only against the light. The victims were all those who opposed their ideology, but especially Christians and Jews. The Christians, because they had to swear allegiance to the evil man and thus renounce their Lord, the Master of the disciples; the Christians, because they had to make decisions against the evil ideology to the point of shedding blood; the Jews because the evil plan of hatred and extermination followed them throughout history.

In this context of WWII, I will examine the discipleship of Pope Pius XII, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jurgen Moltmann, and Miroslav Volf. The structure of the study is as follows: in the first part, I will briefly present the lives of these personalities; in the second part, I will intend it as a spiritual litmus test; and in the third part, I will summarize their discipleship ministry. In the conclusion, I will reflect on the current crisis situation and how Christianity is addressing it, with the working hypothesis being the paradigm shift that breaks the vicious circle of history, a paradigm that emphasizes reconciliation and engages Christians in combining academic theological research with the internal ministry of the church and the *Missio Dei* into one: discipleship. The theology of reconciliation, the theology of the stranger and the theology of relationship are able to prevent atrocities, exclusions, and deviations that are done by people but in the name of God, which is totally unacceptable.

2. Historical considerations

2.1. *Pope Pius XII*

On 2 March 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli is elected Pope as Pope Pius XII. On 9 October 1958, the Pope took his last breath. His last words were: "Pray, pray, pray, that this unhappy situation for the Church may end" (Ventresca 2013, 297). The Life editorial that day began with the headline "The world pauses on the death of a Pope", eulogizing him thus: "the most impressive living symbol of the spiritual which the world knew" (Ventresca 2013, 297). Officials from around the world sent condolences to the Vatican, including Israel's President Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Foreign Minister Golda Meir, Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Rome's Chief Rabbi Elia Toaf, former Israeli diplomat to Italy Pinchas Lapide. And the list goes on with prominent political, religious and religious figures, culminating with Pope Benedict XVI: "On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI signed the Decree of Heroic Virtue for Pope Pius XII. The now "venerable" Pius XII was deemed to have lived an exemplary Christian life - not a faultless one but one that was indicative of a close communion with God in his vocation as priest, bishop, and pope. Responses varied from the triumphant to the tragic" (O'Shea 2011, 1).

From the above, it is clear that there were also voices against bringing serious accusations against the Pope, so that Eugenio Pacelli became a very controversial person, not so much during his mandate (and especially during the war), but after his death. In such a situation, it becomes extremely difficult and sensitive for a Christian to "surround himself with a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), to take people like Eugenio Pacelli as models of discipleship in crisis situations.

Of course, superficiality, partiality, subjectivism and a critical spirit were in abundance in the approach to the person, life, mission and responsibility of the Pope, and therefore a theological analysis must penetrate and pierce through this mist or aura with which the most important figure of Christianity was surrounded during the most difficult period in history that mankind has experienced. Moreover, the claims have been quite lofty, or exalted, on the part of critics, elevating the pope as the number one man in the world, only to have him thrown down and crushed from that height. The fact is that during the war Vicarios-Dei did not even have the heroism of Churchill, who dedicated himself to England when he was elected to office by declaring: 'I have nothing to offer you but blood, tears and sweat'. The "silence of the pope" (Kornberg 2015, 235-264) exasperated those of his time and still exasperated those of today. Was it a sign of cowardice or indifference, or was it the highest and deepest quality of a disciple? Was it prudence, diplomacy, politics, or the only leverage he had left? Viewed from different angles, the answers differ and are taken to extremes, yet the truth must be somewhere, and a Christian and a theologian agree with the statement of 19 March 1964 in the publication "L'Osservatore Romano": "The silences of the Pope - when they exist - are not theirs,

but ours: that is imposed by Christians in order to seal the lips of the Father and Teacher through their filial intractability. It is not written in the Gospel: "Jesus kept silent"? The Vicar of Christ may also want and need to be silent (Kornberg 2015, 235). After the end of the war, when the destroyed, impoverished and disoriented states were looking for support, the Catholic Church came out of the war stronger, stronger and more widespread. This gave rise to more and more such questions and attitudes: "And what does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?" (Mark 8: 36). Surely the Pope knew this but he also knew that a Christian without the institution of the church is in danger of losing his identity.

What, though, was the Pope's basic idea? A strategist might claim that by tacitly condoning Nazism the Pope has shielded his church from the Communist danger: "The Pope? Who is he? How many divisions does he have?" These are the sarcastic words of Stalin concerning to Pius XII after the war during the Yalta. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Pope replied: "Joseph Stalin is dead. Now he will see how many divisions we have up there" (Ventresca 2013, 253). Thus he let Nazism be a wall against communism even though he had to witness its atrocities with pain. Two powers of darkness are fighting each other, and at the same time Christians live among them. The Pope's only weapon, silence, brought a whole world against him during his lifetime and a whole world against him after his death: "During a visit to Rome in 1994, I went to kneel at the tomb of Papa Roncalli - Pope John. I can recall quite vividly the flowers and messages left by his tomb in the crypt. Nearby the tomb of Pius XII was unadorned. I visited St. Peter's again in September 2000 just after the beatification of John XXIII... Meanwhile pilgrims made their way to a sculpture of John in the nave of the basilica... After nearly forty years of people kissing the image, the bronze shines brightly. Across the nave is the statue of Pius XII... There are no pilgrims *there*" (O'Shea 2011, 223).

Shouting voices, only make the Pope's too heavy cross heavier. Could the pope's voice have stopped the death trains and closed the gates of Auschwitz? At this moment, an entire Africa is condemned to extermination, critics could exercise their voices for Africa. At the moment the situation of migrants in Europe is very sensitive and tense, critics could exercise their voices for the cause of migrants. I have presented two situations as difficult as the situation of the Holocaust in the Second World War. For an honest answer on Pope Pius XII, a reconstruction can be made by addressing these present situations. Pope Pius XII was a wartime pope, and only from this angle can his work be objectively analyzed.

In a diary found by chance, Pope Pius XII, notes as a footnote: "The good never do noise, and the noise will never do something good". The man Pacelli, the disciple Pacelli still has much to say to history, and at the same time, coming from the hardest mission, from the hardest war, he still has much to say to those who want to be disciples of Christ. At the same time, in this article, I will use the work of the pope as context for the other people I will address.

2.2. Karl Barth

"We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation (Schneider n.d.). This is the first of the six articles of the Barmen Declaration of May 1934, largely drawn up by Barth. In January 1933, Adolph Hitler was appointed Chancellor. In a very short time, he established the Third Reich, based on Nazi ideology, in which he has also drawn the German Church, gaining the support of church leaders.

Barth, a Swiss theologian, was called to teach in Germany in 1933. Following the Declaration, he was expelled back to Switzerland. A fortunate case, because if the Barmen Declaration had been issued in 1938, it would also have constituted the theologian's death sentence. Certainly, a resistance remained in his wake, albeit a rather weak one compared to the Nazi colossus, but sufficient to motivate and mobilize Christianity; yet it remained in a state of paralysis or disorientation towards true theology. At the time of Barth's statement, the German Church was going through a situation characterized by some errors or spiritual diseases, accumulated since the birth of Protestantism (Jungel 2014, 15-16). And centuries later, on the eve of WWI, when liberal theology agreed with the new ideology, it was only a step from here that theologians and professors agreed to sign that Manifesto justifying the politics of war (Svinth-Vaerge 2023, 225). Against this background of the failure of liberal theology to be relevant in crisis situations and to address a firm position, Barth writes in 1922 *Romerbrief*, the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, rightly regarded as a bomb dropped on the compromised theology of the time. But the state of the German nation continues to degenerate, resulting in the emergence of the Nazi ideology, which is described as a new theology (Svinth-Vaerge 2023, 222). Exploiting theological errors, the myth of the superior man, the danger of communism, the precarious economic state, this new theology has a dizzying impact on the German people.

Barth remains firm in his theology. When over the years he compiled his monumental work, *Church Dogmatics*, the motto of Chapter XVI of Volume IV, Part 3, is the same as Article 1 of the Barmen Declaration: "Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear and whom we must trust and obey in life and in death" (Barth 1961, 3). Yet the tension pressing down on Barth was not an easy one. As a theologian who had to remain faithful to the Word, he was so abandoned and isolated by the other theologians and intellectuals of the time that he even came to doubt himself. On the one hand, the Confessing Church in Germany, on the other the Swiss Society for Aid, which together with Emil Brunner sought to question him about the orthodoxy with which Barth claimed that "salvation comes from the Jews" (John 4:22), so that even those close to him were so opposed to him that under wartime conditions all this

could bring anyone to their knees: "Yet Barth found himself isolated from many colleagues in the Confessing Church whom he regarded as having fought only for their own academic freedom and as having neglected, by their subsequent silence, to uphold the rights of Jews.... Barth thus asked himself if he had failed to be prophetic at Barmen in not making the Jewish question a key element in his draft of the text: "Of course in 1934 no text in which I have done would have been acceptable even to the Confessing Church, given the atmosphere that there was then..." (Hunsinger 2019, 105). Not only is the theology and the writings that remain for posterity a reference and a pillar for scholars in the field, but also the pre-war, wartime and post-war attitudes have meant that it remains an unwritten law in theological academia today that you cannot be a theologian without reading Barth. In humanity's most difficult period Barth earned his name so that he has something to say to those who want to be disciples of Christ.

2.3. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

"I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people..." (Bonhoeffer 1959, 16). This is part of a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr in 1939. Bonhoeffer went to America to refuse enlistment in the Nazi army, but within a very short time, he returned to Germany, believing that his coming to America had, in fact, been a mistake. In exploring Bonhoeffer's life and work, writing just a paragraph about him may lead to the mistake of omitting essential things, so I will turn to what Barth wrote about him, because I believe that as Barth saw him, it is surely the best characterization: "From 1933 on, Bonhoeffer was the first, indeed the only one, who focused so centrally and energetically on defending Jews against Hitler's injustice. While the Confessing Church concentrated on defending the Church, it did little for Jews outside. It was Bonhoeffer standing on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount as concrete guidance for life, who spoke out against the Nazi anti-Jewish policies and urged the Church to act in opposition (Gushee 2016, 88). The dilemma in which Bonhoeffer was placed (Gushee 2016, 83) exhausts human solutions, questions portions of his theology, brings the disciple and zealot face to face, confronts the command not to kill with *transforming initiatives*. To some extent this can be understood through his statement on the Jewish question, a phrase that has remained famous and which characterizes him: 'to throw oneself between the spokes of the wheel, in order to stop political oppression and to rescue people in danger' (Mawson 2019, 93).

Another aspect that reflects Bonhoeffer's character is the situation where, having been imprisoned following the failed assassination attempt on Hitler, and being engaged, he is asked to cooperate with Nazism in exchange for his life. "The last temptation," Bonhoeffer replies, after which he climbs the scaffold. When the disciple is asked to pay with his very life for his faith and convictions, life is indeed a

last temptation, and, in fact, the strongest, against which he has only one weapon at his disposal, to die, for otherwise, life itself would become the cruelest death.

2.4. Jurgen Moltmann

"But strictly speaking we can no longer get beyond Auschwitz by ourselves, but only together with the victims... Auschwitz was not the physical end of Judaism – but was it perhaps the spiritual end of Christendom, an end which we have not yet noticed." (Moltmann 1997, 181).

The Second World War left a deep impression on the teenager Jurgen (born 1926), particularly the 1943 British Air Force operation Gomora on Hamburg, where he was given a glimpse of the horrors of war. In 1945, the young soldier, who had just enlisted, was taken prisoner and taken to Britain, from where he was not released until 1948. In 1954 he received his doctorate, after which Moltmann spent a lifetime dedicated to theology, in which he addressed to Christianity a theology called "theology after Auschwitz", which, however, was not assimilated by the churches because of the realities and depths revealed and because of the history that Christianity was invited to assume; at the same time he addressed to humanity themes of general interest, of real use in achieving an attitude of reconciliation and therefore the preservation of the future by addressing ethics of hope.

Quoting Adorno in his writings, Moltmann acknowledges with academic honesty that theology and implicitly Christianity have lost their fragrance: 'After Auschwitz, there is no more poetry' (Moltmann 1997, 181). At the same time, he is aware in his theology of the horrors committed by Christianity, adopting in his writings a remedial and healing attitude to history: 'The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. 'Where is God? Where is he?' someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows ...' (Moltmann 2015, 331). This testimony of Elie Wiesel, this reality marked the entire life of the Holocaust survivor: 'I shall never forget the moments which murdered my God and my soul. I shall never forget the flames which consumed my faith forever' (Moltmann 1997, 179).

These realities of war have left their mark on Moltmann's theology, so he has earned the right to have something to say to Christianity and not only to Christianity, but to all mankind. Addressing realities unbearable to human beings, Moltmann has something to say about being a disciple in conditions that God himself cannot bear, adopting that *hester panim* - "While God tolerates the sinner he must abandon the victim...God is mighty in the renunciation of his might, in order to bear with man" (Moltmann 1997, 178) - hiding his face from the horrors of pain.

2.5. Miroslav Volf

"After I finished my lecture Professor Jurgen Moltmann stood up and asked one of his typical questions, both concrete and penetrating: "But can you embrace a *cetnik*?" ...No, I can not – but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to." (Volf 1996, 3). Indeed he is able, because we found him there, merged with those anathematized, excluded, marginalized and even killed in the name of faith, in the Name of God. I have heard his voice from beyond, from those who grope for God in other religions. I have seen his *theology of open arms* in embracing those who will continue to strike out but in my dissertation I named Volf as a prophet of reconciliation because that is what I understood from reading his books. The communist context, and then the painful war in the former Yugoslavia, can affect a person's life to the extent that he becomes a saint or a monster. I did not find Volf here, I had to search some more, and so I found him one step ahead, and the main theme he tackles in his theology touches on the whole history of Christianity in the area where it failed to be relevant. Is Volf's theology a continuation of Moltman's echo, addressing only the painful situation in his homeland? Or is it the cry of the whole of history? Or is it the cry of God?

An overwhelming weight accompanies his words, namely those who can no longer speak, those who have passed from life unreconciled, then all those whose blood has reddened history. The echo of their voice from eternity Volf wants to resound in his writings (Stop...). An even more overwhelming weight accompanies every word he writes, namely the cries of those present, muffled by the grief of lost loved ones, the tears of the persecuted, the broken hearts and broken hands that were lifted up to God, with the pain all the more heartbreaking in the belief that God himself broke them. (Pause...) When at a World Council, someone put the question accusingly to God: "Where is God when the world is struggling between life and death, through wars, poverty, injustice?" a rabbi replied, "God is where you left him when you left him". Yet God does not break, but has broken Himself...and all who follow Him in this mandate of reconciliation to save humanity.

Volf also echoes all these cries in his words, with which he wants to pierce all those who cause so much pain, because the skies are too soaked with tears and blood, put in Shakespeare's lines, of a disturbing depth: "And now I ask you enemies of life/ Poor victims of cruel fate/ Montecchio and Capoletto! you,/ Those of you who were always in a cruel war,/ See the doom of your enmity:/ They rose to the blue skies (Romeo and Juliet),/ And that's not all. The frenzy that you have stirred up, the entire Citadel has overwhelmed it.../ The statue of Juliet...remind everyone forever of a faithful and loving soul/ Romeo's statue, also, will show/ how the terrible enmity love kills forever! A dark peace is left now.../ until in despair we cross the bridge" (Shakespeare, 2016, 315-317). "Till, my God...? cries the people there in pain. I wish that the only ones left to be sacrificed "until the full number is fulfilled", (Rev. 6:10-11), were only the messengers of reconciliation. And one of them is Volf.

3. Definitions of the notion of apprentice in the light of reconciliation

A definition of discipleship and discipleship emerges from the Councils of early Christianity, but which nevertheless had consequences in that they anathematized, excluded and exiled those who failed to relate correctly to biblical doctrines. Thus the space bounded by what constituted true faith and the defense of faith unfortunately became a forbidden space for those in need of spiritual healing. History then proves the tragic end of those who were "left to perish" (Jenkins 2008, 30,105), while the disciples, who were supposed to reach out a hand, were especially concerned not to perish themselves, because in defining the identity of the disciple, the other, the neighbour, the stranger was not given a place.

Although the identity and mandate of discipleship is clearly defined in the Bible, the story nevertheless presents a distorted reality of this notion. Among those who have noticed that something is amiss is Buber, through his emphasis on the identity of "I and Thou" (Buber 1937, 11), who seeks to correct this distorted picture. However, even a cursory glance at biblical truths points to God's reconciliation of the human being to then continue the work of art of the Reconciling Creator through discipleship. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism (Bierma 2013, HC Q 1,2,86) the very first article, sends the reader towards the truth of a human identity dependent on God, an open and relational identity and not an identity closed in on itself; and article 86 exemplifies that the praxis of a life of gratitude offered to God consists in a dedication to one's *neighbour* that he too may be won for Christ.

As a result of these situations, I have sought to add to the definition of the disciple, given by the doctrines elaborated by the Holy Fathers, another way of definition, which completes and integrates the identity, so that what has been exiled can be reconciled. Reconciliation is the character and praxis of divinity. Only within this framework can a relevant Christianity and discipleship be defined. If any other framework is adopted, Christianity is in danger of giving humanity a distorted image of divinity. In this section, I will capture the attitudes and warnings issued by some prominent theologians who have sought to preserve and perpetuate an authentic image of divinity.

Thus **McGrath** draws attention to the fact that theology must be shaped and contained by divinity and not the other way around. Then the task of theology is to detect the human tendency to have monopoly and control in defining transcendent realities, the result being the shaping of a limited framework devoid of divine immanence and at the same time devoid of the primordial quality of human being to manifest itself in the spiritual dimensions of freedom: "But God cannot be imprisoned and we ought not to be surprised if the theoretical rationalist cage we have constructed in our minds suddenly breaks into pieces, unable to contain the majesty and glory of a living God! In the end, it is God who must be allowed to shape

our thinking. The contours of our thought need to be adapted to God, not the other way round!" (McGrath 2013, 107).

Vanhoozer emphasizes the Church's responsibility to provide humanity with an authentic image of a reconciling divinity, so that Christian identity and Christianity are defined exclusively in relation to the divinity. Therefore the mandate of a Christian, of a disciple, is to carry out the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18), and only in this way can he be identified and defined, through dynamic action of relationship and reconciliation: "What the church has to offer to the world is not only the message but also a practical demonstration of salvation: the transformed identity of those who not only bear the image of Christ but also stand in right relationship to him; the promise of reconciled community; the reality of being - toward - resurrection" (Vanhoozer 2014, 62).

Of course, the danger of relativism - Karkkainen warns us - is not to be expected in a pluralistic world, with consequences for identity, definitions of concepts and values. An opening of Christianity towards relationality must be carefully supervised by a theology that crystallizes and clearly outlines its forms and does not fail by losing its meaning. The paradox of relationship lies precisely in defining and defining identity, in contrast to the natural and logical-human consequence that sees in dialogue, in communion precisely the opposite - a fusion and a loss of identity, specific to Asian, Hindu, Buddhist, pantheistic religions: "The remedy to pluralisms, however, is not exclusivism but rather an attitude that takes delight in the potential of an encounter with the other without denying either party's distinctive features. The aim is to make room for a critical, reverent and open engagement with otherness, without any predictable outcome. That kind of engagement does not water down real differences in the way of modernism. Too easily, pluralism tends to deny the self-definitions of particular religions" (Karkkainen 2019, 509).

Brueggemann develops the notion of apprenticeship and apprenticeship with an emphasis on dynamism, freeing it from any fixed, rigid, static definition, devoid of life and creative act. In fact, all of Brueggemann's theology is a redefinition of what was omitted by Chalcedon, namely reconciliation. Thus the disciple, in Brueggemann's view, is a sacred mandate to carry out on earth the act of reconciliation offered by God to the human being: 'Christian discipleship is understood as a pursuit of "the way". The way, as a metaphor, is not precisely characterized, but it is in a different way, the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of suffering, the way to Jerusalem. The term marks Christians as those who live on a path that contrasts with any fixed and settled way of life. The way has clearly brought the early Church into conflict with all false paths of self-assurance' (Brueggemann 1982, 122).

In the same spirit are Gavin D'Costa, who captures the action of the Holy Spirit in engaging relationship in the context of a modern Europe in which the Christian pulse is growing weaker (D'Costa 2000, 109-132), and Amos Yong, who

invites Christianity to seek and identify the imprint of the Holy Spirit in other religions (Yong 2020, 243). Thus, the picture takes shape, offering the image of a dynamic, relational, reconciling disciple, who has at his disposal not human boundaries but spiritual horizons in fulfilling his mandate.

Darrell Fasching, reflects on the story of the Tower of Babel, of man's inability to transcend by his own forces and fixed methods, noting that this is not man's destiny, and then turns his gaze to the human condition of being *alien and alienated*. People like him risk being anathematized by the disciples of the centred and fixed theology in which they know all too well who they are and what they are to do. The history of Christianity, however, proves the opposite of this kind of *Babel theology*, in which man fails permanently, the consequence being too many bloody rows. Fasching, therefore, proposes the *alienated theology*. In the context of this theology, being a disciple implies an orientation towards the alien: "To be an alien is to be a stranger. To be alienated is to be a stranger to oneself. Alienated theology understands doubt and the questions that arise from it as our most fundamental experience of the infinite. For our unending questions keep us open to the infinite, continually inviting us to transcend our present horizon of understanding. In a like manner, the presence of the stranger continuously calls us into question and invites us to transcend the present horizon of the egocentric and ethnocentric answers that structure our personal and cultural identities. An alienated theology understands that only a faith which requires one to welcome the alien or stranger is truly a utopian faith capable of transforming us into new beings who are capable of creating a new world of pluralistic human interdependence" (Fasching 1993, 6-7).

The term *syneidesis* from Greek, or *constientia* from Latin (Rotaru 2017a, 545-550), means consciousness, that is, a knowing together. Therefore the definition of identity and implicitly of the notion of disciple, does not consist in a rigid formula, encapsulated in itself, but in a relational and creative openness towards the Creator and towards the other that defines certain aspects of identity, without which it would be incomplete and therefore unable to fulfil the mandate of being a disciple. Consciousness, therefore, encompasses within itself both one's own identity and the aspect of relating to the other, as well as the immanent imprint of divine identity. Thus, to be a disciple implies a definition in relation to the other as well as to the divinity, and not to be a disciple implies one's own affectation of both the other and the divinity.

Have human beings continued to build towers of Babel, now using not bricks and tar but culture, civilization (Rotaru 2023, 62-79) and even theology? Brueggemann is sounding the alarm in this direction, and a re-evaluation of theology does not mean a renunciation of what the Holy Fathers have handed down to us, and then generation after generation, it does not mean an act of rebellion against Christian dogma, it does not mean committing heresy, but an act of tearing down every human initiative to transcend, through all that is best, an act of tearing down that tower of Babel, identified by Brueggemann as "fortress mentality" and other

kinds of towers: "This text (of the *Tower of Babel*) suggests a different kind of unity sought by a fearful humanity organized against God's purposes. This unity seeks to establish a cultural, human unity without reference to God's threats, promises or mandates. This is a self-inflicted unity in which humanity has a "fortress mentality". It seeks to survive by its own resources. It seeks to build a world free from holy danger and immune to God's terror in history. It is a unity founded on fear and characterized by compulsion. A human unity without the vision of God's will risks being ordered into oppressive conformity. And in the end it will be in vain" (Brueggemann 1982, 100).

In this part, it is precisely to this definition that I refer - to be a disciple in relation to human diversity - a definition by which I do not intend to enter into opposition to established dogmas, but to dare to affirm that Chalcedon teaches us who God is and who we are but fails to teach us who our neighbor is. It is unacceptable for Christianity to witness the extermination of the neighbor, to agree to the exclusion of the neighbor from divine communion and from the hope of eternity, for which it has nevertheless received a sacred mandate. The dignity (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) of authentic Christianity will also include a patriotism for the neighbor, and a relational vision. Applying the reflections of these leading thinkers, as a litmus test solution, to the lives of the personalities in the first part, we will obtain a contextual, relevant theology able to address the challenges of today.

4. The theology of the disciple

In this part, I will capture some glimpses of the theological content of the characters analyzed in the first part of this article, seen through the prism of the definition of discipleship (from which I have tried to emphasize the aspect of reconciliation and relationship) in the second part. From the outset, this part seems difficult because I would be in danger of committing a breach of honesty by analyzing the life and work of people in peacetime during wartime or other conflicts. I have chosen this theme, however, to highlight the discipleship of these people, because as one whose profession was war I could honestly answer Ricoeur's question, "d'ou parlez-vous"? The motivation behind analyzing the lives and work of these men is because too painfully superficial theological stones are thrown at people whose life's dilemma was not their life against the life of the other but, rising above their life (already stepping into the transcendent), their action has been to save as many human beings as possible from inhuman situations, often having only a "hester panim," a God who hides his face from pain, a God who hides in the greatest pains of humanity, especially in those strangers, anathematized, excluded and exiled, whom he is eager to save.

All those who knew Pacelli closely, unanimously agreed that he was a special man, in whose presence you feel that transcendent state towards divinity. As pontiff, Pius XII, knew that the hour of darkness cannot be approached by any method or

form in which human powers, actions, initiatives, however encouraging, are involved, and he knew that in that hour of darkness it would be a defeat to appeal to those legions of angels (or divisions of which Stalin spoke). In the hour of darkness, a disciple, a noble character defined by God himself, will know that it is the hour in which the lamb, in order to receive the grace of being chosen to be slaughtered as a burnt offering, must not open his mouth.

The theology of the silent pope cannot be put into words because it would detract from its aura, but theology must be prepared in every generation to address the hour of darkness through the theology of silence, so as to realize the conditions of the burning of all, the essence of which is communion with God for the salvation of the excluded. The actions of protest, of disapproval of Nazi and fascist ideology and policy, initiated by the pontiff, had no effect before the war, then during the war the pontiff encouraged and gave freedom to all Christians to undertake actions of salvation, so that after the war the pontiff undertook actions to save the Nazi criminals themselves. In all situations, the pontiff remained constant in saving lives and tried to remain constant in his silence. The proof is that when he did open his mouth, even then he failed miserably.

Silence is the noblest of the qualities of a disciple of Christ, understood as not accusing criminals by protesting silence but, on the contrary, not accusing criminals. Thus, a disciple distinguishes himself from other men, however moral and upright they may be, not only by refusing to accuse, and not only by knowing that the hour of judgment belongs to the Master alone and not to the disciple, but by bearing within himself, through silence, the sorrow around him (both of the victims and of the criminals), he tries to be like the Master, being the bearer of atonement. But to be a bearer of atonement in the case of the disciple, this refers to the sacred mandate to be salt and light, to direct the gaze of all towards the Master Bearer of Atonement.

As mentioned in the first part of this article, Barth was born in a period of political crisis, characterized by two world wars. On top of this crisis is superimposed another, the theological crisis, which fails to address the political and social crisis of the time in terms of Christian values and eternal and immutable truth. It can rightly be said that Barth's theology is a theology of crisis, but a deeper look reveals that the crisis Barth addresses is not a crisis of a particular time period, or of a category of people or a category of sciences: "God is in heaven and you are on earth. The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this crisis of human perception – the Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads – the figure of Jesus Christ... Paul did speak of Jesus Christ...the permanent crisis between time and eternity...the whole is placed under the crisis of the Spirit of Christ" (Barth 1968 10,17). Barth is, therefore, relevant both to particular situations and to the definition of discipleship, as he is able to answer Ricoeur's question, "D'ou parlez-vous?" (Kearney 2010, xi), and also to prove to Hunsinger that he is able to address the dehumanized post-Holocaust reality

with a relevant theology: As it is known the Gulag is the big brother of Auschwitz, and the author exposes the testimony of Varlam Shalamov, a survivor of Gulag: "nothing human was left to a human being - only mistrust, rage and lies. The ethical norm which applies in this situation is: "worse deeds exist than eating human flesh." Perhaps the most terrifying lesson of testimonies of extreme dehumanization is that it involves anyone, regardless of background, social, educational or any other conditions" (Hunsinger 2019, 218).

Bonhoeffer can only be understood through the prism of Aeneas' experiences at the fall of Troy, expressed by Vergilius in the words, "Animus meminisse horret!" (Thornhill 1886, Book II Verse 10-14) Then the context of war brings to the fore situations requiring major decisions, of life and death, of action or inaction, of fidelity or betrayal, such that the quality of being a disciple of Christ cannot be fitted into templates and still less can it be classified and cataloged by the human being, but only by God (Rotaru 2012a, 5).

Bonhoeffer's merit is that he offers Christianity and humanity two works that are special precisely because they are born in the midst of the most devastating war. Thus, "The Cost of Discipleship" and "Ethics" remain reference works, that provide answers to the present article. From the outset the author treats the notion of discipleship with a categorical attitude, making a clear distinction between cheap and costly grace. (Bonhoeffer 1959, 45). It is an acknowledged fact that an authentic theology traverses history, addresses contexts of a broad spectrum, confronts ideologies and concepts of life from different religions and cultures, brings the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, to a single crucial point, where the human being is brought face to face with the Creator and Master of eternal destiny and given the freedom to determine his or her own path to eternal destiny (Rotaru 2019, 214-215).

This is precisely what Bonhoeffer's theology does, a theology born and forged in the context of war proves to be valid in the context of Christianity today, confronting a cheap morality, culture and religiosity in which costly grace is exiled by a cheap grace of selfish self-indulgence, of comfort and luxury, of carelessness and indifference to the other, of the consumerism of grace and at the same time of the exclusion of the stranger from the *ivory tower*: "If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the Gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering...The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross" (Bonhoeffer 1959, 98).

Thus, Bonhoeffer's theology remains for all time a prophetic theology, a voice calling the disciple to be like his Master. Moreover, Bonhoeffer frees himself from human constraints and religiosities and lifts his spirit to those heights of a creative

relationship with his Creator, of a discipleship desired by his Master: "Freedom dares to act. Obedience has tied hands, freedom is creative. Obedience observes God's decalogue, freedom creates new decalogues" (Bonhoeffer 2005, 288).

Before moving on to the next apprentice I need to take a trip. When I chose Pacelli and Bonhoeffer the intention was not to set them in antithesis, but to distinguish from this wide spectrum of attitudes (from the "silence of the pope" to Bonhoeffer's sacrifice preceded by the words "silence in the face of evil is an evil in itself"), not the failure of one or the bravery of the other, but the theological content that addresses the tragedies of humanity, a theology that is able to speak through its bearers and messengers and that has something to say: a message of reconciliation.

It is unanimously known, recognized, and accepted by Christians everywhere that orthodox consensus delimits and defines the biblical doctrines: "*Ubique, Semper, Ab Omnibus*. Fundamental to the Orthodox consensus was an affirmation of the authority of tradition as that which had been believed "everywhere, always, by all". The criteria for what constituted the orthodox tradition were "universality, antiquity, and consensus." The immediate purpose of this definition... have been to attack...the innovation and deviation from the tradition of orthodoxy." (Pelikan 1971, 333). Moltmann's theology falls within the biblical limits expressed in Matthew 13:38: "The field is the world" and not within the limits expressed by Cyprian of Carthage: "*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*". Therefore, the field of activity of Christianity and implicitly of the disciple is the world and theology must address the world, precisely what Moltmann does: "The cruciality of this ministry is not that the church may prosper. It is that the world may live and not die..." (Brueggemann 2007, 203). Then Moltmann's theology is also called "Theology after Auschwitz". (Moltmann 2015, 11). By this Moltmann tells us that the history of Christianity is ours and that we have to take it on; moreover, an attitude "as if nothing had happened" is not compatible with being a Christian, on the contrary Christian ethics and discipleship must lead to healing, reconciliation and a new re-evaluation of theology so that the horrors of history are not repeated.

Is there currently any ecclesial authority that also adds Moltmann's words to the Apostles' Creed? What would the history of Christianity have looked like if these words had been in the basic documents from the beginning, where they actually belonged? "The intention is not to alter the words of tradition; but one must know what has to be added in thought. After "born of the Virgin Mary" ...we should add something along the following lines: Baptized by John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit: to preach the kingdom of God to the poor, to heal the sick, to receive those who have been cast out, to revive Israel for the salvation of the nations, and to have mercy upon all people." (Moltmann 1990, 150).

Moltmann's theology addresses a question to the whole of Christian theology, which springs from the third world - from that *surplus of people* who are a nuisance to the first world - from the world of the excluded, from the world of those who experience only pain: "So Christian theology cannot simply ask: who is Christ for us

today? It has to ask: Who really is Christ for the poor of the Third World? and: Who is Christ for us when we make use of their poverty, for our own purposes?" (Moltmann 1990, 65). A theology that cannot give a pertinent answer, a theology that does not have an orthodoxy followed by an orthopraxy and an orthopraxy, in a word, discipleship, that addresses the pains of the world, is only a distorted image of the master, which it offers to humanity and the failure of the disciple to be like the master. Moltmann's protest in theology also touches on the aspect of mysticism, of that higher knowledge that only the initiated have, and emphasizes knowing and addressing the other person, from whom true freedom is achieved: "I become truly free when I open my life for other people...Then the other person is no longer the limitation of my freedom; he is an expansion of it." (Moltmann 1993, 216). The Moltmann disciple has something to say to Christianity and humanity through the depth of his relationship with his Master: "I began to see things with the eyes of the Christ dying on the cross" (Moltmann 2015, 10).

Volf, Moltmann's disciple, went a step further than his master, approaching the *Master-creator amoris* and *Master-creator of reconciliation*. To what extent he is indebted to Moltmann, to what extent Volf's context, in the light of Moltmann's context, gives rise to such a theology, only he can say, but what is certain is that we are offered a theology of reconciliation that is profound, realistic, relevant and contextualising. Here I will quote the late Corneliu Constantineanu, from his introductory word in the book *Exclusion and Embrace*: "No one has made it clearer than Volf that in order to reflect adequately on Christian involvement in society, we cannot avoid addressing vital notions such as social agency, identity, otherness, exclusion, hostility, sin, forgiveness, memory, reconciliation, truth, justice" (Volf 2017, 29). Coming from Africa, from a Muslim background, troubled and with many unanswered questions, at my first contact with the academic field (because I found that I needed education in order to address the outsiders effectively), Professor Măcelaru, in his first lecture, told us that we must become doctors for our churches, heal the churches (Rotaru 2017b, 57-76), heal theology, and only then address the world. And Professor Oprean echoes Volf's theology: "Reconciliation is God's initiative towards humankind. As such it is not only for the church but for the entire world. To reduce reconciliation to one's relationship with God or with his community of so-called "saved ones" actually means to deny God's eternal plan of reconciliation, powerfully displayed and revealed in the Christ event" (Oprean, 2021, 189).

I believe that the man Miroslav Volf, the theologian and disciple prophet Miroslav Volf has something to say to Christianity and to the current context in which mankind desperately needs a bridge over which to cross, thus finding its humanity. And Volf has worked on this bridge and is still working on it.

5. Conclusions

Today mankind is faced with an extremely delicate situation: the problem of emigration from less developed countries to Europe. Immigrants are coming from Asia and Africa, especially from Islamic countries. If the economic and social crises are so obvious and felt by Europeans that politicians have no positive solutions, however, as far as the spiritual reality is concerned, this can escalate to the highest levels, because, on the one hand, Islam is unable to assimilate the values of Western civilisation and on the other it wants to promote its religious values which, in fact, have contributed and are contributing to the destabilisation of the countries of origin. If anti-Semitism was a constant in Christianity and WWII was blamed on the Jews, as a result of political, economic, social and religious trends that were totally unorthodox, the scapegoat ending up in extermination camps, the quality of disciple of Christ for those who approved, cheered and participated in that genocide is questioned. Nor are those who remained passive and indifferent to the Jewish question qualified to say anything to humanity about being a disciple of Christ. For the present generation, the Holocaust, the Shoah, is only history (and not objective enough either, as it is still littered with attitudes unsuited to the quality of human beings), the extermination in the camps and the war losses remain only figures, for which a student might even advance and wave the diplomas of knowledge. Christianity risks failing to address an orthopraxy appropriate to orthodoxy and the quality of human beings, thus orthopraxy remains questionable in crisis situations.

But the present reality is critical. Theodor Adorno (Brain 2017, 111) proved in 1950 with the help of a test, the F-Scale, that the concept of *authoritarian personality* could give birth to monsters that would affect humanity. Also, in 1963, the Milgram test (Russell 2022, 151-153), proved that realizing conditions like the Third Reich, destructive obedience to authoritarian personalities leads to the reality that the Holocaust could be repeated today and also in other nations, not only the German one. What is happening in Europe today is an evil environment conducive to the development of extermination policies and actions. Here, I am referring to the Islamic population in Europe which, by its attitude, religion, social and economic challenges, is a potential scapegoat (except that compared to the Jews, Muslims really are a danger), leading towards the Holocaust, with the specification that now it will be on a much higher level. In this situation Christianity, which must understand history and the present times, has a particularly important mandate to address the imminent danger with an attitude of discipleship to Christ and to make discipleship as well, now in times of peace, because in times of crisis the levers will be fewer but the responsibility will be greater.

What ought we to do? At this question Barth answered: "We ought to do that which corresponds to grace". For these reasons, Barth characterized Christian morality as obedience not to an absolute law, but to an ever actual invitation, offered

to humanity between the creation of the world by Christ Alpha and its completion by Christ Omega, to respond freely to a gracious God." (Hunsinger 2019, 113).

Creative grace, this path to which Christ invites his disciples, encompasses a spectrum of attitudes, often different, like Ezra (Ezra 9) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13: 23-31); *creative grace* accepts both the pope's silence and Bonhoeffer's sacrifice; *creative grace* is incapable of being defined and pinned down by any dogma, even the Holy Fathers; *creative grace* is the scaling of any boundaries, paying any price, just so that it is possible for the disciple to offer grace, like his master, like Volf; *creative grace* is the ultimate finality, the path that opens an infinity of solutions to impossible challenges when the human being fails in trying the best; *creative grace* is the divine seed becoming seed (allusion to the parable of the tares in which the seed, being the Word, and therefore God himself, becomes the sons of God); *creative grace* is the eternal communion between the disciple and his master, more precisely the eternal communion of the master with his disciples.

In the first part of this article, I sketched just a few lines of the life and context of these people to help me then define the notion of the disciple, whose orthodoxy is the theology of reconciliation and the theology of the stranger, expressed succinctly in part two. Thus the people in part two I intended to be a kind of referee for those in part one. In part three, I have also drawn some theological lines which, taken together, portray the image of a disciple who addresses the present context a praxis which, taken into account, can become contextualizing in a world which is in desperate and urgent need of restoration of its humanity, dignity, identity and communion, and of transcendent rehabilitation through a relationship with an immanent divinity, an immanence whose bearers are the disciples.

Following the red thread of this article, the referee Brueggemann is able to conclude the theology of discipleship and discipleship by the term "proslambanesthe" (Brueggemann 1998, 56). *Proslambano* is a powerful word, it is the *welcome* greeting! addressed to man by the divinity and which the divinity expects the disciple to bear in his mission. And the Volf disciple passes this test, *summa cum laude*, certainly noted as such not only by the arbiters of part two but by the Master himself: "For in the light of Christ's self-sacrifice and resurrection, the future belongs to those who give themselves in love, not to those who nail others to a cross" (Volf 2006, 83). With all due respect to the other categories of theology and theologians, with all due respect to their contribution throughout history, however, the pressing answers on the mission field we have found in public theology. It keeps Christians "awake" and relevant, and the violent and unjust terrain of humanity is the proper ground for a Christian, however insignificant, to become a genuine disciple. From Sedmak's point of view, orthodoxy born out of contexts of crisis and conflict can lead to the dichotomy between orthodoxy and orthopraxy: He concludes like that: We do theology "but once we visit a refugee camp, once we see the pictures of war, once we listen to the story of people...we wake up." (Sedmak 2002, 101) And he has every right in such situations to emphasize action. However,

what he wants to convey is not exactly discipleship at the expense of theology, but that process of transformation of the Christian, expressed in Bonhoeffer's words as follows: "When I first took up theology, my idea of it was quite different - much more academic, perhaps. But now it has become something else entirely...The restoration of the church depends...on lives of uncompromising discipleship, following Christ...It seems to me that peace and social justice are such things (of discipleship).... (Metaxas 2016, 345).

A particularly important fact, of divine revelation value, is that the public theology proclaimed in the school I attend by the faculty contains in its very essence this paradigm of the theologian-disciple, who is able to address the challenges of the world in the way that these people I have addressed in my article have helped define the notion of disciples of Christ.

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Postmodernism and the Crisis of the Paradigm Change in the Christian Mission

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ABSTRACT: Postmodernism brought about changes that affected almost all aspects of social and religious life. The Christian world's perspective on its mandate to mission all nations of the earth has substantially redefined itself after the 1950s to bring itself into line with the new globalizing mentality. The old missionary paradigm was replaced by a new one, and the consequences at the level of theology, especially Protestant theology, were consistent, often nefarious, and especially affected the church in the long run. One of the new attributes of missionary work and Christian theology, in general, is relevance. It will often decide what the essence and meaning of the Christian perspective is in the face of the great challenges of the world today. This article argues that the church today is facing great and important challenges. Adhering to the old mission paradigms can jeopardize not only its present actions but future survival.

KEYWORDS: postmodernism, mission, paradigm, globalizing mentality, relevance

1. Introduction

Since the middle of the 20th century, it has become increasingly evident that humanity is about to enter a new age of history. Postmodernism, a socio-cultural emulation that emerged as a reaction to the devastation caused by the two world wars, popularised the thesis of the 'programmatic rejection' of the concepts or notions that had previously underpinned the idea of modernity. Raschke sees postmodernism as a kind of philosophical and theological iconoclasm designed to dynamite the doctrinal position of Western Christianity.

Built on the idea of a relationship with a personal Christ, Western Protestantism will propose a GloboChrist, that is, a universal, global body as the new Body of Christ. The new globalized Church becomes a network, each believer representing a node of that network (Raschke 2008, 21). The failure of this project of modernity (Habermas) was argued by some thinkers by evoking the horrors of war and the collapse of that Eurocentric, Christian,

Enlightenment, racist, colonialist and industrialist mentality. Braidotti identified this European human ideal that lay at the foundation of modernity in da Vinci's depiction of Vitruvian man (Braidotti, 2016, 25).

Modernism had aimed for world peace, but unfortunately failed. Taylor, considered that this period was characterized by a great exaltation of the autonomy of human reason and its involvement in all areas of life (Taylor 2000, 73). In contrast, postmodernism was directed against metanarratives, considered to be the vehicles of modernist ideals. This led to the distortion of the perception of science (truth), culture (the beautiful) and religion (the sense of moral good).

The metanarrative, Bauckham explains, represents for the exponents of the new wave "the attempt to tell a single story about the whole of human history in order to ascribe a single meaning to human nature" (Bauckham 2003, 87). The reason why postmodernism set out to abolish metanarratives was because they were guilty of being totalizing and supportive of the thesis of societal progress and human nature. Lyotard, for his part, has sown a general suspicion of all metanarratives (which he labels authoritarian and oppressive), which of course includes the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. He notes, "Science has been at odds with narratives since its inception. According to its own criteria, most of these stories turn out to be fables... Simplifying to the maximum, we regard as 'postmodern' the distrust of meta-stories" (Lyotard 1993, 15). The church, a promoter of its own set of meta-narratives, has been directly affected in its ontological (those that define the church's being) and existential (which concern the church's relationship to the individual and to the world) underpinnings. Curiously, the extent of the religious transformations during this period is almost completely ignored by historians. Jenkins notes, "Neglect of religious factors at the turn of the millennia can be seen as comically short-sighted, on a par with those who would talk about eighteenth-century history without mentioning the French Revolution" (Jenkins, 2002, 1). The period of the 1960s, then, saw an unprecedented escalation of attacks on key concepts of Christianity. One of the most targeted was that of Christian mission. The so-called 'Christian' world abounded in 'missions' and 'missionary strategies', but with an equally strong counter-reaction from the secular world (Rotaru 2006, 251-266).

Moreau distinguishes between 'mission' and 'missions'. If Christian mission was defined in the past as 'what the Church does for God in the world', some speak today of missions that can be projected onto socially nuanced goals, but not necessarily very clear in their biblical legitimation. These are directions along the lines of philanthropy, education, medical support, anti-hunger efforts, developing inter-ethnic relations, etc. (Moreau, Corwin and McGee 2015, 70). It had become clear that the Christian perspective would soon face an important paradigm shift, not only in its missionary approach (suspected of being a disguised form of colonialism), but in many of its doctrinal, practical and institutional components. At a certain point, a certain semantic tension even arises between the old meaning of the concept of Christian mission and another, which is emerging on the horizon:

global mission. In Raschke's terms, 'globalization' - the heraldic signifier of the new postmodern society - is no longer about 'what' and 'where', but much more about 'however' and 'wherever' (Raschke 2008, 30). True, the new terms are vague, strange, different from those inherited from the Protestant tradition. Many of the 'new missionaries' will adjust their 'visions', bewitched by the promises of globalization (Taylor 2000, 60). However, Taylor argues, to doubt that Christ's Church will be able to face the tempting prospect of globalization is misplaced. "Viewed from a biblical perspective, it is globalization that must confront the Church's perspective" (Taylor 2000, 60).

2. Christian mission to the end of the modern period

Until the 1960s, the concept of 'Christian mission' held a perhaps broad, but nevertheless concrete meaning: mission was the crossing of cultural barriers in order to establish new human relationships in the name of Christ and to plant new local communities of believers. Specific reference was made to the following structural-functional aspects: a) sending groups of missionaries (men, women, with or without much training in missiology) to certain areas targeted by the strategy of the local churches, b) establishing a set of 'missionary activities' (basically preaching, teaching, medical care), c) delimiting an area of impact of that missionary circle, d) providing material support by the missionary organization running those activities, e) estimating the mission field, that un-evangelized territory to be explored in a later phase of mission expansion, f) building a centre of operations for that mission, g) motivating the local religious community to provide spiritual support (fasting and prayer) during the mission, finally, h) providing the minimum set of specialised (lay) services that that mission can offer.

The fundamental biblical concepts of the mission of the Christian Church until near the end of the second millennium are broadly the five listed by John Stott: mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation and conversion (Stott 2008, 9). There is a danger, however, that the new times prophesied by postmodernism will change the meanings of these terms, giving them semantic connotations other than those proper to Scripture. These fundamental concepts, Stott argues, must answer the most important question facing the church: What is the responsibility left by Christ to Christians to the rest of the world?

The model of modern mission, Bosch explains, was biblical, taking up the agenda of the Great Commission: spreading the gospel, converting unbelievers, and ultimately planting new churches (Bosch 2011, 22). These biblical categories, however, Stott warns, should never have come under the influence of postmodern trends of social renewal or idealistic trends militating for world peace. The inner crisis of the 'Christian' world, coupled with attacks on its recent past, should have awakened Christianity from its centuries-long numbness and confronted it with a

new reality. The world was changing significantly in the second half of the 20th century, and the Church was forced to resist this trend in order to survive.

Bosch (2011) identified a number of mutations affecting human society during this period. First, he observes an unprecedented development of technology having a colossal impact on everyday life. Then, the Christian West slowly become secularized. At the same time, as the de-Christianization of the 'civilized world', other religions claiming to be socially integrated are also emerging in the same geographical area. Many of these non-believers turn out to be far more devoted to their religion than Christians. On the other hand, Christianity is beginning to feel a general sense of guilt due to the excesses of the colonial period, but especially the atrocities of the two world wars. This feeling will lead to a kind of operational inhibition, considerably diminishing the missionary dynamic in the West. The world was suddenly faced with the phenomenon of irreversible segregation between rich and poor, and between Christians and those of other religions. But the centre of gravity of Christianity no longer belonged to Europe. It is relocated to the countries of the East (China, South Korea) or even Africa. These territories become the new launching pads for most mission projects. Another change, somehow related to the 'autonomy' standard of the churches, is visible in the lack of missionary involvement, something once considered essential (Bosch 2011, 24). Also of great impact is the unprecedented growth of Pentecostal movements. Some experts estimate that they now account for about 25% of all practising Christians (Chua et al. 2017, 3). Ormerod, a promoter of 'globalized' cohabitation between Catholicism and Pentecostal movements, states:

In almost every respect, Pentecostalism is at the other pole from the Catholic Church: its short historical heritage, its organizational renunciation of a centralized structure, its informal ecclesiology. But what the two share is their identity as global movements. Almost every book written about or by Pentecostals in recent decades traces the global nature of this movement (Ormerod and Clifton 2009, 26).

The mass success of Pentecostalism is probably due to the adjustment of its strategies to the specificity of globalization trends, a trend that has been felt since the beginning of the 20th century. The openness of many Pentecostal groups to any form of dialogue, even with those of other faiths, however, creates an extremely dangerous theological gap that can endanger the integrity of the Word preached in missionary endeavors. The emphasis on mission and evangelism, coupled with considerable resistance to theological pressures of all kinds, has led to the considerable growth of this denomination, creating a fourth Christian force (alongside Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism).

Mission, Stott observes, no longer signifies that old and exclusively soteriological concern for the enlargement of the Kingdom of God (visible especially in the patristic period and much less so, it is true, in Reformation times). It is now

replaced by the new ecumenical, humanistic, reconciling concern for the harmony of peaceful cooperation between peoples. The problem is that, in the new understanding of mission, it is in fact the world that is preparing to dictate the church's agenda and turn the church into its instrument. Evangelism originally had the strict sense of proclaiming the Gospel to the unsaved, with preaching taking the central place. Today, a redefinition of the Gospel message in terms of its recipients is called for, with a change in preaching methods and the vocabulary used. While social action was initially only one of the instruments of evangelisation, it is now tending to become a partner in it. If in the past the Church was perceived as strict, Stott, in his new missionary perspective after 1974, proposes a serving Church in the same way as her Head, Christ, served (Stott 2008, 32). Dialogue with non-believers was considered in the past as 'dangerous', even bordering on compromise. Dialogue with non-believers was once considered 'dangerous', even bordering on compromise. Now, however, the dialogue seems to be encouraged as a proof of Christian authenticity, humility, integrity and sensitivity. It is as if the Church is sent out to dialogue with the world about whatever the world needs. Someone, however, reminded, "It is not our job to save the world, but to point people to Christ!" Such a proposal, that of an unrestricted dialogue, must, however, be viewed with great reserve.

In attempting to discover the cause of these mutations or transitions, Bauckham has developed an interesting perspective on mission in the modern period, starting from the relationship between the universal and the particular (Bauckham 2003, 83). When it comes to God's will with humanity, Bauckham notes, it is important to understand that God's universal plan with all humanity is revealed in the particular example of Jesus. This particular, when it comes to the gift of salvation, is a multiplied reality, one carried from one individual to another in the direction of the universal, i.e. the Kingdom of God. The blessing of salvation is indeed intended for all people. But it can only be received when it is shared from one person to another, that is, from individual to individual. The plan of evangelization remains a movement from the individual to the general and not vice versa. However, some Christians remain stuck in the individualistic plane (Protestantism), while others have moved irreversibly towards universalism (Orthodoxy and Catholicism).

3. The paradigm shift in Christian mission

The next paradigm that has become increasingly visible over the last 60 years is postmodernism. Some scholars already see humanity as firmly anchored in this new perspective. But in order to highlight the shift from modernism to postmodernism, one must first consider the starting point. Bosch identifies five essential missiological 'answers' that the Enlightenment offers from its old rationalist perspective: 1) Christianity propagated itself in the way of a unique religious experience, 2) As something strictly related to personal experience, 3) As something more rational

than scientific 4) As a law that addresses all of humanity, and 5) As an element that liberates humanity from any other kind of religious addition (Bosch 2011, 302). It was these aspects that shaped the modern paradigm proposing both philosophy and missionary praxis.

Contrasting the postmodern paradigm with that of modernism, Bosch suggests that it would be necessary to give new confidence to reason (which is disavowed in postmodernism), but not in a reductionist sense, as the Enlightenment did. The Enlightenment had eliminated 'religious reason', those patterns of reason which, in premodernism, were linked to the religious component of the human being. Reality had to include again the religious reason, which for Huntington for example, lies at the foundation of all civilization (Huntington 2011, 77). Moreover, it seems that postmodernism does not impose or reveal any existing tension between science and religion. Such a circumstance, Bosch believes, would even be attractive to the entire Christian community. Veith, almost as enthusiastically, writes: "Some Christians may believe that, with the end of modernism, the postmodern era could mean a revival of classical Christianity. They see postmodernism in very vivid colours. Although I am somewhat of the same opinion, I also see a new secular ideology replacing the modernist perspective. Like modernism, postmodernism is equally hostile to Christianity, but for different reasons" (Veith 1994, XI).

Another long-criticised aspect is the attempt to objectify the world. Man has come to treat everything as an object and to place himself affectively (as subject) outside that object. This philosophical approach has profound implications in shaping the missiological ways of today's world. The paradigm shift has also meant a shift from a historicist perspective (in modernism) to an eschatological one (in postmodernism). This obviously also affects the theological horizon. The seductive, yet illusory, image of progress, proclaimed with such conviction in the Enlightenment, has led to the fabrication of a philosophy of colonialist expansion. Initially, the aim of missionary societies was to respond in a timely manner to the needs of the people in the area of missionary operations. Later, in the last years of the 20th century, these societies began to create 'development projects'. It was clear that missionary objectives were suddenly beginning to differ from those that were initially purely charitable. Now the idea of 'rural reconstruction', 'industrial development', etc. was being pursued. Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants alike were joining in such projects. But the effect is not as expected. Rich countries, Bosch admits, have become richer, while poor countries have become poorer. Enlightenment objectivism has succeeded - says Polanyi - in totally falsifying the pre-modern conception of truth (Bosch 2011, 308). A solution to this impasse, in the postmodern context, would be to create a new kind of truth, not the objective one, but a 'personal' one. The commitment to personal knowledge is placed above objective knowledge, being a type of knowledge without accurately capturing the subject to be known. This form of 'cognitive engagement' might impose a particular 'truth' as valid, just because people choose it to be so.

4. Christian mission in postmodernism

The intention to redefine the mission is relatively new. Until the Jerusalem conference in 1928, the Church had not been concerned with the global mission effort. Then followed meetings in which terms were chosen which could most clearly define the Church's mission (*kerygma*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *martyria*, *leitourgia*, etc.) were discussed in turn. It became clear that changes would occur in the context and premises of mission. The changes required recontextualisation in the context of mission theology. As Schreiter recognized: 'religion... can provide the *telos* that a global system misses, a coherent and ordered vision' (Ormerod and Clifton 2009, 14). Here are some of these changes: a) The shift in the center of gravity of Christianity from the West of the industrialized world (Europe and America) to the global South (Africa and the Far East). Christianity, it is true, had never been an eminently 'Euro-Western' religion, but its sphere of influence had been somewhat fixed in Europe and North America for much of history. But this was to change after 1950, so that today the Christian majority is no longer to be found in Western countries, but rather somewhere in Africa. Tennent recalls that Christianity Today magazine noted years ago that 85% of the members of Yale University's Campus Crusade for Christ were Asian, while the university's Buddhist meditation program was exclusively white. It was also said that there are more Anglican believers in Nigeria than in all the Anglican churches in Europe and America combined. There are more evangelicals in Nepal than in Spain. At the same time, India is sending over 41,000 cross-cultural missionaries around the world (Tennent 2010, 26). b) Changing the character of local church mission to multinational and multi-denominational. Thousands and thousands of missionaries are being sent to other parts of the world from southern countries as part of a multi-denominational effort. c) Changing the character of the mission field. Expansion of the world's urban territory. More than half of the world's population now lives in cities, with urbanization on the rise. Mission philosophy needs to be readapted from one aimed at the rural (going all the way to the aboriginal) to one suited to the urban population. d) The unprecedented connectivity of today's population. The Internet and mobile telephony, new technologies that continue to develop, are having an increasing impact accelerating the trend of globalization. e) Changing demographic balance. Unprecedented migratory movements are still taking place. It is estimated that more than 230 million people were living outside their own countries at the end of the 1990s. In recent years, huge masses of people have been moving from the East and Africa to Europe.

All this general imagery of the new paradigm of mission requires, as is only natural, a missiological reorientation of the Church. Here are some proposals that are put forward in the hope of 'accommodating' Christian mission to the current face of the mission field: i) New missionary strategies will have to take into account the complexities of today's global urban environment. Missionary 'techniques' will

be very different from those of William Carey or Hudson Taylor. Mission in the neighbourhood of the contemporary urban megapolis will not resemble mission in the rural steppe of past centuries. ii) Mission strategies and structures will need to reflect the global nature of the Church. Partnerships will be ways to better meet the challenges presented by historical patterns of power manifestation and resource distribution. Ormerod, writes: "Christianity is not a spectator of globalization, but one of its agents, one of the forces that have expanded the possibilities for interconnection between people, the spread of social or political ideas and cultural links" (Ormerod and Clifton 2009, 9).

Perhaps a fierce rejection of globalization per se is not exactly the wisest choice. Rather, what is expected of the Church and its media exponents is a well-founded critique of the way in which politics, economics and technology - as instruments of globalization - are in danger of providing the premises for injustice, poverty and environmental destruction. iii) Local churches need to see themselves as centres of mission, rather than seeing mission as something that happens elsewhere, in a space outside the church. iv) The church needs to get used to sharing the Word anywhere and in any conditions. New innovative ways of helping and equipping those who mission in different places are needed. v) Mission must cease to be the 'job' of a few 'specialists'. Mission objectives must concern all believers, whether in the local church or in the diaspora. Mission agencies will be forced to take all these scenarios into account.

But what can be the harmful effects of the new 'globalizing' paradigms of mission on local religious communities? (Rotaru 2014, 532-541) One of Bosch's assumptions about the new models of mission was that of a missionary ecumenism, an inter-ethnic and multi-denominational partnership. Usually - the case history of recent history attests - ecumenical consensus has not led to anything doctrinally good. Concessions made in the face of traditional mega-cults have caused greater inconvenience than those advantages of conclusion. Yet evangelical Christianity has its own response to the current global needs of humanity. That unity of purpose of humanity is also one of the eschatological tasks of the Church. Ormerod, states that 'within this community, diversity is not abolished, but is placed in that space of communal faith' (Ormerod and Clifton 2009, 13). The emphasis on 'diversity', even if it seems justified in that space defined by the exhortation 'forbear one another' has much wider repercussions, because it involves the framing of new missionary strategies. Moreover, the view that the old paradigm of mission is outdated, in the sense of anachronistic, seems to be embraced by a growing number of theologians, and not necessarily of all shades (Antone 2008). Moreover, there are those like Hans Ucko, a priest in the Church of Sweden and a member of the World Council of Churches, who believe that the term 'mission' should even be deleted from the Christian vocabulary, it brings with it a negative charge in the direction of missionary complicity with colonialism. Such an association, says Ucko, only makes inter-ethnic dialogue more difficult (Antone 2008).

S. Wesley Ariarajah, a Sri Lankan ecumenist, put forward the following four proposals for changing the missionary paradigm in order to make mission more credible and relevant for the 21st century: 1) From an exclusive to an inclusive understanding of mission. In the modernist paradigm, mission was understood as the Church's ministry of bringing God to unbelievers. This missionary model is also called 'Noah's ark'. The Church, like Noah's ark, contains the elect who are set apart to be saved. Then the saved will come out of the ark and try to save others outside the ark. The model is a limiting one, Ariarajah says, and avoids contact or partnership with others outside. Or, this can be interpreted as Christians being hostile to those of other religions. Alternatively, Ariarajah proposes an *inclusive* understanding of mission. This would mean that Christians mission for a God already present and active in the world, their role being to bring the world to God. In conclusion, mission is not the monopoly of Christians. They participate on the mission field alongside others. It is obvious, however, that the Church runs the risk of mixing the Gospel message with other discourses that are foreign and possibly antagonistic to Scripture. 2) From conversion to healing. Both situations define the main objective of the mission. In pre-modernism and modernism, conversion was the main objective of mission. Now this objective is denounced as limiting and even narrow. It is often anathematised under the heading of proselytism. In the new paradigm, conversion is seen as a new orientation of man towards God and his neighbour, but without recourse to religious perceptions or denominational labels. The aim of mission becomes to reconcile, heal and unify. It actually has the meaning of righting all social and economic wrongs. The risk of such a tendency is to turn mission into a form of socio-political activism. The mission would focus on charitable aspects and not necessarily on soteriological ones. The great drawback of such a perspective is that it positions the Church as a provider of 'worldly' services instead of preserving its character as the Body of Christ or the embassy of the Kingdom of God. 3) From majority to minority. Ariarajah believes that the traditional meaning of conversion would imply the colonialist, imperialist desire to bring more and more members into the Church in order to 'be stronger by quantity'. Somehow, the power of the Church is visualized by the number of those who belong to it through membership. But, says the new paradigm, the aim should not be to bring everyone into the Church, to be the majority. On the contrary, one can remain a minority, a 'remnant' (Romans 9:26-28). The power of salvation (Matthew 5:13) lies not in quantity, say such missiologists, but in quality. The conclusion is that we should no longer fight for an increasing number of converts, but insist on the witness of love and justice. Again, such a perspective distorts the missionary praxis: that of facilitating the attainment of salvation. The new paradigm sees mission as a therapy to be used only if one feels the need and only for a certain time. 4) From doctrinal topics to deep spiritual concerns. In the past, the main background of the proclamation of the Gospel message was apologetic. The intention was to demonstrate that the Christian religion is superior to all others and the only true

one. Now, says Ariarajah, such strategies will have no future. But missionaryism, devoid of a certain doctrine of mission, becomes simply a social-political program. The need for salvation is subtly replaced by the need for solidarity. But you cannot enter the Kingdom by being only 'in solidarity' with Christ, without having been changed by him.

5. Conclusions

The Church of contemporary times faces great challenges. If it does not do mission, it will slowly die. Huntington argues that, "in the long run Mohammed will win. Between 1900-2000 Christianity grew from 26.9% to 29.9% of the total population. Islam grew from 12.4% to 19.2%. Islam is likely to reach 30% by 2025" (Huntington 2012, 86). If it does mission in terms of the new paradigms, it will ultimately suffer the same fate... Even if it seems anachronistic, the only remedy is for the Church to remain in its old paradigm of mission (Rotaru 2012,5). This does not always, it is true, fit into the already outlined frameworks of globalization, but it respects the ontological prescriptions that guarantee Christ's Church its continued perpetuation (Matthew 28:19,20). The theology of mission must be articulated in a perfectly balanced way within the general whole of Christian theology, the fundamental pillars of which are: the theology of God, the theology of man and the theology of the order of created things. The question is, says Richard Bauckham: Can the biblical narrative, where the guarantee of truth is offered only by the correct reference to the Word of God, stand up to postmodern narratives? What might lead to the formulation of an answer, Bauckham argues, is that biblical metanarrative has always been in opposition to the world's metanarrative. The character of biblical metanarrative has always been one of counter-narrative. As long as Christians retain this adversarialness, it will be possible to talk about Christian mission (Rotaru 2017, 57-76), and by implication, the Church of Christ.

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“Nobel” for Entire Life Performance

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ABSTRACT: The linguistic foundation of the term *δυναμις* (*dinamis*) comes from the Greek language, positively aspected and used in rendering the meaning of *power*, *dynamics*, *potential*, and *ability*. Epistemological progress promotes in the patented formula the notion of dynamite, of the same Hellenistic essence, used for the first time in 1866 and attributed to the explosive that is the subject of this study and which belongs entirely to Alfred Nobel. The interest in this invention was intended to be compatible with scientific evolution and technological progress. Generous in many humanitarian and scientific philanthropic acts, Alfred Nobel was paradoxically pessimistic, bitterly ironic, and convinced that his discoveries, instead of contributing to the annihilation of war, would inevitably make conflicts even bloodier than before. The notoriety of Nobel's will is colossal, exceptional and unmatched in its essence and substance. It stands as a symbol of undisputed epistemological power and a dynamic of the most distinguished praxis.

KEYWORDS: *dinamis*, science, morality, Alfred Nobel, dynamite, Nobel Prize, conscience, will to power, Nietzsche

“I am dynamite!” – Friedrich Nietzsche

1. Introfuction

The present study revolves around the concept of *δυναμις* (*dinamis*) – *power*, from its linguistic foundation to its scientific potential, and, last but not least, deeply ethically imprinted in human consciousness.

Science and morality: in which formulation do these two concepts acquire maximum potential for evolution? Unfortunately, history, in its most vulnerable moments, has often shown us that where scientific progress is relied upon, the morality tangent is questionable. Which is the permissible limit to make possible the existence of this binomial: science and morality? Where does the premise of this supposed inadvertence come from? Educational deficiencies? *The power?* *The Nietzschean Last Man* and his *Will to power?* Ethics (Rotaru, 2005b, 38), integrity, and morality are identified as fundamental concepts inherent in philosophy and human consciousness (Rotaru 2016a, 30-37). Fortunately, philosophy sufficiently problematizes out of necessity, but it does not have the power to sanction the

reprehensible manifestations of fellow human beings, which inevitably leads us to think of Hannah Arendt, of positive law, of human plurality, of the Ancient polis - zoon politikon – in classical Grek world, where the prevailing ideal of existence was the life dedicated responsibly, ethically and practically to the community, and immediately to the revocation of the possibility of ever finding ourselves in the nudity of fundamental rights (Rotaru 2019, 214-215).

The specula, as a tool in the thinking of those concerned with satisfying their own material and social interests, represents the embodiment of the most ferocious opportunism; all in the name of power, this time identified at the lowest level of existence. The consequences of such visions and interests have been shown to be catastrophic to humanity, for so many times.

2. The linguistic foundation of *δυναμις* (*dynamis*)

The linguistic foundation of the term *δυναμις* (*dynamis*) comes from the Greek language, positively aspected and used in rendering the meaning of *power*, *dynamics*, *potential*, and *ability*. The epistemological progress promotes in the patented formula the notion of dynamite, of the same Hellenistic essence, used for the first time in 1866 and attributed to the explosive that is the subject of this study and which belongs entirely to Alfred Nobel. Interest in this invention was intended to be compatible with scientific evolution and technological progress. Generous in many humanitarian and scientific philanthropic acts, Alfred Nobel was paradoxically pessimistic, bitterly ironic, and convinced that his discoveries, instead of contributing to the annihilation of war, would inevitably make the conflict even bloodier than it had been before then. The notoriety of Nobel's will is colossal, exceptional and unmatched in its essence and substance. Symbol of undisputed epistemological power and a dynamic of the most distinguished praxis.

In the same key, contemporary with Alfred Nobel, the eccentric F. Nietzsche will have revolutionized the world with his authentic writing, mirrored in the *philosophy of masks*, in *the last man* and *the will to power*. An innovation unmatched and incomprehensible to most of the sage's guild. "I am dynamite!" ... he exclaimed in a sublime revelation moment, thus becoming the successor of an open universality.

3. Alfred Bernhard Nobel: The Chemist – the Industrialist – the Humanist

3.1. Biographical landmarks embedded in the history and culture of his time

"Alfred Bernhard Nobel was one of the most illustrious personalities of the 19th century. His inventions, vision and generosity would profoundly mark the course and development of human civilization. He was both a visionary and a patron in every sense of the word. It has remained a landmark, a living symbol and a source of inspiration for many. Today his name is attached to the most prestigious award on

the world map, whose awarding continues to be the most important event of its kind in the international political, cultural and scientific circles" (Descopera.ro 2011).

3.2. A family of inventors

Alfred Bernhard Nobel, the third son of Immanuel Nobel and Andrietta Ahlsell, was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on October 21, 1833, into a family where science and knowledge were highly valued. His father, a reputed scientist and inventor of the time, was a descendant of the famous Swedish scientist Olof Rudbeck; Immanuel Nobel, an engineer skilled in the construction of bridges and buildings in Stockholm, experimented with various rock blasting techniques, according to the volume *Personalities of Science - Little Dictionary, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House* (1977). Although his mother came from a wealthy family, 1833 would be a bad year for the Nobel family, caused by his father's bankruptcy. This fact will separate Alfred's parents for a while, the father going, in 1837, to Finland and then to tsarist Russia for a new career. Andriette stayed in Stockholm and, in order to support her family, opened a grocery store, which brought her a modest income (Sîmbeteanu n.d.).

Meanwhile, his father founded a company in St. Petersburg responsible for the distribution of military supplies to the Russian army, convincing its generals of the usefulness of laying water mines to prevent British ships from entering the territory. This belligerent tactic proved to be a real success, with the mines built by Immanuel Nobel keeping the British fleet at bay during the Crimean War (1853-1856). In 1842, Immanuel Nobel brought his family to Saint Petersburg. Here, his son's study natural sciences, languages and literature.

3.3. Science

3.3.1. Nitroglycerin – Ascanio Sobrero

At 17, Alfred, inheriting his family's appetite for science and research, developed into a versatile man, fluent in Swedish, Russian, French, English and German, and equally attracted to English literature and the exact sciences, such as physics and chemistry. After turning 18, Alfred traveled to the United States where, for a period of four years, he furthered his chemistry studies under the guidance of Professor John Ericsson, who, among other things, conceived and designed the armored ship USS Ironclad, made famous in the American Civil War. The instability of the family business prompted Alfred to return to Europe and continue his studies in France, where he had the chance to work in the laboratory of a famous chemist, then, T.J. Lawns. It was also here that he met the young Italian chemist Ascanio Sobrero, who three years earlier, in 1847 to be exact, had invented nitroglycerin, a particularly powerful and unstable explosive liquid. Nitroglycerin was at the time considered too dangerous to be used in practice, due to the fact that it could cause

explosions at small variations in temperature or pressure (Descopera.ro 2011). Alfred Nobel was, however, interested in the possibility of its use in construction and mining, which is why he began to work on developing methods to control the nitroglycerin explosion. He would soon discover that mixing glycerin with quartz formed a paste that could be molded into various shapes and sizes.

3.3.2. *First Patent: Method of obtaining dynamite dust – Alfred Nobel*

In 1863, he was awarded the first Swedish patent for the *Method of Obtaining Dynamite Dust*, a mixture of nitroglycerin and gunpowder, a formula invented in collaboration with family members. A few months after the explosive formula was invented, the family laboratory was destroyed. Experiments with nitroglycerin, resulting numerous times in explosions and loss of human life, led Nobel to deepen research in this field. His research will have tragic consequences, the terrible explosion at his own explosives factory Helensburgh, in Stockholm, leads to the death of several people, including the eldest of the family, his brother, Emil Nobel. The authorities are forced to ban his experiments inside the city.

During this time, his father and brother continue their business in Russia, supplying the Tsarist Empire with explosives for the army and enjoying success in oil exploitation in the North Caucasus. Thus, the contracts with the tsarist army and the oil wells in Azerbaijan and Chechnya transformed the members of the much-tried Nobel family into some of the richest people of those times (Descopera.ro 2011). On the other hand, Alfred did not let himself be defeated by the first failures in his career, which was announced to be an exceptional one. After the authorities forbade him to do any more experiments within the radius of the capital Stockholm, Alfred set up his laboratory near Lake Malaren, an isolated area without human settlements. Deeply affected not only by the death of his brother, but also by the thousands of deaths of miners throughout Europe who used the dangerous nitroglycerin as an explosive, Alfred Nobel devoted all his efforts to the discovery of a safe and effective explosive.

3.3.3. *Dynamite. The Detonator – Alfred Nobel*

The Swedish scientist, who had tried many explosive materials capable of setting off explosions, discovered that a porous silicon ore called kieselguhr absorbed a significant amount of nitroglycerin, resulting in a much safer process to mine than his previous mixture. The formula called for a 75% nitroglycerin and 25% kieselguhr mixture, which he gradually improved because it proved not to be as powerful as he wanted, since the kieselguhr did not contribute anything to the power of the explosive, and actually reduced its effect by absorbing caloric energy which should have intensified the explosion. Nobel replaced it with other active natural ingredients, such as wood pulp as an absorbent, and a salt (sodium nitrate) as an oxidizing agent. These transformations allowed Nobel not only to improve the quality of the explosive, but also to be able to prepare explosives of different grades.

Thus, he called his invention, for the first time, *dynamite*, which he patented in 1867 (Descopera.ro 2011). In order to be able to cause the explosion, the brilliant scientist patented another invention, a detonator that allows the dynamite to be activated by lighting a fuse. Because dynamite reduced the cost of blowing up stone blocks, Nobel made selling it a profitable business.

By the time of his death, Nobel had patented 355 inventions. He discovered the possibility of priming the detonation of nitroglycerine with the help of mercury fulminant. He succeeded in making dynamite powder, dynamite gum, and then the formula for a propellant powder, to which he gave the name of ballistite, a mixture of equal parts of nitroglycerin and nitrocellulose. He took aerial photographs, and developed methods of obtaining synthetic silk, synthetic rubber and synthetic leather. Also fond of literature and poetry, he wrote a tragedy and several novels (Descopera.ro 2011). From 1873, he settled in Paris, and in 1881, he set up a laboratory in Servan, where he continued research in order to improve the dynamite formula, a laboratory he transferred, in 1890, to San Remo, in Italy.

3.4. Industrialist – inventions that innovated mining and construction

"Without dynamite, I think we'd barely be out of the Stone Age. I say that dynamite created our society" ("also the lithium in your phone battery or the silicon in your computer processor, both of which have been mined using dynamite." Lee Fronapfel, Colorado School of Mines: (Tudosie 2020), are the words of the famous mine manager, Lee Fronapfel (Lee Fronapfel, Colorado School of Mines: <https://playtech.ro/2020/cum-dinamita-a-modelat-lumea/>).

Alfred Nobel installed a factory in Viterviken in Sweden, then one in Krummel, near Hamburg, Germany, making an extremely prolific business out of the dynamite trade (*To dissociate its name from previous companies linked to dangerous explosives, Nobel insists that the containers of the new explosive product be initially inscribed with the logo Nobel's Safety Powder, later changed to Dynamite, after the explosive was patented*), exporting the products to countries in continents such as Europe, Australia, North America, thus becoming the first person in the world who creates an international company. In 1868, 11 tons of dynamite were produced, five years later, ten times more, and in 1874 over 3000 tons.

Thus, dynamite acquired the dimension of an indispensable tool in the field of engineering. It was used in the construction of railways; where it was necessary to go through the mountain, specialists used dynamite to create tunnels. Also, in the construction of the Hoover Dam in the United States in the 1930s, it was used to divert water, and in cities, it was used to create sinkholes deep enough to be the infrastructure of skyscrapers. The mining industry also began to see the advantages of using dynamite, most of the elements necessary to build the contemporary world were the result of mining activities; e.g.: ores necessary for the production of concrete, ores of aluminum, titanium, silicon, etc.

In the same historical period, the pneumatic jackhammer was also invented, along with the artificial diamond head drill, which made the mining industry acquire new proportions (Tudosie 2020).

3.5. *The humanist*

"If I have one thousand ideas a year, and only one turns out to be good, I am satisfied" declared the famous Swedish scientist, who always defined himself as "a humanist who loves humanity" (Brainy quote 2023), declaring himself convinced that "prosperity the world could fight all the evils". Alfred Nobel was a follower of pacifism. He was aware of the dangers posed by possible misuses of his inventions, calling war "the horror of horrors and the greatest of all crimes". It is almost impossible to ignore the personality of Henry Dunant and his "*A Memory of Solferino*", another humanist genius of his time, forerunner and founder of the Red Cross. Alfred Nobel never married. Traveling incessantly between Sweden, Germany, France, Russia, USA, Italy, he lived most often alone, without a stable home, without family, devoting all his energy and passion to business trips and intensive work in the laboratory. He had built a real empire of dynamite, being fully convinced in his inner forum that his dynamite would sooner lead to peace than a thousand other international conventions. However, history records him as an idealist, deeply dedicated to work, Victor Hugo calling him "Europe's richest vagabond."

3.6. *The Nobel succession – undeniable heritage of humanity*

Among the world's philanthropic wills, the most famous is that of Alfred Nobel. Reputed chemist, formidable industrialist, illustrious inventor and outstanding humanist, he produced a considerable fortune, establishing in his will as his last wish that his capital be reinvested, and that the interest be distributed annually in the form of prizes to those who, during the previous year, they will have brought the greatest benefits to humanity.

3.6.1. *The Nobel Prizes*

Nobel's will specify only five disciplines that remained unchanged, as did the institutions he chose to award the trophies: The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences for Physics and Chemistry, The Swedish Academy of Letters for Literature, The Karolinska Institute in Stockholm for Physiology and Medicine, Norwegian Parliament for Peace or brotherhood among the poor. The Peace Prize is the only prize awarded in Oslo, because Nobel wanted to associate Norway, which was linked to Sweden before becoming independent in 1905, to his will (Șîmbeteanu n.d.).

In his memory, on the occasion of the centenary of the National Bank of Sweden, it established and subsidized in 1968, a sixth prize offered to notable figures from the world economy.

At the time of his death, the Nobel Empire consisted of a network of nearly 100 factories, the Swedish scientist being one of the richest men in the world. On November 27, 1895, the year before his death, at the Swedish-Norwegian Club in Paris, he made public his will, which consisted in the creation of a prize that would bear his name and stipulated a fundamental aspect regarding the eligibility of the nomination of the candidates, insisting that no considerations based on nationality, sex, religion should influence the choice of laureates: "in awarding the prizes, the nationality of the candidate will not be taken into account in any way". Nobel stipulated in his will that all his factories be sold and the proceeds placed in a bank deposit. The resulting interest was to be awarded each year to those who, in the previous year, had done the best things for humanity. On June 29, 1900, the Nobel Foundation was also established, which controls compliance with the rules bequeathed by Alfred Nobel's will. The Nobel Prizes have been awarded every year since 1901 on December 10, the anniversary of his death (The Swedish Academy, www.nobelprize.org/about/the-swedish-academy/).

3.6.2. Moral philosophy – Friedrich Nietzsche

To continue in the spirit of *δυναμις* (*dinamis*), the so-called dynamite, in the sense of power inherited from the Greek language and resurrected in the modern era with scientific progress, has explosive echoes in the sphere of the humanities as well. Some of Nietzsche's eccentric characteristics are easily found in Nobel. The geniuses of the times they lived in, revolutionary in work and thought, they gave the world masterpieces of unparalleled originality.

Described as one of the most important European men of letters of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche exerted a remarkable, often controversial, influence on the philosophical thought of the generations that followed him. His authentic writing, mirrored in the *philosophy of masks*, in the *Last Man* and the *Will to power*, turned the world upside down, giving it a unique and irreversible meaning.

As the flip side of the coin, through the fraudulent crossing of the border from morality to opportunism, it was usurped and interpreted in bad faith by the Nazi ideology, with fatal repercussions on humanity, and which, surely, the nihilist philosopher would not have desired. Friedrich Nietzsche's moral philosophy is unique and inexhaustible. This work is by no means intended to holistically address even part of his remarkable work. It is just a review of the *δυναμις* (*dinamis*) notion and the fact that the philosopher has aligned himself with those who will have changed the world. Society has always been reluctant to massive change and it has always required extraordinary courage, mixed with a percentage of madness and acceptance of non-acceptance by others.

Nietzsche criticizes the fundamental values of the ultra-rationalized society in which he lived, reaching the denial of encyclopedic principles that exclude the vitalism of existence.

The concept of will to power plays a central role in Nietzsche's thought, insofar as it is for him, in a metaphysical sense, a tool for understanding the world: "*the most intimate essence of existence is the will to power*" (Bondor 2020, 45-47).

His project of re-evaluating the traditional concepts of metaphysics will entail the abolition of idealistic values, especially of Christianity, but also of historians. The *will to power* is analyzed as an internal relation of a conflict, as an intimate structure of becoming, as a fundamental pathos, and not only as a force development. This conception allows the overcoming of man, not his elimination, but the abandonment of the old idols and the hope in a world beyond, the acceptance of life in what it behaves as an aspiration to power.

Thus, contrary to the false interpretations of his philosophy, the Nietzschean Last Man is not an all-powerful physical and intellectual man, but represents an evolving tendency, expected and desired by man: "I have come to announce to you the *Last Man*. *Man* is something to be overcome" ("*Thus spoke Zarathustra*"). According to Zarathustra's parable of the acrobat, man is therefore a bridge between the anthropoid ape and the *Last Man*, a transitory element in evolution (Llaser 2020, 107). „*I am dynamite!*” cried the philosopher of mankind from the top of his lungs, thus marking his belonging to change and evolution.

A double-edged sword, we would be entitled to say, taking into account the impossibility of many to adhere to modernism eager to free themselves from the corseted entourages and above all, the inability or need of others to conform morally to the wind blowing in the change direction.

4. Conclusion

Depending on the eras that dominated society, *scientia moralitas* underwent influences that led to the expression of power (Rotaru 2023, 62-79). *Power*, in its primordial Hellenistic sense, is viewed positively. Man, by nature, is a complex being (Rotaru 2005a, 295-324), commendable to those spirits who share the membership of freedom, evolution, true followers of eudaimonias, and undesirable, incompatible with the reprehensible manifestations of those who guide their existence in opposition to values and aspirations framed in the pattern of good.

Alfred Nobel had a purpose and made constant, considerable efforts, counted with unimaginable and traumatic suffering in improving his work. Despite the general unfavorable opinion regarding his work, he did not lie and created for mankind something as original as dynamite, namely the Nobel Prizes, the most prestigious appreciation of scientific progress, the balance of humanity, the preservation of peace. This is where the essence of true power is to be housed.

In the same key, at the opposite pole of the exact scientific world, the Nietzschean philosophical thought that created the *Last Man* and the *Will to power* for the world, is nothing more than an evolving trend, expected and desired by man (Rotaru 2016b, 29-42).

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Jewish Wedding in Romania: Tradition and Modernity

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ABSTRACT: The Jewish wedding is a complex and symbolic ceremony that reflects a combination of religious customs and community traditions. In ancient times, marriages were arranged by parents or tutors and were considered contractual institutions aimed to ensure the continuity of the family and property. In the Talmudic period, marriage began to be seen more as an expression of love and feelings, and the concept of betrothal emerged. In the Middle Ages, marriage became increasingly religious. New traditions and customs emerged and were meant to reflect the spiritual importance of marriage. This article presents a general description of the Jewish wedding ceremony, focusing on its historical, cultural, and religious aspects, aiming to contribute to the understanding of Jewish bridal cultural interferences and the preservation of Jewish wedding traditions in an increasingly interconnected world.

KEYWORDS: marriage, Jews, Jewish wedding, Chuppah, Ketubah, Sheva brachot, hora, tradition

Introduction

In early antiquity, marriage was often a contractual institution aimed at ensuring the continuity of family, property and preserving tribal heritage (Burrows 1970). In many ancient societies, obviously including the Jews, marriage was arranged by the parents or tutors, and children were often married from childhood. Men could marry more than one woman, while women could marry only one man. Bigamy was forbidden in the Ashkenazi communities (Jews coming from central or Eastern Europe) based on a decree given in the year 1000 by Rabenu Gershom Meor ha-Gola (Wigoder 2016, 602). This decree is still valid today in almost all Jewish communities. Marriage (among Jews) was and is seen as a social and economic obligation rather than an expression of love or feelings (Rotaru 2011, 5).

As the Encyclopedia of Judaism shows, in the Second Temple era (63-70 BC), some freedom of choice began to emerge so that twice a year, young men who were not married had the opportunity to choose their future wives from among the women who participated in the vineyard dances (Wigoder 2016, 133).

According to Jewish tradition and understanding, marriage is more than a contract between a man and a woman, it is a mystery, an institution with cosmic significance. In the view of the Talmudic sages, marriage is a renewal of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. The wedding day is a time of purification and spiritual fulfillment, similar to Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year.

Short history

The traditional Jewish wedding, called *chatunah*, blends biblical, historical, mystical, cultural, and legal traditions. These traditions are passed from generation to generation, forming a chain of Jewish continuity that goes back more than 3,800 years. "In the Hebrew Bible, there are no regulations or other details about the wedding ritual; the marriage is regarded as a kind of legal transaction, but its concrete form is not described" (Grossman 2001, 21).

A woman is "acquired" (a term used in popular dialects) in three ways: she is acquired by money, by a contract, or by performing a sexual act. Talking about price, "Since the seventh century, this price has been paid in the form of a silver or gold ring in the presence of witnesses by the groom to the bride" (Sturzebecher 2022).

The marriage was arranged between the parents of the bride and groom, or the older brother, in the absence of the father. Some examples given could be found in the Old Testament, in the first book, Genesis 24:29, 34, where Abraham searches for a wife for his son Isaac, Jacob's negotiations with Laban for Rachel, and Hamor's approach to Jacob regarding Dinah and Shechem. In the same way, Judah arranges the marriage of his firstborn (Genesis 38:6). They married within kinship groups, not because they were in love, but because their parents considered that marriage advantageous for their families, but also for the couple (Judges 21:21).

In ancient times, the husband "bought" his wife or wives who became his property, but this did not prevent the relationship between the two from developing harmoniously and in time to love each other. According to Jewish law, Jews could marry at a very young age, at the age of 12 for girls, *bat mitzvah*, and at the age of 13 for boys, *bar mitzvah*, this being the age of spiritual maturity, when they answer for their mistakes. The determining criterion for marriage was the ability to enter into a contract and express their will. This condition excluded the disabled, mentally ill, deaf, and dumb, who could marry if they proved competence in making a decision.

Intermarriage, marrying someone from another nation or religion, was forbidden according to Deuteronomy 7, Ezra 9, Joshua 23, etc. If this happened, parents mourned and performed a symbolic burial of the child if the child contracted a mixed marriage. Some members of Orthodox families hold *shiva* (mourning period) for someone who married outside the Jewish faith to prevent Jewish cultural and religious assimilation. Therefore, for ultra-Orthodox Jews, intermarriage is considered *the silent Holocaust* (Berger 2010, 149).

At the same time, for most Jews, these marriages could be performed by converting to Judaism (See the example of Sephora, Moses' wife - Exodus 4:24-26).

Traditions and customs

The Talmudic sages imposed a period of betrothal before marriage. Marriage without betrothal cheapens the institution of marriage because it gives the impression that it is an impulse decision without much thought or preparation.

Jewish marriage is a transition to a new stage in life in which the bride and groom are endowed and empowered with new powers and responsibilities. These powers are symbolized by the wedding ceremony, which is a spiritual and symbolic ceremony. During the ceremony, the bride and groom are forgiven for their past sins and are given the ability to plan their future and bless others. To honor their special status, family and friends hold a reception before the ceremony in their honor.

The reception is an occasion to celebrate their new life together and wish them blessings for the future. Two separate receptions are held (usually in adjoining rooms), one for the bride and one for the groom. By tradition, the bride and groom refrain from seeing each other for a full week before the wedding in order to increase their love and desire for each other, as well as their subsequent mutual joy at their wedding. They will only meet again at the *badeken* (veil-covering ceremony) following the reception.

The groom covers the bride's face with a veil to focus on her inner beauty. The custom of covering the bride's face with a veil originated with the matriarch Rebekah, who covered her face when she met her groom, Isaac (Genesis 24:65). The veil underlines the fact that the groom is not only interested in the bride's outer beauty, which fades with time but rather in her inner beauty, which she will never lose. It also emphasizes the innate modesty that is a hallmark of the Jewish woman. The bride's face remains veiled throughout the *chupah* ceremony, giving her privacy in this sacred time (Chabad.org, n.d.)

Also, during this time, the dowry is negotiated, consisting of contributions from the bride's family, in money or goods, for the new household. The contract is signed: the *Ketubah*, which reaffirms the fundamental conditions imposed by the Torah on the husband, such as providing food, clothing, and marital rights for his wife, which are inseparable from the marriage. It includes the husband's guarantees to pay a certain amount in case of divorce and compulsory inheritance rights for his heirs if he dies before his wife.

In *Ketubah*, there are no reciprocal oaths. The wife only agrees to accept her husband's marriage proposal. But it is definitely not an act of sale; the man is not buying the bride. In fact, the *ketubah* represents more the witnesses rather than the husband or wife. By this instrument, they attest to the groom's actions, promises, and declarations and the bride's willingness to accept the proposal of marriage.

The Ketubah is a charter of a woman's rights in marriage and a man's duties. *The Ketubah* is designed for the protection of the woman, and every legal nuance in this regard has been crafted so that her husband will not find it easy to divorce her. In a society traditionally focused on the needs of men, women have always needed more defense and protection against violation of personal rights than the man. The *ketubah* document recalls the wedding between God and Israel when Moses took the Torah, the "Book of the Covenant," and read it to the Jews before the *chupah* ceremony at Mount Sinai.

It is more than a compensation system that strengthens relationships between families and encourages or supports marriage. Also, as part of the betrothal ceremony, the groom places the wedding ring on the bride's finger in the presence of witnesses. As he puts the ring on his finger, the groom says to her, "With this ring, you are consecrated to me, according to the law of Moses and Israel." In the past, mothers of prospective spouses would break a vessel, referring to the fact that just as a shard cannot be repaired, it is better to marry and then divorce than to break a prenuptial agreement (Wigoder 2016, 135).

After getting the gift, the woman becomes the legitimate wife of the groom (Deuteronomy 22:23, 24), even if the physical relationship has not been consumed. The "betrothal" period was followed by the marriage ceremony, which took place outside the governmental authority or synagogue. The Jewish wedding ceremony, *chuppah*, usually takes place in the afternoon and can extend into the late evening. The exact duration can vary depending on local traditions and the couple's preferences. (According to information obtained from the Oradea community, the duration was between 3-7 days.)

The bride and groom are accompanied to the *chupah* by escorts, who are usually the couple's parents. The groom arrives first, and the bride is coming later. After the groom arrives at the *chupah*, the moderator (or another person who is honored with this duty) welcomes the groom on behalf of all gathered by singing *Baruch Haba* and *Mi Adir*, a short Hebrew greeting that also includes a request for God's blessings on the new couple. When the bride arrives at the groom's side, she surrounds the groom seven times, during which time the cantor (moderator) sings *Mi Ban Siach*.

This short hymn extols the bride's modesty and faithfulness and, again, calls on God to bless the bride and groom. The bride encircles her groom seven times to break down any remaining walls or barriers between them, referring to the time when Joshua and the Israelites surrounded seven times the walls of Jericho to break down its walls.

Chupah is a *canopy* that sits on four pillars and is usually decorated with ornaments. *The* marriage ceremony takes place under this canopy which is open on all sides, as a demonstration of the couple's commitment to establish a home that will always be open to guests, as it was Abraham and Sarah's tent.

The final stage of the marriage ceremony

After the ceremony, there follows a seven-day celebration called *sheva brachot*: the recitation of *Sheva Brachot* - "The Seven Blessings". There are social events that take place during the first seven days of the marriage and bring the community together to celebrate the new union, the blessings are recited under the *Chuppah*, each of them expressing different aspects of life seen as a couple's journey. These blessings emphasize themes of joy, love, companionship, and the ultimate goal of establishing a peaceful home. The glass of wine shared during the ceremony reinforces the idea of shared responsibility and mutual support.

This celebration is an opportunity for family and friends to enjoy the new couple and wish them blessings for their future together. It is a family celebration attended by friends and relatives. Such a rite is found in the second book of Maccabees, chapter 9, from verses 37 to 39. The wedding feast was usually held in the groom's house, where there were dances, love songs (Song of Songs 4:1-7), poems, and an important part of the feast consisted of the prayers of blessing for the bride and groom (Psalm 45 – which is a wedding song), followed by a banquet that lasted 7 days (Genesis 29:7; Judges 14:4).

Another custom was to read chapter 31 of Proverbs, which presents the model of an ideal housewife, as the future bride was supposed to become. The recitation of this chapter is also done after the wedding by the husband in front of his wife every Friday evening. In the apocryphal book of Tobit, chapters 7 and 8, written in the early 2nd century B.C., there are wedding prayers for the young Tobias and Sarah, prayers that also refer to the couple Adam and Eve.

Then follows the breaking of the glass, a poignant moment at a Jewish wedding reminiscent of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It also symbolizes the fragility of human relationships, emphasizing the need for compassion and understanding. After breaking the glass, the guests exclaim *Mazel Tov*, which means good luck, to wish the couple a prosperous and joyful life together.

The festive meal that follows the ceremony is an important part of the Jewish wedding celebration. It is customary to serve various symbolic foods, such as *challah* bread, to represent sustenance and abundance. In addition, dancing and music are integral components of the celebration, with upbeat tunes enhancing the joyous atmosphere.

From the signing of the *Ketubah* to the breaking of the cup and the festive meal, every element of the ceremony has symbolic meaning, emphasizing the deep commitment and spiritual dimensions of the union. The emphasis on community participation further reinforces the idea that marriage is not just a union between two individuals but a celebration that involves the entire community, creating a foundation for a strong and lasting partnership (Rotaru 2016, 29-43).

Romanian traditions incorporated into the Jewish wedding atmosphere

The wedding ceremony is rich in cultural meaning and ritual, reflecting a mix of religious customs and community traditions that have evolved over centuries. In recent years, weddings of people belonging to the Jewish community in Romania have become more modern. Many couples choose to have secular or mixed ceremonies that include elements of both traditions. These weddings take place outside the synagogue, in locations such as restaurants, hotels, or even outdoors. However, they are not recognized by the Jewish community.

Returning to the Jewish community in Oradea, it should be noted that before the war, Oradea was a vibrant and diverse city with a significant Jewish community. The Jewish presence in Oradea dates back some centuries, contributing to the cultural, economic, and social structure of the city. After the war, Holocaust survivors returned to Oradea to rebuild their lives and communities. Unfortunately, the number of those who survived was extremely small, out of more than 33,000 Jews from Oradea who were deported, only between 2,700 and 3,000 Jews returned.

"In this context, in the post-war period, the Oradea community made great efforts to rebuild its community, and marriage played a key role in this process. One of the consequences of the Holocaust, in terms of marriages, was that there were very few Jewish women, and young people who were going to marry, and they could not find Jewish partners, so that those mixed families appeared. From the point of view of the Mosaic religion, marrying a non-Jew is absolutely forbidden. To better understand what it means to be a Jew in terms of the Mosaic religion: A Jew is one who has a Jewish mother or became a Jew by conversion. Certainly in this post-war period there were Jewish marriages, only they were very few. In the dark years of the Communist regime, religious marriages were almost forbidden. In other words, those who survived the horrors of the Holocaust became atheists, and broke all ties with Jewish religious life. Another negative aspect that led to the disappearance of Jewish marriages was that, both in Oradea and in other cities in Romania, there were no spiritual leaders, there were no rabbis. However, after 1990, rabbis from Israel with Romanian and Oradea origins appeared in the community and tried to revive the spiritual life of the community. A pressing problem faced by the Jewish community of Oradea was of those who were not halacha Jews (i.e. after their mother, were only after their father or had Jewish ancestry), and who could not be considered Jews from a religious point of view. In order to solve this problem, a conversion centre was set up in Oradea. Those who wanted to be recognized as halacha Jews could attend these conversion courses. After completing these years of study, the candidates took an exam before a rabbinical court, which decided which person was ready to take on those responsibilities pertaining to Jewish life. For the couples participated in these courses, automatically along with the mandatory conversion process, a Jewish wedding was performed. Since 2011 in Oradea Jewish weddings have been celebrated," says in an interview with Mr. Rezmuves Ivan Robert, worship official in the Jewish Community of Oradea, on January 05, 2024.

From the Romanian music and dances integrated into the Jewish atmosphere of the last years, the following stand out *Hora*. "The hora is a dance of Romanian and Israeli origins that is traditionally performed at Jewish wedding receptions. It begins with guests holding hands and dancing in circles around the newlyweds" (Forrest 2023). Romanian Jews who emigrated to Israel brought with them the tradition of the *hora*, a dance from Romanian folklore that is now also practiced in Israel. This dance flourished only in the 20th century and is now an important part of Jewish wedding receptions. It is usually danced twice: at the beginning of the wedding to welcome the guests and start the celebration, and immediately after dinner to re-energize the crowd and create an atmosphere of joy. The most popular songs sung during the *hora* dance are *Hava Nagila* (meaning "let us rejoice") and *Siman Tov U'Mazal Tov* (meaning "a good omen and good fortune will come to us"). As the *hora* dance reaches its climax, the newlyweds are lifted into the air in a gesture of celebration of their love and union. "The couple is thought to be spiritually elevated on the day of their wedding," says Rabbi Cherney (Forrest 2023).

During their lift in the air, the newlyweds hold a napkin between them, each holding a side. Rabbi Cherney explains: "In religiously observant Jewish communities, men and women have not touched prior to the wedding. While this is very different in religiously liberal Jewish communities, the tradition of connecting through the napkin continues on. The couple is connected even though they are not physically touching each other. Interestingly enough, waving a napkin at a wedding, instead of clinking glasses, is also a symbol of joy and cheer amongst those who are hard of hearing!" (Forrest 2023).

There are other aspects of intercultural, musical, and choreographic Romanian taken over/integrated in Jewish weddings, but that requires a new presentation in another article.

Conclusions

"A living culture faces any historical challenges" (Cioban 2018, 63). In conclusion, the tradition and all its Jewish symbolism (Cohen 2015, 123-145), with its roots hidden in the Bible, has an influence on both the Jewish community and the community that adopted them. What has preserved Jewish traditions so well is probably the importance of religion to Jews. According to Solomon Rapfael Hirsch, a promoter of Orthodox Judaism who said that "the commandments of the Torah must be the letter of the law for us, even if we do not understand the reason and purpose of any of them. The fulfillment of the commandments must not depend on our investigations" (Puscas 2017, 42; Rotaru 2015, 318-322). As Macelaru (2011, 171) says: "So then, a story that builds coherently on the past, accurately assesses the possibilities of the present, and presents an appealing future, will also enlarge people's views of their possibilities. In other words, the biblical story, in this way, will motivate a remaking of the presently lived "story" so that it will resemble more closely the "story" people desire for."

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